PAST MASTERS 155

Arthur Machen
Bertram Atkey
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William J. Locke
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Percival Wilde
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and more

PAST MASTERS 155

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

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Hume Nisbet

1849-1921

In: *Stories Weird and Wonderful*, 1900

Hume Nisbet

IT WAS the exact kind of abode that I had been looking after for weeks, for I was in that condition of mind when absolute renunciation of society was a necessity. I had become diffident of myself, and wearied of my kind. A strange unrest was in my blood; a barren dearth in my brains. Familiar objects and faces had grown distasteful to me. I wanted to be alone.

This is the mood which comes upon every sensitive and artistic mind when the possessor has been overworked or living too long in one groove. It is Nature's hint for him to seek pastures new; the sign that a retreat has become needful.

If he does not yield, he breaks down and becomes whimsical and hypochondriacal, as well as hypercritical. It is always a bad sign when a man becomes over-critical and censorious about his own or other people's work, for it means that he is losing the vital portions of work, freshness and enthusiasm.

Before I arrived at the dismal stage of criticism I hastily packed up my knapsack, and taking the train to Westmorland, I began my tramp in search of solitude, bracing air and romantic surroundings.

Many places I came upon during that early summer wandering that appeared to have almost the required conditions, yet some petty drawback prevented me from deciding. Sometimes it was the scenery that I did not take

kindly to. At other places I took sudden antipathies to the landlady or landlord, and felt I would abhor them before a week was spent under their charge. Other places which might have suited me I could not have, as they did not want a lodger. Fate was driving me to this Cottage on the Moor, and no one can resist destiny.

One day I found myself on a wide and pathless moor near the sea. I had slept the night before at a small hamlet, but that was already eight miles in my rear, and since I had turned my back upon it I had not seen any signs of humanity; I was alone with a fair sky above me, a balmy ozone-filled wind blowing over the stony and heather-clad mounds, and nothing to disturb my meditations.

How far the moor stretched I had no knowledge; I only knew that by keeping in a straight line I would come to the ocean cliffs, then perhaps after a time arrive at some fishing village.

I had provisions in my knapsack, and being young did not fear a night under the stars. I was inhaling the delicious summer air and once more getting back the vigour and happiness I had lost; my city-dried brains were again becoming juicy.

Thus hour after hour slid past me, with the paces, until I had covered about fifteen miles since morning, when I saw before me in the distance a solitary stone-built cottage with roughly slated roof. 'I'll camp there if possible,' I said to myself as I quickened my steps towards it.

To one in search of a quiet, free life, nothing could have possibly been more suitable than this cottage. It stood on the edge of lofty cliffs, with its front door facing the moor and the back-yard wall overlooking the ocean. The sound of the dancing waves struck upon my ears like a lullaby as I drew near; how they would thunder when the autumn gales came on and the seabirds fled shrieking to the shelter of the sedges.

A small garden spread in front, surrounded by a dry-stone wall just high enough for one to lean lazily upon when inclined. This garden was a flame of colour, scarlet predominating, with those other soft shades that cultivated poppies take on in their blooming, for this was all that the garden grew.

As I approached, taking notice of this singular assortment of poppies, and the orderly cleanness of the windows, the front door opened and a woman appeared who impressed me at once favourably as she leisurely came along the pathway to the gate, and drew it back as if to welcome me.

She was of middle age, and when young must have been remarkably good-looking. She was tall and still shapely, with smooth clear skin, regular features and a calm expression that at once gave me a sensation of rest.

To my inquiries she said that she could give me both a sitting and bedroom, and invited me inside to see them. As I looked at her smooth black hair, and cool brown eyes, I felt that I would not be too particular about the accomodation. With such a landlady, I was sure to find what I was after here.

The rooms surpassed my expectation, dainty white curtains and bedding with the perfume of lavender about them, a sitting-room homely yet cosy without being crowded. With a sigh of infinite relief I flung down my knapsack and clinched the bargain.

She was a widow with one daughter, whom I did not see the first day, as she was unwell and confined to her own room, but on the next day she was somewhat better, and then we met.

The fare was simple, yet it suited me exactly for the time, delicious milk and butter with home-made scones, fresh eggs and bacon; after a hearty tea I went early to bed in a condition of perfect content with my quarters.

Yet happy and tired out as I was I had by no means a comfortable night. This I put down to the strange bed. I slept certainly, but my sleep was filled with dreams so that I woke late and unrefreshed; a good walk on the moor, however, restored me, and I returned with a fine appetite for breakfast.

Certain conditions of mind, with aggravating circumstances, are required before even a young man can fall in love at first sight, as Shakespeare has shown in his Romeo and Juliet. In the city, where many fair faces passed me every hour, I had remained like a stoic, yet no sooner did I enter the cottage after that morning walk than I succumbed instantly before the weird charms of my landlady's daughter, Ariadne Brunnell.

She was somewhat better this morning and able to meet me at breakfast, for we had our meals together while I was their lodger. Ariadne was not beautiful in the strictly classical sense, her complexion being too lividly white and her expression too set to be quite pleasant at first sight; yet, as her mother had informed me, she had been ill for some time, which accounted for that defect. Her features were not regular, her hair and eyes seemed too black with that strangely white skin, and her lips too red for any except the decadent harmonies of an Aubrey Beardsley.

Yet my fantastic dreams of the preceding night, with my morning walk, had prepared me to be enthralled by this modern poster-like invalid.

The loneliness of the moor, with the singing of the ocean, had gripped my heart with a wistful longing. The incongruity of those flaunting and evanescent poppy flowers, dashing the giddy tints in the face of that sober heath, touched me with a shiver as I approached the cottage, and lastly that weird embodiment of startling contrasts completed my subjugation.

She rose from her chair as her mother introduced her, and smiled while she held out her hand. I clasped that soft snowflake, and as I did so a faint thrill tingled over me and rested on my heart, stopping for the moment its beating.

This contact seemed also to have affected her as it did me; a clear flush, like a white flame, lighted up her face, so that it glowed as if an alabaster lamp had been lit; her black eyes became softer and more humid as our glances crossed, and her scarlet lips grew moist. She was a living woman now, while before she had seemed half a corpse.

She permitted her white slender hand to remain in mine longer than most people do at an introduction, and then she slowly withdrew it, still regarding me with steadfast eyes for a second or two afterwards.

Fathomless velvety eyes these were, yet before they were shifted from mine they appeared to have absorbed all my willpower and made me her abject slave. They looked like deep dark pools of clear water, yet they filled me with fire and deprived me of strength. I sank into my chair almost as languidly as I had risen from my bed that morning.

Yet I made a good breakfast, and although she hardly tasted anything, this strange girl rose much refreshed and with a slight glow of colour on her cheeks, which improved her so greatly that she appeared younger and almost beautiful.

I had come here seeking solitude, but since I had seen Ariadne it seemed as if I had come for her only. She was not very lively; indeed, thinking back, I cannot recall any spontaneous remark of hers; she answered my questions by monosyllables and left me to lead in words; yet she was insinuating and appeared to lead my thoughts in her direction and speak to me with her eyes. I cannot describe her minutely, I only know that from the first glance and touch she gave me I was bewitched and could think of nothing else.

It was a rapid, distracting, and devouring infatuation that possessed me; all day long I followed her about like a dog, every night I dreamed of that white glowing face, those steadfast black eyes, those moist scarlet lips, and each morning I rose more languid than I had been the day before. Sometimes I dreamt that she was kissing me with those red lips, while I shivered at the contact of her silky black tresses as they covered my throat; sometimes that we were floating in the air, her arms about me and her long hair enveloping us both like an inky cloud, while I lay supine and helpless.

She went with me after breakfast on that first day to the moor, and before we came back I had spoken my love and received her assent. I held her in my arms and had taken her kisses in answer to mine, nor did I think it strange that all this had happened so quickly. She was mine, or rather I was hers, without a

pause. I told her it was fate that had sent me to her, for I had no doubts about my love, and she replied that I had restored her to life.

Acting upon Ariadne's advice, and also from a natural shyness, I did not inform her mother how quickly matters had progressed between us, yet although we both acted as circumspectly as possible, I had no doubt Mrs Brunnell could see how engrossed we were in each other. Lovers are not unlike ostriches in their modes of concealment. I was not afraid of asking Mrs Brunnell for her daughter, for she already showed her partiality towards me, and had bestowed upon me some confidences regarding her own position in life, and I therefore knew that, so far as social position was concerned, there could be no real objection to our marriage. They lived in this lonely spot for the sake of their health, and kept no servant because they could not get any to take service so far away from other humanity. My coming had been opportune and welcome to both mother and daughter.

For the sake of decorum, however, I resolved to delay my confession for a week or two and trust to some favourable opportunity of doing it discreetly.

Meantime Ariadne and I passed our time in a thoroughly idle and lotus-eating style. Each night I retired to bed meditating starting work next day, each morning I rose languid from those disturbing dreams with no thought for anything outside my love. She grew stronger every day, while I appeared to be taking her place as the invalid, yet I was more frantically in love than ever, and only happy when with her. She was my lone-star, my only joy--my life.

We did not go great distances, for I liked best to lie on the dry heath and watch her glowing face and intsense eyes while I listened to the surging of the distant waves. It was love made me lazy, I thought, for unless a man has all he longs for beside him, he is apt to copy the domestic cat and bask in the sunshine.

I had been enchanted quickly. My disenchantment came as rapidly, although it was long before the poison left my blood.

One night, about a couple of weeks after my coming to the cottage, I had returned after a delicious moonlight walk with Ariadne. The night was warm and the moon at the full, therefore I left my bedroom window open to let in what little air there was.

I was more than usually fagged out, so that I had only strength enough to remove my boots and coat before I flung myself wearily on the coverlet and fell almost instantly asleep without tasting the nightcap draught that was constantly placed on the table, and which I had always drained thirstily.

I had a ghastly dream this night. I thought I saw a monster bat, with the face and tresses of Ariadne, fly into the open window and fasten its white teeth and scarlet lips on my arm. I tried to beat the horror away, but could not,

for I seemed chained down and thralled also with drowsy delight as the beast sucked my blood with a gruesome rapture.

I looked out dreamily and saw a line of dead bodies of young men lying on the floor, each with a red mark on their arms, on the same part where the vampire was then sucking me, and I remembered having seen and wondered at such a mark on my own arm for the past fortnight. In a flash I understood the reason for my strange weakness, and at the same moment a sudden prick of pain roused me from my dreamy pleasure.

The vampire in her eagerness had bitten a little too deeply that night, unaware that I had not tasted the drugged draught. As I woke I saw her fully revealed by the midnight moon, with her black tresses flowing loosely, and with her red lips glued to my arm. With a shriek of horror I dashed her backwards, getting one last glimpse of her savage eyes, glowing white face and blood-stained red lips; then I rushed out to the night, moved on by my fear and hatred, nor did I pause in my mad flight until I had left miles between me and that accursed Cottage on the Moor.

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2: Mrs. Maunde's Pearls

Rosa Praed

1851-1935

Queenslander, 19 Dec 1908

Rosa Campbell Praed

WHEN ELINOR MAUNDE was left a widow with one delicate child, people said that it would not make much difference to her eventually, since Bastian Pacha, her father, a soldier of fortune and reputedly a rich man, would naturally make her his heiress. She took up her abode in his flat in Albert Court, and when her time of mourning was over, the two went out a good deal in London society. Bastian Pacha loved to entertain and to be entertained, and Mrs. Maunde, although not handsome, made a good appearance, for one reason because she wore very fine Jewels. Bastian Pacha had brought home a large collection of gems, with which he decked his daughter. Latterly, however, he had been observed that Mrs. Maunde no longer wore a variety of ornaments, but limited her display of jewels to chain of remarkably fine pearls, which were said to have been the gift of an Eastern sovereign to Bastian Pacha.

The reason for this became evident at the Pacha's death, which was sudden. His reputed wealth had no existence in title-deed or scrip. He had lived on the price of his jewels, Most of which he had sold in the last year or two, and having speculated unfortunately with the proceeds had lost everything except the chain of pearls, his sole legacy to his daughter. This Mrs. Maunde learnt shortly after the funeral.

The discovery was a great blow. Her whole heart was bound up in her sickly little girl, who had lately developed a spinal complaint, and had been ordered, as the one chance of averting permanent disablement and extreme suffering, to undergo a special treatment and to take at once a long, sea voyage and winter in a warm climate. Mrs. Maunde had just completed her preparations

for the voyage and for a six months' stay in New Zealand. Her preparations included the engagement of a lady doctor and the purchase of expensive medical appliances. Now she found that there was no money to pay for these essentials, as she considered them, to her child's life. Obviously the only thing to do was to sell her pearls. Her thoughts turned immediately to a German Jew of her acquaintance— one Helmoth, a man well known socially and who had not long back acted as a sort of agent for Bastian Pacha in the sale of a set of emeralds to a German princess. He came in response to her summons rather early in the day and found the flat in confusion, and an auctioneer making an inventory of furniture.

Mrs. Maunde's maid ushered him into her mistress's boudoir, which was unoccupied. Here, too, apparently, things were being looked over. The contents of a writing bureau were stacked on the sofa. A jewel-box stood open, and some few unimportant brooches and rings lay on a pile of lace in bad condition. Mr. Helmoth noted this in a glance, and gave an imperceptible shrug, but his eyes brightened as, glancing at another table, he saw exposed in their velvet-covered case the famous chain of pearls.

Mr. Helmoth went over and peered at the pearls, showing the man of business beneath his handsome, fashionable-looking exterior. He took the opportunity to test the pearls, though he had seen them often enough on Mrs. Maunde's thin neck.

While he was thus engaged the lady herself entered— a pale, high-bred woman of about thirty-five, fragile, nervous, and washed-out in appearance, having lost the former bloom of youth, and not troubling to repair it by artificial means. She looked frightfully ill, worn, and miserable. The hand she gave him was trembling like the claw of a frightened bird, and hot as a live coal.

After the first few conventional sentences of greeting and sympathy, Mr. Helmoth put back the pearls which he had been examining, scarcely apologising for his curiosity.

"You know, my dear lady, that I am an Oriental by temperament, and delight in the sheen of jewels. You ought to be careful, though, in leaving those about when you have workmen on the premises."

"Yes, yes, I know," she answered. "And especially now that all I care for in the world depends on them."

He pressed her hand, and was struck anew by its feverishness. "Ah, there's no need for me to say how I feel for you. Mere words of condolence convey nothing. I can only beg that you will make use of me to the full."

"Thank you. I was sure that you would do anything you could. You were kind enough to be an intermediary when my father sold his emeralds. I want you to help me now in the some way."

"Willingly, if it is in my power. But I don't keep up my sleeve a supply of princesses ready to pay fancy prices for jewels they happen to covet. That was just a lucky chance. But, tell me, what do you want to get rid of?"

"I want you to sell my pearls for me— and at once."

"Surely not these which yon always wear?"

"Yes."

"Then it is true—the rumour I heard of disappointment as to Bastian Pacha's estate ?"

"There's no estate. My father died with debts which we hope to cover by the sale of everything of any value in the flat. But as for me, I have nothing in the world— practically— but these pearls. I haven't even money enough to take Daisy away, as I had arranged, with the qualified doctor and nurse. And everything depends upon how the treatment is carried out and upon the sea voyage. Our passages were booked before my father died—in the Macedonia. She sails in a fortnight."

"Oh, if you wished to delay, the passages could easily be transferred to another steamer," he said.

"I dare not delay. Daisy must be got out of England before the bad fogs come on. To-day, her breathing is terribly oppressed. See, this is the first fog of the winter, and it is only the beginning of October." She pointed tragically to the window, through which the opposite houses could to seen blurred by yellow mist. As she did so, something seemed to catch her own breath, and she put her hand to her side as if in pain.

"Forgive me," he said, "but you are looking very ill. Have you teen a doctor?"

"It is nothing. I fancy I have a touch of influenza. I haven't time to think of myself. There's so much besides to think of. And I can't arrange anything definitely until I know that I shall get money for the pearls."

He smiled. "Of course you will get money for them. But l am afraid that if you make a forced sale you won't get as much as they are worth."

"Solignac— the man in Paris, you know—valued them at a hundred and fifty thousand francs."

Helmoth shrugged again. "Of course, I know Solignac. But there's a difference between the owners' and purchasers' valuations."

"I would take less than that," she said. "But other Judges have assured me that tho pearls are worth even more."

"Well, we shall see. I should rely on the opinion of Liebmann— the man in Bond-street. The best chance, I fancy, is a private sale— perhaps to one of your friends."

"Yes, I thought so. And that is why I have sent for you. You know everybody."

"Not quite. But, oddly enough, it Just happens that a week or two ago a rich woman of my acquaintance told me she wanted to buy some pearls. You may know her— Madame Sabatier?"

Mrs. Maunde shook her head. "I know Madame Sabatier by name of course, but not personally." .

"No doubt she has seen you wearing the pearls. Would yon like me to see what I can do with her?"

"Oh, if you would. Is she a great friend of yours?"

Helmoth smiled his indefinable smile. "I have been of use to the Sabatiers— socially and financially. I ought to warn you, however, that they're the kind of people, who, as you say, insist on full change for a sovereign."

Mrs. Maunde drew herself up proudly.

"I don't wish that any one should give more than the value of the pearls and l am prepared to take less if I can dispose of them at once. Mr. Helmoth, if you will see Madame Sabatier I shall be deeply grateful. You are at liberty to tell her why I want to sell them. And now you will not mind if I go back to Daisy. Only, do please let me hear as soon as possible."

"You shall hear fn an hoar or two. I will telephone from Madame Sabatier's house— if your telephone is still going."

"Yes." And she added, with faint irony, "It is paid for until the first of January."

Helmoth departed, and Mrs. Maunde, taking the jewels, west back to her child.

Two hours later she was called to the telephone. Mr. Helmoth spoke from Madame Sabatier's house. He said that Madame Sabatier knew the pearls, and was enchanted at the idea of possessing them. If she and Mrs. Maunde could agree as to terms, she wished to conclude the purchase as soon as possible, for she was leaving tor the Riviera in ten days' time. Unfortunately, she was now confined to the house with a cold, but would Mrs. Maunde bring the pearls at three o'clock that afternoon?

Mrs. Maunde made the appointment, and braving the chill damp of the fog, went at three o'clock to the Sabatiers' house in Bambridge-terrace, Regent's Park. Madame Sabatier was a French-woman of the forceful type. She gave a suggestion of Creole blood in her crisp wavy black hair, her large dark eyes and brunette complexion, but she had none of the Creole languor. In

manner she was brisk and determined, with an affectation of frankness and of being a woman of the world. Her surroundings were sumptuous; her room a mass of rich embroideries, cushions, and hot-house flowers, which seemed out of harmony with a secretaire of the First Empire, on which were packets of carefully-docketed papers. Her crimson brocade tea-gown smothered in lace was the only sign she gave of invalidism. Beside her, poor, pale Mrs. Maunde looked like a mourning ghost.

But Madame Sabatier was a woman of business playing at being a great lady. That became evident when the pearls were produced and she begun to appraise them, examining each one separately and pointing out flaws in several, only discoverable under her magnifying-glass. Finally, however, she admitted that the collection was a very good one, and the pearls evenly matched in shape and colour. Then she made a tentative bid of fifty thousand francs —she was accustomed she said, to compute in francs. Mrs. Maunde replied haughtily, though she had a difficulty in hiding her disappointment.

"I am afraid there must be some misunderstanding. I told Mr. Helmoth that Solignac had valued the pearls at a hundred and fifty thousand francs " Madame Sabatier held up her hands and shrugged, somewhat in Helmoth's own manner.

"Oh, Solignac! Now if it had been Liebmann! Yes, Helmoth told me something of the sort. But— pardon, my friend— I have myself had experience of the valuations of Solignac. They do not support themselves in the opinion of other experts. Well, shall we say sixty thousand francs?"

Mrs. Maunde closed the case, coldly shaking her head.

Madame Sabatier raised her offer to eighty thousand francs, which she declared was the utmost to which she would go. Elinor hesitated. She thought of Daisy; of the lady doctor, who had the offer of another appointment, and was awaiting her decision. But Madame Sabatier's mode of haggling offended her instincts as a gentlewoman, and she refused. She even refused ninety thousand francs, and was almost sorry. Would she be likely to get a better offer?

Perhaps she was sacrificing her child's life. Madame Sabatier watched her visitor's face, and when Elinor took up the velvet case. And, expressing courteous regret, moved towards the door, Madame Sabatier intercepted her with a tragic gesture.

"Well, it seems that one must pay for one's foibles. Mrs. Maunde, I speak absolutely without reservation. I have set my heart on those pearls. Pearls are my Mascotte. I have long coveted an evenly-matched set. My husband laughs at my superstitions. Ninety thousand francs is my limit. I dare not risk his anger."

"And I, Madame Sabatier, dare not risk my child's welfare."

"Ah— poor little thing! Helmoth told me. I feel for you with a full heart. For myself, I have no children. But, alas! my husband insists that business and sentiment are things apart. What can I say?"

Madame Sabatier waited, but Mrs. Maunde, with an air of finality, made a step forward. Madame Sabatier stopped her again.

"Hem! An idea occurs to me. Let us apply to our good friend Helmoth to have the pearls revalued. I have confidence in Helmoth, you also, and also my husband. I will appoint that tomorrow, at 12 o'clock precisely, Helmoth shall bring Liebmann. You will meet him here. If he values at no more than ninety thousand— or at less— we accept his decision. If at more, you will permit me to reconsider the affair? Is it then an appointment?"

Mrs. Maunde agreed.

"And for the moment— till midday tomorrow— you will leave the pearls, that my husband may see them?"

Elinor demurred. She had often been cautioned not to let the pearls out of her own keeping.

Madame Sabatier interposed eagerly.

"*Bien entendu*! I hold to the offer of ninety thousand francs. To prove my sincerity, and that you may be at no risk in the matter, I will write you a cheque now for that amount. To-morrow, after the appointment with Helmoth and Liebmann, if it be so decided, you can return me the cheque."

Mrs. Maunde politely waived the question of the cheque. But Madame Sabatier insisted, wrote it at once and handed it to her visitor. "For the formality," she requested a receipt.

Elinor left the house without her pearls, but with Madame Sabatier's provisional cheque in her purse, secured, as that lady put it, against evil hazard.

The fog had lifted, driven by a keen wind from the east which, as Elinor turned the corner, struck her chest. She walked on a little way, for she had not thought of asking for a cab; and now that the strain was partially relaxed, she became conscious of increasing illness. She felt giddy and sick, and had a stabbing pain in her side when she drew her breath. An empty hansom passed her, and she managed to hail and get into it.

That night she was so ill that the doctor had to be summoned. The case was one of pneumonia, following on neglected influenza. Her appointment to meet Helmoth and Liebmann at Madame Sabatier's was never kept; nor could she open the letter, in which Madame Sabatier wrote to the effect that as Mrs. Maunde had failed in her part of the agreement, Madame Sabatier considered

that she had duly bought the pearls for the sum of ninety thousand francs, for which she held Mrs. Maunde's receipt.

SIX DAYS later a large dinner party took place at the house of Baron Schomberg, the financier, in Grosvenor-square. Mr. Helmoth was there, and stood beside the partner to whom he had been told off— a soulful young woman, with peculiarly limpid eyes, wearing a sort of classical robe, and a Greek fillet in her hair— while the company waited the announcement of dinner, delayed by the late arrival of two guests. These were M. and Madame Sabatier, who presently, as Helmoth's eyes turned to the door, made their entrance.

M. Sabatier, dapper, blonde-moustachioed, lynx-eyed, wore the ribbon of the Legion of Honour. Madame Sabatier— a head taller than her husband— was as usual magnificently dressed, and Helmoth noticed that, among other jewels she wore, were Mrs. Maunde's chain of pearls. Their eyes met, and his expressed slight annoyance. It had been settled at the close of that interview with Liebmann, whom he had taken to see the pearls at Madame Sabatier's house— the meeting which poor Mrs. Maunde had not attended— that the pearls were to change hands again— he, Helmoth, receiving handsome commission on the transaction. He contrived to whisper a word or two over Madame Sabatier's shoulder as she passed just before him into the dining-room. She answered with a laugh.

"They go to-morrow, my friend. But truly, the temptation to-night was irresistible."

It was an elaborately-served dinner, the guests many, the table, a long one, decorated with a profusion of flowers, set in low silver bowls. Helmoth, looking across this parterre, found that he had unimpeded view of Madame Sabatier, who was rested exactly opposite, and he watched her with interest as she talked animatedly to the gentleman on her right.

The soulful young lady, surveying the company through her long-handled eye-glasses— a jarring note in her classical toilet— was also arrested by the sight of Madams Sabatier, whom she studied furtively in the intervals between the courses, appearing to fall in naturally with Helmoth's fancy for observing that lady in preference to making conversation with his legitimate companion.

About the middle of dinner, after one of these observations, the soulful young woman put down her eyeglasses and remarked to Helmoth:

"I see that poor Elinor Maunde has sold her pearls, and I do hope, for the sake of little Daisy, that she has got s good price for them."

Helmoth answered evasively, turning the subject to the unexpected collapse of Bastian Pacha's reputation for riches and commiserating Mrs. Maunde in feeling terms.

The girl was even more effusive in her compassion, and added, "I suppose you know that there's hardly any hope of her getting better?"

"Hardly any hope!" replied Melmoth. "For Daisy?"

"No, for Elinor. Had you not heard how ill she was? I called this morning to inquire. She was delirious. They expect the crisis to-night."

"Do you mean that Mts. Maunde is seriously ill?" be asked, anxiously.

"She is dying," returned the girl. "It's double pneumonia. They've been giving her oxygen, and when it comes to that things are generally pretty bad."

Just then there was a lull in the buzz of talk on the other side of the table, and Helmoth became aware that Madame Sabatier had stopped short in something she had been saying about her forthcoming trip to Monte Carlo; and that she was leaning forward listening intently. He purposely made a diversion by inquiring of the lady on his left whether she had been staying at a certain great house in Scotland that autumn, but while she was answering, a quick, horrified exclamation from the soulful young lady on his right railed his attention to her again. She had dropped her long-handled eyeglasses, which clattered down, upsetting a frail hock tumbler, and was staring strangely beyond the row of people on the other side of the table.

Helmoth glanced across, but saw only Madame Sabatier's handsome face, wearing an expression of gloomy abstraction. Behind her a large painting covered a big piece of the wall, and partly obscuring it were the figures of a butler with decanters, and of a pair of powdered footmen carrying tall, pink, frosted glasses of Sorbet *à la rhum*.

One of the men was trying to attract Madame Sabatier's notice, and at last succeeded. She negatived the sorbet with a half shake and quick turn of the head. As she glanced back leftward, an extraordinary change came over her face, and it seemed that she too beheld that which the soulful girl was still staring at in a frightened manner, though apparently no one else was aware of the object, whatever it might be.

Madame Sabatier had given a violent start, a cry of consternation died on her lips, and now she sat rigid, her face bent sideways, her terror stricken gaze fixed over her shoulder on a point of space behind at the left of her chair. For a moment she was as one petrified by some supernatural fear, her face deadly white except for the patches of rouge on her cheeks, her eyes glassy and distended, her mouth agape.

Silence fell on those near, and the men on either side looked at her in wonder. But the talk went on at both ends of the table till that too was

stopped of a sudden by a piercing shriek that rang from Madame Sabatier's lips. She screamed out in French some frenzied words, which from the wildness and rapidity of her utterance were scarcely intelligible to many of the English present.

"Have pity! For the love of heaven have pity! I am guilty ! I have robbed the dead. Holy Mother, forgive! I swear that I will make reparation. Ah! No— no— do not touch me! You shall have them back— the full price shall be paid. But do not touch me. I say I will give them back."

Madame Sabatier went on for a minute or two, raving incoherently, and beating with her right hand in the air, as though she were fighting an invisible assailant, while with her left hand she clutched at the chain of pearls and seemed trying to tear it from her neck. Suddenly her screams ceased, and she fell back in her chair foaming at the mouth and writhing like a person in an epileptic fit.

Everybody had risen and everybody was asking what had happened.

M. Sabatier rushed to his wife's assistance, and with him an eminent physician, who was one of the guests at the dinner party. Between them, and with the help of another man, Madame Sabatier was taken from the room, and neither she nor her husband reappeared. In her struggles the chain of pearls had snapped, and several had rolled on the ground. Helmoth, who had been unmistakably shaken by the incident, begged the soulful young lady to tell him what she had seen.

She answered in great agitation :

"Mr. Helmoth, I declare to you that when I looked across that time I saw poor Elinor Maunde, with the most dreadful expression upon her face, standing close behind Madame Sabatier— a little to her left— and pointing to her pearl necklace. I dare say you'll think me mad— but I saw her as plainly as I see you. And it's my belief that there was something wrong about the sale of that necklace, and that Elinor's spirit could not pass over in peace till she had tried to set it straight. For I'm certain that Elinor Maunde is dead."

Helmoth shuddered, and took a quick gulp of champagne.

He left the house immediately after dinner, and drove to Albert Court. There he learnt that Mrs. Maunde had expired at the very time that her apparition had been seen in Baron Schomberg's dining-room.

Next morning M. Sabatier called on the Baron, and asked that he might be allowed to search the dining-room for four pearls which were missing from the chain. He stated that the pearls had recently been valued at twenty thousand francs apiece.

———————

3: Nightstick Nemesis

Frederick C Painton

1896-1945

Gold Seal Detective, Jan 1936

Frederick Charles Painton

1: White and Yellow

PATROLMAN BARNEY DALL stood at the corner of Mott and Pell Streets and stared with gray, alert eyes at the colorful Chinatown scene before him. He liked this beat much better than his old post in the Bronx, and he felt grateful to Sergeant McLacey for bringing about his transfer when the sergeant had been shifted. "You're poison to Lieutenant Allen, Barney," McLacey had said, "and he'll get you if I leave you behind. So you for Chinatown. But for crysake, use your head because—"

"What do you mean, use my head?" protested Barney. "That's all I have been doing. Studying every night. I bet you I could pass the examinations for detective second grade right now."

"Sure, I know," said McLacey scornfully, "you're so bright you dazzle my eyes. But it won't do you any good. if you get kicked out of the Department. Don't break so many regulations. And do you know what the newspaper boys call you now?"

"Sure," said Barney, "the Killing Cop."

"Right. And the crooks call you the Murder Bull, and they'll kill you if they can."

Barney Dall's gray eyes thinned into an opaque hard stare. "Let them try, the rats!"

"Sure. But after all, the state hires a guy at Sing Sing to officially bump them."

Barney Dall laughed mirthlessly. "Yeah? That's what you think." He pulled out a folded newspaper from under his tunic and pointed to a black headline which read:

GENTLEMAN PAUL MORDER
FREED ON MURDER CHARGE

"Read it," urged Dall. "Go on, read it and then tell me the guy that wires the hot seat will ever get a chance at Paul Morder. You know and I know that Morder killed Pat Flannigan, one of the best cops on the force. A guy I went to police school with. And what happens? The judge dismisses the charge for lack of evidence."

McLacey bit his lip. "Well, that's the law," he said reluctantly.

"Right," nodded Dall. "Well, if I run into Paul Morder, he'll take a slug through the head. He'll join Iron Hat Schultz in the morgue— and the judges don't dismiss charges against stiffs."

"All right, you black-headed Mick," cried McLacey, who hated to be worsted in an argument, "but remember this! They's plenty of guys in the Department who'd like to see you out, And I'm telling you they'll get you the next break you make."

Barney's eyes smoldered but he shut up. Thinking about McLacey's warning, Barney walked slowly along Mott Street, telling himself they'd never get him. Moreover, now that he needed the extra money to marry Jennie Muller, he'd get promotion too.

He stared at the curious objects for sale. Shark's fin soup; lee chee nuts. Bird's nest soup! He wondered what that would taste like. Many Chinese passed him. The young men, smartly dressed in the latest Broadway styles, walked briskly, alertly. The old men passed him slowly, shuffling along in padded felt slippers, hands in sleeves, black felt hats pulled down over braided, wound queues. Barney took a deep breath. He liked it here; a touch of Oriental romance about all this.

He reached Canal Street and turned and strolled leisurely back on the other side of the street so as to reach his call box on the hour. Halfway there he was startled by a loud, rending crash as if a barrel of glass had rolled down a set of cellar steps. The sound came from Pell Street.

He heard an excited yammer of voices; felt that electric tension that grips the air when the unusual has happened. He broke into a run and reached the

corner in a few paces, tugging at his holstered gun. Upon reaching the corner, however, he thrust the police regulation .38 back, and reduced his speed to a brisk walk.

Two automobiles, one new, expensive, low and powerful, and the other short, antique and practically without paint, were locked radiator to radiator. As Dall approached, a loud voice of violent anger bellowed.

"You dirty, lousy Chink!" cried a man. "Why the hell don't you look where you're going?"

The big thick-set speaker swung a right hook that caught a slight, fragile Chinese youth under the ear and knocked him sprawling ten feet away. The Chinese should have been knocked out. But as Dall came hustling up, the youth got to his feet. His Mongol eyes were slitted with fury, his face a pale saffron. He rushed at the bigger man with gallant courage, striking with his small pale hands.

The bigger man snarled in satisfaction. "No insurance, no nothing, damn you, I'll take it out of your hide!"

He was prepared to strike such a blow as might have terribly hurt the Chinese youth. But Dall arrived just then. He grabbed the arm, whirled the man and with a push sent him teetering into the gutter. He put out a left hand, palm flat, to stop the charge of the youthful Chinese.

"Hold it somewhere else and charge admission," he said curtly.

A CROWD had gathered as if by magic, mostly Chinese, old and young, and bobbed-haired women among them, too. They hemmed the three in now. At sight of Barney Dall's shield and uniform, the Chinese youth had stepped back, hands dropping passively at his sides.

The bigger man, burly and overbearing, snarled, "You lay another hand on me, flatfoot, and I'll see your shield is lifted."

Dall sighed wearily and got out his notebook. Automatically he wrote the time— four-fifty-six. "I suppose your sister married the Commissioner," he murmured. "All right, what's it all about?"

The big man said his name was Nick Poulios and he was driving through to Canal, taking a short cut, and the Chinese louse had veered and hit him head-on. And who was going to pay for the damage?

Dall turned his eyes to the passive Chinese.

"I am Yung Lee," the youth said quietly. "I did not veer, nor run into him. I was going along the street. He came swiftly— faster than he should— and turned and ran into me."

"You're a lousy liar!' cried Nick Poulios.

A murmur in Chinese werit up, and Yung Lee quieted it with words in his native tongue.

Barney Dall looked at the two cars. They were about in the center of the narrow street. The battered old car, a twenty-nine Ford, had left skid-marks where it tried to stop. The other car had left skid-marks but not so long.

Out of the slant-eyed assembly, an old Chinese stepped. "I am Yung Kee," he said courteously, "father of this unworthy youth. I saw what happened. And my miserable son has spoken the truth. The other veered into him."

"Ah, you Chinks!' said Poulios. "You always stick together. Don't you believe him, officer. Us white people have to stand together. It happened the way I said."

There was a hissing intake of breath. Barney Dall suddenly felt slant eyes burning into him. In that second, it struck him that he was on trial with these Chinese. They feared and distrusted him and the white law. He ignored the sensation and examined the tracks, walked around the cars. Finally, after finishing his notes, he pulled out a summons pad.

"You're to blame, Poulios, and I'm slating you for reckless driving," he said. "You left marks where you veered. Trying to crowd that lad off the road, looks like."

"Why, you crummy—" Poulios yelled, enraged. "By God, I'll fight this and take your badge!"

"Cut it," said Barney, "or I'll take you in myself."

He made out the summons and handed it to Poulios who took it reluctantly. Then Dall shooed at the crowd with his hands. "Go on, get back to your laundry," he called.

Poulios went to his car muttering. The bumper had saved him from much damage and the car drove away.

Dall said to Yung Lee, "Get a garage to tow that heap away. And get it fixed good, because that bird's insurance company is going to pay the bill."

Yung Lee bowed. "This miserable person is grateful to you, officer," he said, "for I—"

Whatever he intended to say was never finished, for a little Chinese youth of no more than ten or so came hurtling down the street, screaming in Chinese. As he saw Barney Dall, he changed to English.

"Big man all blood and no move in hallway," he cried. "He be three-eyed man now."

Again Barney sensed that electric tension. This time one of tragedy. He thrust a way through the crowd that still clotted close. He seized the youth. "Where?" he jerked.

The boy began to weep in frightened fashion, But Yung Lee spoke sharply to him, and the boy turned and led the way up Pell Street. Barney Dall hurried after him. The child turned into a faded old brick, three-story building and thumped and clattered up the stairway. Barney pulled his flashlight, for even in daylight these stairs were murky. On the third landing, the child pointed and muttered excitedly in Chinese.

The radiance of Barney's flashlight picked out the grisly sight well enough. A Chinese in black silk trousers, with padded felt slippers on his feet, lay curled up on his side as if asleep. Between his eyes was a round blue hole with a single drop of blood hanging redly there. His eyes looked tranquilly at the wall.

But he was quite dead— had been dead from the second that hole had been made by a pistol bullet.

Underneath his right hand was a sharp curved knife whose steel blade had no smear on its gleaming surface. Automatically Dall glanced at his watch— five-two. They'd be wondering about his five o'clock call.

He stared down at the Chinese. Then he became aware of men behind him. The first was the youth, Yung Lee.

"Know him?" asked Barney.

Those who say a Chinese does not feel emotion are wrong. Yung's face was wild with excitement, sorrow and amazement. Only with an effort did he catch himself. He arranged his features.

"The unfortunate is known to me, officer. He is Kei Ming. A brother in my tong."

"What would he be doing here like this?"

Yung Lee shrugged. "Where man wanders lies in the lap of the gods, mister."

Dall got out his notebook and made a careful description of what he saw.

Aside from the appearance of the murdered Chinese, this was little enough. Beyond the dead man, perhaps five yards or so, was a door. The only door on this landing.

"Who lives there?" asked Barney.

The little Chinese answered excitedly, "The old one— the snatcher of pennies. Missus Parr."

Barney Dall lifted his head in startled fashion. Mrs. Parr? That would be the famous— or infamous— Chinatown Nell Parr whom he had heard about. She was a real character in Chinatown. He had seen her once or twice. An old woman of seventy, dehydrated and bent with age. Years ago, before she became a legend, she had been a Broadway beauty whose pictures in tights had adorned many a saloon. When Nigger Mike Salter had run a place here, she had sung in it. She had gone on opium, married a Chinese, Chen Chei

Mock, and after he had died, had gone on living in Chinatown. The Chinese regarded her affectionately, and she was never molested. It was said she had a million dollars hidden in her wretched rooms.

Dall ceased writing. Chinatown Nell Parr might tell him about this murder. She should have heard the shot.

He rapped sharply on the door.

There came no answer.

"Mrs. Parr!" he called. "Open up. Police business."

His knuckles played a sharp, impatient tattoo. Finally, receiving no reply, he turned the knob and the door opened under his pressure. He took two steps forward and shrank back.

"Good God!' he muttered.

It seemed to him then that Chinatown Nell Parr was leaping through the air at him like a witch astride a broom. He got hold of his jangled nerves and stared again.

This time he saw the truth. This was an old house and the out-moded gas chandelier that hung from the center of the high-ceilinged room had merely been remodeled to hold electric lights.

Instead of Chinatown Nell Parr flying at him, she was merely dangling from the chandelier by the neck, from a strong horsehair cord. The wind from the opened window was swinging her lifeless body to and fro like the pendulum on a clock.

Her eyes were open; her mouth was open. On her face was an expression of deadly terror. Barney Dall stepped into the room and her tiny feet, swinging slackly, kicked him in the leg.

2: In Wrong Again

THE manual of police procedure is very specific as to what a patrolman must do when handling a crime of violence such as murder. Unless he is a witness of the crime or hot on the trail of the murderer, he must make strict notes and notify the Homicide Department with the minimum of delay.

Patrolman Barney Dall wasted twenty more minutes. This can be charged to the fact that he believed in using his head. Instead of running out to leave clues and fingerprints to be ruined by pressing Chinese, he proceeded to look for them himself.

He knew the motive was robbery. The room had been stripped to bits in a frantic, desperate search. Furthermore, she had been tortured. Not only was her skin burned between the toes and the fingers, but pricks near her eyes

showed where needles had been used. Finally, she had been hoisted by the horsehair rope so that her toes barely touched to keep her from strangulation.

Hither she had not told and had been killed in fury; or she had told and then had been murdered on the theory that a dead woman tells no tales.

Barney found two items which might be clues. The first was a strand of hair about two feet long. The second was a chip of amber-colored stone that looked like part of a ring setting.

When the Homicide Squad car arrived at twenty minutes to six, Dall turned over the bit of semi-precious" stone but forgot the hair.

Detective First Grade Manhard was in charge. He read over Dall's notes and a heavy scowl made his thick-chinned face lower.

"How come a half hour lost there?" he demanded. ""Damn it, we could have closed in this area to pinch any known criminals."

Dall said, "I was alone and I had to stay here and send a kid to have the call phoned in."

"Damn lot of time lost," grumbled Manhard. "Okay. Get back on your beat."

Dall went out, knowing that Manhard would make a report of the delay and that a black mark would be placed against him. He didn't care; his imagination had been caught by the bizarre quality of the crime. Its Chinese background, the glamour around the history of Chinatown Nell Parr, the peculiar mystery of it. Over and over again as he patrolled, he asked himself why was the Chinese shot dead outside the door? Here was a murder mystery like you read in books.

But he had to forget that when he reported at the precinct house at the end of his duty tour. Sergeant McLacey was there, frowning savagely at him. Deputy Inspector Hanrahan was also there, anger glinting in his deep-set eyes. In his hand he held a summons.

"Did you issue this to Nick Poulios?" Inspector Hanrahan demanded.

"Sure," rejoined Dall, and proceeded to tell about the accident.

Hanrahan only half heard him out. "Why you poor idiot!" he cut in. "How the hell you ever got on the cops is beyond me. In the first place, why give a summons to Nick Poulios who has more friends in the administration than some people have hair? Second why support a Chink's word against Poulios?"'

"Because the Chinese was right," cut in Dall quietly.

"Right, my eye!'' yelled Hanrahan. "You dim-wit! Haven't you seen through this yet? The Chinks had their eye on lifting Chinatown Nell Parr's roll. That Chinese, Yung Lee, deliberately ran into Nick Poulios to distract your attention while the murder and robbery were going on or a getaway was being made."

Dall hadn't thought of this, but he had the sense to keep quiet. He was in wrong and a false word now might cause him to lose his shield for good.

Hanrahan tore the summons into tiny bits and hurled the fragments into the air disgustedly.

"As soon as we've sweated a confession out of the young Chink, we'll break this case," he said, "and I'll have to report that a policeman supposedly of intelligence connived with the Chink to supply an alibi."

This was the first that Dall knew young Yung Lee had been arrested for murder. Possibly the youth was guilty, Dall did not know. But one fact stuck out prominently.

"Why was the Chinese shot outside Nell Parr's door?" he asked.

"Shot by Yung Lee to save a divvy," snapped Hanrahan. "Anyway, you're suspended temporarily. I hope I can fix this for you because you're a friend of McLacey's, but I doubt if I can. You handled the thing like a sap."

Whereupon the inspector stormed out, and left Dall to McLacey.

"Ah, God!' muttered the sergeant. "Your mother must have dropped you on your skull when you was a kid. I can fix that delay in reporting, but why give a ticket to Poulios?"

"Because he veered into the Chinese," said. Dall.

"What if he did? He's a friend of the big pols. Well, I'll do what I can."

DALL had a thoughtful supper, aware of an inward resentment at the red tape that threatened his promotion just when he wanted promotion most. Chewing on a toothpick, he went north on the subway to the Bronx and into Two Hundred TwentyFourth Street. He liked to talk things over with Jennie.

She sat by the window, knitting something which he feared would be a winter scarf for himself. He sat down heavily and told her what had happened. Usually quiet and soft, she flamed instantly with resentment at the treatment given Barney.

"How dare they?" she blazed. "You did just as you should."

"Sure," said Barney. "But I'm not supposed to use my head. I'm supposed to follow regulations."

She was fearful. "Will they— will they discharge you?" she asked.

Barney shrugged. "If that young Chink is guilty they probably will. Somebody has to take the blame."

He reached into his pocket for a cigarette and pulling out the paper package found shoved inside it the coiled strand of hair which he had picked up from the floor near where Chinatown Nell Parr's feet had dangled. At the time, he had thought it merely a strand of her gray locks pulled out in the torture process.

But as he took it from the cigarette package he saw that it had a golden glint.

"Oh, boy," he muttered, "I forgot to turn this in."

At her questioning look, he explained where he had found the hair. She unrolled it, stretched it between her fingers and examined it. Suddenly she gave an excited little ery. With a quick motion, she wet her fingers and slid them along the strand of hair. Barney watched her, and watching saw that the tiny bit of saliva remaining on her fingers was now colored a sort of orange.

"Barney," she cried, "this is a dyed hair. A quick dye. One that will wash out instantly. This hair belonged to a brunette. Look at the hair root."

Barney did and was impressed. He leaned back heavily. The hair was a vital clue. If he turned it in now, he'd be further charged with incompetence. He swore softly to himself. Jennie, aware of his perturbation, leaned over and patted his cheek. "You'll lick them," she said. Dall nodded, thinking hard.

Maybe the Chinese thieves did do this murder; torture conformed with their methods.

But why then was this hair on the floor? It might be that some woman who dyed her hair had come to see Nell Parr and it had shaken off. But Nell Parr was a recluse. She never had callers. But how could he find the owner of that dyed hair? Following this through, his mind. reverted to the murdered Chinese in the hallway outside. Hanrahan's version of this didn't click with Dall.

"By the Lord!" he muttered, jumping to his feet, "if I could find out why that Chinese was bumped off, I'd know what to do." He put on his hat.

"I was going to make you a cup of tea,"' said Jennie.

"Save it," he said, kissing her cheek. "T've got lots to do."

She followed him to the door. "Show them, Barney," she cried, her eyes glowing, "that you're the best cop in New York."

He went to Canal Street by subway. He read a five-star final account of the murder, and was startled to learn that Nell Parr had nearly two hundred thousand dollars in cash in her rooms— all stolen. The police had arrived at this figure because the money had apparently been fastened in packages of a thousand dollars with paper and pin, with the amounts written on the paper band in Nell Parr's writing. There was said to be jewels, too, but no verification of this.

The information didn't help Barney Dall any. The bills doubtless had not been marked, or their numbers taken. The money could be spent with impunity.

He walked slowly along Mott Street and inquired of a Chinese curio dealer where Yung Kee, father of the arrested Chinese youth, lived. Finding it in Pell Street, he turned up that winding short street. Night Chinatown was different.

In the day he had found it drab, ugly, cruelly without any beauty under the harsh sunlight. By night, however, with neon lights going, and with Chinese (a nocturnal people) flooding the streets in quaint costumes, it was colorful, romantic, filled with the smells and scents of the East.

He turned into an ugly, squat brick building and finding the door open, pushed on it. Yung Kee was a tea merchant and, like most Chinese, had his office in his home.

A single bulb droplight glowed saffronly as Dall came up the hallway. As he reached the end where a door was lettered both in English and Chinese, this light suddenly went out. A stairway was to the right. Barney Dall had no gun. Instantly, suspecting a trick, he lunged to the right.

Quick as he was, it was too late. A solid body thudded down upon his shoulders as if dropping from a height, and the weight, as well as the unexpectedness of the attack, bore him to the floor. Savage fists pounded at him; feet thudded in his ribs; a cursing fetid breath fanned against his face.

3: The Lady Leads

FOR a brief space the ferocity and fierce surprise of the onslaught bore Barney Dall down and only a miracle kept him from being knocked senseless. That and the darkness. He nuzzled his head into his assailant, took two fierce blows to the windpipe that made him cough, summoned his energies and suddenly reacted.

This is a neat trick and a swell one if you can do it. The assailant, carried on by his own onslaught, getting no resistance and relaxing his own protection, is often caught off guard. This was when Barney exploded. His head shot upward, trying to strike the chin of the unknown. His feet lashed out and the knees came up, striking for the groin. His fists whipped hard and sunk solidly into human flesh. Holding Barney Dall then. was akin to holding an armful of buzzing rattlesnakes.

Silently, he swarmed over his antagonist, risking knife and bullet. Thudding fists, groans and husked breaths filled the silence of the hallway. The grind of bones on flesh. A thumb hooked into Dall's eye and a blinding flash succeeded it, but he wriggled back to butt headforemost before his eye was thumbed from its socket.

In that moment he visualized his assailant, his location. Fists going like pistons he crashed in. A right hook slid off the man's shoulder. In a flash Barney threw his arm around the man, brought the body toward him with such force that they both grunted as they struck chest to chest. Up came Dall's knee.

A sickening groan told it had found its mark.

"Yah!" howled the man, the first loud sound of the fight.

A second later a low whistle echoed through the house. Barney Dall crowded in, locked his arms around his man.

"Stay a while," he panted.

For a second the assailant relaxed. Barney started to drag him toward the wall where he expected to find a light switch. But human muscle can hold a tight grip just so long. Experienced wrestlers know when to lie docile until that fractional relaxation for a renewal of the grip. The assailant felt Barney relax as Barney kicked out his foot to locate the wall. In a flash the man twisted like a snake, a violent blow caromed off Dall's jaw, hard enough to upset his balance. Before he could recover, the antagonist had squirmed out of his grip and the sharp rattle of racing feet bespoke retreat. Dall turned, shaking his head, and raced in pursuit.

He reached the door in time to see a hand snake out of a dark car without lights and drag a taller man inside. The car roared into low gear, whined up the street toward Mott and vanished on two wheels around the corner.

Barney stood for a second, assembling his wits, straightening his rumpled clothes. Pursuit was useless. He didn't even have the number.

Why had he been attacked? Why had the antagonist run, at the sound of a whistle? He shrugged and, then his eyes thinned.

"Yung Kee ought to have some answers," he told himself, and reéntered the hallway.

With a match he found the switch that was on a brief landing where the stairs led up. He saw that anyone could hide here and jump anyone approaching. The man, then, had been waiting for him. Or had he? Perhaps he had been waiting for someone else.

He rapped at Yung Kee's door. A second or so later came the rattle of unleashed chains and the door opened. The old Chinese, wearing black gabardine and a black skullcap with the red button of the mandarin class, stared blankly and then bowed in sudden recognition.

"Ah," said the old man, "the benefactor of my son. Please to enter my miserable lodgings."

He led the way to a small room heavy with teakwood furniture, hung with brocades, and smelling of frankincense. The old man squatted before a taboret whereon reposed tea things of gorgeous jade. All this he did with a stately dignity that impressed Barney.

"Some of the worthless tea, perhaps?" he inquired.

Barney Dall did not learn until later the formidable etiquette that surrounds a Chinese. Impatiently he waved his hand.

"I'm here for information, Yung Kee," he rejoined. "To get your kid and myself out of a jam."

An expression of pain swept the old yellowed face and quickly vanished. Even to this kindly white barbarian, he must not show how much he loved his only son. Besides, he would take his own vengeance. =

"The police coming to an old man is a paradox worthy of Confucius," he murmured, impassively.

Dall shook his head.

"Then what's the extra tea cup, half full, sitting there for?"

Yung Kee's look at the extra: cup was expressionless; his shoulders rose and fell. "I cannot tell you."

Dall set his lips grimly.

"Listen," he said, "I'm trying to help. Your kid, Yung Lee, is liable to burn for murder. I've got ideas about that killing. I think you know who the woman was who called today on Chinatown Nell Parr. I want you to tell me who she is."

SILENCE fell on that room, a silence that shut out all noise and brought to the nostrils the smells and color of the Far East. The old man: removed his hands from his sleeves, clapped the palms, and when a yellow servitor came he gave some orders in clipped consonants. The servitor departed.

"Mister Dall,'' said Yung Kee quietly, "for many years the Chinese living here have outwardly conformed to American rule. But we think differently in here"— he tapped his narrow forehead— "and it has been found necessary to use our own methods of reward and. punishment. In this case, we will use our own methods."

Barney Dall weighed this.

"Which means I'm right, and your son didn't kill Nell Parr."

"No. Nell Parr was married to a tong brother of mine. Years ago, before the sickness afflicted her mind, she was kind to my people. A Chinese remembers a friend even in adversity. She was sacred to the Chinese. No one would harm her."

Barney Dall sat up straight. "And that means, then," he said, "that the Chinese who was killed was her bodyguard— a man assigned by your tong to protect her."

Yung Kee's eyes narrowed in approbation. "You are clever, Mister Dall."

Now, swiftly, Barney Dall prodded the old man with questions. But to his amazement he got no further enlightenment. Every question was parried or denied or met with silence. Slowly his anger at this stubbornness grew.

"Listen, you can't save your son unless you talk."

Yung Kee leaned forward. "Your American justice has many worn cogs. The gears slip. I have told you that Nell Parr was protected by my tong. We could not save her from death. But we can see to it that. her murderer is punished."

"And your son?"

"We will save him if we can. If not, then I shall see that he is revenged."

Barney Dall understood then. The Chinese is a stubborn man where his vengeance is concerned. The killer of Nell Parr and her Chinese bodyguard should pay according to Chinese custom, and despite Yung Kee's apparent friendliness to him, Barney Dall was just a white interloper. One to be distrusted. Barney Dall felt the anger of frustration. Despite his sympathy he rose stubbornly.

"You've got to tell who she is."

Yung Kee shook his head. "We go over ground already seen."

Barney came close. Yung Kee rose. As he did so, a small oblong of white was to be seen hanging loosely in his voluminous sleeve. A piece of paper.

Before the old man could make a move, Barney Dall grabbed him and seized the paper. "You make it necessary," he said.

Yung Kee snarled and grabbed for it, but Barney snatched it beyond reach. Opening it, he saw it was a piece of rice paper with Chinese writing on it.

"What's it say?" he demanded.

Yung Kee shrugged. "I will not tell."

"Okay," shrugged Barney, "we have Chinese interpreters at headquarters." He saw he had struck home and followed his advantage. "Come on, Yung Kee, give me that lead. I need. I to save myself from a trial that will cost me my shield."

Yung Kee's eyelids snapped wide.

"Save you from a trial?"

"Sure." Barney told him how matters stood and seeing sympathy, delicately hinted his trial was caused by his protection of Yung Kee's son. The old: man listened quietly.

Then he held out his hand. "Debts are made to be paid. I will help you. Give me the paper."

Dall did so.

The old man said, "There is a girl— Christie Carle, she is called, and she is to be found at a night club, the Paroquet. That should be enough for you."

"It is, thanks."

Barney turned. The old man's voice held him.

"Mr. Dall, I think you are a good man. But I warn you not to stand in the way of destiny. You will not be permitted to interfere with what is to happen. I have yielded foolishly here, but I cannot yield further."

"That is a threat?" asked Barney Dall.

Gently the old man shook his head. "The superior man never threatens a friend. We will not hurt you, but we will not let you interfere with our effort to save my son."

Outside in the cool air Barney Dall wiped his brow and felt he had returned from a long journey to a place where camel bells and rickshaw cries had echoed in his ears. He was under no illusions. Friendly or not, the opposition of Yung Kee and his vengeance was a dangerous obstacle. He took the subway uptown.

The Paroquet was on Fifty-First Street between Broadway and Seventh Avenue, a holdover of the old prohibition days, trying to make a go of it now by dispensing poor liquor at high prices and giving a risque cheap show. Low smoke-filled room; rose lights; men and women huddled close over liquor and the whole smelling of cheap scent.

Barney Dall did not fail to see the sudden gleam in the head waiter's eyes as the man piloted him to a seat. A waiter learns to spot a policeman. Barney sat down and ordered a Tom Collins.

Dall's Tom Collins came and he sipped at it, his keen eyes searching the room, A strange sort of tenseness was in the air. He saw the head waiter talking to a man. The man's back was turned; the man walked away with his back still turned. When the waiter went by a moment or so later, Barney said, "Know a doll around here named Christie Carle?"

"Never heard of her,' said the waiter.

Barney sat until the cheap music started. Girls were around, professional hostesses they were called, and he got up with the idea of dancing with one and learning something. As he did so a dapper, slim dark man in perfectly fitting dinner jacket approached him, smiling. Even smiling, the face was sinister.

"Hi-yuh, officer," he said familiarly. "Enjoying yourself? Can I get you anything? I'm Paul Morder!"

"Yes, I know," said Barney warily.

"Everything's on the house. I've got a piece of this." Paul Morder gestured. "Sit down and have something good."

Barney Dall sat down. "I'm looking for Christie Carle."

"You pick 'em swell," chuckled Gentleman Paul Morder. "What it takes she's got in clusters." He gestured to a waiter who nearly fell down hurrying. "Bring Miss Carle here. Officer Dall likes her."

The girl came, tall, voluptuous in the Mae West style, eyes pretty but calculating, aware of her charms, flaunting them. Gentleman Paul made the introduction. Barney regarded her with interested eyes. "T'll leave you two to

enjoy yourselves," Morder said. "Get everything good because it's on the house."

THE girl's hair was dark and Barney noticed one thing, it was straight and seemingly damp whereas for her make-up her hair should have been curly. With a purpose in mind, Dall played the part of sucker; he told her he was crazy about her. He drank the champagne and stared into her mascaraed eyes, let his fingers tighten on hers. Finally he said as if in disgust, "We can't talk here. Let's go places, Take a ride."

"We could go to my apartment," she said. "You're pretty nice, big boy."

Barney pretended a drunkenness. "You ain't seen nothing yet."

He got her cloak and hat and helped her into a taxicab. She snuggled up to him and began talking about the horrors of night club life, and how she'd like to get away from it all and have a chicken farm in Jersey somewhere. Barney Dall held her hand, kissed her several times and, as he told himself, acted like a fool. He didn't ask where they were going nor did she say.

Yet after fifteen minutes of this, they pulled up before a pretentious apartment house on West Side Avenue, She got out and said, "Come on up, honey, and see how a poor working girl lives."

Barney staggered out. "You're marvelous," he muttered.

They went up in a self-operated electric elevator. There was no one in sight. On the sixth floor she led the way to an end apartment and fumbled with a key.

"Oh, dear," she muttered, "I'm so darned nervous. Honey, unlock this, will you?"

Barney took the key and did some fumbling himself. He had a sense of premonition, of peril. Yet as he unlocked the door and swung it half way open and peered inside without entering, he saw nothing.

"After you, darling," he waved a hand.

She went in, saying, "I hope you like my little nest."

Barney followed, pretending to stagger, and thus got a look around. He saw nothing. The door closed and with a smile at him she threw the inside lock on it. She came to him, patted his cheek, kissed him.

"Sit down, honey," she cooed. "I'll go get something comfortable on."

"Swell joint," he said, sitting down. "But I'll get you a better one."

She went into the next room, closed the door. Barney, listening acutely, did not hear a click. He lit a cigarette and waited. Two minutes. Five. Ten!

"Christie," he called. There was no reply.

Alive now to danger, he leaped to his feet. He went to the door through which she had passed. It was locked. It was a steel door. He shrugged. Why had

she done this? Obviously there was another exit to the corridor from that room in there. But what was the idea?

"Stalling for time, maybe," he said. "But why?"

He went to the door through which he had entered the apartment. Cautiously he threw the lock she had put on the door.

Behind him came a solid roar of sound. Something banged on his head and, hiccoughing like a man who has laughed too much, he staggered, whirled half way and pitched forward on his face.

