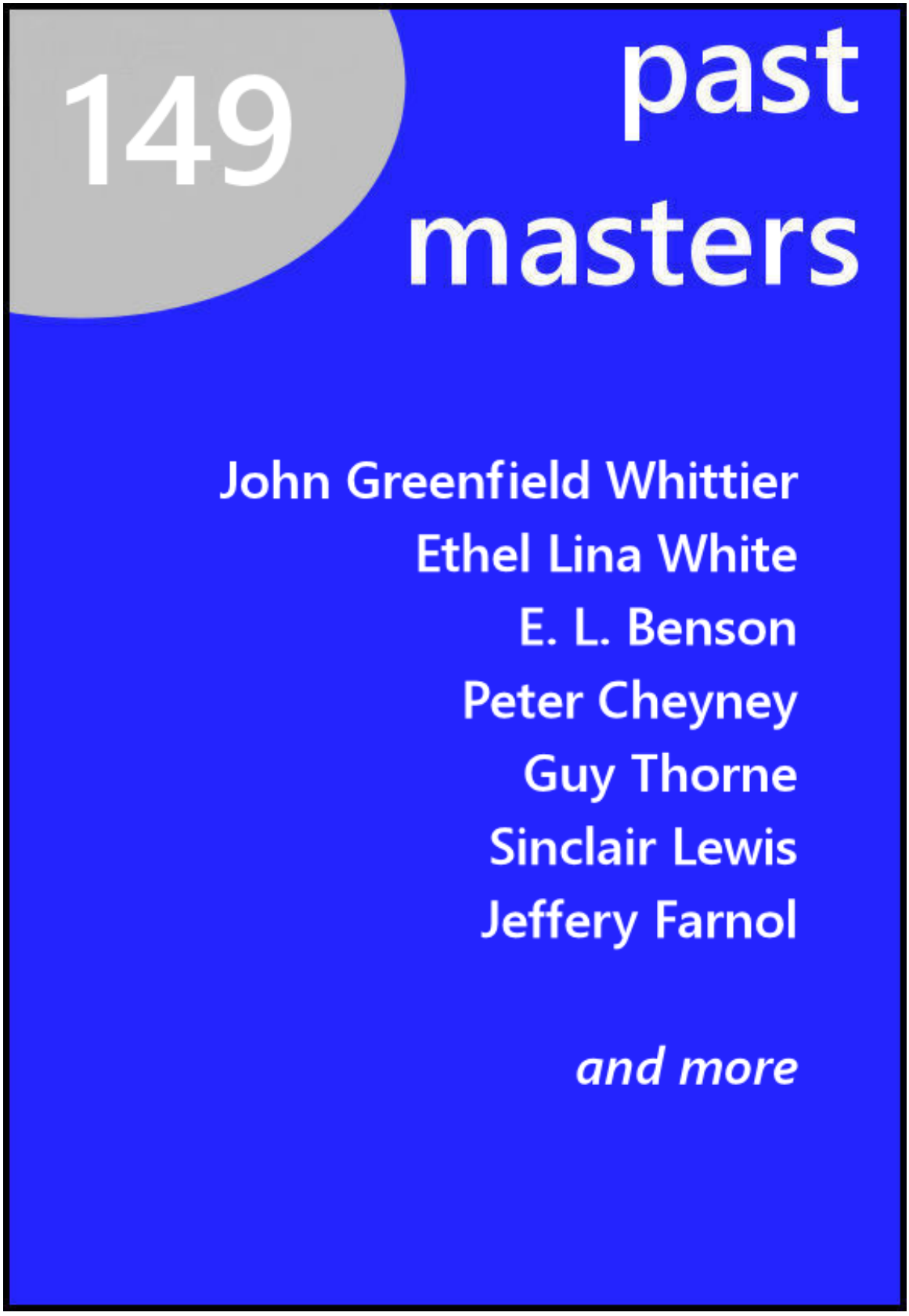
149
past
masters
John Greenfield Whittier
Ethel Lina White
E. L. Benson
Peter Cheyney
Guy Thorne
Sinclair Lewis
Jeffery Farnol
and more

PAST MASTERS 149

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

9 Jan 2024

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1: The Hoof Slide

Ethel Lina White

1879-1944

The Lady's Realm, April 1914

Courtesy Roy Glashan's Library

Ethel Lina White

"I DON'T care what a man is, as long as he can ride straight!"

Lady Nina Glendower tilted her bowler hat and stared meaningly at the handsome young farmer. That he did not miss her drift was evident by his conscious laugh.

"Well, I must say," he confessed, "when I'm leading the field in a hard run or riding one of my gees to win in a point-to-point, I don't feel exactly inferior to any belted earl."

"Not you! 'A man's a man for a' that.' I always say straight out what I think."

Lady Nina kicked vigorously at the blistered paint on the gate to emphasise her freedom of speech. Young, beautiful and ignorant, she considered herself privileged to ride rough-shod over the conventions. The presence of a gardener at work close by hampered her no more than the fact that she was conducting her flirtation practically under the windows of the lodge.

Edmund Saxon hesitated before replying, although shyness was alien to his nature. Then, with customary bluff, he rushed in boldly.

"Seems to me all such rot! Here's you— smart as paint, young, set on riding and all that. Here's me— a two-year-old in sound condition, so to speak, keen as mustard on everything you like. We've been on the land every second as long as your people. Yet, every dead-alive big-bug in the county, as well as the batch of them underground, would be galvanised to life with a shock of horror if they heard that you and I— well— wanted to get married!"

Lady Nina coloured slightly at the audacious speech, but she tossed her head.

"The deuce take the county!"

She spoke recklessly for effect, but Saxon applauded her unconventional words.

"I admire your spunk! But the question is— Are you prepared to back it?"

"Why not?"

"This way?"

"What's the odds?"

Their lips met in a kiss.

The gardener looked up at the sound, then spat on the ground contemptuously. But Lady Nina heeded him less than the clods he turned. Her attention was attracted by a second witness of the tender scene.

A woman, mounted on a piece of horseflesh that seemed, like the Fuzzy, to be "all 'ot-sand and ginger," sped by with a clatter of hoofs. The girl had only time for a snapshot vision, but it was enough to make her stare after the retreating rider. The beauty of the woman's face was arresting, although its lines had been marred by Anno Domini— and something worse— and the curves of her figure, set off by the tight black habit, were magnificent.

Nina caught her breath.

"Whoever's that?"

"Mrs. Sam Leek. They keep a pub— 'The Royal George'— a few miles back. She rides in every race-meeting and show. There's not a man or woman to touch her for a hundred miles round."

Nina's face darkened at the animation in his voice.

"Aren't you drawing the long bow?" she asked.

"Not me! She'd ride the Fiend, if she could get a bit in his mouth, and there's not a man but would follow her down to the Pit itself, where it's to be feared she's heading."

Again Nina felt chilled. Saxon seemed to be unconscious of her titled self. She was suddenly filled with a feeling of jealous enmity against this publican's wife.

"She stared at me as if I were a mite in a cheese," she said haughtily. "Did you notice? The cheek!"

"Ah! That's because *I* was with you."

In that sentence, Saxon, with native egotism, summed up the situation, as he bracketed the two women together in the running. Lady's Nina's face instantly grew dark with anger.

The young farmer was quick to notice the change.

"Of course she's nothing to me," he added hastily. "She's over forty, and married. Besides, she boozes. Oh, I say, don't go!"

He gazed blankly at the retreating form of Lady Nina. Then, mounting his cob, he rode away over the grassy border of the road.

Gradually his serenity returned as his thoughts dwelt on his latest conquest. In his flirtation with Lady Nina Glendower he was flying higher than any airman, and there was a smile of triumph on his tanned face as he cantered homewards.

Presently he came to earth again as a bend of the road brought into view the figure of a woman, seated on the edge of a horse-trough, while her steed cropped the grass at the road-side.

Saxon's face lit up at the sight. The next second he was off his horse and seated by the side of Mrs. Sam Leek.

"Waiting for me?" he asked, with a confident smile.

"Oh, go to blazes!" The coarseness of the woman's speech— its accent tinged with the local dialect— was strangely at war with the beauty of her reckless blue eyes.

"Think I'd cool my heels for you?" she continued. "I don't go in for cubbing. My old man's worth twenty of your sort."

Although Saxon's face lost some of its confidence, he still continued to gaze with infatuated eyes.

"Your riding at Newton Abbey, Friday, was top-hole," he said. "Congrats. You took the water-jump in style to make a dead man sit up and cough. I'd give something—. Look here! Why haven't you ever a decent word for me? You've plenty of honey for other chaps. Why am I black-listed?"

Mrs. Leek smiled, and much of the coarseness of her face faded in the wonderful fascination of her expression.

"You hang up your hat at too many houses, Eddy. Think I'd enter the running with every half-baked girl in the county? By the way— who's your latest? The flapper you were kissing by the gate?"

Back came the swagger to Saxon's movements.

"That? Flapper indeed! Nineteen, if a day, and a fine girl. *That*, if you please, is Lady Nina Glendower— the eldest daughter of the Duke of Roseminster. You see, my lady, finer folk than you are only too glad to snap up your leavings!"

There was no finesse about Saxon; his surface veneer of breeding was sloughed at first tilt with Mrs. Leek— revealing the coarse grain of his nature.

His boast only made the woman rock with laughter.

"You young fool!" she gasped at length. "*You* and a duke's daughter! She's just pulling your leg. It's common talk Lord Townley is coming down the week-end to settle up affairs. The match has been rumoured in the papers weeks past. She's flirting with you to keep her hand in. In love with a back-door

acquaintance! If she could buy you at her price and sell you at her own she'd do well out of the deal."

Again she shrieked at the sight of Saxons crestfallen face. Then she put one roughened hand on his coat-sleeve.

"Look here," she said, "I've a sneaking liking for you, because you've a straight nose and a decent seat. Take my tip, old man! Marry some girl in your own sphere— say, your cousin, Miss Preece. She'd make a champion farmer's wife. Moreover, she's fool enough to jump at you. But, if you want to save your face, drop these rotten ideas of rising above your station. It don't pay to be a thruster. Forgotten your pilling over the Hunt?"

Saxon rose hastily and mounted his cob. Mrs. Leek's words had brought up a painful recollection of his surprise when the surrounding gentry, who met him with utmost cordiality at hunt breakfast and ploughing-matches, resented his ambition to wear the pink.

"He laughs best who laughs last," he growled. "It would be a slap in the face for you, my girl, if Lady Nina bolted with me. What will you bet I don't cut out this lord of yours?"

"I'll bet my head!"

Saxon rode off with feigned hilarity. In spite of his tall words, he knew Mrs. Leek had scored. Yet she sat for fully ten minutes afterwards, her eyes charged with anxiety and her head held tightly between her hands, as though she feared to lose it with her wager.

Meanwhile, the girl whose name had been bandied over the horse-trough, trudged up the drive. She always rode cross-saddle, and her long coat, that showed her boots, gave a boyish look to her appearance. As she passed the gardener he touched his hat respectfully, but the look he bestowed on her back was significant. Although the family had been barely a fortnight in the place the Duke had taken for the hunting, every dependent had already formed an opinion on Lady Nina Glendower.

"That a dook's daighter!" the man commented. "My Liz's more of a lady than *her*. Making herself cheap with all the village lads like a common wench!"

But the puppy that Nina had just hoisted up persisted in washing her face all the way to the house. He knew of the two days and nights, after he had taken poison, when she had nursed him hours at a stretch, the tears trickling down her nose, as she strove to drag the wobbling paws back from Shadowland.

Her father and stepmother were standing on the old stone terrace when Nina approached. Both regarded her with a fixed expression of stony disapproval.

"Where have you been, Nina?"

The duke— who appeared to be made of the same material as the terrace— spoke coldly.

"Rotting about."

The duke's expression changed to a look of tense anxiety. His eldest daughter— fully fledged beauty though she was— in running to an excess of animal spirits at the expense of her brains, seemed unlikely to bring credit upon his name.

The light of rebellion was kindled in her eyes by her father's next words.

"Townley is coming to-morrow, Nina. I have sanctioned his visit, and I hope that you will— er— keep yourself in hand, so that matters may be satisfactorily concluded."

"Townley!" Nina made a hideous grimace. "He's not my sort!" she objected.

"A matter for congratulation, and a testimonial to his breeding. And— one word more. We leave here next week."

Nina faced her parents with startled eyes.

"But, Dad— why? This is such a ripping hunting country. And we've only just come. Why?"

"Because of a certain undesirable piece of news that has just been brought to my notice."

The girl collapsed before her father's penetrating stare. It was evident that he had already heard of her flirtation with the young farmer. Simulating an air of bravado, she ran out of the room.

Her eldest step-sister— a pretty girl of seventeen— was having her hair dressed for dinner, when Nina burst in upon her toilette.

"Heard we're off, Lav? Know why? I hardly know whether I'm on my head or heels."

"You might get a clue by keeping your eye on your hat," replied Lavender coolly. She was curiously like a pink edition of her grey father.

"Townley's coming to-morrow, Lav!"

"I know. You may go, Perkins!"

"Look here, Lav! Would you grab at your first offer?"

"Certainly not, unless it were worth my while."

"There you are. It's not. So I pass!"

Lavender's calm voice shattered her premature triumph.

"But I certainly should, if I were *you*. You see, you've been already talked about, and once in connection with a chauffeur."

Lady Nina gasped at the matter-of-fact words. For the first time in her life she suddenly felt cheapened. Without replying, she rushed away to her own room.

The new feeling of inferiority hurt her pride terribly. As she looked in the glass, and took stock of her rich young beauty, she contrasted her position with that of her sister, Lavender.

"I must be a throw-back," she said at last. "I don't seem born to all this. Lavender and the kids get more respect than me. Wonder why? Well, there's Townley!"

She gave a groan, as her mind reverted to the Saxon era. Her last flirtation would soon be as much a thing of the past as any page of back English history. She thought of Townley well-born, well-bred, well-educated, and then her eyes were attracted by her favourite picture that hung above her head— the portrait of a famous highwayman.

It seemed to her that the bold, handsome face bore a strong resemblance to Saxon. She had a sudden vision of breaking free from the old, restricted life, and riding out into the world, with this caped hero, Gretna Green in front, dimly seen through a golden haze of romance.

She gave a cry of triumph. In the midst of her dejection a thought had struck her. She chided herself for her folly in not realising the fact before. All her life she had kicked against the pricks, but she had meekly put her head into the halter, all the same. Yet all the time a door to freedom stood before her gaze. Outside was open country. She had only to bolt.

In an instant she snatched up a writing-pad and hastily scribbled a few lines.

When the missive was delivered to Edmund Saxon by that evening's post, he raised his brows at the handwriting, which would have disgraced a kitchen-maid. But his face flamed with excitement as he tore it open and read its contents.

Dear Edmund,

It has been brought home to me to-day. I'm out of place here— a misfit. They want to dispose of me, but I decline to have my life made by others. I'll make my own. This is my decision. Sooner than serve in Heaven, I'll rule in Hell. If you care to meet me to-morrow, we'll ride to Slowton and get married there, by special license. And the country may go hang! Yours, Nina.

In a frenzy of triumph, Saxon tore to his writing-desk, and covered page after page with his thick, characteristic writing. He smiled grimly as he gave his letter to a man for instant delivery. It struck him that the handsome head of Mrs. Sam Leek was even then tottering on its shoulders.

THE air was raw and sprayed with mist next morning when Lady Nina Glendower, accompanied by a groom, went for her morning ride. At the bend

of the drive she twisted her head round for a last view of the house. Never again, she told herself, would she place foot inside.

She broke off in her whistle to make a remark.

"*Après moi, le déluge*. *You* don't know what that means, Foote, but it exactly expresses the present position. Some Johnny or other— I forget who— said it. And now *I* say it."

"After me, the deluge. A remark made by a dissolute French monarch before the French Revolution," answered the man, glibly.

"Gracious, Foote. Why you know more than me."

"I received a Board School education. And I've learned much living with the aristocracy."

The usual veiled impudence was in the man's voice. Nina was conscious of it, and it spurred her on to action.

"Well, do you know enough to go home and spin some fairy-tale about a dropped shoe? I'd sooner your room than your company this morning, Foote. Here! This'll help you to oil your brains."

A coin passed, and then Nina cantered forward alone into the mist— revelling in her first ecstasy of revolt. She never stopped when she reached the crossroads, where Saxon was waiting for her.

"Follow me, if you can," she shouted, as she tore past.

"To the end of the world." Saxon's reply was the essence of romance, as he thundered after her.

They made a perfect pair as they galloped away over the moor, both young, handsome and in love— the girl with liberty, the man with social advancement.

Lady Nina pulled up at last.

"Feel on oats to-day, as if I could last for ever. But we mustn't wind our horses. What did you think of my note?"

"It made me the happiest man on earth. I suppose your governor'll do something for us?"

"What's the odds? I guess I'm brainy enough for a farmer's wife, anyway? Here, what are we stopping for?"

Saxon had drawn rein in front of an inn, over the door of which hung the painted head of a Hanoverian monarch. It was "The Royal George."

At the sound of the clatter of hoofs, a head looked through the window, and next minute Mrs. Leek appeared at the doorway.

Nina stared at her with the same intense curiosity. In the strong morning light, and apart from her horse, the woman seemed made of coarser clay. She looked a strapping plebian in her huge-patterned check dress.

"Morning, Mrs. Leek. Whiskey-and-polly for me, and a glass of cider for the young lady," sung out Saxon.

It was his moment of triumph. He had stopped especially at the "George" to proclaim his win.

A dull mottled red ran up the woman's face.

"Won't you come in and have something to eat as well?" she asked. "It may be you've far to go!"

As Saxon hesitated, Lady Nina slipped from her horse. Besides her hunger, she had a thirst for knowledge, and she wished to see more of this strange woman, who appeared to have the mankind of the county to heel. She was possessed with a sudden longing to get at grips with her.

They followed the publican's wife into a small, musty parlour undusted, and smelling of beer.

Mrs. Leek noticed Lady Nina's start of disgust.

"Pretty ghastly, eh?" she remarked. "I've got a girl, but I don't know what to tell her to do, and I'm in the saddle or behind the bar, all day. Wasn't brought up to house-work. Spent my time in the stables."

"And to good advantage, I hear."

Lady Nina spoke with cold politeness. Again, to her intense astonishment, she scented a rival in this impossible woman.

Mrs. Leek laughed.

"I don't do it for my health. You'll ride yourself, one day, with practice. But you've not had your drink yet. I've champagne fit for— well, special occasions— in the cellar. If Mr. Saxon will come with me to reach some down, we'll see what it's like!"

One eyelid fell in a barely perceptible wink as she spoke.

To Nina's anger, Saxon responded to the signal. There was a light in his eyes she had never seen there before as he sprang to his feet. With bitter jealously, the girl saw that he welcomed the chance of a few minutes' privacy with Mrs. Leek.

"Come on," he said, "and afterwards we'll drink the health of— my future wife!"

Nina saw them disappear through the door. Then, hot with indignation, she hurried out of the stuffy parlour. She had barely reached the road, when she heard the sound of footsteps, and Mrs. Leek ran out of the house.

She put her hand on the horse's bridle.

"Mount this instant," she said. "Ride straight home and pray you'll be there in time before the door slams in your face!"

Nina gasped with surprise.

"What d'you mean?" she cried. "Where's Saxon?"

"Locked in the cellar."

The girl turned white with passion.

"How dare you?" she cried, stamping with rage. "Give me the key this instant. You've been drinking! I tell you we're to be married this morning."

"That'll you'll never be!"

"Why, what's he to you?"

"Ask yourself that!"

Girl and woman— they faced each other— a pair of combatants in the grey November fog. Then Nina spoke slowly.

"Oh, how I *hate* you! I've never hated any woman so much in my life."

The woman winced sharply, as if struck.

"My girl— that's what a kid thinks when its mammy stops it from playing with fire."

There was a sudden softening of the coarse voice.

"Look at me!" she suddenly commanded.

Nina gazed at the handsome, dissipated face, with loathing. She marked the puffy bags under the violet eyes and the red stain of the face, inflamed by spirits.

The woman noticed the shudder.

"Ah, you don't like it? And you didn't like my house. I tell you, even as I and mine are, so will be you and yours! Have you one useful gift to make you fit to be a poor man's mate? Heaven help you, if not. For you're marrying a man who's not in love with you!"

"He is. I tell you, he is!"

The girl's voice rang out, half in defiance, half in appeal.

"He's not. Meet the truth, girl, and don't shy! If I were of equal birth with you"— the woman smiled a crooked smile— "and I beckoned him away from you, which of us would he choose?"

For some minutes Lady Nina stood thinking. It was the blackest second of her young life, when she faced things squarely. Then, with hanging head, she turned towards her horse. It was her answer.

She rode slowly away, while the woman watched her in silence. Before the mist had swallowed her up she returned flushed and panting.

"I was thinking," she said, "of what you said about closed doors. I'm afraid of my father. Will he hear of this? There may be a scandal if it leaks out."

The woman laughed grimly.

"Don't fret," she said. "Someone'll pay the piper, but it won't be you. You're up against me, and my reputation's good to knock you out of the running. Saxon's visit will be put down to me. The fun's begun already. My old man heard him in the cellar, and they're at each other, hammer and tongs. We'll

have a free-fight, directly, but Saxon has a cousin who will nurse him up, and I'll give as good as I get. But you'll be out of it."

Well out of it. With a shudder of disgust, Lady Nina saw the sordid scene.

"I'll go back and tell your husband," she cried. "I can't let you pay for me. I'll stand my corner."

But the woman's rough hand tightened on her wrist.

"Go home!" she shouted. "All your talking wouldn't do a ha'porth of good. Besides, maybe, I've not done all this for you. Perhaps, it's done for the sake of an old grey house, down in a southern country, a house that's big enough to hold this village. It's a house like the one you and yours have lived in for generations. Remember that house always! And remember, too, that you've been entered in a race for posterity, where each rider cuts off with a fine, unsullied name, and sees it safely handed down to the next starter, when his course is run. Just now, my girl, you jibbed. You're headed straight again. Keep the track, and Heaven keep you from the cropper others have come!"

Then the woman's voice suddenly changed. Its coarse accent fell away, like an old garment, leaving it bare as at the birth of speech.

"Besides, it doesn't pay," she said, in the new voice. "Remember, if we fall in the race, though we win, the hoof-slide is scarred on the course! And few of us win through!"

Lady Nina blinked away the tears that started to her eyes, for she knew she was face to face with one of the "lost legion."

"Oh, you poor soul!" she cried, as she stopped to kiss the handsome, drink-marred face.

IT WAS a very crest-fallen colt that meekly returned to stables, after three hours of liberty. Lady Nina returned from her ride alone, a trifle pale and subdued, and entirely bereft of her usual swagger. She accepted Lord Townley's proposal to go for a spin in the car with alacrity, and came back in it, formally engaged, to her own, and her family's pleasure.

The duke, in particular, unbent, to express his delight.

"The fact of the matter, Nina," he explained confidentially, "I have been worried on your behalf, because of a certain strain— ahem! Your mother, now; you've been told she died at your birth. In reality, as all the country knows, but has forgotten, I hope, she eloped with a groom in my employ when you were two years old. Of course I divorced her immediately. I can tell you no more of her, but you know where such marriages lead— to the down-grade!"

Nina opened her eyes yet wider. Pity in a vague kind of way for the unknown parent filled them, also surprise. But the duke, who was searching her face with anxious eyes, to his relief saw no light of comprehension dawn

there. Her father's anxiety to leave the district and the dissipated hostess of the "Royal George" were two isolated facts— not to be connected with a back-page of stale history to a glare of ugly significance.

When they breathed on the mirror of her mind, and thereby dulled her wits— the gods were kind.

2: The Ruby Rat

Albert Dorrington

1874-1953

Sydney Mail 15 May 1929

Albert Dorrington

'SHE'S got a letter from the owners,' Varneck growled to the white-faced steward in the steamer's waist. 'Sling her duds into number three cabin. This hooker is being used as a boarding-house for the owner's friends,' he added, with a scowl in the direction of the young girl waiting at the gangway head.

Varneck was first mate of the *Omar*, bound from Rangoon to Sydney. It was his second voyage under the house-flag of Jonathan Martin and Co. In view of the fact that a dozen companies were competing for the Australian passenger trade Varneck could not understand the mentality of a young lady seeking a long, hot voyage on a noisy cargo tramp. There were fools, he argued, who felt that a trip in a ship named *Omar* would be productive of poetry and wine. He had read *Omar*, and had sailed in the ship, and the nearest thing to poetry in her was her almost fiendish capacity for shipping tons of water out of a calm sea.

But Varneck in his wrath was unaware that Miss Jose Pender had interviewed old Jonathan Martin in his stuffy office on Malay Avenue and had explained that her father, Captain Mark Pender, had until recently owned the *Omar*— a fact well known to the company and directors. The Martin Line had

acquired her only a year before, at scrap iron rates, owing to Captain Pender's ill-health and his inability to meet his creditors.

Furthermore, Jose had confided the news of her father's death to the sympathetic Jonathan, who listened to the story of her constant privations, her struggles to obtain a livelihood in an Eastern city. Some slight property still remained to her father in Sydney. The granting of a free passage in the Omar to Sydney would enable her to attend to many small matters in connection with her father's unlucky investments. Jonathan Martin had given a ready assent, and by the time the Omar had left Rangoon the captain and mate were aware of Jose's identity.

Two days out Varneck broke the news that a stowaway had been discovered under the for'ard hatches.

'One of those derned Sydney poets, by the look of him,' the mate informed the captain irritably. 'By the lord, I'll trim his silk socks and make him feel the difference between hell and home!'

'The cook wants a mate,' the captain interposed, one familiar with Varneck's seasoned brutality. 'Let him peel potatoes and feed the galley fires. That's plenty for the toughest Sydney poet.'

The cook, peering from the galley, shouted the stowaway's name along the decks.

'Hi there, Harold Tulse! This way for the ham an' the cinders. Lend me a hand with this tub of spuds.'

Tulse's appearance would have gladdened the heart of the most taciturn director of photo plays. Tulse was twenty-five, with the physical make-up of Jack Dempsey and Adonis. In the language of the atelier artist, his face was a money-map and a house-filler.

Harold dived into the galley like a young seal scouting for a livelihood. He was glad of the let-off and eager to fan the cook's affections after his forty-hour fast in the stifling forehold.

'It will be trying for you to work with a goat like me, Bidge,' he said to the cook after his first morning in the galley. 'No other food artist afloat would put up with me.'

It was the first time in his life that Bidge had been referred to as a food artist. Hitherto his cooking had been regarded by the ship's company as something between slow poisoning and deliberate murder. He began to like Harold Tulse, and after the first evening's wash-up allowed him freedom to look round the ship.

During the day Tulse had kept a sharp eye on cabin number three. It was the cabin occupied by the lady passenger. As yet he had not seen her ; but

from various hints dropped by the steward during his visits to the galley Harold gathered that Jose Pender was recovering from a slight attack of mal-de-mer.

It was a wet night, with occasional seas breaking over the Omar's rails. Six bells had sounded, and the look-out man loomed dizzily in his oilskins in the fore part of the ship. Varneck had gone below, and the second officer on the bridge was staring silently ahead with his back to the galley. For the fifth time Tulse strolled idly past cabin number three, and then, with a lightning, glance along the alleyway, opened the door and entered.

Jose Pender was, seated with' her back to the cabin door, so that the light from the electric bulb fell directly on the book she was reading. She turned quickly at sound of his entry, her eyes widening in surprise.

'What do you want? Who are you?' A shadow of annoyance crossed her face at so unexpected an intrusion. Tulse fell back at the first impact of her kindling eyes. 'I— I beg your pardon.' he stammered, his flaming cheeks revealing the shock of his own amazement. 'I really... You see,' he blundered on under her merciless scrutiny, 'I was under the impression that this was Miss Jose Pender's cabin.'

She put aside her book, and her look of indignation changed to one of good-natured forbearance.

'And assuming that it happens to be Miss Pender's cabin, what then?' she inquired with a grim little smile.

Harold Tulse recovered himself with the skill of a matador who had missed his thrust. A grin expanded over his good-natured face.

'But you aren't Miss Pender, and that makes all the difference, Miss— er—?' He paused and regarded her inquiringly.

'Pender,' she informed him icily; 'Miss Jose Pender.'

Tulse wiped his brow with the one silk kerchief in his possession. For his years Harold was a person of wide culture and academic attainments. He hated liars and all forms of knavery. At the same time his keen sense of chivalry had more than once prevented his examining the lie' too closely when it began and ended in the presence, of a lady.

'I beg your pardon. Miss Pender,' he found voice to say. 'I ventured on board this vessel under stress of circumstances, with the object of accompanying my fiancée, Miss Jose Pender, to Sydney. She was the only passenger aboard the *Omar*, and this cabin, number three, was the one allotted her.'

He was about to pass out. She beckoned with the air of one accustomed to certain forms of obedience in others.

'One moment, Mr. Tulse. Your entry into my cabin has caused me more surprise than you imagine. I did not expect that you would hide in the forehold and follow me to Sydney.'

Tulse stared hard into her unflinching brown eyes, while a touch of indignation betrayed his fast ebbing patience,

'I have never met you before in my life!' he flung out. 'Miss Jose Pender is the daughter of the late Captain Pender. She is known to the manager of this company. And you are not the Miss Pender for whom this cabin was reserved!'

Not for an instant did he remove his eyes from hers. Finding them evasive, His fingers closed suddenly on her wrist.

'Tell me,' he said quietly, 'your little game.'

In the twist of a finger she had shaken off his grasp and stood with lips grown hard as fate. 'The game, Mr. Tulse, is law! I am the law on this ship as long as that wireless amidships continues to function. Get that?'' Her lips relaxed as she spoke. Something of tenderness, pity, came into her eyes as she explored the young stowaway, the creased, well-cut pants already showing stains from the galley wash-pots, the silk socks, and the low Oxford shoes that spoke of his youthful tastes and up-bringing.

'It was my painful duty,' she went on at last, 'to arrest, and detain Miss Jose Pender at the moment she was about to go aboard this vessel.'

'Arrest Jose?' Tulse experienced a sick, frosty feeling within him. 'What was the charge, pray?' he demanded hoarsely.'

'Conspiring to defraud the Burma Ruby Corporation, Mr. Tulse. I am attached to the Criminal Investigation Department, Scotland Yard. I demand to know what you are doing on this ship,' she inquired with disconcerting brevity.

Tulse's mind grew limpid as a mountain stream. It reflected and genuflected before her. But. it did not respond to the cold bluff that was behind her inquiry.

'I am a stowaway, Miss C.I.D.,' he retorted blandly. 'When I'm through with being a stowaway I'll find time to stand your department on its silly head for arresting Miss Pender.'

She lit a cigarette, and offered him one from her gold case as an afterthought. He shook his head, although a few moments before he would have sold his shoes for one.

'If I were a he-policeman,' she informed him sweetly, 'I'd pinch you before we got to Fremantle.'

He breathed through his shut lips as he regarded her more closely, the rich mass of Titian-like hair drawn back and held by a broad diamond-hilted pin, the strong, quiet face that was not without beauty.

'Instead of which,' she went on, 'I must again ask you to explain your presence on this ship. When you have done that to my satisfaction I shall be able to say whether Miss Jose Pender shall remain in custody, so it is up to you, Mr. Tulse.'

The young stowaway heaved and writhed his shoulders like a mastiff shaking off a beating. This woman was batting well in a game he was only beginning to understand.

'You mean that my fiancée will be held in custody until I or someone, else helps you with your job of smashing up the Burma ruby gang. You are asking me to lay the goods before you and bring the right pair of wrists to your handcuffs,' he retorted impatiently.

She smiled coldly. 'Your wrists will do. Mr. Tulse, the moment a doubt of your honesty of purpose crosses my mind.'

'Thank you.' He bowed slightly. 'Tell me what you desire,' he said, after a breath-giving space.

She adjusted the diamond-billed pin in her hair before responding. She fell, that his eyes were battening on if with almost childish curiosity.

'To put it squarely. Mr. Tulse. I'm after a small parcel of rubies that the late Captain Pender acquired from the superintendent of the. Burma Ruby Corporation.'

'Well?'' He waited for her to continue. 'There is a theory that Captain Pender left the gems in the care of an agent at Rangoon. He did not take them to Australia, or he would not have, died in poverty. The Omar was searched on his arrival. Well, Mr. Tulse,' she continued naively. 'Scotland Yard slept on the case until Jose Pender made a move for Sydney. Acting on instructions, I arrested her an hour before the Omar sailed, and stepped into her place, it was as easy as shelling peas.'

'There's going lo be some more easy shelling later on,' he predicted with a smile. 'Jose Pender never saw the rubies. Her father bought them, and I've, the superintendent's receipt; here.'

HE drew a closely-folded sheet of paper from his coal, pocket and spread it before, her. She examined the stamp and signature, carefully, pausing a moment to make a note of the date in a small book she carried.

'The deal was an illicit one,' she assured him. 'The parcel of stones was worth a hundred limes more than Captain Pender paid the superintendent. The Burma Corporation dismissed him from the mines.''

'A good thing, too, Miss Clad,' Tulse agreed. 'But while he was in authority he had the power to sell. Let, me tell you frankly,' he went on with determination, 'you shelled some peas when you arrested Jose Pender.'

She flinched slightly at his words. A shadow of doubt lurked in her eyes, a passing sense of uneasiness that, did not escape him.

'If I'm wrong,' she said slowly, 'Jose Pender comes out of prison, and I'll be told to chase an electric iron in a laundry. Tell me the truth about those rubies. Mr. Tulse, and I give you my word this case will go no further.'

There was a ring of sincerity in her voice that impressed Tulse. and the fact that Jose Pender's liberty depended for the moment on her goodwill quickened his desire to prevent further misunderstanding. No taint of complicity must attach to Jose's name. A footstep sounded in the passage outside. Tulse regarded her inquiringly.

'If I'm caught here,' he began in a whisper.

'Never mind these stewards and firemen,' she told him. 'I'm law here. We're holding an inquiry. Get busy with this explanation. Maybe I want to go home.'

Tulse drew breath sharply. His mind flew back to the inexcusable tragedy which had come into the life of Jose Pender owing to the carelessness and folly of her father.

Tulse had set himself the task of locating the last hundred thousand dollars of a weak man's fortune. Captain Pender had trusted his associates blindly. His servants had robbed him without pity or regard for the half-grown daughter who was fated to be left penniless. And now this woman from Scotland Yard was crossing his trail. If he trusted her he might complete the ruin which Mark Pender had begun. If he flouted or disregarded her presence on the Omar she might work incalculable harm to Jose. He would tell her the truth, the hard, unbelievable truth that still shrouded the movements of the Burma ruby gang.

THE stammering beat of the engines was the only sound that reached them in the small, stuffy cabin. A cross-sea swept the decks from lime to lime, burying the Omar to her rails in blinding gulfs of brine.

Tulse leaned against the shut cabin door, his powerful back barring any sudden entry on the part of steward or mate.

'If you had been born in the Far East, Miss C.I.D., the events I am relating would seem as natural as the people concerned. Being a white woman, you will probably accuse me of beating up a lie instead of the egg.'

'Guess I know an egg when it's fried,' she retorted, with an affectation of mirth. 'You hand me the yolk with that ruby in it, Mr. Tulse. You were talking about some information?'

'bout Captain Pender and, I may add, his Burmese, cabin steward, Bhu Chin. This fellow was the tool of a Chinese gang known as the Yellow Five. Little Bhu was as harmless as a drugged bank manager while at sea. Ashore he had

the police in the apple-guessing competition. They didn't know whether he sold poison or stole sweets. But folks knew that he worked the illicit gem stunt, in company with the notorious Lucy Loo, a clever woman with a university education.

She regarded him thoughtfully for a moment, her chin resting in her while palm.

'I have seen her with Bhu Chin. Go on, Mr. Tulse.'

'Well, Captain Pender little guessed that his ship was being used as a thief-boat by the Five. On the last voyage home, a year ago. Pender sold and gave away the smaller rubies he had bought from the superintendent of the mines. He kept one, a big pigeon-blood stone that was christened the Morning Star, and worth in London or Antwerp a hundred thousand dollars.

'The captain kept the Morning Star in his cabin safe. He trusted Bhu Chin, because he had never found him stealing anything heavier than a roast chicken. He had rescued the kid from the toils of a coolie slave driver up in the Shan States, and he never dreamed that the kid in his gratitude would play solo with a little thing like the Morning Star.

'Like most sea captains in the East, Pender's predilections ran mostly to the morning cocktail, followed by an indefinite number of gin-swizzles,' Tulse informed her, almost, ruefully. 'On the home run the swizzles used to last right, up to the South Head light. Then poor Pender used to pull himself together, while little Bhu Chin got out his shore-going clothes.

'Well, on this last trip, home Bhu found the time, dragging, and he knew that the Omar was making her last trip as far as Pender and he were concerned. The old man had made up his mind to sell the ship and retire with Jose in a villa at Coogee. The Yellow Five knew it, and Lucy Loo had asked little Chin what he was going to do about it.

'The gin-swizzles answered the question; they left Chin with nothing to do but fan the captain to sleep after dinner. I will not insult your intelligence, Miss C.I.D., by telling you that Chin had the run of the safe after the last swizzle. If you follow the picture closely you will see little Chin licking the big ruby and holding it up to the light, and wondering what was to become of him and the beautiful Lucy Loo when a fresh bunch of owners got hold of the Omar. He wanted a country house for Loo, and a car that, would freeze out competition as a road-burner. He had dreams, and Loo filled them like the paint in a picture.'

TULSE drew breath for an instant as the bell on the bridge overhead stroked the hour. The voice of Bidge, the cook, was heard rating the steward

for the theft of a ham pie. The Omar thrashed and dived through the cross-seas, her binnacle lights showing dimly in the smother of brine and rain.

'To cut it short,' Tulse went on quickly, 'little Chin saw a way to keep faith with his dreams.'

'How many of us do that,' the lady detective interposed with a sigh.

Tulse nodded in sympathy.

'Chin made up his mind to stop licking the ruby and call it his own. As I said before, he found that the monotony of the voyage was going to drive him to the dope. He had always kept pets in his cabin— a tortoise was one that kept him company until it got under a falling load of pig iron one day. He tried two pigeons, and fixed up a hutch in the foc'sle, but lost them both at Adelaide. As a last effort to be sociable he made friends with one of the big brown rats that peeped in and out of his cabin.

'The ordinary ship's rat will stand a lot of handfeeding in the way of cheese rinds and bacon scraps. Chin fed his pet rat until it ate sugar from a spoon. Before half the trip was over he had it running in and out of his cabin through a chink in one of the panels.

'I am giving you the story, Miss C.I.D., as it was related by Chin to Lucy Loo and to the detectives at Sydney when they arrested the little fellow for opium smuggling.'

Tulse paused in his narrative to note the effect of his words on the. lady detective. She shrugged and made a slight gesture of dissent.

'I never heard it, Mr. Tulse. But I'm not saying everything isn't true,' she answered, without looking up.

'What followed may interest us both,' he continued thoughtfully. 'Three days before the Omar reached port the Morning Star had disappeared from the cabin safe. Captain Pender lost his head at the discovery, he swore that he would not take the Omar through the heads until the big ruby was put back in the safe.

'Everything and everybody in the ship was searched, sifted, and put. through the hoops a dozen times in a morning. Pender saw red. He said he'd line the Omar's gangway with plain-clothes detectives and search parties, so that every man Jack of the Omar's crew would be gouged and bored to their eye-roots before they got ashore.

'Pender would have kept his threat about not entering the heads until the ruby was replaced. He overlooked the question of coal. But he kept his word regarding the plain-clothes police on the gangway when the Omar berthed. They showed up six-deep around the stokers and firemen coming ashore with their duds. Chin went through the search twice on account of his proximity to the skipper's cabin. Nothing doing!'

The lady detective smiled reminiscently. 'Chin was arrested,' she reminded him.

'For concealing opium in his mattress.' Tulse added, 'Perhaps you know what happened lo the Morning Star?' he inquired, meeting her shaft-like glance.

'You are going to tell me.' she parried almost wistfully. Harold Tulse fell into a brief study of cabin number three as he stooped here and there to scrutinise the chinks and crannies in the panelled walls. Straightening his shoulders, he leaned reflectively against the shut cabin door.

'I am going to tell you what Bhu Chin did with Captain Pender's hundred thousand dollar ruby, Miss C.I.D. You are listening?'

She inclined her head, while her shut hand resting on the cabin table appeared to tremble in the agony of self-repression.

'Bhu Chin,' Tulse stated coldly, 'realised the difficulty of carrying the gem ashore when he took it from the cabin safe. He felt that if he could hide the stone on the ship until she returned to Rangoon he would beat the cops in the first round. He had also made up his mind to return in the Omar to Rangoon, either as a stowaway or steward. This would have given him an opportunity of recovering the Morning Star. His Asiatic mind groped and gyrated around the possible hiding-places for the stolen gem. No place was police-proof. He had seen illicit stones taken from bottled wine, from newly-baked bread, sausages, and motor tyres. Then when the search parties were scouring the ship and howling for the scalp of the thief, little Chin looked down at the fat brown rat that was nibbling some biscuit crumbs from his hand. And that settled it for Chin.

'You see, miss, on the day he took the ruby from Pender's safe he also took the precaution of covering it with a hard coat of blue-grey enamel he kept, handy for his illicit purposes. The enamel gave it the appearance of an ordinary pebble.

'He wore a wrist watch.' Tulse informed her grimly. 'Forcing the watch from the strap, he set the enamelled ruby in its place. With a strong needle and some pack thread he covered the gem with a fine network of stitching. Then he gouged a lower hole in the strap and fastened it like a collar round the rat's neck.

'When the search parties tore into his cabin to comb his belongings and strip him in Pender's presence the rat and ruby were running between decks among the cargoes of hemp and kapok.'

The lady detective stood up, white-lipped and trembling, her hand pressed to her mouth, as though a drop of blood had welled from her heart.

'Oh, the damned little fool!' she burst out. 'They pinched him at Sydney for the opium. Two years hard! And that biscuit-nibbling bilge-rat running about the hold with the real money round its neck!'

Her sudden outburst steadied Tulse. Slowly, deliberately he drew a pair of silver-plated handcuffs from his inner pocket and laid them silently on the table beside the book she had been reading when he entered.

'Lucy Loo,' he said suavely. 'I am the law on this ship. I've followed you ever since I arrested little Chin. What about it?'

HE WAS prepared for what followed. The sleeping strength of her young torso and hands woke with the feline agility of a lioness suddenly prodded from her lair A thin-bladed knife struck out and down at his breast. He stopped it with a light blow above the forearm, and wrenched the weapon from her hand.

'I knew you'd play up, Loo,' he chided. 'And, after all, I can't arrest you for being acquainted with the Yellow Five and little Bhu Chin. But I can stop you hunting rats on this ship and assuming Jose Pender's name. You sent her a wire purporting to come from Jonathan Martin and Co., asking her to postpone her trip on the Omar owing to lack of cabin accommodation. l saw that wire and suspected a trick. I asked Jose to keep quiet and allow me to handle the situation. I didn't enjoy stowing away on this ship, but it's part of my daily work as a policeman. Seems to me the owners weren't looking when you came aboard!'

Lucy Loo shrank against the cabin wall in the stifling reaction that followed her hopeless clinch with the young detective. Her life had been spent in desperate encounters with crooks and jewel-thieves. She had heard from Bhu Chin the account of the Morning Star ruby and the curious way he had sought to hide it from Captain Pender. But, like Tulse, she had only half-believed the little fellow's story.

She had bided her time for an opportunity to investigate the truth. Chance favoured her one day when she learned from one of the Omar's stewards that number three cabin had been reserved for Jose Pender. A thought had flamed in her mind that Jose had picked up the rat story and was travelling by the Omar in the hope of finding a way to recover the lost jewel which really belonged to her father.

Just here the voice of Bidge, the cook, sounded in the alleyway. 'Ahoy there, Tulse! Lend a hand here with some casks of flour. Hurry up, man! Hurry!'

Since he had secured his passage by strategy Tulse felt obliged for the moment lo obey orders promptly; otherwise he might be called upon to reveal his professional status to the captain of the Omar.

'You may keep these bracelets as a souvenir, Lucy Loo.' He indicated the silver-plated handcuffs on the table. 'In the meanwhile, if you attempt to carry on your schemes I shall provide a rougher pair from the ship's armoury.' He slipped from the cabin and joined the cook at the galley door.

Tulse discovered almost immediately that Bidge was more in need of company than help. In spite of his big babbling voice the autocrat of the galley was fonder of a game of cards in his cubby than yarning with the deck hands in the forepart.

Into the cubby Bidge led Tulse. It was not spacious, but it belonged to Bidge, and two chairs and a square box-table, the walls were covered with portraits of Bidge and his wife Melinda. Tulse's glance look in the cubby and its simple adornments as he played aces, kings, and jacks to anything that the galley master felt disposed to lead. And as the young detective listened to Bidge on the art of not playing bridge his eye took root in a small wrist-strap that hung between Melinda's picture and the' framed portrait of John Henry Ridge.

'Not one of them fire-fighters downstairs can play the game.' John Henry repeated for the fifth time. 'I can beat Jaikes, the second officer, three nights out of four. But he ain't always off duty '

Tulse played on abstractedly.

Inset in the wrist-strap and sewn with pack-thread was a blue-grey pebble the size of a small watch!

Tulse batted his eyes as though someone had slashed them with a whip.

'This cubby, my dear Bidge, is a cosy stall on a night like this. May I ask where you got that wrist-strap with the building material sewn up in it?'

His cook sorted the cards before answering.

'You might ask who the bunch of yahoos was that ran this ship afore it changed owners. Harold, my boy, it was a rat saloon! It's my believe those Chinkie sailors and firemen used to feed 'em. Some of 'em was big enough to eat off the table without climbing up. They owned the derned galley when I took it over, and some was as tame as chickens on a farm. Blamed if they didn't wear ornaments too.'

'Bidge,' the young detective interrupted with a gesture of dissent, 'easy does it. You are going to tell me that the rats wore watch-guards, silk hats, and coloured waistcoats, I'm—'

The cooks grew purple in his effort to remain calm and cold of speech.

'I'm saying, Harold, I killed a rat in my galley last trip that was wearin' that derned dog-collar up there. Ain't it proof that those Chinks played with the vermin? I told Mr. Varneck: I showed him the collar. "Bidge," says he, "lay off

the wet brown. I don't want to inspect the horse's collar. Fry me some steak and forget yourself."

'Bidge'— Tulse placed a gold coin on the table— 'I want to buy a wrist-strap. The one up there will suit me fine.'

'Never knew you'd a wrist watch, Harold.' The cook eyed him sharply. 'Besides, it wouldn't fit a ham like yours.'

'I want it for a lady,' Tulse explained truthfully. 'I've been examining it the last ten minutes. It isn't an ordinary leather strap,' he confessed with admiration; 'it's a kind of French suede, and hard to buy in the shops.'

'Well, it's yours, Harold, and may it bring your lady luck. The stone, ain't—'

'My dear Bidge. I'm obliged.' The young detective took the strap before the cook had made up his mind about the stone.

Tulse stayed in the cubby, losing game after game until eight bells had sounded on the bridge. Then he turned in for the night....

THE *Omar* put in at Thursday Island to unload. The moment she was fast to the pier Tulse reached for his hat and strolled ashore. Ten minutes after he had gone, Lucy Loo followed. They met unexpectedly on the parade. Her face had blanched, her eyes grown hollow.

'I'm going on to Sydney, Mr. Tulse. And I want to say this: Next time you're at the pen where Chin is tied up tell him that Loo will be waiting outside when his time's up. Tell him I'll be at the gate with a piece of gas-pipe inside a stocking— the blob-eyed Chow.'

Jose Pender was waiting when the Brisbane express landed Harold Tulse at Redfern. Holding her sweet, sad face between his hands, he kissed her tenderly again and again.

It was not until a year after their marriage that he confided to her the real story of the Morning Star ruby and the part that Lucy Loo had played in it.

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3: The Mary Queen of Scots Jewel

William O. Fuller

1856-1941

1929 (as "*A Night with Sherlock Holmes*"; private printing)

The Misadventures of Sherlock Holmes, Little Brown, 1944

Fuller was an American journalist, lecturer, and after-dinner speaker, and, obviously, a Sherlock Holmes fan.

IT WAS one of those misty, rainy mornings in early summer when the streets of London contrive to render themselves particularly disagreeable, the pavements greasy with mud and the very buildings presenting their gloomy facades wreathed in a double melancholy. Returning from a professional call and finding Baker Street in my way, I had dropped in on my friend Sherlock Holmes, whom I found amid the delightful disorder of his room, his chair drawn up to a fire of coals and himself stretched abroad in it, pulling at his favorite pipe.

"Glad to see you, Watson," he called heartily. "Sit down here, light a cigar and cheer me up. This infernal wet spell has got on my nerves. You're just the company I require."

I helped myself to a cigar, put a chair to one side of the grate and waited for Holmes to talk, for I understood that in this frame of mind he had first to relieve himself of its irritability before a naturally pleasant mood could assert itself.

"Do you know, Watson," he began, after some moments of silent smoking, "I don't at all like your treatment of my latest adventure. I told you at the time that the part played by that country detective threw my methods into a comparison with his such as tends to overrate my abilities."

Holmes's querulous allusion to the now famous Amber Necklace Case, to my mind one of his most brilliant exploits, I could afford to let pass in silence, and did so.

"Not," he added, with a suggestion of the apologetic in his voice, "not that, on the whole, you let your pen of a ready chronicler carry you too pliantly into the realm of romance— but you must be careful, Watson, not to ascribe to me the supernatural. You know yourself how ordinary my science is when the paths of its conclusions are traced after me. As, for instance, the fact that I am about to have a caller— how I know this may for a moment appear a mystery to you, but in the sequel most commonplace."

There came on the instant a rap at the street door, and to my surprised look of inquiry Holmes replied, with a laugh:

"My dear Watson, it is kindergarten. You failed to hear, as I did an instant ago— for you were listening to my morose maunderings— the faint tooting of the horn of a motorcar, which it was easy to perceive was about turning the upper corner of our street; nor did you observe, as I was able to do, that in the proper space of time the unmistakable silence caused by the stopping of a motor engine was apparent under my window. I am persuaded, Watson, that a look out of that window will plainly disclose a car standing by my curb-stone."

I followed him across the room and peered over his shoulder as he put back the curtains. Sure enough, a motorcar had drawn up to the curb. Under its canopy top we perceived two gentlemen seated in the tonneau. The chauffeur stood at the street door, evidently waiting. At this moment Holmes's housekeeper, after a warning rap walked into the room, bearing two cards on a tray, which she passed to Holmes.

"Mr William S. Richardson— Mr William O. Fuller," he said, reading the cards aloud. "H'm. Evidently our friend the Conqueror has many admirers in America. You may ask the gentlemen to walk upstairs, Mrs. Hudson," he added.

"How do you know your callers are from America?" I was beginning, when following a knock at the door, and Holmes's brisk "Come in!" two gentlemen entered, stopped near the threshold and bowed. They were garbed in raincoats; one, of medium height, smooth-shaven, resembling in features the actor Irving; the other, of smaller stature, distinguished by a pair of Mr. Pickwick spectacles.

"Pray come in, gentlemen," said Sherlock Holmes, with the courtesy of manner that so well becomes him. "Throw off your raincoats, take a cigar, sit here in these chairs by the fire, and while you talk of the circumstances that have given me the honor of a visit so soon after your arrival in London, I will busy myself in mixing a cocktail, one of the excellent devices which you American people have introduced to an appreciative British public."

The visitors responded readily to these overtures of cordiality; from a tray on the table selected with unerring discrimination what I knew to be Holmes's choicest cigars, and in a brief time the four chairs were drawn in a half-moon before the glowing grate. Introductions had quickly been got through with.

"Dr Watson, as my somewhat over-partial biographer, Holmes said as he lighted his pipe, "was on the point of wondering, when interrupted by your entrance, at my having in advance pronounced upon the nationality of my callers."

The taller of the gentlemen— it was the one bearing the name Richardson— smiled.

"I was myself struck by that allusion," he responded, no less than by your other somewhat astonishing reference to our being but newly come to the city. In point of fact we have been here a period of something less than twenty-four hours."

Sherlock Holmes laughed pleasantly. "It is the simplest of matters when explained," he said, "as I have often pointed out to Dr. Watson. In the line of research to which I occasionally turn my attention, as he has so abundantly set forth in his published narratives, acquaintance must be had, as you will know, with a great variety of subjects. The motorcar, for instance, that ubiquitous invader of the realm of locomotion, naturally falls within the periphery of these attentions; nor could I long study its various interesting phases without coming to recognize the cars of different makes and nationalities. There are, if my memory is not at fault, some one hundred and thirty varieties of patterns easily distinguishable to one adept in this direction. When Watson looked out of the window, at my shoulder a moment ago, his investigations, pursued in quite different channels, did not disclose to him what was evident to me at a glance, namely, an American machine frequently encountered in this country. It was easy to guess that its occupants were also from the States.

"As to the other matter— among the earliest things the American man or woman of taste does on reaching London is to give an order to the engraver for his name card in the latest London style. The card this season, as we know, is small, the type a shaded variety of Old English. The cards brought me by the hand of Mrs. Hudson were of medium size, engraved in last year's script. Plainly my American callers had at the longest but a short time come to the city. A trifle hazardous— yes— but in these matters one sometimes has to guess point-blank— or, to quote one of your American navigators, 'Stand boldly to the South'ard and trust to luck!' You find this holds together, Watson?"

I confessed with a laugh that I was quite satisfied. The American gentlemen exchanged glances of gratification. Evidently, this exhibition of my friend's characteristic method of deduction afforded them the highest satisfaction.

"Which brings us," remarked Holmes, whose pipe was now drawing bravely, "to the real object of this visit, which I may say at once I am glad to be honored with, having a high appreciation of your country, and finding myself always indebted to one of your truly great writers, whose French detective I am pleased to consider a monumental character in a most difficult field of endeavor. My friend Watson has made some bold essays in that direction," added Holmes, with a deprecatory shake of the head, "but it is a moot question if he ever has risen to the exalted level of *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*."

As Sherlock Holmes ceased speaking, the visitors, who had been grave, looked at each other questioningly.

"It is your story," said the one in spectacles.

The gentleman by the name of Richardson acknowledged the suggestion.

"Perhaps," he said, "I would best begin at the beginning. If I am too long, or obscure in my details, do me the honor to interrupt me.

"Let us have the whole story," said Holmes. "I naturally assume that you solicit my assistance under some conditions of difficulty. In such matters no details, however seemingly obscure, can be regarded as inessential, and I beg you to omit none of them."

The American flicked the ash from his cigar and began his story.

"My friend and I landed at Liverpool ten days or more ago, for a summer's motoring in your country. We journeyed by easy stages up to London, stopping here only long enough to visit our bankers and to mail two or three letters of introduction that we had brought from home."

"To mail—" interrupted Holmes; then he added with a laugh: "Ah yes, you posted your letters. Pardon me."

"Long enough to post our letters," repeated the American, adopting the humorously proffered correction. "Then we pushed on for our arranged tour of the South of England. At Canterbury a note overtook us from the Lord M—, acknowledging receipt of our letter of introduction to that nobleman, and praying us to be his guests at dinner on Wednesday of the present week—yesterday— as later he should be out of the city. It seemed best, on a review of the circumstances, for us to return to London, as his Lordship was one whom we particularly desired to meet. So Wednesday found us again in the city, where we took rooms at the Langham, in Portland Place. It wanting several hours of dressing time, we strolled out in a casual way, bringing up in Wardour Street. I don't need to tell you that in its abounding curio shops, which have extraordinary fascination for all American travelers, we found the time pass quickly. In one of the little shops, where I was somewhat known to the proprietor by reason of former visits, we were turning over a tray of curious stones, with possible scarf pins in mind, when the dealer came forward with a package that he had taken from his safe, and removing its wrappings said: 'Perhaps, sir, you would be interested in this?'

"It was a curious bit of antique workmanship— a gold bar bearing the figure of a boy catching a mouse, the whole richly set about with diamonds and rubies, with a large and costly pearl as a pendant. Even in the dingy light of the shop it sparkled with a sense of value.

" 'It is from the personal collection of the Countess of Warrington,' said the dealer. 'It belonged originally to the unfortunate Mary Queen of Scots, and

there is an accompanying paper of authentication, showing its descent through various hands for the past three hundred and forty years. You will see engraved here, in the setting, the arms of Mary.'"

Holmes, a past master in the science of heraldry, his voice exhibiting a degree of interest with which I was quite familiar, here broke in:

"Or, a lion rampant within a double tressure flory and counter flory, gules. Mary, as Queen of Scotland and daughter of James I, would bear the arms of Scotland. I know the jewel you are describing— indeed, I saw it one time when visiting at the country seat of the Countess, following a daring attempt at burglary there. You know the particulars, Watson. I have heard that since the death of the Countess, the family being straitened financially, some of her jewels have been put into discreet hands for negotiation."

"So the dealer explained," the visitor continued, "and he added, that as the jewels were so well known in England, they could be sold only to go abroad, hence the value of a prospective American customer. I confess that the jewel interested me. I had a newly married niece in mind for whom I had not yet found just the wedding gift that suited me, and this appeared to fit into the situation.

" 'What is the price?' I asked.

" 'We think one thousand pounds very cheap for it, sir,' said the dealer, in the easy manner with which your shopkeepers price their wares to Americans.

"After some further talk, our time being run out, my friend and I returned to the Langham and dressed for dinner. It was while dressing that a knock came at my room door. Opening it, I found a messenger from the curio dealer's, who, handing me a small package, explained that it was the jewel, which the dealer desired me to retain for more convenient examination. In the embarrassment of the moment I neglected to do the proper thing and return the package to the messenger, who indeed had touched his cap and gone while yet stood in the door.

'"Look at this, Fuller,' I called, and stepped into his room-is our traveling custom to have rooms connecting. 'Isn't this quite like an English shopkeeper, entrusting his property to a comparative stranger? It's a dangerous thing to have credit with these confiding tradesmen.'

"My friend's reply very clearly framed the situation.

" 'It's a more dangerous thing,' he said, 'to be chosen as the safe-deposit of priceless heirlooms. It is scarcely the sort of thing one would seek to be made the custodian of in a strange city.'

"This was true. The dinner hour was close on our heels, a taxi was in waiting, there was no time to arrange with the office, and I dropped the package into my inner pocket. After all, it seemed a secure enough place. I

could feel its gentle pressure against my side, which would be a constant guarantee of safety.

"We were received by Lord and Lady M— with the open-handed cordiality that they always accord to visitors from our country. The company at table was not so large but that the conversation could be for the most part general, running at the first to topics chiefly American, with that charming exhibition of English naiveté and ignorance— you will pardon me— in affairs across the water. From this point the talk trailed off to themes quite unrelated but always interesting— the Great War, in which his Lordship had played a conspicuous part; the delicious flavor of wall-grown peaches; the health of the King; of her ladyship's recipe for barley-water; the recent disposal of the library and personal effects of the notorious Lord Earlbank. This by natural steps led to a discussion of family heirlooms, which speedily brought out the jewel, whose insistent pressure I had felt all through the courses, and which was soon passing from hand to hand, accompanied by feminine expressions of delight. "The interest in the jewel appeared to get into the air. Even the servants became affected by it. I noticed the under butler, while filling the glass of Captain Pole-Carew, who was holding the trinket up to catch the varying angles of light, in which it flashed amazingly, fasten his eyes upon it. For an instant he breathed heavily and almost leaned upon the captain's shoulder, forgetting the wine he was in the act of decanting, and which, overflowing the glass, ran down upon the cloth. The jewel continued its circuit of the table and returned to my inner pocket.

" 'A not over-safe repository, if I may venture the opinion,' said the captain, with a smile. I had occasion later to recall the cynical remark.

"We returned to our hotel at a late hour, and fatigued with the long day went directly to bed. Our rooms, as I have said, adjoined, and it is a habit in our travels at the day's end to be back and forth, talking as we disrobe. I allude to this fact as it bears upon the case. I was first in bed, and remember hearing Mr. Fuller put up the window before his light went out. For myself, I dropped off at once and must have slept soundly. I was awakened by hearing my name called loudly. It was Fuller's voice and I rushed at once into his room, hastily switching on the electric light. Fuller sat on the edge of the bed, in his pajamas— and as this part of the story is his, perhaps he would best tell it."

The visitor in the Pickwickian spectacles, thus appealed to, took up the narrative.

"I also had gone instantly to sleep," he said, "but by-and-by came broad awake, startled, with no sense of time, but a stifled feeling of alarm. I dimly saw near the side of my bed a figure, which on my suddenly sitting up made a hurried movement. With no clear idea of what I was doing, I made a hasty

clutch in the dark and fastened my hand on the breast of a man's coat. I think my grip was a frenzied one, for as the man snatched himself away, I felt the cloth tear. In a second of time the man had crossed the room and I heard the window rattle as he struck the sash in passing through it. It was then I cried out, and Mr. Richardson came running in."

"We made a hasty examination of the room," the first speaker resumed. "My evening coat lay on the floor, and I remembered that when taking it off I had hung it on the post of Fuller's bed. It is to prolong an already somewhat lengthy story not to say at once that the jewel was gone. We stared at each other with rueful faces.

" 'The man has gone through that window with it!' cried Fuller. He pointed with a clenched hand. Then he brought his hand back, with a conscious air, and opened it. 'This is a souvenir of him,' he said, and he held out a button— this button."

Sherlock Holmes reached quickly for the little article that the speaker held out and carefully examined it through his lens.

"A dark horn button," he said, "of German manufacture and recent importation. A few strands of thread pulled out with it. This may be helpful." Then he turned to his callers. "And what else?"

"Well— that is about all we can tell you. We did the obvious thing— rang for the night clerk and watchman and made what examination was possible. The burglar had plainly come along a narrow iron balcony, opening from one of the hotel corridors and skirting the row of windows that gave upon an inner courtyard, escaping by the same channel. The night watchman could advance only a feeble conjecture as to how this might be done successfully. The burglar, he opined, could have made off through the servants' quarters, or possibly was himself a guest of the house, familiar with its passages and now snugly locked in his room and beyond apprehension."

"Did you speak of your loss?" asked Holmes.

"No; that did not appear to be necessary. We treated the incident at the moment as only an invasion."

"Exceedingly clever," approved Holmes. "You Americans can usually be trusted not to drive in too far."

"We breakfasted early, decided that you were our only resource and— in short," concluded the visitor, with an outward gesture of the hands, "that is the whole story. The loss is considerable and we wish to entrust the matter to the discreet hands of Mr. Sherlock Holmes."

My friend lay back in his chair, intently regarding the button poised between his forefingers.

"What became of that under butler?" he asked abruptly.

A little look of surprise slipped into the countenance of the visitor. "Why, now that you call attention to it," he returned, after a moment's reflection, "I remember seeing the head butler putting a spoonful of salt upon the red splotch the spilled wine had made, then turning his awkward assistant from the room. It was so quietly done as to attract no special notice. Afterward, over our cigars in the library, I recall his lordship making some joking allusion to Watkins— so he called the man —being something of a connoisseur in jewelry— a collector in a small way. His Lordship laughingly conjectured that the sight of so rare a jewel had unnerved him. Beyond regarding the allusion in the way of a quiet apology for a servitor's awkwardness, I gave it no particular thought."

