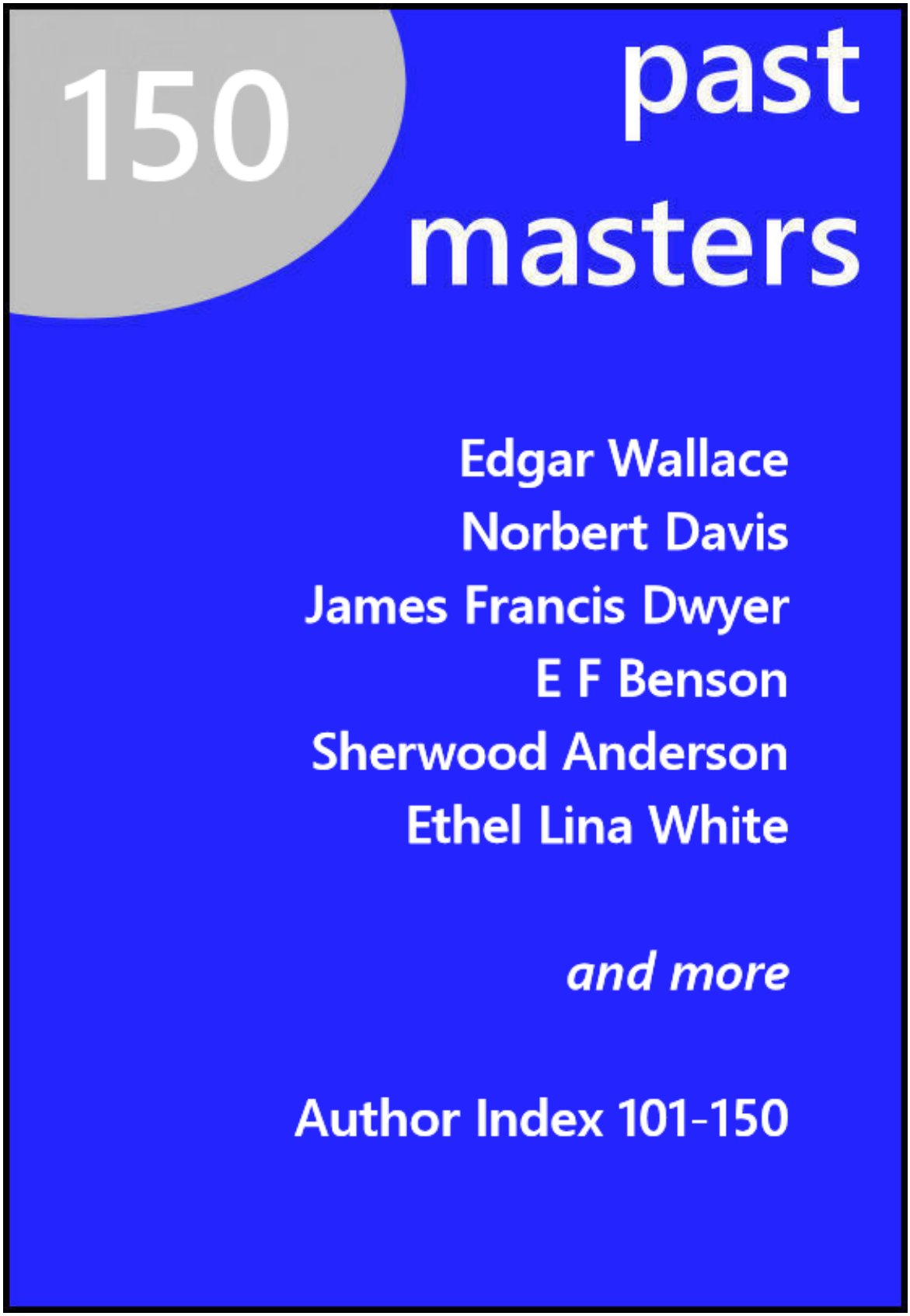
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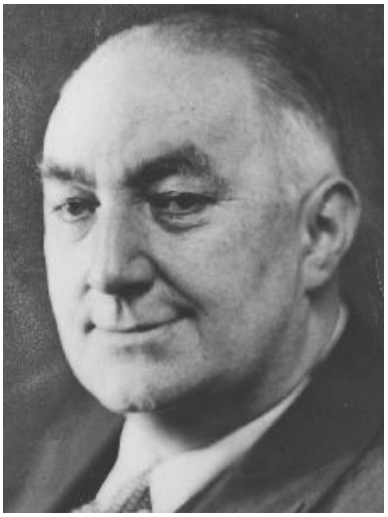

Edgar Wallace

The first of a very early Edgar Wallace short story series, featuring Police Constable Lee, a working class policeman in the poor neighbourhood of Notting Dale. (Not to be confused with the nearby, now much gentrified Notting Hill.) Notting Dale really exists. In the period of this story both Notting Hill and adjacent Notting Dale were notoriously deprived areas.

THE magistrate looked over his glasses at the prisoner in the dock, and the prisoner nodded in the friendliest way.

The clerk at his little desk before the magistrate jerked his head round in the direction of the dock.

"Were you drunk last night?" he asked pointedly.

"I were in a manner of speakin' excited," said the prisoner carefully.

"You are charged with being drunk. Are you guilty or not guilty?"

"Not guilty," said the accused loudly.

The clerk nodded, and a constable made his way to the box.

A stolid-looking constable, who moved with surprising agility, and glanced at the resentful prisoner with a twinkling eye.

"P.-C. Lee 333 'D'," he began, "I was on duty last night—"

"Hold hard," said the aggressive prisoner, "let's have all this took down in black an' white."

He fished out from the depths of his mud-stained overcoat a tattered memorandum book and the stump of pencil.

"Now then," he said sternly, "what did you say your name was, me man?"

"P.-C. Lee, of 'D'," repeated the good-natured constable.

"Oh!"

Very deliberately the accused closed his book and replaced it. He looked benevolently round, then: "Guilty," he said.

"Seven and six or five days." said the magistrate.

"The fact of it is, sir," said the accused man later— he was sitting in the waiting room whilst his wife was collecting the necessary three half-crowns— "I didn't catch your name."

"I dessay," said P.-C. Lee with a smile.

"I respect you, Mr. Lee," said the prisoner oratorically, "as if you was me own brother— hopin' there's no offence."

"None whatever," said P.-C. Lee, "an' talkin' about brothers, where's your brother Elf?"

"Elf?" said the other wonderingly, "Elf? Why, he's in Orstralia."

"I don't know a public house of that name," said P.-C. Lee reflectively. "but I dessay I shall find him."

P.-C. LEE LIVES quite close to me. We have met professionally when he was severely reticent and remarkably polite and respectful; we have met privately, when he was more communicative.

Inspector Fowler, to whom I mentioned the fact of our acquaintance, had nothing but praise for Lee.

"He's a remarkable chap," he said enthusiastically. "He's practically the last court of appeal in the Notting Dale district. They take him all their little disputes to settle and he holds an informal court at his lodgings."

For P.-C. Lee lives in the heart of Notting Dale, in a tiny house near Arbuckle-street, and sometimes, when he's off duty, and when there is a slack time in his arbitration court, he comes to me to smoke a pipe and talk shop.

"Crime," reflected P.-C. Lee, "ain't always murder, nor highway robbery, nor forgin' cheques for £10,000. That's the crimes authors— present company excepted— write about. It's generally a tale about how a detective with whiskers fails to discover the lost diamonds, an' a clean-shaven feller, who plays the fiddle, works it out on paper that the true robber was the Archbishop of Canterbury, But crime, as we know it in the 'D' Division, is mostly made up of 'bein' a suspected person' or 'loiterin' with intent' or 'being found on unoccupied premises for the purpose of committin' a felony'; or, as you have seen yourself, 'drunk an' usin' abusive language'.

"I've done all kinds of duty, plain clothes an' otherwise, an' although I've had my share of big cases, an' have been to the Old Bailey scores an' scores of

times, the gen'ral run of life has been takin' violent an' insultin' 'drunks' to the station, an' pullin' people in for petty larceny.

"One of the most extraordinary chaps I've had to deal with was a man by the name of Simmons. He moved into 64, Highfield-street, an' I got a tip from headquarters to look after him. A quiet little man, who smoked a briar pipe, an' went about his work sayin' nothing to anybody.

"He was a bachelor so far as I could find out, an' there was an old woman, who was his aunt, who kept house for him.

"The rum thing was that he didn't associate with any of the 'heads'.

"There was a nice lot of lads in my district. Nick Moss who did seven years for armed burglary; Teddy Gail, who did five for runnin' a snide factory*; Arthur Westing, the tale-pitcher— Lord! I could fill a book with their names."

_____

[A counterfeit coin manufactory.]*

"Somehow, they knew he was in a queer line of business, an' naturally they tried to be friendly with him— but he had nothin' to do with them, an' that made 'em wild. They tried to find out what his lay was, but he was as close as an oyster. They came to me, some of 'em, an' worked the conversation round innocently to Simmons.

"Nick Moss was the most curious.

" 'That's a queer chap in 64, Mr. Lee,' he says. 'Can't make him out.'

" 'Can't you?' says I.

" 'No,' says Nick, shakin' his head. 'Do you think he's quite straight, Mr. Lee?'

" 'I hope so,' says I. 'It'd be a dreadful thing if a dishonest feller came into this pure an' innercent neighbourhood corruptin' the morals of its upright citizens.'

" 'It would,' says Nick.

"To tell you the truth, I had no more idea of what Simmons' game was than they had. My instructions were worded rather curiously. 'Watch Simmons, but don't interfere with him.'

"I thought once that he must be a nark*, but the station Inspector told me he wasn't on the books, an' none of our C.I.D. men knew him. All I knew about him was that from time to time he used to go away for two or three days at a time carryin' his little brown bag an' smokin' his pipe. My mate, who's an energetic young chap, stopped him one night when he was coming home an' asked to see inside of his bag."

_____

[Police spy.]*

"But there was nothin' except a paper of sandwiches an' a couple of short luggage straps. The sandwiches was wrapped up in a paper that bore the name of a Chelmsford confectioners, an' we watched for the Chelmsford report to see if there had been a burglary— but nothin' appeared. I don't know whether Simmons reported the matter; so far as we knew at the station he didn't, but a few days afterwards my mate was transferred to 'R' Division, and got a nasty letter from the Yard tellin' him not to exceed his duty.

"One night, soon after this, I was standin' on duty at the corner of Ladbroke Grove, when a woman came to me sobbin'.

"I recognised her at once. She was the wife of Crawley Hopper, a chap well known to the police as a ladder larcernist.*"

_____

[A "ladder larceny" is a definite form of housebreaking. Whilst a family is at dinner a ladder is placed against a bedroom window, the thief enters and clears the bedroom of portable valuables.]*

" 'Mr. Lee,' she sobs, 'look at my eye!'

" 'I wouldn't mind the beatin',' she says, 'but he's took up with another girl.'

" 'Go home to your mother, Mrs. Hopper,' I says, 'He's in drink an' he'll be sorry in the morning.'

" 'He'll be sorry to-night,' she says savagely, 'because he was the man that did the Highbury job last Wednesday.'

" 'Oh!' I says—we'd been on the lookout for the man who did the Highbury job—'in that case I'll ask you for a few particulars.'

"The end of it was, I found Crawley in a little pub standin' drinks all round. He had his arm round the neck of his new girl an' I beckoned him outside.

" 'I want you, Hopper,' I says.

" 'What for?' says Hopper, as white as a sheet.

" 'The Highbury job. Come along quietly to the station.'

" 'It's a fair cop,' says Hopper, an' went like a lamb.

" 'Who gave me away?' he says.

" 'Information received,' I answered.

"He nodded his head.

" 'I think I know the lady's name,' he says, 'an' when I come out she'll know mine,' he says.

"Crawley had lots of pals, an' as soon as they found he'd been pinched, they had a whip round to get the money together for a mouthpiece (as they call a lawyer), an' naturally they went to Simmons.

"From all accounts, Nick Moss an' a feller named Peter called on him one night.

" 'We are making a collection, Mr. Simmons,' says Nick, 'for a friend of ours that got into a bit of trouble.'

" 'What kind of trouble?' says the little man.

"He stood in the doorway in his shirtsleeves smokin' his pipe most furious.

" 'To tell you the truth,' says Nick frankly, 'he's been pinched.'

" 'By the police?' says Simmons.

" 'By the police,' says Nick.

"Simmons shook his head.

" 'It's no good comin' to me,' he says. 'I don't pay a single penny to help criminals,' he says, cool as a cucumber.

" 'What?' says Nick wrathfully, 'you undersized little crook! For two pins I'd scruff you!"

"An' with that he reached out a handy left— but somehow it never reached Simmons, an' before he knew what was what a pair of hands like steel clamps caught his arm, an' he found himself chucked into the street, an' the door banged.

"Nick an' the feller Peter waited for ten minutes bangin' at the door an' askin' Simmons to be a man an' come out an' be smashed, but Simmons took no notice, an' just then I strolled up and cleared away the little crowd that had collected.

"Nick was so wild that he wouldn't go at first, but I persuaded him, first by kind words, an' then by a smack on the head. After that I got the tip that the boys were waitin' for Mr. Simmons to do him in, an' when I saw him I gave him a friendly warnin'. He smiled as though the idea of his being done in was an amusin' one, but knew our lads too well to see any joke in it.

"Sure enough they laid for him, six of the brightest boys in Nottin' Dale.

"The first I knew about it was from hearin' shouts of 'Murder!' an''Police!' an' I ran as fast as I could, blowin' my whistle.

"I found Simmons with his back to the wall, his head bleedin' but grinnin' cheerfully. He had a life-preserver his hand an' two of the lads was sleepin' peacefully on the pavement.

" 'Hullo,' says Simmons, 'just in time.'

" 'Was that you shoutin'?' I says.

" 'Not me,' says he, with a chuckle. 'I rather think it was a gent named Moss— you'll know him by the bump on his forehead.'

"They left Simmons alone after this. They used to scowl at him, an' he used to grin at them, but they never tried any more tricks. Nick Moss was rather bitter.

" 'A little feller like that didn't ought to be strong— do he, Mr. Lee?' he says indignantly. 'It's deceptful, that's what I call it.'

"Failin' to get satisfaction in one way they tried another. They did their best to put him away. There wasn't a thief in London, nor a receivin' shop either, where they not did make inquiries to find out what Simmons' particular hobby was. But for a long time they worked without any result.

"One day this chap Peter I told you about was standin' on the arrival platform at Euston, an' he sees Simmons get out of the Manchester train. Peter was a bag-claimer an' used to do quite an extensive line of business at big railway stations, pickin' up other people's bags, beggin' pardon if they found him at it, an' he was too busy to think much about Simmons till that night when he was talking things over to Nick at the little pub.

" 'Manchester!' says Nick, quite upset. 'Lord love a duck! Why, ain't you heard the news?'

" 'No,' says Peter.

" 'The Manchester an' Salisbury Bank was cleared out last night— eight thousand pounds taken an' the chap got clear away.'

"Peter whistled.

" 'He's one of the swell mob, that's what he is,' says Nick excited, 'an' if I don't put him away my name's not Nick Moss.' Which as a matter of fact," commented P.-C. Lee thoughtfully, "it wasn't."

" 'Go out an' get a late paper,' says Nick, tremblin' with excitement; 'perhaps there'll be a description of the feller that did it.'

"So Peter went out an' bought one, an' together they read it over.

" 'Here it is,' says Nick, who ain't much of a reader. "Thomas Cadaver was executed this mornin' at Manchester for— " no, that ain't it— here we are—' an' he read in the late news: "Description of the suspected man: short, strongly built, clean shaven, wearing a black bowler hat—"

'That's him for a dollar,' says Nick, an' round they came to me with the paper. I was just goin' on duty at time.

" 'Mr. Lee,' says Nick, 'we've got a good thing for you.'

"Good,' I says. 'Did you buy it or find it?'

" 'It's the Manchester Bank bloke,' says Nick, very solemn, an' handed me the paper. I read it carefully.

" 'I'll take it down to the station,' I says.

"There was a lot of news in the paper that night, but the news that mostly interested the boys was that Crawley Hopper had been found not guilty. There was some technical mistake in framin' the indictment, an' the evidence was a bit contradictory an' between the two Crawley got off.

"He was discharged at six o'clock, an' I met him at eight. He come up to me, an' I could see he'd been celebratin' the occasion, for he was what I'd call 'nasty drunk'.

" 'Hullo, P.-C. Lee,' he says, 'seen my missis?'

" 'Which one'?' I says.

" 'You know which one,' he says with an ugly look, 'the one that gave me away.'

" 'Don't talk foolish,' I says, 'nobody gave you away,'

" 'All right,' he says, turnin' to go, 'I'll know all about it very soon.'

"There are instincts that come to a man," said P.-C. Lee gravely, "that oughtn't to be suppressed. My instinct told me to arrest him— on any charge. To give him a night at the station. But I hesitated. He'd just been released from prison an' was naturally excited. I didn't want to kick a man who was down, so I let him go.

"At eleven thirty I was in Pointer-street, when I saw him comin' towards me. There was somethin' in his air that I didn't like, an' I stopped him.

" 'Where are you goin', Crawley?' I says.

"He sort of hesitated before he answered; then he ran. But I caught him in a dozen yards.

" 'Let go!' he hissed an' he struck at me.

"It was a stingin' blow in the face, an' I felt somethin' warm an' sticky. I thought he must have used a knife on me, so I took my stick to him an' that quietened him.

"With the help of another constable I got him to the station.

"My face was covered with blood, but I couldn't feel the cut, an' as soon as I got him into the steel pen the Station Inspector ordered one of the men to go for the divisional surgeon.

"Then Crawley spoke.

" 'It's all right,' he says in a matter-of-fact tone, 'he's not wounded.'

" 'Where did the blood come from?' says the Inspector.

" 'Off my hands,' says Crawley, and showed us.

" 'I've done in my missis,' he says simply.

"An' it was the truth, for we found the poor creature stone dead in her mother's house. It was one of the most dreadful things that had ever happened in our division for a long time, but it wasn't what you'd call a paper murder, for there was no mystery about it. It was just a low down, sordid wicked murder, an' Crawley's trial lasted two hours, an' he was sentenced to death. There's always a lot of mad people who'll sign a petition to get a brute like Crawley reprieved an' there was the usual procession of old ladies walkin' about askin' people to sign papers to save the life of this 'poor creature'.

"All the boys did their best in the way of gettin' mouthpieces but when it came to signin' petitions they wouldn't.

"Nick put the situation to me.

" 'I'm a thief, Mr. Lee.' he says, quite serious; 'you know all about me. I was born a thief, an' will die a thief— but I've got no use for a man who does a thing like Crawley did. We did our best to prove him innercent, but now there's no doubt about his bein' guilty he's got to go through it.'

"I hadn't much bother with 'em on my beat durin' the weeks followin' the trial. Everybody was subdued an' upset, an' I had time to keep my eye on Simmons. I'd got a fuller account of the wanted man from the Manchester police, an' I must confess that it filled the bill so far as appearances went. We reported the matter to Scotland Yard, an' they sent one of their best men down to have a look at him.

"But he poured cold water on the idea— in fact, he was very much amused.

" 'Him!' he said. 'Don't you know who he is?'

" 'No, sir,' I says, an' I waited for him to tell me, but he didn't.

"I missed Simmons for a bit. With the Crawley business finished, an' almost forgotten, things began to liven up in our quarter, an' what with one thing an' another I didn't trouble about Simmons.

"I saw him one night. He was walkin' home briskly an' nodded to me. He passed me when suddenly he stopped an' walked back.

" 'I've got a message for you,' he says. 'Crawley told me to tell you that if he'd taken your advice he wouldn't have been where he was.'

" 'Crawley,' I says puzzled, 'Crawley's dead.'

" 'I know that,' he says quietly, 'but he told me just before he died.'

" 'How could you see him?' I says.

" 'Oh, I saw him all right,' he says, turnin' away, 'I'm the hangman!' "

2: The Helpless Ones

Frederick Booth

1882-1948

Broom, Dec 1921

Anthology: *The Best Short Stories of 1922*

EDDIE GORDON sprawled face upward on the living room couch, asleep. His head was at the foot of the couch, hanging partly over the edge, and his shod feet lay nearly buried where the pillows and his overcoat were jumbled together. One arm hung over the side of the couch, and his hand, crumpled against the floor, lying limp in the shadow, resembled a cast-off gray glove. He lay so still with his clothes all tumbled and his head turned and hanging back against one shoulder, one might have thought him dead. But he only slept.

At six o'clock a lively step sounded in the hall. A key snapped in the lock. The door opened and Sally Gordon came in.

She turned her head deliberately toward the couch as she closed the door. A sigh, rather tremulous but brief, whispered in the gloom. She went quickly to the table in the middle of the room, felt about for a match, and lighted the gas chandelier. Without looking again toward the couch she removed her overcoat and hat, went into the bathroom, turned high the gas and washed her face and hands, vigorously brushing the ink-stains from her fingertips. She turned from the bathroom into the bedroom, turned up the light there, and brushed her hair with soft, slow strokes. She touched her face rather indifferently with a powder-puff, and stood then stroking her eyebrows with the tips of her fingers, looking long into the mirror. She gazed at her reflection and her face wore a look of pleasure. Once with her palm she smoothed back the hair from her forehead with a slow, caressing stroke, as one would stroke back the hair from the forehead of a child. She regarded herself steadily with the unaffected and unconcealed tenderness with which she would have regarded a child.

At last, reluctantly, she turned down the light and walked back into the living room.

She stood by the couch and stared down at her husband. Her eyes had the peculiar intent look of a mother who watches her sleeping baby. Her eyes roamed the whole length of his body, looking at his untidy clothing, his uncombed hair, at his muddy boots that had muddied his overcoat and the pillows. At last she slipped one arm under his shoulders and with a great effort pulled him up on the couch so that his head had a better resting place. She reached for a pillow and tucked it under his head. She picked up his limp, hanging arm and laid it across his body, pulled his gaping coat together and

buttoned the bottom button. She made quick, sure movements, the movements of one who performs an accustomed human task.

Having made him easier, less ungraceful in his inertness, she sat down on the edge of the couch and gazed intently into his face. Her eyes dwelt in turn on every one of his features and to every one she gave some sort of touch, his tousled hair a pat, his forehead a slow stroke, his closed eyes a touch of her finger-tips, and still in her face was that peculiar intent and anxious look, the look of a mother who dotes on her fragile treasure.

Eddie Gordon slept, hardly breathing, not moving. His sleep was profound, sodden, the sleep of a hard and habitual drinker who gets drunk every night and sleeps until morning, drunk every morning and sleeps until night. His face had a greenish yellow color about the forehead and eyes, was flushed at the cheeks and swollen at the mouth.

Sally knew what ailed him. It was a daily event in her life, and she found herself reacting to it this time exactly as she had many times before, as she did every time she saw her husband lying so still and helpless, his heart barely beating, his breath barely stirring. Always when she saw him thus, so profoundly helpless, so utterly and mystically babelike, the feelings of a mother for awhile possessed her completely. It possessed her as one is possessed by a mood. It possessed her against her will, this common emotion that had not yet found expression in her life. She dreaded this slow welling up of morbid desire to fondle and nurse that helpless, still baby, her husband. But it was not to be resisted while it ran its course. In that desire, during its beginning and even during the moments of her surrender to it, was something that filled her with self-horror. She felt herself tricked and made worse than silly. She felt herself infected with moral decay. Always she had fought against it, as she had this time, with little devices, delays, as one in sleep fights the approach of a bad dream which comes on regardless. And always she surrendered, for awhile. Always, for awhile, something in her was glad to have this man even thus dependent, thus her own.

So she sat, prinking her husband's hair, straightening his disordered clothing, lost in this strange little orgy of motherliness.

But after awhile a look of distaste ruffled a little her face. Little dimples puckered the middle of her forehead. The wide pupils of her eyes narrowed a little. She turned her face a little away, still looking, cocked her head a little sideways, bit her lip and drew her hands back, hesitating. The man's mouth was sagging open, and impulsively, with a studious, earnest air, like a child modeling clay, she took his face in both her hands and firmly pressed his mouth shut, and for a moment held it so. But when she took her hands away his mouth again sagged open. He slept.

She frowned and again put out her hands, but drew them back. She recoiled a little and turning her head swept his body from head to foot with one swift glance. She took his limp hand in hers, held it up to the light and looked at it narrowly. His hand was unclean all over and the nails were black. She flung it down hurriedly, and without getting up she turned her back to him, and bending over, her elbow on her knee, her mouth resting against her fist, stared at the floor a long while. The silence was absolute.

Minutes passed. She arose and walked aimlessly about for awhile, tucking at her hair, rearranging the furniture.

Once she glanced at her watch. She came and leaned back against the table, looking at her husband. Her hands arranged and rearranged a bunch of violets pinned between the buttoned lapels of her jacket.

After awhile she called sharply, "Eddie! Eddie!"

Silence.

She bit her lip and shook her head slowly a long time, gripping the edge of the table and holding her body rigid. She lifted up her head and gazed at the ceiling.

"Oh, God!" she whispered, as though she believed God might be in the room above. Her body sagged while she gazed at the ceiling. She sobbed without making a sound. Tears glinted in her eyes but did not roll down her cheeks.

The man lay regardless.

At last the woman smiled, a wry smile; looked at her watch; and turned toward her coat and hat.

A step sounded in the hall, heavy and rather slow, coming toward her door. It stopped at her door, there was a wait, a firm rap. She opened the door at once.

"You, Allen?" she exclaimed in an undertone.

A tall man was looking in at her. He was rather angular and awkward. His eyes were deepset and gray, and his large, rather bony face had a sober look.

"May I come in?" he said.

She led the way into the room. He followed slowly, closing the door behind him. She looked at him with a question in her face.

"I could not stay away any longer," he said.

"I never told you not to come," she replied.

He had not appeared to notice the man on the couch. Now, as if he had known all the time, he turned slowly and looked down at Eddie. After some moments he again faced her.

"The same as ever," he said.

She shrugged her shoulders and a poor smile flickered on her lips. He looked at her steadily but not offensively, and she could not take her eyes from his face. The steady, full breathing of this man could be heard in the room. He put out his great hand and stroked back the hair from her forehead as she herself had done when she stood before the mirror in the bedroom. Her head was thrust a little back by the weight of his hand, but she continued to look up into his eyes. Her hands trembled on the edge of the table.

"You've had enough," he said at last. "You're going away with me this evening. You are going now."

The pupils of her eyes widened. Her face grew pale and her lips seemed brilliant by contrast. She put both of her hands against his shoulders. The quick gesture seemed to warn him not to come any nearer, yet the touch of her hands against his coat was almost like a caress.

A sort of eagerness animated the face of the man, tempered by hesitancy and grave concern. The look of his face plainly said, "I want you, but I wouldn't hurt you."

He held his head in an awkward fashion and moved his lips, searching for words. They gazed at each other without speaking.

The man on the couch flung his head fretfully about, opened his eyes and blinked up at the light, turned his body a little more and raised himself on his elbow. His swollen lips made a grotesque attempt to draw themselves down, and failed; but the stare of his eyes was fixed, unwinking and terrible. He saw how her bare arm, the sleeve slipped back, gleamed like a bar of silver against the tall man's shoulder. He stared and then his face became dull. Quietly he laid himself down again.

The tall man said at last, "Pack your suitcase and come away. I'm not asking you to... You know. You understand me, don't you, Sally? I love you. But that's not it, not entirely. I wouldn't try to break up your home, not if you had a home. I see you wearing yourself out here. This is breaking you, this business. You've said so yourself. Now it's time to cut it out, anyway, for awhile. I saw that look in your eyes when I came in. Leave him a note. I'll take you anywhere you say. You can go to my mother's, or you can go to a hotel. But you've got to have a rest for awhile anyway. I saw that look in your eyes when I came in. Now you've got to give this business a let-up. Don't worry about him. Leave him a note and some money. Anyway, I have always managed to look him up every day or so, I'll see to it that he gets along. You know that Eddie and I understand each other, Sally, I mean, when he's sober. And I don't have to tell you, do I Sally, that I am honest about it with both of you, no matter how much I want you? You and Eddie and I, we've always been friends, and we always will be, no matter what happens. I'll see him and I'll talk to him straight out. It will

be for the best all the way round, for him too. He'll see the thing straight. He's not so unreasonable, not when he's sober. I know he will consent. I know it can be settled in the right way. Pack a suitcase and come away with me tonight."

His heavy manner, his blunt speech, his awkwardness, revealed the heaviness of his desire and his anxious earnestness.

The woman had slowly drawn away from him. Now she leaned back against the table, one hand braced against the edge, the other hand smoothing down the lapel of her jacket. She held her head sideways and cast at the floor a troubled and pensive look, its pathos heightened by the whiteness of her face and supple neck.

She thinned her lips and a frown puckered her forehead.

"No," she said slowly, in a small voice. "No, I couldn't do that. You know I couldn't, Allen. No. No."

The tall man looked at her with an expression of benign indecision and puzzlement. He turned his head toward the sprawled shape on the couch. He bit his lip. A deep flush mounted to his forehead and made the arteries in his temples swell. He stroked his chin, meditating.

"Sally," he said at last. The constraint in his voice made the woman look quickly up. "I'll tell you, Sally, I haven't talked to you about this thing the way I feel like talking. Now I'm going to talk the way I feel like talking. Maybe it's brutal of me to do it, but I can't help that. I have to say what I think. I'm that way and you know me well enough not to mind too much."

But he paused and studied her face, hesitating, half afraid. Then he said:

"You loved me before you met Eddie, didn't you, Sally?"

"Yes."

"I knew it." His voice trembled a little, and he stopped for a moment because he did not want to show how pleased he was at her confession while he was still under the disadvantage of her resistance.

His slow voice went on, "Yes, I used to feel almost sure of it. Even though it was presumptuous of me, I did think so. You were always straightforward. You were never ashamed of your feelings. But I couldn't ask you to marry me, not then. You remember how things were with me— my kid sisters and all to be looked after. I had to wait."

"I understood," said Sally in a low voice. "I knew you cared, and why you— didn't say anything."

"But you married Eddie just the same! And it wasn't because you didn't care for me. I know why you married him. I'm going to tell you why you married him."

"Don't! You needn't tell me. I know. I didn't know then. I just felt something that was too strong for me. I didn't know why I had to give in to it. I just had to. Now I know what it was. I know why I had to give in to it."

She paused, pressed the back of one hand against her mouth. She bent her head. Her hand trembled against her mouth and her shoulders trembled a little too. She took her hand away from her mouth and began to tug at one of the buttons of her coat. Her lips were white. She pressed her upper lip against her teeth to keep it from quivering.

"I could have waited for you. I knew you would ask me some day. But there was one thing I couldn't wait for. I was twenty-four, and natural. My whole feeling for life and people was full of a woman's desires. I didn't know it then, but I know it now. I was strong, I could have waited if I had known it then. I know now that my whole feeling for Eddie was that I wanted to mother him. I had to mother somebody. But I didn't know it was that, not then. I didn't understand it at all. I used to be afraid and ashamed because I still loved you and here all the time Eddie and I were coming closer and closer together. I didn't understand myself at all. Yes, I still loved you, but... I couldn't have children then, it takes money to have children. Those days you were having your own struggles and I could barely make my living. I couldn't even allow myself to think of having children."

She stopped, turned her head and looked at the sleeper on the couch. She knitted her brows and compressed her lips. The tall man moved his lips as if to speak, but she went on:

"One night he came to see me. That was when he was on The Sun, and he had made such a hit, you remember? He was drunk that night. He came to the house drunk. I used to wonder how he could get drunk— how he could— such a sweet boy. Now I know why. He got himself drunk so he could run away from responsibilities— so he would be helpless— so he could be a child, just as he is now. He was beautiful that night— drunk. He was beautiful partly because he was drunk. Can you understand that? Some men are that way. He was that way then. His cheeks were flushed, his eyes sparkled, and his yellow hair stood up all over his head, glittering in the lamplight. He sat on the couch and drew up his knees so that his feet were on the couch too. He sat there and talked to me. He lisped when he talked. His head was unsteady on his shoulders, like a baby's. He talked to me about his mother. You know she died when he was five. He had to grow up unfinished. He had become a man but he was still a child. He told me how beautiful his mother was and how he would have been different if she had lived. I was like her, he said. He sat there and talked to me just about as he would have talked to his mother, I suppose, if she had been there in my place. The room was warm and after awhile he couldn't talk at all.

But he was beautiful, as a child is beautiful. His yellow head fell over against me. I put my arms around him and pulled his head down and held him close to me. I didn't know what I was doing. Maybe I didn't want to know.

"After that I couldn't resist him. I didn't try. I wouldn't let myself think about you. Eddie needed me. The whole thing with me was pity. A woman must pity something! I told myself that Eddie needed me. I loved him for his weaknesses."

The tall man slowly nodded his head. "I knew that was why you married him," he said. "I can see how a woman would do that."

The woman went on: "After we were married I used to go out and hunt for him when he didn't come home. I still do sometimes. I hunt for him in the back rooms of saloons, at the bar, down at the Press Club. I go along the streets where I know he is likely to be. I lead him home by the hand. Yes, and he leans on me, and he babbles to me like a baby as we go along the streets, he says the same things over and over again the way a baby does. He comes with me through the streets like a child that was lost and is glad to be found again. And when I get him home I wash his face and feed him. I put my arm around him and make him eat. I undress him and put him to bed. And he is glad of it. He is glad to be like a baby; then he can live that part of his life that was never finished. And I used to be glad too."

"You used to be glad?" the tall man said. "That is hard to believe."

"Yes, I think I must have been glad of his helplessness. Do you understand? His helplessness gave me an excuse to mother him. I had to mother somebody! The worst thing is, no good at all has come of our being married— no good to either of us. No, it has hurt us both."

She turned her head, holding it a little sideways as she had when she sat on the couch by her husband, and looked at him again. There was something childlike in the expression of her face and in her pose. Her whole body expressed ingenuous bewilderment and trouble. She put her finger to her lips.

The tall man, his hands at his side, studied her face. He said nothing. He waited for her to go on.

She made a little gesture with her hand as if she were brushing something away.

"See, now he has got to where he no longer wants even to be helped. Now he doesn't even want to be cared for."

Her voice was tired and plaintive, the voice of a tired child.

"To be a coddled baby doesn't satisfy him any more. He wants to be a sleeping baby. Sleep! Sleep! Only let him sleep! He gets drunk at night and sleeps till morning. He gets drunk in the morning and sleeps till night. That is what drinking is with him. That is what drinking is for. That is the way he

escapes— he has always drunk to escape— he is backing out of life entirely. Do you see? Now he doesn't want me to take care of him any more, for that reminds him that he is alive and in the world. I know. He is trying to find again the deep sleep that a baby has before it is born."

The tall man would have spoken but she went on.

"Can't you see how it is with me now? There is no longer any satisfaction, not even the kind of satisfaction I got from it at first. Maybe I should have known better at first. But we always say that afterward, when it is too late."

"It isn't too late," the tall man said. "You know it was a mistake. It's a simple thing to correct that mistake, and you know it's perfectly straight. As far as Eddie is concerned we will take care of him."

"But I couldn't do it. I just couldn't, somehow. You don't know how it is. But I know. The whole thing is like a habit, only it's worse than a habit. I know. I have tried to break it. But I didn't use much will power. Maybe I didn't want to break it.

"You think I am strong. Maybe I am strong. But I am like most women. My strength does just about as it pleases with me."

She bowed her head and looked hopelessly at the floor.

The tall man had already taken her by the shoulders. She lifted her head quickly. Her face wore a look of surprise and fear because of his sudden and strong grip on her shoulders.

"You may call it a habit or whatever you like, you've had enough of it," he said. His face had turned pale and his mouth was stern. But his eyes regarded her kindly. She made no attempt to pull away from him. The frightened look left her face.

"You'll put an end to this business. I'll make you. Then you'll be glad."

They looked at each other in silence. The sleeper on the couch seemed to be holding his breath.

"I don't know," said the woman at last. "Maybe I would be glad. Yes, maybe I would be glad. But I don't know— I just don't know how I could make myself do it."

"How about me?" said the tall man in a voice that had changed since last he spoke. "Why do you always leave me out of it? Maybe if you let yourself think about me once in a while..."

He had turned pale and his lips were trembling. He stopped speaking, but not because he was ashamed of his emotion. He stopped speaking because he was ashamed of what his emotion had impelled him to say.

She was looking at him in surprise and wonder. She put out one hand and touched his coat with her finger-tips, unconsciously, lightly. Her chin quivered.

"Allen," she said softly, "Allen, I didn't mean— please—"

"Never mind," he said slowly, in a constrained voice. "You know I didn't mean to talk to you that way. I don't want to appeal to your sympathy. And I don't want to make you do anything. You know that. I meant all along to appeal to your understanding. You know that. I still mean to. And as far as understanding goes, you understand everything as well as I do. It's all a matter of making up your mind. I don't want to force you to do anything. I know how hard it is for you. You take your time about it. Don't think about me. Try to think about what is the best thing to do. And just take your time about it."

She still kept her head lowered and still her fingers touched his coat. He knew that if he had taken her in his arms then and there the decision would have been entirely of his own making, and to his own liking. But his pride rebelled at the thought of reaching a decision, above all a decision in his own favor, by such a primitive method, by a method so contrary to his idea of how an. issue between a man and a woman should be met. He would have her make her decision through her own understanding and by her own will I His hands left her shoulders and he stepped a little away from her. They no longer touched each other.

She nodded her head a little, looking at the floor.

He studied her, a little puzzled. "Then, may I come back next week, say, next Monday evening?"

Again she nodded her head, without looking up.

"Will you try to make up your mind between now and then? Will you be ready to tell me what you have decided to do?" He spoke almost as he would have spoken to a child.

For a moment she still looked at the floor. Then she lifted her head. She met his kind gaze timidly.

"Yes, Allen, I will," she replied in a low voice.

He drew a deep breath. "Good night," he said, awkwardly holding out his hand.

"Good night, Allen."

He was gone and she closed the door quickly behind him.

She stood by the door while the sound of his footsteps rang in the hall. She looked wistfully about the room, sunk again in silence. She puckered her brows, thinking.

She understood Allen. She knew why he had not followed up his advantage. She respected him for it. But she almost hated him for it as well.

She walked slowly back into the middle of the room. Again she leaned back against the table. The uneasy breathing of the man on the couch could be heard.

"Eddie," she called.

Slowly he turned his face away from the wall. He opened his eyes and for a moment stared without winking down the length of his body. Then he crooked one arm, raised himself to a sitting posture, turned and pulled his feet off the couch. He sat with his body toward her. But he looked down at her feet. He put his hands down on either side of him against the couch, as if to brace himself. He moved his dry lips two or three times.

"So you let Allen go away without you," he said.

"You were awake?"

"Most of the time." He looked up at her. He had slept a long time and he was quite sober. The pupils of his blue eyes were like black pin-heads. He tried to control the uneasy movements of his swollen upper lip.

"I heard what you told him," he declared in a high, assertive voice. "You're right about me. I know it. But it's worse than you think. I'm done. I'll be glad when I'm dead. Not on your account either. On my own account. I'll be glad when I'm dead, I tell you. You ought to have gone away with him. What makes you so silly?"

"Please, Eddie."

"I mean it. I wish you'd go away and leave me. I wish to God you would."

He stared defiantly at her, blinking his eyes.

She tried to speak. She moved her lips, searching for words. Exasperation struggled with the pity in her face.

She looked at him without trying to hide her pity. Her forehead was puckered with little dimples. She tilted her head a little to one side and half extended one hand.

"Eddie!" she cried. "Eddie, my poor boy! If you'd only let me—"

"Ah-h!" He waved his hand in front of his face, brushing away her words.

"Don't I know what you're about to say!" he sneered, twisting his face and making his light-colored eyes glare at her.

"Save me— eh? Want to try that again, eh? What do you want to do that for? You've tried that before. Now you want to try it again, eh? I know. I know. What makes you so silly? I'm done. You know I'm done. Allen's right. Better chuck the whole thing and forget it. You'll be glad afterward."

He wagged his head, smirked at her and added: "And maybe you don't know it but I'll be damned glad of it too."

"You mustn't talk that way, Eddie. You mustn't."

"Yes I will," he declared, pulling down his puffed upper lip. He looked around at the floor, at the furniture, at her, with an unchanging, hard stare. A silence followed. Nothing could be heard but his quick, uneasy breathing and the uneasy motions of his body on the couch. His hands moved all of the time. His yellowish face moved. His eyes rested nowhere.

She came and sat by him. She put her hand on his shoulder. She regarded him with a look of pity, watching his face. Her feeling for him trembled on her lips. Her eyes watched every movement he made, dwelt on every one of his features. Her fingers trembled.

But he would not look at her. He looked sideways at the floor.

"When he comes Monday you'll go with him. You'd better." His voice was high and harsh.

"No I won't go!" She put her arms around him and began to cry. "I just couldn't, somehow. What would become of you? How could I when I know you would be alone and nobody to take care of you! Eddie, I feel so sorry for you. I feel so sorry for you. As long as you need me I shall stay. I shall stay. I don't know what will become of us but I shall stay. I can't help myself."

He stiffly put up his hands and pulled her arms away from his shoulders. She turned away from him. He, bending over, propping his elbows on his knees and his chin against his fists, stared at the floor. He blinked his eyes and puckered his forehead as if he were trying to think.

She stood half turned from him, with her head bent, staring at the floor. She was half ashamed, half pensive. The silence lasted a long time. In the silence the man made a despairing gesture and ejaculated:

"Oh, Jesus, what's the use!"

Minutes passed. The woman stood without moving. The man's lips writhed, his forehead scowled, his eyes stared.

"There's no use in talking about it, is there Eddie?" The woman turned and looked at him with patient weariness. He let his hands fall and dangle between his knees. He shook his head.

"Christ, no! What's the use in talking!"

She slowly crossed the room and began putting on her hat.

"I'm going to dinner; will you come with me?" She looked at him with a flash of wistfulness in her eyes.

He shook his head without saying anything. She put on her overcoat and came over to him, stood by his side and stroked his hair. He stared at the floor.

''I'll be back in about an hour," she said at last. "Goodby, Eddie."

"Good-by."

He listened to her footsteps in the hall until they died away. He sat thrusting his head forward. The fixed stare of his light-colored eyes defied the lines of his mouth which changed all of the time.

At last he stood erect in a crumpled sort of way and walked into the middle of the room. His wrinkled trousers clung to his calves and bagged at the knees. His coat had come unbuttoned and he held it together with one hand like a woman wearing a shawl. He frowned, sticking out his upper lip; and his

forehead was broken by many little wrinkles. His forehead was greenish-yellow in the gaslight. He shivered and a whisper rang through the room:

"Jesus, it's cold!"

He let go of his coat, felt in his pockets and brought out a sack of tobacco and some papers, rolled a cigarette, lighted it and began to smoke greedily, inhaling the smoke. He looked at the table, at the chairs, at the floor. And all the time he made grimaces, scowled and shivered. His movements were uncertain and halting, but he stared intently this way and that. He was trying to reflect. But he was dizzy and cold. His blood felt yellow.

Once he looked at the door where they had gone out. He listened a long time while the cigarette smoked in his fingers.

At last he turned away from the door, back toward the middle of the room. He happened to see her handkerchief lying at the foot of the table. He threw away the cigarette and picked up the handkerchief and stared at it. He shivered more than ever and pulled his coat together at the bottom, but forgot to button it.

With a gesture of finality he threw the handkerchief from him, on the table. With the manner of an idle or a sick man he walked to the window, drew aside the curtain and looked down at the glittering street. His mind became clearer and his thoughts began to arrange themselves in more orderly fashion.

After a long time he turned away from the window.

"Yes," he drawled in a fretful voice, "yes it would serve me right. Christ, yes, she'd be doing the right thing."

His forehead became smooth. His face ceased to pout and wrinkle. It became calm. The pupils of his staring eyes became a little larger. He lifted his head a little. His face had almost an eager look. One would have said that he had reached some sort of a decision.

He found some paper and envelopes in the table-drawer and took a pencil from his pocket. Craning over the table, his intent face pallid in the gaslight, his hair gleaming like disordered gilt plush, he began to write in a shaky large scrawl.

He wrote one sheet almost full; signed it; folded it crookedly; put it in an envelope and scrawled a single line across the face of the envelope. On another sheet he wrote six or seven short lines, underlining each one; signed it boldly at the bottom and put it in another envelope, which he addressed.

He stood the two envelopes against some books and looked at them as he put the pencil back in his pocket. On the first envelope was written: *For My Wife*. On the other: *For the Police*.

He rolled and smoked another cigarette slowly, looking at one spot on the carpet.

At last he tossed the remnant of the cigarette on the floor as if something in him craved disorder. He walked slowly into the bedroom, thrusting his head forward and his elbows out.

In the bedroom he turned up the light and without hesitation opened a little drawer in the old-fashioned bureau, taking out a revolver. He held it in both hands and cocked it. He stared into the mirror, and with something of the manner of a man who prepares to take a new kind of medicine he lifted the revolver and pointed it at his temple.

Then something in his whole mechanism seemed to stop and something else seemed to start. His body sagged and quivered at the same time. His eyes bulged. His mouth opened in such a way that his teeth glittered. A loud groan rang through the room. Quickly he laid the revolver down and walked back into the living room. He took unsteady steps and held his hands against his forehead.

"Oh, Jesus!" he cried.

He stood still a long time, pondering. It seemed to him that the silence of the room was lost in another silence.

His eye fell on a quart whiskey-bottle standing on a corner of the table. The unusual character of his awakening had made him, thus far, forget all about it.

It was nearly a third full of liquor. A little gleam came into his eye, the faintest color into his cheeks. He looked at the bottle with a sort of eagerness and went hopefully toward it.

He was thinking of the revolver on the bureau and it seemed to him that some of the whiskey would make that business easier.

He picked up the glass and the bottle and poured out a large drink, shuddered and swallowed it, making a face. He had eaten nothing all day and at once the whiskey was racing in his blood. Color flashed into his cheeks. He felt his blood becoming red again.

He took another drink and waited for the effect. After a little while he took still another. There was only a little left in the bottle.

Now his eyes were brighter and they had a misty look. The pupils were larger. He blinked his eyes and looked about. His face looked almost cheerful. He appeared to be reflecting. Indeed his thoughts raced rapidly but they began to tumble over each other. He hardly understood his thoughts. Vague emotions stirred him.

A sort of courage was mounting in his body, warming him like a new-kindled fire. But he felt mournful too.

He waited. He was about to have great thoughts. He was about to discover some magnificent solution of everything.

He stood still a long time, pondering. A little smile began to tremble on his mouth.

He poured out the last of the whiskey and shook the bottle to get the last drop. But now his head was rolling a little and his eyes were vague.

He lifted the glass. Just then his uncertain glance fell on his wife's handkerchief. He looked long at the handkerchief, blinking. His head wobbled a little. He was trying to seize some idea that eluded him. Thoughts rose up in his mind but they fell over one another. His face wore a crippled look.

A long while he stood in thought, staring feebly at the handkerchief. But at last a faint, self-satisfied smile appeared on his trembling mouth.

Visibly swaying he turned around, his gaze wandering a little; steadied himself a little bit, and began to look uncertainly in the direction of the door. The smile flickered over his face like a blue flame. His mouth moved. His lips picked at words.

But he remembered the whiskey. He lifted the tumbler and emptied it, spilling some on his chin, half turned and with a single motion flung the glass ringing on the table.

He turned toward the door again, peering uncertainly as a man peers in the dusk. His head wagged. His voice blurred the silence:

"Di' think I was 'sleep?"

Pleased, he laughed, rolling his head. But he stopped laughing to look toward the door, listening. His mouth got ready to talk.

"Di'— di' y' think I was 'sleep? Di' y' think I was 'sleep?" he called. No reply. Silence beyond the door. He smiled a satisfied smile. He laughed at the silence beyond the door; wagged his head; turned away; made two or three sidelong steps and brought up against the table. He flattened one hand out on the table-top and leaned against that hand. He stood there. His body swayed back and forth to a certain rhythm, like a weed in a creek. A smile flickered back and forth across his face like shadow on a shaking leaf. Sunk in drunken revery he blinked his drunken eyes, smirked and blinked. Now and again, when he leaned harder than usual, the legs of the table creaked under his weight. The hiss of the hot gas-lamp mingled with the noise of his breathing.

The little handkerchief lay on the table just under his nose. He had to see it if he looked. And when at last, tired of leaning against the table, he roused himself a little from his revery, he did see it at once. Pulling himself up as straight as he could he confronted the handkerchief with all his unsteady dignity, and with a righteous smirk, as one confronts an offender. He took the handkerchief in both his hands and turned it over and over. He stared at it as a baby stares at a new plaything. He moved his mouth all the time, breathing noisily. He blinked hard and often, looking and pondering. He seemed to be

trying to recall something the handkerchief almost reminded him of, something he had forgotten.

At last he made the sort of motion a baby makes when it throws down a plaything, and threw the handkerchief on the floor. He looked pleased with himself and smirked down at the handkerchief. Satisfied, he pondered no longer. He turned with studied care, aimed himself at the bedroom door, made crooked long steps and went unsteadily in.

He looked at the revolver a long time. Sometimes he scowled. Sometimes he smiled. After awhile he picked up the revolver in both hands; turned and swayed back into the living room. He stood in the middle of the room, his body bending to and fro, and peered at the revolver with idiotic eyes. He stuck out his lips; blinked his eyes with great deliberation, pondered over the thing he held in his hands.

Now he began to look at the door again, listening and watching more and more attentively. At last he fixed his gaze wholly upon the door. The pupils of his eyes were distended. Bending in the middle, his legs trembling, his body swayed this way and that. His lips no longer smiled, but writhed.

"Think I was 'sleep?" he called. "Di' y' think— steal m' wife when I was 'sleep?"

His voice shrilled in the room. He began to hurl at the door inept anathemas against the treachery of wives and the cowardice of men. He made uncouth accusations. He delivered himself of bizarre philosophies; sometimes mumbling, sometimes shrilling his words. He twisted his shoulders, stepping about in a small space. His voice quavered, rising and falling. His head tossed as if he rode in a boat.

But the silence at last reduced him to silence.

The labor of thought again showed in his face. Something was eluding him. Yes, he had forgotten something he was going to do. He tried hard in his own way, opening and shutting his mouth, blinking and searching the floor with his aimless eyes. Sometimes mutterings fell out of his mouth.

He smiled again. Something stirred him. Now he remembered what he had forgotten. He lifted the hand that held the revolver and aimed his wavering gaze down toward it. He raised his eyebrows and blinked. He turned the gun over this way and that, staring and blinking as if he had never seen one before in all his life. His face was pulled out of shape with the labor of cogitation. He began to smirk. He looked toward the door again, opening and shutting his mouth; and at last he delivered himself:

"Di' y' think I was go' shoo' m'self? Di' y' think I was go' shoo' m'self?"

His head sank on his breast and his eyes half closed. But he heaved his head up again and opened his eyes.

"Ah, sure, sure," he called. "Steal m' wife an' I shoo' m'self. Sure! sure!"

He laughed. But the laugh crumpled up in the silence.

His eyes were witless. It looked as though his pale head had talked without his knowing it. He wagged his head and announced solemnly:

"I'll shoo' you." He waited a moment, trying to keep his gaze on the door, and repeated more loudly:

"I'll shoo' you. I'll shoo' you."

He smiled down at the revolver and patted the barrel with an aimless motion.

"We know where fin' 'im, don't we?" he said to the revolver.

His eyes brightened and he became a little steadier smirking at the door, he called loudly, "We know where fin' 'im. We know where fin' 'im."

He turned, and like a man walking in the dark he made his way to the couch. Here he laid the revolver down. With much labor and fumbling he gathered up his overcoat. With much labor he began to put it on. Half way through the job he paused, turned, and sent a wavering look toward the door.

"Di' y' think I do' know where fin' im?" he jibed.

He got his overcoat on and put on his hat. He stood a long time with a solemn expression on his face. He blinked studiously. He had become steadier. A fixed purpose seemed to have got him under its control. With great care he buttoned the overcoat and settled his hat as straight on his head as he could. Now his eyes were no longer blurred and wavering. They glowed as with fever and a flame was mounting in his cheeks. But his mouth was a woeful thing, a wound that opened and shut, writhing.

He picked up the revolver and looked at it, smirking. With the smirk on his face he turned toward the door and began to shove the revolver down into the inside pocket of his overcoat.

"We know," he said, wagging at the door. "We know where—"

The trigger of the revolver must have caught in some part of his clothing. The crash of the discharge tore the wavering smirk from his face. Piteously intent, he stared for a second at the door. Then he lay quickly down, as if he accepted everything.