4: Countermove

GENTLEMAN PAUL MORDER stood graciously bidding a couple of rich playboys good night. But his eyes with drooping lids anxiously watched the doorway and a slight breath of relief escaped him as he saw the full, lovely figure of Christie Carle enter. She did not remove her hat or cloak but came directly to him.

Silently he led her to his little private office, sound-proofed.

"Well?" he turned and tension showed in his set features.

"He's dead."

Paul Morder's eyes gleamed. "Good! Are you covered up?"

"Sure," she nodded. "I left him and went to Ham Maxner's. He'll alibi for me. When I left him, I went to the apartment and set the guy's watch back, allowing about ten minutes, and busted it."

"Good! Ham alibis you— and I'm alibied here." Morder smiled. "By God, that automatic gun wired to the lock is a honey. Where'd it get him?"

"Right through the head. His face was all bloody."

She lit a cigarette, moved restlessly. "T still don't see why we had to chance bumping off a cop."

"You're not smart, that's why." Morder, with a smoker's instinct to smoke when someone else did, lit one. "The guy was willing to swear that Poulios's car veered into the Chink's? Ordinarily any other cop would have lied for Poulios. That was serious but could be fixed. But tonight the goof sees that Yung Kee, and then he comes here looking for you. Does he smell a rat? Sure, he does. And. we've got to shut him down."

"It was dangerous just the same," she said.

"Why? What can anybody prove?"

"We've got to get rid of the body."

"Why? That's not your apartment and Loretta's in Los Angeles."

Christie frowned. "We ought to supply a motive for his killing."

Morder frowned. "Nuts! We can take him out and dump him in the Bronx if you want."

"All right," she said, "that'll be okay. And frankly, I'd like to be on that boat for Europe. I ain't afraid of the cops, but them Chinks sure give me the creeps."

"They won't do a thing," encouraged Paul. "It was a bad break that that Chink was watching the old woman. But how could we know she had protection?"

Paul Morder got his hat and coat and stick. "The police haven't got a clue to us now," he boasted, "and what the Chinese suspect, they'll keep to themselves. They don't run to the cops."

"No, but they're liable to run to us— with guns or knives. I'm scared of Chinks."

The two went out to Paul Morder's bullet-proof sedan and were driven uptown. They went to Hamilton Maxner's. Maxner was a rich playboy who sampled morphine and sin and was drunk most of the time, and drunk or sober was madly in love with Christie Carle. Here Paul Morder left Christie and went down to a corner drug store and made a;telephone call.

Fifteen minutes later Nick Poulios joined him. An uneasy, worried Poulois. He gasped and turned pale as Morder told him the details.

"Geez!" he muttered. "We're in up to our necks."

"That's the way it is," said Morder. "We've got to keep going— or burn. Come on."

They walked toward the apartment house where Christie Carle had lured Barney Dall.

"Where's the dough hid?" asked Poulios.

"Where you can't find it," snapped Morder. "We'll divvy when this stiff is disposed of."

Poulios was still uneasy. "Listen, I don't like it."

"What have they got?" growled Morder. "I'm alibied:; so are you and Christie. I'm the one cop-killer," he grinned, "who beat a rap."

POULIOS said no more. They reached the apartment house and cautiously investigated. Apparently no one had heard the shot; there were no changes, and when Morder pulled open the door, he found the body of Barney Dall lying just as it had been. They wiped down the blood, got one of Dall's arms over each of their shoulders. Dragging him between them like a stupidly drunken man, they took him down to the parked car. None saw this either. They stacked him in the rear seat and Poulios sat down beside him while Paul Morder started the car and took it smoothly away from the curb.

They rode easily along. Poulios was still fretful. "When do we split the wad?" he demanded.

Morder growled irritably. "Oh, tonight, if you like, after we get rid of this set-up."

"Where?"

"What difference does it make?"

"This," snapped Poulios, leaning forward. "You and Christie are lamming. I've got to stay. How do I know you won't take the wad and leave me in the bag?"

"You don't know" laughed Morder. "That's your risk." Poulios cursed. Morder said, "Aw, keep your shirt on. I was only kidding. We'll go to Christie's place and split there."

"You've got it with you, then?"

"No, you sap! Shut up now."

Poulios relaxed, but from his demeanor it was to be seen that he placed no faith in Paul Morder. As he leaned back, one of Barney Dall's limp hands fell against his leg. The idea of a corpse touching him was distasteful. Gingerly he picked up the hand to put it between the dead man's outstretched limp legs.

"Holy God!' he suddenly ejaculated. "He's warm!"

"Warm?" repeated Morder. "Hell, you're crazy. He's colder than a mackerel— he's been dead going on two hours."

Poulios shivered, shrank from the corpse.

"I tell you he's warm," he chattered. Paul Morder cursed. His foot hit the brake. His hand streaked inside his pocket. "Grab him, you fool," he muttered, "if he's warm—"

Barney Dall was quicker than either of them. A sweeping blow that had everything he owned behind it connected with Nick Poulios's jaw.

You could hear the Greek's teeth click when they slammed together.

Barney Dall leaned forward, poked his finger into Paul Morder's back. "Keep heading straight for Broadway, Morder," he said softly.

But he forgot the rear view mirror. In it, revealed in the reflected light from the dash lamp, Morder saw it was only a finger. But he did not turn with his gun. Instead, with a movement that Barney could not intercept, he opened the door, slid out of the car, dropped to the pavement.

The car by now was going very slowly. As Morder's feet hit the pavement, the gun streaked from his pocket and it was spitting lancing flames before he had taken a step. Dall fell to the bottom of the car. Slugs tore through the opening. Ripped through the upholstery of the car. Slammed above and below him. Hit the seat back within an inch of his nose. And then the car, running loosely, with the wheel cramped by Morder's swift departure, wheeled

angularly into the curbing. They took the curb and smote an electric light pole with a crash that knocked Dall into the front seat. He snaked over and out the door, with the swift pad of feet racing behind him.

"Kill him, Poulios," he heard Morder's urgent voice, "it's him or us now."

But Poulios did not answer and Dall, seizing the chance to run, made the most of it. Morder fired at him. One slug bounced bluely off the sidewalk. Then he rounded a corner into a driveway, ducked through another alley and so threw off Morder's murderous pursuit. He ran clear to Amsterdam Avenue and went into an allnight restaurant where the man stared at his rumpled, bruised condition doubtfully, but started an order of ham and eggs and three cups of coffee. Here Barney Dall pulled himself together to think. It was really the first time he had a chance.

Frowning, he reviewed the incidents since the gunshot had roared behind him and the bullet had ripped across his scalp just above the left ear. He had lain a long time unconscious. When he had regained consciousness, he had discovered the clever electric mechanism whereby, when he opened the door, a gun, trained on it, had been electrically fired. This had been the tip-off.

As soon as he saw it, he knew that any charge of assault or attempted murder would fall through. It was his word against Christie Carle's, or Paul Morder for that matter; and in a court of law their word was as good as his. From this he reasoned one fact; the two crooks would not let him lie there. A murder is simple until the time comes to dispose of the body. So he waited there, human bait, to see what would happen.

It had been going good, too, until Poulios had discovered he was warm.

What to do now? He ate his ham and eggs and drank the coffee. It made him feel better.

"If I pull a pinch or make a charge," he reasoned, "all three of them would be sprung. I know they killed Chinatown Nell Parr, but a jury wouldn't. I know Morder and Christie tried to kill me but I can't prove that either!"

Suddenly he smothered an exclamation and put down the scalding coffee.

"The money!" Involuntarily the exclamation broke from his lips and the cook gave him a suspicious look. Of course! That was it. And as sure as God made little apples, Christie Carle had it in her room. He remembered the conversation. Hastily, he flung down a half dollar and departed. But at the curb he stopped. Where was her place? Where would they split the loot?

A sudden feeling of exhausted discouragement gripped him. His head ached abominably; he was utterly spent. A plan of action occurred to him, but there was nothing more he could do tonight. Tomorrow would be as well.

"The hell!' he muttered. "I'm going to bed!"

5: A New Attack

SERGEANT McLACEY heard Barney Dall out to the last word. He leaned back in his chair, pushed up his uniform cap and scratched the damp red curls on his forehead.

"By the living devil!' he muttered. "I don't know whether you've been dreaming— Are you leveling with me, Barney Dall?"

"You know it's the truth," rejoined Barney steadily.

The two were sitting in the precinct house at noon, Barney, because of his suspension, had no duty tour, and he had unburdened his heart of the whole business.

"I suppose it is," sighed McLacey. "You have your faults, but one of them ain't lying. But God Almighty, do you realize what you've told me? That Poulios is behind Gentleman Paul Morder, and that's why that crook's been getting away with murder?"

Dall did not reply; he was waiting for McLacey's verdict. He got it at once.

"Lad, it's no dice. You can't charge Poulios or Christie or Morder and make it stick. Even a dimwit lawyer could get them off. You've got to have proof and— Wait a minute."

He reached for a telephone. "Find Christie Carle, Nick Poulios and Paul Morder. No pinch. Tail them." He turned back to Barney. "Besides their alibis," he resumed, "there are three of them against you— and your Chinese can't or won't say anything."

"The Chinese kid still in jail?' Barney asked.

"Sure, and likely to burn unless you break this case."

"I've got one idea that might work," said Barney Dall and enlarged upon it.

McLacey heard him out and shook his head. "That money is in general bills. How could you identify it as Nell Parr's?"

"Give me a chance," said Barney Dall.

McLacey argued. Barney talked back. An hour passed. Then the telephone rang. McLacey listened, swore and jerked down his cap.

"Morder's scrammed. Not around his regular haunts. Christie Carle's disappeared, too. We're checking up "on Poulios." He frowned. "Dammit, I don't like your idea, but if—"

The telephone rang again. "Maybe that's on him," broke off McLacey.

He said, "Hello," listened, and then nodded to Barney. "For you."

It was Mrs. Muller. She said angrily, "What did you want Jennie for down there?"

Barney Dall sat bolt upright. "Me, want Jennie?"

"Yes. She just left. I told her—"

What she told Jennie, Barney never heard. A roaring grew in his ears until it deafened him. He heard his voice say, "But I never sent for Jennie, Mrs. Muller— I—"

He closed his eyes for a second, opened them. Somehow he got a grip on himself. "Who came for her? What did he look like? What sort of a car?"

He got his answers, but they were of no help. The driver of the car whom Mrs. Muller had not seen, had sent up for Jennie by a boy playing in the street. The car had driven off. She didn't know cars; no, she hadn't seen the license number. He seemed suddenly old, gaunt, as he hung up.

"They've got Jen," he said wearily. "They're hitting at me through her."

"I know," said McLacey gently. "But they've overstepped. I can get help for you on the strength of this."

"They'll get in touch with me— call off my dogs or else—" said Dall. He jumped to his feet, nervously paced. the floor.

"Mac, locate Poulios for me. That's all I ask. I'll make him talk or—"

"Sure, kid. Sure!'

But Poulios had disappeared. Barney went to his boarding house, hoping for a message. But there was none. On a hunch and a desire to be doing something, he went to Yung Kee's. By now it was growing dusk, and the neon lights began to glow, and the dark, weird Chinese who seemed to sleep by day, came out of their holes like phantoms from another world.

Once again Barney Dall entered the hall of Yung Kee. This time a tall, powerful man, obviously a Manchurian, looking awkward and gawky in occidental clothing, stood barring Yung Kee's door.

"I wish to see Yung Kee," Barney said.

The immense man with the bulletshaped yellow face shook his head.

"Him not in— sorree!"

Barney Dall pushed on the door. The man thrust him away. Impassively, "Velly sorry, big master's not in there. Go."

Barney Dall heard faint voices. His eyes thinned. Suddenly he slugged the Chinese and not on the jaw. His fist sank to the wrist in the man's stomach. Taken unawares, the Chinese gasped out his breath, groaned and staggered back. Dall shoved on the door, literally crashed in.

He stopped at the sight before him.

Yung Kee sat as he had before. Beside him was a small dark Chinese. Facing these two, terror-stricken, sobbing convulsively, was Christie Carle.

She turned swiftly as she heard Barney enter. Seeing him she quickly ran to him. "Don't let them hurt me," she screamed. "It wasn't me, I tell you. It was him— it was Morder. Damn him! Get me out of here, for God's sake."

NEITHER of the Yungs made any movement to intercept or interfere. At sight of her, Barney Dall's heart leaped. He could use her, or through her, use these Chinese to save Jen. He made her no reply and walked to Yung Kee. "I've come for help," he said.

"The superior man does not invade the presence even of his friend without welcome and invitation," said Yung Kee sternly.

"That doesn't matter," said Barney Dall patiently. "Morder— or this wench— has got my girl Jen. They've kidnaped her to shut my mouth. I'm shut until I get her back. Don't you see? You've got to help."

They stared in silence. A fragrant wisp of frankincense drifted across Barney Dall's nostrils. He looked into the Mongol faces: slant eyes revealing nothing, faces as set as wax masks.

"They might kill her," he said. "T've lost the trail. You can put me back on. That's all I ask." He felt of the gun resting warmly against the bulge of his hip.

Yung Kee said, 'Mister Dall, you are an honorable man, and one who would keep the custom if you knew it. We think well of you. But now you interfere beyond the limits of friendship. I ean do nothing except ask you to go."

At this second the great Manchurian burst into the room, a knife which to Dall seemed a foot long, glittering in his hand. Dall jerked his gun but even this did not stop the Manchu. A quick order from Yung Kee did. The giant bowed submissively but the glance he turned on Dall was full of hatred. Dall shivered slightly; he was surprised now to see how big the man really was that he had dropped with a punch. The Manchu withdrew. Barney put away his gun but kept his hand near.

"You must speak," he said.

"No," said Yung Kee.

Christie Carle ran to him, seized his hand. "They're going to torture me, kill me. Get me out and I'll save your girl."

Barney stared from her to the impassive faces in front of him. She might be lying but he had to take a chance.

With a sudden movement he drew the gun and covered the two Chinese. Almost as if he had looked into a crystal, he could foresee now what would shortly transpire.

"Sorry," he said briefly, "then it'll have to be this way."

Again he encountered the stolid looks, the blank wall of an Oriental face. Yet their glittering dark eyes spoke of things he cculd not read.

Yung Kee said, "Such rewards from white foreign devils are to be expected. The account is closed, Mister Dall."

The girl sighed and ran to the door. Barney lingered strangely enough. "We had, when I was a kid," he observed, "a saying that there were many ways of skinning a cat. Maybe Confucius could say it better, but that's the way it is."

The two Chinese exchanged quick glances. Barney said to Christie Carle, "Watch my back. I've got that manmountain to get by."

"God," she muttered, "I'll never forget this. Never. They were going to stick hot needles under my fingernails." She shuddered.

Barney thrust the gun snout under the Manchu's nose. "Nothing from you but silence," he ordered.

The Chinese did not watch the gun; he watched Dall's eyes. His great hands hung beside him, fingers moving as if he were tightening on an invisible throat. The woman muttered in terror; Barney felt her breath on his neck. As he backed out she got behind him, and in this manner they reached the street. And continued backing to Mott Street.

Barney pocketed the weapon. "Now, Christie," he said softly, "just try to double me and see what happens."

She protested all the way to Canal Street that she wanted only to get free of the Chinese. "I've always been afraid of them," she sobbed. ''No kidding, I'll help you to your doll and then I'm lamming. For good and for all."

Barney let her keep that thought. They came to a hack and a car dart ed forward with eagerness and a driver leaned out. "Taxi," he said. Christie climbed in. Barney delayed.

"Wait a minute," he said.

"What for?' she cried quickly.

Barney moved down to the next cab. He whispered softly to the driver.

"Is that a regular cab on this stand?"

"Hell, no. He's been waiting."

Barney nodded.

"Here's twenty bucks," he offered. "You follow that cab and don't lose it, and there'll be twenty more where this came from. And it's on the level—" He flashed his police badge.

"You bought something," said the driver.

Barney went back to the cab and got in. "Tell him where," he said to Christie.

"Morningside "The Albemarle."

"Okay, Miss," said the driver. The way he said it told Barney plenty. But he pretended to ignore it. The cab whined away and settled down to the long run uptown.

Barney sat on the right side; the gun was in his right hand pocket. He slumped down carelessly.

"What's Morder thinking of?" he demanded. "He can't get away with this."

"He's got away with worse,' she retorted. "It ain't you, flatfoot; it's them Chinks."

Barney relapsed into silence. If he noticed her fingering her purse bag nervously, he pretended not to. Occasionally, twisting in apparent impatience at the ride, he perceived the pursuing taxicab. Past Seventy-Second Street, Christie Carle fidgeted. She started a conversation about a holdup in a night club she had once seen. She switched into a violent tirade on crooked cops.

At Ninety-First Street, she had her old bravado. Barney Dall never seemed more careless; and never had he been more alert.

"Drive," she said.

The cab driver swung into a side street leading to Morningside Drive. Not the right one, Dall noticed.

Suddenly Christie Carle "What's that?"

"What's what?" asked Barney Dall, turning.

Out of the corner of his eye he saw her strike with the purse bag— a chunk of lead doubtless in its base. The bag hit his head. He weaved just enough. Then he groaned loudly, said, "You—" and slumped forward. But, slumping, he made sure he could dodge a second blow if she chose to deliver it.

But she did not. "Okay, honey," she cried to the driver, "slow down— quick!"

The cab slowed down; Christie Carle pushed and thrust at Barney's. body until she tumbled him to the. running board. He was not going slackly. He was falling with all the skill he possessed. He rolled off. the running board. He heard her say, "Quick— step on it!"

The cab roared on its way.

It was fairly dark here. Barney instantly got to his feet, rubbing his ear which the slungshot had really hurt. He saw no following lights, and cursed. Had the cab lost him after all?

"Damn that driver," he muttered, "and she's going straight to Morder."

He could see the twin tail-lights, winking ruby red against the slight rise in the asphalt pavement. And. then a car slid alongside him and a voice muttered, "Geez, I almost didn't see you."

Barney exclaimed, leaped on the running board and wrenched at the. door. "Get after that cab," he ordered. "And leave your lights off."

The cab roared a half block before the driver said, "I figured maybe you didn't want them to know you had a tail, so I cut them."

Barney was too relieved to make remark. He sat grimly fingering his gun, watching the tail-lights of the cab ahead.

6: Death Plays Trumps

THE staircase was dark, and as he tiptoed from landing to landing Barney Dall almost wished he had chosen the fire escape in the back to invade this hide-out. He had passed it up because it looked too risky, just as he had not waited to telephone McLacey. Christie Carle would bring alarms and fright. The murderers would flee and any delay might permit an escape. He tiptoed to the final landing, close enough behind Christie Carle to hear the door click as she pulled it closed after her.

Had Barney had time, he might have thought what a swell hide-out this was. A fine old residential section of New York, among respected Columbia professors and research students. But he had mind only for the fact 'that the end of the trail lay behind that 'door over there.

The immediate problem was how to get in and not be killed in the doing. Morder would shoot on sight— and the door was locked.

While he was pondering this point, he heard footsteps on the stairway up which he had just come. There was no light in the hallway. He shrank back against the wall and extended his automatic. He could barely make out a silhouette against the lighter darkness below as the figure came into view. First head, then shoulders and finally an extended oblong shadow.

To his surprise, the shadow went straight for the hide-out door. The shadow rapped, four times rapidly, then a pause, then one.

Chains rattled on the other side. The shadow said, ''Poulios, Paul. I got the chow."

Barney's heart leaped. Perhaps the breaks had been against him, but this was one for his ledger. As silently as a stalking tiger he came away from the wall. He was behind the squat figure, so close that he felt his breath must fan the man. That Poulios must literally feel him there. But the man did not.

The door opened a fraction, then half way. Barney could not see who was opening the door. Nick Poulios started to walk in. As he took the second stride, Barney Dall rammed the gun snout firmly against the broad back.

"Keep on walking, Poulios," he said softly, "and don't look around."

The force of the jab made the man trip forward. Barney followed him into a room whose blazing lights made him blink. He eased to the side instantly, to get his back to the wall, and his gun was very blue and very dangerous.

"Reach 'em, Morder," he said briefly.

Poulios, quivering with terror, had stopped in the center of the room, only half way turned around. Christie Carle had frozen, half rising from a divan. A.drink of liquor was in her right hand. After the first abortive attempt to draw

a gun, Paul Morder had stiffened and stood motionless, expressing supreme astonishment. Then rage as his hands went up.

"You dirty, double-crossing—" he began at Christie.

She gave a frightened cry. "Not me, Paul, I swear to God. I dumped him—"

"Cut it," said Barney. "Where's Jennie?"

"She ain't here," snarled Morder.

"That's a lie. Go get her, you—" Barney gestured with the gun toward Christie. Something in his expression started her on her way. A momentary silence fell, and Nick Poulios, pale, his face a desperate mask, turned all the way around to face Barney.

"You got nothing on us,' he snarled. "I'll have you busted for this."

He waved his right hand in a fist. Barney Dall's eyes studied that fist.

"Well, I'll be damned!" he muttered.

In that second he knew who had killed Nell Parr.

POULIOS yelled, "For God's sake, do something, Paul."

Morder looked murder but his hands stayed up.

Christie Carle reéntered the room and behind her came Jennie Muller, rubbing her wrists as if she had been tightly bound. The girl's red hair was tousled, her clothes rumpled, but her dark Irish eyes were alight and unafraid.

"Barney!" she said.

Barney looked at her and she had never seemed so beautiful, so fine and splendid. But his face did not change.

"Go downstairs, Jen," he said, "and you'll find a taxi about a half block to the right. Get in it and find a telephone. Tell McLacey to come here right away. Have him send a couple of squad cars."

She came across the room, slim, rounded, with the lithe eager walk of the young. Her face clouded.

"But you, Barney, you— they'll— I'll stay with you."

"Go on," he said harshly, "this is police duty. Call McLacey like I told you."

Her glance became one of pride. "Right," she said.

Without coming close to him to get in the line of fire, she went on through the door. Paul Morder cursed, but the unswerving gun muzzle held him motionless. Poulios uttered a loud groan. Then silence came upon the room.

Barney finally said, ''Get the money you robbed Nell Parr of, Morder."

Loud protests. ''You got me wrong, I never had anything—"

"Skip it," said Barney wearily. "Get the dough, or I'll find it."

Christie Carle said, "He's got us, Paul. I'll get the money."

She went toward a sort of escritoire. Barney watched her, but he never saw her produce that gun. She must have got it when she released Jennie. He only

saw the sudden whirl of her, the hiss of dress against silken legs. Her white arm flashed up.

Barney had his weapon trained on Paul Morder. He swung, but too late.

The sharp report of a small pistol roared in the room. Barney felt the lead go into him. Even as he whirled to the impact, he saw Paul Morder's hand dive like a streak for a shoulder holster. Morder's hand and the gun reappeared almost simultaneously. His eyes were fiendish.

The gun roared, but another explosion preceded it. Barney, choosing to stop Morder, ignored Christie Carle and his gun had fired a fraction of a second ahead of Paul Morder's. The .38 slug from his weapon hit the crook over the belt buckle. An oof of sound escaped Morder's lips as the bullet knocked the wind out of him.

He buckled slightly in the middle, and then went down in sections, first his knees, then his buttocks and then he rolled on his side, still trying to fire again, Barney could see the white knuckle of the trigger finger tightening. But Paul Morder hadn't the strength.

"He's got me," he exclaimed in utter astonishment, "he's got me."

His voice seemed a release to the electric tension of the room. Christie Carle fired again, and Barney Dall never knew how she missed, for his eyes were on Nick Poulios.

The man was running for the door to the next room. Christie Carle ran at Barney screaming, "What's it take to knock you over?"

He turned to fire at her. But he never pulled the trigger. She was wearing white. As she charged at him, he saw blood appear on her dress. Some invisible hand stopped her as if she had run into a stone wall. Another roar of sound struck on his ears. He heard Nick Poulios scream. A strange weakness assaulted Barney then, and to his own surprise he found himself on his knees.

He saw Nick Poulios lying on his back, holding his hands to his neck through which a crimson flood pumped.

Barney took a breath; it hurt him as if he had a stitch in his side. What had happened here anyway?

His glance still roved, and then he saw the two Chinese near the window and, beyond the window, hanging against the night, a rope. The first Chinese was. Yung Kee, the old Chinese, and he held the gun. The other was the huge Manchurian.

And this one was coming toward Barney, clacking shrilly in Pekinese dialect. Barney didn't understand what the man said, but he didn't have to. Every movement was a betrayal of the intent to kill. The expression was saying that the white foreign devil must die to shut his mouth, too.

Yung Kee's voice stopped the Manchurian in his tracks. Barney fell to one side, braced himself, got in a sitting position with his back to the wall.

"So what?" he said.

Yung Kee advanced in worried fashion. The gun vanished into his pocket.

"Mister Dall," he said, "we must have an accounting."

Incredibly weak and weary, the wall felt comfortable against Barney's back. "About what?"

"Again I ask your help," said Yung Kee agitatedly. "You are clever, Mister Dall, and your remark about skinning a cat told us what you intended. We followed your second cab. We, too, were trying to locate Poulios to save my son."

"Yes," said Barney.

"But your intrusion forced us to play the game a different way than we had intended. In your presence I have wounded this woman and killed Poulios."

The old man wet his lips. "This will mean arrest and notoriety for me, unpleasant time in jail even if these be crooks. We played the game your way— we could have stopped you from taking the woman from our midst— it is time you helped me now."

Barney listened languidly. He knew he must be losing blood. This sleepy feeling. But his mind was clear and calm. What Yung Kee said was right.

Yung Kee was still talking. "We are all in this room without right. Unless it can be proved that these three killed Nell Parr, technically we both could stand trial for murder."

This was true. But Barney with that lucidity of mind that now gripped him, saw all the answers.

"Listen," he said groggily, "the police will be here any second. Get back the way you came. I'll attend to this."

"And we will be cleared?"

Barney nodded.

Yung Kee said, "And you can save my son?"

"Yes," said Barney. "Beat it— quick !"

Yung Kee looked at the corpses. He bowed jerkily as if to ghosts.

"Nell Parr," he said distinctly, "the debt is paid in full."

He was gone and with him the Manchurian. Silence came to the room. Barney Dall had his eyes closed when McLacey, leading policemen with drawn revolvers and Tommy guns, burst into the room. McLacey looked at Poulios and Morder, dead. At Christie Carle groaning from her slight wound. At Barney Dall, pale and weak.

McLacey stooped and cradled Barney Dall in his arm. "Up to your old tricks, eh, you black-headed Mick," he muttered. "How are you going to alibi yourself this time? Where's the proof these killed Nell Parr?"

Barney opened his eyes and smiled. "Take me to Poulios," he muttered. Carrying him as gently as a babe, McLacey put him beside the corpse.

Barney called on his will, lifted Poulios's right hand. Here even McLacey could see that the ring finger between the knuckles was thin, barely skin covering the bone, as if a ring had been there a long time and had not permitted flesh to make the finger pudgy as Poulios's other fingers were pudgy.

"Poulios killed Nell Parr," Barney said. "He deliberately veered into Yung Lee to cause an accident to establish himself with the police somewhere else. He wore a ring. Remember that piece of carnelian? It broke when he was torturing the poor old woman."

McLacey exclaimed and bent over the corpse. He searched it and finally put before Barney's tired gaze a solid gold ring with empty prongs where the jewel mounting had been. "A bit of carnelian under one prong, lad," said McLacey roughly. "That proves it.

"And her hair will show brunette under the microscope," said Barney, gesturing toward Christie, "that will prove that she was the woman in the room. She and Poulios framed it, and Morder, being Christie Carle's lover, was called in to help the situation out when I balled their plans up. And Christie will confess."

He grinned sleepily, "Anything else?"

"Why did you kill Poulios and Morder?" cried McLacey. "Geez, what we could have learned from them! The commish will tear his hair."

Barney knew that with his answer his chances of promotion would go glimmering. But he had promised Yung Kee.

"They resisted arrest," he said. "I killed them in self-defense."

"Horsefeathers," said McLacey.

BARNEY DALL was right. There was no promotion. A palm for his Police Cross and a half eulogy, half reprimand— for being so quick on the trigger— finished the matter. After a month in the hospital, he went back to Chinatown. At the end of his first day's tour, he sought out Jennie.

"Look," he said, "what do you think of that?"

She stopped brewing the strong tea to look. It was a beautiful piece of rare white jade with Chinese characters cleverly carved upon it.

"From Yung Kee," he said, "and it makes me brother to every Chinese in America and China, too."

Jennie's eyes glowed. "Oh, Barney, it's beautiful."

"Seems nice," he admitted. "But I'd rather have had promotion."

"You'll get it," she said, pouring a cup of tea for him. "They can't keep you down."

"Maybe not," grinned Barney, "but they're trying hard enough."

He poured some of the tea into his saucer to cool.

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4: The Gold Ship

J. Allan Dunn

1872-1941

Adventure, 30 Nov 1921

Joseph Allan Elphinstone Dunn

A SCORE of men sprawled on the sand in the spattered shade of overhanging thicket that came down in an almost impenetrable jungle, from the rocky hill summits to the shelving margin of white beach. Most of them were asleep, arms and legs flung wide, bronzed and hairy, with bearded faces exposed recklessly to the sun's shafts that pierced the boughs, or pillowed on corded forearms, noses to the grit.

All wore short wide breeches and shortsleeved wide-collared tunics of dingy white or grimy striped pattern. All had sashes of stained but vivid silk beneath more practical belts of leather with heavy buckles of brass or silver. Few boasted foot covering. Some had gaudy kerchiefs bound about their heads.

Pistols were stuck in some of the belts or laid on the sand beside their owners. Cutlases were thrust in the beach at varying, drunken angles; and empty bottles were scattered where tipsy hands had flung them after draining.

One, lean and tall and angular, without a beard but with a week's growth of red stubble sprouting from cheeks and chin, sat bolt upright, gray eyes set and vacant, singing in a high tenor that was charged with half-maudlin sentiment, oblivious of audience or the lack of it.

The blue waters of the Windward Passage lipped the beach gently. Across the channel, westward, the hills of Cuba showed blue as the sun slanted to its bedding. To the north, Great Inagua Cay loomed low, and back of it the islands of the Bahamas faded in vanishing perspective.

The afternoon was hot and drowsy, the hum of insects mingling with the soft plash of the tide, the harsher dissonance of snoring men, topped by the

tipsy tenor. Palm trees soared majestically from the bush, green fronds bowing in the fitful breeze.

A man sat apart from the others on a coral clump close to tide edge. Long, muscular arms were wrapped about his knees, his chin sunken on his chest, his blue eyes alight, charged with a certain desperation that was offset by the humorous quirk of his wellshaped mouth.

The chin was a bold one, decked with a beard trimmed to a point. The mustachios were upcurled, the eyebrows cocked upward of their own volition. Of medium height, he was sparely and powerfully built. Scated, he gave the impression of a coiled spring. Inactive, he disseminaied a well defined suggestion of gaiety coupled with recklessness not unbacked by efficiency.

"For it's hame, dearie, hame,
Oh, it's hame I lang to be;
For my topsails they are hoisted
And I must put oot to sea."

The Scots accent of the red-stubbled tenor were strong. Liquor could not spoil the real quality of the voice nor drown the feeling of the singer. The character of the listener's glance changed to milder aspect and became dreamy.

"Oh, the oak and the ash
An' the bonnie birchen tree;
They all are growin' green
In the north countree.

So it's hame, dearie, hame,
It's hame I lang to be;
'Tis far an' wide I've wandered
Since I parted, sweet, fra' thee.'

A lazing giant, black-visaged and surly, raised on one elbow and cursed the singer. Another man essayed to fling a bottle at him but the missile slid from his flaccid fingers and he fell back on the sand while the Scotchman sang on through his recurring refrain of

"Hame, dearie, hame,
It's hame I lang to be;"

unconscious of criticism.

Before the gaze of the man on the coral clump the limpid sapphire of the channel turned to a crisp sea of steely blue whipped by the wind— the choppy waters of the English Channel, or, as he styled it, in his own beloved Norman-French, The Sleeve.

The headland of Cape Maisi changed to the white cliffs of his native town, Dieppe, where the Arques came rolling down to the pebbly beach. He saw the castle on the western cliff, time-worn and battle scarred; on the eastern, the Church of Our Lady of Good Help. He saw the nestling town, redroofed, the shipping in the harbor, the fishing craft at Le Pollet anchorage, and his eyes grew dim.

SUDDENLY he smacked a fist hard into a horny palm and rose, wheeling on the singer whose song ceased abruptly with a dropping jaw as his senses struggled back to consciousness under the lash of the unexpected tirade.

"Name of a fool, Sanderson, stick to surgery and forget to sing! You lament like a moulting raven. Home, is it, that you want to be?— with your earrings pawned for a jack of liquor and your breeches lacking in use and decency? A fine sight you'd make, Alec Sanderson, beneath your bonny birchen trees, with the village children laughing at you for a waif and a vagabond. A murrain on your song!"

Sanderson surveyed him with a blinking stare that began to hold a ray of intelligence.

"Aye, Pierre, m'lad," he hiccoughed. "Hame. 'Tis where we'd all be, first and last. I'll warrant ye the words got beneath your skin, to say nothing of the voice, for ye ken I've a voice beyon' the ordinar', syne I've tipple to mellow it. I'd not give ane wee bell of purple heather for all the bloom o' the Antilles, nor a sup o' Scots usquebaugh for all the sack brewed in Hispaniola.

"I came to the Main to mak' my fortune, I'm free to admit. I'm a registered apothecary an' chirurgeon, a man o' letters and o' family. An' yet 'm naught but a wastrel, a ne'er-do-weel, dreein' my own weird, brought down to ministering to the hurts of a pack o' buccaneerin', roarin', rantin' ruffans wi' no more prospects than a stranded starfish, out of elbow, out of luck, out o' siller, out o' liquor.

"An' you, Pierre, wi' mair brains i' your feet than the rest possess in their headpans, you reproach me, Alec Sanderson, man 0' learnin' an' family, wi' havin' no seat to my breeks. Mair, you draw me a picture of mysel' chased by the bairns beneath the birches for a gipsy. Man, think shame of it!"

Tears of fuddled self-sympathy stood in his eyes. Pierre laughing at him, clapped him on the shoulder. The sleepers began to awaken, yawning into the lowering eye of the sun that destroyed the last of their shadow and warned

them of nightfall and the need of a better lodging. They examined the already empty bottles, tilting them for the last few, aggravating drops, with a few curses at their luck, grouping gradually about the still grumbling Sanderson and Pierre.

"Look you, men," declared the latter. "Alec here declares us out of everything."

"True enough," broke in the swarthy giant who had sworn at the singer. "We've not enough powder to prime our pistols, let alone charge 'em. There's not three doubloons in the whole company. We've lost our ship and our skipper. What's to do? We came out here to discuss the matter."

"And spent the afternoon in guzzling," capped Pierre. "Now, let's talk in sober fashion. Since we have nothing left to lose, it is certain we must better our condition if we are resolved to make the effort. Most of us have come over seas, as Sanderson has confessed, in the hope to make our fortunes and return. We have helped win Hispaniola and Tortuga from the Spaniards. We have seen French governors established, but the isles are overrun with colonists and the cattle are fast disappearing.

"There is no more profit in boucan or in hides. You know how long it took us, and with what hard toil, to gain a shipload, only to lose all in the channel. Misfortune, it seems, has taken pains to buffet us. We are marked for men who are unlucky. We lose at cards and at dice. We are reduced to the condition of beggary if we are not yet beggars.

"What to do then? Why, to force the hand of Fortune. To make a bold bid. Since Opportunity avoids us, let us go out and seek Opportunity. Look you, we French hold Hispaniola and this isle of Tortuga; but the Spanish, our enemies, hold the seas. They have taken toll of us, and heavily. Let us adjust the balance.

"Their *flota* galleons carry rich freight wrung from the toil of Indian slaves. Treasures of gold and silver and valuable produce—enough, in one hull, to make rich men of all of us and send us home in honor to our own places. The cause is just—to despoil the foes of our countries and enrich ourselves at one stroke, to accomplish that for which we came to the Main. What say you?"

"Tis piracy."

Pierre whirled on the speaker.

"Call it by what name you will. If it is piracy to singe the beard of the king of Spain, to avenge the tortures of the Inquisition, the wrongs of enslaved natives, then enroll me as a pirate! Will any feed us on Tortuga for the love of our company? Has the governor, Le Passeur, any love for those who can not pay his tithes? Something like this we must do—or perish."

THEY caught the infection of his spirit, rallying to the flash of his eyes, the ring of his voice, thronging together, throwing up their arms with a hoarse cheer. All save the giant.

"Brave words," he said. 'Do we swim out into the Caribbean and wait for a galleon to come by and deliver itself to us? Do we catch flying fish as we go and drink the dew from our beards? When do we start? Speech will not slake thirst 'nor fill an empty belly, to my mind."

Pierre was swift to see the dampening of their ardor. :

"We are not quite to the end of our resources," he said. "Simon, the Jew, is in my debt for a buffeting I saved him— perhaps for his very life. He has sworn to repay me. I can get from him some arms; powder and bullets, some provisions and a boat. We do not need much if our hearts are welded to our enterprise. So long as his boat does not leak and has a sail and sweeps, she will serve us. Fortune favors the brave."

Sanderson suddenly chuckled.

"I am minded," he said, "of what a wise man wrote over thirteen hundred years ago. Eumenius, orator and scribe to Cesar Constantine. Listen."

They gathered round the red-headed chirurgeon with the respectful awe in which they held his learning, their jaws slack as he quoted in Latin:

" 'Atque ita eventu temeritatis ostenderant nihil esse clausum piratice desperationi quo navigiis pateret accessus.'

"And so, by the result of their daring exploit, showed that wherever ships can sail, nothing is closed to pirates in desperation'," he translated. "I am for Pierre. Let us go and seek out Simon. If he gives us a black cloth and some white bunting to boot I will make shift to furnish us a fitting flag for the expedition."

"Look you," went on Pierre, pressing the moment. "I was born in a caul. Beneath a fortunate star. So far my happy hour has not come, but it is close. A wise woman foretold at my birth that riches and honor would come to me out of a golden ship. See, it is stamped upon my wrist."

He held out his forearm for their inspection. Distinct through the sunburn there showed a birthmark that, with little imagination, showed like a miniature ship, high-pooped, full-sailed, golden under the patina of tan.

"Twice since then has my fortune been read," he said. "By a breed woman at Port Royal, a voodoo mistress. By a gipsy in Bordeaux. Both spoke alike— of a golden ship sailing on the seas, freighted with my fortune, and of riches and honor and the name of Pierre le Grand! That ship is now upon the seas, my braves. Let us put out to meet it and share its cargo. Within a week, mayhap by

this time tomorrow, we may be drinking rich wines and clinking doubloons in other pockets than these rags now hold."

They hung on his words, swept by superstition, inflamed by the hope of betterment, wrapt in the picture his words had conjured up for them, confident in his self-belief, gazing on the birthmark as a magic talisman.

Only the black visaged giant, surly and jealous, still demurred.

"And you, it seems, are to be the selfappointed leader and claim the major share," he grumbled. "It is not the first cock that crows in the village that is always the best bird. If we obtain this boat and turn from buccaneers to pirates, it is the best man among us who should be captain. The best, I say."

He glared truculently around, one hand on the butt of his pistol. They shrank from him a little, except Sanderson who regarded him sardonically, and Pierre.

"It is my mission to heal wounds rather than make them," said the Scotchman. "You need not roll your bull eyes at me, Volin. A chirurgeon is apter needed at the tail of a fight than at the beginning."' Volin turned on Pierre, contemptuously appraising his lesser bulk from head to foot.

"Pierre le Grand!" he sneered. "Pierre le Petit would suit you better, [am thinking."

The eyes of the Norman seemed to dissolve into little pools of blue flame about the black pupils in which shone points of light.

"As you say, Volin, we have yet to get the boat," he said in a voice that was cold and fine as the sweep of a steel blade. "That comes later. First'"—and the blue flame grew fiercer—"there is this matter of height between us which seems to trouble you. My shadow may be less than yours, Volin, but a good sword makes arm lengths equal.

"When a man is dead," he added softly, 'St makes little difference what size his grave is dug. There is still light left and the beach is level. What say you, Volin, between you and me, shall we prove which is the better man?"

He stepped aside and plucked his cutlas out of the sand, tossing it in the air to catch it again by the hilt.

"The better man,'' he repeated, running his thumb along the keen edge of the steel. "Or shall we make it to the death, Volin the Black?"

For just a moment the giant hesitated while the crowd held silence.

"We will make the ring," he said sullenly.

Pierre laughed.

"I thought so," he said. "You have lost the fight already, Volin."

TWO men made a fairly true circle in the sand on a spot that was level, hardened and still damp from the ebb, tracing the circumference with the

point of their cutlases. The diameter was about eighteen feet, a radius of three paces from the center.

Volin and Pierre stripped off their tunics and stood naked save for sash and belt and the wide breeches that came to their knees. The sun sank almost clear of clouds. The long shadows of the men ranged sharp over the white coral. Volin's chest and stomach were shaggy with black hair, Pierre's skin practically smooth.

Pierre might have weighed a hundred and sixty pounds, his opponent fifty more. Volin's muscles were bunched on his shoulders and arms. His breadth and depth of chest, as he expanded it, were prodigious, his calves enormous, his slightly bowed legs sturdy as the trunks of young oaks. He swung his cutlas like a cane and it whistled against the air.

Pierre stood aside with point to the grit, waiting for the preparations to be completed.

Sanderson took a red silk cloth that some one stripped from his head and stood within the ring.

"You'll take stations north an' south," he said dryly. 'Cross blades on guard at the word, and watch the kerchief till it drops. Then at it, an' may the Lord ha' mercy on your souls. I'll do the best I can wi' your bodies."

Volin took place as if he were planted in the beach, his visage lowering. Pierre advanced, lithe as a panther, the supple muscles rippling over his torso like snakes under the skin, free but coordinate, a gay smile on his lips, his eyes still holding a light like burning alcohol.

The blades touched with an earnest click of steel. Pierre's feet were far apart, his left arm crooked, the wrist curved. Volin bent his behind his brawny back, the fist clenched.

"The first to step fairly outside the ring loses the fight," said Sanderson. "Are ye ready? On guard!"

The crowd gathered in a crescent between the fighters and the shore, to keep their shadows from interference. Sanderson retreated to the border of the circle, equally between the pair who viewed the red signal held at arm's length at shoulder level, from the corners of their eyes. He bunched the silk cloth and let it fall.

Before its fluttering folds. had fairly touched the sand, Volin sprang back, whirling his cutlas high, bringing it swishing down with a force that seemed irresistible, driving to cleave Pierre's neck where it joined the shoulder. Pierre's weapon flashed up, red in the sunset as if already blooded. The giant's blade glided from its well placed angle and he barely parried a lightning lunge that made him step back so that his heel smudged the ring.

Bellowing, he flailed a dazzling circle to sweep aside Pierre's guard. Pale sparks flew from the grating steel as Pierre nimbly sidestepped, well inside the ring, his cutlas always set to swerve aside cut and thrust, sending in snaky lunge after lunge that were barely avoided by the clumsier Volin.

He saw the giant's stomach begin to heave and the sweat break out upon his face. He laughed as he danced away from a swinging blow.

"Too much rum and beef, Volin," he 'mocked. "Taut belly, slack body. You are over-blooded. I will relieve you presently —Ahb-h!"

A streak of blood showed on Volin's upper arm where Pierre's point had sliced the flesh. The red stream flowed down to his wrist and*dripped on the sand. Pierre pushed the attack and Volin responded with a furious rally. A straight thrust, caught and carried through in tierce, passed between Pierre's side and arm.

Volin grasped at the steel threatening his throat and roared as Pierre slashed it loose, almost severing the giant's thumb. Cursing, he leaped awkwardly forward, beside himself with pain and rage, his left arm with its bloody fist bludgeoning at Pierre's smiling face, his cutlas held edgewise in front of him.

Pierre seemed to shrink before the onslaught. He dropped to his left knee and sent up his blade, swift and true to the mark—Volin's hairy armpit.

There was a skreek of steel on bone, a gush of blood—and Pierre's steaming point coming out back of the giant's shoulder, crimson-tipped.

For a moment Volin seemed to hang suspended on the weapon, his face convulsed. Then he staggered back, clear of the circle, the hot blood pouring from the wound, and sagged to the beach like a dropped chain.

THE boat that Simon provided was little better than a canoe. It barely held the little company of reckless adventurers. There was no chance of comfort other than shifting their cramped positions. Occasionally three or four would lie down on the shifting bottom-boards or curl up in stern or bow. Oftener they swam about the craft to stretch their limbs. That was before the sharks began to keep them persistent company.

First one high fin had appeared and trailed them. Then another showed, until day and night at least a score of the sea tigers formed their escort, the ripples from their fins streaking the blue water from dawn to sunset, showing arrowy lines of phosphorescence after dark.

The food that Simon had provided was neither plentiful nor of high quality. The biscuit was moldy and weevil-bored, the meat badly cured and the wine thin. He had been niggardly with the powder. Equipped thus, they had left

Tortuga under a fire of comment that was close to jeering. That, in their desperate pride, precluded any return save a triumphant one.

There was a mast in the pirogue and a lugsail. The last was of as doubtful strength as the rigging. They dared not trust it ina stiff breeze. Nor could they sail within ten points of the wind, while the craft made leeway like a crab. The thole-pins were clumsy and the oars ill-matched. The seams needed calking and an hour's cessation from bailing found the water beginning to slosh about in the bilge.

In such sorry, desperate case Pierre steered his inadequate command as they ran down the Windward Channel and out into the Caribbean Sea, looking for a prize in the shape of a rich merchantman that might be boarded by a tour-de-force. Volin was in hospital at the house of a woman who favored him. But where, through his own fault, he dropped out, nine more hardy spirits who were hard put to it to secure what they deemed the necessaries for living had volunteered.

Besides Pierre and Sanderson, the chirurgeon, there were twenty-seven men, armed only with pistols, cutlases and_ resolution.

The oars were splashing listlessly, the sail filled and flapped as the pirogue laboriously topped each dark-blue hissing roller that reflected from a myriad shifting facets the brassy glare of the mid-afternoon sun. It sagged as they sank into the valleys. The men lolled on the thwarts, their belts tightened against a growing hunger, their tongues swollen in dry mouths.

Some chewed on bullets, since Simon's tobacco had given out on the fifth day and they had been seven at sea. All gazed covertly, almost continually, at Pierre, with bloodshot, sun-scorched eyes. Their faces were sullen. Luck seemed steadily against them. There seemed nothing ahead but starvation for them, a meal to the persistent sharks, or a humiliating return. The rations had been halved again that morning.

The high range of Hispaniola was in plain view with the verdure of the lower slopes and levels about the blue hills like a green veil. It was on their lee and, aiding the wind, a current held them gripped, slowly swinging them in toward shore and the promontory of Cape Beata, that seemed to them far from being "blessed." Pierre doubted whether he could persuade them to put about to sea again, and his soul was sour within him.

So far his will had triumphed, his belief in his "happy hour" and the "gold ship," that was birthmarked on his wrist, unfaltering. While the rations were full, and before the wine and tobacco gave out, he had held his crew closer to his own mark of confidence. The last twenty-four hours. had seen the barometer of hope go down hour by hour until the degree marked danger from open mutiny, holding him responsible for a feather-brained enterprise.

He would be the laughing stock of the Spanish Main, he told himself, chewing the bitter cud of failure as he held the tiller and gazed moodily ahead toward the land.

In the west clouds were already marshaling for the sunset review. A cable's length away a covey of flying fish soared from the water, gleaming in blue and silver. Instantly the sharks' fins on that side of the boat disappeared, as the sea-tigers, while waiting for their human feast, chased the dolphins that in turn harried the flying fish. The men's eyes turned longingly toward the shimmering skimmers, then dully back to Pierre with slow resolution gathering to protest.

"Let's make Beata Island, mates. There's water there."

The gruff voice was echoed by others. Pierre glanced down the boat to where Sanderson's gray eyes reassured him of one steady adherent. He marked the man who had spoken. His right hand gripped the tiller, his left crept down to the curving butt of the pistol in his belt.

"So, Michel, you are the first to quit. Yet I think I heard you take oath with the rest of us not to turn back until we had taken our ship."

He laid the pistol on his knees, shifted hands on the tiller and raised the long muzzle until it pointed at the rowers. The bow oarsman shrank aside.

"Show us then your ship," said Michel sullenly. "Show us a ship and I'll fight while there's life in me. Dead men can not capture prizes, nor starving ones neither." As if moved by a master cord, all hands strained their eyes round the mastless horizon, then returned to Pierre, carelessly fingering his weapon.

"You'd go back to be laughed at— jeered out of every tavern in Tortuga, a byword in all Hispaniola?" he asked them.

"I'd rather be laughed at by men than fought over by sharks," retorted Michel. "That's what'll be the end of us. Look at the brutes. They know they'll get us soon. I counted twenty-nine at noon. One for each of us."

THE flying fish had disappeared and the sharks had resumed their patrol. One eighteen-foot monster veered toward the boat, its blunt nose close to the surface, its yellow eyes regarding them viciously. It half turned on its back, the dirty white of its belly glazed blue by the watery film, its rows of teeth showing savagely in the triangular maw. One of the men struck at it with an oar and the brute, with hardly a motion of fins or tail, rushed at it, caught the splintering blade and tore the sweep away as the sailor lost his balance and lunged heavily against the gunwale, hauled back by his comrades.

"Let shark fight shark," said Pierre. "We'll keep our quarrels. We are all in the same boat and I am its commander. There's land in sight for cowards. There's food left for brave men. I thought I had shipped them. You styled

yourselves picaroons and pirates while your bellies were full. Must you always cast sixes to keep heart in the game?"

"There are no stakes in sight," grumbled Michel. 'The sap is out of us. I'd as lief be in —— as grilling in this boat."

"Aye!" The murmur rose almost to a shout.

"—is where you'll be in short order, Michel," said Pierre with the muzzle of his pistol slowly lifting, leveling. "You swore to obey me. You gave me the right of life and death over those who refused my orders. I doubt if you have the capacity for prayers," he went on grimly, "I'll say one for you."

Disappointment had curled his brain a little. The sun had turned his blood to fire. His finger twitched on the trigger. So far his will had turned aside despotically all suggestion of failure. Now he gave it rest. He was not keen to kill but he sensed this for the sticking point and a somber despair stiffened his purpose. He judged that the first man to weaken in the enterprise would be weak in other ways. The blue flame glowed in the eyes that mercilessly met Michel's. Michel cowered.

"I but spoke what was in the minds of all of us," he said from behind the back of a fellow. "Put it to the vote."

Pierre reviewed the chances, reading the haggard faces. There would be but one vote with his, he figured; that of Sanderson. The men, unclean, cramped, half-fed, had lost their stiffening. There were two quarter-rations left. The morning would see them at the end of their resources, barely able to make a landing. He had failed— unless he compromised.

He caught a short nod from Sanderson in the bow, as if the chirurgeon read his mind and agreed with his finding. At the same time, he had loosened his brace of pistols behind the men's backs, ready to follow Pierre's lead.

The heart was out of them. To shoot was sheer murder— useless. They were like ashes, all the fire gone, unless he could furnish it with the spark that still burned within him.

"There is no need to vote," he said. "I do not ask the impossible of any man. Only his utmost. We have enough for one fair meal, enough to stay your appetites. We'll make it tonight's supper. We'll stand as we are until the breeze fails, which it likely will by sunset. Then we'll drift and paddle westward until dawn. If the sun finds no sail in sight, we'll land at Port-au-Prince or keep on to Jamaica and Port Royal, if the wind favors.

"We are in the highway of Spanish shipping. We have waited a week without sight of sail. Never, I venture to say, has such a thing happened before nor will again. Fortune has tested us to the snapping point. To those who stand her whimsies she gives golden rewards at the last. Come, we'll finish our food tonight— tomorrow will be another day."'

There was neither assent nor dissent from the men. Then Sanderson spoke.

"We're wi' you, Pierre. Fortune is a hard lass to woo, but her half-sister, Misfortune, canna abide bein' laughed at. Heavy heart never gets over the hill." He started to sing a popular catch, his voice hoarse but putting spirit into the lilt so that one or two began to join the chorus, husky from thirst though they were. Presently the whole crew were singing, in time if not in tune, the lanky red-headed Scotchman with his stubbly fiery beard and greengray eyes perched in the stem beating time.

Pierre, holding tiller in the stern, was the only one who did not sing, though he was grateful enough to Sanderson. His eyes were moody. He was the gamester awaiting the last roll of the dice that either sends him from the board a beggar or gives him a new lease on life.

Pierre was a Norman. What sounded like brag to some was natural foaming of the spirits to him. The wine of his veins was not a still one. It bubbled and effervesced. He had vaunted that he, Pierre le Grand, was about to come into his own— that he would return to Tortuga master of a treasure ship of Spain to fire a salute to the fort before he came ashore, and, after scattering gold and broaching casks of wine, after bestowing gifts and giving a farewell feast, he would sail back to La Belle France, a conquering hero.

These and other things sounded foolish now. To return was unbearable. They would call him by Volin's name— Pierre le Petit. He gritted his teeth and muttered a. good Norman oath. Sooner than that he'd put a bullet through his head as he sat on the gunwale and let the sharks get him for a fool who had listened to fortunetellers and gipsies.

The sun sank and the coast of Hispaniola heightened and deepened in color, blue to purple, purple to indigo. The wind grew fainter but still held. The pirogue rode the dark, glassy surges that were veined with molten gold where the lowering sun shone on their shifting mirrors. The men sang on. But Pierre, looking at the birthmark on his wrist, heard them not.

"Twas at Saint Kitts I met a lass,
Black eyed as any gipsy;
I pledged her in a friendly glass
And then with love grew tipsy—o!
And then with love grew tipsy.

I took the lass away with me,
We landed in Jamaica.
But there we soon failed to agree
And so I had to shake her—o!
And so I had to shake her.

A sailor's love is like the sea,
Inconstant and uncertain;
He holds one lass upon his knee,
With one behind the curtain—o!
With one behind the curtain.

The lasses they do not repine
When Jack turns out a roamer;
They laugh and in a glass of wine,
They pledge the last newcomer—o!
They pledge the last newcomer!"

THE southwestern portion of Hispaniola was shaped like a long-toed boot, the promontory, of which Cape Beata is the southern headland, being in the perfect form of a heel. The sole, with Cape Tiburon in the toecap, spurning the Jamaica Channel, is slightly lifted, and the inside line of the heel cants westward.

As the sun dropped close to the horizon, its beams almost level with the crests of the waves, Pierre bestirred himself to serve the remains of food that he guarded in the stern-sheets.

The faulty breeze blew in his face as he measured the distance they were from land. They had made their westing off Beata and, whenever they lifted to a crest, they could now look into a deep bay beyond some scattering island of no great dimensions.

Suddenly Pierre's figure, moving sluggishly, galvanized into swift action, his face transfigured. He rose half erect, grasping the tiller, the light from the sunset ruddy on his eager, exultant features.

"Look, lads!" he shouted. "Look and then down with you below the gunwales. Let no more than six of ye show in plain sight, so they'll take us for a fisherman when they close in. The light'll fail before they'll make us out clearly. There she is, my braves! Regard her, then, and know my fortunate hour has come. There sails the gold ship of Pierre le Grand— to us, lads! to us!"

They crouched to his order after one quick look and then remained to gaze as they huddled on the bottom boards. Slowly finding her way into the open Caribbean, clearing the cape with the last of the wind, there came a stately ship that the sunset gilded from truck to waterline.

The canvas was dyed saffron in the glow. Golden drops fell from the prow that rose flashing from golden foam. Her gleaming sides threw off radiance that blazed on the protruding muzzles of cannon and winked from the scrolled carvings of her high, decorated poop. The very rigging seemed to be spun from thread of gold as she came lunging majestically along.

At every roll of the roursled hull from the brine the high light of her dripping curves shifted in a swift dazzle of light as brilliant as the flare from an opening furnace. She might have been plated with the precious metal from keel to vane. A ray of light breaking through a gap in the ridge, held her fairly in its widening beam and dusted her with gold, transmuting her with the touch of Midas to a ship of magic, her hull in an aureate sea, her pyramided canvas aswim in ambient, amber-tinted air.

The men gazed with awe and then, kindled by Pierre's triumphant cry of identification, of appropriation, they shouted in chorus—

"The ship of gold! The ship of gold!"

"Ours for the taking, lads. There lie beds for your sore bones tonight, coverlets of silk, velvet raiment. A ruff for your neck, Michel, instead of a round of bloody beef packed from the hunt. Rare wines, rare victuals, gold to clink gd

"There may be gold, my captain," said the man who rowed next to bow, an ancient worthy, bald of pate and gray of sprouting whisker, "but, from the look of things, there's iron a-plenty to protect it. Look at those guns and see the royal standard. Yon's a galleon of the *flota*, a war-ship, no merchant. There is a dog can bite. Should they have the humor to sink us they could do it ten times before dark with those grinning culverin. And she'll carry from seventy to a hundred men."

"Call it odds of three to one, then," said Pierre. Now, with his gold ship in full sight, he neither sensed nor brooked opposition and swept it aside like so much rubbish. "If you are too old to fight, my friend, if you have lost stomach for close work, you may stay in the boat— aye— and keep it for your share, for, once out of it, we'll not return.

"The men aboard of the galleon have to be paid. The more of them, the more money we'll find aboard. Once master of her, we'll raid the seas with those same culverin until we bite into something that satisfies us. If the dons aboard see us they take us for fishermen, unworthy notice. We'll wait 'till after dark, then row to her and board her. Any one of us is worth six men surprized and that's the way we'll tackle her.

"There's no moon, the sky's thickening enough with clouds to hide most of the stars and there's scant wind to drive them off or give the galleon more than steerage way. Why, 'tis made for us! A dash, a bold face, maybe a thrust or two and a shot and 'tis done with."

They cheered at that, not loudly, for fear of being heard aboard the galleon. The ship of gold was fading to a dark bulk. As she veered, lanterns showed on her poop and lights from the quarter windows.

The sea ran dark, touched with crimson gleams. In the light of the dying embers of the sunset Pierre read the faces of his men, turned toward him, set with present purpose and courage. He had fanned the spark to a flame.

"Once we board, we stay," he told them. "To falter is to fail. The Spanish are not easy on prisoners. Better to die. Are you committed to the venture? Are you gamecocks or partridges?"

The vision of the golden ship was still with them. Superstition helped to crystallize their courage. They believed this was the "happy hour." They gave him a deep-throated assent.

"Good! Then Alec Sanderson shall use his chirurgeon's tools to good purpose. With luck it may be the only use for them. See you, Alec, you shall be the last to leave this apology of a canoe. Simon made me promise to return it when we were through with it. We'll pay him for it instead. You could put your foot through the rotten planks if you trod carelessly. But Alec shall scuttle us a hole or so and we'll sink her. We'll fight with the sea back of us. Name of a dog, we'll make them think we are water devils!"

Sanderson leaned aft from the bow, leading the second cheer.

Before it reached the horizon line the sun plunged into a mass of cloud that completely obscured it. Night fell swiftly. The land vanished, the sky blended with the sea. Pierre ordered the sail taken down and for a time they drifted while he kept the bow to the waves with the tiller and an improvized sea-anchor made of oars lashed together.

THE galleon, showing now only as a cluster of fixed lights, was slowly bearing down upon them. Pierre made his plans and gave his orders while they murched the last crumbs of the food they trusted would prove only an enérée to something more substantial and appetizing.