Sherlock Holmes continued to direct his gaze upon the button.

"Your story is interesting," he said after some moments of silence. "It will please me to give it further thought. Perhaps you will let me look in on you later at your hotel. It is possible that in the course of the day I shall be able to give you some news."

The visitors hereupon courteously taking their leave, Holmes and I were left alone.

"Well, Watson," he began, "what do you make of it?"

"There is an under butler to be reckoned up," I replied.

"You also observed the under butler, did you?" said Holmes abstractedly. After a pause he added: "Do you happen to know the address of Lord M—'s tailor?"

I confessed that this lay outside the circle of my knowledge of the nobility. Holmes put on his cap and raincoat.

"I am going out on my own, Watson," he said, "for a stroll among the fashionable West End tailor shops. Perhaps you will do me the honor to lunch with me at the Club. I may want to discuss matters with you."

Sherlock Holmes went out and I returned home. It was a dull day for patients, for which I was glad, and the lunch hour found me promptly at the Athenaeum, waiting at our accustomed corner table— impatiently waiting, for it was long past the lunch hour when Holmes came in.

"A busy morning, Watson," was his brief remark as he took his chair.

"And successful?"

To this Holmes made no reply, taking his soup with profound abstraction and apparently oblivious of his guest across the table. While I was accustomed to this attitude of preoccupation, it piqued me to be left so entirely out of his consideration. A review of his morning investigations seemed, under the circumstances, to be quite my due.

"I am going to ask you," began Holmes, when the meal had gone on to its close in silence, "to get tickets for the Alhambra tonight— four tickets. In the middle of the house, with an aisle seat. Then kindly drop around to the hotel and arrange with our friends to go with us. Or, rather, for us to go with them— in their motorcar, Watson. Request diem to pick us up at Baker Street. You will undertake this? Very good, Watson. Then— till I see you at my rooms!" And tossing off his coffee in the manner of a toast, Sherlock Holmes abruptly arose and left me, waving his cap as he went through the door.

It was useless to demur at this cavalier treatment. I had to content myself with the reflection that, as my friend mounted into the atmosphere of criminal detection, the smaller obligations fell away from him. During what was left of the day I was busy in executing the commissions which he had entrusted to me, and night found me at Baker Street, where I discovered Holmes in evening clothes.

"I was just speculating, Watson," he began, in an airy manner, "upon the extraordinary range and variety of the seemingly insignificant and lowly article of commerce known as the button. It is a device common in one form or another to every country. Its origin we should need to seek back of the dimmest borders of recorded history. Its uses and application are beyond calculation. Do you happen to know, my dear Doctor, the figures representing the imports into England for a single year of this ornamental, and at times highly useful, little article ? Of horn buttons, for example— it were curious to speculate upon the astonishing number of substances that masquerade under that distinguishing appellation. Indeed, the real horn button when found— if I may quote from our friend Captain Cuttle— is easily made a note of."

It was in this bantering vein that Holmes ran on, not suffering interruption, until the arrival of our callers of die morning, in their motorcar, which speedily conveyed us to the Alhambra, that gorgeous home of refined vaudeville. The theater was crowded as usual. A few moments after our arrival, one of the boxes filled with a fashionable party, among whom our American friends recognized some of their dinner acquaintances of the previous evening. Later I perceived Captain Pole-Carew, as he looked over the house, bow to our companions. Then his glance ranged to Sherlock Holmes, where I may have imagined it rested a moment, passing thence to a distant part of the galleries. Why we had been brought to this public amusement hall it was impossible to conjecture. That in some manner it bore upon the commission Holmes had undertaken I was fain to believe, but beyond that conclusion it was idle to speculate. At one time during the evening Holmes, who had taken the aisle seat, suddenly got up and retired to the lobby, but was soon back again and apparently engrossed in what went on upon the stage.

At the end of the performance we made our way through the slowly moving audience, visibly helped along by Holmes. In the lobby we chanced to encounter Captain Pole-Carew, who had separated from the box party. He greeted the Americans with some reserve, but moved along with us to the exit, near which our motorcar already waited. The captain had distantly acknowledged the introduction to Holmes and myself, and knowing how my friend resented these cool conventionalities, I was unprepared for the warmth with which he seconded the suggestion that the captain make one of our party in the drive home.

"Sit here in the tonneau," he said cordially, "and let me take the seat with the chauffeur. It will be a pleasure, I assure you."

The captain's manifest reluctance to join our party was quite overcome by Holmes's polite insistence. His natural breeding asserted itself against whatever desire he may have entertained for other engagements, and in a short time the car had reached his door in Burleigh Street.

Sherlock Holmes quickly dismounted. "We have just time for a cigar and a cocktail with the captain," he proposed.

"Yes, to be sure," said Captain Pole-Carew, but with no excess of heartiness. "Do me the honor, gentlemen, of walking into my bachelor home. I— I shall be charmed."

It was Sherlock Holmes who carried the thing off; otherwise I think none of us would have felt that the invitation was other than the sort that is perfunctorily made and expected to be declined, with a proper show of politeness on both sides. But Holmes moved gayly to the street door, maintaining a brisk patter of small talk as Pole-Carew got out his latchkey. We were ushered into a dimly lighted hall and passed thence into a large apartment, handsomely furnished, the living room of a man of taste.

"Pray be seated, gentlemen," said our host. "I expected my valet here before me— he also was at the theater tonight— but your motorcar outstripped him. However, I daresay we can manage," and the captain busied himself setting forth inviting decanters and cigars.

We had but just engaged in the polite enjoyment of Captain Pole-Carew's hospitality when Sherlock Holmes suddenly clapped his handkerchief to his nose, with a slight exclamation of annoyance.

"It is nothing," he said, "a trifling nose-bleed to which I am often subject after the theater." He held his head forward, his face covered with the handkerchief.

"It is most annoying," he added apologetically. "Cold water— er— could I step into your dressing room, Captain?"

"Certainly— certainly," our host assented; "through that door,

Mr. Holmes."

Holmes quickly vanished through the indicated door, whence presently came the sound of running water from a tap. We had scarcely resumed our interrupted train of conversation when he reappeared in the door, bearing in his hand a jacket.

"Thank you, Captain Pole-Carew," he said, coming forward, "my nose is quite better. It has led me, I find, to a singular discovery. May I ask, without being regarded as impolite, if this is your jacket?"

I saw that Captain Pole-Carew had gone pale as he answered haughtily: "It is my valet's jacket, Mr. Holmes. He must have forgotten it. Why do you ask?"

"I was noticing the buttons," returned Holmes; "they are exactly like this one in my pocket," and he held the dark horn button up to view.

"What of that?" retorted our host quickly; "could there not be many such?"

"Yes," Holmes acknowledged, "but this button of mine was violently torn from its fastening— as it might have been from this jacket."

"Mr. Holmes," returned Captain Pole-Carew with a sneer, "your jest is neither timely nor a brilliant one. The jacket has no button missing."

"No, but it had," returned Holmes coolly; "here, you will see, it has been sewn on, not as a tailor sews it, with the thread concealed, but through and through the cloth, leaving the thread visible. As a man unskilled, or in some haste, might sew it on. You get my meaning, Captain?"

Sherlock Holmes as he spoke had crossed the room to where Captain Pole-Carew, his face dark with passion, was standing on the hearthrug. Holmes made an exaggerated gesture in holding up the jacket, stumbled upon the captain in doing so, and fell violently against the mantel. In an effort to recover himself his arm dislodged a handsome vase, which fell to the floor and shivered into fragments. There was a cry from Captain Pole-Carew, who flung himself amid the fractured pieces of glass. Swift as his action was, Sherlock Holmes was quicker, and snatched from the floor an object that glittered among the broken fragments.

"I think, Mr. Richardson," he said calmly, recovering himself, "that, as a judge of jewelry, this is something you will take particular interest in."

Before any one of us was over the surprise of the thing, Captain Pole-Carew had quite regained his poise, and stood lighting his cigar.

"A very pretty play, Mr. Sherlock Holmes," he said. "I am indebted to you and your itinerant friends for a charming evening. May suggest, however, that the hour is now late, and Baker Street, even for a motorcar, something of a distance?"

"Naturally," said Sherlock Holmes, when we had reached his rooms and joined him in a good-night cigar, "you expect me to lay bare the processes and

so rob my performance of its sole element of fascination. Watson has taught you in his memoirs to expect it. My button quest was certainly directed against his Lordship's under butler, but at the first inquiry it turned up, to my surprise, the entirely unexpected valet of quite another person. It was a curious fact, the tailor declared, that he should twice in one day have calls for that identical button, and he innocently alluded to the valet of Pole-Carew. This was sufficient clue to start upon.

"Investigation in proper quarters not only established the palpable innocuousness of the under butler, but afforded such insight into the existent relations between the captain and his valet as I doubt not will again bring them into the sphere of my attentions. It was plainly the brain of the master that conceived the robbery, but the hand of the valet executed it. I even paid a most enjoyable visit to our friends at the Langham, as I had promised."

The Americans looked at each other.

"That could hardly be," they said. "We were not out of our rooms, and our only caller was a clerk from the curio shop with a message from the dealer— an impertinent old fellow he was, too, who followed us about the rooms with many senile questions as to our tour."

"In this profession I have to adopt many disguises," Holmes smilingly explained. "Of course I could have called on you openly, yet it amused me to fool you a bit. But a disguise would not serve my purpose in getting into Captain Pole-Carew's apartments, which was the thing now most desired. Looking back upon the achievement, I flatter myself that it was rather ingeniously pulled off. You know, Watson, of my association with the theaters and how easily under such a connection one can learn who has reserved boxes.

"I confess that here things played into my hand. I perceived that Pole-Carew recognized me— that is your doing, Watson— and I was not surprised when I saw his glance single out a person in the gallery, with whom he presently got into conversation. I say conversation, for Pole-Carew I discovered to be an expert in the lip language, an accomplishment to which I myself once devoted some months of study and which I have found very helpful in my vocation. It was an easy matter to intercept the message that the captain from his box, with exaggerated labial motion, lipped above the heads of the audience. " 'Hide the vase!' was the message, several times repeated. "Hide the vase!'

"That was the moment when I left the theater for consultation with a friendly detective in the lobby. I strongly suspect," said Sherlock Holmes, with a chuckle, "that the reason the captain failed to find his valet at home could be traced to the prompt and intelligent action of that friendly detective. Our

foisting ourselves upon the reluctant captain was merely a clever bit of card forcing, arranged quite in advance, but the rest of it was simplicity itself.

"Inasmuch as you declare that it is the property only, and not a criminal prosecution, that you desire, I do not think anything remains!"

"Except," said the gentleman warmly, taking the jewel from his pocket, "to pay you for this extraordinary recovery."

Sherlock Holmes laughed pleasantly.

"My dear American sir," he replied, "I am still very much in your debt. You should not lose sight of Edgar Allan Poe."

4: A Regent of Love Rhymes

Guy Thorne

Cyril Ranger Gull, 1876–1923

The Lady's Realm Dec 1905

Cyril Ranger Gull

Whatsoever I have to doe before death, all leasure to end the same seemeth short unto me, yea were it but of one houre.

— Montaigne

OTHER MEN had been discovered; talented women writers had been found out; reputations had been invented; but for many years. Glendinning still stood where he did.

He wrote stories which cultured people liked, and which cultured newspapers spoke well of, but he made very little money. His work vibrated in the ears of the general public with a dumb sound like a drum beaten under a blanket. It was thought as well to know his name, but to read his books was an indubitable bore.

He lived alone with his wife in an old granite cottage set among trackless moors in the wild hinterland of Cornwall. For two years they had dwelt thus, very happy in a simple life full of brave Atlantic airs, majestic sunsets, the companionship of shy birds and beasts, and the sound of God going by in midnight winds.

They had made their little home beautiful by simple means. Gertrude had gone to small country sales at weather-worn farmhouses and ancient cottages. Here was an old chair in which ancient Celtic herdsmen had sat for generations, dreaming of things that are forgotten. There a piece of Cornish cloam, so old and sturdy, and yet so faintly beautiful, that it might have been a veritable find from the Druid barrows under the mysterious cromlech hard by upon Carn Galva.

Very poor though they were, their poverty was refined and irradiated by the simple beauties ready to their hand. And on nights when the wind was high and the Atlantic roared far below with a sound of kettle-drums, when the clots of spume were flying far inland over their steep-pitched roof, they sat by the fire and thought no couple more fortunate than they.

Each daybreak was a recurring joy, each morn a pious beginning of simple household business and high literary toil.

Then, quite suddenly and unexpectedly, the London people found Glendinning out. There were articles about his work in the papers that matter. People wrote to him kind letters of praise and thanks, and husband and wife saw that a real career was opening before them. Both said they never really wanted to leave their splendid solitude, that immense landscape which in itself was a rare bloom upon the fruits of peace and quiet. But both realised also that a duty, the duty of taking the sudden spring-tide at the flood, lay before them; and this was because before very long a child was to come to them both.

It happened later that Glendinning found himself pledged to produce a book for an eminent firm of publishers, for which they would pay him a large sum. Here was fortune indeed. They could put by a large portion of the money. A vista of splendid possibilities opened before them; both agreed that their former contentment with nothing was simply because, in the past, little more than nothing was to be had.

Three months later, and when the book was nearly done, their only local friend called upon them— their only local friend, that is, who could pretend to any culture or knowledge of affairs. He was the doctor of the neighbourhood, a justice of the peace for Portalone, the little fishing town five miles away.

They told him of their good fortune, of the new prospect that was opening out for them both; and the congratulations of the able, grizzled creature were hearty and sincere.

"Ah," he said, "I knew that it would come soon. Before long, in a year or two, I shall lose you both, and then there won't be a soul in the hinterland to talk to any more. But, my dear children, I can't tell you how glad I am! When baby makes his appearance, he will be born with a silver spoon in his mouth— or should I have said a gold-mounted fountain pen? Of course you will make a Charles Dickens of him!"

The good man stayed to lunch with the Glendinnings, and enjoyed an hour of wild speculative talk with the author. It was always a tonic to him to meet Glendinning, to discuss things that one can neither touch nor see, to argue about the reason of the Present and the possibilities of a Hereafter. The fact that both men held diametrically opposite views upon those questions that

only the lords of life and death can really decide made their arguments most satisfying and stimulating events in the routine of a remote and quiet life.

"Death," said the doctor, as he went to fetch his mare from the little thatched stable behind the cottage, "death is simply cessation of correspondence with environment; and if you could only believe me, Glendinning, it is nothing more than that. We live again in nature, but that is all.

"Out of his mouth a red, red rose!
Out of his heart a white!

"We inform ourselves into all sensuous life. When we die our personality ceases."

Glendinning had argued the point until he was tired. He refused to believe that a man's soul was like the flame of a candle, blown out and then utterly non-existent, but he said no more. While the doctor was putting the bridle on the mare he let him run on.

But Gertrude, who had been listening to the talk without comment, contributed, no argument indeed, but simply a statement of personal opinion.

"For my part," she said, "I can't understand the doctor's point of view. I can't confute it, but, temperamentally, charm he never so wisely, I can't and won't believe in it!"

"Well," said the doctor, with one foot in the stirrup, "we shall all know some day, my dears."

With that he hoisted himself into the saddle, drew on his gloves of red dogskin, waved them a cheery farewell, and cantered over the heather towards Portalone.

They watched him till he became a black skeleton upon the horizon of the moor, then, linked arm in arm, they strolled along a footpath among the heath, towards a farm two miles away.

Glendinning began to talk business details with his wife.

"Of course I am not insured," he said; "we have never been able to afford the premium. But now I shall be able to put a hundred or two aside for you in case anything happens."

"Don't talk of such horrid things, dear," she answered, half laughing, but with brooding apprehensions in her gentle eyes.

They walked towards the farm. A mile away they met a plodding labourer, who greeted them and passed the time of day.

"Don't 'e go too near Trevarrick town-place, my dears," he said: "Mr. Trewella's bull 'e do begin to be getting a bit roguish, they do say."

They smiled at him, and, engrossed in their own affairs, wandered on towards the steading.

THE DOCTOR was back again, only four hours after he had left the cottage when it was happy. He was standing by the bed upon which Glendinning lay— his face was very white and set. He had been too good a friend to them for years not to tell them the truth now. He hadn't learned the suave and proper lies with which less rugged physicians oil the path of death. The sternness of the hard life upon the moors had entered into his blood; he believed that softness and half-truths were a cruel preparation for the grave. So he told them, quite simply, that in an hour or two Glendinning must pass away.

The furious creature, with its vast muscular neck, and head like a battering-ram, had done its work too well.

Glendinning felt no pain— he would never feel physical pain any more— but death was heavy upon him and life was going like a dying fire.

"Shall I stay, Glendinning?" the doctor said.

"I think not, old man," Glendinning answered; "I think Gertrude and I will be alone, please."

The doctor, who had seen many deathbeds, took up the hand of his friend, a hand that was still warm, full of blood, and unharmed. He lifted it to his lips, and then with a bowed head turned to go.

"I'll be back, child," he whispered to Gertrude, and left her alone with her husband.

Glendinning was unable to retain command of his brain for very long. He began to sob brokenly, and to moan that he had not finished *A Regent of Love Rhymes*. His last words were:

"You see, dear, if only I had finished the thing, then— then— you would have had something to go on with— only five thousand words— only five thou—" and with that he shivered a little and lay still, breathing heavily until his life was finished.

THE MIDNIGHT wind had wailed over the cottage so often, and Gertrude and her husband had read so many things into it— fantastic, romantic, and even holy— that it could now, even when Cyril was lying dead in the bedroom, have no extraordinary appeal to her.

The doctor had been there. The women from the farm, friendly sympathisers and kind-hearted Cornish folk, had sprung up on the moor and clustered round the house, and in it, like crows.

That was what Gertrude thought. She wanted to be left alone with her beloved dead.

Even now, down in the kitchen a farmer's wife was snoring on the settle. But Gertrude was alone— alone in Cyril's writing-room, with only the wooden partition between it and their own room, where he lay so waxen and so calm.

The time had not yet come for her to accept the gracious influences, the supreme consolations, the comfort that God pours into wounded hearts. She was stunned still, and as yet no echo from Paradise had come.

She had lit the lamp in the pleasant writing-room, and it shone on Cyril's pictures, on Cyril's books, on all the ordered litter of the great table where he wrote.

How secure, ordered, comfortable, and *right* it all seemed!

There was the typewriter, reflecting the light of the lamp from all its polished surfaces of black japan and steel, and by the side of the machine was the neat pile of manuscript, the final and uncompleted "copy" of *A Regent of Love Rhymes*.

The thing hypnotised her, and as she gazed at it the intense physical strain of the last hour had its result. She fell into a state, half-broken, half-stupor.

Through all her dream there ran these words— "You see, dear, if only I had finished the thing, then— then— there would have been something to go on with— only five thousand words, only five thou—" She woke with a start and sat up, rigid, in her chair, A clicking metallic noise filled the quiet little room.

She plucked at her eyes with trembling fingers, for she had thought that she saw an inexplicable thing upon the little green-topped table where the typewriting machine was standing. She thought that the keys were being depressed in the quick rattle of an expert hand. The carriage seemed travelling rapidly towards the imminent moment when she should hear the tinkle of the bell… The bell sounded, the carriage was thrust back with its gritty, corn-crake noise and the sudden clash of its impact upon the nickel buffer at the end of the track. Then, once more, the enamelled keys began to dance and glitter in the light.

No! This was not an illusion. The thing was actually going on.

Rigid as a corpse, she took two gliding steps towards the table.

As she stopped, the carriage was lifted up and the noise of the keys stopped. It was exactly as though some invisible typist was scrutinising the last sentence that had appeared upon the cylinder. The carriage clashed confidently down. Once more the keys began to race, the levers to hop up against the ribbon.

Then there was a screech of the cog-wheels. The filled sheet came up into the air, as if a hand was holding it. It remained sustained for a moment and then fluttered neatly down upon the thick pile of manuscript, which was the almost completed story— *A Regent of Love Rhymes*.

She staggered back to her chair. She knew.

She could not understand how or why, but she knew that some superhuman force was at work. She realised that *A Regent of Love Rhymes* was being completed— not for the sake of art— but for her sake.

The clicking went on unceasingly. The mechanical movement which filled, completed, and removed the page did not stop.

She glided away from the machine, felt along the wall till she came to the door of the study, opened it, jumped across the intervening space at the stair-head and burst into the death chamber.

The candles round the bed burned still and cold. The shell which had been Cyril lay waxen and smiling.

Nothing had changed.

Again she hurried into the writing-room. The machine was going on towards its relentless completion of the tale.

Then, at last, she realised that, from some other world, her husband was writing the final lines of the tale for her— for *her*.

The lords of life and death had given him this little grace.

She drew nearer and nearer to the whirring, clicking thing, and, a yard away, watched the mystery, so stupendous in its operation, so commonplace in its material means, go on throughout the night.

The wind wailed and sobbed round the house; the dead body lay silent in the other room; and as she watched and listened, a sense of the august Powers which were at work for her came into her soul like balm.

She watched. She saw the very last lines of all, glowing, burning, wonderful lines were being stamped upon the linen paper which had been made in the United States. Then, as she held her breath in love, in gratitude, and in nameless fear, she saw the carriage lifted once more, and she saw that, in purple capitals, *FINIS* was written.

The loud clicking in the little room stopped suddenly. A heavy silence lay over the cottage, a silence which the terrific wind intensified, and could not break.

Gertrude rose up. She lifted her eyes, and called to Cyril's soul.

"Cyril," she cried, "Cyril," she called, "hear me before you go right away! Send me one more message— you have finished the book, dearest, tell me where you have done it— love— love of my heart— one word one word more—"

But the typewriter remained still and motionless. The love which was so strong that it had pierced through innumerable veils to help its object was not allowed to tell the lonely wife why it had done so, and from what near or distant place it had sent its last message.

We may get very near to the thick veil, we may think that the lords of life and death are kind and have revelations for us, but God knoweth His own time and place, and we are not allowed to understand.

We have not deserved it yet.

That is what Gertrude was taught.

She remained waiting very hopefully for the ultimate explanation, and the meeting with Cyril.

THE BOOK was a great success, but most of the critics, in their wisdom, agreed on one point. They said that, while the last two chapters of the story were well written, the author seemed to have attempted too exalted a note, and one which he was not quite able to sustain.

5: Le Roi est Mort

Ethel Lina White

The Pall Mall Magazine, January 1910

Produced by Matthias Kaether and Roy Glashan

"SHE'S, she's— I don't know how to put it. But *you* know! She's not like other girls." The boy twisted his Panama hat between his kneading fingers. He was merely an ordinary, tanned youth in a white drill suit; further, something in copra. But, to Venetia South, he was invested with the sinister dignity of the Man with the Scythe. For he had borne the news that meant the deathblow to her career.

Deposed! The word burnt its way like a slow-match through her brain, as she languidly waved her fan, in apparent unconcern. In the rush of the warm Trade-winds among the plumed palms she heard its echo. The faraway murmur of the surf-song hummed the refrain. Deposed!

Hers had been a long reign. Ever since she had come to pass the days of her grass-widowhood on the little tooth of coral-reef, round which the great wash of blue Pacific curled and licked in unceasing swirl, she had established a rule of absolute and despotic monarchy. All the mankind of the island had laid their hearts at her feet, and then under them. All their womankind had acknowledged her power in a universal vote of enmity.

She rocked to and fro, her fan timing each jealous stab at her heart. A bewitching woman— despite the tide of her beauty was just on the turn. In defiance of custom, she wore a loose muslin robe, in the native style, and a wreath of scarlet flowers was bound in her hair.

"You can't think how ripping she is!" went on the boy. "She's so *different*, you know. Such slang— like a man— only she's every bit a girl. But there's not much chance for me. She's all the rage everywhere, and now Jardine has cut in—"

"Jardine!"

The fire suddenly broke through the smouldering grey ash. Venetia's eyes blazed, and her self-control vanished.

"Rather! Jardine's great at present."

Mrs. South looked at the boy with unconscious scrutiny— every detail of his appearance photographing itself indelibly on to her brain. She noticed the crop of freckles on his face— the gold stopping in a front tooth— the way his eyebrows met. Insignificant in himself, this was the straw that had marked the turn of the current.

When he had called that afternoon, she had gone through her usual course of procedure. Two fingers, a cup of tea, a draught to sit in. Then, stifling her yawns, she had waited for him to come to the inevitable point, and declare his love. And he had declared his love— his love for another woman.

WHEN, at last, the boy had left her, Venetia sat for a long time brooding, her chin down, and her head flat, in the attitude of a hooded cobra about to strike. Clairvoyant at last, she wondered she had not marked before the slow ebb of the high tide of popularity. She had never troubled to join in the social life of the island. The island had to come to her. She remembered now that fewer men had drifted into her bungalow during the past weeks. She had even received a call from a woman, and had let that omen, as significant of coming disaster as wax-moth in a hive, pass unnoticed.

Stung to a sudden frenzy, she sprang up and burrowed into her dark jungle of a room. Hopeless confusion reigned over everything. Several packs of cards, a bridge-scorer, cigarettes, loose music, empty tumblers and straws, dead flowers, red-skinned bananas, and cushions all lay scattered like the débris after an earthquake. A gilt clock from the Louvre had long lost its French vivacity, and settled down for life at four o'clock. Over all was a litter of photographs. All were portraits of men, and, with one exception, there was no duplicate. That exception, however, was significant, for the same face was pictured in nine different photographs.

Taking up one, Venetia looked at it closely. It represented a man with handsome, impassive features and sleepy eyes.

It was now nearly two years since Lord Jardine had stopped at the island for afternoon tea. When the yacht had called for him, six months later, he was still drinking tea, and had languidly waved his spoon in dismissal. Apparently the lying French clock and Mrs. South's charms had settled his course of inaction.

But Venetia, as she scanned the sleepy eyes, acknowledged the humiliating truth that, for once, the island gossip was at fault. Jardine, with his impassive calm, had completely baffled her resources.

Without warning, she felt an unaccustomed scalding behind her eyeballs, and a couple of tears ploughed their way through the layer of pearl-powder on her face. The next minute this advance-guard to an hysterical outburst was swiftly brushed away, as the woman caught sight of a white clad figure swinging up from the beach. It was the Trents' new governess, and the girl to whom the fickle island had transferred its allegiance.

As she approached, Mary Moon looked at the flower-wreathed bungalow with unwilling curiosity. Ever since her arrival she had heard rumours of the

sinister and alluring charms of Mrs. South, but she had turned an indifferent ear to these lurid anecdotes. She was too soaked through with the charm of this tropical Paradise, too intoxicated with the delight and freedom of her new life, to worry her head about this enchantress of the island, who was apparently in the wholesale line cf me Circe business.

It was only since her rapidly-increasing friendship with Lord Jardine that doubts had clouded her serenity. She had looked at the inscrutable face of the big man— thought of the stories, and wondered— wondered. Then, she had tried her hand at cross-examination, with disquieting results. Jardine had hedged at first, but, presently, growing careless, had let slip admissions that testified to his appreciation of the charms of Mrs. South. Finally, with a yawn, he had dismissed the subject with the two words, "Ancient history."

As the girl looked askance at the bungalow, some one hailed her. "Do come in!"

It was Venetia South's voice that called from the verandah.

THE SOCIETY ISLANDS have been well-named, after all, although the connection with their Royal Geographical sponsor is chiefly to be traced in their remarkable and alarming degree of latitude.

Yet, in spite of the universal friendliness, Mary Moon hesitated. Secure in her new-born happiness and *joie de vivre*, she was conscious of the fact that, if she owned the universe, she was not quite mistress of herself. Jardine's careless words had implanted a sting, and she felt the first stirring of jealousy.

Her eyes strayed past the gleaming emerald of the lagoon to the foaming outline of the reef. Outside were the breakers and the sharks.

Then she accepted her rival's challenge in a brief word, "Thanks!"

The woman looked at her closely and critically, as she stumbled over the threshold into the darkened room. She was a typical English girl— bonny and jolly— with ripe cheeks and trim waist. Venetia summed up her points coldly and dispassionately, bending her will to purge her mind of prejudice.

It was with a feeling of triumph that she put out of Court the two qualities she most dreaded— youth and freshness. Lord Jardine had not been attracted by the charms of Sainte Mousseline. There were plenty of young and beautiful girls in the island, and white muslin, although common enough, was more in request with the frivolous islanders— when embroidered.

Then, as she scanned the girl's trim outline, her neat, shining hair, and linen dress, she arrived at her conclusion. Mary Moon had won her supremacy by the potent power of starch. The fibres of her moral nature had been permanently stiffened to resist the soporific spell of the island, just as her skirts bore witness to drastic treatment at the wash-tub. She shone by

contrast. At home, Jardine would have passed her without a backward glance. Here, after flabby morals and flimsy draperies, she was a spice of ginger in the midst of the universal insipid sweetness.

Venetia drew a long breath, for she was ignorant of the antidote to this Dew infusion.

MEANTIME, Mary had taken keen stock of Mrs. South. The instant she had entered the room she had been assailed with a strong feeling of repugnance. The air was soaked with perfume; it clogged every square inch with its clinging odour. Accustomed as she had grown to the scent of the South Sea Islands, with its dominant note of tieré flower and copra, Mary longed for a fan to sweep away this reck of a personal essence.

It seemed to her, instinctively, that it had been sprayed about after each fresh exodus to sweeten the air of the bitter reproaches and curses of the victims of this Belle Dame Sans Merci. She knew that within these walls men's hearts had been bandied about in at game of pitch-and-toss— that youths had been stripped of their faith in womankind— that lives had been ruined and ambitions shipwrecked.

But, although she dimly felt the atmosphere of the room, in her young common sense Mary was inclined to believe that Mrs. South's reputation had been grossly exaggerated. To her critical eyes she looked incapable of playing the part. A wild-haired woman, with a powdered face, lying in a crumpled wrapper against a pile of amber cushions. She noticed, with stern disapproval, the yellow stain of cigarettes on her finger-tips, the dark pouches under her eves, and the good four inches of open-work stocking on the couch— unconscious that Mrs. South's minimum display was usually five.

The woman watched the girl's changing face, as her gaze roved over the picture-gallery of men's portraits. She smiled as she saw the frown and start with which Mary Moon encountered, in succession, the nine photographs of Lord Jardine.

"You're looking at my collection?" she asked. "I'm getting overstocked. Shall have to make a clearance, when I've the energy. Jardine, now— he's the worst offender. Always a fresh one. I suppose you've also loads? No? Then *do* take one— any one— to help me out! Choose!"

From the expression on the girl's face she saw that her shaft had gone home.

But Mary stood her ground. "I was looking for a portrait of your husband— that's all."

This time it was Venetia South that frowned.

"I haven't one— a photograph, I mean. But I wear his miniature, of course. The proper place for a husband is hanging round your neck."

"Like a millstone?"

Mrs. South concealed her annoyance with a laugh.

"Oh, my dear Ralph is more like a rolling-stone. Never at home. But, tell me— how do you like the island?"

"Perfect. I've never had such a glorious time before!"

Mary forgot her surroundings as she broke into a burst of enthusiasm. The dark walls seemed to fade to a mist, and she saw through them again the deep wash of the blue Pacific, the glorious orange sunshine, and the dazzling purity of the powdered coral beach.

Venetia, feeding her with careless question, heard more than her words, for her strained ear caught the bubbling undercurrent of the triumph-song of a woman in love.

She broke into the rhapsody with a jarring laugh.

"Goodness, how you enthuse! 'Thank God for life—thank God for love!'"

Mary, riding on the full wave of happiness, suddenly experienced a bitter flavour, like a swimmer who has swallowed a mouthful of salt water. She looked at Venetia, and noted for the first time, with an unreasonable pang of envy, the length of the lashes that outlined her eyes and the delicacy of her taper fingers.

"Very charming!" went on Venetia. "But have you ever thought that it all leads to nothing? All this picnicking, flirting, and lotus-eating? There's Jardine, for instance— He's been slacking here for nearly two years, but he's no earthly good to any one. He'll never marry in the island— now, will he?"

Mary faced the question squarely. "No. I suppose it is unlikely."

"Undreamt-of. Well, of course, it's all right for me, with an encumbrance already, but for an unmarried girl like yourself one naturally asks, 'What's the good of it?'"

Mary rose to her feet. She only wanted to break loose from this dark den, to breathe in the scented air, and to fall again under the spell of the eastern Pacific island.

Yet, at the doorway, something urged her to stop.

"I don't think you would talk like that," she said, "if you realised what— this— *means* to me— what sort of a time I've had before. At home— there was no money for dances or enjoyment. We just had to be educated to be independent. Then years teaching at a school, slaving all the time, indoors and out. Goodness! I feel a brute now when I remember how I bashed those wretched girls at hockey! Then, I had a slice of luck— a good private engagement. An easy time, but— my word!— the snubs. Only the governess!

You know the sort of thing. And now, *this*— this glorious life; the freedom, the equality, the absolute perfection of living! But— I'm talking rot! Good-bye!"

As the girl stepped out into the rainbow-tinted world she was unconscious of the drift of her words. But Venetia understood. She had made an appeal.

THE WOMAN'S MIND swung back to the days of her own girlhood, passed in the lively society of a garrison-town, and contrasted it with the grey ash-path over which Mary Moon's feet had prated So far— she had had everything! For nearly two years Jardine had been her possession, even though he preserved the copyright of his emotions. Should she grudge three months of him to the girl— six, at most?

She fought it out during the days that followed, but when the moon had ridden into the sky for the seventh time she declared the ultimatum of that empty week. War to the knife!

During those long, idle hours the truth had slowly eaten down to the bone, like acid. She was deposed! Only one or two courtiers of her defaulting retinue had straggled in to see their former idol, and, in their manner, she had read the writing on the wall. They were frankly sympathetic, and, telling her she looked a wreck, advised a change, unconscious of the change that had wrecked her life. She looked at herself in the mirror afterwards, and loathed the white-faced woman that glared at her from the glass.

Small wonder that her charms deserted her after days of pacing her room like a caged animal, and dining principally off her finger-nails! Woman-visitors, however, she had as a crowning insult; and, although she hated their society, they served as her scouts and spies. They arrived primed with gossip as to the career of Mary Moon, the number of her dresses, the snowball-growth of her conquests, the infatuation of Lord Jardine. No one knew how hard the deposed queen took her reverses; it was impossible to tell from the weary set of her jaded face. In those days, when the grasshopper was a burden, she seemed beaten to the world. The fickle island society had hailed a new sovereign, and was shouting on all sides, "Le roi est mort! Vive le roi!"

But, for all her inaction, and the verdict of the club gossip, Venetia South had not received her *coup de grâce*. She lay in her den— *perdue*— like a wounded tigress, but her mind was busy with schemes for a last desperate rally. She knew that it was impossible to regain her position by a slow siege; the facile fancy of the South Sea Islanders must be taken by assault. She fixed the date of the encounter and the battle-ground without hesitation. At the bachelors' ball she would make her last bid for supremacy.

But the weapon? For days Venetia ransacked her wardrobe, until her floors were layers deep in littered laces and muslins. She could find nothing to suit

her ends. White she tabooed, for she guessed instinctively her rival's choice, and she dared not risk a brush with her glorious colouring. The rest of her things were rags, off-colour and shop-soiled, like the spoils of a remnant sale. She longed, from the depths of her soul, for a Paris creation, with which to kill competition, after the manner of a Kipling heroine.

Then, thrown back on her resources, she ransacked a pile of old *Sketches*. The total yield of their torn and soiled covers was a coloured picture of the dancer, "Eldorado," who had set the Thames on fire and made things hot generally in London, a few years previously.

Venetia stared at the costume with fascinated eyes. It was absolutely alluring and startling. The daring draperies, their filmy transparencies, their foaming poppy sheen, their spangle of barbaric gilding, inflamed her imagination.

She sat brooding over it for hours. Should she copy it? In England— apart from the lime-light— the costume would be frankly impossible. Here, under tropical skies, the temperature was, presumably, warmed to sufficient height to resist a shock.

Venetia tore her eyes from the tempting thing. She knew that to appear at the dance in that costume was to play the game with loaded dice or marked cards. Then, as she met the sleepy stare of Jardine's pictured eyes from nine different points of view, her last atrophied scruples were sloughed like an old skin.

THE magic of a tropical clime was at full strength on the night of the ball. The sky was pricked with golden stars, fireflies caught in the purple web of darkness. Down below, however, the fireflies flashed free, as lights darting hither and thither proclaimed the festive exodus from villa and bungalow to the illuminated club-house.

Mary Moon was one of the earliest to arrive. She looked a charming English export in her white dress, which, although a day behind the fair in England, was the latest fashion that had arrived at the Eastern Pacific.

As she surrendered her card to an Increasing ring of partners, her thoughts reverted to the last time that she had worn that gown, at a county ball, at home, when she had been a most tenacious wallflower.

The contrast heightened her triumph. Then, as Lord Jardine commandeered her card, the rose on her cheek deepened. It was evident that he also anticipated pleasure from the evening, for his glance was almost alert.

As they began to skirmish over the number of dances a name caught her ear. She turned, and saw a couple of women, who were gossiping to a youth.

"Fancy! I hear Mrs. South is turning out to-night!"

"Silly woman! She'd better lie low, if only to save her face!"

"Oh, you never know!" laughed the boy. "There's life in the old dog yet."

The old dog! Thus yapped the puppy. Yet, in feeling a pang of pity for her prostrate rival, Mary could not quite banish a guilty sense of joy on the score of the Jardine episode. Then she noticed that the boy, who was underhung, had further slipped his lip.

"By Jove!" he murmured, gazing at the doorway.

Instantly the women's heads swung round as on a pivot. At the same instant, Jardine drew a quick breath. Glancing up, Mary saw that he, also, was staring in the same direction. She turned swiftly, with a sense of coming disaster.

Attired like a pagan goddess, an Eastern dancing-girl, an oriental queen— whatever they chose to label her— Venetia South swept into the room, and at her appearance every scruple was licked up in the fierce flame of admiration that she kindled. Mrs. Grundy died before that scorching ray. The women gazed at her with fascinated envy, and the men slipped back to prehistoric aeons, and invoked, with unconscious faith, a pagan deity.

"By Jove!"

It was the murmur on every lip, bare or thatched.

Mary Moon stared with wide-eyed dismay. Was *this* the woman whose charm she had despised? She failed to recognise the yellow-faced, faded belle in this glorious creature. She was barbaric, splendid, wicked. Every bit of her— the garlands of scarlet blooms on her dishevelled hair, the flaming draperies that apparently hung together by enchantment, the rouge that blazed on her cheeks— was a challenge to the senses and a menace to the conventionalities.

Then, the low-drawn breath was relaxed, and a buzz of voices hummed free. Mary heard the low whisper of the planter's wife behind her.

"That's playing the game *too* low. If I catch my old man dancing with her—"

But she spoke to the empty air, for the youth had gone blundering over to Mrs. South.

With a sinking at her heart, Mary looked at Jardine. She hardly recognised him. His cool, impassive face had broken up before a flush of deep excitement. His eyes were alert. For the first time Lord Jardine was awake.

Hardly conscious of his action, he handed her back her card, with a mutter of thanks. Then he steered into the throng in the direction of the maelstrom that spun round Mrs. South. The next instant they were whirling round the room in the embrace of a waltz.

The girl hardly knew how she blundered through the dance. An east wind had swept through the tropical warmth of the ball-room, blighting her

triumph. She could only feverishly wait for the next valse, against which Jardine had placed his initials.

It came at last. The band struck up, and Jardine floated by— again with Mrs. South.

Mary sat alone for the space of a minute only, before another partner secured her, but in that moment the iron entered her soul as she caught the flash of exultation in the eyes of her rival.

Venetia glanced at the white, girlish figure almost with derision. In the intoxication of her triumph the game appeared too simple, the foe too unworthy. A mere school-girl to flatten! A bread-and-butter flapper! She had crushed her to powder beneath her French heel. The world had come back at the first crook of her finger.

She laughed aloud, and Jardine laughed in answering excitement.

"Let's sit out!" he said. "I have something to say."

She looked with triumph at his transformed face. With an inch less bodice and two shades in depth of colour, she had achieved instantaneous success after two years of failure.

Yet when they sat alone under the murky glow of a swaying Chinese lantern, Jardine played idly with her fan and remained silent. The whisper of the far-away valse murmured a benediction. The sleeping island turned in her slumber, and they caught the perfume of her heaving breaths. Magic was loose in the air.

"*What* a night!" breathed Venetia. Then she promptly put the test-question that was hot on her lips.

"How do you think your new flame is looking? Miss Moon."

Jardine roused himself with an effort.

"Who? Oh, yes! Mary Moon. Quite nice. An ordinary enough little girl! See scores of them in England."

Venetia relaxed her breath. Her task was accomplished, and Mary Moon had taken her proper place in the scheme of things.

"What are you thinking of?" she asked, as, in spite of his tense expression, Jardine seemed looking into space.

He gave a laugh.

"Sorry! My thoughts were thousands of miles away. Odd to think that somewhere on the atlas— high up above all this waste of blue paint— is grey, drizzling England. Bet you anything, it's raining! Slippery pavements. Hansoms and taxis. The lights of Leicester Square. Can't you see them?"

"No!"

Venetia's voice was sharp. Jardine was in love with her. His every look in the ball-room proclaimed his newly-lit passion. She had brought him here to make his lips redeem the promise of his eyes.

"No," she repeated. "We're here. That's enough. *Here*, in this enchanted island. You and I. Why do you bother about England?"

"Why not? I'm going back."

The scented universe slipped under Venetia's feet. The stars above wheeled dizzily in their struggle to preserve their places.

The woman's voice came in a thin scream.

"You're not going back? You're *not!* You— you *couldn't* be so cruel as to desert us— this lovely island!"

"This lovely island, as you call it, is about played out. I'm fed up with reef and palm. I go by the next boat. Surely, you never imagined I should stay here always?"

VENETIA gasped under the blow. She could not imagine the island without Jardine. Its charm peeled off at a touch. It stood revealed as an isolated, aching spot of exile. Blue, heaving hummocks of Pacific Ocean rose interminably to separate her from the fog-bank of far-away England.

Utter bewilderment swamped her faculties. She could not think. She tried to grapple with the appalling fact.

Jardine was going away!

Then she broke out into an incoherent torrent of entreaties, exhorting the charm of the islands.

"You won't go. This is nothing but a freak. You've eaten 'foi,' and you'll be back next boat. Think cf the freedom, the glorious climate! You'll miss that. And the picnics, the reefing, the bathing, the delightful time you've had lately with that jolly girl, Miss Moon! That fresh, *charming* girl! She's brought new life into the island."

In her desperation she was pushing forward her rival into the game, like a little white pawn— exploiting her charm, her attraction. Anything to pin Jardine to the spot!

He shook his head.

"It's awfully good of you to be so persistent, Venetia. You've all been perfectly ripping. But— if I wanted to— and I'm fogged on that point— I couldn't now. Couldn't stay. I'm drawn away— dragged home!"

There was silence. Then Venetia whispered huskily:

"*Who* has done this? A woman?

"Yes. *You!*"

Venetia's brain reeled. Roller after roller of blue ocean passed before her eyes in never-ceasing movement.

Then she made a great bundle of the tattered remains of her traditional furniture, every remnant of her inherited dignity, every vestige of her school polish, every shred of her social training, and threw it to the winds. She caught at his arm.

"Take me with you!" she cried.

Jardine paused. Then, very carefully, he detached her clinging fingers.

"I'm sorry," he said coldly, "but there are two impediments to the course you propose."

"What— what?"

"To begin with— your husband."

"*That*— for him!"

Captain South was disposed of in a snap of two fingers.

"Secondly— my wife."

"Your *wife!* You are married?"

Venetia turned on him, with concentrated rage.

"You have *dared* to deceive me all this time!"

"If it comes to that, it's never been published in England."

Jardine's cool voice fell like lumps of ice on her hot heart.

"As a matter of fact, I came a mighty cropper over my marriage, and fled the country to escape the consequences of my folly. Came here to forget, and thought I had. Till tonight. Venetia, you graceless woman, you little know what you've done for me! When I saw you to-night— I saw more than you. Saw a pale image of the woman who has wrecked my life, broken me to bits. Eldorado, the dancer, and my wife!"

For a moment there was silence. Venetia swayed in her feat, as if to faint. Then, gathering together her forces, she rose and left him brooding in silent resentment.

HE WAS awakened. He had to return— return to the old slavery, the old enchantment. Against his will, he had been aroused. But he could not sleep again.

The instant Venetia South appeared in the ball-room she was surrounded by eager suppliants. The band blared a triumphant *valse*. In one corner sat a neglected white figure. The fickle islanders had again made history. Their new queen was deposed, their old sovereign restored.

"*Le roi est mort! Vive le roi*!"

———————————

6: Oh, Whistle, And I'll Come To You, My Lad

M. R. James

1862-1936

Ghost Stories of an Antiquary (Collection), 1904

Montague Rhodes James

"I SUPPOSE YOU will be getting away pretty soon, now Full term is over, Professor," said a person not in the story to the Professor of Ontography, soon after they had sat down next to each other at a feast in the hospital hall of St. James's College.

The professor was young, neat, and precise in speech. "Yes," he said, "my friends have been making me take up golf this term, and I mean to go to the East Coast— in point of fact to Burnstow (I dare say you know it)— for a week or ten days to improve my game. I hope to get off tomorrow."

"Oh, Parkins," said his neighbor on the other side, "if you are going to Burnstow, I wish you would look at the site of the Templars' preceptory, and let me know if you think it would be any good to have a dig there in the summer."

It was, as you might suppose, a person of antiquarian pursuits who said this, but, since he merely appears in this prologue, there is no need to give his entitlements.

"Certainly," said Parkins the professor, "if you will describe to me whereabouts the site is, I will do my best to give you an idea of the lay of the land when I get back; or I could write to you about it, if you would tell me where you are likely to be."

"Don't trouble to do that, thanks. It's only that I'm thinking of taking my family in that direction in the Long, and it occurred to me that, as very few of the English preceptories have ever been properly planned, I might have an opportunity of doing something useful on off-days."

The professor rather sniffed at the idea that planning out a preceptory could be described as useful. His neighbor continued, "The site— I doubt if there is anything showing above ground— must be down quite close to the beach now. The sea has encroached tremendously, as you know, all along that bit of coast. I should think, from the map, that it must be about three quarters of a mile from the Globe Inn, at the north end of the town. Where are you going to stay?"

"Well, *at* the Globe Inn, as a matter of fact," said Parkins. "I have engaged a room there. I couldn't get in anywhere else; most of the lodging-houses are shut up in winter, it seems; and, as it is, they tell me that the only room of any size I can have is really a double-bedded one, and that they haven't a corner in which to store the other bed, and so on. But I must have a fairly large room, for I am taking some books down, and mean to do a bit of work; and though I don't quite fancy having an empty bed— not to speak of two— in what I may call for the time being my study, I suppose I can manage to rough it for the short time I shall be there."

"Do you call having an extra bed in your room roughing it, Parkins?" said a bluff person opposite. "Look here, I shall come down and occupy it for a bit; it'll be company for you."

The professor quivered, but managed to laugh in a courteous manner. "By all means, Rogers; there's nothing I should like better. But I'm afraid you would find it rather dull; you don't play golf, do you?"

"No, thank heaven!" said rude Mr. Rogers.

"Well, you see, when I'm not writing I shall most likely be out on the links, and that, as I say, would be rather dull for you, I'm afraid."

"Oh, I don't know! There's certain to be somebody I know in the place; but, of course, if you don't want me, speak the word, Parkins; I shan't be offended. Truth, as you always tell us, is never offensive."

Parkins was, indeed, scrupulously polite and strictly truthful. It is to be feared that Mr. Rogers sometimes practiced upon his knowledge of these characteristics. In Parkins's breast there was a conflict now raging, which for a moment or two did not allow him to answer. That interval being over, he said, "Well, if you want the exact truth, Rogers, I was considering whether the room I speak of would really be large enough to accommodate us both comfortably; and also whether (mind, I shouldn't have said this if you hadn't pressed me) you would not constitute something in the nature of a hindrance to my work."

Rogers laughed loudly. "Well done, Parkins!" he said. "It's all right. I promise not to interrupt your work; don't you disturb yourself about that. No, I won't come if you don't want me; but I thought I should do so nicely to keep the ghosts off." Here he might have been seen to wink and to nudge his next

neighbor. Parkins might also have been seen to become pink. "I beg pardon, Parkins," Rogers continued, "I oughtn't to have said that. I forgot you didn't like levity on these topics."

"Well," Parkins said, "as you have mentioned the matter, I freely own that I do *not* like careless talk about what you call ghosts. A man in my position," he went on, raising his voice a little, "cannot, I find, be too careful about appearing to sanction the current belief on such subjects. As you know, Rogers, or as you ought to know; for I think I have never concealed my views—"

"No, you certainly have not, old man," put in Rogers *sotto voce*.

"—I hold that any semblance, any appearance of concession to the view that such things might exist is equivalent to a renunciation of all that I hold most sacred. But I'm afraid I have not succeeded in securing your attention."

"Your *undivided* attention, was what Dr. Blimber actually *said*," Rogers interrupted, with every appearance of an earnest desire for accuracy. "But I beg your pardon, Parkins, I'm stopping you."

"No, not at all," said Parkins. "I don't remember Blimber; perhaps he was before my time. But I needn't go on. I'm sure you know what I mean."

"Yes, yes," said Rogers, rather hastily, "just so. We'll go into it fully at Burnstow, or somewhere."

In repeating the above dialogue I have tried to give the impression which it made on me, that Parkins was something of an old woman— rather henlike, perhaps, in his little ways; totally destitute, alas! of the sense of humor, but at the same time dauntless and sincere in his convictions, and a man deserving of the greatest respect. Whether or not the reader has gathered so much, that was the character which Parkins had.

On the following day Parkins did, as he had hoped, succeed in getting away from his college, and in arriving at Burnstow. He was made welcome at the Globe Inn, was safely installed in the large double-bedded room of which we have heard, and was able before retiring to rest to arrange his materials for work in apple-pie order upon a commodious table which occupied the outer end of the room, and was surrounded on three sides by windows looking out seaward; that is to say, the central window looked straight out to sea, and those on the left and right commanded prospects along the shore to the north and south respectively. On the south you saw the village of Burnstow. On the north no houses were to be seen, but only the beach and the low cliff backing it. Immediately in front was a strip— not considerable— of rough grass, dotted with old anchors, capstans, and so forth; then a broad path; then the beach. Whatever may have been the original distance between the Globe Inn and the sea, not more than 60 yards now separated them.

The rest of the population of the inn was, of course, a golfing one, and included a few elements that call for a special description. The most conspicuous figure was, perhaps, that of an *ancien militaire*, secretary of a London club, and possessed of a voice of incredible strength, and of views of a pronouncedly Protestant type. These were apt to find utterance after his attendance upon the ministrations of the vicar, an estimable man with inclinations toward a picturesque ritual, which he gallantly kept down as far as he could out of deference to East Anglian tradition.

Professor Parkins, one of whose principal characteristics was pluck, spent the greater part of the day following his arrival at Burnstow in what he had called improving his game, in company with this Colonel Wilson, and during the afternoon— whether the process of improvement were to blame or not, I am not sure— the colonel's demeanor assumed a coloring so lurid that even Parkins jibbed at the thought of walking home with him from the links. He determined, after a short and furtive look at that bristling mustache and those incarnadined features, that it would be wiser to allow the influences of tea and tobacco to do what they could with the colonel before the dinner hour should render a meeting inevitable.

"I might walk home tonight along the beach," he reflected— "yes. and take a look— there will be light enough for that— at the ruins of which Disney was talking. I don't exactly know where they are, by the way; but I expect I can hardly help stumbling on them."

This he accomplished, I may say, in the most literal sense, for in picking his way from the links to the shingle beach his foot caught, partly in a gorse root and partly in a biggish stone, and over he went. When he got up and surveyed his surroundings, he found himself in a patch of somewhat broken ground covered with small depressions and mounds. These latter, when he came to examine them, proved to be simply masses of flints embedded in mortar and grown over with turf. He must, he quite rightly concluded, be on the site of the preceptory he had promised to look at. It seemed not unlikely to reward the spade of the explorer; enough of the foundations was probably left at no great depth to throw a good deal of light on the general plan. He remembered vaguely that the Templars, to whom this site had belonged, were in the habit of building round churches, and he thought a particular series of the humps or mounds near him did appear to be arranged in something of a circular form.

Few people can resist the temptation to try a little amateur research in a department quite outside their own, if only for the satisfaction of showing how successful they would have been had they only taken it up seriously. Our professor, however, if he felt something of this mean desire, was also truly anxious to oblige Mr. Disney. So he paced with care the circular area he had

noticed, and wrote down its rough dimensions in his notebook. Then he proceeded to examine an oblong eminence which lay east of the center of the circle and seemed to his thinking likely to be the base of a platform or altar. At one end of it, the northern, a patch of the turf was gone— removed by some boy or other creature *feræ naturæ*. It might, he thought, be as well to probe the soil here for evidences of masonry, and he took out his knife and began scraping away the earth. And now followed another little discovery; a portion of soil fell inward as he scraped, and disclosed a small cavity. He lighted one match after another to help him to see of what nature the hole was, but the wind was too strong for them all. By tapping and scratching the sides with his knife, however, he was able to make out that it must be an artificial hole in masonry. It was rectangular, and the sides, top, and bottom, if not actually plastered, were smooth and regular. Of course it was empty. No! As he withdrew the knife he heard a metallic clink, and when he introduced his hand it met with a cylindrical object lying on the floor of the hole. Naturally enough, he picked it up, and when he brought it into the light, now fast fading, he could see that it, too, was of man's making— a metal tube about four inches long and evidently of some considerable age.

By the time Parkins had made sure that there was nothing else in this odd receptacle, it was too late and too dark for him to think of undertaking any further search. What he had done had proved so unexpectedly interesting that he determined to sacrifice a little more of the daylight on the morrow to archeology. The object which he now had safe in his pocket was bound to be of some slight value at least, he felt sure.

Bleak and solemn was the view on which he took a last look before starting homeward. A faint yellow light in the west showed the links, on which a few figures moving toward the clubhouse were still visible, the squat martello tower, the lights of Aldsey village, the pale ribbon of sands intersected at intervals by black wooden groynes, the dim and murmuring sea. The wind was bitter from the north, but was at his back when he set out for the Globe. He quickly rattled and clashed through the shingle and gained the sand, upon which, but for the groynes which had to be got over every few yards, the going was both good and quiet.

One last look behind, to measure the distance he had made since leaving the ruined Templars' church, showed him a prospect of company on his walk, in the shape of a rather indistinct personage, who seemed to be making great efforts to catch up with him, but made little, if any, progress. I mean that there was an appearance of running about his movements, but that the distance between him and Parkins did not seem materially to lessen. So, at least, Parkins thought, and decided that he almost certainly did not know him, and

that it would be absurd to wait until he came up. For all that, company, he began to think, would really be very welcome on that lonely shore, if only you could choose your companion. In his unenlightened days he had read of meetings in such places which even now would hardly bear thinking of. He went on thinking of them, however, until he reached home, and particularly of one which catches most people's fancy at some time of their childhood: "Now I saw in my dream that Christian had gone but a very little way when he saw a foul fiend coming over the field to meet him."

What should I do now, he thought, *if I looked back and caught sight of a black figure sharply defined against the yellow sky, and saw that it had horns and wings? I wonder whether I should stand or run for it. Luckily, the gentleman behind is not of that kind, and he seems to be about as far off now as when I saw him first. Well, at this rate he won't get his dinner as soon as I shall; and, dear me! it's within a quarter of an hour of the time now. I must run!*

Parkins had, in fact, very little time for dressing. When he met the colonel at dinner, Peace— or as much of her as that gentleman could manage— reigned once more in the military bosom; nor was she put to flight in the hours of bridge that followed dinner, for Parkins was a more than respectable player. When, therefore, he retired toward twelve o'clock, he felt that he had spent his evening in quite a satisfactory way, and that, even for so long as a fortnight or three weeks, life at the Globe would be supportable under similar conditions— *especially*, thought he, *if I go on improving my game*.

As he went along the passages he met the boots of the Globe, who stopped and said, "Beg your pardon, sir, but as I was a-brushing your coat just now there was something fell out of the pocket. I put it on your chest of drawers, sir, in your room, sir— a piece of a pipe or something of that, sir. Thank you, sir. You'll find it on your chest of drawers, sir— yes, sir. Good night, sir."

The speech served to remind Parkins of his little discovery of that afternoon. It was with some considerable curiosity that he turned it over by the light of his candles. It was of bronze, he now saw, and was shaped very much after the manner of the modern dog whistle; in fact it was— yes, certainly it was— actually no more nor less than a whistle. He put it to his lips, but it was quite full of a fine, caked-up sand or earth, which would not yield to knocking, but must be loosened with a knife. Tidy as ever in his habits, Parkins cleared out the earth onto a piece of paper, and took the latter to the window to empty it out. The night was clear and bright, as he saw when he had opened the casement, and he stopped for an instant to look at the sea and note a belated wanderer stationed on the shore in front of the inn. Then he shut the window, a little surprised at the late hours people kept at Burnstow, and took his whistle to the light again. Why, surely there were marks on it, and not

merely marks, but letters! A very little rubbing rendered the deeply cut inscription quite legible, but the professor had to confess, after some earnest thought, that the meaning of it was as obscure to him as the writing on the wall to Belshazzar. There were legends both on the front and on the back of the whistle. The one read thus:

FLA
FUR BIS
FLE

The other:

QUIS EST ISTE QUI VENIT

I ought to be able to make it out, he thought, *but I suppose I am a little rusty in my Latin. When I come to think of it, I don't believe I even know the word for a whistle. The long one does seem simple enough. It ought to mean, "Who is this who is coming?" Well, the best way to find out is evidently to whistle for him.*

He blew tentatively and stopped suddenly, startled and yet pleased at the note he had elicited. It had a quality of infinite distance in it, and, soft as it was, he somehow felt it must be audible for miles round. It was a sound, too, that seemed to have the power (which many scents possess) of forming pictures in the brain. He saw quite clearly for a moment a vision of a wide, dark expanse at night, with a fresh wind blowing, and in the midst a lonely figure— how employed, he could not tell. Perhaps he would have seen more had not the picture been broken by the sudden surge of a gust of wind against his casement, so sudden that it made him look up, just in time to see the white glint of a sea bird's wing somewhere outside the dark panes.

The sound of the whistle had so fascinated him that he could not help trying it once more, this time more boldly. The note was little, if at all, louder than before, and repetition broke the illusion— no picture followed, as he had half hoped it might. *But what is this? Goodness! what force the wind can get up in a few minutes! What a tremendous gust! There! I knew that window fastening was no use! Ah! I thought so— both candles out. It's enough to tear the room to pieces.*

The first thing was to get the window shut. While you might count twenty Parkins was struggling with the small casement, and felt almost as if he were pushing back a sturdy burglar, so strong was the pressure. It slackened all at

once, and the window banged to and latched itself. Now to relight the candles and see what damage, if any, had been done. No, nothing seemed amiss; no glass even was broken in the casement. But the noise had evidently roused at least one member of the household; the colonel was to be heard stumping in his stockinged feet on the floor above, and growling.

Quickly as it had risen, the wind did not fall at once. On it went, moaning and rushing past the house, at times rising to a cry so desolate that, as Parkins disinterestedly said, it might have made fanciful people feel quite uncomfortable; even the most unimaginative, he thought after a quarter of an hour, might be happier without it.

Whether it was the wind, or the excitement of golf, or of the researches in the preceptory that kept Parkins awake, he was not sure. Awake he remained, in any case, long enough to fancy (as I am afraid I often do myself under such conditions) that he was the victim of all manner of fatal disorders. He would lie counting the beats of his heart, convinced that it was going to stop work every moment, and would entertain grave suspicions of his lungs, brain, liver, etc.— suspicions which he was sure would be dispelled by the return of daylight, but which until then refused to be put aside. He found a little vicarious comfort in the idea that someone else was in the same boat. A near neighbor (in the darkness it was not easy to tell his direction) was tossing and rustling in his bed, too.

The next stage was that Parkins shut his eyes and determined to give sleep every chance. Here again over-excitement asserted itself in another form— that of making pictures. *Experto crede*, pictures do come to the closed eyes of one trying to sleep, and are often so little to his taste that he must open his eyes and disperse them.

Parkins's experience on this occasion was a very distressing one. He found that the picture which presented itself to him was continuous. When he opened his eyes, of course, it went; but when he shut them once more it framed itself afresh, and acted itself out again, neither quicker nor slower than before. What he saw was this:

A long stretch of shore— shingle edged by sand, and intersected at short intervals with black groynes running down to the water— a scene, in fact, so like that of his afternoon's walk that, in the absence of any landmark, it could not be distinguished therefrom. The light was obscure, conveying an impression of gathering storm, late winter evening, and slight cold rain. On this bleak stage at first no actor was visible. Then, in the distance, a bobbing black object appeared; a moment more, and it was a man running, jumping, clambering over the groynes, and every few seconds looking eagerly back. The nearer he came the more obvious it was that he was not only anxious, but

even terribly frightened, though his face was not to be distinguished. He was, moreover, almost at the end of his strength. On he came; each successive obstacle seemed to cause him more difficulty than the last. *Will he get over this next one?* thought Parkins; *it seems a little higher than the others.* Yes; half climbing, half throwing himself, he did get over, and fell all in a heap on the other side (the side nearest to the spectator). There, as if really unable to get up again, he remained crouching under the groyne, looking up in an attitude of painful anxiety.

So far no cause whatever for the fear of the runner had been shown; but now there began to be seen, far up the shore, a little flicker of something light-colored moving to and fro with great swiftness and irregularity. Rapidly growing larger, it, too, declared itself as a figure in pale, fluttering draperies, ill-defined. There was something about its motion which made Parkins very unwilling to see it at close quarters. It would stop, raise arms, bow itself toward the sand, then run stooping across the beach to the water edge and back again; and then, rising upright, once more continue its course forward at a speed that was startling and terrifying. The moment came when the pursuer was hovering about from left to right only a few yards beyond the groyne where the runner lay in hiding. After two or three ineffectual castings hither and thither it came to a stop, stood upright, with arms raised high, and then darted straight forward toward the groyne.

It was at this point that Parkins always failed in his resolution to keep his eyes shut. With many misgivings as to incipient failure of eyesight, overworked brain, excessive smoking, and so on, he finally resigned himself to light his candle, get out a book, and pass the night waking, rather than be tormented by this persistent panorama, which he saw clearly enough could only be a morbid reflection of his walk and his thoughts on that very day.

The scraping of match on box and the glare of light must have startled some creatures of the night— rats or what not— which he heard scurry across the floor from the side of his bed with much rustling. *Dear, dear! the match is out! Fool that it is!* But the second one burned better, and a candle and book were duly procured, over which Parkins pored till sleep of a wholesome kind came upon him, and that in no long space. For about the first time in his orderly and prudent life he forgot to blow out the candle, and when he was called next morning at eight there was still a flicker in the socket and a sad mess of guttered grease on the top of the little table.

After breakfast he was in his room, putting the finishing touches to his golfing costume— fortune had again allotted the colonel to him for a partner— when one of the maids came in.

"Oh, if you please," she said, "would you like any extra blankets on your bed, sir?"

