PAST MASTERS 153

Bertram Atkey
Frank L. Packard
Ethel Lina White
Algernon Blackwood
Marjorie Bowen
Lady Eleanor Smith
Alfred George Gardiner

and more

PAST MASTERS 153

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

21 Feb 2024

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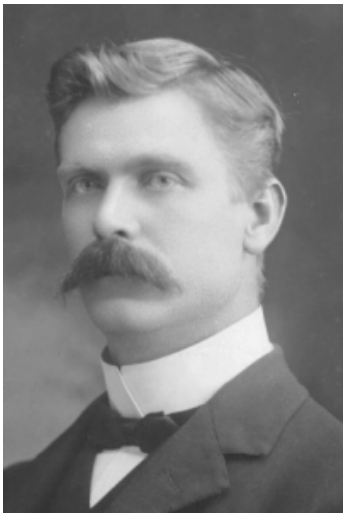
Roderic Quinn

1867-1949

The Bulletin, Sydney, 4 Mar 1909



Roderic Joseph Quinn

SOMETHING of mine had captured the heart of Hogan. He said that if it were set to music it would make a good song. He had coal-black on his arms and smut on his nose, and the sweat streamed down his face in sable streaks as he discussed the matter and ventured a proposition. The proposition was to the effect that he knew a girl named Araminta who was no slouch in the composin' line. If I was without objection he would ask Araminta to do the settin'. As it is no desire of mine to put obstacles in the way of budding genius, I accepted Hogan's offer with thanks.

As a result of our community of interest, Hogan and I became friends, where formerly we had occupied only the cold relationship of tradesman and client. Hogan was a wood and coal merchant in a thriving way of business, and, as a consequence of our friendship, I heartily believe that he gave me full weight in the way of coal and almost as much wood as I ordered and paid for. It is little kindnesses like this which make friendship so admirable.

I sometimes sit back and light a pipe and think of Hogan. Without help, and with little education, he had built up a business that made him the envy of almost every other wood and coal merchant in the suburb. He was active, sober, shrewd and industrious, with few prejudices and few predilections. From a humble seat in a wood cart he had climbed to the glory of a fuel merchant, with three men and a boy on his pay-roll. Such a character and such

progress showed that Hogan belonged to that type of man who sees a goal and goes for it, and reaches it in spite of a whole field of opposing shoulders. Hogan, however, had one magnificent aversion and one all-absorbing hobby, and these things made himfallible.

His aversion was marriage; his hobby music.

Hogan, leaning against the post of his gateway, or sitting on his three-legged office stool, would often talk of his aversion.

"I'm not for marriage, " he'd say. "No woman gets me. In spite of all their oglin's and their mincin s and their mouthin's, I pass 'em by like the idle wind, which they respect not. Free I was born, and free I'll die. No eyes, blue or dark, grey or green, sly or sly without seemin' to be sly, will ever yard me up and put me into harness. The green hills for me, with a free leg and an unbitted mouth."

Hereabouts I would remark that I had heard men talk that way before.

"And saw them fall in afterwards," Hogan would continue. "Well, that may be. Some men get in front of trams and are turned into smilin' corpses. On the other hand, the man who watches and keeps his ears wide, and takes the sidewalk for it, gets to the end of his journey safe and sound, and continyers to wear his smiles alive."

I ventured to interpolate that, if everyone thought in the same way, posterity would have a poor prospect of seeing the sun by day and the moon by night.

Thereupon Hogan, if he were chewing, would turn his tobacco on his tongue, or if he were smoking blow a wreath of smoke, fat with content, from his mouth, and reply: "Maybe you re right, but I'm not everyone— I'm Hogan."

After some moments of cogitation he would continue :

I'm not disallowin that some men have got to be victimised. Victims is necessary. But my way of lookin' at it is this: the Holy Bonds is no less bonds than if they were that headstall over there, or those hoops of iron round that cask, they're more so, in fact; the headstall may fray away and perish, and the hoops rust and burst and give the cask a chance to spread itself, but the 01 ?^ s last for ever. I make you a present of the point that while there's horses there's got to be headstalls, and while there's casks there's got to be hoops to bind them, and while there's fools there's got to be Holy Bonds. But I'm no fool. I'm Hogan "

With that fine imagery of the race to which he belonged he would sometimes enchant my attention while he aired his aversion in a larger area.

"You see them horses there— the grey and the brown. Both of them are equal quiet as horses, both does the work they've got to do. Both will stand all day fillin' his sides with corn, or leanin' on three legs and restin' the fourth.

Both has the same lugubr'ous droop of the lower lip. Well, good ! Now put them two horses in a paddock, and watch out what'll happen. Any kid with bare legs and a scratch on his nose can catch the brown and ride him. But with the grey it's a mighty side different, an' I'm the man that knows it. Come at him with yer hands full of corn; comeat him with your 'whoa,' your 'now boy,' and your coaxin'. There's no foolin' him. Just as yer get inside a length of him he gives a hoist to his head, lifts his heels in the air, raises a proud, triumphant whinny, and gallops off. Well, that horse is Hogan, and I'm that horse. When Pink Mill'n'ry comes into my paddock, where I'm feedin' my full and feelin' happy, and tries her arts on me— smiles on me with nice, red, saucy lips, and coos to me in the rosy tones of the cushat dove, up goes my heels and away I gallops. Yes, Nature giv' the same wisdom to that horse as it giv' to me— only sometimes he overdoes it, rejoocin' me to conspicuosity with a halter in m' hand."

ONE NIGHT I found Hogan on a ferry steamer faring homeward from a city concert. He was dressed in prosperous black, and his face was smooth and shaven. I found it difficult to reconcile him with Hogan of the coal-black countenance. And more than this, when I saw that he was companioned by a trim young lady in startling blue and a white felt hat, greatly flowered and feathered, I could not think of him as Hogan the philosophic rebel against the august institution of matrimony. The girl had saucy eyes and plenty to say, and the amount she had to say kept her pretty teeth in constant view. I thought within myself, as I saw her smiling into Hogan's eyes, that, though unaware of it, the halter was in dangerous nearness to his head.

The following night I found him at his usual leaning post.

"'Twas Araminta," he said in reply to my twitting, "an' there's nothing between us but pure love of music."

I paraphrased Euclid to the extent that people who love the same thing often wind up by loving one another.

He laughed cynically.

"That," said he, "may be true of some, but it's not of me."

When Hogan dilated on his hobby he was no less eloquent than when he spoke of his aversion.

"It's a night like this, with a high white moon, that music gets me most," he said on one occasion, "but it gets me anyway, all the time. A good song is bread and meat to me and wine and woman, and everything that's worth while. It's that that takes me down to Araminta so often. She sings the touchin' melodies I like—the 'Home, Sweet Homes' and the 'Annie Lauries' of music, not the arryers, and the symphonies and the Screams in Blue."

I interrupted Hogan.

"Has Araminta a mother?" I asked

"She has," he replied, "a good deal of mother— 16 stone of mother at the very least."

"Any sisters?"

"One," said Hogan, "an'that one's a beauty. She has the temper of ten devils, a wart on her nose, and a beard on her chin."

"A beard!" I ejaculated.

"Yes, containing 40 hairs. I counted 'em. She hates me, an' I her."

Shortly after business took me away from the city, and I did not see Hogan for a full fortnight. When I met him he was no longer the confident and self-sufficient fellow of other days. His eyes wore a shifty look, and he talked fitfully on subjects which were novel themes between us. He asked me if I thought that there were any honest lawyers in the country, and when I answered that I knew of some, but that they were unsuccessful, he did not seem too well pleased, and put his hands in his pockets, and seemed to take hold of the money that they contained. Before he left me he put another strange question. He wanted to know my opinion of our Judges, and whether it was true that they favored the gentler sex in suits between men and women. I said that I had a high respect for our Judges as a whole, but that, being men, I supposed they would naturally lean to the woman.

At the corner of a street I saw a little girl endeavoring to capture a goat. She had a succulent cabbage leaf in one hand, and in the other a length of rope. The goat eyed the cabbage leaf hungrily, but, when the girl advanced, trotted off.

The girl followed, calling softly to the shy animal, and presently the goat succumbed to the temptation.

"There you are, Hogan," I said.

Hogan only groaned.

Gossip leaves no stone unturned in our suburb, and it was soon a matter of public scandal that Hogan had jilted Araminta. Damning evidence was quoted against him on all sides. Night after night he had been seen in her little parlor singing love duets with her. He had taken her to many concerts, and bought her a violin, and was paying for her musical tuition. Wild stories were afloat about his treatment of her. It was said that on one eventful night her mother had found the girl leaning on his shoulder, pale with passion and altogether unstrung. It was further said that when the indignant mother asked him when he was going to marry her girl, he had yelled "Ha! Ha!" like a red devil in Faust, and "Marriage be damned!" and left the house in a hurry and without his hat.

Popular feeling surged up against Hogan like a high tide furious with foam. When it became known that the girl, with her hand to her heart and her hat awry, had been seen sitting at her window, weeping, several customers refused to pay Hogan what they owed him. Later on, when it was announced that Araminta, under medical advice, had left for a health-stay in the country, public indignation knew no bounds. Hogan was alluded to as a monster, as a deceiver and a black-hearted betrayer. The girls in the house adjoining his, and the girls in the house opposite, took it in turns to play tunes voicing the perfidy of man to woman. When the piano adjoining him ceased to play the "Fatal Wedding." the instrument opposite punched home the agony by raising "I'll Be All Smiles To-night." Sometimes the two pianos made the night hideous with one soul-blasting lamentation. It was a hot time for Hogan.

WHEN we met again, I told Hogan there was only one thing to do— to marry her.

"I'll not do that," said Hogan, grimly.

"I believe you're innocent," I said; "but appearances are against you."

"Innocent I am," said Hogan; "and I'll not be trapped. If I'd giv' her one word of love, I'd marry her. But 'twas the music I was after."

I told him that some men might believe that— not all— but that no woman would.

"They're banded agin' me," he said. " Every mother s daughter of 'em. The man that can get marrid an won't get marrid is like a rat, an' they re like terriers after him. What, in God's name, am I to do?"

When as I looked at Hogan, pale and a wreck of his former self, I pitied the man, and pity set my wits to play, and the idea came.

"Hogan," I shouted, " there's a way out."

He put his hand on my arm. He trembled very much. He looked me eagerly in the eyes. He said, "What is it?— quick!"

"The other girl," I said, " the sister— the ugly one— she hates you."

Hogan nodded.

"Well," I said, "appearances are against you: put them in your favor."

"How?"

"It was alleged that Araminta was your attraction when you visited her house. Make it appear that it was not so— that her sister attracted you."

"But how?" he asked again, his face almost happy.

"Go to her house to-night and propose for her."

Hogan's face fell.

"But— but," he muttered.

"Doesn't she hate you?" I asked.

"She does, she hates me— I'll do it," he said.
"Before witnesses," I suggested.
Before ten of 'em," he approved.

He came to me late at night. He had been drinking.
"I did it," he said, "before witnesses."
"Well? "
"She said, 'This is so suddin, but I accept yer.' "
We stood without words for a while, and when Hogan went away— "It's the black and dirty trick I've played meself," he said.

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2: The Other Fellow's Job

Frank L. Packard

1877-1942

The Popular Magazine 15 Feb 1913

Frank Lucius Packard

THERE is a page in Hill Division history that belongs to Jimmy Beezer. It happened in the days of the building of the long-talked-of, figure-8-canted-over-sideways tunnel on the Devil's Slide, that worst piece of track, bar none, on the American continent.

Beezer, speaking generally, was a fitter in the Big Cloud shops; Beezer, in particular, wore a beard. According to Big Cloud, Beezer wore a beard because Mrs. Beezer said so; Mrs. Beezer, in point of size, made about two of Beezer, and Big Cloud said she figured the beard kind of took the cuss off the discrepancy.

Anyway, whether that is so or not, Beezer wore a beard, and the reason it is emphasized here is because you couldn't possibly know Beezer without it. Its upper extremity was nicotinedyed in spots to a nut brown, and from thence shaded down to an indeterminate rust color at its lower edge— when he hadn't been dusting off and doing parlor-maid work with it in the unspeakable grime of a "front-end." In shape it never followed the prevailing tonsorial fashions. As far as anyone knew, no barber was ever the richer for Beezer's 'beard. Beezer used to trim it himself Sunday mornings, and sort of half-moon effect he always gave it.

He was a spare, short man, all jump and nerves, and active as a cat. He had shrewd, gray, little eyes, but, owing to the fact that he had a small head and wore a large-size, black, greasy, peaked cap jammed down as far over his face as it would go, the color of his eyes could hardly be said to matter much, for

when you looked at Beezer, Beezer was mostly just a round knob of uptilted nose— and beard.

Beezer's claims to immortality and fame, such as they are, were vested in disease. Beezer had a disease that is very common to mankind in general. There's a whole lot of men like Beezer. Beezer envied the other fellow's job.

He was an almighty good fitter. Tommy Regan, the master mechanic, said so, and Regan ought to know; that's why he took Beezer out of the shops where he had grown up, so to speak, and gave him the roundhouse repair work to do. And that's where Beezer caught the disease— in the roundhouse. Beezer contracted a mild attack of it the first day, but it wasn't bad enough to trouble him much, or see a doctor about, so he let it go on, and it got chronic.

Beezer commenced to inhale an entirely different atmosphere, and the more he inhaled it the more discontented he grew. An engine out in the roundhouse, warm and full of life, the steam whispering and purring at her valves, was a very different thing from a cold, rusty, dismantled boiler shell jacked up on lumbering blocks in the erecting shop; and the road talk of specials, holding orders, tissues, running time, and what not had a much more appealing ring to it than discussing how many inches of muck No. 414 had accumulated on her guard plates, the incidental damming of the species wiper, and whether her boxes wanted new babbitting or not.

Toiling like a slave ten hours a day for six days a week, and maybe overtime on Sundays, so that the other fellow could have the fun, and the glory, and the fatter pay check, and the easy time of it, began to get Beezer's goat. The "other fellow" was the engineer.

Beezer got to contrasting up the two jobs, and the more he contrasted the less he liked the looks of his own, and the more he was satisfied of his superior ability to hold down the other over any one of the crowd that signed on or off in the grease-smeared pages of the turner's book, which recorded the comings and goings of the engine crews.

And his ability, according to Beezer's way of looking at it, wasn't all swelled head, either, for there wasn't a bolt or a split pin in any type of engine that had ever nosed its pilot unto the Hill Division that he couldn't have put his finger on with his eyes shut. How much, anyhow, did an engineer know about an engine? There wasn't a fitter in the shops that didn't have the best engineer that ever pulled a throttle pinned down with his shoulders flat on the mat on that count, and there wasn't an engineer but what would admit it, either,

But a routine in which one is brought up, gets married in, and comes to look upon as a sort of fixed quantity for life, isn't to be departed from offhand, and at a moment's notice. Beezer grew ardent with envy, it is true, but the idea of actually switching over from the workbench to the cab didn't strike him

for some time. When it did— the first time— it literally took his breath away. He was in the pit, and he stood up suddenly; the staybolts on the rocker arm held, and Beezer promptly sat down from a wallop on the head that would have distracted the thoughts of any other man than Beezer.

Engineer Beezer! He had to lift the peak of his cap to dig the tears out of his eyes, and when he put it back again the peak was just a trifle farther up his nose. Engineer Beezer— a limited run— the Imperial Flyer— into division on the dot, hanging like a lord of creation from the cab window— cutting the miles on the grades and levels like a swallow— roaring over trestles— diving through tunnels— there was excitement in that, something that made life worth living, instead of everlastingly messing around with a hammer and a cold chisel, and pulling himself thin at the hips on the end of a long-handled union wrench. Daydreams? Well, everybody daydreams. Why not Beezer?

It is not on record that any one ever metamorphosed himself into a drunkard on the spot the first time he ever stepped up to a bar; but, as the Irishman said, “Kape your foot on the rail, an’ you've the makin’s uv a foine bum!”

Of course, the thing wasn’t feasible. It sounded all right, and was mighty alluring, but it was all dream. Beezer put it from him with an unctuous, get-theebehind-me-Satan air, but he purloined a book of “rules’— road rules— out of Fatty MacAllister’s seat in the cab of 1016, He read up the rules at odd moments, and moments that weren’t odd, and gradually the peak of his cap crept up as far as the bridge of his nose. Beezer was keeping his foot on the rail.

Mrs. Beezer found the book. That’s what probably started things along toward a show-down. She was, as has been said, a very large woman, also she was a very capable woman of whom Beezer generally stood in some awe, who washed, and ironed, and cooked for the Beezer brood during the day, and did overtime at nights on socks and multifarious sewing, including patches on Beezer’s overalls. The book fell out of a. pocket one evening. Mrs. Beezer examined it, discovered MacAllister’s name scrawled on it, and leaned across the table under the paper-shaded lamp in their modest combination sitting and dining room.

“What are you doing with this, Mr. Beezer?” she inquired peremptorily; Mrs. Beezer was always peremptory with Beezer.

Beezer coughed behind his copy of the Big Cloud *Weekly*.

“Well?” prompted Mrs. Beezer.

“I brought it home for the children to read,” said Beezer, who, being uncomfortable, sought refuge in the facetious.

“Mr. Beezer,” said Mrs. Beezer, with some asperity, "you, put down that paper and look at me.’

Mr. Beezer obeyed a little doubtfully.

“Now,” continued Mrs. Beezer, “what’s got into you since you went into the roundhouse I don’t know; but I’ve sorter had suspicions, and this book looks like ’em, You might just as well make a clean breast of what’s on your mind, because I’m going to know.”

Beezer looked at his wife and scowled. He felt what might be imagined to be somewhat the feeling of a man who is caught sneaking in by the side entrance after signing. the pledge at a blue ribbon rally. It was not a situation conducive to good humor.

“There ain’t anything got into me,” said he truculently. “If you want to know what I’m doing with that book, I’m reading it because I’m interested in it. And I’ve come to the conclusion that a fitter’s job alongside of an engineer’s ain’t any better than a mudpicking Polack’s.”

“You should have found that out before you went into the shops ten years ago,” said Mrs. Beezer, with a sweetness that tasted like vinegar.

“Ten years ago!” Beezer flared. “How’s a fellow to know what he’s cut out for, and what he can do best, when he starts in? How’s he to know, Mrs. Beezer, will you tell me that ?”

Mrs. Beezer was not sympathetic.

“I don’t know how he’s to know,” she said; “but I know that the trouble with some men is that they don’t know when they're well off, and if you're thinking of—"

“I ain't,” said Beezer sharply.

“I said ‘if,’ Mr. Beezer; and if—"

“There’s no ‘if’ about it," Beezer lied fiercely. “I'm not—"

“You are,” declared Mrs. Beater emphatically, but with some wreckage of English, due to exceeding her speed permit— Mrs. Beezer talked fast. “When you act like that I know you are, and I know you better than you do yourself, and I’m not going to let you make a fool of yourself, and come home here dead some night, and wake up same as poor Mrs. Dalheen got her man back week before last on a box-car door, Don’t you know when you're well off? You an engineer! What kind of an engineer do you think you'd make? Why—”

“Mrs. Beezer,” said Beezer hoarsely. “Shut up!”

Mrs. Beezer caught her breath.

“What did you say?” she gasped.

“I said,” said Beezer sullenly, picking up his paper again, “that I'd never have thought of it if you hadn’t put it into my head, and now the more I think of it the better it looks.”

“I thought so,” sniffed Mrs. Beezer profoundly. “And now, Mr. Beezer, let this be the last of it. The idea! I never heard of such a thing!”

Curiously enough, or perhaps naturally enough, Mrs. Beezer’s cold-water attitude had precisely the opposite effect on Jimmy Beezer to that which she had intended it should have. It was the side-entrance proposition over again. When you’ve been caught sneaking in that way, you might just as well use the front door on Main Street next time, and have done with it. Beezer began to do a little talking around the roundhouse. The engine crews, by the time they tumbled to the fact that it wasn’t just the ordinary grumble that any man is entitled to in his day’s work, stuck their tongues in their cheeks, winked surreptitiously at each other, and encouraged him.

Now it is not to be implied that Jimmy Beezer was anybody’s fool, not for a minute. A first-class master fitter with his time served is a long way from being in that class right on the face of it... Beezer might have been a little blinded to the tongues and winks on account of his own earnestness; perhaps he was for a time. Afterward— but just a minute, or we'll be running by a meeting point, which is mighty bad railroading.

Beezer’s cap, when he took the plunge and tackled Regan, had got tilted pretty far back, so far that the peak stood off his forehead at about the same rakish angle that his upturned little round knob of a nose stuck up out of his beard, which is to say that Beezer had got to the stage where he had decided that the professional swing through the gangway he had been practicing every time, and some others, that he had occasion to get into a cab, was going to be of some practical use at an early date.

He put it up to Regan one morning when the master mechanic came into the roundhouse.

Regan leaned his fat little body up against the jamb of one of the big engine doors, pulled at his scraggly, brown mustache, and blinked as he listened.

“What’s the matter with you, Beezer?” he inquired perplexedly, when the other was at an end,

“Haven't I just told you?” said Beezer. “I want to quit fitting and get running.”

“Talks as though he meant it,” commented Regan sotto voce to himself, as he peered earnestly into the fitter’s face,

“Of course I mean it,” declared Beezer, a little tartly. “Why wouldn't I?"

“No,” said Regan; “that ain't the question. The question is, why would you? H’m?”

“Because,” Beezer answered promptly, “I like a snap as well as the next man. It’s a better job than the one I’ve got, better money, better hours, easier all around, and one I can hold down with the best of them.”

Regan’s eyebrows went up. "Think so?” he remarked casually.

“I do,” declared Beezer.

“Well, then,” said Regan, “if you’ve thought it all out and made up your mind, there’s nothing I know of to stop you. Want to begin right away?”

“I do,” said Beezer again. It was coming easier than he had expected, and there was a jubilant trill in his voice.

“All right,” said Regan. “I'll speak to Clarihue about it. You can start in wiping in the morning.”

“Wiping?” echoed Beezer faintly.

“Sure,” said Regan. “That's what you wanted, wasn’t it? Wiping— a dollar-ten a day.”

“Look here,’ said Beezer, with a gulp; “I ain’t joking about this.”

“Well, then, what are you kicking about?” demanded Regan.

“About wiping and a dollar-ten,” said Beezer. “What would I do with a dollar-ten, me with a wife and three kids?”

“I don’t know what you’d do with it,’ returned Regan. “What do you expect?”

“I don’t expect to start in wiping,” said Beezer, beginning to get a little hot.

“You've been here long enough to know the way up,” said Regan. “Wiping, firing— you take your turn., And your turn’ll come for an engine according to the way things are shaping up now in, say, about fifteen years.”

“Fifteen years!”

“Mebbe,” grinned Regan. “I can’t promise to kill off anybody to accommodate you, can I?”

“And don’t the ten years I’ve put in here count for anything?” queried Beezer aggressively. “Why don’t you start me in sweeping up the roundhouse? Wiping! Wiping, my eye! What for? I know all about the way up. That’s all right for a man starting in green, but I ain't green. Why, there ain't a year-old apprentice over in the shops there that don’t know more about an engine than any blooming engineer on the division. You know that, Regan."

“Well,” admitted the master mechanic, “you’re not far wrong at that, Beezer.”

“You bet, I'm not!’ Beezer was emphatic. “How about me, then? Do I know an engine, every last nut and bolt in her, or don’t I?”

“You do,” said Regan. “And if it’s any satisfaction to you to know it, I wouldn’t ask for a better fitter any time than yourself.”

“Then, what’s the use of talking about wiping? If I’ve put in ten years learning the last kink there is in an engine, and have forgotten more than the best man of the engine crews’ll know when he dies, what’s the reason I ain’t competent to run one?”

Regan reached into his back pocket for his chewing, wriggled his head till his teeth met in the plug, and tucked the tobacco back into his pocket again.

“Beezer,” said he slowly, spitting out an undesirable piece of stalk, “did it ever strike you that there’s a whole lot of blamed good horse doctors that'd make mighty poor jockeys, h’m?”

Beezer scowled deeply, and kicked at a piece of waste with the toe of his boot.

“All I want is a chance,” he growled shortly. “Give me a chance, and I'll show you.”

“You can have your chance,” said Regan. “I’ve told you that.”

“Yes,” said Beezer bitterly. “It’s a swell chance, ain’t it? A dollar-ten a day—wiping! I'd be willing to go on firing for a spell.”

“Wiping,” said Regan, with finality, as he turned away and started toward the shops; “but you’d better chew it over again, Beezer, and have a talk with your wife before you make up your mind,”

Somebody chuckled behind Beezer, and Beezer whirled like a shot. The only man in sight was Fatty MacAllister. Fatty’s back was turned, and he was leaning over the main rod poking assiduously into the internals of the 1016 with a long-spouted oil can; but Beezer caught the suspicious rise and fall of the overall straps over the shoulders of Fatty’s jumper.

Beezer was only human. It got Beezer on the raw, which was already pretty sore. The red flared into his face hard enough to make every individual hair in his beard incandescent; he walked over to Fatty, yanked Fatty out into the open, and shoved his face into Fatty’s.

“What in blazes are you grinning at?” he inquired earnestly.

“Hm?” said Fatty.

“Yes— h’m!” said Beezer eloquently. “That’s what I’m asking you.”

Whether Fatty MacAllister was just plain lion-hearted, or a rotten bad judge of human nature isn’t down on the minutes. All that shows is that he was one or the other. With some labor and exaggerated patience, he tugged a paper-covered pamphlet out of his pocket from under his jumper. It was the book of rules Beezer had “borrowed” some time before.

“Mrs. Beezer,” said Fatty blandly, “was over visiting the missus this morning, and she brought this back. From what she said, I dunno as it would do any good, but I thought, perhaps, if you were going to take Regan’s advice

about talking to your wife, you and Mrs. Beezer might like to look it over again together before you—"

That was as far as Fatty MacAllister got. Generally speaking, the more steam there is to the square inch buckled down under the valve, the shriller the whistle is when it breaks loose. Beezer let a noise out of him that sounded like a green parrot complaining of indigestion, and went at MacAllister head on.

The oil can sailed through the air and crashed into the window glass of Clarihue's cubby-hole in the corner. There was a tangled and revolving chaos of arms and legs, and lean and fat bodies. Then a thud. There wasn't anything scientific about it. They landed on the floor and began to roll, and a pail of packing and black oil they knocked over greased the way.

There was some racket about it, and Regan heard it; so did Clarihue, and MacAllister's fireman, and another engine crew or two, and a couple of wipers. The rush reached the combatants when there wasn't more than a scant thirty-second of an inch between them and the edge of an empty pit— but a thirty-second is a whole lot sometimes.

When they stood them up and got them uncoupled, MacAllister's black eye was modestly toned down with a generous share of what had been in the packing bucket, but his fist still clutched a handful of hair that he had separated from Beezer's beard, and Beezer's eyes were running like hydrants from the barbering. Take it all around, thanks mostly to the packing bucket, they were a fancy enough looking pair to send a high-class team of professional comedi'ans streaking for the sidings all along the right of way to get out of their road.

It doesn't take very much, after all, to make trouble, and once started, it's worse than the measles in spreading.

Mostly, they guyed Fatty MacAllister at first; they liked his make-up better owing to the black eye. But Fatty was both generous and modest; what applause there was coming from the audience he wanted Beezer to get, as he wasn't playing the "lead."

And Beezer got it. Fatty opened up a bit, and maybe drew on his imagination a bit about what Mrs. Beezer had said to Mrs. MacAllister about Jimmy Beezer; and what Beezer had said to Regan, and Regan to Beezer, not forgetting the remark about the horse doctor.

Oh, yes, trouble once started makes the measles look as though it were-out of training, and couldn't stand the first round. To go into details would take more space than a treatise on the manners and customs of the early Moabites; but, summed up, it was something like this: Mrs. Beezer paid another visit to Mrs. MacAllister, magnanimously ignoring the social obligation Mrs.

MacAllister was under to repay the former call. Mrs, MacAllister received Mrs. Beezer in the kitchen over the washtubs, which was just as well for the sake of the rest of the house, for when Mrs. Beezer withdrew, somewhat shattered, but in good order, by a flank movement through the back yard, an impartial observer would have said that the kitchen had been wrecked by a gas explosion. This brought Big Cloud's one lawyer and the justice of the peace into it, and cost Beezer everything but the odd change on his month's pay check when it came.

Meanwhile, what with a disturbed condition of marital bliss at home, Beezer caught it right and left from the train crews, engine crews, and shop hands during the daytime. They hadn't anything against Beezer, not for a minute, but give a railroad crowd an opening, and there's no aggregation on earth quicker on the jump to take it. They dubbed him "Engineer" Beezer, and "Doctor" Beezer; but mostly "Doctor" Beezer, out of compliment to Regan.

Old Grumpy, the timekeeper in the shop, got so used to hearing it that he absent-mindedly wrote it down "Doctor Beezer" when he came to make up the pay roll. That put it up to Carleton, the super, who got a curt letter from the auditors' office down East, asking for particulars, and calling his attention to the fact that all medical services were performed by contract with the company. Carleton scowled perplexedly at the letter, scrawled Tommy Regan's initials at the bottom of the sheet, plus an interrogation mark, and put it in the master mechanic's basket.

Regan grinned, and wrote East, telling them facetiously to scratch out the "Doctor" and squeeze in a "J" in front of the Beezer, and it would be all right; but it didn't go— you can't get by a high-browed set of red-tape-bound expert accountants of unimpeachable integrity, who are safeguarding the company's funds like that. Hardly! They held out the money, and by the time the matter was straightened out the pay car had come and gone, and Beezer got a chance to find out how good his credit was. Considering everything, Beezer took it pretty well, though he went around as though he had boils.

But if Beezer had a grouch, and cause for one, it didn't make the other fellow's job look any the less good to Beezer. Mrs. Beezer's sharp tongue, barbed with contemptuous innuendo that quite often developed into pointed directness as to her opinion of his opinions, and the kind of an engineer he'd make, which he was obliged to listen to at night, and the men— who didn't know what an innuendo was— that he was obliged to listen to by day, didn't alter Beezer's views on that subject any, whatever else it might have done. Beezer had a streak of stubbornness running through the boils.

He never got to blows again. His tormentors took care of that. They had MacAllister as an example that Beezer was not averse to bringing matters to an

intimate issue at any time, and what they had to say they said at a safe distance. Anyhow, most of them could run faster than Beezer could, because nature had made Beezer short. Beezer got to be a pretty good shot with a two-inch washer or a one-inch nut, and he got to carrying around a supply of ammunition in the hip pocket of his overalls.

As for MacAllister, when the two ran foul of each ‘other, as Fatty came on for his runs or signed off at the end of one, there wasn’t any talking done. Regan had warned them a little too hard to take chances. They just looked at each other sour enough to turn a whole milk dairy. The men told Beezer that Fatty had rigged a punching bag up in his back yard, and was taking a correspondence course in pugilism.

Beezer said curried words.

“Driving an engine," said they, “is a dog’s life, it’s worse than pick slinging, there’s nothing in it. Why don’t you cut it out? You've had enough experience to get a job in the shops. Why don’t you hit Regan up and change over?”

“By Christmas!” Beezer would roar, while he emptied his pocket and gave vent to mixed metaphor, “I’d show you a change over if I ever got a chance; and I’d show you there was something to running an engine besides bouncing up and down onthe seat like balls with nothing but wind in them, and grining at the scenery!”

A chance— that’s all Beezer asked for— a chance. And he kept on asking Regan. That dollar-ten a day looked worse thah ever since Mrs. Beezer’s invasion of Mrs. MacAllister’s kitchen. But Regan was obdurate, and likewise was beginning to get his usually complacent outlook on life (all men with a paunch have a complacent, serene outlook on life as a compensation for the paunch) disturbed a little. Beezer and his demands were becoming ubiquitous. Regan was getting decidedly on edge.

“Firing,” said Beezer. “Let me start in firing: there’s as much in that as in fitting, and I can get along for the little while it’ll be before you'll be down on your knees begging me to take a throttle.”

“Firing, eh!" Regan finally exploded one day. “Look here, Beezer; I’ve about enough from you. Firing, eh? There'd have been some firing done before this that would have surprised you if you hadn't been a family man! Got that? Now forget it! The trouble with you is that you don’t know what you want or what you're talking about.”

“I know what I want, and I know what I’m talking about,” Beezer answered doggedly; “and I’m going to keep on putting it up to you till you quit saying ‘No.’ ”

“You'll be doing it a long time, then,” said Regan bluntly, laying a few inches of engine dust with blackstrap juice; “a long time, Beezer— till I’m dead.”

But it wasn’t. Regan was wrong about that, dead wrong. It’s queer the way things work out sometimes!

That afternoon, after a visit from Harvey, who had been promoted from division engineer to resident and assistant chief on the Devil’s Slide tunnel, Carleton sent for Regan.

“Tommy,” said he, as the master mechanic entered his office, “did you see Harvey?”

“No,” said Regan. “I didn’t know he was in town.”

“He said he didn’t think he’d have time to see you,” said Carleton; “I guess he’s gone back on Number Seven. But I told him I'd put it up to you, anyway. He says he’s along now where he is handling about half a dozen dump trains, but that what he has been given to pull them with, as near as he can figure out, is the prehistoric junk of the iron age.”

“I saw the engines when they went through,” Regan chuckled. “All the master mechanics on the system cleaned up on him. I sent him the old Two-twenty-three myself. Harvey’s telling the truth so far. What’s next?”

“Well,” Carleton smiled, “he says the string and tin rivets they’re put together with comes off so fast he can’t keep more than half of them in commission at once. He wants a good fitter sent up there on a permanent job. What do you say?”

“Say?” Regan fairly shouted. “Why I say God bless that man!”

“Hm?” inquired Carleton.

“Beezer,’ said Regan breathlessly. “Tell him he can have Beezer. Wire him I'll send up Beezer. He wants a good fitter, does he? Well, Beezer’s the best fitter on the pay roll, that’s straight. I always liked Harvey— glad to do him a good turn— Harvey gets the best.”

Carleton crammed the dottle down in the bowl of his pipe with his forefinger, and looked at Regan quizzically.

“I've heard something about it,” said he. “What’s the matter with Beezer?”

“Packing loose around his dome cover, and the steam spurts out through the cracked joint all over you every time you go near him,” said Regan. “He’s had me crazy for a month. He’s got it into his nut that he could beat any engineer on the division at his own game, thinks the game’s a cinch, and is sour on his own. That’s about all, but it’s enough. Say, you wire Harvey that I'll send him Beezer.”

Carleton grinned.

“Suppose Beezer doesn’t want to go?” he suggested.

“He’ll go,” said Regan grimly. “According to the neighbors, his home life at present ain’t a perennial dream of delight, and he’ll beat it as joyful as a live fly yanked off the sheet of fly paper it’s been stuck on; besides, he’s getting to be a regular spitfire around the yards. You leave it to me— he'll go.”

And Beezer went.

YOU KNOW the Devil’s Slide. Everybody knows it; and everybody has seen it scores of times, even if they’ve never been within a thousand miles of the Rockies. The road carried it for years on the back covers of the magazines printed in colors. The Transcontinental’s publicity man was a live one, he played it up hard, and as a bit of scenic effect it was worth all he put into it— there was nothing on the continent to touch it.

One thing the pictures didn’t show was the approach to the Devil’s Slide. It came along the bottoms fairly straight and level, the track did, for some five miles from the Bend, until about a mile from the summit, where it hit a long, stiff, heavy climb, that took the breath out of the best type engine that Regan, representing the motivepower department, had to offer. And here, the last few hundred yards were taken with long-interval, snorting roars from the exhaust, that echoed up and down the valley, and back and forward from the hills like a thousand thunders, or the play of a park of artillery, and the pace was a crawl— you could get out and walk if you wanted to. That- was the approach to the Devil’s Slide on a westbound run, you understand?

Then, once over the summit, the Devil’s Slide stretched out ahead, and in its two reeling, drunken, zigzag miles dropped from where it made you dizzy to lean out of the cab window, and see, the Glacier River swirling below to where the right of way in a friendly, intimate fashion hugged the Glacier again at its own bed level. How much of a drop is that two miles? Grade percentages and dry figures don’t mean very much, do they? Take it another way. It dropped so hard and fast that that’s wha: the directors were spending three million dollars for— to divide that drop by two! It just *dropped*— not an incline, not by any means— just a drop. However—

When it was all over the cause of it figured out something like this— we’ll get to the effect and Beezer in a second. Engine 1016 with Number One, the Imperial Limited, westbound, and with MacAllister in the cab, blew out a staybolt one afternoon about two miles west of the Bend. And, quicker than you could wink, the cab was all live steam and boiling water. The fireman screamed and jumped. MacAllister, blinded and scalded, his hands literally torn from the throttle and “air” before he could latch in, fell back half unconscious to the floor, wriggled to the gangway, and flung himself out. He sobbed like a broken-hearted child afterward when he told his story.

"I left her," he said. I couldn't help it. The agony wasn't human— I couldn't stand it. I was already past knowing what I was doing; but the thought went through my mind that the pressure'd be down and she'd stop herself before she got up the mile climb to the summit. That's the last I remember."

Spider Kelly, the conductor, testified that he hadn't noticed anything wrong until after they were over the summit— they'd come along the bottoms at a stiff clip, as they always did, to get a start up the long grade. They had slackened up almost to a standstill, as usual, when they topped the summit; then they commenced to go down the Slide, and were speeding up before he realized it. He put on the emergency brakes then, but they wouldn't work. Why? It was never explained. Whether the angle cock had never been properly thrown into its socket and had worked loose and shut off the "air" from the coaches, or whether (and queerer things than that have happened in railroading) it just: plain went wrong, no one ever knew. They found the trouble there, that was all. The emergency wouldn't work, and that was all that Spider Kelly knew then.

Now, Beezer had been out on the construction work about two weeks when this happened, about two of the busiest weeks Beezer had ever put in in his life. Harvey hadn't drawn the long bow any in describing what the master mechanics had put over on him to haul his dump carts with. They were engines of the vintage of James Watt, and Beezer's task in keeping them within the semblance of even a very low coefficient of efficiency was no sinecure. Harvey had six of these monstrosities, and, as he had started his work at both ends at once, with a cutting at the base of the Devil's Slide and another at the summit, he divided them up, three to each camp, and it kept Beezer about as busy as a'one-handed paperhanger with the hives, running up and down those two miles, answering "first-aid" hurry calls from first one and then the other.

The way Beezer negotiated those two miles was simple. He'd swing the cab or pilot of the first train along in the direction, up or down, that he wanted to go, and that's how he happened to be standing that afternoon on the track opposite the upper construction camp about a hundred yards below the summit, when Number One climbed up the approach, poked her nose over the top of the grade, crawling like a snail that's worn out with exertion, and then began to gather speed a little, tobogganlike, as she started down the Devil's Slide toward him.

Beezer gave a look at her and rubbed his eyes. There wasn't anything to be seen back of the oncoming big mountain racer's cab but a swirling, white, vapory cloud. It was breezing pretty stiff through the hills that day, and his first thought was that she was blowing from a full head, and the wind was playing tricks with the escaping steam. With the next look he gulped hard— the steam

was coming from the cab— not the dome. It was the 1016, MacAllister's engine, and when he happened to go up or down on her he always chose the pilot instead of the cab. Beezer never forced his society on any man. But this time he let the pilot go by him— there was something wrong, and badly wrong at that. The cab glass showed all misty white inside, and there was no sign of MacAllister. The drivers were spinning, and the exhaust, indicating a wide-flung throttle, was quickening into a rattle of sharp, resonant barks as the cab came abreast of him.

Beezer jumped for the gangway, caught the rail with one hand, clung there an instant, and then the tools in his other hand dropped to the ground as, with a choking gasp, he covered his face, and fell back to the ground himself.

By the time he got his wits about him again, the tender had gone by. Then Beezer started to run, and his face was as white as the steam he had stuck his head into in the empty cab. He dashed along beside the track, along past the tender, past the gangway, past the thundering drivers, and with every foot the 1016 and the Imperial Limited, Number One, westbound, was hitting up the pace. When he got level with the cylinder, it was as if he had come to a halt, though his lungs were bursting, and he was straining with every pound that was in him. He was barely gaining by the matter of inches, and in about another minute he was due to lose by feet. But he nosed in over the tape in a dead heat, flung himself sideways, and, with his fingers clutching at the drawbar, landed panting and pretty well all in on the pilot. A minute it took him to get his breath and balance, then he crawled to the footplate, swung onto the steam chest, and from there to the running board.

Here, for the first time, Beezer got a view of things and a somewhat more comprehensive realization of what he was up against, and his heart went into his mouth and his mouth went dry. Far down below him, in a sheer drop to the base of the cafion wall, wound the Glacier like a silver thread; in front, a gray, sullen mass of rock loomed up dead ahead, the right of way swerving sharply to the right as it skirted it in a breath-taking curve; and with every second the 1016 and her trailing string of coaches was plunging faster and faster down the grade. The wind was already ringing in his ears. There was a sudden lurch, a shock, as she struck the curve. Beezer flung his arms around the handrail and hung on grimly. She righted, found her wheel base again, and darted like an arrow into the tangent.

Beezer's face was whiter now than death itself. There were curves without number ahead, curves to which that first was but child's play, that even at their present speed would hurl them from the track and send them crashing in splinters through the hideous depths into the valley below. It was stop her, or death; death, sure, certain, absolute, and quick, for himself and every man,

woman, and child, from colonist coach to the solid-mahogany, brass-railed Pullmans and observation cars that rocked behind him.

There was no getting into the cab through the gangway; his one glance had told him that. There was only one other way, little better than a chance, and he had taken it. Blue-lipped with fear— that glance into the nothingness almost below his feet had shaken his nerve and turned him sick and dizzy— Beezer, like a man clinging to a crag, edged along the running board, gained the rear end, and, holding on tightly with both hands, lifted his foot, and with a kick shattered the front-cab glass; another kick, and the window frame gave way, and, backing in, feet first, Beezer began to lower himself into the cab.

Meanwhile, white-faced men stood at Spence's elbow in the dispatcher's office at Big Cloud. Some section hands had followed Number One out of the Bend in a hand car, and had found MacAllister and his fireman about two hundred yards apart on opposite sides of the right of way. Both were unconscious. The section hands had picked them up, pumped madly back to the Bend, and made their report.

Carleton— "Royal"— Carleton, leaning over Spence, never moved, only the muscles of his jaw twitched; Regan, as he always did in times of stress, swore to himself in a grumbling undertone. There was no other sound in the room save the incessant click of the sender, as Spence frantically called the construction camp at the summit of the Slide; there was a chance, one in a thousand, that the section hands had got back to the Bend before Number One had reached the top of the grade.

Then, suddenly, the sounder broke, and Spence began to spell off the words.

"Number One passed here five minutes ago. Whats the matter? What's—"

Regan went down into a chair and covered his face with his hands.

"Wild," he whispered, and his whisper was like an awe-stricken sob. "Running wild on the Devil's Slide. No one in the cab. Heaven help us!"

There was a look on Carleton's face no words could describe. It was gray, gray with a sickness that was a sickness of his soul; but his words came crisp and clear, cold as steel, and without a tremor:

"Clear the line, Spence. Get out the wrecking crew, and send the callers for the doctors— that's all that's left for us to do."

But while Big Cloud was making grim preparations for disaster, Beezer in no less grim a way was averting it, and his salvation together with that of every soul aboard the train came, in a measure at least, from the very source wherein lay their danger— the speed. That, and the fact that the pressure MacAllister had thought would drop before the summit was reached, was at last exhausting itself. The cab was less dense, and the speed whipping the wind

through the now open window helped a whole lot more, but it was still a swirling mass of vapor.

Beezer lowered himself in, his foot touched the segment, and then found the floor. The 1016 was rocking like a storm-tossed liner. Again there came the sickening, deadly slew as she struck a curve, the nauseating pause as she hung in air with whirring drivers. Beezer shut his eyes and waited. There was a lurch, another and another, fast and quick like a dog shaking itself from a cold plunge— she was still on the right of way.

Beezer wriggled over on his back now, and, with head hanging out over the running board, groped with his hands for the levers. Around his legs something warm and tight seemed to clinch and wrap itself. He edged forward a.little farther. His hand closed on the throttle and flung it in. A fierce, agonizing pain shot through his arm as something spurted upon it, withering it, blistering it. The fingers of his other hand were clasped on the air latch, and he began to check— then, unable to endure it longer, he threw it wide. There was a terrific jolt, a shock that keeled him over on his side as the brake shoes locked, the angry grind and crunch of the wheel tires, and the screech of skidding drivers.

He dragged himself out and crouched again on the running board. Behind him, like a wriggling snake, the coaches swayed and writhed crazily, swinging from side to side in drunken, reeling arcs. A deafening roar of beating flanges and pounding trucks was in his ears. And shriller, more piercing, the screams of the brake shoes as they bit and held. He turned his head and looked down the right of way, and his eyes held there, riveted and fascinated. Two hundred yards ahead was the worst twist on the Slide, where the jutting cliff of Old Piebald Mountain stuck out over the precipice, and the track hugged around it in a circle like a fly crawling around a wall.

Beezer groaned and shut his eyes again. They say that in the presence of expected death sometimes one thinks of a whole lot of things. Engineer Beezer, in charge of Number One, the Imperial Limited, did then; but mostly he was contrasting up the relative merits of a workbench and a throttle, and there wasn’t any doubt in Beezer’s mind about which he'd take if he ever got the chance to take anything again.

WHEN he opened his eyes, Old Piebald Mountain was still ahead of him, about ten feet ahead of him, and the pony truck was on the curve, but they had stopped, and Spider Kelly and a couple of mail clerks were trying to tear his hands away from the dead grip he’d got on the handrail. It was a weak and shaken Beezer, a Beezer about as flabby as a sack of flour, that they finally lifted down off the running board.

There was nothing small about Regan— there never was. He came down on the wrecking train, and, when he had had a look at the 1016, and had heard Kelly's story, he went back up to the construction camp, where Beezer had been outfitted with leg and arm bandages.

"Beezer," said he, "I didn't say *all* horse doctors wouldn't make jockeys— what? You can have an engine any time you want one."

Beezer shook his head slowly.

"No," said he thoughtfully; "I guess I don't want one."

Regan's jaw dropped, and his fat, little face puckered up as he stared at Beezer.

"Don't want one!" he gasped. "Don't want one! After howling for one for three months, now that you can have it, you don't want it! Say, Beezer, what's the matter with you, h'm?"

But there wasn't anything the matter with Beezer. He was just getting convalescent, that's all. There's a whole lot of men like Beezer.

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3: A "Trunk Call"

Algernon Blackwood

1869-1951

The Westminster Gazette, 27 Feb 1909

Algernon Henry Blackwood

Reprinted as "You May *Call From Here" in Blackwood's collection "Ten Minute Stories", 1914, a title it retained in later anthologies.*

SHE SENT the servant to bed at half-past ten, and sat up in the flat alone. "I'll let my cousin in," she explained; "she may be rather late." She read, knitted, began a letter, poked the fire, and examined her husband's photographs on the mantelpiece; but most of the time she looked about her nervously, sometimes going to the door to listen, sometimes lifting the corner of the blind to look out upon the lights of North Kensington struggling with the blackness. The fog was thicker than ever. A rumble of traffic feeling its way floated up to her from below.

But at last the door-bell rang sharply, and she ran to let in the cousin who had promised to spend the two nights with her during her husband's absence in Paris. They kissed. Both began talking at once.

"I thought you were *never* coming, Sybil—!"

"The play was out late— and the fog's bad. I sent on my box this afternoon on purpose."

"It came safely; and your room's quite ready. I do hope you'll manage all right without a maid. Oh, I'm *so* glad you've come, though!"

"Foolish little country mouse!"

"Oh, it's not that so much, though I admit that London still terrifies me at night rather; but you know this is the first time he's been away—and I suppose—"

"I know, dear; I understand perfectly." The cousin was brisk and cheerful. "You feel lonely, of course." They kissed again. "Just unhook me, will you?" she added, "and I'll get into my dressing-gown, and then we'll be cosy over the fire."

"I saw him off at Victoria at 8.45," said the little wife when the operation was over.

"Newhaven and Dieppe?"

"Yes. He gets to Paris at seven in the morning. He promised to telephone the first thing."

"You expensive little monkey!"

"Why?"

"It's ten shillings for three minutes, or something like that, and you have to go to the G.P.O. or the Mansion House or some such place, I believe."

"But I thought it was the usual long-distance thing direct here to the flat. He never told me all that."

"Probably you didn't give him the chance!"

They laughed, and went on chatting, with feet on the fender and skirts tucked up. The cousin lit her second cigarette. It was after midnight.

"I'm afraid I'm not the least bit sleepy," said the wife apologetically.

"Nor am I, dear. For once the play excited me." She began to describe it vigorously. Half-way through the recital the telephone sounded in the hall. It tinkled faintly, but gave no proper ring.

The other started. "There it is again! It's always doing that— ever since Harry put it in a week ago. I don't quite like it." She spoke in a hushed voice.

The cousin looked at her curiously. "Oh, you mustn't mind that," she laughed with a reassuring manner. "It's a little way they have when the line gets out of order. You're not used to playing the telephone game yet. You should call up the Exchange and complain. Always complain, you know, in this world if you want—"

"There it goes again," interrupted her friend nervously. "Oh, I do wish it would stop. It's so like someone standing out there in the hall and trying to talk—"

The cousin jumped up. They went into the hall together, and the experienced one briskly rang up the Exchange and asked if there was anybody trying to "get through." With fine indignation she complained that no one in the flat could sleep for the noise. After a brief conversation she turned, receiver in hand, to her companion.

"The operator says he's very sorry, but your line's a bit troublesome to-night for some reason. Got mixed, or something. He can't understand it.

Advises you to leave the receiver unhooked till the morning. Then it can't possibly ring, you see!"

They left the receiver swinging, and went back to the fire.

"I'm sorry I'm such a timid donkey," the wife said, laughing a little; "but I'm not used to it yet. There was no telephone at the farm, you know." She turned with a sudden start, as though she heard the bell again. "And to-night," she added in a lower voice, though with an obvious effort at self-control, "for some reason or other I feel uncomfortable, rather— excited, queer, I think."

"How? Queer?"

"I don't know exactly; almost as if there was someone else in the flat— someone besides ourselves and the servant, I mean."

The cousin moved abruptly. She switched on the electric lights in the wall beside her.

"Yes; but it's only imagination, *really*," she said with decision. "It's natural enough. It's the fog and the strangeness of London after the loneliness of your farm-life, and your husband being away, and— and all that. Once you analyse these queer feelings they always go—"

"Hark!" exclaimed the wife under her breath. "Wasn't that a step in the passage?" She sat bolt upright, her face pale, her eyes very bright. They listened a moment. The night was utterly still about them.

"Rubbish!" cried the cousin loudly. "It was my foot knocking the fender; like this— look!" She repeated the sound vigorously.

"I do believe it was," the other said, only half convinced. "But it is queer. You know I feel exactly as though someone had come into the flat— quite recently, since *you* came, I mean— just before that tinkling began, in fact."

"Come, come," laughed the cousin, "you'll give us both the jumps. At one o'clock in the morning it's easy to imagine anything. You'll be hearing elephants on the stairs next!" She looked sharply about her. "Let's brew our chocolate and get to bed," she added. "We shall sleep like tops."

"One o'clock already! Then Harry's half-way across by now," said the wife, smiling at her friend's language. "But I'm *so* glad, oh, *so* glad, you're here," she added; "and I think it's most awfully sweet of you to give up a comfy big house...." They kissed again and laughed. Soon afterwards, having scalded their throats with hot chocolate, they went to bed.

"It simply *can't* ring now!" remarked the cousin triumphantly as they passed the receiver dangling in mid-air.

"That's a relief," her friend said. "I feel less nervous. Really, I'm too ashamed of myself for anything."

"Fog's clearing, too," Sybil added, peering for a moment through the narrow window by the front door.

An hour later the little flat was still as the grave. No sound of traffic was heard. Even the tinkling of the telephone seemed a whole twenty-four hours away, when suddenly— it began again: first with little soft tentative noises, very faint, troubled, hurried, buried almost out of hearing inside the box; then louder and louder, with sharp jerks— finally with a challenging and alarming peal. And the wife, who had kept her door open, without pretence of sleep, heard it from the very beginning. In a moment she found herself in the passage, and Sybil, wakened by her cry, was at her heels. They turned up the lights and stood facing one another. The hall smelt— as things only smell at night— cold, musty....

"What's the matter? You frightened me. I heard you scream—!"

"The telephone's ringing again— violently," the wife whispered, pale to the lips. "Don't you hear it? This time there's someone there— *really*!"

The cousin stared blankly at her. The laugh choked in her throat. "*I* hear nothing," she said defiantly, yet without confidence in her voice. "Besides, the thing's still disconnected. It *can't* ring— look!" She pointed to the hanging receiver motionless against the wall. "You're white as a ghost, though," she added, coming quickly forward. Her friend moved suddenly to the instrument and picked up the receiver. "It's someone for me," she said, with terror in her eyes. "It's someone who wants to talk to me! Oh, hark! hark how it rings!" Her voice shook. She placed the little disc to her ear and waited while her friend stood by and stared in amazement, uncertain what to do. *She* had heard no ringing!

"You, Harry!" whispered the wife into the telephone, with brief intervals of silence for the replies. "*You?* But how in the world so soon?— Yes, I can just hear, but very faintly. Miles and miles away your voice sounds— What?— A wonderful journey? And sooner than you expected!— *Not* in Paris? Where, then?— Oh! my darling boy— No, I don't quite hear; I can't catch it— I don't understand.... The pain of the sea is nothing— is *what*?... You know nothing of *what* ...?"

The cousin came boldly up. She took her arm. "But, child, there's no one there, bless you! You're dreaming— you're in fever or something—"

"Hush! For God's sake, hush!" She held up a hand. In her face and eyes was an expression indescribable— fear, love, bewilderment. Her body swayed a little, leaning against the wall. "Hush! I hear him still; but, oh! miles and miles away— He says— he's been trying for hours to find me. First he tried my brain direct, and then— then— oh! he says he may not get back again to me— only he can't understand, can't explain *why*— the cold, the awful cold, keeps his lips from— Oh!"

She screamed aloud as she flung the receiver down and dropped in a heap upon the floor. "I don't understand— it's death, death!"

AND the collision in the Channel that night, as they learned in due course, occurred a few minutes after one o'clock; while Harry himself, who remained unconscious for several hours after the boat picked him up, could only remember that his last desire as the wave caught him was an intense wish to communicate with his wife and tell her what had happened.... The next thing he knew was opening his eyes in a Dieppe hotel.

And the other curious detail was furnished by the man who came to repair the telephone next day. At the Exchange, he declared, the wire, from midnight till nearly three in the morning, had emitted sparks and flashes of light no one had been able to account for in any usual manner.

"Queer!" said the man to himself, after tinkering and tapping for ten minutes, "but there's nothing wrong with it at *this* end. It's the subscriber, most likely. It usually is!"

4: Betty and the Copper King

Rosa Praed

1851-1935

Leader (Melbourne) 26 Feb 1910

Rosa Caroline Praed (Mrs Campbell Praed)

MRS. FITZACKERLEY and Miss Sibyl Fitzackerley were "At Home" one June afternoon, at the Castalian Rooms off Queen's Gate.

The Castalian Rooms are much patronised by South Kensington hostesses of moderate means and large visiting lists, who pay their social debts by giving one comprehensive "crush." There is a hall with a stage for private theatricals, tea rooms opening off it, and a huge palm lounge, forming the vestibule of the block of flats of which these entertainment rooms are an attractive feature.

To-day, Mrs. Fitzackerley's friends were being amused by the performance of a little French play in which her daughter took the chief part. Miss Sibyl Fitzackerley had once been commended for her rendering of the role by no less a personage than the King of Baziria, who had witnessed it at a famous mansion, of which a portion of the park adjoined Mrs. Fitzackerley's modest, dower estate. She was a widow, and judging, by the string of broughams, victorias, motors and taxi-cabs which blocked the street behind, the Castalian Hall might have been supposed a lady of considerable wealth and social importance.