Committed to the reckless enterprise, Pierre was fully sensible of all its hazards. He was spinning a coin with Destiny. One side meant lingering imprisonment, perhaps torture and the Inquisition, if not death.

That possibility he thrust aside and made what preparations he could to curry favor with Fortune by boldness. If they encountered strong opposition and the fight grew too hot, his men might try to retreat. That he would cut off by sinking his boat beneath him— as another commander once had burned his bridges.

He determined to attack while a part, at least, of the Spanish crew would be at supper. He detailed his men under subleaders, to the best of his judgment of their fighting ability and character. A crosseyed, wild-tempered Irishman named Fallon he told off to capture the powder-room.

"See you, Tom," he said. "You should find it amidships on the gun-deck. Take seven with you—choose your men now, quickly, and get them together beside you. Tremaine, you'll take seven more. Make for the fo'csle, hold 'em up by surprize, disarm them and clap 'em under hatches. De Blois, take you three and carry the wheel. Taque, you, with your brother and two more, clear the deck of the watch.

"I'll attend to the afterguard. They'll be in the cabin over their wine. Remy will come with me; and Michel Otard, ' Renton and Grey. Alec, you'll follow to the cabin when you've finished your scuttling.

"We'll board aft at the break of the poop, to starboard. She's on the port tack and she'll not be shifting. When she's ours we'll put her about and sail up Channel tonight. Tomorrow we'll wake Tortuga with our guns and give them a scare till we break out our flag.

"Draw all your pistol charges and recharge. Try your flints. Fight hard and ' quick. Now, muffle those rowlocks, and out oars. We'll row to meet her. Pull soft, lads; show no seafire in the strokes."

To Pierre the deed was not so much one of piracy as warfare. As long as history ran, the men who dwelt on the southern slopes of the Pyrenees were at bitter enmity with those on the northern. It was the bounden duty of every Frenchman under Louis the Thirteenth to kill any Spaniard under Philip the Fourth, as every Spaniard equally felt himself entitled to hang every Frenchman.

In Tortuga there were not only French— there were English, Irish, Scotch and Dutch, all equally pariahs in the eyes of Spain.

And in Europe, the Thirty Years war was on. So Pierre meant to capture the galleon as speedily as possible, in one swift rush, aided by hot lead and cold steel.

They met the galleon's course a little ahead of her bluff bows. Gazing upward they caught the glint of the sprit light on the steel cap of a sentinel, took another stroke and caught at the sloping sides, easing themselves sternwards.

Sanderson pulled out the boat's cleaning plug and tossed it away. He made swift work with his saw while the water gushed in and the overladen pirogue began to settle.

The night was hot and the gun ports were open. The muzzles of the culverin projected. Along the run ran bilge molds, there were chain-plates on the outside of the rail, deep carvings on the walls of the after cabin, all good as ladder rungs to desperate men.

They had thrown off their boots, those who had them, and they sat silent, clutching . their cutlases, ground to razor-edges before leaving port, pistols ready in sling and belt, taking great breaths of anticipation.

Between the foundering pirogue and the galleon the wash ran suckingly, charged with pale phosphorescence. From the open cabin windows there came the clink of glass and metal, scraps of short sentences.

Pierre's hand encountered a rope like a boat fall, Above him he saw a crane rigged for taking small boats inboard. He clung to the rope, then passed it down forward, finding the second fall. The water was now almost up to the thwarts of the canoe which was ready to sink beneath them.

"*Now*!"

They rose to Pierre's whisper as if it had been a bugle call and swarmed up the side of the galleon like so many cats, spurning the scuttled boat that sank in a swirl as Sanderson leaped for the muzzle of a culverin and clawed up after the rest.

A few startled sailors confronted the leaders. Two were struck down. The rest fled with Tague and his men hard after them.

De Blois leaped up the carven ladder to the poop, lit by its three lanterns. The officer of the deck was staring overside when de Blois jumped him. Pierre caught the quick ring of steel. A shot sounded forward where the Britisher Tremaine tackled the forecastle. The cross-eyed Fallon and his seven fighters had rushed below to the powder room.

The Spanish sailors, panic-stricken; had dived below believing themsélves attacked by seafiends as, dripping wet, the ragged, unshaven buccaneers flourished their naked steel or clapped pistols to the heads of willingly surrendering prisoners.

UNDER the rail of the poop, in a gallery formed by the hood projection of the upper deck, a sentinel had been set. So swift had been the rush of Pierre and his four that the man, unsurprized, was still gawping through the glazed windows at his superiors in the cabin. He was armed with sword and arquebus, helmeted with a light morion.

Michel, anxious to- distinguish himself, snatched off the helmet with one hand and struck the sentry a blow with the butt of his pistol upon the base of his skull. The man toppled, pitched forward, trying to spin on his neck as Pierre flung open the door.

Beneath four flaring candles that were set in a ceiling lantern of wrought iron, four richly dressed hidalgo officers in ruff and ruffle, sat about a massive table playing cards. The cabin was handsomely paneled and hung with tapestry. There was a valuable Eastern rug on the floor. There were flagons

and goblets on the table. The luck seemed to have been going all the way of the man who sat facing the cabin door. Gold pieces were piled in front of him. He was holding up a card, displaying it with a smile and gay words that suddenly froze to silence.

"You will observe," he was saying, "that once more I hold the winning card. I— in the name of ——, what is—"

Pierre reached the table in a bound, leaning across it with one hand outspread upon the scattered cards and stakes, his pistol leveled at the player's breast.

"You will observe," he cried, in fair Spanish, "that you have overlooked this little ace— this ace of trumps that will assuredly spoil your suit of hearts unless you quietly surrender."

The commander of the galleon dropped his cards and held up his ruffled wrists as he shrank back against the paneling. Four savages, foul and fierce looking, puddling his cabin rug, grinned at him sardonically behind the man who.covered him with a pistol muzzle that had grown as large around as a porthole. At the temple of each of his officers was a similar menace.

A lean, red-stubbled devil with hairy legs and arms stood in the middle of the floor holding a great cutlas by hilt and blade in hands that swung low towards his bare knees.

A cross-eyed, panting pirate appeared in the cabin door.

"All secured below," he reported exultantly. 'Tremaine has 'em herded. The ship is ours."

Don Sebastien de Rueza y Dourado, vice-admiral of Spain, was a proud man but he did not let his pride interfere with expediency.

"Your ace wins, señor," he said. "I take it you are Frenchmen. May I ask the name of your leader?"

"You may call me Pierre le Grand," said the Norman, the battle-flame of his eyes changing to milder complacency. "Since I have won the game, may I ask the exact amount of the stakes? It may save some searching and inconvenience on both sides."

Don Sebastien heaved a sigh of resignation.

"This is the *Santa Ysabel*, bound for Cadiz, laden with gold bullion," he said. "You have made a rich haul. Now take that pistol away from my head. And tell me what you propose to do with me and— my command."

"Since we are rich, we can afford to be generous," said Pierre. 'We are not murderers. You are prisoners-of-war. Such of your men as suit I shall impress as crew. The rest I will put in a boat and give them a chance to reach Cuba without delay. As for yourself, and these gentlemen, to whom I have not the pleasure of being introduced—"

He paused while more grinning pirates crowded into the cabin. Don Sebastien gave the names of his officers.

"All men of rank— and therefore of ransom, I see," said Pierre le Grand. "We will arrange those matters later. Now, it is dry work fighting, we will pledge you in a glass of wine. Ventre de Saint Gris, but I admire a man who takes things philosophically."

Two hours later the *Santa Ysabel* had been put about and was making up for Cape Tiburon on a breeze that had gathered as the night advanced. Pierre paced the poop with Sanderson. Both were washed and shaven and were clad in the spare raiment of the galleon's officers. All the men, unwounded every one of them, had been fed and wined and clothed. The treasure room had been inspected.

"I shall renounce piracy," said Pierre. "I am rich enough to be a very honest man They may even ennoble me. We sail for Dieppe, Alec, after we have shown Tortuga the kind of fish we catch in the Caribbean— and thereby encourage others to do likewise. Those who wish may stay there and chuck away their money. I must send Volin a few luck pieces. But I shall save mine. I am a Norman."

"And I— am a Scotchman," said Sanderson, dryly. "I go with ye to Dieppe and then—"

"What then?" asked Pierre le Grand. The chirurgeon did not answer. It was doubtful if he heard. He had gone to the poop rail and he was singing, just above his breath:

"For it's hame, dearie, hame,
It's hame I lang to be;
For my topsails they are hoisted
And I must put oot to sea."

Pierre smiled sympathetically. He gave an order to the helmsman and then he went below to superintend the weighing and reckoning of the bullion cargo of the gold ship.

5: Intuition

Henry Leverage

Carl Henry, 1879-1931
Adventure, 30 March 1922

IT WAS the *Calipso*— a four-masted, topsail schooner— varnished, holy-stoned, new-rigged; the pride of her owner's eye as she lay tugging at her anchor-chain across the Bay from San Francisco.

Her owner and skipper, "Micky" McMasters, had ventured his all in the *Calipso* and a certain Australasian pearl concession— best reached by heading south of the Line and running before the trades, after Fiji was reached, until Nati came up out of a sapphire sea like a painting on a Japanese fan.

Micky McMasters called Nati "The White Man's Graveyard." He had returned to San Francisco in order to obtain medicine, stores and American divers; the last were hard to get in the South Seas and wanted much red gold for their services.

Rolling down East Street, San Francisco, Micky spied, from astern, the bowed back and swinging arms of an old-time shipmate who resembled a wreck on a hostile shore. The sailor was lurching and tacking and mumbling incoherently. Micky crept upon the man and looked him over, from broken brogans to a sorry-looking headpiece; the clothes he wore were evidently the last from a meager locker.

"Howdy, matey!" said Micky McMasters with just a touch of cockney in his speech. "Howdy, 'Blue Peter'!"

Blue Peter pried open a pair of matted eyes.

"Who calls?" asked he.

Micky McMasters shrank from the derelict— Blue Peter reeked of gin and vice; the lips of him were swollen and the old-time fire had died.

"Who hails?" repeated Blue Peter.

Recognition came to the shell-back; his twisted digits clawed the air; they fell upon Micky's broad shoulders and fastened with the nails ripping the cloth of the little skipper's pea-jacket.

"Jumpin' bowheads!" said Blue Peter. "It's you!"

Micky squirmed— he was in for it— Blue Peter, like the Ancient Mariner, was not to be denied. Close came his whiskered face.

"Jumpin' bowheads! Help me out, mate. I'm cast away an' near to starvation. You were with me on th' *Orca*— remember?"

The mutiny of the *Orca*, in the Arctic, could not be forgotten. Micky avoided Blue Peter's talons, stepped back, drew out a watch and said:

"It's six bells. I must be goin'. Will a little siller come in 'andy, Blue Peter?"

"Siller, yes— but sign me off this cursed land— if you will save my life. Th' pilot fishes an' sharks an' harpies o' th' coast have plucked me clean. I want deep sea again— away from sinful men. McMasters, for 's sake save an old mate! Ship me somewhere."

Micky McMasters whipped out a card, wrote directions, added two paper dollars, and steered away from Blue Peter. He went about his business, obtained the last diver, paid for stores—to be delivered on board the Calipso that afternoon—then, when evening came, he crossed the ferry to Oakland and chartered a Whitehall boat which carried him to the schooner.

One thing he noticed when climbing aboard after paying the boatman: Blue Peter sat on the forecastle deck, smoking a cord-wrapped pipe, and the gray-thatched eyes of the mariner were fixed in the onshore wind that came through the Golden Gate.

"You sent him out," said "Red" Landyard, the mate.

Micky clicked a strong jaw.

"Gol blyme, yes!"

"What for? He's no use!"

Gripping the schooner's polished rail, Micky McMasters leaned until his head was over the water. The boatman and the Whitehall boat were floating back to Oakland; a silver dusk lay over the hills, broken in the north by the yellow flame of San Francisco. Micky turned his glance upon Blue Peter.

"Red," he said to the Yankee mate, "you an' I 'ave sailed an' steamed since we were lads. We think we know th' sea— but we only think so. Blue Peter is older than hus an' far wiser. 'E works by intuition— a good compass to steer by. 'E told me, six, seven years ago, that th' crew of th' *Orca* were on murder bent— an' they were! It was Blue Peter who saved me from an Arctic grave. So, Blue Peter stays forrard, an' we'll all turn in— for we're leavin' when th' wind shifts at sun-up. I got my clearance papers— everything!"

Micky McMasters strode across the deck, and entered his cabin by way of a sliding door at the break of the poop.

THE *Calipso*, full-handed, with a bone at her yacht-like prow and every sail set to an offshore breeze, cleared the land of California and plunged upon the vasty blue.

Red Landyard, the American mate, worked the booze out of the six foremast hands, including Blue Peter, and inspected the divers' quarters in the galley— where four men were quartered with the cook— men whom Micky had paid five hundred dollars advance in San Francisco for their service in getting pearls from a reef too deep for native divers to reach. Then the mate

went aft, spat to leeward, and climbed the quarter-deck steps at the top of which stood Micky McMasters.

"Wall," said the mate, "everything is shipshape except that Old Man of th' Sea you sent aboard. He's goin' to be about as useful to me as a sick walrus."

Micky McMasters gulped at a memory.

" 'Andle 'im gently— poor soul, this may be 'is last passage."

"I'll make it his last!"'

Micky's tattooed hands closed over the mate's wrists.

"Watch Blue Peter— get acquainted with 'im. 'E ain't no Shippin' Board apprentice. 'E's full o' intuition. See 'im now— a-standin' by th' fore-sheet. 'Ow did 'e know I was about to sing hout to slacken that sheet?"

Red Landyard eyed Blue Peter, then squinted to windward.

"Th' breeze is shiftin' to th' north— guess Blue Peter saw that an' stood by."

Mickey nodded.

"Yes, he suspected I'd give th' order. That's where th' salt is thickest— on men like Blue Peter. 'E don't need no orders— 'e thinks ahead."

A gust from over the starboard quarter indicated that the wind had veered; Red Landyard gave the order to slacken sheets. He sprang to the deck and assisted a Lascar who shared the watch with Blue Peter— the third sailor on deck being at the wheel.

Coming back to Micky's side, on the quarter-deck, Red said cuttingly:

"Your old man may work by intuition— but he don't do any other kind of work. He couldn't belay a main-sheet— he's weak, skipper, an' surly."

" 'Andle 'im gently," was all Micky said.

Later the cockney captain drew the mate aft by the rocking taffrail.

"What do you think of my divers?" he questioned. "Go' blyme, I promised my boy I'd get th' best in 'Frisco! D'you think I succeeded, Red?"

Micky's "boy" was aged twenty-three— he had charge of a pearl shed, two hundred natives, and much gear, located on the island of Nati. He was McMaster's son— by a wife who lived at Great Grimbsy, England— a helpmate who awaited the fortune that was promised from the torrid seas.

"What do you think of my divers?" repeated Micky.

Red Landyard shifted a chew of tobacco from one cheek to the other. ''What do I think? Why, skipper, they look capable of anything. They were playing poker, drinking from a square-face of gin, an' they all ——ed me when I inspected their bunks. I think you got picked men— picked for meanness. Like as not they'll murder a few natives at Nati."

"But will they get th' hoysters?"

"Pearls?"

"Gol blyme, yes—th' pearls!"

"They may get them— but they look as if they'd keep some for themselves."'

"My boy'll see that they don't!" said Micky.

THE *Calipso* ran before north-eastern gales for two days and made grand time. The divers were seasick and quarrelsome; they fought with the cook, messed up the galley, called Red Landyard forward and argued with him concerning their quarters— which, on account of following seas, were wet.

Red had a tobacco-stained beard, a glittering pair of eyes, and fists like blocks. He proceeded, while Micky watched from the quarter-deck and Blue Peter stood near by, with ultimate instructions:

"Two of you come out on deck an' share th' watch! Two of you turn in— I'll need you next watch. Th' articles you signed called for assistance in case of necessity. There's a necessity! Lay aloft an' furl that main topsail! You I mean— an' you I mean!"

Red's eyes flamed; he selected a puny-looking diver, yanked him from the galley and hurled him toward the mainmast. The next to follow was a big man— who melted in the mate's nipping grip.

The two divers climbed the weather shrouds, cursed the schooner, and strained their arms in the biting gale that came over stern. The main topsail was made snug— in a fashion. Returning to the deck, the two divers avoided Red Landyard, went forward, and stood near where Blue Peter crouched at the forecastle companion.

"I guess that'll larn them who's boss here," said the mate to Micky Masters. "They act like first-cabin passengers!"

Micky's grin was unholy.

"Keep them on deck until we run down hour latitude— they've 'ad too much gin an' not henough ginger for deep-reef diving."

Blue Peter came aft at the change of watch, touched a gray forelock and looked at McMasters.

"Can I speak to you a minute, skipper?"

Micky nodded and watched the old salt climb the weather steps. Blue Peter grasped the quarter-deck rail.

"You got four men in th' galley, skipper."

"Gol blyme, yes!"

"Three o' them are divers— after a fashion. Th' other, skipper, is no diver. He's never been under th' surface— unless he fell overboard. How do I know, skipper?"

Micky's jaw squared; he clenched his fists.

"Yes, 'ow d'you know?"

Blue Peter took his time; he pulled out his cord-wrapped pipe, filled it with black tobacco, struck a sulfur match on a dry spot, shielded his flame, and puffed slowly.

"I've been goin' deep sea, man an' boy, for almost fifty years. I've been on pearlers an' blackbirders an' copra schooners an' traders; an' I've never yet seen a diver who couldn't breathe."

Micky glared at the shell-back.

"What d'you mean?"

Slowly Blue Peter's pipe-stem steadied on the galley-house, out from which came a trailing smudge of smoke that shot forward and was whipped over the plunging bow.

"What do I mean, skipper? I mean what I saw with my own eyes— they not being of the best, I may be wrong— but th' mate— a good man— sent th' divers aloft to furl sail, an' when th' divers came forrard one of them was blowin' like a porpoise stranded on a sandbar. He was short-winded; is that th' way for a diver to be?"

"Which one?"

Micky Masters shot the question through gritted teeth.

Blue Peter placed the pipe-stem in his mouth, puffed deliberately, squinted his eyes and said:

"It wasn't th' little diver— as I'd suspect from th' build o' him— it was th' big man who blowed so hard. Says I then an' there, skipper, he's a harpy sailin' under false colors."

The cockney captain was off the poop and forward in a rush of indignation; he disappeared in the galley-house; he reappeared dragging the big diver whom Red Landyard had sent aloft to furl the main topsail. Backed against a dipping rail, with the green seas lipping the scuppers, Micky held the man and called for Red Landyard.

The mate, half-dressed, in vermilion-hued underwear and with a pair of heavy trousers dragging around his knees, appeared from the cabin. He lunged to the skipper.

"What's this— mutiny?"

Micky shoved the pseudo-diver forward.

"This man admits 'e's a sham!" shouted the little skipper. ''E signed on an', as Blue Peter says, 'e's never done any divin'. 'E was only a pump-hand— an' I gave 'im five hundred advance. What'll my boy at Nati say?"

"Blue Peter?" queried the Yankee mate, looking around the deck.

"Yes, Blue Peter guessed this miserable lump was a sham."

"Blue Peter deducted it?"

" 'E did hit by intuition— 'is intuition is strong! Get forrard, you!" snapped the irate skipper. "Turn hinto th' fo'cas'le where you belong!"

Micky McMasters went to the galley after the man had dropped down the forecastle companion; he told the three divers what he required of them and added that he was captain of the schooner.

"No more shams go with me! I'm expectin' to try you out at seventeen fathoms when we reach Nati— an' may 'Eaven 'elp you hif you don't stay down an 'our— because my boy is lookin' for real deep-reef divers!"

Red Landyard cooled the cockney skipper's blood with a question concerning Blue Peter when McMasters came fuming out of the galley.

"This Old Man of th' Sea," drawled the mate, "this wreck you believe so firmly in— how does he happen to be before th' mast? He might have owned ships, I guess?"

"Blyme, yes!"

Micky glared at the galley, then forward, then tested the wind by a biting glance at the sun and well-filled foresail.

" 'E might," said the skipper "or owned a line of packets— 'e's old henough an' wise henough! I minds him well on th' *Orca*; 'e 'asn't changed one bit. 'E was always predictin' things that came true— 'e knew which way th' ice would drift an' where th' lanes were, an' just th' spot to find a bowhead. 'E's a 'oly terror on intuition!"

"It's probably based on experience," said the practical mate.

"Hit's based on th' queer things of th' sea— th' change of compass point in time to avoid a reef, or th' shiftin' of helm when there's a rock ahead, or th' feelin' that there's a lee shore somewhere to lee'ard, or—"

"I had that experience once, Micky. I was second mate on a windjammer— *The Bounding Billow*— out of 'Frisco. We were off Chile somewhere, when th' old man changes th' course for no reason at all, an' we picks up a long-boat filled with passengers from th' wrecked coaster *Iguique*. Why th' old man took that notion I don't know— an' he didn't either. It was intuition."

Micky nodded.

"We've brought good luck with hus— because Blue Peter is goin' to keep us out of trouble."

GOOD luck held, for the schooner *Calipso*, all the way down the long slant of the South Pacific; gales quieted to following winds; a breeze wafted them over the Line. Micky and Red Landyard had little or nothing to do, save keep the sheets trimmed and the schooner on her course for Nati.

Islands, as fair from a distance as visions in a dream, rose from the tropic sea— spicy odors came within the wind— a feeling settled on the schooner's

crew of good cheer and kindness. Blue Peter, freed from his vice, gin, started making clothes, shoes, even a hat. He came on deck clad in duck trousers and muslin shirt; his gray beard was trimmed; his eyes were less watery.

"Your Old Man of th' Sea," suggested the Yankee mate, "is getting spry. He likes these latitudes."

" 'E's welcome!" said Micky. "All I want from this 'ot-'ouse world are pearls— then we set course for England an' Great Grimsby. I 'aven't seen th' missus in two years— my boy 'asn't seen 'is mother in five. Is that any way to treat th' best you 'ave?"

Red Lanyard squinted at Blue Peter, who stood braced against the galley-house. The old salt's pipe was glowing; his cheeks seemed almost ruddy.

Suddenly Blue Peter's right fingers coiled around his pipe-stem; his hand dropped; he closed his eyes and shook his head. Micky and the mate heard him mutter dolefully:

"Trouble ahead. Yea, there's trouble."

The cockney skipper thrust one-half of his body over the quarter-deck rail,

" 'Vast with that croakin'!" he shouted.

Blue Peter pried open his eyes, replaced the pipe in his mouth, hitched his trousers and rolled forward, where he disappeared under a foreboom. " 'E's a regular Davy Jones!"

The little captain spat to the deck.

" 'E's no prophet; 'e's bad luck!"

"I thought he was good luck," the mate drawled.

"I've changed my mind!" snapped Micky.

NATI, more lovely, from a distance, than a novelist's description, was reached thirty-one days out of San Francisco. Micky took the wheel from the wheelman and set a course for the lagoon's entrance— a narrow rapid of tidal water. He brought the Calipso through safely, floated across the lagoon and broadsided alongside a rotting wharf at the land end of which were two long warehouses built by a defunct Dutch trading company.

Natives, headed by the white men of that port, came swarming out of the town. Heading the islanders was Micky's son, Bob McMasters, who climbed over the schooner's rail and embraced his father. Turning, resting his chin on the cockney skipper's shoulder, the son asked as he counted the crew of the Calipso—

"I hope for goodness' sake you brought the divers?"

"Gol blyme, yes!"

Red Landyard heard Micky's pointed question which followed his "Gol blyme!''

"Lad, 'ow are th' pearls?"

"Not so good, father. We've cleaned the five-fathom reef."

Bob McMasters pointed a steady hand toward the south shore of the lagoon.

"We cleaned that beastly well, with the help of native divers. Then we've been getting some up from the six-fathom reef— over there."

Bob's arm swung northward.

"But the best of the lot are too deep— except for diving-gear and good men. I hope the men you brought are capable fellows."

Micky led his son to the galley-house, where they inspected the gear brought from San Francisco and talked with the three deep-reef white divers. The fourth man sat on a hatch forward and glared aft. Blue Peter towered above this man and cast a shadow upon him. Red Landyard, after inspecting the two shore lines— the schooner was to remain at Nati— stretched his lanky legs by visiting the American consul.

"Do you calculate," queried the mate, "that 'McMasters and Son' will clean up a fortune in their concession?"

The American consul mopped a heated brow and closed one eye vigorously.

"They may!"

"What are their chances?"

"Deep-reef diving has been tried here— it didn't work. There's a pearl in about every thousand oysters. I wish they'd get the rotten mess off the beach."

Red Landyard went to the schooner. Micky and Son had gone to the pearl-sheds with the divers and gear. Blue Peter sat under an awning of his own making, sewing a patch on a sail.

"Well, what do you think of Nati?" questioned the Yankee.

Blue Peter stopped sewing, palmed the needle and blinked toward the jungle's fringe that came down to the still waters of the lagoon. The old salt's eyes raised and fastened upon a line of mist-hidden hills that marked the island's interior. He resumed sewing, closed his eyes, and muttered—

"There's fever here— an' somethin' else."

"What else, Blue Peter?"

Slowly the shell-back's head wagged.

"I don't fathom— what else— but it's somethin'."

Red Landyard shivered slightly, although the sun was hot, and glanced at the rotten wharf. He noticed that both hawsers securing the *Calipso* dipped into stagnant lagoon, raised, and dipped again— as if there were an unseen swell upon the surface of the water.

McMasters came back to the schooner at sundown; the little cockney skipper was enthusiastic.

"We're goin' to get th' pearls this time!" he declared. "Red, there's a lava reef, where my boy is workin' with th' three divers, that's rich as th' Bank o' England. It's that rich!"

"Look out for fever," cautioned the mate. "Blue Peter senses it, I guess."

"Th' lad's immune; 'e's tough with right livin' an' youth. 'E's layin' it hout to those divers, an' they're afraid of 'im."

"I mean you should look out for fever."

The little skipper glared toward Blue Peter.

" 'E said that! 'E's always croakin'. I wish I'd left 'im ashore at 'Frisco. Maybe we did wrong, Red, in bringin' 'im with hus."

The ancient seaman came slowly down the cleared deck and stood beside McMasters.

"Ye were speakin' of fever just now— I overheard you. Yon's th' answer to th' fever. See th' kirk over there an' th' graveyard. How many have died at Nati?"

Again Red Landyard felt a chill in the tropic air; he followed the direction of Blue Peter's shaking finger and saw a broken-down church beneath the cross for which was a jungle-tangled graveyard— the resting-place of many Dutch traders and white beachcombers. Nati, with all its charm, was a fever-hole.

Micky went into the cabin and called the mate to him.

"Red," he said, ''we'll hopen a square-face of trade gin an' forget th' old fool's croakin'! My boy's not set on leavin' this port for many weeks. 'Ere's 'ow to success in th' pearls!"

SUCCESS, in a measure, came to Micky McMasters and Son; the three divers gutted the seventeen-fathom lava-reef and repaired their gear for deeper diving on a twenty-fathom reef at the northeast bight of the lagoon. They worked through the tropic days.

Micky assisted. Once the little skipper went down himself, but the strain was too much for his unaccustomed lungs. He spat blood and bent over with pains when he returned to the *Calipso*.

"Better take to your bunk," advised Red Landyard. "I'll get a doctor from town if th' pains continue."

"Gin!" gulped Micky.

He grew dizzy, reeled, fell over; and Red Landyard had to lift him into the cabin bunk. The mate opened the portholes, stationed a Lascar as nurse, and went on deck. Blue Peter stood in the waist of the schooner, regarding the slimy walls of the wharf and trading-sheds.

"Th' old man's got th' bends," said the mate.

Blue Peter nodded.

"He'll have worse than that, sir."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, sir, this is a cursed island— no good ever came out of Nati. Wasn't I here in 89? I was here, sir, as knows, an' there was fever then. Cappin Jones of th' *Bernicia* almost died of it— an' three of th' crew grew black as pitch an' sprang overboard. But it wasn't that I feared of this island— it is somethin' else—"

Red Landyard glared over the top of his beard.

"You quit your croaking!— you, quit!"

Old Blue Peter rolled forward, filled his pipe, sat down on the forecastle deck and puffed slowly as he eyed the dipping shorelines and the sheer of the trading-shed. A silence came upon the lagoon; the tropic stars torched the night— the world slept.

Bob McMasters came on the wharf at sunup.

"How's th' governor?" he called to Red Landyard.

The mate climbed ashore and whispered, out of any possible hearing of Blue Peter or the cook:

"I guess your old man's all right, Bob. He's been spittin' blood— but not much. I calculate he'll pull through, with th' medicine I gave him an' a little quiet. He seems to have a touch o' fever— not much. I dosed him with veronal an' fed him quinine three times. Better let him sleep— an' go on with your pearling."

Bob McMasters strode up the wharf and took the jungle trail that led to the pearling sheds at the north of the lagoon. Red Landyard, watching, concluded he had never seen a finer young man.

The doctor came to the schooner in the morning and sat on the edge of Micky's bunk.

"What you need," he said after taking the little skipper's temperature, "is sea air, and plenty of it. You're a blue-water man— and this lagoon is almost stagnant."

Red Landyard saw the doctor ashore; then the mate returned to Micky's cabin.

"Suppose," drawled the mate, "we take Blue Peter and the Lascar and set out. Bob can do without you for a few days. I guess that doctor was right."

"I'm willin' to do anythin'," breathed Micky. "I wish I 'ad a ton of ice!"

The mate went on deck and consulted with Blue Peter, who was leaning over the rail in the bow, watching the shore-lines dipping in the slime of the lagoon. The seaman turned his head.

"Ye are right," he said, "about goin' to sea for th' old man's health. We all should go away from here. Ye see that?"

Blue Peter's fingers were spread toward the rotting wharf.

"See th' rats— they've been swarmin' along th' shore-lines all night an' all day. They're comin' aboard like Canton pirates —big, whiskered ones an' little ones with heady eyes—all squeakin' an' hurryin'; an' some o' them drowned an' some o' them got over——"

"Well, what of it, Blue Peter?"

"They're frightened out of their holes.'

"Why should they come aboard?"

"Because th' schooner is stanch— an' healthful. Rats know things we don't know. Look at that one comin'— crawlin'— 'e's a wise rat."

The mate had seen rats climbing aboard ships and schooners many times in his life. He became openly skeptical.

"You think there will be a plague ashore— but there won't be any."

"Ye know?"

The Yankee mate felt like gripping Blue Peter's throat and throwing him over the rail.

"Ever since we left 'Frisco," he exclaimed, "you've been mumblin' an' rantin' an' cantin', 'Vast with it an' act like a man!"

Slowly the old salt's head turned toward the shore; he leaned and watched the dripping hawsers, down which, spaced like knots in a line, came rats that squeaked and were engulfed in the slime of the lagoon. One, a big fellow, scrambled aboard the schooner, ran between Red Landyard's outspread legs and disappeared beneath a bucket-rack in the waist of the Calipso.

"Ye saw that?" croaked Blue Peter.

Red Landyard shrugged his shoulders; he went aft to Mickey's cabin. The little skipper felt better.

"We'll go out of this cursed lagoon— some time tonight— an' cruise for a breeze. Get a deck of cards, Red. We'll play pinochle."

An idle day passed; the mate at nightfall informed the shipkeepers, a Lascar and Blue Peter, that the schooner would clear Nati at high tide— seven bells in the morning. Blue Peter leaned from the rail.

"Ye are leaving young McMasters behind?"

"Certainly!"

Blue Peter shook his head.

"Tis wise to go out— but not without th' old man's boy."

"Nonsense!"' the mate exclaimed. "Bob has got to watch th' divers. If he don't they'll steal whatever pearls they get."

MIDNIGHT, eight bells, found Blue Peter acting strangely. He shuffled a lone watch across the *Calipso*'s planks, eyed the shore, sighed, grew restless, glanced aft and finally became remarkably spry for an aged man.

The sail-locker was open; Blue Peter went over its contents and selected a marlinspike with a twine-wrapped handle. He balanced this in his hand, swung it, then hid it beneath his shirt where it could be readily pulled out.

Pausing, he again glanced aft where Micky McMasters and Red Landyard were sleeping. No sound came from the cabin— the Lascar was doubled in a forecastle bunk.

The *Calipso* floated near enough to the rotting wharf for a determined man's spring. Blue Peter made the leap, landed on the wharf, rose and stood silently regarding the shadows that stretched from the sheds to the sleeping town and the scrub jungle.

He half-ran, half-staggered, along the shore of the lagoon and came by a sandy trail to the pearl-shacks where Bob McMasters and the divers slept.

A dog barked; a native appeared, crawling from a thatched tent. Blue Peter shouted that McMasters was ill and called for Bob to come to the schooner at once. Bob appeared, clad in white pajamas.

"Bring the pearls," said Blue Peter. "The old man is ravin' to see 'em. Come at once!"

Cursing the hour, Bob disappeared into the shack and reappeared with trousers and shoes on.

"Follow me," said Blue Peter.

The old salt stumbled along the sandy trail and struck around the lagoon; Bob McMasters had difficulty keeping up with him.

"What happened to my father?" he questioned. "Is the fever worse?"

Blue Peter did not answer; he shook his head dolefully and fingered the pointed end of the cord-wrapped marlinspike. The two men passed between the trading-sheds and came out upon the wharf. Bob eyed the schooner, seized hold of the shore-line that ran to the bow and pulled on it. The *Calipso* gradually was drawn in his direction.

Bob leaped, and Blue Peter followed after him; they landed in a sprawled heap near the forehatch. Out was whipped the marlinspike from Blue Peter's shirt; he crouched, leaned forward and brought the well wrapped handle down across Bob's forehead. The blow was repeated—this time over the ear. McMasters' son fell flat, quivered, then was still with his strong features turned to the tropic stars.

Blue Peter dragged Bob to the open forehatch, lowered away and followed after him. The old salt cut line, bound Bob's hands and feet, triced him beyond any chance of moving, gagged him with a piece of canvas, and hauled

McMasters' son forward until he was wedged between two cases near the forecastle bulkhead. Then the seaman climbed on deck, pulled the hatch over the coaming and resumed his lone watch as if nothing had happened.

Red Landyard, yawning, appeared at six bells. The Yankee mate studied the surface of the lagoon, lifted his chin, sensed the slight offshore breeze and ordered Blue Peter to call the Lascar and spread foresail and staysail.

"We're goin' away from your —— rats!" said the sleepy mate.

Blue Peter looked at the wharf.

"They're swarmin' aboard, sir. Like as not th' hold is full of them."

"We should worry— they're good luck!"

Blue Peter went about the business of rousting out the Lascar, drawing in shorelines, coiling them up, and hoisting foresail and jib.

The *Calipso*, with Red Landyard hanging on the wheel, sheered from the wharf and glided across the lagoon. The tide, being at flood, allowed room for the keel over the lava at the strait, and the schooner drove to sea.

Noontime found Nati horizon-down and a bracing breeze singing through the *Calipso*'s rigging. Micky, as if he had been given new wine, appeared on deck and walked briskly to the quarter-deck rail. He glanced over and saw Blue Peter standing in the bow; the old seaman's face was turned toward a smudge that marked the island.

" 'E's sorry we set sail," said the little skipper to the mate. " 'E's longin' for Nati."

Red Landyard cut a chew from a plug of tobacco.

"Blue Peter isn't sorry, skipper. He's glad. He was croakin' concernin' rats an' Nati ever since we went there. I don't fathom that old barnacle, an' I never will. He's queer!"

" 'E's got intuition."

A diversion occurred aboard the Calipso when the sun set with a rush of scarlet streamers flamingoing the west. Across the sea came a tidal bore— an unusually high wave— that rocked the schooner, swung her three points off course, and set sails and standing rigging flapping.

"Gol blyme!" exclaimed Micky. What was that?"

The little skipper unconsciously glanced toward Nati— more than horizon-down. He reeled and grasped Red Landyard's arm.

"Was that a dizzy stroke, or ham I seein' things?"

"Here it comes again," drawled the mate. "It's a bunch of tidal waves— each bigger than th' other! Look out— hang on to somethin'— we're in for it, proper!"

THE Calipso tossed and twisted like a chip in a whirlpool— the bow went under, then the stern was sucked between mountainous waves. A racking was in the air— rain fell— far-off explosions sounded with tropical thunder.

Daybreak revealed a scene of desolation. Lava floated on the sea— wreckage, mud, silt discolored the water. The schooner's deck and tangled rigging were coated with pink slime. Over the heavens was spread a pall through which the sun tried to appear.

"We'll make for Nati!" Micky shouted to Red Landyard. "Clear that foresail. 'Ere comes a wind!"

The mate, aided by Blue Peter and the Lascar, succeeded in setting the sail and taking advantage of a hot wind from the south. The fast schooner heeled over. Micky hung to the wheel.

Noon came and was passed; it was in the long forenoon next day before a canoe was raised and a course set to intercept it. The cockney skipper shouted to the natives in the canoe—

"What 'appened at Nati?"

A brown giant pointed a frightened finger toward the bottom of the sea.

"Nati gone," he answered. 'Big mountain blow up— all gone, cappin. We go too— for next island."

Micky reeled from the rail; Red Landyard caught the little skipper and carried him toward the cabin companion.

"My boy's gone too," sobbed Micky. "That island is no more."

Blue Peter came up the quarter-deck steps and intercepted Micky and the mate as they were going down the companion. "Jus' a moment, skipper. There's somethin' forrard I want to show you. I kinda had an idea that Nati was no place for a white man's son— so I brought him aboard an' laid him out nicely."

"You brought my Bob aboard?"

Blue Peter touched his cap.

"He is in th' forehold— next th' fo'castle bulkhead. He's got th' pearls in a poke around his neck, sir."

Micky struggled from Red's arms, staggered over the quarter-deck, went down the steps and dashed forward to the forehatch. The Lascar aided the little skipper in getting the slime from the hatch and opening it. A glad and somewhat indignant shout racked the schooner when Micky came upon his trussed-up son.

Red Landyard nipped Blue Peter's arm.

"I guess you're responsible," drawled the mate. "An' I guess you'll be forgiven. How did you know that Nati would blow up? You must have deducted it— or used intuition."

"I used some o' one an' some of th' other, sir. Ye know rats desert a sinkin' ship— then why wouldn't they desert a volcanic island?"

Blue Peter touched his gray forelock and walked off the quarter-deck.

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6: The Adventure of the Miracle

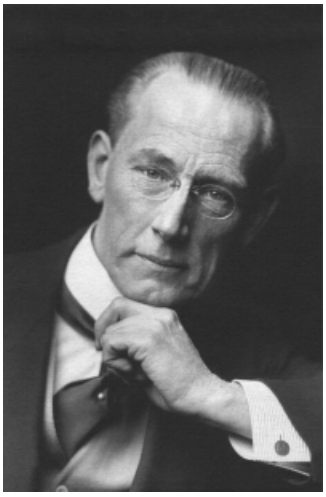
William J. Locke

1863-1930

The Strand Magazine Oct 1911

The American Magazine Oct 1911

One of a series: "The Joyous Adventures of Aristide Pujol"



William John Locke was a British novelist, dramatist and playwright, best known for his short stories

ARISTIDE, by attaching himself to the Hotel du Soleil et de l'Ecosse as a kind of glorified courier, had founded the Agence Pujol. As he, personally, was the Agence and the Agence was he, it happened that when he was not in attendance at the hotel, the Agence faded into space; and when he made his appearance in the vestibule and hung up his placard by the bureau, the Agence at once burst again into the splendor of existence. Apparently this fitful career of the Agence Pujol lasted some years. Whenever a chance of more remunerative employment turned up, Aristide took it and dissolved the Agence. Whenever outrageous Fortune chivvied him with slings and arrows penniless to Paris, there was always the Agence waiting to be resuscitated.

It was during one of these periodic flourishings of the Agence Pujol that Aristide met the Ducksmiths.

Business was slack, few guests were at the hotel, and of those few none desired to be personally conducted to the Louvre or Notre Dame or the Statue of Liberty in the Place de la Bastille. They mostly wore the placid expression of folks engaged in business affairs instead of the worried look of pleasureseekers.

"My good Bocardon," said Aristide, lounging by the bureau and addressing his friend the manager, "this is becoming desperate. In another minute I shall take you out by main force and show the Tomb of Napoleon."

At that moment the door of the stuffy salon opened, and a traveling Briton, whom Aristide had not seen before, advanced to the bureau and inquired his way to the Madeleine. Aristide turned on him like a flash.

"Sir," said he, extracting documents from his pockets with lightning rapidity, "nothing would give me greater pleasure than to conduct you thither. My card. My tariff. My advertisement," pointing to the placard. "I am the managing director of the Agence Pujol under the special patronage of this hotel. I undertake all traveling arrangements— from the Moulin Rouge to the Pyramids, and, as you see, my charges are moderate."

The Briton holding the documents in a pudgy hand looked at the swift-gestured director with portentous solemnity. Then with equal solemnity he looked at Bocardon.

"Monsieur Ducksmith," said the latter, "you can repose every confidence in Monsieur Aristide Pujol."

"Humph!" said Mr. Ducksmith.

After another solemn inspection of Aristide. he stuck a pair of gold glasses midway on his fleshy nose and perused the documents. He was a fat, heavy man of about fifty years of age, and his scanty hair was turning gray. His puffy cheeks hung jowl-wise, giving him the appearance of some odd dog— a similarity greatly intensified by the eye sockets, the lower lids of which were dragged down in the middle, showing the red like a bloodhound's; but here the similarity ended, for the man's eyes, dull and blue, had the unspeculative fixity of a rabbit's. His mouth, small and weak, dribbled away at the corners into the jowls, which in their turn melted into two or three chins. He was decently dressed in gray tweeds, and wore a diamond ring on his little finger.

"Umph," said he at last, and went back to the salon.

As soon as the door closed behind him, Aristide sprang into an attitude of indignation.

"Did you ever see such a bear! If I ever saw a bigger one I would eat him without salt or pepper. *Mais nom d'un chien*, such people ought to be made into sausages!"

"*Flégme britannique*!" laughed Bocardon.

Half an hour passed and Mr. Ducksmith made no reappearance from the salon. In the forlorn hépe of a client Aristide went in after him. He found Mr. Ducksmith, glasses on nose, reading a newspaper, and a plump, black-haired lady with an expressionless face knitting-a gray woolen sock. Why they should be spending their first morning— and a crisp, sunny morning, too— in Paris in

the murky staleness of this awful little salon, Aristide was at a loss to conjecture. As he entered, Mr. Ducksmith regarded him vacantly over the top of his gold-rimmed glasses.

"I have looked in," said Aristide, with his ingratiating smile, "to see whether you are ready to go to the Madeleine."

"Madeleine?" the lady inquired softly, pausing in her knitting.

"Madame," Aristide came forward, and, hand on heart, made her the lowest of bows. "Madame, have I the honor of speaking to Madame Ducksmith? Enchanted, madame, to make your acquaintance," he contínted, after a grunt from Mr. Ducksmith had assured him of the correctness of his conjecture. "I am Monsieur Aristide Pujol, Director of the Agence Pujol, and my poor services are absolutely at your disposal."

He drew himself up, twisted his mustache, and met her eyes— they were rather sad and tired— with the roguish mockery of his own. She turned to her husband.

"Are you thinking of going to the Madeleine, Bartholomew?"

"I am, Henrietta," said he. "I have decided to do.it. And I have also decided to put ourselves in the charge of this gentleman. Mrs. Ducksmith and I are accustomed to all the conveniences of travel— I may say that we are great travelers, and I leave it to you to make the necessary arrangements. I prefer to travel at so much per head per day."

He spoke in a wheezy, solemn monotone from which all elements of life and joy seemed to have been eliminated. His wife's voice, though softer in timbre, was likewise devoid of color.

"My husband finds that it saves us from responsibilities," she remarked.

"And overcharges, and the necessity of learning foreign languages, which at our time of life would be difficult. During all our travels we have not been to Paris before, owing to the impossibility of finding a personally conducted tour of an adequate class."

"Then, my dear sir," cried Aristide, 'it is Providence itself that has put you in the way of the Agence Pujol. I will now conduct you to the Madeleine without the least discomfort or danger."

"Put on your hat, Henrietta,' said Mr. Ducksmith, "while this gentleman and I discuss terms."

Mrs. Ducksmith gathered up her knitting and retired, Aristide dashing to the door to open it for her. This gallantry surprised her ever so little, for a faint flush came into her cheek, and the shadow of a smile into her eyes.

"I wish you to understand, Mr. Pujol," said Mr. Ducksmith, "'that being, I may say, a comparatively rich man, I can afford to pay for certain luxuries; but I

made a resolution many years ago, which stood me in good stead during my business life, that I would never be cheated. You will find me liberal but just."

He was as good as his word. Aristide, who had never in his life exploited another's wealth to his own advantage, suggested certain terms, on the basis of so much per head per day, which Mr. Ducksmith declared with a sigh of relief to be perfectly satisfactory.

"Perhaps," said he, after further conversation, "'you will be good enough to schedule out a month's railway tour through France. and give me an inclusive estimate for the three of us. As I say, Mrs. Ducksmith and I are great travelers— we have been to Norway, to Egypt, to Morocco and the Canaries, to the Holy Land, to Rome, and lovely Lucerne— but we find that attention to the trivial detail of travel militates against our enjoyment."

"My dear sir," said Aristide, "trust in me and your path and that of the charming Mrs. Ducksmith will be strewn with roses."

Whereupon Mrs. Ducksmith appeared, arrayed for walking out, and Aristide having ordered a cab, drove with them to the Made-leine. They alighted in front of the majestic flight of steps. Mr. Ducksmith stared at the classical portico supported on its Corinthian columns with his rabbit-like, unspeculative gaze— he had those filmy blue eyes that never seem to wink— and after a moment or two, turned away.

"Humph," said he.

Mrs. Ducksmith, dutiful and silent, turned away also.

"This sacred edifice,' Aristide began in his best Cicerone manner, ''was built, after a classic model by the great Napoleon, as a Temple of Fame. It was afterwards used as a church. You will observe, and if you care to, you can count, as a conscientious American lady did last week, the fifty-six Corinthian columns— you will see they are Corinthian by the acanthus leaves on the capitals. For the vulgar, who have no architectural knowledge, I have *memoria technica* for the instant recognition of the three orders— cabbages, Corinthian; horns, Ionic ('orns, iornic— you see); anything else Doric. We will now mount the steps and inspect the interior."

He was dashing off in his eager fashion when Mr. Ducksmith laid a detaining hand on his arm.

"No," said he solemnly. "I disapprove of Popish interiors. Take us to the next place."

He entered the waiting victoria. His wife meekly followed.

"I suppose the Louvre is the next place," said Aristide.

"I leave it to you," said Mr. Ducksmith.

Aristide gave the order to the cabman and took the little seat in the cab facing his employers. On the way down the Rue Royale and the Rue de Rivoli

he pointed out the various buildings of interest, Maxim's, the Cercle Royal, the Ministére de la Marine, the Hotel Continental. Two expressionless faces, two pairs of unresponsive eyes met his merry glance. He might as well have pointed out the beauties of the New Jerusalem to a couple of guinea pigs.

The cab stopped at the entrance to the galleries of the Louvre. They entered and walked up the great staircase on the turn of which the Winged Victory stands, with the wind of God in her vesture, proclaiming to each beholder the deathless, ever soaring, ever conquering spirit of man, and heralding the immortal glories of the souls, wind-swept likewise by the wind of God, that are enshrined in the treasure houses beyond.

"There!" said Aristide.

"Umph! No head," said Mr. Ducksmith, passing it by with scarcely a glance.

"Would it cost very much to get a new one?" asked Mrs. Ducksmith timidly. She was three or four paces behind her spouse.

"It would cost the blood and tears and laughter of the human race," said Aristide.

("That was devilish good, wasn't it?' remarked Aristide, when telling me this story. He always took care not to hide his light under the least possibility of a bushel.)

The Ducksmiths looked at him in their lack-luster way and allowed themselves to be guided into the picture galleries, vaguely hearing Aristide's comments, scarcely glancing at the pictures and manifesting no sign of interest in anything whatever. From the Louvre they drove to Notre Dame, where the same thing happened. The venerable pile standing imperishable amid the vicissitudes of centuries (the phrase was Aristide's and he was very proud of it) stirred in their bosoms no perceptible emotion. Mr. Ducksmith grunted and declined to enter; Mrs. Ducksmith said nothing. As with pictures and cathedrals so it was with their food at lunch. Beyond a solemn statement to the effect that in their quality of practised travelers they made a point of eating the food and drinking the wine of the country, Mr. Ducksmith did not allude to the meal. At any rate, thought Aristide, they don't clamor for underdone chops and tea. So far they were human. Nor did they maintain an awful silence during the repast. On the contrary, Mr. Ducksmith loved to talk— in a dismal, pompous way— chiefly of British politics. His method of discourse was to place himself in the position of those in authority and to declare what he would do in any given circumstances. Now, unless the interlocutor adopts the same method and declares what he would do, conversation is apt to become one-sided. Aristide having no notion of a policy should he find himself exercising the functions of the Chancellor of the British Exchequer, cheerfully tried to change the ground of debate.

"What would you do, Mr. Ducksmith, if you were King of England?"

"I should try to rule the realm like a Christian statesman," replied Mr. Ducksmith.

"I should have a devil of a time," said Aristide.

"I beg your pardon?" said Mr. Ducksmith.

"I should have a— ah, I see— pardon— I should—" he looked from one paralyzing face to the other and threw out hisarms. "*Parbleu!*" said he, "I should decapitate your Mrs. Grundy and make it compulsory for bishops to dance once a week in Trafalgar Square. *Tiens*! I would have it a capital offense for any English cook to prepare hashed mutton without a license, and I would banish all the bakers of the kingdom to Siberia— ah! your English bread which you have to eat stale so as to avoid a horrible death!— and I would open two hundred thousand cafés— *mon Dieu*! how thirsty I have been there!— and I would make every English work-girl do her hair properly— and I would ordain that everybody should laugh three times a day under pain of imprisonment for life."

"I am afraid, Mr. Pujol," remarked Mr. Ducksmith seriously, "you would not be acting as a constitutional monarch. There is such a thing as the British Constitution which foreigners are bound to admire even though they may not understand."

"To be a king must be a great responsibility," said Mrs. Ducksmith.

"Madame," said Aristide, "you have uttered a profound truth." And to himself he murmured, though he should not have done so, '*Nom de Dieul Nom de Dieu de nom de Dieu*!' "

After lunch they drove to Versailles, which they inspected in the same apathetic fashion; then they returned to the hotel where they established themselves for the rest of the day in the airless salon, Mr. Ducksmith reading English newspapers and his wife knitting a gray woolen sock.

"*Mon vieux*," said Aristide to Bocardon, "they are people of a nightmare. They are automata endowed with the faculty of digestion. *Ce sont des gens invraisemblables*."

Paris providing them, apparently, with no entertainment, they started, after a couple of days, *Aristide duce et suspice Pujol*, on their railway tour through France, to Aristide an Odyssey of unimagined depression. They began with Chartres, continued with the Chateaux of the Loire, and began to work their way south. Nothing that Aristide could do roused them from their apathy. They were exasperatingly docile, made few complaints, got up, entrained, detrained, fed, excursionized, slept, just as they were bidden. But they looked at nothing, enjoyed nothing (save perhaps English newspapers and knitting) and uttered nothing by way of criticism or appreciation when Aristide

attempted to review the wonders through which they had passed. They did not care toknowthehistory, authentic or Pujolic, of any place they visited; they were impressed by no scene of grandeur, no corner of exquisite beauty. To go on and on, in a dull, non-sentient way, so long as they were spared all forethought, all trouble, all afterthought, seemed to be their ideal of travel. Sometimes Aristide, after a fruitless effort to capture their interest, would hold his head, wondering whether he, or the Ducksmith couple, was insane. It was a dragonfly personally conducting two moles through a rose garden.

Only once, during the early part of their journey, did a gleam of joyousness pierce the dull glaze of Mr. Ducksmith's eyes. He had procured from the bookstall of a station a pile of English newspapers and was reading them in the train, while his wife knitted the interminable sock. Suddenly he folded a *Daily Telegraph* and handed it over to Aristide so that he should see nothing but a half page advertisement. The great capitals leaped to Aristide's eyes:

DUCKSMITH'S DELICATE JAMS.

"I am the Ducksmith," said he. "I started and built up the business. When I found that I could retire, I turned it into a Limited Liability Company, and now I am free and rich and able to enjoy the advantages of foreign travel."

Mrs. Ducksmith started, dropped a stitch.

"Did you also make pickles?" asked Aristide.

"I did manufacture pickles, but I made my name in jam. In the trade you will find it an honored one."

"It is that in every nursery in Europe," Aristide declared with polite hyperbole.

"I have done my best to deserve my reputation," said Mr. Ducksmith, as impervious to flattery as to impressions of beauty.

"*Pecaire*!" said Aristide to himself, "how can I galvanize these corpses?"

As the soulless days went by, this problem grew to be Aristide's main solicitude. He felt strangled, choked, borne down by an intolerable weight. What could he do to stir their vitality? Should he fire off pistols behind them, just to see them jump? But would they jump? Would not Mr. Ducksmith merely turn his rabbit eyes set in their bloodhound sockets vacantly on him and assume that the detonations were part of the tour's program? Could he not fill him up with conflicting alcohols and see what inebriety would do for him? But Mr. Ducksmith declined insidious potations. He drank only at meal-time, and sparingly. Aristide prayed that some Thaïs might come along, cast her spell upon him and induce him to wink! He himself was powerless. His raciest stories fell on dull ears; none of his jokes called forth asmile. At last

having taken them to nearly all the historic Chateaux of Touraine, without eliciting one cry of admiration, he gave Mr. Ducksmith up in despair and devoted his attention to the lady.

Mrs. Ducksmith parted her smooth black hair in the middle and fastened it in a knob at the back of her head. Her clothes were good and new, but some desolate dressmaker had contrived to invest them with an air of hopeless dowdiness. At her bosom she wore a great brooch containing intertwined locks of a grandfather and grandmother long since defunct. Her mind was as drearily equipped as her person. She had a vague idea that they were traveling in France; but if Aristide had told her that it was Japan she would have meekly accepted the information. She had no opinions. Still she was a woman, and Aristide, firm in his conviction, that when it comes to love-making, all women are the same, proceeded forth with to make love to her.

"Madame," said he one morning— she was knitting in the vestibule of the Hôtel du Faisan at Tours, Mr. Ducksmith being engaged, as usual, in the salon with his newspapers— "how much more charming that beautiful gray dress would be if it had a spot of color."

His audacious hand placed a deep crimson rose against her corsage and he stood away at arm's length, his head on one side, judging the effect.

"Magnificent! If madame would only do me the honor to wear it."'

Mrs. Ducksmith took the flower hesitatingly.

"I'm afraid my husband does not like color," she said.

"He must be taught," cried Aristide. "You must teach him. I must teach him. Let us begin at once. Here is a pin."

He held the pin delicately between finger and thumb, and controlled her with his roguish eyes. She took the pin and fixed the rose to her dress.

"I don't know what Mr. Ducksmith will say?"

"What he ought to say, madame, is 'Bountiful Providence, I thank Thee for giving me such a beautiful wife.' "

Mrs. Ducksmith blushed and, to conceal her face, bent it over her resumed knitting. She made woman's time-honored response.

"I don't think you ought to say such things, Mr. Pujol."

"Ah, madame," said he, lowering his voice, "I have tried not to; but *que voulez-vous*, it was stronger than I. When I see you going about like a little gray mouse"— the lady weighed at least twelve stone— "you who ought to be ravishing the eyes of mankind, I feel indignation here"— he thumped his chest, "my Provençal heart is stirred. It is enough to make one weep."

"I don't quite understand you, Mr. Pujol," she said, dropping stitches recklessly.

"Ah, madame," he whispered— and the rascal's whisper on such occasions could be very seductive, "that I will never believe."

"I am too old to dress myself up in fine clothes," she murmured.

"That's an illusion," said he, with a wideflung gesture, "that will vanish at the first experiment."

Mr. Ducksmith emerged from the salon, *Daily Telegraph* in hand. Mrs. Ducksmith shot a timid glance at him and the knitting needles clicked together nervously. But the vacant eyes of the heavy man seemed no more to note the rose on her bosom than they noted any point of beauty in landscape or building.

Aristide went away chuckling, highly diverted by the success of his first effort. He had touched some hidden springs of feeling. Whatever might happen, at any rate, for the remainder of the tour, he would not have to spend his emotional force in vain attempts to knock sparks out of a jellyfish. He noticed with delight that at dinner that evening, Mrs. Ducksmith, still wearing the rose, had modified the rigid sweep of her hair from the mid-parting. It gave just a wavy hint of coquetry. He made her a little bow and whispered "Charming!" Whereupon she colored and dropped her eyes. And, during the meal, while Mr. Ducksmith discoursed on bounty-fed sugar, his wife and Aristide exchanged, across the table, the glances of conspirators. After dinner he approached her.

"Madame, may I have the privilege of showing you the moon of Touraine?"'

She laid down her knitting. "Batholomew, will you come out?"'

He looked at her over his glasses and shook his head.

"What is the good of looking at moonshine? The moon itself I have already seen."

So Aristide and Mrs. Ducksmith sat by themselves outside the hotel and he expounded to her the beauty of moonlight and its intoxicating effect on folks in love.

"Wouldn't you like," said he, "to be lying on that white burnished cloud with your beloved kissing your feet?"

"What odd things you think of."

"But wouldn't you?" he insinuated.

Her bosom heaved and swelled on a sigh. She watched the strip of silver for a while and then murmured a wistful "Yes."

"I can tell you of many odd things," said Aristide. "I can tell you how flowers sing and what color there is in the notes of birds. And how a cornfield laughs, and how the face of a woman who loves can outdazzle the sun. *Chére madame*," he went on after a pause, touching her little plump hand, "you have

been hungering for beauty and thirsting for sympathy all your life. Isn't that so?"

She nodded.

"You have always been misunderstood."

A tear fell. Our rascal saw the glistening drop with peculiar satisfaction. Poor Mrs. Ducksmith! It was a child's game. *Enfin*, what woman could resist him? He had, however, one transitory qualm of conscience, for with all his vagaries, Aristide was a kindly and honest man. Was it right to disturb those placid depths? Was it right to fill this woman with romantic aspirations that could never be gratified? He himself had not the slightest intention of playing Lothario and of wrecking the peace of the Ducksmith household. The realization of the saintlike purity of his aims reassured him. When he wanted to make love to a woman *pour tout de bon*, it would not be to Mrs. Ducksmith.

"Bah!" said he to himself, "I am doing a noble and disinterested act. I am restoring sight to the blind. I am giving life to one in a state of suspended animation. *Tron de l'Air*! I am playing the part of a soul reviver! And, *parbleu*, it isn't Jean or Jacques that can do that. It takes an Aristide Pujol."

So, having persuaded himself, in his southern way, that he was executing an almost divine mission, he continued with a zest, now sharpened by an approving conscience, to revive Mrs. Ducksmith's soul.

The poor lady who had suffered the blighting influence of Mr. Ducksmith for twenty years with never a ray of counteracting warmth from the outside, expanded like a flower to the sun under the soul-reviving process. Day by day she exhibited some fresh, timid coquetry in dress and manner. Gradually she began to respond to Aristide's suggestions of beauty in natural scenery and exquisite building. On the ramparts of Angouléme, daintiest of towns in France, she gazed at the smiling valleys of the Charente and the Son stretching away below, and of her own accord touched his arm lightly and said: '' How beautiful!" She appealed to her husband.