"Ah! thank you," said Parkins. "Yes, I think I should like one. It seems likely to turn rather colder."

In a very short time the maid was back with the blanket. "Which bed should I put it on sir?" she asked.

"What? Why, that one— the one I slept in last night," he said, pointing to it.

"Oh yes! I beg your pardon, sir, but you seemed to have tried both of 'em; leastways, we had to make 'em both up this morning."

"Really? How very absurd!" said Parkins. "I certainly never touched the other, except to lay some things on it. Did it actually seem to have been slept in?"

"Oh yes, sir!" said the maid. "Why, all the things was crumpled and throwed about all ways, if you'll excuse me, sir— quite as if anyone 'adn't passed but a very poor night, sir."

"Dear me," said Parkins. "Well, I may have disordered it more than I thought when I unpacked my things. I'm very sorry to have given you the extra trouble, I'm sure. I expect a friend of mine soon, by the way— a gentleman from Cambridge— to come and occupy it for a night or two. That will be all right, I suppose, won't it?"

"Oh yes, to be sure, sir. Thank you, sir. It's no trouble, I'm sure," said the maid, and departed to giggle with her colleagues.

Parkins set forth, with a stern determination to improve his game. I am glad to be able to report that he succeeded so far in this enterprise that the colonel, who had been rather repining at the prospect of a second day's play in his company, became quite chatty as the morning advanced; and his voice boomed out over the flats, as certain also of our own minor poets have said, "like some great bourdon in a minster tower."

"Extraordinary wind, that, we had last night," he said. "In my old home we should have said someone had been whistling for it."

"Should you, indeed!" said Parkins. "Is there a superstition of that kind still current in your part of the country?"

"I don't know about superstition," said the colonel.

"They believe in it all over Denmark and Norway, as well as on the Yorkshire coast: and my experience is, mind you, that there's generally, something at the bottom of what these countryfolks hold to, and have held to for generations. But it's your drive." (Or whatever it might have been: the golfing reader will have to imagine appropriate digressions at the proper intervals.)

When conversation was resumed, Parkins said, with a slight hesitancy, "Apropos of what you were saying just now, Colonel, I think I ought to tell you that my own views on such subjects are very strong. I am, in fact, a convinced disbeliever in what is called the 'supernatural.'"

"What!" said the colonel, "do you mean to tell me you don't believe in second sight, or ghosts, or anything of that kind?"

"In nothing whatever of that kind," returned Parkins firmly.

"Well," said the colonel, "but it appears to me at that rate, sir, that you must be little better than a Sadducee."

Parkins was on the point of answering that, in his opinion, the Sadducees were the most sensible persons he had ever read of in the Old Testament; but, feeling some doubt as to whether much mention of them was to be found in that work, he preferred to laugh the accusation off.

"Perhaps I am," he said; "but— Here, give me my cleek, boy!— Excuse me one moment, Colonel." A short interval. "Now, as to whistling for the wind, let me give you my theory about it. The laws which govern winds are really not at all perfectly known— to fisherfolk and such, of course, not known at all. A man or woman of eccentric habits, perhaps, or a stranger, is seen repeatedly on the beach at some unusual hour, and is heard whistling. Soon afterward a violent wind rises; a man who could read the sky perfectly or who possessed a barometer could have foretold that it would. The simple people of a fishing-village have no barometers, and only a few rough rules for prophesying weather. What more natural than that the eccentric personage I postulated should be regarded as having raised the wind, or that he or she should clutch eagerly at the reputation of being able to do so? Now, take last night's wind; as it happens, I myself was whistling. I blew a whistle twice, and the wind seemed to come absolutely in answer to my call. If anyone had seen me —"

The audience had been a little restive under this harangue, and Parkins had, I fear, fallen somewhat into the tone of a lecturer; but at the last sentence the colonel stopped him.

"Whistling, were you?" he said. "And what sort of whistle did you use? Play this stroke first." Interval.

"About that whistle you were asking, Colonel. It's rather a curious one. I have it in my— No; I see I've left it in my room. As a matter of fact, I found it yesterday."

And then Parkins narrated the manner of his discovery of the whistle, upon hearing which the colonel grunted, and opined that, in Parkins's place, he should himself be careful about using a thing that had belonged to a set of papists, of whom, speaking generally, it might be affirmed that you never knew what they might not have been up to. From this topic he diverged to the

enormities of the vicar, who had given notice on the previous Sunday that Friday would be the Feast of St. Thomas the Apostle, and that there would be service at eleven o'clock in the church. This and other similar proceedings constituted in the colonel's view a strong presumption that the vicar was a concealed papist, if not a Jesuit; and Parkins, who could not very readily follow the colonel in this region, did not disagree with him. In fact, they got on so well together in the morning that there was no talk on either side of their separating after lunch.

Both continued to play well during the afternoon, or, at least well enough to make them forget everything else until the light began to fail them. Not until then did Parkins remember that he had meant to do some more investigating at the preceptory; but it was of no great importance, he reflected. One day was as good as another; he might as well go home with the colonel.

As they turned the corner of the house, the colonel was almost knocked down by a boy who rushed into him at the very top of his speed, and then, instead of running away, remained hanging on to him and panting. The first words of the warrior were naturally those of reproof and objurgation, but he very quickly discerned that the boy was almost speechless with fright. Inquiries were useless at first. When the boy got his breath he began to howl, and still clung to the colonel's legs. He was at last detached, but continued to howl.

"What in the world *is* the matter with you? What have you been up to? What have you seen?" said the two men.

"Ow, I seen it wive at me out of the winder," wailed the boy, "and I don't like it."

"What window?" said the irritated colonel. "Come, pull yourself together, my boy."

"The front winder it was, at the 'otel," said the boy.

At this point Parkins was in favor of sending the boy home, but the colonel refused; he wanted to get to the bottom of it, he said. It was most dangerous to give a boy such a fright as this one had had, and if it turned out that people had been playing jokes, they should suffer for it in some way. And by a series of questions he made out this story: The boy had been playing about on the grass in front of the Globe with some others; then they had gone home to their teas, and he was just going, when he happened to look up at the front winder and see it a-wiving at him. *It* seemed to be a figure of some sort, in white as far as he knew— couldn't see its face; but it wived at him, and it warn't a right thing— not to say not a right person. Was there a light in the room? No, he didn't think to look if there was a light. Which was the window? Was it the top one or the second one? The seckind one it was— the big winder what got two little uns at the sides.

"Very well, my boy," said the colonel, after a few more questions. "You run away home now. I expect it was some person trying to give you a start. Another time, like a brave English boy, you just throw a stone— well, no, not that exactly, but you go and speak to the waiter, or to Mr. Simpson, the landlord, and— yes— and say that I advised you to do so."

The boy's face expressed some of the doubt he felt as to the likelihood of Mr. Simpson's lending a favorable ear to his complaint, but the colonel did not appear to perceive this, and went on, "And here's a sixpence— no, I see it's a shilling— and you be off home, and don't think any more about it."

The youth hurried off with agitated thanks, and the colonel and Parkins went round to the front of the Globe and reconnoitered. There was only one window answering to the description they had been hearing.

"Well, that's curious," said Parkins; "it's evidently my window the lad was talking about. Will you come up for a moment, Colonel Wilson? We ought to be able to see if anyone has been taking liberties in my room."

They were soon in the passage, and Parkins made as if to open the door. Then he stopped and felt in his pockets.

"This is more serious than I thought," was his next remark. "I remember now that before I started this morning I locked the door. It is locked now, and, what is more, here is the key." And he held it up. "Now," he went on, "if the servants are in the habit of going into one's room during the day when one is away, I can only say that— well, that I don't approve of it at all." Conscious of a somewhat weak climax, he busied himself in opening the door (which was indeed locked) and in lighting candles. "No," he said, "nothing seems disturbed."

"Except your bed," put in the colonel.

"Excuse me, that isn't my bed," said Parkins. "I don't use that one. But it does look as if someone had been playing tricks with it."

It certainly did. The clothes were bundled up and twisted together in a most tortuous confusion. Parkins pondered.

"That must be it," he said at last. "I disordered the clothes last night in unpacking, and they haven't made it since. Perhaps they came in to make it, and that boy saw them through the window; and then they were called away and locked the door after them. Yes, I think that must be it."

"Well, ring and ask," said the colonel, and this appealed to Parkins as practical.

The maid appeared, and, to make a long story short, deposed that she had made the bed in the morning when the gentleman was in the room, and hadn't been there since. No, she hadn't no other key. Mr. Simpson he kep' the keys; he'd be able to tell the gentleman if anyone had been up.

This was a puzzle. Investigation showed that nothing of value had been taken, and Parkins remembered the disposition of the small objects on tables and so forth well enough to be pretty sure that no pranks had been played with them. Mr. and Mrs. Simpson furthermore agreed that neither of them had given the duplicate key of the room to any person whatever during the day. Nor could Parkins, fair-minded man as he was, detect anything in the demeanor of master, mistress, or maid that indicated guilt. He was much more inclined to think that the boy had been imposing on the colonel.

The latter was unwontedly silent and pensive at dinner and throughout the evening. When he bade good night to Parkins, he murmured in a gruff undertone, "You know where I am if you want me during the night."

"Why, yes, thank you, Colonel Wilson, I think I do; but there isn't much prospect of my disturbing you, I hope. By the way," he added, "did I show you that old whistle I spoke of? I think not. Well, here it is."

The colonel turned it over gingerly in the light of the candle.

"Can you make anything of the inscription?" asked Parkins, as he took it back.

"No, not in this light. What do you mean to do with it?"

"Oh, well, when I get back to Cambridge I shall submit it to some of the archeologists there, and see what they think of it; and very likely, if they consider it worth having, I may present it to one of the museums."

"'M!" said the colonel. "Well, you may be right. All I know is that, if it were mine, I should chuck it straight into the sea. It's no use talking, I'm well aware, but I expect that with you it's a case of live and learn. I hope so, I'm sure, and I wish you a good night."

He turned away, leaving Parkins in act to speak at the bottom of the stair, and soon each was in his own bedroom.

By some unfortunate accident, there were neither blinds nor curtains to the windows of the professor's room. The previous night he had thought little of this, but tonight there seemed every prospect of a bright moon rising to shine directly on his bed, and probably wake him later on. When he noticed this he was a good deal annoyed, but, with an ingenuity which I can only envy, he succeeded in rigging up, with the help of a railway rug, some safety pins, and a stick and umbrella, a screen which, if it only held together, would completely keep the moonlight off his bed. And shortly afterward he was comfortable in that bed. When he had read a somewhat solid work long enough to produce a decided wish for sleep, he cast a drowsy glance round the room, blew out the candle, and fell back upon the pillow.

He must have slept soundly for an hour or more, when a sudden clatter shook him up in a most unwelcome manner. In a moment he realized what had

happened. His carefully constructed screen had given way, and a very bright frosty moon was shining directly on his face. This was highly annoying. Could he possibly get up and reconstruct the screen? Or could he manage to sleep if he did not?

For some minutes he lay and pondered over the possibilities; then he turned over sharply, and with all his eyes open lay breathlessly listening. There had been a movement, he was sure, in the empty bed on the opposite side of the room. Tomorrow he would have it moved, for there must be rats or something playing about in it. It was quiet now. No! the commotion began again. There was a rustling and shaking; surely more than any rat could cause.

I can figure to myself something of the professor's bewilderment and horror, for I have in a dream 30 years back seen the same thing happen; but the reader will hardly, perhaps, imagine how dreadful it was to him to see a figure suddenly sit up in what he had known was an empty bed. He was out of his own bed in one bound, and made a dash toward the window, where lay his only weapon, the stick with which he had propped his screen. This was, as it turned out, the worst thing he could have done, because the personage in the empty bed, with a sudden smooth motion, slipped from the bed and took up a position, with outspread arms, between the two beds, and in front of the door. Parkins watched it in a horrid perplexity. Somehow, the idea of getting past it and escaping through the door was intolerable to him; he could not have borne— he didn't know why— to touch it; and as for its touching him, he would sooner dash himself through the window than have that happen. It stood for the moment in a band of dark shadow, and he had not seen what its face was like. Now it began to move, in a stooping posture, and all at once the spectator realized, with some horror and some relief, that it must be blind, for it seemed to feel about it with its muffled arms in a groping and random fashion. Turning half away from him, it became suddenly conscious of the bed he had just left, and darted toward it, and bent over and felt the pillows in a way which made Parkins shudder as he had never in his life thought it possible. In a very few moments it seemed to know that the bed was empty, and then, moving forward into the area of light and facing the window, it showed for the first time what manner of thing it was.

Parkins, who very much dislikes being questioned about it, did once describe something of it in my hearing, and I gathered that what he chiefly remembers about it is a horrible, an intensely horrible, face of *crumpled linen*. What expression he read upon it he could not or would not tell, but that the fear of it went nigh to maddening him is certain.

But he was not at leisure to watch it for long. With formidable quickness it moved into the middle of the room, and, as it groped and waved, one corner of

its draperies swept across Parkins's face. He could not— though he knew how perilous a sound was— he could not keep back a cry of disgust, and this gave the searcher an instant clue. It leaped toward him upon the instant, and the next moment he was halfway through the window backward, uttering cry upon cry at the utmost pitch of his voice, and the linen face was thrust close into his own. At this, almost the last possible second, deliverance came, as you will have guessed. The colonel burst the door open and was just in time to see the dreadful group at the window. When he reached the figures only one was left. Parkins sank forward into the room in a faint, and before him on the floor lay a tumbled heap of bedclothes.

Colonel Wilson asked no questions, but busied himself in keeping everyone else out of the room and in getting Parkins back to his bed; and himself, wrapped in a rug, occupied the other bed for the rest of the night. Early on the next day Rogers arrived, more welcome than he would have been a day before, and the three of them held a very long consultation in the professor's room. At the end of it the colonel left the hotel door carrying a small object between his finger and thumb, which he cast as far into the sea as a very brawny arm could send it. Later on the smoke of a burning ascended from the back premises of the Globe.

Exactly what explanation was patched up for the staff and visitors at the hotel I must confess I do not recollect. The professor was somehow cleared of the ready suspicion of delirium tremens, and the hotel of the reputation of a troubled house.

There is not much question as to what would have happened to Parkins if the colonel had not intervened when he did. He would either have fallen out of the window or else lost his wits. But it is not so evident what more the creature that came in answer to the whistle could have done than frighten. There seemed to be absolutely nothing material about it save the bedclothes of which it had made itself a body. The colonel, who remembered a not very dissimilar occurrence in India, was of opinion that if Parkins had closed with it it could really have done very little, and that its one power was that of frightening. The whole thing, he said, served to confirm his opinion of the Church of Rome.

There is really nothing more to tell, but, as you may imagine, the professor's views on certain points are less clear-cut then they used to be. His nerves, too, have suffered. He cannot even now see a surplice hanging on a door quite unmoved, and the spectacle of a scarecrow in a field late on a winter afternoon has cost him more than one sleepless night.

———————

7: The Black Patch

F. A. M. Webster

1886-1949

The Shadow 11 Jan 1932

Frederick Annesley Michael Webster

IT WAS an unusually drowsy summer afternoon. One of those days when nothing seems to be happening, yet you expect that anything might happen.

A. B. Crisp, whose initials had prompted his fellow members at headquarters to title him ''Alphabet," was walking down Fifth Avenue, quite at ease. Having no severe duties on hand, he was in hopes of finding "Patsy" Piers, whose attempts at selling bonds, Alphabet realized, often tired him out early in the afternoon, driving him to the club.

But even as Alphabet was thus meditating, he was startled by the staccato rattle of a perfect fusillade of revolver shots. His eyes turned instantly toward the sound, on the opposite side of the street.

A uniformed officer, doing his beat, had just fallen to the pavement. Three men came dashing out of a big jewelry store and rushed into a big racing car. The car immediately roared into action, turning toward Sixth Avenue and cutting down between the pillars of the elevated tracks.

Alphabet dashed across the street, dodging the snarled-up traffic miraculously as he ran. He thrust his way through the crowd which had already gathered around the fallen policeman and entered the showroom of Hammerson Jewelers, from which the escaping men had come.

The interior of the showroom presented a strange spectacle. No damage seemed to have been done, but several salesmen were stiJI cowering down behind the counters.

One of the men held an antiquated service revolver in a very shaky hand, while three others were just raising a lady who appeared to have fallen to the floor in a dead faint.

Alphabet surveyed the scene for a minute, then turned to an officer who had followed him into the shop.

"Shut that door, and keep it shut," Alphabet ordered him, showing his detective's badge. "And see that no one goes in or out!"

The officer stolidly set himself in the doorway, while Alphabet hurried to the office in the rear of the showroom .where the lady had been carried.

As she was stretched out upon the davenport, recovering from her shock, Alphabet recognized her as Lena Vedore, society beauty, and one of the most bejeweled young women of her set.

Beside her was a tall, black-bearded man. One of his keen gray eyes, Alphabet noticed, was disfigured by a very peculiar hazel wedge set in the iris.

The man turned toward Alphabet with a questioning look. He evidently wanted an explanation of Alphabet's presence.

"Headquarters," the detective said as he showed his badge. "Detective Crisp. Just happened by when all the shooting started. I've a man at the door now, and I'll take charge."

"I am Garside, managing director of Hammerson's " The man's sentence was interrupted by a fluttering sigh from the davenport, where Miss Vedore was struggling to sit up.

"The man with the black patch! He— he fired a pistol at me!" she gasped. Then, in stronger voice of intense anxiety, "Oh, my diamonds ! Mr. Garside, are they safe?"

"The Westwater Diamonds?" Garside queried. "Did you bring them?"

"You know that I arranged to let you have them to-day, Mr. Garside!" she answered, exasperated at the question.

"Wait a minute!" interrupted Alphabet. "Suppose you tell me just what happened, young lady. And no one will interrupt. Let's get this straight! Then maybe we can get somewhere on the case."

Lena Vedore looked at Alphabet intensely for a moment. Then, evidently satisfied with her scrutiny, spoke.

"I came into this shop a few minutes ago, to deliver the Westwater Diamonds to Mr. Garside for resetting," she explained. "As I entered, a horrible-looking man with a twisted lip and a black patch over his right eye was standing close to the door of this room.

"This man turned toward me with a pistol, and fired. Then the shop seemed to be filled with armed men, and several shots were fired. In the

confusion, my jewel case was snatched from my hands ! Then, I think, I must have fainted."

"I see," said Alphabet. "Was any one aware that you were bringing the Westwater Diamonds here this morning?"

"No one, except Mr. Garside," she answered. "He asked particularly that I keep the matter a secret."

Alphabet swung round upon the jeweler.

"Well, Mr. Garside?"

"What Miss Vedore has told you is perfectly true, Mr. Crisp. It is our custom to take all possible precautions to prevent people knowing when valuable jewels are about to be committed to our care."

"And in whom did you confide?" asked Alphabet.

"Not in a single soul," Garside replied.

For a moment, Alphabet Crisp hesitated. Then he spoke again to the black-bearded man.

"Will you tell me what you knowabout the robbery?"

"Certainly. But I'm afraid I shan't help you very much," Garside responded. "I was between the desk and the door when the raiding began. I heard a scream and was reaching out my hand to open the door when a shot was fired. So— er— I'm afraid I locked the door and rang up the police !"

''And that's all you know, Mr. Garside?" Alphabet prompted.

"Yes— but my manager says—"

Alphabet raised his hand.

"One moment, Mr. Garside. We'll let the manager tell his own tale!"

The manager entered, visibly shaking with fear, and tremblingly confirmed everything that Miss Vedore had related.

"Did you see the man who fired at Miss Vedore?" Alphabet asked him.

"No, sir," the manager answered. "The sound of the first shot alarmed me. I saw Miss Vedore drop a jewel case and rushed to her assistance, but she had fallen in a faint, and the case had vanished before I could get round the counter."

"I don't understand, why you didn't see the man with the black patch!" muttered Alphabet.

"The man with the black patch was standing in deep shadow," intervened Miss Vedore. "Tie was between the big grandfather clock and the portiere which protects Mr. Garside's door."

"That's queer," muttered Alphabet thoughtfully. "None of the three men who rushed out of the shop answered that description. And I didn't see any one of them carrying anything. How big was your jewel case?"

"Quite large enough for you to have seen if a man was carrying it. It was plain pigskin, without initials or any other mark," the beauty answered.

But Alphabet scarcely heard her last words. His roving glance had just come to rest upon a strip of pinkish paper, which lay curled up on the carpet close to the door.

The voice of Miss Vedore, however, broke in upon his speculations when she suddenly asked if that was all he required.

"Eh? Oh, yes— yes— most certainly. That will be all. And you can expect to hear f rom us shortly," he added encouragingly.

She arose, and Alphabet hurried to open the door for her. As he did so, his foot covered the scrap of paper. He escorted the young lady to the entrance, where he questioned the officer on guard whether he had seen a man with a twisted lip and a black patch over his eye enter or leave the premises. The officer had not.

Alphabet returned to the director's office and seated himself in front of Mr. Garside's desk.

The strip of paper had vanished from the carpet. But, as Alphabet went on to question Mr. Garside, the detective crossed his legs and detached from the sole of his shoe the little pink slip, which had stuck to it as he walked to the door.

He slipped the paper unobtrusively into his pocket, not attracting Garside's attention.

"ARE YOU quite sure, Mr. Garside," Alphabet questioned, "that no one but you knew of Miss Vedore's appointment with you to-day to deliver the Westwater gems ? None of your staff .knew of her projected visit?"

The jeweler spread expressive palms and shrugged his shoulders,

"I think not; but, how can I tell for certain?"

Alphabet looked long and searchingly at the man. He seemed to study that peculiar hazel wedge in the man's eye; his small, pointed beard; his big, com manding nose, and his strong but delicate and beautifully manicured hands.

"Why is your office darkened, Mr. Garside?" he suddenly asked.

The jeweler surveyed the oak-paneled walls and the black velvet curtained windows in a comprehensive gesture. Then his eyes turned to the powerful electric light above his desk.

"Darkened is hardly the correct term, surely, Mr. Crisp," he deprecated. "This room is as light as day. Such a setting as I have planned here, is to make. precious stones show to better advantage by electric light."

"I suppose there is no chance that the man with the black patch— and the diamonds— departed through the window behind those curtains?" Alphabet questioned further.

"None whatever. I told you that I locked my door the moment the firing commenced."

"Well," said Alphabet, "we'd better search the premises for him."

But they found no trace of the marauder, within the shop, the strong rooms, or the offices.

"How will this robbery affect you?" asked Alphabet as he was about to take his departure.

"We are covered by insurance, of course," came the answer, "so we shall not suffer financially."

"Right,'' said Alphabet. "It looks to me as if there has been a leakage of information somewhere in your staff. Will you let me know when any other particularly valuable consignment of jewels is to be received?"

Mr. Garside shrugged his shoulders.

"It is a question of relative values, Mr. Crisp. We carry a stock of enormous value. I am surprised that the thieves contented themselves with the Westwater Diamonds."

"But, still," persisted Alphabet, "I'd like to know, say, if any famous stones are likely to come into your charge."

"Very well," agreed the jeweler.

BACK at headquarters, Inspector McAliece was awaiting Alphabet Crisp.

"I had your call, Crisp," announced the grizzled old veteran. "You're a lucky dog to find yourself right on the spot at the psychological second, so to speak!

"The assistant commissioner has left word that I was to take you to him as soon as you got back. So come along."

As they entered the assistant commissioner's room, Carleton Cumberledge pushed aside a paper he had been studying and drew a fresh file toward him.

He greeted Alphabet with a quick smile. "You've butted right in on a big thing this time, Crisp," Cumberledge volunteered. "We've been keeping a certain few things on the quiet, for the very good reason that we don't want to have the papers hold an inquest on our division for leaving a dangerous gunman at large.

"And that, in fact, is just what has been happening with this man who has a black patch over his eye!"

The assistant commissioner paused, and Alphabet made a murmur of police interest.

"Black Patch! That's the only name we know him by," Cumberledge went on. "Black Patch! The deadliest shot with a pistol, the most ruthless killer we've run across yet!

"That man has led every daring jewel raid in this city for the last two years ! We've caught members of his gang as they escaped, at times. But we've never caught him, or even seen him escaping!"

"Has he always worn a black patch over his eye, sir ?" interrupted Alphabet.

"Yes," replied Cumberledge, and continued :

"The general details of his raids are known. The papers have published particulars of how the criminals killed a clerk in each office, and literally shot their way to liberty as they escaped in a racing car, whose number we never got— or, when we did, it did us no good "But the secret we have guarded is this:

"Always, the operation was directed by a smooth-faced individual with a hideous twisted lip and a black patch over his right eye! Always, Black Patch himself shot down the unfortunate clerks— and he shot to kill.

"And, always, the clerk who was murdered was the only employee of the firm who could possibly have given him information as to when the big consignment of diamonds, or the big amount in bonds, would be on the premises!

"In other words, it is probable that they were his confederates, and that he killed them to prevent a squeal. What I have been wondering about was the man who was killed in this morning's raid— and what we can find out about him!"

Alphabet's eyes were blazing, and he was almost stuttering with excitement as he answered.

"Black Patch made a mistake at last, I'll bet! There was no one killed in to-day's robbery! And Miss Vedore and Mr. Garside both claim no one but themselves knew that the Westwater Diamonds were to be brought to the shop to-day!

"And, too," Crisp finished, "Black Patch was neither seen entering nor leaving the premises!"

"No one ever has seen him make his get-away," the assistant commissioner answered gloomily.

"Listen, sir," said Alphabet, whose hand had stolen to his pocket. "Miss Vedore states that this fellow, Black Patch, was standing in the shadow between a big grandfather clock and the portiere covering Garside's doorway.

"Garside states that he locked himself inside his office at the sound of the first shot, but this is what I spotted on the carpet just inside the door of Garside's room!"

Alphabet opened the hand he had withdrawn from his pocket and disclosed a crumpled strip of flesh-colored, but transparent adhesive plaster.

Carleton Cumberledge frowned at the object for a long moment and Inspector McAliece, by means of a discreet, deprecatory cough, expressed his opinion that his subordinate had blundered very badly.

"Well?" queried the assistant commissioner.

"You don't see the implication, sir?" responded Alphabet.

"I do not!"

Alphabet heaved a small sigh, as he tucked the tiny strip of plaster away carefully in his pocket book.

"In that case I'd like to be a little more certain of my suspicions before I put forward a theory, sir," he stated.

The frown disappeared from the assistant commissioner's forehead and a quick smile moved his lips.

"You're a queer, secretive guy, Crisp," he laughed, "but I'll give you a free hand for the next forty-eight hours, since you've a theory in prospect and some suspicions to work upon, for I'll be hanged if any officer connected with the Black Patch cases has produced even that much, up to the present !"

Alphabet Crisp left headquarters and went directly toward the same club which had been his goal earlier that day.

This time he arrived at his destination, and found Patsy there, entirely unoccupied.

"Patsy," Alphabet began, "I'm on the verge of tremendous things, and none other than you can be of mighty help. Now, listen, and see what you can do for me.

"Can you, out of the wealth of clients you use for a living, find one extremely sporting, wealthy person who is willing to take a chance for the benefit of the public?

"Can you, or can you not, introduce me to some such person, and use your influence to have them follow my suggestions?"

"Can you," Patsy countered with equal force, though not such enthusiastic spirit, "spare some time for a bite to eat, and explain further your great desires?"

So they did, and after the brief meal, Patsy and Alphabet found their way to the home of one of the wealthiest of the younger sportsmen, Marvin Chandler.

And he proved a sportsman through and through, so Alphabet went to bed that night in perfect peace.

THROUGHOUT the following morning, Alphabet waited in his office for a telephone call that never came through. Soon after noon he walked along the corridor and knocked at the door of the assistant commissioner's office.

"Well, Crisp, any fresh developments?" queried Cumberledge.

"There will be developments this afternoon, sir, unless I've missed the mark altogether," Alphabet temporized.

"Hm-mm. Have any special arrangements to be made?"

"Rather a lot, I'm afraid, sir. May I suggest that police reserves be called up for Forty-eighth and Forty-ninth streets, and that the flying squad be ready to deal with a racing car carrying armed passengers?

"And— if you don't mind, sir— I'd like a couple of large busses to block Fifth Avenue, either side of Hammerson's at precisely two minutes after four o'clock this afternoon. I have a hunch those premises are going to be raided again !"

"You're a mysterious devil, Crisp, as I think I've remarked before, but I suppose you know what you're up to," smiled the officer, and, taking up the telephone, issued the necessary instructions.

Before he left headquarters, Alphabet spent a few minutes with Inspector McAliece, explaining his scheme.

At a few minutes before four o'clock that afternoon, Alphabet entered the premises of the Hammerson Jewelers, and asked for the managing director.

He found Mr. Garside seated in his office, with heavy black velvet curtains drawn and shutting out every scrap of daylight from the window, which appeared to be open, since the curtains stirred slightly from time to time. A single electric light blazed brilliantly above the desk.

The jeweler's bearded countenance broke up into beaming smiles at the sight of the visitor.

"Why, Mr. Crisp," he cried, "this is most opportune! I have been upon the point of telephoning to you ever since I opened my mail this morning. Mr. Marvin Chandler may be here at any moment. He is coming to consult me concerning some of his jewel collections."

"You are afraid of a repetition of yesterday's raid, eh?" queried Alphabet, as he seated himself at the opposite side of the desk. "I wonder why you did not call me up as you promised ?"

But, before Garside could answer, there was a shout from the shop and a shot rang out. Well though Alphabet had schooled himself, the sudden

commotion caused him to turn toward the door. In the same instant there was a terrific report close at hand, and out went the light.

Instantly, Alphabet spun round and his hands dropped like steel clamps upon the hands of Garside; and, although those hands held no weapon, and Garside urged him to secure the man who must have entered by the window and remained concealed behind the curtains, Alphabet still held on until the door into the shop opened and McAliece appeared.

At the same instant the light flooding into the room from the open door was augmented by the curtains masking the window being softly separated.

The slightly vacuous features of Patsy Piers peered through the opening.

"There's your man, officer; there's the fellow who shot out the light! Get him!" shouted Garside excitedly, and strove to tear his wrists from Alphabet's restraining grasp.

"Me? Shot out the light? Oh, no, absolutely not. Nothing in my pockets, except a pair of good fists, I assure you. Pretty useful with them when necessary, of course, therefore no need for silly, messy firearms. Oh, no, absolutely and most emphatically *not*!" That from Patsy.

"What are you doing here?" queried Inspector McAliece sternly.

"Me? Oh, just passing along, saw the open window, heard old Alphabet's voice, and dropped in to see how he was keeping his end up. Letting a little light into dark places, eh?"

Patsy waved an explanatory hand from the extinguished light to the now open velvet curtains. "There were only two people in this room and one of them was the man who fired a shot," he added.

With a dour smile on his grim features, Inspector McAliece stepped forward and snapped steel handcuffs upon the supple wrists of Josiah Garside. After which Alphabet relieved the man of the pistol which reposed in his coat pocket, and, with a quick gesture, snatched the false beard from his chin.

From another pocket he fished up a black eye shade and a roll of flesh-colored transparent adhesive plaster.

"*Voila*! Mr. Black Patch!" he announced.

"Aye," agreed the inspector, "and, what's more, we've got the rest of the gang— all except two who were killed when that racing car charged one of your busses head on. That was a bright idea, Crisp.

"By the way," the inspector went on, "I guess Chandler is waiting in the shop to tell you how much he's enjoyed the entertainment. And he's holding on pretty tight to his jewels, I guess."

LATER that evening, Alphabet Crisp again confronted the assistant commissioner.

"Now then, Crisp, let's have the story," said Cumberledge. "I've dealt with the Hammerson Jewelers for some time past, and Garside is the last man I should have suspected of being Black Patch. I'm eager to hear how you spotted him."

"Well, of course, sir," said Alphabet diffidently, "it was just dumb luck my being on the spot when Miss Vedore's diamonds were stolen. You see, I was in the room when she revived from her fainting fit, and her very first words focused my attention upon the main issue.

"She stated that a horrible-looking man, with a twisted lip and a black patch over his right eye, fired a pistol at her, and that other armed men entered the premises, and that her jewel case was snatched from her in the ensuing confusion.

"The point that struck me at once was that the man with the black patch must have been actually on the premises before the raid began, but none of the assistants nor the doorman had seen this man enter the premises. They had not seen him in the shop, nor was he to be found when we searched for him.

"It seemed possible, therefore, that he might be nothing more than a figment of Miss Vedore's imagination. If, on the other hand, such a person had been present, the only place in which he could possibly have taken refuge was the managing director's office.

"But Garside stated that he had locked his door directly the firing started, and, moreover, that door had only just been opened when I entered the shop.

"It was during the ensuing conversation that I spotted a small strip of adhesive plaster upon the carpet inside the room. It was flesh-colored and transparent, and it suggested to me the possibility that the use of such a strip of plaster might enable a man to fake the appearance of a twisted lip, which will go a long way toward providing an efficient disguise.

"The black patch might be an adjunct to the miscreant's make-up, but that matter provided an open issue, until I returned here and you, sir, told me about the previous exploits of Black Patch.

"From your statement, sir, it appeared that the leader of the gang had been wearing the black patch for a period of at least two years.

"Now, the use of an eye shade suggested either a diseased or injured eye, which had to be protected, or that the eye was missing, or had some distinctive characteristic which the owner wished to conceal.

"The wearing of the shade for two years seemed to me to preclude the possibility of disease or injury, and so I decided I must look either for a oneeyed man or a person with a peculiar right eye.

"Garside had a distinctive hazel wedge in the gray iris of his right eye, and it seemed reasonable to assume that Black Patch had disappeared into Garside's office when the Westwater Diamonds were stolen. The presence of a strip of plaster inside the door served to strengthen this theory.

"Then, sir, you told me of the shooting of possible confederates by Black Patch, upon the occasion of previous raids. But, if Garside was Black Patch, he would need no accomplice to tell him when the Westwater Diamonds would be delivered to the Hammerson Jewelers. It was then that I said that Black Patch had blundered.

"With this theory forming in my mind, I determined to lay a trap, and through the instrumentality of my friend, Patsy Piers, I induced Mr. Chandler to make an appointment to deliver some of his jewels to Garside at four o'clock this afternoon.

"All this morning I waited for Garside to put through the promised call, notifying me that further famous jewels were likely to come into his custody. No call came through, and, meanwhile, you know of the steps that were taken to deal with the raid if it should take place.

"As Patsy had helped me and was anxious to have a hand in the affair, I asked him to watch the window opening from Garside's office onto a deserted side street.

"I have no doubt that Garside realized that I suspected him, and it was for that reason that he shattered the lights with a pistol shot while I was in his room at the time of Chandler's arrival, which coincided with the appearance in the shop of Black Patch's gang of gunmen.

"No doubt Garside intended to finish me off in the darkness, and for that reason had left open the window, by which Piers entered, in order that it might appear as if Black Patch had arrived and left by that window.

"As you know, sir, we found a black patch and a roll of plaster in Garside's pocket; his beard was a false one, and Miss Vedore's jewel case was locked away in his safe. I think that that explains the whole matter."

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8: Introduction to a Stranger

David Wright O'Brien

1918–1944

Weird Tales March 1939

I had no idea David Wright O'Brien also wrote verse. I found this in Weird Tales. *I think it is his only poem. O'Brien joined the USAAF in WW2 and died during a Flying Fortress bombing raid on Berlin.*

DEATH is a stranger in ragged attire;
His friendship and handclasp few mortals desire;
They shun him, avoid him and try to defeat him;
Yet slowly their steps take them forward to meet him.

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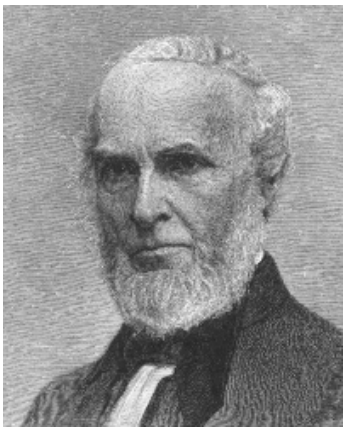
9: The Haunted House

John Greenleaf Whittier

1807-1892

In: *Legends of New England* (1831)



John Greenleaf Whittier

The little book "Legends of New Engand" was mostly verse. This was the only prose story of any length.

THE BEAUTIFUL river, which retains its Indian name of Merrimack, winds through a country of almost romantic beauty. The last twenty miles of its course in particular, are unsurpassed in quiet and rich scenery, by any river in the United States. There are indeed, no bold and ragged cliffs, like the Highlands of the Hudson, to cast their grim shadows on the water— no blue and lofty mountains, piercing into the thin atmosphere, and wrapping about their rocky proportions the mists of valley and river— but there are luxuriant fields and pleasant villages, and white church-spires, gleaming through the green foliage of oak and elm— and wide forests of Nature's richest coloring, and green hills sloping smoothly and gracefully to the margin of the clear, bright stream, which moves onward to the Ocean, as lightly and gracefully as the moving of a cloud at sunset, when the light wind which propels the trial voyager is unfelt on earth.

It was on the margin of this stream, during the early times of Massachusetts, that a stranger— a foreigner of considerable fortune— took up his residence. He had a house, constructed from a model of his own which, for elegance and convenience, far surpassed the rude and simple tenements of his neighbors; and he had a small farm, or rather garden. which he seemed to cultivate for amusement, rather than from any absolute necessity of labor. He had no family, save a daughter— an interesting girl of sixteen.

Near the dwelling of Adam McOrne— for such was the stranger's name— lived old Alice Knight— a woman, known throughout the whole valley of the river, from Plum Island to the residence of the Sachem Passaconaway, on the Nashua,— as one under an evil influence— an ill-tempered and malignant old woman— who was seriously suspected of dealing with the Prince of Darkness. Many of her neighbors were ready to make oath that they had been haunted by old Alice, in the shape of a black cat— that she had taken off the wheels of their hay-carts and frozen down their sled-runners, when the team was in full motion— that she had bewitched their swine, and rendered their cattle unruly— nay, more than one good wife averred, that she had bewitched their churns and prevented the butter from forming; and that they could expel her in no other way, than by heating a horse-nail and casting it into the cream. Moreover, they asserted that when this method of exorcism was resorted to, they invariably learned, soon after, that goodwife Alice was suffering under some unknown indisposition. In short, it would be idle to attempt a description of the almost innumerable feats of witchcraft ascribed to the withered and decrepid Alice.

Her exterior was indeed well calculated to favor the idea of her supernatural qualifications. She had the long, blue and skinny finger— the elvish locks of gray and straggling hair— the hooked nose, and the long, upturned chin, which seemed perpetually to threaten its nasal neighbor— the blue lips drawn around a mouth, garnished with two or three unearthly-looking fangs— the bleared and sunken eye— the bowed and attenuated form— and the limping gait, as if the invisible fetters of the Evil One were actually clogging the footsteps of his servant. Then, too, she was poor— poor as the genius of poverty itself— she had no relatives about her— no friends— her hand was against every man, and every man's hand was against her.

Setting the question of her powers of witchcraft aside, Alice Knight was actually an evil-hearted woman. Whether the suspicions and the taunts of her neighbors had aroused into action those evil passions which slumber in the seldom-visited depths of the human heart— or, whether the mortifications of poverty and dependence had changed and perverted her proud spirit— certain it was, that she took advantage of the credulity and fears of her neighbors. When they in the least offended her, she turned upon them with the fierce malison of an enraged Pythoness, and prophesied darkly of some unknown and indescribable evil about to befall them. And, consequently, if any evil did befall them in the space of a twelve-month afterward, another mark was added to the already black list of iniquities, which was accredited to the ill-favored Alice.

With all her fierce and deep-rooted hatred of the human species— one solitary affection— one feeling of kindness, yet lingered in the bosom of Alice Knight. Her son a young man of twenty-five— her only child seemed to form the sole and last link of the chain which had once bound her to humanity. Her love of him partook of the fierce passions of her nature— it was wild, ungovernable and strong as her hate itself.

Gilbert Knight inherited little from his mother, save a portion of her indomitable pride and fierce temperament. He had been a seaman— had visited many of the old lands, and had returned again to his birth-place— a grown up man— with a sun-burned cheek— a fine and noble figure, and a countenance rude and forbidding, yet marked with a character of intellect and conscious power. He had little intercourse with his mother— he refused even to reside in the same dwelling with her— and yet, when in her presence, he was respectful, and even indulgent to her singular disposition and unsocial habits. He had no communion with the inhabitants of his native town— but, stern, unsocial and gloomy, he held himself apart from the sympathies and fellowship of men, with whom indeed, he had few feelings in common.

Mary, the daughter of Adam McOrne, seemed alone to engage the attention of Gilbert Knight.

She was young, beautiful, and, considering the condition of the country, well-educated. She naturally felt herself superior to the rude and hard-featured youth around her— she had tasted enough of the sentiment, and received enough of the polish of education, to raise her ideas, at least, above the ignorant and unlettered rustics, who sought her favor.

Despised and spurned at, as the mother of Gilbert Knight was, still her son always commanded respect. There was something in the dignity of his manner, and the fierce flash of his dark eye, which had a powerful influence on all in his presence. Then, too, it was remembered that his father was a man of intellect and family— that he was once wealthy— and had suddenly met with reverses of fortune. These considerations gave Gilbert Knight no little consequence in his native village; and Adam McOrne, who ridiculed the idea of witches and witchcraft, received the occasional visits of Gilbert with as much cordiality as if his mother had never been suspected of evil doings. He was pleased with the frank, bold bearing of the sailor; and with his evident preference of his dwelling, above that of his neighbors— never so much as dreaming, that the visits of Gilbert were paid to any other than himself.

It was a cold, dark night of Autumn, that Gilbert, after leaving the hospitable fire-side of McOrne, directed his steps to the rude and lonely dwelling of his mother. He found the old woman alone;— a few sticks of

ignited wood cast a faint light upon the dismal apartment— and an old and blear-eyed cat was at her side, gazing earnestly at her unseemly countenance.

"Mother," said Gilbert, seating himself, " 'tis idle— 'tis worse than folly to dream of executing our project. Mary McOrne will never be my wife."

"Ha!" exclaimed Alice, fixing her hollow eye upon her son— "Have I not told you that it should be so, and must be? You have lost your courage; you have become weaker than a woman, Gilbert. I tell you that Mary McOrne loves you, as deeply, as passionately as ever man was loved by woman!" Gilbert started. "I do believe she loves me," he said at length, "but she will never be my wife. She dreads an alliance with our family. She has said so— she has this night solemnly averred that she had rather die at once, than become the daughter-in-law of— of—" Gilbert hesitated.

"Of a witch!" shrieked Alice, in a voice so loud and shrill that it even startled the practiced ear of Gilbert. "'Tis well— I will not be stigmatised as a witch with impunity. That haughty Scotchman and his impudent brat of a daughter shall learn that Alice Knight is not to be insulted in this manner! Gilbert, you shall marry her, or she shall die accursed!"

"Mother!" said Gilbert, rising and fixing his dark eye keenly on that of his mother— "I understand your threat; and I warn you to beware. Practice your infernal tricks upon others as you please— but Mary McOrne is too pure and sacred for such unhallowed dealing; and as you dread the curses of your son, let her not be molested."

He turned away as he ceased speaking, and instantly left the dwelling. He had seen little of his mother for many years— he knew her disposition but imperfectly; and, while in public he ridiculed the idea of her supernatural powers, he yet felt an awe— a fear in her presence— a certainty that she was not like those around her. He knew that the breath of her displeasure operated to appearance like a curse— that she did, either by natural cunning, or supernatural power, mysteriously distress and perplex her neighbors. He saw that her proud spirit had been touched; and that she meditated evil against McOrne and his daughter. The latter, Gilbert really loved— as deeply and devotedly as such a rude spirit could love; and he shuddered at the idea of her subjection to the arts of his mother. He therefore resolved to press his suit once more, and endeavor to overcome the objections which the girl had raised; and, in the event of his failure to do so, to protect her from the wrath of his mother.

But Mary McOrne— much as she loved the dark-eyed stranger, and his tales of peril and shipwreck in other climes— could not associate herself with the son of a witch— the only surviving offspring of a woman, whom she verily believed to be the bond slave of the Tempter.

And so she strove with the strong feeling of affection within her— and Gilbert Knight was rejected.

A short time after, the tenants of the dwelling of McOrne were alarmed by strange sounds and unusual appearances. In the dead of the night they would hear heavy footsteps ascending the stair case, with the clank of a chain— and groans issued from the unoccupied rooms of the building.

The doors were mysteriously opened, after having been carefully secured— the curtains of the beds of McOrne and his daughter were drawn aside by an unseen hand; and low whispers of blasphemy and licentiousness, which a spirit of evil, could only have suggested, were breathed, as it were, into their very ears. The servants— a male and female— alike complained of preternatural visitations and unseemly visions. They were disturbed in their daily avocations— the implements of household labor were snatched away by an invisible hand— they saw strange lights in the neighborhood of the dwelling. They heard an unearthly music in the chimney; and saw the furniture of the room dancing about, as if moving to the infernal melody. In short, the fact was soon established, beyond the interposition of a doubt, that the house was haunted.

The days of faery are over. The tale of enchantment— the legend of ghostly power— of unearthly warning and supernatural visitation, have lost their hold on the minds of the great multitude. People sleep quietly where they are placed— no matter by what means they have reached the end of their journey— and there is an end to the church-yard rambles of discontented ghosts—

"—that creep
From out the places where they sleep—
To publish forth some hidden sin,
Or drink the ghastly moonshine in,"

And as for witches, the race is extinct— or, if a few yet remain, they are a miserable libel upon the diabolical reputation of those who figured in the days of Paris and Mather. Haunted houses are getting to be novelties— and corpse-lights and apparitions and unearthly noises, and signs and omens and wonders, are no longer troublesome. Ours is a matter-of-fact age— an age of steam and railway and McAdamization and labor-saving machinery— the poetry of Time has gone by forever, and we have only the sober prose left us.

Among the superstitions of our ancestors, that of Haunted Houses is not the least remarkable.

There is scarcely a town or village in New-England which has not, at some period or other of its history, had one or more of these ill-fated mansions. They were generally old, decayed build-ings— untenanted, save by the imaginary demons, who there held their midnight revels. But there are many instances of "prestigious spirits" who were impudent enough to locate themselves in houses, where the hearthstone had not yet grown cold— where the big bible yet lay on the parlor-table; and where, over Indian-pudding and pumpkin-pie, the good man of the mansion always craved a blessing; where the big arm chair was always officiously placed for the minister of the parish, whenever he favored the family with the light of his countenance; and where the good lady taught her children the Catechism every Saturday evening. This was indeed, a bold act of effrontery on the part of the Powers of Evil, yet it was accounted for on the ground, that good men and true were sometimes given over to the buffetings of the enemy, of which fact, the case of Job was considered ample proof.

The visitations to the house of McOrne became more frequent and more terrific. The unfortunate Mary suffered severely. She fully believed in the supernatural character of the sights and sounds which alarmed her; and she looked upon old Alice Knight as the author: especially after hearing a whisper in her ear, in the darkness of midnight, that, unless she married Gilbert Knight she should be haunted as long as she lived. As for the father, he battled long and manfully with the fears which were strengthened day by day— he laughed at the strange noises which filled his mansion, and ridiculed the fears of his daughter— but it was easy to see that his strong mind was shaken by the controlling superstitions of the time; and he yielded slowly to the belief, which had now extended itself through the neighborhood, that his dwelling was under the immediate influence of demoniac agency.

Many were the experiments tried throughout the neighborhood for the discovery of the witch.

The old, experienced grand-mothers gathered together almost every evening for consultation, and divers and multiform were the plans devised for counteracting the designs of Satan. All admitted that Alice Knight must be the witch, but unfortunately there was no positive proof of the fact. All the charms and forms of exorcism which were then believed to be potent weapons for the overthrowing of the powers of Wickedness having failed, it was finally settled among the good ladies that the minister of the parish could alone drive the evil spirits from the dwelling of their neighbor. But Adam McOrne was a sinful man; and his oaths had been louder than his prayers on this trying occasion: and, when it was proposed to him to invite the godly parson to his house, for the purpose of laying the spirits that troubled it, he swore fiercely, that rather

than have his threshold darkened by the puritan priest, he would see his dwelling converted into the Devil's ball-room, and thronged with all the evil spirits on the face of the earth or beneath it.

And, with shaking heads and prophetic visages, the good women left the perverse Scotchman to his fate.

Notwithstanding his bold exterior, the heart of Adam McOrne was daily failing within him.

The wild, nursery tales of his childhood came back to him with painful distinctness— and the bogle and kelpie and dwarfish Brownie of his native land, rose fearfully before his imagination.

His evenings were lonely and long; and he resolved to invite Gilbert Knight— the fierce sailor, who feared neither man nor fiend— to take up his residence with him: in the firm belief that no power, human or superhuman, could shake the nerves of a man, who had wrestled with the tem-pest upon every sea; and who had braved death in the red battle, when his shattered deck was slippery with blood and piled with human corpses.

Gilbert obeyed the summons of McOrne with pleasure. He had heard the strange stories of the haunted mansion, which were upon every lip in the vicinity; and he felt perfectly convinced that his mother was employed in disturbing the domestic quiet of the Scotchman and his daughter— whether by natural means, or otherwise, he knew not. But he knew her revengeful disposition, and he feared, that unless her schemes were boldly interfered with, she would succeed in irreparably injuring the health and minds of her victims. Besides, he trusted that, should he succeed in accomplishing his purpose and laying the evil spirits of the mansion, he should effectually secure to himself the gratitude of both father and daughter.

Gilbert was received with much cordiality by Adam McOrne. "Ye may weel ken," said the old gentleman, "that I am no the least afeared o' a' this clishmaclaver, o' evil speerits, or deils or witch-hags; but my daughter, puir lassie, she's in an awsome way— a the time shakin' wi' fear o' wraiths and witches and sic like ill-faured cattle." And Adam McOrne made an endeavor to look unconcerned and resolute in the presence of his guest, as he thus disclaimed any feeling of alarm on his own part. He could not bear that the bold sailor should look upon his weakness.

Even Mary McOrne welcomed the presence of her discarded lover. Yet, while she clung to him as to her only protector, she shuddered at the thought that Gilbert was the son of her evil tormentor— nay more, the horrible suspicion would at times steal over her that he had himself prompted his wicked parent to haunt her and terrify her into an acquiescence with his wishes.

But, when she heard his frank and manly proposal to watch all night in a chamber, where the strange sights and sounds were most frequent, she could not but trust that her suspicion was ill-founded, and that in Gilbert Knight she should find a friend and a protector.

Adam McOrne, secretly overjoyed at the idea of having a sentinel in his dwelling, ordered a fire to be kindled in the suspected chamber; and placing a decanter of spirits on the table, he bade his guest good night, and left him to the loneliness of the haunted apartment. It matters not now what thoughts passed through the mind of Gilbert, as he sat silent and alone, gazing on the glowing embers before him. That his mother was engaged in a strange and dark purpose, in regard to the family of McOrne, he was fully convinced— and he resolved to unravel the mystery of her midnight adventures, and relieve the feelings of the Scotch-man and his daughter— even, although in so doing he should implicate his own mother, in guilty and malicious designs.

The old family clock struck one. At that moment a deep groan sounded fearfully through the room. Gilbert rose to his feet and listened earnestly. It seemed to proceed from the room beneath him; and it was repeated several times, until it died away, like the last murmurs of one in the agonies of death. In a few moments he heard footsteps on the stair case ascending to a long, narrow passage at its head, which communicated with his apartment.

"I will know the cause of this," said Gilbert, mentally, as he threw open the door, and sprang into the passage. A figure attempted to glide past him, appareled in white, uttering, as it did so, a deep and hollow groan.

"Mortal or devil!" shouted Gilbert, springing forward and grasping the figure by the arm— "you go no further. Speak, witch, ghost, whatever you are— declare your errand!"

The figure struggled violently, but the iron grasp of Gilbert remained unshaken. At that moment the hurried voice of the old Scotchman sounded through the passage.

"Haud weel, haud weel, my braw lad; dinna let go your grip— in God's name haud weel!"

"Let me go," said the figure in a hoarse whisper— "Let me go, or you are a dead man!" Gilbert retained his hold, and endeavored to discover by the dim light which streamed from his apartment, the countenance of the speaker.

"Die, then, unnatural wretch!" shrieked the detected Alice, snatching a knife from her bosom, and aiming a furious stab at her son. Gilbert pressed his hand to his side, and staggered backward, exclaiming, as the features of his mother, now fully revealed, glared madly upon him— "Woman, you have murdered your son!"

The knife dropped from the hand of Alice, and with a loud and almost demoniac shriek, she sprang down the stair case and vanished like a spectre.

Adam McOrne hurried forward, the moment he saw the white figure disappear, and followed Gilbert into his apartment. "Are ye hurt?— are ye wraith-smitten?" asked the Scotchman; and then, as his eye fell on the bloodied dress of Gilbert, he exclaimed— "Waes me— ye are a' streakit wi' bluid— ye are a dead man!"

Gilbert felt that his wound was severe, but with his usual presence of mind, he gave such directions to McOrne and his daughter, as to enable them to prevent the rapid effusion of blood, while a servant was despatched for the nearest physician. Mary McOrne seemed to forget the weakness of her sex, while she ministered to her wounded lover with a quick eye and a skillful hand. It is on occasions like this— when even the strong nerves of manhood are shaken— that the feeble hand of woman is often most efficient. In the hour of excitement and turmoil, the spirit of manly daring may blaze out, with sudden and terrible power— but in the deep trials of suffering humanity— in the watchings by the bed of affliction— then it is that the courage of woman predominates— the very excess of her sympathy sustains her.

The arrival of the physician dissipated in some degree the fears of McOrne and his daughter.

The wound of Gilbert was not considered as dangerous; and he was assured that a few days of confinement would be the only ill consequence resulting from it. The kind hearted Scotchman and his kinder hearted daughter watched by his bed until morning, at which time Gilbert was enabled to explain the singular circumstances of the night; and at the same time he expressed a wish that McOrne should visit the dwelling of his mother, who, he feared would resort to some violence upon herself, in the belief that she had, in her frantic passion, murdered her son.

Adam McOrne, convinced by the narration of Gilbert that human ingenuity and malice, instead of demoniac agency, had disturbed his dwelling, sallied out early in the morning to the rude and crazy dwelling of his tormentor.

He found the door open— and on entering, the first object that met his view was the form of Alice Knight, lying on the floor, insensible and motionless. He spoke to her, but she answered not— he lifted her arm, and it fell back with a dead weight upon her side.— She was dead— whether by terror or suicide, he knew not. "Ugh!" said Adam McOrne, in relating the discovery— "there she was— an ill-faured creature— a'cauld and ghaistly, lookin' for a' the world as if she wad hae thankit any Christian soul to hae gie'n her a decent burial."

She was buried the next day in the small garden adjoining her dwelling, for the good people of the neighborhood could not endure the idea of her

reposing in their own quiet grave-yard. The minister of the parish indeed attended her funeral, and made a few general remarks upon the enormity of witchcraft and the exceeding craftiness of the great necromancer and magician, who had ensnared the soul of the ill-fated Alice— but when he ventured to pray for the repose of the unhappy woman, more than one of his hearers shook their heads, in the belief that even their own goodly minister had no right to interfere with the acknowledged property of the Enemy.

It is said that Alice did not sleep peaceably, nathless the prayers of the minister. Her house was often lighted up in the dead of the night, until

"Through ilka bore the flames were glancing."

and the wild and unearthly figure of the old woman herself crossed more than once the paths of the good people of the neighborhood. At least, such is the story, and it is not our present purpose to dispute it.

The manner in which old Alice contrived to perplex the Scotchman and his daughter, was at length revealed by the disclosures of the servants of the family. They had been persuaded by the old woman to aid her in the strange transactions— partly from an innate love of mischief, and partly from a pique against the worthy Scotchman, whose irritable temperament had more than once discovered itself in the unceremonious collision of his cane with the heads and shoulders of his domestics.

Gilbert recovered rapidly of his wound: and a few months after, the house, which had been given over to the evil powers, as the revelling-place of demons, was brilliantly illuminated for a merry bridal. And the rough, bold sailor, as the husband of Mary McOrne, settled down into a quiet, industrious and sober-minded citizen. Adam McOrne lived to a good old age, stoutly denying to the last that he had ever admitted the idea of witchcraft, and laughing, heartily as before, at the superstitions and credulity of his neighbors.

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10: The Stolen Goddess

Scott Campbell

(Frederick W. Davis, 1858-1933)

The Popular Magazine May 1907

A Felix Boyd case, one of a series of 24 stories which ran from February 1906 to January 1908

"IT'S amazing— astounding! Only the very audacity of the crime could have made it possible. All Paris will be shocked, dazed with horror, unless the truth can be suppressed and the cherished treasure speedily recovered. It is monstrous— appalling! I, even I, my dear Boyd, am unnerved. The Venus de Milo has been stolen!" Monsieur Maurice Plaquet was

very pale and excited. His eyes were twin mirrors of overwhelming consternation and dismay. His desultory phrases were uttered in attenuated whispers, superlatively cautious, thrilling in their intensity, and evincing a state of mind bordering upon suppressed frenzy.

This was Mr. Felix Boyd's introduction to one of the most remarkable cases that ever came under his notice. In company with Jimmie Coleman, his friend of the Central Office, Boyd had sauntered into the Louvre soon after nine o'clock that April morning, at which hour the doors of this famous museum of art are opened to the public.

As frequently may be observed in one of a peculiarly sensitive and impressionable mind, Boyd's remarks to Coleman, as they lingered in the Salle des Cariatides, appeared to lead up to the startling disclosure presently made by Monsieur Plaquet, the young French detective with whom Boyd recently had figured in a case of some importance. It was as if something in the air, some subtle harbinger of what was coming, had turned Boyd's thoughts in this direction.

"Along parallel lines, Jimmie, that's about the way of it," he was saying. "The better the police service, the greater the cunning and ingenuity displayed by criminals. The one acts like a spur upon the other, so to speak, and the result is a constant neck-and-neck race between them, Jimmie, with only the flip of a coin for choice of the winner."

"There's more truth than poetry in that," Coleman assented, with habitual grimness. "It's a dead even gamble, Felix, for a fact."

"Here in Paris, Jimmie, we find a police service superior to any in the world," Boyd thoughtfully continued. "Yet here, too, the police records present an unparalleled variety of crimes, some of which were absolutely fantastic in their conception and execution. They stand as ugly monuments to the superior ingenuity and rascally cunning of the perpetrators."

"That's right, too."

"There are crimes committed in Paris that would not be dreamed of in any other city in the world. The public never hears of half of them. Even the restless journals of the boulevards are either kept in ignorance of the facts, or peremptorily silenced by the police. Volumes of unwritten history along these lines might be found in the secret archives of the— by the way, Jimmie, notice that man over yonder, the fellow in an astrakhan coat. Curious-looking chap, isn't he? He was pointed out to me at the Luxembourg yesterday."

Coleman stared askance at him, the one other man among the few early visitors then in that gallery. He was wrapped in contemplation of a colossal piece of decorative statuary— and wrapped in a voluminous astrakhan coat reaching nearly to his ankles, despite that the month was April. He was a gross, red, heavily bearded man, shockingly corpulent, yet low of stature— a squatty, repulsive figure that had absolutely. no right to be in so unbecoming a coat.

"Too much Johnson," Coleman dryly growled under his breath. "Who the devil is he?"

Boyd glanced furtively around before he answered, much as if he expected to see in some part of the gallery, or through one of the open doors, something worthy of his interest. That he failed to do so brought an odd, momentary gleam into his eyes, an expression unnoticed by his companion.

"Herr Ludwig is his name, Jimmie," he murmured indifferently. "An art connoisseur, I was told."

"I reckon it's the dippy-house for him who told you."

"I'm inclined to think he was right," smiled Boyd.

"Who'd ever guess it?"

"I judge that he's a Hungarian. I saw him admiring a painting in the Luxembourg yesterday morning— ah, he is going."

Herr Ludwig had come out of his seeming trance and was moving on, walking with a lurch and roll like that of a drunken sailor on a pitching deck. Presently he disappeared around a turn of the gallery.

It was five minutes later, when rounding the same turn, that the young French detective was seen hurriedly approaching, and Coleman quietly exclaimed :

"By Jove! the face of Plaquet indicates that one of your fantastic crimes has been discovered. There must be something doing, Felix, or he'd not look like that."

"What has occurred, Maurice?" inquired Boyd, as the other approached.

It was then that: Monsieur Plaquet declared himself in confidential whispers, as already noted, and made the astounding disclosure that one of the chief treasures of the Louvre, one of the noblest creations handed down by

ancient Greek art, one of the proud possessions of Paris, and a model worshiped by every art student in the world— the Venus de Milo had been stolen!

"Stolen— the Venus de Milo!" gasped Boyd, staring at him. "You don't really mean that!"

"Hush!"' Plaquet silenced him. "Not so loud, my dear Boyd. The truth must be suppressed. The public must not know— not yet! The treasure must be recovered, or Paris will go mad. Visitors are being excluded from the salon from which it was stolen— see for yourself. The conservator of the Louvre is there, half-crazed. Monsieur Thibeau, the prefect of police, is there. He is questioning the workmen. Not too loud, my dear Boyd, and betray no excitement."

Boyd glanced in the direction indicated. Several groups of visitors were reluctantly retracing their steps to other parts of the gallery, after having been refused admission into the salon of the Venus de Milo. Boyd observed that Herr Ludwig was among them, audibly bemoaning the restriction imposed. There were remarks about repairs being made, that portions of the floor were being renewed, and that the salon must be temporarily closed to the public.

"The device of Monsieur Thibeau," whispered Plaquet, in an explanatory way. "Some reason must be given. The truth must not leak out at present, not before we have done our utmost to trace and recover the lost treasure. This priceless Venus—"

"Bosh!" muttered Coleman, with a growl. "I've heard it cost only a petty twelve hundred dollars. We have millionaires at home who pay a thousand times that for—"

"Cost— pay!" Plaquet desperately whispered. "Man alive, are you mad? Money could not have bought the Venus de Milo. It has no price. It is the pride of the French people. It is the admiration of every visitor to Paris, the adored of every art student in Europe. Do you hear him, my dear Boyd? Mon Dieu! do you hear him?"

The suppressed frenzy of Plaquet over the Central Office man's characteristic view of the matter would have appeared ludicrous under less serious circumstances. Though he heard what was said, Boyd's gaze was lingering absently on the man in the astrakhan coat, who was departing, as if averse to complying with the restriction imposed, though other visitors were yielding graciously to the polite requests of several of the museum attendants in uniform.

"I think you spoke of workmen," Boyd lightly remarked, reverting to Plaquet. "If the closing of the salon is only a subterfuge of Monsieur Thibeau, to what workmen did you refer?"

"There are workmen there," Plaquet quietly explained. "The floor has been undergoing repairs since yesterday morning. On Mondays, as you know, the Louvre is closed for cleaning, and the opportunity was taken to repair some of the inlaid work of the marble floor in the salon of the Venus de Milo."

"Ah, I see," murmured Boyd.

"Four of the workmen now are there, hurriedly summoned by the prefect of police, whom the Louvre conservator has begged to investigate the affair in person. The fifth, Jules Ferrol, is at home in a fit."

"In a fit?"

"Yes."

"One of the workmen?"