As a matter of fact, Mrs. Fitzackerley's most valuable asset was her beautiful daughter, who she confidently expected would carry off the newest catch of the marriage market— Mr. Roger Wade, the Australian Copper King.

The play was in full swing. A foreign prince who was present applauded vigorously. Late arrivals were pressing forward in the rude fashion of a smart London crowd, the third and most insignificant member of Mrs. Fitzackerley's

family had abandoned in tearful despair the task assigned to her of finding: them satisfactory places.

That insignificant member was Mrs. Fitzackerley's penniless Australian niece Bettina— familiarly Betty— Van Ashe, 19, and, if not pretty, distinctly attractive. A neat little figure in a browny yellow dress, with a brownish leathered hat set on masses of curly red-brown hair; the delicate skin that goes with that hair; brown eyes surrounded by up-curving lashes; an expressive nose; a kissable mouth, which would pucker into a whimsical appealing smile.

At the present moment, it was a naughty, miserable little face, for Betty had been severely snubbed by her aunt and others, and there was something defiant in her air, through all its dejection, as she seated herself in a basket chair in the lounge, somewhat out of the track of people going into the hall with her back against a tall green tub containing a bushy palm. A man coming out of the theatre, and strolling round looking rather bored; suddenly perceived her. His bored look vanished. He went eagerly towards where she sat.

"Miss Van Ashe! What luck!— But— is anything the matter?"

She pulled a wistful face, but her pleasure at seeing him was unmistakable.

"Oh, nothing— only I'm just out of it all."

"So am I! Poor little Australia! Can I stop; and talk to you?"

He pulled up a chair as he spoke, and placed it also against the back of the big tub.

"Yes, do talk, to me, and tell if, there's anything in England , that isn't society manners and long handled eye-glasses, and Australian accents, and all the other horrible tilings."

The man laughed heartily. He was very tall, very good-looking, extremely well-tailored and with a general appearance of well-being. He had an unconventional manner, and a bronzed open-air look.

"The other horrible things— meaning that as an Australian one has to buy one's way in English society! Oh I know! But you've pretty well shed yours— the accent I mean. I haven't."

Which was true; he had more than a suspicion of the twang.

"If you'd heard me when I came over!" she said. "I had an accent that made Aunt Augusta and Sibyl shudder. I'm bound to say that now I think it must have bean frightful, and I'm grateful to Aunt Augusta for making me realise it."

"Let us compare, notes," said lie. "I've seen you often at Mrs. Fitzackerley's— at a distance, and wanted badly to get to know all about you, but somehow I never could quite place you."

"That's easily enough done. I'm a poor relation and a black sheep."

"I'm a black sheep, too," said he.

"You! I thought you were a millionaire!" said Betty simply.

"Oh, well, I was a black sheep before I became a millionaire. How long have you been over on this side?"

"A bit more than a year."

"So have I— and I've had a ripping time. I hope you have too."

"That I haven't," returned Betty.

"Oh, how's that?"

"I think you might guess. I do say it's hard on a Bush girl to plop herself down among relations on this side, before she's been broken in a bit to English ways— at least, if the relations are like—" She pulled herself up guiltily.

"Like yours? Now how do you find them?"

"Stiff and proper and smart— you know Sibyl's awfully smart, and if you don't do credit to Sibyl's smartness, so much the worse for you in Aunt Augusta's eyes."

He laughed again.

"That's only their way of looking at things from the outside. They don't mean it."

"Oh, don't they! Over here, they do think a most awful lot about outside things— whether you've got on the right sort of hat, and the right sort of dress, and say the right, sort of thing, and do your heir in the right sort of way, and have your nails manicured and your gloves and shoes "just so!" Seemed to me that Aunt Augusta thought it much more important you should set your hat at the right angle than that your heart should be in the right place— And your whole body too if you were visiting at the wrong sort of house."

"Meaning looking up old Australian pals?" he observed sagely.

"Yes. But I've, only got one pal; and she lives in Shepherd's Bush, and writes society and fashion letters for Australian papers. I go and tell her all the bits of smart gossip I can pick up."

"Oh, indeed! And what's her name; and whereabouts in Shepherd's Bush does this journalist of fashion hold out?"

"She's Bess Findelsen, arid she lives at 8 Lavinia Gardens, Brook Green."

"Father a mining engineer at Aramac?"

"Yes. Oh, do you know him?"

"We had dealings in a small, way. I've a mind to go some afternoon and look up Miss Findelsen."

He pulled out his note book and made an entry. "Oh, I'll tell Bess. I do want to get round there by and bye. She's made ever so many articles out of the dresses this afternoon. '

"I wish I might offer you my motor and go with you straight away; But I suppose Miss Fitzackerley, wouldn't like that?"

"I should think not, indeed," Betty screwed her mouth up comically at the notion of how angry her aunt, would be were she to go off for a drive with Sibyl's own particular millionaire— the . Copper; King. .

"But I should love a drive in the motor,' she added. '

"And I should love: to take you. Perhaps if I were to ask your cousin, too? Don't you think I could fix it up somehow with your people? If only it were possible—"

Betty shook her head a second, time. The Copper King drew back as if he were hurt at the rebuff. Something in his face startled her, and made her heart leap in wild conjecture. Could it be that he minded her refusal because he cared? Or was he merely vexed at her for not jumping to his suggestion— he whom all the girls ran after. Of course! he couldn't care. Yet she had often caught his eyes fixed upon her, even when he had been talking to Sibyl; but they had never been really alone together, before.

A burst of applause sounding from the hall steadied Betty. She said to him banteringly:— "But you know, your body is quite in the wrong place now, Mr. Wade."

"Is it? Where should it be?"

"In there to be sure — up by the Prince and all the great people clapping its hands over Sibyl's wonderful French."

"Well, you see, I don't understand French, so I thought I'd have a smoke out here. Then when I saw you, I said to myself 'Here's my chance at last!' "

"Your chance?"

"Of getting to know you better. You don't mind by telling you that?"

"Mind! — I — I think it's very kind of- you. But I expect I ought to be seeing if Aunt Augusta wants me for anything."

"Oh, don't spoil my chance— I want so much to hear all your experiences in England— from the beginning."

"That was the day I arrived at Chillbeeches— Aunt Augusta's country house, you know. Such a funny name, isn't, it? But I declare after I'd been there an hour I thought it exactly fitted. There's an avenue of beeches as you go up to the house; and I didn't suppose I'd ever been in an atmosphere more chilly than that -avenue led me up to."

"What! They weren't glad to see you! That was a shame!"

"Well, you see, I'd just come off steamer, and I d got on a blue serge coat and skirt that I'd bought at a store in Aramac, and a floppy hat. And Aunt Augusta just stared at me as if she wasn't quite sure what sort of an animal she'd got hold of, and if it was quite safe to kiss me."

"But your cousin?"

"Oh, Sibyl looked me up and down too; and before they'd finished I knew I was every bit of me wrong. You'd only got to have a glance at Sibyl to be certain of that." .

"Dresses all right, does she?"

"Rather. You'll never see Sibyl wearing floppy hats when she oughtn't— nor ready-made serge frocks— nor anything except what s absolutely correct. Sibyl's always beautifully turned out. She stays in grand country houses, and hunts and rides and drives and acts. What started her you know was the King of Baziria seeing her act and admiring her tremendously. Sibyl can talk French and Italian and Bazirian and all the rest. Aunt Augusta. was horrified at my not knowing even French; and Sibyl said she supposed there were no educational advantages in Australia."

"Wanted to let you down easy. That was nice of Miss Sibyl."

"Y— e— es," Betty agreed doubtfully, and went on with contradictory resentment. "It's all very well for Sibyl. She's never had anything in her life but people adoring her and a splendid time. She doesn't know what it is to be poor and sick and sorry—" Betty's voice broke.

"And you do— poor child."

"I should think I did. There were six of us, and not a penny when Dad died and the Bank came down on the station. Two went out as governesses— I was no good for that, and Mother thought I was the best one to send to Aunt Augusta."

"Beastly hard luck!" He bent sympathetically towards her, and she looked up at him, gratitude in her brown eyes which were wet with the tears brimming their up-curling lashes.

"I was down on my luck, too," he said— "when I was a black sheep — before I struck copper. Go on— What did they do first thing?"

"First thing . Aunt Augusta rigged me out. But when she'd done it. I could tell all the time she considered I was frightfully bad form, and that she and Sibyl were on thorns last I should disgrace them. They made me so nervous, L was always putting my foot into it. Sibyl asked me if I'd like her to tell me . things I did wrong, and I said I supposed she'd better. Well, I remarked at dinner that a man I knew in the bush was a gentleman. You wouldn't have thought that was wrong? Sibyl said, 'One doesn't talk about people one knows being 'gentlemen,' because naturally one doesn't know any man who is not a gentleman.' I couldn't help answering, 'Then it's clear you haven't been in Australia!' and Sibyl smiled in a superior sort of way and shivered."

The Copper King guffawed as he patted the girl's arm, comrade fashion.

Betty went on.

"Now, if Sibyl had come out to the bush, I'd have been on my own ground; and it would have been she who felt strange, not me. You, know up in the bush, when a person is eating your grub you do the best you can to make them happy and comfortable. But Sibyl never troubled herself at all about me, except when she was afraid I should do something awful. I used to feel at Chillbeeches sometimes as if I just couldn't hear it a minute longer— as if I must run away . or scream out or break chairs or make faces. Oh, a terrible thing happened once—"

Betty paused in sheer breathlessness. She had chattered on, paying no heed to the fact that the performance was over and that people were filtering out from the hall. The two were well screened behind their tub and too much absorbed in each other to notice who went to and fro. In truth, Betty was conscious of little else than the strong, kindly face bent towards her, as her companion encouraged her with a smile, nod or quick ejaculation.

"So a terrible thing happened?" he said. "Do tell me."

"Aunt Augusta caught me making faces at her."

The man chuckled. "You don't say— How?"

"This way"— Betty's voice grew unfortunately louder in her dramatic rendering of the incident. "Aunt Augusta was writing letters in the morning-room, and I was behind her, and just to relieve myself, I made faces at her back; Then suddenly I became conscious that Aunt Augusta was looking at me. There was a glass in front of her writing table and she was staring at me in it— quite 'horrified' "— Betty reproduced Aunt Augusta's horror— "I did beg her pardon, but it was no good. And then I broke out and let her have how I felt. And after that she sent me to Coventry— and I've been in Coventry ever since!"

"They don't talk to you?"

"Only as much as they're obliged. And the worst of it is that Aunt Augusta has written to Mother— poor Mother! It makes me hate Aunt Augusta when I think how Mother will break her heart. That was what I was thinking about when you caught me looking so down in the mouth— There! If Aunt Augusta heard me say 'down in the mouth!' "

"Good old Australese!" said he. "You and I will always talk Australese in future— Miss Betty, I m awfully sorry for you— I didn't think it was like that— I— wish—"

He was pulled up short by a voice from the other side of the palm— a voice at white heat of displeasure, which said "Bettina!" in a tone of such amazed indignation that the girl jumped up from her seat and turned to confront a tall, fashionably dressed young-elderly lady who was advancing threateningly towards her from behind the tub.

Bettina knew from the expression of her face that she must have been standing there long enough to overhear all the latter part of the conversation. Betty's own face was a study in discomfiture and defiance! She shot an appealing glance at her companion who got up a little more slowly than she had done, and revealed himself to Mrs. Fitzackerley, whose expression of venomous anger anger changed to one of equally venomous propitiation.

"Mr. Wade! Really! I had no idea that you were the confidante of Miss Van Ashe's fancied wrongs, I can only assure you that I have received at great personal inconvenience arid have endeavoured to do my duty by a most inappreciative young woman upon whom my darling Sibyl's kindness and example appear to have been entirely lost! Bettina, I came out here to look for you and to ask you kindly to show the tea room to any of my guests who don't know their way about."

Roger Wade defended his fellow culprit chivalrously enough.

"Why, that's exactly what she's been wanting to do all the time, and what I've prevented her from doing. It's all my fault, Mrs. Fitzackerley, and I'm most awfully sorry. Don't scold Miss Van Ashe; scold me instead. You see we'd just discovered we were both from the bush, and both black sheep, and I was drawing her out on the subject of her particular delinquencies, while at the same time, I was confessing mine. Do forgive us like the kind soul you are. If you won't I shall go and ask your daughter to intercede for me."

Mrs "Fitzackerley was mollified by the allusion to Sibyl, and her wrath turned to forced sweetness.

"You are an ungrateful bear, but I must forgive you as you ask so humbly— now you must find Sibyl, and apologise to her. She is dreadfully hurt at your showing such disapproval of her performance. Why, my dear Copper King, you are more difficult to please than the King of Baziria. He admired Sibyl's acting in that piece when she played it at Grandchester House enormously."

Wade deprecated comparison with his Majesty of Baziria, and excused himself on the plea of his ignorance of the French tongue. Just then, Mrs. Fitzackerley's attention was claimed by departing guests.

"Dear Lady Jane— must you go."

"So sorry, but we ought to have been tea-ing at the Ritz... Sibyl was quite wonderful — I am not surprised at the King of Baziria. Now do tell me— which is it — Prince Albano or that good-looking man they call the Copper King?"

"Sh— sh!" Mrs. Fitzackerley's glance at Wade surprised him in the act of offering his arm to Betty.

"Mr. Wade, I can't allow you to desert Sibyl— she must need some refreshment— and there she is in the doorway. Bettina" (sternly) "remain near me, please. Dear Lady Jane — if you must— Oh, the Prince is devoted, of

course, but. one does want something beside a title— and Sibyl is so English— Good-bye— Charming of you' to come— Good-bye!. Sibyl, love," as Miss Fitzackerley, a magnificent blonde, looking in her Directoire costume of the play like a fashion model in advance of the prevailing mode, but undeniably a beautiful woman— sailed up on the arm of a small, black moustachioed, ecstatic foreigner.

"Sibyl, love, Mr. Wade wants to make his peace with you. Now, do, like a good man, take her in and get her a cup of tea. No, really, Prince, I can't have you paying my daughter such very extravagant compliments— comparing her to Rejane!— And yet here's Mr. Wade, who hadn't patience to sit out the performance. Scold him well, Sibyl, darling— You are not going, Prince!— Ah, yes— tea-ing at the Ritz. —Lady Jane's just left. We shall see you to-night at the Duchess's ball— Sibyl dearest, don't forget to settle with Mr. Wade about Ranelagh. He can motor us there in. payment for his rudeness."— Sibyl smiled magnanimously at the Copper King, and accepted his escort to the tea room, while Betty's heart sickened as she watched the pair. Roger Wade was as fine a figure of a man as Miss Fitzackerley was of a woman, and how well he bore out his soubriquet of the Copper King. In truth, he was the monarch of poor Betty's dreams, but who could imagine that he would ever stop to look at her, when Sibyl's loveliness was within range of vision?

The storm hurst upon Bettina, when Roger Wade, the last to depart, had paid good-bye— after having invited the whole party— Bettina pointedly included— to motor with him to Ranelagh and dine with him at the club after the sports were over.

It was a pretty bad storm— Mrs. Fitzackerley's sugary effusiveness could in a second become dangerously vitriolic— but that bout was short, the footman interrupting it by the announcement of the carriage. It began again, however, when they reached the furnished house in Cromwell-road, which Mrs! Fitzackerley had taken for the season. "How dared Betty throw herself at the head of Sibyl's admirer in so outrageous a manner? Immodest, designing minx! Ungrateful liar! Beggar that bit the hand which fed her!"

Mrs. Fitzackerley had a fine command of vituperative epithets. Betty, goaded to desperation, declared that not another mouthful of her aunt's bread should ever pass her lips— and with that she fled to her little chamber on the servant's floor, and barred herself within, while mother and daughter both hastened to their rooms, having suddenly realised that this painful scene had made them late in dressing for a dinner party and the Duchess's ball, at which last entertainment Mrs. Fitzackerley had privately determined that Sibyl should complete her conquest of the Copper King.

When the carriage had driven off with her aunt, and cousin, Betty stole downstairs, let herself out, took an omnibus, and made her way to Lavinia Gardens, Brook Green.

Plain, downright Bess Findelsen was virtuously indignant at Mrs. Fitzackerley's treatment of her niece, but when Betty informed her friend of the Copper King's, share in the matter, Miss Findelsen— being a writer of stories as well as of fashion, articles— scented some, compensating elements of romance. She at once offered the girl a sofa-bed in her tiny flat of two rooms and a kitchen, and it was settled that Betty should return that evening to her aunt's house, pack her box, and bring it along, after leaving the necessary letter to explain her departure.

Meantime Miss Findelsen, who as Betty arrived had been starting with a packet of MSS. for Fleet-street, was to take the tube, deliver her "copy," and come back to meet, her guest. Left alone, Betty sat down to compose the letter to her aunt, which she could more conveniently do here than in the bare little room she had left.

She was biting her pen over the task, tears streaming down her cheeks the while, when a motor pulled up outside, and presently there came a ring of the electric hell, and a loud rat-a-tat at Miss Findelsen's modest entrance door.

Bess "did for. herself," and accordingly Betty opened the door to a tall man standing in the dim passage, which seemed absurdly small and mean for so imposing a personage.

"Miss Findelsen at home?" said he, and Betty exclaimed tremulously, "Oh! it's you! How did you come here?"

"In my motor, of course," said the Copper King. "I had an idea I'd find you."

He stepped into the wee vestibule, shutting the door behind him.

"Couldn't we have some light?" he said; and turned the switch himself.

The sudden illumination brought into evidence Betty's wet eyelashes and tear-stained cheeks.

The .Copper King put his hand in a brotherly way upon her shoulder.

"You've been crying;" he said. "There's been a row: I know all about it. I heard the beginning."

"You! Oh, how?"

"I found I'd made a mistake about the Ranelagh dinner, and that I was engaged that evening. So I came back, to see if we couldn't fix up another evening instead. Bless those palms— nobody saw me, and I heard the old lady pitching into you. I'd have stepped up and gone for her, but the footman came along, and there was no good making a scene before him. Besides, I could not have said then what I want to say now. So I sneaked off and sent an excuse to the place I ought to have dined; at to-night— I ain't going to the Duchess's

ball— and whizzed up here instead. I guessed you'd have made tracks to your old pal in Shepherd's Bush."

Betty blushed deeply and stammered in her confusion. "Oh, you have heard!— I don't know what you could have thought— oh, Mr. Wade, I feel so dreadfully ashamed."

"You needn't, unless it's for your aunt. She's like a native cherry— nice to look at, but precious sour when you put teeth into her— I say— Miss Van Ashe— you don't mind my having, come after you in this abrupt way?"

He spoke in quite a different tone, and there was a look in his eyes which made her turn her own away.

"You are not vexed with me," he continued. "I couldn't bear it if you were."

"I think— oh, I'm sure it was very kind of you," said Betty. "But— Miss Findelsen has gone with her article to the London office of *'The Antipodean*,' " she added lamely.

"I'm glad to hear that. I don't want Miss Findelsen; I want you— Miss Van Ashe— Betty, won't' you let me tell you what I've come to say?"

She led the way into Bess's little parlor, which his gracious, kindly presence seemed to fill outright. But all of, a sudden, he had become shy and awkward— he the Copper King— the conquering hero of London drawing-rooms. He stood up against the mantelpiece, and fidgeted, and then blurted. it all out.

"Betty— if I wasn't badly in love with you, I shouldn't feel in such a mortal funk."

She laughed; she couldn't help it; and then her lips quivered.

"I— I thought you were kind. It isn't kind to make a joke about— about— being in love with you."

"Joke! There's no joke! I fell in love with you the first minute I ever set eyes on you— don't ask me why— I can't tell you. It seemed to me I'd always loved you— perhaps it was a case of 'When I was a king in Babylon, and you were a Christian slave'— or the other way on. I'm your slave now anyhow— and what I'm in a funk about is lest you should think I'm taking a mean advantage of your being in a bit of a fix."

"But I thought— Aunt Augusta thought— Wasn't it Sibyl all the time?"

"It was you all the time— no disrespect to Miss Sibyl— and I've a shrewd suspicion she'd prefer being a princess to marrying a rough Australian— who never did set up for a gentleman. So once in her life, you see, Miss Sibyl has known a man who wasn't a gentleman."

The Copper King laughed, but in a moment was serious again.

"I used to try awfully hard to get a word with you, but somehow until to-day I never got the ghost of a show. Betty, darling, you might do worse than marry me, and I think I can make you love me back— in time."

And she thought, so too. When Miss Findelsen returned and was told the news, the Copper King immediately put her literary faculty into requisition, and made her compose a paragraph beginning "A marriage has been arranged"— which he proposed to take himself that evening to the office of the "*Morning Post*," and "by book or by crook," as be phrased it, get it to appear in the next morning's issue of that paper.

5: 'Mate': A Bush Love Story

Roderic Quinn

Catholic Press (Sydney) 24 Dec 1914

THOUGH the rest of the district knew him as Jack Hallam, to her he was known as 'Boy,' and when he had occasion to talk to her, which was frequently enough, seeing that they foregathered daily, it was his habit to address her as 'Mate,' although her rightful name was Tess Rawson.

She was a sun-burnt, long-limbed little creature, with devilment in her eyes and hair, and the spirit of mischief in her immortal soul. He was just what she desired him to be. Between them both they contrived to make themselves unpleasantly conspicuous on their native heath, and to so arrange their daily doings that their whole neighbourhood was forced to take a vital interest in them. It was they who stole rides on Mrs. Porter's old grey hack, going farther in a day than was good for that ancient, and to them was directly attributable the poor. crop produced by Jackson's strawberry bed. The ideal way in which to eat strawberries is to drown them in cream, but even without cream, and devoured surreptitiously, they are not unpleasant eating. It was also alleged against the boy and girl, because it was known that they had a prodigious palate for that kind of thing, that it was they who sucked Mrs. Brown's clutch of new-set eggs, saying no word of the matter, but leaving the nest full of hollow pretences till, in the fullness of time, the iniquity was brought to light, and a deluded hen and cheated woman made hysterical outcry.

'Mate' had a father, but no mother. Her mother, worn out with the ceaseless toil and worry which drag down the selector's wife, had slipped away quietly— gone to sleep and forgotten to awake while the child was still at the toddling stage. Her going conferred on 'Mate' a large liberty of action, which she was wont to exercise with expansiveness, and in joyous disregard of what her neighbours might think, or say, or suffer.

The boundary fence of 'Mate's' selection and 'Boy's' western fence were one. Boy and Mate were one also in all the experiences of lire which mean so much to youth . and so little to the adolescent. They mixed their joy and grief inseparably, and fought for each other— Mate, with her tongue for the Boy, and Boy with his fists for Mate.

Mate loved the bush, and loved Boy because he seemed a part of it. He seemed to share it's strength, its freshness. She went to him, as to it, for consolation or sanctuary, when distress or fear assailed her. When the wild things in her blood cried out she sought him.

Thus, when the spirit moved her, she would say to him: 'What about a run, Boy?' And always he would reply: 'Right O, Mate.'

She would stand with one foot. advanced, her hair tossed back, her eyes, with a challenge in them, fixed on the Boy 's face,-and then with a cry of: 'Trot! Gallopy! Run!' they would be off; side by side, with heads thrown back, their charge would take them down the slope; together they would splash through the knee-deep creek at its bottom; and, side by side, with heads bent down, race up the ridge beyond. Then on and on they would go amongst tall trees with ferns about their ankles. Heedless of stubbed toes or scratched faces, in a wild all-surrender to the joy of the moment, they would continue their headlong pace till lung and limb revolted and brought them prone to earth— there to lie— two panting figures couched on ferns, delightfully tired— Mate with flushed cheeks and red lips, and Boy with lit eyes that scarcely noticed these things, but would recall them in after years, when Mate...

Ranging the bush together, they found honey-trees— stores of wax and yellow honey hidden away from the sun— and revelled in their find. They fished for gudgeons in the creek holes, and cooked their catch and ate it *al fresco*. A hollow log or a trunk with a hole in it met with their keen inspection— since it might house a frilled lizard or a native cat or a trio of dazzlingly-plumed parrots.

Sometimes of a moonlight night, when all in the house slept, Mate would leave her room and steal away on tiptoe to , an appointed place, where Boy, armed with a half axe, and accompanied by 'Spot,' his cattle dog, would be waiting. Then, together without a word to one another, since little sounds carry far in the night, they would seek the saplings by the creek, and play havoc with the possums in their branches, Mate and Boy felling the trees, and 'Spot' providing the killing.

Afterwards, when he had grown up, the boy remembered these nights, too— the possum, with pricked ears, outlined against the moon, and the eager dog sitting on his haunches, with upturned muzzle, waiting till the sapling crashed to earth and the moment for tooth-work arrived. But, most of all, it was his habit to re-vision the silver light among the saplings, and the girl, standing in the silver light, her hair wild, her eyes flashing with the fire of the moment. Those same eyes, very large and very dark, had a certain hardness in them, which took from their beauty.

But, Boy, if no one else, had seen them on one occasion at least, grow very soft indeed. This happened on the day of the adventure with the horse, when he and she were alone. They had been warned against the horse. He had come to Hallam with the reputation of being a man-eater. It was said that he had

attempted to paw his late owner, and that he had kicked a steer to death, breaking his ribs with a thunderous impact of hoofs.

But there are men whom horses respect, men who have a certain mastery in their eyes and touch of hand, and tone of voice, and Hallam was one of these. Notwithstanding the ill-repute which attached to the horse, Hallam took him, and found him as willing in the collar as if he had the temper of an angel. With Hallam within ken his quietness would be lamb-like; and from looking at him it could not be gleaned that he was only biding a favourable time in which to hit back against the toil and the whiplash and the tyranny of man.

When the opportunity offered he was quick to seize it.

Boy, who was walking some yards in front, heard Mate cry, and, turning, saw her running towards him. Her arms were outstretched, and she was in great terror. Behind her came the horse, his head thrust forward, his lips turned back, showing long teeth, and a red cavern of mouth, his ears flattened. There was something in his eyes, which, in human eyes, would make an observer shudder, shoot, or, lacking a gun, back away and run.

But Boy did none of these things. Being used to horses, he did not fear them. He ran forward with arms uplifted, shouting at the top of his voice, and the horse, startled by his boldness, brought himself to a sudden stop; then, turning on the boy; came at him. He struck the Boy full on the head with one of his forefeet, and the Boy remembered no more.

He did not know till hours afterwards that he owed his life to 'Spot,' who came to his rescue at the critical moment, flying through the dead timber like a yellow streak, with scarce a yelp to tell of his coming. The horse had been heeled before, and, having no fancy for a renewal of the experience, turned and galloped off.

Mate was present when Boy came back to consciousness, and it was then that he saw the softness in her eyes.

ii

WHEN Mate was 12 years old it happened that somewhere at the other side of the world a relative died, leaving her father money. Then came advice from many mouths, telling Rawson that he should have his daughter educated up to that position in life which his money made possible. He listened, and, although the girl's society was his best treasure in the world, he succumbed to the wise one's words. It was decided that Mate should go to a high-class Sydney school, where she would be pared and planed and polished, and made altogether desirable.

On the morning of her departure, Boy came to her house to see her off. An early start was necessary, and the matin of the birds— the warbling of magpies and the shrilling of plover— was in full voice when she climbed into the cart beside her father. A thick dew had fallen, and the gum leaves, red and green, glistened in the young light. Mate looked and listened, and a second time the boy saw her eyes soften. Then she looked at the boy, and held her hand out.

'God-bye, Boy,' she said, not smiling; and though the boy did not recognise it, he was only a part of that which she was farewelling.

'Good-bye, Mate.' He dropped her hand, and turned away to open the gate, so that the cart might pass through. Then he leant against the gatepost, and watched her to the top of the hill. There she turned and waved her hand. He responded with an answering hand wave, and long after she had disappeared from his sight he continued to lean against the gate-post, looking along the track she had taken with stunned eyes. He felt that somehow or another a wrong had been done him.

Nearly two years passed before he saw her again. She did not greet him with the frank, familiar 'Hello!' of former days. Something had changed within her since their last meeting, causing a cleavage between them. She had become demure— precise. This was noticeable when in a sudden, bold moment, summoning his courage, he suggested an old-time scamper through the bush. No, she would not run with him; it would tire her, and make her hot. Besides, she had to be careful of her boots, of her frock. The boy looked away from her towards the tall trees in the distance, so that she should not see the disappointment in' his eyes. He felt very much alone.

'But, Boy, I'd like to go for a walk down the old track,' she said, and off they went together— the changed Mate and the same Boy.

They crossed the creek where it was bridged by a squared log, and climbed the ridge beyond, he clad roughly in just such clothes as his mother could afford to, give him, and she dressed daintily. The bush was filled in every aisle and avenue with short, fine, blue misty light, which haunts tall timbered country on summer days. Being high noon, however, the birds were silent.

Boy, in the face of his companion's restraint of speech and manner, felt awkward. Once or twice he had tried to make talk, but his words came clumsily, and she made no effort to assist him. He desisted, and fell silent, wondering why all the topics that meant so much to her two years before should now seem so uninteresting. What had the great school in the city done to Mate to change her so?

But, suddenly, as in a flash, the old Mate— the dashing, reckless, laughing Mate was back again at his side, racing elbow to elbow with him, riotous with joy, and fired with the spirit of the chase. A leveret, leaping from a clump of tall

grass, had wrought the miracle, transforming her in a single second to her old self again.

'Trot! Gallopy! Run!'

She was already a half-score of paces in front of the boy when the old cry escaped her and a good hundred yards had been covered before he drew level with her. Her hat, hanging by its strings, swung behind, and her hair, breaking from its riband, streamed loose. She was fast of foot, but not so fast of foot as he.

Nevertheless, he shortened his stride, so that she might not be tempted to give up the chase out of pique at his superiority in speed. Two years before she had been his equal in fleetness, but now he had become her master. Still, he had no desire to assert his mastery. His desire was to have her racing by his side, as she had been, wont to do before the school people took her in hand and spoiled her.

Fast of foot, however, as the boy and girl were, the leveret was faster. At the end of a mile the little grey runner had them hopelessly out-distanced and so blown that they were glad to sink down among the ferns at their feet. There they lay till their lungs righted themselves, the sunshine falling through the trees above them, dappling their bodies and faces with little flecks of golden light, displaced at times, by reason of the sway of leaves in the wind, by little flecks of shadow.

Suddenly, with old time enthusiasm, the girl spoke.

'Boy,' she said, 'it's all lovely, isn't it? I'm glad to be back to it again — even for a little while.'

The boy nodded. It was the right thing for her to say, and he was glad that she had said it. Then, very seriously, she continued: 'Whenever away at school, I thought of it; I thought of you, Roy. Somehow, you seemed to be "it," you know.'

Into his eyes, into the lines of his voung mouth, crept a glowing gladness at this news, that, in her absence, she had not wholly forgotten him. But still he did not speak. Then, there amongst the ferns, her large, dark eyes fixed on his, stirred him, drew him strangely, so that he rose, knelt on one knee, and kissed her. After this, and till the end of Mate's stay, they raced and fished and hunted, as of old. The mysterious bush had reclaimed her child, in spite of all the estranging lures of the city.

When next she met him they were no longer children.

DURING the long years that passed between meeting and meeting, Boy had travelled many tracks. He had been a drover in the Gulf country, a pearler on the northwest coast, a miner at Kalgoorlie. A restless foot had brought him to many strange places, but it had not brought him to Eldorado. Brown and tough, and tall, and straight as a mountain ash— straight right through in body and soul— the boy became a man, returned to the old selection.

And the date of his return tallied with that which saw the gates of Berrima Gaol thrown open, and Haroun, the vengeful, pass out into the sunlight.

For three years he had sojourned within gaol walls, eaten gaol fare, and done gaol toil. But now, at last, he was free to equalise things with the man who had sent him to prison, and, turning to the four points of the compass, as though to look upon the wideness of the world which had become his again, he struck west towards Rawson 's selection.

Boy went that evening to the girl's home. As he neared it, the odour, of hawthorn in bloom came to his nostrils, suggesting a sweetness in store for him. When he left the house an hour afterwards, the hawthorn did not seem to smell so sweetly. The eagerness, too, had gone out of his feet. He walked slowly.

The first thing that chilled him was the quietness with which she greeted him. It was as though he had not been a long time away from her; as though they had met yesterday or yesterday week. The hand that she had given him lay coldly in his, unresponsive to, if not resenting, the pressure of his fingers. The lines of her face and figure had become very sweet and graceful. Her eyes steady, imperturbable, but still lustrous, had lost their old-time hardness. Her speech seemed guarded, as though she ; had been taught to watch the utterance of every word and sentiment. She seemed pruned, trimmed, repressed.

He knew straightaway, from a glance at her, that she had lost her old enthusiasm. She spoke of the bush and the things of the bush as though they were commonplace. And while she talked a disturbing feeling came to Boy that he too had become uninteresting to her. He looked at his big, brown hands, and at hers— soft and white— and it was borne in on him that, somehow or another, immeasurable distance divided their owners.

Once, however, he surprised a look in the girl's eyes that thrilled him. The rare, visiting softness had come to them once again. But, even while he thrilled, her next words slowed his pulse. She spoke of her father, and of the accident which had put him to heel with a broken ankle; and of how he suffered. It was of her father, then, that she was thinking, and not of him, when love rushed to her eyes and peeped out.

After an hour of easeless talk, he had risen and gone away. Her hand-shake at parting had been no warmer than at their greeting. It was little wonder then that, when he closed the garden gate behind him, the hawthorn blooms seemed to have lost some of their odour. As for the girl, she went back to her writing paper to re-commence work on a letter, which the intrusion of Boy had interrupted.

It was intended for a man in the city — a pleasant enough fellow, and eligible in most ways. The sentence, which she meant to write, would have run thus: 'Yes — I accept.'

But the appearance of Boy must in some way or another have altered her mind, since she wrote instead:

'I cannot just now give you a definite answer.'

Finishing her letter, she rose and went into her father's room with a cooling drink. Then, after some talk of Boy and other matters, she read him to sleep.

The next day, as she rode towards town to post her letter, she met a man trudging along the track, a swag on his shoulders. He smiled a 'Good-day' to her, but, even as she returned his salute, she felt that she did not like his smile. His dark eyes, too, disconcerted her— they seemed so purposeful.

The following afternoon the girl, who helped her with the housework, spoke to her of this man. He had come to the door with enquiries for Mate's father. She had told him that Mr. Rawson was ill, and in bed. At that he had gone away, saying that he would return another time, as there was a little matter that he desired to settle with Mr. Rawson. His smile at parting had revealed a row of perfect teeth, white and even.

That night the girl, saddling a horse, rode away to Mrs. Brown 's, where a dance was to be held. Mate after having seen her father to sleep, went into the garden. It was a hushed, languorous, ease-breathing night— such a night as compels, one to lie back at leisure, and muse, and remember. It had this effect on Mate.

She thought of her life in the city, and of all the fascinations associated with it. Sitting in her prim, trimmed garden, the scent of roses came to her, and when it was not the scent of roses, it was the scent of some sweet-breathing alien tree. The perfumes reminded her of a certain other night on the balcony of a harbour-side house, and of roses, and a young man's whispered words. She smiled.

Still smiling, she raised her eyes and looked beyond the garden to the ridge over the creek. Through the trees, on its crest, she saw the stars, but it was not at the stars that she looked. No; and it was not at any one tree— it was towards them all— the massed darkness of them all. From where she sat she could see a dim whiteness— the glimmer of their trunks. Their foliage, looming

blackly, seemed to have about it a kind of const iousr.pss, of stilled life, that appealed to her strangely. She caught herself thinking that, yonder— not here, in the prim, trimmed garden, nor yet in any city of man's making— life, large, lovely and wonderful, had its abiding place. The old days when, it had been her habit to helter-skelter through the timber, bare-legged and hatless, came back to her, and with the old days...

The bush seemed not so much to call her as to command her. She rose and walked towards it with outstretched arms, shutting the gate behind her on the garden and all its alien trees and flowers. The old love calling, had not called vainly.

iv

SHE took the track towards Hallam's boundary-fence, walking slowly. When she had gone a half-mile or more a man, striding quickly, loomed up out of the dark, and confronted her. She gave a little cry, and stood stock still. Then she gave a little laugh, and ran forward. It was Boy.

'Mate,' he exclaimed, 'did I startle you!'

'A little,' she said; 'I'm afraid I'm getting nerves.'

'I'm sorry.'

She was dressed in white, and her face was white. She was hatless, and her hair, coiled smoothly, seemed darker than the darkness. It was her eyes, however, shining up into his that he most noticed.

'I was going to your place,' he said.

'Oh,' she answered— a pleased tone in her voice. Perhaps he did not think his words would bring her any pleasure— perhaps he did not look for any in her reception of them.

'Yes— to see your father,' he explained.

She withdrew her eyes from him, and when she spoke, it was in her ordinary tones.

'It is good of you,' she said; 'he is alone, and unable to move from his bed. He will be glad to see you. Let us go back together.'

She turned and, side by side, they walked through the night. Each of them misunderstanding the other remained silent. To talk of the things that mattered seemed impossible; to talk commonplace would be hypocrisy. They remained mute, aloof, and even the great, near trees, failed to bring them together.

Then Boy started. The girl had clutched his arm, pressing her fingers into his flesh and muscle so that she hurt him.

'Look! Look!' she whispered.

His eyes were on her eyes, but on the instant they followed the direction of her pointing hand. He saw a great glow among the trees, a leaping flame in the distance; but for a moment he did not understand what these things meant.

'The house,' she said, now no longer whispering, but speaking hoarsely; 'there is no one to help him! He cannot help himself! O God! Go on, Boy— save him!'

Even then, in that moment of peril, so strange is the working of the mind, Boy found himself shaping his lips to the old cry: 'Trot! Gallopy! Run!'

But he did not permit it utterance.

Already they were speeding along, as they had so often sped together as children, careless again of bush or stone. But now, Boy allowed no spirit of chivalry to shorten his stride, so that his companion might keep pace with him. Within a dozen yards he had left her behind him; and when she came out into the open, she saw him close to the burning house. It was all ablaze, and the doorway through which ho must enter was crossed with flames.

She tried to call out to him not to attempt the adventure, not to be a fool— to let herself make the attempt— but her lungs, for lack of breath, refused her sound. When she reached the garden he had already disappeared.

At that moment she heard, although her senses were focussed on the scene in front of her, the short, angry bark of a dog that pursued something that ran. Already Haroun was flying with Nemesis on his tracks.

When Boy came out of the burning building with her father on his shoulder, she ran forward, with little cries of love and anxious questioning.

'Is he alive?'

'Ask him?' said Boy, with a short, triumphant laugh.

'And you?' He laughed again.

'Not hurt, Mate,' he replied.

Between them they placed the old man on a patch of cool, soft grass, and even then, before she knelt to attend to him, she ran forward to his rescuer, and threw her arms around his neck.

'Oh, Boy! Boy!' she cried; 'I love you more than ever.'

The old man, watching them from the grass, laughed softly. In his time he, too, had had his share of kisses.

6: Tiny

J. Winton Heming

1900-1953

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John Winton Heming

Australian pulp writerwho produced over 100 pulp novels in various genres under various pseudonyms.

TINY crouched closer to the doorstep and shivered. It was raining and Christmas time; but Christmas meant nothing in Tiny's life. Some people called him a fox-terrier, but it was a crass exaggeration. Somewhere, perhaps, in his pedigree the dominating strain was that of a fox terrier, but— well, Tiny looked something like a fox-terrier, anyhow.

But breeding didn't worry Tiny. Not it! He didn't even know what it was. The dog most entitled to respect in his eyes was the one which could snap the fastest and hardest in a fight. Such a one was Bully— the bull-terrier from the corner house. Tiny hated Bully— and respected him. Bully regarded Tiny as a mongrel to be sent about his business, because he (Bully) had a home and Tiny had not. In all his two years of varied thieving, scampering existence, Tiny had never had a home. Sometimes he looked wistfully at other dog's warm kennels and food— supplied food, not stolen— and it was then that Tiny dreamed and built castles in the air. Dogs do have dream-castles you know.

Oh, yes— you ask 'em!

Tiny felt down-hearted. Times were lean. Things were not going right at all. The last bone he stole from another dog's kennel was —well, just bone! And bone, without even marrow, is not very satisfying. Also,all his dug-out storehouses were dug out. So he crouched on the doorstep and peered forth.

He was undersized, thin and dirty; one ear showed signs of devastating recent conflict and his eyes held that expres sion commonly known as— yes, as “hang dog.” Tiny was usually a good-humored little pup, always willing to meet human advances half-way; with the proper degree of cautious suspicion, of course. And he was cunning— his vagabond life caused him to be so. He was an adept thief; he knew a poison bait when he saw it; he could smell a dog-catcher’s cart a mile off, and he could deduce to a fine degree from a stranger’s voice just what sort of reception he was likely to receive at that stranger’s hands— or feet. In common with practically all dogs he was short-sighted, and he relied on his nose, ears, quick wit and ready instinct to protect him.

The rain came down a little harder, and Tiny almost allowed a whimper to escape him. But he saved himself in time. Experience had taught him that whimpering was a luxury allowed to petted dogs only. To others, it netted nothing but kicks and harsh words.

Tiny was lonely. He longed for a home, a warm bed, a full stomach and fondling hands. He was an optimist, and yet— well, it’s hard to be optimistic when one is cold, wet, hungry and friendless.

Footsteps sounded on the path near by, and Tiny espied a pair of long legs striding towards him. He shrank a little closer into his corner. These he knew were a man’s legs, and he was never sure of a man’s legs. He knew that those persons who wrapped themselves up in rags, much to the detriment of free movement, who were called women, were the most gullible humans. They did occasionally throw— with ill-directed aim— a bone at one; but the men were far better left alone.

The legs bore down on him and turned in suddenly at the doorway. Tiny bowed his head abjectly and waited— for whatever was coming.

It came! A boot hit him above the tail, and he slithered silently out on the wet footpath.

Tiny took the buffetings of Fate philosophically. Dodging blows was second nature; stopping kicks was a habit. He turned a glance of gentle reproof at the donor of the kick and slunk off through the rain.

Fate was hard— especially when it happened to be in the guise of a heavy boot. He strolled on, by the world forgot, looking for a new retreat from the weather. He was not in the mood for doorsteps any longer, and food and warmth were such distant boons that he did not waste further thought on them. At least, not till he saw the old lady.

She was approaching him down the street, a big umbrella held above her head. Tiny didn’t distrust umbrellas— in season. He peered at her and noticed that she had a kindly face. His heart burned with hope. Kindly old ladies were

almost always good marks— if not, the very best of marks— for a comforting pat and an even more comforting bone.

Tiny edged towards his hope with a twisting sidelong motion of friendship and good feeling. The old lady had the Christmassy sensation of goodwill as she blinked down through her spectacles at the mongrel which obstructed her path. Tiny had invested his eyes with just the correct amount of watery sadness, and she paused.

“Poor ’ittle doggie,” she said.

Whoever had had the job of shortening Tiny's tail at birth had been a good tradesman. He had made the stump too short to wag, so Tiny was forced to wag the rear half of his body. He did so now ecstatically.

The old lady bent and patted him.

“Poor ’ittle doggie,” she repeated. “All wet and cold.”

Tiny rolled over on his back in the mud. It was certainly not a very dignified thing to do, and the mud was cold and sticky, but he decided that it was worth suffering if a bone were at the journey’s end. How ever, he kept a sharp eye on this human’s movements. One never knows!

“I think I’ll take the poor little thing home,” the old lady said aloud to herself. “It’s Christmas time; there’s no one in, and besides, nobody will mind, surely.”

Tiny heard, and he made a fairly accurate guess at the meaning.

“Come on ’ittle doggie,” said the old lady, as she snapped her fingers and started off.

Tiny was on his feet in an instant. He scampered wildly about her, but he was too old in the head to jump up on her dress. He had spoilt good chances before with his muddy feet. An animal will always learn by experience. Humans are usually not so apt.

It was only a short distance to the old lady’s home, and Tiny followed her through the gateway and up the side-entrance to the back-door. He noticed that she opened the door with a key, and he was glad of this, because it meant no one was inside. He had been taken home by old ladies and children before, and no sooner had he reached the coveted goal than a rough masculine hand had hurled him forth into the world again. All in all, Tiny didn’t have much time for men, and evidently the feeling was reciprocated.

The old lady stooped and spoke to him, and he licked her hand. One word he recognised, and it brought back all his old hunger-pangs. It was “meat”!

He shook the water in a shower from his back and padded into the house after the old lady, his cautious eye ever on the alert for possible enemies. In the kitchen it was warm and, one wish gratified, he wagged his rear end

excitedly and gazed hungrily on his benefactress. She was busy at the meat-safe.

Something flew through the air. Tiny instinctively leapt sideways and advanced on it suspiciously. His eyes brightened and his ears cocked. It was meat— cooked and unpoisoned meat!

Two gulps and it had gone. Tiny looked round for more— and got it. The old lady had the Christmas feeling badly, or maybe she found Tiny more grateful for his Christmas present than she had found her 18-year-old grandson, to whom she had given an encyclopaedia, when what he wanted was a motor-cycle.

Tiny always gulped his food. His belief was that a chop in the stomach was worth half a dozen in the butcher's shop and, besides, it was the safest way. Once meat was down it was hard to take back— with or without force. And this house might have its own special canine. Get what you can, while you can and where you can, was Tiny's motto— which is a motto common to many human beings, only they call it extravagance. At least, they don't call it that, but whoever foots the bill does.

When Tiny had got to the stage when mere humans sit back and reach for the toothpicks he began to eat more slowly. Enemies there appeared to be none, and food there was in plenty, so this was a case for steady, enjoyable eating.

"This is the life," he thought. "Give me a home every time."

The old lady had been busy while he ate, preparing and eating her own simple meal. It was from the dinner table that most of the scraps came, which forced Tiny to adopt the new sin of gluttony. He had never been a glutton before— he had never had the opportunity.

Having finished her meal, the old lady placed a plate of scraps on the floor for Tiny, and leant back and contemplated him with a no-more-thanks-I've-had-sufficient expression on her face.

Tiny sniffed at the scraps wistfully. He would have liked to have eaten them, but he felt he just couldn't undertake the task, so he looked round for a place to hide them. He was staring drowsily at a corner behind the dresser when the old lady spoke. Tiny wagged his rear. He didn't understand what she was saying, but he felt it was the right thing to do. One simply has to make concessions to a person so kind even if wagging one's rear is an effort. What the old lady actually did say was, "Now the best thing to make you a nice doggie would be to give you a bath."

Experienced house-dogs may have pricked up their ears at the word "bath," but not so Tiny. He never remember hearing the word.

He decided to put off the hiding of the scraps till later. Sleep called insistently, so— lulled for the moment into a false sense of security— he staggered to the hearthrug, rolled himself up, and went to sleep.

The old lady was ruminating aloud as old ladies have a habit of doing.

"He looks a good watch-dog. I'll keep him if I can, but Dick and Tom are sure to shoo him out if I don't clean him up a bit. He's far too disgraceful now."

Nothing like suiting the action to the word, so on the stove went a kettle of water, and in the centre of the room appeared a bath-tub, soap and brushes. Tiny slept peacefully on. He had decided to adopt this abode for life. "This'll do me," was his last waking thought. "A home at last!"

Soon afterwards, when the lady placed her hand on the scruff of his neck, Tiny yawned, sat back firmly on his haunches, and looked at her with reproach.

"Out again," he thought.

But no— the old lady wasn't dragging him to the door but to the centre of the room. Tiny wondered, but nevertheless resisted. One doesn't get dragged for nothing, and he had never been dragged to anything good yet.

His captor released his neck and grasped his body; he was lifted up and lowered again. Then he protested a little. He found himself up to his belly in unpleasantly warm water, and although the sensation wasn't very nasty, it was unusual. But worse was to come. The old lady began to splash water all over him— in his eyes, his ears, and some even in his mouth.

Tiny had never tasted soap before, and he did not wish to do so again. He spluttered and fumed, struggled and gurgled. He had a curious sensation of being forcibly drowned; his eyes were smarting, and fleas were racing up and down his spine taking fresh grips every quarter of a second. Instinct had always warned him to keep away from water, and Tiny realised now that his instinct was a very wise thing. A "home" somehow didn't possess the rosy tint it had had previously.

At last, to his very great relief, he was hauled forth. Then the drying began. No self-respecting dog likes to have his hair rubbed quickly and roughly the wrong way and his fleas irritated. Would you like it? The drying concluded, but Tiny was not free.

"I'm not going to let— keep still!— you go," the old lady said. "You'd only— do keep quiet!— roll in the— ah-h, bad doggie!— mud if I— ah, no you don't! —do."

Tiny quietened for lack of breath. The old lady tied a piece of rag tightly round his neck, a cord to the rag, and the cord to the ice-chest.

In Tiny's breast was a longing to roll in order to smooth out all the rumpled hairs and soothe his tingling skin. The old lady released him, and he made a leap for the door. He had never been in an aeroplane, so he did not know that

he experienced all the sensations of looping the loop then. Half way in that mighty forward leap something plucked hard and sharply at his neck, and he turned over in the air and landed on the flat of his back.

Aesop's Fables were nothing in his young life, but he believed in "Try, try, try again." He was up with a bound, and "tried again." Once more he turned an acrobatic flip-flap. Three times the performance was repeated; then Tiny sat down to recover his breath and review the situation. The cord was tangled round his legs and one strand hung over his battered left ear.

For a few moments he blinked at the cord thoughtfully; then he rose and backed slowly away from the ice-chest, untangling himself as he went. At the full extent of the cord he was forced to halt.

"Ah! So that's it," he mused. "That's why I can't get away!"

He lay down as near to the door as he could and began to think.

He was a prisoner. There was no doubt of that; and he had always been so free. No more could he enjoy himself chasing motor-cars and trams and annoying cyclists. No more could he hunt cats. No more holes to dig—or fights to have— or—.

The thought came to him that he didn't like home so much after all. There were advan tages, yes, but there were also disadvantages. And he'd sooner be independent any day. The open road for him!

He wriggled his neck and tugged carefully on the cord. His rag collar loosened. The old lady had tied the knot like— well, like a woman usually does. A few quick jerks, and lo, he was free!

Tiny didn't wait to offer up prayers of thanksgiving. He tripped over the door-step going out, and skidded on his nose. He heard a shrill feminine cry behind him as he scrambled to his feet, but he heeded it not.

It was raining—drizzling, gloomy, yea, even wet rain. In the corner of a doorstep sat huddled a small, dirty terrier. His eyes were sad and hungry.

An old lady spied him there, and bending she spoke softly to him,

"Poor ikkle puppie," she said.

But the poor ikkle puppie didn't stop for conversation. After one glance of disdain he raced away down the wet street. Tiny had been there before!

7: Dolly Dots an Eye

J. Winton Heming

World's News (Sydney) 27 Feb 1935

DEAR ILA,

You haven't had a billet ducks from me for a good while dearie so I Just sort of shook off my tired reeling, grabbed the old fountain pen, gave it a good shake, dipped it in the ink well (that's the only way it works), and commenced to scribble in the usual old way— up, down, and all around, but never on the line. You know, dearie, that when I was too young to defend myself, someone with no more imagination than a policeman called me Maggie. So when I grew old enough to grasp the fact that Maggie would never cause more than a grin in the electric signs I changed it to Dolores. And then the unfeeling public took a hand, and I was abbreviated to Dolly— sort of cut short in my youth, so to speak. It was too late to change then, so I just had to put up with it— with the consolation that maybe Dolly is one taste nearer the popular palate than Maggie, anyhow.

Not that I'm- a big blaze in the electric *yet*. The name of Dolly Webster (nee— I'm noted for my knees, dimpled Maggie McCarthy) ain't caused the theatre electrician to break his neck putting it up over the foyer so far, but well, I live in hopes. You might have noticed me— I'm the little blonde third from the left in the Chuckles' Chorus, with the knees.

Of course, I wasn't always a blonde, but I was always partial to gentlemen, so I suicided. And since then I've found that the genus homo who prefers blondes ain't always a gentleman, and that though gentlemen prefer blondes they marry brunettes. But I ain't strong on the masculine gender. I has my art to consider, and I'm just like 99 per cent, of chorus girls— they ain't never got time to do the things that they are supposed to do even if they had the inclination, which they ain't, or the energy after a few hours of stretching the ankles and articulator organs. And as for having to run the gauntlet of a bevy of beaux lined up on the pave before the stage door-with a hot-house garden or so clutched in their clammy fists— well, it ain't worried me none so far. It just don't happen. Sometimes on pay night though, Bill Broome, one of the stage hands, takes me out after the show and puts over for an orange crush. I think he's got a bit of a crush on me— which ain't reciprocated any. But the orange crush comes in handy as a gargle to lay the stage dust. I think Bill only does it so he can tell the family that he stands in big with one of the chorus— though what's to be proud of in that is one bid above me. And after the drink we part, and Bill and I are only nodding acquaintances any other time. During the drink we talk scandal about the stars and "shop" with most unashamed gusto.

Well; this ain't telling you nothing about Rosie and Robbo. Rosie is one of them sort who fall head over ballet shoes (which ain't got no heels) in love with every fresh pair of side-levers she sees. She come to the Chuckles' Co. from one of them ballet schools where we nearly all gets initiated to the high kick, pleca (that's how it sounds, though I ain't sure you spell it that way) do cartwheels and bendbacks, taps and so forth while we cling to a bar and live in hopes of cheating Nature by an effort to make both our legs lie in one straight line along the floor. Well, Rosie comes to us with wide-open eyes and mouth and an overwhelming curiosity as to whether there was any nice males in the show. I brands her in one "moon-struck, male-struck, and mentally-struck," and I ain't wrong, as events proves.

Robbo is our ballet master. He features side-levers and a toothbrush mo, though he's a decent feller for all that.

Even if he does go in off the high end occasionally you can't hold that against him, 'cos some of the chorines would make a duckling bite itself. Like most of these pros, he has a wife in the distant background somewhere.

I met her one day— she comes down to the flea-house we calls a theatre and asks at the stage door for him. A shy little thing she was— timid as a college boy before the headmaster. I'm just tripping over the doorstep— a bit late for rehearsal—but I pauses to put the spot on her. You don't often see 'em shy in our business.

"Looking for someone, kid?" I asks.

She goes red and gurgles like a deep sea diver who forgot to put his helmet on. "Yes," she manages at last. "I wanted to see my husband— just for a moment if no one will mind."

"Who *is* your worse half?" I asks.

"Oh!" She colors up like a chorus girl at the rouge pot. "How foolish of me! He is Mr. Robinson:"

"Oh, Robbo? Yes, I'll tell him." .

I'm just stepping out to do it when Robbo comes into the scene. He's evidently heard my dulcet tones, which ain't pianissimo at any time, and he was coming on the run with thunder writ large on his alabaster brow. But when he sees the shy little dame the thunder blows up and the sun comes out. He walks right past me.

"What's wrong, sweetheart?" he asks, both hands out to her.

"I'm sorry I had to come, dear;" she says, and love flashes two pale blue spots from her optics. "But John is sick— he wants you."

Trouble takes the stage on Robbo's brow. He turns to me where, instead of clattering up the dressing-room steps, I'm tip-toeing up like I was in a church.

"Dolly," he says, "tell Mr. White I must go out for an hour."

I nodded, and then they was gone.

It seems the kid has only the measles, with more spots than we had in the projection room, but he gets over.it.

The first oil I has of Rosie's heart disease was one morning about a week before the opening, when she's standing up-stage while Robbo works the ponies down front. Rosie grabs my arm,

"Isn't he gorgeous!" she sprays over my neck in a treacly voice.

"What is?" I asks.

"Mr. Robinson," she says. "He spoke to me twice, this morning."

"How lucky for you!" I says, "he bawled me out *three* times."

"I'm going to pitch for him," she says, a glint in her eyes like a dead fish.

And she does! And how! Well,.she weren't a bad-looking kid, if you like anything as tasteless as water, and, she had a good figure— if wide in places— and Robbo was only a man.

He don't take much notice of her at first, but she pushes herself in gradually. She knew how to 'use her wits, even if they was only half-wits-I'll give her that.

I might mention I ain't aiding and abetting Rosie none, and it's getting under my skin. One day I pulls her up on the stairs.

"Oh, Rosie," I says, "I think you ought to know that Robbo is married."