"Umph!"' said he.

Once more (it had become a habit) she exchanged glances with Aristide. He drew her a little farther along under pretext of pointing out the dreamy sweep of the Charente.

"If he appreciates nothing at all, why on earth does he travel?"'

Her eyelids fluttered upward for a fraction of a second.

"It's his mania," she said. "He can never rest at home. He must always be going on, on."

"How can you endure it?" he asked.

She sighed. "It is better now that you can teach me how to look at things."

"Good!" thought Aristide. "When I leave them she can teach him to look at things and revive his soul. Truly I deserve a halo."

As Mr. Ducksmith appeared to be entirely unperceptive of his wife's spiritual expansion, Aristide grew bolder in his apostolate. He complimented Mrs. Ducksmith to his face. He presented her daily with flowers. He scarcely waited for the heavy man's back to be turned to make love to her. If she did not believe that she was the most beautiful, the most ravishing, the most delicate-souled woman in the world, it was through no fault of Aristide. Mr. Ducksmith went his pompous, unseeing way. At every stopping place stacks of English daily papers awaited him. Sometimes, while Aristide was showing them the sights of a town, to which, by the way, he insisted on being conducted, he would extract a newspaper from his pocket and read with dull and dogged stupidity. Once Aristide caught him reading the advertisements for cooks and housemaids. In these circumstances Mrs. Ducksmith spiritually expanded at an alarming rate; and in an inverse ratio dwindled the progress of Mr. Ducksmith's sock.

They arrived at Périgueux, in Périgord, land of truffles, one morning, in time for linch. Toward the end of the meal the *maitre d'hôtel* helped them to great slabs of *paté de foie gras*, made in the house— most of the hotelkeepers in Périgord make *paté de foie gras* both for home consumption and for exportation— and waited expectant of their appreciation. He was not disappointed. Mr. Ducksmith, after a hesitating glance at the first mouthful swallowed it, greedily devoured his slab, and, after pointing to his empty plate, said solemnly:

"*Plou*."

Like Oliver he asked for more.

"*Tiens*!" thought Aristide, astounded, ''is he too developing a soul?"

But, alas! there were no signs of it when they went their dreary round of the town in the usual ramshackle open cab. The cathedral of Saint-Front extolled by Aristide and restored by Abadie— a terrible fellow who has capped with tops of pepper castors every pre-Gothic building in France— gave him no thrill; nor did the picturesque, tumble-down ancient buildings on the bank of the Dordogne, nor the delicate Renaissance facades in the cool narrow Rue du Lys.

"We will now go back to the hotel," said he.

"But have we seen it all?" asked Mrs. Ducksmith.

"By no means," said Aristide.

"We will go back to the hotel," repeated her husband in his expressionless tones. "I have seen enough of Périgueux."

This was final. They drove back to the hotel. Mr. Ducksmith, without a word, went straight into the salon, leaving Aristide and his wife standing in the vestibule.

"And you, madame," said Aristide, "are you going to sacrifice the glory of God's sunshine to the manufacture of woolen socks?"

She smiled— she had caught the trick at last— and said in happy submission, " What would you have me do?"

With one hand he clasped her arm; with the other, in a superb gesture, he indicated the sunlit world outside.

"Let us drain together," cried he, "the loveliness of Périgueux to its dregs!"

Greatly daring, she followed him. It was a rapturous escapade— the first adventure of her life. She turned her comely face to him, and he saw smiles round her lips and laughter in her eyes. Aristide, worker of . miracles, strutted by her side chokeful of vanity. They wandered through the picturesque streets of the old town with the gaiety of truant children, peeping through iron gateways into old courtyards, venturing their heads into the murk of black stairways, talking (on the part of Aristide) with mothers nursing chuckling babes on their doorsteps, crossing the thresholds, hitherto taboo, of churches and meeting the mystery of colored glass and shadows and the heavy smell of incense.

Her hand was on his arm when they entered the flagged courtyard of an ancient palace, a stately medley of the centuries, with wrought ironwork in the balconies, tourelles, oriels, exquisite Renaissance ornaments on architraves, and a great central Gothic doorway, with great window openings above, through which was visible the stone staircase of honor leading to the upper floors. In a corner stood a mediaeval well, the sides curiously carved. One side of the courtyard blazed in sunshine, the other lay cool and gray in shadow. Not a human form or voice troubled the serenity of the spot. On a stone bench against the shady wall Aristide and Mrs. Ducksmith sat down to rest.

"*Voila*," said Aristide. "Here one can suck in all the past like an omelette. They had the feeling for beauty, those old fellows."

"I have wasted twenty years of my life," said Mrs. Ducksmith with a sigh. "Why didn't I meet some one like you when I was young? Ah! you don't know what my life has been, Mr. Pujol."

"Why not Aristide, when we are alone? Why not, Henriette?"

He too had the sense of adventure, and his eyes were more than usually compelling and his voice more seductive. For some reason or other undivined by Aristide, overexcitement of nerves, perhaps, she burst into tears.

"Henrietie! Henriette, *ne pleurez pas*."

His arm crept round her, he knew not how; her head sank on his shoulder, she knew not why— faithlessness to her lord was as far from her thoughts as murder or arson, but for one poor little moment in a lifetime it is good to weep on some one's shoulder and to have some one's sympathetic arm around one's waist.

"*Pauvre petite femme*— and is it love she is pining for?"

She sobbed; he lifted her chin with his free hand— and what less could moral apostle do?— he kissed her on her wet cheek.

A bellow like that of an angry bull caused them to start asunder. They looked up, and there was Mr. Ducksmith within a few yards of them, his face aflame— his rabbits' eyes on fire with rage. He advanced, shook his fists in their faces.

"I've caught you. At last, after twenty years, I've caught you."

"Monsieur," cried Aristide starting up, "allow me to explain."

He swept Aristide aside like an intercepting willow branch and poured forth a torrent of furious speech upon his wife.

"I have hated you for twenty years. Day by day I have hated you more. I've watched you, watched you, watched you. But, you sly jade, you've been too clever for me till now... yes! I followed you from the hotel. I dogged you. I foresaw what would happen.... Now the end has come.... I've hated you for twenty years— ever since you first betrayed me "

Mrs. Ducksmith, who had sat with overwhelmed head in her hands started bolt upright, and looked at him like one thunderstruck.

"I betrayed you?" she gasped in bewilderment. "When? How? What do you mean?"

He laughed— for the first time since Aristide had known him— but it was a ghastly laugh that made the jowls of his cheeks spread horridly to his ears, and again he flooded the calm, stately courtyard with the raging violence of words. The veneer of easy life fell from him. He became the low-born, petty tradesman, using the language of the hands of his jam factory.... No, he had never told her. He had awaited his chance. Now he had found it. He called her names....

Aristide interposed, his Southern being athrob with the insults heaped upon the woman.

"Say that again, monsieur," he shouted, "and I will take you up in my arms like a sheep and throw you down that well."

The two men glared at each other, Aristide standing bent, with crooked fingers, ready to spring at the other's throat. The woman threw herself between them. "For Heaven's sake," she cried. 'Listen to me. I have done no wrong. I have done no wrong now— I never did you wrong. I swear I didn't."

Mr. Ducksmith laughed again, and his laugh re-echoed round the quiet walls and up the vast staircase of honor.

"You'd be a fool not to say it. But now I've done with you. Here, you, sir. Take her away— do what you like with her— I'll divorce her. I'll give you a thousand pounds never to see her again."

"*Goujat*! Triple *goujat*!" cried Aristide, more incensed than ever at this final insult.

Mrs. Ducksmith, deadly white, swayed sideways, and Aristide caught her in his arms and dragged her to the stone bench. The fat, heavy man looked at them for a second, laughed again and sped through the portecochére. Mrs. Ducksmith quickly recovered from her fainting attack and gently pushed the solicitous Aristide away.

"Merciful Heaven!" she murmured, "what is to become of me?"

The last person to answer the question was Aristide. For the first time in his adventurous life resource failed him. He stared at the woman for whom he cared not the snap of a finger and who, he knew, cared not the snap of a finger for him, aghast at the havoc he had wrought. If he had set out to arouse emotion in these two sluggish breasts he had done so with a vengeance. He had thought he wasamusing himself with a toy cannon and he had fired a charge of dynamite.

He questioned her almost stupidly— for a man in the comic mask does not readily attune himself to tragedy. She answered with the desolate frankness of a lost soul. And then the whole meaning— or the lack of meaning— of their inanimate lives wes revealed to him. Absolute estrangement had followed the birth of their child nearly twenty years ago. The child had died after a few weeks. Since then he saw— and the generous blood of his heart froze as the vision came to him— that the vulgar, half-sentient, rabbit-eyed bloodhound of a man had nursed an unexpressed, dull, undying, implacable resentment against the woman. It did not matter that the man's suspicion was vain— to Aristide the woman's blank amazement at the preposterous charge was proof enough; to the man the thing was real. For nearly twenty years, the man had suffered the cancer to eat away his vitals— and he had watched and watched his blameless wife until, now, at last, he had caught her in this folly. No wonder he could not rest at home; no wonder he was driven Io-wise, on and on, although he hated travel and all its discomforts, knew no word of a foreign language, knew no scrap of history, had no sense of beauty, was utterly ignorant, as every single one of our expensively state-educated English lower classes is, of everything that matters on God's earth; no wonder that, in the unfamiliarity of foreign lands, feeling as helpless as a ballet-dancer in a cavalry charge, he looked to Cook or Lunn or the Agence Pujol to carry him through his

uninspired pilgrimage. For twenty years he had shown no sign of joy or sorrow or anger, scarcely even of pleasure or annoyance. A tortoise could not have been more unemotional. The unsuspected volcano had slumbered. To-day came disastrous eruption. And what was a mere laughing, crying child of a man like Aristide Pujol in front of a Ducksmith volcano?

"What is to become of me?" wailed Mrs. Ducksmith again.

"*Ma-foi*!" said Aristide, with a shrug of his shoulders, "what's going to become of anyone? Who can foretell what will happen in a minute's time? *Tiens*!" he added, kindly laying his hand on the sobbing woman's shoulder, "be comforted, my poor Henriette. Just as nothing in this world is as good as we hope, so nothing is as bad as we fear. *Voyons*. All is not lost yet. We must return to the hotel."

She weepingly acquiesced. They walked through the quiet streets like children whose truancy had been discovered and who were creeping back to condign punishment at school. When they reached the hotel, Mrs. Ducksmith went straight up to the woman's haven, her bedroom.

Aristide tugged at his Vandyck beard in dire perplexity. The situation was too pregnant with tragedy for him to run away and leave the pair to deal with it as best they could. But what was he to do? He sat down in the vestibule and tried to think. The landlord, an unstoppable gramophone of garrulity, entering by the street door and bearing down upon him, put him to flight. He too sought his bedroom, a cool apartment with a balcony outside the French window. On this balcony, which stretched along the whole range of first-floor bedrooms, he stood for a while, pondering deeply. Then in an absent way he overstepped the limit of his own room frontage; a queer sound startled him; he paused, glanced through the open window, and there he saw a sight which for the moment paralyzed him.

Recovering command of his muscles, he tip-toed his way back. He remembered now that the three rooms adjoined; next to his was Mr. Ducksmith's, and then came Mrs. Ducksmith's. It was Mr. Ducksmith whom he had seen.

Suddenly his dark face became luminous with laughter; his eyes glowed, he threw his hat in the air and danced with glee about the room. Having thus worked off the first intoxication of his idea, he flung his few articles of attire and toilet necessaries into his bag, strapped it, and darted, in his dragon-fly way, into the corridor and tapped softly at Mrs. Ducksmith's door. She opened it, a poor dumpy Niobe, all tears. He put his finger to his lips.

"Madame," he whispered, bringing to bear on her all the mocking magnetism of his eyes, "if you value your happiness you will do exactly what I

tell you. You will obey me implicitly. You must not ask questions. Pack your trunks at once. In ten minutes' time the porter will come for them.''

She looked at him with a scared face. "But what am I going to do?"

"You are going to revenge yourself on your husband."

"But I don't want to," she replied piteously.

"I do," said he. "Begin, *chére madame*, every moment is precious."

In a state of stupefied terror the poor woman obeyed him. He saw her start seriously on her task and then went downstairs where he held a violent and gesticulatory conversation with the landlord and with a man in a green baize apron summoned from some dim lair of the hotel. After that he lighted a cigarette and smoked feverishly, walking up and down the pavement. In ten minutes' time his luggage and that of Mrs. Ducksmith was placed upon the cab. Mrs. Ducksmith appeared trembling and tear-stained in the vestibule.

The man in the green baize apron knocked at Mr. Ducksmith's door and entered the room.

"I have come for the baggage of Monsieur," said he.

"Baggage? What baggage?" asked Mr. Ducksmith, sitting up.

"I have descended the baggage of Monsieur Pujol," said the porter in his stumbling English, "and of madame, and put them in a cab, and I naturally thought monsieur was going away too."

"Going away!" He rubbed his eyes, glared at the porter, and dashed into his wife's room. It was empty. He dashed into Aristide's room. It was empty too. With a roar like that of a wounded elephant he rushed downstairs, the man in the green baize apron following at his heels.

Not a soul was in the vestibule. No cab was at the door. Mr. Ducksmith turned upon his stupefied satellite.

"Where are they?"

"They must have gone already. I filled the cab. Perhaps Monsieur Pujol and madame have gone before to make arrangements."'

"Where have they gone to?"

"In Périgueux there is nowhere to go to with baggage but the railway station."

A decrepit vehicle with a gaudy linen canopy hove in sight. Mr. Ducksmith hailed it as the last victims of the Flood must have hailed the Ark. He sprang into it and drove to the station.

There, in the *salle d'attente* he found Aristide mounting guard over his wife's luggage. He hurled his immense bulk at his betrayer.

"You blackguard! Where is my wife?"

"Monsieur," said Aristide, puffing a cigarette, sublimely impudent and debonair, "I decline to answer any questions. Your wife is no longer your wife.

You offered me a thousand pounds to take her away. I am taking her away. I did not deign to disturb you for such a trifle as a thousand pounds, but since you are here—"

He smiled engagingly and held out his curved palm. Mr. Ducksmith foamed at the corners of the small mouth that disappeared into the bloodhound jowl.

"My wife," he shouted, "if you don't want me to throw you down and trample on you."

A band of loungers, railway officials, peasants and other travelers awaiting their trains, gathered round. As the altercation was conducted in English which they did not understand, they could only hope for the commencement of physical hostilities.

"My dear sir,"' said Aristide, "I do not understand you. For twenty years you hold an innocent and virtuous woman under an infamous suspicion. She meets a sympathetic soul, and you come across her pouring into his ear the love and despair of a lifetime. You have more suspicion. You tell me you will give me a thousand pounds to go away with her. I take you at your word. And now you want to stamp on me—wma foi, it is not reasonable."

Mr. Ducksmith seized him by the lapels of his coat. A gasp of expectation went round the crowd. But Aristide recognized an agonized appeal in the eyes now bloodshot.

"My wife," he said hoarsely. "I want my wife. I can't live without her. Give her back to me. Where is she?"

"You had better search the station," said Aristide.

The heavy man unconsciously shook him in his powerful grasp as a child might shake a doll.

"Give her to me. Give her to me, I say. She won't regret it."

"You swear that?" asked Aristide, with

lightning quickness.

"I swear it. Where is she?"

Aristide disengaged himself, waved his hand airily toward Périgueux and smiled blandly.

"In the salon of the hotel, waiting for you to throw yourself on your knees before her."

Mr. Ducksmith gripped him by the arm.

"Come back with me. If you're lying, I'll kill you."

"The luggage?" queried Aristide.

"Damn the luggage!" said Mr. Ducksmith, and dragged him out of the station.

A cab brought them quickly to the hotel. Mr. Ducksmith bolted like an obese rabbit into the salon. A few moments afterwards, Aristide, entering, found them locked in each other's arms.

They started alone for England that night, and Aristide returned to the directorship of the Agence Pujol. But he took upon himself enormous credit for having worked a miracle.

"One thing I can't understand," said I, after he had told me the story with his wealth of gesture and picturesque phrase which] have not ventured to reproduce, ''is what put this sham elopement into your crazy head. What did you see when you looked into Mr. Ducksmith's bedroom?"

"Ah, *mon vieux,* I did not tell you. If I had told you, you would not have been surprised at what I did. I saw a sight that would have melted the heart of a stone. I saw Ducksmith wallowing on his bed and sobbing as if his heart would break. It filled my soul with pity. I said: 'If that mountain of insensibility can weep and sob in such agony, it is because he loves— and it is I, Aristide Pujol, who have reawakened that love.'"

"Then," said I, "why on earth didn't you go and fetch Mrs. Ducksmith and leave them together?"

He started from his chair and threw up both hands.

"*Mon Dieu*!" cried he, "you English! You are a charming people, but you have no romance. You have no dramatic sense, I will help myself to a whiskey and soda."

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7: The Haunted Rajah

Bertram Atkey

1889-1953

Blue Book, March 1929

A tale of the "Easy Street Experts"

THE HONORABLE John Brass leaned back in his chair at a dining-table in his favorite corner of the Medieval Hall of the Astoritz Hotel and surveyed the top half of his rather grim-looking partner, Colonel Clumber, with an expression of good-humored but critical reproach on his large, red, full-fed face.

"It is not for me to pull your clothes to pieces, Squire," he said. "But at the same time, I'm bound to admit that your dress suit is a pretty frightful sight to see. It's not so much that it's green with old age, or that it's about as fashionable as the cartwheel collars they used to wear in the days of Queen Elizabeth— anybody could overlook that in a gentleman; but the thing doesn't fit you, man. It never has and it never will— not while you go to those ungodly tailors of yours! No."

He sipped his wine— if one cared to call the solid pull he took at it sipping— and squared himself heavily back into his own new and undeniably well-cut coat.

"Cut!" he went on inexorably. '"Cut's the thing. Like this suit of mine. That get-up you're wearing— speaking as one old friend to another, as old friends can— is doing my reputation no good. To tell you the honest truth, it's high time you spent a few pounds at a first-class tailor's— not that I care for my own sake so much as for yours—"

The Colonel drew in a glass of champagne like one inhaling it rather than drinking it. He set down the fragile glass like a man regardless of destruction, and, his face empurpled with what he evidently considered just anger, rather dangerously screwed his thick-pillared neck about in an effort to see how his coat fitted at the collar and shoulders.

"This suit—" he began. "Why, you insulting— hey, look here! I'll tell you something! Never mind about my clothes! Never mind. What you need to mind about is the insulting way you're getting into of criticizing your best friends— that's it! You're gradually getting to be so much in love with yourself that—"

HE broke off abruptly with the air of an infuriated grizzly sullenly retreating pro tem, as a very large, excessively black gentleman in extremely smart evening raiment came up and hung over their table like a total eclipse.

"How do you do yourselves att present period, I trust, sars— haha!"' said this inky arrival, in the species of English which is used without mercy by many of the bettereducated denizens of India's coral strand.

The partners in picaresque adventure, their friendly if slightly snarlsome differences instantly forgotten, looked up with the keen and welcoming interest which they were ever ready to extend to one whom past experience had always proved the herald of one of those financially happy coups of which the two adventurers were highly skilled executants.

The somber-hued but toothsomely smiling newcomer was, of course, their old friend Mirza Khan, confidential body servant and highly trained go-there and comeback boomerang of His Highness the Rajah of Jolapore, that plutocratic potentate who long ago had made the highly pleasing discovery that by the simple process of spending nine months of each year in London and Paris, he could rule his teeming millions of dusky subjects far more satisfactorily than by baking for eleven months out of the twelve in one or other of his red-hot palaces , in Jolapore.

"Why, it's Mirza! Bless my soul— and his, if he's got one— it's Mirza Khan!" said Mr. Brass, and signed imperatively to the attentive tip-chaser in charge of their table to place a chair for the funereal-complexioned old-timer. "Well, well— Mirza Khan! D'ye notice him, Squire— it's Mirza!"

Even the dour Colonel Clumber beamed — a little morosely, maybe, but still with a sort of gloomy radiance, on the genial scoundrel now seating himself next to them.

"Very happy coincidence, meeting you here, Mirza,"' he muttered.

But the smooth Mirza, smiling with the genuine affection of the left jaw of a gintrap for the right jaw, denied that.

"Oah, noa, sars," he stated. 'Noa coincidence, I assure you. Calling att your flatt thee person of saffron hue, Sing, told me thatt I should find you here eating and drinking."'

He shrugged.

"Noa champagne, sar!" he replied to the Honorable John's hospitable gesture with the air of one who has bathed ad nauseam in that attractive if expensive fluid. "I will partake of plain wiskisoda in double quantity."

HIS poison duly set before him, and the greetings being complete, Mirza Khan proceeded to explain himself and to justify his sudden swoop on the partners.

It was in reply to a rather avid question from Mr. Brass that he told them, with every symptom of a man most anxiously uttering the stark-naked truth, that his master, the Rajah, had been in England staying at Shaveacre Castle— which he had rented for the shooting season— for the past month.

The Rajah had come on from Paris with all his suite except Mirza, who had been too unwell to accompany the Royal party.

"Fact of matter being trouble withinside, sars," explained Mirza. 'Extremelee good chef in Paris. Yess. Soa veree good that I suffered from grave attack off disability digestive apparatus to accommodate visual estimate off victuals. Thatt is to say in good old Anglo-Saxon fashion 'eyes too big for belly!'— haha! Soa thee doctors operated on me same day as His Highness left for England, taking as bodyservant onlee thee creeping cobra off grass, crocodile off ghat, thee French vulture, Santoin!"

Mr. Brass laughed.

"You never liked Santoin, did you, Mirza?" he asked.

"Noa, sar!" Mirza was vehement.

"Well, what's he been doing this time?" continued the old wise-osopher, pushing his plate— his empty plate— away with the air of a man who has no further use for food.

"Ahaa! Thatt is precise reason off thiss visit upon you, sars!" exclaimed Mirza. "I will partake further wiskisoda and explain thatt!"

He partook, and having partaken, explained in such detail that by the time dinner was over, the pair of sharp-set old adventurers were looking so extremely businesslike and grim that the waiter hardly dared to present his truly formidable little bill— though, with an effort, he just managed to do it, as waiters, stout fellows, will.

IT appeared that His Highness, the Rajah of Jolapore, had started in life with the firmly fixed conviction that he was one of those mortals whom Nature had intended to be happy; one of those joyous souls who only wished to get the best out of life and to be left alone to enjoy the best of everything in his own way. He did not wish to interfere with anybody else, and he did not wish anybody to interfere with him or try to meddle and stop him from having precisely what he wanted exactly when he wanted it.

For some fifty years he had run himself through life according to these naively greedy notions— entirely to his own satisfaction. He had spent millions in pursuit of the things he felt he needed, and on the whole, had not been swindled much more than could be reasonably expected. Moreover this simple child of nature would have been entirely content to continue— to go on as he had started, so to express it. But, explained the fat and smiling Mirza Khan,

certain difficulties had arisen. A bad nervous breakdown from which he had not yet completely recovered, for example. And on the heels of this, an even more serious trouble. For some considerable time past, the Rajah's ancestors had been appearing unto him, at awkward midnight moments, in the somewhat disconcerting form of phantoms. And they had, moreover, developed a truly affrighting habit of talking to him out of the air, so that he never felt certain that the spirit voice of his grandfather would not huskily break in upon his slumbers or maybe his conversation with a friend.

"That's a thundering nasty thing to happen to any man, Mirza, let me tell you," exclaimed Mr. Brass with warm sympathy. "Seeing visions and hearing voices! You mean he's getting hallucinations after his nervous breakdown, hey? That's bad!"

Mirza's face was graver than a graven image's as he nodded over another partaking of wiskisoda.

"Yess, sars, by Jove! Veree bad!" he said. "Speaking as fellow who has studied question to hand, I beg to assure hearty concurrence. The matter off ancestors bobbing up att totally inconvenient moments is question off veree serious nature to Moslem gentleman of rank, fashion and bad nerves."

He explained with a certain grim earnestness how much more seriously than a white man an Oriental would take such unusual and intrusive manifestations.

"Thee educated white man veree naturally would feel entitled to say to spirit, 'Get out— damn' impudence— call again later!' or words off thatt character. But Oriental gentleman would take matter much more seriouslee— oah, yess indeed! There are great quantities superstition running freely to waste, don't you know, in my country," said Mirza. "And phantasms of ancestors who issue instructions to present surviving members off family are not to be ignored lightlee! Noa! We high-born Indian noblemen are ignorant chappies in some aspects, oah, decidedlee yess!"

He spoke sincerely, even if his English was rather crippled in both feet.

"Well, maybe, Mirza. But what is the trouble? What are these spirit grandfathers and folk commanding the Rajah to do?" demanded the Honorable John, not particularly caring, however.

MERZA looked graver than ever.

"To abdicate his throne! To abandon forever thee luxuries of thee world, thee sins off thee flesh, thee vain things off life, to renounce, in peremptoree fashion, all thee vanities. Thatt iss to say, to throw all behind him, to take onlee begging-bowl and blanket and to goa forth from his palaces to live as simple holy man for the rest off his whole life. That iss sometimes done in India as

matter of personal conviction," explained Mirza quickly. "Not soa often as formerly— but sometimes, oah, yess, by all means. A great man, rich, proud, mighty, decides to become poorest off poor. There is noa question off why and wherefore, sars. I cannot explain. It is done— sometimes. There is great story in English literature off such case— written, oah, jollee well, by great master, Mr. Kipling."

Mirza Khan drew breath and wiskisoda simultaneously, as he eyed the partners.

"Well, what of it?" said the Colonel heavily. 'I don't suppose the Rajah's going to take any notice of these trunk-calls from the Never-never, is he? A man like him aint going to allow the phantom of his grandfather to upset the whole of his arrangements, is he?"

Mirza shrugged.

"Impossible to explain exact point off view, I see, sar," he said. "His Highness is gentleman of great courage— but owing to Oriental difference off code, off psychology and soa forth, he is in grave danger off reluctantly obeying behests of ancestral ghosts!"

"What's that, Mirza?" Mr. Brass, startled, broke in. "Are you trying to tell us that His Highness is liable to do as his spirits tell him— although he doesn't want to— and certainly, isn't cut out for a mendicant holy man? D'ye expect us as men of the world to believe that the Rajah— one of the most dashing sportsmen, for his age, I ever came across— is liable to do such a thing as abdicate because his old grandfather revisits him to say so?"

Mirza Khan's glossy face was glum, and his voice agitated as he replied most urgently:

"I do, sars. It iss matter off absolute certaintee that within short period of few weeks His Highness will be phantasmally frightened into this act of supreme sacrifice unless successful intervention is executed promptly by competent gentlemen qualified to give entire satisfaction, yours faithfully, yess sar!"

The Honorable John thrust out a thickish, rather brilliantly red lower lip, then drew it tightly in again so that his mouth looked like a species of weasel trap.

"Um!" he said. "Umm! Shall have to see what can be done about this! We've got the Rajah out of difficulty before— no doubt it can be managed again! Must look into it, Mirza. Better come along to our flat and have a talk— discuss things— look into the matter— see what there is in it— um— so to put it."

They rose.

THREE days later Messrs. Brass and Clumber were installed as members of His Highness the Rajah of Jolapore's shooting party at Shaveacre Castle— the country seat of the Marquis of Muckhampton, who, advised in no uncertain terms by his advisers to regard himself as a certain starter for the Autumn Bankruptcy Stakes, had decided that he could not profitably continue to sit in his country-seat when a Rajah so rich as His Highness of Jolapore wished to sit in it instead.

It was a moderately motley houseful of guests that the smooth Mr. Brass and his partner encountered, and all seemed to be enjoying themselves except the Rajah, who in the three years which had flitted by since the partners had last seen him, had aged and fattened and dulled. He was pleased, he said, to see them again; and his tired eyes, over the heavy pouches left by half a century of the life luxurious as lived by a gayety-loving, novelty-seeking, enormously rich prince of sunny Ind, lighted up with a momentary flash of pleasure as he greeted them. There had been occasions in the past when they had really been of great service to him.

"Not the man he was, Colonel," said the Honorable John to his partner when they were alone. "No. His nerves have got into a very poor state. His health aint what it was. And he's uneasy— in fact, he looks scared to me. He never was a man easily scared, either. Mirza's right— there's something or somebody, ghosts or devils or just plain crooks, that are working hard on him some way or other. He begins to talk and look like a man who don't care much what happens, anyway. And that's not healthy. We shall have to keep our eyes open and our éars set like sails while we're here!"

Two days of the eye and ear work advocated by the old expert produced quite a little crop of results— the said crop being greatly enriched by certain discoveries of the Honorable John's yellow valet the Chinaman Sing, who went gliding in his silent, ghostlike way about the castle at all hours of the day and night, making full use of a knowledge of locks so profound that ordinary keys had long since been superfluous to this saffron seeker after knowledge.

The fat and anxious Mirza Khan had helped considerably also, though he had had troubles of his own to deal with. He explained these one day after lunch.

"During my temporary absence from customary duty off personal attendance on His Highness due to recent grave illness withinside, sars, thee cadaverous snake off grass, creeping snipe off Paris gutters, thee man Santoin, had wormed his way into His Highness' good books and committed many. libels to royal master concerning self. But have now succeeded in reéstablishing self in former exalted position in His Highness' regard and have pleasure in stating that thee situation is att finger-tips. Yess!"

The burly Mirza grinned.

"His Highness is great gentleman, sars. He suffers misunderstanding att periods, butt always in the end he relies on own bodyservant, self, that is to say, more than the French valet, the creeping creature Santoin, who is veree poor quality person!"

"Sure, sure," said Mr. Brass, who was well aware of the bitter jealousy, the almost bloodthirsty enmity, between Mirza and Santoin. 'Now pass the whisky and tell me everything you've discovered. How're the ghosts getting on?"

Mirza looked glum.

"Ancestors have not visited personally for some days but have been extremelee vocal. He has heard at night urgent voices out off air belonging to his father's father, and to thee first ranee— who was adored wife of His Highness twenty years ago— and who died one year after marriage. He has never forgotten her— never loved subsequent wives in same degree. Noa! I wish in strongest fashion to say to you, sars, thatt it has been shock of veree desperate nature to royal master when he lies sleepless at hour off midnight, with self silent as mouse at post in alcove, to hear most lovely voice off long-dead queen issue from air saying, 'Arise now, beloved, cast off panoply of king, shake dust of palaces from feet, turn back on vain things, take begging-bowl, staff and beggar's robe, go forth to spend declining years in meditation, in search for thee true knowledge, wisdom and Perfect Way. For thee dear soul's sake!' Oah, yess, misters, I tell you it is jollee disconcerting to hear dead beloved's voice at midnight imploring such remarkable performance," insisted Mirza uneasily, and dropped his voice.

"It is difficult mystery. There is private detective in castle specially engaged figuring as guest— he is Captain Clanister— but he seems unable to solve puzzle—"

MR BRASS nodded his heavy head, scowling at his glass.

"Yes, yes, we know about him. But get back to the voices, Mirza. This beloved— the ranee who died so long ago— have you heard her speak?"

Mirza Khan's hard eyes were uneasier than ever as he said that he had.

"Yess sar."

"Did you recognize the voice as that of the dead queen? How about the accent— the dialect— was it right? Was it correct in every detail? Would you swear this spirit voice is the voice of that dead queen? You knew her— back in the old days, I mean?"

Mirza understood.

"Yess sar, I knew her— I was in her high favor for personal devotion and service to Rajah!" he said. 'And as she spoke in old days soa she speaks now—

even to thee little personal peculiarities such as all persons have in speaking— I heard them again in thee air last night. Oah, it is undeniablee her voice!"

"Humph!" grunted Mr. Brass. "*You* evidently believe it is."

He sat thinking for a long time, scowling absently at Mirza and the Colonel. He was evidently coming to an important, even vital conclusion.

"Pass the whisky," he said finally. "I see we shall need clear heads for this affair."

He took a stiffish head-clearer and began to ask Mirza a string of questions about Jolapore, continuing the cross-examination so long that Colonel Clumber, without troubling to stifle a dark and cavernous yawn, was moved to protest. "Well, I like music," he said with heavy sarcasm. "And there's no doubt that you've got a very pretty voice— of its kind. But now I'll be leaving Mirza to do the rest of the listening. I've got an appointment to play golf with that attractive niece of old Colonel Standrishe this afternoon."

Mr. Brass stared.

"So do," he said stiffly. "I hardly expected you'd be able to catch the. drift of my questions, Colonel. But later on I'll put the thing in simple words and get in a blackboard and a bit of chalk so that I can draw a few diagrams to help you understand."

He laughed, quite restored to good humor by this crushing, if ancient, repartee.

"Ha ha, sar— that is flea in ear in witty fashion," laughed Mirza, who was always charmed with the partners' frequent exchange of heavy-handed badinage.

"Wit!" echoed the Colonel. "That's not wit— it's jealousy because Beryl Standrishe prefers me as a golf partner!" he explained curtly, and left.....

It was perhaps half an hour later when the door opened on the haze of smoke in the Honorable John's room to admit Sing, the lemon-tinted lad from far Cathay.

It appeared Sing had discovered something which he desired to show his owner. True, it was in the bedroom of the wellpaid private detective, Captain Clanister, but the Captain was out. So they went to investigate Sing's discoveries.

IT was late on the following evening that the Honorable John was quietly introduced into the large and elaborate suite of the Rajah by Mirza Khan for an interview which was to be both private and delicate.

Mr. Brass and the Rajah had met several times before during the day, but by no means in circumstances which rendered a heart-to-heart talk a matter of facile arrangement. They had, for example, exchanged smiles at a corner of the

Four-hundred-acre Wood, where the house-party was assembled, heavily armed, with the fixed intention of dealing fairly and squarely with every one of the highly expensive pheasants inhabiting said wood which inadvisedly came within reach. And they had, as it were, recognized each other distantly at dinner— again an occasion when Mr. Brass felt he could not tactfully baw] his most private convictions half the length of a gorgeous table to the host at its head.

The Rajah, whose confidence in the avid loyalty of Mirza Khan had evidently been completely restored, was awaiting Mr. Brass, together with a bottle or two of those matters which history proves to be highly effective lubricants of difficult dis-cussions, It was in his big dressing-room— and his dressing-gown— that he received the genial old adventurer....

"Mirza Khan insists most turbulently that you have information of grave importance to impart to me, my dear Mr. Brass," said His Highness in the suave, pleasant, civilized manner that characterized him when he was in a good temper. "Wont you sit down and— have a chat with me?"

He turned to Mirza.

"Lock the door and pour wine," he advised that dusky vulture peremptorily.

The Honorable John smiled.

"That's a sound idea— locking the door, I mean— nine times out of ten, Your Highness. But this is one of the tenth times. What we're dealing with goes through locked doors as easily as unlocked, wide open ones."

The Rajah's eyes glowed faintly. "You think so, Mr. Brass?"

"No, Your Highness; I know it." He took the foaming glass which the hovering Mirza proffered him and encountered the Rajah's friendly eyes over the pair of rims.

THE RAJAH set down his glass; Mirza refilled it and vanished.

"They tell me you have something of vital interest to say to me," he said, his deep, dark eyes burning. "I do not know whether that is true; for by God, Brass, I never know whether my servants tell me truth or lies."

The Honorable John waved a large, pacifying hand.

"Well, Your Highness can judge— though Ill admit that I can't call to mind anybody who was willing to pay me enough to make it worth my while to tell more lies than necessary. Hard work, lying, Your Highness. Still—"

He took from a gold casket, and carefully lit, a cigar. He thought for a few moments,

"Yes," he said presently, "this is a magnificent cigar, Your Highness."

Then, rather abruptly, he went on: "Speaking as a man who has a genuine anxiety to see you continue to enjoy health, happiness and prosperity, I'll say

frankly that I don't see how Your Highness can very well expect to gain much by entering on a style of living from which wine and horses and congenial feminine companionship and— er— so on— are all cut out. Cut completely out. You've been used to these things all your life— they're second nature to you. To me, personally the thing's unthinkable," he added, warming up, as usual, at the sound of his own cheery voice. "I'd do it for no man, Rajah! And I've known what it is to rough it in my time, whereas you—"

He broke off. "You'd prefer me to be frank, Your Highness?"

"Oh, certainly— speak as one man to another."

"I was going to," said Mr. Brass comfortably. "Well, now, suppose you do this desperate thing you've been egged on to do. Last night I read up that story by Rudyard Kipling about the Indian Prime Minister, Purun Dass. And a damned good story it is, and the part of holy man fitted Mr. Dass like a fork fits a knife. But I don't see you in the part of a wandering holy man whose only property consists of a skin or a blanket, a staff, and a begging bowl, which peasants will fill— maybe— for your dinner. What will you get, anyway— a little rice, a few little cakes, a bit of *ghi* or native butter, maybe a touch of rancid fish occasionally, and now and then a bit of sweet preserve— not so sweet at that— and for the rest, fruit and nuts. Fruit and nuts, begad, Rajah! Good enough things in their way, fruits and nuts, as accessories to a real meal, but no more than that, Rajah! No sir— no, Your Highness, the food question alone has got your idea beaten from the start. Lack of proper food, good wine and real tobacco would undermine your physical system in a month — and lack of good clean clothes, of real exciting sport, of riding, and of the tender influence of the ladies, would give you another breakdown in a week— and your good spirits would be—"

"Good spirits! Bah!" growled the Rajah. "Man, I have not been in good spirits for months!"

MR. BRASS smiled. "I know. That's why I'm here. I'm going to make it my business to get you smiling again."

The Rajah's eyes glowed.

"If you can do that, Brass, I will make you a rich man — but you cannot. Unless," he added, with a species of nervous fury, "you can deal with the supernatural!"

The Honorable John chuckled.

"That will be all right," he promised.

"You are confident," said the Rajah, "with the confidence of ignorance."

He brooded for a moment. Then he said:

"Listen!"

In the low, urgent voice of one who is badly nerve-ridden, he told Mr. Brass the story of the ancestral apparitions and voices. Mr. Brass had heard it all before— but it sounded much more convincing from the Rajah than from Mirza Khan. The old adventurer was a little shocked at the evident sincerity of the Rajah's belief in the manifestations of his long dead but still enterprising grandfather— and his first wife.

He smoked quietly and let the Rajah run down.

"—so you see, Brass, that while I dread the notion of becoming a wandering holy man— I dread even more to continue disobeying these— behests. What am I to do?"

He drained a glass of champagne.

"Do? I'll tell you, Rajah, presently. Meantime, tell *me* something. Who is your heir— the formal, official heir, recognized by the British Government?"

"My eldest son, born of my second wife, the Prince Bahadur Bhil, hah!"

RATHER intently the Honorable John sat watching the Rajah.

"Um! His Highness the Prince Bahadur Bill! Do you get on pretty well together?" he pursued.

The Rajah snapped a thumb and finger.

"When I abdicate, Brass, Bahadur Bhil will step into my shoes smiling," he said. "And if I proffered him my empty mendicant's bowl on the next day, he would probably decline to fill it. My son— by my second chief wife! Doubtless he means well— but he was the son of the wrong wife! Bah!"

"I see," said Mr. Brass musingly. "It's a pity that you feel that you have to hand him a ready-made throne— still warm, so to put it. However—" He shrugged and took a little champagne. Not more than the glass would hold, of course.

He resumed his quiet questions for the next half-hour, at the end of which time the Rajah wearied. The Honorable John sensed that before the Rajah showed it, and rose.

"Well, so it goes, Your Highness. We shall see." He moved through into the next room and indicated a bell-push lying on a table by the Rajah's bedside.

"I took the liberty of having this installed today," he said. "It probably won't be needed, but if you hear any voices or see any ghosts tonight, Rajah, will you do me the favor of pressing this bell the instant they begin to utter or to appear? Don't worry— just ring, Rajah, just touch the button. The old man is on the lookout tonight and his brains were never brighter!"

The Rajah promised.

IT was just as the clocks about the place were striking two that the French valet of the Rajah, Monsieur Santoin, issued forth from the apartment occupied by that ancient Colonel who called himself, probably without any right to do so, "Sir George Standrishe," and smilingly catfooted his way down the corridor in the direction of the Rajah's suite.

After a long day of hard shooting, eating and drinking, the house-party had retired comparatively early, and the castle was silent as a deserted church. M. Santoin glanced about him as he went, but his glances were perfunctory and careless, like those of a man absolutely confident that no eye followed him 'on his nocturnal perambulations.

He came to an alcove just outside the door of the Rajah's bedreom and looked in with some interest and no admiration upon the figure of the faithful servant of His Highness, Mirza Khan, as usual on guard while his master slumbered.

He was, of course, sound asleep in his comfortable chair. His mouth was unprettily open and his big arms were lying loosely along the arms of the chair, the great hands dangling over the ends. Ona table near the chair was a coffee-set, with the cup empty.

Mirza Khan was extraordinarily still— so still that he did not seem to be breathing at all.

The pallid smile of Monsieur Santoin faded suddenly and a certain sharp anxiety appeared in his eyes. He stepped forward and bent low, sniffing at the empty coffeecup. an fraction of a second later Mirza's two black hands were gripped about his scrawny neck, and even as he gasped at the shock, his own hands were clenched from behind by another pair, small, cool, but disconcertingly sinewy and powerful.

"Silence, snake off grass," said Mirza very softly, and rose, keeping his hands closely associated with M. Santoin's neck. "Come with us, if you please."

SANTOIN perceived that the person in charge of his hands was Sing, and he found no more comfort in the face of the yellow man than in that of the black Mirza.

So he went with them— to the apartment of Mr. Brass, where, comfortably occupying big easy-chairs, the partners were awaiting them. Upon the refreshmenttable between them, there lay, in addition to refreshment, a couple of the biggest and ugliest revolvers Santoin had ever seen in his life. They were so big that one might have hammered horseshoes out of cold iron with them. And though Santoin did not know it, that was about all they were fit for. Messrs. Brass,and Clumber were not in the habit of using arms except

for their moral influence, and these bulging bits of artillery had been borrowed temporarily out of the castle gun-room. °

The look of sheer ferocity with which the Honorable John received his unwilling visitor would have been worth quite a few dollars to any film-producer.

"So you've brought him, you boys! That's good," he said. "Hold him, Sing, but don't break his arm with any ju-jitsu tricks— at least, not till I say so. I'll let you know presently."

M. Santoin paled noticeably at the implacable ferocity which tinged the Honorable John's voice.

Then the old rascal rose, seemed to inflate himself and looming over Santoin like an impending avalanche, held converse with him in this manner:

"Now, you traitorous fox, 'm going to ask you some questions. You'll answer 'em or I'll put you through not the third degree but the thirty-third! Try to trick me and it were better for you that you hung a millstone round your neck, passed through the eye of a needle and ran down a steep place into the sea— like that fellow in 'The Pilgrim's Process' or some such title. Mark you that, my lad!"

EVIDENTLY Santoin marked it, for he proceeded to betray his associates with a fluent and easy technique in the art of betrayal that could only have been the result of very much practice.

"Tonight you and your friends figure that you'll supernaturally persuade the Rajah finally to frighten himself into abdicating, hey?"

"Yes sir!" twittered Santoin.

"Then you'd cable Bill— Prince Bahadur Bill— to send on your money, and you'll split it and hook it in various directions, hey?"

"Yes sir."

"What was the job going to be worth to you all?"

Santoin hesitated.

"Come-on, the truth, you hyena!" said Mr. Brass tensely.

Still Santoin hesitated.

"Break his arm, Sing," said Mr. Brass coolly.

"No, no— *pas du tout*!" observed Santoin hastily. "The recompense was to be two hundred thousand pounds!"

"Hey!" Mr. Brass was startled at the amount— for a moment only. Then he smiled blandly— tlike a large bear that has just found a bee's nest overflowing with honey.

"Write it off as a total loss, Santoin," he said. 'And tell me— Clanister is one of you, aint he?"

"But certainly," said Monsieur Santoin.

The Honorable John glanced at the clock. 'When do they start?"

"At half-past two."

Mr. Brass asked one or two more questions, then said, "Good! That's all for the present." He beamed. "Tie him up, Sing. Legs, hands, arms and mouth. Pass the whisky, Squire..... Your good health, Mirza."

TEN minutes later a very silent but extremely formidable procession of four persons of various hues, including well-fed red, dark black and pale egg-yolk yellow, issued forth from the Honorable John's bedroom and headed, in complete silence, down the corridor— Mr. Brass, Colonel Clumber, Mirza Khan and Sing, all armed to the point of hideousness.

They stopped first at the room occupied by M. Santoin's notion of a private detective, Captain Clanister. The Honorable John tapped lightly on the door. Somebody inside coughed hackingly but briefly. Mr. Brass opened the well-oiled door and entered.

Captain Clanister, in his shirt-sleeves raised his sleek head from an instrument of highly electrical appearance on a table before him— and his jaw fell at sight of the gaping muzzles of the personal artillery of his callers.

"No need to explain, Captain," said Mr. Brass with quiet ferocity. "If you move, you'll be shot from north, south, east and west! Point those clever hooks up to the second floor— quick!"

The Captain conceded the point with considerable speed.

"Good. Tie him up, Sing, my lad! Arms, hands, legs and mouth— as the fashion is tonight."

Five minutes later, leaving a plain bundle where they had found a smart young fellow, they were tapping discreetly at the deor of that aristocratic old gentleman Colonel Sir George Standrishe.

But it was a vastly different-seeming old gentleman who faced them as they entered in response to his low cough. Colonel Standrishe, save for a certain snakishness in his ancient eyes, was an admirable specimen of the old soldier who has spent most of his life in India— quite a handsome old fellow, in fact.

BUT the person who faced the Brass battery now was very unlike old Colonel Standrishe. Indeed, he looked much more like an old, old Moslem rajah— so much more, that Mirza Khan uttered an exclamation of amazement tinged with superstitious terror.

"Don't start anything rough, Colonel Standrishe," suggested Mr. Brass. "Bones at your age are brittle, you old scoundrel."

The man was so staggered that he made no resistance at all to the attentions of Sing. Carefully, and not too roughly, the Chinaman corded him up.

Mr. Brass looked at him curiously.

"Yes. He's done it well. He certainly looks like something that has escaped from a thirty years' occupation of a vault. He's got a gray kind of look. I suppose a ghost would have that. Is he really like the Rajah's father, Mirza?"

There was no mistaking the sincerity in Mirza Khan's voice as he replied:

"Sar, it is appalling resemblance. At first glance, heart stood still in mouth! I am brave man,— in favorable circumstances,— but confess hair erected self on head att sight off gentleman in question. Own personal eyes advised brain, 'Here iss spirit of old Rajah arisen again!' Common-sense stated otherwise— haha! Iff Colonel appeared in present fashion to me at middle off night, I confess should state privately to self, 'Here is perfectly genuine phantom of old master,' and should crawl! under bed. Oah, yess... Veree nasty cunning old gentleman, thiss man, sars."'

"Humph! Well, he's safe enough now, at any rate," said Mr. Brass. "And now for the lady."

Because, like the others, she was expecting Santoin's signal, she proved no more difficult to capture than her confederates.

She was standing at her dressing-table, and she no longer looked like the smart, up-to-date little Miss Beryl Standrishe who was so popular among the shooting-party at the Castle. Instead, she looked exactly like the young and lovely little Queen of Jolapore she was about to impersonate— that never-forgotten little ranee who had been the Rajah's first wife and the only woman he had really loved.

"Oah!" said Mirza Khan, as the passionless Sing tied her up like the others. "Oah, there is something moast painful in this matter. She iss soa exactlee like little royal lady I served in past years!"

He stared at the woman.

"Oah, I am what you call veree sentimental— but she brings back to me all my youth, and thee brave old days in Jolapore!" he cried. "My little royal mistress whom I served veree faithfully— dead so many years ago and thee gallant youth of His Highness and thee honorable youth off Mirza Khan dead with her. Oah, I am ashamed man—"

A harsh voice cut into Mirza's dream like a hot knife into cold butter.

"Well, what are you going to do about it, Mirza?" demanded Mr. Brass. 'The past was fine— devil a doubt of it— it always was. But we're dealing with the present— hey? It's time to go to the Rajah and explain."

And that is what he and Mirza did— leaving Colonel Clumber and Sing to collect the prisoners into one bunch ready to parade before the Rajah.

THIS adventure, the Honorable John always maintained, had probably the oddest finish of any one of his many adventures. For he and Mirza, hastening to the Rajah's bedroom, found him wide awake, yet strangely unable to move hand or foot. Santoin had contrived to see to it that he should be drugged by some subtle, evil and obscure drug that, for a little space, could rigidly enlock his muscular system into a paralysis so deadly that it deprived him of the power to move but yet did not affect his mentality.

A superstitious, nerve-ridden man under the influence of such a drug could gaze upon apparitions in the dim light of his bedroom, believe them to be real, and finding himself unable to move, consider himself the victim of their influence while they were present.

He could lie there and hear their voics when they were not present— but, even if he were in a condition to suspect trickery, he could not rise to prove it.

That, thanks to the sinister talents of Monsieur Santoin, of the man Clanister, and of Beryl and Colonel Standrishe, was what had happened. Heavily bribed by that far-off prince Bahadur Bhil, the quartet had almost succeeded in scaring the most superstitious ruler in India off the throne which Bahadur Bhil would occupy. The immense revenues of Jolapore would have made it almost ludicrously cheap at two hundred thousand pounds.

MR. BRASS paraded his captives before the motionless man on the royal bed.

For a long time, a very long time, his hot eyes surveyed them in silence, clinging chiefly to the impersonation of the dead queen.

Presently he spoke: "The voices I heard in the darkness were yours. The figures I have seen appear in the night were yours. If your speech had been incorrect,— your vernacular faulty,— I should have known. If your dress had been wrong in any particular, I should have seen that. Yet, I saw nothing. How does it happen that you, Colonel Standrishe, are so familiar with the speech and dress of my dead grandfather— and you, Miss Standrishe, with the voice and little gestures, mannerisms, and favorite dresses of— my wife?"

He could not move as he asked his questions. Neither Colonel Standrishe nor his niece would speak. Clever and dangerous crooks, they clung to the refuge of stubborn silence.

It was Mirza Khan who explained— or rather, began to explain, for the Rajah guessed an instant after Mirza began.

"In the old days, Your Highness, this man Standrishe was given post as master of horse under His Highness your father's father. His name then was Cartrall. I was young then but I remember veree well—"

"Enough, Mirza Khan. Now I too remember." The Rajah's eyes glowed.

"He could speak our tongue like one of us. And he knew us. He had trained the woman, as he only of all the English could train her, to be like my wife and to appear to me as the spirit of the ranee! Bahadur Bhil has bribed them to play upon my— superstition. Very good. There is no more to say. The other man— Clanister— is—"

"Oh, just a superior mechanic to arrange the voices by means of some telephonic device from his room to yours, Rajah!" explained Mr. Brass.

"And Santoin—"

"Iss merelee ordinary traitor— snake off thee grass, Highness,"' put in Mirza Khan.

"Exactly," said the motionless prince, and thought for five long, rather tense seconds.

Then he spoke:

"It is well for you— ghouls, soulless were-wolves that you are— that you do not stand before me in my palace at Jolapore, for I would have my elephants tear you to red rags, stamp you into the dust under their feet till you were less than the dust they trod!"

His eyes gleamed like jewels, on the woman— then dimmed.

"Or, it may be, because in spite of your evil intent, you have enabled me to recapture for a few moments an echo of the past — to hug a mirage to my heart— I might have spared you, vultures as you are!"

His eyes turned to Mr. Brass— and his head moved. The strength of the drug was dying. "Hai!" said the Rajah. "Mirza Khan! Send by the cable to the man of whom we speak in this land as Oyoub— this message — 'The jewel is false and wholly without value,"

Mirza started, stared.

"Your Highness—" he stammered.

"Send it, Mirza Khan!"

The Rajah writhed— sat up.

"And these! What am I to do with these canaille, Mr. Brass?"

The Honorable John's genial laugh came like the sound of a roller breaking on the beach— steady, balanced, sane, unchanging.

"Why, Rajah, in this country we usually throw them out. But as one's a lady and the other is an old man, we shouldn't be out-of-the-way rough about it!"

"No?" said the Rajah. "Very well. Let them go back to their rooms. In the morning let them be fed, then taken to the railway station and left there to do as they desire."

"Including thee man Santoin, Your Highness?" demanded Mirza.

"Naturally, Mirza Khan," said the Rajah. So they cleared the room.

But Mr. Brass, his partner and Mirza Khan returned by request— for the Rajah had something to say. He made it short. "All my life, my friends," he said to the partners, "I have roweled myself with the spur of superstition. That spur was of base metal and it has now rusted away."

He drew from a gold box before him a great carved diamond— a colossal thing that blazed and burned with a hundred darting, prismatic fires under the electric light.

"This is the thing we have called the Fortunate Eye of the Kingdom through centuries of superstition, Brass. I am no longer superstitious, and therefore I have no longer 'any desire to keep a symbol, an emblem of superstition. Intrinsically— in spite of the carving— it must be worth fifty thousand pounds! Take it!"

"Thank you," said Mr. Brass, taking it.

IT was later that the old adventurer observed to Mirza Khan: "I hope this good-looking stone is not the jewel the Rajah spoke of in that cable as worthless, Hey?"

Mirza shook his head, but for once he did not smile.

"No sar," he whispered. "This jewel is worth to each of us partakers possible twentee thousand pounds each, gentleman. But jewel mentioned in cable was subtle method of referring to the Prince Bahadur Bhil!"

"Bill!" echoed Mr. Brass.

"Yess sars. Result of that cable will be serious for that royal gentleman. Within space of four days he will be victim of fatal accident. Matter off politics and secret treachery. Also well-deserved fate!"

But the Honorable John and his partner only smiled, evidently believing Mirza Khan to be quite wrong about that.

In a way they were right about Mirza being wrong.

It was five days later— not four, as Mirza had prophesied— that the newspapers announced briefly that the Prince Bahadur Bhil of Jolapore had been killed in the course of a tiger-hunt on foot— a practice against which he had frequently been warned by his best friends, including his father the Rajah.

It was startling news— but not startling enough to interrupt certain successful negotiations which Mr. Brass was then conducting with a famous diamond-buyer. For the Honorable John was ever a man of balance— one, so to put it, who would always be able to look Justice square in the eyes without quailing.

8: The Indestructible Lady

Bertram Atkey

Blue Book, Feb 1930

Another tale of the "Easy Street Experts"

"NEVER, as long as you live to encumber this green earth, can you hope to be a golfer!" said the Honorable John Brass heavily to his partner, Colonel Clumber. "No— never! The way you hit at that ball was a disgrace to the League of Nations! They ought to have Total Prohibition, for a golfer like you! Ha-ha! Here, let me show you how you heaved your great carcass at that ball! No wonder you hit it off the map— in the totally wrong direction! Buffaloes could do no more— camels could do no less; but a human being should act a trifle superior to the brute creation."

Mr. Brass leaned smilingly against his brassie and let his lower jaw swing thus with its accustomed facility.

"You're four down now, Squire," he resumed, "and four down you will always be unless you pull yourself together and clear your ideas up a little. This is a game of knack and skill, not a trial of brute force. You're not hammering spikes in the road— you're playing a game—"

Colonel Clumber completed the process of inhaling an amount of air equivalent to that which he had lost in the explosion to which he had given terrific utterance on making the rotten shot which Mr. Brass was so freely criticizing.

"Listen," he then said. "I want no more of your valuable advice— no more of it! You play your game, and J'll play my game. When I feel I've got something to learn from you about golf I'l] let you know. I'll stop the game and request you to deliver a small lecture on golf, you poor old twenty-four handicap, grave-digging, mole-frightening, grass-cutting, bunker-wrecking specialist! Four up! You are four up, are you? I don't know of a single thing that strikes me as being of less consequence than you being four up on me—"

"There's no need," interrupted Mr. Brass stiffly, "to be rude over a game of golf that you're losing! If you are the sort of player that doesn't care to take advantage of the friendly interest of a player like myself in your game— why, you aren't. That's all. But you're wrong, Squire. Some time you'll see it for yourself. There's no need to be rude and hot and angry with a good friend who asks nothing better than to be allowed to put you right about the science of the thing. I'm not a professional— I don't charge you anything for my advice— it's free—"

"I pay you what it's worth— nothing!" shouted the Colonel, apparently maddened at his partner's cool assumption of such colossal superiority.

"Well, well, don't holler about it— you are getting folks looking at you. Here's one old lady already tearing over to see what's wrong!"

The Colonel glanced over to see an old lady hurrying toward them, evincing every conceivable symptom of joining in the conversation. He suggested his present notion of an ideal health resort for all interfering old ladies, sullenly dropped a ball and resumed the battle with singular ferocity.

Then the partners strode with true golfing gloom down the course.

WHEN he reached his ball, Mr. Brass paused before addressing it to piauce back at the old lady.

She had not followed them far, and now was just disappearing along the trees bordering the links with her arm in that of a tall girl in a brown-and-orange jumper.

His caddie followed his look.

"That's only the old lady who lives in the red house you can just see at the twelfth, sir," he volunteered. '"She's childish, sir."

"Ah, is she so, my lad? Humph! There are times when I wish I was childish myself. Just give me that mashie," he said, one keen eye on Colonel Clumber not far distant.

He lost that hole in spite of his partner's lack of science, knack and skill— as he did the next— and the next.

Consequently, he was in but a dourish and fumesome mood when a little later, at the twelfth hole, he was approached by the girl who had led the old lady away.

"I am so sorry that my mother interrupted your game," she said, smiling upon the Honorable John. "Did she bother you — talking? She is very fond of talking to people— strangers— she meets on the golflinks."

The Honorable John's quick, rather hard eyes played over her— without much interest at first, for he was absorbed in his game. But, quickly enough, a new interest appeared in his expression, for he realized at once that she was an extremely handsome woman in a tall, athletic sort of way. She was obviously no longer a chicken (as Mr. Brass mentally expressed it) and she looked to be a woman of no little experience, worldly wisdom, and understanding. "Too much, in fact!" thought the Honorable John as he beamed on her, and began to explain that the old lady had not bothered them at all. A far less astute adventurer than Mr. Brass would have noticed the look of undisguised relief which gleamed for a moment in the bold dark eyes of the woman.

Then she smiled, said that she was glad, wished them a pleasant game and turned away, taking out a cigarette-case as she strolled toward the little red house just visible among the trees.

The Colonel looked after her approvingly.

"A fine woman, that," he asserted. "Big, strong, healthy specimen of womanhood— just about my style."

But Mr. Brass, for once, did not set out to prove that she was really much more his "style" than the Colonel's. On the contrary, his gaze was thoughtful as he stood watching her go.

"Maybe, maybe she's your style, Squire," he said. "But something tells me that if you picked her out for a wife, she'd liven up your ideas before you'd been married long! She's hard, that young lady is— iron could be no harder, if I am any judge. There's something about her I don't much fancy. I admit it was very polite of her to come over ready to apologize for her ma, and so on, but— was it necessary?"

But the Colonel only laughed.

"I guess when a girl like her sees a man like me on these quiet country links playing a fine bold overhauling game of golf like I am, now I've run into my true form — you're only one up now— she's got a right to come over and try to scrape an acquaintance with me on any excuse!"

He chuckled, charmed with the idea and even more with the look on his partner's face.

"I've got an idea I shall see more of that young lady before this little holiday is over," he declared, vaingloriously. "Stand back— it's my honor."