"Yes, yes, to be sure," Plaquet impatiently nodded. "He was seized with it yesterday while at work— a horrible sight, the 'attendants say. He was twisted out of shape and frothed at the mouth like a mad dog. He was taken out by his friends, the workmen, and conveyed home in a wagon."

"What time did that occur?"

"Late in the afternoon, just before closing."

"And when was the robbery discovered?"

"Not until this morning."

"Who saw Ferrol in a fit?"

"His fellow workmen, also two of the attendants in this wing."

"Did the attendants see him carried out?"

"I infer so."

"Did anybody else see him?"

"The gendarmes at the outer door saw him."

"Did the attendants afterward see the statue now said to have been stolen?"

Plaquet shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, I know what you think, my dear Boyd," he replied. "We also have thought of that. It is, however, impossible. Yet Monsieur Thibeau now is interrogating the workmen and the attendants who—"

"Do you think that Monsieur Thibeau would object to my presence?"

"Quite the contrary, I'm sure," said Plaquet. "He thinks very highly of your judgment, and knows you may be trusted. Besides, my dear Boyd, you might possibly see some way by which you can serve us."

The eyes of Mr. Felix Boyd gleamed a little brighter under his drooping lids.

"Yes, possibly," he drawled a bit dryly ; then pointedly added: "Suppose that I do see some way by which I can serve you? Is it your wish that I should do so?"

Plaquet gasped and threw up his hands. "Can you ask such a question?"

"Take us into the salon," directed Boyd.

Monsieur Thibeau, gray and dignified, smiled faintly when the three men entered, and signified with a slight nod that he approved of what Plaquet had done. He did not, however, discontinue his rapid fire of searching questions addressed to the half-dozen men lined up before him.

While he listened, Boyd glanced gravely about the room. In the middle of it stood a vacant pedestal, that on which the stolen statue had been posed, a mute rebuke of the outrage committed. The inlaid marble floor showed signs of recent repairs. Several large pieces of light duck, or canvas, were spread in places, on which stood two wooden pails containing cement and trowels, while some mason's tools, some broken bits of marble, and several pairs of overalls were lying nearby.

Two of the men undergoing Monsieur Thibeau's fusilade of questions were the regular attendants in that wing of the Louvre. The other four were men who had been at work repairing the floor during the previous day, all stalwart fellows, and, as far as one could judge, intelligent and honest.

The story told by these six men, for the truth of which all of them vouched, was not particularly remarkable. Coincidental with the stealing of the Venus de Milo, however, it became extraordinary.

It appears that one Jules Ferrol, a fifth workman employed there the previous day, had fallen in a violent fit late in the afternoon. Both attendants testified to having seen him in convulsions on the floor, and to the fact that he presented a hideous picture. One of the workmen, Jean Coudert, who was well acquainted with Ferrol and knew him to be subject to such attacks, at once had declared that he must be taken home without delay. One attendant was immediately sent to bring a conveyance to the nearest exit from the Louvre, and he luckily found a covered wagon near-by that served the purpose.

Meantime, in order that the repulsive condition of Ferrol should not be seen by any persons encountered, one of the pieces of duck, then lying on the floor, was thrown over him, and he was taken up by his fellow workmen and hurriedly borne to the waiting wagon. In this he was quickly placed and driven away, with Goudert and another workman also going to take care of him.

The attendant who had assisted in removing the stricken man testified to the truth of all this, and also that he had hurriedly stated the circumstances to the gendarmes at the door the previous day, who at once had allowed the workmen to take out their burden, despite that it was entirely covered, they having no reason to doubt the attendant's veracity, nor to suspect the workmen of any felonious design.

The same attendant also testified that he had returned to the salon a little later, and had seen the Venus in its customary place. This also was vouched for

by the two workmen who had remained behind, and who now claimed to have returned to the room after some of their tools.

These somewhat exciting incidents had occurred late Monday afternoon, only a few minutes before the hour for closing the Louvre; and, if true, despite the remarkable coincidence that was obvious, they left only one rational inference— that the theft of the Venus de Milo had been subsequently committed, during Monday night or early 'Tuesday morning.

Mr. Felix Boyd appeared to have no deep interest in those portions of the testimony which he had arrived in time to hear. He hardly glanced at the attendants or the workmen; and when, at the end of half an hour, the prefect sent Plaquet on a mission to the house of Jules Ferrol, Boyd glanced at Coleman and indifferently remarked :

"We'll not remain longer, Jimmie, I think. You may, Monsieur Thibeau, depend upon our discretion."

Then he bowed gravely, and followed Plaquet from the salon.

ii

THOUGH Jimmie Coleman surmised it, Monsieur Plaquet did not— that Mr. Felix Boyd had a design in so abruptly leaving the scene of the inquiry conducted by the prefect of police. It became apparent to the other when they left the Louvre and emerged into the Rue de Rivoli, however, for Boyd then remarked, with brows raised inquiringly:

"Possibly you will not object, Plaquet, to my going with you to the home of Jules Ferrol."

Plaquet looked sharply at him, saying quickly:

"You suspect something ?"

"I know something."

"So soon, eh! You know what?"

Boyd smiled in his unfathomable fashion, and shook his head.

"Not yet, my dear Plaquet," said he. "I know only that the Venus de Milo has been stolen, and that I feel a growing interest in the case. If you object to my going with you—"

"*Sacré*!" cried Plaquet, interrupting. "There is no if to it. Come along."

"At this particular stage of the game, Jimmie, two may be a disadvantage," Boyd lingered to remark, with a significant stare at the Central Office man. "Ill rejoin you at our hotel in time for lunch."

"It's all one to me," Coleman indifferently nodded. "See you later, Plaquet."

"The sooner the better. *Au revoir*, Jimmie."

"I suppose, Plaquet, that you are informed of all that Monsieur Thibeau has learned of the case up to this time," said Boyd, as they locked arms and moved on.

"Yes, yes, perfectly."

"His questions indicated to me that he suspects that the Venus de Milo, not Ferrol, was taken out of the house by the several workmen."

"Who would not suspect that, indeed? Yet that is impossible."

"Monsieur Thibeau is a clever man?"

"Very."

"Why has he not asked who saw Ferrol leave the Louvre after the time he is said to have fallen in a fit? There were five workmen, then, in the salon. If the Venus was taken out under cover of the sheet of duck, as Monsieur Thibeau appears inclined to suspect, what became of the fifth workman — in other words, Jules Ferrol?"

"Oh, but it was Ferrol, not the Venus," cried Plaquet confidently. "Your reasoning, my dear Boyd, can bring you only to my own conclusions."

"You are so sure, eh?"

"Ferrol was not afterward seen to leave the Louvre," said Plaquet. "I have convincing evidence that he did not leave it, except as alleged. I know the distance to his house, the time naturally required for such a wagon to traverse it, and I have questioned the driver and the neighbors opposite the house of Ferrol, who saw him taken from the wagon and carried in. The distance is a mile; the difference in time between his leaving the Louvre and his arrival home was exactly eleven minutes. I established the time by the testimony of the gendarmes at the Louvre, and that of several neighbors who saw Ferrol arrive home. Since all of these people could not be mistaken and would not lie, it is presumable that we are right."

Boyd heard him with a smile, one only vaguely indicating that he, then, was aiming only to evoke a statement of all the absolute facts thus far established, that he might make his own analysis of the case in' accord with them.

"Quite true," he lightly remarked. "You reason that Ferrol, if not in the wagon, could not possibly have made his way from the Louvre unseen and reached home in eleven minutes."

"Certainly. Besides, the neighbors saw Ferrol taken from the wagon."

"Has the driver of it been seen and questioned ?"

"Yes."

"What does he say?"

"He tells the same story. Ferrol was in a fit. Delande drove straight to the house and helped carry him in."

"Delande is the driver's name?"

"Yes."

"What is his business?"

"He deals in rags and junk."

"A vocation that ordinarily would not have taken him near the Louvre," observed Boyd.

"Yes," muttered Plaquet, nodding. "We have thought of that. He states that it was only by chance that he was passing the Louvre at that hour with his covered wagon."

"Has he been arrested?"

"No. Yet, *sub rosa*, he is under constant surveillance."

"The gendarmes at the Louvre door," said Boyd—"did they detect nothing suspicious about the burden brought out by the workmen ?"

"Suspicious— no!" exclaimed Plaquet. "An arrest would instantly have followed. The word of the attendants was enough. The workmen passed out quickly with their burden. One gendarme says he saw, protruding beyond the edge of the cloth, the stiff crown of the black hat worn by Ferrol. Was not that enough, eh? Must it not have been Ferrol, eh? Could you think of the Venus de Milo with a stiff black hat on her classical head ?"

Boyd laughed softly.

"It would require a considerable stretch of one's imagination, Plaquet, for a fact," he rejoined. "This Ferrol — he is still in the fit, I think you said."

"He was when I saw him two hours ago."

"You are going there now to learn his condition ?"

"Yes."

"You are known to be of the police ?"

"Yes, to be sure. My questions enraged his haggard mother."

"Ah, Mrs. Ferrol resented any suspicions cast upon her son, eh?" smiled Boyd.

"It so appeared."

"Yet you did not tell her of the stolen goddess, I infer."

"No, no, nor must you," cautioned Plaquet.

"You may rely upon my discretion," said Boyd. "About these several workmen, Plaquet. Are they known to be men of good character?"

"So far as we have learned."

"Will they be arrested?"

"Not at present, I think. Their silence, however, will be insured."

"I judge so," nodded Boyd carelessly. "Assuming them to be innocent, Plaquet, can there be any trap in that floor now under repairs, by which the Venus could have been removed during the night?"

"No, no, impossible! Absurd!"

"Has any search been made for other evidence pointing to an explanation of the crime?"

"Indeed, yes! A score of our detectives are seeking for it."

"The evidence must be found elsewhere, Plaquet, if you are right about Ferrol observed Boyd. "You may say that I am a physician employed to look into his case, if any explanation of my presence is necessary. I may, in fact, wish to study the man quite closely."

Plaquet glanced again into Boyd's gray eyes, but he could find in them no sign of encouragement. He said more gravely:

"You'll have an opportunity. We are nearly there. It is this way."

Their rapid walk had brought them to one of the lower precincts of the city, where the ancient buildings were running to the bad, where crowded tenements abounded, and narrow-courts and devious alleys formed a labyrinth wisely avoided by night. Here the population was of the lower classes, with a percentage of the disreputable.

Plaquet had entered one of these courts, a narrow way flanked on either side with inferior wooden dwellings, through the miserable vista of which could be seen in the near distance a bit of the sunlit Seine, the only bright spot in a gloomy picture.

Plaquet halted at the doorway of a low dwelling, the walls of which and the rise of the steps were close upon the narrow sidewalk. A faded block of wooden houses stood opposite, at the soiled windows of which the faces of women and children could be seen, reflecting a morbid curiosity concerning the man in a fit living opposite.

"It was here the wagon stopped," Plaquet hurriedly muttered. "This is Ferrol's door. I have questioned those people opposite, who saw him removed from the wagon and carried in. None can doubt them."

Boyd was bestowing a vacant stare at the wall of the house, at the two curtained windows of a room on the second floor.

"The two workmen who came with him carried him in, I infer," he absently replied.

"The driver and one of the workmen," corrected Plaquet, whose inquiries had been exhausted. "The other workmen remained in the wagon to help lift him out. We'll enter without ceremony."

He did not observe the curious curl of Felix Boyd's thin lips as he mounted the worn wooden steps. He led the way into a narrow entry and up a flight of bare stairs, then into a rear kitchen adjoining a bedroom in front, with an open door between them. A kettle was boiling on the stove, emitting an unsavory odor of cooking, and the scene was far from inviting.

As the two men entered from the hall, a slovenly old woman came hurrying from the front room, her gray locks hanging in disorder over her seared brow, her toothless jaw nervously twitching, and her lips constantly in motion— that unconscious motion of the lips quite frequently observed in aged persons having something on the mind.

In this woman's bleared blue eyes, moreover, there was a look of apprehension which Boyd was quick to notice; and here his keen discernment and rare detective instinct, his superiority in these respects over his companion, came into play. He had seen nothing in front of the house for the woman to have feared, and he turned indifferently and laid his hand on a table near the back window, out of which at the same time he furtively glanced.

A man was just departing through a back alley— a tall, gaunt, scraggly whiskered fellow of forty— moving with a haste quite plainly indicating that he had seen the approach of Boyd and his companion, and had hurried out through a rear door, finding it impossible to depart unseen by that in front. Boyd had seen this man once before, yet none would have thought that he saw him now or had any interest in him.

"How now, Madame Ferrol?" Plaquet meantime was crying. "How is your son progressing? Does he speak, eh? Has he moved yet? Any signs, eh?"

The aged hag, for that she truly appeared, beat her breast and glared at him with flaming eyes, croaking in accents of mockery that would have been grotesque had it been less pitiable.

"Speak, eh? Moved, eh? Signs, eh?" she cried, punctuating each taunting query with a fierce forward thrust of her unkempt head. "Do you come here again to torment me, you Plaquet? Did I not tell you, miserable, that he would lie three days as you saw him? Do I not— ?"

"There, there, Madame Ferrol, hold your tongue."

"Do I not know when he will be well again? Have I not seen him so, you Plaquet, since he was "

"Peace, woman, or the devil seize you!" interrupted Plaquet, with a mingled growl and laugh. "Are you one huge ingrate, that you resent a kindness I would do you? I have brought you a good doctor to see your stricken son. Here you, my dear Boyd, and have a look at Monsieur Ferrol. As I've told you, my dear-doctor, he is in a bad way."

The change in Plaquet, with the announcement he had made, aptly adopting the suggestion Boyd had given him, wrought an immediate change in the woman, indicating that within the heart, seared deep by time, the maternal love still burned warm and tender.

She turned and stared at Boyd with softer eyes, in which hope and hopelessness battled for expression; and even while she gazed he saw again

that mute moving of her aged lips, as of one whose mind bears a burden which that of the heart fails to entirely obscure.

"You can do: nothing for him," she finally croaked.

"I might try, at least, my good woman," Boyd kindly rejoined. "You will allow me to see him, I'm sure."

"Other doctors have seen him."

"Then no harm can come of my doing so, Madame Ferrol," smiled Boyd, with a bow, as he passed her and followed Plaquet into the front room.

The shades were only partly drawn — as Boyd had noticed from the street. Trust him to have noticed whether one at either window might have seen the approach of Monsieur Plaquet.

On a narrow bed near the wall was stretched the stricken man, a sturdy fellow of forty, with shaven face now as white and composed as if in death, and with his open eyes fixed with a sightless stare at the begrimed ceiling.

Plaquet dropped into a chair near the head of the bed, on the edge of which Boyd gently seated himself, and passed his hand around Ferrol's cold wrist.

"Catalepsy, Plaquet," he said quietly. "It is a sort of apoplectic seizure, inducing the conditions you see here. Though I have made a study of the disease, of which but little really is known because of its rareness, I think I never have seen so pronounced a case. Ordinarily the attack may last from a few minutes to as many days, and consciousness usually returns as abruptly as it is lost. A noteworthy case, indeed."

Boyd addressed these remarks to Plaquet, speaking in ordinary tones, and with the air of a medical expert, all the while retaining the wrist of Ferrol in his hand. Yet the eyes of Mr. Felix Boyd were turned most of the time, with a furtive gaze to which even Plaquet was oblivious, upon the face of the woman who had followed them into the room.

With a hopeless wringing of her hands, Madame Ferrol was passing to and fro between the kitchen door and the foot of the bed, a picture of impoverished old age and maternal distress. Plainly enough she was listening, and had heard all that Boyd said; yet, too, her wagging head evinced a train of thought of her own, and her lips were moving mutely, as before.

Presently Felix Boyd broke her train of thought.

"I judge, Madame Ferrol," he said, "that your son is subject to these attacks periodically."

The woman halted and looked at him, saying simply:

"Yes, monsieur."

"Since he was a child?"

"Since he was a young man, monsieur."

"Do they occur frequently?"

"Three each year, monsieur."

"Ah, they are periodical," remarked Boyd. "I judge that they occur at regular intervals, Madame Ferrol?"

"Alas, yes!" groaned the woman. "Four months to a day, monsieur. He can tell, poor Jules, the very day they should come— and do come, alas!"

"The attack lasts about three days, Madame Ferrol, I think you said."

"Yes, monsieur. He then will be well again. I said so to you— you Plaquet. Why do you come here, eh?"

She wheeled around and returned to the kitchen. Still sitting on the edge of the bed, Boyd could see her over the stove, now at the table, again at the stove, in resumption of her domestic work— and, too, he could see that her mind was again absorbed, and that her lips were mutely moving.

"What do you think?" inquired Plaquet, meantime.

"About what?" said Boyd, with curiotis indifference.

"This man?"

"What should I think ?"

"Is he feigning?"

"No, impossible! The man is in a state of catalepsy. The woman has told you the truth about his disease."

"You think so, eh?"

"I do."

"So do l Shall we go?"

"Not yet."

Plaquet wondered and waited, then questioned again, and their quiet intercourse was continued for ten minutes. Still Boyd did not stir from his seat on the bed, and Plaquet asked again:

"Shall we go? Are you ready?"

"Not yet," murmured Boyd. "I first wish to see if I can detect any symptom of— ah, is some one coming?"

A vehicle had stopped outside, and a man's heavy tread presently sounded on the bare stairs of the adjoining entry.

Boyd quietly arose and glanced from the window. The enclosed service wagon of an undertaker stood in the court. On the side of the wagon was a metal plate bearing the name— Paul Canole.

Boyd read it, resumed his seat, and took the stricken man's wrist again. At the same moment a hearty voice sounded through the miserable rooms. "How now, aunt? I have heard that Jules is in another of his fits. I was driving by, and have come in to learn."

"Alas, yes!" Madame Ferrol replied, with a groan. "He was taken yesterday. No, no, don't go in there, good

Paul. A doctor is there, and one Plaquet, of the police. God only knows for what!"

Boyd observed that Paul Canole drew back, and decided not to enter the front room. Like his cousin on the bed, he was a sturdy, well-built fellow, and he remained for several minutes talking in subdued tones to the woman in the kitchen. As well as one could then have judged, their talk was entirely about the sick man, and Paul Canole finally departed and drove away.

Plaquet gazed at the inscrutable face of his companion, wondering.

"Are you ready? Shall we go?" he repeated.

"Not yet— not quite yet."

For, two more minutes Mr. Felix Boyd sat motionless on the edge of the bed, apparently absorbed in thought, with his hand still holding Ferrol's white wrist, while his eyes were turned with a vacant stare toward the kitchen and at the woman again at work about the stove.

At the end of the two minutes Boyd decided that he had discovered a curious fact— that the woman's train of thought had been permanently broken.

Her lips had ceased moving.

"We will go, Plaquet," said he, rising indifferently. "This man is like one dead. There is, as you see, nothing to be learned here."

It would have required the experience of Jimmie Coleman to have detected the subtle significance with which this was said.

It was nearly one o'clock when the two men approached the Hôtel de Calais, at the door of which Felix Boyd halted.

"You twice have asked me what I make of this case, Plaquet, and I have not yet informed you," he observed, with a rather quizzical light in the depths of his keen gray eyes.

Plaquet shrugged his shoulders and vented an odd little laugh.

"Hey!" he lightly exclaimed. "Do you think you need to tell me that, my dear Boyd?"

"I will tell you what I think," smiled Boyd. "This curious mystery admits of only two solutions. Either the Venus de Milo was stolen during last night, presumably by treacherous attendants who devised some way to secretly remove the statue from the Louvre; or E

"Well?"

"Or it was removed by the workmen who now claim to have carried out Jules Ferrol in a fit."

"Once more— well?"

Plaquet's eyes were vainly searching the depths of those that were looking into his.

"You do not know which is the correct solution, eh?" murmured Boyd.

"I do not, indeed. Do you?"

Boyd laid his hand on his companion's arm, and his voice took on a low, peculiar ring that few could have resisted.

"What I now say to you, Plaquet, I shall say in strict confidence. It must not be mentioned, not suggested by hint or look, before to-morrow."

"Trust me, Boyd, it shall not."

Boyd's eyes burned brighter.

"Then meet me here at nine this evening," he whispered sharply. "It will be well if you come in disguise, Plaquet, and wise if you have a gun in your hip pocket. I then will take you where you may learn what I now know, Plaquet, and where you may lay your hands on the Venus de Milo!"

Plaquet impulsively reached out to insist upon more— but Mr. Felix Boyd, with a refusal in his eyes, swung sharply around and hurried into the hotel.

iii

FROM the pulsing heart of Paris, ceaselessly throbbing with life, to the serene repose of its rural environment is only a step. It is well that one weary of the maelstrom may so quickly reach a realm of quietude and rest.

In contrast with the life and light within, the open country beyond the grim fortifications appeared dark at ten o'clock that night, under the light of the stars only, an obscure scene against which the road to Versailles stretched away like a yellow bar on a field of purple.

The gendarmes at the gate appeared oblivious to the presence of the three men who were loitering scarce within speaking-distance, yet who kept for the most part within the gloom and shadows afforded by the adjoining walls. It was close upon ten o'clock when Plaquet asked the hour, and Mr. Felix Boyd informed him.

"There'll soon be something doing, then," the Central Office man growled under his breath, yet in accents of grim satisfaction.

"Assuming that Boyd is right," qualifed Plaquet.

Coleman peered at him rather contemptuously through the semidarkness.

"Right, eh?" he said, with quiet significance. "Want to gamble against it, Plaquet? I'll take the other end."

Plaquet chuckled softly and shook his head.

"Better not," added Coleman dryly. "I'd get your dust. You do not know Boyd as I know him. He works in the dark, like a rat, and keeps those in the dark who watch him. Never doubt the sharpness of his teeth, however."

"What time now, my dear Boyd? How soon may we expect—"

"Hist! Here where it's darker, Jimmie. Close to the wall, Plaquet."

The interruption had come from Felix Boyd. While the others were quietly talking, he had been standing as motionless as a figure of bronze in the darkness, apparently oblivious to the complimentary remarks of his loyal friend, and with his frowning eyes gazing out over the yellow highway that stretches away to Versailles.

With the interruption, however, he seized each of his companions by the arm, drawing both hurriedly from the road and into the deeper gloom under the fortification walls.

"What now?" whispered Plaquet excitedly.

Boyd's thin, clean-cut face looked white in the darkness. His lips were drawn, his brows knit, his eyes aglow with a light all their own. Despite his rigid self-control, a trained hound in leash was never more impatient.

"Listen!" he muttered. "That sound is significant."

"The song of those men?"

"Yes."

"What can that signify?"

"That our quarry is coming. Those fellows may have been sent to divert the attention— wait here, both of you! Don't stir until I return!"

Two men with their arms interlocked, boisterously singing and apparently much intoxicated, were reeling along the highway toward the city and the gate through which they must pass. They still were a hundred yards away, dimly visible in the starlight, and were making night hideous with their ribald song.

Felix Boyd had darted away from his companions, gliding swiftly through the gloom near the wall, only to suddenly appear like a shadow at the elbow of one of the three gendarmes just within the Porte de Versailles.

"Listen!" he quietly commanded. "Detain those two men who are singing. I suspect they may have been sent to divert your attention and give you trouble, in the hope that the wagon will be allowed to pass out unchallenged. Let it do so, in case men and wagon arrive here together, indicating that I am right. Leave me to hold up the wagon. You make sure, however, that you hold the singing men."

A nod from one of the gendarmes, with fingers respectfully raised to his cap, was the answer; but Felix Boyd had glided away the moment his last word was said.

Ten seconds later he rejoined his companions, coming as quickly and silently as he had departed. The singing men still were fifty yards away. Their vociferous song had increased in volume while they approached. Reeling along the middle of the highway, oblivious to the eyes watching them, to the figures crouching in the gloom scarce twenty yards distant, they presently passed beyond the break of the wall and were lost to view.

"Quiet!" hissed Boyd. "Not a sound — not a move!"

Yet now there came from within the gate the sounds of an altercation. The singing had ceased, and the voices of the singers were being loudly raised in protest. One would have said that the two drunken men were resisting an arrest by the gendarmes, for in addition to cries and protests, there now were sounds of a hand-to-hand struggle.

In the very midst of the mélée then in progress Felix Boyd suddenly heard the rapid clatter of hoofs and the rumbling of wheels of an approaching wagon, one about to leave the city. Instantly the light in his eyes became a fiery gleam. He loosed his grip on the arms of his companions, crying quickly, with indescribable intensity:

"I am right! Wait the word from me, both of you. You to the horse's head, Jimmie. You, Plaquet, to the back of the wagon. Down any man who attempts flight. Leave the driver to me. Ten thousand dollars to as many cents, Jimmie, he will be— Paul Canole !"

No verbal description could adequately depict the aspect, voice, and sentiments of Felix Boyd in such moments as these. As if to corroborate his last words, uttered in whispers that cut the night air like the sweep of a rapier, the clatter of hoofs suddenly fell sharply on the road outside of the grim walls, a bay horse came quickly into view, then the closed service wagon of an undertaker— and the voice of Felix Boyd acted like spurs in the sides of his excited companions.

"Now, Jimmie!" he cried. "At him all together!"

They were in the road in an instant, all three, and Coleman jerked the animal's head to his flank when he grasped the bits and forced him back to his haunches.

"Hold up, gentlemen!" cried Boyd, with a foot on the wagon-step. "Where go you at this hour? You appear in haste."

The eyes of Canole— startled and affrighted eyes— peered down at him from under the hood above the seat. The ruddy hue had vanished from his cheeks, and a man seated on a long, deal-board box behind him slunk out of view.

"Why do you stop me, officer?" gasped Canole. "I am on business—"

"Your name, citizen!" Boyd sharply interrupted. "What is your name?"

"Henri Devrol, officer. I am—"

"Why is it not on your wagon, my man? I see that the metal plate has been lately removed."

"It is being repaired, relettered, officer. You may see it at—"

"Let me, instead, see what you carry."

Canole thrust out both hands in protest, when Boyd attempted to mount to the seat.

"For your life, officer!" he cried appealingly. "We remove a corpse for burial— a death. of malignant smallpox! The burial must be at night and out of the city. For your own sake, officer is—"

"Smallpox, eh?" cried Boyd, with a loud, derisive laugh. "Never mind— I've had it! I'll see for myself, Canole, not Devrol, and—"

The derisive laugh, the mention of his name, the repeated attempt of Boyd to mount to the seat— these seemed to act like some swift and frightful stimulant upon the man addressed. With a half-smothered shriek, that of a man who has played a desperate game and knows it is lost, a man then bent only upon escape, Canole dropped his reins and launched himself at Boyd to hurl him out of his way.

The latter met him half-way, and they came down in the road together, each upon his feet. Then the hand of Felix Boyd quickly rose and fell, and the thud of a blow with a weapon followed its fall. Canole uttered only a single groan and dropped flat in the road.

There were sounds of breaking doors at the back of the motionless wagon, then a struggle, and the voice of Plaquet calling for aid.

Boyd ran to his assistance, just as two of the gendarmes approached through the gate. Canole's companion had tried to escape— and failed; for in half a minute the man was in irons, one whom Boyd had seen that morning at the Louvre.

Plaquet now was frantic, in a frenzy of eagerness surpassing that of the morning. With an exultant cry he gazed in at the rear of the wagon, saw the deal-board coffin-box that it contained, and some loose tools lying beside it.

"They are here, Boyd, the tools," he shouted. "We now shall see if you are right. We will see if it is here— the pride of—"

"You'll do nothing of the kind at present," Boyd sharply interrupted, seizing him by the shoulder and drawing him away.

"Boyd—"

"Peace! Are you mad, Plaquet? These are the hirelings only. I want the master."

"You are right again and —"

"And no time must be wasted," Boyd again interrupted, irresistible in such moments. "Look after these two men, gendarmes. You have the othets secured, eh? Very good— very good! Into the wagon, Jimmie; and you, Plaquet. Await our return, gendarmes. We will bring you the master to go with the menials."

Boyd was upon the wagon-seat, ribbons in hand, with his companions crouching behind him.

Leaving the gendarmes to look after the men already secured, Boyd drove on more calmly and leisurely over the starlit road. Little was said, for he insisted upon caution and quietude. Yet:the ride that brought them to the end of their night mission was not long.

Nearly where the road to Clamart branches from that to Versailles, there appeared a second covered wagon emerging from a narrow road.

As they were about to pass, a moment later, a huddled form on the seat of the wagon leaned forward and softly cried:

"That you, Paul?"

"Yes," growled Boyd. "Drive on a little, that I may back up to you."

A gaunt figure beside the first speaker urged his horse on a few steps.

Boyd and his companions sprang quietly down and darted to the front of the other wagon, two at one step, Boyd at the other. There was an ugly ring in the latter's voice, an uglier gleam from the weapon that rose in the starlight, when he spoke to the man on the seat.

"Come down, Herr Ludwig, you and your servant," he cried. "Come down, and make no fuss— unless you feel sure that coat you wear is proof against a bullet. Come down, Herr Ludwig, and let us fit you both to a pair of bangles."

There were two wagons driven back to the Porte de Versailles.

There was one driven at eleven o'clock that night into the courtyard of the Louvre. The bells of Paris had not struck the midnight hour when it departed.

It had left, again in proud pose upon her waiting pedestal, a stolen goddess all unconscious of the outrage done her — the Venus de Milo, unrivaled amid the treasures of art with which she dwells. 'The inlaid floor in her sanctuary of variegated marble now was cleared— and the doors of the salon were open as usual next morning.

To this day, in the secret archives of the Paris police, enrolled as the chief figure in one of the most remarkable cases there recorded, there may be read by the few privileged to read— the name of Mr. Felix Boyd.

IT WAS precisely twelve o'clock when Felix Boyd loosened his collar and cravat in the parlor of his apartments that night, then reached for his tobacco

and pipe. The Central Office man's heels were elevated to the edge of the table.

"It's just as I told you this morning, Jimmie; there are crimes committed in Paris that would not be dreamed of in any other city in the world," Boyd observed, as he pressed home the tobacco and struck a match. "The better the police service, the greater the ingenuity displayed by criminals. It's a dead open-and-shut cinch, Jimmie, that's what it. is." Jimmie Coleman nodded and removed his pipe.

"I reckon you're right, Felix; you always are," he said musingly. "But how the deuce did you get wise to this affair? That beats me!"

"That so, Jimmie?" Boyd smiled and sat down. "Then Ill tell you how I discovered the truth, and at the same time divest the discovery of all the mystery and merit you ascribe to it. It was curious, in a way, yet superlatively simple."

"Humph!" grunted Coleman. "Your idea of simplicity and mine are about as near alike as chalk and cheese."

Boyd laughed, and sank back in his easy chair.

"Follow me, Jimmie, and see how simple it was," said he. "I stumbled upon a pointer to the truth even before I knew the crime had been committed."

"The deuce you did!"

"You remember that I called your attention to Herr Ludwig in the Salle des Cariatides. He appeared absorbed in viewing a piece of statuary."

"I remember."

"Yet I incidentally noticed that his attention was not on the statue. I saw that he was listening, also craftily casting furtive glances toward the gallery doors. I wondered for what he was so stealthily watching and listening. I knew for what, Jimmie, when I learned of the crime."

"He had come there to see if it had been discovered, and what was being done."

"That was my immediate impression," nodded Boyd. "It was confirmed by his reluctance to depart, moreover, and by what I already had heard about him."

"What was that, Felix?"

"A friend pointed him out to me in the Luxembourg yesterday. He stated that Ludwig is an art connoisseur, and is said to be a collector of rare art treasures for one Baron Heiglehoff, an aged and eccentric recluse, who dwells in some isolated old castle somewhere up on the Rhone. He has barrels of money, this Heiglehoff, and a pronounced mania for securing gems of art, for which he will pay fabulous prices, yet which he buries away in his stronghold for the inspection of nobody but himself." :

"Evidently an old crank," growled the Central Office man.

"That's about the size of it," Boyd assented. "Jimmie, I at once felt tolerably sure that Ludwig, at the instigation of his employer, had put up a very crafty job and a bundle of money to secure the Venus de Milo."

"Well, you hit it right," grinned Coleman, through a veil of smoke.

"Now note how easily I got at the truth, which the prefect of police only suspected," Boyd smilingly continued. "I quickly was convinced that the fit of Ferrol was a blind, that the five workmen and at least one attendant were Ludwig's tools, that the Venus had been carried out under cover, instead of a man, and that the statue then was in the keeping of one of Ludwig's confederates."

"What convinced you of all that?"

"Several statements that were made, which I felt sure must be false. One workman testified that he returned to the salon to get his tools, and saw the Venus there after Ferrol had been removed. Jimmie, masons do not remove their tools until their work is done, and the work in the Louvre was not then completed."

"Humph! I see the point."

"One of the attendants also told the same lie— the one who had made it a point to assure the gendarmes at the outer door, thus heading off an investigation of the covered burden that was being brought out, Plainly enough, that attendant was in Ludwig's employ."

"Surely."

"Next, Jimmie, the fact that the covered wagon of a junk-dealer was so handy to the Louvre at just the moment it was wanted, convinced me that its owner, Delande, was also in the game. I reasoned, however, that Delande would not retain the statue, as he might be liable to immediate suspicion, and his house, shop, and stable quickly searched. I felt sure that he must have got rid of it."

"Yes, yes, naturally."

"Having gathered these points, Jimmie, I used my own brains to fathom how the trick must have been turned," continued Boyd. "Ferrol pretends to fall in a fit, frothing at the mouth, a froth produced by soap and spittle. The honest attendant is despatched for a wagon— known to be waiting. Ferrol then leaps up, claps on a disguise, and in a jiffy the statue is under the canvas and Ferrol is helping the workmen remove it."

"But there were five workmen," growled Coleman. "What became of the fifth?"

"He slipped out of his overalls and blouse, which might have betrayed his vocation, and he easily left the Louvre with the numerous other cleaners employed there on Mondays. None would naturally have suspected him."

"Ah, I see."

"To continue my own reasoning," smiled Boyd. "Upon arriving at his door, Ferrol, with disguise removed, was taken into the house by one workman and the driver of the wagon. See the point, eh? Ferrol must have been the second workman in the wagon, since the driver's aid was required, and the statue obviously was the object under the canvas."

"Yes, yes; sure thing.

"The wagon being covered, naturally the neighbors could not see into it, and the statement that the other workman, only a myth, remained in the wagon to help lift Ferrol out, was a ties?

"Certainly."

"Thus I figured out how the trick probably was done, which we since have confirmed," Beyd went on. "Three serious questions then stared me in the face. Was it possible that Ferrol still was feigning to be in a fit, and so cleverly as to deceive Plaquet and the doctors? What had become of the Venus de Milo? How was it to be located? Those were the three questions, Jimmie."

"Posers, I should have called them," laughed Coleman.

"Yet the answers were obtained quite easily," smiled Boyd. "Upon entering the house of Ferrol, I saw a man hastening out through the rear alley."

"Ludwig's servant?"

"Exactly," nodded Boyd. "I had seen him with Ludwig at the Luxembourg, and I now was sure I was on the right track. An examination of Ferrol convinced me that his fit now was genuine. Upon questioning his mother, however, I learned that his fits were periodical, that he could tell to a day when he would have one, and it instantly dawned upon me that all of the circumstances had been learned by Ludwig, and advantage taken of them to have Ferrol feign a fit the previous day and make off with the Venus de Milo. Naturally, Jimmie, the fact that Ferrol would be found in a cataleptic fit the next day, would tend strongly to confirm the statements of all of his confederates, and avert suspicion of the actual truth."

"I believe your story," declared Coleman. "It was a most remarkable scheme, Felix, for a fact."

"There were but a few more steps, Jimmie," laughed Boyd. "I got another and my most valuable clue at the house of Ferrol. I observed that his mother, when not in conversation, was constantly moving her lips, a habit of some aged persons when in thought. By watching her lips, Jimmie, I discovered that she was constantly repeating the words: 'Porte de Versailles; ten tonight.' "

"Holy smoke!"

"You see the point, I observe," smiled Boyd. "It at once struck me that Ludwig's servant had been there to give Madame Ferrol instructions which he dared not put on paper, and which she was to impart to some person whom neither Ludwig nor the servant felt it safe to visit."

"The one who then had the statue," put in Coleman.

"Surely," nodded Boyd. "That person was to come to Madame Ferrol and receive the instructions left by the servant."

"Exactly."

"So I made a pretense for waiting till he came, which luckily occurred in about a quarter-hour. It proved to be Ferrol's cousin, an undertaker, and I'at once saw the rest of the scheme. The Venus was to be removed in a casket box, placed in an undertaker's wagon, and carried out by the Porte de Versailles at ten to-night. Presumably it was to be delivered somewhere out of the city, or received by Ludwig himself at some prearranged point on the road to Versailles."

"Yes, yes, I see."

"I clinched this, Jimmie, by noting that Madame Ferrol's lips ceased to move after Canole's departure. There no longer was any occasion for her to remember the instructions she had been carrying in mind."

"Very good, Felix. Very good, indeed."

"You may wonder why I did not advise, on this evidence, the immediate arrest of Canole and the searching of his place," added Boyd. "There were several reasons. There might have been difficulty in proving our case, in locating the statue, or in tracking him and his team this evening. Then, too, he might have feared suspicion and craftily have confided the work to another, of whom we know nothing. I reasoned that the sure way was to be at the Porte de Versailles at ten o'clock, Jimmie, and there collar our man.'

"That was the proper caper, Felix.'

"You missed me part of this afternoon, Jimmie," smiled Boyd, in conclusion. "I went out to learn where Ludwig was, and how employed. With but little difficulty, I found out that he had hired a covered wagon and left the city in the direction of Versailles» It then was like adding two and two, Jimmie, to deduce that we should meet Ludwig on the road to-night."

"By Jove! Felix, you've done a wonderful piece of work,' Coleman now declared warmly. "Talk about your French police and detectives— why, old pal, you can give them cards and spades, and then win the game at a canter."

Mr. Felix Boyd laughed soitly, as if pleased, then laid aside his pipe.

"Well, yes, Jimmie, I did most of the work, for a fact; but it remains for the French police to clean up after me," he rejoined, with a yawn. "They'll hush the

affair. It will not do to let it be known that such a treasure could be stolen from the Louvre. The police will come out with clean skirts, never fear. The public will never know the truth, despite that the culprits will get what's due them. It was unfortunate for Ludwig that haste was imperative. If the Venus had not been found today, by to-morrow Paris would have been cordoned with troops, and a search of the city high and low begun. Ludwig anticipated that much, and he lost no time. Now he must take his medicine, and his hirelings, also. Behold the hour, Jimmie. Let's go to bed."

11: I Should Know Better

Peter Cheyney

1896-1951

In: *Making Crime Pay*, 1943

Reginald Evelyn Peter Southouse-Cheyney

I SHOULD know better. Mind you, it isn't much comfort to say that to myself now. But there's no doubt about it. This time the drinks are on *me*.

My lawyer says with luck I'll get away with about four years. He calls that *luck*!

Mind you, there's a funny side to this story. I suppose I can say with a proper amount of pride that I was considered the best confidence man in the Western Hemisphere; but when I told you that the drinks were on me I meant what I said, because the funny part of this thing is that I've never been picked up for doing a job in my life, and now they have got me for something I *didn't* do. Put yourself in my place and try to laugh that one off.

It was a lovely June afternoon. The car was singing along the road, with the engine making that purring note that delights the heart of a keen motorist, and I'm a keen motorist. It was a new car which I had just run in. I'd got my luggage back in the boot. I had two hundred and fifty pounds in my pocket and I had thirty-six thousand pounds in the Bank. Tell me what more a man could want. But, of course, I wasn't satisfied. I had to look for a little trouble.

I can remember whistling to myself when I drove down the road past the Eastbourne Golf Club. I thought I'd stay at Eastbourne just for two or three days. I'm rather fond of Eastbourne. When I got into the town I was thirsty and I needed petrol. So I pulled up at a hotel garage. While they were filling the tank I walked round the corner into the cocktail bar where I ordered a whisky

and soda. I was drinking it when somebody touched me on the arm. I looked round. It was Gringall.

Gringall, I should tell you, is a detective-inspector at Scotland Yard. He's always been rather disappointed about me.

He said: 'Hullo, Steve, How's it going?'

I said: 'It's going very nicely, Gringall. Have a drink?'

He looked at me for a moment; then he said:

'All right. I will.'

I ordered him a double whisky and soda. Then he said:

'You know, Steve, you ought to retire.'

I smiled at him. I asked: 'Really! You tell me why.'

He lit a cigarette and looked at the glowing tip of it before he answered. Then he said:

'You're slipping, Steve. You're losing your technique.' I looked horrified.

'No?' I said. 'Not really! Tell me how and when and why.'

He finished his whisky, and put the glass down.

'I'll tell you,' he said with a grin. 'Two weeks ago you "took" an American millionaire named Marvin for thirty-six thousand pounds. He was staying at the Savoy Hotel. You used one of the oldest plays in the world to separate that mug from his money. Your technique was so old-fashioned that it almost creaked.'

I raised my eyebrows.

'You don't say, Gringall?' I said, but I wasn't feeling *quite* so good.

'You don't have to worry, Steve,' he went on. 'I'm going to admit that I was very disappointed about that Marvin. We'd got the whole case in the bag. I was looking forward to coming round to see you, to tap you on the shoulder and take you inside. And then at the last moment he walked out on us. He wouldn't prosecute.'

My heart had been thumping considerably. Now it began to slow down a bit.

Gringall said: 'You're a lucky cuss, Steve, aren't you? It seems that Marvin had just got engaged to a very nice American girl about half his own age. He thought that if he prosecuted you, when she read the story in the papers she'd laugh her head off at his being taken for a sucker with that old trick you pulled on him, so he decided he'd rather lose the thirty-six thousand pounds and let you get away with it. You are a lucky fellow, aren't you, Steve?'

I didn't say anything. Then I asked him if he'd have another whisky and soda. He said no. I ordered one for myself. I felt I needed it. Was that a close shave or was it! I can remember picking the glass up off the bar and looking

through the amber-coloured liquid inside it, and saying to myself: 'Steven, my lad, this is where you *do* retire.'

I said to Gringall: 'Well, life's a funny thing. Anyway, nothing matters, Gringall, because I definitely am retiring.'

He grinned at me. He's got an insolent sort of grin.

He said: 'Oh, yes! What are you going to do?'

'I'll tell you,' I said. 'I'm going to stay here in Eastbourne for a few days. Then I'm going to look round for a nice little cottage somewhere. I'll take it, live there and play golf for six months, decide exactly what business I'm going into. I rather think I'll go into the car business. I like motor-cars.'

He said: 'No, you won't, Steve. You're a confidence man. You've been a "con" man for fifteen years, and you've got away with it. It's the salt of life to you, that game. You could no more give it up than I could give up being a "blue-ink". You'll go on being a "con" man and you'll slip up, and the next time you slip, as sure as God made little green apples, I'm going to have you.'

I finished my drink and said: 'No, you won't, Gringall. I told you I was retiring. In a year's time I'll probably be lord of the manor some place, and you'll touch your hat when you see me and curtsy.'

He put on his hat. As he turned away, he said:

'Like hell I will! I'll have you inside, Steve, before I'm through with you.'

I'D been at the Hotel Splendide for three days. I'd played golf and driven the car round and enjoyed life generally.

It was on the Thursday, when I was having lunch, that she came into the dining-room. She was the sort of woman who made you catch your breath. I'll try to give you an entirely inadequate description of her.

She was tall—but not too tall—and willowy, and she moved with an amazing grace that is quite indescribable. She had ash-blonde hair, violet eyes—big violet eyes with long lashes—and a rather serious and remote air that was quite alluring in these days of too obvious 'oomph'.

I'd seen her arrive just before lunch, and I suppose it was my professional curiosity that made me interested in her. That she was well blessed with this world's goods was obvious. She arrived in a 1939 Rolls sports car and her luggage was right off the top shelf.

I was standing in the hotel *foyer* when she came in. She went to the desk to register and, as she took the pen in her hand, she saw me. She looked at me for what seemed a very long time. Then she put the pen down and turned and looked through the doorway out towards the sea. Then she picked up the pen and registered. She was smiling—a lovely remote sort of smile. Then she went over to the lift.

When she'd gone I walked over and looked at the register. I saw that she was Miss Paula Galloway and that she lived at Haddenham. Then I went in to lunch.

The dining-room at the Splendide is a big room. There were quite a few people in it, and they were all so busy looking at her when she came in that I thought I might as well look too. She was one of those women that you couldn't help looking at, even if it is rude to stare.

The head-waiter showed her to a table in the corner. When she sat down she looked round the room and she saw me. She looked straight at me, and then, without any hesitation, she came straight across to my table and sat down in a vacant chair.

She said: 'Godfrey—my dear—after all these years!'

I ask you! So I was Godfrey. I was her dear, and after all these years!

I summoned up my most attractive smile, my most charming voice. I used all the technique that I usually bestow on the less cultured American gents that I used to separate so successfully from their bankrolls.

I said: 'I'm terribly sorry to tell you that you're making a mistake. My name isn't Godfrey, and it's just part of my appalling luck that I'm not your—'

She interrupted me. She put out her hand—the ring on the engagement finger was worth about a thousand pounds—and said softly:

'My dear, you *are* Godfrey. The tragedy is that you don't remember. I *couldn't* be mistaken about you; it's impossible. I've known all these five weary years that I'd find you. I came over from Haddenham just to be here for a few days and think about you, and because we'd been so happy here.'

Well—I stalled. How could I help it? As a 'con' man of ten years' standing, I *had* to. This might be the best bit of business I'd ever done.

'Tell me something,' I said to her. 'Why are you so certain that I'm Godfrey? And why wouldn't I know that I was Godfrey? Why do I think I'm someone else, Miss Galloway?'

She turned the full blast of those two lovely eyes on me and smiled. I felt my toes beginning to curl up. She said very softly:

'How do you know I'm Miss Galloway—Godfrey?'

I looked at the hotel register,' I said brightly.

'Exactly,' she said. 'And you did that because you were interested in me. D'you know *why* you are interested, darling?'

I didn't say anything. She held out the finger with the engagement ring on it, and she said:

'You were interested because your brain was *trying* to remember. It was trying *so hard* to remember that you are the man who put that ring on my

finger, the man whom I was about to marry. The man whom I'm *going* to marry. And how do you like that, sweet?'

I said: 'I like it a lot, but I still don't understand. And I still don't believe I'm Godfrey.'

She smiled again. Then she murmured:

'Of course you don't. Please listen carefully to what I have to say.' I listened.

'Five years ago', she began, 'you and I were engaged to be married. I think we were the two happiest people in the world. Your name was and is Captain Godfrey Ferring. You had fought with the Australians in the first part of the Great War and afterwards with the Royal Flying Corps. You were dead keen on flying.

'When I met you, you were very broke and terribly attractive—as you still are. You spent your last money on my engagement ring.' She flashed a quick smile at me. 'But you had a first-class carburettor which you had invented, and when I showed it to Daddy, he said at once that it was a winner, and that he'd use it on the new racing-car the factory was building then. Of course you don't remember that Daddy agreed to pay you twenty thousand pounds for the patent rights in the carburettor, and you don't remember—my poor darling—that you haven't received a penny of the money, and that it's still waiting for you.'

I pinched myself under the table. This was *good*!

She looked away towards the window. I could see the tears in her lovely eyes.

'It was on a Sunday,' she went on. 'You'd come down to the Hall at Haddenham for the week-end. You came on the Friday. We were to be married on the following Thursday. We were both walking on air. Our whole future was assured. Daddy had arranged for you to go into the factory and work on the car-designing side. We had a credit with the firm of twenty thousand pounds for your invention. Daddy thought you were a first-class person, and I adored you.'

I nodded. I was beyond words.'

'On the Monday afternoon you left the Hall at Haddenham and went over to the car works at Fairley. The test car had been finished—the one fitted with your carburettor. In spite of the fact that Williams told you that the car wasn't right for the road, you insisted on taking it out. Williams says that you drove the car round the test ground at about forty and then swung out on to the main London road. He says that you accelerated hard, and that you must have been touching ninety miles an hour, when—when you skidded and went into the hedge.'

She hesitated a moment and looked down at the table. I saw a tear fall on the cloth.

'The car was smashed out of recognition,' she went on after a moment, 'but you disappeared. No-one had heard or seen anything of you until to-day.'

I got it. I said, looking a little vague: 'I suppose I'd lost my memory?'

'Exactly,' she said. 'It was quite obvious that you were not physically hurt. You couldn't have been, because obviously you'd got out of the wreckage and walked away. You weren't anywhere near when Williams got there with the ambulance.'

She paused, and I did some of the fastest thinking I've ever done in my life. I thought that it would put the seal on a career not entirely unsuccessful if I could get away with this. I wondered if I could.

She continued: 'We did everything 'to find you. Daddy was distraught. I'—she shrugged her shoulders a little pathetically—'went into a nursing home for four months. I was nearly *mad* with grief. We advertised; we employed detectives; we did everything.'

She smiled. That smile illuminated her face. Her eyes shone.

'And now I've found you,' she said. 'And I'm never going to let you go—never.'

I thought I'd do a little investigating. I said:

'But supposing all this was possible. Surely I'd have contacted someone who knew me. Friends or relations—'

'You had no relations, Godfrey dear,' she said. 'Both your father and mother died when you were very young. I can remember you telling us that practically every man you'd known in the old days was either killed in the Great War or had died since. You had no-one except us. There was nobody to recognize you. And Heaven only knows where you got to.'

I made up my mind. I was going to chance this. This was going to be my supreme effort. I thought back. Four and a half years ago I'd gone to India. I'd been there two years before I'd come back to England.

According to her this Godfrey Ferring had no relatives, no friends. If it was good enough for her to think I was Godfrey, it was good enough for me to *be* Godfrey. All I had to do was to forget everything that had ever happened to me before I went to India—a process that would suit me admirably—and there was a first-class job in her father's car business waiting for me, with a big cash balance in hand.

And she loved me. I ask you—what a set up!

I waited for a minute or two. I tried to look like a man who is struggling to remember. Then I said:

'You know it *is* a bit odd. Of course I'm not agreeing that I *am* Godfrey Ferring, but it's an awfully strange coincidence that I can't for the life of me remember what happened to me before I went to India four years ago. Whenever I try to think my mind shies away from the subject. The other odd thing is that directly I saw you I had the idea that I knew you, that I knew you awfully well.'

She turned the full power of those marvellous violet eyes on me. They were very soft and dimmed with unshed tears. She put her hand over mine. She said:

'Don't worry, darling. Everything's going to be all right for us. I'm here for three days, and then I'm going to stay with the Harneys at Clist Place—a few miles from here. But I shall cut short my visit. I'm going to telephone Daddy after lunch and tell him that I've found you. He'll be overjoyed, and then you and I are going to talk. We're going to have two marvellous days together, after which I'll go to the Harneys' for two or three days, come back here for you, and take you back to Haddenham. D'you see, sweet?'

I said I saw. After all, what could *I* lose!

THOSE two days before she went to her friends were marvellous. I shall always remember them. We bathed, played golf, and walked. She wouldn't let me drive the car. She said she was going to stop me driving altogether; that she'd nearly lost me through a car, and she wasn't going to chance it happening again.

I tell you it was wonderful.

She'd been in touch with her father, and the old boy had sent me a wire that must have cost him about four pounds telling me that he and his wife were overjoyed that their little girl had found me and was going to be happy again.

Between you and me and the gate-post, after two days, even *I* had almost begun to believe that I was Godfrey Ferring. In point of fact, I was busily engaged in trying to forget that I'd ever been anyone else.

Paula was an amazing girl. She was quite marvellous. She had everything. Kissing that woman was like going straight to Heaven..

On the morning of the third day, I put her and her luggage in the Rolls. She slipped in behind the steering wheel and put her hand in mine as I stood by the side of the car.

She said: 'I'll be back for you in three days. Have your things packed. I'm going to take you *home*, darling. While I'm away you're not to drive the car. Remember, you promised. Neither of us is going to drive cars after we get

home. I'm afraid of them now. I shall leave the Rolls at the Harneys' and you can garage your car here. We'll go back home by train. Is that a bet?'

I said it was a bet. She put her face up to be kissed.

'*Au revoir*, darling,' she said. She let in the clutch. Then: 'Sweet, do something for me.'

I said I'd do anything for her.

'The last time I saw you,' she said, 'before the smash I mean, you were wearing rather well-cut grey flannel trousers, a cream silk shirt with a soft collar, a dark brown crepe de Chine tie, a brown Harris sports jacket, and brown suede shoes. I always adored you in that kit. While I'm away, do get some things like that, and wear them when I take you home. It will be just like *old* times.'

I said that would be easy. I said I'd jump off the end of the pier with weights tied round my neck for her. I would have, too!

Then she went off.

I gave myself a double whisky and soda and drank a toast to Captain Godfrey Ferring, after which I went into the town, found the best tailor, and ordered the kit she'd asked me to get.

THREE days afterwards she came back. We lunched together and arranged to catch the three-thirty for Haddenham.

By this time I had definitely got myself into the Captain Godfrey Ferring idea. I had made up my mind that I was going right through with this thing, that I was going to marry Paula, that I was going to work like the deuce in her old man's racing-car business, and generally be a first-class fellow. Every time I looked at her I found myself regretting that I'd spent so many years of my life working the old 'con' act'.

We arrived at the station at three-fifteen. The train, it seems, was going to be late, but we didn't mind. We waited on the station surrounded by miles of luggage, enjoying every second of each other's company.

Suddenly she said: 'Oh, good heavens, I am a fool!' I asked why. She said:

'Would you believe it? I've left my dressing-case—a new crocodile one—at the Harneys'. Daddy gave it to me just before I came down. I hate being without it. What a fool I am. I shall have to ask them to send it on—unless—'

'Unless what?' I asked.

'Unless you'll be a positive angel and take one of the hired cars that waits outside this station and go and get it for me. Clist Place is only three miles from Eastbourne. I'll wait here for you, and we can catch the four-fifteen. What do you say, darling?'

I said: 'Of course, I'll go right away.'

She said: 'The driver is sure to know the Harneys' place. When you get there just tell the butler or someone that you're Captain Ferring and that I've sent you back for my crocodile dressing-case. And don't dawdle, dear, because we must catch the four-fifteen.'

I said I wouldn't dawdle.

I went outside the station, found a car and went off. It didn't take long to get to Clist Place, which, by the way, was a big country house of the old style. I rang the bell, and when the white-haired butler opened the door, I said my piece.

He asked me to come into the hall and wait. He went off and reappeared five minutes later with the dressing-case. He apologized for the fact that everyone was out.

I felt glad that they were. I wanted to get back to Paula.

I went back, handed over the case, was thanked prettily, and we caught the four-fifteen. We got a carriage to ourselves and behaved like a couple of kids, laughing and talking and making fatuous jokes. We were amazingly happy.

We had to change trains at Ashford. Paula, carrying her crocodile dressing-case, went off to try and get a carriage in the new train, while I superintended the transfer of our luggage.

It took a few minutes to find a porter and get the luggage moved, and then I walked down the platform looking for her.

I couldn't find her. She had disappeared into thin air!

I was fearfully upset. Five minutes afterwards the train went off, and I stood there on the platform, more distraught than I'd ever been in my life. She wasn't on the train, and she wasn't on the platform. Where was she?

Eventually I made up my mind to go on to Haddenham, introduce myself to her people, and explain what had happened. I felt that she *must* turn up, that it was impossible that anything could have happened to her. After all, young women don't disappear into thin air on Ashford Railway Station.

I had a word with the station-master, who informed me that there was no through train to Haddenham, and that the only thing I could do would be to take the slow train to London and catch a later direct train to Haddenham from there.

I took it. I think it was the most sorrowful train journey I've ever had. No Paula, no luggage, nothing. And I was worried sick about her.

The journey seemed interminable. It was seven o'clock before we pulled in at Charing Cross. Somehow, for some unknown reason, I had an idea that Paula might be waiting for me at the barrier.

She wasn't. I gave up my ticket and was walking across the station when someone put a hand on my arm. I turned and saw Gringall. He was grinning.

He said: 'Well, Steve—I said I'd get you, and I've got you. I told you you were slipping.'

I said: 'What do you mean, Gringall? I don't know what you're talking about.'

'Oh, no?' said Gringall cynically.

He handed me a copy of the *Evening News*. I looked at it and saw:

IMPUDENT JEWEL ROBBERY

'An amazing jewel robbery took place this afternoon at Clist Place, near Eastbourne.

'Soon after Miss Paula Galloway and her fiancé— who had called for her earlier in the afternoon— had left Clist Place by car, an individual who bore the most amazing resemblance to Captain Ferring arrived at the house and said that he had come back for Miss Galloway's dressing-case, which she had left behind and which she required.

'The rest of the family were out, and the butler went to Miss Galloway's room, found the case and handed it over. It contained over twenty thousand pounds' worth of jewellery belonging to Miss Galloway.

'The bogus Captain Ferring then left in a hired car.

'Earlier in the day a woman, described as being "very beautiful", had spoken to one of the gardeners working in the grounds and elicited the fact that Miss Galloway and Captain Ferring would be leaving that afternoon.

'There is no doubt that this woman was working in conjunction with a housemaid in Clist Place, who left suddenly that morning and who was able to inform the thieves that the real Miss Galloway had arranged to send for her dressing-case containing the jewels the next day.

'That the ruse was carefully planned was indicated by the fact that the bogus Captain was wearing clothes identical with those worn by the real Captain Ferring.

'An early arrest is expected.'

Gringall said: 'Come on, Steve. It's a pity I met you when you arrived at Eastbourne. Directly the local police telephoned the Yard this afternoon, I *knew* it must be you who had pulled the job.'

I sighed.

'Gringall,' I said, 'can we have one drink before we go?'

He said certainly we could. We went into the buffet. When we'd got our whiskies and sodas I said:

'I don't expect you to believe what I say, and I know I haven't got a dog's chance of getting out of this; but I'm going to tell you the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

'Some woman has taken me for a ride. And what a woman! I can't even dislike her for it. She must have noticed me at the Splendide at Eastbourne and seen that I was Ferring's double. She pulled the fastest act on me that's ever been pulled. She kidded me into getting the same clothes as those that Ferring usually wears. She kidded me into going to Clist Place and asking for that

dressing-case. And then, when she'd got it, she walked out on me. Believe it or not, that's the truth.'

Gringall grinned.

He said: 'You tell that to the horse marines, Steve. And if I were you I wouldn't use that story as a defence. It'll get you an extra year. If I were you I'd just plead guilty and do your time like a gentleman.'

I didn't say anything. What was there to say? But whoever she was, that girl had something. She had brains, nerve and looks. She had all the things I thought *I* had.

When I come out, I hope I'll meet her again. I won't even be annoyed with her.

To do a thing like that to *me*—of all people! I should know better!

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12: The Thing in the Hall

E. F. Benson

1867-1940

In: *The Room in the Tower and Other Stories*, 1912

Edward Frederic Benson

THE following pages are the account given me by Dr Assheton of the Thing in the Hall. I took notes, as copious as my quickness of hand allowed me, from his dictation, and subsequently read to him this narrative in its transcribed and connected form. This was on the day before his death, which indeed probably occurred within an hour after I had left him, and, as readers of inquests and such atrocious literature may remember, I had to give evidence before the coroner's jury. Only a week before Dr Assheton had to give similar evidence, but as a medical expert, with regard to the death of his friend, Louis Fielder, which occurred in a manner identical with his own. As a specialist, he said he believed that his friend had committed suicide while of unsound mind, and the verdict was brought in accordingly. But in the inquest held over Dr Assheton's body, though the verdict eventually returned was the same, there was more room for doubt.

For I was bound to state that only shortly before his death, I read what follows to him; that he corrected me with extreme precision on a few points of detail, that he seemed perfectly himself, and that at the end he used these words:

"I am quite certain as a brain specialist that I am completely sane, and that these things happened not merely in my imagination, but in the external world. If I had to give evidence again about poor Louis, I should be compelled to take a different line. Please put that down at the end of your account, or at the beginning, if it arranges itself better so."

There will be a few words I must add at the end of this story, and a few words of explanation must precede it. Briefly, they are these.

Francis Assheton and Louis Fielder were up at Cambridge together, and there formed the friendship that lasted nearly till their death. In general attributes no two men could have been less alike, for while Dr Assheton had become at the age of thirty-five the first and final authority on his subject, which was the functions and diseases of the brain, Louis Fielder at the same age was still on the threshold of achievement. Assheton, apparently without any brilliance at all, had by careful and incessant work arrived at the top of his profession, while Fielder, brilliant at school, brilliant at college and brilliant ever afterwards, had never done anything. He was too eager, so it seemed to his friends, to set about the dreary work of patient investigation and logical deductions; he was for ever guessing and prying, and striking out luminous ideas, which he left burning, so to speak, to illumine the work of others. But at bottom, the two men had this compelling interest in common, namely, an insatiable curiosity after the unknown, perhaps the most potent bond yet devised between the solitary units that make up the race of man. Both— till the end— were absolutely fearless, and Dr Assheton would sit by the bedside of the man stricken with bubonic plague to note the gradual surge of the tide of disease to the reasoning faculty with the same absorption as Fielder would study X-rays one week, flying machines the next, and spiritualism the third. The rest of the story, I think, explains itself— or does not quite do so. This, anyhow, is what I read to Dr Assheton, being the connected narrative of what he had himself told me. It is he, of course, who speaks.

"AFTER I returned from Paris, where I had studied under Charcot, I set up practice at home. The general doctrine of hypnotism, suggestion, and cure by such means had been accepted even in London by this time, and, owing to a few papers I had written on the subject, together with my foreign diplomas, I found that I was a busy man almost as soon as I had arrived in town. Louis Fielder had his ideas about how I should make my début (for he had ideas on every subject, and all of them original), and entreated me to come and live not in the stronghold of doctors, 'Chloroform Square,' as he called it, but down in Chelsea, where there was a house vacant next his own.

'Who cares where a doctor lives,' he said, 'so long as he cures people? Besides you don't believe in old methods; why believe in old localities? Oh, there is an atmosphere of painless death in Chloroform Square! Come and make people live instead! And on most evenings I shall have so much to tell you; I can't "drop in" across half London.'

Now if you have been abroad for five years, it is a great deal to know that you have any intimate friend at all still left in the metropolis, and, as Louis said, to have that intimate friend next door, is an excellent reason for going next

door. Above all, I remembered from Cambridge days, what Louis' 'dropping in' meant. Towards bed-time, when work was over, there would come a rapid step on the landing, and for an hour, or two hours, he would gush with ideas. He simply diffused life, which is ideas, wherever he went. He fed one's brain, which is the one thing which matters. Most people who are ill, are ill because their brain is starving, and the body rebels, and gets lumbago or cancer. That is the chief doctrine of my work such as it has been. All bodily disease springs from the brain. It is merely the brain that has to be fed and rested and exercised properly to make the body absolutely healthy, and immune from all disease. But when the brain is affected, it is as useful to pour medicines down the sink, as make your patient swallow them, unless— and this is a paramount limitation— unless he believes in them.

I said something of the kind to Louis one night, when, at the end of a busy day, I had dined with him. We were sitting over coffee in the hall, or so it is called, where he takes his meals. Outside, his house is just like mine, and ten thousand other small houses in London, but on entering, instead of finding a narrow passage with a door on one side, leading into the dining-room, which again communicates with a small back room called 'the study,' he has had the sense to eliminate all unnecessary walls, and consequently the whole ground floor of his house is one room, with stairs leading up to the first floor. Study, dining-room and passage have been knocked into one; you enter a big room from the front door. The only drawback is that the postman makes loud noises close to you, as you dine, and just as I made these commonplace observations to him about the effect of the brain on the body and the senses, there came a loud rap, somewhere close to me, that was startling.