He lay first on his face, and muzzled his face snugly between his hands. Presently he turned over quietly on his back. One hand knocked once or twice against the floor.

The look fixed on his countenance was the look of one who has at last discovered something real.

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3: The Room in the Tower

E. F. Benson

1867-1940

The Pall Mall Magazine, Jan 1912

E. F. Benson

E. F. Benson is probably best known now for his "Mapp and Lucia" saga, which has been adapte for TV several times, as recently as 2014, but he was also a fine writer of horror and supernatural stories as well.

IT IS PROBABLE that everybody who is at all a constant dreamer has had at least one experience of an event or a sequence of circumstances which have come to his mind in sleep being subsequently realised in the material world. But, in my opinion, so far from this being a strange thing, it would be far odder if this fulfilment did not occasionally happen, since our dreams are, as a rule, concerned with people whom we know and places with which we are familiar, such as might very naturally occur in the awake and day-lit world. True, these dreams are often broken into by some absurd and fantastic incident, which puts them out of court in regard to their subsequent fulfilment, but on the mere calculation of chances, it does not appear in the least unlikely that a dream imagined by anyone who dreams constantly should occasionally come true. Not long ago, for instance, I experienced such a fulfilment of a dream which seems to me in no way remarkable and to have no kind of psychical significance. The manner of it was as follows.

A certain friend of mine, living abroad, is amiable enough to write to me about once in a fortnight. Thus, when fourteen days or thereabouts have elapsed since I last heard from him, my mind, probably, either consciously or subconsciously, is expectant of a letter from him. One night last week I

dreamed that as I was going upstairs to dress for dinner I heard, as I often heard, the sound of the postman's knock on my front door, and diverted my direction downstairs instead. There, among other correspondence, was a letter from him. Thereafter the fantastic entered, for on opening it I found inside the ace of diamonds, and scribbled across it in his well-known handwriting, "I am sending you this for safe custody, as you know it is running an unreasonable risk to keep aces in Italy." The next evening I was just preparing to go upstairs to dress when I heard the postman's knock, and did precisely as I had done in my dream. There, among other letters, was one from my friend. Only it did not contain the ace of diamonds. Had it done so, I should have attached more weight to the matter, which, as it stands, seems to me a perfectly ordinary coincidence. No doubt I consciously or subconsciously expected a letter from him, and this suggested to me my dream. Similarly, the fact that my friend had not written to me for a fortnight suggested to him that he should do so. But occasionally it is not so easy to find such an explanation, and for the following story I can find no explanation at all. It came out of the dark, and into the dark it has gone again.

All my life I have been a habitual dreamer: the nights are few, that is to say, when I do not find on awaking in the morning that some mental experience has been mine, and sometimes, all night long, apparently, a series of the most dazzling adventures befall me. Almost without exception these adventures are pleasant, though often merely trivial. It is of an exception that I am going to speak.

It was when I was about sixteen that a certain dream first came to me, and this is how it befell. It opened with my being set down at the door of a big red-brick house, where, I understood, I was going to stay. The servant who opened the door told me that tea was going on in the garden, and led me through a low dark-panelled hall, with a large open fireplace, on to a cheerful green lawn set round with flower beds. There were grouped about the tea-table a small party of people, but they were all strangers to me except one, who was a school-fellow called Jack Stone, clearly the son of the house, and he introduced me to his mother and father and a couple of sisters. I was, I remember, somewhat astonished to find myself here, for the boy in question was scarcely known to me, and I rather disliked what I knew of him: moreover, he had left school nearly a year before. The afternoon was very hot, and an intolerable oppression reigned. On the far side of the lawn ran a red-brick wall, with an iron gate in its centre, outside which stood a walnut tree. We sat in the shadow of the house opposite a row of long windows, inside which I could see a table with cloth laid, glimmering with glass and silver. This garden front of the house

was very long, and at one end of it stood a tower of three stories, which looked to me much older than the rest of the building.

Before long, Mrs Stone, who, like the rest of the party, had sat in absolute silence, said to me, "Jack will show you your room: I have given you the room in the tower."

Quite inexplicably my heart sank at her words. I felt as if I had known that I should have the room in the tower, and that it contained something dreadful and significant. Jack instantly got up, and I understood that I had to follow him. In silence we passed through the hall, and mounted a great oak staircase with many corners, and arrived at a small landing with two doors set in it. He pushed one of these open for me to enter, and without coming in himself, closed it behind me. Then I knew that my conjecture had been right: there was something awful in the room, and with the terror of nightmare growing swiftly and enveloping me, I awoke in a spasm of terror.

Now that dream or variations on it occurred to me intermittently for fifteen years. Most often it came in exactly this form, the arrival, the tea laid out on the lawn, the deadly silence succeeded by that one deadly sentence, the mounting with Jack Stone up to the room in the tower where horror dwelt, and it always came to a close in the nightmare of terror at that which was in the room, though I never saw what it was. At other times I experienced variations on this same theme. Occasionally, for instance, we would be sitting at dinner in the dining-room, into the windows of which I had looked on the first night when the dream of this house visited me, but wherever we were, there was the same silence, the same sense of dreadful oppression and foreboding. And the silence I knew would always be broken by Mrs Stone saying to me, "Jack will show you your room: I have given you the room in the tower." Upon which (this was invariable) I had to follow him up the oak staircase with many corners, and enter the place that I dreaded more and more each time that I visited it in sleep. Or, again, I would find myself playing cards still in silence in a drawing-room lit with immense chandeliers, that gave a blinding illumination. What the game was I have no idea; what I remember, with a sense of miserable anticipation, was that soon Mrs Stone would get up and say to me, "Jack will show you your room: I have given you the room in the tower." This drawing-room where we played cards was next to the dining-room, and, as I have said, was always brilliantly illuminated, whereas the rest of the house was full of dusk and shadows. And yet, how often, in spite of those bouquets of lights, have I not pored over the cards that were dealed me, scarcely able for some reason to see them. Their designs, too, were strange: there were no red suits, but all were black, and among them there were certain cards which were black all over. I hated and dreaded those.

As this dream continued to recur, I got to know the greater part of the house. There was a smoking-room beyond the drawing-room, at the end of a passage with a green baize door. It was always very dark there, and as often as I went there I passed somebody whom I could not see in the doorway coming out. Curious developments, too, took place in the characters that peopled the dream as might happen to living persons. Mrs Stone, for instance, who, when I first saw her, had been black haired, became grey, and instead of rising briskly, as she had done at first when she said, "Jack will show you your room: I have given you the room in the tower," got up very feebly, as if the strength was leaving her limbs. Jack also grew up, and became a rather ill-looking young man, with a brown moustache, while one of the sisters ceased to appear, and I understood she was married.

Then it so happened that I was not visited by this dream for six months or more, and I began to hope, in such inexplicable dread did I hold it, that it had passed away for good. But one night after this interval I again found myself being shown out on to the lawn for tea, and Mrs Stone was not there, while the others were all dressed in black. At once I guessed the reason, and my heart leaped at the thought that perhaps this time I should not have to sleep in the room in the tower, and though we usually all sat in silence, on this occasion the sense of relief made me talk and laugh as I had never yet done. But even then matters were not altogether comfortable, for no one else spoke, but they all looked secretly at each other. And soon the foolish stream of my talk ran dry, and gradually an apprehension worse than anything I had previously known gained on me as the light slowly faded.

Suddenly a voice which I knew well broke the stillness, the voice of Mrs Stone, saying, "Jack will show you your room: I have given you the room in the tower." It seemed to come from near the gate in the red-brick wall that bounded the lawn, and looking up, I saw that the grass outside was sown thick with gravestones. A curious greyish light shone from them, and I could read the lettering on the grave nearest me, and it was, "In evil memory of Julia Stone." And as usual Jack got up, and again I followed him through the hall and up the staircase with many corners. On this occasion it was darker than usual, and when I passed into the room in the tower I could only just see the furniture, the position of which was already familiar to me. Also there was a dreadful odour of decay in the room, and I woke screaming.

The dream, with such variations and developments as I have mentioned, went on at intervals for fifteen years. Sometimes I would dream it two or three nights in succession; once, as I have said, there was an intermission of six months, but taking a reasonable average, I should say that I dreamed it quite as often as once in a month. It had, as is plain, something of nightmare about

it, since it always ended in the same appalling terror, which so far from getting less, seemed to me to gather fresh fear every time that I experienced it. There was, too, a strange and dreadful consistency about it. The characters in it, as I have mentioned, got regularly older, death and marriage visited this silent family, and I never in the dream, after Mrs Stone had died, set eyes on her again. But it was always her voice that told me that the room in the tower was prepared for me, and whether we had tea out on the lawn, or the scene was laid in one of the rooms overlooking it, I could always see her gravestone standing just outside the iron gate. It was the same, too, with the married daughter; usually she was not present, but once or twice she returned again, in company with a man, whom I took to be her husband. He, too, like the rest of them, was always silent. But, owing to the constant repetition of the dream, I had ceased to attach, in my waking hours, any significance to it. I never met Jack Stone again during all those years, nor did I ever see a house that resembled this dark house of my dream. And then something happened.

I had been in London in this year, up till the end of July, and during the first week in August went down to stay with a friend in a house he had taken for the summer months, in the Ashdown Forest district of Sussex. I left London early, for John Clinton was to meet me at Forest Row Station, and we were going to spend the day golfing, and go to his house in the evening. He had his motor with him, and we set off, about five of the afternoon, after a thoroughly delightful day, for the drive, the distance being some ten miles. As it was still so early we did not have tea at the club house, but waited till we should get home. As we drove, the weather, which up till then had been, though hot, deliciously fresh, seemed to me to alter in quality, and become very stagnant and oppressive, and I felt that indefinable sense of ominous apprehension that I am accustomed to before thunder. John, however, did not share my views, attributing my loss of lightness to the fact that I had lost both my matches. Events proved, however, that I was right, though I do not think that the thunderstorm that broke that night was the sole cause of my depression.

Our way lay through deep high-banked lanes, and before we had gone very far I fell asleep, and was only awakened by the stopping of the motor. And with a sudden thrill, partly of fear but chiefly of curiosity, I found myself standing in the doorway of my house of dream. We went, I half wondering whether or not I was dreaming still, through a low oak-panelled hall, and out on to the lawn, where tea was laid in the shadow of the house. It was set in flower beds, a red-brick wall, with a gate in it, bounded one side, and out beyond that was a space of rough grass with a walnut tree. The façade of the house was very long, and at one end stood a three-storied tower, markedly older than the rest.

Here for the moment all resemblance to the repeated dream ceased. There was no silent and somehow terrible family, but a large assembly of exceedingly cheerful persons, all of whom were known to me. And in spite of the horror with which the dream itself had always filled me, I felt nothing of it now that the scene of it was thus reproduced before me. But I felt the intensest curiosity as to what was going to happen.

Tea pursued its cheerful course, and before long Mrs Clinton got up. And at that moment I think I knew what she was going to say. She spoke to me, and what she said was:

"Jack will show you your room: I have given you the room in the tower."

At that, for half a second, the horror of the dream took hold of me again. But it quickly passed, and again I felt nothing more than the most intense curiosity. It was not very long before it was amply satisfied.

John turned to me.

"Right up at the top of the house," he said, "but I think you'll be comfortable. We're absolutely full up. Would you like to go and see it now? By Jove, I believe that you are right, and that we are going to have a thunderstorm. How dark it has become."

I got up and followed him. We passed through the hall, and up the perfectly familiar staircase. Then he opened the door, and I went in. And at that moment sheer unreasoning terror again possessed me. I did not know for certain what I feared: I simply feared. Then like a sudden recollection, when one remembers a name which has long escaped the memory, I knew what I feared. I feared Mrs Stone, whose grave with the sinister inscription, "In evil memory," I had so often seen in my dream, just beyond the lawn which lay below my window. And then once more the fear passed so completely that I wondered what there was to fear, and I found myself, sober and quiet and sane, in the room in the tower, the name of which I had so often heard in my dream, and the scene of which was so familiar.

I looked round it with a certain sense of proprietorship, and found that nothing had been changed from the dreaming nights in which I knew it so well. Just to the left of the door was the bed, lengthways along the wall, with the head of it in the angle. In a line with it was the fireplace and a small bookcase; opposite the door the outer wall was pierced by two lattice-paned windows, between which stood the dressing-table, while ranged along the fourth wall was the washing-stand and a big cupboard. My luggage had already been unpacked, for the furniture of dressing and undressing lay orderly on the wash-stand and toilet-table, while my dinner clothes were spread out on the coverlet of the bed. And then, with a sudden start of unexplained dismay, I saw that there were two rather conspicuous objects which I had not seen before in my

dreams: one a life-sized oil-painting of Mrs Stone, the other a black-and-white sketch of Jack Stone, representing him as he had appeared to me only a week before in the last of the series of these repeated dreams, a rather secret and evil-looking man of about thirty. His picture hung between the windows, looking straight across the room to the other portrait, which hung at the side of the bed. At that I looked next, and as I looked I felt once more the horror of nightmare seize me.

It represented Mrs Stone as I had seen her last in my dreams: old and withered and white haired. But in spite of the evident feebleness of body, a dreadful exuberance and vitality shone through the envelope of flesh, an exuberance wholly malign, a vitality that foamed and frothed with unimaginable evil. Evil beamed from the narrow, leering eyes; it laughed in the demon-like mouth. The whole face was instinct with some secret and appalling mirth; the hands, clasped together on the knee, seemed shaking with suppressed and nameless glee. Then I saw also that it was signed in the left-hand bottom corner, and wondering who the artist could be, I looked more closely, and read the inscription, "Julia Stone by Julia Stone."

There came a tap at the door, and John Clinton entered.

"Got everything you want?" he asked.

"Rather more than I want," said I, pointing to the picture.

He laughed.

"Hard-featured old lady," he said. "By herself, too, I remember. Anyhow she can't have flattered herself much."

"But don't you see?" said I. "It's scarcely a human face at all. It's the face of some witch, of some devil."

He looked at it more closely.

"Yes; it isn't very pleasant," he said. "Scarcely a bedside manner, eh? Yes; I can imagine getting the nightmare if I went to sleep with that close by my bed. I'll have it taken down if you like."

"I really wish you would," I said.

He rang the bell, and with the help of a servant we detached the picture and carried it out on to the landing, and put it with its face to the wall.

"By Jove, the old lady is a weight," said John, mopping his forehead. "I wonder if she had something on her mind."

The extraordinary weight of the picture had struck me too. I was about to reply, when I caught sight of my own hand. There was blood on it, in considerable quantities, covering the whole palm.

"I've cut myself somehow," said I.

John gave a little startled exclamation.

"Why, I have too," he said.

Simultaneously the footman took out his handkerchief and wiped his hand with it. I saw that there was blood also on his handkerchief.

John and I went back into the tower room and washed the blood off; but neither on his hand nor on mine was there the slightest trace of a scratch or cut. It seemed to me that, having ascertained this, we both, by a sort of tacit consent, did not allude to it again. Something in my case had dimly occurred to me that I did not wish to think about. It was but a conjecture, but I fancied that I knew the same thing had occurred to him.

The heat and oppression of the air, for the storm we had expected was still undischarged, increased very much after dinner, and for some time most of the party, among whom were John Clinton and myself, sat outside on the path bounding the lawn, where we had had tea. The night was absolutely dark, and no twinkle of star or moon ray could penetrate the pall of cloud that overset the sky. By degrees our assembly thinned, the women went up to bed, men dispersed to the smoking or billiard room, and by eleven o'clock my host and I were the only two left. All the evening I thought that he had something on his mind, and as soon as we were alone he spoke.

"The man who helped us with the picture had blood on his hand, too, did you notice?" he said. "I asked him just now if he had cut himself, and he said he supposed he had, but that he could find no mark of it. Now where did that blood come from?"

By dint of telling myself that I was not going to think about it, I had succeeded in not doing so, and I did not want, especially just at bedtime, to be reminded of it.

"I don't know," said I, "and I don't really care so long as the picture of Mrs Julia Stone is not by my bed."

He got up.

"But it's odd," he said. "Ha! Now you'll see another odd thing."

A dog of his, an Irish terrier by breed, had come out of the house as we talked. The door behind us into the hall was open, and a bright oblong of light shone across the lawn to the iron gate which led on to the rough grass outside, where the walnut tree stood. I saw that the dog had all his hackles up, bristling with rage and fright; his lips were curled back from his teeth, as if he was ready to spring at something, and he was growling to himself. He took not the slightest notice of his master or me, but stiffly and tensely walked across the grass to the iron gate. There he stood for a moment, looking through the bars and still growling. Then of a sudden his courage seemed to desert him: he gave one long howl, and scuttled back to the house with a curious crouching sort of movement.

"He does that half-a-dozen times a day," said John. "He sees something which he both hates and fears."

I walked to the gate and looked over it. Something was moving on the grass outside, and soon a sound which I could not instantly identify came to my ears. Then I remembered what it was: it was the purring of a cat. I lit a match, and saw the purrer, a big blue Persian, walking round and round in a little circle just outside the gate, stepping high and ecstatically, with tail carried aloft like a banner. Its eyes were bright and shining, and every now and then it put its head down and sniffed at the grass.

I laughed.

"The end of that mystery, I am afraid," I said. "Here's a large cat having Walpurgis night all alone."

"Yes, that's Darius," said John. "He spends half the day and all night there. But that's not the end of the dog mystery, for Toby and he are the best of friends, but the beginning of the cat mystery. What's the cat doing there? And why is Darius pleased, while Toby is terror-stricken?"

At that moment I remembered the rather horrible detail of my dreams when I saw through the gate, just where the cat was now, the white tombstone with the sinister inscription. But before I could answer the rain began, as suddenly and heavily as if a tap had been turned on, and simultaneously the big cat squeezed through the bars of the gate, and came leaping across the lawn to the house for shelter. Then it sat in the doorway, looking out eagerly into the dark. It spat and struck at John with its paw, as he pushed it in, in order to close the door.

Somehow, with the portrait of Julia Stone in the passage outside, the room in the tower had absolutely no alarm for me, and as I went to bed, feeling very sleepy and heavy, I had nothing more than interest for the curious incident about our bleeding hands, and the conduct of the cat and dog. The last thing I looked at before I put out my light was the square empty space by my bed where the portrait had been. Here the paper was of its original full tint of dark red: over the rest of the walls it had faded. Then I blew out my candle and instantly fell asleep.

My awaking was equally instantaneous, and I sat bolt upright in bed under the impression that some bright light had been flashed in my face, though it was now absolutely pitch dark. I knew exactly where I was, in the room which I had dreaded in dreams, but no horror that I ever felt when asleep approached the fear that now invaded and froze my brain. Immediately after a peal of thunder crackled just above the house, but the probability that it was only a flash of lightning which awoke me gave no reassurance to my galloping heart. Something I knew was in the room with me, and instinctively I put out my right

hand, which was nearest the wall, to keep it away. And my hand touched the edge of a picture-frame hanging close to me.

I sprang out of bed, upsetting the small table that stood by it, and I heard my watch, candle, and matches clatter on to the floor. But for the moment there was no need of light, for a blinding flash leaped out of the clouds, and showed me that by my bed again hung the picture of Mrs Stone. And instantly the room went into blackness again. But in that flash I saw another thing also, namely a figure that leaned over the end of my bed, watching me. It was dressed in some close-clinging white garment, spotted and stained with mould, and the face was that of the portrait.

Overhead the thunder cracked and roared, and when it ceased and the deathly stillness succeeded, I heard the rustle of movement coming nearer me, and, more horrible yet, perceived an odour of corruption and decay. And then a hand was laid on the side of my neck, and close beside my ear I heard quick-taken, eager breathing. Yet I knew that this thing, though it could be perceived by touch, by smell, by eye and by ear, was still not of this earth, but something that had passed out of the body and had power to make itself manifest. Then a voice, already familiar to me, spoke.

"I knew you would come to the room in the tower," it said. "I have been long waiting for you. At last you have come. To-night I shall feast; before long we will feast together."

And the quick breathing came closer to me; I could feel it on my neck.

At that the terror, which I think had paralyzed me for the moment, gave way to the wild instinct of self-preservation. I hit wildly with both arms, kicking out at the same moment, and heard a little animal-squeal, and something soft dropped with a thud beside me. I took a couple of steps forward, nearly tripping up over whatever it was that lay there, and by the merest good-luck found the handle of the door. In another second I ran out on the landing, and had banged the door behind me. Almost at the same moment I heard a door open somewhere below, and John Clinton, candle in hand, came running upstairs.

"What is it?" he said. "I sleep just below you, and heard a noise as if— Good heavens, there's blood on your shoulder."

I stood there, so he told me afterwards, swaying from side to side, white as a sheet, with the mark on my shoulder as if a hand covered with blood had been laid there.

"It's in there," I said, pointing. "She, you know. The portrait is in there, too, hanging up on the place we took it from."

At that he laughed.

"My dear fellow, this is mere nightmare," he said.

He pushed by me, and opened the door, I standing there simply inert with terror, unable to stop him, unable to move.

"Phew! What an awful smell," he said.

Then there was silence; he had passed out of my sight behind the open door. Next moment he came out again, as white as myself, and instantly shut it.

"Yes, the portrait's there," he said, "and on the floor is a thing— a thing spotted with earth, like what they bury people in. Come away, quick, come away."

How I got downstairs I hardly know. An awful shuddering and nausea of the spirit rather than of the flesh had seized me, and more than once he had to place my feet upon the steps, while every now and then he cast glances of terror and apprehension up the stairs. But in time we came to his dressing-room on the floor below, and there I told him what I have here described.

THE SEQUEL can be made short; indeed, some of my readers have perhaps already guessed what it was, if they remember that inexplicable affair of the churchyard at West Fawley, some eight years ago, where an attempt was made three times to bury the body of a certain woman who had committed suicide. On each occasion the coffin was found in the course of a few days again protruding from the ground. After the third attempt, in order that the thing should not be talked about, the body was buried elsewhere in unconsecrated ground. Where it was buried was just outside the iron gate of the garden belonging to the house where this woman had lived. She had committed suicide in a room at the top of the tower in that house. Her name was Julia Stone.

Subsequently the body was again secretly dug up, and the coffin was found to be full of blood.

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4: A Close Corporation

Clarence Herbert New

1862-1933

Blue Book Sept 1925

GRIGSBY had gone up to bed an hour before the usual owls left the billiard-room, and was sound asleep in twenty minutes. As an engineer, however, he had become accustomed to waken instinctively when danger of any sort threatened either his construction-work or himself— to waken with eyes still closed and recumbent figure motionless, but with every sense alert, concentrating upon what and where the danger might be. So, though he had been in deep-breathing unconsciousness a second or two before, the faint tang of wood-smoke in the air of his room brought him out of it with the first inhalation— shortly after one in the morning.

Some dangers call for motionless consideration before they are located; smoke calls for instant action. At the second breath he was out of bed, opening the door into the hall, where the suggestion of something burning was scarcely more perceptible than in his room. Accustomed to quick-thinking in emergencies, he knew that in bare feet and pajamas he was handicapped for effective fire-fighting, and so in less than two minutes he pulled on the heavy shoes, riding-breeches and puttees he'd been wearing during the day, the shoes not being completely laced, but held sufficiently by the puttees. Then he ran lightly down two flights to the ground-floor— through parlors, dining-room, kitchen and a connecting barn which led to the garage, grabbing up a soda "extinguisher" in the hall as he went.

As he opened the sliding door from the barn, one glimpse into the garage was enough. A seven-foot flame was shooting up from the puddle of oil carelessly drained upon the concrete floor, and had already caught upon the rafters overhead. The soda in his extinguisher might have been so much sand, for all the effect it had. He succeeded in rolling out the four gasoline barrels, but it was only a question of minutes before the flame began eating into the barn. Although he had more than once urged a ten-thousand-gallon tank on the hill across the road, nothing had been done about it, and there was no force of water available. He tightly closed the tin-covered sliding door into the barn and took perhaps five seconds to estimate the time available for getting the guests out of the inn, with its annex and cottage. Then he ran out to the hoop of railroad-iron suspended from one of the trees, and struck it repeatedly with the hammer until its booming tones echoed from one end of the lake to the other.

To the guests occupying ground-floor rooms he paid no attention— if they hadn't sense enough to get out of the doors or windows, they might roast, for all he cared; there was scant time for those on the upper floors, as it was. Not for an instant had he any sense of panic or nervousness. That would have wasted precious time— possibly lives. Rattling the handle of each door, and pounding as he went, he called out instructions to those inside in clear, level tones which set them doing as he ordered even though they were sure he overestimated the danger.

"There's fire at the other end of the buildings— coming this way! You have possibly five or ten minutes to get out! Don't lose your heads or stop to dress! Tie up all the clothes you can find, in sheets— throw them out of the windows! Clothes!. Tie 'em up in sheets! Don't try to save anything but clothes! You'll need 'em!?

AS he was starting up the stairs to his own floor, the door of a room near the foot of them opened, and Joan Romney came out, with breeches and golf-stockings hastily strapped on over her nightgown— unfastened tennis-shoes on her feet. Through a communicating door he saw her aunt, apparently collapsed in a rockingchair, a negligee thrown over her nightgown, every incandescent in the room turned on. But the girl, apparently, was as cool as he.

"I heard you striking the iron hoop out there, Mr. Grigsby, and caught what you've been shouting as you came upstairs. How much time have I got? This smoke coming in at the window probably makes the fire seem a little nearer than it is! I can do up most of the clothes in five minutes if I've got as many more to handle Auntie afterward. Or— had I better get her out first?"

"I think not. She looks rather paralyzed— but she'll do anything you tell her to if you say it quietly. If she doesn't, put up a howl, and I'll come back. Those folks upstairs aren't stirring as lively as they should!— Hello, Pendleton!"— as the proprietor came running down the hall.

"How bad is it, John? I was sleeping like the dead!"

"Garage is gone— nothing can save the barn and inn! May possibly save the annex and cottage if you get busy! Go down and sit on that telephone until the fire gets to you! "They've got two chemical-engines in Westford, and they might haul them up here with autos— in time!"

"Nobody in the exchange at this time of night— they don't consider all-night service necessary, you know, in these parts!"

"There's somebody sleeping within sound of an emergency-bell they're supposed to hook on when they quit! You keep ringing until they answer! Means several thousand dollars saved out of the wreck if those chemicals get here in time! Wind's blowing away from cottage and annex just now! Get busy,

man— get busy! Gee! They're coming to, up there, at last! Hear 'em run! Smoke's chasing 'em out, probably! Look at this coming— will you! Scared sillp— almost falling down the steps!"

Grigsby's hand shot out and grabbed the man as he was flying toward the lower stairs.

"Wait a minute, you! Wait a minute! You can get out without breaking your neck! Did you get any clothes together — do 'em up— heave 'em out the window? May have to go around a few days in pajamas if you didn't— and some of these mornings are nipping! Run back and get one suit, anyway! Then help me get the rest of these folks started!"

"No! Not on your life! Want me to be roasted! See you damned! Ah-h-h— look! The fire's right on top of us!"

"That's only the reflection on the wall, you fool! Go back and get some clothes! You wont? Well, then— go in here and help Miss Romney with her aunt while I chase upstairs again— she's got her hands full! You two are engaged— aren't you?"

"No— yes— I don't know! Get out of my way, damn you! There's no time to waste on an old woman— Miss Romney's able to look out for herself! We'll all be roasted alive if we don't hurry! Get out of my way!"

For one second Grigsby looked at the young fellow in sheer amazement; then, as he saw Joan Romney come out of her room with Mrs. Eversley-Whyte, he stepped aside. "I beg your pardon, Caldwell! I I guess didn't size you up right! Run along out if you want to!"

IT should be borne in mind that in emergencies people act and speak far more rapidly than the eye grasps words on the printed page. Note how long it has taken to read this far, and it will be clear enough that not more than seven minutes had elapsed since Grigsby first ran downstairs. By this time the fire had eaten fairly into the barn, where a mow of hay was almosf explosive in the fierceness with which it blazed up, sending tongues of flame through every crack to lick and catch upon the inn itself. Realizing that his time was getting shorter every second, the engineer raced up to the top floor and found half a dozen guests so confused that they needed sharp direction before they snatched a few clothes together and got out. Herding the last of them, as he supposed, he followed on down— to be met on the veranda by a horrified Joan Romney.

"The Stafford children! Mrs. Stafford is out there on the lawn almost crazy! Says she can't find the children anywhere! They have the room across the hall from yours on the top floor, with their governess! Do you s'pose it's possible that they can be—"

"Don't think so! Just chased everybody down! But I'll have a look, anyhow! It's getting pretty hot. up there!"

WITH a handkerchief over his nose and mouth, he dashed up the stairs— to find the door of the children's room jammed by something on the other side of it. With a powerful heave of the shoulders, he managed to push that something along the floor inside until he could squirm his body through the opening and lift up the senseless governess. The two children were at the window— wide-eyed, partly stunned by what was happening. Grigsby didn't stop to curse at Miss Romney's foolhardiness when he found her at his elbow, but flung one of the sheets at her with orders to rip it into six-inch strips. This she did, so methodically that her strips were ready as soon as his. Knotting them together, he threw a loop under the governess' arms and lowered her out of the window— shouting to men on the ground to cast off the loop at once. Pulling it up, he fastened the children, back to back, and let them down— but the people below had difficulty in untying the loop again. A volume of smoke suddenly filled the room and drove him back from the window. Pulling Miss Romney down upon the floor, where it was less dense, he crawled with her through the door and into a small attic with one dormer window at the end of the hall, overlooking the precipitous hundred-foot drop to the lake below. Both were choking a little as they got upon their feet. There was a suggestion of horror in the girl's eyes, though she was almost as cool as he.

"Are we trapped, Mr. Grigsby? Rather paralyzing— to have death come right on top of one when such a thing seems least possible!"

"Yes— I've noticed that a few times. I can't say for a minute or two how bad a fix we're in— depends upon whether the flames come through that door and partition before I figure it out! Wait a bit! I made for this place instinctively. Now I know what suggested it! You've often seen that long I-beam which juts out from this dormer and is supported by the cantilever strut anchored into the rock a third of the way down— ever notice what they use it for? Westford, six miles down the lake, on the opposite side, is the terminus of that little narrow-gauge railway-spur from Brockville Junction. All the supplies for the inn come that way— and-it costs less to send them up by water in a launch than to haul them clear around the head of the lake by \motor-truck, with these grades and bad roads. They hoist the stuff up here from the launch with that tackle out at the end of the I-beam, and swing it in the cellar-door just under us. This window is pretty small, but we can get through it— the beam comes in through the clapboarding two feet below the sill, and runs out forty feet over the water."

"You mean to crawl out along that beam — a hundred feet above the water— and slide down the ropes at the end of it? I— I'm not quite sure my head will stand it!"

"I can walk it much faster than crawling — we do that all the time on structural iron, you know— and if a sheet of flame comes out after us, we may get dizzy! Crawling's out of the question! I'll get out first and then take you in my arms!"

IN daylight the dizzy height and narrow foothold would have made it a far more dangerous proceeding, but the engineer held himself ready to dive if he felt his balance going and risk hitting the forty-foot depth of water at an angle that would give the minimum strain on his back. Joan shut her eyes and tried to keep from shuddering. After what seemed a year of suspense, he gently lowered her astride of the beam at its outer end and guided her hands where they could clutch the lashings of rope which held the big block underneath. With the flames bursting out- pehind them, it was but a moment or two before they were seen by the crowd on the lawn— who watched in breathless horror, expecting every second to see them topple over. When they got down astride the end of the beam, Joan said, rather faintly:

"I suppose I can slide way down there on this rope if I make up my mind to it— and if my hands aren't cut to pieces before I'm halfway down—"

"Oh, yes, easily— after I've told you how to manage a sailor's foot-hitch. But I can just as well take you down on my back, astride of my hips. With that particular foothold, a man can handle at least twice his own weight on a rope and still have one hand free. When you start climbing down onto my back, don't be afraid— I wont let you fall, even if you lose your own grip!"

Lying flat along the iron beam with his legs curled tightly around it, Grigsby hauled up the lower pendant block until there was enough downhaul slack to reach the water under them. Then letting himself down over the end, he threw his right leg around the downhaul so that it passed inside his thigh, around under the knee, outside the calf, and over the instep of his foot. Shoving the instep of his left foot under the sole of his right, with the rope between them, he obtained a perfect brakelock in which he could have stood without slipping for an hour or more if necessary. Easing off the grip of his left foot allowed the rope to slip around his leg and let him slowly down. This sailor's foot-hitch— as it is known on the old square-riggers— has been used, probably, for centuries, and gives a man complete control of his weight upon any rope from a half-inch up to one and a half:

When he had the downhaul securely gripped, he reached up one hand and firmly grasped the belt which held Miss Romney's breeches. Following his

instructions at every point, she then let herself down over the end of the iron beam until her legs got a grip around his waist and she could drop one arm over his shoulder. Although controlling her nerves with a fine exhibition of will-power under such conditions, she was trembling— and didn't dare look down, or anywhere beyond the rope which scraped her nose. As soon as he felt that she was hanging on firmly enough to support her weight and would keep her nerve, barring accidents, he began easing himself down the rope a foot or so at a time, to prevent it from chafing his legs too much. Most of the guests were now on the lawn at the south of the inn, along the top of the cliff, and had been watching the performance breathlessly— afraid to call out for fear of making the two lose their balance or grip. But they now sent up cheer after cheer— several of them running down the steep path and steps in the face of the cliff to the boathouse below, so that when Grigsby and his burden were within three feet of the water, a boat was already under them.

THERE was a disposition to pound the engineer and Miss Romney on their backs while superlative compliments were showered upon them— but he sidetracked most of this by asking what was being done toward getting the guests and whatever they had saved under shelter for the remainder of the night, which was getting perceptibly colder from a raw east wind that fortunately helped to save both cottage and annex. Grigsby commenced giving practical orders as soon as he reached the top of the cliff— knowing that assistance would soon reach them. Within a few minutes, in fact, cars and flivvers of every breed and condition began arriving with food and blankets from the bungalow colony around the shores of the lake. After them came the chemical-engines and a number of cars from Westford. Grigsby's booming strokes upon the iron hoop had been heard for miles— the blazing buildings told the story. So the vacationists and townspeople responded as quickly as they could. Considering the roads and the grades, they got there amazingly soon.

As the engineer had been coming to the lake for years whenever in the United States, within reaching distance, he had become acquainted with most of the regular bungalow-dwellers while paddling or fishing up and down the shores. So when Braley, just across from the inn, turned up in his big touring-car, he jumped on the running-board to ask:

"Have your cousins gone home, old man? Could you take in Miss Romney and her aunt for a few days— let me cut a few spruce-boughs and camp down on your veranda?"'

"Beds and grub for all three of you— no trouble at all! I suppose I could take in a couple more— but that would crowd us some, and there's plenty

accommodation for the rest all the way down alongshore to Westford. 'The Frazier House can sleep and feed twenty of 'em at least. How nfany are there, altogether?"

"About fifty guests. Pendleton can take care of possibly ten, and most of his help, in the cottage. All right, Tommy! Let's get the women with their bundles, and go! The sooner they're in bed, the better. And you'd best take your time going back— no reason for giving your car any more such banging as you must have risked to get here in the time you did! Besides, the women are pretty well done up. Miss Romney's one corking good sport, I'll tell the world!"

"Why— what'd she do? Say, John— a lot of the folks are calling for you— don't you hear 'em?"

"Let 'em call! And get me out of here as soon as you can, for the love of Pete!"

"Why? Whatcha been doing?"

"Not a darned thing except a bit of night police that came about by sheer accident! Here's Miss Romney! She'll go get her aunt while I stay here in the shadow of your car."

THE mysterious disappearance of Grigsby and the two ladies wasn't generally explained until a day or two afterward— by which time the movement to lionize him for what he had done lost some of its pep. In the morning, at Braley's, Joan turned out for her six o'clock swim as usual, apparently none the worse for her somewhat hectic night; but her aunt's conventional ideas were suffering from shell-shock— it took her several days to accept the wearing a single sport-suit, whenever she wasn't in bed, as a thing one could do without losing caste. That afternoon the engineer paddled Joan up the lake for a little mental rest. Presently, as they drifted under an overhanging spruce, he lighted his pipe and asked:

"Er— Miss Romney— if I really grasped that little affair yesterday morning, you're engaged to Caldwell— not? Going to marry him?"

"I was. But when he made that beastly scene over your showing me the jujitsu defense, just because we hadn't been introduced, I got a slant on Percy which had escaped me before. After lunch he ordered me to go motoring with him. I refused— and we went down to the toathouse instead. I said a few things which perhaps I oughtn't— gave him back his ring. The way he took it confirmed my belief that I was entirely right— but the way he acted during the fire, up there in the hall, settled the question absolutely!"

"H-m-m— I was kinda hoping you hadn't seen or heard that. People aren't all built alike. Most of us have weak spots somewhere, I guess. Still— I'm sort of pleased to know you're through with Caldwell. He really isn't your type. Of

course it's impertinence on my part to ask— but I am a little curious to know how you happened to pick him out?"

"I didn't! He was wished on me! And after last night, Mr. Grigsby, you couldn't offend me by asking anything that comes into your head! Dad had plenty of money, once, but his business associates robbed him— he left me just a very small income. Aunt Fanny took me to live with her when he died— kept hammering on the idea that I must marry a rich man or drop out of the set I'd always gone with. Percy Caldwell has an income of twenty thousand, and will get a million or more when his mother's estate is turned over to him in a few months. Aunt Fanny said he'd been crazy about me since we were children— which, of course, is flattering enough to any girl. I told them I didn't love him in the least! They both assured me that would come after we were married. So— I just drifted into it."

GRIGSBY got the whole picture— the girl's upbringing with a father who thought she was about right, yet impressed upon her the same qualities which made his friends love and his enemies respect him — the shifting to a more artificial environment with her aunt after Romney dropped dead one morning, when he discovered the rascality of men he had trusted— the nagging which had driven her into a risky engagement against her wishes and judgment. And she was going to be a jewel for some man, some day. For a while the canoe drifted along in absolute silence, as he kept his paddle-blade under water and digested all this. She seemed to know as well us he that exchange of thought and ideas isn't necessarily vocal— often conveying more perfect understanding when it isn't. Neither would have said that there was anything more than friendly attraction between them at the time.

THREE months afterward Joan sat in the living-room of her aunt's Park Avenue apartment, writing a dozen notes— all practically the same— to the only three relatives she cared about, and a few of her most intimate friends:

Dear

I am going to marry John Grigsby, Thursday afternoon, next week, at the Little Church Around the Corner. It will be lovely to have you there if you can come— and to have you lunch with us afterward at the Ritz.

Affectionately, Joan.

This proceeding outraged so many of Mrs. Eversley-Whyte's social canons that it was some days before she could persuade herself to be present at the simple ceremony and the delightfully informal luncheon which followed it. She had ascertained that Grigsby was by no means a pauper,— in fact, stood high

in his profession,— but this meant nothing to her. Socially the man was a nobody. To her amazement, however, he was the most forceful and distinguished-looking man at the table, holding his own in the lighter chat, but with a subtle inference that in discussing more worth-while topics he was even better. He was more retiring than assertive, an excellent listener. And the impression of his personality was strong upon the whole party after he and Joan had casually disappeared— to drop completely out of sight for one solid month. In February those who answered their telephone and followed instructions found them snugly at home in a four-room apartment in the best residence-section of Brooklyn. After three days of hard work upon moving in, they had looked about them with a satisfaction almost too deep for words.

"We got away with it, Joan— didn't we? Nothing that anybody would call junk— not too much furniture and fixings, but enough! Nine-tenths of the apartments one goes into seem as bare as a barn— no books, no pictures, the minimum of department-store furniture, not a single darned thing to give the place any atmosphere of a home, a place that folks live in. But we've got it, here, even if we have to pull up stakes and go somewhere else in a year. Why, do you know, I lived in a box-car six months on one of the South American railroads, just behind the construction gang, and that car made the boys feel as if they could tip their chairs back, put their feet on the window-sills, smoke cutplug and go to sleep if they wanted to!"

All this was by way of compliment to results produced mainly by Joan herself while he was away during the day ne she glowed under it.

"John, there's something I've been wanting to ask you. Let's not tell anybody— ever— anything about our honeymoon. Hm? J'd— I'd like to keep that just between ourselves— as the sweetest experience of our lives."

He nodded— with the slow smile she loved to watch.

"I— sort of— had that idea too, girl. Funny, how many similar ones we seem to find!"

"M-hm. Our code of life must have the same basic principles, I think. Playing the game is one of them. No matter whether life comes hard or easy— play the game, clear through, to the end—"

"Right."

"Treat the other fellow as we think he should treat us—"

"Right."

"Not make foolish promises, ever— but carry out those we do make—"

"Right."

"Help the other fellow a little, if we can— conveniently. Eh?"

"Even inconveniently, Joan— if there's nobody else to bear a hand."

"I— I think I'll hug you for that! Bend down here!"

NEXT morning, as she opened her door to take in the milk, a blond cherub in a blue-linen suit stood on the landing— legs apart, head cocked a little on one side, taking her in, reflectively.

"You busy, zis mornin'?"

"Why— not particularly."

"Zen I'll come in an' draw pitchers, I fink!"

"Why— of course! I guess I must have been expecting you. Sit down here at the other side of the table while I eat my breakfast— I'll get you a pencil and some paper."

The artist was serious, but not above resting occasionally at his work.

"What's you' name?"

"Joan."

"O-o-o-o— you stayed fou' days an' ten nights in zat ol' whale's tummy, didn' you! Wasn' it orful dark? Didn' you hafta cut windys in him to see out wiv?"

This was intriguing, as unremembered biography— but she caught it in a minute or so.

"Oh-h-h— you must be thinking of my ever- so-great-grandfather, Jonah! He was the one in the whale— everyone in our family knows the story."

At this point one of the bells rang— too long for the postman, not quite snappy enough for the ice-man at the dumb-waiter. A white-faced woman in a negligee asked nervously:

"Have you seen my little boy anywhere? He had on a blue suit! His velocipede is down by the telephone, and he isn't playing on the street, or anywhere in sight—"

Joan put a finger to her smiling lips and quietly drew the woman inside, where she pointed to the little figure intent upon his drawing, at the table.

"Sh-h-h! Don't scold him! He just stepped in to pay a social call— and we seem to like each other very much. Isn't he a dear! Next time you miss him, better ring my bell first— I think this is going to become a habit."

It was the beginning of acquaintance with the Fosters. The Smithers tomboy precipitated another with them, when she pitched down the roof-stairs and Joan took her in to patch a bleeding scalp. Grigsby himself started the daily exchange of civilities with Apartment G-4 by getting into a mutually satisfactory political discussion with Forbes Rockwell in the subway, coming home one night. Morning meetings at the mailboxes in the lower hall accounted for two more families. A smiling and gracious manner, with a few scraps of Italian, captivated Tony the "shoeshine" across the street, until in his

dreams he was Joan's abject slave. Smith the greengrocer— born Mavrocordatos, in Patras— found that she had been through the Corinth Canal on a European tour, and established her marketing on a telephone basis. Mrs. Hurley, the subway ticketagent, admired her hat while making change one morning— began to exhibit evidences of better taste in her own clothes from that moment. Without seeking for it in the least, even finding it somewhat burdensome on busy days, the Grigsbys were neighborhood folks within a month. So much for that something inside a few of us which attracts our fellow-men and -women.

Joan liked to make a good many of her own clothes, hem window-curtains, put in half-hours on Spanish or some of the Asiatic tongues against a need for them in the out-places— looking up from time to time at the strong face, decorated with the beloved pipe, and bent over .he plans, maps, sheets of memoranda, at the opposite side of the table. At times she would go over to the piano in its dark corner and play, very softly, bits from Grieg, Debussy, Liszt, Macdowell, Nevin— but this was only when she noticed the little pucker of fatigue between his eyes, because it invariably made him drop what he was doing, lean back in his chair and watch her as she played. Sometimes an hour or two passed without a word between them. Words were unnecessary. They were, and always have been, sufficient unto themselves— but neighborliness has its responsibilities and drawbacks. There cre evenings when they had to make comfortable those who came up to call, to return such visits in some of the other apartments— though when it became known that they were bride and groom, the other families were really considerate in leaving them alone until it seemed as if company might be welcome.

ONE evening John looked up from his work with a slightly apprehensive expression.

"Wonder what's struck Bremmerton tonight? Just listen for a minute or so to what he's playing on that Strad of his!"

Bremmerton was the widower who lived all alone just under them— a retired actor who had saved enough to keep him in modest but comfortable circums'ances for the rest of his life— a former "lead" in the classic drama who couldn't adapt himself to modern slush, though still active enough to have remained behind the footlights a few years more had he cared to.

"This must be one of his morbid nights they've told us about, John! That playing is worth three dollars a seat in Carnegie Hall— but I don't believe a man can do it when he's mentally normal. Let's go down and see him. Hm?"

It was evident that Bremmerton had answered his bell unwillingly, but the expression of his face changed a little when he saw who they were. His living-

room was lighted by a single table-lamp with a red shade which left the ceiling cosily in shadow but illumined faces in the comfortable chairs below its rim.

"May I accompany you in 'The Venetian Love Song,' Mr. Bremmerton? Your playing was too alluring to resist— we just had to come down!"

"Mighty kind of you, Mrs. Grigsby— we'll try it presently. But first your good husband will have to chase the blue devils out of me with some of his sane and cheerful talk— I'm in a bad mood tonight!"

"Any particular reason? Could we help, do you think?"

This was said with such unmistakable sympathy and good feeling that none but a callous brute could have taken offense. The actor was anything but that.

"You're helping now— as far as I'm concerned; but you can't right the topsy-turvy, wrong-headed, crazy mental condition everybody seems to be in today! This world is a beautiful place— one might discover new attractions and interests every day were it not for the rottenness of so many people in it! It makes little real difference to me that there's not a soul who cares a curse whether I'm alive or dead, because there ate so many beautiful and interesting things which enable me to forget that. But here in this apartmenthouse, a little world by itself, it fills me with despair, completely disheartens me, when I see under its surface, as I'm peculiarly in a position to do, the tragedy, scandal, treachery and meanness which are slowly destroying some of the little families Ive liked best during the last two years! When I began playing tonight, I could have taken my old service automatic from the drawer and sent a ball through my head without a single regret!"

"Well— that's a man's privilege, Bremmerton, when the game seems no longer worth playing. But— to Joan and me— you're not as poor a sport as that. We've sensed an undercurrent, here, among the folks we know— but can't seem to make head or tail of it. Couldn't you— er— loosen up a bit— give us some idea of what's wrong?"

BREMMERTON was still moody, but perceptibly less morbid. This likable pair restored some of his faith in human nature.

"In every apartment-house you'll find one or more families with a mean streak so thick and yellow that they wouldn't try to overcome the thing if they knew they had it. The worst one in this house is down in 'B-2.' That woman listens at the dumb-waiter by the half-hour, hangs over the hall-landings or out of her window to discover something by which she can get some trouble-making edge on her neighbors. She told Foster that his wife was in Washburn's apartment for an hour the other day, looking at some of his books— the writer, you know— while his wife was out marketing; and she's started trouble in two other families much the same way. In addition to her little touch, there's

trouble brewing in other directions. Take the Smithers: Little Ellie is really one of the most attractive children on the block, but her mother's too much occupied with clothes and outside entertainment to give her any attention. She's the tomboy of the neighborhood— good for her, physically, but rubbing all the bloom off a growing peach. Smithers is paying-teller in a bank, probably isn't getting over three thousand — perhaps less. His wife and his livingexpenses cost him more than that— considerably. He may have something put aside, or other resources— but suppose he hasn't? Whats the answer? What's bound to happen pretty soon? And they're both of them folks we'd rather keep with us!

"Take the Rockwells— no children— pet dog and canary. For some fool reason I can't puzzle out, she got sore, or hurt, at something he did last winter— probably without knowing it— and she's been an iceberg to him ever since! He's becoming disillusioned, swamps himself in work, making more money than he ever thought he could make, but getting cold-hearted, pessimistic, taking his stenographer out to dinner and keeping her at the office, evenings. Julie's beginning to go out alone with her married friends. Both about as fine as they make Jem at the start— drifting toward shipwreck. Yet I seem powerless to butt in and right things even if I could see an opening— that's what disheartens me so! Not one of 'em cares a tinker's damn for old Bremmerton or what becomes of him— they'd consider any suggestion from me an impertinence!"

THERE was silence in the apartment overhead as the Grigsbys got into pajamas and nightie. When the light went out, there was fragmentary discussion. "You can size another woman up, Joan, before I'd even know where to begin. What do you think of Julie Rockwell— anyhow?"

"She's a fine, conscientious woman— means to do right, but quick-tempered— moody when she feels abused. It started over a ridiculous hat! She'd been wanting it for a month, in a shop-window— bought it. Forbes may have been worrying over some business matter, spoke irritably. His taste is instinctively good— hers needs more cultivation. He said that hat made her look like a type which every decent woman tries to avoid imitating, and she was very deeply hurt. It took her a few weeks to see how perfectly right he was, but she'd been brooding over it— thought, if he really loved her, he never would have spoken as he did. I've noticed that she's been freezingly polite to him once or twice, but didn't suppose they could be really drifting apart!"

"And the pitiful, exasperating part of it is that they certainly did care a lot when we first came here— seemed like perfect pals! If they separate, neither will ever find another so nearly congenial mate! My ideas are old-fashioned, of

course— people laugh at me for them. But if a couple are sufficiently careful in their choosing to begin with, I believe that the *one-man-and-one-woman' marriage is the only sort worth attempting."

IN the morning, as Grigsby paused for a moment on the hall-landing, the voice of Mrs. Sarnoff— B-2— came distinctly up as she was having a moment's chat with Mrs. Rockwell (Mrs. Sarnoff had possessed the most unbridled tongue in her native Connecticut town before she married a Russian journalist and found herself an amateur in the art of scandalous propaganda.) "As I was sayin' only yesterday, Mis' Rockwell— you can't trust the men. You gotta watch 'em all the time! If I didn't go round to the office every few evenin's an' bring Sarnoff home with me, I'd never know what chicken he was takin' out to dinner, an' blowin' his cash on. Course— I aint sayin' nothin' like that about Mr. Rockwell stayin' late— but you can't always tell, now— can you? Hey?"

Grigsby's hands fairly itched to get the woman by the throat and put her tongue permanently out of business— but that sort of thing isn't done. Tell such a person what one thinks of him or her, and one is reminded of a skunk before the discussion ends. Sue them for slander, and the newspapers fasten upon juicy testimony like flies on a piece of decaying meat. The only remedies are silence— and. such ostracism as may be possible. He almost ran down the remaining flights to catch Mrs. Rockwell before she closed her door, but he could have taken more time. She was standing there alone in the hall, thinking— thinking—

"Glad I happened to catch you, Mrs. Rockwell! Joan and I want you both up in our diggings for dinner tonight— about Don't tell me you've got a date! We'll be plumb disappointed— and — there's going to be turkey, I think."

"Why— I— I'm afraid— It's awfully nice of you and Mrs. Grigsby. I don't see how I could make it in time. You see, I expect to be out— rather late. Probably wont get back until eight, if I do then. And Forbes will be out of the question working late at the office— getting his dinner somewhere around Times Square, I suppose."

"Now wait a bit— just a second! Eight o'clock will be all right for us if you can't make it before— and I'll telephone Rockwell as soon as I get to my shack, on the job—"

"It wont do any good, Mr. Grigsby. He'll appreciate the invitation, of course, but he'll tell you that he can't get through before nine or ten o'clock."

"All right— I'll try, anyhow! But if he wont come, we can expect you, can't we? Come on— take a chance on the turk! We really want you!"

He knew as well as if her mind had been open for him to read— after what the Sarnoff woman had said— what it was she meant to do between six and

eight that evening. It was entirely possible that Forbes Rockwell might take his stenographer out to dinner at one of the hotels in the theater district. Why not— when Julie herself dined out so frequently, and left him to eat alone if he did come home? And if he did, there was nothing to prevent her following them— watching to see whether they were talking business or enjoying themselves— misconstruing what she did see. Grigsby knew that until the Sarnoff woman dropped the poison into her mind, Julie had never suspected there might be anything more than business in his keeping Miss Aikman after hours in the office— though the girl was both pretty and well educated. And it seemed to him more important than his own professional work at the moment that Mrs. Rockwell shouldn't see what she was now more than half convinced she would see. Forbes was both surprised and pleased when the engineer appeared in his private office, but shook his head regretfully at the invitation.

"Mighty darned nice of you, but— I'm afraid I couldn't make it. Mess of detail that it's too risky to hand over and take the chance of some other fellow carrying it out properly."

"How late do you expect to be here?"

"Nine or ten, at least."