Mr. Brass stood back in an unusually submissive, almost absent-minded way. They drove in silence, and trudged on down the course— the Honorable John to the rough on the right, Colonel Clumber to the rough on the left.

"Did you say that old lady was childish, boy?" Mr. Brass demanded of his caddie.

"Yessir. So folks say," replied the youth, "Hum! What's their name?"

"Duxtable, sir. The old lady is the young lady's ma-in-law, sir."

"Oh, that's it, is it, my lad? They all live together in that red house, do they? What sort of a man is Mr. Duxtable? Good golfer, I suppose?"

The small caddie shook his head.

"I don't know, sir. He aint living at home. He lives in some foreign part, so they says about here. The only gentleman young Mrs. Duxtable plays golf with is Mr. Huntingdale, a gentleman who paints pictures about here, sir."

"Oh, is that it? Well, well— just give me that niblick, my boy, and break off that bit of bush growing over my ball."

MR. BRASS was thoughtful throughout the remainder of the game— so thoughtful that it must have interfered with his "knack and skill," for the Colonel beat him by four up.

But Mr. Brass was oddly and most unusually unperturbed about this. He only smiled a little wryly as, walking back to the hotel, the Colonel began to give him some unasked-for advice about his mashie shots.

"You used your mashie as if you thought you were holding a Dutch hoe, man," said the Colonel in his uncharming way.

"Yes, I know," agreed Mr. Brass. "I was thinking. I've got Mrs. Duxtable on my mind."

"Mrs. Duxtable! And who the dickens might Mrs. Duxtable be?"

"That young married woman you think is so much your particular style," explained Mr. Brass. "I am none too well satisfied about her and her mother!"

"That will worry them an awful lot," said the Colonel satirically. 'What have they done except be polite to you? Asa matter of fact, the girl was out-of-the-way nice."

"Yes, I know," admitted Mr. Brass. "That's what I'm wondering about! I'm not much of a man for the girls— but at the same time I never knew a girl to be outof-the-way nice except for some out-ofthe-way reason."

He glanced at his watch as they stepped onto the veranda of the comfortable little hotel near the links— a quiet, tranquil little course in the heart of the New Forest, known only to the comparatively few golfers who are willing to take a good deal of trouble to find a place where good golf can be obtained with good cookery.

"Lunch in fifteen minutes," said Mr. Brass. 'Meantime, we'd better have something to tide us over till then. Personally, I'm all parcked up."

When, a minute or so later, the unparching process was in full swing, the observant old rascal returned to the question of young Mrs. Duxtable.

"It's a very small, delicate point, Squire, and few men would notice it— if I hadn't the eye of a hawk and a very quick brain behind it I don't mind admitting it would have escaped even my notice— but there was no real reason for that young woman to come over to us in that way. Her ma hadn't interfered— she never came within range. We were well away and well on with our game when the daughter came up to the old lady. Well, now, she said with her mouth that she hoped her ma hadn't bothered us— but with her eyes she said something else. She was anxious— worried— and when we said the old lady hadn't butted in at all, she was relieved. Why? She was afraid her mother had said something— told us something— she shouldn't have done. And that was why she came over— to find out if that was so!"

Mr. Brass beamed on his partner.

"See, Colonel?"

But the Colonel snorted derisively.

"No, I don't," he said. "I don't see that at all. I think you're fancying things. That young woman was a very considerate, ladylike, attractive party. I liked her and I'm going to ask her to dine here with me one of these evenings. I think you've got hold of a mare's tail— a mare's nest— and if you don't look out, you'll find it'll turn on you and fasten its teeth in the slack of your plus-fours in no half-hearted fashion!"

But Mr. Brass only smiled blandly..

"I knew a bit of fine reasoning like that would get past you, Squire," he said composedly, finishing his *aperitif*. And he led the way to lunch.

UNLIKE the Colonel, Mr. Brass cut his after-lunch *siesta* short. It was midway between two and three o'clock when he woke with a start that made the big basket-chair on the veranda groan. He waited a few seconds, then lit a cigar, gazed at his sleeping partner, and strolled away, round to the garage at the back of the hotel.

He found Sing, his Chinese valet, cook, chauffeur and general all-round workingmachine, concentrating with three other chauffeurs on what appeared to be a form of bitter self-torture performed with ordinary playing-cards, and called fan-tan.

The old adventurer grinned genially from behind his cigar at the quartet.

"So, while your bosses are breaking their hearts out on the links you lads sit here wringing out your souls this way, hey? Well, well, vive le sport, as they say in France," he said. "But I'll have to rob the company of one of its decorations for an hour or two. Just play out this hand, however. I'll watch."

He meandered round the players, glancing at each hand, and halted finally behind an elderly grizzled chauffeur.

"I have got a half-crown which says my friend here will wipe up the floor with all present, bar myself, this deal."

Sing looked up showing his teeth in a parsimonious Chinese smile.

"You bettee half-clown, Master, please? Velly well— I bettee half-clown, please, me winning, Master!"

"You're on, Sing— but you'll win yourself about as much as an old maid's mistletoe wins her!"

Grimly the hand was played.

Mr. Brass was really an observant man, but he failed rather signally to observe just exactly how his yellow retainer won that hand. Yet win he did, apparently without effort.

MB: BRASS stared fixedly at him, then at the cards, then back at Sing.

"You've won!" he said, with a touch of incredulity in his fruity voice.

"Yes, Master, please," agreed Sing.

"But, damme, man, that was impossible!" roared the Honorable John.

"That's what I'm always a-telling him, sir,' said the grizzled chauffeur, sourly. "I ought to have won that lot, sir, as you seen for yourself. He's always scraping out like that, sir. I'm glad he's got to go on duty, sir— he's injurious!"

"He is that," agreed Mr. Brass heartily; and he paid Sing his half-crown and led him kindly but firmly away.

"You want to remember that those chaps have probably got wives and families to support, my lad! I didn't like the way you cleared up that hand. I'll have to take you on that fan-tan game myself one of these days," he threatened.

Half an hour later, the Chink was lost in a very different game from garage fantan. To be exact, he was rather deftly prying open a small window at the back of the lonely little cottage— not far from the red house— rented by Mr. Huntingdale the artist, who, according to the Honorable John's caddie, was such good friends with young Mrs. Duxtable.

Acting on his employer's instructions, Sing had waited under cover of the trees until he had seen Mr. Huntingdale come out from his cottage with a golf-bag slung over his shoulder, carefully lock the cottage door, and stroll off toward the red house.

A few minutes later Mr. Brass carefully concealing his portly figure behind a huge beech not far from the front door of the red house, saw young Mrs. Duxtable emerge therefrom and seat herself on a deck chair. He noticed that she locked the door behind her.

AS she sat smoking, evidently waiting for some one, another person came round, evidently from the back of the house. If the Honorable John Brass had been a party easily thrilled it is possible that he would have encountered quite a thrillsome little jar at sight of this newcomer— for he was unprepossessing to a degree. Short and shambling, squat and square, with legs so bowed that he could have ridden beerbarrels in absolute comfort, and with arms so extravagantly long that he could almost have scratched his ankles without stooping, the creature was a startling contrast to the attractive lady. He was lean and dark and leathery about the features and face; his eyes were small and set extraordinarily deep under craggy brows, and his jaw protruded about twice as far as any normal jaw. And it needed shaving— just as the man's hair needed cutting.

This he-being shambled up to Mrs. Duxtable's chair and spoke so softly that Mr. Brass could not hear his voice. But he heard quite clearly the sharp, clear reply of the woman.

"No, certainly not. Wait till we come back from golf. Then you can go for an hour or two. Meanwhile, get the car ready; Mr. Huntingdale and I will be leaving for London after tea. And this time don't forget to fill up with petrol."

The shambling man, evidently a sort of general handy-man, touched his beetling brow and shuffled round to the back of the house, just as a tall, powerfully built young man in plus-fours sauntered up— a good-looking person in a hardish sort of way.

"Mr. Huntingdale, for a dollar!" said Mr. Brass to himself, shamelessly watching the couple embrace with the air of people to whom an embrace was no novelty, though still a pleasure.

"Ha! Now what would young Mr. Duxtable have to say about that, I wonder?" mused the old eavesdropper. 'Absence makes the heart grow fonder'— of some one present! Hey?"

He watched the couple pick up their golf-bags and stroll off toward the links.

"Allow nothing to interfere with their golf, evidently," said the Honorable John. He waited a few moments, then moved forward to the front of the house.

HE went very silently, for he had no desire to disturb the un-pretty gentleman at the back. Mr. Brass was distinctly a good judge of men— even abnormal men — and he was tolerably sure that the long ape-like arms hanging from that big barrel-like chest were about as strong as those of a medium he-gorilla in good health and excellent training.

It was instinct— developed by a good deal, of dangerous experience— rather than knowledge which convinced the smooth old rascal that there was something queer about this place. .

It was not that the old lady was said to be a little "childish"— for many quite charming old ladies are that; it was not that the retainer or serving-man looked like a cross between a chimpanzee and a plain-faced prize-fighter— lots of retainers look very little more attractive; it was not that young Mrs. Duxtable kissed Artist Huntingdale with a finish that hinted at previous practice, for any broad-minded person before condemning her would naturally wish to know something more about the lady's husband.

It was merely the Honorable John's hunting-sense which hinted to him that there was something wrong at this place; it had sprung from his first realization

that the relief he had noted in the eyes of the younger woman on the links that morning was greater than the occasion called for.

He was anxious to know something more about the household generally, particularly the old lady.

He had a dim sort of notion that, out of the tail of his eye, he had seen that she was running — apparently to join in the friendly little discussion about the Colonel's poor golf— but he was not certain about that.

"Wish I was," he muttered as he moved forward. "If that old lady had been running hard and the young woman running hard after her, then I should certainly catch just a whiff of rat somewhere... Still, we'll see. Pity the Colonel's got such a habit of distracting my attention from important details. Must mention it to him."

He peered into all the windows at the front of the house— a small, double-fronted red-brick villa without any pretension to picturesqueness— the sort of place a small country builder, enriched by the war, might solemnly erect for his own habitation under the impression that he was achieving a monument to his own greatness.

Everything behind the panes looked normal enough. The rooms were furnished rather sparsely in the normal way— neither well nor ill.

He moved on round the house— rather like a leisurely but inquisitive old bear taking a look around.

There were no signs of the old lady, through any window at either of the sides or the front of the house.

He paused at one of the corners to watch the manservant busy attending to a large car just outside a garage at the back. The man was pouring petrol into the tank. He had a lighted cigarette-end in his mouth. Mr. Brass felt that Sherlock Holmes would instantly have produced one of his lightning deductions about him. Indeed, the Honorable John produced one himself.

"Just a plain damn' fool!" he said.

Then a peculiar thing happened.

A pane of glass smashed itself, or was smashed, in the house, in one of the rooms overlooking the garage.

Mr. Brass drew back just in time to avoid the eyes of the reckless fool pouring petrol into the car under the very nose of a lighted cigarette. A second later the man had dumped down the petrol-can and was running to the back door of the house. The Honorable John got a one-eyed glimpse of him as he went lumbering along rather like a fast land-crab.

The back door opened and shut with a little slam.

"Gone indoors to see what's wrong," said Mr. Brass. "I don't blame the lad."

He edged round the corner, took a sudden decision, and hurried to the back door.

It was ajar. He was by no means inexpert about back doors— so he looked at the inner side of it, saw the key, withdrew it, and closed and locked the door from the outside.

Then he stepped back and looked up at the back of the house. The shattered pane was in the window of a room immediately over the back porch.

Mr. Brass looked wistfully at that rather frail-appearing porch.

"It's not the sort of place for a man of my figure to go scrambling about on!" he muttered, and somewhat reluctantly, began to test the strength of a water-pipe and some Virginia creeper which covered the porch.

"Don't like it," he said to himself. "A man might get a couple of broken limbs playing the fool climbing about a thing like this! Sing's the lad for this— ought to be round: about here by this time too — the lazy hound! — Ah!"

He started slightly as a figure appeared silently round the corner of the house. It was "'the lazy hound" Sing, who, acting on instructions, had come on to scout around the red house until he could discreetly join forces with his dearly beloved "boss."

He grinned and offered a package about the size of a brick to Mr. Brass who took it without inquiry, and in a harsh whisper issued his further instructions to the agile tough from far Cathay.

"Get up on this porch quick and quiet, my lad. Just take a peep through that broken pane, make a note of what you see — if anything— then slither down like cats falling and be ready to bolt with me!"

He watched with a touch of envy as the hardy perennial who had worked for him so long and faithfully went up that porch like an alley-cat.

"The lad's got the figure for it. He can climb like a canary creeper," he mused.

Sing took one cautious glance into the room, withdrew his head instantly out of view of those inside, and came down like a sack of potatoes, though more silently.

Mr. Brass darted onto the porch, turned the key of the door, leaving it unlocked, hissed "Follow me!" to Sing and led the way at a portly sort of trot to the cover of the trees.

"Well, what did you see?" he demanded, though already he could guess roughly what Sing's reply would be.

It was about as he surmised: Sing had seen the old lady, sitting gagged and bound in a chair in the middle of the room. One arm was free— clearly the arm with which she had managed to throw a water-bottle through the window. The

ugly man from the garage was engaged in retying the loose arm of the old lady to the arm of the chair.

"Huh! I see," said Mr. Brass. He thought for a moment, then glanced at his watch. "Better be getting back to the hotel," he said.

SING stared; it was evident that the saffron-hued scalawag was expecting to join his master in rescuing the old lady forthwith.

But the Honorable John thought otherwise.

"Don't fret, my lad; we shall be back before very long. Haven't you got the brains to understand that we've got to catch the Duxtable-Huntingdale combination red-handed? No, of course you haven't— why should you?"

And he led the way back to the hotel— carefully avoiding the golf-links

In the privacy of his room Mr. Brass took out the brick-shaped package which Sing had handed him.

"Now, what's all this?" he said, and cut the string.

It was money— dquite a quantity of it, all in the highly convenient form of one-pound notes.

Mr. Brass looked at his yellow retainer, then at the bale of notes, then back at Sing.

"Humph!" he repeated, "what's all this?" — and turned the lump of money gingerly over with his fingers.

"Have to count it, I suppose, hey?" he observed. "Dry work counting money on a day like this, Sing, my son! We'd better have something. Go and get a small bottle of the champagne we brought with us. That's for me. And while you're downstairs, look in at the bar and buy a bottle of stout. That's for you— you've been a good lad, and I'm one of those who believe in rewarding a good man."

Possibly he was— but evidently he did not believe in spoiling him. However, Sing departed grinning happily, so probably he felt sufficiently rewarded

By the time the leisurely Mr. Brass had counted the thousand pounds' worth of notes — exactly — and gleaned from the stout-imbibing Chink the story of how he had found them hidden in a grandfather's clock which was one of the chief articles of furniture in the almost unfurnished cottage occupied by Mr. Huntingdale, the afternoon was waning, and the Honorable John's champagne had waned entirely.

"I see what you mean, Sing," pronounced the old adventurer at last. "And on the whole, in a way, you might have done worse. I'm not altogether displeased with you, my lad; though, another time, just be a bit more careful. There might have been another thousand in the coalbox. Never rush things.

You're getting into a queer, awkward sort of habit of rushing things. Don't do it. However—" he detached one single forlorn-looking humble note from the mass and passed it to Sing.

"There you are— that's for you," he said genially. 'Don't fool it away playing fantan with those chauffeurs down in the garage. Keep it— save it up. Men like you with your opportunities, working for a man like me, ought to be worth a lot o' money when the time comes to retire! Hook it now, but keep handy. I shall probably be wanting you in half an hour or so."

DELIGHTED at these few words of what he regarded as praise, Sing withdrew. He was rather like a well-trained retriever. Anything he found in any place to which he was sent by his owner he carried gladly back to Mr. Brass intact, though he would probably have bitten the hand off anybody else who had reached for whatever he was carrying. But it was Mr. Brass who many years before had bought him, unconscious, for a sum which is popularly known as "five bob" from a tired policeman who, on returning home, had found him in the gutter into which certain of Sing's compatriots had tidily deposited him after drugging and robbing him. That had been in the days of Sing's youth and inexperience. He had grown out of youth and inexperience— but not out of gratitude to his possessor...

Mr. Brass, like a giant refreshed, strolled through the sunny peace of the declining afternoon toward the eighteenth green, where he took a seat and a cigar. He had not long to wait. Mrs. Duxtable and Mr. Huntingdale were driving from the last tee as he arrived.

The Honorable John chuckled as he noted that the dour Clumber, evidently having scraped some sort of acquaintance, was carrying the lady's bag, with every symptom of enjoying the job.

Mr. Brass did not await their arrival on the green, as they came on. Like a careful general, he withdrew, ''according to plan." From a well-judged distance the Honorable John saw them hole out, noted the lady take her bag, shake off the Colonel — who looked as if he were hanging around for an invitation to tea— and with the man Huntingdale, depart in peace towards the red house.

MR. BRASS awaited his partner, who came glooming morosely along like a man with a wasted afternoon to look back upon.

"Come on, man, come on! Stir your stumps— we've only got a few minutes before us," said the senior partner, as he turned to the hotel and beckoned the distant Sing.

Mr. Brass was watching the dwindling figures of the golfers.

"We'll follow just as soon as they get to the edge of the trees," he said.

The Colonel stared at him.

"I suppose you could give some sort of a guess at what you're driving at— if pressed by a smart lawyer— but I can't!" he said.

"No, I know— I know you can't," agreed Mr. Brass. "I'll tell you as we go. And before we even start I can tell you that you've spent most of your afternoon carting round the golf-clubs of a very dangerous she-crook."

"What d'ye mean— Beryl Duxtable a she-crook?" demanded the Colonel.

"Every inch of her," insisted the Honorable John. "You'll see! Huntingdale's another. There they go— out of sight. Here's Sing. — Follow us, my lad. Come on, Colonel. Liven yourself up a little— for we're on serious business!" Mr. Brass rapped out his orders. so imperiously that even his obstinate partner went along with no more emphatic demur than a demand to be told what was what, then and there.

SO Mr. Brass told him as much as he thought was good for him.

"You mean to say that they got the old lady roped and gagged in that house?" echoed the Colonel. "Why?"

"That's what we're going to find out if we can. And we shall. Trust the wise old thinker of this little firm!" said the Honorable John. "They're leaving for London after tea— and I have a notion that 'tea' means to them a couple of large, brown Scotch whiskies and sodas apiece! I may be wrong (though I'm probably right) but I fancy those two are getting away for good today."

They hurried into the shadow of the belt of trees separating the red house from the links. There Mr. Brass gave his last instructions. All went well... .

From the tree they saw the car standing at the front of the house facing toward the main road.

The plain-featured person who acted as handy-man was leaning over the engine with an oil-can.

"Couldn't be more convenient," whispered Mr. Brass and signed to Sing. The Chink glided out, and was on the gorillaman like a springing cat. He turned with a sort of growl— but he was too late. He was immensely powerful— but so was Sing; Mr. Brass was distinctly no weakling and the Colonel was about as feeble as a buffalo bull.

So they pacified the man without much difficulty or noise, tied his hands, gave him a notion of what a gag, similar to that of the old lady's, felt like, and dumped him down in the car—"to rest," said Mr. Brass.

Then the two moved into the house through the half-open front door. This was evidently one of the occasions upon which Mr. Brass deemed it discreet to depart from his rule of going about his business unarmed, for each of them

held now a pistol big enough to blow large holes through a rhinoceros. The Honorable John had thoughtfully brought one for Colonel Clumber.

IN the narrow hall they paused to listen.

Just as he expected, Mr. Brass heard voices— not too loud— in that back room through the window of which the old lady had managed to hurl a water-bottle.

He signaled and they went up the stairs like large and silent grizzly bears.

Mr. Brass threw open the door with his left hand, and introduced the battery in his right, following it personally immediately after.

"I'll blow the head off the first of you who acts rough!" he said. :

Mrs. Duxtable and Mr. Huntingdale whirled like startled tigers.

But they steadied as they saw the three black pistol muzzles, and the grim, hard, menacing eyes behind those muzzles.

Mr. Brass— engaged as he was on his business — was no longer bland: Colonel Clumber never had known how to be bland, and Sing was about as much like the proverbial bland Chinese as a bear-cat in a hornet's nest.

The "artist" spoke first— and he addressed the attractive Mrs. Duxtable in tones of some ferocity.

"There you are!" he snarled; "there you are! I tipped you off at the eleventh that the cheap old skate was a detective, didn't I? But no, no— you amateur vamp, that wasn't good enough for you, was it? He was just another poor old adorer that wanted to singe his wings in your beautiful illumination, wasn't he? That was what you said—"

Here the Colonel moved forward.

"One more small syllable of that sort out of you, Hubert, and Ill knock your block out of true!" he growled.

Hubert held back the remaining syllables. The woman did likewise.

Mr. Brass moved up, looking quite deadly behind his awesome firearm.

"Stand back— *get* back— you two!" he said savagely.

They looked once at his pale jade eyes — and stood back, clear of the mute old lady over whose chair they had been bending. "Keep them so," said the Honorable John to his partner; and Sing bent over the old lady, gently removing the gag.

She was a tough-looking and stringy old lady. "Now tell us, my dear," said Mr. Brass, "Just what it's all about. What your name is, and how much you're worth, and why they did this to you. Don't be afraid— don't—"

"I am not afraid — don't be foolish!" snapped the indomitable old dame. "I am Lady Jane Dumbartington. I live in hotels, mainly, for I *will not* be pestered by my relatives who are all after my money!"

Her jaws clamped like crabs' claws at the mention of her money.

"These appalling creatures kidnaped me — at least, *she* did. She claims to be the wife of my only son Gervase— a thoroughly bad lot whom I cut off with a shilling years ago. She says that she is an actress whom Gervase married for her money in Paris some years ago. She says Gervase spent all her money, then deserted her and has never been heard of since. So she, and her friend — bah! — kidnaped me, brought me here and tried to frighten me into repaying the money she says Gervase spent. I gave them some— but they weren't satisfied. They didn't play fair— they kept me here— a woman of my means and standing! When you came they were threatening to kill me if I did not write them a check for five thousand pounds, and a letter to the bank instructing them to honor it. So release me; my man, and lock 'em up— lock 'em up!.... "I don't believe she ever met Getvase in her life. He's a young blackguard, certainly, but he always had good taste!"

"Certainly, Lady Jane. Just as soon as we can manage," said Mr. Brass vaguely, and turned to the two crooks.

"It was pretty barefaced," he said. "Anything you want to say?"

Mr. Huntingdale said nothing; Mrs. Duxtable made a noise like an angry cat.

MR. BRASS thought for a moment.

"But what about this morning, Lady Jane?" he asked. "What were you doing on the golf-links?"

"Why, you stupid fellow, I had managed to get loose and I was running to ask for the protection of two fat golfers— one was rather like you— but she caught me just in time and brought me back. She's a very strong woman."

"I see," said Mr. Brass.

He addressed his partner.

"Just release Lady Jane," he said, "while I get these criminals downstairs into safety."

"Very well."

He jerked his big head at the door, indicating his desires with a gesture of his pistol-filled hand.

Obediently Mr. Huntingdale and Mrs. Duxtable moved to the door and out, followed by the grim Mr. Brass.

"Get into the room on the right," he said savagely, as they went downstairs.

They did so.

"Stay here!" said the Honorable John, looking in on them. "Try any funny business and you will be all stodged up with lead before you can guess what's which!"

He shut the door and locked it loudly.

Then he tramped heavily back up the stairs. But he did not return immediately to witness the release of the Lady Jane, and the heaviness of his steps vanished oddly when he reached the top of the stairs. In spite of his portliness he moved as lightly as a ballet-dancer— lighter, indeed, than some of the "Dying Swans" of recent years— and he moved fast. The second bedroom he entered was the one he sought— that of Mrs. Duxtable.

Mr. Brass already had her fellow-crook's careful accumulation. All that remained to do now was to get the full-blown Beryl's.

It took him just three minutes and a half to find it— the little twin brother to Huntingdale's packet of notes, quietly stowed away in two portions, in the feet of a pair of old riding-boots in a cupboard. Mr. Brass knew he had found it, the moment he set eyes on the boots— they were far too big and shabby for Mrs. Duxtable and the trees in them were sticking out much too far.

"Still, it wasn't a bad hiding-place— for stuff which she thought would never be searched for, anyway," he said blandly; then he put the money where it would do no harm, and returned to Lady Jane and her rescuers.

The indomitable old lady was striding about, talking like one a long way behind with her conversation. She was autocratic, imperious, despotic and inclined to be tyrannical. She demanded that the Duxtable Huntingdale pair be locked up forthwith for all eternity, and she looked as if she felt privately that it wouldn't matter much if Mr. Brass and his friends were locked up with them!

But the Honorable John spoke to her gently, mentioned the close proximity of the comfortable hotel, and was generally soothing.

"I suggest that you allow my friend and me to escort you to the hotel while my servant guards these two people till the police can be sent for them. I have them safely under lock and key downstairs!" he asserted.

She stared.

"Where, man, where? In the cellar?"

"No, Lady Jane— in the front room!"

She wheeled on him.

"Anybody guarding them, man?"

Mr. Brass smiled.

"No— but I've got them locked in!" And he showed the key.

"Why, you stupid fellow, what about the window? Good gracious, can't any of you men ever use your intelligence?"

The Honorable John's jaw fell most realistically.

"Eh? Never thought of that!"

The fierce old lady dashed past him and down the stairs. But she dashed in vain; even as she had so cleverly explained, the two crooks had thought of the window and used it— their car was already fast receding down the drive.

"There— you see, idiot? There they go with nearly three thousand pounds of mine in that car! Oh, I've no patience! Come along, come along, take me to the hotel, and send for the police!"

SO they took her there, and handed her over to the manager— who, oddly enough, proved to be an old acquaintance of hers. He had once managed a hotel she had harassed at Bournemouth.

She was, as the manager subsequently informed Mr. Brass and partner, worth about twenty thousand a year, though she required as much attention as if she had twenty million— and, he added, she wanted to pay for it as if she had about twenty pounds a year.

"A queer, savage old bird," said the manager. "But what can you do? Turn 'em away? Not with the hotel business in its present state! And there are thousands like her— thousands! Drifting about, nagging around from home to hotel, from hotel to hydro, from hydro to— well, you know how it is. These old ladies have got no real vice in 'em, but they're rum 'uns, most of 'em. They outlive the poor mutts that sweated 'emselves into an early grave making the money— and in a year or two they honestly think they made the money themselves. They're fair game for every crook in Christendom— if the crook can get away with it. Mostly, he can't. They're tough. Tough! They're pretty near indestructible, these old hotel-dwellers! I'd hate to be the next crook that tries to wish something onto Lady Jane— Hey, what's that?" He turned to a hovering waiter. "Lady Jane insists on seeing the manager at once! Oh, certainly! Any little thing like that— huh!"

The man made a grimace at the partners and hurried away.

Mr. Brass and the Colonel half-grinned at each other, and went to the Honorable John's room.

"Queer affair!" said the Colonel, over a bottle. "Nice, smart girl, too."

"Who? Lady Jane?" said Mr. Brass satirically. "The other was neither smart nor nice."

"Huh! She was smart enough to get away with her plunder, anyway! One would have thought that such a sharp set of brains as yours might have seen a way for us to make a trifle out of all our trouble."

A WAITER knocked, and entered bearing a box of cigars on a tray.

"With Lady Jane Dumbartington's compliments; gentlemen," he said, and left.

Mr. Brass opened the box, sniffed at the contents, then offered the box to the Colonel.

"Have a cigar, Squire," he said genially. "You see, we have got something out of the affair, after all."

"What?" said the Colonel, smelling at the cigars. "You don't call this box of herbage anything, do you?"

"I wasn't speaking of the material in that box," said the Honorable John mildly, as he drew forth two brick-shaped wads. "I was speaking of this particular herbage! There you are— one for you, one for me, a thousand apiece. I dropped over there and collected it while you were sleeping your lunch off. I'll tell you all about it in a minute. Not bad for the old man, hey? A thousand apiece for us— and a box of something or other to smoke, for Sing!"

"The poor hound!" said the Colonel pityingly.

"Not he, Squire; he'll enjoy 'em— he and his pals in the garage. Pass the whisky, and listen; there's just time to tell you before dinner. The whisky, man— pass it here! Thanks!"

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9: Dorothy's Dolls

Fred Jackson

1886-1953

Blue Book Oct 1912

One of a series of stories about "the Man in the Chair", by Frederick John Jackson, author, playwright, Hollywood movie producer.

DURING the hot months, Mr. Kristian White found to his astonishment that he would be unable to leave town. He had planned a sea-trip— the exceeding fatness of the family purse promising all sorts of extravagances— but Crime takes no vacations; and Mr. White, having declared himself her implacable enemy and Nemesis, watching from day to day for a break in the endless stream of cases and, finding none, resigned himself with a sigh to the inevitable, and contented himself at home. Mrs. White made the place fresh with cool linens, and the height of the building raised them above the noise and dust and flying pests, and so they were comfortable enough.

Girton, however, the office attendant, was granted a holiday, Ruth volunteering to take his place. And it was due to all this that Mr. White was able to solve the mystery that was worrying little Dorothy Allen and disturbing her parents too. For Girton had an unbreakable rule of "first come, first served." If he had been in charge that day, the other clients who appeared before little Dorothy would have been given precedence, but Ruth was more sympathetic, and the little giri, hugging her dolly convulsively, her blue eyes still swimming in tears, received instant attention.

Mrs. Allen later admitted that if they had been compelled to wait, her impulse to consult the detective would have weakened, and— everything would have ended differently.

Mrs. Allen was with Dorothy, you see— Mrs. Allen looking rather wistful, a little hesitant and shamefaced; and behind her was a governess who seemed to find only amusement in the situation. The varying expressions of the three would have excited anyone's interest— even in that anteroom where everyone came under stress of some unusual, emotion; but what attracted Ruth's attention instantly, was that little Dorothy was in tears.

"Is Mr. White very busy?" asked Mrs. Allen, as the trio advanced. "Shall we be forced to wait long?"

Ruth looked thoughtful.

"Is it a very important case upon which you have come?" she asked. "Is it dangerous to waste time?"

"Well," said Mrs. Allen, flushing, "We hardly know. Its such a very curious matter."

Ruth looked at the child. "Concerning the baby?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Allen. "This is really Dorothy's case entirely."

"Then," said Ruth, "we shall have to make an exception in Dorothy's favor and have Mr. White see her next."'

She spoke a few words to the elderly lady who was being defrauded— then she took up one of the announcement slips from the desk and wrote:

"Miss Dorothy—?"

"Allen," said the older of the trio. "I am Mrs. Spencer Allen."

Ruth carried in the card to her husband. He was just dismissing the client with whom he had been in consultation, and he took the card with a mischievous smile.

"Is Miss Allen a young lady?" he asked.

"Very young," said Ruth gravely.

"Pretty?"

"Very pretty," said Ruth, "and very much upset."

"I'll see her at once," said he. "I have always been eager to aid young, pretty ladies in distress."

"Indeed," said Ruth. "Well, I mean to stay and chaperone you this time. For once, I find myself in danger of being jealous."

Then she moved to the door and nodded, and little Dorothy came in with a business-like tread, still hugging her doll. Mrs, Allen and the governess followed.

"Well, well!' cried Mr. White, smiling. "I did not expect such a very young client."

And he held out his hand. Dorothy— seeming to find something trustworthy about the tall, dark-eyed man in white— advanced and put her moist little fat hand in his. Mrs. Allen smiled. The governess giggled foolishly. And all three found seats. Dorothy took the footstool that Ruth usually occupied at her husband's side.

"Now, Miss Allen,' said White. "What can I do for you?"

"I want my dollies," said Dorothy.

"Your dollies?" repeated White, and looked up at Mrs. Allen. She was slightly flushed— a little ill at ease.

"Has someone been taking her dollies?" he asked.

Mrs. Allen nodded.

"It must sound absurd to you— my coming here on such an errand," she began with difficulty, "but I confess the thing is so extraordinary it has begun to get on my nerves. And Dorothy is quite heart-broken."

She drew a long breath. Dorothy looked from her mother to White, with anxious eyes— still hugging the little pink and white bisque baby. The governess still grinned foolishly.

"Yes?" said White. "Perhaps you had better fill in the details just as briefly as you can— but omit nothing that seems to have any bearing on the matter that troubles you. The more details, the more chance I have of solving your problem, because details are clues. Everything leaves a trace of its existence or its occurrence. The law of cause and effect, you see. My method of solving riddles is simply working back from effect to cause. Now, about the little girl's dollies?"

Mrs. Allen nodded and smiled a little.

"To begin with, she had quite a collection. We've traveled rather a lot, and Dorothy has dolls of every nation— or perhaps I should say had. At the moment she has only the one in her arms— Cynthia Elizabeth. She might not have that, except that it is her favorite, and seldom leaves her, night or day.

"Three days ago, when the servants unlocked the house in the morning, they found evidences of its having been entered during the night. A pane of glass had been cut from a large rear window. On the buffet were signs of a hurried feast. But the silver was undisturbed. Nothing in fact, seemed to have been taken. My safe was not opened. My jewelry was safe. The first explanation that occurred to us was that some one— not a thief— maddened by hunger, perhaps, had effected entrance in order to eat. It seemed rather extraordinary, but not nearly so extraordinary as it seemed later. For when Dorothy was dressed and taken to her nursery, it developed that one of her dolls was missing."

"What sort of doll?" asked Mr. White quietly.

Mrs. Allen looked uncertainly at the governess, Then she asked a question in German, and translating the reply, said:

"A bisque doll that we got in Vienna. It was dressed in peasant costume, and was worth— possibly— a few dollars. It was by no means the most expensive of Dorothy's collection."

Mr. White nodded.

"We thought that the house-breaker might have taken it for a child. We thought it might be a man with a youngster to look out for— or that it might have been a young girl, to whom the doll had proven too great a temptation. So we did not report the matter to the police. Dorothy had dolls enough, anyway, we decided, and could easily spare one. We had the window repaired."

Dorothy was watching White's face, now, with concentrated appeal.

"Two nights ago—"

"That was the next night?" asked White.

"Yes. The same window was entered in the same way. The marauder had not stopped to feast this time, but had carried off five more dolls."

"Of what sort?" asked White.

Mrs. Allen asked the governess and she replied, ''Various sorts."

"Dorothy cried that time," said her mother, "because she's very fond of the babies. But we still felt the matter hardly important enough to report. However, we had one of the footmen watch that window night before last. Nothing happened. No one tried to enter. No dolls were stolen. We thought the matter ended, so last night we did not stand guard— and all the rest of the dolls were stolen."

"How many were there?" asked White.

"About— a hundred and twenty-odd, I should think. Some were rather more like ornaments than toys. Not one was worth a really large sum of money. And there was so much silver about— there were so many more valuable things. Of course some of the dolls were unique. But I can't imagine anyone's taking them for the value of them. Indeed, today's occurrence leads me to conclude that it is rather to deprive Dorothy of them, the thieves aim— though why anyone should desire to hurt the child, I can't imagine."

"What was to-day's occurrence ?"

"Naturally, Dorothy was heartbroken over the loss of all her children save one— Cynthia Elizabeth. As I said, Cynthia is her favorite. Cynthia sleeps with her, eats with her, and always plays with her. I promised that she should have them all back, meaning, so far as was possible, to replace them; and contented with this assurance, Dorothy was willing to go to the Park with Fraulein. As I glean the rest of it from Fraulein and the child herself, Dorothy played with another little girl named Helen Marlin, Fraulin talked with Mrs. Marlin's nurse. While the children were playing— and while Fraulein was not looking"— Mrs. Allen glanced severely at the governess— "a lady approached Dorothy and—"

"She said, 'What a pretty doll!" said Dorothy, breaking in excitedly, "and I wouldn't let her take it— and she wanted to and I wouldn't Jet her. And she tried to pull Cynthia 'Lizabeth right — out— of— my— arms! And I— yelled."

Dorothy looked defiant and hugged Cynthia Elizabeth.

"Dear me!" said Mr, White. "That is serious, isn't it? She asked you to let her take it, Dorothy?"

"Yes," said Dorothy, "and I wouldn't and she said 'please' and I wouldn't — and she tried to pull her!"

"And you called your nurse," said White.

"Yes," said Dorothy.

"And then what?"

The governess burst into fluent German.

"Fraulein says she hurried to Dorothy's side and the lady departed."

"What is the description of the lady?" asked White.

Mrs. Allen repeated it for the governess. "The lady was tall, and slender, and beautifully dressed. She had earrings and rings. She had beautiful blond hair and dark eyes. And a motor-car was waiting for her."

"Your nurse didn't know the lady? And Dorothy didn't?"

"No," said Mrs. Allen.

White smiled at Dorothy.

"Will you let me see Cynthia 'Lizabeth?" he asked.

Dorothy hesitated— regarded him— looked speculatively at her mother— and again at White.

"He's going to find all the other dollies, said Mrs. Allen. "Let Mr. White see your dolly, Dorothy."

Dorothy walked slowly over to the big basket-chair and exhibited her chief treasure. It was a bisque doll, looking exactly like every other bisque doll. It had a smile, even pearly teeth, plump cheeks, blue eyes that closed, long, wonderfully blond curls. It was dressed in a marvelous embroidered baby-dress and baby-cap, made as well as Dorothy's own garments.

"There is nothing at all remarkable about this doll, is there?" asked White.

"Nothing. I dare say you could buy them by the dozen in any shop."

"Where did you buy Cynthia?"

"I didn't buy it. It was given to Dorothy in Paris."

"By whom, may I ask?"

"A traveling acquaintance— a Mrs. Bartlett of Chicago. She happened to occupy a compartment with us, going into Paris; and Dorothy was carrying Margery Jane, and the conversation started with dolls. Mrs. Bartlett had one in her bag that she had intended as a gift for another child— hbut she insisted on giving it to Dorothy."

"What sort of woman was Mrs. Bartlett ?"

Mrs. Allen looked surprised.

"Apparently a cultured, amiable, wealthy lady. I did not know her well. We saw each other only that once, but she seemed to take a tremendous interest in Dorothy."

Mr. White looked thoughtful.

"I wonder," he said, "if Dorothy would leave Cynthia 'Lizabeth with me until to-morrow ?"

"Leave it?" asked Mrs. Allen. Dorothy looked anxious.

"And to-morrow," said he, "we'll get all of her other dolls back. Could you trust her to me until to-morrow?" he added, drawing the child to his knee. "I'm a detective. She'd be quite safe with me!"

"Just until to-morrow?" asked Dorothy. "Surely to-morrow ?"

"I think so," said White.

Dorothy sighed, hugged Cynthia desperately, and relinquished her. She was now entirely bereft.

Mr. White held Cynthia on his lap.

"I should advise, Mrs. Allen, that you keep the child indoors for the rest of the day, and until you hear from me to-morrow— just to be on the safe side. Watch her pretty closely."

Mrs. Allen turned pale.

"You think there's some danger threatening ?"

"Maybe not. But taking precautions never does anyone any harm. No real cause for uneasiness, I think. Oh— and by the way— is this the way Cynthia was dressed when Mrs. Bartlett gave her to Dorothy?"

"No. Dorothy's children must all have complete wardrobes. I think she was in pink originally. Yes— I'm sure of it. The dress and hat must be still in Cynthia's locker."

"Will you send them to me, please?" he asked.

Mrs. Allen agreed— and then the nursemaid, mother and child were all ushered out by the big black servant at the door.

Mr. White was regarding the doll again. Ruth watched him curiously.

"What do you make of it, dear?" she asked.

He smiled at her.

"It's comparatively simple. Somebody wants this doll. From the unusual events surrounding the giving of it, I should assume that the original donor wants it. Possibly she was compelled to get rid of it in the train. She has not dared to get it herself lest the Allens recognize her, so she sends some one else; and the some one else got confused when confronted by all of Dorothy's dolls, for you will remember Cynthia has changed her dress. The thief was looking for a doll in a pink dress. He took the wrong one the first night— the second night he probably took all the ones in pink dresses— the third night he took them all. To Mrs. Bartlett's dismay, the right one was still not forthcoming. She watches Dorothy— probably from the cab— and sees that the child is carrying the doll she wants. So she sends a friend to coax it away or snatch it away from the child."

"But why should anyone go to such extremes for an ordinary doll?" breathed Ruth wonderingly.

He shrugged. "Nobody would. Therefore, this is *not* an ordinary doll."

"It looks ordinary enough," said Ruth.

"Quite true. Therefore the difference is hidden." He lifted the clothes and examined the bisque body.

"Could you put these back if I took them off?"

"Certainly," said Ruth, laughing. She took Cynthia from him and swiftly stripped her. He considered the clothes carelessly, laid them aside and turned his attention to the doll itself. It was molded and jointed in the usual fashion. There was no sign writing on the body.

"Could you get another doll exactly like this, do you suppose?" asked White, thoughtfully.

"I should think so. Why?"

He made no answer, but sat motionless an instant longer, his white brow wrinkled, his dark eyes fixed gravely on the object in his hands. Then with a shrug he caught Cynthia by the head and again by the torso— and wrenched! The head came off in his hand, and was swiftly laid aside. He looked into the body of the doll— turned it upside-down and shook. Nothing came out. He shook it again with the same result.

"You've spoilt it," said Ruth. "You'll break little Dorothy's heart!"

He thrust in his finger and drew out an end of cottony fabric, A thick, tight roll followed. Swiftly— Ruth bending over him— he unwound it. She uttered a little cry of astonishment; a quantity of unset gems lay before their eyes! 'Twinkling, scintillating, sparkling unset diamonds— heautifully cut and polished, snow-white, and of good size!

THE customs had no knowledge of a Mrs. Bartlett, and Mr. White had small description of her to assist in his search, so Cynthia 'Lizabeth was sent to a doll doctor, where her head was restored. Then, fully clothed again, she was given back to Dorothy— and that night, two of White's assistants were hidden in the little girl's room.

As White expected, the search for the right doll was not abandoned. Mrs. Bartlett's accomplice, convinced now that the jewels were in the doll Dorothy carried always with her, entered the child's sleeping room and stole Cynthia Elizabeth. White's men did not interfere. They merely followed, and in a house off Sixth avenue on Forty-ninth street, succeeded in taking a little band of smugglers numbering five— all of whom were suspects, and one of whom was Mrs. Bartlett of Chicago, alias "Kate Nast," alias "Lady Leighton" and many other names.

IN the trial that followed, it developed that many children had met the kindly Chicago woman in Europe and had received dolls— which were

afterward mysteriously lost or stolen. It was a very clever graft, as a child carrying an ordinary bisque doll was not apt to excite the suspicions of the customs men. It might never have been discovered but for an illness which overtook Mrs. Bartlett in Paris and prevented her forwarding information about the consignment in Cynthia until Cynthia had had new clothes.

All the rest of Dorothy's dolls were found in the Forty-ninth street house—and returned in safety. And Dorothy is a staunch friend and supporter, now, of Mr. Kristian White. She is firmly convinced that there is nothing he does not know.

———————

10: The Case of the Mutilated Bibles

George Barton

1866-1940

Blue Book, Nov 1909

The first of a series of short stories under the overall title of "The Adventures of Bromley Barnes" published in "Blue Book Magazine"

BROMLEY BARNES sat in a cosy chair in his handsome bachelor apartments overlooking Washington Square, complacently chewing away at the end of an unlighted cigar. His friend, formerly a chemist and fellow employee in the Customs Service, but now a lawyer, had been scolding him for leaving the Service but the old man smiled and said he was having, for the first time in his life, the luxury of an uninterrupted reading of the books in his collection of the Great American humorists.

"Have you heard from the authorities since you resigned as Chief Investigator of Customs?" asked Forward.

"No," retorted the veteran, "and what's more, I don't want to hear. I'm satisfied to sit in front of the open fireplace and read Artemus Ward, Josh Billings, Bill Nye, Eugene Field, and the rest of 'em. Let others do the work. I'm getting older every day; I'm moderately well-to-do, and there's no reason in the world why I shouldn't spend the remaining years of my life in peace instead of rushing about in pursuit of rascally smugglers."

Forward shook his head very skeptically.

"There isn't another man in America who could solve the problems you've solved. You've saved millions for the government. Who else could have foiled the filibustering plot in the 'Cargo of Mixed Pickles?' Who else could have uncovered the mystery back of the 'Missing Suit Case?' "

Barnes chewed savagely at the end of his unlighted cigar. He spoke in short, jerky, sentences.

"You overrate me, Forward. I simply used common-sense. Ninety-eight men out of a hundred are grossly careless. They're devoid of the sense of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and feeling. I use 'em all, and cultivate the habit of observation. But I've done my share of work and now I want to enjoy a sixth sense the sense of rest."

A clattering noise on the stairs and the hurrying footsteps in the hallway interrupted the talk.

Barnes arose, with a frown.

Forward's look was a question.

"Yes," answered the old man, with a sigh, "it's Clancy, and he's coming here with a smuggling case that's so bad the Customs' people can't do anything with it."

"Take it then; take it by all means!" cried the lawyer.

"It's all right for you to talk that way," retorted the chief, "since you've been admitted to the bar and appointed United States Attorney, you hand out orders like a judge on the bench."

"I wish you would take it," said Forward, appealingly. "I can try these cases so much better if I take part in developing the evidence."

"But I'm not a detective," insisted Barnes, doggedly.

"Of course you're not a detective," said the lawyer, humoring the whim. "You're a Specialist."

"Specialists don't handle every case that comes along," commented the old man, half mollified.

"No," was the shrewd response, "only the curious cases."

"That don't sound bad," mused Barnes, 'Specialist in Curious Cases.'"

At this point the door opened and Cornelius Clancy, disheveled and out of breath, hastened into the room.

The chief waved his hand toward a chair.

"Take a seat, and when you've recovered, tell me all about the case."

The little man looked at Barnes from out of bulging eyes. For a moment he was speechless.

Finally he stammered :

"Why— how— how did you know there was a case!"

Barnes chuckled softly, and murmured:

"Never mind about that; get rested and then tell me about it as intelligently as possible."

"It's about Sam Mills, who came on the *Oceanic*," sputtered Clancy.

"What about him?" asked the chief.

"There didn't seem to be anything wrong with him. He only had one steamer trunk; it was searched and contained nothing dutiable. So we passed him."

"How was he dressed?"

"He wore a big storm ulster, a fur cap, and boots that came to his knees—"

"Oh, Con! Oh, Con!" interrupted Barnes, with a gesture of whimsical despair. "A man wearing Siberian clothing on a balmy day in October, and you passed him!"

"Why, chief, we never thought—" began the little man.

"Of course you didn't think," interrupted the old man. "That's why you're here now to get my help. But go on. What was the sequel?"

"The sequel came an hour after Mills landed. It came in the shape of this telegram from Washington," and Clancy handed Barnes a little slip of yellow paper.

The chief read it at a glance. The typewritten message said:

> Arrest Samuel Mills, a passenger on the "Oceanic" due at your port this afternoon.
>
> Suspected of smuggling.

"When did he land?"

"Yesterday morning. The *Oceanic* arrived twelve hours ahead of time."

"What have you done since then?"

"We've arrested Mills; found him at an apartment-house in Harlem this morning. He's in a cell now."

"That's something," commented Barnes.

"It's something, but it's not much," moaned Clancy. "We've searched Mills, made him strip to the skin, and all that sort of thing. We went through his rooms, too, but there isn't a shred of evidence against the man. He calls his detention an outrage on an American citizen and threatens to sue the collector for false arrest. We were strongly tempted to release him."

"You haven't, have you?" cried the veteran.

"No; not yet: You must help us out with this case."

"What did he do after he was arrested?" inquired Barnes.

"He asked for a Bible— said he'd have to have something to relieve the horror of his situation."

"That don't sound much like a thief or smuggler," interjected Forward.

"Did he get it?" asked the chief, ignoring the interruption.

"Yes, sir, they got him one."

"What else did he want?"

"Pen and ink."

"What then!"

"In a half hour he asked me to take a message to a friend— William Turner, of West One Hundred and ThirtyFifth Street."

"What was it?"

"Simply his visiting card. He slipped it in this envelope."

Barnes reached over, and taking the envelope, tore it open and took out the card.

"Is that according to the code?" asked Forward, who watched the movement interestedly.

"Absolutely," rejoined the chief. "There may he honor among thieves, but the men who purstie them can't indulge in such a luxury."

Barnes walked over to the window to get a better look at the card.

Over the engraved name was penciled:

Have been arrested. Come to see me at once. Under the name was this jumble of letters and numerals:

RAEBVCXDXEIFXGIHX

The chief looked at this long and earnestly, and then turned to the little man.

"Clancy, go back to Mills and tell him you've delivered his message. After that, by hook or crook, get possession of the Bible and bring it to me."

The assistant departed without a word.

Barnes sat down before a little table in the corner of the room.

"Forward," he said, "kindly hand me that deck of playing cards."

The chemist did so.

Barnes shuffled the cards and began to lay them down one at a time.

"What's that?" queried Forward.

"Solitaire."

"But why are you playing it?"

"It's my mental cock-tail," was the smiling response.

"Your mental cock-tail?"

"Precisely. When I have a problem to solve, I stimulate my brain by indulging in a game of solitaire. I find it a bully thing to sharpen my wits."

"What particular form of the game are you playing now?"

"This is called 'Anno Domino.' It takes one entire pack of cards. The tableau is formed by the four foundation cards you see here— one of each suit. Each suit is so selected that if the families are successfully completed, the result will be the date of the year."

"That looks good."

"It is," said the chief, indulgently. "Now, Forward, if you'll kindly leave me to myself for a few minutes, I'll be obliged to you."

The chemist walked to the window and gazed out at the big marble arch in Washington Square while Barnes concentrated his mind upon his game.

A little more than half an hour passed and the chief arose with a shout of triumph. Almost at the same moment Clancy burst into the room carrying the coveted Bible.

The chief grabbed the volume from his assistant and turned the pages hastily.

"Mutilated!" he muttered. "Just as I thought— mutilated!"

The others looked on amazed.

"Forward," called the chief, after a moment's thought, "go to that bookcase over there and get me a copy of the Bible."

The chemist obeyed.

"There are several Bibles here," he called out.

"That's so," assented Barnes. "Bring me the Douay version.

Forward did so.

The chief opened it at a certain page and rapidly scanned the printed words.

He gave a cry of joy.

"It's all right! Clancy, order an electric cab at once. We've got to do things this afternoon, and we've got to do them quickly."

Clancy started off at a run. Before he had reached the bottom of the stairway Barnes appeared at the landing.

"I say, Con."

"Well?"

"While you're out, you might buy a spade, too; it may be a handy thing to have in the cab."

"A spade?"

"Yes," chuckled the chief, "an ordinary, every day, common garden spade."

As his assistant disappeared, Barnes returned to his room, rubbing his hands together and talking to himself more than to Forward.

"My," he muttered, "how commonplace things do disturb some people. I call for a spade and the whites of Clancy's eyes come out like two fleecy clouds in a blue sky. I s'pose if I'd sent for Cleopatra's needle it would have seemed perfectly reasonable."

He walked up and down the narrow apartment with his hands behind his back and his head sunk between his shoulders, wrapped in deep thought. Five minutes passed in this way, and at the end of that time, Clancy came clattering up the stairs with the announcement that the cab was at the door.

"Did you get the spade?" asked the chief.

"I did," grinned the little assistant.

"Am I to go along?" asked Forward.

"Assuredly," laughed the old man. "We may need a doctor before we get through."

"And might I ask— " began the chemist.

"What we're going to do first?" interrupted Barnes. "Certainly." "I've put this card in a fresh envelope and Clancy is going to carry out his promise to Samuel Mills by delivering it to Mr. William Turner at his rooms on West One Hundred and Thirty-Fifth Street."

It was dusk when the cab left Washington Square. Broadway was reached at a time when the enormous traffic of the metropolis was at its height. But the chauffeur was a trained operator and he guided the machine in and out of innumerable lanes of wagons, trucks, carriages, trolley cars, and pedestrians without an accident and indeed without so much as scratching the paint on the highly polished electric cab.

It was quite dark when they arrived at their destination. The cab was stopped three or four doors from the house of which they were in quest. Peering through the window, Barnes noticed that a real estate agent occupied the lower part of the large apartment house.

"Clancy," he said, "what floor does your friend Turner occupy?"

"Fourth story back."

"All right; you take Mills' card to him. Keep your eyes open. Note the contents of the room; in fact, note everything. Then come back to us and await further developments."

Clancy alighted from the vehicle and entered the One Hundred and ThirtyFifth Street house. As he did so another man came out, and while he walked past the cab, the lights from the electric lamp shone brightly on his face.

"By George!" gasped Barnes, glaring at the stranger, and gripping Forward by the wrist, "but the game is working out to perfection."

"What is it?" asked the chemist.

"Nothing— at present," answered the chief, and he lapsed into silence.

In a few minutes Clancy returned to the cab, and after the door had been pulled to, Barnes turned to him with a significant

"Well?"

"I handed him the envelope," reported the little man, "and when he opened it and read the card he was very much agitated. After awhile he told me it was all right and that there would be no answer."

"What did you observe?"

"The room was barely furnished. On a table were some papers and a Bible."

"Fine! Fine!" ejaculated Barnes, unconsciously grasping Forward by the wrist.

"I learned something else,' Clancy.

"What was it?"

"Mills had this same room the day before Turner came there."

"Very good, and where might you have learned this interesting fact?"

"From the housemaid," was the answer, with a sheepish expression.

"Oh, you rogue. Turner will leave soon. Now, I suppose if it were necessary for you to go back to that room, the housemaid might be of some assistance."

"That's what I thought, sir."

"Bully for you, Clancy."

For ten minutes after that the trio in the cab sat in silence.

"Will he come out soon?" ventured Forward, after a while.

"That depends on his own wit," replied Barnes. "If he has ordinary intelligence, he should come rushing through that doorway within the next thirty seconds."

The words were scarcely out of his motith when the door was flung open and Turner came hurrying to the sidewalk. He paused for a moment and then hastened in the direction of a drug-store on an adjoining street.

"He will try to get a cab," whispered Barnes. "If it is drawn by the usual broken-down nag used by the night-hawks, all will be well; if not, we have a wild race ahead of us."

"What shall we do first?' queried Forward.

"I must see his room," said the chief. "Come with me, Clancy. If there's any trouble in getting in you may have some influence with that housemaid."

The chief and his assistant opened the door and started for the fourth floor back. The staircase was dark and narrow and their progress was slow. As they reached the fourth floor they were almost dazed by the glare of the light. Turner, in his haste, had left the dcor of his room wide open and the gas on at full flow.

Before Clancy could speak, Barnes was in the room and making a bird'seye survey of its contents. He made a rush for the table, and grabbing up a book, turned the pages with great rapidity.

"A Bible!" he ejaculated. "Another Douay Bible! And mutilated, too! This is luck."

A blue print containing tracings stood on the table. One part of it was marked with a pencil. With a grunt of satisfaction Barnes picked this up and thrust it into his pocket.

The torn half of an envelope lay on the floor, and this, too, Barnes picked up and scrutinized carefully.

The fragment was as follows:

nson
erly
rica

The old man turned it upside down and sideways, but could make nothing of it.

"Come!" he called suddenly. "We have no time to waste here. We must hurry or we'll lose this game."

As they stumbled down the stairway, a little white object on the third step attracted his attention. Barnes stooped down and picked it up. It was another torn half of an envelope.

He compared it with the fragment in his hand, then gave a shout and struck Clancy a resounding whack on the back with the palm of his hand.

"What— what— do you mean?" stuttered the young fellow, breathless and red in the face.

"That's sheer joy, my boy!" cried the old man, gayly. "Our case is complete— only stupidity can now rob us of the victory."

In another moment they were in the electric cab. Barnes called out to the chauffeur before he pulled the door to.

"Go straight south and stop at the first telegraph and cable company office you reach."

As the cab moved noiselessly along the asphalted streets the old man pulled out two fragments of paper and put them together in view of his companions.

Six eyes came together in the cab and this is what they read:

J. K. Johnson
Kimberly
South Africa

"What does it represent?" asked Forward.

"A link in the chain," was the terse response.

The cab came to a sudden halt. The sound of ticking telegraph keys sounded on the night air.

Barnes leaped out of the vehicle and in four or five strides was at the desk writing a cablegram. It was directed to the United States Consul at Kimberly, South Africa, and instructed him to arrest J. K. Johnson and to hold him a prisoner pending further orders. This disposed of, he began writing a telegram to the Superintendent of Police of New York City. It instructed him to arrest Isaac Marconi, jeweler, of Maiden Lane.

Clancy, who had slipped into the office and was looking over his shoulder, said:

"Where does Marconi come in in this adventure?"

"Did you notice a man coming out of Turner's house as you went in?"

"No."

"Of course, you didn't. Well, I did. The man was Marconi. He's a shady character. He's been on my books for some time. So we'll just lock him up on suspicion."

The cable and the telegram dispatched, Barnes and Clancy returned to the waiting Forward.

As they entered the cab, the chief called to the chauffeur:

"Now for Utopia as fast as electricity will carry you."

The operator sat motionless with a stupid expression on his face.

Barnes broke into a hearty laugh.

"I forgot; maybe you never heard of it. Well, it's a city— a boom city. Five dollars down and five dollars a month."

"How do I get there?"

"Cross the Williamsburg bridge and after that go like fury until you get into the outskirts of Brooklyn. It's almost a straight line, but if you're in doubt, I'll guide you all right."

The man asked no further instructions but pulled the lever and the cab was soon whizzing down the street.

It seemed but a few minutes before he reached the entrance to the bridge. He put on more speed at this point and the machine whizzed over the river like some great bird— regardless of speed laws. The lights on the bows of passing steamships below flickered uncertainly, and before the astonished riders realized the fact they were speeding through the streets of Brooklyn, and heading for the suburban city of Utopia.

Barnes put his head out of the window from time to time and instructed the chauffeur.

As they passed the paved streets of the city and struck the dirt roads of the country, Forward began to show signs of impatience.

Finally, he said, with a tinge or sarcasm in his tones: "Barnes, you haven't been drinking ?"

"Not if I except the glass of sherry I had with my lunch."

"And, of course, you're not losing your mind."

"Heaven forbid!"

"Then why this insane ride into the country? Why this spade in the cab? Why this whole preposterous performance ?"

The old man chuckled with glee. He put his hand on the chemist's knee.

"My friend, you're a learned man, a scientific man, but there are things going on in the world about you of which you are in complete ignorance."

"What do you mean?"

"Be patient for a few minutes anid the problem will solve itself."

There was dead silence in the cab for fifteeen minutes.

After that Barnes shouted to the operator:

"Stop here!"

He did so, and the three men alighted.

A great barren waste of land confronted them, but it had all been carefully laid out in building lots. A big wooden sign informed the wayfarer that this was the site of the city of Utopia, and that the low price of the lots made an immediate purchase imperative.

Barnes stood gazing over the land.

"What are you looking for?" asked. Clancy.

"The City Hall," was the grinning retort.

But the idle jest only momentarily covered his real purpose. He pulled the blue print from his pocket and scanned it carefully.

"Where's the foundation walls?" he muttered half to himself. "Where's the corner stone— every city has one."

The others followed Barnes as he pottered from one lot to another. Presently they came to a plot of freshly disturbed earth.

The chief gave an exclamation of satisfaction.

"Quick!" he cried. "The spade!"