"Well, what of it?" she sneers. "I never did go chicken stealing— I like a man of experience,"

"But," I pleads, "Robbo is happily married— with a kid."

"See if she can hold him," Rosie says, "and it ain't any of your business anyhow."

"Thank goodness that sort of thing ain't my business," I says, and goes on up the stairs, not feeling as chirpy as I sounds.

Well, I'm telling you, I keeps seeing visions of Mrs. Robbo's shy little dial, and I begins to worry about it, which ain't usual for me.

I has to put a brake on it somehow, because, although Robbo ain't fallen yet, I can see the way things is headingand that's down hill with a little woman at the bottom to take the impact.. So I has to act quick.

I'm cogitating the whole biz two days before the show, and was getting along Pitt Street as deep in thought as a punter is in debt, when I feels a hand like an elephant rest on my arm so lightly that I reels, from shock!

And who do you think it was? Big Bertha! You remember Bertha that used to do the male impersonations act, "Six Feet of Quality." She's six feet all right, and wide with it, and has a voice which would frighten a bulldog. And every inch of her is fine gold. When she bumps me like that I gets bumped with an idea.

"Hello, Dol," she says, "how's work?" "Good, kid," I says. "But I want you to do something for me."

"How much is it?" Bertha asks. "I ain't flush— the kids needed boots this week."

"That's right," I says. "You've got a tribe of kids. Listen to me—"

Then I goes on to give her the whole song and dance, and she gets the lines, and this is how the performance went.

Rosie shares a flat with some other chorines up at the Cross, and next morning as she's stepping out all kalsomined and water-waved there's me and Bertha and five kids waiting for her.

"Hello, Dolly," she says Jauntily, not knowing Bertha. "Waiting to escort me to work in case I meets Robbo on the way?"

Then Bertha takes over, that being her cue. She places herself before Rosie and cuts off Rosie's view of the rest of Bohemia.

"This girl," she says, waving one of the hams she calls fists in my direction, "tells me you're pitching for my husband."

Rosie gasps a little, then decides to be cheeky.

"It's like her hide," she says. "Who's your husband, anyway?"

"I'm Mrs. Robinson," lies Bertha, "and this is the family."

Rosie gasps again. "I don't know," she gurgles like a homeless fish, "what you mean."

"Then perhaps," Bertha says, "this'll convince you."

Then she places one of those aforementioned hams very scientifically in Rosie's eye.

Rosie screams and staggers against the wall. .

"That'll go black," Bertha says, calm and convincing. "And it might close up. You might cover some of it with grease-paint. But-if I hear of you do- ' ing any vamping which ain't on a piano I'll call around some night, break your nose, knock out your teeth, and generally make such a mess of you there' won't even be any peroxide on your hair -let alone waves. That's all. Take a tumble while you're safe— or you'll takea real tumble."

Then we moves off in massed formation, leaving Rosie whimpering against the wall.

It was curtains after that, 'cos Rosie got so windy that her china mug would get cracked that she resigns, and no one's sorry, while Mrs. Robbo'll never know how close she was to losing her leading man.

Cheerio, Ha. Yours till the day when actors ain't conceited.

Dolly.

8: A Venetian Evening

Marjorie Bowen

1885-1952

The Story-Teller Aug 1914

Australian Women's Weekly 24 June 1933

Marjorie Bowen (Gabrielle M. V. Long)

THE Marchese Barbetta had left his palace for the last time. In front of his doors the State barge which had borne his coffin rocked on the slow tide of the canal, which swelled between the blue and white striped posts showing his gorgeous armories. The crimson damask pall still lay over the gilt seats, and as the barge gently rose and fell with the waves the corners dipped and lifted from the water.

It was August, midday, and the heat intense.

Venice, so gay last night, to be again so gay to-night, slept. No deserted city could have been more quiet; the sun ruled over lonely piazzas, silent canals, churches where the beggars lay huddled like heaps of rags in the shadows of the stone cornices and saints, empty gondolas, line on line, and palaces with the shutters closed, fainting flowers trailing over the terraces and balconies.

Towards the Lido, San Giorgio showed through a mist of heat against the background of a blaze of open sea, across which sometimes passed faint gold sail— some Eastern ship looking like the argosy of another world. The Lion, the Campanile, the rose-colored palace and pearl-colored prison gleamed against a sky dazzlingly pale with heat.

Don Duilio, the heir of the Marchese Barbetta, sat at a window and peered through the shutters at the barge rocking on the water.

So intense was the heat that the very water gave no idea of coolness; when the new Marchese put his hand out of the window, it was as if he put it into a fire.

The flies were still; where the sunlight slipped between the shutters lay on the tessellated floor of a pool of gold, of strength fierce enough to burn Don Duilio's foot through his velvet shoe.

Over him was the languor of this great heat. He had much to occupy him; he had, in brief, to face disaster complete and immediate, yet he sat there lazily, looking with idle eyes at the barge which had carried away his uncle that morning.

Then the palace had been full; cousins, friends, dependents had hurried to and from the painted chambers, fingering the handsome furniture, criticising the pictures, whispering scandalous stories of the old Marchese.

All had manifold expectations. Then the will was read: one sentence only. The lawyer laughed as the document fluttered on to a malachite table and a dozen eager hands snatched at it. Duilio caught it and read aloud:

"I leave no money, prodigious debts, and the rest to Holy Church."

THE relatives, the friends, the servants fled like a company of butterflies when the flower on which they have been resting has been cut beneath them. Don Duilio was alone with his bare title, his mortgaged palace, a handful of scudi, a mountain of debts, and his memory of the dead.

He had always lived as one who some day, any day, be rich. His uncle had never stinted him; together they had been two of the most extravagant cavaliers in Venice, and Duilio had been quite content. He had never wanted his uncle's death, nor expected it; the old man had been always robust.

Who would have guessed that one night he would fall from his seat in the lamp-hung gondola and die without a word among the glasses and fruit, the sweets and wine of the floating supper table?

As little could any have guessed that the lawyer, on breaking the seals of the Marchese's will, would have nothing to give anyone but that mocking sentence.

Duilio felt more surprise than resentment; he saw that if his uncle had lived there would have been ruin soon just the same. The lawyer had left him a bundle of papers; flicking them over, he saw that vast sums were owing to a certain Jew whom he had often seen on the Rialto.

The very place was not his— nay, nor was anything in it. He had cast the paper into the canal and wondered why the crows had not yet gathered round their prey. As for himself, life without money was clearly impossible— at least in Venice.

No one was more careless than he of the actual scudi; he despised those who earned and those who hoarded them. Yet how to do without them?

They were necessary to secure those reverent servants who all his life had ministered to his needs; to procure the silks and satins with which he went clothed, the food and wine with which he was fed; necessary for the flowers and for the suppers with Caterina and Giovanna, the serenades beneath the high, white balcony of Anna; necessary for the play, the comedy, the music the balls, the fetes, the carnivals!

There were no more of them, and he was utterly incapable of procuring any. How could a young Venetian noble hope to earn money? He never entertained the shameful idea. The problem admitted of only money and without Venice, then one must cease living.

One of the relations that morning had held out a half-hearted offer of a home in Tuscany. Tuscany! Don Duilio could not even contemplate life anywhere but in Venice.

Well, he must do what the old Marchese had done— depart as comfortably and gracefully as possible, from a life which had suddenly become intolerable, from a world which had failed him signally.

He envied the old Marchese who had died so easily and pleasantly amid the song and laughter, with the purple night about him and a lady's white hand in his, and who now lay quietly in the cool marble church.

And how was he to follow to that same repose? Now he could not think; presently, when the grateful dark came, when the gondolas slipped out from the lagoons, lights flashed from the windows and music came over the water, then he would be alive again, like all the others. Then he could decide.

He rose and turned from the window. The shadowed room was large and lofty, yet hot and close. Blonde and rosy goddesses smiled from the walls, from the gilt bosses of the rich, dark ceiling hung lamps fashioned in myriads of glass flowers. Eastern tapestries were on the floor, on chairs were piled Eastern cushions.

The Marchese stretched himself and yawned. He was a fitting figure for the gorgeous chamber; even in his black his appearance was luxurious. He was very slight, dark as a Moor, with a Moor's arched nose, and his large black eyes were well used to express all the shades of passion and all the niceties of the language of love. His black hair showed through the powder in front and the curls resisted the pomade.

He had a mole on his chin which seemed to call attention to the fact that he was not in any way handsome, but he was as bright, as graceful, and as elegant as a hawk.

He looked at himself in one of the mirrors as he passed, looked at his reflection curiously as if he saw it for the first time. The first time? Nay, the last.

The door was ajar on to the stairs, and he passed out. The house was usually silent during the heat of the day; but he remembered that this was not the silence of repose, but of desertion.

Not a single page, maid, or a servant remained; he could imagine that they had not gone empty-handed— the Jew had certainly been cheated of some of his spoils.

The Marchese had felt no resentment; were they not doing as he meant to do, fleeing from failure?

It was cooler on the head of the great staircase. He lent on the heavy gilt balustrade, looked down the well of stairway.

The silence was as the silence of oblivion. On one of the marble steps lay a crimson flower which had fallen from the old Marchese's damask pall, a thing which would live and die under the sun of one day, yet looked as if it had lain there and would lay there for all eternity.

DUILIO conjured ghosts out of the shadows which filled the enclosed stairs; ghosts of all the pretty women in mask and domino, swinging hoops and satin slippers, who had fluttered up and down; the cavaliers with cane and glass; the priests, the dancing girls, the figures of carnival, the mourners, and, lastly, the Marchese in his coffin with the gilt nails and the crimson pall, and the troop of pretenders who had fled so soon after in gay disgust.

As the Marchese imagined these figures filling the empty stairway, one of them gathered substance and took on the semblance of flesh and blood; it was a dark woman.

She moved slowly through the floating wraiths of his fancy and seemed to be mounting the stairs towards him; her hair and her figure merged into the shadow, he could see only her face, grave and pale, and her neck, white as a magnolia leaf.

He rubbed his eyes and leant lower over the rail; she was looking at him and seemed frightened— her lips were parted, one hand trembled along the painted wall as she advanced.

The figures of his fancy vanished, leaving her alone on the great stair-way. He could see her dusky hair and her dark dress now, she was alive and coming to him. He waited; to speak would be to break the spell.

She came nearer, slowly mounting the stairs with timid steps and looking at him the while.

He had once seen in the studio of a great artist a piece of dark paper pinned to a board; the artist, while the light talk was passing, idly took up a white chalk and a black, and sketched on the grey paper a girl's head—a few

strokes, a few minutes, and a lovelier face than any in the room was looking from the easel.

The Marchese was reminded of this as he watched this pale creature blossom from the darkness of the deserted stairs. She turned and came up the last flight; he saw now that she was poorly dressed in worn, ugly garments.

She stopped by the red funeral rose. "Signor Marchese.'' she said, and held her heart as if in fear.

"Ah," he answered. "You have broken a very pretty dream. Who are you, my dear?''

She did not reply.

"How did you come here?"

"I have been here a long while," she murmured.

"But I have never seen you."

"How should you? I was one of the kitchen girls, Signor Marchese."

"WHY have you stayed?" he asked, amused. She looked down at the rose, and then up at him.

"Because I had nowhere to go, Signor. I came here from the convent. I know no one in Venice."

"You can," he said, "go back to the convent, eh?"

"No," she replied. "Never. I like this palace better. I am very sorry you are ruined, Signor Marchese."

"Why," he said, "you are the first who has expressed that sentiment— the only one who has felt it— if you have felt it."

"I have cried, Signor Marchese," she answered simply, "for the late Marchese and for you."

He glanced away.

"Where are the others?" he asked. "Gone, Signor. All gone. I stayed below till I was afraid— it was so big and dark. Then I thought to come up. Forgive me."

"Thank you, child," he smiled. She came two steps higher.

"Where are the great ladies?" she asked timidly. "Will they ever come again?"

"Nay, never," and this time he sighed. She sighed, too.

"I used to peep sometimes at the great ladies, such ladies! All in silk."

He looked at her quizzically. She was fair and young, fresh and graceful, her hands were scarcely coarsened nor her body bowed by work.

Emboldened by his look she came to the top of the stairs.

"What are you going to do, Signor?" Her eyes were soft as velvet; her comeliness was enveloped in her coarse clothes as a butterfly is in a cocoon.

He noted it mournfully.

"VENICE will always be kind to such as you." he said, thinking of the life he now regarded as past. "I will give you a few scudi— the last!— and the name of a lady who would take a maid. I think."

"I will not go." she answered. "Tell me," she clasped her hands, "what are you going to do?"

"It is too hot now." he replied. "When it is cooler I will think."

"Will you leave Venice?"

"Ah, no."

"But the Jews will have this palace? All that is in it? Everything?"

"Everything; but why are you so interested?" he asked, smiling again now and regarding her. The rosy blood stormed her face.

"Oh, Signor Marchese, the great ladies have gone— none of them cares. But I care; let me stay.

"I have been unhappy. No one was kind to me, for I would not work. I used to go to the kitchen grating and watch the gondolas and the lights, and hear the music and the soft voices, and smell the perfumes of the wine and fruit, the jasmine and the roses.

"And I meant to die, but the water was always so dark."

"What is your name?" he said.

"Musetta," she answered meekly.

"Well, Musetta, I will give you a silk gown, a bouquet of rose and jasmine, a supper of fruit and cakes, with red wine in a milk-white goblet. But afterwards—"

"Yes?"

"Afterwards, I shall go away. I shall take the gondola and— and—"

"And go to sea. Never to come back," she said.

He started at the way in which she had divined his thoughts.

"And I will come, too," smiled Musetta.

He looked at her long and thought-fully.

"Why, if you like you shall come, too," he agreed at last.

She clasped her hands like a happy child.

"Now, the silk dress!" she cried.

They both laughed, and the sound of their laughter went upwards like a slow mounting bird through the empty palace.

HE took her to a chamber used by many fair guests; his sister had been the last. Her clothes and even her jewels awaited her return.

He unshuttered the window which looked on to a shadowed canal, and she stood timidly in the beautiful little room which was perfumed like a bouquet of flowers.

"The sun is beginning to set," he said; he bowed to her. "I shall await you below."

He went, and she listened until the last echo of his footsteps had died away.

A distant melody lifted on the silence. Venice was beginning to awake.

"Now fall the shining leaves apart
And do their wealth disclose;
And I may kiss the golden heart
That lies within the rose!"

Musetta pulled open the drawers and caskets, and cast on to the silk couches the gowns and laces, shawls and shoes. She laughed with pleasure as she handled them, and her knees shook with joy.

"Now comes the perfect day at last,
When I may know my dreaming true.
Delays and doubtings both are past
And I have found the soul of you."

Musetta took off her rough garments; she washed herself in the basin of rosy alabaster with scented unguents she found in a silver bottle; she combed out her hair with an ivory comb; she powdered and painted her face as she had seen the great ladies powdered and painted.

The sun was sinking behind the palaces; green shadows began to fill the canals, shutters were opened and people moved to and fro.

From her high window Musetta could see a star, clear as crystal, in the bright, paling sky.

She robed herself in lace with over all a grey silk dress embroidered with thousands of roses; she fastened a pink feather in her hair and a braid of pearls round her neck. She put on little white shoes with high scarlet heels.

She stood before the long mirror regarding herself.

The shadows increased and the star grew brighter; at last it was the only light she had, for the sun had set.

She left the chamber. The shoes felt strange to her feet and the flounces filled the doorway. She had put on a grey mantle and drawn the hood over her hair.

As she hastened down the stair her silks filled the silence with a mysterious and pleasant rustling.

The palace door was open and she stepped out, holding up her skirts.

The gondola rocked at the steps. A rosy lantern hung at the prow, the blue silk curtain fluttered in the evening breeze. Against the cushions leant the Marchese.

He had changed his mourning; beneath his scarlet cape showed the gold and white of his festival dress, and a gold plume waved in his hat.

She stood half in the luminous twilight of the outer air, half in the shadow of the doorway, and she looked unreal in her pearl color and grey and rose, so strangely did the light play over her and her swinging hoops and gleaming embroideries.

"You are a great lady now," he smiled. He rose and helped her into the gondola. Her eyes sought the damask covered barge on which the old Marchese's coffin had rested.

She stepped into the gondola, fair and light as a lily, and sank back among the velvet cushions. He laid on her lap a bouquet of jasmine and lilies, roses and carnations.

"For one night," she said.

Other stars were out now; the sky glittered like a velvet robe on which diamonds have been flung. Lamplight streamed from the windows of the palaces; over the dark waters went the gondolas and the barges hung with flowers and lanterns.

Voices and music arose from the parties of pleasure; the night moths were abroad, and towards the Lido the sea darkened into the sky.

Musetta saw a luxurious supper before her; the Marchese had prepared with his own hands the repast of her dreams, one such as she had often seen in the kitchens, but never yet beheld on the table.

It was the remains of the funeral feast he had arranged, but she did not think of that nor of how truly it was a feast of death.

She saw only the white lace cloth, the silver-gilt tazzas, the glasses with the milk-white lines and the opal-colored dragons for stems, the delicate jellies of quince and orange, the dewy fruit in porcelain dishes, the creams decorated with almonds and violets, the meats fastened with skewers, the birds on gilt dishes with their feathers rising through delicate pastries, the wine in glamorous bottles— wine white as crystal, gold as amber, warm-colored as a ripe peach, red as a summer rose.

They ate and drank beneath the canopy of the violet sky, the moored gondola close to the steps of the palace, about them the carnival of the Venetian summer night.

After all, Musetta ate very little and took but one glass of the amber-colored wine. Nor did she speak much; she continually looked at her satin lap and the flowers resting there, and the Marchese looked continuously at her—his glance was amused. They laughed together like children.

When at last she had finished toying with her fruit and cakes, he gathered up the supper equipment and placed it on the palace steps.

"To-night I am my own page," he said, and then unmoored the gondola.

"I am my own gondolier," he added, as he took the long oar; then he glanced at her gravely.

"Will you go back, Musetta?"

"To what? To face to-morrow? No. I will never be a kitchen girl again. I shall always be a lady in silk."

SHE leant back in her seat and drew the blue curtains aside so that she could look out. He pushed off the gondola. The steel prow with the gilt horses flashed in the light of the swinging lantern. He doffed his cloak and hat.

She looked back once at the State barge rocking in the swell of their departure, then she kept her face to-wards the sea.

Towards the sea he steered; they passed gay palaces, the great Piazza with the Campanile, the quays, the long front of the Doge's Palace, the canal that divides it from the prison and the enclosed bridge by which prisoners pass, the island of San Giorgio, and so on into the broadening waters.

The lights were now few; they saw few pleasure boats; the music and the laughter began to be behind them.

They passed merchant barges and anchored ships with sails furled; the waters spread and encompassed them; they had left behind all the other gondolas.

Musetta drew the grey silk mantle round her shoulders, for the air began to blow cold from the sea.

There was no moon, the stars were intensely bright and seemed to hang within touch. Venice slipped away behind them, a scattered cluster of lights like loose-flung gems.

HERE and there a gleam showed the lamp before a shrine rising from the shores of the low lagoons where the scraggy reeds and bushes dipped to the salt tide and often served as nets to catch the bodies of drowned or murdered men which drifted down from Venice, the dreadful fruit of some gay flower of carnival.

The waves began to rock the gondola, and presently seized it and bore it out to sea as a leaf is seized by a stream and borne swiftly onwards out of sight.

Then the Marchese drew up the oar and put on his cloak and came and sat beside Musetta.

She smiled happily; it was so much better than the kitchens of the Palazza Barbetta.

He smiled, too; it was so much better than seeing the Jews in possession of his home and finding himself in the streets without a white piece in his pocket.

The night was warm yet fresh; the boat drifted beyond sight of the lights of Venice, and the stars seemed to crowd down on them.

They sat close together now the open sea was all about them and the stars were flung nearer, nearer like a veil. The waves were larger now, and presently began to overwhelm them; the splashing sounded to them like the music of flutes and guitars, and the starlight seemed like the lights of the great Piazza in carnival time.

The evening slipped into the night. Venice slept after the feast and the merry-making; the Marchese and Musetta slept, too.

9: The Shadows on the Wall

Mary E. Wilkins Freeman

1852-1930

Everybody's Magazine March 1903

Mary Eleanor Wilkins Freeman

American author in the gothic mode. This story is one of her most reprinted.

"HENRY had words with Edward in the study the night before Edward died," said Caroline Glynn.

She was elderly, tall, and harshly thin, with a hard colourlessness of face. She spoke not with acrimony, but with grave severity. Rebecca Ann Glynn, younger, stouter and rosy of face between her crinkling puffs of gray hair, gasped, by way of assent. She sat in a wide flounce of black silk in the corner of the sofa, and rolled terrified eyes from her sister Caroline to her sister Mrs. Stephen Brigham, who had been Emma Glynn, the one beauty of the family. She was beautiful still, with a large, splendid, full-blown beauty; she filled a great rocking-chair with her superb bulk of femininity, and swayed gently back and forth, her black silks whispering and her black frills fluttering. Even the shock of death (for her brother Edward lay dead in the house,) could not disturb her outward serenity of demeanor. She was grieved over the loss of her brother: he had been the youngest, and she had been fond of him, but never had Emma Brigham lost sight of her own importance amidst the waters of tribulation. She was always awake to the consciousness of her own stability in the midst of vicissitudes and the splendor of her permanent bearing.

But even her expression of masterly placidity changed before her sister Caroline's announcement and her sister Rebecca Ann's gasp of terror and distress in response.

"I think Henry might have controlled his temper, when poor Edward was so near his end," said she with an asperity which disturbed slightly the roseate curves of her beautiful mouth.

"Of course he did not *know*," murmured Rebecca Ann in a faint tone strangely out of keeping with her appearance.

One involuntarily looked again to be sure that such a feeble pipe came from that full-swelling chest.

"Of course he did not know it," said Caroline quickly. She turned on her sister with a strange sharp look of suspicion. "How could he have known it?" said she. Then she shrank as if from the other's possible answer. "Of course you and I both know he could not," said she conclusively, but her pale face was paler than it had been before.

Rebecca gasped again. The married sister, Mrs. Emma Brigham, was now sitting up straight in her chair; she had ceased rocking, and was eyeing them both intently with a sudden accentuation of family likeness in her face. Given one common intensity of emotion and similar lines showed forth, and the three sisters of one race were evident.

"What do you mean?" said she impartially to them both. Then she, too, seemed to shrink before a possible answer. She even laughed an evasive sort of laugh. "I guess you don't mean anything," said she, but her face wore still the expression of shrinking horror.

"Nobody means anything," said Caroline firmly. She rose and crossed the room toward the door with grim decisiveness.

"Where are you going?" asked Mrs. Brigham.

"I have something to see to," replied Caroline, and the others at once knew by her tone that she had some solemn and sad duty to perform in the chamber of death.

"Oh," said Mrs. Brigham.

After the door had closed behind Caroline, she turned to Rebecca.

"Did Henry have many words with him?" she asked.

"They were talking very loud," replied Rebecca evasively, yet with an answering gleam of ready response to the other's curiosity in the quick lift of her soft blue eyes.

Mrs. Brigham looked at her. She had not resumed rocking. She still sat up straight with a slight knitting of intensity on her fair forehead, between the pretty rippling curves of her auburn hair.

"Did you— hear anything?" she asked in a low voice with a glance toward the door.

"I was just across the hall in the south parlor, and that door was open and this door ajar," replied Rebecca with a slight flush.

"Then you must have—"

"I couldn't help it."

"Everything?"

"Most of it."

"What was it?"

"The old story."

"I suppose Henry was mad, as he always was, because Edward was living on here for nothing, when he had wasted all the money father left him."

Rebecca nodded with a fearful glance at the door.

When Emma spoke again her voice was still more hushed. "I know how he felt," said she. "He had always been so prudent himself, and worked hard at his profession, and there Edward had never done anything but spend, and it must have looked to him as if Edward was living at his expense, but he wasn't."

"No, he wasn't."

"It was the way father left the property— that all the children should have a home here— and he left money enough to buy the food and all if we had all come home."

"Yes."

"And Edward had a right here according to the terms of father's will, and Henry ought to have remembered it."

"Yes, he ought."

"Did he say hard things?"

"Pretty hard from what I heard."

"What?"

"I heard him tell Edward that he had no business here at all, and he thought he had better go away."

"What did Edward say?"

"That he would stay here as long as he lived and afterward, too, if he was a mind to, and he would like to see Henry get him out; and then—"

"What?"

"Then he laughed."

"What did Henry say."

"I didn't hear him say anything, but—"

"But what?"

"I saw him when he came out of this room."

"He looked mad?"

"You've seen him when he looked so."

Emma nodded; the expression of horror on her face had deepened.

"Do you remember that time he killed the cat because she had scratched him?"

"Yes. Don't!"

Then Caroline reentered the room. She went up to the stove in which a wood fire was burning— it was a cold, gloomy day of fall— and she warmed her hands, which were reddened from recent washing in cold water.

Mrs. Brigham looked at her and hesitated. She glanced at the door, which was still ajar, as it did not easily shut, being still swollen with the damp weather of the summer. She rose and pushed it together with a sharp thud which jarred the house. Rebecca started painfully with a half exclamation. Caroline looked at her disapprovingly.

"It is time you controlled your nerves, Rebecca," said she.

"I can't help it," replied Rebecca with almost a wail. "I am nervous. There's enough to make me so, the Lord knows."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Caroline with her old air of sharp suspicion, and something between challenge and dread of its being met.

Rebecca shrank.

"Nothing," said she.

"Then I wouldn't keep speaking in such a fashion."

Emma, returning from the closed door, said imperiously that it ought to be fixed, it shut so hard.

"It will shrink enough after we have had the fire a few days," replied Caroline. "If anything is done to it it will be too small; there will be a crack at the sill."

"I think Henry ought to be ashamed of himself for talking as he did to Edward," said Mrs. Brigham abruptly, but in an almost inaudible voice.

"Hush!" said Caroline, with a glance of actual fear at the closed door.

"Nobody can hear with the door shut."

"He must have heard it shut, and—"

"Well, I can say what I want to before he comes down, and I am not afraid of him."

"I don't know who is afraid of him! What reason is there for anybody to be afraid of Henry?" demanded Caroline.

Mrs. Brigham trembled before her sister's look. Rebecca gasped again. "There isn't any reason, of course. Why should there be?"

"I wouldn't speak so, then. Somebody might overhear you and think it was queer. Miranda Joy is in the south parlor sewing, you know."

"I thought she went upstairs to stitch on the machine."

"She did, but she has come down again."

"Well, she can't hear."

"I say again I think Henry ought to be ashamed of himself. I shouldn't think he'd ever get over it, having words with poor Edward the very night before he

died. Edward was enough sight better disposition than Henry, with all his faults. I always thought a great deal of poor Edward, myself."

Mrs. Brigham passed a large fluff of handkerchief across her eyes; Rebecca sobbed outright.

"Rebecca," said Caroline admonishingly, keeping her mouth stiff and swallowing determinately.

"I never heard him speak a cross word, unless he spoke cross to Henry that last night. I don't know, but he did from what Rebecca overheard," said Emma.

"Not so much cross as sort of soft, and sweet, and aggravating," sniffled Rebecca.

"He never raised his voice," said Caroline; "but he had his way."

"He had a right to in this case."

"Yes, he did."

"He had as much of a right here as Henry," sobbed Rebecca, "and now he's gone, and he will never be in this home that poor father left him and the rest of us again."

"What do you really think ailed Edward?" asked Emma in hardly more than a whisper. She did not look at her sister.

Caroline sat down in a nearby armchair, and clutched the arms convulsively until her thin knuckles whitened.

"I told you," said she.

Rebecca held her handkerchief over her mouth, and looked at them above it with terrified, streaming eyes.

"I know you said that he had terrible pains in his stomach, and had spasms, but what do you think made him have them?"

"Henry called it gastric trouble. You know Edward has always had dyspepsia."

Mrs. Brigham hesitated a moment. "Was there any talk of an—examination?" said she.

Then Caroline turned on her fiercely.

"No," said she in a terrible voice. "No."

The three sisters' souls seemed to meet on one common ground of terrified understanding through their eyes. The old-fashioned latch of the door was heard to rattle, and a push from without made the door shake ineffectually. "It's Henry," Rebecca sighed rather than whispered. Mrs. Brigham settled herself after a noiseless rush across the floor into her rocking-chair again, and was swaying back and forth with her head comfortably leaning back, when the door at last yielded and Henry Glynn entered. He cast a covertly sharp, comprehensive glance at Mrs. Brigham with her elaborate calm; at Rebecca quietly huddled in the corner of the sofa with her

handkerchief to her face and only one small reddened ear as attentive as a dog's uncovered and revealing her alertness for his presence; at Caroline sitting with a strained composure in her armchair by the stove. She met his eyes quite firmly with a look of inscrutable fear, and defiance of the fear and of him.

Henry Glynn looked more like this sister than the others. Both had the same hard delicacy of form and feature, both were tall and almost emaciated, both had a sparse growth of gray blond hair far back from high intellectual foreheads, both had an almost noble aquilinity of feature. They confronted each other with the pitiless immovability of two statues in whose marble lineaments emotions were fixed for all eternity.

Then Henry Glynn smiled and the smile transformed his face. He looked suddenly years younger, and an almost boyish recklessness and irresolution appeared in his face. He flung himself into a chair with a gesture which was bewildering from its incongruity with his general appearance. He leaned his head back, flung one leg over the other, and looked laughingly at Mrs. Brigham.

"I declare, Emma, you grow younger every year," he said.

She flushed a little, and her placid mouth widened at the corners. She was susceptible to praise.

"Our thoughts to-day ought to belong to the one of us who will *never* grow older," said Caroline in a hard voice.

Henry looked at her, still smiling. "Of course, we none of us forget that," said he, in a deep, gentle voice, "but we have to speak to the living, Caroline, and I have not seen Emma for a long time, and the living are as dear as the dead."

"Not to me," said Caroline.

She rose, and went abruptly out of the room again. Rebecca also rose and hurried after her, sobbing loudly.

Henry looked slowly after them.

"Caroline is completely unstrung," said he. Mrs. Brigham rocked. A confidence in him inspired by his manner was stealing over her. Out of that confidence she spoke quite easily and naturally.

"His death was very sudden," said she.

Henry's eyelids quivered slightly but his gaze was unswerving.

"Yes," said he; "it was very sudden. He was sick only a few hours."

"What did you call it?"

"Gastric."

"You did not think of an examination?"

"There was no need. I am perfectly certain as to the cause of his death."

Suddenly Mrs. Brigham felt a creep as of some live horror over her very soul. Her flesh prickled with cold, before an inflection of his voice. She rose, tottering on weak knees.

"Where are you going?" asked Henry in a strange, breathless voice.

Mrs. Brigham said something incoherent about some sewing which she had to do, some black for the funeral, and was out of the room. She went up to the front chamber which she occupied. Caroline was there. She went close to her and took her hands, and the two sisters looked at each other.

"Don't speak, don't, I won't have it!" said Caroline finally in an awful whisper.

"I won't," replied Emma.

THAT afternoon the three sisters were in the study, the large front room on the ground floor across the hall from the south parlor, when the dusk deepened.

Mrs. Brigham was hemming some black material. She sat close to the west window for the waning light. At last she laid her work on her lap.

"It's no use, I cannot see to sew another stitch until we have a light," said she.

Caroline, who was writing some letters at the table, turned to Rebecca, in her usual place on the sofa.

"Rebecca, you had better get a lamp," she said.

Rebecca started up; even in the dusk her face showed her agitation.

"It doesn't seem to me that we need a lamp quite yet," she said in a piteous, pleading voice like a child's.

"Yes, we do," returned Mrs. Brigham peremptorily. "We must have a light. I must finish this to-night or I can't go to the funeral, and I can't see to sew another stitch."

"Caroline can see to write letters, and she is farther from the window than you are," said Rebecca.

"Are you trying to save kerosene or are you lazy, Rebecca Glynn?" cried Mrs. Brigham. "I can go and get the light myself, but I have this work all in my lap."

Caroline's pen stopped scratching.

"Rebecca, we must have the light," said she.

"Had we better have it in here?" asked Rebecca weakly.

"Of course! Why not?" cried Caroline sternly.

"I am sure I don't want to take my sewing into the other room, when it is all cleaned up for to-morrow," said Mrs. Brigham.

"Why, I never heard such a to-do about lighting a lamp."

Rebecca rose and left the room. Presently she entered with a lamp— a large one with a white porcelain shade. She set it on a table, an old-fashioned card-table which was placed against the opposite wall from the window. That wall was clear of bookcases and books, which were only on three sides of the room. That opposite wall was taken up with three doors, the one small space being occupied by the table. Above the table on the old-fashioned paper, of a white satin gloss, traversed by an indeterminate green scroll, hung quite high a small gilt and black-framed ivory miniature taken in her girlhood of the mother of the family. When the lamp was set on the table beneath it, the tiny pretty face painted on the ivory seemed to gleam out with a look of intelligence.

"What have you put that lamp over there for?" asked Mrs. Brigham, with more of impatience than her voice usually revealed. "Why didn't you set it in the hall and have done with it. Neither Caroline nor I can see if it is on that table."

"I thought perhaps you would move," replied Rebecca hoarsely.

"If I do move, we can't both sit at that table. Caroline has her paper all spread around. Why don't you set the lamp on the study table in the middle of the room, then we can both see?"

Rebecca hesitated. Her face was very pale. She looked with an appeal that was fairly agonizing at her sister Caroline.

"Why don't you put the lamp on this table, as she says?" asked

Caroline, almost fiercely. "Why do you act so, Rebecca?"

"I should think you *would* ask her that," said Mrs. Brigham. "She doesn't act like herself at all."

Rebecca took the lamp and set it on the table in the middle of the room without another word. Then she turned her back upon it quickly and seated herself on the sofa, and placed a hand over her eyes as if to shade them, and remained so.

"Does the light hurt your eyes, and is that the reason why you didn't want the lamp?" asked Mrs. Brigham kindly.

"I always like to sit in the dark," replied Rebecca chokingly. Then she snatched her handkerchief hastily from her pocket and began to weep. Caroline continued to write, Mrs. Brigham to sew.

Suddenly Mrs. Brigham as she sewed glanced at the opposite wall. The glance became a steady stare. She looked intently, her work suspended in her hands. Then she looked away again and took a few more stitches, then she looked again, and again turned to her task. At last she laid her work in her lap and stared concentratedly. She looked from the wall around the room, taking note of the various objects; she looked at the wall long and intently. Then she turned to her sisters.

"What *is* that?" said she.

"What?" asked Caroline harshly; her pen scratched loudly across the paper.

Rebecca gave one of her convulsive gasps.

"That strange shadow on the wall," replied Mrs. Brigham.

Rebecca sat with her face hidden: Caroline dipped her pen in the inkstand.

"Why don't you turn around and look?" asked Mrs. Brigham in a wondering and somewhat aggrieved way.

"I am in a hurry to finish this letter, if Mrs. Wilson Ebbit is going to get word in time to come to the funeral," replied Caroline shortly.

Mrs. Brigham rose, her work slipping to the floor, and she began walking around the room, moving various articles of furniture, with her eyes on the shadow.

Then suddenly she shrieked out:

"Look at this awful shadow! What is it? Caroline, look, look! Rebecca, look! *What is it*?"

All Mrs. Brigham's triumphant placidity was gone. Her handsome face was livid with horror. She stood stiffly pointing at the shadow.

"Look!" said she, pointing her finger at it. "Look! What is it?"

Then Rebecca burst out in a wild wail after a shuddering glance at the wall:

"Oh, Caroline, there it is again! There it is again!"

"Caroline Glynn, you look!" said Mrs. Brigham. "Look! What is that dreadful shadow?"

Caroline rose, turned, and stood confronting the wall.

"How should I know?" she said.

"It has been there every night since he died," cried Rebecca.

"Every night?"

"Yes. He died Thursday and this is Saturday; that makes three nights," said Caroline rigidly. She stood as if holding herself calm with a vise of concentrated will.

"It— it looks like— like—" stammered Mrs. Brigham in a tone of intense horror.

"I know what it looks like well enough," said Caroline. "I've got eyes in my head."

"It looks like Edward," burst out Rebecca in a sort of frenzy of fear. "Only— "

"Yes, it does," assented Mrs. Brigham, whose horror-stricken tone matched her sister's, "only— Oh, it is awful! What is it, Caroline?"

"I ask you again, how should I know?" replied Caroline. "I see it there like you. How should I know any more than you?"

"It *must* be something in the room," said Mrs. Brigham, staring wildly around.

"We moved everything in the room the first night it came," said Rebecca; "it is not anything in the room."

Caroline turned upon her with a sort of fury. "Of course it is something in the room," said she. "How you act! What do you mean by talking so? Of course it is something in the room."

"Of course, it is," agreed Mrs. Brigham, looking at Caroline suspiciously. "Of course it must be. It is only a coincidence. It just happens so. Perhaps it is that fold of the window curtain that makes it. It must be something in the room."

"It is not anything in the room," repeated Rebecca with obstinate horror.

The door opened suddenly and Henry Glynn entered. He began to speak, then his eyes followed the direction of the others'. He stood stock still staring at the shadow on the wall. It was life size and stretched across the white parallelogram of a door, half across the wall space on which the picture hung.

"What is that?" he demanded in a strange voice.

"It must be due to something in the room, Mrs. Brigham said faintly.

"It is not due to anything in the room," said Rebecca again with the shrill insistency of terror.

"How you act, Rebecca Glynn," said Caroline.

Henry Glynn stood and stared a moment longer. His face showed a gamut of emotions— horror, conviction, then furious incredulity. Suddenly he began hastening hither and thither about the room. He moved the furniture with fierce jerks, turning ever to see the effect upon the shadow on the wall. Not a line of its terrible outlines wavered.

"It must be something in the room!" he declared in a voice which seemed to snap like a lash.

His face changed. The inmost secrecy of his nature seemed evident until one almost lost sight of his lineaments. Rebecca stood close to her sofa, regarding him with woeful, fascinated eyes. Mrs. Brigham clutched Caroline's hand. They both stood in a corner out of his way. For a few moments he raged about the room like a caged wild animal. He moved every piece of furniture; when the moving of a piece did not affect the shadow, he flung it to the floor, his sisters watching.

Then suddenly he desisted. He laughed and began straightening the furniture which he had flung down.

"What an absurdity," he said easily. "Such a to-do about a shadow."

"That's so," assented Mrs. Brigham, in a scared voice which she tried to make natural. As she spoke she lifted a chair near her.

"I think you have broken the chair that Edward was so fond of," said Caroline.

Terror and wrath were struggling for expression on her face. Her mouth was set, her eyes shrinking. Henry lifted the chair with a show of anxiety.

"Just as good as ever," he said pleasantly. He laughed again, looking at his sisters. "Did I scare you?" he said. "I should think you might be used to me by this time. You know my way of wanting to leap to the bottom of a mystery, and that shadow does look— queer, like— and I thought if there was any way of accounting for it I would like to without any delay."

"You don't seem to have succeeded," remarked Caroline dryly, with a slight glance at the wall.

Henry's eyes followed hers and he quivered perceptibly.

"Oh, there is no accounting for shadows," he said, and he laughed again. "A man is a fool to try to account for shadows."

Then the supper bell rang, and they all left the room, but Henry kept his back to the wall, as did, indeed, the others.

Mrs. Brigham pressed close to Caroline as she crossed the hall. "He looked like a demon!" she breathed in her ear.

Henry led the way with an alert motion like a boy; Rebecca brought up the rear; she could scarcely walk, her knees trembled so.

"I can't sit in that room again this evening," she whispered to Caroline after supper.

"Very well, we will sit in the south room," replied Caroline. "I think we will sit in the south parlor," she said aloud; "it isn't as damp as the study, and I have a cold."

So they all sat in the south room with their sewing. Henry read the newspaper, his chair drawn close to the lamp on the table. About nine o'clock he rose abruptly and crossed the hall to the study. The three sisters looked at one another. Mrs. Brigham rose, folded her rustling skirts compactly around her, and began tiptoeing toward the door.

"What are you going to do?" inquired Rebecca agitatedly.

"I am going to see what he is about," replied Mrs. Brigham cautiously.

She pointed as she spoke to the study door across the hall; it was ajar. Henry had striven to pull it together behind him, but it had somehow swollen beyond the limit with curious speed. It was still ajar and a streak of light showed from top to bottom. The hall lamp was not lit.

"You had better stay where you are," said Caroline with guarded sharpness.

"I am going to see," repeated Mrs. Brigham firmly.

Then she folded her skirts so tightly that her bulk with its swelling curves was revealed in a black silk sheath, and she went with a slow toddle across the hall to the study door. She stood there, her eye at the crack.

In the south room Rebecca stopped sewing and sat watching with dilated eyes. Caroline sewed steadily. What Mrs. Brigham, standing at the crack in the study door, saw was this:

Henry Glynn, evidently reasoning that the source of the strange shadow must be between the table on which the lamp stood and the wall, was making systematic passes and thrusts all over and through the intervening space with an old sword which had belonged to his father. Not an inch was left unpierced. He seemed to have divided the space into mathematical sections. He brandished the sword with a sort of cold fury and calculation; the blade gave out flashes of light, the shadow remained unmoved. Mrs. Brigham, watching, felt herself cold with horror.

Finally Henry ceased and stood with the sword in hand and raised as if to strike, surveying the shadow on the wall threateningly. Mrs. Brigham toddled back across the hall and shut the south room door behind her before she related what she had seen.

"He looked like a demon!" she said again. "Have you got any of that old wine in the house, Caroline? I don't feel as if I could stand much more."

Indeed, she looked overcome. Her handsome placid face was worn and strained and pale.

"Yes, there's plenty," said Caroline; "you can have some when you go to bed."

"I think we had all better take some," said Mrs. Brigham. "Oh, my God, Caroline, what—"

"Don't ask and don't speak," said Caroline.

"No, I am not going to," replied Mrs. Brigham; "but—"

Rebecca moaned aloud.

"What are you doing that for?" asked Caroline harshly.

"Poor Edward," returned Rebecca.

"That is all you have to groan for," said Caroline. "There is nothing else."

"I am going to bed," said Mrs. Brigham. "I sha'n't be able to be at the funeral if I don't."

Soon the three sisters went to their chambers and the south parlor was deserted. Caroline called to Henry in the study to put out the light before he came upstairs. They had been gone about an hour when he came into the room bringing the lamp which had stood in the study. He set it on the table and waited a few minutes, pacing up and down. His face was terrible, his fair

complexion showed livid; his blue eyes seemed dark blanks of awful reflections.

Then he took the lamp up and returned to the library. He set the lamp on the centre table, and the shadow sprang out on the wall. Again he studied the furniture and moved it about, but deliberately, with none of his former frenzy. Nothing affected the shadow. Then he returned to the south room with the lamp and again waited. Again he returned to the study and placed the lamp on the table, and the shadow sprang out upon the wall. It was midnight before he went upstairs. Mrs. Brigham and the other sisters, who could not sleep, heard him.

THE NEXT day was the funeral. That evening the family sat in the south room. Some relatives were with them. Nobody entered the study until Henry carried a lamp in there after the others had retired for the night. He saw again the shadow on the wall leap to an awful life before the light.

The next morning at breakfast Henry Glynn announced that he had to go to the city for three days. The sisters looked at him with surprise. He very seldom left home, and just now his practice had been neglected on account of Edward's death. He was a physician.

"How can you leave your patients now?" asked Mrs. Brigham wonderingly.

"I don't know how to, but there is no other way," replied Henry easily. "I have had a telegram from Doctor Mitford."

"Consultation?" inquired Mrs. Brigham.

"I have business," replied Henry.

Doctor Mitford was an old classmate of his who lived in a neighboring city and who occasionally called upon him in the case of a consultation.

After he had gone Mrs. Brigham said to Caroline that after all Henry had not said that he was going to consult with Doctor Mitford, and she thought it very strange.

"Everything is very strange," said Rebecca with a shudder.

"What do you mean?" inquired Caroline sharply.

"Nothing," replied Rebecca.

NOBODY entered the library that day, nor the next, nor the next. The third day Henry was expected home, but he did not arrive and the last train from the city had come.

"I call it pretty queer work," said Mrs. Brigham. "The idea of a doctor leaving his patients for three days anyhow, at such a time as this, and I know he has some very sick ones; he said so. And the idea of a consultation lasting

three days! There is no sense in it, and *now* he has not come. I don't understand it, for my part."

"I don't either," said Rebecca.

They were all in the south parlor. There was no light in the study opposite, and the door was ajar.

Presently Mrs. Brigham rose— she could not have told why; something seemed to impel her, some will outside her own. She went out of the room, again wrapping her rustling skirts around that she might pass noiselessly, and began pushing at the swollen door of the study.

"She has not got any lamp," said Rebecca in a shaking voice.

Caroline, who was writing letters, rose again, took a lamp (there were two in the room) and followed her sister. Rebecca had risen, but she stood trembling, not venturing to follow.

The doorbell rang, but the others did not hear it; it was on the south door on the other side of the house from the study. Rebecca, after hesitating until the bell rang the second time, went to the door; she remembered that the servant was out.

Caroline and her sister Emma entered the study. Caroline set the lamp on the table. They looked at the wall. "Oh, my God," gasped Mrs. Brigham, "there are— there are *two*— shadows." The sisters stood clutching each other, staring at the awful things on the wall. Then Rebecca came in, staggering, with a telegram in her hand. "Here is— a telegram," she gasped. "Henry is— dead."

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10: Mrs. Raeburn's Waxwork

Lady Eleanor Smith

1902-1945

The London Mercury, March 1931

Lady Eleanor Furneaux Smith

British novelist and short story writer, daughter of the first Earl of Birkenhead. Many of her short stories were ghost stories.

THE RAIN, which had poured with a pitiless ferocity for so long upon the chimneys and roofs of the great manufacturing city, seemed at length to enclose the whole town within towering prison-walls of burnished steel. It was now afternoon; the short winter day was nearly over, and it had rained thus from dawn, would probably continue to rain throughout the night. A dark, wet dusk began to envelop the city like a sable blanket; the streetlamps sprang into life, looming ahead like the ghosts of drowned and weary daffodils, casting watery and trembling reflections upon the shining rivers that were pavements. There were few people walking the mournful streets and those there were had to struggle and batter their way through sharp gusts of wind, bent double beneath dripping and top-heavy umbrellas.

Such a one was Patrick Lamb, and so great was his hurry that more than once as he stumbled over an unperceived kerb he ran the risk of entangling both himself and his umbrella in the foaming, muddy torrents of the gutters beneath his feet. He had every reason to hurry; he was on his way to apply for a job, and he feared that unless he hastened, he would be too late to secure this vacancy which meant so much to him.

Turning at last into a dark and narrow street he saw opposite to him a ramshackle building of yellow brick, from the roof of which swelled forth a glass dome encrusted with the dirt and soot of ages. A flight of shallow steps led to a swing door. This was his destination.

He flung open the door and was immediately confronted by a turnstile, near which sat a seedy-looking man in an ill-fitting uniform not unlike that of a fireman.

'Sixpence, please,' said the man, and whistled through his teeth.

Patrick Lamb shook his head.

'No... I'm not a visitor. I have an appointment with Mr. Mugivan, the manager.'

'Ah— ha,' said the attendant knowingly, and showed him into a tiny slice of a room filled with papers, files, account-books and dust. Here sat Mr. Mugivan, a fat, podgy man with thick legs and a face like a tomato.

'Good afternoon,' said Patrick Lamb, hesitatingly, 'I hear that you have a vacancy here for an— an attendant.'

Mr. Mugivan stared for a moment at the young man's sallow, rather long face, at his deep-set grey eyes and slender, puny body,

'Who told you so?'

'My landlady, in Bury Street. She knew the last man you had here.'

'And what made you come?'

'Necessity. I'm in need of work. I was stranded here a week ago with a theatrical company.'

There was a silence. Mr. Mugivan suddenly laughed, looking at his visitor rather defiantly with little red-rimmed eyes that were not unlike the eyes of a pig.

'Rather a come-down, isn't it, for an actor to find himself minding Mugivan's Waxworks?'

'That doesn't matter, sir. And, if you'll only let me, I'll mind them damn well.'

'It's long hours,' said the proprietor, still speaking contemptuously. 'Nine in the morning till seven at night. An hour for lunch and an hour for tea. Two pound a week— and the attendant has to wear a uniform. An actor wouldn't fancy that, would he?'

'Maybe I'm not an actor,' said Patrick Lamb.

Mr. Mugivan spat upon the floor.

'I'll give you a trial, anyhow. What's your name?'

Patrick told him,

'Well, Lamb,' and the proprietor creaked himself out of his chair, revealing incidentally that he wore carpet slippers and had bunions, 'come with me and I'll show you Mugivan's Beauties before you go. You can start to-morrow morning.'

Obediently Patrick followed his new employer through the turnstile which was swung round obligingly by the other attendant, down a narrow whitewashed tunnel into a large apartment.

'Ever seen figures before?' enquired Mr. Mugivan.

'Waxworks? Not since I was a kid.'

'Hall of Monarchs,' said Mr. Mugivan, sucking his teeth with a depreciating sound.

The room in which they found themselves was bare and vault-like; here, too, the walls were whitewashed; the floor was covered with a red drugget and in the middle of the room was placed a sofa upholstered in shabby crimson plush. Yet although bare the room was not empty, but crowded, crowded with a pale throng of mute and stiff and silent figures. They stood in groups, a dais to each group, and were protected from the public by a red cord which imprisoned them, like sheep in a pen, so that had they wished, they could not have strayed, but must for ever remain captive. There they stood, and would no doubt stand throughout the ages, these tinsel kings and queens, Plantagenets and Stuarts, Tudors and Hanoverians, calm and blank and dreadfully remote, pallid of cheek and glassy of eye, indifferent to all who passed by to gape at them, a host of waxen princes, all dead, many of them forgotten, terribly isolated in their garish splendour, uncannily galvanized into a crude semblance of life that yet denied them even the elements of life, leaving them fixed, frozen and staring, while the dust thickened upon their cheap and fusty robes of purple and sham ermine.

Opposite the door through which they had come, was another door, leading to yet another chamber. Mr, Mugivan led the way.

'Curiosities and Horrors,' he explained carelessly. They passed through the second door.

Here was another room, a replica of the first, but more dimly lit, more melancholy even than the Hall of Monarchs since the illumination that winked upon this dreary scene was greenish, ghastly— such a light as might have been expected to proceed from a sconce of corpse candles. Here were more massed ranks of still, impassive figures, paler, these, than the monarchs, in the dim grotto of their melancholy chamber, and more repellent, perhaps because their stiff, indifferent bodies were clothed in the garments of every day and borrowed no majesty from princes' robes, however sham. A skeleton gleamed white in one comer of the room; there was a stuffed ox with six legs, a tiny waxen midget, and a giant of local fame. Save for these the room was peopled only with men who had killed, and who had paid the penalty for killing. A throng staring before them, expressionless, rigid, mask-like, brooding, perhaps upon their crimes.

Mr. Mugivan seemed more at home in the second room. He became almost conversational-

'Here's Hopkins, the Norwich strangler.... Tracy, who shot a policeman.... John Joseph Gilmore, cut the throats of his wife and two children....'

They moved across the room. Then, near the slit of a window, crossed by iron bars, Patrick saw her for the first time. She stood on a little dais by herself, a young woman, or rather the effigy of a young woman, dressed neatly in dark clothes that were already old-fashioned in cut. She carried herself proudly, like a queen, and whereas the other waxworks were completely expressionless of countenance, this one alone, with proudly-curling lips and short, imperious nose, seemed, he thought, actually to live, perhaps because she was Disdain incarnate. She stood there easily, gracefully— long, pale hands folded upon her breast, and Patrick, gazing, felt the cool, amused stare of her grey eyes. For a moment his heart leaped sharply, startling him, and he had a sudden impulse to move forward and look more closely at her; then this sensation was succeeded by a creeping feeling of curious discomfort. He was embarrassed; he had to avert his eyes.

'Who's that woman?' he asked impetuously, and then wished that he had not spoken.

Mr. Mugivan answered him casually, with his back turned to an effigy.

'That's Mrs. Raeburn, the poisoner.... and that's the lot, so come on.'

'Mrs. Raeburn? I seem to know the name.'

'No doubt, no doubt. It was well enough known at one time.'

They walked away, towards the Hall of Monarchs, and Patrick was acutely conscious of the supercilious grey eyes that must be gazing after them. The sham eyes of a sham woman, a waxen effigy! He felt acutely ridiculous.

Mr. Mugivan said no more until they found themselves once again in the little office. Then, offering Patrick a cigarette, he asked suddenly;

'You're not a fanciful sort of chap by any chance?'

'Fanciful? You mean nervous? No, I can't say that I am. Why?'

'No place for fancies, this,' confided Mr. Mugivan, waving his hand in the direction of the Exhibition. 'It's a lonely sort of a job most of the time, and once you start thinking the figures is looking at you, well, you're done, that's all. Last chap we had here took to having fancies. That's why you've got this job.'

Patrick felt suddenly rebellious.

'I can safely say I shan't have fancies,' he said laughing. 'I may not be particularly brave, in fact I'm not, but I must say it would take more than a parcel of wax dolls to scare me.'

'Figures aren't dolls,' Mr. Mugivan corrected, shocked.

'Figures, then,' and he thought; 'Talking of figures, that woman, Mrs. Raeburn's got a good one.'

But neither he nor Mr. Mugivan mentioned the name of the woman poisoner aloud.

'Nine o'clock to-morrow, then,' said Mr. Mugivan.

'Nine o'clock to-morrow.'

And so they parted.

He discovered, the next day, two things about his new job. One was that his long and very often lonely vigil with the waxworks gave him at times the curious and eerie sensation of being buried alive in a vault filled with the dead; the other that, with the morning, Mrs. Raeburn, poisoner, had become once more a waxen effigy, and was no longer a living, breathing woman. This was comforting, yet in some strange way disappointing, for it was idle to deny that he had thought of her very frequently during the course of the night, and that the prospect of meeting once more the direct gaze of her rather mocking eyes had undoubtedly stimulated him and sent him forth into the cheerless streets kindled with an eager, sparkling excitement which he rather half-heartedly strove to suppress.

As the morning dragged by he studied a catalogue of the exhibition, tr3dng to memorize the many dossiers of princes and murderers. He was accustomed to learn by heart, and in three hours his task was almost complete, yet with one exception. A curious revulsion prevented him from reading, even to himself, the brief account in the catalogue of Mrs. Raeburn's crime, of discovering, through the medium of one cheap, smudged paragraph, that she had been an infamous woman, a monster of vice and cruelty. Taking a penknife from his pocket he cut away from his catalogue all record of her dark deeds. Yet she remained throughout the morning a lifeless effigy, and after glancing at her once, he gladly looked away.

He went out to lunch and returned for the long vigil of the afternoon. Few people came to visit the exhibition, a pair of school children in charge of a maiden aunt, two girls, who giggled and eyed him coyly, an old man, and an amorous couple who plainly regarded his presence as a nuisance.

It was foggy outside; dusk fell early. For the first time that day, as he paced the Hall of Monarchs, he became sensible of the loneliness of his position. Once again the feeling of being buried among the dead returned to him, intensified, this time by a bored and brooding melancholy, whereas in the morning there had also been a sense of adventure. The very tread of his feet, the only sound in the still apartment, smote lugubriously upon his ears. He would have liked to smoke, but this was, of course, forbidden.

At length he turned, and obeying an impulse which was becoming every second stronger, he moved towards the further chamber, the Hall of Curiosities and Horrors. Here the twilight struck gloomily upon the wan and glimmering faces of the murderers, upturned to greet the first dark, smoky greyness of night; greenish they were once more, and dismal; and very hopeless in the blank resignation of their weary vigil in this dim room that was filled with the very breath of genteel decay.

He went straight towards the figure of Mrs. Raeburn, standing tall and quiet and erect on her dais below the barred window. He had never been so near to her before; their eyes met, and once more she had recaptured that spark of life which had so curiously impressed him on the previous day. He gazed for some moments at her pale, clear-cut face, at her direct, ironic eyes. She appeared to return his scrutiny gravely, earnestly, scornfully, yet with a glint of interest and humour in her regard. She seemed, he thought, a woman well used to curious eyes, well able to defend herself against the stares of the inquisitive. Suddenly, to his immense astonishment, he spoke to her, and his voice rang out strangely enough in that silent room.