"And if you didn't have to waste time going out for your dinner over here, you could make it by eight— get over home by eight-forty-five. All right! We'll start the turk a bit later and have him done brown by the time you get there." (Miss Aikman had gone out with her notebook, leaving them alone in the private office.)

"Look here, Forbes," Grigsby went on, "I'll lay some of the cards on the table! There's more behind this than just dinner. Can't go into details for some time yet— but that damned Sarnoff rip has been luxuriating in free speech until she may start something if we don't kick the props out from under her! You don't really want to hurt your wife— do you?"

"God knows I don't." The tone was scarcely above a whisper.

"Then you be ready to leave with me at six o'clock— when I call for you. How about it?"

Rockwell looked up— a speculative frown appearing between his eyes— then nodded.

WHEN julie Rockwell quietly walked through the deserted outer offices into her husband's sanctum at quarter before seven, Miss Aikman looked up from the mass of data and dictated letters on her desk to take a few minutes off and tell her boss' wife that he had left for home with Mr. Grigsby nearly an hour before. She said that he had put a good deal of responsibility on her shoulders that night in order to drop work which he never had trusted to anyone else,

but hoped she might carry it out satisfactorily, so that he could go home more frequently and not work so hard.

"It will be much to my advantage if he does, Mrs. Rockwell— because he'll pay me well if I can get away with it, and I expect to be married next spring."

The little dinner-party was a success because the Grigsbys made it so. Everybody worked, at one thing or another— with big kitchen aprons over their good clothes. After washing the dishes, they danced— and husbands couldn't dance with other wives all the time. Then Joan quite simply told them about her first engagement, the fire at the inn, the way she and John had drifted irresistibly together simply because they were mates in all that the word implied— and asked for the Rockwells' story of their own experiences in that line— knowing from previous bits that it must have been satisfactorily romantic. Unless a man and woman have really grown to hate their life together, reminiscences of this sort are certain to bring back much of the time when they were all-in-all to each other, set them wondering how and why they have been drifting apart. What passed between them when they finally went down to their own apartment will never be told— nor have the Grigsbys ever wished they knew— being of a vastly different breed from the Sarnoff woman. But a lump sometimes comes in the Rockwell throats when they speak to each other of their friends on the top floor.

FOR a month or more John Grigsby had been watching his neighbor Smithers— his wife and daughter also, but more particularly the man himself— making a new safe-deposit box an excuse for dropping in at the bank and having a word or two with Smithers before he went out. The man appeared to stand high in the opinion of his directors, was liked by everybody with whom he came in contact. In his business relations he had the reputation of being absolutely straight— in little things as well as the larger issues. Coming home with him in the subway, as occasionally happened, Grigsby soon noticed little evidences of care which became more frequent as time passed. Not any down-and-out expression, but more subtle indications which cropped out in an occasional pessimistic remark, a more thoughtful look when nobody. was talking with him. His wife never quite seemed to accomplish the effect she aimed at in dress, and possibly for that reason, bought more gowns than she might if the few had satisfied her. More and more, the feverish round of social life in the city had gripped her. She got nothing out of it but invitations, which carried return obligations, and occasional mention in the local society-columns— but she was tentatively accepted as a society woman which, presumably, was her main object. Smithers had positively forbidden her to call upon him in the bank or even have an account there, but the bank people got

occasional glimpses of her in other places, and so far, merely thought him lucky in marrying so good-looking a woman. Her evidences of extravagance hadn't registered with them as yet.

Grigsby, of course, had his own professional work to keep him busy. It was not possible to keep his neighbor under surveillance beyond studying him closely each time they met. But even with these occasional observations, he wasn't far out in his estimate of the time when matters were reaching a climax in Smithers' affairs. Coming home with him one evening, the teller was so preoccupied that he scarcely talked coherently. He was carrying a good-sized leather suitcase which looked as if he had purchased it that day— a strongly reinforced one with a lock that would have induced a thief,to cut through the leather rather than meddle with it, and the lining of fine steel netting would have given him some trouble, at that— though there was no indication of anything unusual on the outside. In response to his neighbor's question, he said that he thought of spending the week-end in Philadelphia— taking Saturday off, if his wife decided to accompany him.

The suitcase stuck in Grigsby's mind. 'The man carried it as if it were fairly heavy, but refused assistance going from the station to the apartment-house. If it were a recent purchase which he meant to pack after he reached home, it would have been empty— unless he had purchased new clothing at the same time, which seemed unlikely. The more the engineer considered all this, the more apprehensive he became. About ten— when he had been out for tobacco and had seen the lamp burning in his neighbor's living-room— he stopped at his door and rang the bell, knowing that Mrs. Smithers was out for the evening. The teller came to the door, fully dressed, but with the appearance of having been working hard all the evening. There were dark circles around his eyes— the air of his rooms was filled with stale cigarettesmoke and the odor of rank coffee. He was about to let his neighbor in, automatically— then seemed to remember something, with a little start, barely perceptible. "I'm afraid I can't ask you in tonight, old chap! It's pretty late, you know— and I've a lot of stuff to finish up before I turn in."

"M-well— it's a matter of a heap more importance to you than to me. Better let me come in and tell you about it— before anybody comes upstairs and sees us here."

A flash of apprehension streaked across the teller's face for an instant. He was about to refuse again, but reconsidered— and let his neighbor in. Without bothering to ask permission, Grigsby filled his pipe— lighted it, deliberately— and sat down at the side of the roll-top desk, covered with letters and sheets of memoranda which, evidently, were being systematically destroyed.

"Where's Ellie? Not out with her mother at this time of night?"

"No— sound asleep— in her own room at the end of the hall."

"Door closed?"

"Yes. She couldn't hear us if she woke up. What's all this about something of importance to me, old man? I'm interested— but so tired that Ill be getting nervous if you don't tell me— quick!"

"Tom,"— it was the first occasion upon which Grigsby had ever called him by his first name, but the tone was so kind a one that Smithers liked it,—"I sold a little mess of stock the other day when some big shark was boosting it way above what the shares are worth, and I haven't reinvested the money, yet. Would you like to borrow two or three thousand— at six per cent?"

"Why— for what purpose?" Smithers was fighting desperately against growing apprehension— to keep his voice normal. "What sort of security?"

"Merely your notes at, say, twelve and eighteen months. That ought to be long enough, hadn't it? Might renew part of them."

"Why— but— good Lord! Oh, man! Why didn't you suggest this to me three days ago, even yesterday! How could I know that you would consider such a loan — that you could even spare that much!"

"My fault, Tom— I was afraid of butting in! I had no means of knowing just when you might need it most. Well— that's my proposition. Shall I bring it around to you in the morning, at the bank?"

"My-God! It's too late! If you've guessed as much as you seem to have guessed, you must know that! It's too late!"

"I doubt it! In fact, I think we can figure a way out— somehow— between us."

Smithers shook his head despairingly— then a sudden suspicion made his eyes blaze insanely. He crouched a little lower in his chair as if getting set for a spring.

"Grigsby— let's understand each other, clearly! I like you a lot— and that sweet little wife of yours. But if you think you can hand me over to the police— forget it! I've got a gun in my pocket, and I'll kill you without a second's hesitation if you ES to start anything!"

NEITHER of them noticed a slight draft as the hall-door opened and somebody came in without making a sound— standing at the dark end of the hall when the door was softly closed— listening. The engineer calmly refilled his pipe as he answered this threat.

"Your gat is in that top drawer— not in your pocket. And I can easily stop you before you pull it. But handing you over to the police hadn't entered my

mind at all. That would mean ruin for the whole family — my object is to avoid that."

"But I tell you it's impossible, John! It's too late!"

"Now— wait. Lets see if it really is! Would it be possible to tote that suitcase back in the morning— get it into the vault as soon as it's opened— bring it home again— empty?"

Grigsby's earnestness was beginning to produce an impression. _

"Why— it might. I doubt if anyone would think of stopping me— suggest opening it. The president or cashier might joke me about it, but the chance of anybody getting curious at all is negligible— I'm usually the earliest bird in the morning."

"Are you willing to try it— with the chance of possible arrest for attempted embezzlement?"

"I don't know that I am! Why should I? I've got eighty thousand in that suitcase! If putting it back would change the condition of my affairs,— with.your loan of three thousand,— I might consider it. But I owe two thousand to the department stores for my wife's bills! It's simply impossible for me to meet the last two payments on my car—"

"Can't you sell it to some friend? It's practically new. You really can't afford to keep a car, anyhow."

"Don't I know that! Neither can two thirds of the men who own them— and mortgage something to get 'em! But my wife says if you haven't a car, you're nobody— you don't amount to anything. And she's not far out, at that! Besides— I need the thing for my get-away!"

"How about Ellie? Do you realize that anything of this sort will cloud her whole life— make it almost impossible for her to marry any decent man when she grows up? He'd be afraid of the streak in her blood, you know!"

"Don't, old man! Don't pile it on! I've got more than I can carry, now! And I can't change my wife! She's a fine woman in most ways, but she can't stop spending— trying to keep up with a fool set who have no sense and don't get her anywhere. In another year, I'd be only deeper in the hole than I am now!"

"If she once realized where all this has driven you, Tom, I think she might surprise you. She came from a small New England town, didn't she? Where she never had any money to spend— scarcely a penny of her own? Then she marries a city man with a good job and a good salary, he puts her in a nice apartment, among a higher social class than she's been going with at home— gives her a pocketand house-allowance which is more money than she ever had in her life to spend. And it goes to her head— she thinks there's no limit to it—"

SUDDENLY they were conscious of the white-faced woman who stood just inside the door clutching the portiére. After one or two efforts to speak, her voice was scarcely more than a whisper:

"Tom— Mr. Grigsby is right! The money went to my head— I never dreamed— or stopped to figure up— how much I was spending. But I— I'l stop it— I'll begin to save! Ill make my own clothes! I'm sick of the car right now— sell it as quickly as you can! I— I came in— awhile ago! Stood there in the hall— heard everything you've said— both of you!— oh, Tom, dear! You won't do it! You wont, will you? You'll take it back! I— I—"

She sank down in a heap on the floor.

After helping to lay her in on the bed, Grigsby tiptoed back into the living-room, where he gripped Smithers' hand reassuringly.

"You two are best left to yourselves now. I'll bring your check around to the bank in the morning. You see— I'll be kinda anxious myself, Tom, until that stuff is back in the vault. There really isn't much risk that anybody will get too curious because they think they know you too' well— but you can just nod if everything's O.K."

The fact that all the bank people did know Smithers so well prevented any notice being taken of him when he carried the suitcase into the big vault and put the bundles of notes back into their tin trunk. Their travels during that sixteen hours were never even suspected.

A YEAR later Grigsby came home one evening with a curious expression on his face which first puzzled and then worried Joan— filled her with a vague apprehension. He seemed immensely pleased— and yet, regretful. Finally it came out. He had been offered the appointment as engineer-in-chief of a big dam and irrigation project in Yunnan, Indo-China. They were to store the things they wanted to keep and sell the rest— transportation being more costly than new furniture in the Orient— starting at the end of the week.

Joan had become attached to this first home of her married life— had made friends who were dear to her. But she had married an engineer with her eyes fully open to the wanderings that went with the profession— and the Grigsbys were a close corporation. Wherever you found one, the other was near by. Their neighbors, however, received the news with a stunned, empty feeling. With the Grigsbys gone, the house would never be quite the same. Little Bobby Foster brought Joan his very best elephant with the white tusks— saying that "Gop" was ker ephalunt now, and was to be taken with her. But she explained that "Gop" would be so lonesome without his brothers and cousins that he might die, so she thought it was better to leave him in Bobby's care until he was older, anyhow— but he would be her ephalunt just the same.

Tony, the shoeshine, assured her that it would be foolish to spend money on a taxi going over to her station.

"My brud' he jus' buy fina new car— sev' pass' car— you tell him what station, he take you anywhere you say. An' my unc', da ice-man, he taka da trunk in da ice-fliv', Si! You no pay not'in'!"

As they drove swiftly away, Saturday morning, in the car of Tony's "brud', there were faces in every window, looking down. The peg-post cop at the corner, and Mrs. Hurley, from her subway ticket-booth, waved a farewell. The children tore along the smooth sidewalk on roller-skates, velocipedes and scooters as fast as their legs could paddle while the car was in sight. And as it disappeared, Tony suspended operations on the feet of a customer for one lingering glance. When the job was finished, he listlessly put on his collar and street coat— telling his two assistants they might go for the day.

"I gotta da bum feel', inside! I closa da shop! I go home an' playa da victrol'."

In the corner apartment on the third floor, old Bremmerton stood looking sadly out from behind his curtains. The only two people in the world who seemed to care any'thing for him were gone— out of his life. Stepping over to the bureau, he pulled out a drawer and took from it the heavy blued automatic he had carried in the army, fingering it thoughtfully— taking out the magazine to see if the clip was full. One shot would be enough, he thought— but there were eight if he had vitality enough left to use them. As he went over to the window again, caressing the gun, he heard the Smithers' door open, across the hall— and a woman's footsteps going down the stairs. He never knew what had happened to turn the tide of their affairs, but was certain that the engineer and his wife had been instrumental in bringing it about. The Rockwells, too— that was another instance, and a train of speculative thought ran through Bremmerton's mind. What was the something the Grigsbys had which worked out in ways like that? Himself, for instance? Could he cultivate the same fine intangible quality— use it in similar ways? The thought was intriguing. If one spent something of himself for other people, might not those others come to care a little— in return? He laid the automatic back in the drawer and gently closed it— feeling as if that exit were closed for all time.

"They'd hear of it— think of me as a quitter. I couldn't stand having the Grigsbys say that of me— I'd turn over in my grave!"

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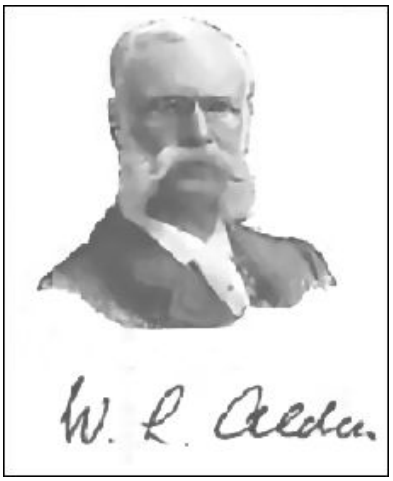
5: Van Wagener's Flying Cat

W. L. Alden

1837-1908

The Idler, Dec 1896



"SPARROWS," said the Colonel, "may be very upright, respectable, middle-class birds long as they stay in England, but when they emigrate to America, they are no better than the average of our working classes. Some meddling idiot brought a lot of sparrows to the States ten or fifteen years ago, expecting they would kill all the worms on the fruit trees. They hadn't been in the country above six months when they took the ground that they were as good as the best of our swell birds, and that they considered that killing worms was a degrading kind of labor fit only for blackbirds and crows. So they took to living on wheat, and strawberries, and cherries, and they multiplied so fast that they are the worst curse that the farmer and the fruit grower ever had, with the solitary exception of the McKinley tariff. That shows the folly of promoting emigration among birds, just as the exportation of rabbits lo Australia showed the folly of supposing that man knows more about the proper distribution of animals than Nature knows. There are now about ten sparrows to every worm in the United Stales, and what we need more than anything else is some style of worm big enough to cat the sparrows.

"Professor Van Wagener and I were discussing the sparrow question one day, and I was complaining of the inefficiency of the American cat. Our cats are about as wide-awake as any monarchical cats that you can produce, but they can't catch a single sparrow. I've known ambitious cats who set out to catch sparrows, and who wasted away to mere skeletons, and died of weakness, through watching for sparrows from dawn to darkness, and never once getting within ten feet of one. As a general rule I don't have much sympathy with cats,

but the insulting language that sparrows use when they see a cat laying for them, and the aggravating way in which they will fly just over the cat's head, or maybe hit the cat over the tail with their wings, is more than any cat can be expected to bear.

" 'The trouble is,' said Van Wagener, 'that the cat isn't a flying animal and the sparrow is. The sparrow's native element is the air, and you can't expect a cat to catch a sparrow so long as the cat can't fly.'

" 'That's true enough,' said I, 'but it don't help us out of our difficulty. Cats weren't made with wings, and neither you nor I can invent a new model of cat that will he able to fly, and to catch sparrows on the wing.'

" 'Don't you be too sure of that,' said the Professor. 'Science has improved everything that it has put its hand to, and I see no reason why science shouldn't improve cats. A flying cat would supply a great public want, for she would kill off the sparrows as easily as she kills off the mice. I've half a mind to try the experiment of inventing a flying cat.'

" 'All right," said I, 'When you get your flying cat finished just notify me and I'll come and see her fly. Then, if you are going in for improving animals, perhaps you will invent a cat that can sing like a nightingale. The present style of singing among cats is disgraceful. They haven't any more idea of music than a Chinaman.'

" 'You only show your ignorance, Colonel,' said Van Wagener, 'when you ridicule science. Give me six weeks, and I promise to show you a flying cat. I don't say positively that the flying cat will exterminate all the sparrows, for that would be a pretty large order; but I do say that she will fly, and that she will give the sparrows the worst scare that they have ever had.'

"Well, the Professor buckled down to business, and from his daily interviews with his private cat, and the consequent scratches that diversified his good old scientific countenance, I judged that he was doing his best to make a cat that would fly. Before the six weeks were up he sent me a note, inviting me to come round to his house at two o'clock the next afternoon to see the first successful flying cat that had ever been invented. I needn't say that I went. I had assisted at the birth of dozens of Van Wagener's inventions, and I had generally found that the presence of a man with experience in the treatment of accidents was a handy thing, so far as the Professor was concerned.

"I found Van Wagener sitting in his library with the most discouraged-looking cat that I had ever seen. As soon as he had shaken hands with me he launched out into a description of his new invention.

" 'You know. Colonel,' said he, 'my method as an inventor. I ask myself what is needed for some particular purpose, and then I proceed to supply that

need. Most people think that an inventor has ideas come to him all of a sudden, in a supernatural sort of way; but that is all nonsense. Inventing is a business, like any other, and any intelligent man can learn it. Now, when I saw that the reason why cats don't catch sparrows is that they can't fly after the bird, I saw that what was wanted was a flying cat, and I proceeded to invent one. Here I have a small balloon. This I fix to that cat of mine, and when it is inflated it will just support the weight of the cat in the air. Then you see this pair of paddle-wheels. They are to be fixed, one on each side of the cat, and are to be driven by a small electrical engine. The balloon floats the cat, and the paddle-wheels propel her. In order to steer the cat I fix a flat piece of tin to the extremity of her tail. When she sees a sparrow her instinct will make her swish her tail from one side to the other, and her attention being fastened on catching the bird, she will unconsciously work her tail in such a way as to steer her directly towards it. Take it all in all I am justly proud of this invention. It is simple and effective, that is to say when the air is still, for of course my paddle-wheels will not propel the cat against the wind. I tried at first to fit the cat out with wings, but it was impossible to teach her to use them. Next to a woman a cat cares less for science than any other animal, and it is impossible to teach her to take an interest in an invention that is designed solely to benefit her. However, the day will come when flying cats will be as common as the ordinary type, and when they once get used to flying they will take to the sport as kindly as they now take to catching mice. Now, Colonel, if you are ready, we will rig up the cat for flying, and we will see what effect she produces on the sparrows in my backyard,'

"It wasn't an easy job to rig up Van Wagener's cat. She kicked and swore her level best, and got in several good scratches on the Professor's hands. However, he stuck to his task, and after a while the cat was ready, and we adjourned to the backyard. There was a whole gang of sparrows in the middle of the yard, forming a sort of ring round two that were fighting, and from the way in which every sparrow was talking at the top of his voice it was clear that some heavy betting on the fight was in progress. When they saw Van Wagener and his cat, they naturally flew up to the eaves of the house, where the fight was resumed. Van Wagoner took his flying cat to the extremity of the yard, and after showing her the sparrows on the top of the house, and exhorting her to gather them in, he launched her into the air.

"The cat rose slowly, kicking and yelling, until she was just about level with the eaves. The sparrows were so occupied with the fight that they paid no attention to her, and when she saw that there were at least twenty of them gathered close together, her desire to get at them made her temporarily forget her balloon and her paddle-wheels. She lashed her tail, as cats will do when

bent on murder, and, just as the Professor predicted, the effect was to steer her in the direction of the sparrows. Her paddle-wheels were working smoothly and regularly, and though they were not large enough to give her any great speed, they steadily carried her across the yard towards the sparrows. Van Wagener was in ecstasies. He challenged me to point out any defect in his flying cat, and when I candidly admitted that it did seem to be a complete success, he was the happiest man in New Berlinopolisville. The cat came through the air so slowly and noiselessly that she was within two yards of the sparrows before they saw her. When they did catch sight of this new and startling animal, they were the worst frightened lot of birds that were ever seen outside of one of those so-called Happy Families, where half-a-dozen birds, clean paralyzed with fear, are shut in a cage with a cat that has been filled up with chloral, and the public is asked to regard the exhibition as a specimen of what will be the usual sort of thing when the millennium gets its work fairly in. Those sparrows left in a tremendous hurry. They had a sudden business call in some distant part of Illinois, and I don't believe a single one of them stopped flying until they had put at least thirty miles between themselves and Van Wagener's flying cat.

" 'Now, you see,' said the Professor, 'how completely successful my invention is. My flying cat will either catch the sparrows and kill them, or she will frighten them out of the country. In either case the great sparrow problem is solved. It makes no difference to me, as a patriotic American citizen, whether all the British sparrows in the country are killed, of whether they are driven over into Canada. Come to think of it, I should prefer the latter result, for the driving of monarchical European birds out of our beloved country will be an object lesson in the enforcement of the Monroe doctrine, which will be of immense benefit to the nation.'

"The Professor, being a scientific crank, was naturally a political crank also, and he was more than two-thirds mad on the subject of the Monroe doctrine, which by-the-bye is unanimously believed in and worshipped by every lunatic in the States. When the Professor once got fairly started on the subject of the Monroe doctrine he forgot everything else, and he had clean forgotten his flying cat when Mrs. Van Wagener leaned out of a second story window, and advised him, in case he was going to make a political speech, to hire a hall. She was a mighty sarcastic woman, and her contempt for her husband's political views was even greater than her contempt for his scientific achievements. She was on the point of continuing her remarks about the Professor's political oration, when she suddenly gave the awfullest screech that I ever heard from female lips, though I was once in a room full of strong-minded women when a mouse ran across the floor. Mrs. Van Wagener thought that her last hour had

come, judging from her screams, but, as I had a full view of what was taking place, I knew it was only the cat who had come. Having missed the sparrows the cat turned partly round to see what had become of them, and just then Mrs. Van Wagener, having unconsciously put her head within the animal's reach, the cat judged that her opportunity for miking a landing had arrived, and accordingly she lit on the top of Mrs. Van Wagener's head.

"Most any woman, not knowing that her husband had invented a flying cat, would have supposed when some monster with sharp claws, and a talent for using bad language, came flying through the air and lit on her head, that nothing less than the sea-serpent, or the flying dragons mentioned in Scripture, had attacked her. What with the cat's desire to kick herself free from her flying apparatus, and her anxiety to get square with the human race, she did more with that poor woman's hair in five minutes than any other cat could have done in a good half hour. The Professor tried to explain that it was only the cat, and begged his wife not to injure the flying apparatus. It didn't seem to occur to him that he ought to run to his wife's assistance, till I had taken him by the shoulders, and started him upstairs, I don't want you to think for a moment that he wasn't anxious to help his wife, but he was so in the habit of looking at things from a scientific point of view, that he forgot that while he was explaining things Mrs. Van Wagener might be clawed to such an extent that she would never be recognized by her nearest friend. When he had once grasped the idea that she needed his help he fairly flew upstairs and succeeded in transferring the cat's attentions to himself. Then I had to come to the rescue, for the Professor not having hair enough to interest the cat, she had devoted her efforts to beautifying his countenance, and if I hadn't succeeded in pulling her off, and tossing her out of the window, she would have torn his eyes out, or at all events ruined his nose. Her balloon had burst during her interview with Mrs. Van Wagener, and consequently when I threw her out of the window she struck the ground pretty heavily, and smashed up the paddle-wheels. We never saw her again, but every little while there would appear in the newspapers stories of a strange animal with a glittering tail, that haunted the lower part of Illinois. You see the cat couldn't rid herself of her steering attachment, and she naturally wasn't willing to show herself in what she considered a disgraceful dress.

"Mrs. Van Wagener made peace with her husband on condition of his making a solemn promise never to have anything more to do with flying cats. I consider that she was wrong in so doing, for Van Wagener's invention was bound to be a success. If he had been allowed to carry it out, flying cats would have become as common as bats, and every sparrow in the States would have emigrated. If it wasn't that I don't believe in using other people's inventions, I

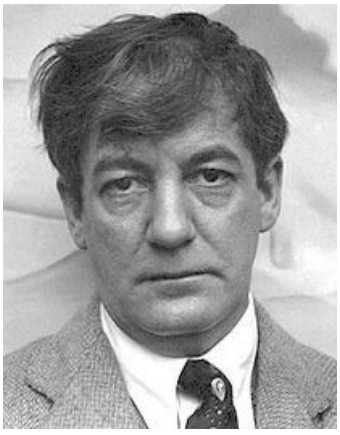
would go in for the manufacture of flying cats myself; and as it is, I believe that Edison will some day hear of Van Wagener's experiment, and will immediately invent a flying cat, and spend the rest of his life in trying to make the invention work."

6: The Triumph of the Egg

Sherwood Anderson

1876-1941

The Dial, March 1920



Sherwood Anderson

MY FATHER was, I am sure, intended by nature to be a cheerful, kindly man. Until he was thirty-four years old he worked as a farm-hand for a man named Thomas Butterworth whose place lay near the town of Bidwell, Ohio. He had then a horse of his own and on Saturday evenings drove into town to spend a few hours in social intercourse with other farm- hands. In town he drank several glasses of beer and stood about in Ben Head's saloon— crowded on Saturday evenings with visiting farm-hands. Songs were sung and glasses thumped on the bar. At ten o'clock father drove home along a lonely country road, made his horse comfortable for the night and himself went to bed, quite happy in his position in life. He had at that time no notion of trying to rise in the world.

It was in the spring of his thirty-fifth year that father married my mother, then a country school-teacher, and in the following spring I came wriggling and crying into the world. Something happened to the two people. They became ambitious. The American passion for getting up in the world took possession of them.

It may have been that mother was responsible. Being a school-teacher she had no doubt read books and magazines. She had, I presume, read of how Garfield, Lincoln, and other Americans rose from poverty to fame and greatness and as I lay beside her— in the days of her lying-in— she may have dreamed that I would some day rule men and cities. At any rate she induced father to give up his place as a farm-hand, sell his horse and embark on an independent enterprise of his own. She was a tall silent woman with a long

nose and troubled grey eyes. For herself she wanted nothing. For father and myself she was incurably ambitious.

The first venture into which the two people went turned out badly. They rented ten acres of poor stony land on Griggs's Road, eight miles from Bidwell, and launched into chicken raising. I grew into boyhood on the place and got my first impressions of life there. From the beginning they were impressions of disaster and if, in my turn, I am a gloomy man inclined to see the darker side of life, I attribute it to the fact that what should have been for me the happy joyous days of childhood were spent on a chicken farm.

One unversed in such matters can have no notion of the many and tragic things that can happen to a chicken. It is born out of an egg, lives for a few weeks as a tiny fluffy thing such as you will see pictured on Easter cards, then becomes hideously naked, eats quantities of corn and meal bought by the sweat of your father's brow, gets diseases called pip, cholera, and other names, stands looking with stupid eyes at the sun, becomes sick and dies. A few hens, and now and then a rooster, intended to serve God's mysterious ends, struggle through to maturity. The hens lay eggs out of which come other chickens and the dreadful cycle is thus made complete. It is all unbelievably complex. Most philosophers must have been raised on chicken farms. One hopes for so much from a chicken and is so dreadfully disillusioned. Small chickens, just setting out on the journey of life, look so bright and alert and they are in fact so dreadfully stupid. They are so much like people they mix one up in one's judgments of life. If disease does not kill them they wait until your expectations are thoroughly aroused and then walk under the wheels of a wagon— to go squashed and dead back to their maker. Vermin infest their youth, and fortunes must be spent for curative powders. In later life I have seen how a literature has been built up on the subject of fortunes to be made out of the raising of chickens. It is intended to be read by the gods who have just eaten of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It is a hopeful literature and declares that much may be done by simple ambitious people who own a few hens. Do not be led astray by it. It was not written for you. Go hunt for gold on the frozen hills of Alaska, put your faith in the honesty of a politician, believe if you will that the world is daily growing better and that good will triumph over evil, but do not read and believe the literature that is written concerning the hen. It was not written for you.

I, however, digress. My tale does not primarily concern itself with the hen. If correctly told it will centre on the egg. For ten years my father and mother struggled to make our chicken farm pay and then they gave up that struggle and began another. They moved into the town of Bidwell, Ohio and embarked in the restaurant business. After ten years of worry with incubators that did

not hatch, and with tiny— and in their own way lovely— balls of fluff that passed on into semi-naked pullethood and from that into dead hen-hood, we threw all aside and packing our belongings on a wagon drove down Griggs's Road toward Bidwell, a tiny caravan of hope looking for a new place from which to start on our upward journey through life.

We must have been a sad looking lot, not, I fancy, unlike refugees fleeing from a battlefield. Mother and I walked in the road. The wagon that contained our goods had been borrowed for the day from Mr. Albert Griggs, a neighbor. Out of its sides stuck the legs of cheap chairs and at the back of the pile of beds, tables, and boxes filled with kitchen utensils was a crate of live chickens, and on top of that the baby carriage in which I had been wheeled about in my infancy. Why we stuck to the baby carriage I don't know. It was unlikely other children would be born and the wheels were broken. People who have few possessions cling tightly to those they have. That is one of the facts that make life so discouraging.

Father rode on top of the wagon. He was then a bald-headed man of forty-five, a little fat and from long association with mother and the chickens he had become habitually silent and discouraged. All during our ten years on the chicken farm he had worked as a laborer on neighboring farms and most of the money he had earned had been spent for remedies to cure chicken diseases, on Wilmer's White Wonder Cholera Cure or Professor Bidlow's Egg Producer or some other preparations that mother found advertised in the poultry papers. There were two little patches of hair on father's head just above his ears. I remember that as a child I used to sit looking at him when he had gone to sleep in a chair before the stove on Sunday afternoons in the winter. I had at that time already begun to read books and have notions of my own and the bald path that led over the top of his head was, I fancied, something like a broad road, such a road as Caesar might have made on which to lead his legions out of Rome and into the wonders of an unknown world. The tufts of hair that grew above father's ears were, I thought, like forests. I fell into a half-sleeping, half-waking state and dreamed I was a tiny thing going along the road into a far beautiful place where there were no chicken farms and where life was a happy eggless affair.

One might write a book concerning our flight from the chicken farm into town. Mother and I walked the entire eight miles— she to be sure that nothing fell from the wagon and I to see the wonders of the world. On the seat of the wagon beside father was his greatest treasure. I will tell you of that.

On a chicken farm where hundreds and even thousands of chickens come out of eggs surprising things sometimes happen. Grotesques are born out of eggs as out of people. The accident does not often occur— perhaps once in a

thousand births. A chicken is, you see, born that has four legs, two pairs of wings, two heads or what not. The things do not live. They go quickly back to the hand of their maker that has for a moment trembled. The fact that the poor little things could not live was one of the tragedies of life to father. He had some sort of notion that if he could but bring into henhood or roosterhood a five-legged hen or a two-headed rooster his fortune would be made. He dreamed of taking the wonder about to county fairs and of growing rich by exhibiting it to other farm-hands.

At any rate he saved all the little monstrous things that had been born on our chicken farm. They were preserved in alcohol and put each in its own glass bottle. These he had carefully put into a box and on our journey into town it was carried on the wagon seat beside him. He drove the horses with one hand and with the other clung to the box. When we got to our destination the box was taken down at once and the bottles removed. All during our days as keepers of a restaurant in the town of Bidwell, Ohio, the grotesques in their little glass bottles sat on a shelf back of the counter. Mother sometimes protested but father was a rock on the subject of his treasure. The grotesques were, he declared, valuable. People, he said, liked to look at strange and wonderful things.

Did I say that we embarked in the restaurant business in the town of Bidwell, Ohio— I exaggerated a little. The town itself lay at the foot of a low hill and on the shore of a small river. The railroad did not run through the town and the station was a mile away to the north at a place called Pickleville. There had been a cider mill and pickle factory at the station, but before the time of our coming they had both gone out of business. In the morning and in the evening busses came down to the station along a road called Turner's Pike from the hotel on the main street of Bidwell. Our going to the out of the way place to embark in the restaurant business was mother's idea. She talked of it for a year and then one day went off and rented an empty store building opposite the railroad station. It was her idea that the restaurant would be profitable. Travelling men, she said, would be always waiting around to take trains out of town and town people would come to the station to await incoming trains. They would come to the restaurant to buy pieces of pie and drink coffee. Now that I am older I know that she had another motive in going. She was ambitious for me. She wanted me to rise in the world, to get into a town school and become a man of the towns.

At Pickleville father and mother worked hard as they always had done. At first there was the necessity of putting our place into shape to be a restaurant. That took a month. Father built a shelf on which he put tins of vegetables. He painted a sign on which he put his name in large red letters. Below his name

was the sharp command— "EAT HERE"— that was so seldom obeyed. A show case was bought and filled with cigars and tobacco. Mother scrubbed the floor and the walls of the room. I went to school in the town and was glad to be away from the farm and from the presence of the discouraged, sad-looking chickens. Still I was not very joyous. In the evening I walked home from school along Turner's Pike and remembered the children I had seen playing in the town school yard. A troop of little girls had gone hopping about and singing. I tried that. Down along the frozen road I went hopping solemnly on one leg. "Hippity Hop To The Barber Shop," I sang shrilly. Then I stopped and looked doubtfully about. I was afraid of being seen in my gay mood. It must have seemed to me that I was doing a thing that should not be done by one who, like myself, had been raised on a chicken farm where death was a daily visitor.

Mother decided that our restaurant should remain open at night. At ten in the evening a passenger train went north past our door followed by a local freight. The freight crew had switching to do in Pickleville and when the work was done they came to our restaurant for hot coffee and food. Sometimes one of them ordered a fried egg. In the morning at four they returned north-bound and again visited us. A little trade began to grow up. Mother slept at night and during the day tended the restaurant and fed our boarders while father slept. He slept in the same bed mother had occupied during the night and I went off to the town of Bidwell and to school. During the long nights, while mother and I slept, father cooked meats that were to go into sandwiches for the lunch baskets of our boarders. Then an idea in regard to getting up in the world came into his head. The American spirit took hold of him. He also became ambitious.

In the long nights when there was little to do father had time to think. That was his undoing. He decided that he had in the past been an unsuccessful man because he had not been cheerful enough and that in the future he would adopt a cheerful outlook on life. In the early morning he came upstairs and got into bed with mother. She woke and the two talked. From my bed in the corner I listened.

It was father's idea that both he and mother should try to entertain the people who came to eat at our restaurant. I cannot now remember his words, but he gave the impression of one about to become in some obscure way a kind of public entertainer. When people, particularly young people from the town of Bidwell, came into our place, as on very rare occasions they did, bright entertaining conversation was to be made. From father's words I gathered that something of the jolly inn-keeper effect was to be sought. Mother must have been doubtful from the first, but she said nothing discouraging. It was father's notion that a passion for the company of himself and mother would spring up in the breasts of the younger people of the town of Bidwell. In the evening

bright happy groups would come singing down Turner's Pike. They would troop shouting with joy and laughter into our place. There would be song and festivity. I do not mean to give the impression that father spoke so elaborately of the matter. He was as I have said an uncommunicative man. "They want some place to go. I tell you they want some place to go," he said over and over. That was as far as he got. My own imagination has filled in the blanks.

For two or three weeks this notion of father's invaded our house. We did not talk much, but in our daily lives tried earnestly to make smiles take the place of glum looks. Mother smiled at the boarders and I, catching the infection, smiled at our cat. Father became a little feverish in his anxiety to please. There was no doubt, lurking somewhere in him, a touch of the spirit of the showman. He did not waste much of his ammunition on the railroad men he served at night but seemed to be waiting for a young man or woman from Bidwell to come in to show what he could do. On the counter in the restaurant there was a wire basket kept always filled with eggs, and it must have been before his eyes when the idea of being entertaining was born in his brain. There was something pre-natal about the way eggs kept themselves connected with the development of his idea. At any rate an egg ruined his new impulse in life. Late one night I was awakened by a roar of anger coming from father's throat. Both mother and I sat upright in our beds. With trembling hands she lighted a lamp that stood on a table by her head. Downstairs the front door of our restaurant went shut with a bang and in a few minutes father tramped up the stairs. He held an egg in his hand and his hand trembled as though he were having a chill. There was a half insane light in his eyes. As he stood glaring at us I was sure he intended throwing the egg at either mother or me. Then he laid it gently on the table beside the lamp and dropped on his knees beside mother's bed. He began to cry like a boy and I, carried away by his grief, cried with him. The two of us filled the little upstairs room with our wailing voices. It is ridiculous, but of the picture we made I can remember only the fact that mother's hand continually stroked the bald path that ran across the top of his head. I have forgotten what mother said to him and how she induced him to tell her of what had happened downstairs. His explanation also has gone out of my mind. I remember only my own grief and fright and the shiny path over father's head glowing in the lamp light as he knelt by the bed.

As to what happened downstairs. For some unexplainable reason I know the story as well as though I had been a witness to my father's discomfiture. One in time gets to know many unexplainable things. On that evening young Joe Kane, son of a merchant of Bidwell, came to Pickleville to meet his father, who was expected on the ten o'clock evening train from the South. The train was three hours late and Joe came into our place to loaf about and to wait for

its arrival. The local freight train came in and the freight crew were fed. Joe was left alone in the restaurant with father.

From the moment he came into our place the Bidwell young man must have been puzzled by my father's actions. It was his notion that father was angry at him for hanging around. He noticed that the restaurant keeper was apparently disturbed by his presence and he thought of going out. However, it began to rain and he did not fancy the long walk to town and back. He bought a five-cent cigar and ordered a cup of coffee. He had a newspaper in his pocket and took it out and began to read. "I'm waiting for the evening train. It's late," he said apologetically.

For a long time father, whom Joe Kane had never seen before, remained silently gazing at his visitor. He was no doubt suffering from an attack of stage fright. As so often happens in life he had thought so much and so often of the situation that now confronted him that he was somewhat nervous in its presence.

For one thing, he did not know what to do with his hands. He thrust one of them nervously over the counter and shook hands with Joe Kane. "How- de-do," he said. Joe Kane put his newspaper down and stared at him. Father's eye lighted on the basket of eggs that sat on the counter and he began to talk.

"Well," he began hesitatingly, "well, you have heard of Christopher Columbus, eh—" He seemed to be angry. "That Christopher Columbus was a cheat," he declared emphatically. "He talked of making an egg stand on its end. He talked, he did, and then he went and broke the end of the egg."

My father seemed to his visitor to be beside himself at the duplicity of Christopher Columbus. He muttered and swore. He declared it was wrong to teach children that Christopher Columbus was a great man when, after all, he cheated at the critical moment. He had declared he would make an egg stand on end and then when his bluff had been called he had done a trick. Still grumbling at Columbus, father took an egg from the basket on the counter and began to walk up and down. He rolled the egg between the palms of his hands. He smiled genially. He began to mumble words regarding the effect to be produced on an egg by the electricity that comes out of the human body. He declared that without breaking its shell and by virtue of rolling it back and forth in his hands he could stand the egg on its end. He explained that the warmth of his hands and the gentle rolling movement he gave the egg created a new centre of gravity, and Joe Kane was mildly interested. "I have handled thousands of eggs," father said. "No one knows more about eggs than I do."

He stood the egg on the counter and it fell on its side. He tried the trick again and again, each time rolling the egg between the palms of his hands and saying the words regarding the wonders of electricity and the laws of gravity.

When after a half hour's effort he did succeed in making the egg stand for a moment he looked up to find that his visitor was no longer watching. By the time he had succeeded in calling Joe Kane's attention to the success of his effort the egg had again rolled over and lay on its side.

Afire with the showman's passion and at the same time a good deal disconcerted by the failure of his first effort, father now took the bottles containing the poultry monstrosities down from their place on the shelf and began to show them to his visitor. "How would you like to have seven legs and two heads like this fellow—" he asked, exhibiting the most remarkable of his treasures. A cheerful smile played over his face. He reached over the counter and tried to slap Joe Kane on the shoulder as he had seen men do in Ben Head's saloon when he was a young farm-hand and drove to town on Saturday evenings. His visitor was made a little ill by the sight of the body of the terribly deformed bird floating in the alcohol in the bottle and got up to go. Coming from behind the counter father took hold of the young man's arm and led him back to his seat. He grew a little angry and for a moment had to turn his face away and force himself to smile. Then he put the bottles back on the shelf. In an outburst of generosity he fairly compelled Joe Kane to have a fresh cup of coffee and another cigar at his expense. Then he took a pan and filling it with vinegar, taken from a jug that sat beneath the counter, he declared himself about to do a new trick. "I will heat this egg in this pan of vinegar," he said. "Then I will put it through the neck of a bottle without breaking the shell. When the egg is inside the bottle it will resume its normal shape and the shell will become hard again. Then I will give the bottle with the egg in it to you. You can take it about with you wherever you go. People will want to know how you got the egg in the bottle. Don't tell them. Keep them guessing. That is the way to have fun with this trick."

Father grinned and winked at his visitor. Joe Kane decided that the man who confronted him was mildly insane but harmless. He drank the cup of coffee that had been given him and began to read his paper again. When the egg had been heated in vinegar father carried it on a spoon to the counter and going into a back room got an empty bottle. He was angry because his visitor did not watch him as he began to do his trick, but nevertheless went cheerfully to work. For a long time he struggled, trying to get the egg to go through the neck of the bottle. He put the pan of vinegar back on the stove, intending to reheat the egg, then picked it up and burned his fingers. After a second bath in the hot vinegar the shell of the egg had been softened a little but not enough for his purpose. He worked and worked and a spirit of desperate determination took possession of him. When he thought that at last the trick was about to be consummated the delayed train came in at the station and Joe

Kane started to go nonchalantly out at the door. Father made a last desperate effort to conquer the egg and make it do the thing that would establish his reputation as one who knew how to entertain guests who came into his restaurant. He worried the egg. He attempted to be somewhat rough with it. He swore and the sweat stood out on his forehead. The egg broke under his hand. When the contents spurted over his clothes, Joe Kane, who had stopped at the door, turned and laughed.

A roar of anger rose from my father's throat. He danced and shouted a string of inarticulate words. Grabbing another egg from the basket on the counter, he threw it, just missing the head of the young man as he dodged through the door and escaped.

Father came upstairs to mother and me with an egg in his hand. I do not know what he intended to do. I imagine he had some idea of destroying it, of destroying all eggs, and that he intended to let mother and me see him begin. When, however, he got into the presence of mother something happened to him. He laid the egg gently on the table and dropped on his knees by the bed as I have already explained. He later decided to close the restaurant for the night and to come upstairs and get into bed. When he did so he blew out the light and after much muttered conversation both he and mother went to sleep. I suppose I went to sleep also, but my sleep was troubled.

I awoke at dawn and for a long time looked at the egg that lay on the table. I wondered why eggs had to be and why from the egg came the hen who again laid the egg. The question got into my blood. It has stayed there, I imagine, because I am the son of my father. At any rate, the problem remains unsolved in my mind. And that, I conclude, is but another evidence of the complete and final triumph of the egg— at least as far as my family is concerned.

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7: The Floating Forest

Herman Scheffauer

1876–1927

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THE TERRIBLE DISCOVERY, now three days old, rankled like a barb of rusted iron in the gentle bosom of Mary Vance. It blotted the brightness of the day for her, and when sleep came it brought dreadful visions and dreams. She saw doomed souls writhing in fiery torment, she saw the smoke-blackened hand of her husband reach forth imploringly from the pit. And this had been so only since three days.

What had seized upon the soul of the ship-captain James Vance, he who had been so full of strange, rude tendernesses, with whom she had sailed the sea since the day they were wed? Had she never really known him, never sounded these abysses of terror so suddenly disclosed? For now he was as if changed by the wand of some sorcerer, his blithe nature dashed with savage rancour, his face disfigured with diabolical darkness. All day he brooded; sometimes he burst out suddenly in frightful curses upon the crew. Ever since they had left Boston he had been sad and preoccupied. She had marked him, tall and splendid, bearded like a sea-king, standing with folded arms in the heaving bows, his rugged head bent upon his breast, his eyes fixed on the blazing foam that flew from the prow of the Serapis. But only since the last three days had she known the truth.

In the presence of his wife the captain's stern features relaxed a little, and his harsh voice grew somewhat softer. But reciprocal anger stirred in the hearts of the crew against the monster passion they could not understand. Mary Vance, isolated by soul and sex, estranged from her husband by this new and remorseless secret, stood alone and forlorn in the shadows cast upon the Serapis by the dread temper of all on board. The sunlight seemed merely to heat the gloom as the *Serapis*, with her big burden of cement and lime, tore on her way toward Callao. It was as if murder, unseen but sensed, moved among them.

Mary Vance was a Scotchwoman whom Vance had met and married five years before in Dundee. She was intensely pious with a piety such as was fixed, uncompromising, and of a day long past. Instinctively now she took to fervent prayers, pouring them upon the waters, uttering them to all the winds.

Three days before a storm had burst upon them. Why had Captain Vance deemed it necessary to provision the boats, to place charts and instruments in them? The *Serapis* had easily mastered fiercer gales.

It was on that very night that Mary Vance had seen her husband rise during one of the early morning watches and stealthily make his way toward the hold. In his eyes, revealed by a lantern's light, was a look she had never seen before. What was he doing in the hold at that hour? Why was he so secret, so silent, so crafty in look and movement? Why, after a wearisome time, did he not return?

The sad-eyed woman, with some strange, foreboding sense of doom weighing upon her, arose, and like a ghost crept on her slippered feet down the steep steps and along the narrow passage that led into the hold. Far ahead in the bows, where the ruddy lantern light bathed the enormous groaning knees and ribs of the bark and revealed the countless heads of the dusty barrels of Portland cement and unslaked lime, the woman saw her husband's head black against the glow. Fantastic shadows were flung toward her as he moved. The vessel pitched and plunged on the mighty swells that followed the gale, and the oaken timbers and beams groaned dolorously as the ship staggered and lifted and shook. Stealthily she crept between the barrels, and watched her husband at his work. He was heaping broken boxes and old ropes, oakum and pieces of oily sail cloth against the foot of the foremast.

"Jamie, Jamie, for the love of Heaven, what be you doing?"

Pale and spirit-like she stood there, her eyes dilated with alarm, her voice full of sorrow and accusation. James Vance wheeled about as though steel had stabbed him; he leaped forward with a roar like a lion and a blasphemous oath, his eyes afire, his clenched fist quivering above his wife's bare head. Cowering, she shrank away. Her husband's arrested fist sank slowly, then opened and clutched her by the braids of her long hair. Like angel and fiend they seemed to stand there, his eyes darting flame into her own, which were filled with terror and tears.

"Mary!" he shouted, "Mary! In a second I'd have killed you! What are you doing here? Go back to the cabin!"

The wife, trembling, crept away from the sombre scene; her white-robed form vanished like a mist from the circle of the red lantern-light and that rolling eye. The next day the captain spoke no word to his wife. The boats, provisioned and prepared for the emergency of the storm, still hung heavy from the davits. Mr. Monroe, the first mate, suggested replacing the stores. Gruffly the captain refused his consent. He was going to run the Straits of Magellan instead of doubling the Cape; the saving of time was worth the risk. The course was plain to him— and yet the *Serapis* was a rotten old tub.

Never had good woman been more defamed by slander's tongue than the good ship of Captain Vance by her master's words. The *Serapis* was framed out of the toughest white oak: her timbers were heavy and staunch, her seams

new-caulked, her masts of picked Norwegian pine. From a famous Belfast yard she came twelve years before, and no ill of sea or shore had ever befallen her.

Dark green and flecked with foam, between black and gloomy headlands, flanked by ragged hulks of sinister rocks and helmets of basalt that thrust up their ugly shapes from the furious waters, the Straits opened before the *Serapis*. The savage and desolate peaks on both sides looked down like giants upon this white-pennoned bird of the sea that flew straight and undaunted between their formidable feet and the jaws of the white-fanged bluffs where bleached the skeletons of shattered ships. Perpetual rain and gloom brooded upon this region of warring elements. Yet safely and swiftly the Serapis fought her way through the fierce currents of the Straits, past this stormy gateway, to burst into the peaceful ocean of the West. The billows of the Pacific now broke against her sides.

Several days had passed, and still the *Serapis* was wrapped from keel to maintop in the black mood of the skipper. Mary Vance stood for hours by the taffrail, her pale blue eyes yearning for sign or portent, wandering along the illimitable sea-flats, searching the bland and unchangeable horizons. The soul of the unhappy woman was in torment, and she knew the soul of her husband writhed within him. All human things housed in the belly of the ship felt this bitterness as the *Serapis*, spreading her woven wings, foamed steadily northward on her track. To the east, at times, the sharp, snow-covered spines of the Andes glimmered pallidly through the grey sea-distances.

"Where be we now, Mr. Monroe?" asked the captain's wife as the mate stood at noon with sextant to the sun.

"Fifty-four south, seventy-six, thirty-one minutes west," replied the officer.

"And the course?"

"Due north."

"And when do we reach the Tiger's Tooth?"

"I think, ma'am, with this wind we'll be there at four bells."

When the slow, sweet strokes upon the bell pealed across the waters, Mary Vance was kneeling by the stern rail of the Serapis, the fallow glow of the sinking sun investing her as with the light of another world. In her hands she held a mass of white flowers and blue, poor crumpled flowers of cloth, torn from an old bonnet. These, with loving looks and trembling hands, she cast upon the white, boiling wake of the ship. Half a mile to the east a sharp, fang-like rock protruded above a ring of foam. It was the Tiger's Tooth.

The woman clasped her thin hands in prayer and inclined her waxen forehead upon them. So she knelt and prayed for a long time. The sailors moved by her, tip-toed, in silence.

As Captain Vance lay in his berth that night, staring with hot and sleepless eyes upon the darkness, which was filled with an oppressive heat, he saw the spectral form of his wife approach in the weak, weird light the stars cast upon the sea. She knelt beside him, her warm arms embraced his neck, and when she laid her lips to his ear he felt a tear pass from her cheek to his own.

"Jamie," said she, "did you see the log to-day?"

"No," he replied.

"Just a few hours ago, Jamie, we were in seventy-six, thirty-one west, fifty-four, twenty-three south."

"Well?"

"Do ye no' remember it, just three year ago, half a mile off the Tiger's Tooth? Do ye no' remember our darling bairn, our Robin, and the dark day we put his poor wee body over the side in this bitter spot? Oh, I've not forgotten it, Jamie, and to-day when we passed over the same place, I threw some blooms upon his grave and said prayers. It's over his head we sailed to-day, Jamie, and it seemed to me I could see our dear dead wean lying down there in the deep sea-bottom, in the thick kelp and the coral; the sweet fruit of our flesh sleeping thousands of fathoms deep with God's awful monsters swimming about his blessed curly head and his bonnie blue eyes looking up at me through the sea. And for the sake of our dear dead bairn, Jamie, and for the sake of them that never came to us, and for the sake of your own immortal soul, Jamie, ye will no' burn the ship?— tell me, Jamie, ye will no' burn the ship?"

Captain Vance loosed himself from the hold of the white and pleading arms, and dolefully the stricken voice broke from his lips:

"Leave me, wife— leave me alone with my thoughts, Mary— I promise."

Mary Vance pressed a kiss upon his bearded mouth and left him, a happy light in her eyes. But to the eyes of James Vance no sleep would come. The air seemed to grow more stifling, his brain was burning as with fever-flames. The vision that had been his insufferable torment through all the voyage, rose again, vivid, grim and ineffaceable.

It was the dingy office of Marcus Hood in Boston, where this crafty man lurked like a spider amidst dusty books, dirty maps, broken samples, and freakish things from the four quarters of the world, and peered from his littered desk through the grimy windows upon the bright, brave ships in the Bay. Marcus Hood was the owner of the *Serapis*, and Vance in his agony lived over again his temptation and his fall. Hood's gesture had been deliberate and the tones of his voice by turns hard and caressing as he pointed to his beautiful ship through the dusty panes.