Clancy brought the implement, and at the command of his superior began to dig. The earth flew. One spadeful after another was tossed into the air. Tt was a cloudy night, but the chauffeur backed up his machine so that the glare of the headlight fell full upon the operation. They presented a curious sight as they stood watching the lusty young Irishman at work.

"Whose grave are we digging?" asked Forward, with a feeble attempt at humor.

No-one answered. There was perfect silence save for the dull echo of the clods of earth as they were thrown out of the rapidly deepening hole.

Presently the spade struck a hard substance and the thud aroused the instant attention of the curiously assorted quartet.

Clancy, in his excitement, jumped into the hole, and in half a minute was out again with a big square wooden box in his two hands. It was fastened with brass hooks.

Barnes tore them off with his clasp knife and opened the wooden box. Within it rested one of the velvet covered cases commonly used by jewelers. it bore the name of "Marconi," of Maiden Lane.

The lid was lifted and the contents caused the four men to start in amazement. There, reposing on a downy bed of soft satin was the most magnificent collection of precious stones they had ever gazed upon. Diamonds, pearls, garnets, sapphires, and emeralds lay in reckless and elegant profusion.

Before they recovered from their astonishment Barnes whispered sharply.

"Quick, hide! Cover the headlight of the machine."

There was a scampering, followed by silence.

Just as they. were securely hidden behind the cab, a big ulstered figure emerged from the darkness.

Barnes and Clancy recognized it immediately as Mr. William Turner, of One Hundred and Thirty-Fifth Street. The man carried a dark lantern.

As the bull's eye struck the empty grave of the gems, he gave a cry of anger. He moved over to look into the hole and at that moment Barnes was behind him, clapping on a pair of handcuffs.

He made no struggle, but as they placed him in the cab, said with a forced smile:

"It is fate."

That night, Turner, Mills, and Marconi were placed under lock and key, charged with being the principals of the biggest smuggling syndicate of their generation. Thanks to the promptness of the American consul at Kimberly, J. K. Johnson was placed in a South African prison before the close of the same day, thus shattering a gigantic conspiracy which had one end in Kimberly, and the other in Maiden Lane, New York.

IT WAS quite late when Barnes closed out all of the details of the case and arranged the evidence for the convenience of the United States Attorney.

Clancy and Forward accompanied Barnes to his Washington Square apartments. After the old man had gulped down his two cups of coffee and started to chew upon an unlighted cigar, Forward ventured to ask him how he had worked it out.

Barnes chuckled.

"I scarcely needed a game of Anno Domino to brighten my wits for this case. Old Maids would have done. After the first move, it was plain sailing."

"But how did you get your first start?"

"When Clancy mentioned the Bible, I felt satisfied Mills was a professional, and professionals don't read the Bible for a pastime. When I saw his card with its queer jumble of letters and numerals on it, I was sure the combination represented a code. The Government has its code, business men have their codes— why not smugglers? This one was beautiful in its simplicity."

"How?" cried Forward and Clancy in chorus.

"This is the thing as it is now," replied Barnes, holding it up to view.

They nodded and looked at the card.

RAEBVCXDXEIFXGIHX

Barnes pulled out a soft lead-pencil and erased every second letter.

The result was as follows:

R E V— X X I X I X

"It did not take a Biblical student," said the old man, "to know that that meant *Revelations*, chapter the twenty-first, paragraph the Nineteenth.

"I was anxious next to find what Bible he had utilized— you know there are many versions of the Scriptures. Well, Clancy brought me the book— it was the Douay Bible— and it was mutilated. The page which should have contained *Revelations* XXI-XIX was torn out.

I referred to my own copy and found that the quotation was as follows:

And the foundations of the wall of the city was garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second sapphire; the third, chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald.

This was Mills' notice to his accomplice, Turner, that he had buried the smuggled stuff.

But where?

Our visits to Turner's apartments revealed that.

When the rascal paid five dollars on the first payment of the lot at Utopia, he made the mistake of leaving the plan of the town— with the lots marked— in his room. Marconi exposed himself by being seen coming from that house. Turner gave his Kimberly confederate away by the torn envelope, half of which I found in his room, and the other half on the stairway. The finding of the second mutilated Bible was literally confirmation as strong as Holy Writ."

"How did a shrewd fellow lik Marconi get caught in such a game?"

"Why, Mills gave him the preciou stones to sell as soon as he got off the ship. Marconi heard the police were after them, and he, panic stricken, returned the gems to Mills, who barely had time to bury them before he was arrested. Turner knew that his pal owned the lot at Utopia. He only needed the cipher message to realize that the precious stones were hidden there."

"They were certainly careful," murmured Clancy.

"They were too careful; that's what brought them to grief."

Forward looked at Barnes with undisguised admiration.

"How do you account for your great success in these affairs?" he asked.
The old man chuckled as he replied:
"Nine-tenth's common sense reasoning ; the other tenth's lucky chance."

11: The Story's End

H. Bedford-Jones

1887-1949

Adventure, 1 Oct 1930

Henry Bedford-Jones

THE BOAT was a long, slim, thin skinned whaleboat, with only three men aboard but with so much of a load that she was just right in the water, and well trimmed. They had seen to that, naturally. Her rag of canvas bellied out and tugged her through the water, up and over the long rollers of the Arafura Sea; the man in the stern handled her with all the nicety required in handling a whaleboat with the wind astern. The other two, sprawled anywhere, smoked or talked or slept at will. They seemed to have small responsibility. The boat and her cargo presented singular problems. Three canvas duffle bags showed the names of their owners crudely painted on them— Larsen and Berman, the two sprawlers by the man in the stern, Frome. Only, the painting of these names had clearly been done very recently. The letters were black and firm, not crackled and blurred by usage.

A seaman's eye would have marveled at the stack of stores and their quality. A case of fine Hollands, several cases of expensive mineral waters; no ship's biscuit, but American bread products; meats and fish and vegetables of the best quality everywhere. Delicacies too— jellies and condiments, a box of *foie gras* tins— things certainly foreign to such men as these three and taking up room which might have been better disposed. And, lashed to the midship thwarts, a plain, dull green chest, a seaman's chest of the old type. In the top of it were hacks and scars as though a name had been chopped out of the wood, and the green paint, over all, was fresh.

"Look alive, George!"

It was the steersman who spoke abruptly. His voice was metallic, strong, as aggressive as his bold dark eyes and his high boned, brutal features. In voice and face alike there shone a certain alert intelligence which redeemed their brute characteristics.

"Up for'ard, George! Or should I call you Mr. Berman? Where you got that name beats me. I never heard of a circumcized Greek before."

Mr. Berman grinned and rose. He was obviously of Greek type; swart, craftily brutish, with narrow little eyes that spoke of evil things and abnormal vices. He made his way forward of the mast until his bare feet could straddle the boat there as he clung, his eyes on the water ahead.

The third man sat up. Easy to see why he had taken the name of Larsen; he was yellow haired, shock headed, his face long, his nose short, his ears sticking out almost at right angles to his head. His eyes were light blue, their bleached lids almost invisible; this gave his expression a peculiar and horrible cast.

"Good thing we brought George," he said with a cackling laugh. "George has an eye for the coral, huh? Old Cap'n Stockton felt safe enough when George was aloft to con—"

"You damn fool!' said Frome levelly. "Will you shut up usin' names?"

Larsen rubbed his head stupidly, frowned a little and stared at the sea.

"We're coming into Poanga by the back way," said Frome, as though explaining something to the others. "Plenty of coral this side, but we've figured pretty close— it'd be two days more if we went around, and we can't chance it. That's the island— the blue tuft."

"A whaleboat," said Larsen slowly, "is a hell of a craft in coral waters."

True enough, and these were obviously coral waters. Far ahead against the horizon loomed up a bluish blotch, the high palms of an island. Here and there, to right and left ahead, one might see an occasional patch of bare white coral rock; one of them jutted up ten feet above the water. These were visible dangers. Then there were places where the waves broke in lines of white foam; patches of reef barely awash. In other spots the water was of a light brown hue, showing half a fathom or less. Light green banks showed a fathom or more, safe enough for this craft. With the sun high and behind, as it now was, George had no difficulty in making out the patches and banks.

Larsen squinted at the man in the stern.

"Wind's goin' down," he observed. "Now see here, Patterson; I hope to hell you're right about that there boat from— "

The man in the stern gave him a straight, savage look.

"You blasted fool, will you get the name straight?"' he snarled. "Understand it for the last time; I don't intend to swing just because you're a fool! Don't go giving your name as Knutson nor mine as Patterson nor George

Berman's as Black George— hear me? If you do, sure as hell I'll croak you. Understand?"

"Aye," returned the fair man placatingly. "I'll remember, Frome, I'll remember. But I hope you're right about that there boat from Thursday Island."

"I am," said Frome. "With the monsoon right, as it is, she drops in on Poanga the first to third of every month. Hardly ever varies a day. Now get your lesson straight. What ship you from?"

"The *Jennie Parker*, trader, out o' Samoa. Cap'n Smith, master," said Larsen. "Two Kanakas come down with some sort o' sickness that broke out all over them, and all hands caught it. We piled up on a reef one night, calm sea— all hands sick. I dunno where it was. Me and George and Frome was some sick, not much. Cap'n Smith, he was dead. We took off in the boat. The mate and another hand, a Portugee, was with us, but they come down sick and died. The mate had laid a course to reach some island and Frome held it. That's all I know."

"How you come to have all them fine cabin stores aboard?" said Frome.

"The mate had us put 'em in,"' returned Larsen. "Said we might's well have 'em."

"Uh-huh." Frome nodded. 'Did the mate bring the ship's papers?" "T dunno," said Larsen. 'Ask Frome. He might know."

Frome smiled. Rather, his thin, wide lips curved in a grimace.

"No, sir," he said. "The mate— Thornberg his name was— had some sort of package in his jacket pocket, but he came down heavy with the sickness and we just hove him over in a hurry when he died. I was afraid of contagion and we were taking no chances. And quite right, my man, quite right," he added mockingly. "All clear ahead, George?"

"All clear," returned George from forward. "Wind going down."

It was not going; it had gone. The canvas began a listless flapping, and at a word from Frome, the Greek came aft, as the boat swung to the long, heavy swells. Frome opened a tin of Capstans, lighted a cigaret and eyed the other two.

"All right, Larsen; break out a bottle of that gin. We'll fry here until about sunset, then we can get ahead a bit before dark. We'd better moor to one of those coral rocks, or lay over the ledge for the night. One touch of coral would rip the bottom out of her like paper. Then, with morning, we can make the island. George, cast off the lashings of the box and open her up."

With sudden alacrity the other two obeyed, Larsen at the case of gin, the Greek at the green seaman's chest, which he managed to lug aft. It was not very heavy.

"Wait a minute before we broach that gin," said Frome, dominating the pair of them with eye and voice. "We'll divvy up now and have the thing settled. I want no fuddled heads getting the straight of this. Did either of you men ever hear of the *Anna J*. out of Sydney?"

Larsen shook his head stupidly. Much of his stupidity, it became evident, was assumed. George Berman frowned, then his face cleared and his white teeth shone out.

"Sure!" he exclaimed. "I was cook in the *Anna J. Fraser* once— that was in New Orleans, see? A long while ago— "

Frome laughed and nodded satisfaction.

"All right. Pass me the stuff."

From the green chest, which opened to his touch, George took a long, heavy box of rosewood, mounted with handsome brasses; a key was in the lock. Frome laid it beside him and leaned forward, examining the chest. Inside this appeared clothes, neatly folded; two *Pilots*, thumbed and dog eared, a revolver and a long, dirty envelop with a rubber band around it. On the inside of the chest lid was the inscription:

Hartley F. Stevens
Care Sailors' Bethel
San Francisco

Frome nodded again.

"All set," he said reflectively. "Whose chest is that, George?"

"The mate's, sir," said the Greek, grinning.

"Hm! So it is. And a matter of thirty quid in that envelop, saved up. Speaks well for you men— never touched it, eh? I tell you, seamen are honest!" Frome's voice was mocking again, and a gleam danced in his dark eyes. "All right, lads, close her up and we'll get to work."

With ill-suppressed eagerness the other two slammed down the chest lid and turned to him as he unlocked and opened the rosewood box.

"Kits ready?" he said.

The others grunted assent. They were ready— Larsen with a large oilskin packet slung by a cord about his neck, which he opened up; George with a bit of cloth and a handy sewing kit.

Frome took a tray from the rosewood box, in which were various odds and ends — a notebook, some jewelry and an old fashioned watch and chain. He looked at it, then dropped tray and all overboard. Neither of the others offered any comment.

He took out a second tray. In this were some gold pieces, a good deal of silver money and several sheafs of banknotes, all sorts of money. He passed this to Larsen.

"Divide it into three, later."

Larsen laid it aside, intent on what came next. This proved to be a deeper tray, filled with little balls of cotton. Frome hesitated and looked at his two companions.

"Now, lads," he said quietly, "if we look 'em over, we'll get to making comparisons and squabbling. Let's avoid all that. We know this is the whole two-year pick from the main beds at Quoin Island and worth about eight thousand pounds at Thursday Island— prob'ly more in any real port. Suppose we take 'em as they come, blind, and leave 'em rolled up. Suit you?"

Larsen frowned, then nodded slowly. George assented with eagerness. Frome set down the tray at their feet, lifted the heavy box and dropped it overboard. Then he took a little ball of cotton from the tray.

"One!" he said, as the others followed suit.

Turn by turn, the three plucked at the contents of the tray, which dwindled rapidly. When it was empty, each of them had a neat wad of cotton beside him. There was one left over; Frome took out a coin in silence, as did the others, and they matched for it. The odd fell to George, who took the one remaining ball and began to sew it up with the rest of his share. Larsen was stowing his in the oilskin, carefully. Frome dropped the empty tray overboard.

"Pearls for luck!' he said. "Now let's have a drink and divvy up the coin."

ASA RYAN, master of the *Island Witch* and also owner thereof, was not only playing in hard luck; he was about done for. No one would have thought it from his looks, as he laid the course for the entrance of the Poanga barrier reef and brought up the schooner for it. He was lean, brown, hard faced; his own predicament had accentuated the rather savage set of eye and jaw and, as he wore only singlet and shorts, with a wide straw hat, the rippling muscles of his body stood out as he swung the wheel.

For the past month and more ill luck had dogged him. Fouled anchor chains at Port Moresby, a resultant smash, with repairs and damages and dockage, had hit him hard. At Thursday Island a fight with two Jap pearlers had left him legally in the wrong, and so adjudged, with a whacking fine to pay and his entire crew lured aboard pearling luggers; and a contract cruise among the islands to meet on time, with no men and little money. He had borrowed the money and scraped up four beachcombers for crew, with his cook and mate. Now the mate was down with fever of some kind, and here at Poanga would be work, plenty of it.

Captain Ryan went through with it, unhesitant.

He was through the reef now, and the curving outline of Poanga harbor opened out ahead. A prosperous little spot, this, with its palms and fisheries; he could catch the odors of copra and shell on the breeze. A white manager and a dozen laborers— they would get the stuff stowed aboard, at all events.

Interest quickened his gaze. He sighted a whaleboat moored at the dock past the godowns and copra sheds, saw one or two white clad figures near the manager's house. However, he had no time to conjecture; his voice lifted sharply, and the four slatternly men forward slouched to the lines. He could run up alongside the dock and moor, for it was eight fathom close in, but ticklish business none the less.

However, Ryan's was a masterly hand at the helm. The canvas fluttered, and the *Island Witch* drifted like a phantom across the still waters of the lagoon. A shout of welcome from the shore, the shrill, gay cries of the laborers came to her as they gathered to make her fast. Her way fell off; barely moving, headed cunningly, she crept in until a line was flung and caught, made fast. Another two minutes and she was at rest.

Ryan flung a snarling command at his four beachcombers to make things shipshape, then he was over the rail and shaking hands with Lambert, the manager— a morose man who had given up hope of life elsewhere. They passed on up to the house together, and Ryan saw the three figures awaiting them.

"Came in yesterday," said Lambert, with a flick of his thumb toward the whaleboat. "Off o' some trading craft that went down. All A. B's, too. Were talking about getting a passage out with you."

"They can," said Ryan grimly. "My boys skipped and I've got four lousy rascals off the beach; no more. So I can use these chaps fine. What craft are they from?"

"I dunno," said Lambert.

On the veranda Ryan met the three of them; this was luck for him, as the first glance proved. With three such men he was saved. His appraising eye told him what they were— Larsen, a sullen animal, used to obeying; Berman, a lithe, vivacious, obscene rascal; Frome, a most unscrupulous blackguard who had probably fallen from some higher estate to his present position. Frome did the talking for the three.

"The *Jennie Parker*, eh? Never heard of her," said Ryan, when the man had finished his story. "And you want passage, do you?"'

"Yes, sir," said Frome. "We can pay you with the whaleboat and her stores— all cabin stores, too. And we'll work our passage besides."

"Hm!" said Ryan. "Can use the boat and the stores, certainly; but if you work, you'll get regular wages and sign on to Suva. I'm on a contract cruise to pick up copra and shell and stuff for the company and land it at Suva. Suit you?"

"Yes, sir," said Frome eagerly.

"All right. My mate's sick; you'll be acting mate. Get aboard, stow your whaleboat on the stern chocks where a boat ought to be but isn't, and let's see how you take charge. When I come aboard I'll sign you on and log your story."

The three departed, Frome striding along, Larsen slouching, the Greek swaggering. Captain Ryan looked after them, half frowning, but Lambert was already speaking of freight and the noon meal was awaiting them inside, so for the moment Ryan was more than content. Lambert was worried about the mate's sickness, too; in his petulant way he did not like it. He was afraid of sick men and said so.

When Ryan returned to the schooner he found a marvelous change. Frome had taken charge; boat and cabin stores were stowed away, the four beachcombers were working in fear and terror, copra and shell were flowing aboard and things were shipshape. When Ryan went down to the cabin, however, it was another matter. His mate was dead. And no one aboard knew what the sickness was.

Ryan called Frome down and put it squarely up to him.

"This is some sort o' fever; may be bad. After what you've just been through, I couldn't blame you and your mates for not wanting to risk it. Say the word and stop ashore."

Frome rubbed his cheek reflectively and smiled in his sardonic fashion.

"We'll risk it, sir,"' he said.

"Then call down two men and get him sewn up for burial."

Frome would risk it, but not Lambert. He refused point blank to let the dead man be buried ashore; he was frantically afraid of contagion, said he'd get out his rifle and open fire on any burial party that set foot on his wharf. Might be bubonic or influenza, and he wouldn't have it, couldn't afford to chance it. Ryan had no right putting in here with a sick man, anyhow.

Disgustedly, Ryan went back to the schooner, put his boat over the side, and with four men at the oars took the corpse outside the lagoon and buried it. He came back, got out his rough log, entered up the business, then called Frome to the cabin.

"Let's have the details of your story, mister. You'll be mate now, of course." Frome gave the details and Ryan jotted them down; George and Larsen were called, and all three read and signed the story. Then Ryan signed them on the articles and everything was set.

"How does it happen," he asked them. "that you three didn't loot your mate's chest after he died? There's money in it. You preserved it carefully enough."

Frome shrugged.

"We had other things to think about, sir."

"I suppose so. Well. Let's get the rest of this stuff aboard and be out of here."

When the cool evening drew down, everything was aboard and the hatches down. Ryan did not delay, but went out with the tide and the night breeze; he disliked Lambert and wanted to be away. So the *Island Witch* slipped gently out, a phosphorescent wake trailing in the sea behind her.

Ryan took the deck until midnight. He had taken three of the beachcombers in his watch, three sodden wrecks of men, good only to be kicked into labor and held at it with hard driving. By the time the night breeze dropped the schooner was clear of the vigils around Poanga and out in the open sea. Ryan was standing by the idle wheel when one of the men shambled aft and touched his forelock.

"Well, Bill?"

"Beg pardon, sir. Summat queer about all this, to my way o' thinking." Old Bill was sober enough now, and once, before the beach claimed him, had been a prime seaman. "Did 'ee happen to note that 'ere Levantine, sir— Berman, his name is?"

Ryan was lighting a cigaret. He stood motionless, silent for a long moment. The lines and canvas were slatting gently as the schooner rose and fell, her spars drifting across the stars and back again. The glitter and coruscation of those far worlds across the universe with their eternal mystery, their problems that had no answer, fascinated Ryan now, as always. From somewhere forward came a gentle recurrent drone of snoring. Bill's two companions were standing watch in their own fashion.

"Yes?"

Ryan scarcely heard his own voice, was unaware that he had replied. He was not paying attention to old Bill; his body was here on the deck, yet for the moment he felt far off, suspended somewhere in space, waiting for something unknown and unforeseen to happen. The stars, the night, the calm, all seemed to surround him with queer things and to bring upon his spirit a singular prescience of unwonted happenings. His mate's death, perhaps. Would the essence and soul of the man cling and hover about the schooner? Ill luck, some would say; he had seen the men look at one another and mutter that afternoon.

And through this dreaming drift of thought he heard old Bill's voice again.

"And I was up at Jack's Place havin' a mug o' beer, sir. I took note of him account o' that 'ere job o' tattooing on his arm. Green and yeller and red it is, sir, if you've noted; it's a hoctopus, sir, and that 'ere is a specialty o' Frisco Mike down to Sydney. It's rare you find a good yeller that takes 'old, sir, but Frisco Mike gets it— "

The voice drifted out of Ryan's consciousness again. A star had fallen, trailing a sharp blaze of light among the constellations and vanishing as though it had never been; like a man's life, thought Ryan, like the mate who had vanished that day from mortal ken, his place already filled by a better man. That's the way with all of us, came the reflection. The world is essential to our petty desires and ambitions, but none of us is essential to the world. Plenty of better men waiting to step into our shoes and do our jobs. We're not even essential to our families, our loved ones—

"Eh?" Ryan turned, for a name had caught his attention, jerking at him subconsciously. "What's that again? Who?"

"Why, sir, Cap'n Stockton. I expect you know him. He had put in with the *Anna J*.— "

"Put in where?" demanded Ryan.

"At Thursday, sir, like I'm tellin' you, with the *Anna J*. She had new petrol engines for use in a calm and he needed to refill his petrol tank. He was taking her up to Quoin Island for the InterIsland Company; you know, they've leased the beds there from government, sir, and I hear they'll make a whacking rich thing out of it, too. Them beds've been protected these ten year back."

"What are you driving at, Bill?" said Ryan sharply. He was all attention now. "Get to the point of it, will you?"

"Why, sir," came the reply in an injured tone, "that 'ere Levantine, sir. I could take my davy he's the one I seen in Jack's Place that night. I mind 'im by the hoctopus, sir, and his bally mug, too. He was off the *Anna J*."

"When was this?" asked Ryan.

"About three weeks since, sir."

Up through the open skylight floated the soft, mellow chime of Ryan's cabin clock. Four double notes; midnight.

"Eight bells, sir," said old Bill mechanically.

"Make it so," said Ryan.

He had found that the old rascal loved this byplay, this ghost of old time sea routine, so out of place on a little trading schooner. The clang of the ship's bell sounded loudly on the quiet night. Ryan finished his cigaret and tossed it away, as Frome came on deck.

"Course N.N.E. a quarter east, Mister," said Ryan. "Won't have any breeze before dawn, though. Hot below?"

"Not bad, sir," said Frome. "N.N.E. a quarter east, sir.'

Ryan glanced around, then went down to his cabin. He was thinking of Captain Stockton, a fine old man, one of the vanishing type of seamen. Ryan had been with him for a year, in one of the InterIsland Company's schooners, when working up for his master's ticket. Odd about this fellow Berman, or George— could not be possible for him to have been with the Anna J. only three weeks ago, though.

All three of those chaps were from some Samoan craft. Old Bill must have been drunk at the time, or had seen some one else decorated with one of Frisco Mike's famous octopus tattoos.

"Too bad I missed seeing Stockton at Thursday Island," thought Ryan as he undressed.

TWO DAYS out of Poanga, the *Island Witch* was leaning over to a freshening breeze, close-hauled, with George Berman at the wheel. Captain Ryan had finished working out his noon sights and came on deck to give Frome a slight change of course. He stood beside the helmsman, drawing at his pipe and watching the rigging with satisfaction. Frome had taken hold well since coming aboard.

Presently Frome went forward, giving Larsen and the third man in his watch some work to do. Ryan met the sidelong glance of the Greek, and then, on sheer impulse, uttered a jesting remark.

"A sweet thing to steer, eh? Suit you better than the *Anna J*?"

To his utmost astonishment, the man's eyes widened upon him in swift, stark terror, and the swarthy face turned to a pasty white.

"Sure, sir, sure— I— I sailed in her once," said George, stammering.

"Eh?" Ryan was incredulous, yet he knew fright when he saw it. "You were ashore from her at Thursday Island about three weeks ago, weren't you?"

George positively gulped. His eyes flew about in desperate search of aid, but found none. Ryan was puzzled by the result of his idle question.

"Where's your tongue?" he demanded with a smile. "Give you a start, eh?"

"Y-yes, sir," returned George. "I was — was aboard her, sir— I skipped ashore. Them others don't know it."

Ryan's face lost its amused expression. He caught the frantic note in George's manner and wondered at it.

"I don't understand," he said. "The *Jennie Parker*, the ship you three men are from, was not in at Thursday. I'd have heard of it when I was there. There's talk of any strange trader."

"Yes, she was in there, sir," exclaimed George eagerly. "She come in for water, same day the— the *Anna J*. was there. I signed up with her that night. She went right out."

"With sick men aboard?" said Ryan incredulously. "Not much she didn't, my man. Pratique isn't worked that slick, by a good deal."

"They kep' it quiet— Cap'n Smith did," said the Greek sullenly. "I didn't know it or I wouldn't have shipped aboard her."

Ryan puffed at his pipe, making no comment. Somehow this was all a tissue of lies; he felt convinced of it. But why? With what purpose? He could see no reason for the man's lies. He knew that Captain Stockton had put into Thursday overnight, three days before he himself had arrived there; but he had heard of no other schooner putting in. In fact, he did not believe for a minute that the *Jennie Parker* had put in there.

"Easily enough settled," he said to himself, and walked forward.

He did not see the eyes of George gripped upon him with stark fear, nor did he see the signals the helmsman made to the uncomprehending Frome.

"Was that ship of yours in at Thursday Island, Frome?" he asked, coming up to the man. Frome turned and regarded him in surprise.

"The *Jennie Parker*? No, sir. I have an idea Cap'n Smith was headed for there, but I was up for'ard and knew nothing for sure."

Ryan nodded, and went aft, going straight below. Frome caught the signal of George, and also went aft; the Greek spoke with him hurriedly, and Frome's brows drew down and murder leaped out in his dark eyes.

"You blasted fool!" he exclaimed in a low voice.

"How'd I know?" cried George. "'Listen! He says I was ashore— and I was ashore that night, too. Remember? But how'd he know, huh?"

"He knows something now," said Frome savagely. "He knows you're a damned liar. If he says any more, tell him you lied just for fun. You give us away and I'll put my knife in you."

"I won't," muttered George sullenly. "Don't be scared."

Below, Captain Ryan was examining the green sea chest that had been turned over to him from the whaleboat, for ultimate forwarding to San Francisco. He went through it carefully, and found clothes, knicknacks, souvenirs, books; but nowhere, except on the inside of the lid, did he find the name of Hartley F. Stevens. Nor were any other names in evidence. Still, there was the long envelop with the thirty pounds in it— three ten-pound notes. Evidence enough of honesty.

He picked up the revolver and examined it. On the nickel plated center of the butt were scratched initials, HFS. Ryan laid it down, half frowning, then picked it up again. He broke the weapon. Four empty shells were ejected, two

unused cartridges; the barrel was foul from recent use. Ryan sniffed it, turned it over and over in his hand.

He looked at the scratched initials again. They were freshly and hastily made, full of little lines running off at tangents, where the knife point making them had slipped. A seaman, doing this job, would have done it carefully, with time on his hands to make a fair job of it. And the paint on the chest was scarcely marred; this was fresh, also. Then, the gouge marks in the lid, where some other name had been carved out.

"Something queer about all this," thought Ryan. "On the other hand, what looks queer may have amazingly simple explanations. Usually does."

He flung himself down on his bunk and slept for an hour. What had been almost suspicion died into nothing. He wakened, looked at the green chest, laughed at himself and went on deck. There he found Larsen at the wheel, Frome whittling at a bit of stick, the other two men at work forward.

Ryan did not like Frome particularly, but liked his way of getting work done and done right. He stood for awhile, talking. Frome admitted he held no ticket of any kind, had only a slight knowledge of seamanship, none of navigation.

"By the way," said Ryan, as his glance fell on the whaleboat in the stern, "I learned a good trick from an old friend of mine once— have followed it myself ever since. Here, I'll show you— "

He went to the whaleboat, which had not been covered over, and reached in for the plug in her bottom. Then he checked himself. He stared at it for a moment, drew back, sent his gaze along the outside of the boat and turned away.

"Put it off till tomorrow," he said with a careless laugh. "After all, it'd take too much time now. Getting on to eight bells. What say to a drink? Come along."

Frome assented, and Ryan went on down into the cabin. He was wondering furiously. Old Captain Stockton had a hobby about the plugs in his boats; he always cut them small and gave them a twist around of adhesive tape. No one else Ryan knew had ever done this. He was thinking about it as he came into the cabin and got out a rarely used bottle, with glasses.

Frome came in and took a chair across the table from Ryan, who had sat down and was pouring a drink. Frome took the bottle and poured his own. Ryan pulled open the table drawer and took out an automatic pistol.

"How did you happen to have a boat from the *Anna J*, Frome?"

The mate looked up, met the intent gaze and froze where he sat.

FOR A moment the two men looked at each other. Then, abruptly, Frome slumped in his chair. He set down the bottle and leaned over, fingering his glass, staring at it with a morose expression on his dark features. Then:

"I need this," he said, and tossed down the drink. Ryan sat watching him, astonished by this attitude, then spoke sharply:

"Out with it, now! I know you three men are from the *Anna J*. No use lying about it any further. What's the game?"

Frome lifted a tortured face, a face twisted with dark thoughts. Then he nodded.

"You're a white man, Ryan," he said in a low voice. "I didn't know we'd strike a man like you. I've hated to lie to you; been damned sorry about it. Here, I've no weapon; hold your gun on me if you like. I can talk better on my feet. I'll come out with the whole thing."

As he spoke, he rose deliberately. He began to pace up and down the cabin; words came from him, awkwardly at first, then more fluently. He did not notice Ryan, sitting at the table, did not look at him; he was absorbed in his story.

"Yes, we were aboard Stockton's craft, Ryan. Stockton's a fine old chap; but bitter hard in his way. Believes in discipline and all that— makes no allowances. Perhaps you know him. If so, I don't need to go into it."

Ryan grunted a half assent. Frome went on with his nervous stride; there was no menace in his aspect, merely a tortured anxiety to set forth everything clearly.

"He had a new mate who came aboard at Sydney. Chap named Barnes— a big bully boy, the kind you hear about but seldom see. Black George had sailed with Barnes before and hated him. From the start Barnes rode him, rode me also; Larsen, a good seaman, was in his watch also and caught it heavy. Captain Stockton knew nothing about it, of course, but he's the sort who backs up his mate to the limit, right or wrong."

Frome paused and Ryan nodded slightly. After a minute Frome came to the table, poured himself another drink, then went on with his pacing the deck.

"Things went from bad to worse. By the time we hit Thursday Island, Barnes was deviling us beyond endurance. We couldn't hope to skip the ship there, of course; we got shore leave in spite of Barnes, and the three of us went up to Jack's Place. We framed it up there, that night. Framed up everything, in case an appeal to Stockton failed. Barnes had threatened to kill George that day, see?"

"Where'd this Barnes come from?" demanded Ryan. "Is he the same chap who was with Bert Hopper up in the Solomons last year?"

Frome nodded.

"Heard of him, have you? Then perhaps you'll understand. Well, we got out next morning for the run up to Quoin Island. Barnes had liquor aboard; he was a perfect devil. A couple of days later I got a chance at Stockton and put it up to him. The old chap was fair and square about it. He gave Barnes a stiff call down, said he'd allow no brutality aboard his ship. Barnes found out I was the one to blame and he laid for me."

Again Frome paused at the table and again poured himself a swallow of liquor.

"You know what a mate can do when he's set to do it," he resumed.

He got out a cigaret, lighted it, puffed as he strode back and forth.

"We got up to Quoin, and while we were there loading shell, Stockton came down with rheumatism. It laid him out. He had spells that way, at times."

This was true enough, as Ryan knew.

"With the Old Man out of the way, we had a hell of a time," went on Frome. "Twice Barnes nearly got me; he was trying to make me turn on him and then log me for mutiny. He was riding George and Larsen worse than ever, too. The three of us agreed that we'd take the whaleboat and skip, the minute we got away from Quoin. Of course, others of the crew were in the know; they were glad enough to see us get away from it safely. George had a cheap old revolver that he'd hidden, and I got it from him in case of trouble. We got the whaleboat fixed up— stole cabin stores and so forth. I fixed up the whole story, just as I told it to you. We put some paint in the boat and so forth. She was tarped and it was safe enough."

Frome halted at the table, where a tin pannikin served as ash receiver, and pressed out his cigaret butt.

"The first night out of Quoin, as soon as our watch went below and Barnes was off deck, we made the break," went on Frome nervously. "As the devil would have it, Barnes came back on deck and caught us at it. He had us cold. Larsen hit him, he pulled a gun— and then I let him have it, four times. Before any one knew what had happened, we were down in the boat and standing off into the darkness. Stockton was still laid out, Barnes was dead and we were safe enough. We got away. Of course, we're wanted for murder now— but there's the whole thing for you. You've got us— "

He ceased speaking abruptly as Wong, the Chinese steward, pattered into the room. Wong was a little scrawny Oriental, a fixture with the *Island Witch*. He stood looking at Ryan, glanced at the pistol, glanced up at Frome, then spoke.

"Catchum key, Cap'n."

Ryan nodded and gestured toward the key hanging inside the door. Wong needed cabin stores, which were kept locked up. When Wong had taken the key and departed, Frome went on speaking.

"Now I've got it off my chest, Ryan, I feel better," he said, coming back to the table. "If you want to turn us in, we can't help it. Give me one more drink, if you will— "

Feverishly, he leaned over the table and picked up the bottle. Ryan, half frowning, was staring abstractedly before him. Frome's hand shook as he poured a small drink—

Swift as light, he drove the bottle against Ryan's head. A short, heavy blow that smashed the nearly empty bottle. Ryan slumped down, the pistol fell from his hand and clattered on the floor; his head and shoulders drooped across the table, blood pouring from a bad gash the broken glass had chopped in his skull.

From Frome broke a sharp, wild laugh of exultation; then he fell to work.

When Ryan opened his eyes, he was lying on the floor, thoroughly bound hand and foot, helpless to move. Frome was kicking him back to consciousness, having stuffed and tied a rag in his mouth to serve as guide.

"You're a sweet innocent fool, eh?" said Frome mockingly. "Swallowed the whole blasted yarn, didn't you? Ho, you're an easy one, you are! Thought yourself so damned smart, ferreting things out, huh? Well, Mister, you lose, that's all. And if you want to know what's what, the *Anna J*. is laying in sixty fathom, with every soul aboard her dead, from that old fool Stockton down. And now that you've logged everything, including your mate's sickness and death, we'll just rattle along to Suva with this here schooner."

He darted to the entry and was gone in a swift leap. After two minutes he returned, with Larsen and George clattering down after him.

"There he is, boys— sweet little package, eh?" Frome chortled as he pointed to the prostrate Ryan. "That's what comes o' being too blasted smart."

"Hell!" exclaimed Larsen. 'How you fix him, huh?"

"Easy. I'll log him sick, then buried at sea. Larsen, you hop along to the sail locker and get some canvas down here, with a palm and needle; you may have to break out a spare topsail and cut it up. Sew him up like he is, get me? Just like he is. Leave him to think about it. Along toward sunset we'll bury him openly— same sort o' sickness that got his mate. Want to see those pearls we got at Quoin, Ryan? Pearls and other things. All divvied up among the three of us. Too bad you don't get a share in 'em, eh? All right, boys. Larsen, get busy. George, you keep those blasted fools busy for'ard — tell 'em the cap'n is down sick. I'll attend to the log."

The other two disappeared. Ryan, his head still bleeding badly, lay silent; it was of no use to struggle. Frome got out the rough log and set to work making the entry, chuckling to himself the while.

Presently Larsen returned, staggering under a heavy bundle of canvas. He opened it on the floor, set palm and needle and cord on the table, then reached for his sheath knife.

"Got to cut her up," he said laconically.

Frome nodded and rose.

"All right, I'll leave the job to you, old-timer. Needn't bother with weights. Let the son of a dog float!"

He went up on deck, there to take open charge and spread the word of Ryan's sickness. Once he looked down through the open transom of the skylight and saw Larsen sitting on the cabin floor, cross legged, slicing up canvas. Frome chuckled and went about his business.

If he had looked down again, before the transom was mysteriously closed, he might have seen a strange sight— a wrinkled little yellow man standing behind the unsuspecting Larsen, meat cleaver in hand. But Frome did not look down again.

FROME, with Ryan's automatic pistol in his pocket, found no one to dispute his sway; word of the captain's illness, indeed, spread something like panic among the four beachcombers, until they received a bottle of squareface all around and were content.

Eight bells sounded. Some little time later Frome realized that Larsen had not come on deck, but his attention was distracted by the appearance of a white speck on the horizon. He altered the schooner's course a trifle and sent for George.

"Better get rid of Ryan right away," he said. "Where's Larsen?"

"Haven't seen him," said George, grinning. '"Prob'ly asleep for'ard."

Frome beckoned to old Bill, who was slouching aft.

"You two men fetch up Cap'n Ryan's body. It's sewed up and ready," he ordered. "All hands, stand by for burial of the dead. One of you chaps go look up Larsen."

The three beachcombers and Wong gathered in the waist, but no sign of Larsen appeared. George and old Bill appeared with the canvas wrapped figure, obviously not liking their job. Frome beckoned them to the rail.

"All right, over with him!' he commanded. "And may the Lord ha' mercy on his soul!"

The two men grunted, swung and let go. In the wake of the *Island Witch* the long gray bundle bobbed once or twice, then vanished. Frome looked around, frowning.

"See anything of Larsen, George? Go down and look him up. The fool's probably lying drunk somewhere below."

George vanished down the companionway. Wong came pattering up to Frome, cheerful and smiling.

"Catchum meat pie fo' supper?" he demanded.

Frome nodded and lighted a cigaret. Wong went down the after companionway, also, but Frome paid him no attention whatever.

Time passed; the sun was touching the western sea rim when Frome, with a start, woke to the realization of it. George had not returned, nor had Larsen appeared.

"That Greek devil!" he muttered. "He's found liquor too. By Godfrey, I'll settle him! Give 'em both a lesson, I will— "

With angry determination in face and bearing, he went below.

He glanced into the large cabin beneath the skylight. It was empty. In one corner was a long Singapore chair, over which were heaped fragments of canvas— the bits cut off by Larsen. Frome went on to the small cabins, looked into them one after the other, found them empty.

Astonished, he came back into the large cabin and stared around. Neither Larsen nor George were to be found anywhere. He went to the locker and found a bottle of squareface, half full, and got it out. Then he heard a voice behind him.

"Looking for something, Frome?"'

Frome turned, saw the heaped fragments of canvas in disarray, and beside them, standing with a revolver in his hand, Captain Ryan.

For one moment Frome went ghastly white with pure terror; then he rallied. This was a real man, no phantom; a man of flesh and blood— indeed, one whole side of his face was black with dried blood.

"Looking for George, are you?" said Ryan. His voice was mocking, and a curt laugh came sharply to his lips. "He's here under the canvas, Frome, tied up, saved for Admiralty court. And who was it you buried, Frome? Why, that was your old pal Larsen— Larsen, but without his loot. He left that behind him. And this is the revolver you were kind enough to plant in that sea chest— the old gun you murdered poor Cap'n Stockton with. You forgot you'd left two cartridges in it—"

A snarl contorted Frome's lips. He dropped the bottle, flung himself forward, one hand going to the pistol in his pocket.

The revolver in Ryan's hand burst into flame; and a second time. The two shots banged out thunderously in the cabin. Frome jerked spasmodically and came down full on his face at Ryan's feet. He lay there motionless, and blood ran into a pool under his arm and reddened across the deck as the schooner canted over.

"So!" observed Captain Ryan, and flung the empty revolver to the deck. "So! And that's the end to your story, my friend."

Frome's head wagged a little to a lurch of the schooner, as though in grim assent.

12: Fire of Retribution

Laurence Donovan

1885-1948

Argosy, 20 Oct 1928

"SLOW TIMED fire bombs started the blaze— we run onto one of them that hadn't exploded! Whoever done it, knew a cross-fire would trap th' men at the camp— "

Old Beth's gaunt face worked with a grim tightening around his lips.

"Reckon you boys could fly 'round the fire 'fore it hits th' camp. I ain't ever been up in a plane, but I've heard you could drop a man anywhere with one of them parachutes— I'll take a chance. We gotta put an intake valve on that engine, load th' men an' make a run for it down th' mountain."

Nick Mims, fire patrol pilot, demurred at first, not because he lacked the guts to go, but orders were orders.

According to the old logger, Beth, his camp high on Round Top mountain was cut off by the fire from all the trails leading down. And once the flames sweeping up the slopes had reached the camp, there was no escape.

"But, Nick, we gotta do it."

Five or six times during old Beth's recital, Jack Singer, mechanic and relief pilot, had reiterated this. In the back of young Singer's mind was the thought of his wife, Nellie. She was camping with friends in the Priest Lake vicinity. Last year there had been a bad fire there, too. Supposing Nellie were trapped? Jack kept thinking of that.

"We gotta do it," he affirmed, impatiently.

"Yeh," agreed Nick at last, reluctantly. "An' if we crash, it's curtains for our jobs— if we get out."

"Them boys must be facin' hell up there right now," said Beth. '" They can see the blaze for miles. The dinkyengine will come hell-beltin' down th' grade through th' cutover stuff— she might make it if we could only get her started.. But th' dinky's settin' on a mile of level track— gotta have that intake fixed 'fore they could fire 'er."

"Who'd you think set the fires?" asked Nick, his gray eyes glinting.

"You sort o' put a crimp in Hinton's monopoly by gettin' the rail right o' way 'cross his cutover land an' runnin' logs to the lake, didn't you?"

"Hinton wouldn't murder my boys," said Beth. "He's my enemy, not theirs."

"Let's go," said the older pilot. "It's a chance. We'll fly around an' volplane down over the mountain top. There ain't ozone enough in the draft over that fire to keep the motor turnin'.

OLD man Beth was making his first flight. He had had the parachute strapped on, asking for detailed instructions about its use. He feared the height; and the idea of jumping into two or three thousand feet of space was appalling. But a score of his boys were in the fire-rimmed camp. Old man Beth would give them their one slim chance of escape or he would die with them.

Jack saw there was no shaking his intention.

"Dinky engineer there," he asked, "to put in the valve and get 'er out?"

"I'll get 'er patched up," evaded the old man. "I been 'round dinky engines a lot."

Jack knew then it was as he suspected. The dinky engineer was not in the camp. Probably not a man there was mechanic enough to install and adjust an intake valve properly, let alone drive the dinky down that perilous ten-mile grade to the terminal at the mouth of the St. Joe on the lake. If old Beth were sure the jump meant death, he'd jump out of the plane regardless.

"You'll likely land in a tree-top," Nick told Beth. "Don't try to slip through if you do. The 'chute will hang you up. Grab on, cut your straps an' climb down if you can. Cut your cord as soon as you jump. I'll zoom the ship so you'll be safe enough."

Nick sent the plane along the Coeur D'Alene lake shore until they were directly opposite the mouth of the St. Joe River and the circling fire on Round Top mountain above it. He banked the Stearman, pulled the control stick hard back and climbed.

Beth groaned when the plane had topped the drifting gray smoke. The flames had been rushing up the mountain at greater speed than he had figured. Less than two miles, as nearly as he could judge, separated the logging camp site from the fire.

Jack watched Beth, and he knew when the old man turned sick. The draft of hot air from the flames, roaring over the mountain top made the going bumpy. The big Stearman rocked, dropped, caught the air cushion and bounced along through the air holes. Jack's own stomach was not sitting so pretty and he was aware that Beth was having a bad time of it.

This form of air sickness is closely akin to seasickness and it requires all of a man's nerve to keep a stiff upper lip. But Beth's mouth was a straight line. He was looking down through the floor windows and he touched Jack's shoulder.

Jack had a glimpse of white through the trees a mile or so down the mountainside. The camp then was still untouched, but at any moment a drifting brand borne on the wind might jump the fire along for the extra mile or two. At a point about fifteen hundred feet above the mountainside, where

he dared swing no closer to the dangerous updraft from the fire, Nick idled the engine for an instant and called out:

"Close as we can come— get set an' jump when I swing!'

Although his face was tinged with a grayish pallor, old man Beth arose and stood ready while Jack unlatched the door. Jack saw that Beth did not look down and he knew why. Sheer grit is required to step off into nothingness, The old man was looking only at the door. His right hand was on the 'chute's rip cord.

Nick gave the motor the gas and tilted the wings sharply.

"Now!" he shouted and waved his hand.

BETH took one firm step toward the door and vanished over the side. Jack turned instantly, touched Nick's shoulder, and before the older pilot could remonstrate, dropped out the open door after the old man.

Nick was not so surprised as Jack expected he might be. He had known all the time that Jack would take the jump. He had kept silent because he did not want Jack to know that he knew. Nick swung the plane back toward the mountain top.

It was his job to get back to the mouth of the St. Joe and have emergency facilities ready. They would be needed if the desperate attempt at rescue succeeded.

Jack was relieved when he saw that Beth's 'chute had opened. Two or three iuindred feet below him the round top of the 'chute was swinging in the wind. Underneath he caught a glimpse of Beth's swaying body. He saw all of this in the split seconds it required him to fall head downward past Beth's 'chute. He wanted Beth to know he was with him, so he did not rip his cord until he was a hundred feet or so under the old man. When his umbrella spread, he waved his hand and shouted. He heard the old man's voice and knew he was all right.

The wind created by the miles of solid fire front below swept the 'chutes swiftly toward the mountain side. The worst moment of their descent was at hand. Jack had been hung in the spike-topped cedars on previous occasions. But he was the lucky one of the pair this time. The edge of his *chute twisted off a branching limb, and. although Jack landed with a jolt, he was on the ground unhurt. Old man Beth was less fortunate.

Beth's umbrella was spiked squarely in the top of a slender cedar. Jack, freeing himself from the straps, got under the tree. Beth was fumbling with the cords and Jack saw he was cutting them.

A hard object came hurtling through the air and narrowly missed Jack's head. Jack smiled grimly. It was the new intake air valve for the dinky.

"Get th' valve— don't wait for me— I'll make it down—"

Despite his own perilous situation, Beth's mind was fixed on getting the log train engine working. But Jack stayed below until he saw the old man had freed himself and was making his way slowly down the tree. Beth reached the lower limbs of the cedar and was attempting to cling to the trunk when a branch snapped. He fell heavily at Jack's feet, and Jack grew sick as he saw how the old man's leg had twisted under him.

Heedless of Beth's protests, Jack got him to his shoulder and started down the mountain toward the camp. He was making slow progress when he heard a crashing in the bush. Four or five of the logging crew had seen the plane and the 'chutes. They contrived a rough sling for old man Beth, and one of the men hurried ahead with Jack to the camp.

Occasional brands and sparks were falling near by. Jack looked along the twisting log track, with its light, rusted rails, and his heart sank. Men of the logging crew crowded around, a new hope succeeding the black despair with which they had watched the crawling blaze.. Jack had the pipes apart and the intake valve in place when Beth was brought in. His fractured leg did not prevent the old man from thinking.

"Grab down the canvas an' souse it in the springs," he directed. " Get the wet canvas an' all th' gunny sacks we've got onto the cars— when we get goin', every man wrap himself up— it'll likely be hotter'n blue hell, but the wet rags 'll help.

"The track doesn't hit the heavy timber— goes across the cutover land, so it ain't likely there'll be any trees blockin' 'er. The cutover'll be hot, but we couldn't go through th' tall stuff."

PLENTY of willing hands piled wood into the firebox when the valve job was done. Whether they survived or perished, Jack was glad he had come. Inexpert hands, he was sure, could not have installed the intake valve.

Jack's only twinge of conscience concerned Nellie. But had she known, she would have had him do as he did. She was game, was Nellie.

Jack watched the needle creep up on the steam gauge. The suspense of waiting for power to move was worse than all the rest had-been. Jack helped get the dripping tent canvas on the cars to help protect the men. Bearded, silent, overgrown boys they were. Some had the strained look around their eyes that told what the hours of watching the approach of the blazing death had meant.

At last the steam hissed from the safety cock. Beth advised that they haul three of the flat cars. He figured it would give the men more room to fight the blaze, if the wet canvas proved insufficient to safeguard them. With two men

stoking the firebox, Jack tested the throttle. The dinky coughed and its four teetering wheels bit into the rails. They were beginning to move.

Some one shouted from the rear car. A brand had fired the woods directly behind them and the blaze was spreading. They were moving in the nick of time. Some of the men shouted again, and Beth called to Jack to stop. Jack could not hear distinctly, but when he had shut off the steam, Beth told him to wait for a minute.

"Three or four campers from up on the mountain just got into the clearin'," Beth explained across the top of the tender. "They're gettin' 'em covered with canvas on our last car. There— they're all clear— let 'er go."

The dinky coughed and the wheels spun again. Jack got no reassurance as to the light engine's stability from the rocking movement over the poorly built track, even at its first slow speed. The track ran for a mile on a level grade around the mountainside. This had been the loading spur. The dinky dragged the flats at a speed of less than ten miles an hour. To Jack, accustomed to the rushing take-off of his planes, they seemed scarcely to move. The acrid tang of the wood smoke drifted into the open cab and stung Jack's nostrils and throat.

He should have provided himself with one of the wet sacks or a strip of canvas. But old man Beth had thought of that, too. A lumberjack came climbing over the wood on the tender, dragging a wet canvas. Tack wrapped one end around his shoulders and trailed the remainder for the stocky little Irishman who was poking wood into the firebox.

The dinky puffed nobly and its wheels slipped and screamed on the rails as it strove to gather speed, despite the dragging weight of the flat cars. The chuffing exhaust drowned all other sound. The tall cedars and Pondosa pine trees began to move past more swiftly. It was like riding a smoke-filled tunnel.

Just before the dinky reached the downgrade curve, a vagary.of the wind swept the smoke back. Jack had a view of thin rails that dipped suddenly over the brink and corkscrewed down the mountain. He figured he would hold the dinky to low speed until they actually entered the heated zone. But the brakes?

Good Lord! He had not thought of that.

THE logging train was not equipped with air appliances. Hand brakes on the flats were used to ease the loads of logs down the mountain. Jack sent his fireman back over the tender to instruct the men about the brakes. And, if they got into fire so hot that the men could not expose themselves, well— Jack refused to think further along that line.

Jack had thought he had taken extreme risks in the planes. But up in the air you could see something. Now the smoke closed in again and he was compelled to draw a corner of the wet canvas across his mouth and nose.

They were on the very brink of the grade. Instead of the dinky pulling the flats, Jack could now feel the shoving weight of the cars. The dinky was leaping ahead and down. If he had only thought of those brakes sooner. But the wheels squealed and grated on the rails. The men of the logging crew knew their stuff. Fora mile they eased along, the smoke lifting and dropping, alternately shutting off Jack's wind and giving him a chance to breathe.

Jack's fireman crouched under the corner of the damp canvas. The dinky and the flats would run by gravity all the way to the transfer pier on the St. Joe River, if they held the rails.

The smoke lifted. For an instant Jack had a sense of relief. But the reason for the sudden swirling of the smoke wiped that out. A sheeted wall of flame leaped across the track ahead. The men on the cars had seen it, too.

Jack felt the dinky lurch forward. The brakes on the flats had been released.

It seemed to Jack that the weight behind must hurl the rolling little engine from the rails. But the drivewheel flanges were tapered for just that sort of thing. The wheels screeched, but they held.

The flames sent a stinging tongue through the cab window. Jack instinctively jerked the corner of the canvas over his face. The hot wind tore at him like a breath from a furnace. He smelled the hair singeing on the backs of his hands. 'The little Irishman crawled close to his legs under the canvas. 'The dinky and the flats had become a blind rocket rushing down the mountainside.

The dinky rocked and lurched. Jack prayed inside that there might be nothing across the rails. He groaned as he thought of what would happen if a burned tree had fallen to block their. way. He hoped that if they failed that he might be utterly destroyed. 'That would be better for Nellie than having him brought home afterward.

Jack risked a look ahead. The corner of the wet canvas was steaming. In front on either side the blaze was leaping and licking at short growth trees, Beth had been right. Only the fact that this was cutover land, small stuff, might save them. In the heavier timber of the virgin forest they would not have had a chance.

Their rushing speed now was more like the swift dash of an airplane. But a plane could go up. The dinky and the flats could only become a twisted mass of wood and iron if they were ditched. A blast, hotter than all the others, corched Jack's face. He got his head under the wet canvas again before he breathed, which was well. One draught of that blaze into his lungs and whether they held

the track or plunged into the superheated ground would not have mattered to him.

It seemed like an hour or more they had been tearing along, hemmed in by he blaze. Probably it was no more than a minute, for the swathe of the fire was less than a mile in width. A quick cooler draught struck Jack's face. He pulled away the canvas. For the first time since leaving the upper level he could see the track ahead. Two snaky rails were running toward him and disappearing under the dinky.

Jack heard the wheels squeal again. The men were striving to set the brakes. Their speed did not seem to lessen perceptibly. He heard a loud snap on one of the flats. A brake chain had parted. One of the men came crawling over the top of the tender, clinging to the swaying sides.

"We can't hold 'er!" he shouted. "Don't try brakin' th' dinky— you'll pile 'er up."

CURVES where the track disappeared shot up the mountain toward them, and miraculously disappeared under the engine and cars just when Jack was sure they would be catapulted into the wall on one side or over the precipice on the other.

"If she holds we kin check 'er on th' loadin' pier— gotta mile run there," said the lumberjack in Jack's ear.

A long straight stretch of track, steeply pitched, loomed ahead. They were out of the fire zone now. Bushes and small trees became a weaving wall of green on either side. The dinky plunged into a cut. Jack breathed easier.

"Cross th' highway just ahead," yelled the lumberjack. "State road 'round th' lake."

Jack had a flash of the road. It wound up alongside the track on one side before it crossed. On the other it disappeared abruptly behind the wall of the cut. Jack thought of his whistle, but the steam was down. The whistle made no sound.

The automobile roadster that shot from behind the wall of the cut almost cleared the rails ahead of the rushing dinky. Jack thought it had, until, in a brief backward glance, he saw the little car turning over and over down the steep bluff below the highway. That same flashing view revealed another car coming down the highway and then the dinky shot around a curve and the scene was shut off.

"God!" cried Jack, "I hope nobody's killed."

"Musta heard th' dinky," said the lumberjack. "Can't be helped now— only a mile to go— 'round that next bend— I'm goin' back— we'll try an' stop 'er."

The dinky and the flats, with brakes grinding, stopped on the long level stretch of the transfer tracks. Nick was among the first to reach the dinky. Jack felt strangely light and a confused blur of faces danced before him.

"Jack! Oh, Jack!"

He opened his eyes with warm, moist lips on his own. Nellie? It couldn't be Nellie down here. She was camping up at Priest Lake.

But it was. She had been with the party that had gone for the trip up Round Top mountain. She was one of the party that had been under the canvas on that last flat.

Jack struggled to his feet despite the protests of Nellie and Nick. He saw old man Beth lying on a stretcher ready to be placed in a car. Beth reached out his hand. He tried to speak, but no words came.

A man came hurrying across the transfer pier from the office. He came straight to Beth.

"Hinton's killed," he said. "Just got the phone message from the fire warden. He'd been chasing him. His roadster went off the highway, turned over. Had a case of fire bombs in the back. Some of them exploded— burned up the car— Hinton was caught underneath."

"The mills of the gods," said old man Beth in a hushed voice, his fingers tightening on Jack's hand.

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13: The Freckleton Fountain

Ernest Favenc

1845-1908

Evening News (NSW) 8 Jan 1898

The Muswellbrook Chronicle (NSW) 12 Feb 1898

FRECKLETON, generally supposed to be so called after the sun-kissed faces of the residents, was in a state of subdued excitement. At 12 noon the Member for the district was going to unveil, or declare open for public use, a drinking fountain presented to the town by its generous and public-spirited Mayor. Everybody was in good spirits— the Member at the chance of displaying his eloquence; the Mayor at the public parade of his generosity; and the general populace at the chance of a holiday, and possibly free drinks.

The important hour was approaching; the band was mustering up in its uniform, and the townsfolk beginning to assemble; when a somewhat seedy-looking swagman came up the main street. He looked around at the festive signs on either hand, and addressed a passer-by with the remark: 'Seems to be some kind of a shivoo going on here.'

The one addressed, glad to have a fresh listener, informed the swagman of the importance of the approaching ceremony.

'And what's the name of your worthy Mayor?' he asked.

'Doolittle; we have hopes of seeing him a C.M.G. after this display of his patriotism and benevolence. Why, fifty dogs have been kept tied up all night without water, to be released immediately after the ceremony, so that they will rush to the fountain and revel in its sparkling waters.'

'Benevolent, to the dogs,' said the swagman, 'and the people who tried to sleep.'

'They certainly disturbed our slumbers somewhat, but one must put up with a little inconvenience during a great time like this.'

'I'm travelling agent for a G.M.C. myself,' said the swagman.

'I don't quite understand?'

'Oh! G.M.C. stands for Great Magical Company.'

'Indeed!'

'Yes. I look a little down on it, I know; but wait till the show comes along in its turnout; they're up to Dick, I can tell you. I'm on ahead just to put up a few bills and notices and secure a loan. Hope to see you at our show.'

'Possibly,' returned the other, and the two parted.

The stranger proceeded on his way to one of the humbler pubs, where he deposited his swag on the verandah floor and went into the bar. After a conference with the landlord and a display of the necessary coin, he obtained

the use of a bedroom, and took himself and his swag there. When he emerged he had changed his dress and much smartened himself up in every way. He carried some posters, which he took round the town, and by permission affixed to the walls of the various inns; and then went to the local newspaper office and made arrangements for the insertion of a notice in the inevitable 'special' that would come out after the function. All this being done in a businesslike manner, he gave himself up to leisure and curiosity, of which he displayed a good deal.

The posters set forth the advent of the G.M.C., or Great Magical Company, and their appearance in their celebrated divining performance, wherein the wonderful witch Desracoolas would divine the past, and foretell the future of anyone amongst the audience who liked to step on the stage.

The opening of the Fountain came off with, great *eclat*, as the paper said afterwards. The dogs, however, were a failure. Not knowing anything about the Fountain, they never thought of going there when released, and instead of tumbling joyously over each other and lapping the sparkling fluid, they capsized buckets, invaded kitchens, bedrooms, and other places, and had a small rampage all to themselves.

The Member, however, did his duty. He held a glass up between his eye and the sun, spoke of its sparkle and purity, then— to the intense astonishment of those who knew his habits— drank it off. The advance agent for the G.M.C. noted everything, and conversed with anybody and everybody who would converse with him.