'You ought to muffle your knocker,' I said, 'anyhow during the time of meals.'

Louis leaned back and laughed.

'There isn't a knocker,' he said. 'You were startled a week ago, and said the same thing. So I took the knocker off. The letters slide in now. But you heard a knock, did you?'

'Didn't you?' said I.

'Why, certainly. But it wasn't the postman. It was the Thing. I don't know what it is. That makes it so interesting.'

Now if there is one thing that the hypnotist, the believer in unexplained influences, detests and despises, it is the whole root-notion of spiritualism. Drugs are not more opposed to his belief than the exploded, discredited idea of the influence of spirits on our lives. And both are discredited for the same reason; it is easy to understand how brain can act on brain, just as it is easy to understand how body can act on body, so that there is no more difficulty in the

reception of the idea that the strong mind can direct the weak one, than there is in the fact of a wrestler of greater strength overcoming one of less. But that spirits should rap at furniture and divert the course of events is as absurd as administering phosphorus to strengthen the brain. That was what I thought then.

However, I felt sure it was the postman, and instantly rose and went to the door. There were no letters in the box, and I opened the door. The postman was just ascending the steps. He gave the letters into my hand.

Louis was sipping his coffee when I came back to the table.

'Have you ever tried table-turning?' he asked. 'It's rather odd.'

'No, and I have not tried violet-leaves as a cure for cancer,' I said.

'Oh, try everything,' he said. 'I know that that is your plan, just as it is mine. All these years that you have been away, you have tried all sorts of things, first with no faith, then with just a little faith, and finally with mountain-moving faith. Why, you didn't believe in hypnotism at all when you went to Paris.'

He rang the bell as he spoke, and his servant came up and cleared the table. While this was being done we strolled about the room, looking at prints, with applause for a Bartolozzi that Louis had bought in the New Cut, and dead silence over a 'Perdita' which he had acquired at considerable cost. Then he sat down again at the table on which we had dined. It was round, and mahogany-heavy, with a central foot divided into claws.

'Try its weight,' he said; 'see if you can push it about.'

So I held the edge of it in my hands, and found that I could just move it. But that was all; it required the exercise of a good deal of strength to stir it.

'Now put your hands on the top of it,' he said, 'and see what you can do.'

I could not do anything, my fingers merely slipped about on it. But I protested at the idea of spending the evening thus.

'I would much sooner play chess or noughts and crosses with you,' I said, 'or even talk about politics, than turn tables. You won't mean to push, nor shall I, but we shall push without meaning to.'

Louis nodded.

'Just a minute,' he said, 'let us both put our fingers only on the top of the table and push for all we are worth, from right to left.'

We pushed. At least I pushed, and I observed his finger-nails. From pink they grew to white, because of the pressure he exercised. So I must assume that he pushed too. Once, as we tried this, the table creaked. But it did not move.

Then there came a quick peremptory rap, not I thought on the front door, but somewhere in the room.

'It's the Thing,' said he.

To-day, as I speak to you, I suppose it was. But on that evening it seemed only like a challenge. I wanted to demonstrate its absurdity.

'For five years, on and off, I've been studying rank spiritualism,' he said. 'I haven't told you before, because I wanted to lay before you certain phenomena, which I can't explain, but which now seem to me to be at my command. You shall see and hear, and then decide if you will help me.'

'And in order to let me see better, you are proposing to put out the lights,' I said.

'Yes; you will see why.'

'I am here as a sceptic,' said I.

'Scep away,' said he.

Next moment the room was in darkness, except for a very faint glow of firelight. The window-curtains were thick, and no street-illumination penetrated them, and the familiar, cheerful sounds of pedestrians and wheeled traffic came in muffled. I was at the side of the table towards the door; Louis was opposite me, for I could see his figure dimly silhouetted against the glow from the smouldering fire.

'Put your hands on the table,' he said, 'quite lightly, and— how shall I say it— expect.'

Still protesting in spirit, I expected. I could hear his breathing rather quickened, and it seemed to me odd that anybody could find excitement in standing in the dark over a large mahogany table, expecting. Then— through my finger-tips, laid lightly on the table, there began to come a faint vibration, like nothing so much as the vibration through the handle of a kettle when water is beginning to boil inside it. This got gradually more pronounced and violent till it was like the throbbing of a motor-car. It seemed to give off a low humming note. Then quite suddenly the table seemed to slip from under my fingers and began very slowly to revolve.

'Keep your hands on it and move with it,' said Louis, and as he spoke I saw his silhouette pass away from in front of the fire, moving as the table moved.

For some moments there was silence, and we continued, rather absurdly, to circle round keeping step, so to speak, with the table. Then Louis spoke again, and his voice was trembling with excitement.

'Are you there?' he said.

There was no reply, of course, and he asked it again. This time there came a rap like that which I had thought during dinner to be the postman. But whether it was that the room was dark, or that despite myself I felt rather excited too, it seemed to me now to be far louder than before. Also it appeared to come neither from here nor there, but to be diffused through the room.

Then the curious revolving of the table ceased, but the intense, violent throbbing continued. My eyes were fixed on it, though owing to the darkness I could see nothing, when quite suddenly a little speck of light moved across it, so that for an instant I saw my own hands. Then came another and another, like the spark of matches struck in the dark, or like fire-flies crossing the dusk in southern gardens. Then came another knock of shattering loudness, and the throbbing of the table ceased, and the lights vanished.

SUCH were the phenomena at the first séance at which I was present, but Fielder, it must be remembered, had been studying, 'expecting,' he called it, for some years. To adopt spiritualistic language (which at that time I was very far from doing), he was the medium, I merely the observer, and all the phenomena I had seen that night were habitually produced or witnessed by him. I make this limitation since he told me that certain of them now appeared to be outside his own control altogether. The knockings would come when his mind, as far as he knew, was entirely occupied in other matters, and sometimes he had even been awakened out of sleep by them. The lights were also independent of his volition.

Now my theory at the time was that all these things were purely subjective in him, and that what he expressed by saying that they were out of his control, meant that they had become fixed and rooted in the unconscious self, of which we know so little, but which, more and more, we see to play so enormous a part in the life of a man. In fact, it is not too much to say that the vast majority of our deeds spring, apparently without volition, from this unconscious self. All hearing is the unconscious exercise of the aural nerve, all seeing of the optic, all walking, all ordinary movement seem to be done without the exercise of will on our part. Nay more, should we take to some new form of progression, skating, for instance, the beginner will learn with falls and difficulty the outside edge, but within a few hours of his having learned his balance on it, he will give no more thought to what he learned so short a time ago as an acrobatic feat, than he gives to the placing of one foot before the other.

But to the brain specialist all this was intensely interesting, and to the student of hypnotism, as I was, even more so, for (such was the conclusion I came to after this first séance), the fact that I saw and heard just what Louis saw and heard was an exhibition of thought-transference which in all my experience in the Charcot-schools I had never seen surpassed, if indeed rivalled. I knew that I was myself extremely sensitive to suggestion, and my part in it this evening I believed to be purely that of the receiver of suggestions so vivid that I visualised and heard these phenomena which existed only in the brain of my friend.

We talked over what had occurred upstairs. His view was that the Thing was trying to communicate with us. According to him it was the Thing that moved the table and tapped, and made us see streaks of light.

'Yes, but the Thing,' I interrupted, 'what do you mean? Is it a great-uncle— oh, I have seen so many relatives appear at séances, and heard so many of their dreadful platitudes— or what is it? A spirit? Whose spirit?'

Louis was sitting opposite to me, and on the little table before us there was an electric light. Looking at him I saw the pupil of his eye suddenly dilate. To the medical man— provided that some violent change in the light is not the cause of the dilation— that meant only one thing, terror. But it quickly resumed its normal proportion again.

Then he got up, and stood in front of the fire.

'No, I don't think it is great-uncle anybody,' he said, 'I don't know, as I told you, what the Thing is. But if you ask me what my conjecture is, it is that the Thing is an Elemental.'

'And pray explain further. What is an Elemental?'

Once again his eye dilated.

'It will take two minutes,' he said. 'But, listen. There are good things in this world, are there not, and bad things? Cancer, I take it is bad, and— and fresh air is good; honesty is good, lying is bad. Impulses of some sort direct both sides, and some power suggests the impulses. Well, I went into this spiritualistic business impartially. I learned to "expect," to throw open the door into the soul, and I said, "Anyone may come in." And I think Something has applied for admission, the Thing that tapped and turned the table and struck matches, as you saw, across it. Now the control of the evil principle in the world is in the hands of a power which entrusts its errands to the things which I call Elementals. Oh, they have been seen; I doubt not that they will be seen again. I did not, and do not ask good spirits to come in. I don't want "The Church's one foundation" played on a musical box. Nor do I *want* an Elemental. I only threw open the door. I believe the Thing has come into my house, and is establishing communication with me. Oh, I want to go the whole hog. What is it? In the name of Satan, if necessary, what is it? I just want to know.'

WHAT followed I thought then might easily be an invention of the imagination, but what I believed to have happened was this. A piano with music on it was standing at the far end of the room by the door, and a sudden draught entered the room, so strong that the leaves turned. Next the draught troubled a vase of daffodils, and the yellow heads nodded. Then it reached the candles that stood close to us, and they fluttered, burning blue and low. Then it reached me, and the draught was cold, and stirred my hair. Then it eddied,

so to speak, and went across to Louis, and his hair also moved, as I could see. Then it went downwards towards the fire, and flames suddenly started up in its path, blown upwards. The rug by the fireplace flapped also.

'Funny, wasn't it?' he asked.

'And has the Elementa gone up the chimney?' said I.

'Oh, no,' said he, 'the Thing only passed us.'

Then suddenly he pointed at the wall just behind my chair, and his voice cracked as he spoke.

'Look, what's that?' he said. 'There on the wall.'

Considerably startled I turned in the direction of his shaking finger. The wall was pale grey in tone, and sharp-cut against it was a shadow that, as I looked, moved. It was like the shadow of some enormous slug, legless and fat, some two feet high by about four feet long. Only at one end of it was a head shaped like the head of a seal, with open mouth and panting tongue.

Then even as I looked it faded, and from somewhere close at hand there sounded another of those shattering knocks.

For a moment after there was silence between us, and horror was thick as snow in the air. But, somehow neither Louis or I were frightened for more than one moment. The whole thing was so absorbingly interesting.

'That's what I mean by its being outside my control,' he said. 'I said I was ready for any— any visitor to come in, and by God, we've got a beauty.'

NOW I was still, even in spite of the appearance of this shadow, quite convinced that I was only taking observations of a most curious case of disordered brain accompanied by the most vivid and remarkable thought-transference. I believed that I had not seen a slug-like shadow at all, but that Louis had visualised this dreadful creature so intensely that I saw what he saw. I found also that his spiritualistic trash-books which I thought a truer nomenclature than text-books, mentioned this as a common form for Elementals to take. He on the other hand was more firmly convinced than ever that we were dealing not with a subjective but an objective phenomenon.

For the next six months or so we sat constantly, but made no further progress, nor did the Thing or its shadow appear again, and I began to feel that we were really wasting time. Then it occurred to me, to get in a so-called medium, induce hypnotic sleep, and see if we could learn anything further. This we did, sitting as before round the dining-room table. The room was not quite dark, and I could see sufficiently clearly what happened.

The medium, a young man, sat between Louis and myself, and without the slightest difficulty I put him into a light hypnotic sleep. Instantly there came a

series of the most terrific raps, and across the table there slid something more palpable than a shadow, with a faint luminance about it, as if the surface of it was smouldering. At the moment the medium's face became contorted to a mask of hellish terror; mouth and eyes were both open, and the eyes were focussed on something close to him. The Thing waving its head came closer and closer to him, and reached out towards his throat. Then with a yell of panic, and warding off this horror with his hands, the medium sprang up, but It had already caught hold, and for the moment he could not get free. Then simultaneously Louis and I went to his aid, and my hands touched something cold and slimy. But pull as we could we could not get it away. There was no firm hand-hold to be taken; it was as if one tried to grasp slimy fur, and the touch of it was horrible, unclean, like a leper. Then, in a sort of despair, though I still could not believe that the horror was real, for it must be a vision of diseased imagination, I remembered that the switch of the four electric lights was close to my hand. I turned them all on. There on the floor lay the medium, Louis was kneeling by him with a face of wet paper, but there was nothing else there. Only the collar of the medium was crumpled and torn, and on his throat were two scratches that bled.

The medium was still in hypnotic sleep, and I woke him. He felt at his collar, put his hand to his throat and found it bleeding, but, as I expected, knew nothing whatever of what had passed. We told him that there had been an unusual manifestation, and he had, while in sleep, wrestled with something. We had got the result we wished for, and were much obliged to him.

I never saw him again. A week after that he died of blood-poisoning.

FROM that evening dates the second stage of this adventure. The Thing had materialised (I use again spiritualistic language which I still did not use at the time). The huge slug, the Elemental, manifested itself no longer by knocks and waltzing tables, nor yet by shadows. It was there in a form that could be seen and felt. But it still— this was my strong point— was only a thing of twilight; the sudden kindling of the electric light had shown us that there was nothing there. In this struggle perhaps the medium had clutched his own throat, perhaps I had grasped Louis' sleeve, he mine. But though I said these things to myself, I am not sure that I believed them in the same way that I believe the sun will rise to-morrow.

Now as a student of brain-functions and a student in hypnotic affairs, I ought perhaps to have steadily and unremittingly pursued this extraordinary series of phenomena. But I had my practice to attend to, and I found that with the best will in the world, I could think of nothing else except the occurrence in the hall next door. So I refused to take part in any further séance with Louis. I

had another reason also. For the last four or five months he was becoming depraved. I have been no prude or Puritan in my own life, and I hope I have not turned a Pharisaical shoulder on sinners. But in all branches of life and morals, Louis had become infamous. He was turned out of a club for cheating at cards, and narrated the event to me with gusto. He had become cruel; he tortured his cat to death; he had become bestial. I used to shudder as I passed his house, expecting I knew not what fiendish thing to be looking at me from the window.

Then came a night only a week ago, when I was awakened by an awful cry, swelling and falling and rising again. It came from next door. I ran downstairs in my pyjamas, and out into the street. The policeman on the beat had heard it too, and it came from the hall of Louis' house, the window of which was open. Together we burst the door in. You know what we found. The screaming had ceased but a moment before, but he was dead already. Both jugulars were severed, torn open.

It was dawn, early and dusky when I got back to my house next door. Even as I went in something seemed to push by me, something soft and slimy. It could not be Louis' imagination this time. Since then I have seen glimpses of it every evening. I am awakened at night by tappings, and in the shadows in the corner of my room there sits something more substantial than a shadow."

WITHIN an hour of my leaving Dr Assheton, the quiet street was once more aroused by cries of terror and agony. He was already dead, and in no other manner than his friend, when they got into the house.

13: My New Years Eve Among The Mummies.

Grant Allen

1848-1899

The Belgravia Annual Christmas 1878

(as by "J. Arbuthnot Wilson")

Collected in *Strange Stories*, 1894, as by Grant Allen.

Charles Grant Blairfindie Allen

I HAVE BEEN a wanderer and a vagabond on the face of the earth for a good many years now, and I have certainly had some odd adventures in my time; but I can assure you, I never spent twenty-four queerer hours than those which I passed some twelve months since in the great unopened Pyramid of Abu Yilla.

The way I got there was itself a very strange one. I had come to Egypt for a winter tour with the Fitz-Simkinses, to whose daughter Editha I was at that precise moment engaged. You will probably remember that old Fitz-Simkins belonged originally to the wealthy firm of Simkinson and Stokoe, worshipful vintners; but when the senior partner retired from the business and got his knighthood, the College of Heralds opportunely discovered that his ancestors had changed their fine old Norman name for its English equivalent some time about the reign of King Richard I.; and they immediately authorized the old gentleman to resume the patronymic and the armorial bearings of his distinguished forefathers. It's really quite astonishing how often these curious coincidences crop up at the College of Heralds.

Of course it was a great catch for a landless and briefless barrister like myself— dependent on a small fortune in South American securities, and my precarious earnings as a writer of burlesque— to secure such a valuable prospective property as Editha Fitz-Simkins. To be sure, the girl was undeniably plain; but I have known plainer girls than she was, whom forty thousand pounds converted into My Ladies: and if Editha hadn't really fallen over head

and ears in love with me, I suppose old Fitz-Simkins would never have consented to such a match. As it was, however, we had flirted so openly and so desperately during the Scarborough season, that it would have been difficult for Sir Peter to break it off: and so I had come to Egypt on a tour of insurance to secure my prize, following in the wake of my future mother-in-law, whose lungs were supposed to require a genial climate— though in my private opinion they were really as creditable a pair of pulmonary appendages as ever drew breath.

Nevertheless, the course of our true love did not run so smoothly as might have been expected. Editha found me less ardent than a devoted squire should be; and on the very last night of the old year she got up a regulation lovers' quarrel, because I had sneaked away from the boat that afternoon, under the guidance of our dragoman, to witness the seductive performances of some fair Ghawázi, the dancing girls of a neighbouring town. How she found it out heaven only knows, for I gave that rascal Dimitri five piastres to hold his tongue: but she did find it out somehow, and chose to regard it as an offence of the first magnitude: a mortal sin only to be expiated by three days of penance and humiliation.

I went to bed that night, in my hammock on deck, with feelings far from satisfactory. We were moored against the bank at Abu Yilla, the most pestiferous hole between the cataracts and the Delta. The mosquitoes were worse than the ordinary mosquitoes of Egypt, and that is saying a great deal. The heat was oppressive even at night, and the malaria from the lotus beds rose like a palpable mist before my eyes. Above all, I was getting doubtful whether Editha Fitz-Simkins might not after all slip between my fingers. I felt wretched and feverish: and yet I had delightful interlusive recollections, in between, of that lovely little Gháziyah, who danced that exquisite, marvellous, entrancing, delicious, and awfully oriental dance that I saw in the afternoon.

By Jove, she *was* a beautiful creature. Eyes like two full moons; hair like Milton's Penseroso; movements like a poem of Swinburne's set to action. If Editha was only a faint picture of that girl now! Upon my word, I was falling in love with a Gháziyah!

Then the mosquitoes came again. Buzz— buzz— buzz. I make a lunge at the loudest and biggest, a sort of prima donna in their infernal opera. I kill the prima donna, but ten more shrill performers come in its place. The frogs croak dismally in the reedy shallows. The night grows hotter and hotter still. At last, I can stand it no longer. I rise up, dress myself lightly, and jump ashore to find some way of passing the time.

Yonder, across the flat, lies the great unopened Pyramid of Abu Yilla. We are going to-morrow to climb to the top; but I will take a turn to reconnoitre in

that direction now. I walk across the moonlit fields, my soul still divided between Editha and the Gháziyah, and approach the solemn mass of huge, antiquated granite-blocks standing out so grimly against the pale horizon. I feel half awake, half asleep, and altogether feverish: but I poke about the base in an aimless sort of way, with a vague idea that I may perhaps discover by chance the secret of its sealed entrance, which has ere now baffled so many pertinacious explorers and learned Egyptologists.

As I walk along the base, I remember old Herodotus's story, like a page from the "Arabian Nights," of how King Rhampsinitus built himself a treasury, wherein one stone turned on a pivot like a door; and how the builder availed himself of this his cunning device to steal gold from the king's storehouse. Suppose the entrance to the unopened Pyramid should be by such a door. It would be curious if I should chance to light upon the very spot.

I stood in the broad moonlight, near the north-east angle of the great pile, at the twelfth stone from the corner. A random fancy struck me, that I might turn this stone by pushing it inward on the left side. I leant against it with all my weight, and tried to move it on the imaginary pivot. Did it give way a fraction of an inch? No, it must have been mere fancy. Let me try again. Surely it is yielding! Gracious Osiris, it has moved an inch or more! My heart beats fast, either with fever or excitement, and I try a third time. The rust of centuries on the pivot wears slowly off, and the stone turns ponderously round, giving access to a low dark passage.

It must have been madness which led me to enter the forgotten corridor, alone, without torch or match, at that hour of the evening; but at any rate I entered. The passage was tall enough for a man to walk erect, and I could feel, as I groped slowly along, that the wall was composed of smooth polished granite, while the floor sloped away downward with a slight but regular descent. I walked with trembling heart and faltering feet for some forty or fifty yards down the mysterious vestibule: and then I felt myself brought suddenly to a standstill by a block of stone placed right across the pathway. I had had nearly enough for one evening, and I was preparing to return to the boat, agog with my new discovery, when my attention was suddenly arrested by an incredible, a perfectly miraculous fact.

The block of stone which barred the passage was faintly visible as a square, by means of a struggling belt of light streaming through the seams. There must be a lamp or other flame burning within. What if this were a door like the outer one, leading into a chamber perhaps inhabited by some dangerous band of outcasts? The light was a sure evidence of human occupation: and yet the outer door swung rustily on its pivot as though it had never been opened for ages. I paused a moment in fear before I ventured to try the stone: and then,

urged on once more by some insane impulse, I turned the massive block with all my might to the left. It gave way slowly like its neighbour, and finally opened into the central hall.

Never as long as I live shall I forget the ecstasy of terror, astonishment, and blank dismay which seized upon me when I stepped into that seemingly enchanted chamber. A blaze of light first burst upon my eyes, from jets of gas arranged in regular rows tier above tier, upon the columns and walls of the vast apartment. Huge pillars, richly painted with red, yellow, blue, and green decorations, stretched in endless succession down the dazzling aisles. A floor of polished syenite reflected the splendour of the lamps, and afforded a base for red granite sphinxes and dark purple images in porphyry of the cat-faced goddess Pasht, whose form I knew so well at the Louvre and the British Museum. But I had no eyes for any of these lesser marvels, being wholly absorbed in the greatest marvel of all: for there, in royal state and with mitred head, a living Egyptian king, surrounded by his coiffured court, was banqueting in the flesh upon a real throne, before a table laden with Memphian delicacies!

I stood transfixed with awe and amazement, my tongue and my feet alike forgetting their office, and my brain whirling round and round, as I remember it used to whirl when my health broke down utterly at Cambridge after the Classical Tripos. I gazed fixedly at the strange picture before me, taking in all its details in a confused way, yet quite incapable of understanding or realizing any part of its true import. I saw the king in the centre of the hall, raised on a throne of granite inlaid with gold and ivory; his head crowned with the peaked cap of Rameses, and his curled hair flowing down his shoulders in a set and formal frizz. I saw priests and warriors on either side, dressed in the costumes which I had often carefully noted in our great collections; while bronze-skinned maids, with light garments round their waists, and limbs displayed in graceful picturesqueness, waited upon them, half nude, as in the wall paintings which we had lately examined at Karnak and Syene. I saw the ladies, clothed from head to foot in dyed linen garments, sitting apart in the background, banqueting by themselves at a separate table; while dancing girls, like older representatives of my yesternoon friends, the Ghawázi, tumbled before them in strange attitudes, to the music of four-stringed harps and long straight pipes. In short, I beheld as in a dream the whole drama of everyday Egyptian royal life, playing itself out anew under my eyes, in its real original properties and personages.

Gradually, as I looked, I became aware that my hosts were no less surprised at the appearance of their anachronistic guest than was the guest himself at the strange living panorama which met his eyes. In a moment music and

dancing ceased; the banquet paused in its course, and the king and his nobles stood up in undisguised astonishment to survey the strange intruder.

Some minutes passed before any one moved forward on either side. At last a young girl of royal appearance, yet strangely resembling the Gháziyah of Abu Yilla, and recalling in part the laughing maiden in the foreground of Mr. Long's great canvas at the previous Academy, stepped out before the throng.

"May I ask you," she said in Ancient Egyptian, "who you are, and why you come hither to disturb us?"

I was never aware before that I spoke or understood the language of the hieroglyphics: yet I found I had not the slightest difficulty in comprehending or answering her question. To say the truth, Ancient Egyptian, though an extremely tough tongue to decipher in its written form, becomes as easy as love-making when spoken by a pair of lips like that Pharaonic princess's. It is really very much the same as English, pronounced in a rapid and somewhat indefinite whisper, and with all the vowels left out.

"I beg ten thousand pardons for my intrusion," I answered apologetically; "but I did not know that this Pyramid was inhabited, or I should not have entered your residence so rudely. As for the points you wish to know, I am an English tourist, and you will find my name upon this card;" saying which I handed her one from the case which I had fortunately put into my pocket, with conciliatory politeness. The princess examined it closely, but evidently did not understand its import.

"In return," I continued, "may I ask you in what august presence I now find myself by accident?"

A court official stood forth from the throng, and answered in a set heraldic tone: "In the presence of the illustrious monarch, Brother of the Sun, Thothmes the Twenty-seventh, king of the Eighteenth Dynasty."

"Salute the Lord of the World," put in another official in the same regulation drone.

I bowed low to his Majesty, and stepped out into the hall. Apparently my obeisance did not come up to Egyptian standards of courtesy, for a suppressed titter broke audibly from the ranks of bronze-skinned waiting-women. But the king graciously smiled at my attempt, and turning to the nearest nobleman, observed in a voice of great sweetness and self-contained majesty: "This stranger, Ombos, is certainly a very curious person. His appearance does not at all resemble that of an Ethiopian or other savage, nor does he look like the pale-faced sailors who come to us from the Achaian land beyond the sea. His features, to be sure, are not very different from theirs; but his extraordinary and singularly inartistic dress shows him to belong to some other barbaric race."

I glanced down at my waistcoat, and saw that I was wearing my tourist's check suit, of grey and mud colour, with which a Bond Street tailor had supplied me just before leaving town, as the latest thing out in fancy tweeds. Evidently these Egyptians must have a very curious standard of taste not to admire our pretty and graceful style of male attire.

"If the dust beneath your Majesty's feet may venture upon a suggestion," put in the officer whom the king had addressed, "I would hint that this young man is probably a stray visitor from the utterly uncivilized lands of the North. The head-gear which he carries in his hand obviously betrays an Arctic habitat."

I had instinctively taken off my round felt hat in the first moment of surprise, when I found myself in the midst of this strange throng, and I was before me like a shield to protect my chest.

"Let the stranger cover himself," said the king.

"Barbarian intruder, cover yourself," cried the herald. I noticed throughout that the king never directly addressed anybody save the higher officials around him.

I put on my hat as desired. "A most uncomfortable and silly form of tiara indeed," said the great Thothmes.

"Very unlike your noble and awe-spiring mitre, Lion of Egypt," answered Ombos.

"Ask the stranger his name," the king continued.

It was useless to offer another card, so I mentioned it in a clear voice.

"An uncouth and almost unpronounceable designation truly," commented his Majesty to the Grand Chamberlain beside him. "These savages speak strange languages, widely different from the flowing tongue of Memnon and Sesostris."

The chamberlain bowed his assent with three low genuflexions. I began to feel a little abashed at these personal remarks, and I *almost* think (though I shouldn't like it to be mentioned in the Temple) that a blush rose to my cheek.

The beautiful princess, who had been standing near me meanwhile in an attitude of statuesque repose, now appeared anxious to change the current of the conversation. "Dear father," she said with a respectful inclination, "surely the stranger, barbarian though he be, cannot relish such pointed allusions to his person and costume. We must let him feel the grace and delicacy of Egyptian refinement. Then he may perhaps carry back with him some faint echo of its cultured beauty to his northern wilds."

"Nonsense, Hatasou," replied Thothmes XXVII. testily. "Savages have no feelings, and they are as incapable of appreciating Egyptian sensibility as the

chattering crow is incapable of attaining the dignified reserve of the sacred crocodile."

"Your Majesty is mistaken," I said, recovering my self-possession gradually and realizing my position as a free-born Englishman before the court of a foreign despot— though I must allow that I felt rather less confident than usual, owing to the fact that we were not represented in the Pyramid by a British Consul—"I am an English tourist, a visitor from a modern land whose civilization far surpasses the rude culture of early Egypt; and I am accustomed to respectful treatment from all other nationalities, as becomes a citizen of the First Naval Power in the World."

My answer created a profound impression. "He has spoken to the Brother of the Sun," cried Ombos in evident perturbation. "He must be of the Blood Royal in his own tribe, or he would never have dared to do so!"

"Otherwise," added a person whose dress I recognized as that of a priest, "he must be offered up in expiation to Amon-Ra immediately."

As a rule I am a decently truthful person, but under these alarming circumstances I ventured to tell a slight fib with an air of nonchalant boldness. "I am a younger brother of our reigning king," I said without a moment's hesitation; for there was nobody present to gainsay me, and I tried to salve my conscience by reflecting that at any rate I was only claiming consanguinity with an imaginary personage.

"In that case," said King Thothmes, with more geniality in his tone, "there can be no impropriety in my addressing you personally. Will you take a place at our table next to myself, and we can converse together without interrupting a banquet which must be brief enough in any circumstances? Hatasou, my dear, you may seat yourself next to the barbarian prince."

I felt a visible swelling to the proper dimensions of a Royal Highness as I sat down by the king's right hand. The nobles resumed their places, the bronze-skinned waitresses left off standing like soldiers in a row and staring straight at my humble self, the goblets went round once more, and a comely maid soon brought me meat, bread, fruits, and date wine.

All this time I was naturally burning with curiosity to inquire who my strange hosts might be, and how they had preserved their existence for so many centuries in this undiscovered hall; but I was obliged to wait until I had satisfied his Majesty of my own nationality, the means by which I had entered the Pyramid, the general state of affairs throughout the world at the present moment, and fifty thousand other matters of a similar sort. Thothmes utterly refused to believe my reiterated assertion that our existing civilization was far superior to the Egyptian; "because," said he, "I see from your dress that your nation is utterly devoid of taste or invention;" but he listened with great

interest to my account of modern society, the steam-engine, the Permissive Prohibitory Bill, the telegraph, the House of Commons, Home Rule, and the other blessings of our advanced era, as well as to a brief *résumé* of European history from the rise of the Greek culture to the Russo-Turkish war. At last his questions were nearly exhausted, and I got a chance of making a few counter inquiries on my own account.

"And now," I said, turning to the charming Hatasou, whom I thought a more pleasing informant than her august papa, "I should like to know who *you* are."

"What, don't you know?" she cried with unaffected surprise. "Why, we're mummies."

She made this astounding statement with just the same quiet unconsciousness as if she had said, "we're French," or "we're Americans." I glanced round the walls, and observed behind the columns, what I had not noticed till then— a large number of empty mummy-cases, with their lids placed carelessly by their sides.

"But what are you doing here?" I asked in a bewildered way.

"Is it possible," said Hatasou, "that you don't really know the object of embalming? Though your manners show you to be an agreeable and well-bred young man, you must excuse my saying that you are shockingly ignorant. We are made into mummies in order to preserve our immortality. Once in every thousand years we wake up for twenty-four hours, recover our flesh and blood, and banquet once more upon the mummied dishes and other good things laid by for us in the Pyramid. To-day is the first day of a millennium, and so we have waked up for the sixth time since we were first embalmed."

"The *sixth* time?" I inquired incredulously. "Then you must have been dead six thousand years."

"Exactly so."

"But the world has not yet existed so long," I cried, in a fervour of orthodox horror.

"Excuse me, barbarian prince. This is the first day of the three hundred and twenty-seven thousandth millennium."

My orthodoxy received a severe shock. However, I had been accustomed to geological calculations, and was somewhat inclined to accept the antiquity of man; so I swallowed the statement without more ado. Besides, if such a charming girl as Hatasou had asked me at that moment to turn Mohammedan, or to worship Osiris, I believe I should incontinently have done so.

"You wake up only for a single day and night, then?" I said.

"Only for a single day and night. After that, we go to sleep for another millennium."

"Unless you are meanwhile burned as fuel on the Cairo Railway," I added mentally. "But how," I continued aloud, "do you get these lights?"

"The Pyramid is built above a spring of inflammable gas. We have a reservoir in one of the side chambers in which it collects during the thousand years. As soon as we awake, we turn it on at once from the tap, and light it with a lucifer match."

"Upon my word," I interposed, "I had no notion you Ancient Egyptians were acquainted with the use of matches."

"Very likely not. 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Cephrenes, than are dreamt of in your philosophy,' as the bard of Philæ puts it."

Further inquiries brought out all the secrets of that strange tomb-house, and kept me fully interested till the close of the banquet. Then the chief priest solemnly rose, offered a small fragment of meat to a deified crocodile, who sat in a meditative manner by the side of his deserted mummy-case, and declared the feast concluded for the night. All rose from their places, wandered away into the long corridors or side-aisles, and formed little groups of talkers under the brilliant gas-lamps.

For my part, I scrolled off with Hatasou down the least illuminated of the colonnades, and took my seat beside a marble fountain, where several fish (gods of great sanctity, Hatasou assured me) were disporting themselves in a porphyry basin. How long we sat there I cannot tell, but I know that we talked a good deal about fish, and gods, and Egyptian habits, and Egyptian philosophy, and, above all, Egyptian love-making. The last-named subject we found very interesting, and when once we got fully started upon it, no diversion afterwards occurred to break the even tenour of the conversation. Hatasou was a lovely figure, tall, queenly, with smooth dark arms and neck of polished bronze: her big black eyes full of tenderness, and her long hair bound up into a bright Egyptian headdress, that harmonized to a tone with her complexion and her robe. The more we talked, the more desperately did I fall in love, and the more utterly oblivious did I become of my duty to Editha Fitz-Simkins. The mere ugly daughter of a rich and vulgar brand-new knight, forsooth, to show off her airs before me, when here was a Princess of the Blood Royal of Egypt, obviously sensible to the attentions which I was paying her, and not unwilling to receive them with a coy and modest grace.

Well, I went on saying pretty things to Hatasou, and Hatasou went on deprecating them in a pretty little way, as who should say, "I don't mean what I pretend to mean one bit;" until at last I may confess that we were both evidently as far gone in the disease of the heart called love as it is possible for two young people on first acquaintance to become. Therefore, when Hatasou pulled forth her watch— another piece of mechanism with which antiquaries

used never to credit the Egyptian people— and declared that she had only three more hours to live, at least for the next thousand years, I fairly broke down, took out my handkerchief, and began to sob like a child of five years old.

Hatasou was deeply moved. Decorum forbade that she should console me with too much *empressement*; but she ventured to remove the handkerchief gently from my face, and suggested that there was yet one course open by which we might enjoy a little more of one another's society. "Suppose," she said quietly, "you were to become a mummy. You would then wake up, as we do, every thousand years; and after you have tried it once, you will find it just as natural to sleep for a millennium as for eight hours. Of course," she added with a slight blush, "during the next three or four solar cycles there would be plenty of time to conclude any other arrangements you might possibly contemplate, before the occurrence of another glacial epoch."

This mode of regarding time was certainly novel and somewhat bewildering to people who ordinarily reckon its lapse by weeks and months; and I had a vague consciousness that my relations with Editha imposed upon me a moral necessity of returning to the outer world, instead of becoming a millennial mummy. Besides, there was the awkward chance of being converted into fuel and dissipated into space before the arrival of the next waking day. But I took one look at Hatasou, whose eyes were filling in turn with sympathetic tears, and that look decided me. I flung Editha, life, and duty to the dogs, and resolved at once to become a mummy.

There was no time to be lost. Only three hours remained to us, and the process of embalming, even in the most hasty manner, would take up fully two. We rushed off to the chief priest, who had charge of the particular department in question. He at once acceded to my wishes, and briefly explained the mode in which they usually treated the corpse.

That word suddenly aroused me. "The corpse!" I cried; "but I am alive. You can't embalm me living."

"We can," replied the priest, "under chloroform."

"Chloroform!" I echoed, growing more and more astonished: "I had no idea you Egyptians knew anything about it."

"Ignorant barbarian!" he answered with a curl of the lip; "you imagine yourself much wiser than the teachers of the world. If you were versed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, you would know that chloroform is one of our simplest and commonest anæsthetics."

I put myself at once under the hands of the priest. He brought out the chloroform, and placed it beneath my nostrils, as I lay on a soft couch under the central court. Hatasou held my hand in hers, and watched my breathing with an anxious eye. I saw the priest leaning over me, with a clouded phial in

his hand, and I experienced a vague sensation of smelling myrrh and spikenard. Next, I lost myself for a few moments, and when I again recovered my senses in a temporary break, the priest was holding a small greenstone knife, dabbled with blood, and I felt that a gash had been made across my breast. Then they applied the chloroform once more; I felt Hatasou give my hand a gentle squeeze; the whole panorama faded finally from my view; and I went to sleep for a seemingly endless time.

When I awoke again, my first impression led me to believe that the thousand years were over, and that I had come to life once more to feast with Hatasou and Thothmes in the Pyramid of Abu Yilla. But second thoughts, combined with closer observation of the surroundings, convinced me that I was really lying in a bedroom of Shepheard's Hotel at Cairo. An hospital nurse leant over me, instead of a chief priest; and I noticed no tokens of Editha Fitz-Simkins's presence. But when I endeavoured to make inquiries upon the subject of my whereabouts, I was peremptorily informed that I mustn't speak, as I was only just recovering from a severe fever, and might endanger my life by talking.

Some weeks later I learned the sequel of my night's adventure. The Fitz-Simkinses, missing me from the boat in the morning, at first imagined that I might have gone ashore for an early stroll. But after breakfast time, lunch time, and dinner time had gone past, they began to grow alarmed, and sent to look for me in all directions. One of their scouts, happening to pass the Pyramid, noticed that one of the stones near the north-east angle had been displaced, so as to give access to a dark passage, hitherto unknown. Calling several of his friends, for he was afraid to venture in alone, he passed down the corridor, and through a second gateway into the central hall. There the Fellahin found me, lying on the ground, bleeding profusely from a wound on the breast, and in an advanced stage of malarious fever. They brought me back to the boat, and the Fitz-Simkinses conveyed me at once to Cairo, for medical attendance and proper nursing.

Editha was at first convinced that I had attempted to commit suicide because I could not endure having caused her pain, and she accordingly resolved to tend me with the utmost care through my illness. But she found that my delirious remarks, besides bearing frequent reference to a princess, with whom I appeared to have been on unexpectedly intimate terms, also related very largely to our *casus belli* itself, the dancing girls of Abu Yilla. Even this trial she might have borne, setting down the moral degeneracy which led me to patronize so degrading an exhibition as a first symptom of my approaching malady: but certain unfortunate observations, containing pointed and by no means flattering allusions to her personal appearance— which I

contrasted, much to her disadvantage, with that of the unknown princess— these, I say, were things which she could not forgive; and she left Cairo abruptly with her parents for the Riviera, leaving behind a stinging note, in which she denounced my perfidy and empty-heartedness with all the flowers of feminine eloquence. From that day to this I have never seen her.

When I returned to London and proposed to lay this account before the Society of Antiquaries, all my friends dissuaded me on the ground of its apparent incredibility. They declare that I must have gone to the Pyramid already in a state of delirium, discovered the entrance by accident, and sunk exhausted when I reached the inner chamber. In answer, I would point out three facts. In the first place, I undoubtedly found my way into the unknown passage— for which achievement I afterwards received the gold medal of the Sociétée Khédiviale, and of which I retain a clear recollection, differing in no way from my recollection of the subsequent events. In the second place, I had in my pocket, when found, a ring of Hatasou's, which I drew from her finger just before I took the chloroform, and put into my pocket as a keepsake. And in the third place, I had on my breast the wound which I saw the priest inflict with a knife of greenstone, and the scar may be seen on the spot to the present day. The absurd hypothesis of my medical friends, that I was wounded by falling against a sharp edge of rock, I must at once reject as unworthy a moment's consideration.

My own theory is either that the priest had not time to complete the operation, or else that the arrival of the Fitz-Simkins' scouts frightened back the mummies to their cases an hour or so too soon. At any rate, there they all were, ranged around the walls undisturbed, the moment the Fellahin entered.

Unfortunately, the truth of my account cannot be tested for another thousand years. But as a copy of this book will be preserved for the benefit of posterity in the British Museum, I hereby solemnly call upon Collective Humanity to try the veracity of this history by sending a deputation of archæologists to the Pyramid of Abu Yilla, on the last day of December, Two thousand eight hundred and seventy-seven. If they do not then find Thothmes and Hatasou feasting in the central hall exactly as I have described, I shall willingly admit that the story of my New Year's Eve among the Mummies is a vain hallucination, unworthy of credence at the hands of the scientific world.

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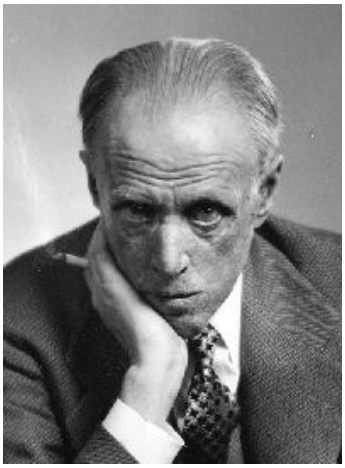
14: Speed

Sinclair Lewis

1885-1951

The Red Book Magazine June 1919



Harry Sinclair Lewis

AT TWO in the morning, on Main Street of a Nebraska prairie town that ought to have been asleep since ten, a crowd was packed under a lone arc-light, chattering, laughing, and every moment peering down the dim street to westward.

Out in the road were two new automobile tires, and cans of gasoline, oil, water, llie hose of a pressure air-pump stretched across the cement sidewalk, and beside it was an air-gauge in a new chamois case. Across the street a restaurant was glaring with unshaded electric lights; and a fluffy-haired, pert-nose girl alternately ran to the window and returned to look after the food she was keeping warm. The president of the local motor club, who was also owner of the chief garage, kept stuttering to a young man in brown union overalls, "Now be all ready— for land's sake, be ready. Remember, gotta change those casings in three minutes." They were awaiting a romantic event— the smashing of the cross-continent road-record by a Mallard car driven by J. T. Buffum.

Everyone there had seen pictures of Buffum in the sporting and automobile pages of the Lincoln and Kansas City papers; everyone knew that face, square, impassive, heavy-cheeked, kindly, with the unsmoked cigar between firm teeth, and the almost boyish bang over a fine forehead. Two days ago he had been in San Francisco, between the smeared gold of Chink dens and the tumult of the Pacific. Two days from now he would be in distant New York.

Miles away on the level prairie road a piercing jab of light grew swiftly into two lights, while a distant drumroll turned into the burring roar of a huge

unmuffled engine. The devouring thing burst into town, came fulminating down on them, stopped with a clashing jerk. The crowd saw the leather-hooded man at the mighty steering wheel nod to them, grinning, human, companionable— the great Buffum.

"Hurray! Hurray!" came the cries, and the silence changed to weaving gossip.

Already the garage youngster, with his boss and three men from another garage, was yanking off two worn casings, filling the gas tank, the oil well, the radiator. Buffum stiffly crawled from the car, stretched his shoulders, his mighty arms and legs, in a leonine yawn. "Jump out, Roy. Eats here," he muttered to the man in the passenger seat. This man the spectators did not heed. He was merely Buffum's mechanic and relay driver, a poor thing who had never in his life driven faster than ninety miles an hour.

The garage owner hustled Buffum across to the lunchroom. The moment the car had stormed into town the pretty waitress, jumping up and down with impatience, had snatched the chicken from the warming oven, poured out the real coffee, proudly added real cream. The lunch and the changing of casings took three and a quarter minutes.

The clatter of the motor smote the quiet houses and was gone. The town became drab and dull. The crowd yawned and fumbled its way home.

Buffum planned to get in two hours of sleep after leaving this Nebraska town. Roy Bender, the relay driver, took the wheel. Buffum sat with his relaxed body swaying to the leaping motion, while he drowsily commented in a hoarse, slow shout that pushed through the enveloping roar; "Look out for that hill, Roy. Going to be slippery."

"How can you tell?"

"I don't know. Maybe I smell it. But watch out, anyway. Good night, little playmate. Wake me up at four-fifteen."

That was all of the conversation for seventy-two miles.

It was dawn when Buffum drove again. He was silent; he was concentrated on keeping the speedometer just two miles higher than seemed safe. But for a mile or so, on straight stretches, he glanced with weary happiness at the morning meadows, at shimmering tapestry of grass and young wheat, and caught half a note of the song of a meadowlark. His mouth, so grimly tight in dangerous places, rose at the corners.

Toward noon, as Buffum was approaching the village of Apogee, Iowa, the smooth blaring of the motor was interrupted by a noise as though the engine was flying to pieces.

He yanked at the switch; before the car had quite halted, Roy and he had tumbled out at opposite sides, were running forward to lift the hood. The fan-

guard, a heavy wire soldered on the radiator, had worked loose and bent a fan-blade, which had ripped out a handful of honeycomb. The inside of the radiator looked as though it had been hacked with a dull knife. The water was cascading out.

BufFum speculated: "Apogee next town. Can't get radiator there. None nearer 'n Clinton. Get this soldered—Here! You!"

The "Here! You!" was directed at the driver of an ancient roadster. "Got to hustle this boat into next town. Want you to haul me in."

Roy Bender had already snatched a tow-rope from the back of the racing car, was fastening it to the front axle of the Mallard, the rear of the roadster.

Buffum gave no time for disputes. "I'm J. T. Buflum. Racin' 'cross continent. Here's ten dollars. Want your machine ten minutes. I'll drive." He had crowded into the seat. Already, with Roy steering the Mallard, they were headed for Apogee.

A shouting crowd ran out from house and store. Buffum slowly looked them over. Of a man in corduroy trousers and khaki shirt, who had plumped out of a garage, he demanded: "Who's the best solderer in town?"

"I am. Good as anybody in Iowa."

"Now, wait! Know who I am?"

"Sure! You're Buffum."

"My radiator is shot to thunder. Got to be soldered. I want six hours' work done in one hour, or less. How about the hardware store? Isn't there a solderer there that's even better than you?"

"Yes, I guess maybe old Frank Dieters is."

"Get him, and get the other good man, and get busy. One of you work on each side. Roy Bender here will boss you." Already Roy was taking down the radiator. "One hour, remember. Hurry! Plenty of money in it—"

"Oh, we don't care anything about the money!"

"Thanks, old man. Well, I might as well grab a little sleep. Where'll I get a long-distance connection?" he yawned.

"Across the street at Mrs. Rivers'. Be less noise than in the garage, I guess."

Over the way was a house that was a large square box with an octagonal cupola on the mansard roof. It was set back in a yard of rough grass and old crabapple trees. At the gate were a smallish, severe woman, in spectacles and apron, and a girl of twenty-five or -six. Buffum looked at the girl twice, and tried to make out what it was thatdistinguished her from all the other women in the crowd that had come pushing and giggling to see the famous car.

She was sharply individualized. It was not that she was tall and blazing. She was slight— and delicate as a drypoint etching. Her chin was precise though soft; she had a Roman nose, a feminized charming version of the Roman nose.

The thing that made her distinctive, Buffum reflected, was her poise. The girl by the gate was as quietly aloof as the small cold moon of winter.

He plodded across the road. He hesitated before speaking.

"I hope there hasn't been an accident," she murmured to him.

"No, just a small repair."

"But, why does everyone seem so much concerned?"

"Why, it's— it's— I'm J. T. Buffum."

"Mr. uh — Buffum—?"

"I reckon you never heard of me.''

"Why, uh — should I have?" Her eyes were serious, regretful at discourtesy.

"No. You shouldn't. I just mean Motor-fans usually have. I'm a racer. I'm driving from San Francisco to New York "

"Really? It will take you— ten days?"

"Four to five days."

"In two days you will be in the East? See the— the ocean? Oh!"

In her voice was wistfulness. Her eyes saw far-ofF things. But they came back to Apogee, Iowa, and to the big, dusty man in leather, with a penitent: "I'm ashamed not to have heard of you, but I— we haven't a car. I hope they will make your repair quickly. May Mother and I give you a glass of milk or something?"

"I'd be glad if you'd let me use your telephone. So noisy at "

"Of course! Mother, this is Mr. BulFum, who is driving across the country. Oh — my name is Aurilla Rivers."

Buffum awkwardly tried to bow in two directions at once. Then he followed Aurilla Rivers' slender back. He noticed how smooth were her shoulder-blades. They were neither jagged nor wadded. It seemed to him that the blue silk of her waist took life from the warm and eager flesh beneath. In her studied serenity she had not lost her youth.

As he drew away from the prying crowd and the sound of hasty hammers and wrenches, he was conscious of clinging peace. The brick of the walk was worn to a soft rose, shaded by gently moving branches of lilac bushes. At the end was a wild-grape arbor and an ancient bench. The arbor was shadowy, and full of the feeling of long and tranquil years. In this land of new houses and new red barns and blazing miles of wheat, it seemed mysterious with antiquity.

And on the doorstep was the bleached vertebra of a whale. Buffum was confused. He traveled so much and so swiftly that he always had to stop to think whether he was East or West, and now— Yes, this was Iowa. Of course. But that vertebra belonged to New England. And to New England belonged the conch shell and the mahogany table in the wide hall with its strip of ragcarpet

down which Miss Rivers led him to the telephone— an old-fashioned wall instrument. Buffum noticed that Miss Rivers conscientiously disappeared through the wide door at the end of the hall into a garden of pinks and pansies and sweet William.

"Please get me long distance.''

"I'm long distance and short distance and—"

"All right. This is Buffum, the transcontinental racer. I want to talk to Detroit, Michigan— Mallard Motor Company— office of the president."

He waited ten minutes, fie sat on the edge of a William and Mary chair, and felt obese, clumsy, extremely dirty. He ventured off his chair — disapproving of the thunder of his footsteps— and stood at the door of the parlor. The corner by the bow window seemed to be a shrine. Above a genuine antediluvian haircloth sofa were three pictures. In the center was a rather good painting of a man who was the very spirit of 1850 in New England— burnsides, grim white forehead, Roman nose, prim triangle of shirtfront. On the right was a watercolor of a house, white doored, narrow eaved, small windowed, standing out against gray sand and blue water, with a moored motor-dory beyond. On the woodshed ell of the pictured house was nailed up the name-board of a ship— *Penninah Sparrow*.

On the left of the portrait was a fairly recent enlarged photograph of a man somewhat like the granther of 1850, so far as Romanness of nose went, but weaker and more pompous, a handsome old buck, with a pretentious broad eyeglass ribbon and hair that must have been silvery over a face that must have been deep-flushed.

By the sofa was a marble-topped stand on which were fresh sweet peas.

Then central called, and Buffum was talking to the president of the Mallard Motor Company, who for two days and nights had sat by the ticker, watching his flashing progress.

''Hello, chief. Buffum speaking. Held up for about an hour. Apogee, Iowa. Think I can make it up. But better move the schedule up through Illinois and Indiana. Huh? Radiator leak. 'By!"

He inquired the amount of toll, and rambled out to the garden. He had to hurry away, of course, and get some sleep, but it would be good for him to see Aurilla Rivers again, to take with him the memory of her cool resoluteness. She was coming toward him. He meekly followed her back through the hall, to the front steps. There he halted her. He would see quite enough of Roy Bender and the car before he reached New York.

"Please sit down here a moment, and tell me

"Yes?''

"Oh, about the country around here, and— uh Oh! I owe you for the telephone call."

"Please! It's nothing."

"But it's something. It's two dollars and ninety-five cents."

"For a telephone call?"

He caught her hand and pressed the money into it. She plumped down on the steps, and he discreetly lowered his bulk beside her. She turned on him, blazing:

"You infuriate me! You do things I've always wanted to— sweep across big distances, command men, have power. I suppose it's the old Yankee shipmasters coming out in me."

"Miss Rivers, I noticed a portrait in there. It seemed to me that the picture and the old sofa make a kind of shrine And the fresh flowers." She stared a little before she said ;

"Yes. It's a shrine. But you're the first one that ever guessed. How did you "

"I don't know. I suppose it's because I went through some California missions a few days ago. Tell me about the people in the pictures."

"You wouldn't— Oh, some day, perhaps."

"Some day! Now, you see here, child! Do you realize that in about forty minutes I'll be kiting out of here at seventy miles an hour? Imagine that I've met you a couple of times in the bank or the post office, and finally after about six months I've called here, and told your mother I like pansies. All right. All that is over. Now, who are you, Aurilla Rivers? Who and what and why and how and when?

She smiled. She nodded. She told.

She was a school teacher now, but before her father had died— well, the enlarged photograph in there was her father, Bradley Rivers, pioneer lawyer of Apogee. He had come out from Cape Cod, as a boy. The side-whiskered man of the central portrait was her grandfather. Captain Zenas Rivers, of West Harlepool, on the Cape. The house in the picture was the Rivers' mansion, birthplace of her father.

"Have you been on the Cape yourself?" Buff^"um queried. "I remember driving through Harlepool, but I don't recall anything but white houses and a meeting-house with a whale of a big steeple."

"The dream of my life has been to go to Harlepool. Once when Father had to go to Boston he did run down there by himself. That's when he brought back the portrait of Grandfather, and the painting of the old house, and the furniture and all. He said it made him so melancholy to see the changes in the town, and he never would go again. Then— he died. Tm saving up money for a trip back East. I do believe in democracy, but at the same time 1 feel that

families like the Riverses owe it to the world to set an example, and I want to find my own people again. My own people!''

Maybe you're right. I'm from the soil. Di-rect! But somehow I can see it in you, same as I do in the portrait of your grandfather. I wish I— Well, never mind."

"But you are an aristocrat. You do things that other people don't dare to. While you were telephoning, I saw our school principal, and he said you were a Viking and all kinds of—"

"Here! Now! You! Quit! Stop! Wait! A lot of people, especially on newspapers, give me a lot of taffy just because I can drive fast. What I need is someone like you to make me realize what a roughneck I am."

She looked at him clear-eyed, and pondered: "I'm afraid most of the Apogee boys think I'm rather prim."

"They would! That's why they're stuck in Apogee." Buffum searched her eyes and speculated: "I wonder if we aren't alike in this way: Neither of us content to plod. Most people never think of why they're living. They reckon and guess and s'pose that maybe some day they'll do better, and then— bing!— they're dead. But you and I— I seem— I've known you a long time. Will you remember me?"

"Oh, yes. There aren't so many seventy-an-hour people in Apogee!"

From the gate Roy Bender was bellowing: "Ready in two minutes, boss!"

Buffum was on his feet, drawing on his gauntlets and leather coat. She looked at him gravely, while he urged:

"Going on. Day from now, the strain will begin to kind of get me. Will you think about me then? Will you wireless me some good thoughts ? "

"Yes!"— very quietly. He yanked off his big gauntlet. He felt her hand fragile in his. Then he was gone, marching down the walk, climbing into the car, demanding of Roy: "Look over oil and battery and ev'thing?"

"You bet. We did everything," said the garage man, "Get a little rest?"

"Yes. Had a chance to sit in the shade and loaf."

"Saw you talking to Aurilla Rivers "

Roy interrupted: "All right, all right, boss. Shoot!"

Buffum heard the garage man out:

"Fine girl, Aurilla is. Smart 's a whip. She's a real swell. Born and brought up here, too."

"Who's this that Miss Rivers is engaged to?" Buffum risked.

"Well, I guess probably she'll marry Reverend Dawson. He's a dried-up old stick but he comes from the East. Some day she'll get tired of school teaching, and he'll grab her. Marry in haste and repent at Reno, like the fellow says."

"That's right. Fix up the bill, Roy? G'by."

Buffum was off. Five minutes later he was six and threequarters miles away. In his mind was but one thought — to make up the lost time; in his eyes was no vision save speedometer and the road that rushed toward him.

A little after dark he rumbled at Roy: "Here. Take her. Going to get some sleep." He did sleep, for an hour, then struggling into full wakefulness he dug his knuckles into his eyes like a sleepy boy, glanced at the speedometer, laid a hand on the steering wheel and snapped at Roy: "All right. Move over."

At dawn nothing existed in the world save the compulsion to keep her at top speed. The earth was shut off from him by a wall of roar and speed. He did not rouse to human feeling even when he boomed into Columbus Circle, the breaker of the record.

He went instantly to bed: slept twenty-six and onequarter hours, then attended a dinner given to himself, and made a speech that was unusually incoherent, because all through he remembered that he was due in San Francisco in eight days. He was to sail for Japan, and a road race round the shore of Hondo. Before he returned, Aurilla Rivers would undoubtedly have married the Reverend Mr. Dawson, have gone to Cape Cod on her wedding trip. She would think only with disgust of large men with grease on their faces.

He could take one day for the trip up and back. He could get to Cape Cod more quickly by motor than by train. He was going to have one more hour with Aurilla, on his way to San Francisco. He would be more interesting to her if he could gossip of her ancestral background. He could take pictures of the place to her, and perhaps an old chair from the mansion. As he drove down Front Street, in West Harlepool, he saw the house quite as it had appeared in Aurilla's picture with the name-board of a wrecked ship over the woodshed, the Penninah Sparrow,

Down the road was a one-room shop with the sign ''Gains Bearse, Gen'l Merchandise. Clam Forks, Windmills, and Souvenirs." Out on the porch poked a smallish man. Buffum ambled toward him and saw that the man was very old.

"Good morning. This Cap'n Bearse?" inquired Buffum.

"I be."

"Uh, uh! Say— uh, Cap'n, can you tell me who's living in the Rivers mansion now?"

"The which mansion?"

"Rivers. The house across there? Huh! That's the Kendrick house."

"But it was built by a Rivers."

''No, 'twa'n't. That house was built by Cap'n Cephas. Kendricks living in it ever since. Owned now by William Dean Kendrick. He's in the wool business, in Boston, but his folks comes down every summer. I ought to know. The Kendricks are kin of mine."

"B-but where did the Riverses live?"

"The Riverses? Oh, them! Come from the West, don't ye? Spend the summer here?"

"No. What makes you think I come from the West?"

"Rivers went out there. Bradley Rivers. He the one you're thinking of?"

"Yes."

"Friend of yours "

"No. Just happened to hear about him."

"Well, I'll tell you. There never was any Rivers family."

"What?"

"The father of this here Bradley Rivers called himself Zenas Rivers. But land, Zenas' right name was Fernao Ribeiro. He was nothing but a Portygee deckhand. Fernao, or Zenas, became a wrecker. He was a good hand in a dory, but when he was drinking, he was a caution for snakes. He come straight from the Cape Verde Islands."

"I understand Bradley Rivers' ancestors were howling aristocrats, and came over on the Mayflower''

"Maybe so, maybe so. Aristocrats at drinking Jamaica rum, I guess. But they didn't come on no *Mayflower*, Zenas Rivers came over on the brig *Jennie B. Smith*!"

"I understand Zenas owned this — this Kendrick House ?"

"Him? Why, boy, if Zenas or Brad either ever set foot across the threshold of that house, it was to fill the wood box, or maybe sell lobsters!"

"B-but — what kind of looking man was Zenas?"

"Thick-set, dark-complected fellow— real Portygee."

"Didn't he have a Roman nose?"

"Him? Huh! Had a nose like a herring."

"But Bradley had a Roman nose. Where'd he get it?"

"From his maw. She was a Yankee, but her folks wa'n't much account. So she married Zenas. Brad Rivers always was an awful liar. He came back here about seven-eight years ago, and he boasted he was the richest man in Kansas or maybe 'twas Milwaukee."

"Did he buy a picture of the Kendrick mansion while he was here?"

"Believe he did. He got one of these artists to paint a picture of the Kendrick house. And he bought a couple of things of me— a horsehair sofy, and a picture of old Cap'n Gould that May Gould left here."

"Did— did this Captain Gould in the portrait have a Roman nose? And side whiskers? Stern looking?"

"That's him. What's Brad been telling you, boy?"'

"Nothing!" sighed Buffum. "Then Rivers was just a plain dub? Like me?"

"Plain? Brad Rivers? Well, Zenas sent Brad to school to Taunton for a year or so, but just the same, we always allowed he was so ordinary that there wa'n't a dog belonging to a Kendrick or a Bearse or a Doane that would bite him. Ask any of the old codgers in town."

"I will, but— thanks."

He came down from the Apogee street, inconspicuously creeping through the dust, a large, amiable man in a derby.

He had only fifty-one minutes before the return of the Apogee branch train to the junction to connect with the next express westward.

He rang; he pounded at the front door; he went round to the back; and there he discovered Aurilla's mother washing napkins. She looked at him over her spectacles, and she sniffed: "Yes?"

"Do you remember I came through here recently? Racing car? I wanted to see Miss Rivers for a moment."

"You can't. She's at school, teaching."

"When will she be back? It's four now."

"Maybe right away, maybe not till six."

His train left at four-forty-nine. He waited on the front steps. It was four-twenty-one when Aurilla Rivers came along the walk. He rushed to her, his watch in his hand, and before she could speak, he was pouring out:

"'Member me? Darn glad! Got less 'n twenty-eight minutes before have to catch train San Francisco steamer Japan possibly India afterwards glad to see me please oh please don't be a Rivers be Aurilla just got twenty-seven 'n' half minutes glad?"

"Why— why— ye-es—"

"Thought about me?"

"Of course."

"Ever wish I might come shooting through again?"

"You're so egotistical!"

"No, just in a hurry. Only got twenty-seven minutes more! Ever wish I'd come back? Oh— please! Can't you hear the Japan steamer whistling— calling us?"

"Japan!"

"Like to see it?"

"Terribly."

"Will you come with me? I'll have a preacher meet us on the train. If you'll phone to Detroit, find out all about me. Come! Quick! Marry me! Just twenty-six and a half more."

She could only whisper in answer: "No. I mustn't think of it. It tempts me. But Mother would never consent."

"What has your mother to do—"

"Everything! With our people, the individual is nothing, the family's sacred. I must think of Bradley Rivers, and old Zenas, and hundreds of fine old Yankees, building up something so much bigger than just one individual happiness. It's, oh, noblesse oblige!" How could he, in face of her ancestor worship, tell the truth? He burst out:

"But you'd like to? Aurilla! Just twenty-five minutes now! He chucked his watch into his pocket. "See here. I want to kiss you. I'm going seven thousand miles away, and I can't stand it, unless I'm going to kiss you, there under the grape arbor!" His fingers slipped under her elbow.

She came reluctantly, appealing, "No, no, please, no!" till he swept the words away with a kiss, and in the kiss she forgot all that she had said, and clung to him, begging: "Oh, don't go away. Don't leave me here in this dead village. Stay here— catch the next steamer! Persuade Mother "

"I must catch this one. I'm due there— big race. Come!"

"With— without clothes?"

"Buy 'em on way— San Francisco!"

"No, I mustn't. And there are others to consider besides Mother."

"Mr. Dawson? Really care for him?"

"He's very gentle and considerate and really such a good scholar. Mother wants Mr. Dawson to get a pastorate on Cape Cod, and she thought that way I might pick up with the old threads, and be a real Rivers again. As Mrs. Dawson, I could find the old house and all—" She was interrupted by his two hands behind her shoulders, by his eyes searching hers with a bitter honesty.

"Don't you ever get tired of ancestors?" he cried.

"I do not! Whatever I may be— they were splendid. Once in a mutiny on the clipper that he was commanding, Zenas Rivers—"

"Dear, there wasn't any Zenas Rivers. He was a Portuguese immigrant named Ribeiro, Fernao Ribeiro. The picture there in the house is a Captain Gould."