'I wonder what have you done?' he asked her abruptly. 'For God's sake what can you have done that you should be here?'

There was a long pause, during the course of which he continued to examine her closely. Was it his imagination, or did her lips really curve; was there an answering twinkle in her eye? And then he turned sharply, for he had caught, or thought that he had caught, a soft, eager rustling sound from the throng of effigies behind his back. And suddenly he was saved, for two little boys came pattering in to visit the Curiosities and Horrors.

The next day saw him resolutely keeping to the Hall of Monarchs. Here, with the lifeless dummies of long-dead kings, he was safe. In that other room he realized that he was in peril. And the day after, although he hungered for a glimpse of Mrs. Raeburn's pale face, he still remained aloof. The next day was Saturday, with a steady stream of patrons who would have made the dankest vault seem homely and prosaic. Then Sunday, a holiday.

On Monday he returned to the exhibition ready to laugh at himself for a morbid fool. The rain had stopped; a feeble ray of primrose sunshine, filtering through the barred window of the second chamber, made even Mrs. Raeburn seem little more than a cunningly fashioned doll of life size. And he had spoken to her, as though she were alive and could hear and understand him! He was disgusted with himself.

Yet, with the swiftly flowing dusk the murderers changed once more; assumed, as was their wont with the shades of night, the vivid and evil

personalities they must have worn during their lifetime; seemed to stretch themselves, as though released from some long spell of immobility; nodded, perhaps, to one another— even winked; perhaps brushed the dust from their shabby garments, smothered yawns, and waited, quietly expectant, for the closing of the exhibition. So Patrick thought, but it was difficult to see, for the shadows were thick in this lost and forgotten room.

He went towards the effigy of Mrs, Raeburn and was not surprised to find that her eyes, alive and brilliant, almost feverish in their eager intensity, remained fixed direct upon him as though she waited to see whether he would, after his three days' absence, speak once more to her.

He was, however, silent. He stared at her proud and beautiful mouth, at her long, pale hands, at the white stem of her throat and admitted to himself that he desired her. Yet he had no immediate wish to touch her, but only longed passionately for the stiff, waxen body of this effigy to melt and transform itself into warm, living flesh and blood. Somewhere, somehow, this miracle must be accomplished, for if he were unable to possess her he thought that, such was the spell she had cast upon him, he must inevitably pine and sicken, for she was *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, and he was in her thrall. At last he spoke to her, softly, scarcely knowing that he spoke.

'You are a witch,' he said, 'and you possess me body and soul. You ought to be burnt, and since you are made of wax it should not be difficult to destroy you... I have a good mind to try.'

This time there was no mistake; a gleam of sardonic laughter came to her eyes, a strange and elfin smile to her curling lips. She defied him. And, as before, the row of murderers behind seemed to move simultaneously with a rustling murmur of excitement. As before, too, he was saved by a footstep from the outer world. He turned sharply. A woman came into the room.

Patrick stiffened, became once more the respectful and vigilant attendant. The woman hesitated for a moment, then approached him slowly, for she was bent and squat and elderly and walked with the help of a stick. He noticed vaguely that she was dressed in dingy black, with a frowsy bonnet askew upon her head and a film of veil that partially concealed her face. He bent down politely.

'Yes, madam? Is there anything I can do?'

'There is,' said the old woman. Her voice was clear and decisive, the voice of one who is accustomed to command. 'I have stupidly neglected to buy a catalogue at the door, and as I am old, and not so good a walker as I was, I wonder if you would save my going back by being kind enough to tell me something about the waxworks. These are murderers, are they not?'

Patrick, only too pleased to occupy his mind in this accustomed fashion, began mechanically.

'Yes, madam. There on my right is Richard Sayers, the Scottish body-snatcher, who shot two men before he was arrested, and protested his innocence to the last.

'...Next to Sayers is Mugivan's conception of Jack the Ripper, the criminal who was never captured... this figure is modelled according to the description of his appearance given to the police by those persons who protested that they had seen him before or after his appalling crimes.... Next to Jack the Ripper we have Landru....'

But while his voice droned on he was dreading the moment when they must face Mrs. Raeburn, when he would look once more upon her pale, remote face and meet once again her steady, contemptuous gaze. He lingered beside the midget, the freakish ox, the local giant. The old woman listened to him attentively, beady eyes darting from beneath her heavy veil. Once or twice she asked him a question, but otherwise was silent, seeming pleasantly absorbed in this monotonous catalogue of grim and fiendish crimes. At last the moment dreaded by Patrick could be postponed no longer; at last they faced the figure of Mrs. Raeburn, standing slim and straight and self-possessed beneath the grated window. Suddenly Patrick remembered that he knew nothing of this murderess save that she had killed by poison; here he was speechless and could recite no bloodthirsty dossier nor did he even know her victim; only that she was young and fair and that she had cast a spell upon him, and these things could not be told to his companion. There was a pause, during the course of which the old woman examined the wax figure attentively and in silence. At length he mumbled:

'This is Mrs. Raeburn... the poisoner.'

As he spoke he shot a sharp glance at the effigy and observed that she was blank and mask-like once more; indifferent both to him and his companion. His witch had again become a waxwork.

The old lady shuffled closer to the figure, peered with a certain attentive inquisitiveness, then turned to him and remarked critically:

'The likeness is not very good.'

He was startled, and gaped, unable quite to grasp the purport of her words.

He asked: 'You knew her?'

She did not answer him, but said still peering: 'She was taller, she had more dignity, more of an air. And I think she was wilder. But it's long ago,' and her face changed all the time.

He asked again, trembling, his hands clammy cold, his voice unconsciously menacing; 'You knew her?'

For the first time the old creature turned to look at him, seeming to observe him closely. She chuckled, and at first he thought that one of the waxworks had laughed, so ghostly, so unexpected, was this little bubbling sound in the quietness of the dim hall.

She said, still chuckling: 'I am Mrs. Raeburn.'

And as he did not answer she pulled back her veil. She was younger than he had at first supposed. She revealed a fat, gross, heavy-jowled face, sallow, unhealthy, with high Mongolian cheekbones. Her nose was squat and thick, her cheeks carved with two deep-cut lines running from her nostrils to the comers of her mouth. Her little, sharp, grey eyes were almost buried in folds of flesh. Beneath the shoddy bonnet a strand of hair hung untidily; it was dyed a bright orange tint. This face, which leered forth so boldly at Patrick, was seamed and stamped with the marks of every foul and obscene vice; brazen, debauched, so brutal as to be three parts animal, it seemed to hang in the air, this gargoyle face, to gloat triumphantly upon his horror and confusion. Then, swiftly, the woman whisked back her veil and said crisply, in her clear and resonant voice:

'It didn't do me justice, your image.' Then in a moment she was gone, while behind her the effigy of Mrs, Raeburn, poisoner, remained standing cool and pale and remote upon her dais, all the paler, all the cooler, for being now the centre of a flood of cold and frozen moonlight.

Patrick fled after the old woman, not because he wished to see her again, but because (of the two of them) the waxen image had become the more repulsive, yet, when he reached the Hall of Monarchs, she lid already disappeared.

He waited, sick and shivering, until the clock struck seven and the show shut down, then he went in search of Mr. Mugivan, whom he found in his office, reading an evening paper with his feet on his desk.

'Good evening,' said Patrick. 'I want to tell you something.'

Mr. Mugivan put down his paper.

'My word, young fellow, you look cheap. 'What is it now?'

Patrick, gulping, said: 'Do you know who's been here this afternoon?'

'I do not,' said Mr. Mugivan. 'I'm proprietor of a waxwork-show, not a magician. Who has here?'

'Mrs. Raeburn. The real Mrs. Raeburn. She came to see her waxwork. She's just gone.'

As Mr, Mugivan gaped, his red face became curiously mottled— white and purple in patches, Patrick noticed dispassionately.

'Mrs. Raeburn?'

'Yes.'

Mr. Mugivan climbed laboriously from his chair.

'Mrs. Raeburn, eh? Somebody's been pulling your leg. You don't know your catalogue, either. Mrs, Raeburn, indeed?'

And he pulled a document from the untidy desk, licked his thumb, and flipped over a page.

'Mrs. Raeburn,' he said, speaking very loud and not looking at Patrick, 'was scragged, hanged, you understand, hanged by the neck for the murder of her husband more than twenty years ago. That being so, you could hardly have seen her here just now. And that's enough of your funny stuff for one day.'

Patrick said nothing. There was really nothing to say. Nor did Mr. Mugivan break the silence, but waddled to and fro about the little room, changing his carpet slippers for boots, struggling into his overcoat, cramming a check cap upon his head. In a moment he had gone.

Patrick switched off the office light, then went forth, as was his custom, to extinguish the gas-jets in the exhibition before locking up for the night. His comrade of the turnstile had already gone home; he was alone, entirely alone with more than a hundred waxen effigies. It was now quite dark outside, for the moon had fled behind a screen of clouds, and there was a rushing sound of strong wind, which swept in gusts past the shuttered windows.

He paused to light a forbidden cigarette, and then it was that he realized with an odd detachment that what he had seen during the afternoon was not a ghost, but something even more monstrous— a disembodied soul: the foul and evil soul of this wretched woman whose lovely image had bewitched him; the hideous reflection of a hideous mind. Behind her seeming purity and beauty had always been this horror, dormant, waiting to leap forth and devour. The wind rose, moaning, battering at the panes.

On such a night, he mused, as he tramped towards the monarchs, ghouls would surely stalk abroad and witches soar through the air clutching their broomsticks and screaming aloud their lust for Satan. Vampires, sorcerers, fiends. A nightmare pack of horrors... He stretched on tiptoe to lower the gas above the wan, impassive face of King Richard II... And in the old days witches were burnt alive like the guys now consumed by flames each fifth of November... And after the burning he supposed that these evil women could do no more harm but were destroyed for ever, they and their spells. A good job too. He entered the second chamber.

THAT NIGHT the inhabitants of the city were surprised to perceive a crimson flush sweeping the sky above the roof tops of a distant street. Then

came a clanging of bells, a roar of motor-engines, and, hotfoot, in pursuit of the fire-brigade, a yelling, excited rabble. Mugivan's Waxwork Exhibition was on fire. No one wanted to miss the show, doubly welcome because it was free.

The wind was strong that night, and licked the flames eagerly, strengthening them until the efforts of the men armed with hosepipes became pathetic in their futility. At length the roof crashed in, and a wall of roaring flames rose as though to leap into the sky. They were triumphant, these pillars of fire, as though they knew that they were purifying, destroying a witch.

By morning Mugivan's Waxwork Show was a drenched and sooty ruin. Many of the figures were entirely destroyed, the monarchs having been on the whole unluckier than the murderers. Down in the Hall of Curiosities and Horrors there were a few survivors. Some were quite untouched. Mrs. Raeburn, for instance, appeared to have emerged unscathed from the ordeal, and stood upon her dais proudly and gracefully, pale hands folded demurely upon her breast. And yet, on closer inspection, Mrs. Raeburn proved not to be entirely unharmed. Her waxen face had melted and, running, the stuff had twisted upon her features a strange and devilish sneer. Save for her pride of carriage she was unrecognisable, distorted. And then the firemen made a further discovery.

Lying near by, where the flames had crackled most fiercely, was a charred and sodden bundle of clothing . They bent to examine it. It was, they found, a human body, the body of a young man.

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11: The Green God

Capel Boake

1889-1944

Herald (Melbourne, Vic), 10 May 1924

Doris Boake Kerr

SHE saw it first, among a lot of dusty plates and other lumber in the window of the dirty little antique shop into which she was wont to peer so wistfully— a small, green Chinese god with folded hands and a smile of ineffable complacency upon its hideous face, and knew at once, with one of her sudden, wild enthusiasms which invariably led her astray, that she simply must have it. Its jade green shape would show up so beautifully on the shelf in her dark oak panelled room, and besides, It would go so exquisitely with that charming black and green Chinese bowl which she had picked up for a mere song. Even Tom, who was sceptical about her bargains, had admitted that. It was fortunate, and seemed like an intervention of Providence on her behalf that Tom had given her extra money that morning. Certainly, he had given it to her to pay the gas and electric light bills, which had an annoying habit of coming in with a peremptory demand for payment if it was delayed, but under these special circumstances they would have to wait, and she would make up the money somehow. There was not the shadow of a doubt but that she must possess that little green god.

The price was rather more than she had anticipated, but she paid it without question, and also bought a small incense burner and a packet of Chinese incense which the old man in the shop told her was necessary to have if she wished the god to bring her luck. As she took her purchases home she had a momentary fear that Tom might not approve of them, but after arranging, them on the high dark shelf was more than satisfied with her own good taste.

Tom was late for dinner that night, which rather disturbed her, as it meant there was probably some trouble in the office, and as he entered the room her

experienced eye saw at once that there was a cloud upon his brow, and a certain gloom in his manner.

"I can't bear these sham antique things of yours, Pam," he said, drawing up a chair to the table. "I tripped on that so called Bokhara rug In the hall arid nearly broke my neck."

The moment did not seem propitious for calling his attention to the green god, so she resolved to defer it until after dinner, when, no doubt, Tom would be feeling better.

Under her tactful management, and the soothing influence of good food, the cloud was beginning to lift from his brow, when, glancing up at the clock, his eye met that of the little green god.

"Good, Heavens," he exclaimed with emphasis, putting down his cup hastily, "What's that atrocity?"

"That?" She looked at it affectionately. "Why, that's a Chinese god I picked up today. "Don't you like it?"

"Like it," he said gloomily. "It makes me feel bilious. If you don't mind, I'll change my seat. It spoils my meal to have that thing grinning at me."

She watched him with blazing eyes, but the consciousness of the unpaid bills restrained her.

"You must have the soul of a born tourist," he went on. "I shudder to think of the junk you'd collect at Colombo or Cairo, and places like that."

"You," she told him coldly, "have the soul of a barbarian. I often wonder why I married you."

Tom found nothing to say in reply to this, and silence fell upon the dinner table.

The coolness engendered by the little green god lasted, with varying degrees, for two or three weeks. Tom flatly refused to face it during his meals, as he said the thing got on his nerves, and she as flatly refused to move it, although its complacent smile was beginning to irritate her beyond endurance. It seemed to dominate tho room, dwarfing everything into in significance; it was the triumph of sheer ugliness over beauty. She wondered at her wild enthusiasm for it and longed to give it away, but that would have been a tacit acknowledgment to Tom that she had made a mistake, and after his attitude on the matter she was not going to admit that. In her preoccupation she had overlooked the bills she had committed to pay, until one morning Tom confronted her with two slips in his hand and a demand for an explanation.

"It's simple enough," she said coldly. "I've forgotten to pay them, that's all."

"Indeed!" he returned, in tones as chilly as hers. "And is it permitted to ask what you did with the money?"

"It was such a large amount, wasn't it?" she retorted quickly. "If you will kindly give me those bills I will pay them out of my own money."

For answer he folded them up, and put them in his pocket. "I'll attend to them," he said with decision, "then they might have a chance of being paid."

The door slammed behind him, and she heard his quick footsteps outside.

"That's the first time he's gone with out saying good-bye," she thought, drearily. "Oh, I wish I'd paid those bills, and I wish I'd never bought that green god. Horrible, ugly thing! I've not had a moment's peace since it came into the house." She sat for a few minutes thinking deeply amidst the ruin of the break fast table, then making a sudden resolution, sprang hastily to her feet.

There was a change in Tom's manner when he returned home that evening. Pam, who wore a chastened air, greeted him meekly.

"Hello, Pam," he said, rather overdoing the casualness of his manner as he put down a parcel in front of her. "Here's something I bought for you."

"How sweet of you, Tom," she said, fingering it curiously and thinking he was rather a dear, after all. "What is it?"

"Well, as a matter of fact," he cleared his throat nervously. "I felt I'd been a bit of a brute to you over various things, and seeing this, I thought you might like it. Here, let me open it. There you are!"

He held up in his hand a jade green god with folded hands and a complacent smile.

"Did you ever see such an exact match? I thought you might like to have the pair of them."

"Oh, Tom!" Her voice faltered. "Where— where did you buy it?"

"In that little shop you're so fond of."

"Tom!" She clutched the green god in her hand, and then dissolved into helpless laughter.

"Oh, Tom, this is my own green god. I sold it back again to that shop this morning!"

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12: A Moth of Peace

Katharine Fullerton Gerould

1879-1944

The Atlantic Monthly Jan 1915

ANNE MARMONT, of old the pupil of the nuns, had told her about Andecy: an ancient place, half-manor, half-farm, in the Marne valley, whence you could walk over a wind-swept plain to the battlefields of the Hundred Days.

'The nuns, being exiled, of course can't keep it up any longer, and no one wants to buy. I remember it as a place of heavenly peace— though in my day they used to make the oldest and crossest nun in the order superior at Andecy. However, Madame Françoise de Paule is dead now, and there aren't any nuns anyhow. Do take it, dear. If you want quiet'— Anne Marmont swept her arms out as if to embrace illimitable horizons. 'Nothing but a church-spire or a clump of trees to be seen from edge to edge of the plain. The unstable ocean is nothing to it. And if you want variety, you can walk over to Champaubert and look at the house where Napoleon stayed, the night before the battle. Riddled with bullet-holes it is. There used to be a foolish ancient there who remembered the Hundred Days. He's dead now, I suppose— but then, so is Madame Françoise de Paule, thank Heaven, and her cane, too. I hope they buried the cane. Do take it, darling. It's dirt cheap, and my dear nuns would be so pleased. They'd probably send the money to the new Nicaragua convent.'

And Miss Stanley had gone to Andecy, had been conquered by the insuperable peace of the plain, and had set up her little household. No place that she had ever seen seemed so good to wait in. When Edmund Laye came back from the Argentine to marry her, she would submit to London; but already she had hopes of enticing him to Andecy for the honeymoon. The chill of the slow spring warmed her northern blood; she liked the reluctance of the season's green, the roaring fire that met her in the *salon*, the sharp cold click of her boots on the brick-paved corridor.

She was well cared for: a Protestant and a foreigner, who was, none the less, a mysterious well-wisher of 'ces dames,' she found a shy allegiance springing up about her steps as she traversed the plain. There was always a hot *galette* for her at *'la vieille Andecy*,' an obsequious curtsy at Congy château from the housekeeper, who showed with mumbling pride the bed where Henri Quatre had slept; and a welcoming smile from St. Eloi, that holy humorist, in the Champaubert chapel. She sat until twilight, often, on the sinister shore of l'Etang des Loups. Even the legended 'Croix Jeanne,' leaning against its pine thicket, seemed glad of her awkward Protestant dip. It was a good place— and all for the price of a second-rate hotel splotched with Baedekers.

Loneliness, in the sense of removal from the social scene, did not afflict her. She who shrank almost morbidly from human encounters, had no fear of the peasants. Slim, shy, timorous, she felt safe here. Her terrors were all of people and what people could do to her. The plain ignored her self-distrust. Letters came from Edmund, regularly, if you granted the delay of driving to Sézanne to fetch them. The months rounded slowly, punctually, to winter and her marriage. So might a châtelaine have waited, powerless but trusting.

Then, in full summer-time, the lightning struck, choosing again the Montmirail plain, after a hundred years' respite. The first rumors were vague and vivid— all detail and no substance, like news in the Middle Ages. There was war, and she scarcely knew more. Jacques or Étienne turned over night into a reservist, and departed; but had it not been for that, she would hardly have known. The two maid-servants whom she had brought with her clamored for Paris; she gave them money and had them driven to Sézanne. After the mobilization they must have got through, for she never heard again. It did not occur to her to strike out, herself, for the capital; for her common sense told her she was better off where she was until Paris had cleared the decks for action. Besides, Paris frightened her. She hated being jostled in streets; she resented even a curious stare.

Old Marie and her husband, with their grandchild, came up from their cottage to the manor to sleep; and with the son and nephew gone, there was nothing for them to do but potter about rheumatically in her behalf. For many days, the click of the rosary was never stilled among the corridors of Andecy.

And still the rumors grew, terror capping terror, until it seemed that even at Andecy blood might rain down at any moment from the arched heaven. At first Miss Stanley forced herself to drive the fat donkey into Sézanne for news— a half-day's trip with only more terror at the end. The feeble crowds beset the bulletins posted outside the *mairie*, and scattered, murmuring their own comments on the laconic messages. Sometimes crones and half-grown children on the edge of the crowd got her to report to them, as she emerged from the denser group in front of the mairie wall. She did so as gently as she could, for they were all involved: fathers, husbands, sweethearts, brothers, sons, were facing the enemy at some point or other that only the War Office knew. If some creatures had had nothing to give, it was only because the Prussians had taken all they had, in '70.

There was no insane terror; the people were strangely calm; yet they and theirs had been, of all time, the peculiar food of the enemy, and there was pessimism afloat. The plain was as defenseless as they: its mild crops as fore-ordained to mutilation by feet and hoofs and wheels as they to splintering shells.

Miss Stanley, who was so shy of unfamiliar action, felt Sézanne too much for her. She stopped going, after a week, and resigned herself to not knowing. She chafed under the censorship, though she knew that Edmund Laye would tell her that it was well done of the 'Powers that Were' to stanch the leakage of news as you would stanch blood from an artery. The General Staff was better off not drained of its vital facts. To be sure, Miss Stanley never read newspapers. Even less, did she subscribe to them. But she longed now for a neutral America, where the extras came hot and hot, where experts of every kind fought out the battles on the front page, and good journalese stimulated the lax imagination.

Her determination to go no more to Sézanne led her for exercise to other quarters of the plain. She would walk quickly, tensely, for an hour, her eyes fixed on a clump of trees or a church-spire far ahead of her at the end of the unswerving road, until the clump and the spire rose up to match her height and she came to the first whitewashed cottage. Champaubert church was never empty, these days, of worshipers who gazed up at gaudy St. Eloi as if he could help. The crops that waved on the old Montmirail battlefield were thinly harvested by women and an impeding fry of children. The steep little streets of Congy were dirtier than ever, and the ducks and the infants plashed about more indiscriminately in the common mud-puddles. No more galettes at 'la vieille Andecy': the old woman was prostrated by the loss of her reservist grandson.

Finally she gave up the plain too, and withdrew into Andecy itself, waiting, always waiting, for word of Edmund Laye. There had been a touch of loyalty to him in her staying on without plan of escape. News of him would reach her here sooner than elsewhere. If she left, she would be lost in a maelstrom, and might lose some precious word. Until she heard from Edmund of his sailing, or of a change of plan, she would stay where he thought of her as being. When she heard, she would go.

Some atavistic sense in Miss Stanley caused her to look, all through early August, to the provisioning of the manor— some dim instinct to hoard food, that might have sprung from the heart of a colonial ancestress behind a stockade of logs: premonition against death and savages. She sent old Marie to buy thriftily, making it clear that her fortress was not for herself alone, but for all who might be in need. Together, she and Marie and the granddaughter piled provisions in the empty rooms and the dark cellars; and they lived frugally on milk and eggs and *soupe aux choux*.

Sometimes she wondered whether the danger was not a mere fixed idea of the foolish peasants who had all been touched in the wits by '70. True, the able-bodied men were gone, but the reports these people brought her made

no sense. Their quality verged on folk-lore. Something gigantic was going on, somewhere, but it had nothing to do with Edmund Laye in the Argentine, or with her at Andecy. Paris in danger? Perhaps: but how to take it on their word? Belgium flowing with blood? Just what did it mean? An aeroplane over Sézanne at dawn? It must often have happened, *allez*! The air was never free, nowadays. The Germans in France? They had been seeing Germans behind every bush for forty years. So she talked with old Marie, scarcely sure whether she or old Marie were the fool.

Since the household no longer drove the fat donkey to Sézanne, none of them knew even what the War Office said— unless what old Séraphine from the next farm reported that her granddaughter had heard in Champaubert from a woman whose married daughter had been to Sézanne two days before, could be called a War Office report. And never, from the first, on the plain of Andecy, had anyone understood *why*. According to the plain, all things were to be believed of the German Emperor, who was usually drunk; but, on the other hand, who could trust an atheist government? The soil of the Hundred Days had never recovered from Bonapartist tendencies, Miss Stanley had often noted; and even old Marie would sometimes mix up '15 and '70. The White Paper— which Miss Stanley had never heard of— would have been wasted on Champaubert and Montmirail.

Wonder stirred at last even in old Marie's fatalistic mind at the lack of panic in this shy young foreigner— who could not chaffer, who could not bully, who could not endure even the mimic urbanity of Sézanne. Strange that she should be willing to stay quietly pacing up and down the cobbled courtyard of Andecy for sole exercise! Past mid-August, Marie put a vague question.

'When I hear from him, I shall go, Marie,' Miss Stanley answered. 'But I leave everything here to you and Théophile. The British fleet holds the sea, they say, and I shall be better off in England. I shall surely come back when the war is over, and perhaps I shall bring my husband with me.'

Some dim muscular effort deepened the wrinkles in the old woman's face. It was as if a knife had cut them in the living flesh.

'I hope so— if Théophile and I are here. To be sure, you must go where it is your duty. We will keep such of the provisions as can be kept— '

'Keep nothing. It is all for you who have been so kind to me— you and yours. Not a child, not a creature, for a dozen miles about that I would not wish to share with, as you know. But— listen, Marie.' Miss Stanley blushed faintly as she bent her head nearer Marie's good ear.

'It *is* my duty. My first duty, that is, must be to my future husband. When he returns from America' (she had long ago learned the futility of distinguishing, for Marie, between '*l'Amérique du nord*' and '*l'Amérique du*

sud'; and was patient with her belief that New York was a suburb of Cayenne) 'he will wish me there. He was to have sailed last month. A letter— a telegram— must have gone astray in the confusion. When I hear, he will doubtless be in England. And when he reached England, I was to go to my friends and be married to him. My heart bleeds for France; but I am not French, and my duty is not here. I am American, you see, dear Marie, and my *fiancé* is English.'

'Ah!' Marie shook her head. 'My old head is turned with all they tell me, and the buzzing in my bad ear is like cannon. But I had thought that the English, for some reason I do not understand, were fighting with us. They have been telling us for ten years that we do not hate the English— that we love them. And Théophile thought that an English army was against the Germans. But perhaps I am wrong. *Monsieur votre fiancé* will not have to fight, then? I congratulate you, mademoiselle.'

'The English are fighting with the French, Marie. But all Englishmen are not soldiers. Monsieur Laye is not a soldier. He is an engineer.'

'He is perhaps past the age.'

'There is no conscription in England, Marie. No man is a soldier unless he chooses.'

'No service to make?'

'None.'

'*C'est beau, ça!* All Frenchmen must fight. So England may go to war, and still have men to till the fields. But where do their armies come from?'

'Any man who wishes may go. But none are compelled— except the soldiers by profession. There will be enough, never fear. England will not desert France.'

The old woman nodded. 'I am not afraid of that. And you are not afraid that *monsieur le fiancé* will fight? I do not understand these things. As Théophile says, what I comprehend I do not hear, and what I hear I do not comprehend. I go to fetch mademoiselle's soup. They are lucky, all the same, to get the crops in, in time of war.' She clattered from the room.

Miss Stanley felt her heart grow heavy, she did not know precisely why. If only word would come! Perhaps she was a fool to stay. There must be trains through to Paris now. Anything to get nearer Edmund, away from this historic, war-bound plain! She crouched by the window to eat her *soupe aux choux* and stale bread. If only some boy would come riding into the courtyard with a letter for her! She had bribed half the urchins who loitered by the mairie in Sézanne to rush to her hot-foot with anything that came.

The lightning that had struck once at Champaubert and Montmirail was to strike again before she heard from Edmund Laye. Suddenly, with no warning,

the heavens opened with that reiterant flash. Frightened stragglers over the plain, refugees from the north pushing on from beyond Sézanne in a blind stumbling dash to the southward; rumors that sprang up out of the ground so that she had but to stand still to hear the world move; indescribable distant noises, commotions less seen than sensed, on the far horizon; a casual smudge of aeroplanes on the great blue round of heaven; an earth, for no visible reason, tumultuously vibrating beneath her,— and then, at last, one hot noon, a frightened boy falling exhausted at her feet. She gave him the piece of gold which for many days had been waiting for him in her pocket, and bade him rest where he lay until he was ready for food. Marie and Théophile crouched beside him, listening to his winded babbling.

Armies, armies, fighting, men riding on horses, guns and wounded— like '15, like '70, like Hell. People like themselves leaving their cottages and farms, making, with such portable treasures as they had (food, relics, poultry, babes in arms), for the shelter of a town. No town could avail them, for in the towns sat the officers, and the marketplace offered only a bigger, a more organized destruction. But the hope of shelter would take them far afield. Anything was better than to see sabres splintering your walls, and a greasy flame replacing all that had been ancestral and intimate. Better to die in the open with friends— not smoked out of your own cellar to fall on a bayonet. They knew the secular ways of war: the dwellers on the plain were the foredoomed type of the refugee, the world over. Once in so often men fought, and poor people were homeless. And now none of the '*vieux de la vieille*' were there to guard.

These were the visions that assembled in Miss Stanley's brain while Marie, her lean fists clenched, reported the boy's wild talk. The lumps of fat hardened on her congealing soup; and still her mind went painfully, shuttle-wise, back and forth from her telegram— infinitely delayed, but clearly authentic— to the apocalyptic events surrounding her. Like most Americans perpetually defended by two oceans, Miss Stanley had no conception of invasion as a reality. The insult of an enemy on your own ground was one which she had never steeled herself to meet. There was no weapon in her little arsenal for a literal foe. Her knees trembled under her as she rose to look out of the window, after Marie, spent with eloquence, had left her.

Edmund Laye, by this, was with his regiment— even she might not know where. No point in trying to break through to London: his telegram, dated the day of his arrival in England, was already too old. The letter he promised her would go the way of all the letters he must have written, that she had never had. And she herself was caught: she had waited too long on that predestined plain. The noises she heard seemed rumblings of the earth and cracklings of the inflamed sky. Andecy manor had not yet seen one soldier, unless you

reckoned the pilots of those soaring monoplanes. But their hours were numbered: soon— any moment, now— all that hidden rumor would break forth into visible fruit of fighting men— men with rifles, men with lances, men with mitrailleuses or howitzers. She was trapped. To try, even with no luggage, to make the miles to Sézanne, would be not so much to take her life in her hands as to kick it from her. Caught; and her nervous nostrils feigned for her a subtle odor of smoke. She turned from the window and went to the quiet room that had once been the chapel. Out of those windows she could not look, thank Heaven! The life of the Virgin, in villainous stained glass, barred her vision.

She was absolutely alone. Old Marie and Théophile were not people: they were strangers, creatures, animals— what not. She scarcely knew. 'Allies' meant nothing to her at the moment but marching men. Even Edmund— who would be killed unless they hid in caves and let their beauty rot in the dark. Fool that she had been not to go to England while there was time! Fool that she had been to forget that Edmund Laye, landing in England, would be first of all a Territorial— one of the thousands of slim reeds on which Kitchener was so heavily leaning. She had been obsessed with peace: sure that war could not touch her or what was privately, supremely, hers. She was a creature of peace; a little doctrinaire who supposed that, in the inverted moral world in which she walked, right made might. There was a deal of most logical self-pity in her tears. How did any of it concern her, that she should be cooped in a country manor to await horrors from unknown people? Why should Edmund Laye, who had chosen an antipodal career, be dragged back to present himself as a mark for some Prussian shell? The senselessness of it angered her. Nations meant little to her; the cosmos nothing. Alone in the chapel, she treated herself to a vivid personal rage. And still the strange tumult, that was more than half made of vibrations too slow for sound-waves, beat upon her nerves like an injury to the internal ear.

By twilight, the physical need of action came to her. She felt, in the subtler fibres of her mind, that if she stayed longer there half prone in her worm-eaten arm-chair, groveling mentally in this welter of concrete alarms, she should sink into a pit whence reason could not rescue her. She had been so calm in her folly, so lulled by the sense of her sacred detachment from this bloody business, so sure that neutrality protected you from fire and steel even in the thickest *mêlée*— she could not have been more ridiculous if she had worn a dress cut out of the Stars and Stripes. Now, some obscure inhibition told her, she must act. She must move her hands and feet, limber her cramped muscles, set the blood flowing properly in her veins, make herself physically normal, or

her worthless mind would let her go mad. She must not think of death or outrage or torture.

She must forget the things she had heard those first days at Sézanne. She must forget the gossip of Marie and Théophile and Séraphine, inventing, inventing, with a mediæval prolixity and a racial gift for the *macabre*, on chill evenings by the fire. They had no need of news. They dug up out of the bloody deeps of the past things the like of which she had never expected to hear. She must forget— shut her staring mouth and forget. Whatever visited itself on Andecy must not find a gibbering mistress there. Perhaps, if she pretended that Edmund knew, moment by moment, what she was doing, she could master her faltering flesh and her undisciplined mind. She had lost him forever, but she would try to be some of the things he thought her. Edmund Laye had called her flower-like. Well: flowers were broken, but they did not go mad. She must be— decent.

Her brisk pacing of the chapel did not allay her fears, but it brought back to her a sense of decorum. Her body had never lent itself to an immodest gesture; what— she caught at the notion— could be more immodest than visible fear? So gradually, by artificial means, she brought herself back into some dignity; scolding and shaking herself into a trooper's demeanor. She could not trust her mind, but perhaps she could get her instincts into fighting form. Cautiously she tried them— as you try a crazy foothold to see if it will bear your weight. Her muscles seemed to respond: suppleness, strength, coordination, were reported satisfactory. She thought she could promise not to fall a-shivering again. The noise in her ears faded; the vibrations ceased to rock her nerves. Miss Stanley flung open the chapel door, and walked firmly, ignoring echoes, down the brick-paved corridor to the kitchen.

Marie, Théophile, and little Jeanne watched, in a kind of apathy, the pot on the fire. In the dim corners of the big kitchen, Miss Stanley thought she saw strange figures. Inspection revealed a few frightened women and children from farms that had once been dependencies of Andecy. Here was something to do— more blessed exercise for hands and feet.

'You, Françoise? and the little ones? And you, Mathilde? and the girl? Good! It is time the children had food and went to bed. We must economize candles, so we will all eat here. The dining-room, in half an hour, will be a dormitory. Jeanne shall sleep in my room. Milk and gruel for the little ones, Marie, and *soupe aux choux* for the rest of us. Milk we will use while we have it. Eggs also. We cannot expect to keep the livestock forever. Bread we have not— until I bake it in my own fashion. It may come to that. Jeanne, you will eat with us older ones. Come and help me make beds for the children. Luckily, there are cots for a whole community. In half an hour'— she took out her

watch— 'the babies sup and say their prayers. To-morrow, I prepare the chapel and the pupils' old dormitory for wounded. Wounded there will be, if what we hear from Sézanne— though they are all fools in Sézanne, from the fat mayor down— be true. My fiancé is at the front. We wait here for our men, hein?' And she beckoned to Jeanne.

She had made her speech blindly, recklessly planning as she spoke, thinking that if she could convince her hearers she could perhaps convince herself. She looked for the effect on them when she had done. The speech had worked. If it worked for them, it must work for her, too. It could not be madness, if it had lighted up those sodden faces. And as she looked from one to another, she saw a flicker of pride, of patriotism, reflected in their eyes. Reflected from what? From her, without doubt. There must have been pride in her voice and glance when she spoke of Edmund Laye. Good! That was the line to take. There should be a brave show: she would work her muscles to death to keep it going. Every due emotion should be cultivated in each limb and feature; every surface inch of skin should play its part. The drum and fife should play all the more bravely because her heart was hollow. Perhaps, if she got a fair start, a fine physical impetus toward courage, she could keep it up to the end.

'Come, Jeanne.' She beckoned the child.

The women stirred, and the children huddled against their skirts crept out upon the floor.

'Théophile, is the great gate locked?'

The old man shook his head vaguely. He had gone near to losing his few wits with the rumors from Sézanne which his ears had drunk up so greedily. His shaken mind was wandering windily about in reminiscences of '70 and legends of '15.

'It had best be locked at once. The lantern, Jeanne. Come.'

The child looked at her piteously.

'Oh, very well!' Miss Stanley pushed her gently aside. 'I shall not need it. There is still light enough. Fetch the bowls for the babies, Jeanne. We must all get to bed, and be up with the dawn.'

Alone, she left the house and crossed the innumerable cobblestones of the huge courtyard to the outer gate. She knew the way of the heavy bolts and bars, for she had often escorted Théophile on his rounds before the official *coucher* of the household; but her shaking fingers tapped the rusty iron ineffectually. She loathed her fingers: insubordinate little beasts! She struck her right hand smartly with her left, her left with her right, to punish them with real pain. The fingers steadied; she drove the foolish, antiquated bolts home.

Something white fluttered about her feet in the twilight: the hens had not been shut up. Miss Stanley was very angry, for a moment, with Théophile; then

angry with herself for her anger. Théophile was frightened because he *knew*: '70 had been the moment of his prime. She did not know; she had no right to be frightened. Tales of the Civil War, she remembered now, had always bored her; she had never listened to them. Her duty now was to secure the poultry. They must have eggs while they could, and chicken broth for the children. Mathilde's little girl was a weakling. So she ran hither and yon, trying to drive the silly handful toward the little grange where they were kept. With traditional idiocy, they resisted; and the last stragglers she lifted and imprisoned ruthlessly in her skirt. She hated the creatures; to touch them made her flesh crawl; but at last she got them all in, squawking, and fastened the door upon them. How like the stupid things, to make extra trouble because there was a war! Her anger against them was quite serious, and sank into proper insignificance only when her task was done.

A stone wall, continuing the house wall all the way round, bounded the courtyard; but through the grille she could see rocket-like sputters of flame far off on the horizon, and here and there a patch of light in the sky which meant fires burning steadily beneath. The pounding vibrations had ceased. There was trouble, a mighty trouble, upon them all; and with the dawn, perhaps, all the things those chattering fools by the fire had spent their phrases on.

Strangest of all to her was the sudden thought that Edmund, separated from her now by the innumerable leagues of destiny, might be, as the crow flies, not so far away. A few fatal miles might be replacing, even now, the friendly, familiar ocean whose division of the lovers had been a mere coquetry of Time. On that thought she must not dwell; besides— irony returned to her at last— did she not gather from those idiots within that all soldiers one ever saw were Germans? One's own armies were routed somewhere; but one encountered, one's self, only the victors, ever. Then the jealous captain to whom she had given the command reminded her that such reflections meant mutiny.

Slim, straight, hollowed out with fear, but walking delicately ahead, she went back to the house and superintended the babies' supper. Then the grown-ups ate— standing about the table as at the Passover, faces half-averted toward the door— and she marshaled them all to their appointed sleeping-places. Marie and Théophile abdicated their dominion with an uncouth relief. If mademoiselle, so shy, so small, could be so sure of what they ought to do— doubtless hers was a great brain in a frail form. After prayers, in which Miss Stanley herself joined, borrowing a *chapelet*, they went off to snore peacefully in the guardianship of that great brain so opportunely discovered.

'You have not an American flag?' old Marie asked, as she shuffled off.

Théophile, past any coherent reflections, was mumbling over the dying fire.

'No, nothing of the sort. I am sorry. I should use it if I had.'

'You could not make one?'

'Impossible, to-night. To-morrow I will see.'

Marie apologetically offered a last suggestion to the great brain. 'A white flag? It would do no harm to have it ready. Françoise swears they are in Sézanne to-night.'

'I will see. *Allez vous coucher.*'

And Miss Stanley turned on her heel and sought the little room where Jeanne was already restlessly dreaming.

Save the babies, Andecy found no deep sleep that night. The old people napped and woke and napped again, according to their habit. The mothers rose and walked beside their children's cots, then fell limply back and dozed. Miss Stanley slept from sheer exhaustion until an hour before dawn. Then she rose and dressed herself, and, when dressed, sent Jeanne to wake her grandparents. Whatever the day might bring, it should not find them either asleep or fasting. They would eat, if it was to be their last meal.

Alone in her room, by candle-light, Miss Stanley made a white flag out of a linen skirt. She sewed hastily but firmly, that it might be no flimsier than she could help. By the first streaks of daylight, she groped for and found, in a lumber-room, a long stick to fasten it to— probably, it flashed across her, Madam Françoise de Paule's cane, never buried, as Anne Marmont had hoped. When the flag was finished, she loathed it: loathed its symbolism, loathed its uselessness. No: whatever happened, she would have nothing to do with that. What could be more humiliating than to hold up a white flag in vain? Another idea came to her; and while breakfast was preparing and the children were being dressed, she carried it swiftly into execution. Slashing a great cross out of a scarlet cape, she sewed it firmly to the white ground. *That* she might hang to the dove-cot, after breakfasting.

She carried it martially with her into the great kitchen, and placed it in a corner. The sun itself was hardly up, but the children brought the flag out into the firelight and old Marie was jubilant. The wonderful idea! The great brain of mademoiselle! She fussed almost happily over the simmering skillet of milk. But the great brain was pondering apart in the lessening shadows. Better the American flag, if she could manage it. She would beg an old blue smock of Théophile's, for she had nothing herself. Those wretched stars! It would take her a long morning; and she felt convinced that this day's sun would not rise peacefully to the zenith. This thing she had made was a lie. Incalculable harm could be done by assuming a badge you had no right to— incalculable harm to those who had the right. She was mortally afraid; but she would not do anything in pure panic. That would make it worse for every one in the end.

An American flag: it must be made. How many states were there? She had no notion, but she fancied they were as the sands of the sea. It would take a woman all day to cut out those stars and sew them to a blue field hacked out of Théophile's smock. And what a makeshift banner, in the end! Even if the enemy politely waited for her to finish it, would they not detect it at once? Was not that the kind of thing every German knew better than she— how many little silly stars there were, safe and far away, sending senators to Washington? A sullen tide of mirth was let loose in her far below the surface. Here she was, quivering with terror, with a lot of foolish livestock on her hands— livestock that she could not give up to slaughter as if they had been the sheep that they really were.

Miss Stanley caught up one of the children to her lap and fed it great spoonfuls of warm milk— choking it hopelessly. Luckily the mother was too apathetic to reproach her. She could not even feed a child without wetting it all over! Disgusted, she put the child down again. It whimpered, and the mother, roused, moved over to it. Miss Stanley looked at her cup. Chocolate— no coffee, for the coffee was gone. Coffee might have cleared her brain, but this mess would do nothing for her. Still, she drank it. And gradually, as their hunger was appeased, they crept about her. Even those who did not move their chairs turned and faced her. She could not meet so many eyes. She had nothing to do with them— these tellers of old wives' tales, who expected her to deliver them from the horrors their own lips had fabricated. Why did they stare at her as if she might have an idol's power over events? Whispering, almost inaudibly, their strung and beaded prayers, yet blasphemously looking to her!

The shadows still lessened in the great kitchen. The sun lay in level streaks on the centre of the stone floor, and even the twilight in the corners was big with noon. The women sat in a helpless huddle, not knowing how to go about the abnormal tasks of the abnormal day. The far-off thunders of the plain began again: vibrations as of earthquake first, then explicit sounds, unmistakable and portentous. To-day, you could distinguish among those clamors. Miss Stanley, with the first sounds, expected to have a tiny mob to quell; but their apathy did not leave them. Even the children turned that steady, hypnotized stare on her. And then Jeanne— how could she not have missed Jeanne from the assembly?— ran down the corridor with a sharp clatter.

'They are there! Soldiers— on horseback— at the gate!'

And indeed now, in the sudden tragic hush, Miss Stanley could hear the faint metallic thrill and tinkle of iron bars, at a distance, struck sharply. Old Théophile roused himself as if by unconscious antediluvian habit, but Marie

plucked him back and ran for the flag with the scarlet cloth cross. This she thrust into the American girl's hand. No one else moved, except that Mathilde flung her heavy skirt over her little girl's head.

For one moment, Miss Stanley stood irresolute. She had never dreamed of such a tyranny of irrelevant fact. She must, for life or death,— for honor, at all events,— respond to a situation for which nothing, since her birth, had prepared her. Peace had been to her as air and sunlight— the natural condition of life. This was like being flung into a vacuum; it was death to her whole organism. Yet, somehow, she was still alive.

Irony took her by the throat; and then the thought of Edmund Laye— linked, himself, with events like these, riding or marching beneath just such skies, on just such a planet, under just such a law. Never had there been, really, immunity like that which she had fancied to be the very condition of human existence. It was all human, with a wild inclusiveness that took her breath. And, whatever happened, paralysis like that which even now crept slowly up her limbs, was of the devil. Against that last ignominy she braced herself.

Her muscles responded miraculously to her call for help, and she felt her feet moving across the floor. If feet could move, hands could. She rolled up the little banner and threw it in the very centre of the fire. It occurred to her as a last insult that she did not know enough German even to proclaim her nationality; but she did not falter again. Some residuum of human courage out of the past kept her body loyal— some archaic fashion of the flesh that dominated the newness of the mind. Past generations squared her shoulders for her, and gave her lips a phrase to practice.

As she passed down the corridor, she flung each door wide open. She paused, a mere fraction of an instant, in the big front door of the house; but from there she could see only a confusion of helmets, and horses nosing at the grille. Almost immediately she passed through the door and walked, hatless, her arms hanging stiffly at her sides, across the innumerable cobblestones, to the gate.

13: Blackout

Ethel Lina White

1879-1944

The Winnipeg Tribune, 28 Sep 1940

Ethel Lina White

Produced by Michael Cox and Roy Glashan, who are gathering a number of Ethel Lina White's short stories which were syndicated to an American disrtibutor and not found in British newspapers or magazines.

THE blackout over London was nearly absolute. When Christina drew aside the window curtains of the sitting room, at first she could distinguish nothing. It was as though a wall had been built up outside the glass. As her eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, she saw the dimmed lights of traffic and glow-worm gleams speckling the pavement, cast by the electric torches of invisible pedestrians.

In spite of dangers and difficulties, the nation was carrying on as usual. Young people made dates— and kept them. Old people went out after dark; they were not to be stampeded out of their habits.

Christina was acutely affected by the Blackout, because it was a definite physical handicap. She had dark blue eyes and had to pay for their beauty with the defective vision which often accompanies that color. But although it was dark when she returned from the munitions factory where she worked, she made the journey with other employees, while the route had grown familiar. Once she was back in the flat, she settled down for the evening and refused all invitations.

That evening, she peered out at the dark, withdrawn world beyond the window as though it were a hostile judge concealing unknown peril. Her nerves were somewhat frayed, owing to lack of sleep.

She went to bed late because she was afraid of a recurrent nightmare. It was always the same dream. She found herself walking down an unknown road, in absolute darkness— with the knowledge that she had a long distance

to go. Suddenly— she felt herself gripped by invisible hands— then the horror always shook her awake.

She was furious over this leakage of energy at a time when she needed all her reserves of strength. Recently she had the honor of a personal interview with a Mr. T.P. Fry— a younger member of the firm which owned the factory. It look place in his private room, when the august man explained the facts.

"Every country in war time," he said, "is subject to the abuse of sabotage. The scum of a nation will always seize its chance to profit. To protect our interests in the factory, we have organized some of our most trusted workers as counter-espionage agents."

Christina thrilled as she listened, although his next sentence conveyed a warning.

"The work requires courage and discretion. You remain anonymous and— in your own interests— you must not try to make contacts. You should take extra precautions against accidents inside the factory and not go out in the blackout, if you can avoid it. You may be followed by malcontents... No extra pay— but I hope there will be a bonus at the end of the war."

AFTER the minimum of reflection, Christina volunteered for the special service. Instead of dull routine, she felt elevated to something in the John Buchan tradition. At first, although she was especially zealous in the prevention of carelessness; she made no exposures. But— as though her vigilance had been marked as inconvenient to the cause of sabotage, a few days previously, she had been nearly the victim of an accident.

One of the girls had turned faint and in the general rush to help her, Christina had been pushed up against a machine... For a terrible moment, her heart felt iced, before a worker switched off the mechanism.

When she went over the incident, she felt doubtful about one of the Good Samaritans who had dragged her to safety. Meta Rosenburg was a thin attractive brunette, slant-eyed and over-painted. She was always expensively dressed, when she discarded her slops, while her style of living indicated an income which could have a tainted source.

Christina shared the expenses of a flat with Ida Brown— a plump reliable girl. That evening, she was looking around at the comfort of the room with its fire and softly-glowing lights, when the telephone bell began to ring. As she went to answer it, a warning sense reminded her that ambushes were always prepared by fake invitations. Primed by her intuition, she was scarcely surprised to hear Meta's deep husky voice at the other end of the line.

"I'm throwing a sherry-party. Come over."

"No thanks." she replied. "I don't drink."

"But you must come. Montrose is here. He wants to know you."

Christina's heart beat faster, for— like all the girls at the factory— she was attracted by Montrose. He held an important position and was tall and handsome. There was also a legend about him that he had been an air-ace before a smash which took mysterious toll but thoughtfully left no visible marks.

"Montrose?" she repeated. "How do you get to know everyone?"

"Wait to be introduced," replied Meta derisively.

"Is it safe to pick up strangers?"

"Not safe, no. But the other way's too dull... I shall expect you."

Before she could protest, Meta rang off.

"You shouldn't keep on saying 'no,'" advised Ida Brown, who always listened to telephone conversations. "No wonder you are getting queer and jumpy."

"I'm not... Or am I?"

Suddenly weary of mental isolation and wholesale suspicion, Christina wanted reassurance from Ida.

"Snap out of it. Go to this sherry-party."

"I don't know where she lives."

"I'll look her up in the telephone book."

"Thanks... I will."

Christina told herself that it was important to reassure Ida, lest— in perfect innocence— she might start the first fatal whisper. In reality, however, it was the thought of Montrose's handsome face which lured her out into the blackout.

SHE put on an ice-blue frock and made up her face with delicate care. While she was slipping on a near-white coat, Ida came into the bedroom to tell her the number of her bus.

"I've written down the address and put it in your gas-mask carrier." she explained. "You get off at the terminus."

Her journey was reduced to such a simple and effortless proposition, that she felt ashamed of her former hesitation. But as she stood in the doorway of the entrance-hall of the Mansions, waiting to accustom her eyes to the darkness, a man nearly knocked her down.

Both laughed at the encounter, but she fell exactly as though she had bumped into the Invisible Man. It was with a return of her old inhibition that she snailed along the pavement, There was neither moon nor stars, while the air seemed tangible as a black curtain. When she had to cross the road, she

trusted to the eyes of other pedestrians to detect the colors of the traffic lights— reduced to thin crosses of red or green.

She reached her starting point, only to realize the handicap of her poor eyesight. Other people boarded the vehicles while she remained on the pavement, running from bus to bus, as fresh ones drew up at the halt. Unable to see their numbers, she always left it too late and boarded them, to be told by the conductor "Full Up."

She was thinking rather desperately of Montrose when someone flashed a torch over the face of the crowd. It cursed him as one man, although— as the bus was stationary— there was no risk of an accident. Christina blinked at the tiny searchlight with a sense that her identity had been revealed. Her mind flooded with morbid wonder as to whether Ida were in league with Meta to lure her into a trap.

Her turn had come at last. She felt herself borne upwards to the step on a human surge and then pressed forward Into a darkened interior.

"Where's the empty seat?" she appealed. "I can't see a thing."

Helpful hands passed her along the aisle and drew her down on a seat beside a stout woman who smelt strongly of cloves.

"There you are, lidy."

With the comfortable sensation of being enclosed in the safety of on ark— tossing on a stormy sea— she felt the bus move onwards. From now on, the driver would have the headache. She was merely another fare— his responsibility.

They journeyed on through the black blanket, occasionally stopping with a back-breaking jerk, to avoid some too optimistic pedestrian. Presently, as the stout lady continued to overlap her, Christina fell as though she were slowly smothered by a feather-bed. Her chance of release came when a semi-visible young man who sat on the opposite side— level with their seat— leaned across the aisle.

"Change places with me, mother," he urge. "I want to sit by my young lady."

"Right you are, duck," consented the lady.

Christina waited for the exchange to be made before she spoke softly to her slimmer neighbor.

"I'm afraid I must break it to you. I'm not your friend."

"I know," said the young man. "I had to lake a chance on you. I saw your face when someone flashed a torch. I knew I could trust you."

ALTHOUGH his voice was uneven— either pitched to a crack or blurred to thickness— his accent was educated and inspired her with the confidence engendered by the snobbish tradition of the old school tie.

"What do you mean?" she asked distantly.

"When I tell you, you'll think me mad," he said.

"I do already... Or drunk."

"Not drunk. No. I'm drugged... Like a fool. I had a drink with a man. He's following me on this bus... But you must see who you are backing— and use discretion."

Before she could protest, he lit a cigarette. In the flame of the match, she saw a face which was too charming and delicate for a man. Its oval shape— combined with fair hair and large blue eyes— suggested some universal Younger Brothers who needed coddling and protection.

"I seem to know your face," she said. "Are you at Fray's Munition Factory?"

"Yes," he replied eagerly. "I'm a draftsman there. You've probably seen me in the Canteen."

Then he lowered his voice to whisper.

"Are you one of Us?" he asked.

She scented a trap in time to avoid It

"Yes. I work there," she said coldly.

"Then you are in this too... Listen carefully. I've a letter here. It's desperately important. Secret Service. I got involved— never mind how... You must take it to Bengal avenue, sixth house on left. It's the second stop. The man is waiting to pounce on me when I leave the bus. But he won't suspect you."

Christina grew wretchedly uncomfortable as she listened. If she had not been enrolled for confidential service at the factory, she would have been immune to suggestion. Now. however, she was susceptible, because she admitted to herself that the young man's story could be true. Stolen documents, espionage, secret agents— these were the phantasy of Peace, but the commonplace of War.

She struggled desperately to get free of the coils.

"Don't talk like a film," she said. "I can't swallow that melodramatic stuff from a stranger."

"But you dare not refuse!" The young man's voice was stern. "It is not for myself. It is for England... Do you remember the address?"

"Of course not. I don't need it."

HEEDLESS of her refusal, he tore a leaf from his notebook, and after scrawling on it, stuffed it inside her gas-mask carrier.

"That's enough to remind you," he said, blinking his eyes. "My head's beginning to buzz. Thank heaven I lasted long enough to contact you. Look! That man— by the door He's waiting for me."

The vehicle was too dimly lit to distinguish faces, but straining her eyes in the gloom, Christina saw a tall man whose hard felt hat was jammed over his eyes. He was strap-hanging near the door; but as the bus slackened speed, he stepped out on to the platform. As he was above average height; he had to stoop slightly to scrutinize the passengers who were getting off at the stage. This crouching posture gave him an appearance of tense vigilance which made the girl think of a jungle beast on the hunt.

"I'll call the conductor," she whispered to the young man.

The words roused him out of his lethargy.

"For heaven's sake, no," he implored. "Don't start anything like that. The chap would plug him— and then us. We haven't got a chance in the dark. It's up to you. You— must— "

Suddenly his head jerked forward and then drooped, while his eyes closed, As she listened to his heavy breathing, Christina wondered what she ought to do. Self-interest, as well as common-sense, told her to keep out of the mess and continue on her way to the sherry party. On the other hand, in a remote lighted corner of her brain, was a reminder that Meta's Invitation might be a trap. In such a case, this mission— which involved her in no danger— might be a providential intervention.

There was third consideration which outweighed the others. The youth had spoken the truth when he said that she dared not accept the responsibility of inaction, if there was the slightest chance to prevent some vital leakage.

"Your friend's having a nap," grinned the conductor as he came up the aisle.

"Not mine," she said quickly.

As she disclaimed him, the man in the felt hat was swift to seize his chance.

"That's all right, mate," he said to the conductor. "My pal and I will see him home. He's had one over the eight."

THIS dramatic fulfilment of the young man's fears spurred Christina to immediate action. She dared not extract the secret document from the young man's gas-mask carrier, lest she should fumble and attract the attention of the nearest passenger. Such an action might look like an attempt to rob a drunken man. Snatching up the young man's gas-mask carrier from, the seat— in exchange for her own— she groped her way to the door, where she waited for the next stop.

Fortunately the conductor did not remember her stage, since in the blackout, one girl looked much like another. He lowered her down on the pavement as though she were a precious consignment. Then she heard the ping of his bell and the bus rolled on its way.