"Burn her, sink her, wreck her before she reaches Callao, Vance," said he, "and a big share of the insurance goes to you. She is underwritten in Liverpool for twice her worth, cargo and bottom. I can afford to be liberal. You can afford to do it— and so be master of your own vessel;— you see, with what you'll save you can easily buy the Isandula."

Vance's ambition was like a demon planted in his breast. He longed for the splendid Isandula and his own freedom as a man longs for the woman of his heart. So in that fell hour, three months ago, the hands of owner and master had met to seal the infamous bargain and the doom of the faithful vessel then loading at the dock.

Last week he had sought to do the deed to which the tempter had bound him. Then his wife had come upon him like a seraph with a flaming sword. To night she had come again and held up to his guilty eyes the pure and radiant face of their dead babe, so mother and babe might plead as with the tongues of clarions for the life of the ship.

A heavy step sounded without, then a knock. Monroe, the first mate, entered the cabin with a lantern. The bloodshot eyes of the skipper looked up at him from the berth.

"Will you please come forward, sir? "asked the mate, "I fear there's trouble of some sort,"

The decks were warm to their feet. The captain ordered the forward hatch removed. A column of foul smoke, interwoven with a dull, struggling flame, leaped into the air.

"Shut the hatch!" he shouted. It was shut, all but a narrow orifice through which they thrust a hose. The water shot upon the barrels in the hold.

"Spontaneous combustion, sir," said Mr. Monroe.

They could not see that none of the water reached the smouldering woodwork. The oil-soaked, close-packed sails had engendered heat and then fire as easily as a smothered coal-heap or a pile of mouldering straw. Within the ribbed body of the *Serapis* terrible convulsions were bred. The barrels of unslaked lime burst, and their contents, hissing hot, boiled forth like geysers and frothing volcanoes, turning the hold to an infernal cauldron. The cement set in the barrels and slowly turned to stone. Then the hatches blew up, and the dense white fumes enveloped the ship as with the snowy shrouds of doom. Like gigantic serpents the fires, freed once more, burst forth from the hatchways and darted their fierce tongues towards the stars. To and fro flitted the forms of the crew, in and out of the depths of the mountainous billows of blinding steam, half hidden or blackly stamped against the crimson background of the flames soaring into the night. Already the decks were intolerable with heat; the pitch bubbled from the seams. The *Serapis* was a hollow shell of

seething lime and raging fire; she held her own destruction within her, red and unconquerable.

"Heave to!" shouted Captain Vance out of the impenetrable limbo of white steam. "Man the boats!"

He picked his way towards the cabin. There in the doorway, face to face, he met his wife. She was ashen pale, even in the glow of the flames; an iron and invincible conviction of the unforgivable crime was stamped on her every lineament. The captain seized her hand and dragged her forward. She followed, passively, deaf to the things he spoke, blind to the terror about her.

"Put Mrs. Vance in one of the boats," he commanded the second mate.

He went to the cabin again through the flame-and the smoke. When he returned with a roll of papers in his hand the last boat was ready to leave the side of the burning ship. He leaped into it, and the doomed *Serapis* stood masterless upon the sea, a floating shuttle of fire.

"Sheer off!" cried the captain, and the boat shot beyond the circle of glaring light cast from the Serapis. Like a wounded animal the vessel began to turn, warping from the wind and setting her head again toward the north. The sails flapped and filled.

"Where is my wife?" asked the captain.

"In the second mate's boat, sir, I think," replied the sailor.

"Mary!" cried Vance in the direction of the other boats, "are you there?"

There was no answer. The *Serapis* with swelling canvas was moving swiftly away.

"Mary!" cried the skipper again.

"She isn't here, sir," came over the water.

At that instant, as if in answer to her name, the white figure of Mary Vance appeared on the stern of the burning bark. Up from the boats arose impotent curses and groans.

"Pull! pull!" rang out the frenzied voice of the captain, and the sailors bent like racers to their oars. But the Serapis, steadily gathering headway, drew her burning robes about her, and slowly the gap of fire-dazzled water widened between blazing ship and straining boat.

"Jump, Mary, jump!" shrieked her husband. "For God's sake, jump!"

Mary Vance turned toward him her wide-open, sorrow-stricken eyes, and once more upon her face he saw that look of unutterable reproach. Like a martyr upon her death-pyre she stood there, the mast like a gigantic stake behind her, centred in the core of the brilliant rose of fire that spread over the ship, her form made radiant and holy by the solemn splendours of the sea and the threshing flames. She held her hands clasped, as in prayer, before her. So, like a saint in a fiery furnace, she drew away from their aching eyes and horror-

writhen hearts. The great topsails, safe from the fire, shone like sheets of ruddy gold against the stars. The smoke and snowy volumes of lime-vapours billowed into the air like clouds in a summer sky, encrimsoned and gilded with the red elements in their hearts. And all about the ship as she sped northward, the sea turned to blood with the reflected glory of her death, and the stars paled, and her wake to the men in the helpless boats was a wake of fire. Through tears and smoke-smarting eyes they beheld the shining, solitary figure of the captain's wife, never moving from the stern. Eruptions of fire and smoke encompassed her, and golden showers of sparks,— a great yardarm fell hissing into the sea. So they looked their last upon her until the *Serapis* was but a blot of red against the cold, eternal skies, a vanishing mass of floating fire, which finally dimmed to a glowing coal upon the horizon and then to a spark that was lost amidst the host of sinking stars. Soon after immense clouds gathered in the heavens and poured their torrential rains upon the sea.

In two days the boats made the broken coast of Chile. And the *Serapis*?— ah! the *Serapis*!

EARLY in the world's infant years, when the American continents rose heaving from the sea and shook themselves dry in the beams of a younger sun than shines to-day, a resting-place had been wrought for the *Serapis*. A high, rocky wall was thrust up on part of the coast south of the Isthmus of Darien, fronting the sea. There came an earth convulsion and rent it asunder from its roots in the sea to its crest in the sunlight. Thither, after unthinkable ages, the *Serapis*, a blackened hulk steered by Death or Destiny, came at last in our day to lay her poor weary body on this rocky bed. The gap in the cliff had become a canyon, the outlet of a small river. Jungles formed on either bank, and the narrow estuary was soon filled with a smothered tangle of tropical trees and rank, riotous vegetation.

The *Serapis*, a masked vagrant of the desert seas, a blasted derelict, but with her bulwarks mostly intact and her mainmast still standing proudly, erring and drifting, crept northward to the equator. Then, caught in the tumult of a violent squall, she was cast shoreward and flung into the entrance of the estuary, high and dry in the river's bed. Here the *Serapis* reposed, washed by the river and the low tides from the sea that foamed up the narrow bight. Her single mast, charred but still solid, stood upright under the festooning arches of the trees that flourished high up on the banks. The soft luxuriance of the teeming forest surrounded her. Once a heavy earthquake shook up the heated and unstable land and loosened a mass of earth and rubble from the cliffs above. It thundered down upon the deck of the Serapis and against her sides, though these the river freed again. The trees and flowers cast their seed upon

the earthen covering of the ship, and soon a tropical garden began to bloom with interwoven leaves and ferns and jungle creepers. Emblazoned blooms and tufted and clustered growths of a hundred shapes and colours began to flourish there. About the upright mainmast a dense host of sturdy vines entwined themselves like green serpents and made a mighty column of foliage. Several trees shot up where the soil lay thickest. Birds mated and nested in her trees: strange furtive animals made their haunts and burrows in the earth on her breast. So the *Serapis* lay for seven years buried in her fair cerements of earth, leaves and flowers, and her name was spoken no more upon the seas.

In the seventh year of her slumbers, in the season of the rains, a great flood devastated the mountains and inland valleys until the narrow sea-gulch roared and raved with the rushing waters. The *Serapis* was lifted from her nest in the river-bed, torn loose from her anchor-chains of flowering creepers and clinging vines, and vomited forth into the sea.

There, like some ancient barge of state, a fragment torn from the rich, primeval forest, trailing her long grasses and mats of tangled ferns through the waters, she roved idly, the sport of every wind and current. The salt spray soon blighted some of the jungle growths, and they hung down from her black bulwarks, rusted and yellow like rotting sails. Several brooding birds, brilliant parrots and flaming toucans, chained by instinct to their nests, remained in the floating forest with their mates. Sea-fowl came and lined the branches of the trees and flew screaming about the strange drifting islet.

The changing impulses of the ocean carried her west, then south. Once at night she lay in the path of a steamer from Sydney— a boat's length to port or starboard and the iron vessel and the wooden had run their heads together like two frantic bulls. The watch upon that steamer spoke in awed voices of a spectre island they had passed during the night, so close that the branches of trees had scraped the shrouds! Their captain, who swore by his charts, cursed them for drunken fools. But when he saw, caught in the ratlines, a small twig newly broken from the bough, fluttering its green leaves in the wind, his heart was confounded within him. Thus had the *Serapis* once more become the blind, dumb, and mindless terror of the deep, a floating menace hidden under beautiful floral robes.

Silent, swift and sure, out of the night came a magnificent clipper-ship southbound from Vancouver to Kingston in Jamaica. Every sail was set, the taut ropes sang in the breeze, her hull seemed lost beneath her towers of straining canvas. Her captain stood in the bow gazing toward the stern, his eyes rested on the vague form of the helmsman in the dull glow of the binnacle-lamp. To left and right of him the red and green stars of the ship's lights shone sharp

and bright as living jewels. They were the eyes of the ship, eyes that saw not, yet could be seen.

A black mass, inert, blind and terrible, the dead ship heaved up her ponderous mass against the living. There was a monstrous shock, a rending crash— the thin, hollow, iron shell of the queenly clipper, striking the thick oak reinforced by the solid tons of cement that lay packed behind it, was crumpled up like pasteboard. She staggered and shook like a racehorse that has dashed its head against a stone wall. The seas poured into her hold. Even as the ships struck, down like a gigantic club rushed the tall mainmast of the *Serapis*, snapped off from its earth-rotted base and tearing with it all its entwining leafage. Like a bolt from the sky it fell across the foredeck of the clipper and upon the master of the ship as he lay prone on the deck where the shock had hurled him. The massive timber crushed him pitilessly beneath a cushion of leaves that exhaled strange fragrances.

Swiftly the stricken ship began to fill. Boats were lowered, the helpless form of the unconscious captain gently lifted over the side. Reeling and swaying, the noble, wounded ship went down to doom, making a maelstrom with sucking spirals and clashing waves that met above her decks and licked the sails ere they sank into the depths. Four boats rocked mournfully upon the sea. Close by drifted the sinister shape of the derelict; her fallen mast, freed from the sunken ship, hung slanting in the dark water; frightened birds, disturbed by the crash, circled screaming in the air.

Fear and ghastly wonder possessed the men. They rowed towards the floating monster. Beneath its ragged raiment of jungle foliage they discerned the familiar hull of a ship. They clambered aboard; their dark shapes and low voices broke the seals of the night and caused this sullen hull of destruction, this rank garden of death, to live once more. The soft, spongy soil felt for the first time the foot of man. The awestruck sailors bore their captain to an open space near the stern, where they laid him, crushed and helpless, with a ship's lantern beside him. The dying man opened his eyes.

"Where am I?" he asked, his eyes bent upon the branches of the tamarisk above his head.

"On the derelict we struck, sir," the first mate replied; "she's covered with earth and trees— most wonderful."

"And where's my ship?"

"Sunk, sir," murmured the mate mournfully, with lowered head. The captain feebly closed his eyes. The lantern-light beat upon his pain-blanched face, framed in a grey beard and long, iron-hued hair. One of the men, thrusting aside the light bracken, held a lantern over the stern, and spelled out the tarnished letters of gold.

"S-E-R-A-P-I-S— *Serapis*," he said.

The first mate started violently. The dying master caught the word through all the treachery of his failing senses.

"Mr. Monroe," he whispered to the officer, "did he say the *Serapis*?"

"Ay, sir, the *Serapis*—our old ship." Painfully the captain raised himself to a sitting position. His eyes were open with a mighty wonder. They were fixed upon the constellation of the Southern Cross, which seemed to rise and sink in a gap between the boughs of the trees.

"The *Isandula* sunk! The *Serapis* still afloat! and it's seven years since I saw her, burning like a torch, sail off through the night! Lord God!"

The soul of James Vance in its extremity was once more confronted by the vision that would not vanish, He covered his face with his hands; the men, hushed in the awful presence of the departing life, stood reverently about him. Then he sank back upon the earth, and it was seen that an inner serenity had settled upon his face.

"Mr. Monroe," he said faintly, and the mate bent down, "I am done for. I'll be gone in an hour or so. I think— I feel she— Mary— is still here. So it's fit I lie down beside her, she that was my good dear wife, here on the old ship that was our wedding couch, our babe's cradle and her coffin. So let me lie here, old friend, you who have stood by me through all the years— till the sea takes all."

His hand strayed forth and closed over the hand of the mate in a last pressure. When dawn came they dug a grave with the blades of their oars in the deep earth that lay upon the after-deck of the *Serapis*. At a depth of several feet they struck the deck of the vessel and came suddenly upon the fragments of mortality that once framed the body of Mary Vance. The trench was widened, and husband and wife at last reposed side by side, and the earth was piled upon them like a mantle. A sailor set a rude cross upon the grave, another decked it with ferns and grasses.

A day later a British steamer sighted the signals of the men on the derelict, and carried the officers and the crew of the *Isandula* to Valparaiso.

South and south the aimless *Serapis*, a floating tomb, wandered and strayed and crossed the path of many a ship. Master after master complained of this danger to navigation along the Chilean coast. So the Minister of the Navy of the Republic ordered forth a gunboat, which for days hunted for the derelict. At last, far to the south, the lookout saw the black, ominous hulk tossing upon the swells. Her trees and foliage were blasted by wave and wind, and she trailed her funeral veils like some mad widow through the bitter seas.

The swift white gunboat stood off— there was a flash of flame, then another, two puffs of smoke and a blended thunder across the waters. The

steel shells burst in the hard unrotted oak of the valiant vessel, and the victorious floods, long denied, roared into her heart. So she sank with a sound of rushing waters that was like a hymn of thanks, sank to sleep amid "the thick kelp and the coral." So the sea that breaks but never is broken, the sea that takes all, closed over her not more than half a mile west of the Tiger's Tooth.

8: The Treasure of the Tombs

F. Britten Austin

1885-1941

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F. Britten Austin

IF EVER a man was emphatically and articulately thankful that the war was over and that he could return to the comfortable if humdrum ways of peace, that man was myself. The contrast of my quiet, cool office in London town after three years of the heat, dust, and flies of Mesopotamia was inexpressibly grateful to me. And although my military service, thanks to my job on the staff, was certainly not only far more interesting but accompanied by infinitely less hardship than the experiences of most of my comrades, I told myself, as once more I took my seat in my mahogany and red morocco private room, that I had had enough adventure for a life-time. Nothing would induce me— I remember my father's nod of satisfaction as I said it; he felt that he could safely resign the management of the business into my hands— nothing would induce me, short of extreme national danger, to quit the solid comfort of three meals a day and the club at the end of it for that fallacious lure of the unexplored horizon which had thrown so strong a spell over me when I had volunteered at the beginning of the war. And I believed myself. I did not even feel the pull, as did so many of those who fought in the war, of those old battlefields of France and Belgium, so familiar to me in 1915. Sometimes, it is true, I thought, of a few of my old comrades and speculated on what had happened to them, but I kept in touch with none. The war faded into a dream-memory, remote from actuality.

Remote though it was, nevertheless when one day my clerk tapped at the door and brought in two cards, inscribed respectively Richard Franks and Henry Jefferson, I had an instant vision of two dirty, haggard flying-officers standing

before me in my map-hung office in the old palace at Mosul. Their machine had crashed whilst on reconnaissance over the mountain-range of the Jebel Abjad, and they had escaped to our lines only after miraculous and hair-raising adventures sufficient to fill a book. My report of the valuable information they had brought back had contributed not a little to their promotion. I smiled at the memory of the two cool-headed young daredevils, who had narrated their thrilling experiences as though they were the most ordinary thing in the world.

"Show them in," I said, as I rose from my seat to welcome them.

I recognised at once, despite the disguise of their civilian clothes, the two young men who came rather diffidently into my room. Obviously they were awed by the unfamiliar surroundings of commerce.

"Good morning, Major," said Franks, a tall, thin young fellow with an aquiline nose on a determined face oddly out of keeping with his nervous manner. One would never have imagined that, single-handed, in what he called a "dog-fight," he had brought down three German machines attached to the Turkish army.

"'Morning, Major," ventured Jefferson, sententiously, evidently not less nervous. He was younger than Franks— not more than twenty-two or three, a mere boy, fair-haired and blue-eyed, the typical stripling who, in thousands, manned and fought England's air-fleets during the war. I noticed that, despite the prejudices of his kind, he carried a somewhat bulky brown-paper parcel.

"Good morning, both of you," I responded heartily, genuinely gratified by their visit. They brought into my work-a-day office a touch of the past which seemed pleasantly romantic in the retrospect. "Glad to see you! Sit down." They subsided rather sheepishly into the nearest chairs. I held out my cigarette-case. "What's the news? Anything I can do for you?"

They helped themselves to cigarettes and then looked at each other in embarrassment, each evidently hoping the other would take upon himself the task of opening their business.

Finally they both spoke at once.

"The fact is. Major—"

"We want you to lend us three thousand pounds!"

They both stopped. Franks frowned at Jefferson in deprecation of this bluntly undiplomatic approach.

I laughed.

"Three thousand pounds! That's a tall order, young gentlemen." I felt old enough to be their father, and had some difficulty in keeping my countenance as I looked at their deadly-serious young faces. "What do you want with three thousand pounds?"

There was another pause of embarrassed silence, and then Jefferson nudged his senior.

"You tell him, Dicky!" he said, in a hoarse whisper. "You can explain things."

Dicky Franks flushed and his brow corrugated for a moment of concentrated thought. Then he dived a hand into his breast-pocket and fished out a map which I recognised at once as of Army origin. In fact, as he unfolded it, it proved to be our old staff map of the Mosul area. The young fellow looked up at me and cleared his throat.

"You remember, Major, that Jefferson and I crashed one day in the Jebel Abjad— in 1918?"

I smiled.

"Perfectly. If my memory is not amiss," I got both you harum-scarum young devils a decoration for that— not to mention another pip."

Franks nodded acquiescence, his face grave.

"You did. Major. Well—" he hesitated, fumbling for an opening— "the fact is we didn't tell you quite the true story about that stunt—" He paused, moistening his lips in his nervousness.

"What do you mean?" I asked. I am afraid there was a sharp severity in my voice. I had an unpleasant vision of having been made a fool of, of having recommended these two young devils on an utterly fictitious story. It flashed into my mind that they had come to me, conscience-stricken, to confess. "Didn't you crash way back in the Jebel Abjad as you said you did?"

Franks's smile relieved me.

"Oh, yes, we crashed right enough, Major— but not exactly as we said we did. All we told you was true. Only we left some of it out."

Young Jefferson wagged his head in emphatic corroboration.

"That's it. Major. There's some of it we didn't want to tell just then. And we've come to tell you now."

Franks threw a glance admonitory of caution towards his companion.

"Yes," he said, a certain reluctance in his voice, as though afraid to give himself away too quickly. "We want to tell you the whole story, Major— but first I— we— want you to promise that whatever happens you won't mention a word of it to anyone else. That's only fair, isn't it, Harry?" He turned to young Jefferson for support.

"We know we can trust you, Major," interjected Jefferson.

"Of course you can!" I said, seating myself again in my chair and lighting my own cigarette. "I'll keep your confidence, whatever it is. Fire away— and cut out the 'Major'! I'm a civilian, and my name's Ogilvy." My smile was intended to put both of them at their ease.

Franks took up his story, reassured.

"Well, Major— sorry— Mr. Ogilvy," he smiled at his automatic slip— "we came down twice on that stunt in the Jebel Abjad—"

"Twice?" I queried, in surprise." You only mentioned once in your report to me."

"I know, Major— Mr. Ogilvy," said Franks. "That's the point. It's the other time we've come to tell you about now."

"Go ahead," I said." I'm listening."

"Well, the details of that flight don't matter," he resumed, playing nervously with the open map on his knees as he spoke. "You remember we'd got a roving commission over the Jebel Abjad— reconnaissance to see if old Johnny Turk had tucked himself away in any of the valleys. It was top-hole weather for observation— clear as possible— but we flew all the morning without a sign of the Turk.

"We circled round to the north-west for a bit before making for home, and searched up and down the cracks of those mountains pretty thoroughly. Suddenly we saw all round us one of those big ugly thunderstorms which spring up from nowhere in no time among the mountains. It was a rotten place to be caught in. We were about the middle of the range and following a valley, the machine a thousand feet or so below the summits on both sides. I put her nose up at once— and just as we were climbing out of the hole we were in, the confounded old bus missed fire! The engine stopped dead. Just the sort of thing that would happen, of course, in a thunderstorm on top of a mountain range!

I saw the barograph needle switch round as we dropped— and I tell you I thought it was all up with us. We were already once more below the summit of the mountain on our left. The valley bottom was boulders. Suddenly I saw that a broad ledge projected from the flank of the mountain, a terrace two or three hundred yards wide. It was almost below us as I spotted it— an unobstructed stretch of smooth rock. I made for it instinctively— there was no time to think— the second flash of lightning flickered all over the machine. I put her down to it, and just as the rain came down on us in bucketfuls we touched and taxied along the ledge. I swerved round to get her head to wind against the gust that blew back from the mountain-side, and pulled her up by a miracle.

"We jumped out, lightning blazing all round us and rain coming down like a thousand waterfalls. It seemed a pretty hopeless place for shelter— and shelter at that minute was worth our next leave, and that's saying something in Mespot. Suddenly, straight ahead of us, I spotted the mouth of a cave. We both dashed for it like rabbits to a hole.

"It was a cave all right, and there we were, sheltered from the storm, with the lightning playing all over our machine outside. Our chances of ever getting

back again looked pretty slim at that moment, I don't mind admitting. If the old bus was struck we hadn't an earthly of ever getting down from that mountain. We looked at each other in the lightning flashes, and we both got the idea to explore the cave to take our minds off the unpleasant possibilities outside.

"It was a big lofty hole, that cave, and the first thing that hit both of us was that its sides had been smoothed by human hands. The chisel marks were still visible. That was surprising enough, for the place seemed absolutely inaccessible. Of course, it occurred to both of us that if people had taken the trouble to climb up here to smooth the walls of a cave they must have had some pretty good reason for doing so. We'd both got electric torches in our tunics and we set out to find that reason.

"It didn't take us long. Twenty or thirty yards inside that cave were three enormous tombs— sarcophagi, don't you call them?— supported on pedestals of squared stone. They were carved all over with figures and covered with roof-like slabs of solid rock. At least, two of them were. We saw at once that we weren't the first to discover those tombs. Someone had been there before us. The slab on the nearest one had been prised off sideways— and underneath the edge of it was a skeleton with an iron bar alongside. Evidently, just as he had got the slab off, it had fallen on him and killed him.

"I tell you we felt pretty excited as we climbed up the pedestal and flashed our torches inside that tomb. The original occupant was still there all right— at least, bits of his skeleton were. But that wasn't what interested us. There were heaps of broken ornaments and things round that skeleton, and the body rested on a bed of what we first thought were neat little bricks. Look!" He extracted a small bar from his pocket and handed it to me. "What do you make of that?"

I took it curiously. It was heavy yellow metal.

"By Jove!" I exclaimed. "This is solid gold!" I turned it over in my fingers and saw upon one of its small ends an embossed oval cartouche filled with hieroglyphic figures. "You've come across the burial treasure of some old Assyrian king, my lads!" I am naturally of an unenthusiastic temperament, but I utterly failed to control the excitement which leaped up in me.

"What an extraordinary adventure!"

Franks nodded gravely.

"What do you reckon that is worth?" he asked.

I balanced it in my hand. It weighed very nearly a couple of pounds.

"About a hundred and fifty pounds sterling, I should say," I hazarded.

"Then, Major— Mr. Ogilvy— there's a hundred and fifty thousand pounds' worth of gold in that tomb alone! We counted the top layer of bricks, and

there were about two hundred— and we estimated that there were at least five layers of them. They're all the same size. Jefferson here has another."

Young Jefferson pulled out a gold brick from his pocket also. It was identical with the first. I put them side by side on my desk.

"I suppose you stuffed your pockets full?" I said, highly interested and a little envious.

"Lucky young beggars!"

The pair of them looked sheepishly at each other. Then Franks laughed.

"Well— to tell the truth, Major— all of a sudden we both got wind up. A most horrible moaning sound came from somewhere out of the darkness of that cave. It was most uncanny, especially with that skeleton pinned under the slab. We didn't stop to think. We both cut and ran for the entrance, scared out of our lives. All we got was the one brick each we had slipped into our pockets and a lump of stone broken off the slab which Jefferson was holding when we heard the noise."

Jefferson undid his parcel.

"Here it is," he said, passing it over to me. Part of a winged bull remained on the fragment, which was incised with characters unknown to me but obviously of great antiquity.

"What happened next?" I asked.

"Well— the storm had ceased. It was bright sunshine outside and neither of us felt like going into that dark cave again. Our nerves were all to pieces. We tinkered up the old engine— it was only a choked jet— and took off from that ledge just as quick as might be."

"You left the treasure?" I did not conceal my surprise.

Jefferson laughed boyishly.

"I guess you would have left it too, just then, Major," he said. That infernal moan was no joke— I know I turned over pretty queer inside me when I heard it. It seemed to go right through you. Ugh!" he shuddered. I suppose we were a bit tuned up just then," he added, in self-apology. "We'd had a near shave before we got on that ledge."

"Go on," I said, nodding my appreciation of their feelings. "What next?"

That's all. You know the rest of it," said Franks. "Just as we were getting clear of the mountain the engine gave out again and we crashed properly. Everything else happened just as we reported it."

"And the gold is still there?"

"So far as we know. We never had a chance to go back." Franks got up from his seat, came across to my desk, and spread out the map. He put his finger on an inked cross in the middle of the brown intricacy of the mountain-ranges. It looked a most inaccessible spot. "Here's the place!" he said. "Think of it! Pretty

nearly half a million pounds' worth of solid gold waiting for us! Worth trying for, isn't it, Major?"

"You are assuming that the other tombs also contain an equivalent amount," I said, damping down his enthusiasm in an effort to control sudden wild fancies of my own. "And you don't realise the difficulties. The place could only be reached by a long and most dangerous expedition. All that country is worse than ever since the Armistice. It is inhabited by wild Kurds who would make a virtue of cutting your throats. Besides, from your description, it would be no easy mountaineering feat to climb up to that ledge."

"Next door to impossible, I should say," agreed Franks, cheerfully. "I can't imagine how the poor devil who was crushed under the slab ever got there— or how they put the tombs there, for that matter. Perhaps there has been a landslide since. No man could climb to that ledge now, that's certain."

"Then how do you propose to get there?" I asked.

The two young men smiled at each other in amusement at my simplicity.

"By aeroplane, of course!" they said, in one breath.

"So that's why you want my three thousand pounds?" My smile was not so cynical as I intended it to be. The fascination of the thing had already got a greater hold over me than I realised.

It was. Breathlessly, both of them speaking at once, they informed me that they had found the ideal machine— an ex-Army bomber designed to carry four tons of explosives and fitted for a flight to India that had been given up at the last moment. It had a saloon in which we— they included me in the expedition with an amazingly calm assumption of my assent— could sleep comfortably and get our meals. It would lift easily the cargo of gold— three tons they reckoned it to be— and had a petrol capacity sufficient for the journey. They offered me a third share of the treasure if I would finance the expedition. Apparently, also, they had set their hearts upon my accompanying them.

"Not so fast," I protested. "I've got a business I can't leave."

"You take holidays sometimes, don't you?" countered Franks. "We shall be back again inside a fortnight."

The upshot of it all was that, when at the end of an hour they left me, they carried off with them my cheque for two thousand pounds for the immediate purchase of that aeroplane, and I— definitely committed to what in solitude I now saw to be a mad adventure— sat in my chair, puffing at my pipe, and staring at the mysterious inscription incised upon the slab of stone. Of course, it conveyed nothing to me, but I could not help a considerable curiosity as to its meaning. I felt rather grimly that at least it would be satisfying to know whose tomb it was that we were proposing to rifle.

It occurred to me to take it up to the Assyrian Department of the British Museum, and then a happier thought followed upon the heels of the first. McPherson at the club! If anyone could decipher that inscription, it would be old Mac! He had devoted the best part of his life to Assyrian archæology. I wrapped up that slab of stone in Jefferson's brown paper, and five minutes later I was in a taxi on my way to the club.

McPherson was there sure enough. I went straight to my point and, without telling him how this fragment came into my hands, I opened my parcel and asked him if he could decipher the inscription. He took it with the eager interest of the man of science presented with a new specimen, pored it over as he twisted it in his hands, nodded his head vigorously.

"A very interesting piece, Mr. Ogilvy!" he said. "Most interesting! The British Museum would be real glad of it. Where did you get it?"

"Never mind where I got it," I replied. "Can you read the inscription?"

"Easily, man! Easily!" he said." There is no difficulty whatever about it. It is mutilated— incomplete, of course. But what is there is plain as print! It is in the usual cuneiform character— the middle Assyrian variety. I should say it dates from about 1500 B.C."

"Interpret, O Sage!" said I.

He adjusted his spectacles and, following the nail-shaped characters from left to right with his finger, translated as follows:—

"I, Sarchon, King of Kings, son of Nimrot, King of Kings, lying in this tomb, say, Come not to open this tomb. He who shall remove the stone that covers me shall die and in the grave find not repose, neither shall the sun shine upon him nor his kindred know his fate.' That's all," said McPherson, looking up at me through his spectacles.

"The inscription is broken at that point."

"You read it like a book!" I said, in admiration.

"Pooh!" he replied. "'Tis easy enough. It presents no points of difficulty. There are hundreds of inscriptions like that. This happens to be a king's, that's all. The interest is in the name of the monarch. Otherwise it is quite commonplace."

I thought of the skeleton lying pinned under the slab in that dark cave.

"Is it?" I said, with an emphasis which made him look curiously at me.

He gave me an odd smile.

"Be careful how you go digging about in those tombs, young man," he said.

Unwilling to expose myself to the inquiries obviously on the tip of his tongue, I made an excuse to cut short the conversation. But, as I went out of the club, I felt that my enthusiasm for the adventure had considerably

evaporated. I could not help seeing that confounded skeleton with the iron bar beside him.

ii

I WILL NOT here dwell upon the details of our preparations for the flight. Suffice it that within a week Franks and Jefferson had flown the aeroplane over to the grounds of the country place near London which I had recently purchased. In the absence of a hangar, firmly secured tarpaulins protected it at once from the weather and the curiosity of the local inhabitants. So far as my unskilled eye could judge, it was a beautiful machine, eminently suited for our purpose. She carried fuel enough in her tanks for a fifty-hour flight, and more could be stowed in the interior. Her water-tank contained two hundred gallons of that vital necessity in the desert. There was ample storage capacity for all the provisions we should require. The two young men were in ecstasies of enthusiasm over her, but I confess that, novice as I was in this form of travel, it was with considerable awe that I stood under the vast spread of her wings and looked up to the cabin which was to carry us, high above the clouds, those thousands of miles to the mountains beyond the Mesopotamian desert which seemed, here in this English countryside, fantastically unreal in their remoteness.

But during the next two weeks there was little time for brooding. The die was cast. I could not decently turn back if I would, and I will confess that sometimes the fascination of our adventure gripped me as strongly as it did the two young pilots. We kept our project as quiet as possible. Those official inquiries which could not be avoided we satisfied with the story of an independent flight to India.

Our route was mapped out in easy stages— six hundred and fifty miles to Marseilles for the first day, six hundred to Messina, eight hundred to Alexandria. Thence, pushing boldly to the north-east, we might, by starting at dawn, make the final one thousand three hundred miles to our destination in one flight if circumstances were favourable. If not, we could come down in the desert for one night. Franks and Jefferson, of course, proposed to fly the machine in alternate shifts. My rôle was that of cook and steward. Naturally, in view of possible trouble with the desert tribes, should we descend among them, we provided ourselves with arms and ammunition, in addition to the implements necessary for breaking open the other tombs.

At last all was ready. I shall never forget the thrill with which, in the fresh brightness of an English summer morning, I saw the great machine, stripped of her last coverings, poised on the greensward in waiting for the start. Franks

was already at his post in the pilot's seat, and first one, then the other of her engines whirred in a deep-toned roar as he tested them, flattening the grass in the wind under the propellers. Jefferson was clambering over the wings in a final examination of every stay and strut. I climbed up the ladder into the interior. My butler, gloomy in disapproval of these newfangled contraptions, but dutifully resolved to be with me until the last moment, pulled away the ladder and shouted "Good-bye, sir," in a tone strongly suggestive of an eternal farewell. I saw him dodge back out of the wind of the accelerated propellers. "Right away!" shouted Jefferson, cheerfully, clambering from the wing into the interior.

The engines leaped to a synchronised deafening roar. Through the windows I saw the grass flit past, drop away from us. The trees around my house sank suddenly— we were up! House and trees twirled away from us as we climbed in a long sweep over the foreshortened figure of the butler waving his valedictions. They reappeared again, far below us, tiny like toys. Then they slipped back out of vision, left behind. We roared over a patchwork of miniature fields, bound— it was almost inconceivable— over distant lands and seas for the vast spaces of the desert and those long-talked-of mountains which loomed, like a mirage in my imagination, beyond its yellow immensity.

iii

MOSUL, white among its verdure, on the nearer bank of the blue Tigris forking about its islands, showed up ahead of us. On the other side of the stream, plainly discernible, were the mounds which covered all that remained of the glory of ancient Nineveh— the city where perhaps, thirty-five centuries ago, had been hammered into shape those gold bricks which had lured us all the way from the heart of a distant Empire greater even than that which here had once been the ultimate of human grandeur. Franks and Jefferson grinned at each other as they glanced down at the white mosque and took a bearing over the confused mass of wooded foothills to the north and east of Mosul towards a stupendous snow-clad peak— the Judi Dagh, I remembered its name— which towered in the distance above the endless chaos of sternly rugged mountains stretching far and wide and reaching back, to the limits of vision, into the recesses of Persia. I stood behind the two lads in the pilot-chamber, straining my eyes towards our destination. In which of those cleft gorges was hollowed the tomb of the three kings on their lofty terrace?

We sped onwards. Beyond the first range of mountains a valley dipped itself into a bowl of green where white houses twinkled among the trees— Amadiyah! We soared over it, swung to the north-west and then to the west,

towards another wilderness of hills. Our pilots were following their original course. A silence as of death seemed to brood over this sterile desolation of crag and boulder. The roar of our engines re-echoed from it with an alien sound as we dipped below the summits in scrutiny of one valley after another.

Suddenly Jefferson pointed ahead of us, one hand clutching at the shoulder of his comrade seated at the controls. "There it is!"

I looked, with a thrill of excitement. There in front of us, a thousand feet or more below the summit of the mountain, but thousands of feet above the bed of the sombre ravine which dropped away from it in a sheer precipice, was a long, broad terrace, obviously artificial. We swung round above it, commenced a cautious descent. It would be no joke to be caught in a sudden air-flurry in such a place. The roar of the engines ceased suddenly. An uncanny silence enveloped us with their cessation. None of us spoke. I could feel my heart beating in my breast. Our nose went down and the rock rushed up towards us, became a wall upon our left hand. Below us that smooth terrace, larger and larger with every second, rose and broadened. The engines started again in a quick brief roar which reverberated endlessly after they were abruptly stilled. We swung round towards the mountain, touched and skimmed across the ledge at an angle, slowed with a quick turn perpendicular to the wall of rock, stopped less than a hundred feet away from it. We had arrived!

Like three eager schoolboys we tumbled out of the machine, ran along the face of the rock. At first glance I noticed what my companions, too preoccupied with the storm, had failed to observe upon their first visit. The precipice which towered above us was a picture-gallery of ancient Assyrian art. Great winged bulls, eagle-headed human figures of colossal size, in flat relief, dominated an endless succession of sculptured scenes, comparatively miniature, depicting the wars and conquests of a vanished empire.

A shout from Franks, in advance of us, told that he had found the entrance to the cave. A pair of vast human-headed bulls arched their wings above its opening. The three of us stopped at the portal. A sudden awe came over us as we peered into its obscurity, a feeling of an indefinable presence that pervaded the atmosphere.

"Listen!" whispered Franks, clutching at my arm.

From the interior came a long weird moan that swelled and died away. We sprang back, a primitive terror quick upon us. Then, as silence once more fell upon that lonely terrace, we crept forward again to the entrance.

A little wind stirred into whorls the dust about our feet as we stood under the archway of those mighty wings. Once more the weird moan issued drearily from the cave. My faculties, heightened with excitement, leaped, to an association of ideas.

"All right!" I cried to my companions. "All right! It's nothing to be afraid of!"

Those cunning old artificers, of a piece with those who had contrived the statue of Memnon in Egypt, had hollowed that rock to such acoustic properties that a breath of wind blowing into it resounded magnified, as from a trumpet, in that mysterious moan so eminently calculated to unnerve the least superstitious. I explained it to the two lads.

"All very well," said Franks, "but I propose we go back to the old bus and have a meal before we risk ourselves in here. We've got plenty of time. We shall feel all the stronger after we've filled up. What do you say, Harry?"

"I think so too," said Jefferson. "We've got to have a meal anyway. And personally I want to make the fewest possible visits to the inside of this cave and get finished with it as soon as may be. It may be only the wind, of course. But I don't like it, all the same. Besides, we must go back for the crowbars."

It was well that we did so. Eager as we were to discover the entrance to the cave, we had forgotten to fasten down the aeroplane in any way. As we approached it, we noticed that it seemed farther from the rock wall than we had left it. A moment later a gust of wind, reflected from that sculptured surface, moved it perceptibly towards the sheer gulf a few hundred yards behind it. Dicky Franks shamed us both with his instant presence of mind. While we stared aghast, he darted forward to the machine, swung himself up over the lower wing into the pilot-compartment, started the engines. He taxied her gently back, and Jefferson and myself made her fast with ropes to projecting points of the rock.

The young man's face was white as he dropped out of the machine and rejoined us.

"They're trying to kill us!" he said, hoarsely, his voice unsteady with a genuine fear.

"Nonsense, Dicky!" I replied. "It was just the wind."

He turned upon me.

"This wind about here is too confoundedly intelligent for my liking!" he said. "I tell you, I've got a feeling—"

"Keep it to yourself, then, my lad!" I said, sharply. "You'll be giving us all cold feet in a minute with your sickly imaginations. We have not flown over three thousand miles to this cave to be put off now with superstitious fancies."

"The Major's right, Dicky," said Jefferson. "We made up our minds to come back for that gold, and here we are. Let's get on with it. We'll have a bite of food first— and then to work!"

Franks remained silent. I could see that he was badly shaken. However, as all three of us sat in the saloon about our meal he recovered his cheerfulness.

"We shall have to make a camp of it, Major," he said." For to-night at least. We can't shift three tons of gold between now and dark."

"Three tons!" murmured young Jefferson. "Ye gods! Three tons of gold— think of it! It's got to be a full-sized ghost that will scare me off three tons of gold!"

Dicky frowned, but made no comment.

"Yes, we shall certainly have to stay for the night," I agreed. "But we'll get as much as possible on board while the day lasts."

"By all means," said Dicky. "I'm ready as soon as you are. I propose that we start first with the tomb that's already opened." He hesitated a moment, as though half-ashamed of what was in his mind." By the way, Major— have you got the copy of that inscription on you?" His attempt at a casual voice was not very successful.

I looked at him, reproof in my eyes. But he was not to be diverted.

"Let me have a look at it, will you?" he said.

I could not very well refuse. I took from my pocket the sheet of paper on which I had jotted down my memory of McPherson's reading of that ominous inscription, and handed it to him.

"I, Sarchon, King of Kings, son of Nimrot, King of Kings, lying in this tomb, say: Come not to open this tomb. He who shall remove the stone that covers me shall die and in the grave find not repose, neither shall the sun shine upon him nor his kindred know his fate."

The threat as he read it out, calm though was his voice, sounded peculiarly awesome in the presence of those ineffably placid stone monsters visible through the windows of the saloon. Their very silence seemed eloquent. Dicky looked up from the paper.

"Do you think, Major, that— just supposing, for example, there were anything in this— I don't say for a moment there is— but just supposing— do you think that the curse is fulfilled so far as the first tomb is concerned? I've been thinking about that skeleton under the slab. If that poor devil paid the penalty— it only says 'uncovering the tomb,' you know— then we ought to be pretty safe in taking the treasure from it. What do you think? We might find so much there that we should not want to disturb the others."

"Shut up, Dicky!" said Jefferson. "You are giving me the creeps."

He was giving me the creeps, too. This kind of talk had to be stopped at once. A solitude such as was so profound about us was not the place to indulge in fanciful speculations.

"By all means let us clear the opened tomb first," I said, with a happy achievement of cool imperturbability. "But I should like to get one of the others open before nightfall. This ledge is apparently not a very safe place for the machine and we do not want to stay a moment longer than is necessary. If a wind-storm sprang up while we are here, it would be extremely awkward, to say the least of it. The cool air from the mountains sometimes blows with hurricane force in its rush to fill the place of the heated atmosphere of the desert-plains, you know." I was determined to be ready with a rational explanation of everything that did or might happen.

Jefferson sprang up from his seat.

"Let's get to work, Major! Come on, Dicky! I bet you I get in first with a chunk of rock at any old ghost that shows himself— loser pays for a dinner at the Savoy when we get back!" He laughed in youthful high spirits. "Come on, you fellows! This way to the pirate's hoard! Where are the old money-boxes?"

I was grateful to him for his boisterous jocularity. Dicky actually smiled as we both rose from the table. A few minutes later, the aeroplane firmly secured behind us, we were on our way to the cave, carrying between us two ammunition-chests with rope-handles— Jefferson's "money-boxes"— which we had brought for the conveyance of the treasure.

After our good lunch, fortified as it had been by a bottle of the best, the dark entrance to the cave no longer looked so forbidding. We ignored the great human-headed bulls as we marched in, Jefferson chanting, in humorous defiance of our past fancies, the refrain of Stevenson's "Treasure Island":—

"Fifteen men on the dead man's chest,
Drink and the devil had done for the rest.
Yo-ho-ho! for a bottle of rum!

"This way to the pirate's hoard, my hearties! Personally-conducted tours under the guidance of expert British officers! Inclusive terms, authentic skeletons provided! Everybody free to help themselves. You pays your money and you takes your choice! Yo-ho-ho! for a bottle of rum! This way to the pirate's treasure!"

Franks interrupted his comrade's seriocomic declamation.

"Shut up, Harry!" he said, irritably. "Don't make a jest of it! After all— " He did not finish his thought. I knew he had our treasure-hunting predecessor in his mind.

That long weird moan came again from the interior of the cave. We ignored it resolutely, switching on our flash-lamps as we advanced into the chill gloom.

"Very clever the way those old fellows arranged the acoustics of this place," I said, with an affectation of indifference not quite in correspondence with my feelings. "Did you notice that puff of wind?" I told myself that I shuddered only at the cold of this sunless place.

"Wind, was it?" said Franks, in a strange voice.

We went on in silence until we reached the first tomb. There, just as the two lads had described it, was the slab aslant from it to the ground— and underneath it that fleshless skeleton with the iron bar by his side.

We gave but a cursory glance either to that luckless relic or to the undoubtedly interesting carvings upon the exterior of the sarcophagus. The glamour of its imagined contents, now after so long journeying almost at our touch, dazzled us to all but instant possession. I understand now that madness of the goldlust of which I have read in tales of the early diggings. I think we would then and there have killed anyone who stood between us and the treasure. I was startled at the expression of my comrades' faces as I saw them in the circle of light from my torch. They were no longer boys. Fever glittered in their eyes. They looked like old men, lean and covetous. The metamorphosis shocked me in the instant of attention which I gave to it. Without a word, but with a concentrated intensity of action, the three of us clambered up the pedestal of the tomb. The long dreary moan reiterated from the black interior of the cave fell this time upon deaf or heedless ears. An apparition itself would have been unnoticed in our excitement.

We switched our torches into the sarcophagus. The uneasy fear at the back of our minds, which none of us had dared to express, was instantly dispelled. The light was reflected in a dull glint from the metallic bed on which reposed a few crumbled fragments of bones and cerecloths. The treasure was still there! Two only of the close-packed bricks of gold were missing.

"Hooray!" shouted Jefferson, his voice reverberating uncannily under the vault of the cave. "The old gentleman has saved it for us! Now, my hearties!" He reached down an eager hand, pulled up a brick. "Once aboard the lugger and the treasure's ours!"

"One of us had better get down and pack it into the boxes," I said. "The other two will hand the stuff down to him."

"I'll pack it," responded Franks, obviously keeping himself under stern control. I noticed that he looked up apprehensively as once more that sinister moan seemed to breathe past our ears. He sprang down to the floor of the cave, took the golden bars we passed to him, packed them neatly into the boxes.

We all worked silently, but with a curious instinctive haste, as though we were menaced by interruption. Nothing stirred, however, not even a resting

bat, in that cave lost among the mountain solitudes. Our vague fears dropped from us as we worked without any interference, visible or invisible. Jefferson even began to whistle.

The two boxes filled, the three of us— Dicky, as the strongest, in the middle— staggered with them back to the aeroplane. Their weight was surprising. Everything was perfectly normal as we returned to the machine. She had not shifted in the least.

We climbed on board and stowed away the chests in the cargo-hold. As we leaped down again, with two empty ones for the next load, I noticed that the sun was already sinking behind the higher crests of the chaos of mountains around us.

"We sha'n't do more than clear this tomb before nightfall," I said, rather anxiously. "And we shall have to hurry to do that." I did not relish the prospect of passing two nights on this dangerous ledge.

We hastened back to the cave and worked with a will. Journey after journey we made, heavy laden, to the aeroplane. Layer after layer of gold bricks was exposed and packed away in the chests. There was more of it than we expected. Instead of five layers there were seven. (I might have guessed that they would be in a sacred number.) It was already pitch-black night when, utterly wearied, we staggered with the last load to our now familiar home. The light left shining through its saloon-windows welcomed us with a pleasant suggestion of comfort and security. Those last trips in the gathering darkness had been decidedly eerie.

We were all in the best of spirits, however, as we sat round our evening meal in the saloon and toasted our good luck with another bottle. The three of us went to gloat over the stack of treasure-chests in the baggage-hold between the wings. Jefferson, characteristically, expressed a doubt whether the space would contain the spoil to be obtained from the other tombs.

"We'll tuck it away somewhere, never fear!" I said, cheerfully. "We'll start work at dawn to-morrow and get clear away before dark! My lads," I added, turning to them, "do you quite realise how rich we are? It seems fantastic to me."

"To me too," agreed Franks, seriously. "We won't talk about it till we get it safely home. And, by the way, I'll have another look at those tethering-ropes. This would be a nasty spot if it came on to blow during the night."

So saying, he jumped out into the darkness. In a few minutes he returned, quite reassured.

"Nothing short of a gale can shift us," he said. "But I'm going to switch on the headlights all the same. An accident in the dark would be no joke."

He went forward and a moment later the terrace was suffused with a reflected radiance from where the two great circles illumined the stiff placidity of those grotesque monsters carved upon the cliff.

We all turned in to our berths, thoroughly exhausted, and in a few minutes were all asleep.

How long I slept I do not know. I was awakened from a confused nightmare of affrighting Assyrian figures that pelted me with gold as I sat in the dining-room of the Savoy Hotel and filled the air with a rushing tumult in which the cream-and-gold pillars of that firmly-established hostelry swayed and rocked as though in an earthquake. It seemed to me that the entire hotel was slipping, slipping, slipping, with an awful grating noise, into a bottomless gulf that had opened for its reception. My consciousness struggled through the welter of dream-phantasms that overlaid it, came to full perception with a shock of wild alarm.

The aeroplane was lifting, slipping, bumping, now pulled up short by a rope, now jerking away in a sudden release, rising and falling from side to side, in a gale of wind that howled among the mountains with the fury of a hurricane. Torrents of rain hammered and drummed upon the canvas roof overhead. Through the saloon windows I had a sudden glimpse of that sculptured rock-face illumined in a blinding jag of lightning. An appalling crash of thunder drowned my voice as I shouted to my companions.

But they were awake. The saloon started into illumination as Jefferson, springing to his feet, switched on the lights. Franks was making for the door to the pilot-compartment, lurching as he went as though in the cabin of a tempest-tossed yacht at moorings.

"We shall be adrift in a moment!" I heard him shout as he disappeared through the door. I guessed his purpose instantly. He was going to start the engines.

Another moment and, with a sharp crack in the midst of that tumult of wind and rain and thunder-coupled lightning, the last rope parted. The machine lifted on her beam. I heard her wing scraping along the terrace as we slid. Instinctively I clutched for support, vain though it was, at a stanchion of my bunk. In another instant we should be over the precipice.

Even as I agonised for the cessation of the scraping sound, I heard the welcome roar of the engines starting into life. Good old Franks! I could imagine him, desperately battling, at the controls. My relief lasted not a second— with a sickening suddenness we dropped, backwards, in an awful vertical descent. The machine swayed violently as she tried to right herself. The engines re-echoed thunderously from the black gulf I glimpsed through the windows,

leaped to spasms of their fullest power, yet futile, I was only too conscious, in the fury of that hurricane.

Then ensued a desperate battle for life. It was useless to think of rejoining Franks at the pilot-wheel; I could have been of no assistance even had it been possible. As it was, I had to cling for dear life to prevent myself being thrown through the canvas roof. But Jefferson had vanished, had managed somehow to go to the help of his comrade. I was alone in that saloon which lurched and twirled, bumped and pitched and rolled, fell and rose again at every variety of angle. The wind assailed her with a frenzy of sledge-hammer blows. I wondered how long she could hold together. The headlights were still on. Through the windows I could see them now making white circles on the rock-face, now shooting their beams endlessly, without a target, into the infinite blackness of the night. The engines raved and roared as, struggling with the brutal buffetings of the gale, they strove to pull us up out of this pit among the mountains into the rock-free regions of the upper air.

There was perhaps a minute of suspense, and then the disaster for which I held my breath happened with a vicious suddenness. Caught in a terrific blast of wind that whirled against the precipice, the machine was flung right over, upside down. A hail of small loose objects in the cabin leaped up about my head as, clinging desperately to the support wrenching in my hand, I felt my feet break through the roof. Simultaneously, I heard a clatter and a crash, loud above the uproar of the gale. The boxes of gold— loose amidships in their compartment— had smashed through the roof on to which they had been flung! As I realised it— visualised our hard-won treasure hurtling into the black gulf below— I had a last glimpse, upside down though I was, of the entrance to the cave, its winged guardians vividly illumined in a lightning flash of peculiarly intense brilliancy.

It was perhaps imagination, but I thought I heard a scream of unearthly triumph mingling with the wild howling of the wind. No theory of cunning acoustics was plausible just then.

But I had no mind, in that dreadful crisis, to bemoan the loss of our treasure. At any moment our lives might be extinguished. Hope of survival was a mockery I did not entertain for an instant. Yet the engines still roared against the fury of the gale and still we kept, despite our inverted position, a purchase on the air. Rocking violently from side to side, the miracle happened. A sudden dive nose-down and we returned, in a sickening swoop, to right-side up. I extricated my legs from the torn canvas of the roof, dropped them to the floor. I had a mental glimpse, warm with gratitude, of Franks dauntlessly sticking to his controls, fighting with every ounce of his strength and amazing skill. "Good lad!" I shouted, though I knew he could not hear.

A moment later and we were dashed violently against the face of the rock. I heard the planes on one side crack and break. It was all over! The next instant we were descending in long circling sweeps at an acute angle. The engines still roared intermittently. I looked, following the beams of our downward headlights, into a bottomless gulf whose walls rushed round giddily in our spiral fall. I saw suddenly great boulders directly beneath us, expanding like bladders in quick inflation. Our nose came up suddenly— sideways. There was a terrific shock— blackness.

It was three weary, tattered, half-starving men— shaken still with the miracle of their escape— who dragged themselves four days later into Mosul. They left behind them, in that gloomy valley, not only a wrecked aeroplane but those golden bars which had rained down from a night of fury into some unknown gulf. As they had picked themselves up, bruised and battered, in the dawn slowly brightening to their returning consciousness, and groped for a way out again to the haunts of men, they had not dared to look up to that terrace where, inaccessible to the boldest mountaineer, those carven winged monsters guarded the treasure of the tombs.