She had slipped from his embrace. But he went steadily on, trying with eyes and voice to make her understand his tenderness:

"Old Zenas was a squat, dark chap, a wrecker, and not very nice. The first real aristocrat in your family is you."

"Wait! You mean that— that it wasn't any of it true? But the Rivers' mansion?"

"There isn't any. The house in the picture has always belonged to the Kendricks. I've just been on Cape Cod, and I found—"

"It isn't true? Not any of it, about the Rivers "

"None of it. I didn't mean to tell you. If you don't believe me, you can write."

"Oh, don't! Wait!" She turned, looked to the right. He remembered that down the street to the right was a rise of ground with a straggly village cemetery. She murmured:

"Poor Dad ! I loved him, oh, so much, but— I know Dad told fibs. But never to harm people. Just because he wanted us to be proud of him. Mr.— what is your name?"

"Buffum."

"Come."

He followed her swift steps into the house, into the room of the shrined portraits. She looked from "Zenas Rivers" to the sketch of the "Rivers' Mansion." She patted the glass over her father's photograph. She blew the dust from her fingers. She sighed: "It smells musty in here, so musty!" She ran to the mahogany chest of drawers and took out a sheet of parchment. On it, he saw, was a coat of arms. She picked up a pencil, turned over the parchment, and drew a flying motor car.

She turned and thrust the sketch at him, crying: There's the coat of arms of the family to come, the crest of a new aristocracy that knows how to work!" With a solemnity that wasn't solemn at all, he intoned: "Miss Rivers, would you mind marrying me, somewhere between here and California?"

"Yes," he kissed her— "If you can make"— she kissed him— ''Mother understand. She has friends and a little money. She can get along without me. But she believes the aristocracy fable."

"May I lie to her?"

"Why, once might be desirable."

"I'll tell her my mother was a Kendrick of Harlepool, and I'll be terribly top-lofty, but in a hurry— especially the hurry! Just got thirteen minutes now!"

From the hall sounded Mrs. Rivers' petulant voice: "Aurilly!"

"Y-yes, Mother?"

"If you and that man are going to catch the train, you better be starting."

"W-w-why," Aurilla gasped; then, to Buffum: "I'll run right up and pack my bag."

"It's all 'tended to, Aurilly. Minute I saw that dratted man coming again, I knew he'd be in a hurry. But I do think you might let me know my son-in-law's name before you go. You only got eleven minutes. You better hurry— hurry— hurry!"

———————————

15: The Last Dose

E. Temple Thurston

1879-1933

The Popular Magazine July 1908

Ernest Charles Temple Thurston

British author, poet and playwright, who published some 30 novels, had five plays produced on Broadway, and published at least two volumes of short stories. Today he is all but forgotten.

"WHITE MAN'S GRAVE," they call it down in Sierra Leone. But the whole of West Africa is a death-trap. Some parts of the world are like the carnivorous plants, tempting in all their wealth of color, alluring in their subtle odors. So they catch their prey. A white man ventures into the heart of them and the earth sucks him into herself. In a few months he is lying beneath the six feet of vulturous sod, food for the very earth that bred him.

It is like this, inland from Lagos. Away up in the forest beyond Abutemetta the land has that swampy, turgid appearance of a reptile dozing in the glittering sun, digesting the raw flesh in its well-filled belly. And at night the tongue of death licks up from the marshes in a velvet mist. The first sight of it to the white man brings a thrill of horror. In it he can see the carnivorous beast prowling for its meal. You find him going into camp and draining his quinin, the hand shaking that holds the glass, the throat swallowing eagerly the magic draft that guards him against the rapacious attacks of the hungry earth. He throws himself into his hammock and looks out at the colossal tree-ferns throwing up their monstrous lacework against an inkblack sky, cursing the whole wonderful beauty of it, wondering if he will ever get back free and

unscathed to the ungainly elms and ponderous oaks— to the flat fields and humble vegetation of a cleaner-feeding land.

All this is in the early days of his sojourn, in the days when news comes up from the base of a man going under whom he dined with some nights ago, in the days when the fever fiend lightly touches his forehead with cold, damp fingers and passes on. Two or three months of it, two or three goes of fever, and familiarity has bred its litter of contempt. Even death itself settles down into its proper perspective. The coming and going of men, men being ordered home, men sent down to the hospital at Lagos to be starved of alcohol and killed like flies in a fly-trap, men dying in a night of fever and buried in a pit the niggers have been flogged to dig— these things harden a man, if they don't succeed in breaking him.

It is a rough school, the scholars are rough and the master spoils none with sparing. Here you learn the relative value of individual life in simple numerical units— no catchy problems in mathematics; no binomial theorems or quadratic equations; it is all taught you in simple arithmetic on a large slate from which, with one sweep of the sponge, the figures can be wiped out of existence, making room for others to take their place.

The Lagos Government Railway calls out of America as many men as it can get. Some come leaping for the handsome pay, some because the devil may care; some are driven by necessity— between the shafts, chafing at the, harness, but spurred to it, beaten to it, under the whip of need. However they may come, there are not many of them. And whoever they are who go, you will find them back again in America in a year or two, jaundiced, wrecked with fever, shaken in nerves; always supposing that they have not found a grave in the swamp-land that stenches through the forest away beyond Abutemetta.

Engineers they are, most of them— the world's pioneers, risking everything to lay a shaky track of rails through a country that God seems to have forsaken and left to rot. In an atmosphere of damp and clinging heat, alternated at night with the searching cold, they work at their cheerless, thankless job; only niggers, the scum of the earth, reeking of it, to help them. A mile of rail goes down in a day— sometimes more, often less.

Then the old antiquated engine comes staggering along with the fresh mateřial, hissing, snorting, shrieking through the deep, dark, limitless forest; and with a silent sense of pride these men stand by and watch her traveling her few hundreds of yards which they by their right and might of manhood have won for the use of men— the few hundreds of yards out of the many thousands of miles that are left.

When it is a bridge to build, the average distance covered in the day goes down to feet, to inches even. But the first time the old engine rides over the

completed span, the sense of pride quits silence, and a shout of Americans, that the world might hear had it the heart to listen, rings up into the giant fern-trees and out through the roof of the forest to God's sky.

This is the heroism of it, the abstract quality of heroism 'which makes its appeal to those far enough off from the canvas.. Come. closer; look into the thing and you will find its reality. Prolonged solitude, the days that pass without the sight of a white face, only the brutal lips and flattened nostrils of the natives to look to for humanity; the soft, warm, humid climate, these are the conditions that drive our hero pioneers to the crying need of the stimulant of alcohol. They drink like dogs at a public fountain. In batches they are sent down to the hospital at Lagos where the doctors, fed at the governor's table, imbued with the governor's morals, cut off the wretches from their drink as you snuff a candle in the face of daylight. Like dumb animals they cry for it— cry for it in vain, and go into death with the bedclothes between their teeth— spitting at the mouth.

Our concern is with the realism of it— the heroism, too, for any who wish to find it. Lester was the second engineer— which is to say the man who does the first engineer's work and receives the second engineer's pay. The first engineer spent most of his time down at Lagos in refined society. For in this, as in all walks of life, the title of a man is in direct relation to the money he earns. Stevenson was the doctor of the district. The district extended to a thirty-mile radius from the camp, and within that radius Stevenson's practise consisted of attending to the ills of some hundreds of natives employed by the railway and the few white men who chanced to be working in his locality. To these latter he gave the best of his skill. The natives were more or less objects of experiment. It is almost impossible.for the white man to overcome his prejudice for the black. He feels and shows his contempt. The very presence of a native stirs the beast in him.

On these two men, then, the second engineer and the doctor of the district seventy miles east of Abutemetta, whatever interest this story may have is concentrated. Two men, racked with fever, rolled in blankets, sweating with a rush of heat and alternately shivering and cursing the cold. In the corner of a tent close by, a black man lay, apparently unconscious— bruised, battered, bleeding— the result of breaking the bottle which contained Stevenson's store of quinin. He had been caught in the act, trying to mop up the pool of liquid that was fast soaking into the earth. Horror twisted his eyeballs as he looked up and saw Stevenson standing in the opening of the tent. Stevenson's language is not possible of repetition. The result of what he did was to be seen ten minutes later when he chucked the motionless body of the native into the corner of the small tent.

All this had happened thirty-six hours before, and now the fever was playing with them as a cat plays with a mouse. The little quinin that was left, they eked out sparingly— doses that had little effect. A boy had been despatched immediately to Abutemetta for a further supply; but the possibility of his return within two days was vague and impossible to rely upon. This was a race for life.. They sat and waited for the outcome. With every crackling of the brushwood outside, one or the other would jump up and return with a shaking head. There were a thousand odd chances that he might fall in ~ with another camp and be able to get enough quinin to stave off this attack. The two men had counted on every one of these, as you count your chances at roulette while the ball is still rolling.

Now it had come to the last dose of quinin. Stevenson held up the bottle and tried to grin. The attempt was sickly. His lips stuck to his teeth and the expression became ugly.

"One more go," he said, licking his lips.

Lester nodded his head. The precious liquid laughed at him in the light of the swinging lamp.

"Well— what are we going to do?" he asked. The words clicked on his dry tongue. "No good halving that— is there?" :

"Not a damned bit of good— not enough for the sort of dose we want, as it is."

They both looked at it, each wondering why the other did not snatch up the bottle and drain it off.

"Well— what are we going to do?" Lester asked again. "Toss for it?"

Stevenson shifted in his seat. "God, no! There's too much chance in that. I have had enough of luck. This dose is probably going to hold one of us up till that confounded boy gets back. Listen! Did you hear that?"

The moment brought a pause, then Lester shook his head. "Nothing," he said. They sat again in silence.

"I'll play you checkers," said Stevenson presently.

Lester looked up— eyes glittering with fever, sweat standing out on his forehead.

"For the dose?"

"Yes."

"You play better than I do."

"Not on the average."

"You beat me last time."

"You beat me the time before."

"Did I?"

"Yes; don't you remember; kings; you wiped me up."

Lester wiped his hands on the blanket that enveloped him.

"All right," he said. "Come on— best of three, or one game?"

"One game," said Stevenson.

They brought out the battered checker-board and laid it on the table, shook out the checkers with a clatter from an old cigar-box, and sat down to the business as they had done a hundred times before. All the formulas they went through in silence— the shuffling of the two pieces in the hand. Stevenson held them behind his back and Lester nodded to the right hand.

Then they began— two men playing a game of checkers for a chance of life. Through the forest of tangled vinous growths that dropped their endless trailers from the highest palms, the cries of roaming beasts would sometimes reach them— weird sounds which their ears had long since grown accustomed to. Sometimes a native would pass the opening of the tent and stop for a moment to gaze in. But they seldom looked up. Each move was made with cautious deliberation; and at last, when three red and three black pieces lay captured at the side of the board, Lester leaned back in his chair.

"Heaven!" he exclaimed. "I feel as if I couldn't even last out the game."

Stevenson raised his eyes critically for a moment. They took i in the bottle containing the dose of quinin as he let them return to the board.

"Wonder what my people will say— when they hear," said Lester.

Stevenson shook himself. :

"Are you married?" he asked.

Lester swung his head to the negative. :

"I am," said the doctor.

"Kids?"

"Three."

"God!"

"Yes— that's the worst of it. Three."

"My move?"

Stevenson nodded and Lester bent over the board.

So the game wore slowly on and the prize—the dose of quinin—stood on the table between them.

"Where do your people live?" Stevenson asked presently. :

"Philadelphia." He made his move before he answered.

"Father an engineer, too?"

"Yes. Took it up when it paid. Not much left in it now."

"He's well off then?"

"Draws his four thousand a year out of one of the railways. I call that comfort— compared with this."

Stevenson took a sip of water from a cup and pulled his blanket more tightly around him.

"Four thousand dollars— a deuce of a lot of money," he said musingly. "They pay me at the rate of fifteen hundred here. Fifteen hundred a year! It sounds all right when you see it on paper over in America. When you come out here and find men going down like ninepins, you begin to think you'll be lucky with half a year's screw and your skin."

"You send it back to your wife, I suppose?" Lester's teeth chattered, snapping the words short.

"Every mail."

"What'll she do?"

The feverish color swept out of Stevenson's face. His cheeks were blanched. He tried to lick his lips.

"How— do? What d'you mean?"

"If this thing knocks us out?"

"Oh, for God's sake go on playing! It's your move,"

Lester surveyed the board. In his last move, Stevenson had left a piece to be taken. Lester noted it. His next move, then, was almost compulsory. His hand was beginning to stretch out when his eye caught Stevenson's hand feeling inside the blanket and extracting a letter from his pocket. Lester hung with his hand poised over the board, while Stevenson began to read the epistle.

"That from your wife?' asked Lester.

"Yes. Lord help her! Listen to this: 'I bought Bertie a present the other day, The poor little chap was given nothing on his last birthday, and when your letter came with the money, I felt I ought to be generous. Of course I only spent a dollar. I couldn't spare more,"

"Oh— that's enough!" Lester exclaimed thickly. He turned back to the board. There was Stevenson's piece, still ready to be taken. Could he take it? Had he any right to win the game? He pictured that woman over in America stinting herself in order to buy her little son a present for a dollar. What would she do if no more letters containing money came from over the water? What would she do if the next letter she received was from the Lagos Government Railway, announcing with regrets that her husband was dead— buried in the swamp-land seventy miles east of Abutemetta? She would be glad even of that dollar then. He had no particular regard for Stevenson. On two or three occasions the doctor had proved himself to be wanting in ordinary courage.

But this woman over in America, whom he had never seen, filled his imagination with sympathy. He found something pitiful in the precariousness of her position. Had any other woman been dependent upon him, this one

would not have entered into his consideration. As it was, he felt she claimed it all. She was as dependent upon him—not by right of law, but by right of humanity—as she was upon her husband. If he gave Stevenson the game, let him take the dose of quinin, luck and the devil might pull him through until the boy returned. As yet, of the two, the fever had struck him harder than it had the doctor; yet death was lurking in the shadow of both of them.

His hand began its slow, uncertain descent toward the board. In these moments he was realizing the just value of life; that it depends upon a man's necessity to others, rather than to himself. His love of life itself is no reliable valuation, no justification of his right to live. So Lester sat in judgment upon himselí—passing his own death-sentence. His hand descended to the board and another piece was moved. He dared not look up at Stevenson as he did it, lest the signs of his determination should be read in his face.

"Jump you!' exclaimed Stevenson.

The words leaped out of his mouth. He seized the piece and laid it by his side as though in fear that the move would be withdrawn. Lester showed no sign of discomfiture; but from that onward, he steadily lost piece after piece, until with crowned men Stevenson swept the board. Stevenson mumbled.something about being sorry— that he thought it had been the fairest way— then his hand reached out for the bottle of quinin. Lester turned away as he drank it, but he heard it gurgling in his throat. Almost immediately after Lester passed into a comatose condition; the sweat draining in channels down his cheeks, he fell back limp and unconscious in his chair.

It was still night when he came to again. The lamp was burning dimly. Stevenson had crawled into his hammock and was lying there motionless. Lester's eyes wandered feverishly around the tent. His sense of weakness was almost overpowering. His eyelids, weighted like lead, fell down over his eyes again. When he opened them once more, the first thing he beheld was Stevenson's letter lying on the floor- For five minutes he gazed at it, thinking vaguely— indefinitely— how that had brought him to his decision. He had made a sacrifice for a woman he had never seen— the greatest sacrifice a man can make. What else had she said in the letter besides what he had heard? A feeling that he had a right to know dragged him to his feet. He staggered— shivering all through his body— across the floor and picked up the letter. Then he tottered back to his chair.

It began with passionate affection. It went on with passion— the passion of a woman who has yielded herself heart, body and soul, and learned too late that honor is not going to be her portion in the transaction. It was the letter Stevenson had read from. He recognized the handwriting as he had first seen it under the lamp. But this was not from Stevenson's wife— rather from some

unfortunate woman whom he had betrayed. There was no mention of her children. A gentle complaint that he had not sent her as much money as last time— that was all.

Lester flung the letter on the table and staggered across the floor to Stevenson's hammock.

"Wake up, you devil!" he shouted in a weak, thin voice. "Wake up!"

There was no answer. The stiff body gave no sign of life to the blows that he showered upon it with his feeble fist. Stevenson had gone already. Lester put his hand on the heart. It had stopped beating. With a smothered moan, he struggled to his own hammock and climbed into it like a tottering child.

TWO HOURS after sunrise the next morning, the boy returned with the fresh store of quinin. He found two hammocks swinging dead men; and before them, squatting on his haunches on the ground, was the bruised: and battered native from the other tent—cursing them gutturally in a language of his own.

———————

16: Lifeboat

Jeffery Farnol

1878-1952

Cosmopolitan, Sep 1930

John Jeffery Farnol

THE BOAT lay becalmed, drifting on the slow, deadly monotonous swell; from cloudless sky the sun beat down, a pitiless sun whose ferocious rays made wretchedness a gasping misery and added to the pangs of thirst.

And in this swaying, sun-blistered boat, two men crouched, watching each other in silence, above a still and shrouded form... Both were young, both haggard with suffering and privation, but there all likeness ended, for the one, slim and dark, was clad in weatherstained yet fashionable tweeds; the other, a big fellow, blue-eyed, golden-haired, was rigged as a sailor; and he it was who spoke at last in voice harsh and querulous:

"When do we drink?"

The slim man glanced at the watch on his wrist and answered hoarsely: "In— exactly fifty-five minutes."

"Be damned to that!" growled the big man. "I'm parched! I'm in— agony."

"So am I!" croaked the slim man. "And what of Miss Wellerby?"

"She's asleep and out of her misery for a bit. But I'm awake, curse it, awake and dyin' for a drop o' that water as you're hoggin'! Ah, you may scowl, Mr. John Parrant, Esquire, but I'm goin' t'drink."

"Hogging, d'you say?" muttered Farrant, glancing on the muffled shape at his feet. "Is it hogging to keep a fool from guzzling the water that may save the three of us? Pull yourself together; try to be a man."

"Look here, you—"

"Silence!" snarled Farrant, gesturing towards the sleeper.

The big man clenched knotted fists and muttered a passionate curse. "Now listen t'me," said he, in voice scarce above a whisper, but with menace in every line of his body, "there's water a-plenty in that keg."

"Yes, but think, man; confound you— think! We may drift like this for days— maybe longer! And we have a woman with us, God help her! Anyway, it's up to us to ration ourselves, especially in water. When we drink, we drink together. Come, if you're an English sailorman, act like one."

"Right-o, mister ruddy gentleman! Here's an English sailor as is goin' to drink now, ah— and hearty too!"

"You will drink half a pannikin of water at twelve o'clock — with us, and not before!"

"Wot's a-goin' to stop me?"

"This!" answered Farrant, and whipped a hunting knife from his belt. "Strange," said he, nodding at it, "that in all that confusion on board I should strap on this knife— quite unconsciously! I brought it to skin game, but if necessary I shall certainly use it on— I think you said your name was Joe Trasker?"

"Ay, that's me!" growled the big man bitterly. "Just Joe Trasker, a deck hand! But you're a toff, eh— like her! And it's both on ye ag'in' me. But I got as much right to live as you or her— and you're both ag'in' me! Oh, I know your game— a sip o' water all round when I'm awake, but soon as I'm asleep "

"Liar!" said Farrant, and sheathed his knife contemptuously.

"Liar, am I? Well, how'm I to know as you don't get at the water when my eye's off ye— or feed it to her?"

"Look at me, man! Look at her! Do we seem any better than you? I'm suffering as much as you are, perhaps more. And as for— her—"

"Ah, her! You're sweet on her, that's wot! I see— I know, if she don't— and you'd do anything for— her!"

"And so would you, Joe, if it comes to the pinch."

"Not me!" growled Trasker.

"Well, I believe you would, Joe, just because you are a sailorman. I rather liked you, Joe, until this cursed suspicion got you— looked on you as a friend. And do I look the sort of cur that would cheat a friend; do I? Anyhow, we drink half a pannikin of water three times a day— and that's that!"

So fell silence again, save for the slap and tinkle of the wavelets and the monotonous creaking of the boat's timbers, Trasker crouching, yellow head between clenched fists, while Farrant's eager gaze quested the vast desolation of sea. At last, stifling a groan, he bent and touched the sleeper.

"Miss Wellerby," said he, croaking hoarsely, "luncheon, ho! Two biscuits and a sip or so of water."

The sleeper moved, sighed and sat up. A face sweet with youth, despite haggard eyes and droop of shapely mouth, a lovely face, aged yet ennobled by suffering endured with a resolute patience.

"I was dreaming," said she wistfully, glancing around that immensity of ocean. "I dreamed we were safe— at home in— our dear England."

"Let's hope it's a happy omen," said Farrant, carefully measuring out the precious water. "Let's drink to home— to England, God bless it!"

He took the cup in shaking fingers but, meeting Farrant's gaze, drank slowly with little sips and sighs of ecstasy. The mug empty, he refilled and passed it to Trasker who, swallowing the water in three sucking gulps, tossed back the mug and, muttering evilly, turned his back ...

Came darkness, palpitant with wonder of stars, and all about a brooding silence.

And Farrant, huddled in the stern, roused ever and anon to peer towards Joe Trasker in the shadowy bow, straining his ears for stealthy movement, his fingers gripping the haft of his knife ... It was after one of these upstartings that a hand touched him, a small slim hand that found and clasped his own.

"Mr. Farrant," she breathed, "I'm afraid of that man— more than thirst or hunger— dreadfully, horribly afraid!"

"No, no," he whispered back, giving that clinging hand a reassuring pat. "Joe's all right, really, and— I'm here!"

"Yes. I have thanked God for you— often. May I call you John?"

"Oh, please do."

"Then, will you call me Eve?"

"Yes, Eve."

"He, that man, wants to drink all the water, doesn't he?"

"Why, no; not all. The poor devil's thirsty and a bit queerish— a touch of the sun, but he's all right, really."

"But I heard you threaten him with your knife."

"But I thought— weren't you asleep, Eve?"

"Oh, no; I was too thirsty." Here he patted her hand again and all but raised it to his lips. "John, if I asked you for water now— just one sip— would you give it me?"

"Don't!" he gasped. "Don't ask me!"

"If I begged, implored — would you?"

"No!" he whispered, between clenched teeth. "I couldn't; it — it wouldn't be just; it wouldn't be fair— to Joe. So, Eve, my poor, dear girl, don't ask " He stopped, for with sudden movement she had drawn his hand to her hot lips and now pillowed her tear-wet cheek on it.

"God was good— very kind— to send me adrift with such a man as you."

So this night passed, but... Ensued long hours, days of stifling heat with a raging thirst mocked by the cool lapping of water; dreadful nights of an ever-growing anguish and hopelessness. Farrant's strength began to fail; Trasker's great body seemed to shrink and shrivel; Eve's wistful eyes seemed larger in the haggard oval of her face, but her smile was ready and her spirit valiant as ever.

Trasker raved and threatened her, or lay huddled in silent misery, his fever-bright eyes so watchful and furtive that there came times when Farrant dared not sleep until he saw those fierce-watching eyes shut and was assured that Joe truly slumbered. It was such a night again and Farrant sat, heavy head against a thwart, when a feeble arm drew his aching head to a more comfortable resting place.

"John," she whispered, "the water's nearly gone."

"Yes. God help us!"

"Well, I— don't think I shall need— any more, and— oh, John, I'm glad! But you must live to—"

"Not without you."

"Listen, John, dear! Today when you fell asleep— the man tried— to get at the water again; hurt me a little, dear. I think he's gone mad. So, John, after I'm gone, if he— tries to steal all the water— my dear, you must— kill him with your knife."

"Eve— oh, Eve, if you go, I shall need my knife for better purpose."

"No! Oh, John, no— not that!"

"I'll not endure this agony alone, Eve. There; hush! Try to sleep. Perhaps in the morning— a ship, dear."

"Then you sleep, too; here, close by me, John."

"No I— I must— watch "

But in this night of horror, of weakness, physical and mental, Farrant slept indeed, and started up feeling for his knife— then caught his breath and lay shaking and appalled, for the weapon was gone.

Day was breaking; all about him was a ghostly light. He looked towards the bow, and his jaw dropped. Save for Eve and himself the boat was empty; Trasker's sprawling bulk had vanished!

Slowly, weakly, Farrant got to his knees, for there beside Eve's slim foot lay his knife, its keen blade horribly dimmed, and beyond this, great gouts of blood. Now, looking upon her sleeping face, hollow-cheeked and ghastly in the dawn-light, and remembering her words, Farrant covered his eyes and rocked back and forth, his weakened frame shuddering convulsively. At last, conquering this spasm, he dropped the knife overboard, and with a corner of

the sail swabbed away those dreadful, murderous stains; this done, he sank back.

Day broke; up rose the cruel sun; the girl stirred feebly and whispered his name. Then his arms were about her, the pannikin of water at her lips and, thus drinking, she glanced up at him in speechless gratitude.

Sitting up, she glanced fearfully towards the bow and thereafter sat utterly still and meek while Farrant set out their poor breakfast. They ate and drank, neither looking at the other and both keeping their heads averted from that empty place in the bow.

"I think," said Farrant at last, speaking with an effort, "we've more chance to pull through — now."

"Oh!" she whispered; and then: "Yes!"

"Anyhow, you won't suffer so much— while the water lasts."

The long day wore on and they were strangely silent; and with every hour Farrant's weakness grew upon him, for his soul was a shaken, trembling thing. And she watched him in an ever-deepening trouble.

"Eve!" said he faintly, breaking a long, haunted silence. "I've dreamed— a ship, a steamer— coming to us. Look— look! Over there."

"No, John," she answered. "It was only a dream; close your eyes and dream again."

From fevered sleeping he was roused by hands that shook him, a voice that, sobbing, called upon his name.

"John— oh, John, it's true! There is a ship at last— coming to us. God has answered our prayers."

"Prayers?" he whispered, coming feebly to his elbow. "Yes; but what— what is that— that white thing tucked under the thwart yonder— a paper?"

She crept forward, took the thing, looked at it and, uttering a broken, joyous cry, came scrambling back and was beside him on her knees, clasping him in the yearning passion of her arms.

"Oh, John, you didn't! Look; read it!"

Then, staring on this crumpled scrap of paper, Farrant saw these words roughly scrawled:

Two is better than one so here's one going out to give two a chance. So good night and good luck to you from Joe

P. S. Am using knife in case of sharks.

"Eve!" Farrant's arms clasped her with sudden new strength. "Oh, my Eve, I thought— ah, thank God!"

"And oh," she whispered, "God bless Joe!"

"Yes!" cried Farrant. "Yes; for by heaven he was a better man than I."

Verily there be times when man, soaring above his finite humanity, becomes very nearly divine.

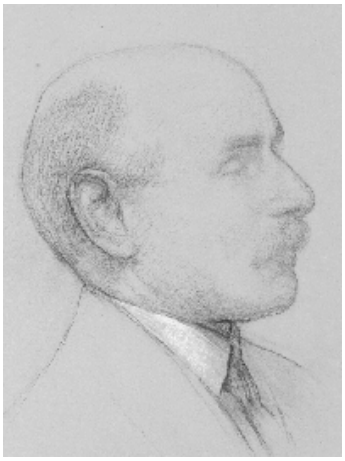
17: Taken By Surprise

Being The Personal Statement of Bedell Gruncher, M.A.

F Anstey

1856-1934

The Cornhill Magazine, Nov 1887



Thomas Anstey Guthrie

THERE ARE CERTAIN misconceptions which a man who is prominently before the public is morally bound to combat— more for the sake of others than his own— as soon as it becomes probable that the popular estimate of his character may be shaken, if not shattered, should he hold his peace. Convinced as I am of this, and having some ground to anticipate that the next few days may witness a damaging blow to my personal dignity and influence for good, I have thought it expedient to publish the true history of an episode which, if unexplained, is only too likely to prejudice me to a serious extent. Any circumstance that tends to undermine or lessen the world's reverence for its instructors is a deplorable calamity, to be averted at all hazards, even when this can only be effected by disclosures scarcely less painful to a delicate mind.

For some years I, Bedell Gruncher, have consecrated my poor talents to the guidance and education of public taste in questions of art and literature. To do this effectively I have laboured— at the cost of some personal inconvenience— to acquire a critical style of light and playful badinage. My lash has ever been wreathed in ribbons of rare texture and daintiest hues; I have thrown cold water in abundance over the nascent flames of young ambition— but such water was systematically tinctured with attar of roses. And in time the articles appearing in various periodicals above the signature of 'Vitriol' became, I may acknowledge without false modesty, so many literary events of the first magnitude. I attribute this to my early recognition of the true function of a critic. It is not for him to set up sign-posts, or even warning-boards, for those

who run and read. To attain true distinction he should erect a pillory upon his study table, and start the fun himself with a choice selection of the literary analogues of the superannuated eggs and futile kittens which served as projectiles in the past. The public may be trusted to keep it going, and also to retain a grateful recollection of the original promoter of the sport. My little weekly and monthly pillories became instantly popular, for all my kittens were well aimed, and my eggs broke and stuck in a highly entertaining fashion. We are so constituted that even the worst of us is capable of a kindly feeling towards the benefactor who makes others imperishably ridiculous in our eyes; and to do this was my *métier à moi*. At first my identity with the lively but terrible 'Vitriol' was kept a profound secret, but gradually, by some means which I do not at present remember, it leaked out, and I immediately became a social, as well as a literary, celebrity. Physically I have been endowed with a presence which, though not of unusual height and somewhat inclined to central expansion, produces, I find, an invariably imposing effect, especially with members of the more emotional and impressionable sex. Consequently I was not surprised even at the really extraordinary sensation I inspired upon my first introduction to a very charming young lady, Miss Iris Waverley, as soon as my *nom de guerre* was (I forget just now by whom) incidentally alluded to. However, as it turned out, she had another and a deeper reason for emotion: it seemed she had been engaged to a young poet whose verses, to her untaught and girlish judgment, seemed inspired by draughts of the true Helicon, and whose rhythmical raptures had stirred her maiden heart to its depths.

Well, that young poet's latest volume of verse came under my notice for review, and in my customary light-hearted fashion I held it up to general derision for a column or two, and then dismissed it, with an ineffaceable epigrammatic kick, to spin for ever (approximately) down the ringing grooves of criticism.

Miss Waverley, it happened, was inclined to correct her own views by the opinions of others, and was, moreover, exceptionally sensitive to any association of ridicule with the objects of her attachment— indeed, she once despatched a dog she fondly loved to the lethal chamber at Battersea, merely because all the hair had come off the poor animal's tail! My trenchant sarcasms had depoetised her lover in a similar fashion; their livid lightning had revealed the baldness, the glaring absurdity of the very stanzas which once had filled her eyes with delicious tears; he was dismissed, and soon disappeared altogether from the circles which I had (in perfect innocence) rendered impossible to him.

Notwithstanding this, Miss Waverley's first sentiments towards me were scarcely, oddly enough, of unmixed gratitude. I represented the rod, and a very

commendable feeling of propriety made her unwilling to kiss me on a first interview, though, as our intimacy advanced— well, there are subjects on which I claim the privilege of a manly reticence.

I hasten over, then, the intermediate stages of antipathy, fear, respect, interest, and adoration. In me she recognised an intellect naturally superior, too indifferent and unambitious to give life to its own imaginings— too honest, too devoted to humanity, to withhold merited condemnation from those of others. I was the radiant sun whose scorching beams melted the wax from the pinions of many a modern Icarus; or, to put the metaphor less ingeniously, the shining light in which, by an irresistible impulse of self-destruction, the poetical and artistic moths flew and incontinently frizzled.

One trait in my character which Iris valued above all others was the caution with which I habitually avoided all associations of a ridiculous nature; for it was my pride to preserve a demeanour of unsullied dignity under circumstances which would have been trying, if not fatal, to an ordinary person. So we became engaged; and if, pecuniarily speaking, the advantage of the union inclined to my side, I cannot consider that I was the party most benefited by the transaction.

It was soon after this happy event that Iris entreated from me, as a gift, a photograph of myself. I could not help being struck by this instance of feminine parsimony with regard to small disbursements, since, for the trifling sum of one shilling, it was perfectly open to her to procure an admirable presentment of me at almost any stationer's; for, in obedience to a widely expressed demand, I had already more than once undergone the ordeal by camera.

But no; she professed to desire a portrait more peculiarly her own— one that should mark the precise epoch of our mutual happiness— a caprice which reminded me of the Salvation Army recruit who was photographed, by desire, 'before and after conversion'; and I demurred a little, until Iris insisted with such captivating pertinacity that— although my personal expenses (always slightly in excess of my income) had been further swelled since my engagement by the innumerable *petits soins* expected by an absurd custom from every lover— I gave way at length.

It was her desire that my portrait should form a pendant to one of herself which had been recently taken by a fashionable photographer, and I promised to see that this wish should be gratified. It is possible that she expected me to resort to the same artist; but there were considerations which induced me to avoid this, if I could. To the extent of a guinea (or even thirty shillings) I could refuse her nothing; but every one knows what sums are demanded by a photographer who is at all in vogue. I might, to be sure, as a public character, have sat without being called upon for any consideration, beyond the right to

dispose of copies of my photograph; but I felt that Iris would be a little hurt if I took this course, and none of the West-end people whom I consulted in the matter quite saw their way to such an arrangement just then. There was a temporary lull, they assured me, in the demand for likenesses of our leading literary men, and I myself had been photographed within too recent a period to form any exception to the rule.

So, keeping my promise constantly in mind, I never entered a secluded neighbourhood without being on the look-out for some unpretending photographic studio which would combine artistic excellence with moderate charges.

And at last I discovered this photographic phœnix, whose nest, if I may so term it, was in a retired suburb which I do not care to particularise. Upon the street level was a handsome plate-glass window, in which, against a background of dark purple hangings and potted ferns, were displayed cartes, cabinets, and groups, in which not even my trained faculties could detect the least inferiority to the more costly productions of the West-end, while the list of prices that hung by the door was conceived in a spirit of exemplary modesty. After a brief period of hesitation I stepped inside, and, on stating my wish to be photographed at once, was invited by a very civil youth with a slight cast in his eye to walk upstairs, which I accordingly did.

I mounted flight after flight of stairs, till I eventually found myself at the top of the house, in an apartment pervaded by a strong odour of chemicals, and glazed along the roof and the whole of one side with panes of a bluish tint. It was empty at the moment of my entrance, but, after a few minutes, the photographer burst impetuously in— a tall young man, with long hair and pale eyes, whose appearance denoted a nervous and high-strung temperament. Perceiving him to be slightly overawed by a certain unconscious dignity in my bearing, which frequently does produce that effect upon strangers, I hastened to reassure him by discriminating eulogies upon the specimens of his art that I had been inspecting below, and I saw at once that he was readily susceptible to flattery.

'You will find me,' I told him frankly, 'a little more difficult to satisfy than your ordinary *clientèle*; but, on the other hand, I am peculiarly capable of appreciating really good work. Now I was struck at once by the delicacy of tone, the nice discrimination of values, the atmosphere, gradation, feeling, and surface of the examples displayed in your window.'

He bowed almost to the ground; but, having taken careful note of his prices, I felt secure in commending him, even to the verge of extravagance; and, besides, does not the artistic nature demand the stimulus of praise to enable it to put forth its full powers?

He inquired in what style I wished to be taken, whether full-length, half-length, or vignette. 'I will answer you as concisely as possible,' I said. 'I have been pressed, by one whose least preference is a law to me, to have a photograph of myself executed which shall form a counterpart or pendant, as it were, to her own. I have, therefore, taken the precaution to bring her portrait with me for your guidance. You will observe it is the work of a firm in my opinion greatly overrated— Messrs. Lenz, Kamerer, & Co.; and, while you will follow it in style and the disposition of the accessories, you will, I make no doubt, produce, if you take ordinary pains, a picture vastly superior in artistic merit.'

This, as will be perceived, was skilfully designed to put him on his mettle, and rouse a useful spirit of emulation. He took the portrait of Iris from my hands and carried it to the light, where he examined it gravely in silence.

'I presume,' he said at length, 'that I need hardly tell you I cannot pledge myself to produce a result as pleasing as this— under the circumstances?'

'That,' I replied, 'rests entirely with you. If you overcome your natural diffidence, and do yourself full justice, *I* see no reason why you should not obtain something even more satisfactory.'

My encouragement almost unmanned him. He turned abruptly away and blew his nose violently with a coloured silk handkerchief.

'Come, come,' I said, smiling kindly, 'you see I have every confidence in you— let us begin. I don't know, by the way,' I added, with a sudden afterthought, 'whether in your leisure moments you take any interest in contemporary literature?'

'I— I have done so in my time,' he admitted; 'not very lately.'

'Then,' I continued, watching his countenance with secret amusement for the spasm I find this announcement invariably produces upon persons of any education, 'it may possibly call up some associations in your mind if I tell you that I am perhaps better known by my self-conferred *sobriquet* of "Vitriol."'

Evidently I had to do with a man of some intelligence— I obtained an even more electrical effect than usual. '"*Vitriol!*"' he cried, '*not* surely Vitriol, the great critic?'

'The same,' I said carelessly. 'I thought I had better mention it.'

'You did well,' he rejoined, 'very well! Pardon my emotion— may I wring that hand?'

It is not my practice to shake hands with a photographer, but I was touched and gratified by his boyish enthusiasm, and he seemed a gentlemanly young fellow too, so I made an exception in his favour; and he did wring my hand— hard.

'So you are Vitriol?' he repeated in a kind of daze, 'and you have sought me out— *me*, of all people in the world— to have the honour of taking your photograph!'

'That is so,' I said, 'but pardon me if I warn you that you must not allow your head to be turned by what is, in truth, due to the merest accident.'

'But what an accident!' he cried; 'after what I have learnt I really could not think of making any charge for this privilege!'

That was a creditable and not unnatural impulse, and I did not check it. 'You shall take me as often as you please,' I said, 'and for nothing.'

'And may I,' he said, a little timidly— 'would you give me permission to exhibit the results?'

'If I followed my own inclinations,' I replied, 'I should answer "certainly not." But perhaps I have no right to deprive you of the advertisement, and still less to withhold my unworthy features from public comment. I may, for private reasons,' I added, thinking of Iris, 'find it advisable to make some show of displeasure, but you need not fear my taking any proceedings to restrain you.'

'We struggling photographers must be so careful,' he sighed. 'Suppose the case of your lamented demise— it would be a protection if I had some written authority under your hand to show your legal representatives.'

'*Actio personalis moritur cum personâ*,' I replied; 'if my executors brought an action, they would find themselves non-suited.' (I had studied for the Bar at one period of my life.)

'Quite so,' he said, 'but they might drag me into court, nevertheless. I should really prefer to be on the safe side.'

It did not seem unreasonable, particularly as I had not the remotest intention either of bringing an action or dying; so I wrote him a hasty memorandum to the effect that, in consideration of his photographing me free of charge (I took care to put *that* in), I undertook to hold him free from all molestation or hindrance whatever in respect of the sale and circulation of all copies resulting from such photographing as aforesaid.

'Will that do?' I said as I handed it to him.

His eyes gleamed as he took the document. 'It is just what I wanted,' he said gratefully; 'and now, if you will excuse me, I will go and bring in a few accessories, and then we will get to work.'

He withdrew in a state of positive exultation, leaving me to congratulate myself upon the happy chance which had led me to his door. One does not discover a true artist every day, capable of approaching his task in a proper spirit of reverence and enthusiasm; and I had hardly expected, after my previous failures, to be spared all personal outlay. My sole regret, indeed, was that I had not stipulated for a share in the profits arising from the sale— which

would be doubtless a large one; but meanness is not one of my vices, and I decided not to press this point.

Presently he returned with something which bulged inside his velvet jacket, and a heap of things which he threw down in a corner behind a screen.

'A few little properties,' he said; 'we may be able to introduce them by-and-by.'

Then he went to the door and, with a rapid action, turned the key and placed it in his pocket.

'You will hardly believe,' he explained, 'how nervous I am on occasions of importance like this; the bare possibility of interruption would render me quite incapable of doing myself justice.'

I had never met any photographer quite so sensitive as that before, and I began to be uneasy about his success; but I know what the artistic temperament is, and, as he said, this was not like an ordinary occasion.

'Before I proceed to business,' he said, in a voice that positively trembled, 'I must tell you what an exceptional claim you have to my undying gratitude. Amongst the many productions which you have visited with your salutary satire you may possibly recall a little volume of poems entitled "Pants of Passion"?'

I shook my head good-humouredly. 'My good friend,' I told him, 'if I burdened my memory with all the stuff I have to pronounce sentence upon, do you suppose my brain would be what it is?'

He looked crestfallen. 'No,' he said slowly, 'I ought to have known— you would not remember, of course. But *I* do. I brought out those Pants. Your mordant pen tore them to tatters. You convinced me that I had mistaken my career, and, thanks to your monitions, I ceased to practise as a Poet, and became the Photographer you now behold!'

'And I have known poets,' I said encouragingly, 'who have ended far less creditably. For even an indifferent photographer is in closer harmony with nature than a mediocre poet.'

'And I *was* mediocre, wasn't I?' he inquired humbly.

'So far as I recollect,' I replied (for I did begin to remember him now), 'to attribute mediocrity to you would have been beyond the audacity of the grossest sycophant.'

'Thank you,' he said; 'you little know how you encourage me in my present undertaking— for you will admit that I can *photograph*?'

'That,' I replied, 'is intelligible enough, photography being a pursuit demanding less mental ability in its votaries than that of metrical composition, however halting.'

'There is something very soothing about your conversation,' he remarked; 'it heals my self-love— which really was wounded by the things you wrote.'

'Pooh, pooh!' I said indulgently, 'we must all of us go through that in our time— at least all of *you* must go through it.'

'Yes,' he admitted sadly, 'but it ain't pleasant, is it?'

'Of that I have never been in a position to judge,' said I; 'but you must remember that your sufferings, though doubtless painful to yourself, are the cause, under capable treatment, of infinite pleasure and amusement to others. Try to look at the thing without egotism. Shall I seat myself on that chair I see over there?'

He was eyeing me in a curious manner. 'Allow me,' he said; 'I always pose my sitters myself.' With that he seized me by the neck and elsewhere without the slightest warning, and, carrying me to the further end of the studio, flung me carelessly, face downwards, over the cane-bottomed chair to which I had referred. He was a strong athletic young man, in spite of his long hair— or might that have been, as in Samson's case, a contributory cause? I was like an infant in his hands, and lay across the chair, in an exceedingly uncomfortable position, gasping for breath.

'Try to keep as limp as you can, please,' he said, 'the mouth wide open, as you have it now, the legs careless— in fact, trailing. Beautiful! don't move.'

And he went to the camera. I succeeded in partly twisting my head round. 'Are you *mad*?' I cried indignantly; 'do you really suppose I shall consent to go down to posterity in such a position as this?'

I heard a click, and, to my unspeakable horror, saw that he was deliberately covering me from behind the camera with a revolver— *that* was what I had seen bulging inside his pocket.

'I should be sorry to slay any sitter in cold blood,' he said, 'but I must tell you solemnly, that unless you instantly resume your original pose— which was charming— you are a dead man!'

Not till then did I realise the awful truth— I was locked up alone, at the top of a house, in a quiet neighbourhood, with a mad photographer! Summoning to my aid all my presence of mind, I resumed the original pose for the space of forty-five hours— they were seconds really, but they *seemed* hours; it was not needful for him to exhort me to be limp again— I was limper than the dampest towel!

'Thank you very much,' he said gravely as he covered the lens; 'I think that will come out very well indeed. You may move now.'

I rose, puffing, but perfectly collected. 'Ha-ha,' I laughed in a sickly manner (for I *felt* sick), 'I— I perceive, sir, that you are a humorist.'

'Since I have abandoned poetry,' he said as he carefully removed the negative to a dark place, 'I have developed a considerable sense of quiet humour. You will find a large Gainsborough hat in that corner— might I trouble you to put it on for the next sitting?'

'Never!' I cried, thoroughly revolted. 'Surely, with your rare artistic perception, you must be aware that such a headdress as that (which is no longer worn even by females) is out of all keeping with my physiognomy. I will *not* sit for my photograph in such a preposterous thing!'

'I shall count ten very slowly,' he replied pensively, 'and if by the time I have finished you are not seated on the back of that chair, your feet crossed so as to overlap, your right thumb in the corner of your mouth, a pleasant smile on your countenance, *and* the Gainsborough hat on your head, you will need no more hats on this sorrowful earth. One— two— — '

I was perched on that chair in the prescribed attitude long before he had got to seven! How can I describe what it cost me to smile, as I sat there under the dry blue light, the perspiration rolling in beads down my cheeks, exposed to the gleaming muzzle of the revolver, and the steady Gorgon glare of that infernal camera?

'That will be extremely popular,' he said, lowering the weapon as he concluded. 'Your smile, perhaps, was a *little* too broad, but the pose was very fresh and unstudied.'

I have always read of the controlling power of the human eye upon wild beasts and dangerous maniacs, and I fixed mine firmly upon him now as I said sternly, 'Let me out at once— I wish to go.'

Perhaps I did not fix them quite long enough; perhaps the power of the human eye has been exaggerated: I only know that for all the effect mine had on him they might have been oysters.

'Not yet,' he said persuasively, 'not when we're getting on so nicely. I may never be able to take you under such favourable conditions again.'

That, I thought, I could undertake to answer for; but who, alas! could say whether I should ever leave that studio alive? For all I knew, he might spend the whole day in photographing me, and then, with a madman's caprice, shoot me as soon as it became too dark to go on any longer! The proper course to take, I knew, was to humour him, to keep him in a good temper, fool him to the top of his bent— it was my only chance.

'Well,' I said, 'perhaps you're right. I— I'm in no great hurry. Were you thinking of taking me in some different style? I am quite at your disposition.'

He brought out a small but stout property-mast, and arranged it against a canvas background of coast scenery. 'I generally use it for children in sailor

costume,' he said, 'but I *think* it will bear your weight long enough for the purpose.'

I wiped my brow. 'You are not going to ask me to climb that thing?' I faltered.

'Well,' he suggested, 'if you will just arrange yourself upon the cross-trees in a negligent attitude, upside down, with your tongue protruded as if for medical inspection, I shall be perfectly satisfied.'

I tried argument. 'I should have no objection in the world,' I said; 'it's an excellent idea— only, *do* sailors ever climb masts in that way? Wouldn't it be better to have the thing correct while we're about it?'

'I was not aware that you were a sailor,' he said; '*are* you?'

I was afraid to say I was, because I apprehended that, if I did, it might occur to him to put me through some still more frightful performance.

'Come,' he said, 'you won't compel me to shed blood so early in the afternoon, will you? Up with you.'

I got up, but, as I hung there, I tried to obtain a modification of some of the details. 'I don't think,' I said artfully, 'that I'll put out my tongue— it's rather overdone, eh? *Everybody* is taken with his tongue out nowadays.'

'It is true,' he said, 'but I am not well enough known in the profession yet to depart entirely from the conventional. Your tongue out as far as it will go, please.'

'I shall have a rush of blood to the head, I know I shall,' I protested.

'Look here,' he said; 'am I taking this photograph, or are you?'

There was no possible doubt, unfortunately, as to who was taking the photograph. I made one last remonstrance. 'I put it to you as a sensible man,' I began; but it is a waste of time to put anything to a raving lunatic as a sensible man. It is enough to say that he carried his point.

'I wish you could see the negative!' he said as he came back from his laboratory. 'You were a little red in the face, but it will come out black, so it's all right. That carte will be quite a novelty, I flatter myself.'

I groaned. However, this was the end; I would get away now at all hazards, and tell the police that there was a dangerous maniac at large. I got down from the mast with affected briskness. 'Well,' I said, 'I mustn't take advantage of your good nature any longer. I'm exceedingly obliged to you for the— the pains you have taken. You will send *all* the photographs to this address, please?'

'Don't go yet,' he said. 'Are you an equestrian, by the way?'

If I could only engage him in conversation I felt comparatively secure.

'Oh, I put in an appearance in the Row sometimes, in the season,' I replied; 'and, while I think of it,' I added, with what I thought at the time was an

inspiration, 'if you will come with me now, I'll show you my horse— you might take me on horseback, eh?' I did not possess any such animal, but I wanted to have that door unlocked.

'Take you on horseback?' he repeated. 'That's a good idea— I had rather thought of that myself.'

'Then come along and bring your instrument,' I said, 'and you can take me at the stables; they're close by.'

'No need for that,' he replied cheerfully. 'I'll find you a mount here.'

And the wretched lunatic went behind the screen and wheeled out a small wooden quadruped covered with large round spots!

'She's a strawberry roan,' he said; 'observe the strawberries. So, my beauty, quiet, then! Now settle yourself easily in the saddle, as if you were in the Row, with your face to the tail.'

'Listen to me for one moment,' I entreated tremulously. 'I assure you that I am not in the habit of appearing in Rotten Row on a spotted wooden horse, nor does any one, I assure you— *any* one mount a horse of any description with his face towards the crupper! If you take me like that, you will betray your ignorance— you will be laughed at!'

When people tell you it is possible to hoodwink the insane by any specious show of argument, don't believe them; my own experience is that demented persons can be quite perversely logical when it suits their purpose.

'Pardon me,' he said, '*you* will be laughed at possibly— not I. I cannot be held responsible for the caprices of my clients. Mount, please; she'll carry you perfectly.'

'I will,' I said, 'if you'll give me the revolver to hold. I— I should like to be done with a revolver.'

'I shall be delighted to do you with a revolver,' he said grimly, 'but not yet; and if I lent you the weapon now, I could not answer for your being able to hold the horse as well— she has never been broken in to firearms. *I'll* hold the revolver. One— two— three.'

I mounted; why had I not disregarded the expense and gone to Lenz and Kamerer? Lenz does not pose his customers by the aid of a revolver. Kamerer, I was sure, would not put his patrons through these degrading tomfooleries.

He took more trouble over this than any of the others; I was photographed from the back, in front, and in profile; and if I escaped being made to appear abjectly ridiculous, it can only be owing to the tragic earnestness which the consciousness of my awful situation lent to my expression.

As he took the last I rolled off the horse, completely prostrated. 'I think,' I gasped faintly, 'I would rather be shot at once— *without* waiting to be taken in any other positions. I really am not equal to any more of this!' (He was quite

capable, I felt, of photographing me in a perambulator, if it once occurred to him!)

'Compose yourself,' he said soothingly, 'I have obtained all I wanted. I shall not detain you much longer. Your life, I may remark, was never in any imminent danger, as this revolver is unloaded. I have now only to thank you for the readiness with which you have afforded me your co-operation, and to assure you that early copies of each of the photographs shall be forwarded for Miss Waverley's inspection.'

'Miss Waverley!' I exclaimed; 'stay, how do *you* know that name?'

'If I mistake not, it was her photograph that you kindly brought for my guidance. I ought to have mentioned, perhaps, that I once had the honour of being engaged to her— until you (no doubt from the highest motives) invested my little gift of song with a flavour of unromantic ridicule. That ridicule I am now enabled to repay, with interest calculated up to the present date.'

'So you are Iris's poet!' I burst out, for, somehow, I had not completely identified him till that moment. 'You scoundrel! do you think I shall allow you to circulate those atrocious caricatures with impunity? No, by heavens! my solicitor shall— — '

'I rely upon the document you were kind enough to furnish,' he said quietly. 'I fear that any legal proceedings you may resort to will hardly avert the publicity you seem to fear. Allow me to unfasten the door. Good-bye; mind the step on the first landing. Might I beg you to recommend me amongst your friends?'

I went out without another word; he was mad, of course, or he would not have devised so outrageous a revenge for a fancied injury, but he was cunning enough to be my match. I knew too well that if I took any legal measures, he would contrive to shift the whole burden of lunacy upon *me*. I dared not court an inquiry for many reasons, and so I was compelled to pass over this unparalleled outrage in silence.

Iris made frequent inquiries after the promised photograph, and I had to parry them as well as I could— which was a mistake in judgment on my part, for one afternoon while I was actually sitting with her, a packet arrived addressed to Miss Waverley.

I did not suspect what it might contain until it was too late. She recognised that photographs were inside the wrappings, which she tore open with a cry of rapture— and then!

She had a short fainting fit when she saw the Gainsborough hat, and as soon as she revived, the extraordinary appearance I presented upside down on the mast sent her into violent hysterics. By the time she was in a condition to look at the equestrian portraits she had grown cold and hard as marble. 'Go,'

she said, indicating the door, 'I see I have been wasting my affection upon a vulgar and heartless buffoon!'

I went— for she would listen to no explanations; and indeed I doubt whether, even were she to come upon this statement, it would serve to restore my tarnished ideal in her estimation. But, though I have lost her, I am naturally anxious (as I said when I began) that the public should not be misled into drawing harsh conclusions from what, if left unexplained, may doubtless have a singular appearance.

It is true that, up to the present, I have not been able to learn that any of those fatal portraits have absolutely been exposed for sale, though I direct my trembling steps almost every day to Regent Street, and search the windows of the Stereoscopic Company with furtive and foreboding eyes, dreading to be confronted with presentments of myself— Bedell Gruncher, 'Vitriol,' the great critic!— lying across a chair in a state of collapse, sucking my thumb in a Gainsborough hat, or bestriding a ridiculous wooden horse with my face towards its tail!

But they cannot be long in coming out now; and my one hope is that these lines may appear in print in time to forestall the prejudice and scandal which are otherwise inevitable. At all events, now that the world is in possession of the real facts, I am entitled to hope that the treatment to which I have been subjected will excite the indignation and sympathy it deserves.

———————————

18: Our Strange Traveller

Percy James Brebner

1864-1922

The Weekly Tale-Teller, 6 May 1911

I WAS a medical student at the time, and, according to my father, had been an unconscionable time getting through my exams.

I explained to him that I had had the misfortune to deal with examiners who seemed to have a hobby for pitching on things which ordinary, decent fellows never worried about; and although I do not fancy I convinced him, it was proved that I was not fooling my time by the fact that after one of the exams— which I passed, by the way— I broke down, and our family doctor suggested a rest and complete change of environment.

That is how it came about that Frank Lascelles and I went on a walking tour in the North of France.

Lascelles you have probably heard about, since he is now a rather famous preacher at a fashionable West End church; and although you are not likely to have heard of me, I can assure you that Dr. Mark Glaisher has a very considerable practice in the neighbourhood of Wimbledon.

I just mention this in case you should underestimate us, and, as some others have done, accuse us of sticking to an imaginary story which, by a strange coincidence, turned out to be true.

We had been tramping for a week, having the time of our lives, and one evening were making for a village called Pedmont, where we intended to stay the night.

We were going along a road lying as straight as a road could lie across a flat bit of country, and were deep in some abstruse argument, when Frank suddenly exclaimed:

"Hallo! Where did that chap come from, I wonder?"

The man was about a hundred yards in front of us, going at the same pace as we were, and it was curious that we had not noticed him before.

He must have joined the road from some footpath across the fields; but even then we ought to have seen him, for there wasn't a bit of hedge or wood to hide him. He was a small man, round and stout, and carried a bag. He was neatly dressed, and was evidently not of the peasant class.

We dropped our argument, and, without agreeing together to do so, quickened our pace, partly out of curiosity to see what the man was like, partly

with that natural desire which comes to so many people to overtake a person walking in front.

In a few moments we had doubled our rate of progress; but although the man in front never looked back, and seemed to be altogether unconscious of our presence, and although he did not apparently quicken his pace, we did not gain a yard upon him.

"Confound the fellow!" I said presently. "Let him get well ahead of us, Frank."

This, however, he seemed to have no intention of doing, for the moment we walked slowly he did so too.

The road dipped after a mile or two and ran between gorse hedges.

Now and again a bend in it would hide the fat little man from us, but directly there was a hundred yards of straight road we saw him again.

Coming to a bridge over a turbulent little brook we stopped, not to rest, but to let the man get away from us.

I am positive he never looked back, but the moment we stopped he sat down on a heap of stones by the roadside with his back towards us.

"He thinks it funny to play the fool in this way," said Frank quite angrily.

"After all, I suppose he has as much right to the road as we have," I remarked; "perhaps more, since he is in his own country."

"He doesn't look to me like a Frenchman," Frank answered. "And, anyway, he has no right to annoy other people."

I laughed a little at his annoyance. The stranger's behaviour had more effect on him than it had on me, and I have wondered since— But this is not the place to speak of my speculations.

Their worth will be better judged when the whole facts are known.

The instant we started again the man jumped up and went on. He appeared to hold himself in readiness to start at a moment's notice, as if his life depended on it, for he had not put his bag down, but held it in his hand all the time.

Pedmont was a fair-sized village and possessed a good inn. Travellers were frequent there on account of the ruins of a famous mediæval castle in the vicinity. We could see the broken walls and towers rising beyond the village street.

Our tormentor walked past the inn, and I was relieved, because I felt certain Frank would want to have a row with him.

We entered and washed the dust out of our throats with a bottle of wine.

In due course an excellent supper was set before us, and the old Boniface came and drank a glass with us, oozing the while good humour and local lore.

We were the only guests that night.

"Did you chance to overtake a small gentleman upon the road?" he asked when I mentioned the way we had come.

"Overtake him? No," Frank answered. "We did our level best to do so, but he would not let us. He went straight on through the village."

"Just now? Just before you came in, do you mean?"

"Yes."

"I did not see him, and I was looking out of the window."

"He was a small, round man, and carried a bag," I said.

"Yes, monsieur, that is right. It is very curious that he should go past. Yes, that was Herr Eckmann right enough. I cannot understand his going straight through the village."

Frank told him our experiences with the little German, and the landlord was more puzzled than ever. He declared that Herr Eckmann was such a sociable individual.

"Who is he?" I asked.

"He travels for a firm in Paris, and calls upon farmers with regard to seeds and roots. I think he does very good business, and every other month he is in this neighbourhood. It is always the same date he comes— regular, like clockwork— so I am always prepared for him. I know his taste and always have something special. This is his day, and for the last five years he has always remained the night here. We are very good friends. We were both through the Franco-Prussian war— on different sides, of course— but we have forgotten that. I do not like the Germans, no; but Herr Eckmann is the exception. He has lived in France a long time; that makes all the difference."

During the evening the landlord went to the door several times to look for his friend, and he inquired about him of every man who came in. They all knew the German well, but no one had seen him that day. An old road-mender said he had been working just at the end of the village all day and would certainly have seen him pass.

It seemed to me there was a general disposition to doubt our veracity, but Frank showed no annoyance at it, nor did I.

We spent an hour or two in the castle ruins next morning. We had arranged to make a short tramp of it that day, and decided to spend the night at St. Chade, where someone had told us there was a decent inn.

Our way lay through some pretty country, well wooded, and with distant peeps of quiet landscape which did not need the soul of an artist to appreciate. We had plenty of time and did not hurry. St. Chade lay at the end of a long valley, and we saw it from high ground when we must have been at least three miles away.

"Let us sit down and have a pipe," said Frank.

He had been rather silent all day. One would have commented on it in an ordinary fellow, but not in Frank. He was given to moods; his nature was artistic, and the artistic temperament is a thing apart. As a rule, I fancy it is a bit of a nuisance to its possessor, and I am very sure it is often a bore to the ordinary people who are brought in contact with it.

I understood Frank, however, and felt no surprise at his long silences.

"A smoke by all means," I said, and I climbed up beside him on to a bank of bracken at the edge of a wood raised a little above the roadway.

I didn't want to talk particularly— I am not quite sure that I didn't doze for a few moments; at any rate, we must have been there for the best part of an hour, and I was engaged in cleaning my pipe-stem with a stiff piece of grass, when Frank suddenly touched my arm.

"Look!"

"What is it?" I said, following the direction of his pointing finger.

At first I saw nothing to call for special notice— except for a bird or two, we appeared to have the world to ourselves— and then I uttered a low exclamation.'

About a hundred yards farther down the road, seated on the bank, just as we were, was Herr Eckmann.

"He wasn't there five minutes ago," Frank whispered.

"He must have been," I said.

"I am sure," was the answer. "I was looking at that queer-shaped tree five minutes since; he must be sitting on the roots of it. He wasn't there just now. I can swear to that."

"He was in the wood, I expect," said I, but I was conscious of feeling rather uncomfortable. Perhaps the fellow had accomplices, and—

"I don't like this, Mark," said Frank, as though a similar idea had passed through his mind; and then he got up, and shouted: "Eckmann! Hi! Herr Eckmann!"

The man must have heard him. Had he been half a mile away I think the shout would have reached him, but he took no notice.

He had his bag in his hand, his back was towards us, and he did not move until we slipped from the bank into the road, then he did the same, and walked on.

We made no attempt to overtake him, as Frank declared it was no use, nor did we talk much as we followed him. Perhaps it was his presence which made us think St. Chade rather a dreary place. This time he did not go farther.

He entered the inn— the Hôtel du Nord it was called— and I turned to Frank.

"We've got him this time," I said.

Frank did not answer, but quickened his pace and entered the inn before me.

Two or three men were seated at a table in the front room, but the German was not there. He had evidently gone straight through to the back part of the premises, or perhaps he had gone upstairs. I wondered if he had tramped on here last night.

One of the men, evidently the landlord, rose from the table as we entered. He looked as if he had consumed too much of his own liquor, and when we asked for a room his only answer was to call his wife.

"Have we a room, Jeanne?"

A woman came to a door at the end of the passage and looked at us.

"Of course," she said. "This way, messieurs."

"Don't say anything about Eckmann," Frank whispered to me as we followed her.

It was a pleasant room she showed us, and the meal which was presently served in an apartment at the back of the house was good.

Yet we were both silent and rather depressed, and I think the landlord must have continued to drink most of the evening, for he and his wife did nothing but quarrel.

Herr Eckmann did not put in an appearance.

"If this kind of thing goes on to-morrow, Mark, I shall get back home," Frank said as we went upstairs to bed.

"Oh, nonsense! Because a silly old German plays the fool you— "

"I mean it."

"But why, man? You must have some reason, something you are keeping to yourself."

"Yes, but— "

"Then out with it."

"I am not sure you would understand," he answered. "We'll talk about it to-morrow."

The two beds were side by side. At the end of the room, opposite the window, there was a small table and a deep and solid armchair standing on a square rug.

There was a key in the door, which I turned, and which Frank took out of the lock before he got into bed. Our window looked out at the back of the house, and just below it was the roof of an outhouse. There was a misty moon, and everything was as quiet as the grave.

St. Chade went to sleep early, and I never remember to have noticed the world so silent before.

I didn't mention it to Frank because he was a little depressed already, but before my head had been on the pillow ten minutes I began to long for day.

I hadn't the least desire to sleep; indeed, I almost suggested that we should get up and start off by moonlight. It would be more pleasant than this stuffy room. As a matter of fact, there was some exaggeration in this, for the room wasn't a bit stuffy; indeed, my bed being nearest to the window, I presently found the atmosphere rather fresh and cold, and drew the clothes more closely round my shoulders. The action possibly put me into a more comfortable position, and drowsiness came over me.

I suppose I had dropped off, for I suddenly started up into a sitting position, not knowing what had roused me.

"Mark!"

Frank was not sitting up. He was lying perfectly still, his back towards me. I thought at first he had called me in his sleep.

"What is it?" I said.

"Look there."

He did not say where, but since his face was towards the end of the room away from the window I looked across his bed in that direction.

The blind was up, a dim moonlight was in the room, and in the armchair I saw a man.