In contrast with the subdued lighting of the vehicle, the surrounding blackness seemed pitch black as the depths of a coal mine; out after flicking her torch about, she discovered the name "BENGAL AVENUE," printed on the corner of a wall. The bus had dropped her on the left-hand side of the road, so she had only to walk straight ahead.

It was also a very lonely locality, for as she followed long stretches of stone wall, partially revealed by the light of her torch, she met no one, she heard no footsteps— no voices— no hoot of passing car.

"Everyone might be dead," she thought.

For the sake of morale, she told herself that there was light and life inside each blacked-out exterior. Civilization still functioned, for she had only to ring at a door to get in touch with humanity again. Probably, if she cared to deliver her document personally at No. 6— instead of dropping it into the letter-box— she would meet with a welcome.

"I suppose he lives here with his family," she thought.

In order to settle this point, she scraped his identification card from a pocket of the carrier— fishing out two Yale latchkeys, to get hold of it.

"Why two?" she wondered.

She knew the reason— or thought she did— after she had read the particulars about the young man in the bus, by the light of her torch. She discovered that his name was "Ivor Thomas" and that he lived in a North London suburb. Apparently No; 6 was an accommodation address, or belonged to a close friend, since he appeared to possess its key as well as his own.

She plodded on doggedly through the darkness, although she was beginning to wish she were not pledged to the adventure. At the back of her mind was a feeling of apprehension, while she was also teased by a sense of familiarity.

"I know this place," she thought "But when have I been here before?"

The answer crashed from the depths of her inner consciousness. This was her nightmare. There was the same long endless road— the utter blackness— the total loneliness. It only lacked the horror of gripping hands.

But those came later— in the dream...

She began to run— the fixity of her purpose propelling her on instead of turning back. It was panic flight which burned itself out, for when she was forced to stop, her heart was leaping as much from exertion as fright. She had reached No. 6, which was also named "Elephant House" and had two roughly

carved elephants surmounting its gate-posts, to demonstrate its claim to the title.

WITH the feeling that her ordeal was nearly over— for her run back to the bus-stop would seem much shorter— she pushed open the heavy gate. As she groped her way up the drive, the small dancing light of her torch revealed a general appearance of desertion and neglect. The front-door steps were dirty and the brass knocker had not been cleaned recently.

It was no surprise, therefore, to find that the slit to the letter box was blocked.

"I must unload this darn document," she decided. "It's too jolly risky to carry it round with me."

Once again she hooked up the two Yale keys, one of which fitted the lock. It turned easily as she pushed open the door and stepped inside into total darkness.

The precaution of shutting herself in, after she had slipped the key back in the carrier, was a test of her courage: but It was not until she felt secure from outside observation, that she flashed her light around.

The next second, she suppressed a scream as she stepped backwards in an instinctive movement to save herself from being trampled underfoot. Towering above her— from the wall— was the head of an enormous bull-elephant with gleaming tusks and upraised trunk. It dominated the most extraordinary hall she had ever seen.

It was screened with fretted woodwork and hung with the stuffed heads of wild beasts, as well as weapons.

"What a place," she murmured. "The home of Anglo-Indians, I should think. Wonder if the sahibs are at home."

Flashing her torch, first low and then high, she saw a dusty Indian carpet— partially covered with drugget— and a flight of stairs leading to a landing on which was posed a black marble statue. Beyond was a shorter flight of steps, the top of which was wiped out by shadows.

"Hullo! Any one there?"

Christina's hail was weak and tremulous, revealing that she was afraid of the empty house.

There was no answer to her call. Feeling that she had fulfilled her duty in England, she listened to the warning voice which told, her to get out of the house and rush back to safety.

"Run— run."

She was about to place the document on a carved teak table, when she noticed that she had torn a corner of the envelope in her extraction of the keys

from the carrier. As she stared at the flimsy paper, she was assailed by doubt. It looked so unofficial that she told herself that she must see the contents before she left it.

Feeling guilty of crime, she ripped open the envelope— to reveal what she dreaded to find— tracings.

They confirmed her lightning suspicion. Ivor Thomas was a rat who was stealing the factory's secrets.. The men in the bus were trailing him; but to save himself from being caught with the evidence, he had fooled them and tricked her into taking it to his hiding-place.

Slipping the document into her coat pocket, she was about to rush from the house when she was startled by a noise from above. It was a heavy thud, as though a statue had crashed down from its pedestal. With a recollection of the figure on the landing, she flashed her torch upwards.

What she saw drained the blood from her heart... A stiff, white, shapeless bundle— like a corpse— was rolling down the stairs.

AT that moment, she understood this hypnotic force of shock. She wanted to flee, but her muscles were locked so that she could not stir, although the thing was drawing nearer to her. Bumping from stop to step, it reached the landing, where it lay— formless, without face or limbs, muffled in its burial clothes.

As she stood and stared, suddenly Christina thought she detected a quiver in the object... Goaded by the elemental duty to make certain whether life was really extinct, she began to mount the stairs.

Kneeling beside the human parcel, she wrenched away a fold of linen and exposed the shriveled, sunburnt face of an elderly woman with an arrogant nose. Her brave old eyes smoldered in token of an unbroken spirit as Christina first tore away the scarf over her mouth and then dragged from her blackened lips the pad with which she had been gagged.

The woman drew a deep breath, gasping like a fish.

"Thank Heaven, I'm a nose-breather," she gasped. "I was choking. I heard you call— and I managed to make it under my own steam."

"Who are you?" asked Christina.

"Miss Monteagle. This house belongs to my brother— the General. We were in Cornwall when war broke out and we stayed on. I came up to see the house... I was attacked by thugs. Two of them." Her face grew suddenly tense as she added, "I can hear them in the cellars. Get help at once."

"But I can't leave you..."

"Quick. No time to loosen knots. If you can't make it, hide. Watch your chance to escape... Cover my face."

Although Christina lacked Miss Monteagle's uncanny faculty of hearing, she realized the urgency. After winding the corner of the sheet around the elder woman's head, she rushed down the stairs. The hall was clear, but before she could reach the door, a series of knocks on the wood, told her that Ivor Thomas was outside.

She was caught between two fires. The thugs had heard the summons and the sound of their footsteps in the distance was audible to her. Desperately flashing her torch around, she darted behind the velvet curtain which muffled a door— praying the while that the men would not come that way.

Her petition was mercifully granted, for the men entered through a low door at the rear. Although she could see nothing, Christina guessed that they carried a lamp from the faint glow which sprayed around the corner of the portière. Then she heard the catch withdrawn and someone entered the house.

"Has the girl left the plans?" asked Ivor Thomas— his voice cracking with excitement.

Without waiting for a reply, he dashed to the letter-box.

"Hell, it's nailed up," he complained.

"Sure, we had to pick an empty house," growled one of the men. "What's this about a girl?"

It was no satisfaction to Christina to learn that her suspicions were confirmed, since she was trapped and unable to save the plans. As Thomas told his story, she realized that he was cowed by the other men and eager to justify his action.

"The girl will come back when she finds the key," he assured them. "She fell for it all right. Besides it worked. The dicks had to let me go. The laugh was on me."

"Did they follow you?" asked a new voice.

"Hell, no. Why? They found nothing on me."

AS she listened. Christina noticed the difference between the voices of the two men. One was gruff and fierce, but the other frightened her more, because of its flat unhuman quality. It was as though a dead man spoke from the grave.

She trembled violently as this second man made a discovery.

"I can see high heels in the dust. That girl has been here. Look around."

Even as Christina realized the horror of the situation, Miss Monteagle came into action! Risking a broken neck, she flexed her muscles in a supreme effort to distract attention. The men In the hall heard a thud from the upper

darkness— outside the radius of their lamp— followed by the gruesome spectacle of a corpse-like object rolling down the stairs.

As Thomas gave a high, thin scream, like a trapped rabbit, Christina recognized her signal to escape. Not daring to creep towards the entrance, lest a man should turn his head, she leaped lightly over the thick pile of the carpet. Drawing back the catch of the lock, she slipped through the gap and drew the door softly to— fearing to shut it.

Once she was outside, she began to run, her high heels turning perilously on the slippery drive. She lost precious time in opening the heavy gate and barely reached the road before the sound of heavy footsteps in the distance told her that she was being followed.

Maddened by terror, she rushed on wildly, praying for help; but the road was as deserted as before. There was no welcome torch-light advertising an A.R.P. Warden on his round— no resident returning to his home. It was useless to scream— hopeless to hide in a garden; she knew that the glimmer of her white coat was visible and that if she tore it off her ice-blue frock would betray her.

Realizing that capture was inevitable, she determined that the men should not get the drawings; and since she could be tortured into revelation of their hiding-place, she must put them in a safe place.

Suddenly she remembered that— on her way to Elephant House— she had passed a pillar-box. Running blindly and keeping to the outside edge of the pavement, she collided with it before she saw it. The crash of the impact winded her completely, but before she collapsed, she managed to push the envelope through the slit.

Then she felt herself gripped by unseen hands, in ghastly fulfilment of her nightmare.

AFTER an interlude of strain and semi-suffocation, when— blinded by a coat over her head, she had been bumped along through the darkness— she realized that she was back in the hall of Elephant House. She looked around her fearfully, hardly daring to glance at a white shape doubled up at the foot of the stairs, because of its hideously unnatural posture.

With the exception of Thomas, the men had concealed their faces with dark scarves, while their eyes gleamed through slits in the material; but she recognized their tones.

It was the dead voice that spoke to her.

"Where is that envelope? If you don't talk, I can make you."

"Oh, I'll talk," she said with faint triumph, "I posted it in that pillar-box."

"Very clever," he sneered. "You may like to hear you've killed a man by that master stroke."

"Who? How?"

"The postman... If we force the box, it might attract attention. We will let him unlock it for us and then make sure he won't talk."

Christina stared at him in horror.

"It's all my fault. My fault."

She sat thinking, thinking— until her brain ceased to function. She had grown dead to emotion when she was startled back to life by the sound of knocking at the front door. It was so loud and persistent that the dead voice whispered a command.

"Gag the girl. Open the door, Thomas, and stall."

Nearly choked by the handkerchief which was roughly forced down her throat, Christina was dragged back into the shadow. She heard the door being opened a few inches and then Meta Rosenburg's voice.

"Where's Christina Forbes?" she demanded.

"Never heard of her," replied Ivor Thomas.

"You will... The police are here. Come on, boys."

At the sound of a shot, Christina closed her eyes. She kept them closed throughout the sensational fight which followed and did not open them until her gag was removed by her rescuing hero— Montrose.

LATER in the evening, she sat in Meta's flat. Montrose was there, as well as Miss Monteagle, who smoked a cigar and drank most of the sherry. The postman had already finished his round in safety, after having delivered an unstamped envelope to the detectives from the Munition Factory.

"Sorry my diversion failed to let you get clear away," remarked the sporting lady to Christina. "You made a hell of a noise. I'll never take you stalking... Lucky I didn't break my neck. I've broken every other bone, huntin', but I'm reserving that for my last fence."

"You were wonderful," Christina assured her, although her eyes spoke to Montrose.

"Want to know how the Master Minds found you?" cut in Meta. "Thomas left your gas-mask behind in the bus, since he was bound to be searched. He reckoned that when the conductor found it and took it to Lost Property, there would be nothing to connect it with him. But an A.R.P. Warden was on the bus and he spotted it and looked at your identification card. He's a bright local lad and knows me my sight— so when he found an envelope with my address on it, it seemed a good excuse to bring it round, as my flat was near."

As she stopped to refill the glasses. Montrose finished the tale.

"Meta got rattled as you hadn't turned up, while your gas mask proved you were on the bus. Fortunately we discovered a scrap of paper stuck in your carrier, with 'Bengal 6' scrawled on it. That gave us the Idea where you'd got out."

"It's wonderful," repeated Christina, still looking at Montrose. "The funny part is, I suspected Meta, when really she is one of Us."

Meta burst out laughing.

"Us?" she repeated. "You're too nice to be a mug. That sabotage-espionage is T.P.'s bright stunt to make the girls careful with the machinery. I know, because he's a relative of mine. Of course, the firm employs trained detectives."

"Oh," Christina's mouth drooped with disappointment. "It was such a thrill to feel part of the war."

"Never mind," said Miss Monteagle. "I'm dated, so I can afford to spout Kipling, although I can't say I'm quoting word for word.

"Two things greater than all things are.
The first is Love and the second is War,
And since we know not what War may prove...."

Intercepting the message flashing between Christina and Montrose, her bass voice softened to the tones of a girl who had vanished into the past, as she finished the quotation:

"Heart of my heart, let us speak of Love."

14: The Adventure of Tornado Smith

Algernon Blackwood

1869-1951

In: *Shocks*, 1935

WHEN Mr. T. Smith, the prominent stockbroker of Capel Court in the City of London, woke that morning, the sun was streaming into his comfortable bedroom in a respectable quarter of the region north of Hyde Park. He felt a curious sense of exhilaration, a strange glow of happiness. Like a boy who knows he has done well in an examination, he experienced a delightful, light-hearted anticipation. And this glow pervaded his whole being. It was as if he expected some happy event, a piece of luck, a glorious stroke of chance.

He could not define it, but he felt that it was there, almost within his grasp. So vivid was this happy emotion that he sprang from the bed and stood in his striped blue-and-white pyjamas, staring out of the open window. The sun on his bare neck was hot, birds were singing in the mangy cedar of the small garden, a few early hyacinths blazed just below him in a narrow strip of green. But he saw nothing to account for what he felt. The sparrows were dirtier than ever.

He was puzzled. Tightening the belt of his pyjamas which had become loose in sleep, he smoothed his scanty hair and rubbed his eyes.

"Had a dream, I suppose," he mumbled to himself. "A jolly dream sometimes does the trick," he added, opening his jacket wider to let the sun warm his scraggy chest. Only, he could not remember any dream.

Mr. T. Smith liked things explained properly, and this bright happiness lay beyond his explanation. It had nothing to do with his business, nothing to do with the buying and selling of shares. He knew that instinctively. His business was good, but it was not as good as that.

He stroked his bare chest and smiled. Something important was going to happen to him. He felt it in his bones. It was something that might alter his whole life…. But of what kind, he asked himself, opening another button, and staring fixedly at the milkman in the area.

So methodical was Mr. T. Smith, so regular in his life, that this stir of emotion upset him rather. His business, inherited from an uncle, was steady and lucrative. "Mr. T. Smith and Co." was respected in the City. It was a family business, his clients too respectable to allow of mistakes. They lived and died prepared— by Mr. T. Smith and Co. Irregularities played no role. His quarters in North London were also eminently right. His landlady, Miss Slumbubble, had looked after him for twenty years. She even mended his clothes; added new pockets when his money, wearing holes, slipped through. The first time, he

remembered, the new pocket was too deep so that his hand dipped to his knee to find a coin. But that was years ago….

Withdrawing from the open window, where the milkman watched him with too much interest, he thought, Mr. T. Smith dressed and went down to breakfast.

"You 'ad a good night?" asked Miss Slumbubble as usual, bringing the invariable eggs and bacon. "You slep' well, Mr. Smith?"

"Better than ever, thank you, Miss Slumbubble," he replied, also as usual. He wondered if she noticed the excitement that still burned in him like a flame. He hoped not.

Apparently she did not. "That mattress," she observed, "is the best in London. And I always make your bed myself, Mr. Smith."

She had said this every morning for the past twenty years, and Mr. T. Smith knew exactly the reply she expected. "I thought you had." He produced it with a smile, and began to eat his eggs.

Only Miss Slumbubble could not know with what curious excitement he had sprung from the "best mattress in London" an hour ago, nor with what a strange sense of anticipatory happiness he started forth upon his day. He put his impeccable tie, if possible, straighter, he tugged at his moustache, he took his umbrella, he set forth. "I feel a bit of a dog, you know, this morning," he caught himself saying under his breath— then turned sharply, for Miss Slumbubble stood behind him. She invariably saw him off to the City.

"Ah! Good-bye, Miss Slumbubble," he exclaimed as usual. "I shall be back by seven o'clock."

"And your dinner will be ready for you, Mr. Smith," replied the landlady, also as usual. "And I 'ope it won't rain."

Mr. Smith paused before making his customary comment. As a rule he said "I trust not," but this morning the words refused to come as they had always come before.

"It *can't*— today," he heard himself saying.

But the door slammed behind him as he said it. He heard the bang. He was not sure whether Miss Slumbubble had caught his words or not. He laughed to himself. He pulled at his moustache. Usually, it felt soft, but now, he noticed, it felt stiff and wiry. It bristled, tather. He laughed again and set forth briskly to walk across the Park to his office. He had, after all, forgotten his umbrella. "Something's wrong with me," he chuckled to himself, "or— perhaps— it's something right." He laughed outright. "Anyhow, it's— *different*."

Then, as he strode along, he suddenly recalled that Miss Slumbubble had made an unusual remark to him. His mind, occupied with something else at the

moment, had not noticed it. Now it came back to him. When he said it could not rain today, her comment was unexpected.

Ordinarily she would have said that "she 'oped not." This morning she said another thing: "Anything may 'appen," were the words she used.

"Anything," agreed Mr. T. Smith, laughing so happily that, as he crossed Bayswater Road into the Park, he nearly got run over.

ii

FOLLOWING the routine of years, he strolled across the Park, intending to take a bus eventually at Trafalgar Square. But today he felt a strange reluctance to go to his office.

He fought against this, for what would people say if Mr. T. Smith was late? He had never been late. His reputation was based upon his punctuality. His clients would talk. Even Miss Slumbubble might hear of it. It would never do if he dawdled.

"Bother Miss Slumbubble!" he suddenly exclaimed. "And hang my clients! What does it matter if I *am* late?"

All the way something was singing in his heart. Perhaps it was that the spring was running in his blood. For now, at last, the spring had really come. Late in May the sun had finally struggled out, and the endless winter seemed to be gone for good. He saw a swallow darting past a chimney. A whiff of warm, scented air blew over him. He thought of gorse and pine trees on some sandy waste… of lizards… butterflies….

He knew suddenly that it was something more than the spring. His whole being thrilled to a new rhythm. Someone— somewhere— had piped… and he had heard. The real man had answered.

Not Mr. T. Smith of Capel Court, but the other one— Tornado Smith.

For he now abruptly remembered that he was named Tornado. Mr. T. Smith, most people thought, was Thomas Smith, even Timothy Smith, but actually his first name was Tornado. And surely he was not called Tornado for nothing!

It was the half named Tornado that heard the queer piping and answered to it, the part of him that, against all judgement and reason, drove his little sailing boat out of the safety of the harbour into the wintry gales of his brief holidays— Tornado, the adventurer that underlay the man of business, the part of him that took wild, even ridiculous, risks from time to time. It was just this "something" belonging to "Tornado," that made him different from the jostling thousands he passed daily on his trudge to his office in the City.

Some spring, some bubble, danced now in his heart, discovered first, it seemed, in sleep.

His steps, unconsciously, became slower and slower. He found himself regretting that he could name no valid excuse for not turning up at the office. At every opportunity he paused and looked about him. He studied the shop windows with the closest attention, as if he had never seen them before—anything to prolong his walk. He was waiting for something. But what that "something" was he had no idea.

"*Tornado*," he repeated to himself with a new feeling of its significance. As though his father had been a whirlwind, his mother a storm. It made him laugh, as he dawdled on, staring at this and that, idling, drifting, waiting…

Still it was not till he had reached Trafalgar Square that he came definitely to a halt. The office seemed suddenly more than he could bear. He stopped dead. Something plucked at his heart. He watched the pigeons drinking at the fountains. He was very late already. He knew quite well that his secretary, with a bundle of tiresome letters, was fuming and fussing; clients were wondering why Mr. T. Smith was late. The telephone was ringing …tinging…

"Well, let it ring!" he thought to himself. "And let the secretary wait! And let the clients wonder why I'm late! It'll do them all good!"

He lingered in the warm sunshine, watching the pigeons preen themselves after their bath, or carrying on the love affairs that the sudden spell of fine weather provoked. The London sparrows, even the flies, detained him.

He caught himself wondering why he still lived in London. He had already made a good deal of money, enough to retire on. Why did he still waste what remained of his early manhood in this hateful way?

Were there not other lands that he could visit, lands with blue skies and sparkling seas? Countries free from the bugbear of what men called "progress," more primitive, perhaps, yet at the same time more peaceful? Places where people still sang at their work in the hot sunshine…?

He thought of all he had read about the lotus-lands of the East and of scattered isles in the Pacific, of coral reefs and golden strands. It was difficult to believe all the stories he had read about such places, though he remembered the strange thrill the reading had given him at the time. There ought to be, there *must* be, he felt, countries just like that, countries where things happened, countries where the inhabitants did more than merely catch buses and run for electric trains. He recalled the sunny, golden advertisements he had read, the travel-folders….

And he tried in his mind to decide if there was any place that absolutely fulfilled his requirements. He felt a little doubtful. Nothing short of a real fairyland would do.

For a long time he stood thus, gazing into the shimmering fountain, but he no longer saw the water where the dirty pigeons bathed. He saw the long line of a coral reef with the great combers breaking over it in silvery foam against a background of waving coconut palms on some enchanted island of the Southern Seas. Soft winds brushed his cheeks. He heard the sea-birds cry….

Dimly he became aware that a small boy was standing beside him, gazing up into his face with large, dark eyes. It was these enquiring eyes that first arrested his attention, for they shared, it seemed, his own vision, and saw what he saw. They were looking, surely, at something the others did not see.

Yet the boy, at the first glance, seemed commonplace enough— like hundreds of others one saw pouring out of school in a back street. Poorly clad, with a thin, half-starved body, there was nothing about him the least attractive. On the second glance, however, Tornado saw that there was a difference. His features were finer than those of the average slum child. In spite of his poor clothes, he carried himself with a certain air, a kind of unconscious grace that suggested some wild animal.

Mr. T. Smith, of Capel Court, found himself staring at him— as a dog or other wild creature stares— full of interest, curiosity, wonder, all of them spontaneous and unconscious.

"Buy a ticket, sir," said the boy in a pleasant, piping voice. "They're only a shilling."

"But where can I go— in these days— for a shilling?" Tornado asked, smiling.

"All the way," the boy answered gravely.

"*All* the way!" echoed Tornado doubtfully, his heart beating.

He saw that the boy actually held pieces of blue paper in his hand that looked like tickets. The sight troubled him.

"Of course," he stammered, "of course, I will." He tried to look as if he were amused, while actually a lump rose somewhere in his throat, as he handed the boy a shilling and took the blue strip of paper in exchange. His hand was shaking.

The little fellow turned to go, then stopped suddenly and came back.

"Be careful never to lose it, Tornado," he said shyly. "Full directions are written on the back." And he turned away a second time.

"But— how do you know my name?" enquired Tornado, trembling now all over.

The strange boy smiled up into his face. It was an entrancing smile.

"Oh, we know our customers," he said softly. "They are so few."

"You don't sell many then?" began Tornado.

This time the boy was really gone. It almost seemed as if he had vanished. He melted away so quickly into the passing throng.

Tornado looked at the blue slip of paper in his hand. On the back, sure enough, were some lines of writing. The thin, spidery letters were queer looking, and, instead of ink, some silvery liquid had been used. But the directions, once he mastered the script, were plain:

"*Be at the Robin Hood Gate at Richmond Park before noon,*" he read, "*and there you will see a girl knitting beneath an oak tree with a cat beside her. Show her this paper and she will put you on your way.*"

iii

FOR some time Tornado turned the paper over and over in his hand. Of course, it was all nonsense. It was some charity stunt, some treasure hunt organised to get money for a hospital. It was one of these modern tricks that extort money out of the sentimental crowd… And yet the whole thing fell in so well with his idle mood that it provided just the excuse he needed— not to go to his office.

"I will go," he informed himself, rather like a truant boy, "for the park will be lovely, and there may be somebody there!"

He started off.

Looking back afterwards, Tornado often thought that the strangest thing about this strange business was that, the moment he decided to go, no further thought of his neglected work, of his office, or even of his old life, ever crossed his mind. It was as if his normal life had ended suddenly. He seemed to have begun a new existence, while yet this "new existence" seemed always to have been *there*. It had always been within reach, only he had never found the way. The old shackles and ties were now cut through, at any rate, and a new and thrilling sense of freedom swept over him.

He had found liberty at last! He felt like a gipsy who leaves the old familiar camp behind him, knowing that the entire world is his to roam as he will. His office, his rooms, Miss Slumbubble, were wiped out as though they never had existed.

How he reached Richmond Park he never quite knew. No memory remains. Whether it was by bus or taxi, on foot, or otherwise, he could not say. It seemed to him sufficient that he found himself at the Robin Hood Gate in an incredibly short time. He was simply— there.

He looked about him eagerly, but at first could see no one that answered in any way to the description on his ticket. The sun blazed down from a cloudless sky; the trees and grasses still held the freshness of early spring; the scent of

the good clean earth was in his nostrils. And he drew in deep breaths of sheer delight at getting away so easily from the noise and smell of the city. The day was radiant, sparkling. His blood stirred within him.

A park keeper, he noticed, was chatting idly with a nurse girl, and an occasional car swept along the roadway with a swirl of dust, yet without a sound. They were like pictures only. But nowhere could he discover a girl beneath an oak tree with a cat beside her.

Putting his hand into his pocket, he pulled out the blue ticket, intending to read it over once again, but, even as his hand closed on it, he became aware that he was looking straight at the object of his search.

There sat a girl beneath an oak tree, exactly as described, and a black cat was licking its paws beside her. He gazed. A moment before, the spot was empty. Yet no surprise stirred in him. This, somehow, was just what he expected.

He was excited, but not troubled. A flicker of nerves, however, it seems, ran through him, for he dropped his ticket, and as it fluttered down and he stooped hurriedly to recover it, the girl and cat both vanished too. He could not be quite sure, perhaps, being too intent on picking it up again. Yet it was nowhere to be seen. Only a large green leaf lay at his feet. He grabbed it instantly— and, sure enough, he again held the ticket in his hand.

After all, he must have been mistaken about the disappearance of the girl and cat. There they both were in front of him, as plain as life.

He advanced. The girl watched him coming. She smiled.

"I'm glad you found your ticket," she said. "I was afraid you might have lost it altogether— like the others." Her voice was soft.

"Do most people lose it?" he found himself asking.

"Most, yes," she replied.

"And can you really show me the way?" he went on, after a pause.

The girl seemed amused at the question.

"Of course I can," she replied.

Something within him hesitated and was afraid. He was afraid of the question he wanted to ask, afraid that the reply would never satisfy him. He took a gulp of breath. Then he asked his question.

"Is it to— Fairyland?" came his whisper. "Is that what the ticket means— all the way to Fairyland?"

"I live there," replied the girl simply, "and my name is Chance. My sister, Luck, lives with me," she added, pointing to the cat.

"But how can a cat be your sister?" Tornado asked.

The girl, without answering, looked at the cat, and Tornado, following her glance, met the full glare of the cat's eyes. He felt a faint shiver run through

him. No further answer seemed necessary. The eyes that met his own were not the eyes of a cat, nor of a human being. They were the eyes, he realised of a spirit— the eyes of something— of someone— who had seen the birth and death of worlds, yet still lived on.

A feeling of chill swept over him. Questions that sprang to his lips died in his throat and remained unuttered. His breath failed him for some seconds. He stared from one to the other uncertainly, and for several minutes no one spoke.

With an effort, Tornado looked towards the park gates. To his surprise some subtle change was already at work. The gates became dim, the nurse girl and the keeper appeared less distinct. He gazed hard, trying to focus his sight, but a tenuous veil seemed to have fallen between him and the familiar world he knew of old. No effort he made could pierce it quite. This queer soft gauze fell between his sight and what he had always known as Reality.

He turned again to the girl. Change seemed to be at work in her too. She looked less homely somehow. Her hair, which he had before described to himself as a washed-out blonde, had deepened in colour; her rather faded blue eyes had lightened up. It was as if some hidden lamp shone through. She began to glow, to radiate light. Second by second her beauty increased. A kind of radiance seemed to surround her like a cloud, and this light glimmered everywhere through the air.

Tornado next became aware that in some strange way he, too, was changing. Slight tremors ran through him from his head to his feet. He felt that he was altering, adapting himself in some way to a changed condition of existence.

Everything in him, he felt, was being speeded up in marvellous fashion, quickened, heightened, swept into higher, swifter gears. His thoughts now tore through him at intenser speed. Rapidity was the keynote. Soon at this pace, he would pass beyond the need of ordinary thought at all, of thought as men knew it. A new power was invading him. Already he seemed beyond the need of speech with his companions. Words, syllables, were unnecessary, for in some strange way they answered his unuttered questions. The blood raced through his veins with a power that seemed strong enough to rend his body in pieces. The tear and rush were furious. Yet he remained utterly indifferent. In this new state the loss of his ordinary bodily sensations, perhaps even of his body too, appeared a matter too trivial to notice. There were more interesting things to think of than that.

All the familiar landmarks were already gone. The park gates, the keeper and the keeper's lodge had long since vanished, and only the tops of the biggest trees remained above a kind of whitish mist. Even while he looked,

these, too, disappeared with a kind of spiral swirl. The familiar world had faded.

He found himself upon a sandy path running through deep heather to a lonely sand beach.

The sun shone brightly on the sparkling water, and far away he could just make out the dim shape of an island. Gulls wheeled about the shore, and a heron, on lazy wing, passed circling over his head.

He looked round for his companions. The cat had gone, and in its place stood a dark and lovely girl. Her sister, the fair one, stood beside her, smiling gravely.

"You may call us Chance and Luck," she said, "for thus are we known among men. But these are only names. Others call us Fate and Destiny, though these, too, are wrong. In reality there is only the Deed and the Payment." She paused and gazed into his eyes. "Perhaps, this is too hard for you," she went on gently, "but, if so, Merlin will explain, for he is the wisest of those who dwell in Fairyland."

iv

TORNADO was in no mood to quibble about names, or as to what Chance meant by her talk of Merlin. He felt a new life pulsing through his veins, and his heart sang with happiness. He noted, almost without astonishment, that he had shed his old clothes somewhere on the journey, his usual City clothes. Now he stood clad only in a leather jerkin with bare and sunburnt legs, and instead of shoes he wore rough sandals of deer's hide. A long hunting knife swung at his belt. Only one thing was missing, a familiar thing that ought to have been there too. What it was he could not say. He recognised its absence— no more than that.

He noted these changes without surprise, but at the same time there came a fugitive flash of memory— a memory of a dream, perhaps, that had come to him only last night. Dreams have this way of cropping up in stray fragments sometimes.

"Miss— er— Slum" he could not get the whole name, "and that place of torture I was going to in my dreams— a bell ringing, ringing— letter— lots of letters— Mr. T. Smith ." He passed his hand across his eyes in a vague effort to remember— "dear, dear, what a horrid dream it was— and there's something I've forgotten— I wonder … I *wonder*…"

His eyes caught the figures of the two girls running past him, and all memory of his dream slipped from his consciousness in the way dreams always slip away and are forgotten. His years had fallen from him like the leaves of a

tree, and the vigour of youth was in his blood. Adventure was calling to him with her deathless voice. Laughing, he ran down the path to join his two companions on the edge of the water. He saw their gleaming white legs as they stepped into a small sailing-boat lying in the cove, its bow resting on the yellow sand, its stern just afloat. As he reached them they paused and looked at him. They leaped back to join him, sitting down on the sand and motioning to him to do the same.

Tornado sat down beside them.

"There's the boat that will take you to Fairyland," said Chance, smiling at him mischievously. "Have you the courage to go in her?"

"I think so," he replied. "What are the dangers?"

The two sisters whispered together for a moment. It was Luck who answered him:

"There is the danger of never getting back," she said, "of never returning. It takes courage, too, to cross the Dragon Field to get to your home."

"My home!" he exclaimed.

Looking at him encouragingly, they laughed, and their laughter, he thought, was like the music of bells coming faintly, sweetly across summer meadows.

"Your home, yes," explained Chance. "Hasn't your home always been here? Haven't you yourself made it here? Through all the dull years, haven't you dreamed of a little house on the edge of the forest, near a pool where the deer come down to drink at nightfall? And a glade where the stags roar when the autumn leaves are falling? And a sailing boat that will take you far away to some enchanted isle? And a girl, perhaps, with dark hair or with blond, and smiling eyes and happy laughter?"

He knew it was all too true. For years and years, all through his life, he had dreamed such things. From boyhood he had dreamed of fords where knights-errant held the crossings against all comers. Sometimes in his dreams he had seen a battlemented town gay with flags, with strange old-world houses and narrow, twisting streets. Time after time he had seen the same town, so that in the end it had become as familiar to him as his own small bit of London. He could find his way about it quite well. He knew where the armourer had his shop and where the leather-workers lived. Even the faces of the people who kept the market stalls in the quaint little square by the church were all familiar. Yet he was never quite sure of his own standing in the town. Even in his dreams he was a little puzzled. Some of the people saw and recognised him, but others completely ignored him as though he was not there. All the same, he felt that it was his own town in a sense. He knew it all, from the archery butts to the tilting ground, where brave tournaments were held with the splintering of lances.

He looked at his two companions. He saw that they read his thoughts, and that there was no need of explanations.

"Tell me, please, about the Dragon Field," he said, a queer trembling shyness in him. "Are they dangerous?"

"They are terrifying," said Luck. "You see, they are the Guardians, and they don't let everybody by. They will not touch *you*."

"Whom do they stop?" he asked.

Luck reflected a moment. "Oh, quite a lot of people," she replied presently. "Those who are cruel to animals and children chiefly. Then money-grubbers and gluttons, the kind that are always thinking of their comfort and their clothes and their looks. Fat people, too, with shiny skins. You know the sort."

Tornado sighed. "Of course," he agreed, "it would never do to let them in. They would make the place impossible."

"And people who never, never take any sort of risk," Luck added.

"Ah!" said Tornado to himself, and fell to thinking.

"Is that Fairyland that I see over there?" he asked after a while, pointing to a misty island far away. He had noticed it when he first arrived at the beach. Very dim and distant it seemed.

Luck's expression and voice were graver as she answered. "You would find it difficult to land there," she told him. "That is called Hy-Bresil by some, by others the Isle of Avalon. The souls of those who perish on some high adventure go there. It is where King Arthur went to rest after his last battle and before he came back to take possession of his two kingdoms."

"His two kingdoms?" Tornado exclaimed.

"Yes," replied Luck, "for does he not reign forever in the hearts of the young— and in Fairyland?"

She turned and looked at her sister, exchanging an understanding smile, then turned back to Tornado.

"And now we must leave you," she said. "There is your boat. Follow that gull with the black patch on his wing, and he will guide you."

The two sisters drew aside and waited, and though Tornado could have gone on talking with them forever, he realised by the tone of the girl's voice, as also by the smile he had seen on both their faces, that it was time for him to go. He, at any rate, was not one of those who never take a risk, he tried to assure himself.

He got into the boat and stepped the mast. A light wind had sprung up, blowing off the land. He said good-bye to the two girls and pushed off boldly. He set the sail. Gaily the little craft slid through the water towards its strange and distant goal, as, looking back, he saw Luck and Chance still standing on the yellow beach, side by side, watching him. He waved his hand and they waved

back. A moment later, when he turned again, he saw them turn and walk away inland till they disappeared among the trees.

The gull flew steadily ahead, occasionally soaring high up into the blue, at other times diving down and lightly skimming the tops of the waves. Sometimes it flew round and round the boat for a few moments, passing close to Tornado's head and peering into his face with its bright peeping eyes.

The wind increased the farther he left the shore, and Tornado found that his little boat was really travelling quite fast through the water. He soon lost sight of land, and only the misty shores of Hy-Bresil were visible far ahead. He must have sailed like this for some hours before he discerned a dark spot on the horizon. The wind was rising all this time, and his boat seemed to travel ever faster and faster, leaping from wave to wave like a thing possessed.

For the past hour or two he had been afraid of driving her under and had eased her occasionally, but seeing how bravely she sailed he now let her have her head, comforting himself with the thought that she was a magic boat in any case and ought to know how to keep afloat.

The land drew nearer. He was now rapidly getting near enough to distinguish details. Tall hills, he saw rose inland, but close along the shore the ground seemed to be flat and wooded. He could see no signs of houses or inhabitants. The coast appeared utterly deserted. But it was also an iron-bound coast. Great rocks jutted out into the sea and the waves broke white over them. The flat portions of the shore, he now saw, were few and far between.

It looked impossible for a small boat to make the land; but Tornado, with blind faith in the gull, followed where it led— straight in towards the rocks. Once or twice, he noticed, the bird turned its head quickly as though to reassure him. Nearer and nearer they came, and though he felt a little sick with fear, there was no turning back now. The roar of the surf thundered all round him, the spray wet his face, and the boat felt the surge of the great combers as they hurled themselves over the jagged rocks. He held his breath.

At the last moment, when everything seemed lost, a narrow channel opened suddenly before him, and the little boat swept through between the dangerous rocky walls into a tiny cove. Once inside, all was quiet. The wind, shut off by the high walls all round, hardly rippled the surface of the blue water which lapped peacefully along the narrow sandy bay. And, to his surprise, he saw that there was actually a little pier made of rough slabs of stone, with a ring of twisted withies to which he could fasten his boat. A moment later he had tied her up and leapt ashore.

The gull, as if satisfied that its job was done, flew several times round his head, screaming shrilly as though to say good-bye, and then headed straight out to sea. Tornado waved his hand in farewell. He fancied he saw it flirt its

wing with the black spot by way of answer. He watched it disappear into the blaze of sunshine above the wide blue sea.

v

TORNADO stood still for some time, taking stock of his surroundings. There seemed to be a footpath from the pier that led directly into the forest. It lost itself at once among the dense trees. After examining the ground in all directions this path appeared the only way he could go, for the shore revealed no openings, and behind him was, of course, the open sea. His best, his only, plan was to follow where it led, since it must, at any rate, lead somewhere.

"Now for the dragons!" he thought uneasily, as a wave of misgiving swept over him. Instinctively, as he started, he loosened the long hunting knife at his belt, although he knew quite well that it would be useless against a dragon that really meant business. The undoubted fact that he was taking a risk pleased him nevertheless; it proved him worthy of being admitted to Hy-Bresil.

As he went cautiously along, keeping his eyes on both sides and in front as well, the trees grew thicker and thicker, larger and larger, so that at last he appeared to be walking in a kind of green tunnel, the branches meeting above his head. Here and there a splash of sunlight stole through and turned some strange flower by the path into a flaming jewel. His feet made no sound on the mossy ground. Silent as the grave the forest was, for no wind stirred.

Quite suddenly, the path led into the open, the trees fell away, and a large clearing lay before him. Deer were grazing quietly all over it. Tornado stiffened like a dog scenting game and almost unconsciously slipped behind a tree to watch them. There were red deer and fallow, here and there an occasional roe, while in the distance he saw other deer that were quite strange to him. But, as his eyes swept the herds, picking out the best beasts in each, his attention was suddenly held by the sight of another animal altogether, and a very weird one.

It was lying down when he first saw it, but, as he watched, it rose slowly and stretched itself. Larger than a stag, he noticed, and coloured like a rocking-horse, dappled black and white. There was no mistaking what it was when he saw the long straight horn coming out of the forehead. He caught his breath. It was the unicorn. Its eyes gazed gently about it, as though, without being alarmed, it somehow knew that a stranger was in its neighbourhood.

"What a gracious, splendid creature!" he exclaimed to himself as he gazed, and a thrill ran through him, for he knew that the unicorn roams no other pastures save those of Fairyland, and that he had, therefore, really arrived.

He must have stood behind his tree for a long time watching the stately creature, his eyes wandering towards the deer as well, for he had quite

forgotten the matter of dragons being possibly in the neighbourhood, when there came a sudden roaring in the sky, and Tornado, quickly looking up, saw six dark shapes rushing downwards at tremendous speed towards the forest; indeed, towards the very clearing at whose edge he stood concealed. What looked like jets of flame preceded them, issuing, apparently, from their mouths. They made a curious loud rattling sound, with other noises that were half hooting and half growling.

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed. "The dragons!"

The shock to his mind and nerves was very considerable, yet his interest was so intense that his fear was not more than he could manage. It was odd, however, that just at this very moment when his entire attention should have been occupied with this arresting sight, he found time to think of something else— that he had forgotten something. This certainty that some familiar object was missing came back again. His hand flew to his knife, but the knife was in its place. There was another thing he ought to have had with him, only for the life of him he could not remember what it was. It was something he always carried. He used it for protection overhead. What it was, however, he could not imagine. He had not got it— that was all he knew.

This thought flashed through his mind, then vanished utterly— and he concentrated all his attention again on the dragons. They were much lower now, just above the tree-tops, in fact, and one by one he saw them plane down into the clearing and settle among the feeding deer as quietly as though they were so many crows. The deer, too, seemed undisturbed by their arrival, moving calmly to one side to give them room to land. The unicorn went on rubbing its horn against a tree. Only they were most certainly not crows. The jets of flame that had poured out of their nostrils while they were in full flight had died down, but a red glow showed when they opened their tremendous mouths, while thin wisps of smoke curled round their jagged lips and floated upwards into the still air. Their huge sides rose and fell as they breathed, accompanied by an odd noise, half rattling, half clanking, that was almost metallic, and came, it seemed, from their interior.

Tornado now felt really frightened. The appearance of these monstrous brutes was chilling to the blood. Any one of them could have swallowed him at a single gulp; their fiery breath could burn him to an ash in a moment; a blow from a single tail— and he would be reduced to a pulp of broken bones and flesh. They were covered, he saw, with bright green scales which gave out a clashing sound as they moved. Their legs and claws were a brilliant scarlet, while their eyes, as large as sou plates, glowed with alternate red and green as touch lit by some internal fire.

On landing they had folded their wings, which towered above their backs fully thirty feet into the air. He stared and stared, and the more he stared the less he liked them. He realised that their arrival coincided too accurately with his own: they arrived because he had arrived. The whole six of them, he noticed, had drawn themselves up directly opposite to where he hid behind his tree, and the path he had been following, the only path there was, ran right through the snide of them. They had arranged themselves with military precision, three on each side of the path.

Peering cautiously round the trunk that sheltered him, he noticed these details. And his heart sank into his deerskin sandals.

Yet his profound trust in what Luck and Chance had told him did not waver. So far, he reflected, he had come safely owing to their guidance. He realised he must trust them to the end, or else fail to prove himself worthy of his quest. His muscles, however, were like paper in his legs. He dared not, could not, move— when, suddenly, he heard a far, shrill cry, and, looking up, he saw the gull with the spotted wing in the air above the trees. It circled once, peeped down at him, uttered its shrill cry a second time, and vanished into space.

It was this that decided him to act. Summoning up all his courage, he took the risk. He stepped out from behind his tree and walked slowly but steadily forward in the direction of the waiting dragons.

The nearer he drew to them the less he liked it. His blood was water. He trembled. But he walked fairly straight, giving no outward sign of flinching. Only a few yards now separated him from the first couple in the dreadful row and he realised that there was only just room to pass between them without actually touching. The slightest stumble, leaning an inch to right or left, would mean that he would brush the awful jaws. Indeed, as he moved slowly forward, the dragon on the right yawned widely, showing an enormous mouth with huge pointed teeth and a red tongue that flickered in and out with a ghastly significance. It was licking its Sea lips, of course. But the behaviour of its companion facing it on the left seemed even more ominous, for its immense tail began to twitch and swing from side to side like the tail of a cat before it springs. It seemed to be gathering its vast legs under it as a kitten does when it leaps playfully at a ball.

Tornado felt himself as the ball. His body dripped with perspiration. His legs only just supported him. But he still kept moving with slow steps forward, nearer and ever nearer.

At last he was actually between the first pair of mighty heads. The creature eyed him, but did not move. He passed slowly onwards. He reached the second pair, whose eyes similarly followed him, the bodies keeping motionless. A whiff of burning brimstone came to his nostrils, blended, he fancied, with another

smell that was curiously familiar, though he could not name it. He knew the name, but it had vanished with another part of his life which, equally, was forgotten.

The dragons, as he passed further between four more pairs of heads, never moved, though following him steadily with their huge, fiery eyes.

When half-way down the line Tornado only just controlled a violent impulse to make a sudden run for it. It occurred to him to dash wildly forward as fast as ever he could sprint— and trust to luck. But as the idea took form in his mind, the words "trust to Luck" brought the quick knowledge that to carry out his plan would betray cowardice and failure. To trust to Luck and Chance was not to run away. There was Destiny. And Destiny, though implacable, obeyed courage and determination. He held on his dreadful way to the end.

And the end came, at last, without disaster. He passed the final pair of monsters safely. Not one of the dragons had moved. Now that he was beyond them, though only a few feet, they still crouched unmoved upon the forest sward. Joy! He had not failed himself! He had proved worthy of the heritage of Hy-Bresil, if only by the skin of his teeth!

Trying not to break into a run, Tornado, his breath irregular, his heart thumping like a little drum, followed the path. The unicorn came close, lowered its stately head, and nuzzled his shoulder with its dangerous pointed horn. He looked a moment into its gentle eyes. The herds of deer divided quietly to let him pass, then fell to feeding again, quite undisturbed. In fact, he had to wait once while a large company of them crossed in front of him.

He had not looked back as yet, but now he heard suddenly a tremendous rattling clatter, a hissing and a hooting, and, turning his head, he saw the great dragons take the air. It was a wondrous sight. They rose without effort, snorting fire and smoke, their scales a din of clanking metal, and, once above the trees, he saw the whole six pass across the sky in a wedge-shape formation like a skein of monstrous geese. They became smaller and smaller as they rose into upper space, their roaring died away, they were gone.

Neither the deer nor the unicorn, he noticed, paid the slightest attention to this great commotion. Silence and peace descended again upon the forest.

vi

TORNADO drew a deep breath and felt happier than ever in his life before. Such happiness seemed incredible, yet he experienced it. He was coming closer and closer to something he had always yearned for. He longed to wait a while and make closer friends with the attractive unicorn, but some instinct warned

him that he must not linger, but should push on farther, for the climax of what he sought lay yet in front of him.

He had now reached the far side of the clearing The sun was sinking, the shadows growing longer. He began to think vaguely about food, about where and how he was going to sleep as well. He was not tired, but sleep when the sun went down seemed natural. Should he lie down on the moss and ferns? Should he look about for berries? The music of a tinkling stream reminded him that he was thirsty. He knelt down and drank his fill of sparkling water.

As he rose to his feet again the forest, it seemed, wore another look. It was not *quite* the same as when he knelt down a minute ago. He gazed about him. There was a certain curious change, he fancied. He felt he had seen it before. The fringe of the woods he was now approaching wore almost a familiar guise. This old impression grew stronger as he walked slowly on. The path, unless he was mistaken, would presently take a sharp turn to the left just beyond that old gnarled oak tree. There would be a cottage with a pool of water beside it. He would go up and knock on the door, and the door would open….

Sure enough, it proved exactly as he imagined. Leaving the forest, the path turned sharply to the left. There stood the cottage, the cottage of his desires, and the pool that he had loved so long in dream. And that figure among the sunflowers, was it Luck or Chance? He could not quite see. It disappeared behind the rows of sunflowers where he saw the unicorn gazing gently at him over the towering foxgloves. It was coming in by the back way, of course, to open to him. His heart rose triumphantly within him. He wanted to shout and sing. He had at last come— Home!

Tornado, his blood pulsing with this happiness, strode boldly up to the door. He knocked confidently. He stood waiting a moment. No one came at first. He knocked again, but still no one came; there was no sound of a footfall. A vague feeling of disquietude stole over him. Ah! there was another way of getting in, he seemed to remember, and his hand went automatically down the side of his leg as if hunting for something he expected to find there.

Was it a pocket he sought? His pocket, at any rate, was there as usual. The thing he looked for, too, lay hard and firm inside it. He drew out his key and inserted it without effort in the lock. The door opened easily as usual. He went in, also as usual. There before him stood his girl-secretary, a pile of letters behind her on the desk, again as usual.

A bell was ringing impatiently, ringing ringing….

The girl's face wore a half reproachful look as she bade him respectfully good morning.

"A little late, am I…?" offered Mr. T. Smith, a trifle apologetically. "I— er— walked the whole way, I'm afraid. The morning," he added, "was so fine, you know…."

"Yes, Mr. Smith," replied the girl. "A pity it's clouded over since." She turned away to answer the telephone, which kept on ringing, ringing.

Even as she said the words he noticed that the first early brilliance indeed had passed. The sky outside was dark and lowering. Rain obviously threatened. The girl was gabbing at the telephone. He waited, listening.

"Miss Slumbubble, sir," she reported, receiver down. "To say you forgot your umbrella. She's sending it at once by messenger."

"Oh— ah— yes," he murmured vaguely. "I— knew I had forgotten— something."

He glanced at his watch. After all, he was only fifteen minutes late.

And perhaps another fifteen minutes had passed when a small messenger boy arrived with his umbrella, offering a piece of blue paper which Mr. T. Smith signed by way of receipt, having first paid the little bright-eyed lad a shilling. He signed without thinking, "Tornado Smith,"

———————————

15: Bob Corrigan's Bluff

William Slavens McNutt

1885-1938

The Popular Magazine 1 May 1914

William Slavens McNutt

American author and Hollywood screenwriter

THE brigantine *Anita*, eighteen days out from Valparaiso, was steering nor' nor'east under a cloud of canvas. Captain Bob Corrigan was standing on the weather side of the poop deck, with a length of marline, puzzling young Martin Hartman, the supercargo, with the baffling simplicity of a "tomfool's knot."

The *Anita* was one of the old Baltimore clippers, built originally for use as a slaver, and later put into the fruit trade, between New York and the Mediterranean. She had come around the Horn with a general cargo, and put into Valparaiso, with one of her butts sprung. She had been condemned there, and Corrigan had bought her for a song and fitted her out for a pearl fisher.

When she sailed from Valparaiso under tops'ls, with an old grayback souther blowing, Corrigan was walking the deck of one of the smartest. vessels that ever sailed the South Pacific. The shores of the world are strewn with the bones of the old clipper ships built in Boston and Baltimore, and never a skeleton of them all but what has written a page in the history of the sea that the men who built and sailed them may well be proud of.

With him on the trip as supercargo, went Martin Hartman, a young fellow from Boston, with a weak lung and a taste for adventure.

Hartman took the marline from Corrigan's hands, and made his hundredth attempt to tie the simple knot that he had so carefully watched Corrigan carelessly tie.

"You've got that piece of grown-up string bewitched,' he declared disgustedly, as he botched the knot again. "I know I did just what you did with it, but it won't behave for me."

Corrigan grinned. "There's other things besides law that need a lot of study to learn," he advised him. "There's things taught outside of college, son."

"La-a-a-nd ho-o-o," the long-drawn cry quavered from the lookout on the upper foretops'l yard.

"Where away?" Corrigan sang aloft through his cupped hands.

"One point on the port bow, sir," answer came back.

"That's Gorgona," Corrigan replied to Hartman's look of inquiry.

"Keep her on her course, Mr. Diaz," he instructed his Chilean mate. "When the south end of the island's abeam, call me."

"I can't make out any land," Hartman worried, searching the horizon through the long glass.

"You haven't got the right kind of a telescope to see through the ocean," Corrigan answered him dryly. "That land won't be in sight from the deck for another hour yet. If you want to go aloft, why

"Not at an " Martin hastily disclaimed any ambition to climb the rigging. "I've descended farther from my simian ancestors than the rest of you. I'm not comfortable hanging to a rope halfway between where I belong and heaven. I'll wait, thanks."

Corrigan laughed. "Have it your own way. You should have shipped before the mast with me instead of supercargo. If you had, TIl guarantee you'd be able to go aloft by this time."

"When I'm tired of life, I'll ship before the mast with you," Hartman replied. "For a landlubber, that's one of the most interesting forms of suicide I can imagine."

"I'll show you a better one when we come to sail through the channel in the reef that runs clear around the island," Corrigan assured him. "It's so narrow you could jump to the reef from the bulwarks on either side as we go through. Any time a landlubber wants a glorious finish, let him try to work a vessel through there with a little sea running. Come below, and I'll beat you one more game of crib while I've still got the time."

"SCHOONER in sight a point off the port bow, sir," Diaz interrupted the crib game in the cabin, a half hour later. "She's just stood off from the island, and I think from the look of her she's Beak Farley's *Albatross*."

Corrigan dropped his cards on the table and settled back slowly in his chair, staring at the mate, while his face underwent a change that sent an unpleasant tingle vibrating along Hartman's spine. Corrigan had been in an unusually good

humor during the entire trip out from Valparaiso. He had the deed to Gorgona Island, bought at an absurdly low figure; young Hartman pleased him as a companion, and he had been buoyed with a born seaman's pride in the smartness of his vessel. Hartman had wondered much that the pleasant man with the quizzical gray eyes and the mocking smile should have the reputation that he knew was Corrigan's.

As he looked at him now, he understood. Anger had transformed the big Irishman's face, as a mountebank artist changes his sketch of a beautiful girl into a hideous demon with a few deft strokes. The genial host had disappeared, and a man as deadly in appearance as a coiled rattlesnake sat in the chair before him. The twinkle was gone from the gray eyes, and they gleamed from under his thick brows like bits of ice. The quizzical face was scarred suddenly with ugly lines of hate. The wide lines were drawn into a thin, inverted semicircle of sullen determination.

"Load that long nine in the bow," he said. "If that poacher Farley's been at those beds, they're not worth the price of the crew's grub for the trip. Beak Farley, huh? I've been afoul of him before. Get those rifles up and loaded, and have them ready to hand out to the crew if we need them I've bought the pearl rights on this island and paid for them in good money; and if Beak Farley's fished in those beds, he's only saved me the trouble. We'll take them shooting instead of fishing, and the work'll be done the quicker."

"Poacher?" Hartman inquired, when the mate had left.

"Meanest thief in the South Pacific," Corrigan answered shortly. "He's stole his last if he's fished my beds."

He took a black bottle from his locker, and poured himself a water tumbler full of the fiery brandy.

"Here's to whats comin'," he said grimly, holding the glass aloft. "If that's Beak Farley, and he's got my pearls and shell, you'll see shark bait made in this next hour, son."

He downed the brandy at a gulp, and buckled a belt with ammunition and two forty-fives about his waist.

"Come on up if your stomach can stand the fun," he invited Hartman. "But if blood bothers you, stop below, and I'll tell you about it when it's over."

Hartman's face was pale, and little drops of sweat were noticeable on his forehead; but he managed a shaky laugh.

"Its something like this I always wanted to see," he declared. "I admit I'm scared to death, but I'm going to watch it from on deck if I can keep my cowardly legs from scuttling down below here with me when it starts."

Corrigan favored him with a little glance of almost admiration. "You're the kind of a coward that makes a hell-roaring fighter if you can make yourself

stand the gaff just once. Grab that rifle there, and if there's need for gun play, do some shooting of your own, early in the game. If there's any fight in your make-up, you'll forget there's any such thing as fear when you've fired the first two or three shots. Come on."

When Corrigan and Hartman came on deck, the men of both watches were in the shrouds, chattering excitedly and watching the far-off schooner. Corrigan trained the long glass on the approaching vessel and nodded.

"That's the *Albatross*, but what's she standing toward us for? If Beak Farley's been poaching, he'd be showing a pair of heels to any vessel of this size that hove in sight."

"She's signaling, sir,' the lookout sang down from the foretops'l yard. "Ensign at the main peak with the union down."

Corrigan frowned thoughtfully.

"That's the distress signal," he enlightened Hartman. "Something amiss with her. Starboard, my man— steady! Now, Mr. Diaz, run down across her stern there, and heave to leeward of her within about three ship lengths with your head yards aback."

"Aye, aye, sir."

"And deal out those rifles to the crew. I know Beak Farley of old, and I don't think much of this distress signal of his. That long nine loaded?"

"Yes, sir."

"Have her manned, and stand ready to fire at the word."

"I can only see three men on deck," Hartman said, as they drew toward the schooner.

"And I don't like that, either," Corrigan growled. "I think there's a bunch of 'em hid. I can make out Farley now. Thats him on the poop there with his glasses on us."