At about 3 o'clock the G.M.C. arrived, but truth to tell the turnout was not so imposing as the agent had vouched for. An overloaded trap, containing a veiled female and two men, was the whole of the show. They drove to the room secured for their performance by their agent at the local School of Arts, and then pulled up. The veiled female, popularly supposed to be the witch Desracoolas, disappeared within the doors, and the men busied themselves with unloading the trap, and the advance agent then took it and the two sorry steeds round to the small pub where he had put up. Public curiosity was quenched and disappointed. The younger people had expected a cheap show, such as the entrance of a circus company with all its tawdry finery on; and an ordinary dust-covered buggy did not fill the bill.

The Mayor entertained the Member for the district and several leading citizens at dinner at one of the principal hotels. The meal had to be held at 3 p.m., in. consequence of the member having to depart that evening to the distant railway station to catch the Sydney train; it being understood, in Freckleton that the work of Parliament was stagnated until his return. Under the influence of something more potent than fountain water, the Member

waxed eloquent, and before leaving assured them that with the influence he possessed they would have a railway brought to their doors six months was over. He then complimented them, on the beauty of their women, which considering that all were freckled alike, was a wide stretch of imagination, and the gallantry of their men; and departed in a buggy amidst what the *Freckleton Advertiser* described as tumultuous cheering; five dogs who had not been tied up all night pursuing the buggy for nearly a quarter of a mile.

The Mayor returned to his domicile smiling complacently. He was an abstemious man, and a hard one. But like most men of that stamp, was vain and self-sufficient. The empty compliments that had been paid him that day pleased him as much as a peerage would have some men.

Mayor Doolittle of Freckleton was a great and important man in his own estimation. He reached home and found his wife lying down, in tears.

'Crying again,' he said.

'I can't help it; you know how I feel when I see other people with their grown-up daughters with them, and I think of our's, roaming about the world, perhaps, without a home or a meal. Our only child, too.'

'Hold your silly tongue, woman. On a day like this to remind me of that ungrateful slut. If she is hungry, and homeless it's her own fault. I won't be upset by any reference to the matter. To-day especially.'

He flounced out of the room, indignant at his wife reminding him of his hard-hearted conduct towards their only daughter, whom he had discarded on account of a poor marriage, made in defiance of his consent. True, as he had to confess, there was nothing against the young fellow but his poverty, and a helping, hand would have put him on the road, to competence; but that was no palliation in his mind. It was against his autocratic will.

The show, such, as it was, at the School of Arts attracted a good audience. The people of Freckleton thought that an entertainment was a fitting wind-up to such, a day, and parted with their shilling and two shillings cheerfully. The advance agent stood at the receipt of customs, one man in shabby evening dress played the much-punished School of Arts piano, and another, also in shabby evening dress, was arranging some conjuring properties on the table standing on the little stage. Of the wonderful witch Desracoolas nothing could be seen; probably she was preparing incantations somewhere.

The Mayor, but not the Mayoress, and other notables arrived, and were given front seats, and the man on, the platform announced the commencement of the performance, which would be some wonderful feats of legerdemain. Afterwards would come the divination and marvellous reading of the witch Desracoolas, in the mirror of the future.

The feats of legerdemain were sufficiently good to please the unsophisticated Freckletonians. Then came the divination of the witch. The stage was prepared by removing the conjuring properties and substituting mirror at a peculiar angle, but visible to all the spectators.

Then the wonderful Desracoolas came forward shrouded in a fancy dress, but with her face still veiled. Anyone of the audience was then invited to step on the stage and have their past revealed and their future told. At this there was much giggling, but no one would bell the cat. At last Boosey Bill, pot-valiant, advanced. The witch withdrew out of sight behind a curtain, and Bill took a seat, feeling very uncomfortable at being in such a conspicuous position. The conjuror stepped forward and asked Bill his name, which was given in a husky voice as William Hawkins.

'Desracoolas!' said the conjuror, 'do you know anything, about this gentleman?'

'I do,' came a woman's voice from. behind the curtain. Would he like to hear 'something about his past?'

'Yes; if you like,' said Bill.

'Shall I say it out loud!'

'Oh; say it out,' said Bill.

'You were for some time a hard-worked Government servant.'

For a minute or two the slow-going wits of the Freckletonians did not take in the small joke; then, as they remembered the well-known fact that Boosey Bill had once served twelve months' hard labor, they began to laugh.

'One moment,' said the voice. 'You are now in love, deeply in love; would you like to see the object of your young affections?'

'Yes; bring her along,' said Bill, savagely, and defiantly.

'Look in that mirror.'

Everybody looked on the mirror, on the surface of which immediately appeared the reflection of a bottle of whisky. A howl of delight greeted this palpable hit, and Bill got up growling.

'Blimey! I've had enough of this,' he said, and get down off the platform, muttering lurid imprecations, for which he was reproved by the Mayor.

For some time there was much hesitation to make the second one; but at length one young fellow, who felt conscious of a harmless record, made the attempt, and came out of the ordeal with honor.

Then the girls began to troop up, and were all mightily astonished at being told perfectly true incidents of their pasts, and, of course, received favorable predictions for the future. Presently the elders tried their fate, and the oracle behind the curtain seemed equally well acquainted with their antecedents. At last the Mayor himself— the great man of the day— stepped on to the dais

amidst applause. He nodded benignly when some one of his past deeds were reported to him. Then said the voice—

'Would you like to see the face of the one you have most injured during your life?'

'I am not aware that I ever injured anyone; but I may have had occasion to act justly,' returned his Worship, pompously.

'Look on the mirror,' said the voice. All looked, and on the surface appeared the face of a young woman, careworn and distressed, looking with sad, pleading eyes at the Mayor of Freckleton.

The Mayor started from the chair, and his face paled; whilst throughout the audience ran a sort of universal whisper—

'Maggie Doolittle!'

The face vanished; and the Mayor became himself again.

'What is this trickery?' he demanded of the conjuror. 'Who is behind that curtain? I will see!'

And before the man could stop him he had lifted the curtain. But there was no one there. Unnerved, in spite of himself, the Mayor returned to his seat, muttering something about warrants and police. But the performance was over. The man at the ill-used piano struck up 'God Save the Queen,' and the audience filed out, talking mostly about the last item in the show.

Mr. Doolittle went home upset and ill at ease; it seemed very hard that, first his wife's reproachful tears, and then this incident should have occurred to overcast the most important day of his life. He answered his wife, when asked about the show, that he was sorry he had attended, which was absolutely true; but would give her no clue as to what had upset him. He thought, and wisely, that she would hear of it soon enough in the morning from other sources. Nothing remains hidden in a country town.

He was an early riser, and strolled off to the fountain before anyone was up to notice him, to refresh his eyes with the inscription setting forth how it was the gift of Robert Doolittle, Mayor of Freckleton, etc. He had had a bad night, and was reflecting on the possibility of his actually having made a mistake. He knew that his wife fretted and grieved continually. In his own way he had been fond of his daughter, and— but there he came to a full stop, he could see nothing beyond.

The G.M.C. were putting their belongings on their shabby buggy as he passed the School of Arts, but he could not find it in his heart, as yet, to return their morning greeting civilly. He walked on home. His wife, not an early riser as a rule, was absent. He did not ask after her, but sat down and ruminated on. that strange and life-like face he had seen last night. How was it done? Then he went into his breakfast-room. The meal was neatly laid, but he missed many of

the little touches his daughter used to bestow— touches only noticed by their absence. Then he began to wonder where his wife was. He arose and glanced in the glass over the mantelpiece.

Good God! There was the face of last night.

He turned quickly to find his wife and daughter standing behind him. There was an instant struggle in his heart, and then his better self conquered. He lifted them both from their knees, where they had fallen before him, and gave his daughter the kiss of forgiveness.

'So you were the witch?' he said, after a short time had passed. 'That accounts for your intimate acquaintance with everybody's past life. Was your husband there?'

'Yes. He played the piano, so you did not notice him.'

'Where is he?'

'Not far,' said Maggie. 'Shall I bring him in?'

'Of course; we'll all have breakfast together. I must find you something better to do than strolling about the country.'

'There's nothing to be done in town, and Will is not strong enough for bush work.'

'Well bring him in.'

'FATHER,' said Maggie, after the breakfast of reconciliation was eaten, 'it was hearing of the fountain about to be opened brought us here. I thought if you gave a fountain to the town you surely couldn't refuse a little love to your daughter.'

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14: The Adventure of the Fallen Angels

Percival Wilde

1887-1953

The Popular Magazine 20 Oct 1924

American author and playwright

THE ATMOSPHERE in the little room was electric. The explosion, one sensed rather than felt, would soon come.

From outside, far below in the street, came the occasional clatter of a belated taxi-cab. From above came the steady, unwinking glare of high-powered lights. The clock on the mantel, and the overflowing ash-trays, indicated the hour of two in the morning. Yet the men seated about the bridge table in the Himalaya Club, cutting in and out at the end of each rubber, played with a concentration that was apparently regardless of everything else.

Straker, so he asserted afterwards, had been on the verge of an apoplectic stroke since midnight. Billings clutched his cards in a nervous hand, and impatiently awaited the moment when the accusation would be made. Chisholm, who could watch the ticker spell out fluctuations which meant tens of thousands to him without turning a hair, bit the ends of his straggly moustache from time to time, and hoped that his exterior did not betray his excitement.

Like the others, Chisholm had absolute confidence in Anthony P. Claghorn— "Tony" Claghorn to his intimates— who, by his own admission, was an expert on everything having to do with games of chance; but, as the minutes stretched into hours, and as Claghorn, with not a wrinkle in his lofty brow, confined himself to smoking the best cigars that the Himalaya Club— and his hosts— provided, and refrained from uttering a word, Chisholm's worries multiplied.

He could not assert that Tony had been an inattentive spectator. At nine, promptly, the game had begun. At nine, promptly, Tony had pulled up the most comfortable chair, and had anchored in it. At half -hourly intervals or thereabouts rubbers had ended, and the six players, cutting to determine the four to play next, had changed seats. At half -hourly intervals or thereabouts Tony, without moving, had called for a fresh cigar.

At ten Chisholm had glanced at Tony questioningly. Tony had replied with an innocent stare. At intervals from then on to midnight, Straker, Billings, Hotchkiss, and Bell had glanced questioningly at the silent young man. He had given them glance for glance— but no satisfaction. Yet during the preceding

afternoon Tony had discoursed eloquently upon the ease with which he would solve the mystery.

To be sure, it had been a mystery of Tony's own creating. Roy Terriss, the suspect, had not been looked upon as such until Tony, by a few well-chosen words, had called the attention of his club-mates to the fact that Roy was a remarkably consistent winner. Before that time it had been admitted that Roy was generally successful at bridge; that he enjoyed playing in an expensive game; and that the game was rarely, if ever, expensive for him. It was Tony who pointed out that Roy's gains, during a winter's play, probably amounted well up into five figures; and it was Tony who, without making direct accusations, had raised his eyebrows significantly at moments when that simple act was not altogether beneficial to Roy's reputation.

Having created the mystery, he had been invited to solve it. With becoming modesty he had accepted the task, and, after sitting solemnly through one five-hour session, had expressed a desire to sit through another. This wish granted, he had declared his intention of being present on yet a third occasion. The results had been painful to his friends, who, expecting they hardly knew what, had thrown caution to the winds, and had been divested of large sums by Terriss, who knowing nothing at all of what was afoot, had played calmly, coldly, and with deadly precision.

Chisholm, indeed, had explained his own mistakes to Tony that very afternoon. "I'm a conservative player," he had asserted earnestly. "I follow the book. I know the rules, and I don't try to improve on them. I don't overbid, and, if the other fellow overbids, I'm a sharp at doubling. But when I'm expecting the whole game to blow up any minute, I can't put my mind on it, and I don't play like myself."

"Even at twenty-five cents a point?"

"What does twenty-five cents a point matter when I'm waiting for you to start the fireworks? Take that hand last night: it was good for three odd. I bid up to five. That wasn't like me, was it? Then Terriss doubled— that's what any sane, level-headed player would have done, holding his cards; and, instead of shutting up and taking my medicine like a little man, what did I do but redouble! Claghorn, I put it to you: was that the act of a normal man? Was that the kind of play you'd look for from me? Then the finesses didn't hold, and I got set for eight hundred points."

Tony smiled reminiscently. "That was a most instructive hand," he commented. "Now, if you had doubled his four instead of going up yourself—"

Chisholm cut him short with a growl.

"Look here," he pointed out succinctly, "we didn't get you into this to give us bridge lessons, you know. If we wanted lessons, we could get them for

about a tenth of what his performance is costing us. You said there was something queer about the game. We're waiting to be shown, that's all."

At two o'clock, ten hours later, Chisholm was still waiting. Billings, neat and dapper, a stickler for etiquette, had, upon this third evening, to his everlasting embarrassment, been detected in a revoke. He had paid the penalty promptly— graciously; had, indeed, insisted upon its being exacted. But the look which he had given Tony had explained more eloquently than could any number of words how he had come to be guilty. And Hotchkiss, fumbling his cards nervously, had failed to cover an honour with an honour— with results which bulked large when the score was added.

And at two o'clock, Billings and Hotchkiss, as well as Straker, Bell, and Chisholm, were waiting— waiting.

The great moment, the long-anticipated moment, came when it was least expected. At two-fifteen the men had adjourned hopelessly. Chisholm was balancing the score; his confederates had already opened their cheque-books; Terris, with folded arms, was waiting to learn the exact amount of his gains.

It was then that Tony flicked the ash from the tip of his cigar, and spoke. "Mr. Terriss is again the only winner," he murmured, as if to himself. "I wonder what he would say if I mentioned that the cards with which he has been winning are marked."

In an instant Terriss was on his feet.

"What did you say, Claghorn?" he thundered. "What did you say?

Tony stood his ground stoutly. "I made the statement," he declared, "that you have been winning with marked cards." He took up the two packs that had been used in the bridge game, and balanced them in his hands. "I still make that statement."

"You—!" shouted Terriss, and dashed at him. Chisholm thrust his bulk between.

"Take it easy, Terriss," he suggested, "we all know what's been going on. Mr. Claghorn has been looking into things for us."

Terriss gazed around the circle of faces.

"What's this? A conspiracy?" he demanded.

Chisholm shook his head. "Terriss, you know us better than that. Bell, Hotchkiss, Straker, Billings— they've all got reputations to lose, not to mention me. We've asked Mr. Claghorn to investigate. That's all."

"And how is Mr. Claghorn qualified to pass upon such matters? What right has Mr. Claghorn to make accusations against me?"

A chorus answered him. Straker, it appeared, had been present upon a certain occasion when Tony had unmasked one Schwartz. Billings, who had been another witness of that feat, contributed details of the manner in which

Tony had exposed a sharper at Palm Beach. Chisholm, a third witness, had half a dozen stories at his finger tips.

Tony Claghorn's career, it was evident from their testimony, had been one long succession of triumphs. His wake was dotted with discomfited cheats, prestidigateurs, and impostors. Once put upon the scent, he had never failed to bring down his man. With appropriate modesty Tony bowed his head while his friends detailed his triumphs. To be sure, the credit for each victory was wholly due to one Bill Parmelee, an unassuming countryman whose acquaintance Tony had made one summer; and Tony, not once, but a dozen times, had explained how his own contribution to the various episodes which had since become famous was of the slightest. But Tony's explanations must have lacked the convincing note, for his friends did not hesitate to trumpet his praises to the four corners of the earth.

That they should forget the quiet young man who had played the leading role was not unnatural; Parmelee, farmer and reformed gambler, cared nothing for advertising, and chose to remain out of sight. Almost mechanically his laurels descended upon Claghorn, who, despite his protestations, found the eminence thus forced upon him far from unpleasant.

When Terriss's monotonous success at bridge had come to Tony's attention, he had attempted to interest Parmelee in the matter.

He had failed. Parmelee, Cincinnatus of gamblers, cared more for his blooded cattle than for fresh laurels. And he had not agreed entirely with Claghorn's conclusions.

"Tony, because a man's a winner, it doesn't follow that he's a cheat," he had pointed out.

"No, but in this case—"

"In any case," Parmelee had interrupted, "you must remember that for every dollar won by dishonest gambling, a thousand are probably won by honest play."

"You don't really believe that!"

"I don't know whether I do or not. But that's what I like to think."

Tony's enthusiasm had been damped, but not extinguished. After revolving the subject in his mind overnight, he had decided that he himself was entirely competent, and that Bill's confidence in human nature was, to say the very least, exaggerated.

Wherefore, Tony had gallantly launched himself into the breach. He smiled at Terriss across the table. Success was his, and its taste was sweet.

"Marked cards, Mr. Terriss," he repeated, "marked cards."

Terriss glanced at the set faces about him, and his assurance decreased visibly.

"I suppose," he faltered, "that it will be quite useless for me to say that I didn't know the cards were marked."

"Quite useless," said Tony.

"I won fairly and squarely, I played the game according to the rules."

"What's the good of arguing?" enquired Straker icily.

Terriss gazed about helplessly. "No; there's no good in arguing if you're all against me," he assented. "What do you expect me to do?"

"Make good."

"How?"

"Give back what you won."

Terriss snorted. "I'll be damned if I do," he declared.

"If you don't," said Chisholm, "you will forfeit your membership in this club."

"And if I do," challenged Terriss, "will I hold on to it? Am I the kind of man whom you want to remain? What's the difference whether I give back my winnings or not— except to me? I've been caught cheating, haven't I? That makes me an undesirable member by itself, doesn't it? Of course, I say that I played honestly: that's what you'd expect me to say. But, even if I gave back my winnings, you won't believe me."

"It's the correct thing to do, Terriss," said Straker quietly.

"What does the correct thing matter to a man who has been caught cheating? No; if I'm to be hanged, I'd rather be hanged as a wolf than as a lamb." He took up the score, and surveyed the totals. "Gentlemen, you owe me money. Write your cheques."

"What?" gasped Chisholm.

"You've lost. Pay me."

"What about the marked cards?"

"Well, what about them? If there are marked cards, you may have profited by them yourself. Try and prove you didn't."

"I lost!" spluttered Chisholm, nearly speechless.

"What of that? If the cards hadn't been marked you might have lost still more. And that applies to all of us." With supreme self-confidence he beamed upon the players. "Pay me," he invited; "pay me, or I'll bring suit against every man jack of you. You see, I no longer have a reputation to lose, and it won't hurt me to go to court. But if you fellows think you will enjoy the publicity, if you look forward to seeing your names decorating the front pages of the newspapers, just try getting out of your debts."

Helplessly the conspirators turned to Tony. "What do you advise?" they asked as one man.

Tony shrugged his shoulders. "This is out of my department," he said modestly.

Straker glanced about keenly. "You know," he said brightly, "Terriss may be bluffing."

Terriss grinned. "If that's what you think, why don't you call his bluif ?"

There was a pause. Then Billings seized his pen and dashed off a cheque.

"Here you are," he said ungraciously, "I have a wife and two daughters. I can't afford to get mixed up in a scandal."

"Quite so," said Terriss. "I thought you'd see the point after I'd explained it to you."

One by one the men wrote cheques, and passed them to the lone winner. He pocketed them carefully, rose, surveyed the conspirators.

"Gentlemen," he murmured, "I am about to leave you, to return to my poor but honest domicile. And I have one last request to make of you: don't tell anybody what happened in this room tonight; don't breathe a word of it to your closest friend."

Straker laughed aloud. "Won't we?" he cackled, "Oh, won't we? I'll make it my business to see that every man in this club knows just what took place in twenty-four hours."

Terriss smiled ominously. "In that event, Straker," he warned, "don't pretend you're surprised when I bring suit for criminal libel."

"What?"

"Against each and every one of you." At the threshold he paused. "I can't stop you from blackening my reputation among yourselves; you seem to have done that pretty thoroughly, anyhow. But let me hear that any one of you has dared to say a word against me outside of this room, and I'll hit back? By George, I will! I'll hit back, and I'll hit back hard! Marked cards! Who brought them into the game? Who profited by them? Who didn't profit by them?" A mocking smile hovered upon his lips as he opened the door. "Gentlemen, think it over! Before you do anything, think it over— and then don't do it!"

The latch clicked, and he was gone.

ii

IT WAS BILLINGS who first broke an agonised silence. "Another such victory," he soliloquised, "and we'll all be broke. What do we do next, Claghorn?"

But that worthy, pausing only to light a fresh cigar, had prudently retreated to the threshold.

"What do we do next, Claghorn?" Hotchkiss echoed.

Tony shrugged his shoulders. "This is out of my department," he said modestly.

Long, long after he had left, gently closing the door behind him, the conspirators sat round the table, comparing notes, exchanging advice, and sympathising with each other's misfortunes. But that, however interesting in itself, has nothing to do with this story.

There are always several ways of looking at a matter. A disinterested judge, for example, might hesitate to characterise the episode which we have recounted as a triumph for Mr. Anthony P. Claghorn. But Claghorn himself spoke of it as a triumph without question. He had set out to expose a sharper; he had succeeded. That the operation had been monstrously costly to his friends was not so important as the fact that it had attained its object. Tony, indeed, did not use stronger terms than "triumph" only because stronger terms did not occur to him.

To his pretty wife he related his exploit with gusto. She understood nothing of cards, but Tony wanted admiration, and her admiration was better than none. But the approbation which mattered most was that of Bill Parmelee, and to that Tony looked forward eagerly. Half a dozen times Tony had been a mystified spectator while Bill, moving along curious lines, had laid the foundations of one of his many victories. It had been Tony's part to observe, to wonder, and to applaud at the conclusion of each carefully planned campaign.

Now, Tony felt modestly, the roles were reversed. "Without help from his friend, acting entirely upon his own initiative he— Tony— had brought his attack to a successful conclusion. It would be Bill's turn to listen while Tony condescended to explain. In the anticipation it was all very pleasant, and Tony lost no time in scurrying to the little town in which Parmelee had immured himself.

"I was satisfied that something was wrong," Tony began magisterially, "oh, long ago; ever so long ago."

"In spite of what I said?" Bill enquired.

"What did you say?" asked Tony tolerantly.

"I tried to convince you that a man can be a winner without being a cheat."

"Oh, yes; I remember that."

"I said that for every dollar won by dishonest gambling, a thousand are probably won by honest play."

"I remember that also," Tony admitted, and lighted a cigar, "but your faith in human nature is— shall we say— exaggerated? In this case the suspect— I'd rather not tell you his name— broke down and admitted everything."

"Well! Well!" said Bill. "Go on with your story."

"I investigated the case carefully. I used a process of elimination. The game was bridge. Certain methods of cheating were, therefore, useless."

"Quite correct."

"A hold-out, for example, would be of no value," said Tony, and went on to explain the nature of a hold-out to the man who had initiated him into its mysteries. "By a hold-out," he volunteered graciously, "I mean a device which can be used for the purpose of keeping one or more cards in concealment until the player wants them in his own hand."

Not a vestige of a smile was visible on Bill's placid countenance.

"I have heard there were such devices," he murmured.

"Quite so; but as I have explained to you, the suspect— whom I prefer not to call by name— could not possibly have used one. It would have meant introducing a fifty-third card into a complete deck, and that would have been detected at once. You see, if Ter— the suspect had introduced a fifth ace into his hand it would inevitably have duplicated an ace in some other hand. Whenever all the cards are dealt out, a hold-out becomes worthless."

Bill stared at the carpet intently. "Not altogether worthless," he qualified.

"Altogether worthless," Tony insisted.

"A hold-out might be used on the deal itself," murmured Bill, as if to himself. "The— ahem!— suspect might put all four aces and all four kings as well into a hold-out, offer the pack to be cut without them, and pass them into his own hand on the deal."

"What?" gasped Tony.

Bill continued unemotionally. "Of course, that would be pretty raw. Nobody but a beginner would try to get away with anything like that. A really sharp player, playing bridge, would pass the top cards into his partner's hand. His partner, you see, wouldn't have to be a confederate: give him more than his share of aces and kings, and he'd go a no-trumper, wouldn't he? In all innocence he'd make the correct bid. It would be quite enough for the sharper, sitting across the table, to give him the cards warranting it."

"By George!" ejaculated Tony. "I never thought of that!"

"There are still other ways in which a hold-out might be used without duplicating any one of the fifty- two cards in the deck, but it's not necessary to discuss them. Go on, Tony."

It was with a sensation that the wind had been taken out of his sails that the young man continued. "Rightly or wrongly, I decided that the suspect was not using a hold-out. You don't think he was. Bill?" he interjected anxiously.

"No."

"I continued with my process of elimination. There are many cheating devices. In bridge most of them are useless. But one cheating device is useful

in every card game." He paused, to aim a long forefinger at his friend. "I refer, of course, to marked cards."

"Ah-ha!"

"I examined the cards carefully. They were not marked. But I risked everything on a bold bluff," chortled Tony, "and it worked, I made one heap of all my winnings," he misquoted, "and I risked it all on one pitch— on one pitch— I forget how it goes on."

"Cut out the poetry and tell me what happened."

"I picked the psychological instant. I've always been good at that — picking the psychological instant— and I boldly accused Ter— the suspect of using marked cards. I knew well enough he wasn't using them. Here"— and Tony produced the cards themselves from capacious pockets— "here they are— unmarked. But I understand human nature, and I felt sure that if I accused a cheat of cheating he would— ahem!— collapse. "Whether or not I happened to mention the exact method he was using did not matter; the accusation would be enough."

"Did it work?"

"To perfection. Ter— the suspect was silent, and silence is confession."

Bill smiled. "Is it?" he queried. "If so, a sleeping man is guilty of anything and everything."

"The suspect knew the game was up."

"Perhaps he felt you were carrying too many guns for him. What was the use of pleading innocence when you— and your friends— were convinced he was guilty?"

"I made it a point to treat— ahem!— the suspect with scrupulous fairness."

"Why not call him by his name? Roy Terriss?"

"How did you know?" gasped Tony.

"That's neither here nor there. Go on."

But Tony was too astonished to continue. "How did you know?" he demanded. "How on earth did you know?"

Bill shook his head. "We'll skip that for the time being. Finish your story."

Tony gazed at his friend with some bewilderment. He had looked forward to this moment of triumph. In the realisation it was not so satisfactory as in prospect. He passed a shaky hand over his brow. "Perhaps you can finish the story yourself, Bill?"

"Perhaps I can. Terriss admitted nothing. Terriss denied nothing. He refused to give back the money he had won. That took nerve, and I admire him for it. He knew he had no chance of vindicating himself. He decided to wait for a better opportunity."

Tony nodded reluctantly. "Most of that's quite correct," he admitted grudgingly.

"You accused Terriss of playing with marked cards. He replied that if the cards were marked he hadn't benefited by it. And he added what was, after all, a logical conclusion: that the marks might have been of value to your friends."

"Absurd on the face of it," commented Tony, "the cards aren't marked."

"Not so absurd as you think," qualified Bill, and his face set in stern lines. "The cards are marked."

iii

SOMETIMES the word "surprise" is too feeble fully to express a state of mind. Indeed, to picture Tony's reaction to his friend's simple announcement in reasonably accurate terms, it would be necessary to overhaul, refurbish, and expand the English dictionary.

Tony gazed at Bill with eyes that popped out of his head, opened his mouth two or three times, wetted his lips, and spluttered, "Wh-what did you say?"

"I said," repeated Bill, "that these cards are marked."

"But they can't be!" exploded Tony. "Don't you see? That was the whole beauty of my bluff— that the cards were what they should be, and that I made him believe they were something else."

Bill smiled grimly. "Sometimes a bluff isn't a bluff. Sometimes a man shoots in the dark and hits the bull's-eye. Sometimes a well-meaning blunderer like you, Tony, tells the truth when he leasts suspects it."

"But it's impossible! I've examined those cards with a magnifying glass! I've gone over them not once, but a dozen times! I haven't found a thing!"

"Tony, you didn't know what to look for." Bill spread half a dozen cards on a convenient table. "In the first place, the cards are of an uncommon pattern. You notice the two little angels in the centre? They're what is known as 'Angel-Backs!'"

"They're the cards that the club supplies."

"I don't doubt that."

"For the last eight months no other cards have been used at the Himalaya."

"Then how about these?" Bill spread half a dozen cards from the second pack on the table.

Tony gave the cards, decorated with a conventional geometrical design, only a glance. "Oh, those? Those are poorer-class cards which the club laid in when it began to run short of the better ones."

"The Angel-Backs being the better class?"

"Of course. You can see that in a minute."

Bill half-closed his eyes reminiscently.

"When I made my living as a gambler— when I was just beginning to learn the ropes— Angel-Backs were fairly common. They were good cards. They were high-priced, but they were worth it. They gradually dropped out of use; cheaper cards took their place. To-day people don't care about quality; it is price that matters. In fact, this pack of Angel-Backs is the first that I have seen in some years. I was under the impression that they were no longer being manufactured."

Tony could not restrain his impatience.

"Come back to the subject. Bill," he begged. "You said the cards were marked. Which pack? And how are they marked?"

"The Angel-Backs, of course. Look at the angels closely."

"I see nothing."

Bill smiled. 'This angel, for example, must have gone walking in the mud. His right foot is not as clean as it might be."

"What of that?"

"This other angel evidently put one hand into the mud. You'll notice it's dirty. This third angel knelt in it: there's some on one of his knees. And this fourth angel must have been doing somersaults; you'll notice his complexion has become decidedly swarthy."

"By George!" ejaculated Tony.

"Go through the pack," invited Bill, "and you'll find that there isn't an angel in it who wouldn't be the better for a bath. And you'll find— it's a pure coincidence, doubtless— that the kings have marks on their right shoulders, the queens marks on their left shoulders, the jacks marks at the waist-line, and so on through the lot. The angels are small— and the marks are still smaller— but they're very evident when you're looking for them."

Without a word Tony whipped out a magnifying glass, and bent over the cards. "You're right!" he said excitedly; "you're right. And that proves my case beyond a doubt."

"What do you mean?"

"Terriss was using marked cards. My guess hit the nail on the head. Terriss marked the cards while the game was under way."

"Marked them as delicately as this? As accurately? Tony, don't you believe it!"

"But cards can be marked during the progress of a game."

"Yes — with a prick, or with a spot of colour. But to mark cards like this? To select a minute speck on the back of each, and dot it as neatly as these are dotted? That takes time, skill, and privacy. The man who marked those cards did it in his room."

"You mean Terriss brought the marked pack with him, and substituted it for one we were using?"

"Not likely."

"Why not? It could have been done."

"It's most improbable. You'll notice that every card in the pack is marked— not the high cards alone."

"What of that?"

"What would be the object — in bridge? Really fine players place the cards as far down as the sevens and eights. But who ever heard of taking a finesse against a three-spot? Or a four? Or a five? Why should any sane man take the trouble— and the risk— to mark them?"

Tony corrugated his brow. "Perhaps," he hazarded, "perhaps the man who marked the cards was keen on doing a thorough job. Having begun, he didn't know when to stop."

Bill shook his head decisively. "It won't do, Tony. It won't do at all. An amateur might have done that— you might have done that at a first attempt— but the man we are looking for is a professional, or I know nothing about gambling and gamblers. Look at the beauty of the work! See how perfectly his shading matches the colour of the backs! And, remember, if he marked the twos and threes there was a good reason."

Tony shrugged his shoulders. "Reason or no reason, I can't see that it's of any particular importance."

But Bill was already studying a time-table. "The next train for town leaves in forty minutes," he mentioned. "I'm going to pack my bag."

Tony gazed at him with surprise.

"Going to town because the twos and threes are marked? Really, I think you're exaggerating their importance."

"It would be difficult to do that," said Bill. He rose and glanced keenly at his friend. "In the first place, they prove that Roy Terriss is innocent."

"How so?"

"I have been given to understand that he plays no other game than bridge."

"Yes; that's so."

"Well, the man who marked these cards didn't expect to play bridge at all. That's my second point, Tony. The man who marked the cards didn't neglect the little ones for the soundest reason in the world."

"And what's that?" asked Tony scornfully.

Bill opened his valise, and began to jam articles of clothing into it. He glanced at his friend and smiled, opened his mouth to speak, closed it, and

smiled again. "Tony, hasn't it struck you yet?" he demanded at length. "The man who marked these cards expected to play poker!"

iv

UPON EVERY other occasion that Parmelee had accompanied him to town, Tony had been filled with happy anticipation. It had meant, Invariably, that the man-hunt was on in earnest; that a pursuit which would end only with the exposure of the guilty individual was under way. In the past Tony— a privileged spectator, knowing enough to whet his curiosity to the utmost, but never knowing quite as much as he wanted to— had enjoyed a long succession of happy thrills.

Not once, but half a dozen times, had he observed Parmelee picking up a scent like a well-trained bloodhound, disentangling it from others, following it to a surprising conclusion. Tony had watched, wondered, admired; here was drama, hot off the griddle, served in the most appetising fashion, and the clubman, whose chief entertainment, in earlier days, had been provided by the headlines of the sensational newspapers, had come to learn that a thrill at first hand was worth a dozen relayed through print. It had all been most enjoyable— yet Tony, upon this particular occasion, was conscious of no pleasurable feelings. He gazed gloomily out of the window and gave himself up to unhappy reflections. The cards had been marked; Terriss was not the guilty man. Both facts, Tony was compelled to admit, were crystal clear. It followed, as night follows day, that the criminal must be one of his own particular cronies: Chisholm, Billings, Hotchkiss, Bell, or Straker. Tony reviewed the list to the accompaniment of the click of the wheels. Man-hunting, he admitted, was a sport which eclipsed all other sports; but somehow it lost its zest when the prospective victim was one of his own friends.

After half an hour's gloomy meditation he turned to the quiet countryman at his side. "Bill," he ventured tentatively, "I take it that when you reach town you will want to go to the Himalaya Club."

"You take it correctly."

"It's not necessary, you know."

"Why not?"

"Well, really, I haven't asked you to investigate anything."

"That's all right, old fellow," Bill responded heartily; "I haven't waited to be asked."

Tony's voice carried a gentle tinge of reproof. "Don't you think," he enquired tactfully, "that you should wait until you are asked?"

Bill laughed. "Meaning, I suppose, that I'm butting in—"

"I wouldn't say that."

"No; but it's what you are thinking." He glanced shrewdly at Claghorn. "Tony, old fellow, you shot in the dark, and you brought down the wrong man. You have branded Roy Terriss a crooked gambler— a cheat, a thief— a man unfit to be received in decent society. Do you want him to rest under that cloud?"

"No, no, indeed," began Tony vociferously, "that's not what I mean at all—"

"Of course not," Bill chimed in; "you're too fair and square to tolerate anything like that. You want Terriss cleared— cleared triumphantly— only"— and Bill smiled shrewdly— "only you're rather scared that I'm going to fix the blame on one of your very best friends. Isn't that so?"

Tony nodded.

Bill grinned. "That's what might happen, no doubt. I'm not denying it. If I merely wanted to bag a man, and didn't care how I did it, I think I could convict any one of your friends— or you yourself, for that matter."

"Convict me?" gasped Tony.

"It could be done. How did you come by those marked cards?"

"Why, why, I took them from the table."

"How did they get there? How do I know you didn't mark them yourself? How do I know that you and your friends weren't banded together to rob Terriss?"

It was Tony's turn to grin. "Well, we lost."

"To Terriss, perhaps. But the night before the same crowd won pretty heavily from somebody else— what?"

"How did you know that?"

"It doesn't matter," said Bill; "I know it — that's enough. I'm simply trying to show you how easy it would be to find a victim if I were after no more than that. You and your friends have touched pitch, Tony, and you can't touch pitch without being defiled."

Tony's brain whirled. "You mean, then," he sputtered, "you mean that the guilty man is Chisholm— or Billings— or Straker— or Bell— or Hotchkiss— or— or me?"

Bill laughed. "If it will comfort you— and I think it will— I'll let you into a secret, and tell you that I don't suspect any of them— or you, I mean," he corrected gravely.

Tony felt a crushing weight rising buoyantly, easily, happily.

"Do you mean that?" he cried.

"We're looking for a professional cheat," said Bill. "Remember that. Hold fast to that. It's the only thing, Tony, between you yourself and the deep sea.

You've been worrying about your friends so much that you've completely overlooked what a suspicious character somebody else is."

"Who?" begged Tony.

"Tony Claghorn," said Bill— he smiled at his friend's consternation— "Tony Claghorn has been running around with me so much that he has acquired a first-hand knowledge of cheating devices. How do you know he hasn't used that knowledge? How do you know he hasn't tried to convert theory into practice? It would be profitable— very profitable— and he might get away with it. No, Tony," said Bill, "Roy Terriss is safe. It's Tony Claghorn we have to look after now. And if I'm going to town it's because I think I see a chance to save his skin."

Tony was so completely dumbfounded that he was silent for the rest of the trip.

It was between hours at the Himalaya Club when the two men walked in. The regulars, who ate their lunch in the raftered dining-hall every day', had departed, and the even-more regulars, who experimented with games of chance in its card-room from late afternoon until early morning, had not yet arrived.

"We'd better go away and come back later," said Tony.

"Why not wait here?" suggested Bill. He seated himself at a table. "Tony, how would you like to play some cold hands?"

Tony gazed at his friend with a suspicious eye. "What stake?" he enquired.

"Why any stake at all?" countered Bill. "We'll play for nothing— and the fun of it."

Tony assented doubtfully. Ordinarily filled with implicit trust in his friends, his adventure on the train had sadly shook his equilibrium. He— Tony— was under suspicion. Any move of Bill's might therefore be dangerous to him. In some vague, incomprehensible manner disaster threatened— with the most innocent exterior.

With noticeable lack of enthusiasm he seated himself at the table and rang for cards.

Bill glanced at the box and did not open it. "I don't care for these cards," he announced. "Can't we have some Angel-Backs?"

"I'll see, sir," said the man.

Tony's suspicions redoubled. "What's the matter with the cards," he enquired.

"I like to play with cards of better quality," the countryman alleged. His eyes shone as the waiter returned with a pack of the required pattern.

He broke the seal, opened the box, and riffled the cards thoughtfully.

"Do you like these better?" Tony asked.

"Much better. Very much better." He dealt the cards, face down, with amazing speed. "King of hearts. Two of diamonds. Eight of hearts. Ace of spades. Three of clubs. Seven of spades. Ten of hearts. Seven of clubs. Five of hearts. Seven of hearts."

"What's this?" demanded Tony — "legerdemain?"

Bill shrugged his shoulders. "Call it what you like. But if you will look at your cards you will find that you have a four-flush in hearts. You will fill on the draw. The card on top of the pack is another heart."

"And you?" gasped Tony.

"Triplets; nothing but triplets," smiled Bill; "three sevens."

"And they'll be four of a kind on the draw?"

"That would be too raw, old fellow. No, a full house will be enough. That will beat your flush."

Tony broke into a roar of laughter. "I see it!" he cried. "Of course I see it!"

"What do you see?"

"You stacked the cards!"

"That's pretty evident."

"And they weren't hard to stack because you substituted the marked pack— the pack I brought up to the country— for the new pack the waiter handed you!"

"Is that so?" challenged Bill.

"These cards are marked!"

"Admitted."

"They must be the same pack, unless— unless—"

"Well, say it."

"Unless," faltered Tony, with cold sweat breaking out suddenly on his brow, "unless every pack of Angel-Backs in the club is marked!"

Bill smiled. "That's what I'm trying to find out," he granted. "They may all be— shall we say?— Fallen Angels."

Without a word Tony rang for the waiter. "We want another pack— two more packs — of Angel-Backs," he snapped.

The waiter shook his head. "Sorry, sir, I can't do it."

"Why not?"

"We're running very short of the Angel-Backs, and the members prefer them to the other cards. They're better quality. The steward instructed me not to give out more than one pack to a party."

Tony extracted a banknote from his pocket. "I want two packs of Angel-Backs," he repeated. "Do you understand?"

"I'll do what I can," said the waiter. He was back in a few minutes with a single pack. "I couldn't get you two," he apologised. "There's not a gross left, sir. I'm breaking orders as it is, sir."

In silence Tony passed the unopened box to his friend. "Open it, Bill."

Parmelee put his hands behind his back. "Open it yourself. You might accuse me of substituting another pack."

Without a word Tony broke the seal, inverted the box, and allowed the cards to cascade upon the table.

"Well?" Bill enquired.

"Marked— marked; every blamed one of them!"

"Fallen Angels!" murmured Parmelee, "Fallen Angels! Tony, don't you think we might have a chat with the steward?"

Tony clenched his fists. "If he's the man who marked them I'll see that he's out of a job in ten minutes!"

"Why so excitable?" soothed Bill. "What would the steward have to gain by trickery? He isn't the man we want, you can depend upon that."

He listened quietly while his explosive friend summoned the steward, and explained the state of affairs to that worthy. The man examined the cards, paled, bit his lips. "Really, sir," he stammered, "this is most surprising— most surprising—"

"It is!" asserverated Tony.

"I wouldn't believe it if I didn't see it with my own eyes. It's monstrous — incredible!"

"How do you explain it?"

"I— I don't."

"How do we know that you're not the guilty man?"

"Oh, sir, I've been in the employ of this club for twenty-eight years! It would be late in life for me to turn round and become a common cheat. Really, sir, you don't think that I could be capable of such a thing?"

Bill broke into the conversation. "How many more packs of Angel-Backs have you?"

"Less than a gross."

"Why didn't you order more?"

"I did. The jobber couldn't fill my orders."

"Oh!" Bill half closed his eyes. "When did you first buy Angel-Backs?"

"About a year ago, sir. Shall I tell you about it?"

"I wish you would."

"A sample pack was sent us by a mail-order house. The International Supply Company, they called themselves."

"What was their address?"

"A post-office box at Times Square Station, New York City, sir."

"Go on."

"Samples are sent to us frequently, but this sample was unusually good."

"Angel-Backs — I should think so!"

"Not only that, but the cards were remarkably cheap; so cheap, in fact, that the club could sell them at the same price as inferior cards and still make money."

"Didn't that make you suspicious?"

"The International Supply Company explained that the pattern was about to be discontinued, and that they had a large quantity on hand. If we would take them all, they would make us a special price, sir. I didn't make the purchase on my own responsibility. I referred the matter to the House Committee. They told me to go ahead."

"What else?"

"That's all, sir. The members liked the cards, as I explained they would. We used nothing else for many months. Then the Angel-Backs began to run short. I tried to buy more."

"Your letters to the International Supply Company were returned unclaimed?"

"Yes, sir. They had gone out of business."

Bill smiled. "The scent becomes more interesting as we follow it." He turned to his friend. "Tony, what's the next move?"

"To examine the rest of the cards, of course."

Bill's eye twinkled, but he nodded soberly. "Suppose you do that, Tony. There are over a hundred packs left, so it will take time. But be thorough about it: go through every pack, and tabulate your results in writing."

vi

AFTER HIS volcanic friend had departed Bill motioned the steward to a chair at his side. "I have a good many questions to ask you," he began, "but Mr. Claghorn is safely out of the way for at least an hour. He will examine every pack of Angel-Backs in the store-room, and he will find every card marked." The steward waited for him to continue. "In the first place, the membership of this club changes rapidly, doesn't it?"

"What do you mean, sir?"

"New members are elected— old members resign, or become inactive."

"More frequently than I like. Yes, sir."

"At a rough guess, how many members, very active a year ago, are inactive to-day?"

"Twenty, perhaps," said the steward.

"Write their names on a piece of paper."

The man did so.

"Play for high stakes is common here?" pursued Bill.

"It is a rule, sir."

"But not all of the twenty played poker."

"No, sir."

"Scratch out the names of those who played other games. That leaves how many?"

"An even dozen, sir."

"Now let us take another angle. There have been big winners in the club during the past year?"

"Yes, sir. At least eight or ten."

"How many of them did their winning at poker?"

"Five or six."

"Write down their names. Compare the two lists. How many of the big winners— at poker— do you find among the inactive members?"

"Only one, sir."

"That's easy to explain, isn't it? A big winner doesn't become inactive. A big winner sticks to the game just as long as he continues winning."

"Naturally, sir."

"Yet one man who was a big winner— at poker— didn't wait for his luck to change. He stopped coming to the club."

The steward nodded. "That always puzzled me, sir. He played poker, and he had the reputation of being the strongest player that ever sat down to a table in these rooms. He played nearly every night for six months—"

"And then?"

"I never could understand it, sir, but he simply stopped coming."

Bill looked keenly at the other. "Was this man— by some curious coincidence— elected to membership just about a year ago?"

The steward nodded with dawning comprehension. "He was, sir. Mr. Ashley Kendrick was proposed one week after I had purchased the Angel-Backs. The Membership Committee has always been notoriously lax; it's easy to get into the Himalaya. Mr. Kendrick was elected five days after his name had been posted."

"He played poker?"

"Yes, sir."

"With the Angel-Backs?"

"Yes, sir."

"And he won?"

"Invariably, sir."

"Then, six months later, when the cards began to run short, he stopped coming?"

"Oh, no, sir."

"What do you mean?"

"He stopped coming; that part's correct, sir. But at the time we hadn't begun to run short of Angel-Backs."

Bill whistled. "This gets more interesting as we go along!"

"We were using nothing but Angel-Backs at that time; the supply was very plentiful. Mr. Kendrick simply failed to show up one evening— that was all."

"You had his address?"

"Yes, sir, but it was an address which won't help. His address Was right here— in care the Himalaya Club."

"No forwarding address, I suppose?"

"None needed, sir. From the moment he joined until the last evening he spent here Mr. Kendrick never received a letter."

It was at this juncture that Tony Claghorn thrust his exuberant self into the picture. "Bill," he announced, "I've examined the Angel-Backs."

"All of them? So soon?"

"It wasn't necessary to look at more than a card or two from each pack. They're all marked."

He had expected his announcement to produce a sensation. He was disappointed.

"Yes; I expected to hear that," said Bill calmly. "In the meantime, I've been busy."

Tony swallowed his chagrin. "With what result?" he demanded.

"Tony, I've run up a blind alley. I've found out something, but it doesn't help— not a darn bit. I'm stumped. I found the trail getting hotter and hotter, and I followed it. I fetched up against a blank wall."

"If you had allowed me to help you," Tony declared, "that wouldn't have happened."

"Perhaps not. Perhaps not."

"It's not too late now," invited Tony.

Bill grinned ruefully. "All right, Tony. Show me how to lay my hands on a fellow named Ashley Kendrick."

"Ashley Kendrick? Ashley Kendrick? Why, he hasn't been in here for months."

"I know that already."

"I can't tell you how to reach him, but I can put you in touch with his best friend."

"Also a member of this club?"

"He used to be," said Tony. "He's a chap by the name of Venner; a nice chap, but the unluckiest there ever was."

Bill glanced at the steward. "Is his name on your list of inactives?"

"Yes, sir."

"But not on the list of winners?"

"No, sir. As Mr. Claghorn says, Mr. Venner was— unfortunate."

Bill sucked in his breath sharply. "I wonder... I wonder... if by any chance his misfortunes began about the time that the Angel-Backs started to run short."

The steward started. "Come to think of it, they did, sir."

Bill leaped to his feet and flung his arms above his head with excitement unusual for him. "What a fool I was! What a dunderhead! What a numbskull! I should have seen it at once! I should have guessed it right off! Why, it's as plain as the nose on a man's face!"

Tony neither understood nor shared his enthusiasm. "I don't see what you're driving at."

"Don't you see how Venner explains everything?"

Tony fixed a look of mild reproach upon him. "Bill," he cautioned, "don't let me hear you say a word against Venner! He's as fine a fellow as there ever was— even if his luck turned— and I don't see how he explains anything."

By a superhuman effort Bill composed his face, and seated himself again. "Sorry, Tony. Perhaps I was too enthusiastic. But tell me about Venner; tell me all about him."

Tony stood on his dignity. "I don't see what Venner has to do with this case."

"All right, you don't see," said Bill, controlling his impatience with difficulty, "but tell me what I want to know, anyhow."

Tony had acknowledged his friend's authority too long to shake it off easily. "If you insist—"

"I do."

"Then I'll tell you; though I warn you in advance that it won't help you at all." He bent a searching look on the steward. "This must go no further," he warned. "This is to remain a secret among the three of us."

"I shan't say a word, sir. But if you'd prefer to have me go away—"

Magnanimously Tony shook his head.

"Inasmuch as I suspected you, you have a right to listen." He turned to Parmelee. "Bill," he began, "Venner joined the club something less than a year ago— a fine fellow— a gentleman, every inch of him."

"Go on."

"He played poker. I played with him myself any number of times. He rarely played for high stakes— that is, in the beginning. He played a fair game— broke a little better than even. Then, to his misfortune, he met Kendrick.

"Of course, I needn't tell you about Kendrick, one of the best poker players I ever saw; a man who could almost read your mind; who always played in the biggest game, and kicked because it wasn't bigger. Venner met Kendrick, and was fascinated by him. He gave up playing himself to watch Kendrick play: he said he had never seen anything so wonderful. And Kendrick used to like it; Kendrick always saved a chair near him for Venner.

"The two came to be close friends. You'd never see one without the Other. Kendrick seemed to Hke teaching Venner; and Venner's eyes never left Kendrick. And when the game broke up they'd go away together. Kendrick used to live here in the club. For a time, I believe, Venner shared Kendrick's rooms.

"Then, one night Kendrick didn't show up, and Venner acted ds if he had lost the best friend he had in the world. He hovered round the table at which Kendrick used to play; he kept his eyes on the door as if Kendrick might come through it any minute; he asked every man he met if he had seen Kendrick.

"For a week Venner watched. He told more than one of us that he suspected Kendrick had met with foul play. Then he gave him up for lost."

Parmelee's eyes were fixed on vacancy.

"It was then that Venner took Kendrick's place in the game— the big game?"

"Yes, it was an asinine thing to do, but Venner thought he had learnt enough from Kendrick to fill his boots. He did— for a night or so. He won — won heavily— and then his luck turned. He'd win one evening. He'd lose twice as much the next. He'd win a thousand— and lose three. He'd win two thousand— and lose five.

"I urged him to stop. I urged him any number of times, but he always explained that out of ordinary courtesy he couldn't. He had won from the other fellows. He had to do the fair thing by giving them a chance for revenge."

Tony paused and nodded gravely.

"That's what Venner did: a chivalrous, gentlemanly, insane performance. Don't you think so?"

Bill turned to the steward. "What do you think?" he enquired.

"After twenty-eight years in the employ of this club I have learnt that there are times when it is wiser not to think."

Bill nodded. "I can understand how you lasted twenty-eight years." He turned to Tony. "Finish your story."

Tony lowered his voice. "I'm coming to the part I want kept secret. Venner lost. Venner lost every cent he had. Venner had to stop coming to the club. He was posted for non-payment of dues."

"Where is he now? And what is he doing?"

"Never tell a soul, will you? Venner's down and out. He's had to take a job as a waiter in a cheap restaurant, and I have to ruin my digestion by having a meal there every once in so often."

Parmelee grinned and cast a grateful glance at his friend.

"Tony, you've helped! You have no idea how you've helped!" He rose and deliberately winked at the steward. "Are you good at riddles?"

"What's the riddle, sir?"

"This is a hard one. See if you can guess it." Gravely he propounded: "If a farmer, twenty-five years old, lives in Connecticut, goes to New York on the midday train, spends the afternoon at the Himalaya Club and then, because he has a cast-iron digestion, has his dinner at a cheap restaurant, what— what is the waiter's name?"

"Venner sir," said the steward promptly.

"Go to the head of the class," said Bill.

vii

WHILE PARMELEE and his much-mystified friend proceed to a frowsy, second-class eating place on lower Eighth Avenue, there to be served by one Venner, there to corral the said Venner in an untidy, private dining-room, there to tempt the said Venner with promises of immunity and gradually increasing amount of currency until his silent tongue becomes exceedingly loquacious, let us turn back the pages of time two years to the very beginning of an exceedingly strange story.

The day was unbearably hot and sultry. Layers of heated air, writhing and twisting like heavy oil in their ascent, floated lazily upwards from the broiling streets. The asphalt itself was soft and gummy; choking dust, the accumulation of a rainless week, lay in ambush to take suffering humanity by the throat; and in innumerable windows sickly geraniums drooped and wilted under the merciless rays of the sun.

A thermometer, hung at street level, would have indicated a temperature well into the nineties. The same thermometer, carried up five flights of stairs in any one of the nearby tenements would gradually have registered higher and higher figures, until, under the metallic roof, assailed from above by the burning glare of the sun, and from below by the out-pour of scorching air, it would actually have indicated a temperature in excess of one hundred.

Yet the man who bent over a little table in the inferno known as a hall bedroom, in the topmost storey of one of the most dilapidated buildings in the section, was too intent upon his labours to notice such minor matters as the weather.

His single window was closed, its inside covered with soap, so that no observer across the street might peer through it. His door was locked— not merely locked, but barricaded by pieces of furniture which had been moved against it. And, despite the heat, for not a breath of air travelled through the room, a kettle, placed on a portable oil-stove, boiled briskly at the man's elbow. On the table before which he sat, paper cartons— dozens and scores of them— were stacked in orderly fashion until they reached the ceiling. At his right-hand was a saucer containing a reddish liquid with an alcoholic odour. At his left-hand was a second saucer containing a bluish liquid. Half a dozen minute camel's-hair brushes were carefully ranged before him. And, as if the weather and the stove and the tightly closed openings had not made the room hot enough, a high-powered electric light was suspended from a cord, casting a blinding glare upon the man's hands, and upon the objects which were engrossing his attention. He rose, removed a carton from the huge pile, and, holding it dexterously, allowed the steam from the boiling kettle to hiss upon the paper seal. The carton flew open. With delicate care he set it upon the floor and emptied it of its contents: an even gross of individually sealed small paper boxes. Each seal in turn was held for an instant in the jet of escaping steam; each gave way almost instantly.

The man placed the open boxes on one side, seated himself again, and, wiping his hands carefully so that no moisture from them might make a mark, shook one of the boxes, and removed from it a new pack of playing-cards. He spread them out on the table, took up one of his brushes, dipped it in the coloured liquid, and, with the expertness gained by long practice, placed a microscopic dot on the back of each card.

Had an observer been present he would have noted that the colour applied matched the back of the card perfectly; stranger yet, he would have noted that after the minute spot of moisture had dried the closest scrutiny would have been required to show that the card had been tampered with. While moist, the tiny speck of liquid was visible; when dry, it blended with the surrounding color so excellently that no person unacquainted with the secret would have been able to discover a mark.

During his manipulations the man had been careful not to disturb the order of the cards: factory-packed playing-cards are always arranged in the same manner. He examined six or eight cards closely, satisfied himself that the marks which he had made were indistinguishable, levelled the pack, and

returned it to its box. For a second time he held the seal in the jet of steam. Then he closed the flap, pressed the seal so that it adhered again, and laid the box to one side.

A dozen cartons under the table represented the labour of several weeks, working at the greatest speed which he would permit himself, his output did not exceed ten packs an hour— and each carton contained a gross of packs— and the huge pile before him numbered at least several hundred cartons. Had he paused to calculate he might well have been terrified at the result: ten packs an hour; eighty to a hundred a day; at the very best, not more than five gross a week. And nearly a year would elapse before he might reach the completion of his gigantic task.

Presumably, the man had made his calculations before commencing; had estimated the expenditure of time, and had decided that it was worth his while, for he paused not an instant; upon finishing one pack before beginning on another. He worked rapidly yet carefully, with a concentration which might have been explained only had a slave-driver, with a whip, been standing behind him. Practice had brought him surprising skill. There was no waste motion; no misdirected energy. Little by little the pile of unfinished work diminished; little by little the pile of finished work grew.

At seven o'clock, or thereabouts, he extinguished the oil-stove, drew a clean white sheet over the mountain of cartons, washed, and made himself presentable, and went out, padlocking the door of his room behind him. Other tenants of the building, gathered at the entrance for a breath of air, nodded to him as he strode by them. "Good evening, Mr. Kendrick," they chorused.

"Good evening," said Kendrick, and went on his way— to a lunch-room round the corner.

"What's he do for a living?" enquired one of the neighbours.

"He's a literary man," said one better informed.

"A which?"

"A literary man. He writes novels and books and stories. Locks himself in his room from morning till night, and writes— just writes. He told me so himself. Keeps regular hours, just like a working man, too."

"That ain't work— just writing," commented a listener, and broke off to enquire. "Have you ever read anything he's wrote?"

"Not yet. He says there'll be nothing of his published for a year. But he's going to let me know when something comes out."

Let us dive headlong for the end of that year. The pile of unfinished work had shrunk — finally vanished. The little room was filled with neatly stacked cartons, which one might have examined and sworn had never been opened. And the International Supply Company— alias Kendrick— having offered

samples of superior quality playing-cards at ruinous prices to three clubs, equally notorious for the size of the games played under their roofs, and for the ease with which a stranger might secure membership, had arranged to sell the entire quantity to the Himalaya. The following day a horse-drawn truck, specially hired for the occasion, and personally driven by the International Supply Company— alias Kendrick— delivered several hundred gross of marked cards to the Himalaya Club. Within a week Mr. Ashley Kendrick was proposed for membership in that notorious organisation.

He was elected five days later.

Within less than a month he was voted the best poker-player who had ever seated himself at one of the Himalaya's card-tables, and his former neighbours, who had looked forward to reading his books, novels, and stories, waited a while— and then forgot him.

viii

A GAMBLER'S paradise: a place where the play is continuous, where the stakes are high, where the players are liberal, and where every card is marked. It was in such an unbelievably blissful spot that Kendrick now found himself. For a whole year he had worked and planned; for a whole year he had lived economically on his savings; if he was at length to be rewarded, he felt that he deserved it.

Yet he did not make the mistake of playing too well. An infallible player discourages his opponents, whereas an occasional loss is not expensive, and greatly heartens the victim. Kendrick, who knew every card in the pack, who could read his opponents' hands as readily as if they had been exposed, who could tell every time whether or not it was worth while to draw, could have won far more than he actually permitted himself to. Hardly an evening went by without Kendrick sustaining at least one sensational loss; hardly a session without his going down to defeat on at least one well-advertised hand. But never did the gambler rise from his seat poorer than when he had settled himself into it; never did the end of a session make it necessary for Kendrick to produce his cheque-book.

He limited himself strictly to a maximum winning, and his self-control was such that he never exceeded the fixed amount. Yet the maximum was a liberal maximum, for at the end of ten days he had recouped himself for the expenditure of the preceding year, and at the end of three months his bank account had begun to assume formidable proportions.

At the end of four months he increased his maximum liberally, and doubled his bank account, and at the end of five months he began to fling off all

restraint. He began to play poker of a brand unheard of even at the Himalaya, where fine players abounded. He had put by a gigantic nest-egg; and it was his programme to win as much as possible against the day when the Angel-Backs would begin to run short.

It was at this juncture that Venner, so he confessed to Parmelee, projected himself into the situation.

Venner, a shiftless ne'er-do-well of pleasing personality, had dissipated a modest inheritance, and was fast nearing the end of his slender resources. He played poker tolerably; upon occasion he had not hesitated to cheat, and, in the hope of extending his dishonest operations enough to make a killing, he had purchased half a dozen packs of cards at the club, and had taken them home with him with the laudable intention of marking them. Once marked, he would find opportunities to substitute them for the club's cards.

He had marked two or three packs before he made the astounding discovery that the cards were already marked. He could not believe the evidence of his eyes. Feverishly he broke open the sealed boxes, to find that some pioneer in knavery had been before him. More cards, covertly examined at the Himalaya itself, confirmed the amazing truth.

Venner had intended to indulge in cheating on a small scale. His discovery of the existence of a swindle of such gigantic dimensions left him simply thunderstruck. For an instant he reflected that, knowing the secret, he too, could win as he pleased. But upon second thought it occurred to him that there would be quite as much gain, and far less risk, were he to make a cat's-paw of the daring sharper who was doubtless at work this instant.