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9: The Lion's Eyelash

Albert Dorrington

1874 - 1953

Morning Bulletin (Rockhampton, Qld), 6 Jan 1914

Albert Dorrington

IRENE Maxwell passed through the crowd of circus hands until she reached the semi-circle of wagons at rear of Hipla's World Famed Hippodrome. She paused a moment to watch the grooms as they led half a score of ponies to the drinking trough adjoining the camel's hay. A big fly-tormented elephant rocked at its picket, its eyes staring enquiringly from time to time, at the Mahomeddan driver squatting near the edge of the big sawdusted ring.

It was nearly seven o'clock. In another half hour the crowds would come surging past the pay-office, filling the long tiers of seats around the dusty ring. Irene Maxwell had no desire to he caught in the jostling mob of sight-seers that nightly filled the mammoth tent. A vague sense of terror held her as she stepped warily down the narrow lane of wagons. Half-seen animals slunk inquisitively from the barred cage fronts to the inner recesses.

Behind, in the growing dusk, a pair of flaming eye-balls followed her movements. Halting in the shadow of an awning she looked back as though a voice had called. A shudder passed over her. Ten yards away a big black-maned lion stood watching her movements from the front of the high-roofed ring cage.

Irene caught her breath sharply; the yellow eyes seemed to flare in the uncertain light. The huge head jerked up and down as with a slow leonine purr the lion strode away to the far end of the cage.

The grooms led the whinnying ponies from the water trough to the canvas stalls behind the pay-office. A clown, dressed in an old overcoat and bowler

hat crossed the ring cracking a whip and calling loudly to a troop of performing dogs that ran yelping at his heels.

Irene watched, feeling a strange thrill at these unusual sights. And again her eyes went out to the big, black-maned head in the high-roofed ring cape. The lion standing erect was no longer conscious of her presence; its eyes were fixed in something in the dusky background.

A quick, familiar footstep caught her ear. Turning suddenly she found herself almost between laughter and tears, hurrying to meet the oncomer. A young man dressed in semi-military costume came into view. His face was particularly attractive and lacked that rigidity of expression common in men of his class. A certain boyish alertness invested his movements with a singular charm.

" You... have, been looking at my lion, Irene!" he said gently. "I did not expect you here this evening."

She trembled slightly at the touch of his hand, while her startled glance went out again to the maned head watching them both from the barred cage.

"The nature of your work terrifies me at times, Lenny," she declared between breaths. "Sometimes I wake at night feeling that you are in the grip of that terrible creature over there. I wish— I really wish to-night was your last in this dreadful place!"

He laughed in his amused boyish way, holding her gloved hand us they walked slowly towards the circus entrance.

'The men who drives autos and flying-machines take bigger chances than we lion tamers," he assured her. "Sultan and I—' he indicated the distant cage good humouredly— 'understand each other perfectly.'

"You with a tiny whip, and he with those horrible claws!' she broke out, unable to control her rising fears. "I dreamt last night that a terrible accident happened during your 'turn', she almost sobbed. "I really wish, dear, you had chosen another profession!'

He soothed her with many assurances of his ability to look after himself while in the cage with the almost intractable Sultan.

Two years before Irene had met the young lion tamer under fateful circumstances. At that time both were in the employ of a big theatrical syndicate, Leonard Vale appeared nightly with a troupe of lions while Irene came later in the evening to delight her overwhelming audience with representations of Shakespeare's heroines.

It was during one of these performances that a cry of fire flashed through the theatre. The young actress never quite forgot what followed. The safety curtain had failed to lower and the gallery and pit had become a living pandemonium wherein men and women were fighting for their lives.

Irene, dressed in some light gossamer stuff, found herself in a raging corridor of flame blocked at each end by blazing masses of scenery and stage property. Frantically she sought her dressing room only to find in its place a perfect inferno of smoke and blazing woodwork.

What followed was never afterward quite clear to her. Dragging herself back to the wings she became conscious of Leonard's arms about her; of him fighting through the stage traps and properties, his great coat drawn about her head and shoulders until they reached a side exit and safety.

Their various engagements had separated them at times. But when good fortune brought them to the same town it was to renew their pledge of love and affection. Leonard was merely awaiting the expiration of his contract with Hipla's management— a matter of one short week only— and then he and Irene were to be married quietly in a little village church some thirty miles from London.

Afterwards they were to travel together, under more lucrative terms with another big provincial theatrical syndicate. Irene was counting the days and hours now when Leonard would be free to take up his less risky 'turn', for Hipla's lion, Sultan, was regarded by public and press alike as the most dangerous animal in captivity. Her woman's instinct warned her that, sooner or later, the ill-tempered Sultan would turn upon him some night before a crowded audience. The thought was constantly with her. It had brought her into the hippodrome now to stare with hypnotised eyes at the big, black-maned head peering at them both through the iron bars.

Leonard's easy manner together with the nonchalant way he rapped the lion's paw as they passed the cage reassured her slightly. It was only after she had left him at the circus entrance that her fears returned.

A LITTLE horse-faced man slunk from the shadow of the big iron cage as Vale hopped nimbly to the ground, slamming the doo in the face of the black-maned lion within.

A dozen gas flare illumined the dark spaces between the semi-circle of wagons where the outgoing audience pushed and jostled their way from the menagerie into the street. Vale's turn' had been the last item on the programme. A biograph man had attended the performance to obtain films of the young tamer thrusting his head into Sultan's open jaws. Of course there were the usually critically disposed people who hinted of anaesthetics being secretly administered to the lion prior to the event. The biograph operator was satisfied, however, that the films would be a success and departed hurriedly with the crowd.

A little horse-faced man breathed warily as he followed Vale down the labyrinth of wagons until a canvas dressing room was reached at the rear of the pony-stalls. Yale's spangled coat scintillated under the flare lamp. Outside the dressing room, a drowsy-eyed eagle rattled its foot chain in the circus dust and fell again into its brooding lethargy.

Hanging his heavy thonged whip from a nail in the tent post the young tamer lit a cigarette and stretched himself, for a few moment on a hard couch in the far corner. In one of the adjacent cages a pair of Indian wolves padded up and down. Something in their uneasy movements caused Vale to look up suddenly. The horse-faced man was standing in the doorway.

In a flash the tamer was on his feet. "You have no right here!" he called out. "What business brings you to me at this hour?"

The figure in the doorway drew back half a pace, his left hand thrust deep in the pocket of his greasy coat. Physically he was no larger than a boy of fourteen, from his leering horsey manner one plight have guessed him to be a jockey or circus groom. An odour of blackmail and the betting ring invested his movements, he regarded the young tamer with insolent good humour.

"A lady friend of yours asked me to pay you a visit, Professor. P'raps you remember Mademoiselle Lotti of the Variety Theatre?"

"Well?" The young tamer glanced hurriedly at his watch. "What does Mademoiselle Lotti want!"

The jockey-faced boy-man shrugged in a noncommittal way. then glanced back over his shoulder into the darkness where four slits of fire flashed to and fro from the corner of the wolf-house.

"I was sent here to-night, Professor, to give that lion Sultan a surprise tonic to make him feel skittish while you were putting 'im through his tricks."

The tamer eyed him with, sudden suspicion.

"Tell me your business, my friend. I am in n hurry."

He beckoned his strange visitor into the tent and placed a chair beside the hard couch.

"I think you have something to say. Mr. —"

'Odkins with the haitch blown off, Professor."

"Why did Mademoiselle send you to me. Mr. Odkins?" The tamer leaned back on the conch, hands clasped over his knee, his big white wrists blowing a pair of newly healed scares where the lion's claw had rent deep into the bone and sinew. His visitor's toothless mouth and shifting eyes impressed him momentarily. Reaching a small bottle of wine from a cupboard at his elbow he filled a glass and held it forward politely.

Odkins drank in a little famished gulps until his mouth grew slack, his eyes less avid and cunning.

" My word, that's the pure stuff, Professor. Your people know—"

"Your business, my good fellow. I think I mentioned that I was in a hurry !"

Odkins merely beamed at the young tamer across the empty wine glass.

"I hate being hurried, Professor, especially since my nerves have been twisted. You see I ain't been quite myself since the stewards warned me off the turf a year ago. And to-night, that lion of yours looked at me with his green yes. Quite awful. Don't know 'ow you boost 'im through the hoops though. It's a fair nerve breaker!"

Vale appeared to control his impatience at the fellow's gratuitous criticisms. Filling the empty wine glass he pressed it into the jockey's unsteady hand.

"Mademoiselle Lotti sent you here to-night to interfere with me when I was in the cage with Sultan," he hazarded. " Is it not so?"

Odkins drained his glass slowly then returned it to the cupboard top with a steady hand. I used to wire Mademoiselle tips from the stable when I was riding to win, Professor. Last night she sent one of the theatre hands to my place across the river askin' me to pay her a call." Odkins' eyes glowed strangely. "I found her in the dressin' room with a lot of pomades an' hair-brushes.' 'Igh above her head, on the mantel-shelf, Professor, was your photograph; pair of lions at yer feet, an' yer chest blazin' with medals an' stars." '

"Go on!" The young tamer eyed him sharply. Far down the line of wagons came the man-like cough of a leopard.

"Mademoiselle commissioned you to do some-thing, eh? That is what you have come to tell?"

Odkin grinned as he continued.

"She began to tell me your history, Professor, how she hoped one day to be your wife until another lady of the Vaudeville Theatre had made a bid for your affections."

The young tamer flushed unexpectedly but remained silent. He had only met Mademoiselle twice. She had impressed him as a rather overbearing young lady whose attention he had striven to avoid.

Odkins lit a cigarette carefully. 'Mademoiselle Lotti read the announcement of your comin' marriage with Miss Maxwell, Professor. Am I right in sayin' that it takes place next week? I've forgotten the name of the church," he added with a malicious glance in the young tamer's direction.

"It cannot concern you, my friend, nor Mademoiselle Lotti. If—"

"Easy, Professor, easy; there ain't no need to get red on a mention of dates. You're goin' to marry Miss Maxwell next week or you ain't. Well, I put the question pretty straight to Mademoiselle askin' her what she expected me

to do on her behalf. I couldn't stop yer marryin' Miss Maxwell any more than I could win the Championship Stakes on a blamed army mule!"

"I— I think you are a trifle offensive, my friend!" The lion-tamer half rose from his couch, his lithe muscles leaping under his light fitting clothes.

The ex-jockey shrugged his narrow shoulders. "I'm askin' you not to lose your temper, Professor. Wallopin' lions an' things has made your hand 'eavy. So don' don't hit me till you hear what I've got to say."

"Go on then!'"

"Well, Mademoiselle explained her business pretty sudden like. 'I want you, Odkins,' she says, 'to go round to the circus menageries to-night and get close to the cage where Professor Vale is performing with Sultan."

" 'What for?' I say.

" 'Because it's grand performance,' she raps out. 'The cinematograph operators are making special pictures of the Professor's turn. He will make the lion turn on its side and after it his lain quite still he will open his jaws and put his head inside.' Well, she says, smilin' at me through blessed tears, 'when the Professor's head is well inside Sultan's mouth, I want you, Odkins, to squirt a little of perfume into the cage.'

" 'Squirt it on the lion, Mademoiselle?' I asks.

" 'Yes,' she says, fanning herself gently, 'squirt it on the dear animal's eyelash if you can, Odkins.' "

The ex-jockey paused, breathing hard like one in doubt. Then, fumbling inside his pocket he drew out a case containing a large glass syringe and held it up for the tamer's inspection.

"See how it works, Professor!"

He pressed the syringe suddenly. A jet of coloured fluid spat across the tent towards a piece of paper lying on the sanded floor. In a fraction of time the paper smoked and grew black.

"Vitriol! By heaven!" The young tamer leaped back, a luminous terror in his eye.

The ex-jockey returned the syringe to its case chuckling derisively. "Burns your fingers an' makes 'em sore. And Mademoiselle offered me fifty bob to singe the lion's eyelash with it. The price, I might tell you, Professor, isn't big enough!

Vale leaned against the tent pole and for an instant his teeth chattered. Odkins, his syringe tucked away in his greasy pocket, watched him apprehensively.

"I've done the straight thing in comin' here, Professor. Tonight. I stood by the cage when the cine operators was crowdin' in close, an' I had me chance straight an' clear. I could have got clean away."

"You want—"

"Call it a fiver, Professor, and you'll never see me inside the show again. I've been warned off the turf and I'm dependin' on little jobs like this for a livin'. Make it a fiver and I'll quit !"

His manner was leisurely, condescending almost, as he put forward his terms like one bestowing a favour.

Without warning the young tamer's hand went up and the heavy brass mounted whip flew down from the nail.

"Out!" he thundered. "You hell-beast!"

Odkins sprang through the tent door, the whip cracking with the sound of pistol-shots about his legs and ankles. Past the wolf-house he tore until his tumbling feet tripped him almost at the door of the lion's cage.

The young tamer held his twisting body as though it were a child's then raised it deliberately to the pair of green eyeballs behind the bars. Inch by inch the tamer pressed the struggling Odkins until his death white face was pressed close to a snarling, breathing head inside.

"Come, here, Sultan!' the tamer's voice was scarcely a whisper. "Come and tell this little man what you think of him!"

A sobbing snarl seemed to run along the floor of the cage as the huge cat-like head brushed near. Softly, inquiringly it came until the proud stiff hairs and mane pricked and stabbed the ex-jockey's face.

" My God! You won't... not in there!" he choked. "Spare me, Professor... I won't come near you no more! I won't, I swear!"

The tamer lowered him suddenly and then still carrying him in his arms walked to the menagerie entrance and thrust him out into the night.

A FEW MORNINGS later Mademoiselle Lotti, while scanning the paper for a hint of the ex-jockey's success with a vitriol-charged syringe, received a perfumed envelope bearing her name and address. It contained a printed notice of Leonard Vale's marriage with the beautiful Miss Irene Maxwell, late of the Vaudeville Theatre, London.

Despite her vexation and anger the Mademoiselle was irresistibly attracted towards a small pad of bristles lying at the bottom of the envelope. Never before had she seen such coarse bayonet-like hair. It pierced the fingers sharp as wire when touched.

Months later, when Vale had gone north with his bride a circus manager told her that the bristles wore merely the clippings from a lion's eyelash.

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10: Number 13

M. R. James

1862-1936

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M R James

AMONG the towns of Jutland, Viborg justly holds a high place. It is the seat of a bishopric; it has a handsome but almost entirely new cathedral, a charming garden, a lake of great beauty, and many storks. Near it is Hald, accounted one of the prettiest things in Denmark; and hard by is Finderup, where Marsk Stig murdered King Erik Glipping on St Cecilia's Day, in the year 1286. Fifty-six blows of square-headed iron maces were traced on Erik's skull when his tomb was opened in the seventeenth century. But I am not writing a guide-book.

There are good hotels in Viborg— Preisler's and the Phoenix are all that can be desired. But my cousin, whose experiences I have to tell you now, went to the Golden Lion the first time that he visited Viborg. He has not been there since, and the following pages will perhaps explain the reason of his abstention.

The Golden Lion is one of the very few houses in the town that were not destroyed in the great fire of 1726, which practically demolished the cathedral, the Sognekirke, the Raadhuus, and so much else that was old and interesting. It is a great red-brick house that is, the front is of brick, with corbie steps on the gables and a text over the door; but the courtyard into which the omnibus drives is of black and white 'cage-work' in wood and plaster.

The sun was declining in the heavens when my cousin walked up to the door, and the light smote full upon the imposing façade of the house. He was delighted with the old-fashioned aspect of the place, and promised himself a thoroughly satisfactory and amusing stay in an inn so typical of old Jutland.

It was not business in the ordinary sense of the word that had brought Mr Anderson to Viborg. He was engaged upon some researches into the Church history of Denmark, and it had come to his knowledge that in the Rigsarkiv of Viborg there were papers, saved from the fire, relating to the last days of Roman Catholicism in the country. He proposed, therefore, to spend a considerable time perhaps as much as a fortnight or three weeks in examining and copying these, and he hoped that the Golden Lion would be able to give him a room of sufficient size to serve alike as a bedroom and a study. His wishes were explained to the landlord, and, after a certain amount of thought, the latter suggested that perhaps it might be the best way for the gentleman to look at one or two of the larger rooms and pick one for himself. It seemed a good idea.

The top floor was soon rejected as entailing too much getting upstairs after the day's work; the second floor contained no room of exactly the dimensions required; but on the first floor there was a choice of two or three rooms which would, so far as size went, suit admirably.

The landlord was strongly in favour of Number 17, but Mr Anderson pointed out that its windows commanded only the blank wall of the next house, and that it would be very dark in the afternoon. Either Number 12 or Number 14 would be better, for both of them looked on the street, and the bright evening light and the pretty view would more than compensate him for the additional amount of noise.

Eventually Number 12 was selected. Like its neighbours, it had three windows, all on one side of the room; it was fairly high and unusually long. There was, of course, no fireplace, but the stove was handsome and rather old a cast-iron erection, on the side of which was a representation of Abraham sacrificing Isaac, and the inscription, '1 Bog Mose, Cap. 22', above. Nothing else in the room was remarkable; the only interesting picture was an old coloured print of the town, date about 1820.

Supper-time was approaching, but when Anderson, refreshed by the ordinary ablutions, descended the staircase, there were still a few minutes before the bell rang. He devoted them to examining the list of his fellow-lodgers. As is usual in Denmark, their names were displayed on a large blackboard, divided into columns and lines, the numbers of the rooms being painted in at the beginning of each line. The list was not exciting. There was an advocate, or *Sagfører*, a German, and some bagmen from Copenhagen. The one and only point which suggested any food for thought was the absence of any Number 13 from the tale of the rooms, and even this was a thing which Anderson had already noticed half a dozen times in his experience of Danish hotels. He could not help wondering whether the objection to that particular

number, common as it is, was so widespread and so strong as to make it difficult to let a room so ticketed, and he resolved to ask the landlord if he and his colleagues in the profession had actually met with many clients who refused to be accommodated in the thirteenth room,

He had nothing to tell me (I am giving the story as I heard it from him) about what passed at supper, and the evening, which was spent in unpacking and arranging his clothes, books, and papers, was not more eventful. Towards eleven o'clock he resolved to go to bed, but with him, as with a good many other people nowadays, an almost necessary preliminary to bed, if he meant to sleep, was the reading of a few pages of print, and he now remembered that the particular book which he had been reading in the train, and which alone would satisfy him at that present moment, was in the pocket of his greatcoat, then hanging on a peg outside the dining-room.

To run down and secure it was the work of a moment, and, as the passages were by no means dark, it was not difficult for him to find his way back to his own door. So, at least, he thought; but when he arrived there, and turned the handle, the door entirely refused to open, and he caught the sound of a hasty movement towards it from within. He had tried the wrong door, of course. Was his own room to the right or to the left? He glanced at the number: it was 13. His room would be on the left; and so it was. And not before he had been in bed for some minutes, had read his wonted three or four pages of his book, blown out his light, and turned over to go to sleep, did it occur to him that, whereas on the blackboard of the hotel there had been no Number 13, there was undoubtedly a room numbered 13 in the hotel. He felt rather sorry he had not chosen it for his own. Perhaps he might have done the landlord a little service by occupying it, and given him the chance of saying that a well-born English gentleman had lived in it for three weeks and liked it very much. But probably it was used as a servant's room or something of the kind. After all, it was most likely not so large or good a room as his own. And he looked drowsily about the room, which was fairly perceptible in the half-light from the street-lamp. It was a curious effect, he thought. Rooms usually look larger in a dim light than a full one, but this seemed to have contracted in length and grown proportionately higher. Well, well! sleep was more important than these vague ruminations and to sleep he went.

On the day after his arrival Anderson attacked the Rigsarkiv of Viborg. He was, as one might expect in Denmark, kindly received, and access to all that he wished to see was made as easy for him as possible. The documents laid before him were far more numerous and interesting than he had at all anticipated. Besides official papers, there was a large bundle of correspondence relating to Bishop Jørgen Friis, the last Roman Catholic who

held the see, and in these there cropped up many amusing and what are called 'intimate' details of private life and individual character. There was much talk of a house owned by the Bishop, but not inhabited by him, in the town. Its tenant was apparently somewhat of a scandal and a stumbling-block to the reforming party. He was a disgrace, they wrote, to the city; he practised secret and wicked arts, and had sold his soul to the enemy. It was of a piece with the gross corruption and superstition of the Babylonish Church that such a viper and blood-sucking Troldmand should be patronized and harboured by the Bishop. The Bishop met these reproaches boldly; he protested his own abhorrence of all such things as secret arts, and required his antagonists to bring the matter before the proper court of course, the spiritual court and sift it to the bottom. No one could be more ready and willing than himself to condemn Mag. Nicolas Francken if the evidence showed him to have been guilty of any of the crimes informally alleged against him.

Anderson had not time to do more than glance at the next letter of the Protestant leader, Rasmus Nielsen, before the record office was closed for the day, but he gathered its general tenor, which was to the effect that Christian men were now no longer bound by the decisions of Bishops of Rome, and that the Bishop's Court was not, and could not be, a fit or competent tribunal to judge so grave and weighty a cause.

On leaving the office, Mr Anderson was accompanied by the old gentleman who presided over it, and, as they walked, the conversation very naturally turned to the papers of which I have just been speaking.

Herr Scavenius, the Archivist of Viborg, though very well informed as to the general run of the documents under his charge, was not a specialist in those of the Reformation period. He was much interested in what Anderson had to tell him about them. He looked forward with great pleasure, he said, to seeing the publication in which Mr Anderson spoke of embodying their contents.

"This house of the Bishop Friis," he added, "it is a great puzzle to me where it can have stood. I have studied carefully the topography of old Viborg, but it is most unlucky of the old terrier of the Bishop's property which was made in 1560, and of which we have the greater part in the Arkiv, just the piece which had the list of the town property is missing. Never mind. Perhaps I shall some day succeed to find him."

After taking some exercise I forget exactly how or where Anderson went back to the Golden Lion, his supper, his game of patience, and his bed. On the way to his room it occurred to him that he had forgotten to talk to the landlord about the omission of Number 13 from the hotel, and also that he might as well make sure that Number 13 did actually exist before he made any reference to the matter.

The decision was not difficult to arrive at. There was the door with its number as plain as could be, and work of some kind was evidently going on inside it, for as he neared the door he could hear footsteps and voices, or a voice, within. During the few seconds in which he halted to make sure of the number, the footsteps ceased, seemingly very near the door, and he was a little startled at hearing a quick hissing breathing as of a person in strong excitement. He went on to his own room, and again he was surprised to find how much smaller it seemed now than it had when he selected it. It was a slight disappointment, but only slight. If he found it really not large enough, he could very easily shift to another. In the meantime he wanted something as far as I remember it was a pocket-handkerchief out of his portmanteau, which had been placed by the porter on a very inadequate trestle or stool against the wall at the farthest end of the room from his bed. Here was a very curious thing: the portmanteau was not to be seen. It had been moved by officious servants; doubtless the contents had been put in the wardrobe. No, none of them were there. This was vexatious. The idea of a theft he dismissed at once. Such things rarely happen in Denmark, but some piece of stupidity had certainly been performed (which is not so uncommon), and the stuepige must be severely spoken to. Whatever it was that he wanted, it was not so necessary to his comfort that he could not wait till the morning for it, and he therefore settled not to ring the bell and disturb the servants. He went to the window the right-hand window it was and looked out on the quiet street. There was a tall building opposite, with large spaces of dead wall; no passers-by; a dark night; and very little to be seen of any kind.

The light was behind him, and he could see his own shadow clearly cast on the wall opposite. Also the shadow of the bearded man in Number 11 on the left, who passed to and fro in shirtsleeves once or twice, and was seen first brushing his hair, and later on in a nightgown. Also the shadow of the occupant of Number 13 on the right. This might be more interesting. Number 13 was, like himself, leaning on his elbows on the window-sill looking out into the street. He seemed to be a tall thin man— or was it by any chance a woman?— at least, it was someone who covered his or her head with some kind of drapery before going to bed, and, he thought, must be possessed of a red lamp-shade and the lamp must be flickering very much. There was a distinct playing up and down of a dull red light on the opposite wall. He craned out a little to see if he could make any more of the figure, but beyond a fold of some light, perhaps white, material on the window-sill he could see nothing.

Now came a distant step in the street, and its approach seemed to recall Number 13 to a sense of his exposed position, for very swiftly and suddenly he swept aside from the window, and his red light went out. Anderson, who had

been smoking a cigarette, laid the end of it on the window-sill and went to bed.

Next morning he was woke by the *stuepige* with hot water, etc. He roused himself, and after thinking out the correct Danish words, said as distinctly as he could:

"You must not move my portmanteau. Where is it?"

As is not uncommon, the maid laughed, and went away without making any distinct answer.

Anderson, rather irritated, sat up in bed, intending to call her back, but he remained sitting up, staring straight in front of him. There was his portmanteau on its trestle, exactly where he had seen the porter put it when he first arrived. This was a rude shock for a man who prided himself on his accuracy of observation. How it could possibly have escaped him the night before he did not pretend to understand; at any rate, there it was now.

The daylight showed more than the portmanteau; it let the true proportions of the room with its three windows appear, and satisfied its tenant that his choice after all had not been a bad one. When he was almost dressed he walked to the middle one of the three windows to look out at the weather. Another shock awaited him. Strangely unobservant he must have been last night. He could have sworn ten times over that he had been smoking at the right-hand window the last thing before he went to bed, and here was his cigarette-end on the sill of the middle window.

He started to go down to breakfast. Rather late, but Number 13 was later: here were his boots still outside his door— a gentleman's boots. So then Number 13 was a man, not a woman. Just then he caught sight of the number on the door. It was 14. He thought he must have passed Number 13 without noticing it. Three stupid mistakes in twelve hours were too much for a methodical, accurate-minded man, so he turned back to make sure. The next number to 14 was number 12, his own room. There was no Number 13 at all.

After some minutes devoted to a careful consideration of everything he had had to eat and drink during the last twenty-four hours, Anderson decided to give the question up. If his sight or his brain were giving way he would have plenty of opportunities for ascertaining that fact; if not, then he was evidently being treated to a very interesting experience. In either case the development of events would certainly be worth watching.

During the day he continued his examination of the episcopal correspondence which I have already summarized. To his disappointment, it was incomplete. Only one other letter could be found which referred to the affair of Mag. Nicolas Francken. It was from the Bishop Jørgen Friis to Rasmus Nielsen. He said:

"Although we are not in the least degree inclined to assent to your judgement concerning our court, and shall be prepared if need be to withstand you to the uttermost in that behalf, yet forasmuch as our trusty and well-beloved Mag. Nicolas Francken, against whom you have dared to allege certain false and malicious charges, hath been suddenly removed from among us, it is apparent that the question for this time falls. But forasmuch as you further allege that the Apostle and Evangelist St John in his heavenly Apocalypse describes the Holy Roman Church under the guise and symbol of the Scarlet Woman, be it known to you," etc.

Search as he might, Anderson could find no sequel to this letter nor any clue to the cause or manner of the "removal" of the *casus belli*. He could only suppose that Francken had died suddenly; and as there were only two days between the date of Nielsen's last letter when Francken was evidently still in being and that of the Bishop's letter, the death must have been completely unexpected.

In the afternoon he paid a short visit to Hald, and took his tea at Baekkelund; nor could he notice, though he was in a somewhat nervous frame of mind, that there was any indication of such a failure of eye or brain as his experiences of the morning had led him to fear.

At supper he found himself next to the landlord.

"What," he asked him, after some indifferent conversation, "is the reason why in most of the hotels one visits in this country the number thirteen is left out of the list of rooms? I see you have none here."

The landlord seemed amused.

"To think that you should have noticed a thing like that! I've thought about it once or twice myself, to tell the truth. An educated man, I've said, has no business with these superstitious notions. I was brought up myself here in the High School of Viborg, and our old master was always a man to set his face against anything of that kind. He's been dead now this many years a fine upstanding man he was, and ready with his hands as well as his head. I recollect us boys, one snowy day—"

Here he plunged into reminiscence.

"Then you don't think there is any particular objection to having a Number 13?" said Anderson.

"Ah! to be sure. Well, you understand, I was brought up to the business by my poor old father. He kept an hotel in Aarhuus first, and then, when we were born, he moved to Viborg here, which was his native place, and had the Phoenix here until he died. That was in 1876. Then I started business in Silkeborg, and only the year before last I moved into this house."

Then followed more details as to the state of the house and business when first taken over.

"And when you came here, was there a Number 13?"

"No, no. I was going to tell you about that. You see, in a place like this, the commercial class the travellers are what we have to provide for in general. And put them in Number 13? Why, they'd as soon sleep in the street, or sooner. As far as I'm concerned myself, it wouldn't make a penny difference to me what the number of my room was, and so I've often said to them; but they stick to it that it brings them bad luck. Quantities of stories they have among them of men that have slept in a Number 13 and never been the same again, or lost their best customers, or one thing and another," said the landlord, after searching for a more graphic phrase.

"Then, what do you use your Number 13 for?" said Anderson, conscious as he said the words of a curious anxiety quite disproportionate to the importance of the question.

"My Number 13? Why, don't I tell you that there isn't such a thing in the house? I thought you might have noticed that. If there was it would be next door to your own room."

"Well, yes; only I happened to think that is, I fancied last night that I had seen a door numbered thirteen in that passage; and, really, I am almost certain I must have been right, for I saw it the night before as well."

Of course, Herr Kristensen laughed this notion to scorn, as Anderson had expected, and emphasized with much iteration the fact that no Number 13 existed or had existed before him in that hotel.

Anderson was in some ways relieved by his certainty but still puzzled, and he began to think that the best way to make sure whether he had indeed been subject to an illusion or not was to invite the landlord to his room to smoke a cigar later on in the evening. Some photographs of English towns which he had with him formed a sufficiently good excuse.

Herr Kristensen was flattered by the invitation, and most willingly accepted it. At about ten o'clock he was to make his appearance, but before that Anderson had some letters to write, and retired for the purpose of writing them. He almost blushed to himself at confessing it, but he could not deny that it was the fact that he was becoming quite nervous about the question of the existence of Number 13; so much so that he approached his room by way of Number 11, in order that he might not be obliged to pass the door, or the place where the door ought to be. He looked quickly and suspiciously about the room when he entered it, but there was nothing, beyond that indefinable air of being smaller than usual, to warrant any misgivings. There was no question of the presence or absence of his portmanteau tonight. He had

himself emptied it of its contents and lodged it under his bed. With a certain effort he dismissed the thought of Number 13 from his mind, and sat down to his writing.

His neighbours were quiet enough. Occasionally a door opened in the passage and a pair of boots was thrown out, or a bagman walked past humming to himself, and outside, from time to time a cart thundered over the atrocious cobble-stones, or a quick step hurried along the flags.

Anderson finished his letters, ordered in whisky and soda, and then went to the window and studied the dead wall opposite and the shadows upon it.

As far as he could remember, Number 14 had been occupied by the lawyer, a staid man, who said little at meals, being generally engaged in studying a small bundle of papers beside his plate. Apparently, however, he was in the habit of giving vent to his animal spirits when alone. Why else should he be dancing? The shadow from the next room evidently showed that he was. Again and again his thin form crossed the window, his arms waved, and a gaunt leg was kicked up with surprising agility. He seemed to be barefooted, and the floor must be well laid, for no sound betrayed his movements. *Sagfører* Herr Anders Jensen, dancing at ten o'clock at night in a hotel bedroom, seemed a fitting subject for a historical painting in the grand style; and Anderson's thoughts, like those of Emily in the *Mysteries of Udolpho*, began to "arrange themselves in the following lines":

When I return to my hotel,
At ten o'clock p.m.,
The waiters think I am unwell;
I do not care for them.

But when I've locked my chamber door,
And put my boots outside,
I dance all night upon the floor.

And even if my neighbours swore,
I'd go on dancing all the more,
For I'm acquainted with the law,
And in despite of all their jaw,
Their protests I deride.

Had not the landlord at this moment knocked at the door, it is probable that quite a long poem might have been laid before the reader. To judge from his look of surprise when he found himself in the room, Herr Kristensen was struck, as Anderson had been, by something unusual in its aspect. But he made no remark. Anderson's photographs interested him mightily, and formed the

text of many autobiographical discourses. Nor is it quite clear how the conversation could have been diverted into the desired channel of Number 13, had not the lawyer at this moment begun to sing, and to sing in a manner which could leave no doubt in anyone's mind that he was either exceedingly drunk or raving mad. It was a high, thin voice that they heard, and it seemed dry, as if from long disuse. Of words or tune there was no question. It went sailing up to a surprising height, and was carried down with a despairing moan as of a winter wind in a hollow chimney, or an organ whose wind fails suddenly. It was a really horrible sound, and Anderson felt that if he had been alone he must have fled for refuge and society to some neighbour bagman's room.

The landlord sat open-mouthed.

"I don't understand it," he said at last, wiping his forehead. "It is dreadful. I have heard it once before, but I made sure it was a cat."

"Is he mad?" said Anderson.

"He must be; and what a sad thing! Such a good customer, too, and so successful in his business, by what I hear, and a young family to bring up."

Just then came an impatient knock at the door, and the knocker entered, without waiting to be asked. It was the lawyer, in deshabille and very rough-haired; and very angry he looked.

"I beg pardon, sir," he said, "but I should be much obliged if you would kindly desist—"

Here he stopped, for it was evident that neither of the persons before him was responsible for the disturbance; and after a moment's lull it swelled forth again more wildly than before.

"But what in the name of Heaven does it mean?" broke out the lawyer. "Where is it? Who is it? Am I going out of my mind?"

"Surely, Herr Jensen, it comes from your room next door? Isn't there a cat or something stuck in the chimney?"

This was the best that occurred to Anderson to say, and he realized its futility as he spoke; but anything was better than to stand and listen to that horrible voice, and look at the broad, white face of the landlord, all perspiring and quivering as he clutched the arms of his chair.

"Impossible," said the lawyer, "impossible. There is no chimney. I came here because I was convinced the noise was going on here. It was certainly in the next room to mine."

"Was there no door between yours and mine?" said Anderson eagerly,

"No, sir," said Herr Jensen, rather sharply. "At least, not this morning."

"Ah!" said Anderson. "Nor tonight?"

"I am not sure," said the lawyer with some hesitation.

Suddenly the crying or singing voice in the next room died away, and the singer was heard seemingly to laugh to himself in a crooning manner. The three men actually shivered at the sound. Then there was a silence.

"Come," said the lawyer, "what have you to say, Herr Kristensen? What does this mean?"

"Good Heaven!" said Kristensen. "How should I tell! I know no more than you, gentlemen. I pray I may never hear such a noise again."

'so do I," said Herr Jensen, and he added something under his breath. Anderson thought it sounded like the last words of the Psalter, "*omnis spiritus laudet Dominum*", but he could not be sure.

"But we must do something," said Anderson 'the three of us. Shall we go and investigate in the next room?"

"But that is Herr Jensen's room," wailed the landlord. "It is no use; he has come from there himself."

"I am not so sure," said Jensen. "I think this gentleman is right: we must go and see."

The only weapons of defence that could be mustered on the spot were a stick and umbrella. The expedition went out into the passage, not without quakings. There was a deadly quiet outside, but a light shone from under the next door. Anderson and Jensen approached it. The latter turned the handle, and gave a sudden vigorous push. No use. The door stood fast.

"Herr Kristensen," said Jensen, "will you go and fetch the strongest servant you have in the place? We must see this through."

The landlord nodded, and hurried off, glad to be away from the scene of action. Jensen and Anderson remained outside looking at the door.

"It is Number 13, you see," said the latter.

"Yes; there is your door, and there is mine," said Jensen.

"My room has three windows in the daytirne," said Anderson, with difficulty suppressing a nervous laugh.

"By George, so has mine!" said the lawyer, turning and looking at Anderson. His back was now to the door. In that moment the door opened, and an arm came out and clawed at his shoulder. It was clad in ragged, yellowish linen, and the bare skin, where it could be seen, had long grey hair upon it. Anderson was just in time to pull Jensen out of its reach with a cry of disgust and fright, when the door shut again, and a low laugh was heard.

Jensen had seen nothing, but when Anderson hurriedly told him what a risk he had run, he fell into a great state of agitation, and suggested that they should retire from the enterprise and lock themselves up in one or other of their rooms.

However, while he was developing this plan, the landlord and two able-bodied men arrived on the scene, all looking rather serious and alarmed. Jensen met them with a torrent of description and explanation, which did not at all tend to encourage them for the fray.

The men dropped the crowbars they had brought, and said flatly that they were not going to risk their throats in that devil's den. The landlord was miserably nervous and undecided, conscious that if the danger were not faced his hotel was ruined, and very loth to face it himself. Luckily Anderson hit upon a way of rallying the demoralized force.

"Is this," he said, 'the Danish courage I have heard so much of? It isn't a German in there, and if it was, we are five to one."

The two servants and Jensen were stung into action by this, and made a dash at the door.

"Stop!" said Anderson. "Don't lose your heads. You stay out here with the light, landlord, and one of you two men break in the door, and don't go in when it gives way."

The men nodded, and the younger stepped forward, raised his crowbar, and dealt a tremendous blow on the upper panel. The result was not in the least what any of them anticipated. There was no cracking or rending of wood only a dull sound, as if the solid wall had been struck. The man dropped his tool with a shout, and began rubbing his elbow. His cry drew their eyes upon him for a moment; then Anderson looked at the door again. It was gone; the plaster wall of the passage stared him in the face, with a considerable gash in it where the crowbar had struck it. Number 13 had passed out of existence. For a brief space they stood perfectly still, gazing at the blank wall. An early cock in the yard beneath was heard to crow; and as Anderson glanced in the direction of the sound, he saw through the window at the end of the long passage that the eastern sky was paling to the dawn.

"Perhaps," said the landlord, with hesitation, "you gentlemen would like another room for tonight— a double-bedded one?"

Neither Jensen nor Anderson was averse to the suggestion. They felt inclined to hunt in couples after their late experience. It was found convenient, when each of them went to his room to collect the articles he wanted for the night, that the other should go with him and hold the candle. They noticed that both Number 12 and Number 14 had three windows.

Next morning the same party reassembled in Number 12. The landlord was naturally anxious to avoid engaging outside help, and yet it was imperative that the mystery attaching to that part of the house should be cleared up. Accordingly the two servants had been induced to take upon them the function of carpenters. The furniture was cleared away, and, at the cost of a

good many irretrievably damaged planks, that portion of the floor was taken up which lay nearest to Number 14.

You will naturally suppose that a skeleton— say that of Mag. Nicolas Francken— was discovered. That was not so. What they did find lying between the beams which supported the flooring was a small copper box. In it was a neatly-folded vellum document, with about twenty lines of writing. Both Anderson and Jensen (who proved to be something of a palaeographer) were much excited by this discovery, which promised to afford the key to these extraordinary phenomena.

I possess a copy of an astrological work which I have never read. It has, by way of frontispiece, a woodcut by Hans Sebald Beham, representing a number of sages seated round a table. This detail may enable connoisseurs to identify the book. I cannot myself recollect its title, and it is not at this moment within reach; but the fly-leaves of it are covered with writing, and, during the ten years in which I have owned the volume, I have not been able to determine which way up this writing ought to be read, much less in what language it is. Not dissimilar was the position of Anderson and Jensen after the protracted examination to which they submitted the document in the copper box.

After two days' contemplation of it, Jensen, who was the bolder spirit of the two, hazarded the conjecture that the language was either Latin or Old Danish.

Anderson ventured upon no surmises, and was very willing to surrender the box and the parchment to the Historical Society of Viborg to be placed in their museum.

I had the whole story from him a few months later, as we sat in a wood near Upsala, after a visit to the library there, where we or, rather, I had laughed over the contract by which Daniel Salthenius (in later life Professor of Hebrew at Konigsberg) sold himself to Satan. Anderson was not really amused.

"Young idiot!" he said, meaning Salthenius, who was only an undergraduate when he committed that indiscretion, "how did he know what company he was courting?"

And when I suggested the usual considerations he only grunted. That same afternoon he told me what you have read; but he refused to draw any inferences from it, and to assent to any that I drew for him.

11: The Tiger

Hugh Walpole

1884-1941

Harper's Magazine Jun 1927

Sir Hugh Seymour Walpole, CBE

LITTLE HOMER BROWN had one night, after too luxurious a supper, a nasty dream. He dreamed that he was in a jungle. He was lost in a thick dark mass of bush that seemed to rise like a forest with green spikes on every side of him. He walked with naked feet on pointed grass sharp as razor blades, and then he saw shining at him out of the dark mass two burning eyes. Petrified with something more than terror, as one is in dreams, he stood there waiting for the tiger to spring. As the tiger sprang he woke up.

The only thing about this dream was that in the morning he remembered it. He never remembered his dreams, which was a pity, because they were in general pleasant ones, and he had not much romance in his actual waking life. It seemed that he forgot the pleasant ones and remembered the nightmares, which was perhaps characteristic of him because he was of the sort that worries over little troubles and forgets too quickly the larger delights.

He remembered his tiger for three days at least. He told his sister, who kept house for him, and several of his more intimate friends about it. They wisely cautioned him against eating steak just before going to bed. The trouble with him was, as he thought about it, that he was convinced in his heart that there was more in the tiger than steak. He had all his life been afraid of the future, that something would spring out at him one day and eat him up. He was a man small of stature, sentimental of nature, and likely to catch colds. But, like many another Englishman, he was brave enough before the things which he could see. He had so little imagination in general that the things which he could see were the only things about which he did worry. But again,

like many Englishmen, he had one thin stream of imagination running underground deep in his subconscious life. He had been aware of the dark steady flow of it on certain occasions— once when as a child he had been taken to the pantomime and all the houses in Dick Whittington's London had rocked before the inebriated cook; once in an animal shop in Edgware Road when he had seen a sad monkey stare at him from behind the window; once when he had proposed marriage to a lady friend and had been rejected, and once when a motor-car in which he was riding had killed a black Cocker spaniel.

On such occasions he had seen visions. It was as though the earth had opened up beneath his feet and he had realised that he was walking on a kind of hot pie crust over an underworld of energetic little demons. But for the most part he forgot these revelations and lived quietly enough with his tall, bony sister in a neat little house in Wimbledon, pursuing every morning his successful little insurance job somewhere in the bowels of the city.

And he forgot the tiger.

IT WAS THIS insurance business that sent him one day to New York. Quite an adventure for him. Phoebe, his sister, who was as kind as she was tiresome, and, though he didn't know it, absolutely necessary to his existence, was disturbed at his going alone. She would have liked greatly to accompany him and hinted at this; but he sniffed at his coming freedom and would not have had her with him for anything. Nevertheless, when he found himself quite alone on the gigantic liner his heart failed him. He discovered that he had lived so long with his particular cronies that he had quite forgotten how to make new acquaintances. He was afraid to play cards lest he should lose his money, he couldn't dance, and for reading he had a kind of shyness as though by giving himself away to a book he was endangering some mysterious part of his morality. So he walked up and down the deck a great deal, very proudly holding his head up and daring any stranger to speak to him, but secretly hoping that some stranger might.

In New York, however, he was not lonely. That warmth and eagerness of hospitality which always astonishes every Englishman and sends him racing through strangely conflicting moods of suspicion, pride and, although he tries not to show it, sentimentality— these caught little Homer Brown by the throat and caused him to think that after all he must be a very fine fellow indeed.

He started with a room at the Brevoort, but this was a little remote for his business, and in a very short while he was staying with a Mr. and Mrs. Moody in West Sixty-ninth Street.

Mr. and Mrs. Moody were very quiet Americans. Mrs. Moody was so quiet that you had to listen very carefully if you wanted to hear what she had to say. Mr. Moody was stout and broad-shouldered, but oddly timorous for a Mid-Westerner. You would think, to look at him, that he would defy the world, but as a matter of simple fact he couldn't defy a living thing. Englishmen are much more sentimental than Americans, but they are not, of course, so demonstrative. Little Homer conceived slowly a passion for the large, hearty and gentle Mr. Moody, and Mr. Moody, having been brought up in the usual American creed that ten American men were worth only one American woman, was surprised that anybody should pay him much attention. And before Homer Brown returned to England these two had formed a greater friendship than they knew.

Homer Brown was delighted with New York. He loved to feel that every minute of the day was important and it didn't matter to what you were hurrying so long as you hurried. The noise around him excited him as a small rather lonely child is excited at a large children's party where everyone shouts and sings for no especial reason.

At home in Wimbledon he always went to bed at ten o'clock. In New York he found that he could be up till three or four in the morning and not feel at all tired the next day. At least, this was so for the three weeks that his business kept him in New York. It is true that he slept on the boat returning to England for three days and nights almost without a break. The sad thing was that, back in London again, he found himself unsettled. He missed the noise, the hurry, the cold sharp air, the sense of rise and fall as though he were sailing on an invigorating sea of waves and buildings, and he missed very much indeed the warmth of pleasure with which people had treated him. No one in London said that they were delighted to meet you, but only, 'Hello, old man. Haven't seen you about lately.' No lady in London told him to his face that he was too amusing for anything or that it had been just lovely being with him. And then, oddly, he missed the large Mr. Moody. He had never missed a man's company before. He wrote him a rather affectionate letter, but received no answer. American men have time only for business letters.

And so it happened that he was very quick in manœuvring to send himself back to New York again. He was amazed at his own eagerness when one fine spring day he found himself once more plunging through the Atlantic, straining his eyes towards the Statue of Liberty. His first acute disappointment on arrival this time was to find that the Moodys were in Colorado. Mrs. Moody had not been well, and, as Homer knew, the slightest wish on her part was immediate law to Mr. Moody. He had a sentimental feeling that he would like to be near their street, so he found two rooms in one of the West Sixties, rather high up,

and out of his window he could see on the left a huge building crashing to the ground and on the right another structure slowly climbing to the sky. Although the Moodys were away, he was not, of course, alone in New York. He had a whole circle of acquaintances, and almost every evening he went to a party, bathed in the splendid glamour like a tired business man having a holiday at the seaside. The summer came and he did not return to England, and he did not leave New York. The Moodys were still away, and quite suddenly one hot summer's night he discovered himself to be alone. He sat in front of his open window looking at the pale purple-misted sky, listening to the hooting of the taxis, to the clanging electric hammer, to the wriggling, rasping clatter of the Elevated, and to the flashing of strange adventurous discovery; he had no invitation for that evening and nearly all his friends were away. What should he do? He would just walk out and take the air and let adventure have its own way.

WHEN HE HAD walked for a while he discovered that it is a very strange thing to be alone in New York. He had never been alone there before. He was standing in Fifth Avenue somewhere about Forty-fourth Street when he realised that he couldn't make up his mind to cross the street. He looked down the shining length of that wonderful avenue, saw the packs of motor-cars and omnibuses held like animals in leash, knew that he must cross now if ever, and his legs refused to move. The lights changed and the cars swept down, and as they passed him they seemed to him to toss their heads and lick their lips as though they would say, 'We should like to find you in our path— toss you in the air and then ride over you. One day we shall lure you forward.' I have already said that in the main he had very little imagination, but once and again something stirred it, and it was the gleaming mass of those fiery eyes that held him now prisoner to the pavement. He pretended to himself that he was lingering there admiring the beautiful evening and watching the stars come out along the river of sky which ran between the high cliffs of the buildings. But it was not so. He was frightened. He didn't move because he didn't dare to move. New York was suddenly hostile and dangerous. Guarded by his friends, he had felt until now that the City was benignant and especially gratified that he should be there. The City was benignant no longer. He turned away, his heart beating, and after a while found himself in Broadway. Here was a lovely land— like the fairy play of one's childhood, scattered with silver and golden fruit. He admired the lighted signs, the cascade of silver that poured out of the purple fountain, the great flowers of amethyst and rose that unfolded in the middle of the sky and then faded tremblingly away, the strange figures of dancing men that hung on ropes of crimson fire, turned somersaults, and

vanished into thin air. And he loved with a strange trembling passion the building that soared into peaks of silver light far, far above the town. The only fairy palace ever seen by him in actual truth.

He stood staring at these things and was pushed about by the hurrying crowds. He bore them no malice. They, too, were the sharers of this marvellous fairyland. And then, withdrawing his eyes from the heights, it seemed to him for the first time that the faces on every side of him were pale and unhappy and apprehensive. The laughter appeared to him loud and false. The haste had something of panic in it. Shrill bells rang through the air. Everyone scattered and pressed against everyone else. The fire-engines came clanging down the street, and it was as though he felt the ground rock under his feet.

He thought that he would go into some show, and after a while he pushed through some doors, paid his money at the box-office for he knew not what, and was conducted by a girl, who looked at him with a sad and weary indifference, into his place. He had been to the theatre on many occasions before with his friends and they had always been jolly together, or he had fancied that they had. He had never noticed before that many of the American theatres have no music in the intervals between the acts, nor had he realised how sadly American audiences sit, as though they were waiting for some calamity to occur. He looked on the row of faces that stretched out beyond him to the wall, and they all seemed to him grave, preoccupied, and weary. Again, apprehensive. He had often abused in London the chattering, foolish chocolate-munching sibilants of the theatre crowd, but he would have liked them to be with him to-night. The play was strange and odd, and for his Wimbledon propriety extremely indecent. It was concerned with ladies of easy virtue in China who were imprisoned in small gilt cages, and there was a woman with a white Chinese face who terrified him.

As the play proceeded it became for him more and more a bad dream, as though it were his dream and all the people watching it were all his creation. So strange a hold did this gain upon him that during the third act he was largely occupied with wondering what would happen to the audience when he woke up; what would become of them when he stretched his arms and, yawning, found them all vanishing into smoke as he looked around on the familiar things in his Wimbledon bedroom. The last act of the play presented an exotic situation in which a mother finds that she has unwittingly killed her own daughter. This seemed to little Homer the climax of his bad dream, and, just as one always wakes up from a nightmare when the final crash arrives, so now Homer got up and walked out although the play was not quite finished.

He hoped that his bad dream was over, but it was not. It seemed to continue with him as he walked through the plunging lights and shadows that played over Broadway. The faces now on every side of him were white and strained; everyone was feeling the heat of the night, and a large silver fountain in the middle of the sky that was for ever spilling its water among the stars which it stridently outshone accentuated Homer's thirst so desperately that he went into a drug store and drank a strange sickly concoction of pineapple, ice-cream, and soda water.

AFTER THAT afternoon he never seemed quite to wake from his dream again. He received a letter from his sister urging him to come home. It appeared that for once they were enjoying a beautiful summer in England. It was neither too hot nor too cold. But as he read her letter he had a strange, aching vision of the dark cool lanes, the lap of the sea heard very faintly from across the fields, the sudden dip of the hills and the cottages, of the small villages nestling to the stream, roses and carnations everywhere. Of course he ought to go home. There was nothing to keep him here now. There had been nothing really to keep him this time at all. None of his friends was in New York, the weather would soon be appalling. It was not very comfortable in his lodgings, and he had always a strange little headache that ran like an odd tune, a little distorted, always through his head. Of course he ought to go home. But he could not. And he could not because he was held in this odd dreaming condition. Could he but wake up he would take the next boat back. Perhaps he would wake up to-morrow.

A few nights later the weather was desperately hot. There was no air, and after a brief sleep he woke to feel his heart pounding in his chest like a hammer. His windows were wide open, but there was no coolness. He lay there on his bed, his pyjama jacket open, and the sweat pouring from his body. He threw off his pyjamas, plunged into a cold bath, and then lay a little comforted, quite naked, on the top of his bed. As he lay there he heard, beneath the sharp staccato cry of an occasional car, a kind of purr as though someone were gently sleeping near by. Purr, purr, purr.... It was not, he assured himself, the breathing of an individual, but simply the night sound of the City. He had never heard it quite like that before; and between the breathing there came short restless sounds as though someone were turning over or brushing something aside as he moved. The sound had a little of the rhythm of a train when in a sleeping-car you wake in the middle of the night. Rhythm translating itself into a little tune, but this was not so much a tune as a measure that advanced and then receded and then advanced again. He had the idea that it was almost as though someone were walking in his sleep,

padding stealthily along the quiet streets beyond his window, and, so thinking, at last he fell asleep.

Everyone who has lived in New York during hot weather must have noticed that the town seems to change completely its inhabitants. Those who can afford it leave the City. But many of the inhabitants, Southerners, negroes, South Americans who are accustomed to great heat, pervade the streets with a kind of new ownership. They have a sort of pride as though this were their weather and they alone know how to deal with it. They walk about as though they owned the town. Homer, coming one morning out of his door, noticed passing him a large, stout, honey-coloured negro. Rather a handsome fellow with the free disengaged movements of an animal. His big heavy body was clothed in dark, quiet garments, and he passed with lithe, springy gestures. Homer did not know why he noticed him. The negro did not look at him, but passed on with his strange determined ease down the street. That evening Homer met him again. 'He must live near here,' Homer thought. Then he had a curious idea. 'If he were naked and in a dark forest you would think that he was an animal.'