When the *Anita* was yet a mile distant, the schooner was hove to with her jib sheets to windward, and the foresheet eased off. The *Anita* ran down across her stern, luffed to with her head yards aback, and deadened her way, four ship lengths from the schooner. A boat was lowered from the schooner and a mountain of a man in white duck was rowed across to the *Anita* by one sailor. Only one man was left in sight on the deck of ihe *Albatross*. The big man came grunting up the ladder let over the side of the *Anita*, and vaulted over the bulwarks with an agility incongruous with his size.

He stood easily six feet four, and weighed over three hundred pounds. His tremendous head was covered with a thick thatch of short, curly black hair, sprinkled with gray. His eyes were mere glints of black specks, glinting from between the puffy eyelids. He was enormously fat and wheezed asthmatically

when he exerted himself; but he nevertheless gave the impression of great physical power and agility.

He spoke in a high, thin, whiny voice, that was ludicrous in contrast with his great bulk. "I'm in a tight box, Cap' Corrigan," he wheezed. "I'd rather somebody would come along that wouldn't stick me for as tight a bargain as I know you'll, drive to help me out, but I'm glad to see a man with nerve, who'll take a chance."

Corrigan, standing on the lee side of the poop, with his hands laced behind his back, eyed the fat man in silence.

"Where's your crew?" he demanded suddenly, after an uncomfortable interval.

"Ashore, blast 'em!" Farley answered pettishly. "The mutinous—"

"How many aboard your schooner now?"

"Only one. The rest—"

"We'll hear all that below. Keep that long nine trained on the schooner, Mr. Diaz, and if you see more than that one man aboard of her, don't wait for me to give the word to fire. If you're lying to me, you're a fool, Beak Farley."

"You're an awful suspicious man, Bob," Farley complained in his high whine. "That's the worst fault I got to find with you. You always think beause—"

"Stop that, you thieving pirate! You'd cut your mother's throat for a tin dollar. Come below."

"My danged crew's mutinied on me, if you want to know." Farley commenced his explanation querulously, when they entered the cabin. "I was pearling here on—"

"Pearling, huh?' Corrigan interrupted him explosively. "On Gorgona?"

"Think I was fishing off Point Barrow?" Farley inquired caustically. "Certainly on Gorgona. I was pearling there and—"

"And that will be about enough for me to know. Just cast your eyes over that little document, you fat thief."

Corrigan slapped his deed to Gorgona on the cabin table in front of Farley. The fat man picked it up, fished a pair of nose glasses from his shirt pocket, and carefully adjusted them on the high bridge of his beak nose that had given him his name.

He studied the deed over judiciously, his comically pursed lips silently forming the words as he read them over. And suddenly he laughed. He laughed silently at first, tilting his great head far back and closing his tiny, piglike eyes. His whole body shook with mirth to which he gave no voice, and two tiny tears of merriment forced themselves between the clamped eyelids, and meandered aimlessly down over the ovał of his cheeks.

"Heh!" he-piped shrilly, opening his eyes, and winking at Corrigan. "This is a deed to Gorgona, Bob!"

"That's what I supposed when I paid for it," Corrigan answered irritably. "You acted like you thought it was a funny paper of some sort."

"The funniest I ever read," Farley assured him solemnly. "I don't recollect havin' ever read anything quite that funny, Bob. You don't see the joke yet?"

"I do not."

"You ain't got no sense o' humor. Now I see the joke the first time I ever read this thing."

"I noticed you did. But—"

"Oh, this ain't my first readin', Bob. No, indeed. You wasn't around when I first read this deed. There wasn't nobody there that time but just Don Ramon de Cruze an' me. Just us two, Bob."

Corrigan whipped one of the guns from his belt, and thrust the muzzle against Farley's forehead.

"If you know anything, you talk, and talk sense," he ordered grimly. "If you don't, say so, and stop this darned nonsense."

Farley looked fair at him, and, without the quiver of a muscle in his face, pushed the menacing barrel aside.

"Oh, put that thing up," he said shortly, in a tone suddenly grown hard and purposeful. "I'll talk sense to you fast enough. Ramon tried to stick me with that deed to the island, but his price was too low, and I smelled a rat. I went looking for Mr. Rat and I found him; found him in a law book in Valparaiso. Ramon bought the island from Frederico Alvares and paid for it; that part of it's all right. The funny part or it all is that it was not Frederico's to sell. No, it wasn't. The government deeded the island to his grandfather, and Frederico inherited it all fair enough. It was his to give to his children, Dut Frederico was the last of his line, and the island reverted to the Colombian government at Frederico's death. A gift of the government may never be sold by the man receiving, or any of his heirs. Now do you see the joke?"

"Ha, ha!' Corrigan enunciated solemnly. "Hear me laugh? So Ramon bled me for five thousand dollars, huh? Pll remember it. That makes no difference to me now, though; Icame to fish these oyster beds, and fish 'em I will. The government can whistle. I say the island's mine, and what I say goes just now. If you've got any shell you can just deliver it up, because I've bought that island in good faith, and I consider the shell as mine. I'm going to take it unless you know of somebody that'll stop me?"

"I do."

"Who?"

"Don Ramon."

"Ramon?"

"To be sure, Ramon." Farley wrinkled his smooth brow in a tight little frown of disgust. "You show the sense of a turtle, Corrigan," he declared. "I'm sorry to see your wits so dull, because we've got to act together if either one of us is to get out with any profit out of this trip over here. Listen to me: When Ramon found that his title to the island was no good, do you know what he went and did? No. Well, I do. He went and bought the concession from the government to fish these oyster beds, and then he went looking for a sucker to buy his deed to the island. When he was trying to sell it to me, he had his own ship fixed up, ready to sail, and he had the gunboat ready to sail at any minute under his orders to protect his rights on this island. If I'd bought that deed, I'd just about got here when he'd have showed up with his gunboat to drive me off. That's what he'd o' done to me, and that's what he's goin' to do to you, Bob Corrigan. I'll bet my whole schooner agen a moldy sea biscuit, that Ramon an' the gunboat ain't three days behind you right now. They'll nab you before you can do any fishing, and the best you can do is pocket your loss for the trip and the worthless deed; sail back to Valparaiso; oil up your gun, and wait for a good shot at Ramon when he gets back with all the pearl, and shell, and your five thousand dollars to boot."

Corrigan eyed Farley steadily. "I wonder if you lie," he speculated softly.

'Farley shrugged his shoulders. "Keep on a wonderin',' he said resignedly. "An' every minute you spend wonderin', Ramon an' the gunboat are gettin' nearer an' we got less chance to go pardners, an' get away with some 0' this stuff."

"You say pardners? What's your proposition ?"

Farley inclined his great bulk fotward till he sprawled over the table.

"I got four boats out workin' and have had for the past two months," he said. "I've got twenty-four men workin', an' they've took up about forty-five ton of shell. The shell's all stowed ashore in a bamboo shed there where they been workin'. That's twenty-seven thousand some odd dollars' worth o' shell, at the last quotations I heard; an' I claim that's worth takin' away. Good enough. Now, my men signed on for wages. I told 'em I had the concession to fish here, and the bluff went for a bit; but they got suspicious that I was poachin', and finally they mutinied on me. They want a share in the shell; an' if they don't get it, they won't load the shell on the schooner. They would o rushed the schooner to-day, but I found out about it an' got away to sea early this morning with my first and second mates. They've got the shell ashore and my four boats; I've got the schooner, and they can't get away without her. You've got the men, and the arms te make these men behave. Do you see it?

You tame this crew for me, we split even on the shell, and get away before Ramon with the gunboat gets here. What about it?"

Corrigan laughed. "If I had a royal flush, and you held a crooked straight, would I divide the pot with you? That's child's talk. If I go ashore and tame this wild bunch of yours, why should I divide the shell with you?"

"Because the shell's only part of it," Farley answered him. "We've got some fine pearls out of that lot."

"Why shouldn't I take your schooner along with me when I leave the island, and search her for pearls when I've the time for it?"

Farley's mountainous body shook with the vibration of his silent mirth. "They're not aboard, Corrigan," he declared. "I've got them hid ashore."

Corrigan studied him intently. "I wonder," he muttered softly.

"I know you do," Farley replied.

"But it's the truth, Corrigan. The pearls are hid ashore. There is thirty thousand dollars' worth there, Bob. You work half in half with me on the deal, or you'll never see them."

"I think you're lying, but I'll do it," Corrigan agreed.

Farley favored him with a sly wink. "I knew you would, Bob," he confided. "It's a shame for me to split even with you, though. It ought to be easy for me to swindle the man who was taken in by Ramon so easily."

"If you're tired o' life, start something like that," Corrigan advised him. "You'll never get out o` gunshot o' me or one ọ my men till our score is settled, Farley. My brain may be gettin' addled, but I can still drive a nail in the mast at thirty paces with a fortyfive."

Farley shook his head wearily. "You will brag, Bob," he said resignedly. "Very bad habit. Very bad. I shoot a pretty good gun myself, but I wouldn't boast about it in company."

Corrigan's eyes narrowed. He drew a gun with a quick flirt of his right hand, and covered Farley with it.

"You fat snake!" he spat at him. "Im forgetting your fangs are poison. Mr. Diaz, search him for a gun. Then take him and four men aboard his schooner. Find all their arms and lock them up. Follow me into the lagoon, and whateyer you do, don't lose sight of this gob of living lard for a minute. Keep your eye on him all the time, and if you don't like the way he bats his eyes, shoot him. Those are my orders."

Farley heaved his bulk out of his chair with a great wheezing expulsion of his breath through his pursed lips. "Bragging's a bad habit," he whined dolefully. "I told you so, and I've just proved it. Bad habit, Bob; never do ite

Whatever the spirit of the mutinous crew of the *Albatross* may have been prior to the arrival of the *Anita*, their subsequent behavior was meek and mild.

The *Anita* dropped two hundred yards from shore, directly abreast of the bamboo shell sheds, and the cluster of tents where the men were living. The long nine in the *Anita*'s bows sent one shot whining into the hillside just above the beach where the men were camped, and before she could be loaded again, a white shirt fluttered from the tip of a pole that was raised back of one of the tents. Corrigan made a deal with the men that they were to have double wages for the trip, and compelled Farley to sign an agreement to that effect. Then the work of loading the shell aboard the ships began. The shell was brought from shore in the sloop-rigged diving boats and stowed away in the holds. By nightfall, the shell was well-nigh all loaded, and Corrigan went aboard the *Albatross*. "And now we'll settle, you and me," he informed Farley. "Dig up those pearls, and let's get the thing done."

"I can't locate 'em to-night, Bob," Farley wheezed. "They're buried up on the hillside there, an' there's an awful lot o' thick brush to go through, to get to where I planted 'em."

Corrigan frowned. "Quit it," he advised. "It was all right when you needed to bluff, but you don't, now. You've got the pearls aboard; dig 'em up."

The two men regarded each other for a full minute in silence, and then Farley sighed noisily:

"You're a hard man, Bob," he complained querulously, as he inched his great body erect. "A hard man to deal with. . You ain't got much sense sometimes, but when you can' put on the screws, you always do. You ain't got a bit o kindness i in you, Bob, Not a bit. Hi-hum."

He leaned laboriously over his berth and fumbled for a moment.

"Fine hidin' place I had fixed up here, Bob," he wheezed as he worked. "Secret panel right in the side board o' my berth here. Just a little space, but it's big enough to hold lots of little things. Yes, sir. Lots o' little things. Things like this here, Corrigan.'

Farley straightened up, and held a bulging chamois skin bag up for Corrigan to see.

"Fine for hidin' little things like that," he whined on. "Thirty thousand dollars' worth o' pearls in that little bag, Corrigan."

Big Corrigan's eyes glittered, as he peered into the gaping mouth of the poke. It held a full pound of pearls. Corrigan drew forth a handful, and let them run back into the bag through his fingers, delighting in the sensation of the touch of a valuable thing. From the average size and shape of the pearls, he knew that Farley had not underestimated their value.

"How'll we split em?" he inquired of Farley.

Beak shook his great head. "Have it your own way, Corrigan,' he said disinterestedly. "Fix it up just as you like. I'll trust you for a fair deal, since you gave your word as a pardner. That's more'n you'd do by me, Bob."

Corrigan flushed slightly. "You'll get your half, as I agreed," he assured him.

Farley widened his tiny eyes. "I expect to get it," he said. "Surely I do. You're a hard man, but you're square, Bob Corrigan. Youre square, but you're awful suspicious; suspicious of your friends, and willin' to believe anything your enemies tell you. Your judgment's bad, Bob; very bad. You mistrust me, but you believe anything a man like Ramon tells you. You're—"

"Never mind what I am," Corrigan interrupted him. "Let's split these up, and get it over. Got another bag like this?"

Farley opened the cabin-table drawer. "Right here," he said, flipping a limp chamois bag on the table top.

"Scales?"

Farley drew the medicine chest from beneath the cabin table, and handed Corrigan the scales.

"I'll just pour these out, and take them as they come from the bag," Corrigan suggested. "That fair?"

"Anything to suit, Bob; anything to suit."

Corrigan parceled the shimmering wealth carefully, until both bags registered the same weight on the scales.

"It's a gambler's chance which bag is worth the most," he admitted. "They're each of the same weight. I don't know which holds the most valuable pearls, and neither do you. Thats fair for both; take your pick."

"Either one," Farley replied indifferently. "No odds to me one way or the other. You're runnin' this thing, Corrigan, an' I'm willin' to abide by what you do."

Corrigan studied the fat man intently, and the flush in his face rose and crimsoned his temples. His eyes fell before Farley's gaze, and he rose and impulsively thrust. out his hand. "I guess I had you sized wrong, Beak," he admitted humbly. "I'll be frank with you; I picked you for a crook from toe to crown, who'd knife a friend as quick as an enemy. From the way you act, I figure myself wrong and— and— I— I want— to— apologize for it."

The admission came from the big Irishman's throat haltingly, and each word was expelled with an effort. Apologies came hard to Corrigan. Farley hoisted himself to his feet, and grasped the Irish hand. "Don't mention it, Bob," he piped. "Don't say another word about it. I take your apology like you give, an' glad I am to have the chance. I always liked you, Bob, though you might not think it. We've been on opposite sides in some little deals, an' I always try to

hold up my end in any kind of a game, but I'm square with a mate, Corrigan. Once I've passed my word to a man, he's got a mortgage on me that's good as gold. We'll drink to friendship, Bob."

Corrigan's face wore a miserably shamed look, as Farley took bottle and glasses from the swinging tray, over the cabin table, and poured out two tumblers of brandy. To have unjustly mistrusted a man hurt both his pride in his judgment and his Irish instinct for justice. He was eager to prove himself the equal of Farley in faith and courtesy, and he grasped the glass the fat man extended with a will.

"Here's to ourselves," Farley toasted. "Two bully good enemies to now, and friends forever after. Drink her down, Corrigan."

"Drink it is,' Corrigan agreed heartily, and lifted the glass to his lips. The feel of a forgotten quid of tobacco tucked in his cheek checked him, and he turned his head for a moment, to spit it out before he swallowed his brandy. He raised the glass to his lips again hurriedly, to be in time with Farley in the cementing of their friendship, and paused with the liquor already wetting his tongue.

What stopped him he will never know. The knowledge that something did stop him, makes Corrigan tolerant of the wildest suspicions of the most ignorant sailor in his fo'c'stles. He held the glass poised at his lips, and stared over the rim at Farley. Beak was staring back, his own glass poised in the same position as Corrigan's. The air in the little cabin was suddenly electric with portent. Slowly Corrigan lowered the glass and set it on the table in front of him. While his eyes, narrowed and shot with tiny red specks, bored into Farley, he reached and drew his gun.

Farley still held the glass to his lips, and save the fact that his great face was ghastly white, his expression changed not a jot.

Slowly Corrigan raised the muzzle of his revolver until the muzzle was lined with Farley' s heart.

"Drink," he half whispered, in a velvety voice, that was deadly, with an underlying suggestion of chilled steel.

"Drink her down, Farley."

Motionless, silent, expressionless, with his glass still held to his lips, Farley waited for a full, tragic minute. His fat white face crinkled in a sudden smile, and the flesh on his abdomen quivered with his silent mirth. When he spoke, his voice, like Corrigan's, had that underlying suggestion of something hard and deadly. "I'd hate to be shot," he confessed. "It makes such a mess of a man; and then it's a shock. They tell me this is an easy way."

Shaking with his voiceless mirth, he tilted the glass, and the liquor drained down his fat throat. He sputtered slightly, and slowly sat down.

"You're a hard man, Corrigan," he whined mockingly, in a high whisper, and his head relaxed against the back of his chair.

For five long minutes, Corrigan stood motionless, the gun in his hand trained on the seated man. Then he leaned across the table and applied the flat of his palm to Farley's shirt over the left breast. He held it there for a moment, his head twisted to one side, in the attitude of one listening, and suddenly he sighed deeply.

"That was close," he muttered to himself. He picked up both bags of pearls, and went out of the cabin, walking very softly on his toes.

Aboard the *Anita*, he called Diaz, the mate, and ordered the anchor hove up. "And man that long nine and hammer the *Albatross* at the water line till she sinks," he added.

"But, captain—"

"You've heard me, Mr. Diaz."

"Aye, sir."

Hartman intercepted the captain, as he was going to his cabin.

"What are you going to do, captain?" he asked fearfully.

"Sink the *Albatross*, and get out of here," Corrigan answered.

"But the men, captain? Surely you're not—"

"Nobody aboard of her."

"But, captain, why—"

Corrigan reached out suddenly, and grasped the young fellow by the shoulder. He held him at arm's length for a moment, trembling all over with a fit of rage, and then flung him away so that he crashed against the bulwarks and lay senseless on the deck.

Diaz was bending over him when he recovered. The roar of the long nine reverberated in his ears.

"Youre lucky," Diaz said awesomely. "A lucky man."

Hartman struggled to his feet, and stared about, supporting himself on the bulwarks. He was in time to see the masts of the *Albatross* disappear beneath the waters.

"You're lucky," Diaz repeated, and Hartman knew why Corrigan bore the reputation he did in the South Seas.

IT WAS late the next afternoon when the lookout reported a smudge of smoke on the horizon.

"That'll just about be the gunboat," Corrigan guessed, when the mate called him. "Set your signals for him to heave to, Mr. Diaz."

"You're not going to try to run for him?" Hartman inquired.

"Any fool can run, but it takes a wise man to stand still and keep safe," Corrigan answered him cryptically.

The gunboat was hove to when the *Anita* was yet a mile away. The *Anita* ran down across her stern, and luffed to with her head yards aback. A boat was sent out, and Corrigan was rowed aboard the gunboat.

The first man he spied when he climbed aboard of her was Don Ramon de Cruze. It took five of the crew to hold the infuriated Irishman from the Spaniard's throat.

"You fished that island off yourself," Corrigan raved at him. "You sent those schooners over there yourself, and then sold me the island when you knew the beds were all fished out. I'll kill you for that. I—"

A look of understanding flashed between Don Ramon and the captain of the gunboat. The Spaniard laughed tauntingly. "Do you think it, captain?" he inquired with a meaning intonation. "Perhaps. I have the money and you have the deed; it was all according to law, and your threats weary me. Will you go now, or shall I have you thrown over the side?"

And thrown over the side Corrigan was; thrown over by half the deck watch, raving like a madman. He was hauled into his own boat, and rowed back to the *Anita*. When he was some distance from the gunboat, he lay back in the stern sheets, and laughed until the tears streamed down his cheeks, and his sides were weak.

"There's two kinds of bluffin'," Corrigan explained to Hartman over the crib board in the cabin that night. "One kind is makin' a man believe you've got him beat when you ain't; the other is makin' a man believe you're beat when you're playin' a royal flush."

He lay back in his chair, and laughed heartily at the memory of Ramon on the gunboat.

"He never thought to have me searched when I went aboard to raise a row about having been cheated. I've got over twenty ton of good shell aboard and thirty thousand dollars' worth of pearls; the whole lot cost me five thousand dollars, and a six weeks' cruise. Pretty fair. And Ramon and Farleyboth played me for a fool. Yeh. There's two kinds of bluffs, and they're both good— when they work."

"And if they don't?"

Corrigan raised his eyebrows and picked up his cards.

"What's to worry a dead man?" he asked.

16: The Cocaine Smuggler

Ralph Durand

1876-1945

The Detective Magazine, 22 Dec 1922

The Popular Magazine 20 April 1923

British fiction and non-fiction author who spent the 1890s in Australia and Africa, and took up residence in Guernsey in the Channel Islands after WW1. He endured the German occupation in WW2, and lived to see the island liberated in May 1945. He died seven months later.

THE usual dreary procession of cases passed in melancholy procession in and out of the Bruton Street Police Court. There were drunk and disorderlies, pickpockets, men for whose rent landlords were suing, men who had no lawful visible means of support, beggars, breakers of the peace—and with each the magistrate dealt in accordance with the law and his own common sense. Some were discharged with a few words of sound advice; some were remanded to be reported on by the court missionary. Some told long incoherent stories of bad luck to which the magistrate listened with apparently inexhaustible patience. Some were peremptorily sentenced almost before they had finished whining their stale excuses and shambled out of the dock muttering curses.

At the end of the list came a "case" of an unusual type; a decent-looking youngster about twenty years old in the uniform of a ship's officer. He stepped briskly into the dock and stood erect facing the magistrate while the clerk read out the charge that he, George Harmer, third mate of the steamer *Hampshire*, had been caught in the act of trying to smuggle cocaine past the customs.

"What do you plead, Harmer? Are you guilty or not guilty?"

"Guilty, sir."

The magistrate looked up amazed. Such men as are accused of trafficking in cocaine usually lie and go on lying long after all chance of their being believed has gone.

"Have you nothing to say for yourself?" he demanded.

The youngster flushed but looked the magistrate squarely in the face.

"No, sir. I did it more for fun than anything else but I knew it was against the law."

"For fun!" The magistrate leaned over his desk and looked sternly at the prisoner. "You know what cocaine is, don't you?"

"Only that it's some sort of chemist's stuff. I was told I could get a good price for it if I got it past the customs."

"Don't you read the newspapers?"

"Not much, sir. Except for the football news. Seamen get out of the habit of reading them."

"Don't you know that it's a drug that drives men to poverty and women to the streets and both to the lunatic asylum a hundred times more quickly than drink?"

The seaman braced himself.

"No, sir. If I'd known that I wouldn't have touched the stuff."

"You wish me to believe that some unscrupulous scoundrel has made a tool of you?"

'No, sir."

"Yet I would like to believe it. You must. know who advised you to traffic in the drug, who sold it to you abroad and whom you were going to pass it on to in this country. You are in fact, whether you realize it or not, a member of a gang of ruffians. If you will reveal their names and whereabouts you will be recommended for pardon."

"I can't do that, sir."

"You can't or you won't?"

"I won't, sir."

"Six months' hard labor," snapped the magistrate. "I'm sorry I can't make it more."

Harmer's was the last of the day's cases. The reporters closed their notebooks and hurried out of court. The unattached public followed them at a more leisurely pace. The magistrate was preparing to leave when a gray-haired' man— a man with the jaw of a prize fighter, the forehead of a philosopher and the eyes of a saint— moved forward from the public benches and laid a card on his desk..

The magistrate picked up the card and looked keenly at the man who had offered it.

"Mr. Albert Mayo of the Eglinton Street Mission Hall? I've heard of you, Mr. Mayo, and I've heard you preach. What can I do for you?"

"I want you to authorize me to visit the man you have just sentenced in prison."

"Why?"

"I want to comfort the poor fellow."

The magistrate demurred.

"I know that you are called the criminal's friend, Mr. Mayo, and I appreciate the good work you do among men of that class, but I fail to see what special right to be comforted that young ruffian has."

Mayo was in a sense a bilinguist. When he troubled to choose his words carefully he spoke as an educated man. In moments of inspiration in the pulpit

he spoke as an orator. At other times— especially when he was talking to or about criminals—his language was the language of the slum and the thieves' kitchen.

"There ain't no real harm in that man," he pleaded. "I spotted that first go off. There's two kinds of prisoners, sir, as you well know. Some of 'em never ought to be sent to quod at all. There's others, real crooks, ought never to be let out. He belongs to one kind and the blokes that he's been trying to pass the dope for belong to the other. I'm afraid that life in the jug will harden him— make a real hard case of him— so that when he comes out he will be the kind that ought always to be kept in."

"If he belongs to the class that never should be sent to prison, if he was innocent of any wrong intention in smuggling cocaine, he had the chance to clear himself when I invited him to give evidence against his accomplices."

Mayo shook his head.

"He's not the kind that blows the gaff to save his own skin. The only way to get him to do that is to touch his conscience."

The magistrate shrugged his shoulders.

"If you think that cocaine traffickers have consciences worth touching, Mr. Mayo, you are more optimistic than I am," he said. "But I understand that you are a bit of a detective as well as a preacher. If you will undertake to try and get evidence against Harmer's accomplices— I don't care how you set about it— so that the police will be able to break up the whole gang, I will give you a note to the governor of Hoxton Gaol, asking him to let you have all facilities for visiting Harmer alone."

Two hours later George Harmer was pacing up and down the narrow limits of his cell when a warder opened its door, admitted Mayo and closed it again, leaving them alone. Harmer paused in his restless walk and looked his visitor up and down.

"Who are you?" he demanded truculently. "Some sort of sky pilot by the look of you. You can take your tracts somewhere else. I don't want 'em."

"I know just how you feel," said Mayo, seating himself on the prisoner's bed. "I've been in prison myself. Every time the door of my cell slammed— like yours did just now— reminding me that I was a prisoner, I felt like cutting my throat if I'd got the chance. Ten years penal servitude I had. But the way you are feeling just now there doesn't seem much difference between six months and ten years. It's being in prison at all that worries you, and you are thinking of the people at home and wishing you had just one hour of freedom so that you could go and tell them that you smuggled more for fun than anything else and that you didn't know there was any special harm in the stuff you smuggled."

Harmer paused in his restless pacing of the cell.

"How do you know I only did it for fun?"

"You told the magistrate."

"He didn't believe me."

"But I did. I was a burglar, George, before I was pinched. And what do you suppose made me want to crack cribs? The sport of the game more than anything else. The excitement of it and the fun of being cleverer than the detectives. And I was, too, cleverer by a long sight, till I got careless."

A smile as at some unhallowed reminiscence crossed Mayo's face.

"I don't need to be told that nine out of every ten sailors smuggle every time they get a chance," he continued. "A bottle of scent or brandy or a few pounds of tobacco. And it isn't the little bit of profit to be made that makes them do it either. The game wouldn't be worth the candle if that was all. It's the excitement. A sailor's life is a dull life for the most part, so when he's on watch at night and there's nothing else to think about he likes to plan out how he'll dodge the customs next port he comes to. I expect it was that that first started you on the smuggling lay. And then some one who knew that you smuggled put you up to where cocaine could be got abroad and told you that there was big money to be made by smuggling it. And you thought you'd have a try at it. That was about the way of it, wasn't it, George?"

"Something of that sort," admitted the prisoner.

"I thought so. And the idea came into my head in court that as like as not you've got a mother and that if I knew her address and could go and tell her the way I see it, perhaps she wouldn't take your trouble quite so hard."

"You go and tell my sister that," said Harmer eagerly. "You go and tell her just what you've just said to me and itll be the best day's work you've done for a long while. Alice, her name is— Alice Harmer, No. 17 Laburnum Walk, Hackney. Poor little girl! Typist in an office, she is, and doing well— till now. Always held her head high and made herself respected and now I've gone and dragged her name in the mud and made her feel that she's no better than the worst of them. It's enough to make her give up trying."

"I'll go this evening."

Harmer sat down on the bed by Mayo's side. i

"You're a white man," he said fervently. "I say! What's the special harm about this cocaine stuff?"

"Have you ever been drunk, George?"

"Now and again. But only by accident— if you know what I mean. I might take a couple of glasses or so— and then one more. And the last one would make me sort of silly and careless so that I hadn't sense to stop. And then if I

was knocking round with the boys I might get drunk before I knew what I was doing."

"But you never even took so much as one glass without knowing what'd happen if you took too much. With cocaine it's different. A pal might offer you a sniff of it and you might take it just out of curiosity— and once you took it it'd be all up with you. You'd be as silly and reckless and as ready to fight or steal or do any cursed thing as if you were blind drunk. But you'd look sober enough; no one but an expert would know you'd been drugged. And once you'd touched the stuff you'd never rest till you could have it again. Supposing some one gave some of the stuff to your sister, George; how'd you like that?"

Harmer shuddered.

"It doesn't bear thinking of," he said. "Look here! The man I tried to run the stuff for can't know what it's like. If you want to do me another good turn go and warn him. Jack Drew his name is. You know Agate Street, Soho? There's a newspaper shop next the pub at the corner. Go there and tell the man you'll see behind the counter that you want to back the favorite for a place in whatever the next race meeting is. That's the password, you understand. He'll say that he has inside information that the favorite will be scratched. That's the countersign. Then you ask for Jack Drew and he'll tell you where to find him."

Mayo was taken aback. He had intended to persuade Harmer to denounce his accomplice or failing that to set to work as a detective and worm some hint from him that would set him on the accomplice's track. And now he had of his own accord given him all the information he wanted! A professional detective would have asked nothing better. But Mayo's code of honor, a code that had been all he had in the way of religion in his criminal days, prevented his using the information without Harmer's express permission.

"Don't tell me Drew doesn't know what he's doing," he said. "A man that's doing a bit of smuggling just for the fun of it doesn't take all that trouble to cover his tracks. You're a good sort yourself, George, and the trouble with you is that you think everybody else is as straight as yourself. I don't need telling what sort he is. I'm an older man than you and I know more about crooks than you do. He's one of these hearty, come-and-have-a-drink sort of chaps that a fellow like you thinks is a thundering good sort till he does the dirty on you. I'm all for a man's sticking to his pals. There's a man doing time to-day who could get a big remission of his sentence if he blew the gaff about some things I did before I was convicted. But Drew isn't your pal. He's a dirty dog that used you for his own purposes. Split on him, George! If you split : youll get your pardon. But that oughtn't to count with you. What you've got to think of is the rotten work that he and his gang are doing. Split on him, George! Split'on him and lay the whole nasty gang by the heels."

Harmer shook his head doggedly.

"I'm not going to split," he said.

Mayo saw that he meant what he said. He left the prisoner to his own thoughts and went to the office of the governor of the prison.

"Any luck?" asked the governor. "Did you get anything out of him?"

"I messed up the whole thing," said Mayo bitterly. "First I started out to try and get his confidence. And I was just a bit too clever. Then I tried to get him to split. But he won't. He's too good a fellow."

"He ought to be made to talk,'' said the governor. "And there's a way to do it, too, but one's got to be too soft with criminals nowadays."

"Thumbscrews?"asked Mayo.

"There's a more scientific way than that. In.the days when thumbscrews were used a man could be made to say 'yes' to any question that was asked and the torturer was no nearer the truth than before. No. In a case like this we ought to be allowed to do what is done in some continental prisoners.

They watch a prisoner and as soon as he goes to sleep wake him up and ask questions. A clever man may go on lying without contradicting himself so long as he keeps his wits about him but he can't keep his wits about him if he's never allowed to sleep and sooner or later you get the truth out of him. Physical torture is no good. Mental torture is the scientific method. But we aren't allowed to use it."

"I dare say," said Mayo and went his way. He thought no more of the governor's words but they had without his knowing it, laid in his mind the seed of an idea that germinated and took root there.

At Laburnum Walk, Hackney, Mayo conveyed Harmer's message with so much sympathy and with such deep understanding of human nature that he was able wholly to blunt the edge of Alice Harmer's misery. Reaction from shame and anxiety opened her heart. She talked freely and eagerly and in half an hour Mayo knew almost as much about George's life and friends as she knew herself. She showed him a photograph of the crew of the Hampshire, taken when Harmer was second apprentice.

"That's the captain, of course, sitting by the wheel," she said. "And that one used to be mate, but he's left the ship since the photo was taken, so the second mate got his job and George got the second mate's berth. That one holding the life buoy is Jack Drew, George's great friend. He was senior apprentice then and a

"And how was it that he didn't get the second mate's berth instead of George?" asked Mayo, making a careful mental note of Drew's face.

"He left the ship before then. He either came into money or got a well-paid job ashore. I'm not sure which."

"And your brother lost sight of him, I suppose."

"No. They always kept up with each other. George never comes home from a voyage but what Jack comes to look him up and take him to a theater. He has taken me once or twice."

"Ah! And do you like him?"

The girl hesitated. "I always like to be nice to Jack's friends."

Mayo took his leave, enjoining Alice to keep a stout heart and promising to get permission to see George again in prison and to bring news of him. Then he went to Agate Street. He wanted to see for himself whether Drew was as innocent of any real intent to do evil as George Harmer supposed him to be. Real criminals are very easily scared and Mayo had no intention of scaring him unless he found reason to suppose that the estimate he had formed of his character was unjust. He called at his own lodgings, therefore, on his way to Agate Street and there changed into clothes that looked as if he had robbed them from a dust heap. In these, lounging against a lamp-post just outside the newspaper shop to which he had been directed he looked exactly like one of those individuals who stand outside public houses all day ready to mind a barrow, call a cab or undertake at a moment's notice any other temporary employment that does not involve hard work.

People went in and out of the newspaper shop at the rate of about one every three minutes. In most of them Mayo saw little of interest. But he took special note of a man whose tweed coat, stiff white shirt, white tie and black trousers showed him to be a waiter off duty; of a newspaper vender; of a Chinese ship's steward in uniform; of a ship's stoker— a stoker may be known all the world over by the peculiar way in which his hair is cut— and of a woman dressed in the fashion of the week after next. On the heels of the last visitor came a man that Mayo recognized as Jack Drew himself.

Mayo shambled into the shop. The woman had disappeared into some inner room. Drew was standing at the counter glancing through the co™wmns of an evening paper. The face of tne man behind the counter stamped him, to the expert eye, as having originated somewhere in central Europe. Mayo, addressing him in a hoarse whisper, announced his wish to have a bob on the favorite.

"Who's the favorite to-morrow?" asked the man behind the counter to Drew.

"I shouldn't back the favorite," said Drew, scarcely glancing up from his paper. "Hell probably be scratched."

Mayo turned to him and still speaking in a voice that sounded beer sodden whispered, "George Harmer's in trouble. He gave me a message for you."

"Harmer? Don't know the name," answered Drew. He folded up the paper, tossed a penny on to the counter and walked out of the shop. Mayo walked away westward, his hands deep in the pockets of his frowsy overcoat; his eyes fixed on the gutter. A casual observer would have thought he was looking for cigar ends, but he was deep in thought.

Two things were clear to him: Drew was not a man in the least worthy of Harmer's loyalty; the newspaper shop in Agate Street, Soho, was the center of a brisk trade in cocaine. A hint to the police would almost certainly result in the arrest not only of Drew but of a number of other cocaine traffickers as well. Could he give that hint? His curious code of honor told him that he could not without George Harmer's permission. He wracked his brains for some means of overcoming George's mistaken loyalty to an unworthy pal and recalled the governor's opinion that mental torture was the instrument that should be used.

There is a curious tendency among social birds of prey to frequent certain recognized haunts. This circumstance admirably suits the police. But the public, under the mistaken impression that the way to extirpate vice is to scatter it, occasionally denounces this or that restaurant or brasserie. The police then reluctantly force the establishment temporarily into the path of rectitude and thereafter find the task of keeping the birds of prey under observation a difficult one until they settle down again in some new haunt.

The haunt of the moment was a restaurant known to the post office as "Carlo's," and to its frequenters as "The Spotted Cat." The waiters spoke half a dozen European languages equally badly. Aged copies of *La Vie Parisienne* and *Il Messaggero* were on sale at a stall just inside its door. On a dais inside two fat men in dingy linen played apathetic music daily from six p.m. till closing time. The place had the reputation of being gay but such gayety as it had was supplied by its customers.

Chance led Mayo to the door of The Spotted Cat and a sudden inspiration prompted him to stop and keep it under observation. He took up a position in the gutter opposite the door and to avoid attracting attention took from his pocket a few pair of boot laces that he always kept there for such occasions. By this simple act— since boot-lace hawkers are a common object in London streets— he at once became an inconspicuous object in the crowd.

A very short period of observation showed him that the time was ripe for the police to take official notice of The Spotted Cat. Within ten minutes several members of the half world, two of the clients of the Agate Street newspaper shop and a notorious confidence-trick spieler had entered the place. Then— Mayo's heart thumped against his ribs— Drew himself came. He was escorting a girl who was obviously not one of The Spotted Cat's regular customers. She

was quietly dressed and tired looking and as the door swung open hesitated and half drew back.

"This isn't an ordinary shop," she protested.

"It's quite all right. There's a band here. It'll cheer you up," said Drew reassuringly.

Mayo could read the girl's face. He saw shyness, timidity and a certain amount of instinctive repugnance fighting with curiosity and the dislike of seeming a prude. She hesitated and entered. Mayo shambled away from the door and as soon as he was out of sight hurried to the nearest public telephone. After the usual delay, that always seems so much longer than it really is, he got into communication with Scotland Yard.

"Hullo! Mayo speaking," he said. "Is Detective Simmonds there? In the building? Good! Find him and tell him to come round to The Spotted Cat as quick as possible. He'll see me on the curb outside."

He hurried back to his place outside the restaurant door and stood there, having, so far as the casual passer-by could see, no object in life except to sell boot laces and very little hope of doing that, but inwardly seething with almost incontrollable impatience. He calculated how soon Simmonds could arrive. He must allow five minutes for the messenger at Scotland Yard to find him, three minutes for him to get to a cab rank, seven minutes—

But before he had been at his post fifteen minutes Drew returned with his companion to the street and hailed a cab. A change had come over the girl. Her shyness had given place to an air of brazen recklessness. She carried herself like a peacock. She was laughing. Her eyes glittered and a muscle at the corner of her mouth was twitching spasmodically.

Mayo knew nothing of the symptoms of cocaine poisoning but he felt sure she was drugged. His common sense told him that he could do nothing but his common manhood spurred him to action. He grasped Drew's arm.

"Where are you taking that girl?" he demanded.

Drew shook him off and beckoned to the uniformed doorkeeper. The man laid a huge hand on Mayo's shoulder. Then Mayo saw red. He drove his elbow into the doorkeeper's ribs and struck with all his force at Drew's face. But the doorkeeper was an ex-pugilist and had him pinioned before he could strike again. Mayo kicked, heaved, and, unbalanced by fury, used language that would have surprised the Eglinton Street congregation. The struggle lasted barely a minute. A blow from a policeman's truncheon, gently but scientifically applied to his funny bone, brought him to his senses and the realization that the cab was out of sight. The policeman then took him by the scruff of his neck and advised him to come along quietly without any more nonsense. Mayo would undoubtedly have spent that night in a lockup had not Simmonds,

appearing in the nick of time, shown his police badge and carried the revivalist off to Scotland Yard.

"There was nothing you could have done," said the detective when Mayo had told the whole story. "There was nothing I could have done, without a warrant. Nothing can be done now to save the girl from the man. I'll get to work on the Agate Street gang at once. But Drew's the man we want. You get that fellow Harmer to give evidence against him and we'll smash the whole combine."

"I'll have another try," said Mayo. "Perhaps he'll be easier to handle when I tell him what I've seen to-day."

Early next morning Mayo returned to Hoxton Gaol and after seeing the governor was admitted to Harmer's cell.

"George," he said. "I've bad news for you.'

The seaman dropped the oakum he was unraveling.

"Its not— not— nothing -wrong with Alice?" he asked anxiously.

"I've got a shock for you. That man Drew—"

"Have they caught him?"

"Not content with ruining you, he has made your sister a drug fiend."

"I won't believe it."

"You've got to believe it." Mayo's voice thundered as it sometimes thundered in the Eglinton Street Chapel. "You're to blame for it and you can't undo the harm you've done by saying you don't believe it." Then his voice dropped and he spoke gently and softly. "It wasn't her fault, poor girl. She trusted him, like you did— that's where she went wrong. And he betrayed her. Listen till I tell you all I know. She was going home from her work, tired— and a bit heartsick, too, I expect. He met her and offered to take her to where she could have a cup of tea and rest a bit listening to music. He took her to a place where no decent man would take a girl. But how was she to know?

"When he had got her there he told her he had something that would take away her headache. He showed her the powder and said that if she sniffed a little of it up her nostrils her headache would go. She believed him. Why not? You trusted him, so why shouldn't she? The stuff made her feel better— not so tired and sad as she had been. So she took a little more. Better if it had been brandy! Brandy poisons the body, but that was cocaine, George, and cocaine poisons the soul without doing any harm to the body that any one but a doctor could notice. Her soul was poisoned, George, and she was as innocent of any intent to do wrong as— aye, a thousand times more innocent than you were when you tried to bring the accursed stuff into the country."

Harmer sprang to the door and hammered on it with his fists. A warder opened it, curtly told him he'd be punished if he didn't hold his row and slammed it in his face again.

"I forgot," said Harmer miserably.

"Aye, you forgot. You forgot that that door won't open for all your knocking. You're not a free man, George. But the man you won't split on is free. There's no warder has any right to slam the door in his face as long as you keep loyal to him. He's free to ruin another girl to-morrow. He's all right so long as his pals don't split on him. It's fine to have stanch pals."

But Harmer was not listening. He was sitting huddled on his bed, gnawing his fingers, staring at nothing.

FOUR DAYS later Mayo visited the cell again. r

"Its all right," he said. "The home secretary has ordered your release. It was Drew they were after. Thanks to you they've nabbed him and your remission of sentence has come through. I've more than that to tell you. I've been to your owners. I told them that you had had your lesson and weren't likely to go on the cross again. The *Hampshire* sails again to-morrow night. If you are aboard by noon you can sail with her and nothing move will be said."

"I won't sail with her," said George. "I've got to see Alice— and stay with her and protect her."

Mayo laid his hand on George's shouler.

"Can you forgive me, George?" he said. "I deceived you a bit— for your own sake and your sister's sake and for the sake of every decent man and woman. The girl that Drew ruined was my sister, too, George. Your sister and mine. 'We are all one,' the Book says. But it wasn't Alice."

Harmer choked— laughing and sobbing at once.

"Do you mean— that—that Alice— she isn't—"

"Alice is in the governor's office, waiting for you."

———————

17: The House of Jewels

Bertram Atkey

1889-1953

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"FOR anybody who is apt to run to neck," mused Mr. Smiler Bunn aloud one morning to his friend and partner, Lord Fortworth, "these Peter Pan collars are a godsend. And when a man goes eighteen and a half round his shirtband it's up to him to study his neck pretty carefully."

"Yes." Fortworth looked thoughtfully at the big muscular pillar upon which the square head of his partner was set. "Yes—you certainly ain't in the swan class. You've got a neck like a buffalo."

Mr. Bunn looked a little irritated.

"I know it," he said briefly. "And yours ain't any lily stem, if it comes to that. I notice you don't decline to wear soft collars when you're taking it easy."

Fortworth laughed.

"Certainly not. I like 'em. If anybody mistakes me for little Lord Fauntleroy they're welcome to—" He broke off suddenly, eyeing the safety-pin which held the ends of Mr. Bunn's soft silk collar together. "That's a pretty hot emerald you've got there," he said.

Smiler took off the brooch— a big emerald mounted on an ordinary gold safety-pin— and handed it to his partner.

"Well, it's not a bit of broken ginger-beer bottle, certainly," he agreed.

Fortworth looked at the jewel carefully. He was a judge of such things.

"Yes, it's a very fine stone. Where did you get it?"

"I got it some years ago from a miser named Amberfold— Colonel Amberfold— who lived in a lonely house in Sussex. He was a queer old bird. Used to keep two fighting baboons instead of house dogs, and had a searchlight rigged up on top of the house, so that he could signal to the local police if burglars came. He was shot at by some burglars, but was only stunned. They thought they'd killed him, and cleared out. I went through the safe while the Colonel was coming round and got a fistful of stones. I didn't get the best he had, though. I've got an idea they were hidden somewhere else. But I did pretty well— yes."

He smiled like a good-hearted and contented old crocodile, and lit a cigar.

But Fortworth looked thoughtful as he handed the emerald back.

"Tf he's got any better stones than that it's a scandalous thing for them to be hidden away in a safe," he said. "They ought to be flashing out green fire on

some woman's chest— some woman who could afford to illuminate herself that way, I mean."

"True— that's true," said Smiler thoughtfully.

"A fistful of stones like that would fetch from eight to ten thousand of anybody's money," resumed Fortworth. "The fact is you never finished your job at that house."

"No— to tell the truth, I was in a bit of a hurry," confessed Mr. Bunn.

Lord Fortworth rose ponderously.

"Well, we'd better finish it, I consider," he said.

"As you wish," agreed Smiler humorously. "I can always do with a few diamonds." He touched a bell on the garden table beside him. The two crooks were sitting in the sunshine on the very secluded, timber-encircled lawn at their country retreat near Purdston, a remote village on the Surrey-Hants border.

"There's no reason why we shouldn't start work at once," said Smiler. "We've had a very good rest since we took that fat cure at Harromouth. When you make up your mind to start work on a thing, I believe in taking off your coat and slugging in at it without wasting time."

Fortworth carefully selected his third cigar since breakfast, lighted it, and restfully lay back in his chair,

"So do I," he agreed.

Sing Song, the Chinese "Old Reliable," as Mr. Bunn occasionally described their capable, albeit somewhat criminal, manservant, appeared in answer to the ring, and came aeross the lawn bearing a tray with bottles, decanters,and glasses upon it.

The two partners brightened up considerably at sight of the saffron villain.

"That's a good lad," said Mr. Bunn benevolently. "I had an idea somewhere inside me that it was time for a sherry and bitters, Put the tray on the table and mix 'em, Sing Song. Peach for me. Gently, now, my lad— gently, I say. Easy with the bitters— easy, you melonheaded jackass! D'you want to poison me? Half that— half of it! I don't want all bitters!" he roared. "Damme, there are times when you don't seem to have the brains of a Chinese lantern. That's better— that's better. Fill her up with sherry, my lad—that's it."

Their *apéritifs* prepared, Mr. Bunn fixed Sing Song with his eye and bade him listen.

"Take the two-seater, Sing Song, and get away to a place called Southwater, near Horsham in Sussex— got it? Southwater, near Horsham in Sussex." A man called Colonel Amberfold lives there, in a house called The Tower—only there's no tower there worth speaking of. Find out about him. Understand? Find out about him."

The beady eyes of the Chink lighted up.

"Yes, master," he said simply.

He understood Mr. Bunn as well as Smiler understood him.

"Here's five— now hook it."

Smiler handed him five pounds for expenses, and Sing Song, with a yellowish smile, departed.

The partners lay back in their chairs smoking dreamily.

"That lemon will be back in a couple of days with all the news about the Colonel," said Smiler, "He's a wonder to work."

Long before their cigars were finished a low moaning of gears and the fussy splutter of a motor exhaust that sounded from the shady drive advised them that the "lemon" was on his way to Southwater.

As Smiler Bunn had said, they believed in "slugging in without waste of time"— providing Sing Song was there to do the slugging.

Then a plump, egg-shaped gentleman in black, with a hard face and semi-bloodshot eyes, floated out of the house towards them— Mr. Ferdinand Bloom, an ex-actor-crook, who, with his wife, looked after the Purdston establishment— announcing that lunch was waiting their attention,

They "slugged" in— as usual.

ii

FOUR AFTERNOONS later they were sitting in precisely the same place. It was tea-time, and they were reinvigorating themselves body and soul with whisky-and-soda after a leisurely round on the nine-hole mantrap just outside the village. An invincible drought was just yielding to the efforts of Fortworth, who manned the decanter, and Smiler, who wielded the syphon pump, when the harsh bray of ar electric hom from far down the lane that ran to the house from the main road stiffened them where they sat.

"Here's the Chink!" said Smiler. Fortworth nodded.

A curious change had come over their faces, such a change as might suddenly come over two tigers that, basking and purring in sunshine just outside their lair, hear the faint tread of the leather-shod foot of a sahib— which, in turn, usually means a rifle.

They had become taut, tense, watchful. Their lips had thinned and hardened, and a cold light had sprung to their eyes.

"Sing Song— sure," Lord Fortworth.

A motor rushed up the lane, turned into the drive, and stopped outside the house.

They waited a moment, and then the Chinaman came through the shrubbery. He looked worn. There were hard lines down his face— it looked like a face carved out of very old ivory— and his left hand was bandaged from the knuckles upwards.

Mr. Bunn poured out a dazing dose of whisky, insulted it with a sensation of soda, and handed it to the Chink.

"Here's a snort for you, my lad. Hide it!"

Sing Song grinned a bleak grin, and "hid" it with perfect efficiency.

"Now give us the news," commanded Mr. Bunn. '" Hurt your arm?" He indicated the bandage.

Sing Song nodded ruefully.

"Spotte dog— allee same leppald. Cheetah. Catchee me climee wall. No blakee bones, only bitee flesh. Too plenty painful fo' sleepee. You gimme 'nothel wiskisoda, please, mastel?"

He blinked wearily at the partners, who gave him the stimulant— and took another themselves out of sheer sympathy.

Then Sing Song reeled off his report.

It appeared that Colonel Amberfold had left the Sussex village some two years before, and had moved to a remote house on Salisbury Plain. It had taken the Chink a day to ferret out from a firm of furniture removers at Horsham the address of the Colonel, and even then he had used up a considerable time in locating the house on the enormous windswept expanse of desolate, rolling, West Country downland.

But he had found and, with his customary enterprise, thoroughly reconnoitred the house, escaping with a slight mauling from one of a half-dozen cheetahs, the easily tameable dog-like hunting-leopards of India, which the Colonel kept about the place.

"He always was a bit of a Barnum," grumbled Smiler, remembering the baboons which had acted as watchdogs at the Southwater house in the old days. "How did you get away from the animal?"

"Blowee him blains out,' said Sing Song promptly, with a reminiscent smile. '' Blowee blains out— chasee me all acloss the downs, but when we lun out of sight of housee I blowee him headee off—scrapee hole—beliy him deep down, yes. He no bitee again."

"All right. He's dead now— don't gloat over him. Get on, with the report."

They gathered that Colonel Amberfold no longer lived alone, as in the days when Smiler had come down upor him like a wolf on the fold, but that he had installed a housekeeper— "plitty lady, tall, glaceful, blave eyes," said the Chink— and her husband, a "powelful, stlong man," to look aiter the cheetahs, a pony, and presumably to do the odd work.

The house itself was situated in one of those vast, deep, bowl-like depressions which are to be found all over the great plain, and the nearest village was four miles away. The place was approached by a rough cart track across the downs.

Smiler nodded as the Chink finished.

"Yes, as I thought— as I expected. I never made anything like a clean sweep of the place that time," he said. "But it taught the Colonel a lesson. He's been spending money. This will be a harder nut to crack than the old place. But he's certainly got something worth keeping if he's imported six cheetahs and two servants to help him take care of it.''

Fortworth frowned.

"You can never tell just what these military guys who have lived in India in the old days are worth," he said. '' We'd better have a look at this house. But we must go slow. This chap has been bit once— by you, and yours ain't any miniature mouth, old man— and he'll be pretty wide awake."

"Ah, well, these wide-awake sports are the easiest sometimes—if you approach 'em from the correct angle," said Smiler gaily.

Then they began leisurely to discuss the various methods of "doping it out" to cheetahs— with a view to finding the most efficient and practical one to apply to what they termed the Amberfold herd.

iii

THE BUNN -FORTWORTH Combine had taken to canvas— without enthusiasm, for camping out is apt to be unsettling to people who are in the habit of facing and defeating four square meals per diem.

They had pitched their roving tent in a tiny bramble and scrubgrown gully just at the. back of the big crater-like hollow in which was the Amberfold residence. A climb of about thirty yards from their camp would bring them to the summit of the hill, where, taking cover behind a clump of the down serub that flourishes sparsely over the whole of the plain, they could comfortably watch the house and the people of the house. So near were they that, with the aid of the powerful binoculars with which they were provided, they could see into the rooms at the front of the house when the windows were open.

A morning's quiet reconnoitring, alleviated by cigars, corroborated ing Song's account of the inmates of the big bleak-looking house. Colonel Amberfold, whom they saw pottering about the shabby verandah, was a little, withered-looking, bald old man, who appeared to live in a worn black-and-yellow dressinggown. The housekeeper, they decided, seemed to be of a very superior kind of housekeeper indeed, and the odd-job man, her husband,

looked like a person who had spent some little time in barracks—in a professional capacity.

Mr. Bunn, after prolonged study of the three people as, engaged on their duties or pleasures, they appeared and disappeared in and out ef the house, shook his head.

"Those two aren't ordinary servants," he said. "Sing Song made a mistake when he placed them. They may do servants' work, but it ain't their line. I never saw a cook ot a housekeeper carry herself like that dame down there."

Fortworth agreed, and they backed carefully over the ridge and down to their camp, where Sing Song was selecting a choice cold lunch from the bushel or so of provisions packed at the back of the big touring car.

"Well, as far as I can make it out from the Chink's report, Odd-Jobs goes into the village every evening for supplies and things, immediately after he's let the cheetahs loose. The Colonel and Mrs. Housekeeper are probably indoors then, and that seems to me the time to fix the animals," said Mr. Bunn.

Fortworth carved himself a man's slice of ham.

"The trouble about fixing the brutes permanently is that it shortens our time. If we fix 'em early in the evening it gives us just one night to hunt up these jewels— with three people sleeping in the house. Next morning they discover that the cheetahs are dead or missing, and that will put them wise to the game. They'll sit up with Gatling guns next night waiting for us rather than take any chances,"

"You're right, Fortworth," said Smiler, signing to Sing Song to pour him out some more Madeira. "It won't do to put the brutes to sleep. We've got to make friends with 'em— get past 'em without hurting 'em. We must think this out."

But soon after lunch it was settled for them. Sing Song, having cleared away the th'ngs, had taken two fistfuls of food up to the ridge to eat while he watched the house. But the partners had not enjoyed more than forty hundred winks before the Chink aroused them.

"Policee coming acloss downs— two policee," he said excitedly. "Policee" yuight have been a magic word, so swiftly did the partners wake.

"How police?" Bunn sourly,

"Policee coming housee; bling cart with dead sheepee."

The partners hurried up the ridge to their reconnoitring point.

Comfortably hidden away behind the scrub, they saw an interesting little procession wending its way across the cart track to the house, a pfocession comprising two policeconstables, an excited bob-tailed sheep-dog, an even more excited farmer, two shepherds, and a boy leading a horse which drew a

farm catt containing a heavy load of dead sheep. 'Through their glasses they saw that the fleeces of the sheep were shockingly torn and liberally flecked and bedabbled with blood.

The farmer was swearing angrily— his language was borne to the watchers on the hill by the wind.

"Blank the blank cheeters!" they heard him yell to the policemen. "This is the third blank time they worried my blank flock... they ain't... proper control... blank wild beasts... runnin' the blank downs every double-blank night . «« take the three-starred law in my own blank hands next time... Heavy blank damages..."

The wind lulled, and the rest of it was lost. But they had heard enough. It sounded as though the night prowling of the cheetahs was about to be restricted.

They looked at each other in a congratulatory manner.

"We couldn't have picked a better time," breathed Mr. Bunn. Fortworth nodded behind his "cover," and again tumed his glasses on the scene in the valley below.

The procession pulled up outside the house, and the parties thereto, with the exception of the small boy and the sheep-dog, entered the house. The snarling of the cheetahs, disturbed by the influx of strangers and the smell of blood from the carcases in the cart, was plainly audible from their den at the side of the house.

Half-an-hour afterwards the sheep brigade came out again, accompanied by Miser Amberfold, a weird, shrunken little grasshopper of a man, with his black and yellow dressing-gown flapping about him.

He appeared to inspect the dead sheep.

Presently he nodded, handed a slip of paper to the farmer— it looked like a cheque— and the men began to unload the mutton cart and carry the carcases into the back of the cheetahs' outhouse.

"And mind, Mr. Colonel Amberfold," came the robust voice of the farmer, "I've got your undertakin' in the presence of the police that these here wild beasts of your'n ain't allowed to run wild o' nights no more— me agreeing to send you five long chains and posts."