The chair was turned in such a manner that I could not see his face, but there was no mistaking his figure. He was leaning back, one hand resting on the arm, while the other grasped the handle of his bag.

It was Herr Eckmann.

"What are you doing there?"

I hardly recognised my own voice as I asked the question, not very loudly, but quite loud enough for him to hear.

It made no impression on Eckmann, but Frank was out of bed in a moment, and had struck a match and lighted the candle. I did not move until the flame had grown steady. I hoped the man would turn, and that I should see his face. He did not stir, and I slipped out of bed.

When I looked at the chair again it was empty.

"A phantom!" I muttered.

I hardly know whether I was relieved or not as this fact was suddenly forced upon me.

In an ordinary way I suppose I should have ridiculed the idea of such a thing, and should have sought for some simple explanation.

"Have you only just thought of that?" said Frank, in a low tone. "It has come for some purpose, Mark."

I did not answer. I think I wanted to argue the point, and certainly until now I had not supposed we were dealing with anything supernatural.

Evidently Frank had suspected the truth. He crossed the room quickly to the armchair, and I followed him.

"Move quietly," he whispered.

The chair was old-fashioned and heavy, and I watched Frank as he felt the stuffed seat and back.

His movements seemed to fascinate me; he gave the impression of knowing exactly what he was doing, what he was looking for and expected to discover. I made no attempt to help or interrupt him; I only moved the candle which he had placed on the table into a different position to give him a better light.

"Help me to move it," he said-presently. "Don't push— lift it. Carefully. We mustn't be heard on any account."

This done, he turned back the square rug and, taking the candle, examined the polished boards.

"Give me a knife," he whispered.

I got one from my coat hanging over a chair by the bed. Frank slipped the blade into a crack in the boards. That it differed from any of the other cracks might easily have passed unnoticed even after close scrutiny, but with some difficulty Frank prised open a portion of the flooring, some two feet square, which moved on a hinge.

The hiding-place revealed had not been made recently; the house was an old one, and in past times, no doubt, valuables had been concealed here. There was nothing of value in the hole now, only some clothes thrown in anyhow, a hat, a pair of boots, and a small bag. We both recognised them at once.

They belonged to Herr Eckmann.

Frank looked up at me, but for a moment neither of us spoke. I could not tell whether he was afraid, but I know I was.

The terror of the mysterious and unknown had gripped me.

"Let us dress," he whispered.

"Yes, and go— that way," and I pointed to the window.

I am certain I never got into my clothes so quickly before, and I do not believe either of us made a sound. The silence was intense. Not a breath of air stirred in the night, not a sound was in the house.

I was putting on my coat when the silence was suddenly broken.

Stealthily the handle of the door was turned.

It was a moment I shall remember all my life. I had a horrible fear that I had not locked the door, or that in taking the key out Frank had unfastened it

again. Thank heaven, the turning handle did not open it or I should not be alive to set down this awful experience.

Again the handle was turned, not quite so gently, and there was a low exclamation of surprise.

I crossed the room quickly to listen.

"It's locked. I forgot to take away the key."

It was a woman who spoke, and the next moment there was an oath in a man's voice, followed by a violent attack upon the door.

"It won't hold many seconds," said Frank. "Run the chair against it and out with the light."

Pandemonium seemed to have broken loose suddenly, yet I was less afraid now than I had been a few moments ago.

This danger was something tangible, something I could understand; there was nothing mysterious to cope with.

I ran the chair across the room as Frank flung open the window, and as the man hurled his weight against the door I heard the woman run along the passage.

"Come, Mark," Frank called out, as he dropped on to the roof below.

As I scrambled through the window the door gave way. I think the man fell over the chair, fortunately for me. I dropped on to the outhouse, and not a moment too soon, for a bullet, fired from below, struck the window-frame even as I let go the sill.

"Quickly!" Frank shouted, and I slid from the roof to the ground, again only just in time, for the man fired from the window, chipping the tiles just behind me.

Then we ran.

We were without weapons to defend ourselves, and I do not think either of us thought we were running away from one man and his wife. The night seemed to be full of evil, the whole neighbourhood peopled with criminals who would strive to hunt us down.

As a matter of fact, I suppose our nerves were strained and under great tension. We were acting without thought, without consideration.

I was the first to stop.

"You weren't hit, were you?" asked Frank.

He did not seem to realise that I could hardly have ran the best part of two miles if I had been.

"No," I answered.

"Your escape was a miracle," he said. "They must have heard me open the window, for the moment I reached the ground the woman rushed out of the house. I stood still, so that she might not notice me; but she saw you at the

window, probably thought you were the first to escape, and almost before I could move she had levelled a revolver at you. I knocked up her arm and then struck her with all my might."

"What are we to do now!" I asked. "I suppose we ought to go back and wake up the village, and— "

"No, no, that is not the best way," he answered. "They might not believe us. We'll go back to Pedmont, to the landlord there; he and Eckmann were friends."

I fell in with his suggestion. I really think it was the best thing we could do, but I had an unpleasant feeling that we were not being as courageous as we might be.

The landlord at Pedmont listened eagerly to our story, but I do not think he quite believed us.

As soon as possible we were on our way back to St. Chade, accompanied by two gendarmes, but we were very far from the end of our adventure.

We found the Hôtel du Nord closed. This impressed the gendarmes until the villagers explained that there was nothing curious in this. The landlord, whose name was Lemaistre, had sold the hotel some little while ago, with much of the furniture it contained. The new proprietor would not arrive until to-morrow, but everyone was aware that Lemaistre and his wife had arranged to leave to-day. There was nothing curious in the hotel being closed.

No one had heard any shots last night, but this might be accounted for by the fact that the nearest cottage was some little distance from the inn.

The keys, as arranged, had been left with the smith in the village, and we proceeded to examine the room we had occupied last night. The beds were made, the armchair was upon the square rug beside the table, everything was in perfect order. The hiding-place was there, but the gendarmes saw nothing remarkable about it, and it was empty now; clothes, hat, boots, and bag had gone.

It was rather an awkward position for us, for it was soon evident that our story was looked upon as a fabrication. Moreover, no one in St. Chade knew Herr Eckmann, and the neighbours were positive that he visited no farmers in that district.

Later, upon inquiry being made in Paris of the firm for which Eckmann travelled, nothing was known of his disappearance. Quite recently the firm had received orders through him. He was not often in Paris, and they imagined he was travelling the country as usual.

I need not recount all the annoyances we endured, all the formalities we had to go through, before we were allowed to return to England.

There was a general opinion that if Herr Eckmann were dead we were responsible for his death, and I believe the English Government had to undertake to produce us if subsequent discovery necessitated our trial for murder.

At home, as I have already intimated, our story was not credited. Of course we were not looked upon as criminals, but we were considered a pair of foolish young men who had allowed their imagination to run away with them and would not confess to it.

It was some months before the whole truth was known, and commend me to the French police for not letting go of a mystery.

The Paris firm heard nothing more from their traveller, so it became fairly certain that Eckmann was dead.

The first clue came from a farmer in St. Chade. He had been away from home for some time, was away when we were in the village. Herr Eckmann had called upon him a few days before his departure. He had not given him an order, but the German had mentioned that he was going to stay the night at the Hôtel du Nord.

Neither Lemaistre nor his wife was to be found, but eventually at Rouen a man was arrested for half murdering his wife, and in revenge she betrayed him.

He was Lemaistre, and she had gone in fear for her life for years, she said. She was afraid to disobey him. Her husband had killed Eckmann, and she had been obliged to help him to conceal the crime. He had intended to murder us, she declared. As they were leaving on the following day he said they might as well take whatever valuables we had about us, for as no one had discovered anything about the German it was not likely two cursed Englishmen would be missed.

I have no doubt the woman was just as guilty as the man, but while Lemaistre paid the penalty his wife received the benefit of the doubt and got off. I have my doubts, too, whether the main idea was to rob us. I agree with Frank in believing that they were both suddenly afraid we might discover that hiding-place under the rug.

I was inclined to speculate earlier in this narrative, but checked myself. I may do so now and leave others, who perhaps have experience to help them, to form an opinion.

I have wondered whether I should have seen the figure at all had I been alone. It may have been remarked that on each occasion it was Frank Lascelles who saw it first, that I saw nothing until my attention was called to it, and I am inclined to think that his more complex nature influenced me— that alone I should have been blind.

And there is one other point. That horrible woman explained that her husband had smashed the face of his victim so that he might not be identified. Had this anything to do with the fact that we were never once able to get a glimpse of the face of the strange traveller?

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19: Too Plausible

Joseph W. Barry

fl 1927-1933

Detective Fiction Weekly, 7 July 1928

I can discover nothing about this pulp author

1: The Holdup

"PULL over there!" The familiar command of the traffic policeman rang out in the stillness.

Without turning his head the driver of the roadster jammed on the brakes and turned into the curb, stopping.

He looked, expecting the usual reprimand, but was surprised to see a sedan stop alongside.

Two men leaped from the runningboard. One approached the left side of the roadster. The other dashed to the right side.

A sharp command and the driver moved from back of the steering wheel, making room for the man at the left. The other man squeezed in. The driver was pinned between them.

"If you don't know what I'm talking about, who does?"

The squeaking of the brakes as the cars came to a halt attracted the attention of the mechanics in the service station across the road.

They looked at each other.

"What do you make of that?" one of them asked as the roadster shot down Michigan Boulevard, followed by the sedan.

"Search me," shrugged the other, his eyes following the rapidly disappearing tail lights. "Looks like they were copping that roadster."

"Or racing each other home from a road house," suggested his companion indifferently.

"Guess you're right, at that," agreed the other. "Seems too tame for a holdup." And the two men returned to their work.

The roar of the motors was now barely audible.

Scott, the assistant chief of the Federal Protective Association, handed the telegram to Jones.

"Read this," he said.

The chief of the F. P. A. glanced at the telegram and dropped it on his desk.

"Have you had any word on this from Regan?" he asked.

"No," replied Scott.

"Well, I don't fancy running out there to Chicago unless it's absolutely necessary. Let me read this again."

"*Teller found bound and gagged in bank this morning. States he was compelled to open vault for robbers. Loss over two hundred thousand. Can you take personal charge of case? Advise. Signed: Hayward, Empire Bank, Chi cago?*"

"Seems peculiar that the teller was compelled to open the vaults," commented Scott.

"Yes," agreed Jones; " must have happened this morning, after the time clocks on the vaults had run off, and before any one else of the staff had showed up. By the way, Scott, did this telegram come through in code or as it is here?"

"Code," replied Scott, " A. B. A."

"I guess the first thing we'd better do is call up Regan to see what he knows about this. Have Miss O'Neil put through a call for him. After that we'll decide whether to make the trip to see Hayward, or have Regan handle the.

"Right," said Scott, as he left the office.

Jones walked over to the window. The rain and hail beating down on the sidewalks made thoughts of the southern vacation he had planned seem more interesting.

He had been working hard lately, he reflected, and had been looking forward to this rest. Away from all things wintry, with a summer sky overhead, to plunge into warm waters and forget that criminals and crime and prisons and pens ever existed.

His thoughts came to an abrupt halt when Scott entered.

"Just talking to Regan," said the assistant chief. "The only information he's had on this Empire Bank job is substantially the same as we've had."

"Hum— not so good," said Jones. " I was hoping he might have had some more news, however—" He broke off with a concise order.

"Scott," he said, "reserve a lower berth on the Twentieth Century leaving to-night."

"Going alone?" asked Scott.

"Yes, you'd better stay here in case anything breaks."

"Too bad," said Scott sympathetically, "that this had to come just now and spoil your vacation!"

"Yes," nodded Jones, "but I guess we can pull through all right without the vacation."

Scott moved to the door.

"I'll put that reservation through right away."

Jones nodded absently. His mind was already ferreting another criminal, another crime, another case for the F. P. A. Would they never stop? If only the criminal would realize that the long arm of the law would eventually overtake him, that he can't win. One slip means capture, and still the criminal keeps playing the game against the inevitable, Jones sighed.

"Well, Regan," said Jones, "I haven't been out this way in over a year."

"It's all of that, I guess."

"Of course," Jones smiled, "that's because we have an able man at the head of our Chicago office."

"Thanks," replied Regan, "but the fact of the matter is things have been quiet here, a lot of small stuff, but nothing big— that is, until this Empire Bank job broke."

"Yes, of course. Have you had any new developments on it?"

"No, nothing since the first report."

" Who's handling it, in the police department?"

"Inspector Conroy."

"Conroy— Conroy," reflected Jones. "I don't believe I know him. What's his opinion?"

"That there was a leak somewhere. He thinks somebody tipped off the gang who staged the job that there was an unusual amount of cash in large bills in the vault that night.

"Evidently they had been watching the movements of the teller. When they wanted him they knew just about where they could pick him up."

"How do you mean?" asked Jones.

"Well, you see, the teller, Grady, was at a dance at a country club that night. Along after midnight he and his young lady started home. Evidently, they stopped off at a night club for something to eat, because it was near three o'clock when Grady started for his own home, after leaving the girl.

"According to Grady's statement he was going down Michigan Boulevard when he was ordered to stop. He thought first it was a traffic cop. Instead, a couple of gents hopped out of a sedan and covered him.

"They climbed in with him, took the wheel and continued down the Boulevard. About two blocks away from the bank they stopped, walked to the bank and made Grady open the door."

"Where was the watchman?" Jones asked.

"They haven't any. The bank is situated in the corner of an apartment house and the superintendent of the building is supposed to keep his eye on it. This particular night, his eye didn't seem to have been working. He never showed up. But Grady told the gang that the vaults couldn't be opened until eight o'clock."

"What time was it then?"

"About three thirty."

"All right," said Jones, "go ahead."

"Well, the gang made themselves comfortable and decided to wait. A few minutes before eight o'clock they ordered Grady to snap into it and open up. He did.

"Then after picking up all they wanted, dividing it up in packages, they trussed Grady up, hands and feet, shoved a gag into his mouth and beat

"No trace of the gang at all?" Jones asked.

"None whatever."

"The roadster as well as the sedan, you say, were parked a couple of blocks away from the bank?"

"That's right."

"Didn't the policeman on the beat notice them?"

"He did," replied Regan, "but didn't get the license plate numbers."

Jones shrugged his shoulders. "I suppose they were phony, anyhow."

"Probably."

"Where's Grady now?" asked Jones.

"Over at the Empire Bank."

"In the cage?"

"Yes, he's on his regular job. I didn't see any reason for ordering the bank to do otherwise. Why?' Regan looked at Jones questioningly. " Do you—"

"No, not at all. Just thought that the bank would put him on some other work, so that the depositors wouldn't do any talking with him about the holdup. Let's run over to the Empire. I want to see Hayward, anyway."

2: Jones Hears Rumors

THE PRESIDENT of the Empire Bank greeted Jones enthusiastically. "Mighty glad you came. Of course, our insurance covers the loss, but the thing that bothers me is the hopelessness of the situation."

"How's that, Hayward?" the chief of the F. P. A. asked.

"Why, the police here are not doing anything in the matter. There's a rumor that the whole thing was faked."

"Is that so?"

Jones's eyebrows arched in surprise. Here was a new angle.

"Yes, and you know how rumors spread."

"Of course," acknowledged Jones, "but just how do these rumors explain that the money actually disappeared?"

"Well, you see, we've been hit pretty hard lately on loans extended to the fur trade. 'This line has been at a stand still for months now, and any number of manufacturing furriers as well as importers and retailers have failed.

"Word has gone around that we've sustained losses running into hundreds of thousands. Fact is, we've been hard hit, but nowhere near that mark.

"One report that came to me this morning was that we had framed this robbery in order to collect the insurance and that if this one gets over we'll most likely pull another."

"Idle gossip," Jones sniffed.

"True, but we have had heavy withdrawals the past three days. Almost a run on the bank— in orderly fashion, of course. No bank is prepared for anything like that.

"Fortunately, we've been able to borrow from the Federal Reserve. But the business that's going out now will be a long time coming back."

"There's no doubt about that," Jones agreed. "These things have farreaching effects, but there's no way of stopping it. Nothing to do until we can round up some of this gang."

"That's all we can do. Of course, the police department claim that they are doing all they can do, but the talk we hear is that the police department is skeptical and is laying down on the job."

"That's probably just as well," commented Jones; "it will give us a free hand to work with—no interference.

"Getting back to the robbery, however, I understand that Grady is the name of the teller who was held up, is that right?"

"Yes; that's right."

"Is he here now?"

"Yes, do you want to see him?"

"If it can be conveniently arranged. I'd like to go over this thing with him."

As Hayward left the office Jones turned to Regan.

"This is a pretty busy bank," he remarked, watching the crowds hurrying into the corridors. Long lines were forming at the paying teller's window; only occasionally a depositor would approach the receiving teller's window to make a deposit.

"Its unusual, though,' mused Regan; " no doubt about it being a run on the bank, however. It's a question how long they'll be able to hold up.

"A run on a bank is always dangerous. Anything can happen. Of course the Federal Reserve will help them out, but most people don't understand that. They think when the last of the cash is reached— why, that's all there is to it; they're stuck."

Hayward entered the office, followed by a tall, slim youth.

"This is Grady," said Hayward as he motioned the teller to a chair.

Jones scrutinized him shrewly.

Grady was the bank clerk type, studious, sharp-eyed, sallow-complexioned.

"Tell us, in your own way," Jones ordered the boy. "What happened the night of the holdup."

"From the beginning?"

"Yes, right from the start."

"Well, I'd been to a dance—" He had told the story so often. It was beginning to be mechanical.

Finally he settled back in his chair; his eyes never leaving Jones. He had heard much of this bank sleuth from the East. The chief of the F. P. A. studied the design of the rug at his feet. He suddenly looked up at Grady.

"Then from three thirty until eight o'clock these bandits sat around waiting for the time clocks to run off. Is that right?"

"That's right," replied the teller."

"Where were you all sitting?"

"Back of the teller's cages, in the dark."

"What lights were on?"

"Only the night light directly over the vault."

"So that if the policeman on the beat happened to look in at the window, it would have been impossible for him to see any of you?"

"Absolutely impossible."

"The rest of the bank was dark?"

"Yes."

"How many men were there?"

"Four."

"Did they say anything during this wait?"

"Only warned me against making an outbreak."

"I see. Were they armed?"

"Yes."

"Did they talk among themselves?"

"Yes, but I couldn't understand them; they were talking in Italian."

"Were you down to the rogues' gallery?"

"Inspector Conroy showed me a number of photographs at police headquarters, but I didn't recognize any of them."

"After you had left your young lady and started home— what time was that?"

"About three o'clock."

"You drove down Michigan Boulevard, is that right?"

"Yes."

"How long had you been driving when this other car overtook you?"

"About ten minutes, I imagine."

"That would allow the other twenty minutes to carry you and the bandits to the bank?"

"Yes; of course they drove very, fast."

"Of course," agreed Jones.

Grady edged to the front of his chair. He was anxious to supply all the necessary details to this detective. He wanted to help him, to make a good impression. He was so unlike the other detectives who had questioned him, with their bulldog tactics.

"During this ride into town, with the bandits, did any motorcycle policeman stop you?"

"Didn't see any."

Jones rubbed his chin thoughtfully. The facts had been related too smoothly, just a little too carefully for him. He wondered why.

"Now, when you were held up, of course you were taken unawares, but when you saw they were not police officers why didn't you step on the gas again and beat it?"

"It came too quickly, Mr. Jones, I suppose. Before I had turned my head a gun was poked into my ribs."

"Hum— didn't give you a chance at all, did they?" Jones smiled.

"None whatever."

"I suppose the spot they picked to get you was along a quiet stretch of the road, dark—"

"On the contrary, it was directly in front of a service station," interrupted Grady, " or repair shop—something of the sort."

"Oh, yes? Anybody come out to see what it was all about?"

"I don't know, Mr. Jones—at least, I wouldn't have noticed."

"Of course, you reported the exact location on Michigan Boulevard to the police?"

"Why, no." Grady appeared a trifle ill at ease. " Fact of the matter is, they didn't ask me."

"And," suggested Jones, quick to note the change in the teller's attitude,, "it never occurred to you that it was important, eh?"

"No, I guess it didn't."

"All right, Grady. That 'll be all for the moment. Later I'll ask you to oblige the F. P. A. with some more facts."

The teller rose. He was a little nervous. He glanced at Jones's smiling countenance, nodded, and left the office.

Jones turned to Hayward.

"How long has Grady worked for the Empire Bank?" he said casually.

"About three years," the president replied. "Fine chap and a good worker."

The chief of the F. P. A. was satisfied that the president had not observed something that Jones felt worthy of much consideration.

Jones rose abruptly and, with a slight nod, started for the door.

"See you later, Hayward," he called, as he and Regan passed into the bank corridor. The press of people had not subsided, the small line at the paying teller's window was gone altogether now.

"I wonder how much longer they can hold out?" asked Regan.

"I'm thinking of the same thing."

They reached the street.

"Regan," said Jones, "I don't like this chap Grady. Put somebody on his tail pronto. Watch everything he does. I'll meet you at your office in an hour."

Jones signaled a taxi, and a second later was dashing down State Street.

Jones had proceeded but a short distance on Michigan Boulevard, when he spotted a gasoline station, elaborately decorated with electric bulbs on all sides of the office and shop.

The chief of the F. P. A. ordered the cab driver to stop. He got out of the taxi and accosted a mechanic in front of the garage.

"A couple of nights ago," Jones said, "two cars stopped near here. One was a roadster, the other was a sedan. Two men left the sedan and entered the roadster, and both cars drove off. Do you remember anything about it?"

The mechanic looked at Jones curiously.

"What makes you ask?"

"We're checking up on it in connection with another matter." Jones showed his shield. "Were anxious to find out the truth of the statement as it came to us."

"I guess you've got the right dope, all right. I don't know anything about it, except what I saw."

"Sure; but you did see a roadster jammed to the curb and a couple of men hop into it from another car, didn't you?"

"Yes, I did. I figured it out this way— that they had been out to one of the country clubs and were probably racing each other down the Boulevard to see who'd get home the quickest— that's all. Of course, we did think that possibly it might have been a stickup, but when both cars started up again I thought no more about it."

"Why? Because there was no outa cry?"

"Well," replied the mechanic, " it seems to me that if I was the chap in the roadster I wouldn't have stopped. Just kept going, hell-bent for election."

"Yes, but I suppose he was afraid of getting shot— too scared to call for help— or try to escape."

"H-m. Then the driver of the roadster didn't have a chance. Only thing he could have done was what he did."

"Did you hear any of the conversation?" asked Jones.

"Nothing at all. The roadster stopped, and these other birds worked fast. A matter of a few seconds and the thing was over. So, it was a stickup, after all? Well, I'll say they were good, all right— a neat trick."

"Did you notice the license numbers on either car?" asked Jones,

"No, I didn't. You see, I was pretty well convinced that it was just a booze party, and of course when they dashed off as quickly as they did I didn't think much more about it."

"Now that you recall the incident, does it occur to you that there was any— familiarity or friendliness about the whole affair?"

"You mean— set-up?"

"Well, something like that— framed."

"Not a chance. These gents were all business, from what I saw of them."

Jones was satisfied that there was nothing else to learn from the mechanic. He reéntered the waiting tab and started back to the Loop.

The down town section of Chicago, at its best, is a pretty congested thoroughfare, particularly during the early hours of the afternoon. The cab went at a snail's pace.

Finally stopping in front of the Empire Bank, Jones hurried in.

"Hayward," he said, "I'd like to take a look at that vault of yours for a minute."

"Surely," replied the president, pushing back his chair and leading the way to the interior of the bank.

"Any news?" he asked anxiously.

"None yet."

The vault was located in the rear of the bank. It was a huge affair, constructed as a separate unit, with a passageway on both sides.

The outer door of the vault stood open, with its tremendous hinges brilliantly polished. On the back of the round door, inclosed in glass, were three time clocks,

As Jones glanced into the vault he observed the usual grilled day door.

Hayward advanced with the key.

"Which compartments do the tellers use?" asked Jones, as he scrutinized the hundreds of various sized safe deposit boxes.

"These four," replied the president, motioning to the largest compartments in the vault.

Each of these had its own combination.

"Which one was Grady compelled to open?"

"The two top ones, I believe. The bottom two contain only silver, too heavy for the robbers to carry off."

"How many feet would you say there are from the door to these compartments?"

"About twenty feet, I judge."

Jones walked to the door slowly, then turned back again. He appeared to be reconstructing the scene. Finally he looked at Hayward.

"I guess that's all, thanks," he said, opening the day door.

Jones paused at the outer door to examine it, and Hayward joined him.

"When do you wind and set your time clocks?"

"Every morning. One of the assistant cashiers does that, winding the clocks for the number of hours until the next opening."

"You mean the next day?"

"Not necessarily the next day— it might be a Sunday or holiday."

"Oh, yes, I get your meaning. The assistant winds them for the hours intervening. And at closing time the clocks are checked to see they are set correctly and running."

"That's right," Hayward replied.

"Who usually opens up in the morning?"

"The teller and one of the assistant cashiers."

"You mean Grady?"

"Yes, or an assistant teller in Grady's absence."

"But always two men?"

"Yes, two men at opening and two men at closing."

Jones peered through the grilled doorway. At the end of the straight passage was a mirror.

It occurred to him that a passer-by could very easily see any one in the vault, from the street.

Hayward looked at Jones curiously.

"Naturally the robbers didn't break into the vault, and I can't help wondering why you appear so interested. Surely you don't expect to find finger-prints or anything like that, do you?"

Jones looked at the president for a moment, a trifle annoyed.

"No," he replied slowly; " the robbers were not put to the necessity of forcing their entrance, of course. Finger-prints? If there had been any they'd have been obliterated by this time. No, I'm just mooching around. Sort of smelling things out, as it were,"

Jones stepped around to the side of the vault and looked at the front of the vault door. The massive chrome steel reflected the prodigious work of the polisher.

After a minute or two the chief of the F. P. A. walked into the passage on the side of the vault. A square box held his attention.

"That's the signal button," informed Hayward, pointing to the black circle in the center of the wooden inclosure.

"Yes, I imagined as much. This button notifies the protective company when you.open or close the vault?"

Jones concentrated his attention on the signal box.

"Have you a certain number your man uses whenche opens the vault, and a different one when he closes?"

"Yes," Hayward replied. "Our opening signal is four-two, and the closing signal is three-five."

"Well, that signal is sent in before your man starts to work the combinations, is that right?"

"Yes. If he forgets to send in the signal, the protective company rings a bell attached to that box."

"What happens if the signal is sent in wrong?"

"The protection company keeps ringing until the correct number is sent in,'

"And if it isn't, then what?"

"Why, they send a couple of men right over.'

"They have a set of keys for the street door?"

"Oh, yes; and there would be very little delay in their arrival."

The president's secretary appeared with a card.

"What is it?" he asked, as he took the card from her. Then, turning to Jones: "Inspector Conroy of the police department is in my office, probably about this robbery. Would you care to see him?"

"No," replied Jones hastily. "It's just as well that you don't mention anything about my being here." He smiled. "There is such a thing as professional jealousy, you know, and I think Conroy might resent my presence."

"Very well," said Hayward, and walked to the outer office.

Jones was interested in the little push button on the side of the vault wall. He studied it minutely.

To think that a little round disk kept eternal vigil over the millions of dollars of cash and securities. Something in that, he reflected, which reminded him of the elephant and the mouse.

Finally, with a smile of satisfaction, he shrugged his shoulders and made his way out through the street entrance.

3: Inspector of Police

"WELL, what's new, inspector?" asked Hayward, as Conroy entered the office.

"Nothing very encouraging," the police inspector replied; " that is, up to the moment."

"Then, you expect something?"

"Yes; at least, we hope so. Fact is, we did pick up a fellow last night, on suspicion. Haven't been able to make him talk yet, but I think we will before the day is over."

"Where did you get him?"

"Over on the South Side. He is down at headquarters now on a charge of vagrancy."

"How long can you hold him on that?"

"Twenty-four hours anyway. You see, we started to round up all the wellknown characters in town, checking up to see whether they've had any unusual amount of spending money lately, and in making the quiz we picked up this chap. A newcomer to us. Probably a drifter from over the Lakes. Seems intelligent enough, but doesn't appear very anxious about holding long conversations."

"Sounds very interesting. What is his name?"

"His name? I guess it's so long since he used it himself he's probably forgotten it. Malloy is the name he is booked under, but unless we can tack something on him he'll be released tomorrow morning."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"Pick him up again on a charge of disorderly conduct. The complaint will be signed by a patrolman who'll state, when the case is called, that this fellow Malloy was told to move on by the patrolman on the beat, and he refused ; became abusive, and finally had to be locked up. 'That's the story."

"Sounds plausible."

"You see, I've got this affair doped out that the job was staged by a mob from Detroit, and this chap admits having been in Detroit recently."

"I most certainly hope you'll be able to get those men. I was never more anxious about anything in my life."

"Were doing our utmost," assured the police inspector, "and I'm inclined to think we've got something definite to work on now."

Hayward suddenly looked up, to find Grady, the teller, standing near his desk, holding some checks. His eyes were fixed intently on the police officer.

He was surprised by the drawn features of the sallow-skinned youth, Hayward wondered how long he'd been listening.

Conroy, following the direction of Hayward's eyes, turned to look. The teller asked hurriedly :

"Would you mind signing these checks, Mr. Hayward?"

The president reached for them, and a moment later handed them back, signed.

Grady quickly left the office.

"Well, that's all there is to report. I thought I'd let you know about it."

"Yes, yes, of course," Hayward replied, his thoughts on Grady. " Come in again, inspector, and good luck."

As the police inspector left the office, Hayward crossed in the direction of the door leading into the bank.

He pushed the door open quickly.

Grady, eavesdropping on the other side, was surprised into a cry of exclamation. His head got a nasty bump,

"It strikes me," Regan was saying, "that there is a missing link."

Jones laughed.

"Sure; there's a missing link in every job, until you find it. That's our job, and until we do there's something else missing— about two hundred thousand dollars."

"I don't mean that. Something that points to an inside operation."

"Inside? You mean that it was framed by some one inside:the bank?"

"Yes."

"What makes you think that?"

"I don't know, Jones. I never play, hunches, as you know. Usually stick to facts. But in this case there doesn't appear to be any facts around."

"Well," Jones replied, "you couldn't expect any clews to be lying around at this late date."

The chief of the F. P. A. looked at Regan with a complaisant smile. "True," replied Regan, "there wouldn't be any clews to operate on, but the point I'm getting at is there never were any."

"Regan," said Jones slowly, "whether the job was an inside one or not, the fact remains, nevertheless, that a crime was committed. That, at least, is obvious. And admitting that —the criminal always leaves some weak spot, no matter how insignificant. It's just a question of seeing it. Unless, of course, time obliterates it. Then you're stuck."

"Now take this case. Somewhere there's a clew or, I should say, there was a clew, which if properly handled, will lead us directly to the criminal. Sometimes

a detour is necessary, but eventually the right road opens up and somewhere along this road we find the criminal.

"After all, none of us are miracle workers. That applies to the criminal as well. And if we keep everlastingly on the job, eventually we'll come pretty near finding what we're looking for.

"Don't overlook the fact, Regan, that when a criminal stages a job, he's got to work fast, never knows when something will happen to interfere with his work.

"It's different with us. We can take as much time as we want to reconstruct the crime, to get the criminal's mental reaction, to get the why and wherefore. And, incidentally, to find the clew.

"After that, it's just routine work."

Regan sat silent. Finally he said:

"Of course, there's no need of looking for finger-prints. Grady opened the vaults for them and—"

"And," interrupted Jones, "if there had been any they'd have been polished off in the interval. No, we won't find any left-handed gloves lying around, or any footprints on the carefully scrubbed marble corridors of a gent wearing number twelve shoes.

"Those 'heavy' artists are rapidly disappearing. Some still exist in the movies, few in real life. Besides, that kind of a mob usually celebrates after any job as big as this one was, or at least they'd have plenty of jack on display.

"And if that had been the case, our friend the inspector would have had word of it."

Regan looked anxiously at Jones.

"Then you don't believe Grady's story?"

Jones, with a faint glimmer of a smile, slowly shook his head.

"No, I don't believe Grady's story," he replied, " that is— not all of it."

"That's the way I feel about it," Regan said. "His story *sounds* plausible enough, particularly the checking up at the gasoline station— too plausible,"

"You're using your head now, just keep it up," smiled Jones. He rose to go. "Rattle the facts around in your head overnight. To-morrow is another day. Don't try to reach your conclusion to-night."

"But hadn't we better arrest Grady before he gets away?"

"No; I don't think so. Grady isn't going to start anything now. He's laying low. Besides, he's—"

Hayward, the president of the Empire Bank, looked up from his desk and smiled a greeting to Jones and Regan as they entered his office.

"You gentlemen are around pretty early this morning," he commented as he glanced at the clock on the wall.

"Yes," said Jones, "I thought that we might be able to talk with Grady again before he gets too busy."

"Why, certainly. I'll call him."

Jones raised his hand as Hayward started to his feet.

"Don't bother, Hayward. We'll go on inside— want to take another look at that vault of yours— and see Grady at the same time."

Hayward smiled in a quizzical manner, shrugging his shoulders.

"Go ahead. If you want me I'll be here."

As they passed the tellers' cages, Grady looked around and Jones motioned to him.

"Grady," he said, "I'd like to have you show us where you waited with those crooks that night."

The teller, slightly flushed, nodded and walked some ten feet in the direction of the vaults.

"Right here," he said.

"I see. Now starting from this point, you all sat around until it was time for the clocks on the inside of the vault to run off. Then, what happened?"

"Why, I was ordered to open the vaults."

"Which, of course, you did. Now it's customary, isn't it, before you actually open the vaults, whether it's morning or night, to send in the code signal to the protective company?"

"That's right," admitted Grady, the flush spreading over his face.

"Well, after you give the signal on opening, if the signal is the correct one, you then hear two short taps or rings, after this comes through you immediately proceed to the business of getting your cash out and all that sort of thing. Right?"

"Thats quite right."

"Naturally if you happened to send in the wrong signal to the protective company, they would immediately send some one to investigate.- Is that also correct?"

"Yes," the teller replied.

"Well, if you had sent in the wrong signal the night of the robbery, what do you think would have kappened?" Jones asked.

Grady braced himself,

"The protective company would have dashed up immediately— that is, they would have sent over some of their men, I suppose."

"Of course, they would have," said Jones with narrowing, piercing eyes. "Why didn't you?"

Grady's face was flushed. He stalled for time.

"What do you mean, why didn't I? Why didn't I what?" as

"Why didn't you send in the wrong code number, and warn the protective company?"

"It didn't occur to me," Grady replied.

Jones dropped his aggressive attitude. After a moment he spoke.

"I see," he said. "Let's go into the vaults again."

The chief of the F. P. A., followed by Regan, entered the interior of the vaults.

Grady stood silently at the gate through which the others had entered.

"How many of the employees have safe deposit boxes here?" Jones asked.

"Only two of us."

"Who, beside yourself?"

"Mr. Hayward."

"Which box is yours?"

Grady pointed to one of the smaller boxes.

"This one," he said.

"Where is Hayward's?" asked Jones.

The teller walked to the other side of the vaults.

"Right here," he replied, and indicated one of the larger boxes.

"Let's go into one of these booths for a few minutes, I want to talk to you," Jones said to Grady.

Grady nodded his head. His tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth. Silently he led the way. At the side of the vault several safe deposit booths were

located. The teller picked out the largest one and pushed back the door as Jones and Regan entered.

Jones reached into his pocket for a cigar, calmly lit it and leaned back in his chair. He could feel the teller's eyes upon him.

Grady fidgeted nervously with his tie. Finally the chief of the F. P. A. spoke :

"Grady," he said slowly, "just what part did you actually play in this robbery?"

"I? Why, I didn't play any part."

The teller's face was flushed. His denial lacked the ring of truth.

"Oh, yes, you did, Grady!" Jones said quietly.

The teller struggled to keep his control. His nerves, at high tension, were equal to a definite accusation, but the quiet confidential tone of the chief of the F. P. A. was disarming.

"What makes you say that?" asked Grady.

Jones flicked the end of his cigar.

"A number of reasons," he. said. "One of them is that while you were actually held up on Michigan Boulevard that night, it was not unexpected on your part—"

"You mean that it was a frameup?" the teller's voice rose in anger. He stepped closer to Jones.

"That's the idea," smiled Jones. "Grady, you're only a dummy in this. You know that. Frankly speaking, you haven't the guts to pull a job of this size." ^

The teller stepped back to the wall. The flush had disappeared from his face. In its place there appeared a sickly pallor.

Regan gazing intently at Grady, moved slowly to the door.

Jones rose and faced the teller.

"Grady," Jones said firmly, " you think that I'm bluffing about that holdup when I tell you that it was framed. All right. I'll prove to you that I'm not.

"What kind of a car does your brother drive?"

At the mention of his brother Grady cringed. "But he doesn't know anything about this. I swear."

"Well, if he doesn't, you do. And right now is the time to talk—you or your brother."

Grady, with an effort reached a chair.

Jones puffed vigorously on his cigar.

"What do you want me to say?" the teller asked.

"All you know."

Regan, standing with his back to the door, suddenly felt it being pushed open. He turned quickly and confronted Hayward, a trifle startled, but, with a smiling countenance.

"I was just wondering where Grady was. His window has quite a line at it." Hayward looked from Grady to Jones. " But if you need him, Jones, I'll put another man in his place."

"Yes," Jones replied, " we'll need him here for a little while longer. And as long as you're here we'd like to have you stay, too."

"Oh, yes? Why, what's happened?"

"Grady was about to explain how the holdup was planned. Why he sent in the correct signal to the protective company, and several other things, all of which you happen to be very much concerned about."

"I concerned about?" Hayward forced a smile. "Just what do you mean?"

"I should imagine you'd understand that better than any one else."

Grady was sobbing.

Jones put his hand on his head.

"Come, come, Grady," he said, "give us the facts as they happened—perhaps it's not as bad as it looks."

Grady raised his head.

"I don't care about myself— it's my brother I'm thinking about. He's married and-has a couple of kids. Oh, why did I bring him into this anyway?" he moaned.

"What are you talking about, Grady?" asked Hayward in amazement.

The teller looked up at him.

"What am I talking about? What the hell do you think I'm talking about? If you don't know, who does?"

Jones turned quickly to Hayward. Regan, gun in hand, had the banker covered.

"Hayward," ordered Jones, "sit down there!"

The president of the Empire Bank slumped into a chair. Every vestige of courage and nonchalance had gone, He was overwhelmed.

Jones waited for a moment or two then addressed him:

"Where is this money?"

The president sobbed convulsively.

"The money is in my safe deposit box," he confessed.

"All of it?" asked Jones.

"Yes, all of it,' Hayward repeated.

"You shoud have known better than to attempt a thing like this, Hayward," said Jones. "Why did you do it?"

"Why? Because, well— I might as well tell you. It doesn't matter now— I guess nothing matters.

"I made a couple of bad loans during the past few months. I knew if I reported them as lost the directors would ask for my resignation. I couldn't afford to lose my position and standing in the city.

"I made the loans good by selling some of the bonds the bank held as investments. This naturally would not be discovered until the bank examiners came as these securities are kept in my possession.

"Sleepless nights that I've endured were getting on my nerves. I conceived this phony holdup idea. Worked on it until I felt that it was perfect. I had to have assistance from some one, so I thought of Grady.

"At first he refused to help me; finally he consented.

"It was Grady's brother and myself who stopped the roadster in Michigan Boulevard. That's all there is to it. I intended to replace the missing bonds by purchasing others in the market with the money we'd recover from the insurance company."

Jones had listened intently to Hayward. He didn't particularly dislike . him, he thought to himself.

Jones considered. An arrest, he felt sure, would precipitate the collapse of the Empire Bank. The institution had to be saved at any cost.

"Why did you send for me? I should think you would have left it entirely in the hands of the local police." Jones was speaking to Hayward.

"I felt confident that all the detectives in the world would never get at the real facts; and I didn't want the insurance company to delay payment."

"Well, we'll have to call a meeting of the board of directors of the Empire—immediately. They are responsible to the depositors and the State of Illinois for the money placed on deposit with the Empire.

"It will be up to them to decide what attitude to assume, as far as you and Grady are concerned. Until the directors can get here, both of you are to remain in this room, under Regan's supervision."

"How about taking that vacation now, Jones?" Scott was saying.

"Oh, I don't know. I think that little trip to Chicago answered the purpose very nicely."

Scott continued to read the newspaper. Suddenly he looked up.

"Speaking of Chicago, here's an interesting news item: Says that Hay ward, president of the Empire Bank, has resigned and is planning to take a long vacation. Doctor orders a complete rest. Warns Hayward against a nervous breakdown."

"Poor fellow," sympathized Jones, "I'm glad they let him down easily."

"Who made up the loss?"

"Why, the directors, in all probability. If the insurance company had to pay it, Hayward would have gone to jail and the Empire would have lost a lot of business—if not failed enitely."

"I suppose so. By the way, how did you tumble to the fact that the sedan belonged to Grady's brother?"

"The mechanic out on Michigan Boulevard had an idea he had seen it somewhere before. The glass in the rear of the sedan was badly cracked, but not broken.

"I got him to watch out for it, in fact, had him do nothing else but drive around town. Finally he spotted the car.

"Of course, as soon as we found out the owner's name I was satisfied that it was an inside job."

"Sure, but how did you connect Hayward with it?"

"I didn't, at that time. In fact, it was only when Regan discovered Hayward listening in that I was sure of it. Though I did have my suspicions.

"You see, I found that Hayward was being considered for the presidency of another bank. That alone didn't mean anything, but when I realized that he was stirring up a feeling among the depositors I became suspicious,

"In several cases I found that he had actually recommended this other bank to depositors of the Empire, suggesting that they make the transfer there."

"He was working it both ways," said Scott.

"Yes, that was about the size of it," yawned Jones drowsily. "But it was one case, at least, where we didn't have to send some poor damned soul to hell!"

20: Room Number 3

Anna Katharine Green

1846-1935

Woman's Home Companion Nov, Dec 1909, Jan, Feb 1910

(as 'Room Number Three at Three Forks Tavern'.)

Mrs. Charles Rohlfs,

i

"WHAT DOOR is that? You've opened all the others; why do you pass that one by?"

"Oh, that! That's only Number 3. A mere closet, gentlemen," responded the landlord in a pleasant voice. "To be sure, we sometimes use it as a sleeping-room when we are hard pushed. Jake, the clerk you saw below, used it last night. But it's not on our regular list. Do you want a peep at it?"

"Most assuredly. As you know, it's our duty to see every room in this house, whether it is on your regular list or not."

"All right. I haven't the key of this one with me. But— yes, I have. There, gentlemen!" he cried, unlocking the door and holding it open for them to look inside. "You see it no more answers the young lady's description than the others do. And I haven't another to show you. You have seen all those in front, and this is the last one in the rear. You'll have to believe our story. The old lady never put foot in this tavern."

The two men he addressed peered into the shadowy recesses before them, and one of them, a tall and uncommonly good-looking young man of stalwart build and unusually earnest manner, stepped softly inside. He was a gentleman farmer living near, recently appointed deputy sheriff on account of a recent outbreak of horse-stealing in the neighbourhood.

"I observe," he remarked, after a hurried glance about him, "that the paper on these walls is not at all like that she describes. She was very particular about the paper; said that it was of a muddy pink colour and had big scrolls on it which seemed to move and crawl about in whirls as you looked at it. This paper is blue and striped. Otherwise— "

"Let's go below," suggested his companion, who, from the deference with which his most casual word was received, was evidently a man of some authority. "It's cold here, and there are several new questions I should like to put to the young lady. Mr. Quimby,"— this to the landlord, "I've no doubt you are right, but we'll give this poor girl another chance. I believe in giving every one the utmost chance possible."

"My reputation is in your hands, Coroner Golden," was the quiet reply. Then, as they both turned, "my reputation against the word of an obviously demented girl."

The words made their own echo. As the third man moved to follow the other two into the hall, he seemed to catch this echo, for he involuntarily cast another look behind him as if expectant of some contradiction reaching him from the bare and melancholy walls he was leaving. But no such contradiction came. Instead, he appeared to read confirmation there of the landlord's plain and unembittered statement. The dull blue paper with its old-fashioned and uninteresting stripes seemed to have disfigured the walls for years. It was not only grimy with age, but showed here and there huge discoloured spots, especially around the stovepipe-hole high up on the left-hand side. Certainly he was a dreamer to doubt such plain evidences as these. Yet—

Here his eye encountered Quimby's, and pulling himself up short, he hastily fell into the wake of his comrade now hastening down the narrow passage to the wider hall in front. Had it occurred to him to turn again before rounding the corner— but no, I doubt if he would have learned anything even then. The closing of a door by a careful hand— the slipping up behind him of an eager and noiseless step— what is there in these to re-awaken curiosity and fix suspicion? Nothing, when the man concerned is Jacob Quimby; nothing. Better that he failed to look back; it left his judgment freer for the question confronting him in the room below.

Three Forks Tavern has been long forgotten, but at the time of which I write it was a well-known but little-frequented house, situated just back of the highway on the verge of the forest lying between the two towns of Chester and Danton in southern Ohio. It was of ancient build, and had all the picturesquesness of age and the English traditions of its original builder. Though so near two thriving towns, it retained its own quality of apparent remoteness from city life and city ways. This in a measure was made possible

by the nearness of the woods which almost enveloped it; but the character of the man who ran it had still more to do with it, his sympathies being entirely with the old, and not at all with the new, as witness the old-style glazing still retained in its ancient doorway. This, while it appealed to a certain class of summer boarders, did not so much meet the wants of the casual traveller, so that while the house might from some reason or other be overfilled one night, it was just as likely to be almost empty the next, save for the faithful few who loved the woods and the ancient ways of the easy-mannered host and his attentive, soft-stepping help. The building itself was of wooden construction, high in front and low in the rear, with gables toward the highway, projecting here and there above a strip of rude old-fashioned carving. These gables were new, that is, they were only a century old; the portion now called the extension, in the passages of which we first found the men we have introduced to you, was the original house. Then it may have enjoyed the sunshine and air of the valley it overlooked, but now it was so hemmed in by yards and outbuildings as to be considered the most undesirable part of the house, and Number 3 the most undesirable of its rooms; which certainly does not speak well for it.

But we are getting away from our new friends and their mysterious errand. As I have already intimated, this tavern with the curious name (a name totally unsuggestive, by the way, of its location on a perfectly straight road) had for its southern aspect the road and a broad expanse beyond of varied landscape which made the front rooms cheerful even on a cloudy day; but it was otherwise with those in the rear and on the north end. They were never cheerful, and especially toward night were frequently so dark that artificial light was resorted to as early as three o'clock in the afternoon. It was so to-day in the remote parlour which these three now entered. A lamp had been lit, though the daylight still struggled feebly in, and it was in this conflicting light that there rose up before them the vision of a woman, who seen at any time and in any place would have drawn, if not held, the eye, but seen in her present attitude and at such a moment of question and suspense, struck the imagination with a force likely to fix her image forever in the mind, if not in the heart, of a sympathetic observer.

I should like to picture her as she stood there, because the impression she made at this instant determined the future action of the man I have introduced to you as not quite satisfied with the appearances he had observed above. Young, slender but vigorous, with a face whose details you missed in the fire of her eye and the wonderful red of her young, fresh but determined mouth, she stood, on guard as it were, before a shrouded form on a couch at the far end of the room. An imperative Keep back! spoke in her look, her attitude, and the

silent gesture of one outspread hand, but it was the Keep back! of love, not of fear, the command of an outraged soul, conscious of its rights and instinctively alert to maintain them.

The landlord at sight of the rebuke thus given to their intrusion, stepped forward with a conciliatory bow.

"I beg pardon," said he, "but these gentlemen, Doctor Golden, the coroner from Chester, and Mr. Hammersmith, wish to ask you a few more questions about your mother's death. You will answer them, I am sure."

Slowly her eyes moved till they met those of the speaker.

"I am anxious to do so," said she, in a voice rich with many emotions. But seeing the open compassion in the landlord's face, the colour left her cheeks, almost her lips, and drawing back the hand which she had continued to hold outstretched, she threw a glance of helpless inquiry about her which touched the younger man's heart and induced him to say:

"The truth should not be hard to find in a case like this. I'm sure the young lady can explain. Doctor Golden, are you ready for her story?"

The coroner, who had been silent up till now, probably from sheer surprise at the beauty and simple, natural elegance of the woman caught, as he believed, in a net of dreadful tragedy, roused himself at this direct question, and bowing with an assumption of dignity far from encouraging to the man and woman anxiously watching him, replied:

"We will hear what she has to say, of course, but the facts are well known. The woman she calls mother was found early this morning lying on her face in the adjoining woods quite dead. She had fallen over a half-concealed root, and with such force that she never moved again. If her daughter was with her at the time, then that daughter fled without attempting to raise her. The condition and position of the wound on the dead woman's forehead, together with such corroborative facts as have since come to light, preclude all argument on this point. But we'll listen to the young woman, notwithstanding; she has a right to speak, and she shall speak. Did not your mother die in the woods? No hocus-pocus, miss, but the plain unvarnished truth."

"Sirs,"— the term was general, but her appeal appeared to be directed solely to the one sympathetic figure before her, "if my mother died in the wood— and, for all I can say, she may have done so— it was not till after she had been in this house. She arrived in my company, and was given a room. I saw the room and I saw her in it. I cannot be deceived in this. If I am, then my mind has suddenly failed me;— something which I find it hard to believe."

"Mr. Quimby, did Mrs. Demarest come to the house with Miss Demarest?" inquired Mr. Hammersmith of the silent landlord.

"She says so," was the reply, accompanied by a compassionate shrug which spoke volumes. "And I am quite sure she means it," he added, with kindly emphasis. "But ask Jake, who was in the office all the evening. Ask my wife, who saw the young lady to her room. Ask anybody and everybody who was around the tavern last night. I'm not the only one to say that Miss Demarest came in alone. All will tell you that she arrived here without escort of any kind; declined supper, but wanted a room, and when I hesitated to give it to her, said by way of explanation of her lack of a companion that she had had trouble in Chester and had left town very hurriedly for her home. That her mother was coming to meet her and would probably arrive here very soon. That when this occurred I was to notify her; but if a gentleman called instead, I was to be very careful not to admit that any such person as herself was in the house. Indeed, to avoid any such possibility she prayed that her name might be left off the register— a favour which I was slow in granting her, but which I finally did, as you can see for yourselves."

"Oh!" came in indignant exclamation from the young woman before them. "I understand my position now. This man has a bad conscience. He has something to hide, or he would not take to lying about little things like that. I never asked him to allow me to leave my name off the register. On the contrary I wrote my name in it and my mother's name, too. Let him bring the book here and you will see."

"We have seen," responded the coroner. "We looked in the register ourselves. Your names are not there."

The flush of indignation which had crimsoned her cheeks faded till she looked as startling and individual in her pallor as she had the moment before in her passionate bloom.

"Not there?" fell from her lips in a frozen monotone as her eyes grew fixed upon the faces before her and her hand went groping around for some support.

Mr. Hammersmith approached with a chair.

"Sit," he whispered. Then, as she sank slowly into an attitude of repose, he added gently, "You shall have every consideration. Only tell the truth, the exact truth without any heightening from your imagination, and, above all, don't be frightened."

She may have heard his words, but she gave no sign of comprehending them. She was following the movements of the landlord, who had slipped out to procure the register, and now stood holding it out toward the coroner.

"Let her see for herself," he suggested, with a bland, almost fatherly, air.

Doctor Golden took the book and approached Miss Demarest.

"Here is a name very unlike yours," he pointed out, as her eye fell on the page he had opened to. "Annette Colvin, Lansing, Michigan."

"That is not my name or writing," said she.

"There is room below it for your name and that of your mother, but the space is blank, do you see?"

"Yes, yes, I see," she admitted. "Yet I wrote my name in the book! Or is it all a monstrous dream!"

The coroner returned the book to the landlord.

"Is this your only book?" he asked.

"The only book."

Miss Demarest's eyes flashed. Hammersmith, who had watched this scene with intense interest, saw, or believed that he saw, in this flash the natural indignation of a candid mind face to face with arrant knavery. But when he forced himself to consider the complacent Quimby he did not know what to think. His aspect of self-confidence equalled hers. Indeed, he showed the greater poise. Yet her tones rang true as she cried:

"You made up one plausible story, and you may well make up another. I demand the privilege of relating the whole occurrence as I remember it," she continued with an appealing look in the one sympathetic direction. "Then you can listen to him."

"We desire nothing better," returned the coroner.

"I shall have to mention a circumstance very mortifying to myself," she proceeded, with a sudden effort at self-control, which commanded the admiration even of the coroner. "My one adviser is dead," here her eyes flashed for a moment toward the silent form behind her. "If I make mistakes, if I seem unwomanly— but you have asked for the truth and you shall have it, all of it. I have no father. Since early this morning I have had no mother. But when I had, I found it my duty to work for her as well as for myself, that she might have the comforts she had been used to and could no longer afford. For this purpose I sought a situation in Chester, and found one in a family I had rather not name." A momentary tremor, quickly suppressed, betrayed the agitation which this allusion cost her. "My mother lived in Danton (the next town to the left). Anybody there will tell you what a good woman she was. I had wished her to live in Chester (that is, at first; later, I— I was glad she didn't), but she had been born in Danton, and could not accustom herself to strange surroundings. Once a week I went home, and once a week, usually on a Wednesday, she would come and meet me on the highroad, for a little visit. Once we met here, but this is a circumstance no one seems to remember. I was very fond of my mother and she of me. Had I loved no one else, I should have been happy still, and not been obliged to face strangers over her body and bare the secrets of

my heart to preserve my good name. There is a man, he seems a thousand miles away from me now, so much have I lived since yesterday. He— he lived in the house where I did— was one of the family— always at table— always before my eyes. He fancied me. I— I might have fancied him had he been a better man. But he was far from being of the sort my mother approved, and when he urged his suit too far, I grew frightened and finally ran away. It was not so much that I could not trust him," she bravely added after a moment of silent confusion, "but that I could not trust myself. He had an unfortunate influence over me, which I hated while I half yielded to it."

"You ran away. When was this?"

"Yesterday afternoon at about six. He had vowed that he would see me again before the evening was over, and I took that way to prevent a meeting. There was no other so simple,— or such was my thought at the time. I did not dream that sorrows awaited me in this quiet tavern, and perplexities so much greater than any which could have followed a meeting with him that I feel my reason fail when I contemplate them."

"Go on," urged the coroner, after a moment of uneasy silence. "Let us hear what happened after you left your home in Chester."

"I went straight to the nearest telegraph office, and sent a message to my mother. I told her I was coming home, and for her to meet me on the road near this tavern. Then I went to Hudson's and had supper, for I had not eaten before leaving my employer's. The sun had set when I finally started, and I walked fast so as to reach Three Forks before dark. If my mother had got the telegram at once, which I calculated on her doing, as she lived next door to the telegraph office in Danton, she would be very near this place on my arrival here. So I began to look for her as soon as I entered the woods. But I did not see her. I came as far as the tavern door, and still I did not see her. But farther on, just where the road turns to cross the railroad-track, I spied her coming, and ran to meet her. She was glad to see me, but asked a good many questions which I had some difficulty in answering. She saw this, and held me to the matter till I had satisfied her. When this was done it was late and cold, and we decided to come to the tavern for the night. And we came! Nothing shall ever make me deny so positive a fact. We came, and this man received us."

With her final repetition of this assertion, she rose and now stood upright, with her finger pointing straight at Quimby. Had he cringed or let his eyes waver from hers by so much as a hair's breadth, her accusation would have stood and her cause been won. But not a flicker disturbed the steady patience of his look, and Hammersmith, who had made no effort to hide his anxiety to believe her story, showed his disappointment with equal frankness as he asked:

"Who else was in the office? Surely Mr. Quimby was not there alone?"

She reseated herself before answering. Hammersmith could see the effort she made to recall that simple scene. He found himself trying to recall it, too—the old-fashioned, smoke-begrimed office, with its one long window toward the road and the glass-paned door leading into the hall of entrance. They had come in by that door and crossed to the bar, which was also the desk in this curious old hostelry. He could see them standing there in the light of possibly a solitary lamp, the rest of the room in shadow unless a game of checkers were on, which evidently was not so on this night. Had she turned her head to peer into those shadows? It was not likely. She was supported by her mother's presence, and this she was going to say. By some strange telepathy that he would have laughed at a few hours before, he feels confident of her words before she speaks. Yet he listens intently as she finally looks up and answers:

"There was a man, I am sure there was a man somewhere at the other end of the office. But I paid no attention to him. I was bargaining for two rooms and registering my name and that of my mother."

"Two rooms; why two? You are not a fashionable young lady to require a room alone."

"Gentlemen, I was tired. I had been through a wearing half-hour. I knew that if we occupied the same room or even adjoining ones that nothing could keep us from a night of useless and depressing conversation. I did not feel equal to it, so I asked for two rooms a short distance apart."

An explanation which could at least be accepted. Mr. Hammersmith felt an increase of courage and scarcely winced as his colder-blooded companion continued this unofficial examination by asking:

"Where were you standing when making these arrangements with Mr. Quimby?"

"Right before the desk."

"And your mother?"

"She was at my left and a little behind me. She was a shy woman. I usually took the lead when we were together."

"Was she veiled?" the coroner continued quietly.

"I think so. She had been crying— " The bereaved daughter paused.

"But don't you know?"

"My impression is that her veil was down when we came into the room. She may have lifted it as she stood there. I know that it was lifted as we went upstairs. I remember feeling glad that the lamps gave so poor a light, she looked so distressed."

"Physically, do you mean, or mentally?"

Mr. Hammersmith asked this question. It seemed to rouse some new train of thought in the girl's mind. For a minute she looked intently at the speaker, then she replied in a disturbed tone:

"Both. I wonder— " Here her thought wavered and she ceased.

"Go on," ordered the coroner impatiently. "Tell your story. It contradicts that of the landlord in almost every point, but we've promised to hear it out, and we will."

Rousing, she hastened to obey him.

"Mr. Quimby told the truth when he said that he asked me if I would have supper, also when he repeated what I said about a gentleman, but not when he declared that I wished to be told if my mother should come and ask for me. My mother was at my side all the time we stood there talking, and I did not need to make any requests concerning her. When we went to our rooms a woman accompanied us. He says she is his wife. I should like to see that woman."

"I am here, miss," spoke up a voice from a murky corner no one had thought of looking in till now.

Miss Demarest at once rose, waiting for the woman to come forward. This she did with a quick, natural step which insensibly prepared the mind for the brisk, assertive woman who now presented herself. Mr. Hammersmith, at sight of her open, not unpleasing face, understood for the first time the decided attitude of the coroner. If this woman corroborated her husband's account, the poor young girl, with her incongruous beauty and emotional temperament, would not have much show. He looked to see her quailing now. But instead of that she stood firm, determined, and feverishly beautiful.

"Let her tell you what took place upstairs," she cried. "She showed us the rooms and carried water afterward to the one my mother occupied."

"I am sorry to contradict the young lady," came in even tones from the unembarrassed, motherly-looking woman thus appealed to. "She thinks that her mother was with her and that I conducted this mother to another room after showing her to her own. I don't doubt in the least that she has worked herself up to the point of absolutely believing this. But the facts are these: She came alone and went to her room unattended by any one but myself. And what is more, she seemed entirely composed at the time, and I never thought of suspecting the least thing wrong. Yet her mother lay all that time in the wood— "

"Silence!"

This word was shot at her by Miss Demarest, who had risen to her full height and now fairly flamed upon them all in her passionate indignation. "I will not listen to such words till I have finished all I have to say and put these

liars to the blush. My mother was with me, and this woman witnessed our good-night embrace, and then showed my mother to her own room. I watched them going. They went down the hall to the left and around a certain corner. I stood looking after them till they turned this corner, then I closed my door and began to take off my hat. But I wasn't quite satisfied with the good-night which had passed between my poor mother and myself, and presently I opened my door and ran down the hall and around the corner on a chance of finding her room. I don't remember very well how that hall looked. I passed several doors seemingly shut for the night, and should have turned back, confused, if at that moment I had not spied the landlady's figure, your figure, madam, coming out of one room on your way to another. You were carrying a pitcher, and I made haste and ran after you and reached the door just before you turned to shut it. Can you deny that, or that you stepped aside while I ran in and gave my mother another hug? If you can and do, then you are a dangerous and lying woman, or I— But I won't admit that I'm not all right. It is you, base and untruthful woman, who for some end I cannot fathom persist in denying facts on which my honour, if not my life, depends. Why, gentlemen, you, one of you at least, have heard me describe the very room in which I saw my mother. It is imprinted on my mind. I didn't know at the time that I took especial notice of it, but hardly a detail escaped me. The paper on the wall— "

"We have been looking through the rooms," interpolated the coroner. "We do not find any papered with the muddy pink you talk about."

She stared, drew back from them all, and finally sank into a chair. "You do not find— But you have not been shown them all."

"I think so."

"You have not. There is such a room. I could not have dreamed it."

Silence met this suggestion.

Throwing up her hands like one who realises for the first time that the battle is for life, she let an expression of her despair and desolation rush in frenzy from her lips:

"It's a conspiracy. The whole thing is a conspiracy. If my mother had had money on her or had worn valuable jewelry, I should believe her to have been a victim of this lying man and woman. As it is, I don't trust them. They say that my poor mother was found lying ready dressed and quite dead in the wood. That may be true, for I saw men bringing her in. But if so, what warrant have we that she was not lured there, slaughtered, and made to seem the victim of accident by this unscrupulous man and woman? Such things have been done; but for a daughter to fabricate such a plot as they impute to me is past belief, out of Nature and impossible. With all their wiles, they cannot prove it. I dare them to do so; I dare any one to do so."

Then she begged to be allowed to search the house for the room she so well remembered. "When I show you that," she cried, with ringing assurance, "you will believe the rest of my story."

"Shall I take the young lady up myself?" asked Mr. Quimby. "Or will it be enough if my wife accompanies her?"

"We will all accompany her," said the coroner.

"Very good," came in hearty acquiescence.

"It's the only way to quiet her," he whispered in Mr. Hammersmith's ear.

The latter turned on him suddenly.

"None of your insinuations," he cried. "She's as far from insane as I am myself. We shall find the room."

"You, too," fell softly from the other's lips as he stepped back into the coroner's wake. Mr. Hammersmith gave his arm to Miss Demarest, and the landlady brought up the rear.

"Upstairs," ordered the trembling girl. "We will go first to the room I occupied."

As they reached the door, she motioned them all back, and started away from them down the hall. Quickly they followed. "It was around a corner," she muttered broodingly, halting at the first turning. "That is all I remember. But we'll visit every room."

"We have already," objected the coroner, but meeting Mr. Hammersmith's warning look, he desisted from further interference.

"I remember its appearance perfectly. I remember it as if it were my own," she persisted, as door after door was thrown back and as quickly shut again at a shake of her head. "Isn't there another hall? Might I not have turned some other corner?"

"Yes, there is another hall," acquiesced the landlord, leading the way into the passage communicating with the extension.

"Oh!" she murmured, as she noted the increased interest in both the coroner and his companion; "we shall find it here."

"Do you recognise the hall?" asked the coroner as they stepped through a narrow opening into the old part.

"No, but I shall recognise the room."

"Wait!" It was Hammersmith who called her back as she was starting forward. "I should like you to repeat just how much furniture this room contained and where it stood."