That night once again Homer dreamed of the Tiger. It was not so hot a night, but damp and humid. Homer was once again walking with naked feet on sharp spiky grass. And once again he was held with sudden terror, and once again saw the gleaming eyes and smelled the thick fœtid breath of an animal. He woke in a panic of terror, and was at first delighted to find that he was in his plain simple little room, and then he was horrified to discover that the smell of an animal's breath seemed still to linger with him in the room. It was so strong that he could not possibly be imagining it. He got up, walked about the room, sniffing. He went to the window and leaned out and saw the town lying under a dazzling sheet of stars. There was a little breeze, and when he turned back into the room again he found the smell was gone. In the morning it was as though he had had actual contact with some animal, and he had hard work to convince himself that some large dark-coloured beast had not padded round his room while he slept. He seriously examined himself. 'This won't do,' he said to himself. 'This hot weather is getting on your nerves. You must leave for England at once.'

He went that very morning to some shipping office, booked a passage for himself for the next week, and sent a cable to his sister. He felt now as though at last he had awaked from his dream, and England seemed to come very close to him with its cool breezes and long, gently undulating moors and sudden little woods with scattered anemones. But while he was sitting in his little Italian restaurant eating his luncheon he heard again through the open door a purr as if it were of someone breathing close beside him, and as he heard it his

body trembled as though someone said to him, 'You are not going home. You will never go home.' That afternoon he sat in Central Park and watched the blue motionless water and felt a desperate longing for Moody's return. 'I am not very well,' he said to himself. 'It is as though I am only half awake. Must be this hot weather,' and he did a strange thing, because he went up to some children who were playing at the edge of the water and put his hand on the arm of one of them and spoke to it about something. The child answered him gravely, not at all alarmed, and pointed to some boat that it was sailing on the water. The child was a real thing. But was it not part of his dream? If he woke suddenly in his Wimbledon bedroom where would the child be? So he hurried home in a panic, and then, just outside his door, passed again the large, heavy negro, who did not look at him, but went on padding steadily forward. He hurried into his house.

When the time for the actual sailing came he did not go. He sent a cable to his sister saying, 'Important business prevents leaving. Sailing later.' But there was no important business. The weather grew ever more hot, but he was accustomed to it now and, although it depressed him, he liked it. He liked, too, the slightly acrid, rather fœtid smell that seemed now to accompany him everywhere. For a while he was puzzled as to where he had known this smell before and then he thought of the monkey rooms and the snake rooms in the London zoo. It had been just that warmth, damp and pungent.

On a very hot afternoon, sitting in his room, he suddenly thought, 'There must be animals somewhere. Animals that like this heat.' It was, he imagined, what a jungle smell would be; and the light beyond his windows beating down from the blazing blue sky on to the roofs and pavements had a glossy shimmer as though he were looking at a scene through very thin sheets of opalescent metal. Then, once he had this idea that there were animals about, he began to wonder where they would be. He had the odd fancy to picture to himself this vast city, honey-combed with underground cells and passages, like the dark shadowy cells behind the Roman amphitheatres where they kept their beasts for feast days and holidays. It would be a strange thing were the whole of New York built about these dark stone cellars and the wild beasts for ever prowling there. Sitting at his window in his pyjamas, he fancied how these hordes of animals would slink about, padding their way from passage to passage, and the only things seen in that grey dusk were thousands and thousands of fiery eyes, and then it might happen one day that some of them would escape and appear in the streets. Lions and tigers and leopards and panthers, dazzled at first by the bright staring light and then accustomed to it, plunging into the middle of the multitudes. A great lion with tawny head finding its way through the entrance of one of those vast skyscrapers, padding up the stairs, and then

confronting a group of clerks and stenographers. Yes, that would be fine, and how the people would rush from the building to the street! He'd heard it said that if all the human beings ran at the same moment from the skyscrapers into the street, they would be piled one upon the other five deep, and he could see them heaped up in this hot dry weather struggling in masses, and from the windows of the building the lions and tigers peering down at them and waiting with slow licking lips for the splendid meal that was coming to them.

Moving from this still further, he came to his own especial tiger— the animal about which he had dreamed so many years ago, waiting now for him somewhere in the underground beneath the street. At this thought a pleasant warm shiver ran through his body. He put his hand in front of his eyes as though he would shut out from them some picture, and the familiar animal smell seemed to increase in the room.

IT WAS just then, at the end of August, that the Moodys returned to New York. Homer was very glad to see them, but not as glad as he would have been a month ago, because he had now something else to think about. They didn't know about all these animals, all these beasts prowling under the streets in the shadowy dark. And they must not know, because they would think him foolish and wouldn't understand. So, because he had a secret from them, he was very mysterious and preoccupied and not so frank with them as he had been. They noticed, of course, the change and commented on it to each other. Moody had a real affection for this little Englishman, largely because he had been noticed by him and made to suppose that he was somebody; partly because he had a truly kind heart and wanted people to be happy; so he was distressed and asked Mrs. Moody, for whose opinion and judgement he had the profoundest respect, if she knew what the matter could be.

'He seems preoccupied with something,' he said to her. 'He always thinks of something else. He doesn't look well at all. Perhaps it's the heat that's got on his nerves. Englishmen can't stand it. When I was in his room last night he asked me whether I noticed a smell. I noticed nothing. But he said that I should in time. He seems to have a terror of the subway. He implored me yesterday not to use it. His eyes were terrified as he spoke to me about it. I don't like the look of things at all. I think he'd better go home.'

But Homer now saw the Moodys through a dark glass. He wondered how it could be that all the inhabitants of New York were not aware of their great danger. He thought it might be his duty to write to one of the papers about it. But, after all, the animals had been there so long the people must all know. He supposed that they were so confident of their control that it didn't worry them. But suppose you had, as he had, one particular animal who was

watching and waiting for you. He knew now exactly where his tiger must be. Somewhere underground between Fortieth and Forty-fourth Street, where the traffic and the press of people are thickest, and he began to be fascinated by that part of New York. He found that if he went down to the Grand Central Station and stood on that great shining floor he could almost hear the animals moving beneath his feet, and he fancied that if he went lower down through the gates to the trains and stood there in absolute silence when no trains were passing he would be able to hear very clearly soft feet moving and the heavy bodies brushing the one against the other.

So one day he got permission from the station-master to go and meet a train, and he went through and for five minutes was alone there, save for the coloured porters, and through the silence he heard quite clearly the whispering footfalls. There must be many beasts there, thousands perhaps, and you can imagine how one would push ahead of the others and wait, his eyes eagerly fixed for the black gate to open. And one day it might be that the negroes who brought them their food, great red lumps of bleeding meat, would be a little careless, and some of the beasts would slip past and moving noiselessly would be up on the sunlit street before anyone knew that they were there. His own especial tiger would be waiting more eagerly than any of them. He must be a great strong beast with a huge head and gigantic muscles. One scratch of his paw and your cheek would be torn open, and then, at the sight of the blood, the tiger would tremble all over and his eyes would shine until they were like great lamps, and then he would spring.

Then one night Homer told Moody about it. He had not intended to tell him, but it irritated him that that great heavy man should be sitting so calmly in his room and not notice the acrid smell. He told him first about the big honey-coloured negro who was always passing down his street, and Moody thought there was nothing odd in that; so that Homer, thoroughly exasperated, burst out with, 'He is one of the keepers. Although he hasn't told me I know it and he knows that I know it.'

'One of the keepers?' asked Moody. 'Keeper of what?'

'Why, of the beasts, of course. Can't you smell them everywhere?'

He went on then and said that he couldn't understand why people were not frightened.

'It would be so easy some day for one of the animals to steal out while the keeper wasn't looking. Or suppose they went for the keepers one day and broke out— hundreds of them— into the streets. That would be a nice thing. You would see people run for their lives then all right.'

Moody became greatly alarmed, but, as always when one's friends are odd or queer, adopted a tone of quiet reassurance as though he were speaking to a

sick child. He consulted with Mrs. Moody, and the result of this was that he invited Homer to go with him one day to call upon a friend of his. Homer went with him most readily and had with this kind gentleman two hours of most interesting conversation. The interesting, quiet man who talked to him and asked him questions was surprised at nothing which Homer had to tell him. When Homer spoke about the animals he nodded his head and said, 'I know. When did you first notice it?'

Homer, delighted to discover that he had found a sensible person at last, told him everything.

'You see,' he said, 'I shouldn't really mind, myself, a bit, but of course I am a little uneasy because of my own tiger. You can quite understand that it isn't pleasant to feel that he can escape at any time. Then he would come straight for me. He knows just where I am.'

'Why not,' said the quiet little man, 'go home for a while? Your tiger won't follow you to England.'

'Ah,' said Homer, mysteriously, 'I am not so sure. Besides, don't you think it would be cowardly? And then, there's something exciting in defying him. I am not going to show him I am afraid,' and a little warm tremor ran all over his body.

His kind friend asked him many questions about his childhood. When he was very young, had he been taken to the zoo and had he looked at the tigers there? Homer nodded his head. Of course he had. Had he when he was very young been shown pictures of tigers? Yes, of course he had, but what had that to do with it? His little friend agreed that, of course, it had nothing to do with it, but it was just interesting. It was suggested to him that he should come and see his little friend quite often, and Homer said that he would, but, nevertheless, he had no intention of doing so. This man took it all too quietly. He would wake up one day and find out his mistake.

EARLY IN September there came those warm days, close days that are perhaps the most trying moments of all the American climate. If you took a walk you were at once bathed in perspiration. The town had indeed, for even less active imaginations than Homer's, a jungle air. The traffic now was terrific. Down on Fifth Avenue the cars would stand packed in serried ranks. Then, on the changing of the lights, they would slide furiously forward for a brief space, then sit back on their haunches again.

It happened one evening that, hurrying home in the dusk, Homer, looking up the street, saw these hundreds of gleaming eyes and thought with a furious beating of his heart that the moment had arrived at last and that the animals had escaped. He realised at once, of course, that it was the traffic; and yet, was

it? Were not these things alive and acting from their own volition? It might be that they were in union with the beasts and were acting under command, and one day at a given order they would suddenly take the thing into their own hands. In great armies of shining metal they would drive the trembling thousands of tiny human beings into panic-stricken mobs and the animals would be released.

This was fanciful perhaps, but when he returned to his room, he knew with a sudden certainty that his Tiger was free. Homer did not know how he was aware of it, but he was certain. What must he do? He wanted to escape. He was trembling with fear, but at the same time he wanted to face the animal. Some horrid fascination held him. He could imagine himself walking down some dark side street, lit only by some scattered lights, shaking slightly with the reverberation of the overhead railway, and then, turning a corner, there the Tiger would be. He sat there all night not sleeping, sitting on his bed, wondering what he must do. At about three in the morning obeying some curious impulse, he barricaded his door, putting two chairs in front of it and pushing his bed toward it. When day came he must buy a gun; but of what use would that be? He didn't know one end of a gun from another, and, besides, it was hopeless. No gun that he could buy would injure the Tiger. His fate was certain. He could not escape it.

That morning Moody came to see him. He entered very cheerfully.

'Now, my friend,' he said, 'what's this, you're not dressed? Come on, take a bath and come have a meal with Mrs. Moody and myself. You are not well, you know. Mrs. Moody wants you to come and stay with us for a bit. Cheerful company, that's what you want.'

Homer thanked him, shook his head. It was very kind of him, but he was very busy just then and would come and see them in a day or two. Moody talked to him for a little, and then apparently alarmed at Homer's expression, went away.

When the evening came Homer dressed and went out. First he walked on Fifth Avenue and as the traffic rushed by him felt an oppressive bewildering excitement. He knew beyond doubt that now the Tiger had come very close to him. He must be very near any one of these side streets. There were so many animals that the keepers had probably not yet discovered the loss of one of them. The Tiger was waiting in some dark alley or court, crouched against the wall in the shadow. At every step that he took he was being drawn irresistibly nearer. He was no longer afraid, but only strung up to some great pitch of emotion as though the supreme moment of his life had at last come. He was oddly hungry (he had eaten scarcely anything for days) and he went into a little Italian restaurant. He sat down in a corner and saw that there was a very good

meal for a dollar. You could have antipasto, minestrina, spaghetti, broccoli, and all for a dollar. At a large table near him some twenty people were having a feast, and were laughing and joking very loudly. In the far corner a violin and a piano were playing gay tunes. The minestrina was very good— hot and thick. He talked to the waiter and asked him if he liked New York. The waiter liked it very much. 'Now here was a real town. Something was going on all the time and there was money about. Lots of money. You could pick it up in all sorts of ways.' Homer was about to say, 'Yes, but suppose the animals get loose one day, where will you be then?' But he didn't say it, stopped by a kind of sense that it would be bad form to mention it. He sat there staring at the gay supper party. They didn't seem to care. What would they do if he went over to them and told them that just up the street a great Tiger with huge velvety haunches was waiting? They might not believe it, and then he would look foolish, and in any case this was the one thing that in New York nobody mentioned.

After a while he paid his bill and went out. He was now in one of those streets that seem in the evening to be the very borderland of madness. Overhead the trains rattled, on the right the street was 'up' showing black cabins of darkness and then a blaze of burning light. The trains came clattering up, issuing from forests of armed girders and tangled masonry, people hurried by as though they knew that this was a dangerous place and that they must not pause there for a moment.

Homer took a deep breath, stepped forward into the middle of the street, stared past the bright lights of a drug store, and then, with a whirl of concentrated knowledge as though everything in his past life had suddenly leaped to meet him, in one swift instant knew that the time had come. Facing him, as he stood there at the very issue of the dark side street opposite him, crouched the Tiger. Although the street was so dark, Homer could see every detail of his body. He was very like a huge cat streaked with his beautiful colours. His eyes burning just as Homer knew that they would do. His head moving very slightly from side to side. With that vision, terror leaped upon Homer. He turned, screaming there in the middle of the street, and even as he turned, the Tiger jumped. The huge body was upon him. He felt the agonising blow and then sank deep into pits of darkness.

A CROWD collected. His body was dragged out from under the taxicab. The driver began an eloquent explanation. It had not been his fault. The man had seemed bewildered by the lights, had run straight into the cab. There was no time for the driver to do anything. The policeman took notes, an ambulance was summoned.

The Moodys heard of the accident that night. It appeared that it was nobody's fault. Homer had been crossing the street, and becoming bewildered, turned back, and was struck by the taxi.

About three the next morning, Moody woke up quietly trembling, and at last roused his wife. He talked to her about the poor little Englishman.

'I suppose,' he said, 'staying here in the heat was too much for him. Odd thing that, his imagining that some animal was after him.' He lay there, greatly discomforted. 'New York's getting a queer place,' he said. 'You can imagine anything if you let yourself. All this traffic, for instance. They look like animals at night sometimes.' He turned and took his wife's hand in his. 'A bit close in here,' he said. 'You don't smell anything, do you? Sort of animal smell.'

'Why, no, dear, of course not,' said Mrs. Moody.

'Imagination, I suppose,' said Moody. 'Funny thing if this town went wild one day.'

But Mrs. Moody was a sensible woman, not given to silly fancies. She patted her husband's shoulder and so fell asleep. But Mr. Moody lay there looking into the darkness.

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12: Down the Red Lane

Ethel Lina White

1879-1944

The Lady's Realm, October 1911

Ethel Lina White

This text courtey Roy Glashan's Library (www.freeread.com.au) which is collecting many of E L White's short stories never previously reprinted.

"JUST another spoonful, Peterkins, angel! Come, one. Send it 'down the Red Lane!' My Pearl of Babies, stoke up. Oh— you little— aggravation!"

The complaint was justified, for the Pearl of Babies instead of responding to the appeal, turned the contents of his mouth on to his plate— a refined action to show that the previous consignment had not yet reached its destination.

Norah groaned.

"Was there ever such an unfeeling infant? Peter Ferdinand Henbane Fitzbattle, is there anything remotely resembling a heart underneath your Jaegar? Don't you realise the issues at stake? Let me remind you that Mr. Inspector Spy comes to-day with his horrid weighing-machine, and all. Inspector Spy the Fourth. Oh, wouldn't I like to prepare an oubliette for him, just?"

Now, when a beautiful young woman in the hey-day of her youth talks to a conversation-proof infant merely for the sake of hearing her own voice, it is clear evidence of deadly boredom.

This was true in Norah's case. No convict at Portland lived a more restricted, uneventful life— yet, unlike him, she clung to her fetters. For they represented a job, and she had known the heart-sickening lot of being out.

Norah's step-father, Dr. Rice, on his death, left behind him a lot of children and debts— and Norah. The youngsters were planted out in orphanages and the debts cold-shouldered by the relatives. But as no one seemed anxious to receive Norah in any capacity, she set about saving the situation by advertising for another, of a different kind.

Indeed, there had only ever been one soul who was desirous of acquiring her as a personal asset, and that was a certain Dr. Norman, who once came as assistant to her step-father. He was a pale, long-chinned man, a glutton for work, and with ideas on every subject under the sun, including the domestic details of a home. To make matters worse, he was invariably right.

When he proposed to Norah, however, thinking she would jump at the chance to escape the position of drudge in the doctor's poverty-stricken family, he broke his record. This time he was wrong, for she refused him on the spot.

The world is admittedly everyone's oyster, but Norah was not long in discovering that it will not open to a woman's weapon— her hat-pin. She went through the mill at the Registry Office, and it was not until after long lean weeks of ill-success that the unexpected happened, and she found herself under consideration.

Her astonishment was all the greater as she soon gathered that it was no ordinary situation that was on the books. Nor was her perspective charge an ordinary infant. He was not only an infant with a future, but an infant with a past. Litigation had raged fiercely round his puny form, which alone stood between a gigantic fortune and a flock of hungry human vultures.

FOR A whole week, Norah was interviewed by dry and legal gentlemen, and pompous laymen, with "Trustee" written large on their important faces. They all stared at her unblinkingly, and pelted her with strange and probing questions. At the end of the time, to her infinite surprise, she found herself appointed lady-nurse to Peter Ferdinand Henbane Fitzbattle, then resident at Clodoch Towers, Cumbs.

The lawyer-in-chief, who did the most of the talking, explained his decision.

"We are overlooking your lack of previous experience for the reason that you seem to possess the qualities which are a *sine qua non*. You have a long line of predecessors, all highly-trained women, who have either failed to please the infant, or have been unable to stand the absolute isolation. Remember, you will have no separate existence. You live only through your charge. There will be a nursery staff to do all menial work, but you are required not to leave the child, night or day. Doubtless you followed the Fitzbattle case through the Press, and understand that it is of tantamount importance that the boy lives to attain his majority. Too many people have a stake in his death."

"It sounds like a novel or play," faltered Norah, a little dashed by her future prospects.

"H'm! It has its dramatic elements. For instance, the stipulation that you first taste all the infant's food."

That was enough for poor hungry Norah.

"I swear," she said fervently, "that I'll devote myself body and soul to keeping the breath in the body of this child of Promise."

The lawyer actually smiled at her eagerness.

"If you can keep the position, it will mean provision for your old age," was his alluring bribe. "And we trust you to do so."

NORAH soon found out that the lawyer had shown an unexpected talent for fiction in his last speech. Once installed in Clodoch Towers, she was well-housed, well-fed, and well-paid, but she was certainly not trusted. Every week brought its representative from Messrs. Lawyer, Trustee & Co., on a surprise visit of investigation and inspection.

She soon made a grievance of this constant suspicion. She brooded over it daily, although, as a matter-of-fact, it was really the appalling loneliness that had affected her nerves. When the train shook her off at the tiny station of Clodoch, apparently the county of Cumberland had snapped to, like a trap, and shut her out of the map.

She very soon understood why the high-trained legion before her had thrown up the sponge, and only one thing prevented her from following their example. That thing was a person, and that person a Personage—the Infant.

In the beginning, Norah had left him out of her reckoning altogether. She was not particularly fond of children, and had brought up her step-father's pretty, healthy brood on the sound general principle of "a word and a blow, and the blow first."

To her intense surprise, she became the instant slave to this miniature Croesus, with his skinny, ill-nourished form and his cynical old man's face. She grovelled abjectly to obtain his favour. At first, he looked sourly at her peach-like complexion, for, true to type, he already possessed the impaired digestion of the millionaire, and he knew that peaches were taboo. After a time, however, he grew to approve of the incense she offered, and abused her devotion shamefully.

When the maid brought the message that morning to the nursery that the customary inspector had arrived, in addition to her indignation, Norah had experienced a sharp qualm of anxiety. The infant was not only her Heart's Beloved. He also represented her job.

A doctor this time! She worried herself to a pulp because the millionaire would not put on flesh. Would it be her fate, because of his deficit in avoirdupois, to find herself again fired?

She turned and addressed her charge, almost passionately.

"Peter, why can't I make you *fat*? Listen! I want you to send all the milk and all the pudding and all the bananas in the world down the red lane. Wouldn't you like to be fat like this?"

She puffed out her cheeks and distended her chest— a perfectly fiendish abuse of her beauty, but which pleased the infant sufficiently to command a repeat-performance.

Norah strained him to her.

"Eat, eat, *eat!*" she commanded. "Eat everything you can see— everything you can reach!"

"Eat you!"

Peter caught her finger in a really hard nip, but Norah did not rebuke his playful attempt at cannibalism.

"That's right, darling. Send me 'down the red lane!' Only grow fat. *O-oh!*"

THE DOOR had opened and Norah looked to find herself confronted by her stepfather's former assistant— Dr. Jasper Norman.

Her first glance told her that he had kept on being right ever since their parting, and, what was more, had made it pay very well. One could tell by the smart cut of his very professional attire that if he had not yet attained the honour of hanging out a plate in Harley Street, he no longer lived in the neighbourhood of Queer Street.

For his part, he looked at Norah with genuine pleasure, putting up his glass to focus her to better satisfaction. The pretty red-haired girl of old had attracted in spite of her untidy toilet, but now, in the spotless severity of starched linen, she looked a gorgeous white Goddess.

"This is capital!" he said approvingly. "It's an unexpected pleasure to find you here, expressing yourself in what is essentially woman's work. Er— where did you train? You should have consulted me."

At his professional voice, all Norah's former antagonism to her step-father's superior assistant was revived.

"Train?" she asked. "At home with the youngsters. Don't you remember?"

Dr. Norman's face fell visibly.

"You've had no hospital training? Dear, dear! Very irregular!"

"What's the odds? If I've not buried ten, it was the nearest thing. Did you ever know such children for being in the wars?"

Her mouth relaxed to a smile as she thought of the happy, healthy brood of Hooligans, but the young doctor saw no humour in the reply. He looked with positive horror at the puny infant.

"He does you no credit," he said drily. "He looks like a slum-child. What do you feed him on?"

Norah reddened with indignation at this reflection on her idol's appearance.

"What food?" she asked slowly. Then with mischievous inspiration she thought of the rations she daily sampled for Peter.

"He has what I have myself," she answered, after the orthodox manner of her step-father's surgery "mother."

The further drop of Dr. Norman's jaw rewarded her for much.

"Not really? You are serious? Dear, dear! And what have you had for lunch to-day."

Norah, who had the digestion of an ostrich, told him, and from the green hue that spread over his face, one would have thought that it was he who had tackled the indigestible food.

He looked with pained eyes at Norah, and his shocked expression relaxed.

"This is an appalling state of affairs," he said. "Surely you realise you can't bring up a complicated organism like this wealthy microbe, by rule of thumb. But you must keep this post. I'll prepare feeding-charts and a complete set of rules for your guidance, dealing with every subject from the temperature of the room to action in any emergency. Before I leave, I'll bring it in here and explain it to you. No, not a word. I'm only too glad to help you. You have been much in my thoughts since we parted."

The young doctor was about to say "in my heart," but he pulled himself up in evident doubt whether it was professional to possess the internal organs to which he daily ministered.

Norah collapsed before his authoritative manner. Was history to be repeated? Was there no escape from this autocratic young doctor, whose mission apparently was to put her in the wrong, and then set her right? Was she to brook being ordered about in her own nursery?

Before she could decide which great gun of her wrath to train upon him he caught up his hat.

"Well, that's settled. As I have to leave early, I must ask for something to eat before I go. And in view of what you told me about your lunch, may I plead for something wholesome and digestible?"

As he waited to let the reproof sink home, his eyes suddenly brightened in a very unprofessional manner.

"I'm so glad to see you still wear my brooch!" he said softly as he went out of the room.

Gasping with wrath, Norah put up her hand to her collar and removed her sole trinket. It was a gold safety-pin and had been presented to her by her step-father's neat assistant in the double capacity of a present and a hint.

She reflected, heedless of the fact that she had run the pin into her thumb. Did the wretched man preen himself on the fact that she wore it for sentimental reasons? If so, she would show him his mistake. When the baby was swathed in complicated outer layers of wool, for his airing, Norah carefully stuck the brooch on his fleecy chest to testify her indifference to this link with the past.

It was a trivial action, but to live in complete isolation with a small tyrant is apt to develop the petty side of a woman's nature. Norah, who in the old days possessed the glorious, slap-dash faults of a large nature, from taking on the existence of an oyster, had grown prone to exaggerate trifles. Her tussle with the doctor had now grown to the proportions of a civil war. She positively gloated over the memory of her visit to the housekeeper when she countermanded the tempting menu prepared for Dr. Norman in favour of a large rice pudding.

"In accordance with his wishes," she added. "Be sure to tell him that!"

IT WAS a very tempestuous walk that day. For the first time in his life, Peter found himself neglected. Norah bumped him along at record speed, wheeling the perambulator herself, to work off some of her annoyance. She turned the matter of Dr. Norman's coming lecture over and over in her mind, until it glowed red-hot from the force of friction.

It was just as they turned back through the lodge gates, that an idea came into her mind. She looked with sudden interest into the face of her second nursemaid, who had halted to post a letter in the pillar-box.

"Who's that to, Mary?" she asked, halting also.

"My young man. Him what's the postman," added the girl, in what should have been unnecessary explanation. Mary was a bit of a flirt.

"Oh! Would you like to see him tonight?" asked Norah softly. "Well, then, I want you to take the big key of the outer nursery door to the locksmith, to—to have the wards straightened. You needn't come back until nine o'clock. Go for a walk with your postman."

Mary marvelled at the extra extension, for the white goddess of the nursery was a bit of a martinet.

No sooner were they inside the house than Nursemaid the Second was packed off with the key, and Nursemaid the First ordered to lay instantly a lavish tea.

Norah waited with sparkling eyes until every eatable was safely on the nursery-table. Then she crossed to the outer door which was only closed at nights, and gave it a slam. The spring-lock snapped to, and they were prisoners.

She airily explained the incident to Nursemaid the First, who was outside, clamouring for admission.

"No, I can't open the door, for I haven't the key. I've given it to Mary. She won't be back till nine, and it's no good trying to find her. It doesn't matter at all. We've everything we want, and it's only for a few hours. Just explain matters to Dr. Norman and say I'm sorry to miss seeing him again."

Then she waltzed back to Peter and they had tea in style. Contrary to her expectations, Doctor Norman did not attempt to batter in the door. His soul—this is the most polite way of putting it—was too sorely wounded over the matter of the rice-pudding, for he liked good fare, although he insisted on its agreement with digestion. Too stiff-necked to complain or protest, lest he should seem to eat his words, he stuffed his paper of instructions in his pocket, and then prepared to stuff himself with cold rice-pudding. He told himself bitterly that it was the last time he would take the faintest interest in any woman, other than a case.

MEANTIME, in the nursery, Peter watched Norah with growing disapproval. She absolutely talked him off his head, and she kissed him past bearing. He began to entertain fears that she was growing flighty, in which case, he would have to pack her off, like the rest. Perhaps he had been too lenient with her, on the score of her good looks.

Presently he became aware that she was hammering away at him with a question, the repetition of which was growing a nuisance.

"Heart's Desire, where's Nurse's gold brooch?"

To put an end to the nuisance, he at last answered her languidly, "Down er wed lane."

"Down the red lane?" The answer was repeated in a shrill falsetto, quivering with excitement. "Peter, darling, tell me again, *where?*"

Cross at her density, he played down to her intelligence. Opening his mouth, he popped one finger inside, in pantomimic display.

Norah gave a piercing shriek. There was no mistaking his meaning. This was the consequence of her extravagant exhortation to "eat everything he could see." The logical infant had begun on her brooch.

She sat for a moment in frozen horror. When she rushed to the door, at first her numbed brain could not grasp the reason why the handle would not turn. She battered on the heavy oak panels and started to scream at the top of her voice, but common-sense urged her to desist before she was specially bruised or hoarse. Help would not come that way. Her staff would be far away in the kitchen wing. She had planned for isolation, and she got it with a vengeance. It was on her own head.

She turned to look anxiously at Peter who was picking a toy to bits on the rug. It struck her with a pang that he looked paler than usual. His mouth was surely pinched. As she looked, he gave the fretful whimper she had learned to associate with internal pain.

Her heart gave a sickening thud. *What* was she to do? How soon would he be seized with a convulsion of pain? Must she stand by, in her ignorance, and see him suffer, while by the irony of fate, she had just rejected, with scorn, a paper of instructions that told her how to meet every emergency.

As she thought of it, she hit her head like a distraught creature.

"You ignorant, petty fool!" she cried. "Why did you despise his help. He knew. He always knows!"

Then, with a sudden inspiration she dashed over to the tea-table, her face alight with relief. Of course, the baby must be induced to sickness— no difficult matter, for he had a positive talent for it.

Salt-and-water. Mustard-and-water. Norah's knowledge was narrowed down to these two mixtures. But although the lavish tea included every luxury from the cook's larder, mustard and salt were not included among the tit-bits.

In an agony at her failure she rushed back and began to work furiously at the wretched millionaire. She rubbed him till he howled, tickled the back of his throat, while he bit her finger, and finished up by nearly standing him on his head, all the time weeping bitterly and invoking some mysterious deity who went under the name of "Tummy."

Under the treatment, Peter turned blue and black, and then stiffened in her arms like a poker.

Unable to diagnose this result of temper, Norah shivered as if in an ague. Was this a rigour to herald death? At the thought, her sorrow and devotion for her charge was overwhelmed by a sharp spasm of fear. She had forgotten. This baby was not only the apple of her eye. He was a sacred Trust. In imagination she saw the accusing faces of that awful body of men— dry and legal, fat and solemn— Messrs. Lawyer, Trustee & Co. What would they say when they knew that by her carelessness she had killed her Charge? The very thought goaded her to temporary insanity.

The next minute, as a result, the indignant millionaire received an additional shock. For, after folding him in an embrace, strong enough to strangle the powers of Death at work in his puny frame, she shamelessly abandoned him, in a compromising and inelegant manner. Instead of using the door, like honest folk, she went out of the window.

Her breath came in uneven puffs, when her knees left the sill and she felt her feet swing into space. The ivy that covered the walls was centuries old, but

her weight was noble, and she felt her body creep with goose flesh whenever a tuft gave way in her hand.

IN THE room below— quite a respectable drop— Dr. Norman sat and sulked over the triple cause of a wasted chart, a milk pudding, and Norah. Presently the sound of scuffling came to his ears, and he looked up to see a pair of Oxford shoes dangling in space. The shoes were followed by about six inches of leg, and the Doctor looked shocked—needless to say not at the limbs, but at the small hole in one of the stockings.

"That's Norah!" he said tersely.

His diagnosis was correct. For the rest of Norah, in a swirl of white linen and dishevelled tresses swung down on to the ground. Almost in a flash; she had stormed his window, and explained the situation in breathless sentences.

The doctor appeared to grasp the position immediately He seemed to agree that no time was to be lost, for he did not stop to argue about adopting such slow processes as attempting to force the heavy old door, or rousing the household in search of ladders. Without a word, he followed Norah up the ivy.

Without a connected word, the couple wormed their way upwards.

Although fairly safe, the ascent was no filbert-cracking job, and the air was filled with their exclamations and groans, as they pressed upwards to the moribund millionaire.

When their feet were safely planted on the nursery floor, the doctor turned to Norah and handed her something that he had held tightly clasped to him, during their ascent. With a pang of concern, she wondered if the shock had proved too severe for his brain. For he stood and offered her— a rice pudding.

"The one you ordered for me," he said, fortunately, in sane tones. "Quite Providential, really! Now, fill him up with this, every cranny and corner. No emetics here! Your plan is to load him up with stodge."

Norah's eyes were beaming with gratitude as she took his offering towards the common weal.

"Oh, the comfort of having you!" she cried. "I believe, in future, I shall always *reverence* rice pudding!"

Very soon, however, the tears stood once more in her eyes, for not a morsel of the stuff could she get her charge to swallow. After the affair of the window, he had definitely done with her for ever. He was proof to entreaties, bribes and cajolery. When they tried drastic methods, he bottled up his throat with his tongue, after a patent method of his own, and started to choke.

Dr. Norman looked on with some impatience.

"You seem to have no influence over him," he said at length, in disapproving tones. "I see I must try."

His methods were unusual, but justified by their success. He flopped down on hands and knees and barked. The millionaire condescended to look in his direction. When once he grasped the fact that the doctor was a hungry dog who wanted to eat his pudding, he promptly started to put a spoke in his wheel, by eating the pudding himself.

As spoonful after spoonful disappeared, Norah felt a sudden rush of thanksgiving that thawed the ice round her heart. She saw nothing amusing in the spectacle of an immaculately-clad young medico, whose dignity was his god—putting up his hands to beg and whelping like a poodle. She asked herself how she could ever have despised this pearl of mankind.

WHEN PETER Ferdinand, gorged at last to repletion, fell asleep in the doctor's arms, he turned to her and spoke in the old way.

"We must leave the issues to Nature. By the way, do you still forget to darn your stockings?"

"I got that hole in the ivy coming down," answered Norah, meekly.

"I'm delighted. I felt sure of it. You have made so vast an improvement."

It was just like Dr. Norman to construct the whole of her moral character out of a trifling detail. He looked at her so kindly that she poured out her fears.

"There'll be an inquest, I suppose, if anything! And what will become of me? Manslaughter? Prison? Anyway, who would employ a person who had killed a future millionaire?"

"Come, come!" Dr. Norman still spoke professionally. "If the patient pulls through"— he ignored the alternative— "it strikes me as an excellent plan to take joint-charge of him. I think I could work it with the trustees. This is too lonely for you alone. Together though— I could supply the knowledge and you seem to have gained his affection. We'd have to be married, though."

Norah's voice broke, as she answered him.

"But he doesn't seem to care for me now. He turns from me, and—I did love him so!"

As usual, there was a masculine conspiracy to put her in the wrong. For Peter, waking at that instant, and finding his highly salaried attendant idle, instantly made work for her by holding out his arms.

As she caught him to her, the door opened and in walked Mary, the Nursemaid.

"There was nothing wrong with the key, Miss. And, please, the postman wants to know if this is yours. He found it in the pillar-box by the gate."

With a cry, Norah snatched the golden safety-pin. Peter Ferdinand had seized on her metaphor to her confusion. His "red lane" had been the red pillar-box, down whose open mouth he must have dropped the pin, as they halted at the gate.

For half a second, the all-knowing young doctor looked rather foolish. Then he laughed, till he cried. The baby, for his part, cried— I should like to say until he laughed, but laughing was not his line.

And Norah? In the revulsion of her feelings, she kissed them all round. First Peter, then Mary, and then....

But as the object of a story is to tell a tale, but not tales, this is a good place to leave off.

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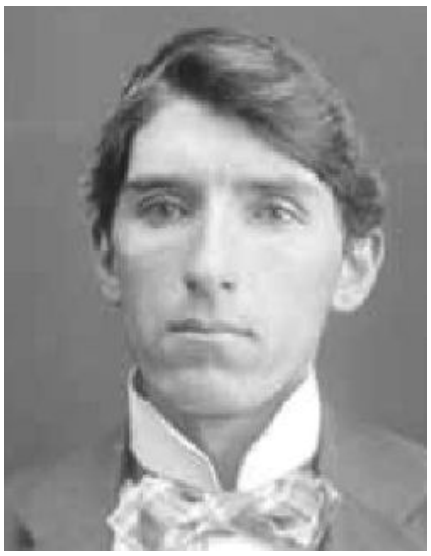
13: The Blue House Boat of Muskingum Island

James Francis Dwyer

1874-1952

The Popular Magazine, 7 Oct 1925



James Francis Dwyer

THE soft charm of a dying summer had fallen upon Manhattan. A bluish veil, the gift of a sun god, shrouded the Hudson and the Jersey shore. Skyscrapers took to themselves infinite charm through their backgrounds of coral pink and flaming amber.

Robert Henry Blane, looking out from the wide windows of his bachelor apartment at The Montespan, surveyed with a certain ecstatic joy the city spread beneath him.

A gentle tap at the door roused The Texan Wasp from his daydream. His ordered "Come in" brought the negro servant, Peter, whose face, from too close proximity to the stove at which he was preparing his master's dinner, hinted at an oil well in his interior.

"What is it, Peter?" asked Blane.

"A tallygrem, suh," answered Peter. "Ise tole the boy to jest wait an' see if there's anny answer."

The Wasp took the message, opened it and read it slowly.

The message ran:

If possible catch St. Louisan Express for Pittsburgh leaving Penn Station at six two. Lady and gentleman on train will speak to you. They are in great trouble and I have recommended you as one person I know who could help them out. Please make great effort. Regards. THIRTY-SEVEN.

Robert Henry Blane softly hummed a verse while Peter hurriedly prepared the valise.

Peter, valise in hand, reported. "All ready, suh. Ise tallyphoned for a keb."

IT so happened that Robert Henry Blane was the last person to board the train. As the smiling porter escorted him to his seat, Blane wondered at what point on the run would the two persons mentioned in the telegram of the great man hunter make themselves known to him. The sleuth had supplied no descriptions. He had simply said "lady and gentleman," and beyond this Blane knew nothing except that the pair were in great trouble.

Blane, not instructed to do the seeking, remained in his section. Voyagers strolled through the cars, showing that queer restlessness of travelers, and The Wasp examined them in a languid way as they passed. He had a belief that he would immediately recognize the persons who sought him, recognize them because their questing spirit would | come out and touch his receptive soul.

And one of the two came. As the express scurried by Rahway, a tall, slender woman with a patrician face, curiously and exquisitely shadowed by grief, slipped into the car like a timid spirit in doubt as to its whereabouts. Her large, brown eyes fell upon Robert Henry Blane and clung to his face for a long moment as if they found in the well-cut features of the Texan an anodyne for the pain that had brought the veil of sadness to them.

She passed, leaving The Wasp certain that she was one of the two who sought him. He thought of the man hunter's wire regarding trouble. Some great grief had brought to the wonderful face that strange spiritual quality that we see sometimes in the portraits of persecuted saints and martyrs.

Dinner was announced, and Blane went forward to the dining car. He looked for the woman as he passed along. He was quite certain now. He felt that her desire for his help came to him as the train roared along. He thought it curious.

The conductor of the dining car led the tall Texan to a seat into which he dropped easily. The chair immediately opposite was unoccupied, but its companion on the same side held an elderly man whose sun-tanned face was ornamented by a gray mustache.

Instinctively Blane glanced at the occupant of the chair beside him. It was the lady of the big, brown eyes.

The meal progressed with that strange jumpiness common to railway dining cars all over the world. The man and the woman exchanged remarks in quiet tones. They were ordinary remarks. The people commented on the

service, on the towns through which the train fled like a pursued demon. Blane's keen ears told him they were not American.

They finished their meal. The man ordered a cigar, then, leaning forward, he addressed the Texan.

"Pardon me," he murmured, his cultivated voice lowered so that it was barely audible, "may I ask if you are Mr. Robert Henry Blane?"

"That is my name, sir," replied The Wasp quietly.

The questioner gave a little sigh of relief as he took a card from a small sealskin case and handed it to Blane.

"We were afraid that you could not come," he said, his voice still low and rather tremulous. "We are delighted at finding you. I am Lord Ruthvannen, and this lady is my daughter, Lady Dorothy Carisbrooke."

The Wasp bowed to the owner of the big, brown eyes, and she, in turn, expressed the joy that she and her father experienced in finding him upon the train. Into the soft liquid tones there came a note of thankfulness that made the adventurer from Houston blush as he listened.

"But I was only too glad to come," he said gallantly. "I was bored at having nothing to do."

A sweet smile appeared for an instant on the beautiful face of the woman. It was there for an instant only, Grief pounced upon it and it vanished. Robert Henry Blane wondered what tremendous sorrow had fallen upon the two persons to whom he had been recommended by the great man hunter.

Between Philadelphia and Harrisburg, The Texan Wasp heard the narrative. A queer narrative. The low, tremulous tones of Lord Ruthvannen that were drowned out at moments by the roar of the flying express seemed to make it more unbelievable. - The husband of Lady Carisbrooke had been killed leading a charge of Gordon Highlanders in the last days of the war. Of the marriage there was one child, a girl, sixteen years of age at the time of her father's death. And it was around this girl that the story centered.

In the years that had elapsed since the death of the father extraordinary attempts had been made to kidnap the daughter. Amazing and deep-laid plans by persons whose motive was a mystery. The terrified mother and the alarmed grandfather had moved from place to place in an effort to dishearten the gang who were endeavoring to abduct the girl, but the unseen pursuers followed.

Ruthvannen and his daughter fled England and crossed to the Continent. The stealthy kidnapers were close on their trail. An attempt to seize the girl in the Avenue de Trianon at Versailles was foiled by a miracle. Cold fear at their hearts, the mother and grandfather fled to Florence and registered under assumed names. On the second day the girl was attacked on the Lungarno by

masked men who were beaten off with the aid of three American tourists who came in response to the mother's cries.

The mysterious attempts continued. The shadow followed to Venice and Milan. In despair the mother and grandfather rushed to Genoa and took ship for the United States. Ruthvannen's wife had been a beautiful Kentuckian who took the English nobleman's heart by storm during her first season in London, and Lady Dorothy Carisbrooke, with all the admiration of America instilled in her by her dead mother, thought that in the country of freedom she would find protection against the devils who followed relentlessly.

"We occupied an apartment in Central Park West," came the whispering voice of the elderly lord. "We thought no one knew of our arrival. We were beginning to breathe freely for the first time in months, then—then He paused and looked with moist eyes at Blane.

It was Lady Dorothy Carisbrooke who took up the narrative.

"Five days ago my daughter, Evelyn, was kidnaped," she said gently. "We were in Central Park when an automobile swooped down upon us. I was knocked down by the machine, and before I could get to my feet Evelyn was dragged inside the car. It disappeared around a turn in the driveway and we haven't seen her since."

Robert Henry Blane was looking at Lady Dorothy. The large brown eyes were swimming in tears. The swift recital of the happening was agony to her.

"And now you have been acquainted with the motive?" asked the Texan.

Ruthvannen nodded.

"Yes," he murmured. "We have been told the motive."

He paused for an instant, then went on. "I think I had better show you the letters we have received, then you will know everything."

From his pocketbook he took a small bundle of letters, one of which, written on paper of a bluish tint, he handed to Blane.

The Texan Wasp opened it and read it slowly. The handwriting» was that of an uneducated person, and the epistle bristled with mistakes in grammar and spelling. It ran:

The rite honnereble the earl of ruthvannen. You ole hound. you arrystocratick blighter you doant remember me i bet. Ime Bill Staggers an you handed me a little bit of orlrite at derby assizes. youole mucker `you give me a stretch o ten years fur jest choking a fat chump to get his poke. my wife jane Staggers an her littel girl died when i was in the pen an arfter i came out i went away to australia an made a fortune on the goldfields at coolgardie then i sed to meself ile go back an give that ole blighter a shake up and ime doin it not arf am i. Ive got yer grandorter an i doant no yet what ime goin to do with her. maybe Ile marry her to a nice young chap who belongs to my gang. cheerio. ile let you no later.

Robert Henry Blane lifted his head and looked at the old nobleman. "Do you remember this fellow?" he asked.

"Perfectly," answered Ruthvannen. "I sat at Derby assizes some sixteen years ago and I recall a case in which I sentenced a red-headed man to ten years' imprisonment for garroting. I have forgotten the name, but I suppose it is Staggers. I'm sure it is. Here is the second letter."

The Wasp took the second communication from Mr. William Staggers, one time of Derby, England, and later of Coolgardie, Western Australia. It read:

Call off the bulls or miss evlin wil be tootin with the angils. she woant marry that young chap i tole you of so i doant no wot to do with her jest yet. i mite kill her if you doant mussil the cops. she wants to let you no she issent ded so ime lettin her rite you a line you ole swine you dident worrey that much over jane staggers an my littel girl. but call off the bulls or this mite be the larst letter she is goin to write.

"Did you call off the police?" asked Blane.

Lord Ruthvannen, nodded. "I told them that my granddaughter had eloped," he murmured. "I was afraid, horribly afraid. I managed to keep it out of the papers when the kidnaping took place."

The nobleman handed over a scrap of white paper, evidently torn from a notebook. Both sides were covered with writing, the penmanship bold and of that peculiar angular style adopted by well-educated Englishwomen. Blane read with interest the following:

"And the inclosure?" asked The Wasp.

Dearest Mother and Grandfather: Do not use the police. It is dangerous to me. I am well treated. Oh, honey, I often rise in violent exasperation resenting greatly grandfather's cruelty to Mr. Staggers! Best love unto every one.

Evelyn Primrose Carisbrooke.

Lord Ruthvannen spoke while The Wasp was stiil reading the message.

"The person who was good enough to wire you to help us solved the message contained in Evelyn's note," he said. "You will possibly see the secret if I tell you that Evelyn never calls her mother 'honey' and that she has no claim to the name Primrose."

The gray eyes of the Texan were fixed on the sheet and each word was subjected to a fierce scrutiny. At the beginning of the fourth sentence he discovered the clew. The first letters of the words that followed made "Ohio River." The same principle applied to the fifth sentence gave the word "blue."

Blane lifted his head and looked at Lady Dorothy Carisbrooke.

"And what does Primrose convey ?" he asked.

"It was the name of Evelyn's house boat at Staines," answered the mother.

A little smile slipped over the handsome features of the adventurous Texan. He conceived a sudden liking for the kidnaped girl who, under conditions that must have seemed terrible to her, had possessed the sang-froid to write a message that gave her terrified relatives a clew to her whereabouts.

Blane looked at his watch. It was ten twenty-five. The express was plowing by Marysville.

"I will wish you good night," he said, bowing before the old nobleman and his daughter. "It is always nice to think of to-morrow when to-day has been full of pain."

Lady Dorothy Carisbrooke rose quickly and gave her hand to the Texan.

"I— I have confidence in you," she murmured. "Hope came into my heart when I saw you in the carriage before dinner. Oh, I knew it was you! You look— you look as if you could do things! You will help, will you not?"

Robert Henry Blane stooped and lightly kissed the fingers that he held.

"I will do everything I can," he said quietly, "I am at your service till we find your daughter."

A BLUE house boat on the Ohio! A needle in a haystack! A grain of wheat on the dusty road to Mecca!

The Texan Wasp stood on the Sixth Street Bridge and watched the waters of the Allegheny hurrying to join those of the Monongahela at Wabash Point. There they lost their identity and became the splendid, broad and muscular Ohio that goes rolling and tumbling for nearly a thousand miles till it tips its Offering into the Mississippi at Cairo Town. A great stream!

A man standing beside The Wasp, whose eyes were turned lovingly upon the rolling stream, spoke in the friendly manner of one riverman to another.

"It's great, isn't it?" he gurgled. "Say, she's a stream! Cussed at times, but the best river in America. I know her! Run the *Powhatan* up and down her for years."

"And where is the *Powhatan* now?" asked Blane.

"Broke her back on a lock wall!" snapped the other. "I'm Captain Haggerty an' there isn't an island or a government light, crib dike, run, landing, or sand bar 'tween here and old Cairo that I don't know. I could feel my way down this river with my eyes shut. Some of these pilots have got to take a rabbit's foot in every one of their pockets or they'd pile their old sternwheeelers up, but not me! Give me a twenty-foot plank an' a pole an' I'd make the Mississippi quicker'n a steam packet."

The Wasp offered a cigar. "I love modesty," he said softly, then, as the captain looked at him suspiciously, he added: "You might be helpful to me. I

was thinking of drifting down the river in a house boat. Just an ordinary house boat with a small kicker to get her through the locks."

Captain Haggerty spat viciously.

"Don't!" he snarled. "That isn't a game for any one! I know 'em! There's chaps as live on leakin' pill boxes on the Ohio that'd kill a man to get his teeth stuffin'. I know 'em an' they know me. When I ran the Powhatan Y useter stand in close to 'em an' heave their pill boxes onto the corn patches with the old girl's wash. One ©' 'em shot at me once, the blamed river rat! Came out of his box an' unloosed a charge of buckshot at me. Only he was tossin' like a cork he'd 'a' got me."

"A friend of mine from New York took to the river," said Blane. "A tough baby. He had a house boat, a blue one."

"Oh, some of 'em may be all right," admitted Haggerty grudgingly. "There are fellows who keep out of the way of packets. A chap is a fool to think he owns the whole stream, isn't he?"

"Maybe," said The Wasp. "This friend of mine that had the blue house boat was contrary. You may have had a run in with him."

Captain Haggerty considered for.a moment, his red eyes filmed as he turned them inward and looked down the river of memory etched within his brain.

"The last time I was down I saw a blue house boat at the mouth of the Little Beaver."

"He might be my friend,' commented Blane. "He was never what you would call a quiet citizen."

There was an interval of silence, then the captain, after a furtive examination of the well-fitting suit worn by Robert Henry Blane, spoke.

"Don't go down the river in a house boat," he said. " 'Cause why? 'Cause all the skippers of packets an' towboats hate 'em. That's why. Some night you'll find your pill box tossed into a West Virginny tater ground, an' if they don't do that to you they'll make kindlin' of you against a lock wall. Now I know where there's a forty-foot motor boat with a new engine an' sleeping accommodation for six. She's at Price's yards at the foot of Federal. You can get her cheap."

The Wasp surprised Haggerty by his reply.

"Let's look at her," he said quielty. "A motor boat would be better, I believe."

In the hour that immediately followed, Captain Haggerty of the *Powhatan* formed the opinion that the dashing person he met on the Sixth Street Bridge was a whale for action. Blane bought the motor boat *Alequippa* after a swift but thorough survey; he engaged Haggerty as a pilot and agent with orders to get the boat ready with all possible speed; then he dashed back to the William

Penn to report progress to Lord Ruthvannen and his daughter. In the brief interview that had taken place between the nobleman and Blane after their arrival in Pittsburgh, Ruthvannen had handed over the conduct of the pursuit to the Texan.

"My daughter has implicit faith in you," he whispered. "She thinks that you will find Evelyn."

"I'll try," said Blane. "I'll try hard."

The Wasp sprang from a taxi at the door of the hotel as a well-built young man came sauntering up the avente: For an instant the young man stared at the adventurer from Houston, then he unloosed a wild yell of delight and sprang toward him.

"Glory be!" he cried, as he clutched the hand of The Wasp. '"Who'd have thought of meeting you? Don't you know me? James Dewey Casey, the 'Just-So Kid!"

Robert Henry Blane gripped the shoulder of the little fighter whom he had met in the long ago at Monte Carlo, Seville, and other places, and rocked him gently backward and forward. The meeting gave him exquisite pleasure.

"Why, Jimmy, this is great!" cried Blane. "I thought that you were doing the European vaudeville circuit with your fighting billy goat."

"Some blighter stole Rafferty in Berlin," growled Mr. Casey. "Stole him an' eat him! They're cannibals, they are! If I'd have caught the fellows that chewed up old Rafferty I'd have cut their livers out. When I lost him I got disheartened an' I came home to see my mother in Brooklyn. She has a boarding house in De Kalb Avenue."

"And what are you doing here?" asked The Wasp.

"I hoped to get a scrap next week, but it's off," said the Kid.

"Do you know anything about engines, Jimmy ?"

"Do I?" cried the pugilist. "Why, I drove machines during the war that were held together with pieces of string and court-plaster. I had an engine that was made up of parts of twenty-six other engines, an' it was x

"You're hired, James," interrupted 'The Wasp. "First engineer on the motor boat *Alequippa*. She's at the foot of Federal Street. Report on board while I get our passengers."

"I like boats," said the pugilist. "That's why my mother put Dewey between James and Casey. She thought I'd—"

"Beat it, Jimmy!" cried The Wasp. "This is a hurry job."

The *Alequippa* cast off from her float above the Sixth Street Bridge at exactly twelve o'clock, and two minutes later the first evidence that Mother Trouble rode with the five voyagers was made evident.

The motor boat passed under the bridge on the north side of the channel and Blane at the wheel received a greeting as she slipped through. A man, leaning out over the bridge rail, fired at the Texan, the bullet striking the cabin roof some twelve inches in front of him, and at the same moment a stone wrapped in paper narrowly nussed the head of Lord Ruthvannen, who was standing on the little deck.