The Combine saw the jewel miser nod, and then the procession proceeded to wend its weary way home,

"This is a case for a bottle— a big 'un, no less," said Smiler Bunn, worming his way back over the brow of the hill, "These cheetahs are going to be kept shut up to-night, and chained up every night after the posts are made. I tell you, Fortworth, nothing can stand against us and our luck."

And they drank a beaker or two— or three— to their luck. Four beakers it might have been... at any rate, there was nothing left for Sing Song out of a quart and a half of Mumm,

iv

AT EIGHT O'CLOCK that evening they sent the hardy Chink over the hill-top with instructions to watch the house until the lights went from the ground floor to the first, and then to report the movements of the inmates to them, they meantime settling down to a tolerably nifty bout at poker— "freezeouts"— in the snug shelter of the hood of the car, A cold rain had begun to fall at sunset, and the wind was rising, but this vagary of the elements was welcome, The greater the noise of the wind the less chance of their being overheard presently. As for Sing Song, the scout, is yellow hide was waterproof, anyway, as Fortworth commented. He was a good watchman, faithful, like a teliable house-dog, continued the ex-Baron, and by proving it tonight he stood an excellent chance of making money— perhaps.

Sing Song grinned and went.

At ten o'clock he prowled back to the camp.

"One lightee gone upstails— one lightee left downstails," he reported.

" Make a note of the upstairs room which is occupied, and come back when the other light's gone," muttered Smiler, intent on three kings and a pair of aces with which he was on the point of scientifically cannibalising his partner's whole available supply of ready money.

Sing Song merged with the darkness again.

An hour later he was back.

"Upstails lightee out long time," he said. "Downstails lightee velly funny. Him dim— low down. Movee all ovel house. Like people huntee— movee flom loom to loom lookee for findee somet'ing. You coming now, please, mastels."'

The partners followed him, a little puzzled, and for the next twenty minutes they stood watching the eccentric behaviour of the light carried by the person or persons downstairs. From the manner in which it showed dimly through the streaming rain, first at one window, then another, then another, then returned to gleam at the first window, it was obvious that someone in the house was moving quickly from room to room, as though they were "lookee for findee somet'ing," as Sing Song put it.

"I bet a dinner that so-called housekeeper and her husband are down there prospecting for jewels," said Smiler suddenly. "I knew they weren't any ordinary menial sports when I saw 'em first through my glasses. It looks to me that the sooner we weigh in down there the better— hey, Fortworth?"

"Sure!" muttered the ex-millionaire. "Come on!"

They started down the hill in teeth of the gale.

It was pitch dark, and the rain did not help to make the going any easier. Twice a rabbit-hole laid Lord Fortworth low, and once a mole-hill performed the same kind office for Mr. Bunn. The fretful, vicious snarling of the cheetahs broke intermittently on their ears; but it was not more fretful than the language which the partners ejected with the grass that they had quite involuntarily taken into their mouths as they fell.

In a few moments they had scaled the low stone wall and were under the lee of the house, where they paused a moment. The cheetahs' den was to the right of them and round a corner. Sing Song, who appeared to know his way blindfold, guided them across a wet lawn, and they halted noiselessly outside the window of the ground-floor room in which the dim light was burning.

They listened a moment, but whatever the person with the light was doing he was doing noiselessly. Then, quite suddenly, the light disappeared, leaving the whole of that side of the house in darkness.

"Run round and see if there are any other lights about, Sing,'' whispered Smiler, straining his eyes in an effort to see through the window and the haif-opened slats of the Venetian-blind inside.

"Black as a tank," he muttered. "They've all gone to bed at last."

Sing Song appeared silently, his eyes gleaming. He had made a complete circuit of the house.

"Lightee allee gone," he reported.

"Good," said Smiler, and fell noiselessly to work on the catch of the window. Under his capable manipulation the catch was "caught" within a few seconds, and a moment later Mr. Bunn was in the room. The others followed.

They listened for awhile; then, reassured, were on the point of drawing out their electric torches when there broke upon the silent darkness a scream of agony, seeming to proceed from under their very feet. It shuddered up through the night, piercing, appalling, intolerable. And from the den of the cheetahs, as that wild note of pain reached them, burst an excited clamour of short coughing Toars that, though not so dreadful, perhaps, as those of tigers, nevertheless were sufficient to string taut the nerves of the startled trio listening in the dark room. The scream died away in a sort of moaning wail, but was followed by a sound that was little less terrible— the deep sound of a strong man, mad with rage and pain, bellowing his wrath upon an enemy. 'The voice rumbled under their feet like the deep-throated snarling of some great beast.

"Hark to that— my God! What's going on in this house?" growled Fortworth, flashing a beam of light on his partner. Mr. Bunn's face was white

and hard as marble, so that the lines about his mouth seemed to be painted there with black paint. The eyes of the Chinaman were narrow glinting slits like those of a wild cat.

"It came from the cellar," said Smiler. "It was a woman who screamed. We'd better go down there and see what's wrong."

"Sure!" Fortworth's teeth set with the snap of a rat-trap. "It sounds as though some woman was being tortured."

"Tortured! Oh, hell—I can't stand for that!" gritted Mr. Bunn. "Come on!"

The three torches blazed out like miniature searchlights, and for a second they paused in astonishment. The room was aflame with light ; it flashed and flared and spurted from the walls in a myriad colours— hot reds and glaring greens, purples, blues, yellows— flickering, scintillating, dancing. It was as though the walls and ceiling were encrusted with huge diamonds, emeralds, rubies, sapphires, fire opal— an Aladdin's cave, the treasure-house of a Rajah.

"Geel" said Fortworth.

But their wonder was momentarily quenched as another scream echoed through the house.

"Come on, quick!" Mr. Bunn, moving with the cat-like quietness that is characteristic of many big men, made for the door. Passing through, he caught out of the commer of his eye the glitter of a wicked-looking knife in Sing Song's hand. He whecled on the Chink tigerishly.

"Put up that knife, you yellow snake, or I'll break you up. How many times have I told you we don't deal in murder. Take it, Fortworth."

Fortworth's finger clamped on the Chink's wrist.

"Give up!" he said in a growling whisper.

Sing Song gave up.

Hunting swiftly along a corridor, they came to an open door at the head of a flight of steps, up which shone a faint light. A hot blast of sulphurous air beat against their faces, as though a stove were burning in the cellar.

"Here!" whispered Smiler, and crept down the stone stairs.

But, despite their caution, they were overheard. A little figure, grotesquely arrayed in a loose dressing gown, shot suddenly into view at the bottom of the steps, a revolver in his hand.

He swung up the weapon and fired point-blank, even as Mr. Bunn jumped at him from the fifth step upwards.

It was the only shot fired, for Smiler blotted the little man out as a falling wall might blot out a dog.

They went down with a thud that shook the house. Fortworth and the Chink were beside them in an instant. But Smiler rose without assistance, looking a little dazed. His head had struck a glancing blow on the bottom step.

"It's— all ri'!" he gasped.

They bent over the unconscious form of the Colonel.

"Look after him, Sing— see if anything's broken. I'm no tiptoed ballet-dancer when I fall on folk," said Smiler. He lifted his hand, and it was scarlet. His left sleeve was drenched with blood.

"He shot me in the arm; nothing serious," he grumbled.

Fortworth helped him off with his coat, and, not unskilfully, bound up with a couple of handkerchiefs the ragged gash which the bullet had ploughed along the forearm.

Someone shouted hoarsely from the left wing of the cellar.

"For God's sake lend us a hand here, whoever you are!"

The partners went.

They found themselves in a dry, spacious, brick-lined vault, in the middle of which stood a brazier of ted-hot coke, with two pokers thrust between the bars. Near the brazier, facing each other across it, were a man and a woman, cach securely toped to one of the several bartels which stood along the walls of the cellar.

The head of the woman hung down laxly as though she had fainted. The man, a big, handsome fellow, had an enormous bruise on his temple, and on his left cheek was an angry red burn. His eyes glared.

Fortworth cut the woman loose and gently laid her on the floor, But Smiler hesitated a moment before he freed the man. He could guess what had happened.

"It's all right now, you know," he said quietly. "We're friends. I think I've half killed Colonel Amberfold. Jumped on him—

The glare in the eyes of the bound man died down a little.

"You can afford to let him alone; he's got his gruel," continued Smiler.

The man nodded.

"Right. I understand. I'll be good. You can cut now," he said. Smiler cut the ropes, and the man swung forward— free.

He stood still, staring rather wildly for a moment, then hurried over to the unconscious woman, lifted her lightly as a feather pillow, and turned to the steps. On his way he kicked the brazier across the cellar with a savage fury that was almost terrifying. Then, stepping over the prostrate Colonel, whose eyes were open and looking up in a bewildered stare, he went on up the flight of steps.

"See to the old man, Sing Song," said Smiler sotto voce, and the partners followed the man with the burn on his cheek,

He lay the woman on a big shabby couch in the hall.

"He never touched her— thank God!" he said in a quivering voice, and bent over her as she drew a long, sighing breath, stirred restlessly and opened her eyes.

"Hush! my dear— don't worry— it's all right now, old lady. Quite. It's Jack

His head bent over hers, and he slipped an arm round her shoulder.

"Steady old girl— take it easy," he whispered. She sobbed strangely— on the edge of hysteria. There was a pause, and suddenly the man rose.

"Good!" he said, in a normal tone.

The woman sat up on the couch, with a rather tremulous laugh, her hands going instinctively to her disordered hair.

"It was horrible!" she said. "But I'm all right now. But your cheek— did it touch you, Jack?" She stood up quickly, and saw the red mark.

"Oh-h! I'll get some oil for it," she gasped, and hurried out, The man turned to the partners.

"My wife and I have a great regard for each other," he said simply. "I am sorry to keep you waiting. How, in the name of Good Luck, did you happen to appear at the exact psychological second?"

"Oh, we are motor-touring— lost our way— saw a light, came to inquire, and heard a scream," explained Smiler airily. " Our car is over the brow of the hill."

"I see— what marvellous luck!"

"My name is Huish— Coomber Huish— and this is my friend, Mr. Morris White," said Smiler introductorily. "The Chinaman's our chauffeur." The other nodded, smiling strangely.

"I do not deny it— naturally," he said. "But— forgive me— I suggest that perhaps we should save time by being frank. I happened to hear early this morning from a humble friend of mine— a hare poacher— that you were camping over the hillside. I guessed what you were after. As it happened, we were after the same thing. The jewels, of course. I'llexplain. Colonel Amberfold is my uncle. When he came here to live he stopped an allowance he had been in the habit of making me— I was in the Army— and I was compelled to send in my papers. At my uncle's wish, we came here to live with him. He is enormously wealthy, and I am his heir. He invited us as guests, but made servants of us. I stood it as long as possible for my wife's sake— she has been accustomed to a better state of financial circumstances than mine, and— my uncle is very rich. But latterly he has become unendurable— he is a jewel miser, as no doubt you know—and I decided to take what I consider we have well earned aud go. He surprised us hunting for the jewels which are hidden all over the house— surprised us"— he indicated the big bruise on his temple— "and managed to drag us down to the cellar, where he proposed to brand us as

thieves. He would have done so— he's half-crazy, you know— but, fortunately, you arrived. That's all it is necessary to explain, I think. Naturally, I

haven't the impudence to blame you for attempting to annex the jewels —I was doing the same, perhaps with more justification, though—and I shall be for ever indebted to you and that very capable-looking Celestial in the cellar. I suggest now that you quietly clear out, and leave me to handle things. Don't be afraid I shall hurt the old man. We shall patch it up. He is not mad enough to want to settle this thing in public. Leave him to me. We'll call it a family squabble. But I hope you will allow me to persuade you to take away a souvenir of— an interesting evening. I shall take it as a favour. You see, we had a little luck before we woke the old man."

He took his hand from his pocket, and opened it so that the contents fell upon the table— a fistful of superb rubies.

"These are nothing to what is hidden in the house, of course, but— I must reserve those for myself. Naturally." He smiled.

The partners reflected.

"You're a cool card," said Smiler at length. "Of course we only did for you what any gentleman would do for another. Still, after all, as you say, rubies are rubies."

"And these are no fake rubies either," added Fortworth, who had been examining them. Among other roles which the ex-millionaire had adopted in the past was that of ruby-prospector in Burma, and he knew about rubies.

"Very well, then, since you insist."

Smiler put the jewels in his pocket. Fortworth indicated the great clusters and knobs of glass that flashed and sparkled from the walls and angles of the room.

"Ornaments?" he queried.

Mr. John Amberfold laughed.

"My uncle's idea of artistic decoration. Glass and cheap paste and prisms. He thinks a diamond is the most artistic and beautiful thing on earth, and a good imitation the next best."

Smiler nodded thoughtfully.

"Not such a fool as he looks," he mused aloud. "He may be cracked and a miser, but he's got some sound ideas."

Mrs. Amberfold came in with some oil for application to her husband's face.

"While you are being put right, we'll fetch the old man up," volunteered Mr. Bunn, and they were on the point of doing so when the Colonel, rather white and shaky, entered, leaning on Sing Song's strong right arm. Evidently the fall had jarred him, but by a miracle nothing was broken.

The Colonel sat down.

"Jack," he said to his nephew, "we have not cut a very pretty figure to-night. I think the best thing we can do is to forget it all. Since my fall I seem to have seen things more clearly. I think I must have been partly insane for the last few years. Certainly I was to-night. We— we must change things "

Messts. Bunn and Fortworth looked at each other. Evidently, thanks to Smiler throwing his weight into the scale, as it were, some subtle psychological change had taken place in the old man. A blow on the head often has queer and unexpected effects. It was plain that a family reconciliation was about to take place, and since they could not claim to be members of the family, obviously there was little or nothing to be gained by remaining. On the other hand, it was even conceivable that much might be lost.

"I think that, on the whole, here is where we step off," said Smiler blandly.

John Amberfold smiled, and not less blandly replied:

"Perhaps it is better so."

They bowed and departed, climbing the hill to the music of the cheetahs.

"He'd have made a fine crook," said Fortworth thoughtfully, referting to John Amberfold, as they reached the car.

"Yes. Champagne, Sing Song."

The Chink stretched out his fist.

"What's this, my son?" asked Smiler.

"Takee flom old man's pocket."

He poured into his master's palm a selection of loose diamonds as big as hazel-nuts.

"So you had the presence of mind to go through his clothes, did you, my lad. Well, all the more credit to you. You're a very good lad, and I shall have to think about giving you a rise one of these days. Now open a bottle and look alive. We'd better be on the London road before dawn, You never know how long these family reconciliations are going to last," he added to Fortworth, who agreed.

The loot panned out at about nine thousand pounds. Some months later, out of sheer curiosity, they made inquiries about the Amberfolds. Evidently the Colonel's cure was permanent, for he had bought a lordly estate in Sussex, and when he was not einployed in desperately striving to knock a stroke or so off a handicap of twenty-four, he seemed to spend his time chiefly in writing letters to the Press trying to institute a campaign against the wearing of jewellery. For his nephew, John Amberfold, and his wife, nothing appeared to be too good.

"On the whole," said Mr. Bunn, summing up one day after lunch, "on the whole, we seem to have been very good friends to that family. They owe a good deal to us, when you come to think of it."

Fortworth smiled his hard smile.

"Yes," he said, "they do. Perhaps the Colonel has remembered the fact in his will,'' he added humorously.

"Yes— perhaps," replied Mr. Bunn.

"Perhaps" was right!

18: The Heirs of Sometime Sam

Robert V. Carr

1877-1930

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Robert V Carr, the "cowboy poet", was also a writer of many short stories.

"SOMETIME SAM" was a devotee of Luck. To that sly, tricky godlet, he offered the rarest incense of his heart's blossom: Hope's eternal fresh spring bloom. To the smirker and mocker, through fifty years of rains, storms, and winds, he chanted the refrain of the prospector's litany: "Some time, somewhere I'll strike it."

In his long, long search for desert gold, he dug thousands of holes, tramped thousands of miles, suffered thousands of disappointments. Yet he was never entirely crushed; always could he muster up an offering to Luck. He seemed immune to decay ; men spoke of him as they would of some landmark of the wastes. "Old Sometime," they said, "has always been out there on the desert."

Occasionally Luck, in teasing mood, tossed a chunk of rich float in his path, or, now and then, permitted him to sell a group of claims. Once a sale netted him a thousand dollars. That money he made last him over a decade.

No gregariousness tormented the ancient wanderer of the wastes. To him, woman was a trap; partners a nuisance; cities and towns as stifling as crowded sheep pens.

He and his burros fitted their environment like the fauna of the waterless land over which they plodded. Instinctively they avoided stepping on that deadly little assassin, the horned rattlesnake, who, in his nocturnal wanderings, often neglects to agitate his tiny castanets. On the darkest night, they could march through a forest of cholla cactus and never once pick up a thorny ball or blunder into a barb-set branch. When those hellish twins, Heat and Delirium, stalked the glaring wastes, he and his burros could survive on a daily water ration a desert tyro would gulp down in an hour.

A medium-sized man, the wasteland wanderer, with quick gray eyes and a bronzed, jutting nose that parted his tobacco-stained mustache as a ship's prow parts a wave. His beard, shortened and haggled with dull scissors, was a dirty gray; his hair a snow-white thatch. When unoccupied by pipe or quid, his pursed lips gave vent to a continuous, monotonous whistle, keyed to a dry whisper.

Sam was old. "Somewhere in the eighties," he might admit, when pressed; "danged if I know perzactly." Aye, Sam was old, and all he possessed was old. His burros were old and as wise as sin. His brass kettle had been a part of his

equipment for over a quarter of a century. His muzzle-loading shotgun, its stock bound with copper wire, was in its twenty-fifth year. His Henry rifle had left the factory nearly three decades ago. To all his relics he gave constant attention and loving and meticulous care.

A slow, methodical putterer, old Sam, occupying himself with a multitude of tiny details, wearing away the long days with what he called "little chores." He lacked cleanliness, but with his relics he accomplished wonders. Seldom did he mislay anything; he could pack his burros in the dark.

He slept in his rags and tatters, never bathed and seldom washed his face; yet, until lately, he had never known a day of illness. Now he was troubled with a dry cough, shortness of breath, spells of faintness, and a recurrent pain in his left arm. No more could he lay his head on the desert's breast and drop into deep, restful, dreamless sleep.

Propped up by his pack saddles, or resting his back against some rock or arroyo wall, he slept only fitfully.

"Guess it's the heart," he told his burros. "Maybe smokin'. too much. Have to cut down."

But his other organs, remarkably sound, relieved the failing heart of much of its burden. Then, too, he possessed an innate toughness that enable him to hold his disability static for long periods.

He was not given to brooding or gloomy forebodings, but now he was vaguely conscious of a dark premonition that whispered funereally of the conclusion of his wanderings. Perhaps he would not always be a desert fixture; there was an end to all things.

With that somber thought came a distaste for the desert and a longing for a home camp by some foaming mountain stream.

"Would be fine," he murmured dreamily, as one visioning a paradise, "to git up in the mountains— like when a boy. Trees and streams— trees and streams— green grass and springs. Might take a splash, if I found a good swimmin' hole. Maybe git up there by and by. But Fil take another look around; bound to strike it some time."

When at last Luck seemingly relented and led him to a vast deposit of goldsplotched ore, Sam indulged in no wild gymnastics, no mad shouts of exultation. Calmly he surveyed the exposure that told him he had found a Golconda.

"Well, boys," he remarked quietly to his burros, "here's what we've been tryin' to find fer quite a spell. There she is, rich as mud. Help yourselves."

But his long-eared friends displayed no excitement; they could not eat gold. What they wanted was a big feed of barley.

Often had he dreamed of finding just such a great lode, thick-sown with blobs of rusty gold, fantastic stringers, dullgleaming nuggets; often had he visioned himself "stompin'" his old hat, and yelling: "I've found it! The world is mine!" Now, his wildest dream a reality, he only leaned heavily on his shovel, his mind in the cold grip of sorrowful futility. "Too old," he mourned, "too old!"

To banish momentarily the midnight of his despair, he evoked the spirit of his youth. At his call, it rose from the past's dark depths, straight-limbed, bright-eyed, radiant as the morning star.

"This would tickle you," he mused, with an indulgent smile. "Wonder what you'd do with it?"

"Work it!" cried Youth. "I'd find a way to get tons and tons of that rich stuff to the railroad."

"Then what would you do, say, after you had the ore goin' in a steady stream to the railroad, and was a rich man?"

"I'd travel like a king to far places," Youth shouted. "I'd have gay companions, rich food, rare wines, private cars, a yacht, whole hotel floors, all that money could buy! For my pleasure, I'd turn the world upside down!"

"Maybe you would, young feller, but after you'd done all that, then what? Maybe it wouldn't work as you figger. Maybe, with all the eatin' and drinkin' and skylarkin', your stomach would give out, and you'd be in bed, on a cracker and a glass o' milk. Maybe all your gay companions "would be jes' fairweather friends. Then, don't fergit, all the time you'd be gittin' older." Like the tolling of a funeral knell, he repeated: "Older— older— older."

"What, then, if you're so wise, would you do?" Youth sneered faintly. "With plenty of money, what would you do?"

"I'd take it quietly, young feller," Sam replied, with paternal patience. ""There's a heap o' things I've learned you've yet. to find out. First thing, I'd git me some good licker ; need a little snort now and then to put fire in my blood. Then some first-class terbacker, both smokin' and chawin'. Next, I'd git some old-fashioned woman to make me a real apple pie— rich and deep and wide, with, say, a quart of real cream to drench it." He smacked withered lips.

"Yes, siree, you crazy young scamp," he went on, "real, gen-u-wine cream from a spring house! Recollect, you thievin' devil, how you used to lap it up? I-gosh, weren't it good! And last of all, green pasture for the jacks, and a rocker on the porch of a mountain cabin fer me. Must be by a stream; one of them kind I can hear a-talkin' and a-laughin' to itself day and night. None of your standin' the world on its ear fer me; jes' enough fer comfort."

The shining figure became wan and ghostly. Slowly it faded into the dark depths.

"Good-by," sighed Sam. "You'd never understand me, anyway. Your wants ain't mine, ner your ways. We're strangers, you and me."

Yes, he'd settle down in the mountains. Snug cabin by some singy-songy stream. That was it— singy-songy stream. He whispered the doublejointed adjective several times, mentally savoring its slight running-water mimicry. He'd have everything comfortable up there: fireplace, cellar, spring house, garden, a cow, some chickens; and— happy thought!— a fishpond. How pleasant to look down into the depths of a clear pool and see a big trout lazily waving his fins!

The strike? Indifferently he stared at the chunk of gold-seamed ore in his grimy, gnarled hand. Under his feet were hundreds of tons of just such rich stuff. For half a century he had searched for it; but, now that he had found it, some inscrutable power had sapped exultation dry, reduced the green immortelles of victory to withered husks.

"Twenty-thirty year ago," he mused aloud, "I'd gone crazy over this; but now— too old— too old— too old. Huntin' fer it was what kept me goin'; the fun's in the dreamin' and the hopin'. But when you find it, somehow you don't care.

"Won't bother about workin' it," he went on, confiding his plans to the silent, indifferent desert. "Come down and git a little once in a while. Don't need ner want much. Won't start no stampede, to bring fightin', killin', lyin'— hell itself. Cover my trail— keep it quiet— say nothin'— take along enough to do fer a spell."

He glanced up at the far peaks, shimmering in the clear air.

"Enough to do me fer a spell up there." He let the specimen slip from his fingers. "Yea, that's what I'll do: take along some to mortar and pan when I git to runnin' water. Won't have to take much ; rich, rich it is—rich as a widder's smile. A mother lode, if ever there was one."

The great deposit was in a high basin, in a vast labyrinth of sharp-shouldered, barren hills and steep-walled, tortuous canyons. Sam, looking for a short cut to a spring, in the depths of the hills, had found the only entrance to the great hollow— a fracture in a wall of solid rock above the rim, barely wide enough to admit a packed burro. Thus, from the treasure cup no rich float to betray to some sharp-eyed prospector the existence of the lode.

From the hills the land sloped down to Hell's Kettle, a great, sandy sink, crescent-shaped, and, in places, within a few hundred feet of sea level. On the crest of the far slope above the convex side of the sink was Last Chance Spring. Between that oasis and the distant peaks ran a low range of volcanic hills, then a long stretch of rolling country, and lastly, the precipitous foothills of the great range.

Between Last Chance Spring and the foothills were hidden springs and seeps— tiny green islands in a vast strait of aridness. Sam knew every one of those springs and seeps; but, since hot weather had not yet laid its withering spell on the lonely land, there was no pressing need for forethought concerning water. In the moderate temperature, he and his burros required only occasional swallows.

Hell's Kettle gave little hint of the inferno the sun of summer would make of its sandy wastes. It was fairly carpeted with the flowers of the desert's evanescent spring; fugacious blooms so tiny a man's hand might shade a dozen varieties. On the sunward side of the sand dunes, the verbena exhaled its delicate perfume, and the desert primTose, pure and immaculate, raised its lovely face to the balmy air's light caress.

For old Sam, it was a long march to Last Chance Spring; and for his burros, too, with several little sacks of the precious ore added to the packs none too light for their old backs.

A giant Joshua tree stood in royal loneliness near the spring. When he saw the familiar black shape looming above the gleaming green glories of the little oasis, his eyes brightened and he made a clumsy effort to quicken step.

Methodically he unpacked and picketed the burros. Then, presently, his old shotgun bellowed.

" 'Rabbit stew,' she says," he chuckled triumphantly.

Deftly he skinned the cottontail. With some onions and salt pork for flavor, it was soon simmering over a little fire. Flapjacks and coffee completed his menu.

After the meal, he whittled some shavings from a dry, black plug, rubbed them in his horny palm, filled his pipe, and lighted it with a blazing twig.

A hawk winnowed past, veering off a few feet from the head of the ruminating smoker. For a moment, he glimpsed the cold, implacable malignancy of the bird's eye.

"A killer," he remarked aloud; "a bad un. Want none o' that; jes' a place to rest by runnin' water— and— and peace."

Moonrise. On the face of the golden globe, dark smudges— finger marks of the great lamplighter. The shadow of the lone Joshua tree, an intricate chevalde-frise. Some winged haunter of the night reiterates a doomful note. A coyote shatters the silence with sudden crazy clamor. In the illimitable monochrome, the oasis is a fragment of black velvet; the fire, a flaming ruby; the old man, an elf's doll.

Sometime Sam was not thirsty, yet he visioned himself luxuriating, like a gamboling otter, in the foam and smother of a waterfall. What was the mysterious power, he asked himself, that had made him a wanderer of the arid

wastes, when he could have easily established a comfortable camp by some mountain stream?

Only a few men knew the desert, he answered slowly, fumbling for what he conceived to be truth. Of that select company, he was an honored member. Any soft fool could survive by a mountain stream; but it required rawhide toughness, endless patience, and eternal vigilance to survive in the harsh, unyielding desert. Where one's land is, there are his fresh tracks. In the vast sweep of barrenness, he had enjoyed undisputed, unquestioned superiority. A man stays where he is king.

But, now, he vaguely realized, he was afflicted with a psychic desiccation. Those long, lonely years in the desert how somehow withered his spirit, until now it was reduced to the juicelessness of a greasewood stick. He could not plainly see the causes of his spiritual dehydration; but the sight of running water, he fondly imagined, would vivify his dry old soul with a bloomy renaissance. His back against the Joshua, he slept fitfully until midnight; then rose somewhat painfully and broke camp. The forlorn little procession passed through moonlit fields of flowers from which rose wave after wave of perfume. Intoxicated by the sweet odors, the ancient burros, after the manner of their kind, essayed some clumsy cavorting.

"Old fools!" Sam reproved sternly. "Have some sense! What would you think o' me, if I tried to fool myself into thinkin' I was twenty?"

As the altitude increased, so did the spells of faintness, but his innate toughness gave the old plodder strength to trail onward and upward— a tortoise pace, but at last he reached Lazy Man's Creek, a hurrying mountain stream that sang the song his spirit craved. For several hours he rested on its grassy bank, staring fascinatedly at its crystal flood. Then he thought of the ore, and began talking to himself. Not entirely a foolish habit. If a man talks only to himself, there is none to betray his confidence.

"Looks like people lived around here. Better bury the stuff afore I meet somebody. Gotta keep mum; mustn't let anybody know."

He swayed slightly as he worked. The little sacks of ore seemed intolerable burdens, his shovel loaded with lead.

"Dizzy ag'in," he muttered.

Shaking and trembling, he scattered dry sticks and brush over the treasure cache, and resumed his slow march up the canyon.

BIG DAVE GREENWOOD, unlike many frontier bachelors, was a relentless foe of dirt and disorder. His comfortably furnished and commodious cabin was as spick and span as the kitchen of any old-time Dutch housewife.

Fifty years young, for him no morning mood of grunting, befrazzled, gummy-eyed stupidity. Clean and freshly shaved, fairly radiating good cheer, he was the personification of wholesomeness, as he flipped goldenbrown cakes, made from corn of his own raising and grinding, or turned rashers of bacon, cured to a delectable flavor in his own smokehouse.

With the assistance of Hank Blinker, an unobtrusive, methodical old man, who had been with him for years, he combined ranching with placer mining. A big garden, an apple orchard, cows, hogs, chickens, and turkeys, gave him a fare not enjoyed by his closest neighbors— Bill Dimby, Ike Downville, Sim Meeker, and Jack Mundy— save through his generosity or when they threw their feet under his table. The four slapdash, slovenly prospectors might have lived as he lived had they not lacked his skill and patience, his foresight and ability to plan wisely, his careful and persistent industry.

His virtues, however, brought severe penalties. The four borrowed his sharp tools, and either failed to return them or brought them back dull and rusty. Too lazy to cultivate gardens or to keep cows and chickens, they depended on him for fresh vegetables, milk and eggs, with no thought of return. They took every advantage of his generosity and good nature, while secretly resenting his ability to give.

His library filled one side of his big living room. He leaned to scientific and fact books, though he had a keen appreciation of poetry and philosophy. Illiterates all, the four were slyly contemptuous of his knowledge.

"Thinks he knows it all," was Sim Meeker's secret thought.

"I could learn what he knows," Ike Downville boasted to himself, "if I wanted to put my mind to it."

"I'm not like Dave," Bill Dimby bouqueted himself; "I don't need a cabinful of books to tell me what to do. I got some sense of my own."

"When I read," Jack Mundy remarked to himself, "I want something interestin'— a story with fightin' and wimmin' in it, instead of the tiresome stuff Dave loads up with."

But when they wanted a well-cooked meal, they were careful to arrive at Dave's cabin on exact schedule. When puzzled by some problem in mining or geology, they carried their dumb heads to Dave. Did one of them meet with accident or misfortune, Dave was the first man he called on for help and sympathy.

The big-hearted prospector was in front of his cabin, feeding brown sugar to his saddle horse, Pard, when Sometime Sam, with his burros straggling behind him, staggered into view. He hurried down the trail, and received the exhausted old man in his mighty arms.

"A hard pull" gasped Sam. "Like to never made it."

"Just rest yourself," advised Dave, his deep voice resonant with sympathy; "I'll take care of you."

He lifted the old man in his arms, as though he were a baby, and carried him into the cabin. An easy-chair, a hot whisky toddy, and a bowl of steaming chicken broth, made the world look brighter to Sometime Sam.

"Now, old-timer," smiled Dave, "a good, long rest will help you forget your troubles."

"You're kind to me," old Sam said softly; and looked about him contentedly. "Got a great place here, friend. Been dreamin' of something like this fer a long time."

"You're welcome to what I've got," Dave gently assured him, "for as long as you care to stay."

He proceeded to undress his patient. When he had him propped up in bed and covered with warm blankets, with a hot iron at his feet, he stepped back and surveyed him benignly.

"This is heaven to me," Sam sighed happily, his eyes warm with gratitude. "Pine wood smells good— everything sweet and fresh. I'm much in your debt, pard; but I'll pay back— some way; I'll pay back."

In the mind of the capable and faithful Dave was no thought of the burden the exhausted old man might eventually become. No selfish calculation of how long his liberty might be restricted by the requirements of a helpless- invalid darkened his cheerful, whole-hearted generosity.

For the slowly failing old desert rat, he prepared tasty, nourishing broths and light custards. He bathed him, shaved him, ministered to his every need. During the long evenings, he read to him. At night, he was up at intervals to ascertain if his patient was resting comfortably. And always was he cheerful and good-natured.

Sam liked to be near the stream; hear its soft, unending song; rest his eyes, long set in the desert squint, on its foam and sunlit ripples. Dave padded a big homemade chair with blankets and set it on the grassy bank. There the feeble ancient meditated during the cool afternoons.

"Purty," he would wheeze— "purty water. Knows something— that water. Dodges down out o' sight when it hits the desert."

Bill Dimby brought some venison.

"Give him some wild meat, Dave," he suggested, with assumed gruffness. "Nothin' like wild meat to brace up an old cuss."

Sam, confessing his desert dream of apple pie, Dave made him one. It was a foot across and an inch and a half deep. He cut a huge quarter, sprinkled it liberally with sugar, and drenched it with pure cream. But old Sam ate only a

morsel. A mountain of gold would not have enabled him to enjoy that luscious cream-drenched wedge of apple pie. Luck grinned sardonically.

At Dave's request, Ike Downville, bottle-nosed and button-eyed, but with the voice of an angel, sang for the ancient dreamer by the stream— "Annie Laurie," "Darling Nelly Gray," "Home, Sweet Home," and "The Old Oaken Bucket." The old, sweet, heartbreak songs flowed from the throat of the dull-faced little prospector like divine melody from the lips of some heathen idol. The golden tones soothed Sometime Sam. He closed his eyes and smiled appreciatively. "Like moonlight fallin on the water," he murmured.

Considering the harmonious operation of Dave's many virtues, in the deepening twilight of his meditations, Sam caught glimpses of a few of the true causes of his spiritual desiccation. While Dave had been watering his mind and soul with knowledge and varied interests, Sam had let his go dry, until they had become gray and leafless. While Dave was receiving fresh and vitalizing thoughts, Sam had wasted years by lonely camp fires in far desert places, mulling over dead memories. Dave had lived; Sam had merely existed.

To many men, the failing of the vital forces brings drooling senility; but to Sometime Sam it brought saintliness. His voice became as thin as the tinkle of silver, his body scarcely a mummy's weight, but he saw only the light of life. In time, all the shadows faded— regret, suspicion, cynicism, and worldly desire— leaving mind and soul bathed in the white light of childish innocence.

In none of Dave's neighbors did Sam discern evil; to him, they were all good. As for Dave, Sam had long since raised him to the rank of a ministering angel. His nurse and comforter was the personification of all that was true and good. Unable to perceive evil, yet remembering his find and its location, he planned to make Dave and the other prospectors his heirs. He would make them all rich and independent. They would always be as they were now: a company of loyal pards, honest, unselfish, trusting and loving one another. With the gold they would do much good; they would help the less fortunate, still the widow's moan, dry the orphan's tear, lend a hand to struggling youth, But faint memories of the lusts of men, whispering to him warningly, made him delay announcing his plan. They were good men; yet, wasn't there something about gold that brought trouble? He would wait— wait a little longer.

THE MONTHS passed, and still Sometime Sam lingered.

One quiet evening, when Dave's neighbors had lighted their pipes, after enjoying one of his excellent meals, Sam suddenly demanded a cup of coffee. Dave, demurring a little, gave him a half cup of the stimulant.

"Wait till she takes hold," the old sufferer choked out.

Silently they waited, indulging him in what they considered a sick man's whim.

"Boys," he began, "you've been kind to me. Be gone in a little while— want to show my feelin' fer what you've done fer me. Goin' to make you all rich— every one o' you."

Between gasps, he told them of the hidden samples, described the trail to his find, the seeps and springs along the reute.

Yet, as he finished, the faint memories of the lusts of men once more rose to trouble him.

"Be square with one another," he beseeched them. "Don't let the gold bring hate and killin'. Do good—"

"You've talked enough, Sam," Dave gently checked. "Time you were getting some sleep." Then, to the visiting quartet: "Sorry, boys, but I'll have to adjourn the meeting."

But the four were already on their feet, their eyes glittering and hard. As they strained their fickle memories to record accurately the old desert rat's description of the route to the fabulous bonanza, in the heart of each cold selfishness snarled: "Take all— every foot of the rich ground— every ounce of the gold!"

A moment of tense silence, and then Bill Dimby picked up Dave's lantern.

Sam had sunk quickly into a doze. He did not see his heirs rush from the cabin, nor hear Dave half humorously remark, after they were gone: "I suppose I'll have to go after my lantern; Bill never brings anything back."

At first the four prospectors walked swiftly; but, when the trail widened, animated by the same sordid impulse, they shamelessly broke into a run.

When they uncovered the samples and saw the gold gleaming dully in the lantern light, they were like famished wolves after a taste of blood. They got in each other's way, their eyes took on a baleful shine, they fumbled the rich stuff. They had been kind to Sam, but the gold possessed the power to drive them to madness. Each one clawed and scrambled to secure the richest chunks. Then it dawned on them that the samples were only samples; that down in the desert was the deposit from which tons and tons of equally rich ore might be taken. The first man to reach the find of Sometime Sam would be a millionaire. They rushed back to the cabin, and wildly called Dave forth.

But the sight of the gold-splotched ore failed to excite that calm-hearted, cool-minded philosopher.

"You boys," he said quietly, easily reading their secret, poisonous thoughts, "can do as you please; but I'll stay home and care for Sam."

"Yes," agreed Bill Dimby jerkily, "that's the thing to do." He was backing away. "You're handy that way. We'll go take a look; maybe he only found a pocket. If we find it, we'll declare you in."

They did not wait until dawn to stampede. Gold lust had transformed them into creatures in whom no noble thought survived. Each was resolved to take possession of Sam's find at any cost. He alone would seize the treasure; he would share it with no man; he would, if necessary, kill to hold it.

The desert silence closed over Bill Dimby and Ike Downville as they vanished, adding another mystery to its secret hoard.

Jack Mundy overtook Sim Meeker at Last Chance Spring. Trail wisdom had not guided them to the seeps and springs along the route. Luck had humored them in their madness— temporarily.

Ordinarily adverse to leaving their pleasant mountain runways, they had only a nodding acquaintance with the desert. Each had galloped forth, imagining a forward trail pleasing to his conceit. He was Luck's favorite. For him a quick dash to Sam's strike and a triumphant return to the cool mountains.

But the heat and glare of midsummer had dispelled their rainbow visions. And the sight of Hell's Kettle, a sizzling trough far below them, had not prompted rosy dreams. Long, terrible miles before them, and not one drop of water, save what they might carry from that well-named fountain, Last Chance Spring.

Meeker had descended into the hot desolation without a canteen. This was not unusual, for there is no limit to human stupidity, as the records of death from thirst testify. Not through any forethought but because it happened to be within easy reach, Mundy had included a big canteen in his hastily assembled equipment.

Meeker's advantage was in the possession of Tricky, an offspring of a broncho stallion and a burro he had bought frem a desert rat. She had inherited the spirit and speed of her father and the endurance and adaptability of her mother. Unlike Mundy's broncho, Easy, now near to exhaustion, she could endure a high degree of heat, required little water, and would crop the bitter desert shrubs. Already she was recuperated and full-fed, while the horse sagged disconsolately.

For a time they made a pretense of friendliness, but at last a glowering, ominous silence fell between them. In their averted eyes were recurrent glints of cold flame. Held by the heat in the giant Joshua's shade, they brooded somberly.

"I'll take the canteen and Tricky," each savagely promised the beast snarling within him. "I'll cross the Kettle in the cool of the night. None but me shall leave this place. None but me."

Inwardly tensing themselves for the inevitable struggle, they labored under a terrible strain. Fear's manacles held them close together; a ghastly intimacy, like condemned prisoners on their way to execution.

Slowly they approached the point of murderous action; then, suddenly, their taut nerves snapped. With mad-dog snarls, they closed in a desperate grapple.

Meeker slipped his knife into Mundy's vitals. Mundy's left hand closed on the naked blade, held it. His fingers cut to the bone, he kneed his opponent back, and jerked his gun clear of the holster. The six-shooter exploded within two inches of Meeker's abdomen. He half turned, and then slapped the earth as though struck by a thunderbolt. He was dead in a few minutes.

Mundy lingered until midnight. Before he died, he managed to release Tricky and Easy.

Sunrise. A coyote shrill yapping certain welcome news to his fellow scavengers, and a buzzard descending in lazy spirals.

WITH THE THOUGHT that the gentle old man would have chosen such a resting place, Dave buried Sometime Sam on a rocky promontory overlooking the eversinging stream. With the blanketed shape in the deep hole, he interred the gold-splotched samples, the meager camp and trail equipment, the old shotgun and the ancient Henry rifle.

Indifferent to many tribal customs, he did not mark the grave. No tombstone could delay the return of dust to dust. Nor did he notify the remote county authorities. Strongly individualistic, he was much adverse to what he termed "legal monkey-doodle business." A coroner could not restore life.

Before the passing of the old desert rat, Dave had noted the return of Easy and Tricky, and surmised the fate of their owners. But he entertained no thought of attempting the rescue of the stampeders. He would not desert helpless old Sam for the sake of men who had deliberately set their feet on the trail of death.

"They were wiser than their riders," was his comment, as he watched the two animals splashing in the shallows of the stream; "they knew their limitations." . When balmy fall smiled on the land of greasewood and cactus, and Hells Kettle no longer seethed and bubbled, he leisurely descended into the desert. His memory, keen and exact, had retained in proper sequence every word of Sam's description of the route to the find. At Last Chance Spring,

he identified what remained of the two victims of their own madness. His shovel soon restored the little oasis to its pristine purity.

He made camp near the entrance to the basin, and walked down to the exposures and blow-outs of the great lode. He prospected until he tired of handling rich stuff. A wagonload would bring what would be a fortune to the average man. And his knowledge of formations told him that here was no showy vein, to peter out with depth, but a hidden mountain of free-milling ore that would produce hundreds of millions of dollars.

He could put up discovery notices, take possession, and begin hauling the ore to the railroad. In a short time, he could have a string of tough mules, with tougher drivers, hauling his wagons loaded with the rich stuff. Then a branch railroad and a roaring town. Money would pour in on him in an endless flood; he would soon be a multimillionaire. But what would he do with it— the golden flood?

Gentle old Sam, with a vision of some huge Santa Claus scattering gold among a poverty-stricken multitude, had beseeched: "Do good." A childish viewpoint.

What was good? Wasn't it just a matter of viewpoint? And wasn't the viewpoint shaped by inherited mental and physical virtues and weaknesses, environment, and the customs and passions of the particular tribe to which one belonged?

Would not the wolf regard a free swing at a flock of sheep as the greatest good one could do him? But what was good for the wolf no amount of money could make good for the sheep. Do good unto a wolf and every sheep in the world would blat: "Injustice!"

Would not the sheep regard giving them green, well-watered pastures as the greatest good one could do them? But what was good for sheep no amount of money could make good for cattle. Loudly the horned crowd would complain:

"Behold, you have done us a great injustice by helping the foul sheep. We cannot graze where sheep have cropped the grass to the roots and left their sickening odor. Injustice! And you call it doing good! Ba-a-aw!"

Power, yes; but not actually Dave Greenwood's. Outwardly the world would kowtow to him; but its sincere obeisance would be to the gold— the gold temporarily in his possession.

Stripped of the liberty of obscurity, he would become the slave of gold. It would impose on him certain rigid rules of conduct, certain conventionalities from which there would be no escape. The world's spotlight would be turned on him, his every move criticized.

Egotism deluded some men into believing that by the use of money they could work a change in the world. But had any human being by any method ever worked any change in the world? Didn't the world, when it got ready to change, do so under its own impulse and power? What mortal could prove that the idea of change was not merely one of man's many illusions?

Could one human being, either by reward or punishment, work an actual change in the nature of another human being? Had the enjoyment of his wellcooked food, his clean and comfortable cabin, and the conveniences his hand had wrought, lessened the inefficiency and slovenliness of the four men, who, scourged by crazy avarice, had ridden blindly to destruction?

Vast wealth would set envy and hatred on his trail. Like starving buzzards, countless beggars would descend on him. He would have to hire lawyers to guard his money, and private detectives to guard him. Of every man who approached him, he would have a secret suspicion—the cancerous thought that back of every protestation of friendship lurked some dark, mercenary motive.

Yet there were shrill inner voices urging him to "cash in."

"What sane man," cried the impatient chorus, "who would not grab this and work it to the limit! You're an idiot, Dave Greenwood, even to hesitate. Think of the luxuries it would bring you! You would not have to lift your hand; you would have only to give orders. Think of the satisfaction of knowing that even while you slept every minute was adding to your wealth. If you do not grab this, some other man will ultimately stumble onto it, and for him it will pour forth its golden flood. If you are alive then, you will bitterly regret your silly philosophizing. Only a fool would turn away from this. Take it!

He had health, comfort, and security, a peaceful heart and a calm mind. He had the ability to enjoy life's simple things—things free of the germ of their own destruction, free of penalties. Why, then, invite the incubus of wealth to set its claws in his soul and hagride it to the grave? Why not remain happy and free?

"I'll let you keep it," he told the desert, and turned toward his ponies.

19: The Secrets of the Grave

Alfred George Gardiner (as by"Alpha")

1865-1946

The Grand Magazine March 1913

I LOOKED a second time at the telegram in my hand, to see at what hour it had been sent.

It was not such a surprising thing that Marston should ask me to go to him in the evening. He often did so ; in fact, I think I had been his only intimate friend ever since we were fellow students at St. Vitus' Hospital. Since that date Marston, who had stuck to the hospital, had gradually worked his way up to be assistant lecturer on Pathology. He was a clever fellow, and was not wanting in original ideas, both in pathology and in one or two other scientific subjects, but he seemed unable to work out his theories satisfactorily, and up to the present time had never scored a complete success. I was working up a small private practice, and was pretty busy, but still I generally managed to see Marston at some hour of the day or evening two or three times a week.

Yet I was a little puzzled by the telegram. It was not so strange that he should ask me to go to his room at the hospital, for I knew he sometimes worked there in the evening. But the curious point was that I had met Marston that afternoon at Professor Verger's funeral, and the hour marked on the form showed that the telegram was despatched less than twenty minutes after we had separated.

However, although I was surprised that Marston had not told me what he wanted of me when we were together, I had no hesitation about keeping the appointment, and hurried off to see one or two patients, in order that I might have the evening free.

I reached the hospital at a little before nine, and the porter answered my inquiry for Marston by telling me that he was in his room, adjoining the post-mortem room, and that he had left word that I was to join him there when I came.

I walked down the long, dimly-lighted hospital corridor, and across the garden to the medical school, vaguely wondering whether Marston had sent for me merely for the sake of a gossip or to show me some new discovery. In the latter case I hoped that it would prove more fruitful than some other of his really promising ideas had been.

When I reached Marston's room I thought that my first idea had been the correct one. The little laboratory that I knew so well seemed to contain none but the familiar objects— the usual test-tubes, plugged with cotton wool, the sections and culture dishes in their usual places, while not even the microscope was on the table, and Marston sat in an arm-chair, smoking his pipe, and staring at the fire.

"I was awfully glad you sent for me, old chap," I said, "although I had to see an old lady an hour sooner than she expected me, and rather offended her in consequence. But why on earth didn't you tell me when you saw me this afternoon, instead of sending me a telegram twenty minutes after we had parted?"

"I thought this afternoon of asking you to come,' he replied, "and then I thought I wouldn't, and I spent that twenty minutes trying to make up my mind if I wanted you or not... But I couldn't be alone."

"Not very complimentary, I must say, that you only wanted me to save you from an attack of the blues," I remarked, "not to mention that it took you twenty minutes to decide that you would not prefer them to my company!"

"Well, it was not exactly that," Marston protested, half laughing; "but at any rate, here you are. Draw up that chair to the fire, fill your pipe— there's "baccy over there —and we'll have a jaw."

I drew up the chair he suggested, filled my pipe and lighted it, and then, in spite of the promised talk, we sat and smoked for a few minutes in silence.

Presently we began to talk of the funeral of that afternoon, and of some of the men we had met there, and gradually the conversation turned to the late Professor Verger himself.

The death had been a very sad one, occurring as it did to a man not much past the prime of life, and striking him in the midst of his work so suddenly, that a - post-mortem examination had been necessary, which, I understood, Marston had performed.

"Verger was a great man," I said. " His death will be a terrible loss to science. What ideas must have been locked up in that brain of his!"

Marston looked at me curiously as I said this, and remarked :

"You've a funny way: of putting things!" Then, after a moment's pause, he added, "Do you know that I understand that at the moment of his death he had just succeeded in discovering the principle underlying the laws of heredity, at which I and others have been working vainly for so long? But I know that he had not written a line on the subject."

"Then the knowledge died with him. What a terrible misfortune!" I said. "What a pity it is that it is impossible to look into that dead brain and reach its secrets!"

"I suppose you're sure it is impossible?" said Marston. And with that he got up and went across the room to a cupboard, from whence he produced a jar containing an object easy to recognise.

"There's Verger's brain. Shall we try to extract its knowledge?"

I started up, wondering whether Marston had gone suddenly mad. I had noticed all the evening that his manner had been unnaturally calm, and that he had been making a tremendous effort to keep control over himself.

"What are you talking about, man?" I said. "Surely Verger's brain is buried with him, or if some scoundrel allowed you to bring it here, what good can it be to you? This will get you into serious trouble. You must be crazy."

"No, I am not mad," Marston. "Wait a minute—"

Going to another cupboard, which he unlocked with-a key which was hanging round his neck, he took out an instrument not unlike a phonograph, but in which I noticed, on looking closely, that where in the ordinary way the cylinder is usually to be found, there was a complicated arrangement of wires and plates, suggesting a delicate piece of electrical apparatus. At the same time he brought out a small battery and coil, and then returned to his seat by the fire.

"You said just now, Staines, that it was impossible to find out what was in a dead man's brain. Isn't that rather an example of what we have so often spoken of as the dogmatism of ignorance? We are all too apt to think that what has not been done will never be done. I daresay I'm a little given to that myself, only in this case, you see, I happen to know something. Think a minute," he went on; "each impression, each idea must be registered somewhere in the brain— how otherwise can you account for Memory? You sleep soundly the night through, you get a blow on the head that knocks you senseless, and yet, if the delicate organ we call the brain remain uninjured, you take up your life again just where you left off, and take out each idea that you had the week before, with the same ease as taking chessmen out of a box."

"That's all very well, and Verger's ideas may still be in his brain, as you say," I argued; "but how can we get at them? You can't distil them from it in a retort; you can't see them under the microscope."

"No, that's not the way in which I should think of going to work," he replied; "but consider. Supposing Verger in his lifetime had wanted you to have his views on heredity, what would he have done?"

"I suppose he would have told me."

"Exactly. He would have set his motor nerves to work to move his tongue and larynx in such a way that the sounds emitted would have suggested to you what he was thinking about. Well, that's the principle I have acted upon in constructing this little apparatus that you see on the table. You know, of course, the part of the brain which governs speech?, Well, we shall stimulate that portion of Verger's brain, and as we haven't the larynx to work upon, we'll conduct the nerve waves into this machine, and then, if I'm not mistaken, you'll hear something remarkable."

"Good heavens!" I cried excitedly, by this time thoroughly roused. "Is it possible? Will it work? Have you tried it before?"

"Only on the brains of dogs and cats," Marston answered; "and I got out the barks and mews all right, although I must confess I didn't understand them. But this is something different. Shall we try the experiment? But you must swear that you will not mention a word of this to anyone. I thought at first to have done it alone, but it seemed too uncanny, and I felt I must have your company. But I won't have it known. You promise me this, Staines, don't you?"

I readily gave the required promise. I did not half like the business, but I was far too excited at what Marston had said not to want to see it to the end.

Then Marston rose, and taking the brain out of the jar placed it upon an insulated glass plate. He then with a pair of delicate forceps connected part of the brain with a high-tension coil, and another with the phonograph-like apparatus. This took him some considerable time, because the connecting wires were extremely delicate, and great care had to be taken to avoid any injury to the brain.

"Are you ready, old man?" he asked when he had finished. "Are you sure that you can stand it?"

I nodded assent, and Marston started the coil.

For some minutes nothing happened. Then I started out of my chair, for surely that was Verger's voice speaking to us in just that slow, hesitating way I knew so well.

The sounds themselves were mechanical and metallic, such as we are accustomed to hear upon the phonograph, but the manner of speaking was characteristically that of Verger. It did not sound as though he were giving a

lecture or talking to us, but more like a man who is speaking to himself, musing as he spoke. At first the words were incoherent, sometimes indistinct, or remarks on matters of no moment, such as interest a sick man.

This went on for five minutes, perhaps longer, for I took little heed of time; then quite suddenly the theme changed. The words were more distinct now, and the tone more positive, although still like that of a man speaking to himself. The instrument was. speaking on scientific subjects now; then, little by little, the whole theory of heredity was unfolded, interspersed with such remarks as, "It must be that!" "There can be no other explanation."

After a time the thing seemed to hesitate; the words came at longer intervals, then some incoherent sounds were audible; gradually the sounds grew fainter and died away.

Then for the first time I turned to look at Marston. To my surprise, although evidently in a state of great excitement, he was seated at a table, stylo in hand, before a sheet of foolscap, which he was rapidly covering. As I looked he threw down his pen, saying:

"It is all over; we shall get no more. I could never make it work twice. What do you think of it?"

"My dear fellow, it is more wonderful than anything I have dreamed of. It is a marvellous discovery. You will be famous all over the world."

"Shall I?" he said calmly. "How? You've promised not to speak of it."

"But you yourself— surely you are going to describe your invention to the world?" I cried. "You will be asked to read a paper on it before the Royal Society. Your name will be in everybody's mouth."

"Possibly, if I did so, I should be famous for a few days— a nine days' wonder. But you don't think seriously, Staines, that it is in that way that scientific reputations are made? Wouldn't people soon be asking what was the good of it? How are the dead brains to be got at? And of how little use would most of them be! No—the invention is ingenious, but I cannot honestly think that I have benefited the human race. I don't think I shall mention it to anyone. I had half a mind not to tell you."

"That would have been most unfriendly!" I exclaimed.

"At any rate I have your word not to talk about it. Well, now, good-night!"

AFTER that evening for many weeks I saw very little of Marston. This may have been partly my fault, for I was exceptionally busy, and I was far from pleased on one or two occasions when I had gone to the hospital at. great inconvenience to be told that Marston was out, or that he had given orders that he was not to be disturbed on any pretext. At our few meetings we talked mostly of trivial subjects, and whenever I made any reference to the great

invention, Marston showed unmistakable signs of annoyance, and immediately changed the conversation.

I was, therefore, the more surprised when one evening he himself referred to the matter, and in a manner that was as startling as the subject was unexpected.

We had both been to a scientific *conversazione* at the Natural History Museum, and on coming out, finding that it was a warm, fine night, I started to walk home, when suddenly Marston put his arm through mine, and instantly burst out with :

"You remember that evening at the hospital a month ago?"

"Shall I ever forget it? It was the most wonderful experience in my life!" I replied.

"Well," he went on, " I want you to forget it. You remember that you promised me never to mention it without my permission? Well— I shall never give you that permission. Forget that night and all that happened— my inane drivel, my fooling with poor Verger's brain, my crazy machine, I have smashed the thing up; it was a rotten, mad idea."

All this he poured out in a rather excited voice. Then, in a different tone:

"You know, old fellow, I was fooling you all the time, but I am sure that you will forgive me. Now I must be off. Good night! But, remember, if we are to continue to be friends, you must forget all about that night."

With these words he dropped my arm and hailed a passing cab, into which he jumped, leaving me too astonished to follow him or to ask for any explanation.

For a fortnight after this meeting I neither saw nor heard anything of Marston, and when I heard his name mentioned it was under circumstances so startling as for the moment absolutely to upset my equanimity. T had a difficult case under my charge at the time, and as I felt the need of a second opinion, I had called into consultation my old friend and teacher, Dr. Hartopp. At our meeting, after we had discussed the patient and the treatment to be followed, Hartopp said to me:

"What do you think of Marston now ? I did not see you at the Royal Society last night, but of course you know all about it. I remember that you have always been his most intimate friend. Isn't the man amazing ? I never thought he had it in him."