She stopped, startled, and then said:

"It was awfully bare; a bed was on the left— "

"On the left?"

"She said the left," quoth the landlord, "though I don't see that it matters; it's all fancy with her."

"Go on," kindly urged Hammersmith.

"There was a window. I saw the dismal panes and my mother standing between them and me. I can't describe the little things."

"Possibly because there were none to describe," whispered Hammersmith in his superior's ear.

Meanwhile the landlord and his wife awaited their advance with studied patience. As Miss Demarest joined him, he handed her a bunch of keys, with the remark:

"None of these rooms are occupied to-day, so you can open them without hesitation."

She stared at him and ran quickly forward. Mr. Hammersmith followed speedily after. Suddenly both paused. She had lost the thread of her intention before opening a single door.

"I thought I could go straight to it," she declared. "I shall have to open all the doors, as we did in the other hall."

"Let me help you," proffered Mr. Hammersmith. She accepted his aid, and the search recommenced with the same results as before. Hope sank to disappointment as each door was passed. The vigour of her step was gone, and as she paused heartsick before the last and only remaining door, it was with an ashy face she watched Mr. Hammersmith stoop to insert the key.

He, on his part, as the door fell back, watched her for some token of awakened interest. But he watched in vain. The smallness of the room, its bareness, its one window, the absence of all furniture save the solitary cot drawn up on the right (not on the left, as she had said), seemed to make little or no impression on her.

"The last! the last! and I have not found it. Oh, sir," she moaned, catching at Mr. Hammersmith's arm, "am I then mad? Was it a dream? Or is this a dream? I feel that I no longer know." Then, as the landlady officiously stepped up, she clung with increased frenzy to Mr. Hammersmith, crying, with positive wildness, "This is the dream! The room I remember is a real one and my story is real. Prove it, or my reason will leave me. I feel it going— going— "

"Hush!" It was Hammersmith who sought thus to calm her. "Your story is real and I will prove it so. Meanwhile trust your reason. It will not fail you."

He had observed the corners of the landlord's hitherto restrained lips settle into a slightly sarcastic curl as the door of this room closed for the second time.

"The girl's beauty has imposed on you."

"I don't think so. I should be sorry to think myself so weak. I simply credit her story more than I do that of Quimby."

"But his is supported by several witnesses. Hers has no support at all."

"That is what strikes me as so significant. This man Quimby understands himself. Who are his witnesses? His wife and his head man. There is nobody else. In the half-hour which has just passed I have searched diligently for some disinterested testimony supporting his assertion, but I have found none. No one knows anything. Of the three persons occupying rooms in the extension last night, two were asleep and the third overcome with drink. The maids won't talk. They seem uneasy, and I detected a sly look pass from the one to the other at some question I asked, but they won't talk. There's a conspiracy somewhere. I'm as sure of it as that I am standing here."

"Nonsense! What should there be a conspiracy about? You would make this old woman an important character. Now we know that she wasn't. Look at the matter as it presents itself to an unprejudiced mind. A young and susceptible girl falls in love with a man, who is at once a gentleman and a scamp. She may have tried to resist her feelings, and she may not have. Your judgment and mine would probably differ on this point. What she does not do is to let her mother into her confidence. She sees the man— runs upon him, if you will, in places or under circumstances she cannot avoid— till her judgment leaves her and the point of catastrophe is reached. Then, possibly, she awakens, or what is more probable, seeks to protect herself from the penetration and opposition of his friends by meetings less open than those in which they had lately indulged. She says that she left the house to escape seeing him again last night. But this is not true. On the contrary, she must have given him to understand where she was going, for she had an interview with him in the woods before she came upon her mother. He acknowledges to the interview. I have just had a talk with him over the telephone."

"Then you know his name?"

"Yes, of course, she had to tell me. It's young Maxwell. I suspected it from the first."

"Maxwell!" Mr. Hammersmith's cheek showed an indignant colour. Or was it a reflection from the setting sun? "You called him a scamp a few minutes ago. A scamp's word isn't worth much."

"No, but it's evidence when on oath, and I fancy he will swear to the interview."

"Well, well, say there was an interview."

"It changes things, Mr. Hammersmith. It changes things. It makes possible a certain theory of mine which accounts for all the facts."

"It does!"

"Yes. I don't think this girl is really responsible. I don't believe she struck her mother or is deliberately telling a tissue of lies to cover up some dreadful crime. I consider her the victim of a mental hallucination, the result of some great shock. Now what was the shock? I'll tell you. This is how I see it, how Mr. Quimby sees it, and such others in the house as have ventured an opinion. She was having this conversation with her lover in the woods below here when her mother came in sight. Surprised, for she had evidently not expected her mother to be so prompt, she hustled her lover off and hastened to meet the approaching figure. But it was too late. The mother had seen the man, and in the excitement of the discovery and the altercation which undoubtedly followed, made such a sudden move, possibly of indignant departure, that her foot was caught by one of the roots protruding at this point and she fell her whole length and with such violence as to cause immediate death. Now, Mr. Hammersmith, stop a minute and grasp the situation. If, as I believe at this point in the inquiry, Miss Demarest had encountered a passionate opposition to her desires from this upright and thoughtful mother, the spectacle of this mother lying dead before her, with all opposition gone and the way cleared in an instant to her wishes, but cleared in a manner which must haunt her to her own dying day, was enough to turn a brain already heated with contending emotions. Fancies took the place of facts, and by the time she reached this house had so woven themselves into a concrete form that no word she now utters can be relied on. This is how I see it, Mr. Hammersmith, and it is on this basis I shall act."

Hammersmith made an effort and, nodding slightly, said in a restrained tone:

"Perhaps you are justified. I have no wish to force my own ideas upon you; they are much too vague at present. I will only suggest that this is not the first time the attention of the police has been drawn to this house by some mysterious occurrence. You remember the Stevens case? There must have been notes to the amount of seven thousand dollars in the pile he declared had been taken from him some time during the day and night he lodged here."

"Stevens! I remember something about it. But they couldn't locate the theft here. The fellow had been to the fair in Chester all day and couldn't swear that he had seen his notes after leaving the grounds."

"I know. But he always looked on Quimby as the man. Then there is the adventure of little Miss Thistlewaite."

"I don't remember that."

"It didn't get into the papers; but it was talked about in the neighbourhood. She is a quaint one, full of her crotchets, but clear— clear as a bell where her

interests are involved. She took a notion to spend a summer here— in this house, I mean. She had a room in one of the corners overlooking the woods, and professing to prefer Nature to everything else, was happy enough till she began to miss things— rings, pins, a bracelet and, finally, a really valuable chain. She didn't complain at first— the objects were trivial, and she herself somewhat to blame for leaving them lying around in her room, often without locking the door. But when the chain went, the matter became serious, and she called Mr. Quimby's attention to her losses. He advised her to lock her door, which she was careful to do after that, but not with the expected result. She continued to miss things, mostly jewelry of which she had a ridiculous store. Various domestics were dismissed, and finally one of the permanent boarders was requested to leave, but still the thefts went on till, her patience being exhausted, she notified the police and a detective was sent: I have always wished I had been that detective. The case ended in what was always considered a joke. Another object disappeared while he was there, and it having been conclusively proved to him that it could not have been taken by way of the door, he turned his attention to the window which it was one of her freaks always to keep wide open. The result was curious. One day he spied from a hiding-place he had made in the bushes a bird flying out from that window, and following the creature till she alighted in her nest he climbed the tree and searched that nest. It was encrusted with jewels. The bird was a magpie and had followed its usual habits, but— the chain was not there, nor one or two other articles of decided value. Nor were they ever found. The bird bore the blame; the objects missing were all heavy and might have been dropped in its flight, but I have always thought that the bird had an accomplice, a knowing fellow who understood what's what and how to pick out his share."

The coroner smiled. There was little conviction and much sarcasm in that smile. Hammersmith turned away. "Have you any instructions for me?" he said.

"Yes, you had better stay here. I will return in the morning with my jury. It won't take long after that to see this thing through."

The look he received in reply was happily hidden from him.

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"YES, I'm going to stay here to-night. As it's a mere formality, I shall want a room to sit in, and if you have no objection I'll take Number 3 on the rear corridor."

"I'm sorry, but Number 3 is totally unfit for use, as you've already seen."

"Oh, I'm not particular. Put a table in and a good light, and I'll get along with the rest. I have something to do. Number 3 will answer."

The landlord shifted his feet, cast a quick scrutinising look at the other's composed face, and threw back his head with a quick laugh.

"As you will. I can't make you comfortable on such short notice, but that's your lookout. I've several other rooms vacant."

"I fancy that room," was all the reply he got.

Mr. Quimby at once gave his orders. They were received by Jake with surprise.

Fifteen minutes later Hammersmith prepared to install himself in these desolate quarters. But before doing so he walked straight to the small parlour where he had last seen Miss Demarest and, knocking, asked for the privilege of a word with her. It was not her figure, however, which appeared in the doorway, but that of the landlady.

"Miss Demarest is not here," announced that buxom and smooth-tongued woman. "She was like to faint after you gentlemen left the room, and I just took her upstairs to a quiet place by herself."

"On the rear corridor?"

"Oh, no, sir; a nice front room; we don't consider money in a case like this."

"Will you give me its number?"

Her suave and steady look changed to one of indignation.

"You're asking a good deal, aren't you? I doubt if the young lady— "

"The number, if you please," he quietly put in.

"Thirty-two," she snapped out. "She will have every care," she hastened to assure him as he turned away.

"I've no doubt. I do not intend to sleep to-night; if the young lady is worse, you will communicate the fact to me. You will find me in Number 3."

He had turned back to make this reply, and was looking straight at her as the number dropped from his lips. It did not disturb her set smile, but in some inscrutable way all meaning seemed to leave that smile, and she forgot to drop her hand which had been stretched out in an attempted gesture.

"Number 3," he repeated. "Don't forget, madam."

The injunction seemed superfluous. She had not dropped her hand when he wheeled around once more in taking the turn at the foot of the staircase.

Jake and a very sleepy maid were on the floor above when he reached it. He paid no attention to Jake, but he eyed the girl somewhat curiously. She was comparatively a new domestic in the tavern, having been an inmate there for only three weeks. He had held a few minutes' conversation with her during the half-hour of secret inquiry in which he had previously indulged and he remembered some of her careful answers, also the air of fascination with

which she had watched him all the time they were together. He had made nothing of her then, but the impression had remained that she was the one hopeful source of knowledge in the house. Now she looked dull and moved about in Jake's wake like an automaton. Yet Hammersmith made up his mind to speak to her as soon as the least opportunity offered.

"Where is 32?" he asked as he moved away from them in the opposite direction from the course they were taking.

"I thought you were to have room Number 3," blurted out Jake.

"I am. But where is 32?"

"Round there," said she. "A lady's in there now. The one— "

"Come on," urged Jake. "Huldah, you may go now. I'll show the gentleman his room."

Huldah dropped her head, and began to move off, but not before Hammersmith had caught her eye.

"Thirty-two," he formed with his lips, showing her a scrap of paper which he held in his hand.

He thought she nodded, but he could not be sure. Nevertheless, he ventured to lay the scrap down on a small table he was passing, and when he again looked back, saw that it was gone and Huldah with it. But whither, he could not be quite sure. There was always a risk in these attempts, and he only half trusted the girl. She might carry it to 32, and she might carry it to Quimby. In the first case, Miss Demarest would know that she had an active and watchful friend in the house; in the other, the dubious landlord would but receive an open instead of veiled intimation that the young deputy had his eye on him and was not to be fooled by appearances and the lack of evidence to support his honest convictions.

They had done little more than he had suggested to make Number 3 habitable. As the door swung open under Jake's impatient hand, the half-lighted hollow of the almost empty room gaped uninvitingly before them, with just a wooden-bottomed chair and a rickety table added to the small cot-bed which had been almost its sole furnishing when he saw it last. The walls, bare as his hand, stretched without relief from baseboard to ceiling, and the floor from door to window showed an unbroken expanse of unpainted boards, save for the narrow space between chair and table, where a small rug had been laid. A cheerless outlook for a tired man, but it seemed to please Hammersmith. There was paper and ink on the table, and the lamp which he took care to examine held oil enough to last till morning. With a tray of eatables, this ought to suffice, or so his manner conveyed, and Jake, who had already supplied the eatables, was backing slowly out when his eye, which seemingly against his will had been travelling curiously up and down the walls, was caught by that of

Hammersmith, and he plunged from the room, with a flush visible even in that half light.

It was a trivial circumstance, but it fitted in with Hammersmith's trend of thought at the moment, and when the man was gone he stood for several minutes with his own eye travelling up and down those dusky walls in an inquiry which this distant inspection did not seem thoroughly to satisfy, for in another instant he had lifted a glass of water from the tray and, going to the nearest wall, began to moisten the paper at one of the edges. When it was quite wet, he took out his penknife, but before using it, he looked behind him, first at the door, and then at the window. The door was shut; the window seemingly guarded by an outside blind; but the former was not locked, and the latter showed, upon closer inspection, a space between the slats which he did not like. Crossing to the door, he carefully turned the key, then proceeding to the window, he endeavoured to throw up the sash in order to close the blinds more effectually. But he found himself balked in the attempt. The cord had been cut and the sash refused to move under his hand.

Casting a glance of mingled threat and sarcasm out into the night, he walked back to the wall and, dashing more water over the spot he had already moistened, began to pick at the loosened edges of the paper which were slowly falling away. The result was a disappointment; how great a disappointment he presently realised, as his knife-point encountered only plaster under the peeling edges of the paper. He had hoped to find other paper under the blue— the paper which Miss Demarest remembered— and not finding it, was conscious of a sinking of the heart which had never attended any of his miscalculations before. Were his own feelings involved in this matter? It would certainly seem so.

Astonished at his own sensations, he crossed back to the table, and sinking into the chair beside it, endeavoured to call up his common sense, or at least shake himself free from the glamour which had seized him. But this especial sort of glamour is not so easily shaken off. Minutes passed— an hour, and little else filled his thoughts than the position of this bewitching girl and the claims she had on his sense of justice. If he listened, it was to hear her voice raised in appeal at his door. If he closed his eyes, it was to see her image more plainly on the background of his consciousness. The stillness into which the house had sunk aided this absorption and made his battle a losing one. There was naught to distract his mind, and when he dozed, as he did for a while after midnight, it was to fall under the conjuring effect of dreams in which her form dominated with all the force of an unfettered fancy. The pictures which his imagination thus brought before him were startling and never to be forgotten. The first was that of an angry sea in the blue light of an arctic winter. Stars flecked the

zenith and shed a pale lustre on the moving ice-floes hurrying toward a horizon of skurrying clouds and rising waves. On one of those floes stood a woman alone, with face set toward her death.

The scene changed. A desert stretched out before him. Limitless, with the blazing colours of the arid sand topped by a cloudless sky, it revealed but one suggestion of life in its herbless, waterless, shadowless solitude. She stood in the midst of this desert, and as he had seen her sway on the ice-floe, so he saw her now stretching unavailing arms to the brazen heavens and sink— No! it was not a desert, it was not a sea, ice-bound or torrid, it was a toppling city, massed against impenetrable night one moment, then shown to its awful full the next by the sudden tearing through of lightning-flashes. He saw it all— houses, churches, towers, erect and with steadfast line, a silhouette of quiet rest awaiting dawn; then at a flash, the doom, the quake, the breaking down of outline, the caving in of walls, followed by the sickening collapse in which life, wealth, and innumerable beating human hearts went down into the unseen and unknowable. He saw and he heard, but his eyes clung to but one point, his ears listened for but one cry. There at the extremity of a cornice, clinging to a bending beam, was the figure again— the woman of the ice-floe and the desert. She seemed nearer now. He could see the straining muscles of her arm, the white despair of her set features. He wished to call aloud to her not to look down— then, as the sudden darkness yielded to another illuminating gleam, his mind changed and he would fain have begged her to look, slip, and end all, for subtly, quietly, ominously somewhere below her feet, he had caught the glimpsing of a feathery line of smoke curling up from the lower débris. Flame was there; a creeping devil which soon—

Horror! it was no dream! He was awake, he, Hammersmith, in this small solitary hotel in Ohio, and there was fire, real fire in the air, and in his ears the echo of a shriek such as a man hears but few times in his life, even if his lot casts him continually among the reckless and the suffering. Was it hers? Had these dreams been forerunners of some menacing danger? He was on his feet, his eyes staring at the floor beneath him, through the cracks of which wisps of smoke were forcing their way up. The tavern was not only on fire, but on fire directly under him. This discovery woke him effectually. He bounded to the door; it would not open. He wrenched at the key; but it would not turn, it was hampered in the lock. Drawing back, he threw his whole weight against the panels, uttering loud cries for help. The effort was useless. No yielding in the door, no rush to his assistance from without. Aroused now to his danger— reading the signs of the broken cord and hampered lock only too well— he desisted from his vain attempts and turned desperately toward the window. Though it might be impossible to hold up the sash and crawl under it at the

same time, his only hope of exit lay there, as well as his only means of surviving the inroad of smoke which was fast becoming unendurable. He would break the sash and seek escape that way. They had doomed him to death, but he could climb roofs like a cat and feared nothing when once relieved from this smoke. Catching up the chair, he advanced toward the window.

But before reaching it he paused. It was not only he they sought to destroy, but the room. There was evidence of crime in the room. In that moment of keenly aroused intelligence he felt sure of it. What was to be done? How could he save the room, and, by these means, save himself and her? A single glance about assured him that he could not save it. The boards under his feet were hot. Glints of yellow light streaking through the shutters showed that the lower storey had already burst into flame. The room must go and with it every clue to the problem which was agitating him. Meanwhile, his eyeballs were smarting, his head growing dizzy. No longer sure of his feet, he staggered over to the wall and was about to make use of its support in his effort to reach the window, when his eyes fell on the spot from which he had peeled the paper, and he came to a sudden standstill. A bit of pink was showing under one edge of the blue.

Dropping the chair which he still held, he fumbled for his knife, found it, made a dash at that wall, and for a few frenzied moments worked at the plaster till he had hacked off a piece which he thrust into his pocket. Then seizing the chair again, he made for the window and threw it with all his force against the panes. They crashed and the air came rushing in, reviving him enough for the second attempt. This not only smashed the pane, but loosened the shutters, and in one instant two sights burst upon his view— the face of a man in an upper window of the adjoining barn and the sudden swooping up from below of a column of deadly smoke which seemed to cut off all hope of his saving himself by the means he had calculated on. Yet no other way offered. It would be folly to try the door again. This was the only road, threatening as it looked, to possible safety for himself and her. He would take it, and if he succumbed in the effort, it should be with a final thought of her who was fast becoming an integral part of his own being.

Meanwhile he had mounted to the sill and taken another outward look. This room, as I have already intimated, was in the rear of an extension running back from the centre of the main building. It consisted of only two stories, surmounted by a long, slightly-peaked roof. As the ceilings were low in this portion of the house, the gutter of this roof was very near the top of the window. To reach it was not a difficult feat for one of his strength and agility, and if only the smoke would blow aside— Ah, it is doing so! A sudden change of wind had come to his rescue, and for the moment the way is clear for him to

work himself out and up on to the ledge above. But once there, horror makes him weak again. A window, high up in the main building overlooking the extension, had come in sight, and in it sways a frantic woman ready to throw herself out. She screamed as he measured with his eye the height of that window from the sloping roof and thence to the ground, and he recognised the voice. It was the same he had heard before, but it was not hers. She would not be up so high, besides the shape and attitude, shown fitfully by the light of the now leaping flames, were those of a heavier, and less-refined woman. It was one of the maids— it was the maid Huldah, the one from whom he had hoped to win some light on this affair. Was she locked in, too? Her frenzy and mad looking behind and below her seemed to argue that she was. What deviltry! and, ah! what a confession of guilt on the part of the vile man who had planned this abominable end for the two persons whose evidence he dreaded. Helpless with horror, he became a man again in his indignation. Such villainy should not succeed. He would fight not only for his own life, but for this woman's. Miss Demarest was doubtless safe. Yet he wished he were sure of it; he could work with so much better heart. Her window was not visible from where he crouched. It was on the other side of the house. If she screamed, he would not be able to hear her. He must trust her to Providence. But his dream! his dream! The power of it was still upon him; a forerunner of fate, a picture possibly of her doom. The hesitation which this awful thought caused him warned him that not in this way could he make himself effective. The woman he saw stood in need of his help, and to her he must make his way. The bustle which now took place in the yards beneath, the sudden shouts and the hurried throwing up of windows all over the house showed that the alarm had now become general. Another moment, and the appalling cry— the most appalling which leaves human lips— of fire! fire! rang from end to end of the threatened building. It was followed by women's shrieks and men's curses and then— by flames.

"She will hear, she will wake now," he thought, with his whole heart pulling him her way. But he did not desist from his intention to drop his eyes from the distraught figure entrapped between a locked door and a fall of thirty feet. He could reach her if he kept his nerve. A slow but steady hitch along the gutter was bringing him nearer every instant. Would she see him and take courage? No! her eyes were on the flames which were so bright now that he could actually see them glassed in her eyeballs. Would a shout attract her? The air was full of cries as the yards filled with escaping figures, but he would attempt it at the first lull— now— while her head was turned his way. Did she hear him? Yes. She is looking at him.

"Don't jump," he cried. "Tie your sheet to the bedpost. Tie it strong and fasten the other one to it and throw down the end. I will be here to catch it. Then you must come down hand over hand."

She threw up her arms, staring down at him in mortal terror; then, as the whole air grew lurid, nodded and tottered back. With incredible anxiety he watched for her reappearance. His post was becoming perilous. The fire had not yet reached the roof, but it was rapidly undermining its supports, and the heat was unendurable. Would he have to jump to the ground in his own despite? Was it his duty to wait for this girl, possibly already overcome by her fears and lying insensible? Yes; so long as he could hold out against the heat, it was his duty, but— Ah! what was that? Some one was shouting to him. He had been seen at last, and men, half-clad but eager, were rushing up the yard with a ladder. He could see their faces. How they glared in the red light. Help and determination were there, and perhaps when she saw the promise of this support, it would give nerve to her fingers and—

But it was not to be. As he watched their eager approach, he saw them stop, look back, swerve and rush around the corner of the house. Some one had directed them elsewhere. He could see the pointing hand, the baleful face. Quimby had realised his own danger in this prospect of Hammersmith's escape, and had intervened to prevent it. It was a murderer's natural impulse, and did not surprise him, but it added another element of danger to his position, and if this woman delayed much longer— but she is coming; a blanket is thrown out, then a dangling end of cloth appears above the sill. It descends. Another moment he has crawled up the roof to the ridge and grasped it.

"Slowly now!" he shouts. "Take time and hold on tight. I will guide you." He feels the frail support stiffen. She has drawn it into her hands; now she is on the sill, and is working herself off. He clutched his end firmly, steadying himself as best he might by bestriding the ridge of the roof. The strain becomes greater, he feels her weight, she is slipping down, down. Her hands strike a knot; the jerk almost throws him off his balance. He utters a word of caution, lost in the growing roar of the flames whose hungry tongues have begun to leap above the gutter. She looks down, sees the approaching peril, and hastens her descent. He is all astrain, with heart and hand nerved for the awful possibilities of the coming moments when— ping! Something goes whistling by his ear, which for the instant sets his hair bristling on his head, and almost paralyses every muscle. A bullet! The flame is not threatening enough! Some one is shooting at him from the dark.

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WELL! death which comes one way cannot come another, and a bullet is more merciful than flame. The thought steadies Hammersmith; besides he has nothing to do with what is taking place behind his back. His duty is here, to guide and support this rapidly-descending figure now almost within his reach. And he fulfils this duty, though that deadly "ping" is followed by another, and his starting eyes behold the hole made by the missile in the clap-board just before him.

She is down. They stand toppling together on the slippery ridge with no support but the rapidly heating wall down which she had come. He looks one way, then another. Ten feet either way to the gutter! On one side leap the flames; beneath the other crouches their secret enemy. They cannot meet the first and live; needs must they face the latter. Bullets do not always strike the mark, as witness the two they had escaped. Besides, there are friends as well as enemies in the yard on this side. He can hear their encouraging cries. He will toss down the blanket; perhaps there will be hands to hold it and so break her fall, if not his.

With a courage which drew strength from her weakness, he carried out this plan and saw her land in safety amid half a dozen upstretched arms. Then he prepared to follow her, but felt his courage fail and his strength ooze without knowing the cause. Had a bullet struck him? He did not feel it. He was conscious of the heat, but of no other suffering; yet his limbs lacked life, and it no longer seemed possible for him to twist himself about so as to fall easily from the gutter.

"Come on! Come on!" rose in yells from below, but there was no movement in him.

"We can't wait. The wall will fall," rose affrightedly from below. But he simply clung and the doom of flame and collapsing timbers was rushing mercilessly upon him when, in the glare which lit up the whole dreadful scenery, there rose before his fainting eyes the sight of Miss Demarest's face turned his way from the crowd below, with all the terror of a woman's bleeding heart behind it. The joy which this recognition brought cleared his brain and gave him strength to struggle with his lethargy. Raising himself on one elbow, he slid his feet over the gutter, and with a frantic catch at its frail support, hung for one instant suspended, then dropped softly into the blanket which a dozen eager hands held out for him.

As he did so, a single gasping cry went up from the hushed throng. He knew the voice. His rescue had relieved one heart. His own beat tumultuously and the blood throbbed in his veins as he realised this.

The next thing he remembered was standing far from the collapsing building, with a dozen men and boys grouped about him. A woman at his feet was clasping his knees in thankfulness, another sinking in a faint at the edge of the shadow, but he saw neither, for the blood was streaming over his eyes from a wound not yet accounted for, and as he felt the burning flow, he realised a fresh duty.

"Where is Quimby?" he demanded loudly. "He made this hole in my forehead. He's a murderer and a thief, and I order you all in the name of the law to assist me in arresting him."

With the confused cry of many voices, the circle widened. Brushing the blood from his brow, he caught at the nearest man, and with one glance toward the tottering building, pointed to the wall where he and the girl Huldah had clung.

"Look!" he shouted, "do you see that black spot? Wait till the smoke blows aside. There! now! the spot just below the dangling sheet. It's a bullet-hole. It was made while I crouched there. Quimby held the gun. He had his reasons for hindering our escape. The girl can tell you— "

"Yes, yes," rose up from the ground at his feet. "Quimby is a wicked man. He knew that I knew it and he locked my door when he saw the flames coming. I'm willing to tell now. I was afraid before."

They stared at her with all the wonder of uncomprehending minds as she rose with a resolute air to confront them; but as the full meaning of her words penetrated their benumbed brains, slowly, man by man, they crept away to peer about in the barns, and among the clustering shadows for the man who had been thus denounced. Hammersmith followed them, and for a few minutes nothing but chase was in any man's mind. That part of the building in which lay hidden the room of shadows shook, tottered, and fell, loading the heavens with sparks and lighting up the pursuit now become as wild and reckless as the scene itself. To Miss Demarest's eyes, just struggling back to sight and hearing from the nethermost depths of unconsciousness, it looked like the swirling flight of spirits lost in the vortex of hell. For one wild moment she thought that she herself had passed the gates of life and was one of those unhappy souls whirling over a gulf of flame. The next moment she realised her mistake. A kindly voice was in her ear, a kindly hand was pressing a half-burned blanket about her.

"Don't stare so," the voice said. "It is only people routing out Quimby. They say he set fire to the tavern himself, to hide his crime and do away with the one man who knew about it. I know that he locked me in because I— Oh, see! they've got him! they've got him! and with a gun in his hand!"

The friendly hand fell; both women started upright panting with terror and excitement. Then one of them drew back, crying in a tone of sudden anguish, "Why, no! It's Jake, Jake!"

DAYBREAK! and with it Doctor Golden, who at the first alarm had ridden out post-haste without waiting to collect his jury. As he stepped to the ground before the hollow shell and smoking pile which were all that remained to mark the scene of yesterday's events, he looked about among the half-clad, shivering men and women peering from the barns and stables where they had taken refuge, till his eyes rested on Hammersmith standing like a sentinel before one of the doors.

"What's this? what's this?" he cried, as the other quickly approached. "Fire, with a man like you in the house?"

"Fire because I was in the house. They evidently felt obliged to get rid of me somehow. It's been a night of great experiences for me. When they found I was not likely to perish in the flames they resorted to shooting. I believe that my forehead shows where one bullet passed. Jake's aim might be improved. Not that I am anxious for it."

"Jake? Do you mean the clerk? Did he fire at you?"

"Yes, while I was on the roof engaged in rescuing one of the women."

"The miserable cur! You arrested him, of course, as soon as you could lay your hands on him?"

"Yes. He's back of me in this outhouse."

"And Quimby? What about Quimby?"

"He's missing."

"And Mrs. Quimby?"

"Missing, too. They are the only persons unaccounted for."

"Lost in the fire?"

"We don't think so. He was the incendiary and she, undoubtedly, his accomplice. They would certainly look out for themselves. Doctor Golden, it was not for insurance money they fired the place; it was to cover up a crime."

The coroner, more or less prepared for this statement by what Hammersmith had already told him, showed but little additional excitement as he dubiously remarked:

"So you still hold to that idea."

Hammersmith glanced about him and, catching more than one curious eye turned their way from the crowd now rapidly collecting in all directions, drew the coroner aside and in a few graphic words related the night's occurrences and the conclusions these had forced upon him. Doctor Golden listened and seemed impressed at last, especially by one point.

"You saw Quimby," he repeated; "saw his face distinctly looking toward your room from one of the stable windows?"

"I can swear to it. I even caught his expression. It was malignant in the extreme, quite unlike that he usually turns upon his guests."

"Which window was it?"

Hammersmith pointed it out.

"You have been there? Searched the room and the stable?"

"Thoroughly, just as soon as it was light enough to see."

"And found— "

"Nothing; not even a clue."

"The man is lying dead in that heap. She, too, perhaps. We'll have to put the screws on Jake. A conspiracy like this must be unearthed. Show me the rascal."

"He's in a most careless mood. He doesn't think his master and mistress perished in the fire."

"Careless, eh? Well, we'll see. I know that sort."

But when a few minutes later he came to confront the clerk he saw that his task was not likely to prove quite so easy as his former experience had led him to expect. Save for a slight nervous trembling of limb and shoulder— surely not unnatural after such a night— Jake bore himself with very much the same indifferent ease he had shown the day before.

Doctor Golden surveyed him with becoming sternness.

"At what time did this fire start?" he asked.

Jake had a harsh voice, but he mellowed it wonderfully as he replied:

"Somewhere about one. I don't carry a watch, so I don't know the exact time."

"The exact time isn't necessary. Near one answers well enough. How came you to be completely dressed at near one in a country tavern like this?"

"I was on watch. There was death in the house."

"Then you were in the house?"

"Yes." His tongue faltered, but not his gaze; that was as direct as ever. "I was in the house, but not at the moment the fire started. I had gone to the stable to get a newspaper. My room is in the stable, the little one high in the cock-loft. I did not find the paper at once and when I did I stopped to read a few lines. I'm a slow reader, and by the time I was ready to cross back to the house, smoke was pouring out of the rear windows, and I stopped short, horrified! I'm mortally afraid of fire."

"You have shown it. I have not heard that you raised the least alarm."

"I'm afraid you're right. I lost my head like a fool. You see, I've never lived anywhere else for the last ten years, and to see my home on fire was more than I could stand. You wouldn't think me so weak to look at these muscles."

Baring his arm, he stared down at it with a forlorn shake of his head. The coroner glanced at Hammersmith. What sort of fellow was this! A giant with the air of a child, a rascal with the smile of a humourist. Delicate business, this; or were they both deceived and the man just a good-humoured silly?

Hammersmith answered the appeal by a nod toward an inner door. The coroner understood and turned back to Jake with the seemingly irrelevant inquiry:

"Where did you leave Mr. Quimby when you went to the cock-loft?"

"In the house?"

"Asleep?"

"No, he was making up his accounts."

"In the office?"

"Yes."

"And that was where you left him?"

"Yes, it was."

"Then, how came he to be looking out of your window just before the fire broke out?"

"He?" Jake's jaw fell and his enormous shoulders drooped; but only for a moment. With something between a hitch and a shrug, he drew himself upright and with some slight display of temper cried out, "Who says he was there?"

The coroner answered him. "The man behind you. He saw him."

Jake's hand closed in a nervous grip. Had the trigger been against his finger at that moment it would doubtless have been snapped with some satisfaction, so the barrel had been pointing at Hammersmith.

"Saw him distinctly," the coroner repeated. "Mr. Quimby's face is not to be mistaken."

"If he saw him," retorted Jake, with unexpected cunning, "then the flames had got a start. One don't see in the dark. They hadn't got much of a start when I left. So he must have gone up to my room after I came down."

"It was before the alarm was given; before Mr. Hammersmith here had crawled out of his room window."

"I can't help that, sir. It was after I left the stable. You can't mix me up with Quimby's doings."

"Can't we? Jake, you're no lawyer and you don't know how to manage a lie. Make a clean breast of it. It may help you and it won't hurt Quimby. Begin with the old lady's coming. What turned Quimby against her? What's the plot?"

"I don't know of any plot. What Quimby told you is true. You needn't expect me to contradict it!"

A leaden doggedness had taken the place of his whilom good nature. Nothing is more difficult to contend with. Nothing is more dreaded by the inquisitor. Hammersmith realised the difficulties of the situation and repeated the gesture he had previously made toward the door leading into an adjoining compartment. The coroner nodded as before and changed the tone of his inquiry.

"Jake," he declared, "you are in a more serious position than you realise. You may be devoted to Quimby, but there are others who are not. A night such as you have been through quickens the conscience of women if it does not that of men. One has been near death. The story of such a woman is apt to be truthful. Do you want to hear it? I have no objections to your doing so."

"What story? I don't know of any story. Women have easy tongues; they talk even when they have nothing to say."

"This woman has something to say, or why should she have asked to be confronted with you? Have her in, Mr. Hammersmith. I imagine that a sight of this man will make her voluble."

A sneer from Jake; but when Hammersmith, crossing to the door I've just mentioned, opened it and let in Huldah, this token of bravado gave way to a very different expression and he exclaimed half ironically, half caressingly:

"Why, she's my sweetheart! What can she have to say except that she was mighty fortunate not to have been burned up in the fire last night?"

Doctor Golden and the detective crossed looks in some anxiety. They had not been told of this relation between the two, either by the girl herself or by the others. Gifted with a mighty close mouth, she had nevertheless confided to Hammersmith that she could tell things and would, if he brought her face to face with the man who tried to shoot him while he was helping her down from the roof. Would her indignation hold out under the insinuating smile with which the artful rascal awaited her words? It gave every evidence of doing so, for her eye flashed threateningly and her whole body showed the tension of extreme feeling as she came hastily forward, and pausing just beyond the reach of his arm, cried out:

"You had a hand in locking me in. You're tired of me. If you're not, why did you fire those bullets my way? I was escaping and— "

Jake thrust in a quick word. "That was Quimby's move— locking your door. He had some game up. I don't know what it was. I had nothing to do with it."

This denial seemed to influence her. She looked at him and her breast heaved. He was good to look at; he must have been more than that to one of her restricted experience. Hammersmith trembled for the success of their

venture. Would this blond young giant's sturdy figure and provoking smile prevail against the good sense which must tell her that he was criminal to the core, and that neither his principle nor his love were to be depended on? No, not yet. With a deepening flush, she flashed out:

"You hadn't? You didn't want me dead? Why, then, those bullets? You might have killed me as well as Mr. Hammersmith when you fired!"

"Huldah!" Astonishment and reproach in the tone and something more than either in the look which accompanied it. Both were very artful and betrayed resources not to be expected from one of his ordinarily careless and good-humoured aspect. "You haven't heard what I've said about that?"

"What could you say?"

"Why, the truth, Huldah. I saw you on the roof. The fire was near. I thought that neither you nor the man helping you could escape. A death of that kind is horrible. I loved you too well to see you suffer. My gun was behind the barn door. I got it and fired out of mercy."

She gasped. So, in a way, did the two officials. The plea was so specious, and its likely effect upon her so evident.

"Jake, can I believe you?" she murmured.

For answer, he fumbled in his pocket and drew out a small object which he held up before her between his fat forefinger and thumb. It was a ring, a thin, plain hoop of gold worth possibly a couple of dollars, but which in her eyes seemed to possess an incalculable value, for she had no sooner seen it than her whole face flushed and a look of positive delight supplanted the passionately aggrieved one with which she had hitherto faced him.

"You had bought that?"

He smiled and returned it to his pocket.

"For you," he simply said.

The joy and pride with which she regarded him, despite the protesting murmur of the discomfited Hammersmith, proved that the wily Jake had been too much for them.

"You see!" This to Hammersmith, "Jake didn't mean any harm, only kindness to us both. If you will let him go, I'll be more thankful than when you helped me down off the roof. We're wanting to be married. Didn't you see him show me the ring?"

It was for the coroner to answer.

"We'll let him go when we're assured that he means all that he says. I haven't as good an opinion of him as you have. I think he's deceiving you and that you are a very foolish girl to trust him. Men don't fire on the women they love, for any reason. You'd better tell me what you have against him."

"I haven't anything against him now."

"But you were going to tell us something— "

"I guess I was fooling."

"People are not apt to fool who have just been in terror of their lives."

Her eyes sought the ground. "I'm just a hardworking girl," she muttered almost sullenly. "What should I know about that man Quimby's dreadful doings?"

"Dreadful? You call them dreadful?" It was Doctor Golden who spoke.

"He locked me in my room," she violently declared. "That wasn't done for fun."

"And is that all you can tell us? Don't look at Jake. Look at me."

"But I don't know what to say. I don't even know what you want."

"I'll tell you. Your work in the house has been upstairs work, hasn't it?"

"Yes, sir. I did up the rooms— some of them," she added cautiously.

"What rooms? Front rooms, rear rooms, or both?"

"Rooms in front; those on the third floor."

"But you sometimes went into the extension?"

"I've been down the hall."

"Haven't you been in any of the rooms there,— Number 3, for instance?"

"No, sir; my work didn't take me there."

"But you've heard of the room?"

"Yes, sir. The girls sometimes spoke of it. It had a bad name, and wasn't often used. No girl liked to go there. A man was found dead in it once. They said he killed his own self."

"Have you ever heard any one describe this room?"

"No, sir."

"Tell what paper was on the wall?"

"No, sir."

"Perhaps Jake here can help us. He's been in the room often."

"The paper was blue; you know that; you saw it yourselves yesterday," blurted forth the man thus appealed to.

"Always blue? Never any other colour that you remember?"

"No; but I've been in the house only ten years."

"Oh, is that all! And do you mean to say that this room has not been redecorated in ten years?"

"How can I tell? I can't remember every time a room is repapered."

"You ought to remember this one."

"Why?"

"Because of a very curious circumstance connected with it."

"I don't know of any circumstance."

"You heard what Miss Demarest had to say about a room whose walls were covered with muddy pink scrolls."

"Oh, she!" His shrug was very expressive. Huldah continued to look down.

"Miss Demarest seemed to know what she was talking about," pursued the coroner in direct contradiction of the tone he had taken the day before. "Her description was quite vivid. It would be strange now if those walls had once been covered with just such paper as she described."

An ironic stare, followed by an incredulous smile from Jake; dead silence and immobility on the part of Huldah.

"Was it?" shot from Doctor Golden's lips with all the vehemence of conscious authority.

There was an instant's pause, during which Huldah's breast ceased its regular rise and fall; then the clerk laughed sharply and cried with the apparent lightness of a happy-go-lucky temperament:

"I should like to know if it was. I'd think it a very curious quin— quin— What's the word? quincedence, or something like that."

"The deepest fellow I know," grumbled the baffled coroner into Hammersmith's ear, as the latter stepped his way, "or just the most simple." Then added aloud: "Lift up my coat there, please."

Hammersmith did so. The garment mentioned lay across a small table which formed the sole furnishing of the place, and when Hammersmith raised it, there appeared lying underneath several small pieces of plaster which Doctor Golden immediately pointed out to Jake.

"Do you see these bits from a papered wall?" he asked. "They were torn from that of Number 3, between the breaking out of the fire and Mr. Hammersmith's escape from the room. Come closer; you may look at them, but keep your fingers off. You see that the coincidence you mentioned holds."

Jake laughed again loudly, in a way he probably meant to express derision; then he stood silent, gazing curiously down at the pieces before him. The blue paper peeling away from the pink made it impossible for him to deny that just such paper as Miss Demarest described had been on the wall prior to the one they had all seen and remembered.*

*Hammersmith's first attempt to settle this fact must have failed from his having chosen a spot for his experiment where the old paper had been stripped away before the new was put on.

"Well, I vum!" Jake finally broke out, turning and looking from one face to another with a very obvious attempt to carry off the matter jovially. "She must have a great eye; a— a— (another hard word! What is it now?) Well! no matter. One of the kind what sees through the outside of things to what's

underneath. I always thought her queer, but not so queer as that. I'd like to have that sort of power myself. Wouldn't you, Huldah?"

The girl, whose eye, as Hammersmith was careful to note, had hardly dwelt for an instant on these bits, not so long by any means as a woman's natural curiosity would seem to prompt, started as attention was thus drawn to herself and attempted a sickly smile.

But the coroner had small appreciation for this attempted display of humour, and motioning to Hammersmith to take her away, he subjected the clerk to a second examination which, though much more searching and rigorous than the first, resulted in the single discovery that for all his specious love-making he cared no more for the girl than for one of his old hats. This the coroner confided to Hammersmith when he came in looking disconsolate at his own failure to elicit anything further from the resolute Huldah.

"But you can't make her believe that now," whispered Hammersmith.

"Then we must trick him into showing her his real feelings."

"How would you set to work? He's warned, she's warned, and life if not love is at stake."

"It don't look very promising," muttered Doctor Golden, "but— "

He was interrupted by a sudden sound of hubbub without.

"It's Quimby, Quimby!" declared Hammersmith in his sudden excitement.

But again he was mistaken. It was not the landlord, but his wife, wild-eyed, dishevelled, with bits of straw in her hair from some sheltering hayrick and in her hand a heavy gold chain which, as the morning sun shone across it, showed sparkles of liquid clearness at short intervals along its whole length.

Diamonds! Miss Thistlewaite's diamonds, and the woman who held them was gibbering like an idiot!

The effect on Jake was remarkable. Uttering a piteous cry, he bounded from their hands and fell at the woman's feet.

"Mother Quimby!" he moaned. "Mother Quimby!" and sought to kiss her hand and wake some intelligence in her eye.

Meanwhile the coroner and Hammersmith looked on, astonished at these evidences of real feeling. Then their eyes stole behind them, and simultaneously both started back for the outhouse they had just left. Huldah was standing in the doorway, surveying the group before her with trembling, half-parted lips.

"Jealous!" muttered Hammersmith. "Providence has done our little trick for us. She will talk now. Look! She's beckoning to us."

v

"SPEAK QUICKLY. You'll never regret it, Huldah. He's no mate for you, and you ought to know it. You have seen this paper covered with the pink scrolls before?"

The coroner had again drawn aside his coat from the bits of plaster.

"Yes," she gasped, with quick glances at her lover through the open doorway. "He never shed tears for me!" she exclaimed bitterly. "I didn't know he could for anybody. Oh, I'll tell what I've kept quiet here," and she struck her breast violently. "I wouldn't keep the truth back now if the minister was waiting to marry us. He loves that old woman and he doesn't love me. Hear him call her 'mother.' Are mothers dearer than sweethearts? Oh, I'll tell! I don't know anything about the old lady, but I do know that room 3 was repapered the night before last, and secretly, by him. I didn't see him do it, nobody did, but this is how I know: Some weeks ago I was hunting for something in the attic, when I stumbled upon some rolls of old wall-paper lying in a little cubby-hole under the eaves. The end of one of the rolls was torn and lay across the floor. I couldn't help seeing it or remembering its colour. It was like this, blue and striped. Exactly like it," she repeated, "just as shabby and old-looking. The rain had poured in on it, and it was all mouldy and stained. It smelt musty. I didn't give two thoughts to it then, but when after the old lady's death I heard one of the girls say something in the kitchen about a room being blue now which only a little while ago was pink, I stole up into the attic to see if those rolls were still there and found them every one gone. Oh, what is happening now?"

"One of the men is trying to take the diamonds from the woman and she won't let him. Her wits are evidently gone— frightened away by the horrors of the night— or she wouldn't try to cling to what has branded her at once as a thief."

The word seemed to pierce the girl. She stared out at her former mistress, who was again being soothed by the clerk, and murmured hoarsely:

"A thief! and he don't seem to mind, but is just as good to her! Oh, oh, I once served a term myself for— for a smaller thing than that and I thought that was why— Oh, sir, oh, sir, there's no mistake about the paper. For I went looking about in the barrels and where they throw the refuse, for bits to prove that this papering had been done in the night. It seemed so wonderful to me that any one, even Jake, who is the smartest man you ever saw, could do such a job as that and no one know. And though I found nothing in the barrels, I did in the laundry stove. It was full of burned paper, and some of it showed colour, and it was just that musty old blue I had seen in the attic."

She paused with a terrified gasp; Jake was looking at her from the open door.

"Oh, Jake!" she wailed out, "why weren't you true to me? Why did you pretend to love me when you didn't?"

He gave her a look, then turned on his heel. He was very much subdued in aspect and did not think to brush away the tear still glistening on his cheek.

"I've said my last word to you," he quietly declared, then stood silent a moment, with slowly labouring chest and an air of deepest gloom. But, as his eye stole outside again, they saw the spirit melt within him and simple human grief take the place of icy resolution. "She was like a mother to me," he murmured. "And now they say she'll never be herself again as long as she lives." Suddenly his head rose and he faced the coroner.

"You're right," said he. "It's all up with me. No home, no sweetheart, no missus. She (there was no doubt as to whom he meant by that tremulous she) was the only one I've ever cared for and she's just shown herself a thief. I'm no better. This is our story."

I will not give it in his words, but in my own. It will be shorter and possibly more intelligible.

The gang, if you may call it so, consisted of Quimby and these two, with a servant or so in addition. Robbery was its aim; a discreet and none too frequent spoliation of such of their patrons as lent themselves to their schemes. Quimby was the head, his wife the soul of this business, and Jake their devoted tool. The undermining of the latter's character had been begun early; a very dangerous undermining, because it had for one of its elements good humour and affectionate suggestion. At fourteen he was ready for any crime, but he was mercifully kept out of the worst till he was a full-grown man. Then he did his part. The affair of the old woman was an unpremeditated one. It happened in this wise: Miss Demarest's story had been true in every particular. Her mother was with her when she came to the house, and he, Jake, was the person sitting far back in the shadows at the time the young lady registered. There was nothing peculiar in the occurrence or in their behaviour except the decided demand which Miss Demarest made for separate rooms. This attracted his attention, for the house was pretty full and only one room was available in the portion reserved for transients. What would Quimby do? He couldn't send two women away, and he was entirely too conciliatory and smooth to refuse a request made so peremptorily. Quimby did nothing. He hemmed, hawed, and looked about for his wife. She was in the inner office back of him, and, attracted by his uneasy movements, showed herself. A whispered consultation followed, during which she cast a glance Jake's way. He understood her instantly and lounged carelessly forward. "Let them have Number 3," he said. "It's all fixed for the night. I can sleep anywhere, on the settle here or even on the floor of the inner office."

He had whispered these words, for the offer meant more than appeared. Number 3 was never given to guests. It was little more than a closet and was not even furnished. A cot had been put in that very afternoon, but only to meet a special emergency. A long-impending conference was going to be held between him and his employers subsequent to closing up time, and he had planned this impromptu refuge to save himself a late walk to the stable. At his offer to pass the same over to the Demarests, the difficulty of the moment vanished. Miss Demarest was shown to the one empty room in front, and the mother— as being the one less likely to be governed by superstitious fears if it so happened that some rumour of the undesirability of the haunted Number 3 should have reached them— to the small closet so hastily prepared for the clerk. Mrs. Quimby accompanied her, and afterward visited her again for the purpose of carrying her a bowl and some water. It was then she encountered Miss Demarest, who, anxious for a second and more affectionate good-night from her mother, had been wandering the halls in a search for her room. There was nothing to note in this simple occurrence, and Mrs. Quimby might have forgotten all about it if Miss Demarest had not made a certain remark on leaving the room. The bareness and inhospitable aspect of the place may have struck her, for she stopped in the doorway and, looking back, exclaimed: "What ugly paper! Magenta, too, the one colour my mother hates." This Mrs. Quimby remembered, for she also hated magenta, and never went into this room if she could help it.

The business which kept them all up that night was one totally disconnected with the Demarests or any one else in the house. A large outstanding obligation was coming due which Quimby lacked the money to meet. Something must be done with the stolen notes and jewelry which they had accumulated in times past and had never found the will or courage to dispose of. A choice must be made of what was salable. But what choice? It was a question that opened the door to endless controversy and possibly to a great difference of opinion; for in his way Quimby was a miser of the worst type and cared less for what money would do than for the sight and feeling of the money itself, while Mrs. Quimby was even more tenacious in her passion for the trinkets and gems which she looked upon as her part of the booty. Jake, on the contrary, cared little for anything but the good of the couple to whom he had attached himself. He wished Quimby to be satisfied, but not at Mrs. Quimby's expense. He was really fond of the woman and he was resolved that she should have no cause to grieve, even if he had to break with the old man. Little did any of them foresee what the night really held for them, or on what a jagged and unsuspected rock their frail bark was about to split.

Shutting-up time came, and with it the usual midnight quiet. All the doors had been locked and the curtains drawn over the windows and across the glass doors of the office. They were determined to do what they had never done before, lay out the loot and make a division. Quimby was resolved to see the diamonds which his wife had kept hidden for so long, and she, the securities, concerning the value of which he had contradicted himself so often. Jake's presence would keep the peace; they had no reason to fear any undue urging of his claims. All this he knew, and he was not therefore surprised, only greatly excited, when, after a last quiet look and some listening at the foot of the stairs, Mr. Quimby beckoned him into the office and, telling him to lock the door behind him, stepped around the bar to summon his wife. Jake never knew how it happened. He flung the door to and locked it, as he thought, but he must have turned the key too quickly, for the bolt of the lock did not enter the jamb, as they afterward found. Meanwhile they felt perfectly secure. The jewels were brought out of Mrs. Quimby's bedroom and laid on the desk. The securities were soon laid beside them. They had been concealed behind a movable brick at the side of the fireplace. Then the discussion began, involving more or less heat and excitement.

How long this lasted no one ever knew. At half-past eleven no change of attitude had taken place either in Quimby or his wife. At twelve the only difference marked by Jake was the removal of the securities to Quimby's breast pocket, and of the diamond-studded chain to Mrs. Quimby's neck. The former were too large for the pocket, the latter too brilliant for the dark calico background they blazed against. Jake, who was no fool, noted both facts, but had no words for the situation. He was absorbed, and he saw that Quimby was absorbed, in watching her broad hand creeping over those diamonds and huddling them up in a burning heap against her heart. There was fear in the action, fierce and overmastering fear, and so there was in her eyes which, fixed and glassy, stared over their shoulders at the wall behind, as though something had reached out from that wall and struck at the very root of her being. What did it mean? There was nothing in the room to affright her. Had she gone daft? Or—

Suddenly they both felt the blood congeal in their own veins; each turned to each a horrified face, then slowly and as if drawn by a power supernatural and quite outside of their own will, their two heads turned in the direction she was looking, and they beheld standing in their midst a spectre— no, it was the figure of a living, breathing woman, with eyes fastened on those jewels,— those well-known, much-advertised jewels! So much they saw in that instant flash, then nothing! For Quimby, in a frenzy of unreasoning fear, had taken the chair from under him and had swung it at the figure. A lamp had stood on the

bar top. It was caught by the backward swing of the chair, overturned and quenched. The splintering of glass mingled its small sound with an ominous thud in the thick darkness. It was the end of all things; the falling of an impenetrable curtain over a horror half sensed, yet all the greater for its mystery.

The silence— the terror— the unspeakable sense of doom which gripped them all was not broken by a heart-beat. All listened for a stir, a movement where they could see nothing. But the stillness remained unbroken. The silence was absolute. The figure which they had believed themselves to have seen had been a dream, an imagination of their overwrought minds. It could not be otherwise. The door had been locked, entrance was impossible; yet doubt held them powerless. The moments were making years of themselves. To each came in a flash a review of every earthly incident they had experienced, every wicked deed, every unholy aspiration. Quimby gritted his teeth. It was the first sound which had followed that thud and, slight as it was, it released them somewhat from their awful tension. Jake felt that he could move now, and was about to let forth his imprisoned breath when he felt the touch of icy fingers trailing over his cheek, and started back with a curse. It was Mrs. Quimby feeling about for him in the impenetrable darkness, and in another moment he could hear her smothered whisper:

"Are you there, Jake?"

"Yes; where are you?"

"Here," said the woman, with an effort to keep her teeth from striking together.

"For God's sake, a light!" came from the hollow darkness beyond.

It was Quimby's voice at last. Jake answered:

"No light for me. I'll stay where I am till daybreak."

"Get a light, you fool!" commanded Quimby, but not without a tremble in his usually mild tone.

Hard breathing from Jake, but no other response, Quimby seemed to take a step nearer, for his voice was almost at their ears now.

"Jake, you can have anything I've got so as you get a light now."

"There ain't nothing to light here. You broke the lamp."

Quiet for a moment, then Quimby muttered hoarsely:

"If you ain't scared out of your seven senses, you can go down cellar and bring up that bit of candle 'longside the ale-barrels."

Into the cellar! Not Jake. The moving of the rickety table which his fat hand had found and rested on spoke for him.

Another curse from Quimby. Then the woman, though with some hesitation, said with more self-control than could be expected:

"I'll get it," and they heard her move away from it toward the trap-door behind the bar.

The two men made no objection. To her that cold, black cellar might seem a refuge from the unseen horror centred here. It had not struck them so. It had its own possibilities, and Jake wondered at her courage, as he caught the sound of her groping advance and the sudden clatter and clink of bottles as the door came up and struck the edge of the bar. There was life and a suggestion of home in that clatter and clink, and all breathed easier for a moment, but only for a moment. The something lying there behind them, or was it almost under their feet, soon got its hold again upon their fears, and Jake found himself standing stock-still, listening both ways for that dreaded, or would it be welcome, movement on the floor behind, and to the dragging sound of Mrs. Quimby's skirt and petticoat as she made her first step down those cellar-stairs. What an endless time it took! He could rush down there in a minute, but she— she could not have reached the third step yet, for that always creaked. Now it did creak. Then there was no sound for some time, unless it was the panting of Quimby's breath somewhere over by the bar. Then the stair creaked again. She must be nearly up.

"Here's matches and the candle," came in a hollow voice from the trap-stairs.

A faint streak appeared for an instant against the dark, then disappeared. Another; but no lasting light. The matches were too damp to burn.

"Jake, ain't you got a match?" appealed the voice of Quimby in half-choked accents.

After a bit of fumbling a small blaze shot up from where Jake stood. Its sulphurous smell may have suggested to all, as it did to one, the immeasurable distance of heaven at that moment, and the awful nearness of hell. They could see now, but not one of them looked in the direction where all their thoughts lay. Instead of that, they rolled their eyes on each other, while the match burned slowly out: Mrs. Quimby from the trap, her husband from the bar, and Jake. Suddenly he found words, and his cry rang through the room:

"The candle! the candle! this is my only match. Where is the candle?"

Quimby leaped forward and with shaking hand held the worn bit of candle to the flame. It failed to ignite. The horrible, dreaded darkness was about to close upon them again before— before— But another hand had seized the candle. Mrs. Quimby has come forward, and as the match sends up its last flicker, thrusts the wick against the flame and the candle flares up. It is lighted.

Over it they give each other one final appealing stare. There's no help for it now; they must look. Jake's head turned first, then Mrs. Quimby, and then that of the real aggressor.

A simultaneous gasp from them all betrays the worst. It had been no phantom called into being by their overtaxed nerves. A woman lay before them, face downward on the hard floor. A woman dressed in black, with hat on head and a little satchel clutched in one stiff, outstretched hand. Miss Demarest's mother! The little old lady who had come into the place four hours before!

With a muttered execration, Jake stepped over to her side and endeavoured to raise her; but he instantly desisted, and looking up at Quimby and his wife, moved his lips with the one fatal word which ends all hope:

"Dead!"

They listened appalled, "Dead?" echoed the now terrified Quimby.

"Dead?" repeated his no less agitated wife.

Jake was the least overcome of the three. With another glance at the motionless figure, he rose, and walking around the body, crossed to the door and seeing what he had done to make entrance possible, cursed himself and locked it properly. Meanwhile, Mrs. Quimby, with her eyes on her husband, had backed slowly away till she had reached the desk, against which she now stood with fierce and furious eyes, still clutching at her chain.

Quimby watched her fascinated. He had never seen her look like this before. What did it portend? They were soon to know.

"Coward!" fell from her lips, as she stared with unrelenting hate at her husband. "An old woman who was not even conscious of what she saw! I'll not stand for this killing, Jacob. You may count me out of this and the chain, too. If you don't— " a threatening gesture finished the sentence and the two men looking at her knew that they had come up against a wall.

"Susan!" Was that Quimby speaking? "Susan, are you going back on me now?"

She pointed at the motionless figure lying in its shrouding black like an ineffaceable blot on the office floor, then at the securities showing above the edge of his pocket.

"Were we not close enough to discovery, without drawing the attention of the police by such an unnecessary murder? She was walking in her sleep. I remember her eyes as she advanced toward me; there was no sight in them."

"You lie!" It was the only word which Quimby found to ease the shock which this simple statement caused him. But Jake saw from the nature of the glance he shot at his poor old victim that her words had struck home. His wife saw it, too, but it did not disturb the set line of her determined mouth.

"You'll let me keep the chain," she said, "and you'll use your wits, now that you have used your hand, to save yourself and myself from the charge of murder."

Quimby, who was a man of great intelligence when his faculties were undisturbed by anger or shock, knelt and turned his victim carefully over so that her face was uppermost.

"It was not murder," he uttered in an indescribable tone after a few minutes of cautious scrutiny. "The old lady fell and struck her forehead. See! the bruise is scarcely perceptible. Had she been younger— "

"A sudden death from any cause in this house at just this time is full of danger for us," coldly broke in his wife.

The landlord rose to his feet, walked away to the window, dropped his head, thought for a minute, and then slowly came back, glanced at the woman again, at her dress, her gloved hands, and her little satchel.

"She didn't die in this house," fell from his lips in his most oily accents. "She fell in the woods; the path is full of bared roots, and there she must be found to-morrow morning. Jake, are you up to the little game?"

Jake, who was drawing his first full breath, answered with a calm enough nod, whereupon Quimby bade his wife to take a look outside and see if the way was clear for them to carry the body out.

She did not move. He fell into a rage; an unusual thing for him.

"Bestir yourself! do as I bid you," he muttered.

Her eyes held his; her face took on the look he had learned to dread. Finally she spoke:

"And the daughter! What about the daughter?"

Quimby stood silent; then with a sidelong leer, and in a tone smooth as oil, but freighted with purpose, "The mother first; we'll look after the daughter later."

Mrs. Quimby shivered; then as her hand spread itself over the precious chain sparkling with the sinister gleam of serpent's eyes on her broad bosom, she grimly muttered:

"How? I'm for no more risks, I tell you."

Jake took a step forward. He thought his master was about to rush upon her. But he was only gathering up his faculties to meet the new problem she had flung at him.

"The girl's a mere child; we shall have no difficulty with her," he muttered broodingly. "Who saw these two come in?"

Then it came out that no one but themselves had been present at their arrival. Further consultation developed that the use to which Number 3 had been put was known to but one of the maids, who could easily be silenced. Whereupon Quimby told his scheme. Mrs. Quimby was satisfied, and he and Jake prepared to carry it out.

The sensations of the next half-hour, as told by Jake, would make your flesh creep. They did not dare to carry a lamp to light the gruesome task, and well as they knew the way, the possibilities of a stumble or a fall against some one of the many trees they had to pass filled them with constant terror. They did stumble once, and the low cry Jake uttered caused them new fears. Was that a window they heard flying up? No; but something moved in the bushes. They were sure of this and guiltily shook in their shoes; but nothing advanced out of the shadows, and they went on.

But the worst was when they had to turn their backs upon the body left lying face downward in the cold, damp woods. Men of no compassion, unreached by ordinary sympathies, they felt the furtive skulking back, step by step, along ways commonplace enough in the daytime, but begirt with terrors now and full of demoniac suggestion.

The sight of a single thread of light marking the door left ajar for them by Mrs. Quimby was a beacon of hope which was not even disturbed by the sight of her wild figure walking in a circle round and round the office, the stump of candle dripping unheeded over her fingers, and her eyes almost as sightless as those of the form left in the woods.

"Susan!" exclaimed her husband, laying hand on her.

She paused at once. The presence of the two men had restored her self-possession.

But all was not well yet. Jake drew Quimby's attention to the register where the two names of mother and daughter could be seen in plain black and white.

"Oh, that's nothing!" exclaimed the landlord, and, taking out his knife, he ripped the leaf out, together with the corresponding one in the back. "The devil's on our side all right, or why did she pass over the space at the bottom of the page and write their two names at the top of the next one?"

He started, for his wife had clutched his arm.

"Yes, the devil's on our side thus far," said she, "but here he stops. I have just remembered something that will upset our whole plan and possibly hang us. Miss Demarest visited her mother in Number 3 and noticed the room well, and particularly the paper. Now if she is able to describe that paper, it might not be so easy for us to have our story believed."

For a minute all stood aghast, then Jake quietly remarked: "It is now one by the clock. If you can find me some of that old blue paper I once chucked under the eaves in the front attic, I will engage to have it on those four walls before daylight. Bring the raggedest rolls you can find. If it shouldn't be dry to the touch when they come to see it to-morrow, it must look so stained and old that no one will think of laying hand on it. I'll go make the paste."

As Jake was one of the quickest and most precise of workers at anything he understood, this astonishing offer struck the other two as quite feasible. The paper was procured, the furniture moved back, and a transformation made in the room in question which astonished even those concerned in it. Dawn rose upon the completed work and, the self-possession of all three having been restored with the burning up of such scraps as remained after the four walls were covered, they each went to their several beds for a half-hour of possible rest. Jake's was in Number 3. He has never said what that half-hour was to him!

The rest we know. The scheme did not fully succeed, owing to the interest awakened in one man's mind by the beauty and seeming truth of Miss Demarest. Investigation followed which roused the landlord to the danger threatening them from the curiosity of Hammersmith, and it being neck or nothing with him, he planned the deeper crime of burning up room and occupant before further discoveries could be made. What became of him in the turmoil which followed, no one could tell, not even Jake. They had been together in Jake's room before the latter ran out with his gun, but beyond that the clerk knew nothing. Of Mrs. Quimby he could tell more. She had not been taken into their confidence regarding the fire, some small grains of humanity remaining in her which they feared might upset their scheme. She had only been given some pretext for locking Huldah in her room, and it was undoubtedly her horror at her own deed when she saw to what it had committed her which unsettled her brain and made her a gibbering idiot for life.

Or was it some secret knowledge of her husband's fate, unknown to others? We cannot tell, for no sign nor word of Jacob Quimby ever came to dispel the mystery of his disappearance.

And this is the story of Three Forks Tavern and the room numbered 3.