The Wasp swung the boat around, his eyes upon the bridge. The half stagnant crowd had taken on tremendous activity. The sharpshooter had dashed toward the north side and the bridge loafers were streaming after him as if a monster vacuum was sucking them into Federal Street.

The *Alequippa* held her position against the current, all hands upon the deck. The commotion on the bridge died away. Men came running back to report.

A fellow climbed on the bridge rail, cupped his hands and shouted the news.

"He got away!" he yelled. "Got around the depot and escaped. Do'you know him?"

"Never saw him," answered The Wasp.

"Fellow with a big felt hat!" screamed the man on the bridge. "Well, he got clean away. Here's a cop coming." The policeman climbed up beside the man and demanded information. Who were they? Why did the man fire at the boat? Why didn't they return to the float and tell what they knew?

Robert Henry Blane glanced at Lord Ruthvannen. The nobleman made a gesture that signified his dislike to all publicity. The Wasp took the cue.

"We're scientists," shouted the Texan, as the cop leaned out and helped his ears by enormous palms. "We are taking a trip down the river to inquire into the family life and habits of mussels and other animals. Why the fellow shot at us is a mystery. And we are too busy to come back and chat with you. We're off. Good-by."

The *Alequippa* turned in her own length and headed downstream at a fifteen-knot gait, leaving an astonished policeman and an unsatisfied crowd upon the bridge. It was then that Lord Ruthvannen made a discovery. He picked up the stone that had grazed his head and examined the sheet of paper in which it was wrapped.

"There's writing on it!" he gasped. "Look!"

Blane turned the wheel over to Haggerty and took the wrinkled sheet of paper from the hand of the nobleman. The message was written in pencil and the creases made it somewhat difficult to read. Slowly The Wasp deciphered the following:

You'll get a bullet in your head, Bob Blane. You ain't better than anybody else. You were called some pretty warm names when the bulls were chasing you over there in Paris. Look out! The fight is on! Cut it out before we fit you for a wooden box.

Robert Henry Blane's jaws tightened, The old scar that temper made noticeable showed white against the tan. He pushed Haggerty away írom the wheel, swung the *Alequippa* to the right of Brunot Island and headed for the first dam on the river. Mr. Blane was annoyed. Mr. Bill Staggers and his gang had declared war and war it would be.

Vanport appeared, and The Wasp edged cautiously toward the right bank as he approached Raccoon Shoals. A blue house boat lay above the shoals.

A tall man with a bushy black beard fended off the Alequippa as she slipped alongside the house boat. His bright of drinking water to spare?" asked the reason for the visit.

"I wonder if you have a pint or so of drinking water to spare?" asked Blane. "Our barrel has leaked."

"You can get water at the dam," drawled the black-bearded one. "I've got to haul mine from the spring half a mile away."

"Is that so!" laughed the Texan. "Well, well!"

There was a moment of awkward silence, then from the inside of the house boat stepped a plump, fresh-faced woman carrying a tin vessel full of water which she handed to Lady Dorothy with a smiling bow.

"Bill is like that," she explained, as the Englishwoman took the offering with both hands. "He's so gruff, but he doesn't mean anything."

Friction was wiped away by the gesture. Even the gruff and unfriendly Bill smiled as his wife asked Lady Dorothy if she wished to inspect the floating home.

The invitation was accepted. Ruthvannen and his daughter climbed aboard the house boat aud were shown with much pride the inside arrangements. There were two bunks, tables and chairs, a cooking stove and plate racks and everything was scrupulously clean and in perfect order. Lady Dorothy felt a little confused and ashamed as she returned to the Alequippa. The house boat was the heme of two peaceable citizens and she conveyed this impression to Blane as she came aboard.

The Texan made an offhand remark about the color of the house boat as the Alequippa cast off. The house-boat owner grinned.

"I like blue," he shouted. "Lots of people like it. There are scores of boats painted blue."

Scores of boats painted blue! The *Alequippa* went on. There was no house boat at the mouth of the Little Beaver River. A farmer on the bank supplied this information,

"One's headin' for New Orleans, mister," shouted the farmer. "Lots of 'em are driftin' down now to dodge the cold weather."

He guessed there were other blue house boats. Not exactly round there, but downstream. He didn't know where. He hated the folk who lived in them.

Lock masters, lockmen, dredge hands, fishermen, farmers on the banks were questioned. The throats of Blane, the Just-So Kid and Haggerty were hoarse through continuous questioning. A blue house boat? Couldn't say whether it was small or large. Couldn't say anything about the occupants. There might be a young lady aboard, also a red-headed man. The brown eyes of Lady Dorothy were moist as she listened to the inquiries and the empty answers.

They found false clews by the score. A lockman at Dam 8, just above Wellsville, Ohio, was certain that there was a blue house boat tied up above Deep Gut Run— absolutely certain.

A water-logged scow on which a shack of flattened kerosene cans had been erected greeted the occupants of the *Alequippa* as they nosed into the West Virginia shore. A crazy river hermit in tattered rags and bent with age informed Blane that there was no other boat tied up there, and, by Jiminy, he wouldn't let any other boat tie up.

"There's only fishin' for one!" he screamed. "I don't want any one else here. Push on! I don't mean to starve to death!"

They came to Steubenville as the night fell and they tied up above the dam, a locking being refused.

A LITTLE after midnight the Just So Kid aroused Blane.

"Say, boss, we're adrift!" he cried. "Some one has cut us loose from the float!"

Jimmy was right. The startled Texan found that the Alequippa was out in the middle of the river, the current carrying her swiftly downstream.

"Quick!" he roared. "Start the engine! We'll be over the dam!"

The roar of the falling waters came plainly to the ears of the roused occupants of the motor boat. The dam was up, and the Alequippa was drifting swiftly toward the "bear trap" through which thundered the water of the throttled river. The three warning lights at the head of the lock wall and the two red lights at the foot shone in the thick darkness like the eyes of exulting demons.

The Just-So Kid started the engine. It faltered and died away as the speed of the drift increased. A startled scream came from Lady Dorothy as the moon, slipping for an instant from the enveloping clouds, showed the lip of the dam. The Wasp breathed a prayer and whispered encouragement to Jimmy.

The engine coughed spasmodically, then settled into a sweet roar of contentment, challenging the noise of the dam. The Wasp put the wheel over and inch by inch fought the clutching current.

He drove the *Alequippa* upstream, clinging to the West Virginia shore and steering by the chain of government lights that are strung along the dangerous passage from the head of Brown Island to Dam 10. He drove the motor boat into .the shore below Light 560 and anchored under the high bank.

Haggerty reported that the ropes tying the *Alequippa* to the float had been neatly severed and a consultation was held in the cabin.

"It is certain that some one is following us," said Blane. "No one knew that we would tie up at Steubenville to-night, so the chances are that one of Staggers' gang has followed us from Pittsburgh. The betting is that he is somewhere near here now. We'll have to keep watch."

The Wasp took the first trick, ordering the others back to their berths, and as he stood on the deck, his eyes upon the river and the distant lights of Steubenville, Lady Dorothy Carisbrooke slipped out of her cabin and came to his side.

"I wanted to tell you something," she whispered. "To-night before this happened I had a dream in which I Saw you crossing a great stretch of mud, and— and you were carrying Evelyn to me. I had a great desire to tell you. I know it will come true! I know!"

"I hope so," said Blane. "If we could pick up some clew, I would be relieved."

"We will!" gasped the mother. "I know we will!"

She slipped back to the cabin, leaving Robert Henry Blane alone with his thoughts. He was a little afraid of what might happen to Evelyn Carisbrooke now that Staggers knew there was an attempt being made to find the place where she was imprisoned.

Rain came with the dawn, a thin, misty rain that obscured the Ohio shore. A tow with four great coal barges came hooting downstream, whistling for a locking. It was a lumbersome big thing that looked rather frightening in the murky light.

Blane drove the *Alequippa* cautiously along at the heels of the tow. Terrifying things to delicately built motor boats are the lurching coal-laden barges of the Ohio. Those barges possess a devilish desire to horn small boats against the lock walls and grind them into splinters.

The *Alequippa* was locked through with the tow and Blane questioned the lockmen while being dropped to the lower level. Had a motor boat gone through since the moment he asked for a locking on the previous evening? The lockmen shook their heads.

The *Alequippa* followed the tow out of the lock, but, disregarding the channel, edged over toward Steubenville. The river mist had thickened. It was difficult to see the town.

Below the highway bridge that spans the river Blane crept in beside a junk boat that had used a half-sunken scow, as a snubbing post. The junkman, a hunchbacked fellow with no claims on beauty, took the line that Haggerty flung to him and the *Alequippa* rested.

"Dirty weather," said The Wasp.

The hunchback nodded. River life had made him uncommunicative.

"Going down?" asked Blane.

The junkman shook his head. It was easier than speech, and if he wasn't going down it would be plain to the inquisitive one that he was coming up.

A woman with a strange peaked face came out of the cabin of the junk boat and stared in a fascinated way at the trim motor boat. Her eyes were red, suggesting recent tears; a small child had a strangle hold on her neck.

Lady Dorothy Carisbrooke found an apple and created a diversion 'by attempting to make the youngster accept it. The mother smiled; the junkman remained moody and solemn.

When the child was at last induced to accept the gift, Robert Henry Blane fired another question at the silent hunchback.

"Wonder if you noticed a blue house boat anywhere along the river as you came up?" he asked. "A friend of ours is down here somewhere, but we don't know the exact spot."

The junkman regarded the river. He shifted his gaze to the Alequippa, examining in turn Lord Ruthvannen, Haggerty, the Just-So Kid, and Lady Dorothy, then his gaze came back to Blane.

"In my business I only see junk," he said solemnly. " 'S matter o' fact I never see the folk as sell it to me. A chap comes with a hunk o' brass or lead or iron an' I just see what he's got an' nothjn' more. Cops have asked me if I remember the fellers who 'as sold me certain things an' I've never obliged the cops once. That's why I'm a success. I hate cops."

Blane laughed.

"I'm not a cop," he said.

The junkman gave no intimation that he had heard. He had gone into the silence and refused to be baited into a controversy. He walked slowly to the small barge that acted as his repository for the things he collected.

The red-eyed woman regarded the five on the Alequippa. Her thin face showed a fleeting smile as Lady Dorothy tried to gain the attention of the youngster who was munching the apple. The Englishwoman asked the age of

the child; the mother told with pride. She said he was big for his age. Lady Dorothy agreed

A boy carrying a few scraps of iron climbed along the plank that bridged the scow and hailed the junk boat. The hunchback became immediately alert. He walked toward the prospective vender as Blane signaled Haggerty to cast off.

For the space of a few minutes the junkman was hidden by a makeshift structure that housed the cheap glass dishes and toys that he gave in exchange for the stuff brought to him, and the peak-faced woman seized the opportunity made by the temporary disappearance of her lord and master. She made a quick dash to the side of the Alequippa, her head thrust forward as she hissed a question addressed to Lady Dorothy.

"Did you— did you want to find a blue house boat?" she gasped "Yes, yes!" cried the Englishwoman. "Oh, yes! Please!"

"There was one at Rush Run as we came up day before yesterday," cried the woman, "Big blue house boat with a gas boat pullin' it."

Lady Dorothy Carisbrooke could not speak, but Blane flung a question at the woman.

"Did you notice the occupants?" he asked. "Did you see a red-headed man or a girl?"

The hunchback screamed for his wife and she fled in terror without replying. The *Alequippa* drifted away from the junk boat; the mist obscured the floating home of the collector of antiques. ,

Blane had seized the chart and was running his finger down the river, softly muttering the names of the towns, islands, and runs marked thereon. "Follansbee, Mingo Junction, Lazearville, Midway, Wellsburg," he murmured. "Brilliant, Beach Bottom- Run " He paused, his finger upon the chart, his eyes turned to Lady Dorothy Carisbrooke, who stood beside him.

"Rush Run!" she whispered. "Oh, oh!"

The Wasp shouted to the Just-So Kid and the Alequippa streaked downstream. Rush Run was barely ten miles away. She scooted by Wellsburg and whistled for a locking at Dam 11.

The lock master pointed to the rules that gave only hourly lockings to pleasure boats. The gray eyes of the Texan Wasp fell upon him like a flame.

"Pleasure boat!" cried Blane. "Pleasure boat? I want an immediate locking in the name of the law!"

THE gray river rolling by Rush Run was bare of boats of any kind. Five pairs of eyes searched in vain for a vestige of the blue house boat.

The Wasp questioned an old man fishing from a stringpiece.

"There was a blue house boat here, mister," croaked the ancient. "She lay for a day or two on the other bank. She slipped away in the night. Right by that tree clump she tied."

Blane swung the Alequippa around and headed across the river. He had a fixed belief that if the house boat was the one that held Evelyn Carisbrooke an unwilling passenger, the girl, so clever at sending the first message as to her whereabouts, would make a further attempt to help the rescuers that she knew would take up the trail. The girl would find a way.

They found the spot where the house boat had tied up. On the bank were blackened rocks that had served as a fireplace; scattered about were tins of all kinds—sardines, beans, corned beef, peaches.

Blane ordered the four to examine everything with infinite care. If the girl was on the house boat, there would surely be some evidence around the camp. If she was clever enough to give a clew to her whereabouts in the letter sent to her mother, there would surely be some indication of her presence at this spot.

Blane's guess was correct. The Just-So Kid found a scrap of paper skewered with a thorn to a blackberry bush, and the wet scrap carried a message from the kidnaped girl. A message pricked with a pin on a dirty leaf torn from a book entitled: "Knight's Smallboat Sailing on Sea and River."

With infinite care the message had been pricked on the leaf. Blane, holding it high, read it to the listening four. It ran:

"Am kidnaped. Blue house boat bound south. Three men, one woman. Tell Lord Ruthvannen, care of British Consul, State Street, New York. Reward. Am in great danger. EVELYN CARISBROOKE."

Lady Dorothy clutched the piece of paper on which the pathetic words had been laboriously pricked by the girl and pressed it to her lips. Her great brown eyes were wide with alarm as she stared at the deserted camp. She seemed stunned.

They helped her on board the boat and once more the Alequippa took up the pursuit. The misty rain became a downpour. It blotted out the banks. The river became a caldron of gray steam that made navigation dangerous. Day marks were indistinguishable.

The message from the girl increased the horror brought by the thought that they might pass the house boat. The river was unfriendly. Haggerty whispered of backwaters as they slipped by Yorkville, backwaters like that at the rear of Pike Island, where a mile stretch of water would give shelter from the keenest eyes using the straight channel,

"We've got to take a chance!" snapped Blane. "We can't explore every-hole and corner on the river. Hail everything that passes and question them."

A boat of the Eagle fleet was hailed off Burlington as she came slowly upstream. A tall-swearing captain, annoyed by low visibility and dictatorial lockmen, answered Haggerty's questions. He hadn't seen a blue house boat. He didn't wish to see a blue house boat and, furthermore, if he did see one he would run his packet over the blamed thing and tell no one what he had done. A congenial and friendly fellow was the captain.

Dam 12 was down, the river running wide, so there was no checking of boats that passed through. The Alequippa crept by Wheeling, standing close in to the left bank, Blane, Haggerty, and the Just-So Kid shouting questions at every one within hearing distance.

The blue house boat was ahead. A float owner at Wheeling Creek confirmed the news. Red-headed man and two others. A fat woman, but no girl. A gas boat pulling it. Passed through two days before.

From Clarington to Baresville Station no person that they hailed had seen the house boat, but at Baresville the numbing thought that they had overshot the mark was wiped away. The blue phantom was ahead of them. Lashed to its small motor boat it was scuttling madly down the river!

Two wet river rats, huddled beneath a miserable shelter, gave the information.

"Yes, mister, a blue house boat pulled by a small gas boat," they chorused when Blane questioned them.

"Did you speak with them?"

"Yes, mister, a red-headed guy chinned us about gas."

"Did you see a girl on the boat?"

"No, mister. A fat woman was with 'em, but no girl. Leastwise we didn't see none."

Lady Dorothy Carisbrooke made a gesture to Blane as he threw over the wheel. She leaned out and tossed a fifty-dollar bill to the wet outcasts whose information had lifted a great fear from the heart of the five.

Dusk found the *Alequippa* below Petticoat Ripple. Blane, supported by Haggerty, advised a stop. The river was tricky; the channel narrow and dangerous by Bat and Middle Island. Besides, there was no possibility of seeing the house boat if she sought shelter and there were few persons abroad who could give information. The Wasp brought the *Alequippa* into the West Virginia shore and tied up.

The Just-So Kid, who had discovered that Lady Dorothy could not drink black coffee, gallantly offered to walk to a farmhouse about half a mile away in an effort to procure milk, and he started while the others made camp.

The farmer's wife, suspicious of river folk as all the dwellers along the banks of the Ohio are, was wheedled into selling a pint of the precious fluid to Mr. Casey and the Kid started back to the *Alequippa*.

He had reached a point not more than a hundred yards from the boat when he halted abruptly and dropped to his knees. In the dim light he made out the figure of a man who was scouting cautiously along the ridge that commanded a. view of the camp, and the actions of the fellow told the little pugilist that he was not friendly to the campers. He had the air of a Pawnee on a scalp hunt.

The Just-So Kid cached his milk and proceeded to stalk the © stalker. Thoughts of the happenings at Steubenville came into his mind. Some one was evidently following the Alequippa down the river in a speed-boat with the intention of delaying or crippling the pursuit.

To the mind of the pugilist the fellow on the ridge contemplated anattack. An attack on whom? The Just-So Kid refused to think that any person on the *Alequippa* outside of Robert Henry Blane was worthy of such careful stalking. The Texan Wasp was the hero of James Dewey Casey. The tall adventurer from Houston had saved the Kid from starvation at Marseilles in the long ago and had earned his admiration in many ways since that day.

The stalker had spread himself out on the top of the rise in the attitude of a sharpshooter. The poor light made it impossible for the Just-So Kid to see whether the fellow carried a weapon, but he had a firm conviction that he did. The rear view— legs far apart and body resting on the elbows— led Mr. Casey to think that the barrel of a rifle pointed in the direction of the *Alequippa*.

The Kid crept closer. The unknown's interest in the camp made him deaf to the slight noises that Jimmy made as he crept forward. The belief that the fellow was awaiting a favorable moment to pot some one grew in the mind of Casey. And that some one would surely be Blane.

For an instant as the Just-So Kid wriggled forward he had a view of the *Alequippa* and the camp. Blane and Haggerty had made a fire and the figure of the Texan was plainly outlined against the blaze.

James Dewey Casey was close to the unknown. Close enough to see the barrel of a rifle as the fellow's head snuggled down upon the stock. The Just-So Kid lifted himself and sprang.

Jimmy landed on the sharpshooter's back an instant before the rifle exploded. He landed with a jolt that knocked the breath out of his antagonist. Mr. Dewey's temper was at boiling point.

The man with the gun was no baby. With a grunt of rage he wriggled free and swopped punches with the supple person who had attacked him. The two rose to their feet, slammed each other for a few minutes, then clinched and

rolled down the slope. The sharpshooter was a heavyweight and a roughand-tumble fighter of no mean caliber.

The Just-So Kid had no opportunity to use the uncanny ability of evading punishment that had made him champion of the A. E. F. The other was more of a wrestler than a fighter. He got a strangle hold on the pugilist as they tumbled into a muddy hole at the foot of the ridge, and it was only a question of time regarding the outcome.

Shouts from the camp saved the life of the Just-So Kid. Blane and Haggerty came charging up the slope and the sharpshooter gathered himself up and took to his heels. He plunged down the shrub-covered bank to the river as Blane came over the ridge, and the muffled explosions of an engine shattered the silence.

The Wasp, plunging through the bushes, took a shot at the small speed boat that swung from the sheltering bank out across the darkening river. The shot was returned; a jeering laugh floated back from the water as the boat was swallowed up in the gloom.

The Just-So Kid, revived by Haggerty, told of the happening and Blane listened quietly.

"I guess you saved my life, Jimmy," he said gently. "'The.bullet from that fellow's rifle lopped off a branch directly above my head. By hopping on his back at the moment he pulled, you spoiled his aim. I thank you."

"Thank me nothing!" snapped Mr. Casey. "If I paid you for everything I owe you I'd be in hock till Judgment Day. Wait till I get a bottle of milk I cached up here."

Unfortunately the fleeing sharpshooter had placed a big boot on the bottle of milk that the champion of the A. E. F. had hidden, and a tiny stream of milk trickled down the hillside.

"Never mind," said Blane, as the Kid poured maledictions on his late antagonist. "I don't suppose Lady Dorothy has any appetite now. Come down to camp."

They kept guard through the night. Only the old nobleman and his daughter slept. Blane, Haggerty, and the JustSo Kid watched the river for an attack.

Robert Henry Blane was doubtful as to the success of the expedition. Staggers' desire for vengeance was rather terrifying. The fellow had nursed his longing for revenge till his soul had become poisoned, and at bay he would think nothing of murder. But to come up with him and fight him hand to hand was the only method available. Ruthvannen's horror of police intervention could not be combated. The Wasp had a belief that the situation had partly deranged the old fellow.

Before dawn, the *Alequippa* nosed out into the gray mist that covered the river.

A riverman at Stewart's Landing had seen the blue house boat. A light tender at Brother's Light confirmed the statement. The *Alequippa* was gaining. The light tender thought that something had happened to the engine of the boat dragging the blue phantom, which had caused them to swing into French Run and make repairs.

"When did they go on?" cried Blane.

"Yesterday afternoon," answered the man. "Couldn't have been more than four o'clock at most."

Four o'clock! The surprised information giver stood and looked after the *Alequippa* as she tore downstream. He gurgled with astonishment as he noted her speed. Over a bad stretch of water the motor boat was speeding like a destroyer.

At Dam 17, one hundred and sixtyseven miles from Pittsburgh, there was more news. The pursuers were hot on the heels of Mr. William Staggers, one time of Derby, England. The five on the motor boat scanned the shores with unwinking eyes. The quarry would be seeking a hiding place.

They came to Marietta, where the Muskingum River flows into the Ohio. Blane considered the possibility of the house boat, finding the pursuers hot on her heels, swinging off into the tributary and making upstream toward McConnelsville. He lost precious minutes in questioning the lockmen on the smaller stream. No blue house boat had gone up the Muskingum.

"There was," said the wizened old man who worked the lock gates, "a blue house boat below Reppart's Bar this mornin', Saw her meself."

The *Alequippa* was speeding downstream before he had finished speaking.

Reppart's Bar lies at the foot of Muskingum Island. It chokes the channel, making it necessary for boats to hug the Ohio shore closely. Below the bar the river runs wide, throwing a backwater up behind the big island which is over two miles in length.

The Alequippa nosed into a landing below the bar, where a barefooted youth stood expectantly. He grinned as Blane hailed him. He was a fount of knowledge. Yes, yes, a blue house boat had tied up there for the night. Yes, a red-headed man. And a girl. Some looker too.

He hopped aboard the motor boat, took a sheet of folded paper from his pocket and approached Lord Ruthvannen.

"I guess this is for you," he said. "I was told to wait an' give it to you. The red-headed chap give me a dollar for doin' it."

The old nobleman dropped the sheet in his excitement. The Wasp picked it up and placed it in the trembling hands of the Englishman. Ruthvannen made a stammered protest.

"You read it!" he gasped. "I— I am afraid."

Robert Henry Blane opened the sheet and read the message that was scrawled thereon. The handwriting was identical with the writing in the letters from Staggers which The Wasp had read on the way to Pittsburgh. The note ran:

If you foller me anny further ile do in miss evlin so jest cut back agin as smart as you like. we issent goin to be cort. miss evlin knows wot we is goin to do to her if you catches up an it dussen make her grin a bit. ile let her rite a word on this to show yer wether she thinks it helthy.

Beneath the ungrammatical scrawl came the message from the girl, reading:

Dear MOTHER AND GRANDFATHER: Mr. Staggers is sincere. All your carefulness only menaces. EVELYN.

Blane, as he read the words written by the kidnaped girl, felt a thrill of admiration for her courage and intelligence. The letter "i" in "is" was the beginning of a secret message formed by the first letters of the words that followed. It read: "I say come."

The Wasp drew the attention of Lord Ruthvannen to the brave contradiction, but the old nobleman was in a state of collapse.

"We— we must go back!" he gasped. "We must! We must! He—he will kill Evelyn! He is a desperate man!"

"But Miss Evelyn wishes us to go on!" protested Blane.

"She is foolish!" cried Ruthvannen. "Turn back! She— she will be killed! [E

Words failed him and he sat gasping for breath, his thin hands clawing at his collar. Lady Dorothy Carisbrooke glanced at the Texan. The big brown eyes of the mother seemed to plead for help and advice.

The Wasp looked at the barefooted youth who had brought the note from Staggers, and who had now returned to the landing where he watched with a certain degree of interest the commotion brought by the message. The youth caught the eye of the tall adventurer and winked slowly. It was a wink that suggested information for sale and the Texan sprang from the motor boat to the landing.

"Do you know anything?" he asked abruptly. "Hurry up. Tell me and you'll get paid."

The youth grinned.

"How much?" he inquired.

"Whatever you want," snapped Blane. "Out with it!"

"Will a dollar an' a half bust you?"

The Wasp quickly slipped a ten-dollar bill into the hand of the youth.

"What is it?" he demanded.

"The red-headed chap tried to fool me that he was goin' down the river," grinned the youth. "He made for the dam, but he didn't go through it. He just turned after he got by Brisco an' came up the river again. He's in behind the island, but don't tell him I said so. He's a bad un."

Blane sprang back to the *Alequippa*. The old nobleman had recovered his speech and was now more than ever intent upon having his own way. A great and appalling dread of Staggers was upon him, Imagination pictured Evelyn Carisbrooke a victim of the murderous devil who had her in his power.

"Turn the boat around!" he shrieked. "No, no! I will not go into the cabin! I will sit here and see that my orders are carried out !"

Blane conveyed the order to Haggerty. The *Alequippa* backed out from the landing and started upstream toward Marietta. Lady Dorothy Carisbrooke's sobs were the only protest against the orders of her father.

Blane glanced at the chart. A stone dike blocked the left channel at the top of Muskingum Island, making it impossible to enter the backwater from that direction. And each revolution of the screw was taking him farther from the girl who in the face of death had been collected enough to write a message bidding her friends to take no notice of the madman's threat.

Blane walked astern as the *Alequippa* headed up by the island. He signaled the Just-So Kid, who came up.

"Jimmy," said the Texan, "I'm going to drop over and swim to the island. If any one asks you where I am, say I am lying down. Tell Haggerty if he gets a chance to hire another boat at Marietta and look me up in a couple of hours, Not before."

"Can't I go with you?" asked the little fighter.

"No, you cannot," growled The Wasp. "Go away now or that old idiot of a lord will think we are playing tricks on him. I never took much stock in the intelligence of folk that wear titles. I would advise you, Jimmy, never to take one."

"Me?" cried the Just-So Kid. "Why I'm a Demmycrat!"

"Beat it!" grinned Blane, as he kicked off his shoes. "Remember what I said. Tell Haggerty to come back in two hours."

The Kid turned and glanced back. Robert Henry Blane, in trousers and undershirt only, had dived into the yellow waters of the Ohio.

THE WASP landed on the upper end of the island, below the stone dike that connected it with the West Virginian shore. Through half-submerged bushes and stretches of sticky mud he crossed the isle to the backwater and then worked his way south toward the open river.

It was a difficult and unpleasant promenade. At times The Wasp sank to his waist in the tenacious mud; at times he swam across brier-choked inlets covered with green scum. Before his eyes as he pushed hurriedly forward - were the threé words which Evelyn Carisbrooke had cleverly built into her message.

"I say come!"

He repeated them to himself. They became a slogan. There was something extraordinarily courageous and self-reliant about the statement. Blane had a great desire to see the girl who could send such a command in the face of death. He thought old Ruthvannen a fool.

The stillness that was upon the island was shattered by the report of a revolver. There came another and another. Blane, surprised by the sounds, splashed madly through the mud. Something was happening in the backwater. A great fear clutched him. Had the crazy Staggers carried out his threat ?

The Wasp thrust his way through a barrier of bushes and came in view of the navigable section of the backwater. Immediately opposite the point at which he stood, her blunt snout driven into the bank, was the blue house boat and the little motor boat that had dragged her down the river. The crouching Texan stared at them. They seemed deserted.

Blane slipped into the water and swam across the backwater to a point above the house boat, where his approach would not be noticed. He landed and crept along the bank toward the blue craft. The silence that was upon the place was a little terrifying. It suggested a sudden elimination of life. It brought a queer quality of horror, of nausea.

On hands and knees the Texan crawled to the forward deck of the house boat. He dragged himself up and peered within the big cabin.

The place was in wild disorder. It looked as if a tornado had swept through the boat, upsetting everything. The floor was strewn with broken crockery, cooking utensils and battered chairs.

Revolver in hand Blane rushed through the cabin to the smaller compartment at the rear. The matchboard division had been partly carried away by something bulky that had collided with it, and this evidence suggested to The Wasp that the combatants, in the final round of the combat, had crashed through the separating wall and tumbled into the smaller cabin.

His surmise was correct. Upon the floor, locked in a death embrace, were two men, their unshorn faces pressed close to each other, their legs intertwined. Upon the breast of one, black and vicious looking, lay a snub-nosed automatic that resembled a Gaboon viper attempting to warm itself on the body of a victim. It had dropped from the lifeless fingers of its owner.

One glance told Blane that neither of the men resembled the description he had of Staggers. William of the gangrened soul was not there. Neither was the girl, Evelyn Carisbrooke, or the fat woman that had been reported on the boat.

After a quick glance at the stern deck of the house boat and the empty cockpit of the speed boat, the Texan dashed back to the nose of the blue craft. He sprang to the bank. Tracks showed in the mud, tracks that led southward in the direction of Briscoe.

Running with body bent double, Blane followed the trail. The heavy prints of a man's shoes showed beside those of a woman's that left nearly as deep an impress in the mud, while beside the two were hardly discernible marks that told of the passing of some light-footed creature shod exquisitely.

The trail swept up the bank. It was lost in the grass. Like a questing hound the Texan ran up and down seeking it. A scrap of paper caught his eye. He pounced upon it. It was part of a leaf from Knight's book on "Small-boat Sailing," the book from which Evelyn Carisbrooke had torn the page on which she had pricked the message that had been found at Rush Run.

Twenty feet farther on Blane found another scrap. He understood! The girl had not lost her head in the dreadful circumstances. Possibly foreseeing a flight from the house boat, she had torn up leaves of the book and thrust them into her pocket. These she was dropping at intervals to guide her ressuers.

The trail was difficult. The trio had forced their way through thickets, holding close to the bank of the river; Staggers evidently afraid to make a break across the road and the electric line connecting Marietta and Parkersburg.

Blane burst through a clump of bushes into a bare bluff immediately above the river. A growl like that which might come from the throat of a wounded beast halted him. Standing on the extreme edge of the bluff, a straight drop of some twenty feet between him and the yellow waters, was Staggers, holding with his right arm a tall girl whose brown eyes, large like those of her mother, were fixed upon The Texan Wasp.

Staggers spoke in a thick voice.

"Not another step!" he growled. "Another inch an' we go over together !"

Blane, gun in hand, stared at the two. The big, red-headed man clutched the slim girl so that her feet were off the ground. Her weight seemed nothing to him. He swayed backward and forward within a few inches of the abyss.

Mr. Staggers was not a pretty sight. A wound on his forehead was bleeding.

The eyes of the Texan examined the face of the girl. He could see no trace of fear. She waited patiently, seemingly prepared to accept anything that might come to her.

There was an interval of silence, broken only by the sobbing of some one who was crashing through the bushes in the direction of the road. The fat woman was escaping.

Blane, gray eyes upon the wound on the forehead of Staggers, spoke.

"It will do you no good to jump into the river," he said quietly. "It will not harm Miss Carisbrooke."

A murderous grin appeared upon the face of the man. His right arm brought the supple form against his body with a jolt that startled the girl.

"Won't it?" he asked. "If she can get clear of me before I choke the life out of her, she's a good un. Bill Staggers is goin' to get even with the ole blighter that gave him a ten stretch in the jug."

Blane sighed softly. Ostentatiously he started to put away his revolver. He thrust it into the leather belt around his waist, then, apparently dissatisfied with its position, he pulled it out again, the red eyes of the madman watching him intently.

The Texan seemed to consider the matter of the revolver, glancing at it as it lay in the palm of his right hand, then, as if he had suddenly made up his mind as to where it should go, he swept it toward the back pocket of his trousers.

The movement was followed by an explosion. A look of intense agony appeared on the face of Blane, for an instant he stood upright, horror showing in the gray eyes, his mouth open, then he crumpled and fell forward, face downward. The girl screamed.

Bill Staggers loosened his clutch on the girl so that her feet touched the ground. He took a step forward, another and another. His red eyes were upon the gun that had exploded as Blane was thrusting it into his pocket. A grin of delight showed on his face as he stooped.

Something that had the clutching power of a thousand tentacles shot out and gripped the ankle of William Staggers. He was jerked from his feet, and, as he fell, one hundred and seventy pounds of Texan manhood rolled on top of him. A fist ripped upward to Bill's chin and the affair was over.

THE sobbing Miss Carisbrooke, sitting on the grass, watched Robert Henry Blane tie up the madman. He did it neatly with the aid of Mr. Staggers' belt, then he seated himself on William and looked out across the river. Round the foot of Muskingum Island came the *Alequippa*.

The girl spoke after Blane had pointed to the boat.

"You— you Americans are so practical," she murmured.

"There's a little fellow on the boat that you'll like," he said. "I had a difference of opinion with your grandfather and I told this chap never to take a title and he said he couldn't, because he was a Demmycrat."

Evelyn Carisbrooke smiled. "Some of the titled people are silly old beans," she said softly. "I— I think I'd like to stay all my life in America."

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14: Don't Give Your Right Name

Norbert Davis

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Norbert Davis

One: An Autograph Addict

GUITERREZ was leaning against the wall beside the front door of his restaurant with his tall chef's hat pushed down over one eye and his hands folded under the bib of his apron. He looked disgusted. There was nothing unusual about that. He always did. He had his reasons, and one of them was getting out of a taxi in front of the restaurant now.

"Hello, you crook," said Guiterrez. "How are you, you chiseler? Have you burned down any orphan asylums or robbed any starving widows today?"

"Not yet," said Max Latin. "But the night is young."

He was a tall man, thin and high-shouldered, and he had the assured, sleek self-confidence of a champion race-horse. His eyes were as cold and smooth as green glass, tipped a little at the corners.

Guiterrez was counting on his fingers. "It seems incredible to me, but you ain't been pinched for three weeks. How does that happen? Did you catch the mayor sleeping with somebody else's wife?"

"No," said Latin. "But I have hopes. What's on the menu tonight?"

"Tonight," Guiterrez answered, "Guiterrez is featuring steamed ragout à la supréme à la Guiterrez."

"Is it good?"

Guiterrez snorted. "Good! It's marvelous! I cooked it, didn't I?" He opened the restaurant door and yelled loudly: "Dick! Here's that thief of a Latin! Be sure you mark the level of the brandy bottle before you give it to him— and with an indelible pencil!"

Latin went on inside, and Guiterrez poked a cigaret into the corner of his mouth and leaned against the wall again. The red neon tubing that bordered the doorway gave his face a satanically dissipated cast.

Another taxi pulled up at the curb, and two men and a woman got out of it. The men were very young and broad-shouldered and husky. They were hatless, and they had crew haircuts. One was blond and the other was brunet. They wore dress overcoats with the collars turned up and white scarfs. They were unmistakably college boys weekending in the city.

"Are you sure this is the place you want to go?" the blond one asked doubtfully.

"It looks dirty," the brunet observed.

"It don't only look dirty," Guiterrez told him. "It is. You won't like it."

The two men stared at him and then decided to ignore him.

The woman said: "I'm certain this is the place. It has an international reputation. The food is divine." She must have been younger, in years, than even her escorts were. Only in years, though. She had a lusciously curved young body very much on display in a strip-tease black evening gown with a cut-out middle section. She wore a silver fox cape and the diamond bracelet on her left wrist was a good four inches wide. Her hair was dead black, and she wore it in a long sleek bob. Her brown eyes were sultry and languorous, and her mouth was a red, moist invitation.

"This is Guiterrez's restaurant, isn't it?" she asked Guiterrez.

"Yup," said Guiterrez. "I run the dump." He leered at her knowingly. "And how are you getting along with your work, baby?"

The two men looked at each other and then started ominously for Guiterrez.

Guiterrez pushed the door open behind him and called: "Hey, Dick!"

A wizened little waiter wearing a black, grease-stained coat and an apron so big that he had wrapped it around himself three times and still had plenty left over appeared instantly. Without saying a word, he took a butcher knife with a blade over a foot long from under the apron and handed it to Guiterrez.

The two college men stopped short, eyeing the long shimmering blade uneasily. Guiterrez commenced to clean his fingernails with it. Dick, the waiter, watched with a sort of idle interest.

The girl laughed throatily. "Bruce! Bill! Behave yourselves! He's just ribbing you. Aren't you, Mr. Guiterrez?"

"Sure," Guiterrez answered. "I'm one of these here humorists. I'm funny as hell all day long."

The two college men decided they saw the joke. They laughed in a rather pained way.

The girl said: "I've been wanting to try some of your wonderful food for a long time, Mr. Guiterrez. Everybody in town is talking about it."

"Yeah," said Guiterrez. "You got any room in the joint for these people, Dick?"

"I got one table left," Dick said. "But I was savin' it for a big spender. These birds look like cheapskates to me."

Guiterrez nodded. "Yeah. They probably are. But just think what you can watch while you're servin' them." He pointed the butcher knife at the girl.

"You got something there," Dick agreed, popping his eyes admiringly. "Come on, gorgeous. I'll give you and your two poodles my personal attention."

The girl swept her magnificently inviting body through the door with the two college men trailing uncertainly behind her.

Guiterrez spat his cigaret butt into the gutter and sighed drearily. Running feet pattered along the walk, and a youth as skinny and tall as a beanpole staggered up and leaned against the wall beside Guiterrez, panting in exhausted gasps.

"Gobble-glip-glip," he said unintelligibly, pointing toward the door of the restaurant. "Glip?"

"I think it'll rain myself," Guiterrez answered.

The skinny youth fought for breath. "Did— did they go— in there?"

"Which they?" Guiterrez asked.

"Lily Trace. She had— two guys— with her."

"Who?" said Guiterrez.

The skinny youth got his breath back with a desperate gasp. "Lily Trace! The most glamorous girl in the world! Her pictures are in all the papers and magazines all the time!"

"She did look a little familiar, at that," Guiterrez observed. "Yeah, she just went in to eat. Is she a friend of yours?"

"Friend!" the skinny youth echoed, aghast. "No! All her friends are millionaires and people like that! She has a penthouse apartment that rents for a thousand dollars a month and twenty-four fur coats and a hundred thousand dollars worth of diamonds!"'

"How'd she get all that?" Guiterrez asked, interested. "Buy it?"

"No!" said the skinny youth scornfully. "Her admirers present her with every luxury she desires."

"They do, do they?" said Guiterrez. "For free?"

"Of course! All she has to do is smile at them, and they grant her slightest wish."

"Is that a fact?" Guiterrez asked. "Well, you live and learn, I always say. What do you want with her?"

The skinny youth looked at him doubtfully, and then backed away a little, getting ready to run. "I want her autograph, is all."

"So," said Guiterrez. "You're one of them cookies, are you?"

He didn't sound very hostile, and the skinny youth relaxed. He was wearing a ragged sports coat and baggy sport slacks and white shoes that were unbelievably soiled. His small, high-crowned hat had the brim tipped up jauntily in front. His face was pale and bony, spotted with enormous freckles, and he had a desperately serious do-or-die air.

"Sure," he said. "I'm an autograph collector. I specialize in celebrities who aren't in the theater or on the radio or in the movies or like that. I've got over ten thousand famous names in my collection. It's very valuable."

"I wouldn't doubt it," said Guiterrez. "You don't go for actors or actresses, huh?"

The skinny youth was scornful. "Naw. That's cornfed stuff. They're too easy. I pick the hard babies. I'm well-known for that. The tougher they are, the better I like it. My name's Steamer. You ever heard of me?"

"Not until now," Guiterrez admitted. ""How do you propose to get Lily Trace's autograph?"

"I'll wait here until she comes out and then ask her. If she refuses I'll think up some other gag. I've got lots of them on tap. You don't mind me waitin' here, do you? I mean, lots of guys get tough if they catch us autograph hunters hanging around their joints. They claim we pester the customers and keep 'em from comin' again."

"Is that so?" Guiterrez said thoughtfully. '"Pester the customers, huh?"

"Oh, I won't," said Steamer. "Honest."

"Oh yes, you will," said Guiterrez.

Steamer started to edge away again. "Huh?"

Guiterrez got him by the arm. "'Listen, jitterbug. Here's a buck. That's for you if you go inside and start annoying customers in a big way."

"Why?" Steamer asked, still doubtful.

"On account of I hate my customers," Guiterrez explained. "I hate each and every one of them personally."

"Well, why?" Steamer repeated blankly.

Guiterrez scowled ferociously. "Because I sweat and slave over a hot stove all day long to cook them the most beautiful food in the whole world! And what do they do with it? Sit in there and poke it down their gullets like a bunch of pigs at a swill box!"

"They pay for it, don't they?" Steamer inquired.

"Is money everything?" Guiterrez demanded. "No! I'm an artist! I've got a soul!"

"What ought they to do with your food?" Steamer asked curiously.

"Appreciate it! Sit there and savor each mouthful gracefully and gratefully! It's genius they're eating! The genius of Guiterrez!"

"Oh," said Steamer.

"Come along," said Guiterrez.

He opened the door and pushed Steamer into the restaurant. It was a long bare room with a high, smoke-stained ceiling. There were booths along the walls, and the center space was packed with round spindle-legged tables. It was late now for the dinner hour, but the place was full and overflowing.

DINERS WERE hunched over the tables, eating with ferocious concentration, as though they were afraid that if they paused for a breath the food would be snatched from them. They were quite right about that. A mangy horde of waiters prowled around, ready to pounce at the first signs of slackening interest. You had to fight for your food at Guiterrez's.

The noise was terrific. The waiters dropped trays now and then just because they were tired of carrying them. They screamed threats at each other and the customers and orders at the cook. They conducted profane political arguments the length of the room, digressing occasionally to discuss the manners and looks of the diners. A juke box howled jive from a corner, and the cash register had a bell like a fire gong attached to it.

"Wow!" said Steamer in an awed voice,

Guiterrez shouted in his ear. "Nobody with any brains would eat in a joint like this, would they? I ask you. But look at 'em! I can't get rid of 'em!"

Dick, the small waiter in the big apron, came up and said to Guiterrez: "What's with you now, stupid? You want I should feed this starving fugitive from a rat race?"

"No," said Guiterrez. "He's an annoyer. He collects autographs. Get to work, Steamer."

"Can I get Lily Trace's first?" Steamer asked.

"Sure," Guiterrez said. "She's over there at the side—" He stopped, staring at a small table near the door. "Since when am I running a flop-house here? Who's that sleeping beauty?"

There was only one man at the table. He was slumped down in his chair, head resting in his folded arms. His thinnish blond hair was crumpled and sticky with perspiration, and there was a loose pink roll of fat over the back of his collar.

"He's drunk," said Dick.

"Do tell," said Guiterrez. "I would never have guessed it." He raised his voice to an indignant shout. "So he's drunk! So throw the bum out, you bum!"

"He's got dough," said Dick. "He waves it. I charged him double for the dinners and he didn't kick."

"How many dinners did he have?" Guiterrez demanded.

"Only one. He's got a dame with him. She had one, too. Also he had fifty or sixty drinks. The dame has been tryin' to get him to blow, but he don't want to. She went back to telephone. I think she's calling for help."

"Maybe I could wake him up," said Steamer. "Sometimes when you ask a guy for his autograph, he concentrates and gets sort of sober. Shall I try?"

"Sure," said Guiterrez.

Steamer went over and tapped the drunk politely on the shoulder and began to talk in a low, insistent voice in his ear. For about a minute he got no results. Then the man rolled his head back and forth in vague awareness. Steamer kept on talking and tapping confidentially.

The man heaved himself back in his chair. "Huh?" He had a round, heavily jowled face and eyes that were glassily bloodshot. His clothes were expensively tailored. "What you say?"

Steamer slid a piece of paper in front of him and poked a pencil into the vaguely fumbling fingers all in one deft, practiced motion.

"Your name, sir. Your autograph, please."

"Oh," said the man. He scowled at the pencil as though he had never seen one before. He maneuvered it around until he got the point headed in the right direction and made a groping, careful scrawl on the piece of paper.

"Thank you," said Steamer.

He pocketed the slip of paper and headed for Lily Trace's table.

"The kid's good," said Dick. "Maybe we should try being more polite to the suckers, huh?"

"Don't be a communist," said Guiterrez. "The guy's waked up now. Where's his dame?"

"She's coming. The skinny one, there."

The girl was thin to the point of emaciation, and her eyes were enormous in the white stillness of her face. Her lips were a thin, bright-red streak, She looked like a drawing of one of those impossibly elongated fashion manikins,

and her sport clothes had the same slick, professional lines. She walked with a beautiful, practiced grace.

"Come on, Don," she said with determination. ''Please."

"One drink," said the man. "Only one. Honest. Then we'll go right away." ,

"Now!" said the girl.

"One drink!" said the man stubbornly. He looked inquiringly at Dick and raised a finger.

"We're fresh out of everything but Mickey Finns," said Dick. "Be happy to serve you one of them, though."

"Eh?" said the man blankly.

The girl jerked at his arm. "Oh, come on! Please, Don! We can't stay here any longer! You can have a drink when we get home."

"Two?" asked the man cleverly.

"A dozen! A hundred!"

"O.K.," said the man. He got unsteadily to his feet. "How much I owe, waiter?"

Dick whipped a bill out of his pocket. "Well, you had two de luxe dinners—" He stopped in mid-sentence, looking at the girl. He drew a deep breath and put the bill away again. "But you paid for them. Don't you remember?"

"Sure, sure. Tip for you."

The man dropped a crumpled bill on the table. The girl picked it up and calmly put it in the pocket of her sport coat, watching Dick as she did it. Dick smiled in a painfully polite way.

The girl took a firm hold on the man's arm and steered him carefully toward the door and out through it. Dick went back to where Guiterrez was standing.

"See that?" he asked. "A man can't even chisel an honest dollar any more. That dame is pure poison. I'd hate to have her get behind me if she had a knife around anywhere."

"She don't need a knife," said Guiterrez. "She's got fingernails she could cut your throat with. Where'd that autograph bug go?"

"I dunno," said Dick, looking around.

"Must have got Lily Trace's signature and beat it out the side door, I guess," Guitterez said shrugging. "Well, there goes a buck, but it wasn't a very good idea, anyway."

"Naturally not," Dick observed, "If you thought of it. Why don't you go back and do some cooking?"

"I'm not in the mood," Guiterrez answered sourly. "I want to be alone."

MAX LATIN was sitting in his special booth, the last one in the line, near the metal swing door that led into the kitchen. Dick stopped beside him and produced a bottle of brandy and a small glass from under his voluminous apron. He pulled the cork out of the bottle with his teeth and put it down beside the glass on the table.

"Screwball is having one of his fits again," he observed.

"Guiterrez?" Latin asked, pouring brandy.

"Yeah. He wants to be alone. So do I— with hot hips over there. Only I'm afraid she comes higher than a gumdrop or a shiny apple."

Latin looked across the room. "I'm afraid so. That's Lily Trace. She's on the expensive side."

"I wonder if she ever gives a benefit performance— for charity and like that?" Dick said speculatively.

"I wouldn't count on it."

"I wish I had more money and less brains," said Dick gloomily. "I got to go to work. Holler if you want me."

Latin sipped at his brandy, enjoying himself. He had the lazy, relaxed air of a sleepy cat.

A smoothly clipped voice said: "Are you Mr. Max Latin, the private inquiry agent?"

"Yes," said Latin, looking up.

The man beside the booth was very tall, taller even than Latin. He had even young-old features that were as cold and sharp as chiseled steel. His eyes were a faded, smooth blue, very light against the tan of his face. He was wearing a dark business suit, and he carried a topcoat over his arm.

"My name is Caleb Drew," he said. "I was informed that you were in the habit of conducting your— ah— business from this restaurant."

"This booth is my office," Latin answered.

"I have a friend who would like to talk to you. If you'll pardon me for a second."

Caleb Drew walked across to Lily Trace's table. She smiled up at him in excellently simulated surprise. The two college boys stood at attention and were introduced to Drew. Lily Trace made a gesture inviting him to sit down. He shook his head and nodded toward Latin's booth.

Lily Trace clapped her hands delightedly. The college boys scowled. Lily Trace got up and took Caleb Drew's arm and let him guide her toward Latin's booth. The college boys sat down glumly and glowered at each other.

"This is Mr. Max Latin," Drew said. "Mr. Latin, this is Lily Trace."

Dick, the waiter, came up and put his elbows on the back of the booth and stared dreamily at Lily Trace. "Latin," he said, "how do you do it, anyway?"

"Get me a couple of glasses," Latin ordered. "Sit down, Miss Trace— Mr. Drew."

Dick took two small glasses from under his apron and put them down on the table. "You go settin' up drinks with that brandy, and Guiterrez will cloud up and rain all over you. That stuff costs sixteen smackers a bottle."

"Go away," said Latin.

"Don't say I didn't warn you," said Dick, obeying. "Call me before the dame leaves, will you? I want to watch her wiggle out of that booth."

Drew said: "The help around here is a little bit— forward."

"I've noticed that," Latin said idly. "Have some brandy?"

"I never drink," said Lily Trace, smiling.

Drew nodded. "Thanks."

Latin poured him a drink. "You wanted to see me, Miss Trace?"

"Yes," said Lily Trace frankly. "I really did want to see you. I like to meet famous people, and you are one of them."

Latin sipped at his brandy. "I've got a long police record, if that's what you mean."

"A lot of arrests," said Drew. "No convictions."

"Bribing juries is an expensive habit," Latin told him. "And with me, time is money. Now you've met me, and we're all happy here together, so what's next?"

"I'd like you to do some work for me," Lily Trace stated. "Some confidential work."

"All my work is confidential— and expensive."

"I'm paying," Drew said.

"Go into your spiel, then," Latin invited.

Lily Trace lowered her voice to a husky, confidential murmur. "I want you to help me steal some jewelry."

"O.K.," said Latin. "Where and when?"

Lily Trace laughed admiringly. "Oh, I like the way you said that! You're so casual. You'd think you went around stealing things all the time!"

"I do," said Latin.

"Oh," said Lily Trace, surprised.

Drew said: "You'd better let me handle this, Lily. You're a little out of your weight class here, I think."

Lily Trace didn't like that last. She studied Latin with narrowed, speculative eyes. She took a deep breath and stretched the cloth of the front of her dress.

Latin sipped his brandy. He was not impressed. Lily Trace chewed on her lower lip, slightly at a loss.

"This is no gag, Mr. Latin," Drew said in his smooth voice. "At least, not the kind you think. Lily doesn't mean for you to actually steal any jewels, of course. She wants it to appear that hers have been stolen."

Latin looked at her. "Insurance?"

"Of course not!" said Drew. "There's no crooked work involved at all."

"Then I don't want to be involved, either."

"Now just a moment," Drew said, losing some of his smooth veneer. "Let me explain, please. Lily wants some more publicity— of the undercover, confidential sort that's so hard to get. Cryptic little hints by columnists and that sort of thing. You know what I mean."

"I've got a rough idea."

"She's not going to report her jewels stolen, and they aren't going to be. But she wants the rumor to get around that they have been— wants people whispering behind their hands about it. You're just the man to handle that."

"I'm listening."

Drew coughed. "Your— ah— reputation....

"It smells high," said Latin.

"Yes," said Drew, relieved. "She wants to use it. She wants you to put out feelers— inquiries— as though you were trying to buy back her jewelry secretly from the imaginary thieves who stole it."

"Compounding a felony," Latin defined.

"Yes," said Lily Trace eagerly. "But itll work. Really it will. I know. Everybody will be running around and whispering and pointing and wondering. There'll be hints about it in all the gossip columns. It'll be one of those secrets that everybody thinks they're smart because they know, and I'll just get all kinds of publicity!"

"And maybe some more jewelry," Latin added.

"Nothing like that is intended," Drew said coldly. "Miss Trace is not accepting any more presents from her admirers. She and I are going to be married."