"I always thought Marston was wonderfully clever," I returned; "but I am not sure that I know to what you are referring."

"But surely, man," exclaimed Dr. Hartopp, ""he has told you about his theory of heredity ? His exposition of it last night was the most absolutely

convincing thing I have ever listened to. I never saw a meeting more enthusiastic. Nobody doubts that his view is absolutely correct."

TWO DAYS LATER I received my medical journal, and turned it over hastily to find the account of the meeting of the Society at which Marston had held forth. If I was amazed when Hartopp spoke to me on the subject, there are no words which will express my state of bewildered astonishment on reading the paper now before me. That evening at the hospital had been too astonishing, and it had impressed itself too deeply upon my brain for me to fail to remember everything that had passed; and there, set down in black and white, as proceeding from Marston's mouth, were many of the very words, the very sentences that I had heard on that never-to-be-forgotten evening when they appeared to proceed from Verger's brain.

The ideas had been amplified here and there, a gap had been bridged over, or a lacuna filled; but the theory was the same, proofs were the same, and the detailed account of the steps by which the result had been arrived at differed but little. Apart from my first feeling of astonishment, my mind was filled with horror and disgust at the thought of the means by which Marston had made his reputation. From little things which had occurred I had known for long that he was not a man with a very fine sense of honour, but that he could stoop to such a scoundrelly action as that of passing off a dead man's researches as his own I could never have believed. '

My mind was rapidly made up. I would go straight to Marston, and would tell him plainly that I would have no part in this; my promise of secrecy did not include the agreement to become his accomplice in a crime— for such indeed it was.

With this determination I had put on my hat, when a sudden thought struck me, which made me sit down again and burst out laughing. What a fool I was! What an incomparable idiot, not to have seen at once the trick that had been played upon me! To think that I, a scientific man, should have allowed myself to be taken in by the tomfoolery of the brain and the electric battery, and the mysterious voice coming from the gramophone |

Of course, Marston had been working on much the same lines as Verger, and had taken advantage of the latter's death to play this ghostly trick on me. What was easier than to speak his theory into the gramophone, using the record to bring it out again under the weird conditions of that night? The brain was probably not Verger's at all, but one procured from the dissecting-room. 'The whole thing was plain to me now. I would go down to Marston— not to tax him with his villainy, but to congratulate him on his achievement.

THE YEAR which followed was a busy one for me, as my practice was steadily increasing, but it saw a vast difference in Marston's position. By his single success he had leapt at once into the first rank of pathologists.

As the excitement which followed the announcement of his theory cooled, objections as to the soundness of his conclusions naturally cropped up. These had been, on the whole, well answered, while some further work of a minor sort had given support to his theory, and although Marston had done no more first-class original work, his reputation stood very high.

It must have been about a year after the reading of his first paper that Marston astonished the world again by the announcement of the discovery of a new bacillus. Although I had been expecting something new from Marston, I was extremely surprised at the form which this had taken, for I knew well that he was by no means an expert in this branch of pathology, although, of course, as was necessary, he had a general knowledge of the subject. Our relations having become much less intimate since his rise to eminence, I contented myself with writing him a short note of congratulation, and put the matter out of my mind, until my attention was recalled to it by the battle which was raging in the scientific world on the subject. Clearly, the new bacillus had not added to Marston's reputation. Objections to his methods of procedure had been very lamely answered. When challenged to repeat his experiments, he frequently failed to get the declared result. Indeed, there were one or two who made so bold as to say that they did not believe that the bacillus existed, nor that the experiments by which its existence and activity were said to be proved had ever been carried out in the manner stated.

It was then that the vague doubts which had hovered in my brain ever since Marston's first success began to take shape again, as it suddenly flashed across my mind that about two months before this supposed discovery of the bacillus the great German bacteriologist, Adelhofen, had died, and that at about the same time I had called upon Marston, and had heard that he was travelling abroad. Could it be possible that there was anything genuine about that strange brain-machine? And had Marston literally sucked another dead man's brains?

This question, and the arguments pro and con, kept surging in my mind, but I could come to no conclusion, and decided to attend to my own business, and to think no more about it.

And so busy had my own life become that I found no difficulty in thrusting away from me the ugly thoughts that had reawakened at this second strange coincidence.

THE MONTHS went by, and the controversy on the new bacillus died down. Marston refused to argue the matter, and wrote to the medical papers a somewhat bitter letter, in which he protested against the jealousy of his professional brethren. A veiled hint as to the law of libel silenced the most violent of his opponents, and for some time nothing more was heard of the subject. Marston's reputation as a pathologist was sufficiently strong to make men think twice before attacking him further.

But in the spring of the following year Marston gained fresh laurels for himself by the publication of a cure for a painful disease of the skin that had hitherto proved intractable.

This made a great stir, not only in medical circles, but also in the lay press. If Marston's theory were correct, then hundreds of wretched sufferers would find a relief for which they had long given up hoping. But this reputed cure would have even more far-reaching results, for should it stand the test of time, theories that had been accepted by the medical profession for generations would have to be abandoned.

Challenged to prove his statements, Marston replied well and boldly. There was nothing in his arguments to which the most captious could take exception. His proofs were beyond dispute. The whole world began to ring with the fame of this marvellous scientist and healer.

But this wonderful achievement only served to quicken once more the wretched doubts and suspicions that would not leave my mind. I remembered a conversation that I had had some time back with a clever but little-known specialist in skin trouble. I had been taking a short holiday in Scotland at the time, and had met this man in the course of my wanderings. His theories had impressed me greatly, and I had laughingly urged him to come to London. But with Scottish caution he had shaken his head.

"No, no, man!" he had said. "Not yet. I want to perfect my theories before I show them in the' glare of the London footlights. I'm not a rich man, and I cannot afford to throw up my work here. But you'll hear of me down there yet!"

I had told Marston of my interesting encounter when I returned south, and he had listened attentively, although without any apparent enthusiasm.

And a month or two later I learned that my Scottish acquaintance would never come to London with his theories completed. He had crossed another Border whence there is no return,

Was it possible that this theory of Marston's, so identical with the views of poor Macdonald, was not his own at all? Had I before me but another proof of the diabolical skill and villainy of the man whom I had once called friend ?

I could bear it no longer. With the firm purpose of sifting the matter to the bottom, and of allaying once and for all these hateful doubts, I went down that evening to see Marston at his own house.

Fate played into my hands to some extent, for Marston was not in when I arrived, although he was expected back at any moment, and in my most casual manner I entered into conversation with his servant.

"A busy man, Dr. Marston!" I said genially. "I suppose he never gets what you might call a real holiday?"

"No, sir," replied the man, as he poked up the fire, for the evenings were still chilly. 'Dr. Marston hardly ever goes out of town. Last time— it was about three months ago, sir— it was to Scotland he went. To see a patient, I understood, sir. So it was not what you would call a holiday."

"The penalty of greatness!" I said lightly, though my heart sank within me. For it was about three months before that I had seen the notice of Macdonald's death in the papers.

These coincidences were getting too much for me.

I had about half an hour in which to face my unpleasant thoughts. Then Marston came in. He greeted me with something less than his usual warmth, There was a restlessness about him that I never remembered seeing before, and his eyes were less frank. Indeed, his whole bearing gave me the impression that he was ill at ease and labouring under some great strain.

For a few minutes our talk was desultory and confined to the passing topics of the hour. 'Then suddenly I confronted him with an abrupt question :

"Do you remember that Dr. Macdonald I spoke of having met with on one of my holidays?" I asked bluntly.

For one instant he looked at me in startled surprise. Then his eyelids quivered and dropped over the tell-tale orbs.

"No," he said questioningly. "What Dr. Macdonald? There are so many."

"I mean the one who died about three months ago,' I pursued pitilessly. "The man who specialised in skin trouble. I told you what a brilliant future he should have before him."

"Did you?" said Marston absently. "I had forgotten. The fact is, my dear Staines, my life just now is such a rush that I forget each day what I have heard or whom I have seen the day before. It is different for you steady-going G.P.'s."

"*You* must remember Macdonald —or rather what I told you about him and his work!'' I said slowly. "For the curious thing is that his pet theory was the very one that you have lately fathered, and with which the world is just now ringing."

His pale face flushed.

"I don't like that expression, 'fathered,' Staines," he said in what I knew to be a dangerously quiet voice. "It has an ugly ring."

"Perhaps," I said, with a quietness that equalled his own. ' But I used it purposely. It is the expression of an ugly suspicion that has been lurking for a good long while in my mind,"

Marston moved across the room. He was between me and the door. I did not like the look of things, and began to wish I had held my tongue. However, the thing had to be thrashed out some time, and why not now?

"A wise man keeps his suspicions to himself," he remarked coldly. "The law of libel is a nasty stone to knock up against."

"It is," I replied. "But so are a good many of the laws of this country. That against body-snatching, for instance, And fraudulent practices are also hardly dealt with."

Marston grew livid.

"Look here, Staines," he said, "I don't know what you're driving at. But your remarks are none the less extremely offensive. Kindly explain—and apologise."

"I will explain, if you like,' I retorted, "but as to apologies—" I shrugged my shoulders. "Since you wish it in plain English, I think you're building your reputation upon the work of dead men's brains. You are a mental vampire."

I rapidly detailed the reasons for my suspicions, and as I cited the instance of Macdonald, Marston sprang at me like one possessed.

"Liar!" he yelled. "I'll choke your black calumny in your throat."

But his action had left the door unguarded. With one bound I managed to evade him, and cleared the distance between myself and the means of egress, Without stopping for hat or overcoat, I ran out into the street. I knew that Marston would not dare to follow me there— unless I had grossly misjudged him.

But this, I was sure now, was not the case. The only question that remained was— what use should I make of my knowledge ? If I kept it to myself I became a party to his crimes. If I told the world, how could I prove what I asserted? It was obvious that Marston still had his diabolical machine. It was equally obvious that he would have kept the whereabouts of it to himself. Probably I was the only man in the world who knew anything about its existence. And even I did not know where he kept it.

I pondered long and deeply upon the subject. My abstracted manner was the cause of dire offence to two of my best "old lady" patients, to whom the length of their doctor's bill was a matter of indifference, and who, therefore, looked to him as to an inexhaustible well of sympathy from which they were entitled to draw. I was worried and depressed. I felt that I could not keep the matter longer, be the consequences what they might.

I determined to take Dr. Hartopp into my confidence, and called upon him accordingly at his house in Harley Street.

He heard me attentively.

"You did quite right, my boy, to come to me," he said with a touch of his old pompous manner. "And we must sift the thing right through for the honour of the profession. But— Marston of all men! Dear, dear, dear!"

We decided to wait to make our attack until some further circumstance should arise to justify our suspicions. We could not very well take action upon the events that had already taken place, without witnesses. But time would doubtless bring some fresh development in which we could take an active part.

"Write to Marston and apologise," advised Hartopp. "It will allay his suspicions. Otherwise he will be too crafty to act in a like manner again."

I demurred strongly, but in the end my old teacher had his way, and a carefully worded letter was dispatched to Marston, in which I expressed my sorrow for having doubted him, and begged him to consider the episode to be due to overwork on my part. "Even we poor G.P.'s often get more than we can cope with," I added, "and I have had a good deal of worry lately." Which was quite true; but he himself was the cause of my worry.

Marston replied with a few curt lines, in which he intimated that he considered me a dangerous lunatic, and wished to have nothing more to do with me.

The incident was then dropped by mutual consent, and like Brer Rabbit I "lay low."

For some time nothing happened to justify any move on the part of Dr. Hartopp and myself. Then, one morning, as I opened my daily paper, I saw headlined in large letters the death of a famous chemist. As I was finishing my breakfast the telephone bell went loudly. I took off the receiver, and Dr. Hartopp called through from the other end :

"Is that you, Staines ? Have you seen this morning's paper? Professor Blackman's death, I mean?"

"Yes," I replied; "but what of it? I haven't poisoned him!"

Dr. Hartopp laughed.

"No, no!" he said; "but— I think we shall soon have an opportunity. You understand me?"

I suddenly tumbled to his meaning.

"Right!" I cried. "What do you propose doing?"

"Come round here at four o'clock, if you're free then, and I'll tell you," was the reply.

I was punctual to the appointment. Dr. Hartopp then told me that he intended going to the funeral of the great chemist. "It is our business to find

out where the grave is," he remarked. "And as I suspect that somebody else will make it his business too, I think you had better not appear among the mourners. I shall arouse no suspicions by my presence, as we happen to have been friends. You know that the poor chap was on the verge of a great revelation to the scientific world?"

"I gathered as much from the obituary notice," I replied; "and I fancy you are right in thinking that we shall have something substantial to go upon soon with regard to our mutual friend."

He nodded.

"Not a word, of course, to anyone. I'll let you know what I think we should do, after the funeral."

I waited patiently, and about six o'clock on the day of Professor Blackman's funeral I received a note from Dr. Hartopp :

Meet me at the main entrance to Cemetery at 9.30 to-night. If your suspicions are correct Marston will lose no time. It must be to his advantage to work with material as fresh as possible. Bring a revolver. A. H.

I knew now what Dr. Hartopp expected. He had grounds for thinking that Marston would make his attempt on the grave that very night, and we were to witness his performance.

I reached the cemetery at the appointed time, to find Hartopp waiting for me.

"He'll come to-night,' he whispered, "so as to make his task the easier, and to avoid detection. He can easily rearrange the disturbed earth. I've had a man watching here since the funeral party left this afternoon, and he tells me that no one has been near. the grave. We must wait and watch."

I nodded, and we made our way into the dark shadows of the cemetery, until we reached the place where Professor Blackman had been laid to rest. There happened to be a conveniently thick clump of yew trees just by the grave, from the cover of which we could watch our man without any fear of being seen ourselves.

It was an uncanny experience, and one that I should not have cared to go through alone. But Hartopp was a man of iron nerve, and never turned a hair, even when at length our patience was rewarded, and we saw a Stealthy figure come cautiously up the broad path and across the strip. of grass,

"There he is!" I whispered excitedly. But Hartopp put his hand on my mouth to enforce silence.

Like some unclean and evil thing Marston swooped down at length upon the grave and began hastily removing the freshly-turned earth. The dank smell lingers yet in my memory as part of a ghastly nightmare.

Presently, after he had been digging for some time, the thief kneeled down and was hidden from sight.

"Listen!" said Hartopp ; is unscrewing the coffin."

For a long time we saw nothing, but our ears were filled with gruesome sounds, sounds that took us back to our student days in the dissecting-room. The time seemed interminable, but at length Marston emerged. He hastily shovelled the earth back into the grave, folded up the spade—which appeared to have a collapsible handle— and hid it in the capacious folds of his overcoat.

He then withdrew as silently and as stealthily as he had come.

"Look," said Hartopp, "at that ominous bundle under his arm! If our surmises are correct— and they must be— poor Blackman's brain is now in Marston's clutches. Let us follow him and see what he w:ll do with it."

"He'll go to his laboratory at the hospital," I said. "Of that I am pretty sure. And, if so, as the night watchman knows me, we shall be able to get in all right. It would be something of a task if it were at his own house."

We followed the retreating figure as rapidly as possible, although several times we had to stop and dodge Marston behind bushes or monuments. Once in the street, it was an easy matter to avoid detection, and yet to keep our prey under observation.

As I had expected, he made off in the direction of the hospital, walking at such a brisk pace that it was almost impossible to keep within sight of him. Poor Hartopp, stout and elderly, began to grow weary and out of breath.

"I'm pumped!" he confessed at last. "We must take a taxi. Come on!"

And in spite of my demurs he hailed a passing vehicle, and we got in.

"Shadow that man," he commanded, "and don't let him suspect you."

The driver must have been used to strange fares and curious errands, for he made no objection, and skilfully crawled along behind Marston, until at last we saw him turn into the hospital gates.

Dismissing our taxi at the comer of the next street, we waited until he should have had time to get into his laboratory and to set about his gruesome task. The moments seemed like hours. But at last, just as two o'clock rang out on the silence from the tower of a neighbouring church, Hartopp nudged my arm.

"I think we might try now," he whispered. "Got your revolver handy? Remember, we're dealing with a desperate man. He's sure to keep some sort of weapon ready for self-defence."

I felt in my coat-pocket. My small revolver lay there snug and ready. I led the way through into the hospital. The janitor looked at me inquiringly. .

"All right, Carter," I said carelessly; "we've an appointment with Dr. Marston."

The man was used to my coming there, and the eccentricity of the famous pathologist was quite enough to account for a nocturnal rendezvous.

"Right, sir!" he answered. "Dr. Marston's just gone through to his room."

I led the way down the long corridors and across the familiar garden, with a curious sense of astonishment at the ordinary appearance of everything. Could it be possible that such prosaic surroundings formed the setting for so ugly a crime ?

But I had little time for reflection. Our victim had had a good start. We must not arrive when the fair was over.

Silently we stole into the little passage on to which gave the doors of Marston's laboratory and of his assistant's room. We had removed our boots, and now, with the utmost caution, I turned the handle of the second door. Hartopp followed me into the darkness of that inner chamber, whose only light came through the glass partition which separated it from Marston's laboratory. In that obscurity we could watch him easily, ourselves secured by the darkness from all observation.

Cautiously feeling our way lest we should knock against the table or a chair, we made for the partition, and standing close up against it, gazed into the lighted room beyond.

There was Marston, and there on the table was his demon invention, the pseudo-phonograph. The brain of Professor Blackman lay on the insulator to one side. With a nerve that I could not but admire, Marston began to manipulate it, connecting it with the high-tension coil, and with the phonographic apparatus, as on that never-to-be-forgotten occasion when I had watched him experimenting with Professor Verger's grey matter.

Hartopp watched with an intensity of interest that almost made him forget the sinister purpose of our vigil.

"By George! What cunning!" he exclaimed in a low whisper. "The man's a genius— a perfect genius !"

"And a perfect villain, too!" I reminded him, breathing the words into his ear. "What do you propose doing now that we have our proof?"

"We must rush in and surprise him," replied Hartopp in the same guarded accents. "Catch him in the act— in *flagrante delicto*. And then summon help for his arrest."

"Pity we didn't bring a constable with us," I murmured. "It would have made things more certain, He's a deuced slippery customer."

"We are two to one, and armed," the doctor reminded me. "Now for it! You lead the way."

With the same caution that had marked our entrance we slipped out of the little room and stood for a moment in the passage outside Marston's door.

Then Hartopp caught the handle in his fingers with a firm grasp, the door opened noiselessly, and I followed him in.

Marston's back was turned to us. He was writing busily at the dictation of the machine. We were upon him before he was aware of anything having happened,

"Game's up!" said Hartopp sternly.

With a sudden violent start Marston dropped his stylo and looked up at us. For a moment he was too much startled to speak. Then, with a shout of dismay, he sprang to his feet.

"What the devil does this mean?" he cried. But as he faced our revolvers he realised that he was trapped.

"Traitor!" he cried, turning on me with a murderous look. He snatched up a dissecting-knife from the table.

"Put that down, or I'll fire 1" roared Hartopp.

Marston's- hand dropped, and the expression of baffled hate on his face was terrible to witness.

"We've got you this time!" continued Hartopp, still covering him with his revolver. "You may as well throw up the sponge."

With a hoarse laugh Marston turned to the table. With a sweep of his uplifted arm he had hurled the chattering instrument on to the floor; it fell with a loud clatter, silenced for ever. Then with his other hand he withdrew a small phial from his waistcoat pocket. Before either Hartopp or I could stop him he had swallowed the contents.

Turning to us again, he smiled mockingly.

"Now, gentlemen, I am ready!" he said.

TO THIS DAY the cause of Dr. Marston's suicide remains a mystery, for Hartopp and I agreed to maintain a complete silence on the subject for the sake of the hospital and of the profession at large. No one knows, therefore, that the reputation of the leading pathologist of his day was founded on secrets filched from the grave.

20: The Octopus of Garden Square

Bertram Atkey

The Grand Magazine April 1913

No 4 in the series "The Intrusions of Smiler Bunn"

"NOW, I consider is that this is about as good a book as was ever written. It's interesting, it's sensible; it hasn't got a lot of frills and things, and it's valuable. Listen to this, Fortworth!" said Mr. Smiler Bunn to his fellow-crook, Lord Fortworth, in their London flat one afternoon.

"Listen to this— it's written by a man who knows what he's talking about." He proceeded to read slowly, and with considerable emphasis, from a slim volume entitled "Queries at a Mess Table," which he had bought that morning:

" 'Cheese may be taken in moderation with advantage'— mark that, Fortworth— 'with advantage, after dinner. A small quantity is considered to assist the digestion... Toasted cheese, no matter of what kind— for in all the consistence becomes close by toasting— is the most indigestible article that can be eaten, and I am sure accounts for disturbed nights and troublesome dreams.' Absolutely true, Fortworth. 'Yet, alas! what is nicer than a well served up Welsh rabbit, and what a wonderful flavour cheese adds to many dishes— macaroni, etc.! After this, one may assist the gourmet by reminding him that the juice of the pineapple at the end of a meal is an agreeable and powerful digestive agent.' Now, that's a thing worth reading and worth remembering. And the little book is full of sound sense like that. We'd better tell Sing Song to get in a couple of pineapples to-night."

Fortworth nodded.

"Very fine bit of writing," he said. "How about wine? Does the man mention drinks?"

"Mention drinks— man alive, he's got a whole chapter on 'em! It's entitled 'What Shall I Drink?' Shall I read it?"

"Sure— half a minute, though. It makes me feel thirsty. Touch the bell."

Smiler rang for Sing Song, his Chinese man-servant, and ran his eye quickly through the chapter which he was about to read.

"Listen, Fortworth— this man is a genius. He says: 'Of the strong sweet wines— Constantia, Malaga, Tokay, Malmsey— they are best appreciated with a plain biscuit, when the stomach is not full. Thus taken they are a wholesome substitute for tea.' So bring in some of that Tokay we've got, Sing Song. Never mind about the biscuit. That's a matter of taste."

Sing Song vanished, and the reading continued until the Tokay arrived, when the partners proceeded to drink the health of the author of the cheering volume which had so aroused their enthusiasm.

Just as Mr. Bunn was on the point of resuming, Sing Song entered again with a note for Lord Fortworth— now known to the public as Mr. Henry Black.

The ex-Baron took the note, glancing carelessly at the address, and suddenly paled a trifle.

"What's up?" asked Smiler, watching him.

Fortworth showed him the envelope. It was addressed to "Lord Fortworth," not, as was usual, to "Mr. Henry Black," or "Henry Black, Esq.," according to the taste and fancy of the sender.

Smiler whistled— a low, discordant whistle.

"Better open it," he suggested.

Fortworth inserted his thumb under the flap.

"I don't like it, Flood" (Smiler Bunn was still Wilton Flood in private life), he said heavily. "I've got an idea there's trouble floating about somewhere. Some guy has got on to me, and it might be awkward."

It may be explained here that in the days when from his zenith as a self-made millionaire brewer, banker, company-promoter, and all-round money captain, he had taken a high dive to the depths of an almost limitless insolvency, he had not waited to answer any of the innumerable questions which hundreds —yea, even thousands— of creditors were waiting to ask him. Not at all, Acting on the advice of Mr. Smiler Bunn, then a friend of the family, he had performed the operation he sometimes described as "pulling his freight'' with such swiftness of decision, and, with the aid of Smiler, masterly skill, that a day after the news of his hopeless smash— due to wild speculation with a view to making greater dividends for a tolerably hungry crowd of Shareholders— he had vanished as completely as the capital of his various companies. His wife, a wealthy American, born in Dublin, had promptly left him at the first sign of his ruin, and, indeed, it was only due to Mr. Bunn that Fortworth was not even now sojourning at Parkhurst, Portland, Dartmoor, or some one or other of our leading official resorts. Smiler, who had lost the hard and dishonestly-earned savings of a lifetime in the Fortworth smash, nevertheless stuck to the fallen financier. As he put it with cynical bluntness, "If Fortworth's specs had turned out well, and he'd been able to pay that gang of shareholding wolves that are now howling for his blood an extra five per cent., they would not have asked any questions as to how he got it. They'd have sharked it and asked for more. But as the specs went wrong they got it in the neck— good and heavy— and serve 'em right. Teach 'em not to be greedy."

So he and Fortworth, warm friends already, with almost identical tastes, became partners. That had been some years before, and no one that mattered had ever recognised in the black-haired, clean-shaven Mr. Henry Black the red-headed, short-bearded Lord Fortworth. Even the police had given him up.

And now he had received a note addressed boldly to "Lord Fortworth."

He read the letter. It was quite short, and was addressed from 412, Garden Square, London, W. It ran :—

My Dear Lord Fortworth,

Can you make it convenient to do me the great favour of calling to-night at nine o'clock and discussing with me the science of swindling and the art of absconding— two features of our present-day civilisation upon which I should greatly like to have the opinion of an expert such as yourself.

I am, my dear Lord Fortworth,
yours very sincerely,
Lubin Lazar.

Fortworth dropped the note.

"A nasty, polite, dangerous swine," he growled, suddenly purple-faced. :

Mr. Bunn looked grave.

"A blackmailer!'' he said. "It was bound to come. Sooner or later in our line of business you tread on one, and he crawls up your trouser leg. Ever heard of him before? It'sa loppy kind of name— sort of a cross between a country dance and an old clo' man's parade."

Fortworth shook his head slowly, his brows knitted.

Smiler's face set hard.

"I don't like the sound of the man," he said. "These polite sports are pretty cold-blooded cards when it comes to collecting the ready iron as a general rule. We shall have to go and see him— after dinner."

He rang for Sing Song.

"Ever heard of a sarcastic tough named Lubin Lazarite— no, Lazar— Lubin Lazar, Sing Song, my lad?" he asked.

The Chink shook his head slowly.

"Ah, it's a wonder! You know most of the crooks in the town," said Mr. Bunn sourly, for he was disappointed. "Skate out." Sing Song "skated," smiling blandly.

"Well, we've got a couple of hours before dinner; it's only about half-past five. We might do worse than go over to Garden Square and have a look round,' continued Smiler. "Or I'll go alone; he probably knows you."

Fortworth, with language, agreed that perhaps it would be wiser for Smiler to do the scouting by himself, but he insisted that his partner should not in any

case harm Mr, Lazar, even if opportunity arose. He wished to reserve that pleasure for himself, he explained, with the air of a grizzly bear who has just been visited by a stiff-stinged hornet.

"We ought to get Lubin carted without violence," said Smiler reprovingly. "Neatness is what we wart to use with him."

He put on his. hat, attached himself to a cigar, and sallied forth. ,

An hour later he was back, but had little news.

"It's a biggish, dark house opposite a kind of church," he said, steering a whisky-and-soda to a place where it would be safe. "Mysterious kind of a house. He had one visitor while I was there. Poor man, I should say, judging from the look of him. Youngish, nervous party, looked half-starved. I shouldn't be surprised if Lubin has got his net round him, too. I arranged to be drifting past when he came out, and he wasn't any happier than when he went in."

"If we don't get any more out of him than he does out of me," replied Fortworth, with a somewhat bloodshot smile, "he wen't get much."

"Ah, well,'' said Smiler soothingly. "We'll see what his particular stomach-ache is to-night. I hope that lemon-coloured Chink got the pineapples in all right."

Fortworth reassured him, and they began to prepare themselves to get ready for the chief rite of the day— dinner.

Even the advent into their lives of Lubin Lazar could not destroy their interest in dinner. They were neither young nor emotional, and they permitted no outside issues to affect their inside tissues.

ii

IT MUST be admitted that the partners looked a more than ordinarily hefty brace to tackle when at about ten minutes to nine they stepped out to the superb Van den Plas-bodied Rolls-Royce Limousin car which helped them through life. Reasonably tall, broad like the side of a battleship, built "' chunky," as Fortworth put it occasionally, with smooth, slightly hard, clean-shaven faces, and correctly attired from the crown of their opera-hats to the soles of their dress-boots, they did not somehow strike one as being the sort of individuals that the gentle confidence trick man or any darkalley tough would approach with genuine optimism.

Sing Song, who, with his usual ability, had contrived to wind up dinner in his best *cordon-bleu* style, and yet leave himself time to make a quick change, was at the wheel, and lost little time in sliding them over to Garden Square.

They alighted, and Mr. Bunn tendered his last word of advice.

"Easy with him at first," he said quietly, for he was fully aware of the big, business-like automatic pistol that sagged the pocket of Fortworth's dinner-jacket under his furs. "Let him show his hand before we show him his error."

Fortworth nodded grimly. Even as Smiler's hand hovered over the bell-push the door swung open and a lady appeared. Evidently she was just leaving the house. She seemed a little excited, and was talking in queer, rather pretty broken English to the man-servant who was showing her out.

"I wan' that you should tell heem yet again eef he not to leave alone my husban' that I shall fin' a plan yet. This is mos' cruel ting he try to accomplish—to crush, to grind under the heel—"

She saw the Bunn-Fortworth Combine waiting on the step, stopped talking suddenly, passed out, and went slowly down the street. She was rather shabby, but very pretty and graceful, with something about her that made one think both of Tokio and Paris.

"Lazar in?" asked Fortworth of the man-servant.

Evidently they were expected, for the man closed the door and conducted them to a room across the rather dark and gloomily-furnished hall.

He announced them— "Two gentlemen, sir!"— and left.

The partners found themselves facing across an elaborately carved writing-table one of the hugest men they had ever seen. He was six feet six tall, if an inch, but his breadth was so terrific as to make him at first glance seem almost short. His face was probably the most handsome the partners had ever seen—but only in the sense that the chiselling of the features was without flaw, for there was no expression upon it. It was utterly blank and inscrutable. The eyes were of a singular dull green, lightless and dead. There was no trace of colour, red or pink, upon the uniformly olive complexion, and the man's hair, thick, heavy, parted in the centre, and brushed away from the parting in a perfectly flat sweep, was snowwhite. He made a strange and terrible figure as he sat facing the partners, perfectly still, perfectly silent, waiting.

Mr. Bunn afterwards confessed to Fortworth that when he stood there taking in Lazar's appearance he experienced for the first time in his life a thrill of fear. And Fortworth, in turn, confessed that he, too, had endured the same-sensation.

"He made me think of a thundering great white python that had got you, but wasn't in a hurry to begin on you," said Smiler.

But they were not the kind of men to allow the appearance of any man—or white python either—to cow them long. Unconsciously, perhaps, Fortworth pressed with the inside of his forearm the comfortable bulge of the big repeater in his pocket, and was cheered on the instant. He had seen too many strange men and sights in unswept comers of the world to permanently lose

his nerve before the man Lazar, and Mr. Bunn, too, had a rarely-tapped vein of coldblooded pluck somewhere in him, upon -which he now proceeded abruptly to draw.

Fortworth took out the letter with a jerk,

"You Lazar?" he asked, the veins across his forehead beginning to bulge a little.

The blackmailer nodded.

"Sit down," he said in a slow voice, so shrill and reedy that the partners almost started. They had expected any kind of voice but that thin, high note. It was weird.

"No, you white-headed hound," rasped Fortworth. "We won't sit down, I want to know just what you mean by this. I take it you've got something to say about it. Say it, then, and we'll settle it now."

Smiler shrugged his shoulders slightly. He had urged the advisability of diplomacy on Fortworth. But he knew from the thick note of rage in his partner's harsh voice, from the pale, glaring eyes, and the gorged veins that were cording themselves on his heavy forehead, that the only kind of diplomacy the ex-millionaire was in the least likely to employ was the kind that is backed up by a .45 "gun."

Without a trace of emotion and without a movement save of the lips the gigantic man at the writing-table answered :

"You are Lord Fortworth, the bankrupt, who absconded eight years ago. I have all the facts, all the proofs. You will pay me one hundred thousand pounds within one month, or I will hand you over to the police."

It was simple, undisguised blackmail, There was not the least attempt to gloss the thing. There was no embroidery upon it, as Smiler said aiterwards.

"I want 'yes' or 'no,'" continued Lazar. 'I am busy. I have no time for talk. The sum is one hundred thousand pounds in notes, bearer bonds, jewels or cash. That is all."

Smiler broke in hurriedly, as Fortworth gasped.

"He hasn't got the money," he said simply. "How can he pay if he hasn't got the money? You're one of the cut-and-dried yes-or-no guys. Well, so are we. You want one hundred thousand pounds; he hasn't got twenty thousand. So what are you going to do about it?" It was the truth; it sounded true because it was so.

Lazar recognised it.

"Very good. He must pay the twenty thousand," he said, wholly cold-blooded. He made an alteration on a slip of paper before him as he spoke.

"And you can go to hell!" bawled Fortworth, fighting mad. He lugged out his big pistol and jammed it into the face of the expressionless giant at the table.

"Move a finger and I'll splash your brains into the coal-scuttle !"' He gasped for words; he had so much to say that the phrases seemed to jam in his mouth.

Lazar stared at him without a tremor.

"You will pay within seven days," he said in the tones of a man concluding an ordinary business deal. His eyes shifted, looking over Fortworth's shoulder and a little to the left of him.

"No," he said. "Don't shoot."

The partners wheeled.

Two men stood in a corner of the room with rifles— not pistols, but tifles—levelled on Fortworth and Smiler Bunn. There was a singular quality of brutality in the fact that the men had rifles—the partners were aware of it simultaneously.

Fortworth choked himself to silence and dropped the repeater.

"Seven days?" said Smiler blandly. "You will have to extend that time. A man can't realise to his last penny within a week. Make it a month, Lubin, and I give you my word that—"

"I cannot accept the word of a fat blackguard whose criminal tastes are only paralleled by his gluttonous tendencies," interrupted Lazar coldly. Evidently he had been making careful inquiries about the partners.

"Why, damn your eyes stuttered Smiler, so taken aback that even Fortworth grinned.

Lazar rose, towering over them.

"Go," he said. "One week."

They hesitated, surveyed the men with the rifles, and finally went. The man-servant was waiting for them just outside the door. They followed him into the hall—sullenly. But with his hand on the catch of the outer door, he pauscd and spoke in a low whisper, his eyes stealthily watching the door of Lazar's room.

"I shall call at your flat at two o'clock to-night. Be in," he said. His lips did not move, and without even looking at them he opened the hall door and ushered them out.

They went down the steps, and even as Sing Song switched on his engine and they were on the point of stepping into the car, they were accosted by a tall, thin, shabby man, who was standing close by the kerb. In the lamplight they saw that his face was white and drawn. His long moustache hung down, limp and untended, and his eyes glittered wildly from their cavernous sockets.

"Are you gentlemen victims also?" He jerked his head sideways, indicating the house of the blackmailer.

Fortworth fired up.

"Not by a tankful, old man, he said, with the fey, deadly hilarity of a roused fighting man.

The shabby nondescript, who talked like a gentleman, gazed curiously at them.

"I talked like that once," he said, "but I've lost my nerve now," and snapped his fingers sharply. It must have been a signal, for a woman appeared from behind the car, opened the door, and entered. Smiler recognised her as the girl who had made him think of Tokio and Paris.

"If you will give my wife and myself a lift to your house I think we might talk things over to our mutual benefit,' said the shabby man.

The partners looked at each other, nodded, and the three joined the lady in the car.

The shabby man seemed to brighten up a little, and plunged into his explanation without delay.

"It has been my lot to hang round the den of that octopus, Lazar, quite a good deal," he said, "and I have come to learn that when a car which obviously belongs to a rich man stops at Lazar's door it usually brings a rich victim— like myself. You look surprised. Nevertheless I possess an income of six thousand pounds a year, of which five thousand nine hundred goes regularly to Lazar— blackmail, every halfpenny of it. Why I find myself compelled to pay this outrageous sum does not matter, any more than why Lazar is victimising or attempting to victimise you and a host of unfortunate people besides. But it cannot continue— it is my life-blood. I can't fight him— he can destroy me. I have been unfortunate beyond belief. And the society is in chaos, bewildered with a multiplicity of impracticable schemes."

"Society? How society?" asked Smiler,

The shabby man looked surprised.

"Do you not know yet that a number of Lazar's victims have formed themselves into a society to exterminate him? If it were only a matter of his death it would be simple; any one of us would gladly destroy him at the first opportunity. But he has protected himself too well, He has documents— dossiers, you may say— of the case of each victim put away in the keeping of some unknown confederate, and in the event of Lazar dying a violent death the confederate is instructed to use the documents against the people concerned as vindictively and harmfully as he can. That is why he has not been killed long ago."

Fortworth scowled. If what this man said was true, there were two of the blackmailers— one active and one a sleeping partner.

"We must find the second man— the confederate," said Smiler Bunn. "Shadow Lazar all the time ; intercept his letters— things like that."

But Fortworth and the shabby man— Kendale, he called himself— did not look hopeful.

"He's guarded against that," said Kendale.

The girl, who had been leaning back in a corner, stirred suddenly, leaning forward.

"I have jus' the ghos' of a plan," she said softly. 'It has but jus' come to me, aud perhaps he is not very good plan. But he is better than no thing.' She looked only at Kendale.

"You mus' not be angree," she said. "You promise me that?" He nodded, and she smiled.

"I think that man who has open the door and shut him when we go to see Lazar, and admit us to enter the house, has feel a little interest for me. He have not tol' me anything of love, but I have think his eyes speak of it two— three— times, those day when I have insist to see Lazar and beg him that he do not blackmail more. Thees evening also his eyes they are kind for me, but he say no thing, perhaps because these gentlemen are come to the door."'

It was the shabby man's turn to scowl, but the girl put up her hands, laughing.

"There is not need for angree," she said in her queer, tangled, pretty broken English. "I have no thought for that man—not any man but for you. Only I jus' tol' you those thing."

"And quite right, too," said Smiler Bunn heartily. "Why, you ought to be proud, man. If that guy who doorkeeps for Lazar has weakened on Madame here, it's a compliment to her and a gift to us. Why, he's calling to see us to-night, and if we play our cards correctly he's the key that's going to pick the Lazar lock. I think he's pretty well through with Lazar anyway... but we'll see,"

The car drew up at the mansions in which the partners occupied a first-floor flat, and they entered the building.

"What made you sort of confide in us, Kendale?" asked Fortworth curiously as they went up.

The shabby man smiled.

"Well, you looked as though you were the sort that would put up a pretty sporting fight with that blackguard before you gave way," said Kendale. "That was it chiefly, I think. And probably it is what Lazar's doorkeeper thought."

Fortworth nodded.

"Well, although I don't mind admitting he made us look a little foolish to-night, I guess you're right. Why, if it comes to a pinch, or if Lazar did no more than put my friend Mr. Flood off his appetite, I believe, apart from what we should do, that little primrose who drove the car to-night would catch him and torture him in some gentle Chinese way until he'd got the name of his partner, then kill them both, and burn their houses down, and enjoy doing it."

Kendale laughed.

"A friend in need, eh?"

"Sure," said Fortworth, "and a wonderful cook."

iii

IT NEEDED little discussion for the partners to realise that nothing very effective could be done against Lazar until the butler or doorkeeper had called, and his reason for calling had been diselosed.

Therefore, with their accustomed bluff hospitality they devoted the remainder of the evening to entertaining, not without success, Kendale and his beautiful wife. It was not difficult to understand that the doorkeeper had fallen in love with Soya Kendale. The Bunn-Fortworth Combine in the course of business and pleasure had encountered many pretty and charming women, but as Tortworth expressed it later, Mrs. Kendale, despite her simple, inexpensive and, indeed, rather shabby costume, had the rest of the Venuses whipped from the word "Go." Sweet, unaffected, a little quiet, and obviously adoring her husband, she pleased the two old wolves immensely. Aided and abetted by Kendale, they encouraged her to talk simply for the sake of hearing her delicious mistakes, and Smiler found it necessary to make many visits to the kitchen in order to correct and improve upon an already sumptuous supper which Sing Song was preparing.

"We don't want Mrs, Kendale to go away from here with any idea that we starve our guests or strangle em with any charity dope, my lad," he was careful to explain to the busy Chink. "Understand that."

Naturally the result was a meal of a kind which the Kendales had not faced for many moons, and to which they did justice. The partners joined them—successfully, as usual.

At two o'clock precisely the electric bell whirred sharply, and a moment later Sing Song showed in and announced ''Mr. Robur Roburton."

It was Lazar's doorkeeper.

He was one of those dark, square-faced men, with a jaw like the butt-end of an anvil, and deep, dark, watchful eyes.

He seemed very self-possessed, but the partners noticed, nevertheless, that his eyes brightened as they fell on Soya Kendale, to whom he bowed scrupulously, Then he faced the others,

"An association with Mr. Lubin Lazar, extending over some six months or more, has taught me the habit of being direct," he said quietly; "and I think that you gentlemen would prefer to get to work without preliminaries. Very good." Although he was addressing himself to the men of the party, his eyes returned again and again to Soya Kendale.

"I have decided that Mr. Lazar's business must come to an end. I need not go into the circumstances which compelled me to join him, any more than we need go into the matters which caused him to blackmail you gentlemen. Briefly, I have come to the conclusion that Lazar's methods are too brutally merciless, relentless and drastic to be allowed to continue ; the suffering he causes to some scores of unfortunate people is altogether out of proportion to his gains, enormous though they are. For instance, no less than three of his victims have committed suicide in the last four days—one in London, two in Paris. He works the Continent and America as well as this country. The man is an octopus, with tentacles spread everywhere. For some time past I have been looking for two or three determined aud absolutely reliable men to help me deal with him, and when you two gentlemen came to-night I fancied T had found them. I overheard your interview, I have come to ask if you will co-operate ; it will be dangerous to the last degree, for Lazar is a man of infinite resource and has a bodyguard of ruffans that fear nothing in the world but the contingency of being discharged from their lucrative Service with him. Yet it can be done: we can draw his teeth at least, but we must do it to-night. There is not time to outline my plan ; you must put yourselves at my disposal, and do with minute scrupulousness all I say. And to-night. Believe me, this is your best and possibly even your last chance of freeing yourself from this man until you are sucked dry, and even then you will be watched in case you make more money. You cannot guess nor have I time to describe the immense organisation which Lazar controls; but this I can say, that with the disarming of Lazar systematic blackmail will practically cease to exist in this and many other cities, for he does not decentralise."

He paused a moment, waiting. His words, quietly spoken though they were, had rung with truth. The man knew what he was saying. That he believed it to be completely true was as obvious as the fact that he loved, or at least was on the verge of loving, Soya Kendale. Probably it was the contemplation of the unhappiness of the girl which had guided his decision to break with Lazar.

"What do you say, gentlemen?"

"We agree." They spoke simultaneously.

Robur Roburton smiled— a quick, short smile that was gone in an instant.

"Good!" he said. "Let us start now. Mrs. Kendale, perhaps, will wait here until we return."

He went across to the girl, extending his hand.

"Good-bye, Mrs. Kendale," he said softly, looking at her as a man sentenced for life might look his last at a bright, busy, sunlit street.

She shook hands.

Outside, Sing Song pushed himself blandly into prominence.

"Please, mastel, you wanting me?" He gazed at Smiler yearnfully with his mouth open like a dog begging to be allowed to exterminate rabbits.

Smiler looked interrogatively at Roburton, who ran his eye calculatingly over the tough, muscular form and whale neck of the Chink, and nodded.

"Fall in— at the back," Smiler, and the Chink fell in.

They walked to Garden Square, and they were a hardy-looking crew. Robur Roburton explained his plans and gave his instructions as they went. Association with these capable gentlemen, brief though it had been, seemed to have restored to Kendale a good deal of that " nerve" which he had lost, and he hummed softly to himself as he went, lightly twirling a lead-loaded cane which he had found in the umbrelfa-stand at the flat, and which was capable of felling a camel at one blow, properly steered.

Arrived at No. 412, Garden Square, Roburton produced a latchkey, opened the door, and the party passed silently in.

As they entered the hall a switch clicked and the place was suddenly flooded with light. A man who had been sitting in the darkness rose—a big, clumsy, pistol-like weapon in his hand. Roburton explained a little iater that it was an air-pistol, powerful enough to send a bullet through a man, and practically silent.

The man' lowered the pistel as he recognised Roburton, and stared interrogatively. He was a big, savage-looking brute, one of the rifle brigade the partners had met in Lazar's room. Roburton went up to him, whispering softly.

"What say?" asked the man, stooping a little, half-turning his head, craning to hear what the doorkeeper said.

If he had tried he could not have posed better for Roburton's purpose. He was just at the right distance, at just the right angle. Roburton's fist, with all of Roburton's hundred and sixty pounds weight behind, took him on the curve of the jaw, and he went down on the soft Turkey carpet like a wet sponge. In a second Sing Song was on him with a coil of rope, and in an incredibly short time he lay bound, gagged, and helpless at their feet.

"Once!" said Smiler with satisfaction. They followed Roburton down a narrow passage. The house was silent as death, and they were lighted only by the sparse ray from an electric torch carried by Roburton. They passed through a sliding panel and came upon a long flight of steps, down which they went in single file.

Three steps from the bottom Roburton stopped.

"Miss the last step; don't tread on the last step," he said warningly. "It's live— the last man who trod on it at night was electrocuted."

They felt themselves paling.

"This is a man-trap of a house," snarled Fortworth. "I want Lazar bad."

It seemed to Smiler for a moment that an icy-cold butterfly was fluttering up and down his spine. Before Roburton had come upon the scene he had been planning to pay a night visit to the house with Fortworth,

"I'm glad Roburton fell in love with that little woman— glad like a child eating cake,'' he muttered.

The narrow passage, lined with enamelled bricks, along which they now proceeded, seemed to be some forty yards long, and, warned by Roburton, they went silent as a string of phantoms.

They went down three very steep steps— the treads were so narrow that they were ledges rather than steps.

Even as Roburton stepped again on level ground something hissed sharply immediately in front of them.

"Ah!" said the doorkeeper, and swung the long, thin tarnished sword which the others, wondering, had seen him take from a rack of trophies on the wall of the hall.

There was a wet plop, as though half a ripe pear had fallen on the hard brick, and a sudden sound of slithering.

"A cobra! Stand back, for God's sake!' hissed Roburton. His light searched the darkness before them. The ledge-like steps led down into a little pit formed by sinking the floor of the passage some five feet. Across the pit was lashing and squirming the divided body of the snake, and on the far side near a similar set of steps was another of the hooded horrors, its head reared high over its nest of coils, awaiting them.

Of a sudden a shaking fit seized upon Roburton.

"T-t-t-ake the l-l-light," he said to Smiler Bunn, his teeth chattering. "I s-s-shall be all r-r-r-r-right in a m-m-minute."'

Smiler took the light, and with his free hand fumbled for his flask, his eyes fixed intently on the sinuous, swaying neck of the killer that hissed gently on the far side of the pit:

"Minute be damned!'' said Mr. Bunn. "You take a pull at this."

Fortworth unscrewed the top, and Roburton sucked greedily at the rare old brandy without which Mr. Bunn rarely went out on business.

"Mastel!" Sing Song squeezed past Kendale, whose "nerve" had gone again, and whose breath caine and went in a queer, dry whistling. "Mastel, me no 'flaid snakee— killee comflabil. Me show. Plenty snakee China."

He took the torch and sword and dropped into the pit, from which they had scrambled. Quite what he did they could not see, but in a second or so there sounded another of those wet "plops," and the hissing of the beast ceased.

The Chink came back, smiling blandly as ever.

"Putee paid him billee," he said, and respectfully took his place in the rear again.

Roburton, steadied by the brandy, stiffened himself.

"Good!'' he said. "Snakes always give me the shudders. I didn't quite expect them there to-night either, I just took the sword in case. This was a new pair. The last couple died, and I did not know the new ones had arrived yet."

"Where are we, anyway?" asked lortworth sullenly; "and how many more obstacles are there in this race?"

"No more between us and Lazar— that I know of— except another man at the end of the passage. We are in the tunnel leading from 412 to 406, Garden Square. Lazar is Lazar at 412, but he is Mr. Remer-Venn, a collector of antiques, at 406."

"Huh!" grunted Smiler. "He's very nearly collected four moderns and a Chink in his tunnel to-night. We'd better make a move."

They passed the pit.

Some three yards farther on Roburton stopped again and asked Smiler for his torch. Then he directed both rays on the floor a few feet in front of him.

"What's wrong?" asked Smiler in his ear.

"Those floor bricks— see? They tun across like a ridge; they're half an inch higher than the floor. I don't like 'em."

Smiler pondered.

"Look as though they might be meant to be trod on. Try 'em with the sword."

Roburton pressed the square of slightly raised bricks. The sword bent, but nothing happened. Still Roburton shook his head. Sing Song, impatient to get to Lazar apparently, stepped forward again.

"Me tleadee on blicks— plessee foot on," he volunteered.

But this unseen danger was different from visible cobras.

"You close your face, banana," growled Smiler, "and keep your place, d'ye hear? You're getting above yourself."

Sing Song slunk back, and they all stared at the little square of bricks.

"I wouldn't tread on 'em for half a million," muttered Kendale.

"Only a blank fool would offer more than that,'' snapped Fortworth,

Their nerves were on edge.

"Pull off the air-pistol at it," suggested Smiler. "Is it a repeating tool?"

"Yes, three shots," burton. "I'll try one."

He pulled off ; there was a tiny hissing pop, and the bullet hit full in the centre of the raised patch. At the same instant, whistling through the air with a note so sharp as to be a scream, a huge blade flashed in a semi-circular rising sweep from the base of the tunnel wall a few feet on the far side of the raised bricks. It sheered over the suspected spot and shot into position against the wall on the expedition's side of the passage, quivering like a steel tongue. It was enamelled white, and was engraved to match the bricks of which the tunnel was built. The whole device was much as though one had fixed a vast handle-less table-knife to the floor and bent it down, curving it sideways and back along the ground, until it fitted with a twist in the bottom of the wall, the tip being secured by a spring working in conjunction with the raised bricks. When "set" the blade fitted so well into the specially grooved base of the wall that it was invisible, but now it was "thrown," the infernal trap was obvious.

The party stared wildly at each other. Had any one of them trodden on those bricks he, and any two behind him, would have been lopped in half like cucumbers.

Smiler pulled himself together with a very sickly smile.

"If it hadn't been for Roburton and me, Sing Song," he said hoarsely, for he was shaken, " you'd have been in a fine state... all over the passage, practically speaking."

"For pity's sake let's get out of this," said Kendale, and began to laugh hysterically.

"Shut up!" hissed Roburton viciously, but the wild mirth of the overstrained man rang louder.

Fortworth seized Kendale by the throat.

"Quiet!" he ground out. " Quiet, or I'll kill you!"

Taken at the right moment, Kendale's hysteria subsided.

But nevertheless he had been heard. A door opened at the end of the passage a few yards along, a flood of white light poured in, and a man appeared at the opening. But Roburton was expecting him, and even as the guard swung up his arm the doorkeeper's pistol gave its queer little breathless "pop," and the guard fell forward, shot through the hip. His pistol clattered out of his hand along the floor towards them.

"Good! Now for Lazar," said Roburton. They hurried forward, leaving the wounded man temporarily to look after himself.

They went up an interminable flight of steps, still in a bricked tunnel, like a pack of hounds.

"We are inside the wall of No. 406," explained Roburton as they went. "The steps lead to two rooms at the top of the house— and this is the only way by which these rooms can be entered, except by a fire-escape through the window. The rooms are cased in with steel, like strong rooms with a window. He keeps all his papers here. If we had gone in at the door of 406 we couldn't have got into the rooms at all. There is a secret door, no doubt, but only Lazar knows it."

He signed for silence.

The stairway curled now like that of a church tower.

"Wait here!" whispered Roburton, and crawled round the last comer.

A few seconds later he was back beckoning. Soundlessly they followed him. The stairs ended in a level platform leading to a door through which could be seen a brightly-lit room.

In the room was a big desk, and a man of gigantic stature was sitting at this desk, asleep, his head resting on his arms, which were spread on the desk before him.

"The lair of Lazar!" whispered Roburton with a theatrical touch, due probably to the nervous strain he was enduring.

They stared.

And even as they stared one of the blackmailer's arms slid off the desk, slowly, inertly, striking heavily against the edge of the chair seat. So it hung laxly.

"See that?' whispered Smiler, and there was something in his voice that thrilled them.

A second passed, then suddenly, as though acting on impulse, they all walked quietly into the room.

Smiler touched the man on the shoulder. But he did not move—for he was dead. There was a little bullet hole in his right temple.

They lifted him— four were needed to do it with decency— to a couch a the side of the room. Then Mr. Bunn crossed over to pull down the blind,

So it was he who noticed the little starred hole in the window pane.

"Someone shot him from a house on the other side of the Square," he said. But none of the others— except Sing Song— heeded him. They were at the big safe in the corner, the door of which hung open. It was crammed with papers—each neatly endorsed with a name.

Presently Kendale rose, a bundle in his hands, his eyes glowing. Evidently he had found the documents, letters and so on which had given, or helped Lazar to retain, his power over him, And a moment later Fortworth had his.

Roburton— evidently a victim who had been called upon to pay blackmail in the shape of service rather than money— presently found his bundle.

"Good!" he said.

But Mr. Bunn disagreed.

"You might think so," he said. "But I don't believe in going through a safe without looking in the money-box compartment."

Then he took his turn at the safe. The drawers were crammed with money— notes and gold to the value of two thousand pounds.

Smiler and Sing Song packed the money in a small brown bag they found near the desk, while the others examined the various papers relating to themselves.

But as Mr. Bunn closed the bag an idea occurred to him.

"Who shot Lazar ? Have you got any idea, Roburton?" he asked.

Roburton nodded.

"I can guess—a man named Talen whom Lazar had bled dry. He could not have had more than the price of a rifle and the rent of an attic to use it from. He was in his day a prize-winner at Bisley."'

Kendale nodded corroboration.

"He was a member of the society," he said. "He was always swearing to settle with Lazar. It was bound to come. His wife died a month ago, and— I suppose he just didn't care so long as he got even with Lazar. He's probably been waiting his chance across the Square by day and night, and to-night it came. Lazar must have been busy, and switched on the light without pulling down the blind!"

"That made him an easy mark for a shot like Talen. He's probably been dead some hours," added Kendale.

Smiler dumped the bag of money on the desk.

"Well, we've leaving here," he said. "You'd better divide the money with the needy ones of your society of victims, Kendale. Or, say, half to them and half to Roburton."

But Roburton shook his head.

"I didn't do this for money or for hatred of Lazar,"' he said, looking them all squarely in the eyes. "I did it for love of a woman I shall never see again— but whom I have helped to make happy."

They knew whom he meant— Soya Kendale.

There was a pause. Then Roburton went on:

"You people had better get out now, We'll get back through the passage, and you can leave the rest to me. I'll see that the money goes to the right people, and their 'dossiers' too. I can deal with Lazar's guards and with— Lazar also."

The Bunn-lortworth Combine glanced at each other. Roburton was right— in every way. He knew the houses, the secrets of the place, the guards, the victims of the blackmailer— everything. He was the right man to wind up the thing.

They returned along the way they had come— Roburton having switched off the current that made a death-trap of the electric step— and so went quietly out into the street, four of them, as they might have been four revellers homeward bound from a card party.

Soya Kendale was curled up on a big lounge in the flat fast asleep when they arrived home. She looked very sweet and pretty, and they had no difficulty in understanding that Roburton found it easy to pity her first and so come to love her.

"That man may have been a blackmailer's butler," said Smiler softly, 'but he was a white man to-night, whatever he was yesterday or will be to-morrow. That's what. Fetch in the old brandy, Sing Song."

The Kendales left the flat next morning for Paris, where they settled down, and a few days later Roburton called.

"Everything's fixed," he said briefly. "I sail for New York next week. You'll hear no more of Lazar."

What he had done with the guards, with the body of the blackmailer, with the "dossiers," with Lazar's loot of years, and so forth, he did not say, Nor did the partners ask. He gave them the address of the man Talen, and this, with their knowledge of how Lazar was killed, was all they needed as a safeguard against the improbable eventuality of being entangled in the killing.

Then he left. They never saw or heard of him again.

SOME six months later they read in a moming paper that a curious subterranean passage had been discovered in Garden Square ; but there was no mention of anything else, no "gruesome discoveries" or "mysteries."

"Well, Flood," said Fortworth, summing up, "whatever Roburton did, he did thoroughly."

Smiler agreed.

"Yes," he said thoughtfully, teaching for the kidneys. " Yes. He was a thorough kind of man."

Which was true.

End