"Felicitations," said Latin. "My price for this little job of work is one thousand dollars— in advance."

Drew stared at him. "That seems excessive—"

"Unless I have to argue about it," Latin continued in the same tone. "Then the price goes up. It costs money to argue with me."

Drew's face looked white and stiff. He took his wallet from his pocket and carefully counted out ten one hundred dollar bills.

"I judged you'd want cash." He dropped a card on the bills. "There's my address and phone number, if you want to get in touch with me."

"Very thoughtful of you," Latin commented. "You'll be hearing of and from me. You'd better get the jewelry out of sight somewhere. As soon as the police hear that I'm nosing around, they'll come and see you. They might be a little on the rough side. They're mad at me now for one reason or another."

"That will be taken care of," Drew promised.

He helped Lily Trace out of the booth. The two college boys sprang to attention and settled back into despair again as Lily Trace waved to them gaily and went on out of the restaurant with Drew.

Dick came out of the kitchen and leaned over the back of the booth. "Latin," he murmured. "There's a stiff out in the alley. Is it one of yours?"

Latin looked up at him silently.

"No joke," said Dick. "Guiterrez fell over it and grabbed a handful of blood. He don't want to be alone any more."

Latin slid out of the booth. "Come on."

Guiterrez was holding his hands under the hot water faucet in the sink. He took them out and wiped them on a dish towel and looked at them. They were as clean and pink as a new baby's. Guiterrez shuddered and shoved them under the hot water faucet again.

"That's the kind of thing I run into around here," he muttered savagely. "My customers not only stuff themselves like hogs— they go out in my alley and die on me. Why don't they go home first if they want to die?"

"You sure it isn't just a stray drunk?" Latin asked.

Guiterrez looked at him soberly. "I'm sure. It's a guy, and he's awful dead, Latin. In that dark stretch between the side door and the mouth of the alley. Just beyond where we set the garbage cans."

"Wait here," Latin ordered.

He went out the side door and closed it behind him. The darkness was like a living thing, a heavy menacing weight that pressed coldly against his face. The mouth of the alley, half-a-block away, was a narrow high rectangle with the street lights feeble and yellow beyond it.

Latin moved slowly and cautiously forward. His knee thrust against the side of a garbage can, rattled the galvanized lid, and the echoes chased themselves hollowly away from him, He touched a limp, yielding weight with the toe of his shoe.

In the street an auto horn blatted flatly, and gears clashed. Latin took a match from his pocket and snapped it on his thumbnail. Shadows jiggled and swooped weirdly around him, and then the yellow flame steadied as he cupped it in his hands.

The man was lying sprawled on his face with his head pillowed in a slick pool of blood. He looked very fiat and thin and deflated. His throat had been cut.

The match flickered out, and Latin struck another. The dead man's clothes had a messy, pulled-around look to them. All his pockets had been turned inside out, the linings hanging like multiple tags pinned helter-skelter to him.

Latin leaned closer to look at his face and then blew out the match. He made his way cautiously back to the side door and went into the restaurant kitchen.

Guiterrez was letting the water from the cold water tap run over his hands. Dick was leaning against the asbestos-covered side of the steak-broiler, picking his teeth with a curved paring knife.

"Did you look at him?" Latin asked.

"Oh, no," said Guiterrez. "I felt him. That convinced me that I didn't want to know him any better."

Latin said: "He's just a kid— maybe twenty at the best. Skinny and tall— freckled face. Wearing dirty white shoes and checked slacks and a sports coat."

Guiterrez stared at Dick, his eyes widening. "The jitterbug!"

Dick nodded. "Must be."

"Do you know him?" Latin inquired.

Guiterrez said: "He told me his name was Steamer. He's one of these dopey autograph collectors. He wanted to get Lily Trace's signature. He saw her go in the joint, and he was gonna wait outside. I told him to go on in and brace her inside and pester some of the other customers while he was at it. I think maybe that wasn't such a hot idea."

"He had something somebody wanted," Latin said. "He's been rolled. A nice thorough job."

"Rolled!" Guiterrez repeated, startled. "Why, hell, anybody could tell just by lookin' at him that he wouldn't be carrying any dough."

"Something else, then," said Latin.

The second cook pushed Dick out of the way and threw steaks in the broiler like a man dealing out meaty, thick cards. The steaks sizzled and smoked and spattered. Guiterrez looked at them and shivered. He put his hands back under the water faucet.

"Did Steamer pester any customers?" Latin asked.

Guiterrez shook his head. "He gypped me. He got Lily Trace's signature and hopped it."

"The drunk," Dick said.

Guiterrez nodded. "Oh, yeah. There was a drunk sleepin' on one of the tables. The kid woke him up by pretendin' he wanted the guy's autograph."

"Did you know the drunk?"

"Nope," said Guiterrez. "He's been here before, though. Quite awhile ago, as I remember."

Latin nodded at Dick, and Dick went out through the swing door into the front part of the restaurant. A waiter yelled some unintelligible gibberish through the order slot, and the pastry chef said: "Go to hell. That ain't on the menu."

Guiterrez began to wipe his hands slowly and carefully. "I don't feel so good now, Latin. I'm afraid I pulled that kid into this. I shoulda kept my big mouth shut."

"Forget it," Latin said absently. He was frowning, his greenish eyes narrowed thoughtfully.

Dick came back into the kitchen. "The drunk's been here before— two or three times. But nobody knows his name or anything about him. The dame he had with him called him Don. She's never been here except tonight. The drunk is a big spender. Steamer got his autograph and Lily Trace's. Nobody else's. Then two college cut-ups beefed with Steamer when he braced Lily Trace. They're just leavin' now."

"Have they got a car?" Latin asked.

"No."

"Go out and tell the taxi driver who picks them up to keep track of them and telephone me here."

"O.K.," said Dick, going out again.

"Get me a table cloth," Latin said to Guiterrez. "'A big one."

"What're you gonna use that for?" Guiterrez asked.

"A shroud."

Guiterrez stared at him, his face paling.

Latin said: "If the cops find that body there, they'll pinch me on suspicion. They couldn't prove anything, but they could hold me for a couple of days. I don't want to be in jail right at the moment."

"You're gonna move him?" Guiterrez asked shakily.

"Yes. Afterwards, I want you to get some ashes out of the broiler— a lot of them— and spread them over the blood and stamp them down."

"Oh-oh," said Guiterrez.

Dick came back through the swing door. "Benny Merkle was the driver that picked up the college guys. I told him what you said."

Latin nodded. "All right. I'm going over and get my car now. You go out in the alley and see that nobody else falls over Steamer. Wait there until I come back with the car."

"O.K., chum," Dick said casually.

Three: Death Of A Dick

DETECTIVE INSPECTOR Walters, Homicide, had a yellowish gaunt face and a sourly cynical nature. He had been chasing murderers of one sort or another for twenty years, and he had gotten to the point where he didn't believe what he heard even when he was talking to himself. He sat in Latin's booth and watched Latin sip delicately at a small glass of brandy.

"It's good," said Latin. "Want some?"

"No," said Walters.

It was late now, and the restaurant was almost empty. A halfdozen waiters were playing craps on a table near the cash register.

Guiterrez came out of the kitchen and said: "Listen, Latin, I've told you before I don't like cops hanging around here all the time. People are gonna think I'm running a bookie joint or a hook shop. You know what kind of a reputation cops have. They stink a place up."

Before Walters could think of an answer, Guiterrez went on up to the front of the restaurant and shouldered his way into the crap game.

Walters drew a deep breath and said: "A guy got killed tonight, Latin."

"Only one?" Latin observed. "Hitler must be slipping."

"This guy wasn't in Europe," Walters said patiently. "And Hitler didn't kill him."

"Who did?" Latin inquired.

"That's a coincidence," Walters said. "I was just about to ask you that."

"Me?" Latin said, surprised. "Now listen, Walters, this is getting to be a nuisance. Just because you find a body somewhere—"

"Not somewhere. On the front steps of the morgue."

"That was thoughtful of the guy."

"He didn't put himself there. Somebody else did."

"Not guilty," said Latin. "I don't even know where the morgue is, and besides I haven't been out of this place all night. You can ask Guiterrez or Dick or any of the waiters."

"Let's not clown around," said Walters wearily. "I know you own this joint and that all these birds work for you. They'd swear black was white if you gave them the nod."

"Prove it,"' Latin invited,

"I can't. Besides, I've got other things to do. This is just a confidential chat. Do you know anything about this bird that got biffed?"

"Who was he?" Latin asked.

"He called himself Steamer Morgan. He was a private detective and a good one— that is, if there are any good ones."

Latin put his glass down. "A private detective?"

"Yeah. Not a crook like you are, though. At least, he didn't go around talking about it as much if he was. He specialized in getting evidence in civil cases."

"Divorces?" Latin inquired.

"No. Accident cases and damage suits. He was plenty expert— knew a lot about law. He had a swell front for it. He looked like a kid, and he went around acting like a jitterbug and a sort of a screwy young punk. The last type of guy you'd suspect of being a detective. He's sneaked up on an awful lot of smarties with that act. And when he got evidence— it was the kind that held in court."

"Was he working on a case?"

Walters shrugged. "I think so. I'm trying to find out now. He worked under cover and on his own. He didn't keep any records. Somebody searched him before they left him at the morgue. Nothing in his pockets at all."

DICK CAME up to the booth carrying a portable telephone. "One of your crummy friends wants to talk to you." Latin plugged the phone in on the concealed connection behind the drape at the back of the booth. "Latin speaking," he said into the mouthpiece.

"This here is Benny Merkle, Mr. Latin. ''m the taxi driver that picked up them two guys from your joint awhile back. Dick said you wanted to know where they went and such."

"Yes," said Latin. "Go ahead."

"They called each other Bruce and Bill. They didn't use no last names. I drove 'em from your joint to a very swanky dive called the Chateau Carleton on Vandervort Road. They don't live there. They waked up the janitor and laid down a pound note to get in."

"What then?" Latin asked.

"I waited around, and in about ten minutes they came boiling out again. One of 'em had a bloody nose and the other had a big bump on his noggin. They was plenty mad at some dame they called Lily."

"What did they do next?"

"They had me drive 'em to a liquor store, and they bought a fifth of Scotch. It was good Scotch. They give me a couple of drinks. Then they asked me if I knew where they could— I mean, they told me to drive 'em over to Katie Althouse's place on Barker Street. They went in there, and they both picked out a girl by the name of Priscilla."

Latin was smiling. "What does she look like?"

"Priscilla? Well, she's sort of dark and kinda built in a big way. She's got black hair she wears in a long bob, and she makes up her mouth in a smear."

Latin chuckled. "All right, Benny. Did you wait for them?"

"Yeah. I took 'em home. They was kinda tired and pretty drunk. I put 'em to bed at the Milton Hotel. I'm there now. You want I should ask some questions about 'em?"

"No," said Latin. "Let it go. Thanks a lot, Benny. Drop in and say hello to the cashier here tomorrow."

Latin put the telephone back in its cradle. He was still grinning.

"Let me laugh, too," Walters invited.

Latin said: "Lily Trace came in here tonight with a couple of college boys. She ditched them and then bounced them when they tried to call on her later. They got mad and went over to Kate Althouse's place and picked out a girl who looked like Lily Trace. As long as they couldn't get the real article they were going to take a substitute."

"They must be dopes," said Walters.

"They've got some fancy company."

Walters nodded. "I don't get it. This cafe society is away over my head. In my time gals like Lily Trace stayed down by the stockyards and hung red lanterns over their doors. They didn't have their pictures in the society pages waltzing with all the town's best bankrolls."

"Do you know where she came from?"

"No, but I'll make you a bet I can guess how. You want to watch your step with her, sonny."

"What?" said Latin.

Walters said: "Look, Latin. I like you in spite of all your fancy tricks, and I think maybe you're even halfway honest now and then. This little deal you've got on with Lily Trace is going to backfire right in your face if you don't watch your step."

"What deal?" Latin asked casually.

"It didn't fool me any, but some of the boys have got a mad on with you. Especially the district attorney's office. About twenty tips have come in tonight that Lily Trace had a lot of jewelry stolen and that you're dickering either for the guys who lifted it or for her or for both. I knew it was phoney because there were too many tips, but the district attorney's boys aren't that subtle."

"Thanks, Walters," said Latin. "I'll take care of it. I know something about Steamer's death. I don't know who killed him, but I'll find out and let you know."

Walters got up. "Better hurry a little. I can't hold the district attorney's boys off you forever, and anyway I like to see results for my efforts."

Latin poured himself another drink. "Find out what Steamer was working on if you can."

"Find out yourself. You know more crooked lawyers than I do."

Walters stopped at the crap game to exchange insults with Guiterrez and then went on out of the restaurant. Latin finished up his glass of brandy and lit a cigaret. After awhile, he took the card Caleb Drew had given him out of his pocket and looked at it.

It was outsize, made of thick parchment. Engraved on it in jetblack old English letters was the name "Caleb Drew IV" and under that "Investment Counsellor." In the lower left corner was an address Latin recognized as belonging to the Teasdale Building in the downtown financial district and a telephone number. In the lower right-hand corner there was another telephone number.

Latin dialed that number, and after the first ring a voice said politely in his ear: "Gravesend Manor."

"May I speak to Mr. Caleb Drew?" Latin asked.

"He's not in, sir."

"Do you mean that he's not home or that he's asleep?"

"He's not here, sir. He hasn't been in for the last two or three days. Do you wish to leave a message?"

"No, thanks."

Latin hung up and dialed Information. When a courteously long-suffering feminine voice answered, he said: "Will you give me the number of Miss Lily Trace? She lives at the Chateau Carleton on Vandervort Road."

"One moment, please." The line hummed emptily to itself, and then the long-suffering voice said: "There's no telephone listed under that name, sir."

"You mean it's an unlisted number?"

"There's no telephone listed under that name, sir."

"All right," said Latin. "Is there switchboard service at the Carleton?"

"No, sir."

"Good-bye," said Latin. He hung up and poured himself another very small portion of brandy. He didn't drink it. He scowled at it thoughtfully for a while and then dialed still another number.

This time the telephone at the other end rang a long time before the connection snapped and a hoarse, blurred voice said: "Abraham Moscowitz, Attorney, speaking."

Latin said: "This is Latin, Abe."

"O.K. I'm coming." The line clicked and was dead.

Latin swore to himself and dialed the same number again. "O.K., O.K.," said Moscowitz's blurred voice. "Don't get ants in your pants. I said I'm coming. Give me a chance to put on my shoes first, will you?"

"I'm not in jail," Latin told him.

"What?" said Moscowitz incredulously. "You mean those police bums got the nerve to hold you without booking you? Get off the phone so I can call the mayor! I'll fix 'em!"

"Shut up," said Latin. "I'm not even arrested. I want to ask you some questions about law."

"Law?" said Moscowitz. "I don't know anything about law. I'm an attorney."

"Did you ever do any business with a private detective named Steamer Morgan?"

"Nope," said Moscowitz. "He's too ignorant. He won't even commit perjury. Can you imagine a private detective that won't commit perjury? What good is he as a witness?"

"Who does he work for?"

"Baldwin and Frazier, mostly. They are a couple of old dodos with hay in their hair. Sometimes they win a case by accident, but not very often."

"What kind of cases?"

"They got a whole bunch of corporate accounts they inherited from their grandpappies."

"Anything in court now that's hot?"

"They got half-a-dozen appeals floating around here and there. Stockholders' suits. They're always suing for an accounting."

"What does that mean?" Latin asked.

"Oh, that's when the stockholders find out there's no dough in the treasury and they want to find out who spent it and what for. I always say, as long as it's gone— who cares? Some sharpshooter is always rapping suckers for their nickels. It doesn't make much difference who he is or how he does it— they won't get their money back."

"Ever hear of a girl named Lily Trace?"

"Whee!"

"Aside from that, do you know anything about her?"

"Nope. I never met her except in my dreams."

"How about a gent named Caleb Drew?"

"Never heard of him."

"He's going to marry Lily Trace."

"Marry her?" Moscowitz repeated, startled. "Say, now there's a smart guy! I never thought of that. A marriage license only costs two bucks, and mink coats come a lot higher than that— even wholesale."

"Good-bye," said Latin. He put the telephone back in its cradle and downed the small drink of brandy. He got up out of the booth and went through the metal swing door into the kitchen.

After a moment Guiterrez followed him. He was carrying Latin's hat and topcoat. Without a word he helped Latin into the coat.

Latin took a stubby hammerless Smith and Wesson revolver out of the waistband of his trousers and dropped it into the side pocket of the topcoat. He took his hat from Guiterrez and put it on carefully.

Guiterrez cleared his throat. "Be a little careful, huh?" he suggested uneasily.

Latin winked at him and went out the back door.

THE GRAVESEND MANOR Apartment Hotel was a somber, heavily dignified building in the massive style of a medieval European castle. It had a lobby like a baronial hall, long and narrow, with ornamental beams that were smooth and dark and oily against the high white ceiling. Latin walked down a length of deep red carpet to the small desk in the corner.

"I'd like to speak to Caleb Drew," he said.

The desk clerk was a small, plump man with a benign smile and white hair that floated around his head like a halo. He looked like a casket salesman.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said, as though he really meant it. "He's not in now."

"It's rather important that I see him," said Latin. "Do you expect him soon?"

"No, sir. That is, I have no idea when he'll return."

Latin nodded and frowned as though he were masticating on some weighty problem, Finally he leaned confidentially on the desk.

"May I have your name?"

"Mr. Hammersley, sir," the clerk said, looking faintly surprised.

"Mr. Hammersley, I'm Detective Inspector Walters of the Homicide detail. May I speak to you in confidence?"

"Oh, of course," said Hammersley, impressed.

"Have you ever heard of a man named Max Latin?"

"That person!" said Hammersely. "Oh, yes indeed! I follow the crime news with— ah— considerable interest. A hobby of mine, you might say. This Latin seems to be a very reprehensible sort of a character— always getting arrested for something or other. He's a private detective, isn't he, sir?"

"'That's what he claims," said Latin. "But I know him well, and in my opinion he's nothing but a crook. We're very anxious to prove that. He's in trouble right now over the matter of an unexplained murder."

"Murder!" Hammersley repeated, blinking.

"Yes. He has homicidal tendencies. Now, we have heard it rumored that he's done some sort of work for Mr. Drew in the past. Not connected with this business, of course, but we think that Latin might try to get in touch with Mr. Drew, knowing how influential Mr. Drew is, to try to persuade him to lend Latin his influence or even some money."

"I understand," said Hammersley eagerly.

"Have you seen Latin around here? He looks like a little bit like me."

"No, I haven't. I'm certain ''d have noticed him if he'd been here. I can recognize his type easily."

"Be sure and notify headquarters if you see him. But I think — knowing the sly, crafty nature of the man— that he will probably attempt to get in touch with Mr. Drew by telephone. I know this is a very unusual request, but will you tell me if Mr. Drew has received any telephone calls this evening while he's been out? I'm sure Gravesend Manor would want to cooperate with the authorities, and this man Latin is really a menace."

"In the circumstances," said Hammersley, "anything we can do. . . ." He fluttered through some telephone call slips and put several on the desk in front of Latin. "You can see that if he did call, he didn't leave his name."

"Oh, he wouldn't use his own name," Latin said, going through the slips. "How about these five calls? They're all from the same person."

"Oh, no," said Hammersley. "They don't have anything to do with Latin."

"I hate to seem inquisitive, but I'd like to be sure—"

"They're all from Miss Mayan. Miss Teresa Mayan. She's Mr. Drew's secretary. She called here repeatedly early this evening, as you see. She said she had to get in touch with Mr. Drew in regard to an important business matter."

"Oh, yes," said Latin. "I wonder. Perhaps she could tell me something about Mr. Drew's business dealings with Latin. It's something I don't like to speak about over the telephone. Do you know where she lives?"

"Yes. At Hadley House. It's on First and Drexel."

"Thank you, Mr. Hammersley," said Latin. "We of the police department appreciate the help of conscientious citizens like you are."

"It was nothing at all," Hammersley said, embarrassed and pleased. "Don't mention it."

Four: Target for Teresa

HADLEY HOUSE went in for the modernistic. It was all as sleek and streamlined as a pursuit plane. Latin got out of the mirrorstudded, chromium-

lined elevator at the fourth floor and walked down a long hall that had pale blue walls and a dark blue ceiling. He knocked on the door numbered 412.

Teresa Mayan opened it. Latin had never seen her before, but he recognized her at once from the descriptions Guiterrez and Dick had given him. She was the girl who had been with the drunk called Don at the restaurant.

She was wearing a black satin hostess coat that rustled luxuriously when she moved, and her face looked pale and still and thoughtful above it. She was not at all surprised to see Latin. She nodded casually and said: "Come on in."

Latin stepped into the square, low-ceilinged living-room and watched her move in her gracefully indolent way to the liquor cabinet in the corner. She poured whiskey out of a squat decanter into two tall, silver-rimmed glasses, fizzed a shot of soda into each. She gave Latin one of the glasses and pointed to the divan.

"Sit down."

Latin sat down slowly, holding the glass in both hands, and watched her. He couldn't quite figure out this approach and he said: "Were you expecting someone— I mean, now?"

"Yes," said Teresa Mayan. "You."

"Do you know who I am?" Latin asked.

She nodded. "I recognized you— from your picture. It's quite a remarkable likeness."

"Picture?" Latin repeated slowly and thoughtfully.

Teresa Mayan smiled at him. "You're quite a clever little lad, but that surprised you, didn't it? You didn't know I had a camera with me, did you?"

"No," said Latin honestly. "I didn't."

"A good one, too. A very good one. Wait." She walked through the doorway that led into the bedroom and came out carrying a large flat square of cardboard. "Be careful. It's still wet."

She lowered the cardboard so that he could see the wet photographic print lying on it. Latin looked and closed his eyes slowly and then looked again.

It was a remarkably good picture of him. Very effective, too. He was kneeling down, holding a match in front of him, and the match flame made his features look white and sharp and clear. It also revealed plainly the body that was lying on the ground in front of him, the slick shine of the pool of blood, the pale loosened features of Steamer Morgan, and even a couple of shadowy garbage cans.

"I've got a title for it," said Teresa Mayan. "I'm going to call it 'Caught in the Act.' I think that sort of explains it, don't you?"

"Sort of," Latin agreed. His face looked white and a little strained.

"The camera is specially made for candid shots," Teresa Mayan explained. "Has a beautiful lens. Very fast, very sensitive. A match in a dark alley like that was just right for it."

"I can see that," said Latin.

"I developed the print myself. I have knockdown dark-room equipment here."

"Very handy," said Latin.

"Yes, it is. I got it for Don. I've been keeping him amused by letting him take nude candid shots of me." She smoothed the front of her house coat. "I make a good nude model if you like them long and limber."

"Oh," said Latin.

TERESA MAYAN laughed at him. "Still a little at sea, aren't you? I'll tell you how it was. I know that you own that restaurant and that you hang around there all the time and that you're a sharpshooter. It's not as big a secret as you seem to think. And I knew that the dope who runs it for you— Guiterrez— saw me tonight when he fell over the body in the alley. He covered it up— pretending he didn't know there was anyone around and acted scared out of his pants— but he didn't fool me. I knew he recognized me, and I knew you'd find out who I was some way or other and come around and try to blackmail me. I was right, wasn't I?"

"It looks that way," Latin admitted.

"So I acted to protect myself," said Teresa Mayan. "You played right along with me by moving the body. Now I've got more on you than you have on me." She indicated the picture with a forefinger that had a blood-red glistening nail two inches long and pointed like a dagger. "I only developed one negative. I've got a lot more."

"Where?" Latin asked.

"Not here," she said, smiling coolly. "Now you put that print in your pocket and run along home. Take a look at it any time you get more smart ideas about shaking me down."

"O.K.," said Latin glumly. He put his glass down on the coffee table and got up. "I don't suppose it would do any good to tell you that J didn't have any such ideas in mind at all when I came over here?"

Teresa Mayan stood and laughed at him in a lightly amused way.

"O.K.," said Latin again.

He took one cat-like step toward her and hit her. His fist didn't travel more than six inches, and it landed with a sharp smack on the hinge of her jaw just below her ear. Teresa Mayan whirled around with a graceful rustle of silk, fell across the divan and rolled off on the floor. She lay motionless, face down.

Latin dropped instantly on one knee and one hand, like a football linesman getting ready to charge. He was holding the stubby Smith and Wesson in his other hand, and he peered tensely over the top of the divan at the door into the bedroom.

Nothing happened. There was no sound, no movement in the apartment, A minute dragged past, then another. Latin came up out of his crouch and slid into the bedroom and flicked the light switch.

The room was severely modernistic. The bed was low and wide. It had no foot, and the head was one huge mirror. There were a good many pictures of Teresa Mayan on the walls. As she had said, she made a very good nude model if you like them long and limber.

Latin looked in the closet and in the bathroom. He went back through the living-room and tried the kitchen. The portable developing outfit was on the tile sideboard next to the sink. Its lightproof hood was raised now, and there were trays and round bottles of developing fluid lined up behind it. The camera was there, too. A pocket-sized German miniature. The back of it was open. There was no film in it and none anywhere around that Latin could see.

Silk rustled in the living-room, and Latin jumped for the doorway. Teresa Mayan was still lying in a limp, graceful heap on the floor.

Latin walked over and looked down at her. "The trouble with you is that you've been to too many movies. You're not dealing with Charlie Chan now. I want that negative. Where is it?"

She didn't move.

Latin leaned over and picked her up effortlessly and bounced her on the divan. She pulled herself slowly up to a sitting position. There was a little red spot on her cheek where Latin had hit her, and she rubbed it slowly and gently, watching him with eyes that were glistening, narrow slits.

"This isn't going to hurt me worse than it does you," Latin told her conversationally. "In fact, I just love to bat people around. You tell me where that film is or you're going to be in the market for some store teeth. You got yourself into this by being too smart. Guiterrez actually didn't see you in the alley. He really was scared out of his pants. I didn't come around here to blackmail you. I didn't know who you were or that you were anywhere near that alley. I wanted to find Caleb Drew, and I thought he'd probably check in here sooner or Jater."

Teresa Mayan said: "What do you want him for?"

"I'm working for him."

"You're a liar."

"Certainly. That's why he hired me. I'm supposed to be negotiating for the return of some of Lily Trace's jewelry that hasn't been stolen."

Her eyes looked as lidless and deadly as a snake's. "Why?"

"She wants publicity. I was going to tell Caleb Drew that if she wanted to get it from what I was doing, she'd have to keep her own big mouth shut. If she doesn't quit sounding off everyone will know it's a phoney. Now I want that film. I don't think it's going to convict me of murder or anything like that, but it can make me plenty of trouble. Where is it?"

"Then what happens?"

"We'll talk about that after I get the film."

"It's in the top drawer of the desk over there."

The desk was against the wall next to the door into the bedroom. Latin went over to it and opened the top drawer. He leaned down to look into it, and the bullet that had been meant for the back of his head missed by about an inch and buried itself in the wall in front of his face.

Latin didn't turn around or straighten up. He dived headfirst through the door into the bedroom. As he hit the floor and rolled, he flipped his arm up and shoved the door hard. The sound of its slam was like an echo of the bursting smash of the shot.

Latin rolled on over and came up to his knees, cursing himself soundlessly. Teresa Mayan wasn't wearing anything under the hostess coat, and it didn't have any pockets large enough to hide a gun. But he should have known she would have one cached around somewhere. Probably it had been poked back of the cushions on the divan.

Another report smacked out, and the bullet made a neat white hole in the door about six inches below the knob. It would have taken Latin right in the middle of the face had he been trying to look through the keyhole.

Latin didn't like that, either. Teresa Mayan could call her shots. He knew just as well as if he could see her that she was kneeling in back of the divan, using its top for a rest. From the sound of its reports, he judged she was using a .25 caliber automatic. That meant she had at least five more shots. Under the circumstances, Latin had no slightest urge to open the door.

This was like a motion picture script that had gone haywire. The heroine besieged in the bedroom protecting her honor. Only Latin wasn't a heroine, and he didn't have any honor.

He tilted his head, listening intently. There were faint, hurried sounds of motion in the living-room. The subdued swish of silk, the muffled tap of a high heel. Latin got up and slid along the wall beside the door. He paused again to listen. If she wasn't on a direct line with the doorway, he had some chance of getting out and finding cover before she could hit him.

He reached slowly and cautiously for the knob and then stiffened rigidly as a latch clicked. It wasn't the bedroom door, though. It was the front door. It slammed with a final, solid thud.

Latin jerked the bedroom door open and slammed it back against the wall, He was afraid of a trick, and he didn't show himself in the doorway. He stayed flat beside it.

Voices came to him very faintly, mumbling from the hall just outside the apartment. Among them, Teresa Mayan's sounded quite clear and loud.

"Shots? Yes, I heard them plainly."

Latin came into the living-room and walked across to the front door and put his ear against the panel. It sounded like there were a dozen people in the hall, all talking at once. Teresa Mayan's voice came again.

"You'd better keep watch here in the hallway. There might be a prowler around. Of course, he couldn't be in my apartment, but I'd feel safer if you'd just watch my door for a little while. It's silly, I know, but I'm so easily frightened by just the thought of things like that."

Another voice said: "Oh, I'll be watching, Miss Mayan."

Latin said some more things to himself. If he stepped out of the apartment now, there was sure to be a beef. That was the last thing he wanted at the moment. He was cornered.

After thinking it over, he shrugged casually and looked around the front room. The satin hostess coat lay on the floor in an untidy pile. Latin studied it for a second, puzzled, and then he understood. Teresa Mayan's tailored garbardine sport coat had been lying across one of the chairs. It was gone now.

She hadn't been able to get at any of her clothes in the bedroom. The hostess coat was too bulky to fit under the sport coat. She had discarded it and put on the sport coat in its place. As a costume, it was a trifle sketchy, but it would get by. She had been wearing plain black suede bedroom slippers, They were a little exotic for street wear, but she probably didn't intend to do any walking.

Latin shook his head ruefully. He braced one of the chairs under the doorknob and began to search the living-room. He found some packets of love letters that made very interesting reading, but their writers had signed them with nicknames that didn't mean anything to him.

He went on into the bedroom. He uncovered an astonishing array of underclothing, all very expensive, lots of costume jewelry, and a great many more pictures of Teresa Mayan. She evidently was quite proud of her own anatomy.

He didn't find any film negative, and he moved to the bathroom. He opened the lid of the big wicker clothes hamper and stood there, rigid with surprise, staring down into the face of the man squatting inside it.

After a long time, Latin took his handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his forehead. The face of the man in the clothes hamper was a mottled bluish-red, and his eyes bulged horribly. He was dead.

LATIN LEFT HIM there. He went back into the living-room hurriedly and picked up the drink Teresa Mayan had poured for him. He lifted it to his lips and then froze, staring down into it with a sort of fascinated horror. He was thinking of the round, brown bottles of developing fluid on the drainboard in the kitchen.

"Good God," he said in a whisper. He poked one finger in the whiskey and touched the end of it gingerly with the tip of his tongue. He put the drink down very quickly.

He remembered hearing somewhere that some sort of cyanide derivative was used in developing film. Teresa Mayan evidently also used it for a mixer. Latin's whiskey was laced with it.

"Good God," he said again, thinking of the blue face of the man in the clothes hamper.

He revised his estimate of Teresa Mayan upward ten notches. She had put the cyanide in the drink while he was in the bedroom. She had known he'd hear what she said out in the hall and that he wouldn't want to dash out and start an argument with the other tenants. He'd wait for awhile, and while he was waiting, what would be more natural than to take a drink? And two bodies were just as easy to dispose of as one.

"Yes, indeed," said Latin to himself.

He went over to the telephone stand in the corner and dialed the number of Guiterrez's restaurant. The instrument at the other end got time to ring only once, and then Guiterrez's voice bellowed in his ear: ""We're closed!"

"This is Latin."

"I said we're closed! We don't serve no more tonight! You come around here and start a beef, and I'll have you arrested!"

"Are the cops there looking for me?" Latin asked. "Are they listening to you?"

"Yes, you heard me! I said I'll have you arrested, or maybe even murder you!"

"Is it Walters?" Latin inquired.

"So you got a pull with the cops, have you? All right, I'll have the *district attorney's* men pinch you! And don't think they won't!"

"Thanks," Latin said. "I'll keep under cover."

He put the telephone back in its cradle and returned to the bathroom. He searched the man with the blue face and found from the contents of his wallet that his name was Donald K. Raleigh. Going into the living-room, he picked up the telephone and dialed another number.

After about ten rings a hollow, tired voice said: "This is Abraham Moscowitz, the attorney who never sleeps."

"It's Latin again, Abe."

"I'm putting on my shoes right now."

"Never mind. I'm not in jail— yet. How do you feel about murder, Abe?"

"I can take it or leave it alone. Why don't you? I mean, leave it alone."

"It follows me around and comes when I whistle— sometimes even when I don't. The district attorney's men are looking for me to ask me about killing Steamer Morgan."

"So you're eliminating competition now, eh? You'd better watch out for the feds. Murder is considered an unfair trade practice in some industries, I understand."

"I didn't kill Steamer. They don't even think I did. They want to hold me while they ask me about some jewels I'm not negotiating to buy back from some thieves who didn't steal them."

"That makes as much sense as a Supreme Court decision. Call me back in the morning."

"Wait a minute," Latin requested. "You mentioned that Steamer worked for a law firm named Baldwin and Frazier. Do they have any case on now involving a man named Donald K. Raleigh?"

"Raleigh," Moscowitz repeated thoughtfully. "Raleigh.... Ob, yeah. The Cataract Power Company case. It's been banging around in the courts for three years. It's got whiskers as long as Frazier and Baldwin have. Raleigh is the president of Cataract Power."

"What's the case about?"

"The same old story. There ain't no dough in the treasury and no kilowatts in the power house and no customers to buy any even if there were. So the suckers want to know why. I could tell them for free. Raleigh's grandpappy and his pappy were smart men in a steal. They could grab the power rights on a river and pay off in Confederate money and make the chumps like it, but he can't. He's a rum-dumb. I don't think he stole the company dough— that is, intentionally. He probably spent it trying to crossbreed giant pandas and teddy bears or trying to corner the paperweight market."

"Why has the case been dragging on so long?"

"Well, naturally Raleigh doesn't want to go to jail. He will if he ever testifies. He's too stupid to lie convincingly. Even to the juries they hatch up in this state— and do we have some dillies! So the first time Baldwin and Frazier jumped him, he fixed the judge and got the case dismissed. So Baldwin and Frazier appealed that decision and got it reversed and started over with another judge that he couldn't fix. So now Raleigh is too sick to appear in court. He's been sick for six months or so. Maybe he really is, I don't know."

"He looked pretty bad the last time I saw him," Latin observed. "In fact, I think somebody may start a rumor that I murdered him."

"Did you?"

"No."

"Well, then what are you calling me for?" Moscowitz snarled. "If I've told you once, I've told you twenty times that I won't defend an innocent client! That's too hard work. If you want me to keep you out of jail, don't get pinched for things you didn't do!"

"O.K. I'll go murder somebody else right away."

"Now you're talking. Be sure you do it in front of some nice, honest witnesses. It's cheaper to buy them before than to bribe them afterwards."

"Good-bye," said Latin.

Five: Lily Takes a Licking

THE FIRST thin red rays of the sun hit the casement windows in the tall spire of the Chateau Carleton and reflected in a million jewel-like pinpoints. Now, in the dawn, the streets were hushed and quiet and empty, and Latin was all alone as he walked past the front of the building and turned down the side street beyond it.

A garbage can bonged against some obstruction and raised dismal, clanking echoes, and then a man came out of the alley behind the apartment building rolling the can along expertly in front of him. He deposited it at the curb beside three more like it and paused to wipe his forehead with a luridly pink bandana.

Two men crossed the street toward him. They were Bruce and Bill, the college men. They were wearing their overcoats and white scarfs, and each carried a cellophane-wrapped florist's box under his arm. They didn't look so healthy this morning, but they were up and around.

Latin slowed to a saunter, watching. Bruce and Bill came up to the janitor and halted, standing at attention.

"Will you let us in the building?" Bruce asked.

"We want to see Miss Lily Trace," Bill added.

The janitor eyed them sourly. "You got a nerve, you two. After the hell you raised last night."

"We came to apologize for that," Bruce said.

Bill held out a ten dollar bill wordlessly.

"Well..." said the janitor uncertainly. "Why don't you wait until some decent hour to do your apologizing?"

"Miss Trace will be up," Bruce said.

"She told us she always waits up to see the sun rise," Bill explained.

"Well, all right," said the janitor, taking the bill. "But no fighting and hollering, remember. Come on and— What do you want?"

"I'm with these gentlemen," said Latin.

Bruce and Bill looked at him in surprise.

"I'm Miss Trace's agent," Latin explained.

"Her business agent?" Bruce asked.

Latin nodded casually. "Sort of. Lead on, MacDuff."

"The name is MacGillicuddy," the janitor corrected.

He piloted them along the alley and down a flight of cement steps into the shadowy reaches of the apartment basement. He opened the door of the express elevator and pointed to the control panel.

"It operates itself. Just punch the buttons."

Bruce and Bill and Latin got in the elevator, and Bill pushed the button numbered 7. The elevator rose with ponderous, quiet dignity.

Bruce cleared his throat. "I hope Miss Trace won't be too angry at us. We behaved very rudely to her last night. We were drunk."

"How'd you like Priscilla?" Latin asked.

Bruce and Bill looked at each other, startled.

"The taxi driver who took you to Kate's is a friend of mine," Latin explained.

"Oh," said Bruce.

"We enjoyed her very much— I think," said Bill.

Latin nodded. "I'll tell her the next time I see her. She'll be interested to know that she looks like Lily Trace."

There was a pained silence until the elevator stopped gently. Bill slid the door back and then followed Latin and Bruce down the hall. Bruce stopped in front of the door numbered 702 and reached for the gilt knocker.

Latin pushed his hand away. "Listen!"

INSIDE THE APARTMENT there was a rumbling thump, and then the sharp smash of breaking glass. A woman screamed in a choked, furious way.

Latin tried the door. It was locked. He slammed his shoulder against the panel. The door was thick and as solid as a stone wall. It bounced him right back.

The woman screamed again. Bruce and Bill shoved Latin to one side and hit the door together, grunting in concert. They hit ard and expertly, shoulders down, but the door was equal to them. It didn't even squeak.

Latin caught Bill by the shoulder and pulled him back. "Down that hall and around to the side! There must be a back door or a terrace to this apartment! Quick!"

Bill went down the hall at a run. Latin hammered on the door with both fists.

"Open up! Open the door!"

There was another final thump and then silence. On the other side of the door someone whimpered softly. Latin rattled the knob fiercely while Bruce breathed on the back of his neck.

The lock snapped. Latin kicked the door wide open and jumped into the apartment, crouching, the stubby revolver poised in his right hand.

"Oh, my God!" Bruce whispered.

Lily Trace was sitting down on the floor with her back against the wall and her rounded, bare legs spread out asprawl in front of her. Her hair was pulled down over her forehead, and she glared through it at them like a cornered animal. She had been wearing a black silk nightgown, but there wasn't much left of it.

"That bitch!" she said breathlessly. She was holding both hands up to her right cheek. She took the hands away, revealing four red furrows that ran from under her eye down past the corner of her mouth. She looked at the blood on her fingers and said many more things, all obscene. The room looked like someone had tried to cage a stray typhoon in it.

Bill came staggering through the rear door of the living-room. He was bent painfully double, and his face was white and sicklooking.

"She— kicked me. I tried to stop her—"

He sat down on the side of an overturned chair and rocked back and forth.

Lily Trace had pulled the remnants of her nightgown from her shoulders and was gingerly examining four more parallel red gashes that ran from her collarbone down between her breasts to her hip like a fantastic slanted bandolier. She looked up and nodded at Latin.

"Forget the jewelry gag, Latin. Get that dame for me. Pll pay anything extra it costs."

"What do you want me to do with her when I get her?" Latin asked.

"Light a cigaret," said Lily Trace. "And stick it in her eye. Or better yet— hold her until I can get there and do it myself." She wasn't fooling.

"I'll see what I can do," said Latin. "Want me to call you a doctor now?"

Lily Trace's mouth was swollen, and she grinned at him lopsidedly. "Hell, no. I've been beaten up worse than this— but not lately. The Gold Dust Twins, here, will help me patch myself up. You get out and locate that dame for me."

Latin liked her suddenly, better than he would have thought possible a half-hour before. He nodded and grinned at her.

"I'll find her. I'll get in touch with you when I do. Put your face together again carefully. It's too nice to spoil."

"Well, thanks, kid," said Lily Trace. "See you soon."

Latin chuckled and went out into the hall. Three or four sleepy, awed tenants watched him as he got into the freight elevator and closed the door behind him. He punched the button for the basement and rode downward.

The janitor was nowhere in sight in the cellar, and Latin walked through it and up the flight of cement steps into the alley.

"Tweet-tweet,"" said a hoarse voice.

Latin stopped instantly. Inspector Walters sauntered over to him and took hold of his arm in a friendly way.

"This is another one of those coincidences," he greeted, "I was just thinking about you. I was saying to myself: 'I wonder what my old pal Latin is doing with himself these days.' And here you are. Funny, eh?"

"No," said Latin. "I thought you were going to keep the district attorney's office off my neck."

"That was before a cop reported that he spotted Steamer Morgan hanging around your joint. Where were you all night— if the answer won't shock me too much?"

"I was cornered in an apartment with a house dick and three old maids watching the door. I had to wait until they got tired and went away. I've got your murderer cornered for you now."

"That's a matter of indifference to me," said Walters. "On account of I've got you cornered. The district attorney's dopes were too dumb to look under those ashes in your alley, but I wasn't. Let's see you work yourself out of that hold."

"Come along," Latin invited.

Mr. Hammersley was still on duty when Latin and Inspector Walters entered the enormous, austere lobby of Gravesend Manor.

"How do you do, Inspector Walters," he said cordially.

Walters' mouth opened in surprise, but before he could make any reply, Latin said smoothly: "Good morning, Mr. Hammersley. This man is one of my

subordinates. It has become very important that I see Mr. Drew at once. Is he in?"

"Why, yes," said Hammersley, "but he left strict instructions that he was not to be disturbed for any reason. He said he wouldn't answer the phone or the doorbell."

"I'm very sorry," Latin said firmly, "but we must see him. Will you give me the passkey to his apartment? You can trust my discretion."

"I'm sure I can," Hammersley agreed, handing over a tagged passkey. "Mr. Drew has apartment 404. Have the police apprehended that Latin person as yet?"

"Oh, yes," said Latin. "He's in custody right now."

He led the way to the elevator, with Walters following a step behind him.

"Impersonating an officer," Walters said grimly. "I don't mind that so much. What gets me is that you impersonated me— and then introduced me as my own subordinate!"

The elevator stopped at the fourth floor, and they walked down a shadowed hallway to the dark, fumed oak door that had the small silvered numerals 404 placed in a neat slant across its middle panel.

"We'll give him a try," said Latin.

He rang the door bell and then knocked loudly on the door with his fist. There was no answer. After waiting a moment, Latin fitted the passkey in the lock and opened the door.

The living-room was square and low-ceilinged, furnished in massive, heavy mahogany. From the doorway at the left came the spattering thunder of a shower.

Latin, with Walters still right behind him, looked in the livingroom closet, in the bedroom and its closet, and into the kitchenette that was fitted up as a bar. He came back into the living-room and pushed the bathroom door wider.

Steam misted the mirror and the chrome fittings of the sink and toilet and billowed in misty clouds against the moisture-beaded ceiling. On the far side of the room there was a sunken bathtub completely enclosed now with a slickly wet shower curtain. Water splashed noisily behind it.

Latin raised his voice: "Drew!"

THE CURTAIN shivered and billowed, and then Drew put his head around the edge of it, wiping soap and water out of his eyes.

"What the devil.... Oh, it's you. I didn't hear the doorbell. Who's that with you?"

"Inspector Walters, Homicide," said Walters.

Drew's eyes widened. "Oh. Well— well, make yourselves at home. I'll be out in just a second."

Latin and Walters went back into the living-room. In the bathroom, the sound of the shower stopped abruptly, and then Drew came out into the living-room, wrapping himself in a woolly white bathrobe. He looked puzzled and worried.

"Are you in trouble, Latin?"

"Somewhat," Latin admitted. "That's what I wanted to talk to you about."

"Oh," said Drew vaguely. "Well, would you like a drink? I've got some of your favorite brandy."

"Is the bottle open?" Latin asked.

Drew shook his head. "No. I seldom drink brandy."

"I'll take some," said Latin, "if I can watch you open the bottle."

"Why, yes," said Drew in amazement.

He found it in the cupboard behind the kitchenette bar. With Latin watching, he cut through the foil seal and worked out the cork.

"What did you want?" Drew asked.

Latin had the brandy in an inhaler a little smaller than a goldfish bowl. He sniffed at it appreciatively, took a sip, and rolled it around on his tongue.

"We're looking for Teresa Mayan," he said, swallowing. "Do you know her?"

"Of course," said Drew. "She's my secretary."

"She used to be your mistress, didn't she?"

"Sort of," Drew admitted.

"But she isn't now?"

Drew coughed. "Weill, now and then... ."

Latin nodded. "Yeah. Have you seen her lately?"

"Not for the last few days. I haven't been to my office."

"She tried to get you last night— on the phone."

"Yes," said Drew. "She wanted me to sign some important letters."

"Did she bring them over here?"

"No."

"Has she been here?"

"No," said Drew, irritated. "She hasn't been here, and she isn't here now. Look around if you don't believe me."

"We have," said Walters glumly. "Don't ask me why, though. I'm just a subordinate."

Latin said: "Did Teresa kick up a row when you gave her the old brush-off?"

Drew controlled his temper. "Yes, she did, A hell of a row, if you must know."

"But you still hire her?"

Drew shrugged. "She's a good secretary, and she knows a lot about my business."

"Do you know a man named Donald K. Raleigh?" Latin asked.

Drew eyed him in silence for a long moment and then said slowly: "Yes. I know of him. I don't know him personally. He's president of the Cataract Power Company. He moved in with Teresa after I moved out. That's why she hasn't been bothering me lately."

"Did you know Raleigh was in legal trouble?"

"Just a stockholders' suit," Drew said. "It doesn't mean anything. I understand from what Teresa has said that he's stalling them. They'll get tired pretty soon."

"Those stockholders," Latin said, "got hold of a couple lawyers who don't get tired and who— believe it or not— are also honest. Raleigh was pretending he was too sick to appear in court. The lawyers hired a private detective to follow him and prove he wasn't. The private detective got the goods on him last night. He got pictures of him eating and drinking in Guiterrez's restaurant, and he got Raleigh's signature on a dated menu from that restaurant. Evidence like that, you can't skid around."

"Ah-ha!" Walters said, suddenly seeing the light. "So Steamer pulled his autograph collecting gag once too often!"

"Yes," said Latin, "Raleigh was too drunk to know the difference. But Teresa Mayan was with him, and she wasn't. She spotted Steamer, so Steamer ended up in the alley with his throat cut and his pockets empty."

"No!" Drew protested instantly. "Teresa wouldn't—"

"Raleigh was plenty scared when he sobered up enough to understand, after they got back to Teresa's apartment," Latin went on. "Teresa scared him some more. I don't know what she told him. It probably was convincing, and he was pretty dumb and pretty fuddled anyway. She told him he'd have to beat it— skip the country. He had assets hidden around here and there. She got his power of attorney, so she could cash in on them and send them to him."

Latin smiled thinly. "She didn't mean to do it, of course. She didn't even give him a chance to go anywhere. She put some cyanide in his farewell drink of whiskey and dumped him into the dirty clothes hamper. She had decided to move back in on you, Drew."

Drew was staring at him, fascinated. "I— I don't believe.... Why, Teresa wouldn't—"

"She went over and beat up Lily Trace to warn Lily to keep her hands off."

Drew's face whitened. "Lily!" He turned and jumped for the telephone.

"She's all right," Latin said, heading him off. "A little battered and bruised, but that's all. You better not call her now. I don't think she'd be in very good humor. After all, she knows who beat her up and why."

"Oh," said Drew uncertainly.

"All I want to know," said Walters, "is where is this here Teresa Mayan?"

"I can't figure that out," Latin said slowly. "I was sure she'd come here. She wouldn't risk going back to her own apartment until she got some reinforcements or found out what happened to me. She ought to be here now."

"Well, she ain't," said Walters.

Latin was frowning at Drew, his eyes narrowed and calculating. He looked at Drew's water-damp hair, at the bathrobe, He glanced toward the bathroom door in the same calculating way and then back to Drew again. He cleared his throat.

"May I have some more brandy?"

"Surely," said Drew. "Try it with some soda. I'll get some ice..."

He reached down under the little shelf that served as a bar. Latin stepped silently forward and picked up the brandy bottle by its neck and swung it in a glistening arc.

There was a sodden smack as the bottle hit Drew's head. He bounced backward into some shelves loaded with glasses and brought them down around him in a ringing, shattering crash.

"They make these thick," Latin said, examining the brandy bottle. "It didn't even crack."

"Talk," Walters ordered dangerously. "Real fast, pal."

"Look in the bathroom," Latin said. "In the tub."

Walters went into the bathroom and came out again almost instantly. "There's a dame in there. She's dead. Drowned."

"Teresa Mayan," said Latin. "Drew was behind her all the time. She was crazy about him. She spotted Steamer at Guiterrez's or on the way there, and she telephoned Drew from the restaurant. He took care of Steamer— with her help. He fed Raleigh a cyanide drink— again, with her help. He planned all this just like I outlined it, only he was going to get the dough— not Teresa. She would do anything he said, but she wouldn't stand for Lily Trace. When she found out about that, she went on the rampage. She smacked Lily around, and she must have told Drew she'd squeal on him if he didn't quit looking in that direction. Drew had maneuvered all this business with Raleigh just to get enough money to get Lily. He wouldn't throw the prize away after he'd won the game, so he dunked Teresa in the bathtub.

"He had it all figured out that she was to take the blame for everything and then throw herself in the river for remorse over her evil deeds."

Walters had a small round tin in his hand. "She was only wearing a sport coat, and this was the only thing in the pockets. I wonder what it is?"

"Open it and see what's inside," Latin suggested.

Walters unscrewed the cover of the tin. He reached in and pulled out a long string of 35 millimeter film.

"Pictures!" he exclaimed. "Now why would she be carrying these around with her?"

"We'll never know," said Latin, pouring himself a drink. "Because that was undeveloped film, and when you exposed it to the light, you ruined it."

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ERNEST FAVENC

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3: A Hypnotic Experience
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8: The Mystery of the Death Stroke
9: An Unwilling Pirate
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21: The Invisible Horseman
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28: The Strange Adventure of George Vallance

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6: In the Lap of Delilah
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19: Waifs of the Straits

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2: The Ghostly Bullock-Bell
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4: The Sacrifice of Norman Grainger
5: On the Island of Shadows
6: Malchook's Doom
7: The Red Lagoon
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12: Blood For Blood
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34: Jim's Second Experience of It
35: The Downfall of Smailes
36: Jim's Last and Serious Case

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24: Clarissa
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EDGAR JEPSON

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13: Mr. Belton's Immunity (with Robert Eustace)
14: The Emerald Celt
15: The Bechut Mystery
16: A Criminal Freak

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6: A House of Mountain Ash

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HAROLD MERCER

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12: Grigson With the Wind Up
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27: A Memory of Morbecque
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"FRANK REID" (1884-1947)
(Alexander Vindex Vennard)

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12: The Pink Death
13: Fingers of Death
14: The Green Umbrella

15: The Pearler of Pomete
16: The Curse of the Poppy
17: Cave of Death
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19: Three Teeth
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25: The Mutiny on the Cypress
26: The Resurrection of Peter Breen
27: The Orang-Utan
26: A Home for Marie Ellen

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ETHEL LINA WHITE

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1: Cheese
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5: White Cap
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The Ghost Gavotte and other stories
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2: The Unknown
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6: The Seven Years' Secret
7: A Bad-Good Woman

8: Noblesse Oblige
9: The Pillow
10: Maids of Honour
11: The Day
12: The Suicide and the Saint
13: The Counter-Irritant
14: The Cellar
15: Don't Dream on Midsummer's Eve
16: The Fairy Pot
17: If You Can... Lose
18: It Hung on a Thread

The Ghost Gavotte and other stories
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14: The Cellar
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16: The Fairy Pot
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HENRY S. WHITEHEAD

Thirty-Two Uncanny Tales
1: The Door / Nov 1924
2: The Fireplace / Jan 1925

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9: The Shadows / Weird Tales Nov 1927
10: The Cult of the Skull / Dec 1928
11: The People of Pan / March 1929
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14; The Lips / Sep 1929.
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