For months Kendrick had been a sensational winner. Within twenty-four hours after penetrating his secret Venner confronted him.

"You can't prove anything," Kendrick said.

"I know it," said Venner.

"I'm the most surprised man in the world to learn that the cards are marked," Kendrick alleged.

"Then you won't object if I pass the word on to the other members, and see that other cards are used?"

Kendrick's eyes narrowed. Venner was easy for him to see through. "What's the alternative?" he demanded.

"Divvy up with me," murmured Venner. "Pay me half of whatever you win, and I'll be silent as the grave."

He paused. "If you don't, I'll expose you. I'll say that you confessed everything—"

"Nobody will believe it."

"If that's what you think, turn down my offer."

Kendrick was in an unpleasant position, and was fully aware of it. The solution— the solution that flashed upon him at once— was to pretend to accept Venner's terms, and to disappear for ever from the scene. But the weak point was painfully obvious: Venner, out of spite, might set the authorities upon his trail. It would be better, Kendrick decided instantaneously, to wait until Venner, too, was thoroughly besmirched; to make Venner an accomplice who dared not open his mouth without imperilling his own freedom. And then, also, even if he had to divide his future winnings, a great deal of money might be amassed in a short time— say, two or three weeks.

He shook Venner's hand heartily.

"You're a man after my own heart," he said. "I accept your proposition."

Then began the short but interesting period during which Venner, according to Tony's description, sat at Kendrick's side and ostensibly studied his game, but during which Venner, according to his own confession, followed the play with an eagle eye to make sure that his partner in crime did not win more than he would admit, and thus defraud him of his share. After a few days Venner invited himself to live in Kendrick's rooms; he could keep a closer watch on him in that manner, and for two brief but happy weeks Venner's income was exceedingly large. He treated himself to a new outfit of clothing, and began to sport small but costly scarf pins. He even looked at automobiles; his improved circumstances would warrant him in purchasing one.

Then, upon the evening of the day that Venner, after convening himself in executive session, had voted that Kendrick should henceforth pay him three-quarters and not merely half of his winnings, the astute gambler disappeared. Venner was worried; honestly believed that his partner had met with foul play. At the end of a week a letter, mailed en route to Mexico City, told Venner the truth. Kendrick had disappeared for good. He had won enough to support him in comfort the rest of his life. He did not propose to share his winnings, even with so likeable a chap as Venner. Nevertheless, he gave Venner his blessing, and mentioned that he admired Venner's collection of scarfpins, which he had taken to Mexico with him.

At once Venner found himself in straitened circumstances. His income had vanished; his expenditure continued. But the Angel-Backs promised relief.

He took Kendrick's place in the big game, and won heavily for two nights. On the third night, to his unutterable horror, cards of a strange pattern were used, and Venner, compelled to play honest poker against men who qualified as experts, lost more than he had won the two preceding sessions.

On the fourth night the Angel-Backs returned, and Venner did well. But on the fifth and sixth nights other cards were supplied and the results were harrowing.

What followed partook of the nature of a nightmare. Venner had run into debt; willing or unwilling, was compelled to play. And he was suddenly confronted with a situation far more dangerous than any that had ever faced Kendrick: the Angel-Backs were running short, other cards were being substituted, and, if Venner invariably won with the Angel-Backs and lost upon all other occasions, it would not be long before some astute observer called attention to the circumstance.

He used to lie awake at night, summoning up hideous pictures, visioning the possibilities. It occurred to him that he might purchase more Angel-Backs, mark them and introduce them into the play. He found that cards of that pattern were not obtainable at any price. Even had they been obtainable, he could not bring them to the table without inviting suspicious comment.

He thought of marking the cards which the club had substituted for the Angel-Backs; but he realised that the sleight-of-hand necessary to exchange them for the pack in use was far beyond him. In his petty cheating in the past he had occasionally indulged in the form of dishonesty known as ringing in a cold pack. That was possible, playing for moderate stakes, with no spectators. It was impossible, save for some sharper far more expert than he, in a big game closely watched by twenty or more men.

For a ghastly week Venner endured the tortures of the damned. Like Kendrick, he found it well to limit his winnings when the gods were good to him, and when chance brought a deck of marked cards to the table. But, unlike Kendrick, he was compelled too often to play with strange cards— and he found it quite impossible to limit his losings.

For all his sins in the past the cheat paid a thousand times over during that week. To put in an appearance each night, smiling and jovial, while his soul writhed in torment; to forego pot after pot when the Angel-Backs offered it to him, because to win too much might create suspicion; to lose upon other nights, and lose heavily— disastrously— because he dared not change his style of play; no wonder the man cracked under the strain. He began to play wildly, recklessly. His opponents, shrewd students of psychology, sensed the change in the wind. In two consecutive sessions they stripped him.

Courtesy prohibits a man from taking another's last cigarette, but it does not prohibit a man from taking another's last dollar. His opponents showed him no mercy. When Venner left the Himalaya Club for the last time, he had borrowed as much as his friends would lend, he owned nothing, and his pockets were empty.

This, coming by driblets in the beginning, coming faster and faster as the man's emotions mastered him in the end, was the story that Parmelee and

Claghorn heard from the lips of one Venner, a waiter in a frowsy, second-class eating-place on lower Eighth Avenue.

ix

IT WAS NOT until half an hour after they had left the restaurant, on their walk uptown, that Bill opened his mouth. Tony, completely floored, for once in his life, had marched at his side in silence.

"We started, didn't we," said Bill, "to find out whether or not Roy Terriss cheated at bridge? It's funny over what a long trail it has led us! Terriss— the Angel-Backs— the Himalaya— Kendrick— Venner—"

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15: Sir Gilbert Murrell's Picture

Victor L. Whitechurch

1868-1933

The Royal Magazine Oct 1905

Thrilling Stories of the Railway, 1912

THE AFFAIR of the goods truck on the Didcot and Newbury branch of the Great Western Railway was of singular interest, and found a prominent place in Thorpe Hazell's notebook. It was owing partly to chance, and partly to Hazell's sagacity, that the main incidents in the story were discovered, but he always declared that the chief interest to his mind was the unique method by which a very daring plan was carried out.

He was staying with a friend at Newbury at the time, and had taken his camera down with him, for he was a bit of an amateur photographer as well as book-lover, though his photos generally consisted of trains and engines. He had just come in from a morning's ramble with his camera slung over his shoulder, and was preparing to partake of two plasmon biscuits, when his friend met him in the hail.

"I say, Hazell," he began, "you're just the fellow they want here."

"What's up?" asked Hazell, taking off his camera and commencing some "exercises."

"I've just been down to the station. I know the station-master very well, and he tells me an awfully queer thing happened on the line last night."

"Where?"

"On the Didcot branch. It's a single line, you know, running through the Berkshire Downs to Didcot."

Hazell smiled, and went on whirling his arms round his head.

"Kind of you to give me the information," he said, "but I happen to know the line. But what's occurred?"

"Well, it appears a goods train left Didcot last night bound through to Winchester, and that one of the waggons never arrived here at Newbury."

"Not very much in that," replied Hazell, still at his "exercises," "unless the waggon in question was behind the brake and the couplings snapped, in which case the next train along might have run into it."

"Oh, no. The waggon was in the middle of the train."

"Probably left in a siding by mistake," replied Hazell.

"But the station-master says that all the stations along the line have been wired to, and that it isn't at any of them."

"Very likely it never left Didcot."

"He declares there is no doubt about that."

"Well, you begin to interest me," replied Hazell, stopping his whirligigs and beginning to eat his plasmon. "There may be something in it, though very often a waggon is mislaid. But I'll go down to the station."

"I'll go with you, Hazell, and introduce you to the stationmaster. He has heard of your reputation."

Ten minutes later they were in the station-master's office, Hazell having re-slung his camera.

"Very glad to meet you," said that functionary, "for this affair promises to be mysterious. *I* can't make it out at all."

"Do you know what the truck contained?"

"That's just where the bother comes in, sir. It was valuable property. There's a loan exhibition of pictures at Winchester next week, and this waggon was bringing down some of them from Leamington. They belong to Sir Gilbert Murrell— three of them, I believe— large pictures, and each in a separate packing-case."

"H'm— this sounds very funny. Are you sure the truck was on the train?"

"Simpson, the brakesman, is here now, and I'll send for him. Then you can hear the story in his own words."

So the goods guard appeared on the scene. Hazell looked at him narrowly, but there was nothing suspicious in his honest face.

"I know the waggon was on the train when we left Didcot," he said in answer to inquiries, "and I noticed it at Upton, the next station, where we took a couple off. It was the fifth or sixth in front of my brake. I'm quite certain of that. We stopped at Compton to take up a cattle truck, but I didn't get out there. Then we ran right through to Newbury, without stopping at the other stations, and then I discovered that the waggon was not on the train. I thought very likely it might have been left at Upton or Compton by mistake, but I was wrong, for they say it isn't there. That's all I know about it, sir. A rum go, ain't it?"

"Extraordinary!" exclaimed Hazell. "You must have made a mistake."

"No, sir, I'm sure I haven't."

"Did the driver of the train notice anything?"

"No, sir."

"Well, but the thing's impossible," said Hazell. "A loaded waggon couldn't have been spirited away. What time was it when you left Didcot?"

"About eight o'clock, sir."

"Ah— quite dark. You noticed nothing along the line?"

"Nothing, sir."

"You were in your brake all the time, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir— while we were running."

At this moment there came a knock at the station-master's door and a porter entered.

"There's a passenger train just in from the Didcot branch," said the man, "and the driver reports that he saw a truck loaded with packing-cases in Churn siding."

"Well, I'm blowed!" exclaimed the brakesman. "Why, we ran through Churn without a stop— trains never do stop there except in camp time."

"Where is Churn?" asked Hazell, for once at a loss.

"It's merely a platform and a siding close to the camping ground between Upton and Compton," replied the station-master, "for the convenience of troops only, and very rarely used except in the summer, when soldiers are encamped there."*

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[The incident here recorded occurred before June, 1905, in which month Churn was dignified with a place in Bradshaw as a "station" at which trains stop by signal.— V. L. W.]*

"I should very much like to see the place, and as soon as possible," said Hazell.

"So you shall," replied the station-master. "A train will soon start on the branch. Inspector Hill shall go with you, and instruction shall be given to the driver to stop there, while a return train can pick you both up."

In less than an hour Hazell and Inspector Hill alighted at Churn. It is a lonely enough place, situated in a vast flat basin of the Downs, scarcely relieved by a single tree, and far from all human habitation with the exception of a lonely shepherd's cottage some half a mile away.

The "station" itself is only a single platform, with a shelter and a solitary siding, terminating in what is known in railway language as a "dead end"— that is, in this case, wooden buffers to stop any trucks. This siding runs off from the single line of rail at points from the Didcot direction of the line.

And in this siding was the lost truck, right against the "dead end," filled with three packing-cases, and labeled "Leamington to Winchester, via Newbury." There could be no doubt about it at all. But how it had got there from the middle of a train running through without a stop was a mystery even to the acute mind of Thorpe Hazell.

"Well," said the inspector when they had gazed long enough at the truck; "we'd better have a look at the points. Come along."

There is not even a signal-box at this primitive station. The points are actuated by two levers in a ground frame, standing close by the side of the line, one lever unlocking and the other shifting the same points.

"How about these points?" said Hazell as they drew near. "You only use them so occasionally, that I suppose they are kept out of action?"

"Certainly," replied the inspector, "a block of wood is bolted down between the end of the point rail and the main rail, fixed as a wedge— ah! there it is, you see, quite untouched; and the levers themselves are locked— here's the keyhole in the ground frame. This is the strangest thing I've ever come across, Mr. Hazell."

Thorpe Hazell stood looking at the points and levers sorely puzzled. They must have been worked to get that truck in the siding, he knew well. But how?

Suddenly his face lit up. Oil evidently had been used to loosen the nut of the bolt that fixed the wedge of wood. Then his eyes fell on the handle of one of the two levers, and a slight exclamation of joy escaped him.

"Look," said the inspector at that moment, "it's impossible to pull them off," and he stretched out his hand towards a lever. To his astonishment Hazell seized him by the collar and dragged him back before he could touch it.

"I beg your pardon," he exclaimed, "hope I've not hurt you, but I want to photograph those levers first, if you don't mind."

The inspector watched him rather sullenly as he fixed his camera on a folding tripod stand he had with him, only a few inches from the handle of one of the levers, and took two very careful photographs of it.

"Can't see the use of that, sir," growled the inspector. But Hazell vouchsafed no reply.

"Let him find it out for himself," he thought.

Then he said aloud:

"I fancy they must have had that block out, inspector— and it's evident the points must have been set to get the truck where it is. How it was done is a problem, but if the doer of it was anything of a regular criminal, I think we might find *him*."

"How?" asked the puzzled inspector.

"Ah," was the response, "I'd rather not say at present. Now, I should very much like to know whether those pictures are intact?"

"We shall soon find that out," replied the inspector, "for we'll take the truck back with us." And he commenced undoing the bolt with a spanner, after which he unlocked the levers.

"H'm— they work pretty freely," he remarked as he pulled one.

"Quite so," said Hazell, "they've been oiled recently."

There was an hour or so before the return train would pass, and Hazell occupied it by walking to the shepherd's cottage.

"I am hungry," he explained to the woman there, "and hunger is Nature's dictate for food. Can you oblige me with a couple of onions and a broomstick?"

And she talks to-day of the strange man who "kept a swingin' o' that there broomstick round 'is 'ead and then eat them onions as solemn as a judge."

The first thing Hazell did on returning to Newbury was to develop his photographs. The plates were dry enough by the evening for him to print one or two photos on gaslight-paper and to enclose the clearest of them with a letter to a Scotland Yard official whom he knew, stating that he would call for an answer, as he intended returning to town in a couple of days. The following evening he received a note from the station-master, which read—

Dear Sir,

I promised to let you know if the pictures in the cases on that truck were in any way tampered with. I have just received a report from Winchester by which I understand that they have been unpacked and carefully examined by the Committee of the Loan Exhibition. The Committee are perfectly satisfied that they have not been damaged or interfered with in any way, and that they have been received just as they left the owner's hands.

We are still at a loss to account for the running of the waggon on to Churn siding or for the object in doing so. An official has been down from Paddington, and, at his request, we are not making the affair public— the goods having arrived in safety. I am sure you will observe confidence in this matter.

"More mysterious than ever," said Hazell to himself. "I can't understand it at all."

The next day he called at Scotland Yard and saw the official.

"I've had no difficulty with your little matter, you'll be glad to hear," he said. "We looked up our records and very soon spotted your man."

"Who is he?"

"His real name is Edgar Jeffreys, but we know him under several aliases. He's served four sentences for burglary and robbery— the latter, a daring theft from a train, so he's in your line, Mr. Hazell. What's he been up to, and how did you get that print?"

"Well," replied Hazell, "I don't quite know yet what he's been doing. But I should like to be able to find him if anything turns up. Never mind how I got the print— the affair is quite a private one at present, and nothing may come of it."

The official wrote an address on a bit of paper and handed it to Hazell.

"He's living there just now, under the name of Allen. We keep such men in sight, and I'll let you know if he moves."

When Hazell opened his paper the following morning he gave a cry of joy. And no wonder, for this is what he saw:

MYSTERY OF A PICTURE
SIR GILBERT MURRELL AND THE
WINCHESTER LOAN EXHIBITION.
AN EXTRAORDINARY CHARGE.

THE COMMITTEE of the Loan Exhibition of Pictures to be opened next week at Winchester are in a state of very natural excitement brought about by a strange charge that has been made against them by Sir Gilbert Murrell.

Sir Gilbert, who lives at Leamington, is the owner of several very valuable pictures, among them being the celebrated "Holy Family," by Velasquez. This picture, with two others, was dispatched by him from Leamington to be exhibited at Winchester, and yesterday he journeyed to that city in order to make himself satisfied with the hanging arrangements, as he had particularly stipulated that "The Holy Family" was to be placed in a prominent position.

The picture in question was standing on the floor of the gallery, leaning against a pillar, when Sir Gilbert arrived with some representatives of the Committee.

Nothing occurred till he happened to walk behind the canvas, when he astounded those present by saying that the picture was not his at all, declaring that a copy had been substituted, and stating that he was absolutely certain on account of certain private marks of his at the back of the canvas which were quite indecipherable, and which were now missing. He admitted that the painting itself in every way resembled his picture, and that it was the cleverest forgery he had ever seen; but a very painful scene took place, the hanging committee stating that the picture had been received by them from the railway company just as it stood.

At present the whole affair is a mystery, but Sir Gilbert insisted most emphatically to our correspondent, who was able to see him, that the picture was certainly not his, and said that as the original is extremely valuable he intends holding the Committee responsible for the substitution which, he declares, has taken place.

It was evident to Hazell that the papers had not, as yet, got hold of the mysterious incident at Churn. As a matter of fact, the railway company had kept that affair strictly to themselves, and the loan committee knew nothing of what had happened on the line.

But Hazell saw that inquiries would be made, and determined to probe the mystery without delay. He saw at once that if there was any truth in Sir Gilbert's story the substitution had taken place in that lonely siding at Churn. He was staying at his London flat, and five minutes after he had read the paragraph had called a hansom and was being hurried off to a friend of his who was well known in art circles as a critic and art historian.

"I can tell you exactly what you want to know," said he, "for I've only just been looking it up, so as to have an article in the evening papers on it. There was a famous copy of the picture of Velasquez, said to have been painted by a pupil of his, and for some years there was quite a controversy among the respective owners as to which was the genuine one— just as there is to-day about a Madonna belonging to a gentleman at St. Moritz, but which a Vienna gallery also claims to possess.

"However, in the case of 'The Holy Family,' the dispute was ultimately settled once and for all years ago, and undoubtedly Sir Gilbert Murrell held the

genuine picture. What became of the copy no one knows. For twenty years all trace of it has been lost. There— that's all I can tell you. I shall pad it out a bit in my article, and I must get to work on it at once. Good-bye!"

"One moment— where was the copy last seen?"

"Oh! the old Earl of Ringmere had it last, but when he knew it to be a forgery he is said to have sold it for a mere song, all interest in it being lost, you see."

"Let me see, he's a very old man, isn't he?"

"Yes— nearly eighty— a perfect enthusiast on pictures still, though."

"Only *said* to have sold it," muttered Hazell to himself, as he left the house; "that's very vague— and there's no knowing what these enthusiasts will do when they're really bent on a thing. Sometimes they lose all sense of honesty. I've known fellows actually rob a friend's collection of stamps or butterflies. What if there's something in it? By George, what an awful scandal there would be! It seems to me that if such a scandal were prevented I'd be thanked all round. Anyhow, I'll have a shot at it on spec. And I must find out how that truck was run off the line."

When once Hazell was on the track of a railway mystery he never let a moment slip by. In an hour's time, he was at the address given him at Scotland Yard. On his way there he took a card from his case, a blank one, and wrote on it, "From the Earl of Ringmere." This he put into an envelope.

"It's a bold stroke," he said to himself, "but, if there's anything in it, it's worth trying."

So he asked for Allen. The woman who opened the door looked at him suspiciously, and said she didn't think Mr. Allen was in.

"Give him this envelope," replied Hazell. In a couple of minutes she returned, and asked him to follow her.

A short, wiry-looking man, with sharp, evil-looking eyes, stood in the room waiting for him and looking at him suspiciously.

"Well," he snapped, "what is it— what do you want?"

"I come on behalf of the Earl of Ringmere. You will know that when I mention Churn," replied Hazell, playing his trump card boldly.

"Well," went on the man, "what about that?"

Hazell wheeled round, locked the door suddenly, put the key in his pocket, and then faced his man. The latter darted forward, but Hazell had a revolver pointing at him in a twinkling.

"You— detective!"

"No, I'm not— I told you I came on behalf of the Earl— that looks like hunting up matters for his sake, doesn't it?"

"What does the old fool mean?" asked Jeffreys.

"Oh! I see you know all about it. Now listen to me quietly, and you may come to a little reason. You changed that picture at Churn the other night."

"You seem to know a lot about it," sneered the other, but less defiantly.

"Well, I do— but not quite all. You were foolish to leave your traces on that lever, eh?"

"How did I do that?" exclaimed the man, giving himself away.

"You'd been dabbling about with oil, you see, and you left your thumb-print on the handle. I photographed it, and they recognised it at Scotland Yard. Quite simple."

Jeffreys swore beneath his breath.

"I wish you'd tell me what you mean," he said.

"Certainly. I expect you've been well paid for this little job."

"If I have, I'm not going to take any risks. I told the old man so. He's worse than I am— he put me up to getting the picture. Let him take his chance when it comes out— I suppose he wants to keep his name out of it, that's why you're here."

"You're not quite right. Now just listen to me. You're a villain, and you deserve to suffer; but I'm acting in a purely private capacity, and I fancy if I can get the original picture back to its owner that it will be better for all parties to hush this affair up. Has the old Earl got it?"

"No, not yet," admitted the other, "he was too artful. But he knows where it is, and so do I."

"Ah— now you're talking sense! Look here! You make a clean breast of it, and I'll take it down on paper. You shall swear to the truth of your statement before a commissioner for oaths— he need not see the actual confession. I shall hold this in case it is necessary; but if you help me to get the picture back to Sir Gilbert, I don't think it will be."

After a little more conversation, Jeffreys explained. Before he did so, however, Hazell had taken a bottle of milk and a hunch of wholemeal bread from his pocket, and calmly proceeded to perform "exercises" and then to eat his "lunch," while Jeffreys told the following story:

"It was the old Earl who did it. How he got hold of me doesn't matter— perhaps I got hold of him— maybe I put him up to it— but that's not the question. He'd kept that forged picture of his in a lumber room for years, but he always had his eye on the genuine one. He paid a long price for the forgery, and he got to think that he ought to have the original. But there, he's mad on pictures.

"Well, as I say, he kept the forgery out of sight and let folks think he'd sold it, but all the time he was in hopes of getting it changed somehow for the original.

"Then I came along and undertook the job for him. There were three of us in it, for it was a ticklish business. We found out by what train the picture was to travel— that was easy enough. I got hold of a key to unlock that ground frame, and the screwing off of the bolt was a mere nothing. I oiled the points well, so that the thing should work as I wanted it to.

"One pal was with me— in the siding, ready to clap on the side brake when the truck was running in. I was to work the points, and my other pal, who had the most awkward job of all, was on the goods train— under a tarpaulin in a truck. He had two lengths of very stout rope with a hook at each end of them.

"When the train left Upton, he started his job. Goods trains travel very slowly, and there was plenty of time. Counting from the back brake van, the truck we wanted to run off was No. 5. First he hooked No. 4 truck to No. 6— fixing the hook at the side of the end of both trucks, and having the slack in his hand, coiled up.

"Then when the train ran down a bit of a decline he uncoupled No. 5 from No. 4— standing on No. 5 to do it. That was easy enough, for he'd taken a coupling staff with him; then he paid out the slack till it was tight. Next he hooked his second rope from No. 5 to No. 6, uncoupled No. 5 from No. 6, and paid out the slack of the second rope.

"Now you can see what happened. The last few trucks of the train were being drawn by a long rope reaching from No. 4 to No. 6, and leaving a space in between. In the middle of this space No. 5 ran, drawn by a short rope from No. 6. My pal stood on No. 6, with a sharp knife in his hand.

"The rest was easy. I held the lever, close by the side of the line— coming forward to it as soon as the engine passed. The instant the space appeared after No. 6 I pulled it over, and No. 5 took the siding points, while my pal cut the rope at the same moment.

"Directly the truck had run by and off I reversed the lever so that the rest of the train following took the main line. There is a decline before Compton, and the last four trucks came running down to the main body of the train, while my pal hauled in the slack and finally coupled No. 4 to No. 6 when they came together. He jumped from the train as it ran very slowly into Compton. That's how it was done."

Hazell's eyes sparkled.

"It's the cleverest thing I've heard of on the line," he said.

"Think so? Well, it wanted some handling. The next thing was to unscrew the packing-case, take the picture out of the frame, and put the forgery we'd brought with us in its place. That took us some time, but there was no fear of interruption in that lonely part. Then I took the picture off, rolling it up first,

and hid it. The old Earl insisted on this. I was to tell him where it was, and he was going to wait for a few weeks and then get it himself."

"Where did you hide it?"

"You're sure you're going to hush this up?"

"You'd have been in charge long ago if I were not."

"Well, there's a path from Churn to East Ilsley across the downs, and on the right-hand of that path is an old sheep well— quite dry. It's down there. You can easily find the string if you look for it— fixed near the top."

Hazell took down the man's confession, which was duly attested. His conscience told him that perhaps he ought to have taken stronger measures.

"I TOLD YOU I was merely a private individual," said Hazell to Sir Gilbert Murrell. "I have acted in a purely private capacity in bringing you your picture."

Sir Gilbert looked from the canvas to the calm face of Hazell.

"Who are you, sir?" he asked.

"Well, I rather aspire to be a book-collector; you may have read my little monogram on 'Jacobean Bindings?' "

"No," said Sir Gilbert, "I have not had that pleasure. But I must inquire further into this. How did you get this picture? Where was it— who—"

"Sir Gilbert," broke in Hazell, "I could tell you the whole truth, of course. I am not in any way to blame myself. By chance, as much as anything else, I discovered how your picture had been stolen, and where it was."

"But I want to know all about it. I shall prosecute— I—"

"I think not. Now, do you remember where the forged picture was seen last?"

"Yes; the Earl of Ringmere had it— he sold it."

"Did he?"

"Eh?"

"What if he kept it all this time?" said Hazell, with a peculiar look.

There was a long silence.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Sir Gilbert at length. "You don't mean *that*. Why, he has one foot in the grave— a very old man— I was dining with him only a fortnight ago."

"Ah! Well, I think you are content now, Sir Gilbert?"

"It is terrible— terrible! I have the picture back, but I wouldn't have the scandal known for worlds."

"It never need be," replied Hazell. "You will make it all right with the Winchester people?"

"Yes— yes— even if I have to admit I was mistaken, and let the forgery stay through the exhibition."

"I think that would be the best way," replied Hazell, who never regretted his action.

"Of course, Jeffreys ought to have been punished," he said to himself; "but it was a clever idea— a clever idea!"

"May I offer you some lunch?" asked Sir Gilbert.

"Thank you; but I am a vegetarian, and—"

"I think my cook could arrange something— let me ring."

"It is very good of you, but I ordered a dish of lentils and a salad at the station restaurant. But if you will allow me just to go through my physical training *ante* luncheon exercises here, it would save me the trouble of a more or less public display at the station."

"Certainly," replied the rather bewildered Baronet; whereupon Hazell threw off his coat and commenced whirling his arms like a windmill.

"Digestion should be considered *before* a meal," he explained.

16: The Shining Pyramid

Arthur Machen

1863-1947

The Unknown World May 1895

Arthur Llewellyn Jones

'HAUNTED, you said?'

'Yes, haunted. Don't you remember, when I saw you three years ago, you told me about your place in the west with the ancient woods hanging all about it, and the wild, domed hills, and the ragged land? It has always remained a sort of enchanted picture in my mind as I sit at my desk and hear the traffic rattling in the street in the midst of whirling London. But when did you come up?'

'The fact is, Dyson, I have only just got out of the train. I drove to the station early this morning and caught the 10.45.'

'Well, I am very glad you looked in on me. How have you been getting on since we last met? There is no Mrs Vaughan, I suppose?'

'No,' said Vaughan, 'I am still a hermit, like yourself. I have done nothing but loaf about.'

Vaughan had lit his pipe and sat in the elbow chair, fidgeting and glancing about him in a somewhat dazed and restless manner. Dyson had wheeled round his chair when his visitor entered and sat with one arm fondly reclining on the desk of his bureau, and touching the litter of manuscript.

'And you are still engaged in the old task?' said Vaughan, pointing to the pile of papers and the teeming pigeon-holes.

'Yes, the vain pursuit of literature, as idle as alchemy, and as entrancing. But you have come to town for some time I suppose; what shall we do tonight?'

'Well, I rather wanted you to try a few days with me down in the west. It would do you a lot of good, I'm sure.'

'You are very kind, Vaughan, but London in September is hard to leave. Doré could not have designed anything more wonderful and mystic than Oxford Street as I saw it the other evening; the sunset flaming, the blue haze transmuting the plain street into a road "far in the spiritual city".'

'I should like you to come down though. You would enjoy roaming over our hills. Does this racket go on all day and all night? It quite bewilders me; I wonder how you can work through it. I am sure you would revel in the great peace of my old home among the woods.'

Vaughan lit his pipe again, and looked anxiously at Dyson to see if his inducements had had any effect, but the man of letters shook his head, smiling, and vowed in his heart a firm allegiance to the streets.

'You cannot tempt me,' he said.

'Well, you may be right. Perhaps, after all, I was wrong to speak of the peace of the country. There, when a tragedy does occur, it is like a stone thrown into a pond; the circle of disturbance keep on widening, and it seems as if the water would never be still again.'

'Have you ever any tragedies where you are?'

'I can hardly say that. But I was a good deal disturbed about a month ago by something that happened; it may or may not have been a tragedy in the usual sense of the word.'

'What was the occurrence?'

'Well, the fact is a girl disappeared in a way which seems highly mysterious. Her parents, people of the name of Trevor, are well-to-do farmers, and their eldest daughter Annie was a sort of village beauty; she was really remarkably handsome. One afternoon she thought she would go and see her aunt, a widow who farms her own land, and as the two houses are only about five or six miles apart, she started off, telling her parents she would take the short cut over the hills. She never got to her aunt's. She's still missing. That's putting it in a few words.'

'What an extraordinary thing! I suppose there are no disused mines, are there, on the hills? I don't think you quite run to anything so formidable as a precipice?'

'No; the path the girl must have taken had no pitfalls of any description; it is just a track over wild, bare hillside, far, even, from a by-road. One may walk for miles without meeting a soul, but it is all perfecdy safe.'

'And what do people say about it?'

'Oh, they talk nonsense— among themselves. You have no notion as to how superstitious cottagers are in out-of-the-way parts like mine. They are as bad as the Irish, every whit, and even more secretive.'

'But what do they say?'

'Oh, the poor girl is supposed to have "gone with the fairies", or to have been "taken by the fairies". Such stuff!' he went on, 'one would laugh if it were not for the real tragedy of the case.'

Dyson looked somewhat interested.

'Yes,' he said, ' "fairies" certainly strike a little curiously on the ear in these days. But what do the police say? I presume they do not accept the fairy-tale hypothesis?'

'No; but they seem quite at fault. What I am afraid of is that Annie Trevor must have fallen in with some scoundrels on her way. Castletown is a large seaport, you know, and some of the worst of the foreign sailors occasionally desert their ships and go on the tramp up and down the country. Not many years ago a Spanish sailor named Garcia murdered a whole family for the sake of plunder that was not worth sixpence. They are hardly human, some of these fellows, and I am dreadfully afraid the poor girl must have come to an awful end.'

'But no foreign sailor was seen by anyone about the country?'

'No; there is certainly that; and of course country people are quick to notice anyone whose appearance and dress are a little out of the common. Still it seems as if my theory were the only possible explanation.'

'There are no data to go upon,' said Dyson, thoughtfully. 'There was no question of a love affair, or anything of the kind, I suppose?'

'Oh, no, not a hint of such a thing. I am sure if Annie were alive she would have contrived to let her mother know of her safety.'

'No doubt, no doubt. Still it is barely possible that she is alive and yet unable to communicate with her friends. But all this must have disturbed you a good deal.'

'Yes, it did; I hate a mystery, and especially a mystery which is probably the veil of horror. But frankly, Dyson, I want to make a clean breast of it; I did not come here to tell you all this.'

'Of course not,' said Dyson, a little surprised at Vaughan's uneasy manner. 'You came to have a chat on more cheerful topics.'

'No, I did not. What I have been telling you about happened a month ago, but something which seems likely to affect me more personally has happened within the last few days, and to be quite plain, I came up to town with the idea that you might be able to help me. You recollect that curious case you spoke to me about at our last meeting; something about a spectacle-maker.'

'Oh, yes, I remember that. I know I was quite proud of my acumen at the time; even to this day the police have no idea why those peculiar yellow spectacles were wanted. But, Vaughan, you really look quite put out; I hope there is nothing serious?'

'No, I think I have been exaggerating, and I want you to reassure me. But what has happened is very odd.'

'And what has happened?'

'I am sure that you will laugh at me, but this is the story. You must know there is a path, a right of way, that goes through my land, and to be precise, close to the wall of the kitchen garden. It is not used by many people; a woodman now and again finds it useful, and five or six children who go to school in the village pass twice a day. Well, a few days ago I was taking a walk about the place before breakfast, and I happened to stop to fill my pipe just by the large doors in the garden wall. The wood, I must tell you, comes to within a few feet of the wall, and the track I spoke of runs right in the shadow of the trees. I thought the shelter from a brisk wind that was blowing rather pleasant, and I stood there smoking with my eyes on the ground. Then something caught my attention. Just under the wall, on the short grass, a number of small flints were arranged in a pattern; something like this:' and Mr Vaughan caught at a pencil and piece of paper, and dotted down a few strokes.

'You see,' he went on, 'there were, I should think, twelve little stones neatly arranged in lines, and spaced at equal distances as I have shewn it on the paper. They were pointed stones and the points were very carefully directed one way.'

Yes,' said Dyson, without much interest; no doubt the children you have mentioned had been playing there on their way from school. Children, as you know, are very fond of making such devices with oyster shells or flints or flowers, or with whatever comes in their way.'

'So I thought; I just noticed these flints were arranged in a sort of pattern and then went on. But the next morning I was taking the same round, which, as a matter of fact, is habitual with me, and again I saw at the same spot a device in flints. This time it was really a curious pattern; something like the spokes of a wheel, all meeting at a common centre, and this centre formed by a device which looked like a bowl; all, you understand, done in flints.'

'You are right,' said Dyson, 'that seems odd enough. Still it is reasonable that your half a dozen school children are responsible for these fantasies in stone.'

'Well, I thought I would set the matter at rest. The children pass the gate every evening at half-past five, and I walked by at six, and found the device just as I had left it in the morning. The next day I was up and about at a quarter to

seven, and I found the whole thing had been changed. There was a pyramid outlined in flints upon the grass. The children I saw going by an hour and a half later, and they ran past the spot without glancing to right or left. In the evening I watched them going home, and this morning when I got to the gate at six o'clock there was a thing like a half-moon waiting for me.'

'So then the series runs thus: firstly ordered lines, then the device of the spokes and the bowl, then the pyramid, and finally, this morning, the half-moon. That is the order, isn't it?'

'Yes; that is right. But do you know it has made me feel very uneasy? I suppose it seems absurd, but I can't help thinking that some kind of signalling is going on under my nose, and that sort of thing is disquieting.'

'But what have you to dread? You have no enemies?'

'No; but I have some very valuable old plate.'

'You are thinking of burglars then?' said Dyson, with an accent of considerable interest, 'but you must know your neighbours. Are there any suspicious characters about?'

'Not that I am aware of. But you remember what I told you of the sailors.'

'Can you trust your servants?'

'Oh, perfectly. The plate is preserved in a strong-room; the butler, an old family servant, alone knows where the key is kept. There is nothing wrong there. Still, everybody is aware that I have a lot of old silver, and all country folks are given to gossip. In that way information may have got abroad in very undesirable quarters.'

'Yes, but I confess there seems something a little unsatisfactory in the burglar theory. Who is signalling to whom? I cannot see my way to accepting such an explanation. What put the plate into your head in connection with these flint signs, or whatever one may call them?'

'It was the figure of the bowl,' said Vaughan. 'I happen to possess a very large and very valuable Charles II punch-bowl. The chasing is really exquisite, and the thing is worth a lot of money. The sign I described to you was exactly the same shape as my punch-bowl.'

'A queer coincidence certainly. But the other figures or devices: you have nothing shaped like a pyramid?'

'Ah, you will think that queerer. As it happens, this punchbowl of mine, together with a set of rare old ladles, is kept in a mahogany chest of a pyramidal shape. The four sides slope upwards, the narrow towards the top.'

'I confess all this interests me a good deal,' said Dyson. 'Let us go on then. What about the other figures; how about the Army, as we may call the first sign, and the Crescent or Half-moon?'

'Ah, there is no reference that I can make out of these two. Still, you see I have some excuse for curiosity at all events. I should be very vexed to lose any of the old plate; nearly all the pieces have been in the family for generations. And I cannot get it out of my head that some scoundrels mean to rob me, and are communicating with one another every night.'

'Frankly,' said Dyson, 'I can make nothing of it ; I am as much in the dark as yourself. Your theory seems certainly the only possible explanation, and yet the difficulties are immense.'

He leaned back in his chair, and the two men faced each other, frowning, and perplexed by so bizarre a problem.

'By the way,' said Dyson, after a long pause, 'what is your geological formation down there?'

Mr Vaughan looked up, a good deal surprised by the question.

'Old red sandstone and limestone, I believe,' he said. 'We are just beyond the coal measures, you know.'

'But surely there are no flints either in the sandstone or the limestone?'

'No, I never see any flints in the fields. I confess that did strike me as a little curious.'

'I should think so! It is very important. By the way, what size were the flints used in making these devices?'

'I happen to have brought one with me; I took it this morning.'

'From the Half-moon?'

'Exactly. Here it is.'

He handed over a small flint, tapering to a point, and about three inches in length.

Dyson's face blazed up with excitement as he took the thing from Vaughan.

'Certainly,' he said, after a moment's pause, 'you have some curious neighbours in your country. I hardly think they can harbour any designs on your punch-bowl. Do you know this is a flint arrow-head of vast antiquity, and not only that, but an arrow-head of a unique kind? I have seen specimens from all parts of the world, but there are features about this thing that are quite peculiar.'

He laid down his pipe, and took out a book from a drawer.

'We shall just have time to catch the 5.45 to Castletown, he said.

ii

MR DYSON drew in a long breath of the air of the hills and felt all the enchantment of the scene about him. It was very early morning, and he stood on the terrace in the front of the house. Vaughan's ancestor had built on the

lower slope of a great hill, in the shelter of a deep and ancient wood that gathered on three sides about the house, and on the fourth side, the south-west, the land fell gently away and sank to the valley, where a brook wound in and out in mystic esses, and the dark and gleaming alders tracked the stream's course to the eye. On the terrace in that sheltered place no wind blew, and far beyond the trees were still. Only one sound broke in upon the silence, and Dyson heard the noise of the brook singing far below, the song of clear and shining water rippling over the stones, whispering and murmuring as it sank to dark deep pools. Across the stream, just below the house, rose a grey stone bridge, vaulted and buttressed, a fragment of the Middle Ages, and then beyond the bridge the hills rose again, vast and rounded like bastions, covered here and there with dark woods and thickets of undergrowth, but the heights were all bare of trees, showing only grey turf and patches of bracken, touched here and there with the gold of fading fronds. Dyson looked to the north and south, and still he saw the wall of the hills, and the ancient woods, and the stream drawn in and out between them; all grey and dim with morning mist beneath a grey sky in a hushed and haunted air.

Mr Vaughan's voice broke in upon the silence.

'I thought you would be too tired to be about so early,' he said. 'I see you are admiring the view. It is very pretty, isn't it, though I suppose old Meyrick Vaughan didn't think much about the scenery when he built the house. A queer grey, old place, isn't it?'

'Yes, and how it fits into the surroundings; it seems of a piece with the grey hills and the grey bridge below.'

'I am afraid I have brought you down on false pretences, Dyson,' said Vaughan, as they began to walk up and down the terrace. 'I have been to the place, arid there is not a sign of anything this morning.'

'Ah, indeed. Well, suppose we go round together.'

They walked across the lawn and went by a path through the ilex shrubbery to the back of the house. There Vaughan pointed out the track leading down to the valley and up to the heights above the wood, and presently they stood beneath the garden wall, by the door.

'Here, you see, it was,' said Vaughan, pointing to a spot on the turf. I was standing just where you are now that morning I first saw the flints.'

'Yes, quite so. That morning it was the Army, as I call it; then the Bowl, then the Pyramid, and, yesterday, the Halfmoon. What a queer old stone that is,' he went on, pointing to a block of limestone rising out of the turf just beneath the wall. 'It looks like a sort of dwarf pillar, but I suppose it is natural.'

'Oh, yes, I think so. I imagine it was brought here, though, as we stand on the red sandstone. No doubt it was used as a foundation stone for some older building.'

'Very likely.' Dyson was peering about him attentively, looking from the ground to the wall, and from the wall to the deep wood that hung almost over the garden and made the place dark even in the morning.

'Look here,' said Dyson at length, 'it is certainly a case of children this time. Look at that.'

He was bending down and staring at the dull red surface of the mellowed bricks of the wall. Vaughan came up and looked hard where Dyson's finger was pointing, and could scarcely distinguish a faint mark in deeper red.

'What is it?' he said. 'I can make nothing of it.'

'Look a little more closely. Don't you see it is an attempt to draw the human eye?'

'Ah, now I see what you mean. My sight is not very sharp. Yes, so it is, it is meant for an eye, no doubt, as you say. I thought the children learnt drawing at school.'

'Well, it is an odd eye enough. Do you notice the peculiar almond shape; almost like the eye of a Chinaman?'

Dyson looked meditatively at the work of the undeveloped artist, and scanned the wall again, going down on his knees in the minuteness of his inquisition.

'I should like very much,' he said at length, 'to know how a child in this out-of-the-way place could have any idea of the shape of the Mongolian eye. You see the average child has a very distinct impression of the subject; he draws a circle, or something like a circle, and puts a dot in the centre. I don't think any child imagines that the eye is really made like that; it's just a convention of infantile art. But this almond-shaped thing puzzles me extremely. Perhaps it may be derived from a gilt Chinaman on a tea-canister in the grocer's shop. Still that's hardly likely.'

'But why are you so sure it was done by a child?'

Why! Look at the height. These old-fashioned bricks are little more than two inches thick; there are twenty courses from the ground to the sketch if we call it so; that gives a height of three and a half feet. Now, just imagine you are going to draw something on this wall. Exactly; your pencil, if you had one, would touch the wall somewhere on the level with your eyes, that is, more than five feet from the ground. It seems therefore, a very simple deduction to conclude that this eye on the wall was drawn by a child about ten years old.'

'Yes, I had not thought of that. Of course one of the children must have done it.'

'I suppose so; and yet as I said, there is something singularly unchildlike about those two lines, and the eyeball itself, you see, is almost an oval. To my mind, the thing has an odd, ancient air; and a touch that is not altogether pleasant. I cannot help fancying that if we could see a whole face from the same hand it would not be altogether agreeable. However, that is nonsense, after all, and we are not getting further in our investigations. It is odd that the flint series has come to such an abrupt end.'

The two men walked away towards the house, and as they went in at the porch there was a break in the grey sky, and a gleam of sunshine on the grey hill before them.

All the day Dyson prowled meditatively about the fields and woods surrounding the house. He was thoroughly and completely puzzled by the trivial circumstances he proposed to elucidate, and now he again took the flint arrow-head from his pocket, turning it over and examining it with deep attention. There was something about the thing that was altogether different from the specimens he had seen at the museums and private collections; the shape was of a distinct type, and around the edge there was a line of little punctured dots, apparently a suggestion of ornament. Who, thought Dyson, could possess such things in so remote a place; and who, possessing the flints, could have put them to the fantastic use of designing meaningless figures under Vaughan's garden wall? The rank absurdity of the whole affair offended him unutterably; and as one theory after another rose in his mind only to be rejected, he felt strongly tempted to take the next train back to town. He had seen the silver plate which Vaughan treasured, and had inspected the punch-bowl, the gem of the collection, with close attention; and what he saw and his interview with the butler convinced him that a plot to rob the strong-box was out of the limits of inquiry. The chest in which the bowl was kept, a heavy piece of mahogany, evidently dating from the beginning of the century, was certainly strongly suggestive of a pyramid, and Dyson was at first inclined to the inept manoeuvres of the detective, but a little sober thought convinced him of the impossibility of the burglary hypothesis, and he cast wildly about for something more satisfying. He asked Vaughan if there were any gypsies in the neighbourhood, and heard that the Romany had not been seen for years. This dashed him a good deal, as he knew the gypsy habit of leaving queer hieroglyphics on the line of march, and had been much elated when the thought occurred to him. He was facing Vaughan by the old-fashioned hearth when he put the question, and leaned back in his chair in disgust at the destruction of his theory.

'It is odd,' said Vaughan, 'but the gypsies never trouble us here. Now and then the farmers find traces of fires in the wildest part of the hills, but nobody seems to know who the fire-lighters are.'

'Surely that looks like gypsies?'

'No, not in such places as those. Tinkers and gypsies and wanderers of all sorts stick to the roads and don't go very far from the farmhouses.'

'Well, I can make nothing of it. I saw the children going by this afternoon, and, as you say, they ran straight on. So we shall have no more eyes on the wall at all events.'

'No, I must waylay them one of these days and find out who is the artist.'

The next morning when Vaughan strolled in his usual course from the lawn to the back of the house he found Dyson already awaiting him by the garden door, and evidently in a state of high excitement, for he beckoned furiously with his hand, and gesticulated violently.

'What is it?' asked Vaughan. 'The flints again?'

'No; but look here, look at the wall. There; don't you see it?'

'There's another of those eyes! '

'Exactly. Drawn, you see, at a little distance from the first, almost on the same level, but slightly lower.'

'What on earth is one to make of it? It couldn't have been done by the children; it wasn't there last night, and they won't pass for another hour. What can it mean?'

'I think the very devil is at the bottom of all this,' said Dyson. 'Of course, one cannot resist the conclusion that these infernal almond eyes are to be set down to the same agency as the devices in the arrow-heads; and where that conclusion is to lead us is more than I can tell. For my part, I have to put a strong check on my imagination, or it would run wild.'

'Vaughan,' he said, as they turned away from the wall, 'has it struck you that there is one point— a very curious point— in common between the figures done in flints and the eyes drawn on the wall?'

'What is that?' asked Vaughan, on whose face there had fallen a certain shadow of indefinite dread.

'It is this. We know that the signs of the Army, the Bowl, the Pyramid, and the Half-moon must have been done at night. Presumably they were meant to be seen at night. Well, precisely the same reasoning applies to those eyes on the wall.'

'I do not quite see your point.'

'Oh, surely. The nights are dark just now, and have been very cloudy. I know, since I came down. Moreover, those overhanging trees would throw that wall into deep shadow even on a clear night.'

'Well?'

'What struck me was this. What very peculiarly sharp eyesight they, whoever "they" are, must have to be able to arrange arrow-heads in intricate order in the blackest shadow of the wood, and then draw the eyes on the wall without a trace of bungling, or a false line.'

'I have read of persons confined in dungeons for many years who have been able to see quite well in the dark,' said Vaughan.

'Yes,' said Dyson, 'there was the abbe in Monte Cristo. But it is a singular point.'

iii

'WHO WAS that old man that touched his hat to you just now?' said Dyson, as they came to the bend of the lane near the house.

'Oh, that was old Trevor. He looks very broken, poor old fellow.'

'Who is.Trevor?'

'Don't you remember? I told you the story that afternoon I came to your rooms— about a girl named Annie Trevor, who disappeared in the most inexplicable manner about five weeks ago. That was her father.'

'Yes, yes, I recollect now! To tell the truth I had forgotten all about it. And nothing has been heard of the girl?'

'Nothing whatever. The police are quite at fault.'

'I am afraid I did not pay very much attention to the details you gave me. Which way did the girl go?'

'Her path would take her right across those wild hills above the house; the nearest point in the trade must be about two miles from here.'

'Is it near that little hamlet I saw yesterday?'

'You mean Croesyceiliog, where the children come from? No; it goes more to the north.'

'Ah, I have never been that way.'

They went into the house, and Dyson shut himself up in his room, sunk deep in doubtful thought, but yet with the shadow of a suspicion growing within him that for a while haunted his brain, all vague and fantastic, refusing to take definite form. He was sitting by the open window and looking out on the valley and saw, as if in a picture, the intricate winding of the brook, the grey bridge, and the vast hills rising beyond; all still and without a breath of wind to stir the mystic hanging woods, and the evening sunshine glowed warm on the bracken, and down below a faint mist, pure white, began to rise from the stream. Dyson sat by the window as the day darkened and the huge bastioned hills loomed vast and vague, and the woods became dim and more

shadowy; and altogether impossible. He passed the rest of the evening in a reverie, hardly hearing what Vaughan said; and when he took his candle in the hall, he paused a moment before bidding his friend good night.

'I want a good rest,' he said. 'I have got some work to do tomorrow.'

'Some writing, you mean?'

'No. I am going to look for the Bowl.'

'The Bowl! If you mean my punch-bowl, that is safe in the chest.'

'I don't mean the punch-bowl. You may take my word for it that your plate has never been threatened. No; I will not bother you with any suppositions. We shall in all probability have something much stronger than suppositions before long. Good night, Vaughan.'

The next morning Dyson set off after breakfast. He took the path by the garden wall, and noted that there were now eight of the weird almond eyes dimly outlined on the brick.

'Six days more,' he said to himself, but as he thought over the theory he had formed, he shrank, in spite of strong conviction, from such a wildly incredible fancy. He struck up through the dense shadows of the wood, and at length came out on the bare hillside, and climbed higher and higher over the slippery turf, keeping well to the north, and following the indications given him by Vaughan. As he went on, he seemed to mount ever higher above the world of human life and customary things; to his right he looked at a fringe of orchard and saw a faint blue smoke rising like a pillar; there was the hamlet from which the children came to school, and there the only sign of life, for the woods embowered and concealed Vaughan's old grey house. As he reached what seemed the summit of the hill, he realised for the first time the desolate loneliness and strangeness of the land; there was nothing but grey sky and grey hill, a high, vast plain that seemed to stretch on for ever and ever, and a faint glimpse of a blue-peaked mountain far away and to the north. At length he came to the path, a slight track scarcely noticeable, and from its position and by what Vaughan had told him he knew that it was the way the lost girl, Annie Trevor, must have taken. He followed the path on the bare hill-top, noticing the great limestone rocks that cropped out of the turf, grim and hideous, and of an aspect as forbidding as an idol of the South Seas; and suddenly he halted astonished, although he had found what he searched for. Almost without warning the ground shelved suddenly away on all sides, and Dyson looked down into a circular depression, which might well have been a Roman amphitheatre, and the ugly crags of limestone rimmed it round as if with a broken wall. Dyson walked round the hollow, and noted the position of the stones, and then turned on his way home.

'This,' he thought to himself, 'is more than curious. The Bowl is discovered, but where is the Pyramid?'

'My dear Vaughan,' he said, when he got back, 'I may tell you that I have found the Bowl, and that is all I shall tell you for the present. We have six days of absolute inaction before us; there is really nothing to be done.'

iv

'I HAVE just been round the garden,' said Vaughan one morning. 'I have been counting those infernal eyes, and I find there are fourteen of them. For heaven's sake, Dyson, tell me what the meaning of it all is.'

'I should be very sorry to attempt to do so. I may have guessed this or that, but I always make it a principle to keep my guesses to myself. Besides, it is really not worth while anticipating events; you will remember my telling you that we had six days of inaction before us? Well, this is the sixth day, and the last of idleness. Tonight I propose we take a stroll.'

'A stroll! Is that all the action you mean to take?'

'Well, it may show you some very curious things. To be plain, I want you to start with me at nine o'clock this evening for the hills. We may have to be out all night, so you had better wrap up well, and bring some of that brandy.'

'Is it a joke?' asked Vaughan, who was bewildered with strange events and strange surmises.

'No, I don't think there is much joke in it. Unless I am much mistaken we shall find a very serious explanation of the puzzle. You will come with me, I am sure?'

"Very good. Which way do you want to go?'

'By the path you told me of; the path Annie Trevor is supposed to have taken.'

Vaughan looked white at the mention of the girl's name.

'I did not think you were on that track,' he said. 'I thought it was the affair of those devices in flint and of the eyes on the wall that you were engaged on. It's no good saying any more, but I will go with you.'

At a quarter to nine that evening the two men set out, taking the path through the wood, and up the hillside. It was a dark and heavy night, the sky was thick with clouds, and the valley full of mist, and all the way they seemed to walk in a world of shadow and gloom, hardly speaking, and afraid to break the haunted silence. They came out at last on the steep hillside, and instead of the oppression of the wood there was the long, dim sweep of the turf, and higher, the fantastic limestone rocks hinted horror through the darkness, and the wind sighed as it passed across the mountain to the sea, and in its passage

beat chill about their hearts. They seemed to walk on and on for hours, and the dim outline of the hill still stretched before them, and the haggard rocks still loomed through the darkness, when suddenly Dyson whispered, drawing his breath quickly, and coming close to his companion.

'Here,' he said, 'we will lie down. I do not think there is anything yet.'

'I know the place,' said Vaughan, after a moment. 'I have often been by in the daytime. The country people are afraid to come here, I believe; it is supposed to be a fairies' castle, or something of the kind. But why on earth have we come here?'

'Speak a little lower,' said Dyson. 'It might not do us any good if we are overheard.'

'Overheard here! There is not a soul within three miles of us.'

'Possibly not; indeed, I should say certainly not. But there might be a body somewhat nearer.'

'I don't understand you in the least,' said Vaughan, whispering to humour Dyson, 'but why have we come here?'

'Well, you see this hollow before us is the Bowl. I think we had better not talk even in whispers.'

They lay full length upon the turf; the rock between their faces and the Bowl, and now and again, Dyson, slouching his dark, soft hat over his forehead, put out the glint of an eye, and in a moment drew back, not daring to take a prolonged view. Again he laid an ear to the ground and listened, and the hours went by, and the darkness seemed to blacken, and the faint sigh of the wind was the only sound.

Vaughan grew impatient with this heaviness of silence, this watching for indefinite terror; for to him there was no shape or form of apprehension, and he began to think the whole vigil a dreary farce.

'How much longer is this to last?' he whispered to Dyson, and Dyson who had been holding his breath in the agony of attention put his mouth to Vaughan's ear and said:

'Will you listen?' with pauses between each syllable, and in the voice with which the priest pronounces the awful words.

Vaughan caught the ground with his hands, and stretched forward, wondering what he was to hear. At first there was nothing, and then a low and gentle noise came very softly from the Bowl, a faint sound, almost indescribable, but as if one held the tongue against the roof of the mouth and expelled the breath. He listened eagerly and presently the noise grew louder, and became a strident and horrible hissing as if the pit beneath boiled with fervent heat, and Vaughan, unable to remain in suspense any longer, drew his

cap half over his face in imitation of Dyson, and looked down to the hollow below.

It did, in truth, stir and seethe like an infernal cauldron. The whole of the sides and bottom tossed and writhed with vague and restless forms that passed to and fro without the sound of feet, and gathered thick here and there and seemed to speak to one another in those tones of horrible sibilance, like the hissing of snakes, that he had heard. It was as if the sweet turf and the cleanly earth had suddenly become quickened with some foul writhing growth. Vaughan could not draw back his face, though he felt Dyson's finger touch him, but he peered into the quaking mass and saw faintly that there were things like faces and human limbs, and yet he felt his inmost soul chill with the sure belief that no fellow soul or human thing stirred in all that tossing' and hissing host. He looked aghast, choking back sobs of horror, and at length the loathsome forms gathered thickest about some vague object in the middle of the hollow and the hissing of their speech grew more venomous, and he saw in the uncertain light the abominable limbs, vague and yet too plainly seen, writhe and intertwine, and he thought he heard, very faint, a low human moan striking through the noise of speech that was not of man. At his heart something seemed to whisper ever 'the worm of corruption, the worm that dieth not,' and grotesquely the image was pictured to his imagination of a piece of putrid offal stirring through and through with bloated and horrible creeping things. The writhing of the dusky limbs continued, they seemed clustered round the dark form in the middle of the hollow, and the sweat dripped and poured off Vaughan's forehead, and fell cold on his hand beneath his face.

Then, it seemed done in an instant, the loathsome mass melted and fell away to the sides of the Bowl, and for a moment Vaughan saw in the middle of the hollow the tossing of human arms. But a spark gleamed beneath, a fire kindled, and as the voice of a woman cried out loud in a shrill scream of utter anguish and terror, a great pyramid of flame spired up like a bursting of a pent fountain, and threw a blaze of light upon the whole mountain. In that instant Vaughan saw the myriads beneath; the things made in the form of men but stunted like children hideously deformed, the faces with the almond eyes burning with evil and unspeakable lusts; the ghastly yellow of the mass of naked flesh; and then as if by magic the place was empty, while the fire roared and crackled, and the flames shone abroad.

'You have seen the Pyramid,' said Dyson in his ear, 'the Pyramid of fire.'

'THEN you recognise the thing?'

'Certainly. It is a brooch that Annie Trevor used to wear on Sundays; I remember the pattern. But where did you find it? You don't mean to say that you have discovered the girl?'

'My dear Vaughan, I wonder you have not guessed where I found the brooch. You have not forgotten last night already?'

'Dyson,' said the other, speaking very seriously, 'I have been turning it over in my mind this morning while you have been out. I have thought about what I saw, or perhaps I should say about what I thought I saw, and the only conclusion I can come to is this, that the thing won't bear recollection. As men live, I have lived soberly and honestly, in the fear of God, all my days, and all I can do is believe that I suffered from some monstrous delusion, from some phantasmagoria of the bewildered senses. You know we went home together in silence, not a word passed between us as to what I fancied I saw; had we not better agree to keep silent on the subject? When I took my walk in the peaceful morning sunshine, I thought all the earth seemed full of praise, and passing by that wall I noticed there were no more signs recorded, and I blotted out those that remained. The mystery is over, and we can live quietly again. I think some poison has been working for the last few weeks; I have trodden on the verge of madness, but I am sane now.'

Mr Vaughan had spoken earnestly, and bent forward in his chair and glanced at Dyson with something of entreaty.

'My dear Vaughan,' said the other, after a pause, 'what's the use of this? it is much too late to take that tone; we have gone too deep. Besides you know as well as I that there is no delusion in the case; I wish there were with all my heart. No, in justice to myself I must tell you the whole story, so far as I know it.'

'Very good,' said Vaughan with a sigh, 'if you must, you must.'

Then,' said Dyson, 'we will begin with the end if you please. I found this brooch you have just identified in the place we have called the Bowl. There was a heap of grey ashes, as if a fire had been burning, indeed, the embers were still hot, and this brooch was lying on the ground, just outside the range of the flame. It must have dropped accidentally from the dress of the person who was wearing it. No, don't interrupt me; we can pass now to the beginning, as we have had the end. Let us go back to that day you came to see me in my rooms in London. So far as I can remember, soon after you came in you mentioned, in a somewhat casual manner, that an unfortunate and mysterious incident had occurred in your part of the country; a girl named Annie Trevor had gone to see a relative, and had disappeared. I confess freely that what you said did not greatly interest me; there are so many reasons which may make it

extremely convenient for a man and more especially a woman to vanish from the circle of their relations and friends. I suppose, if we were to consult the police, one would find that in London somebody disappears mysteriously every other week, and the officers would no doubt shrug their shoulders, and tell you that by the law of averages it could not be otherwise. So I was very culpably careless to your story, and besides, there is another reason for my lack of interest; your tale was inexplicable. You could only suggest a blackguard sailor on the tramp, but I discarded the explanation immediately. For many reasons, but chiefly because the occasional criminal, the amateur in brutal crime, is always found out, especially if he selects the country as the scene of his operations. You will remember the case of that Garcia you mentioned ; he strolled into a railway station the day after the murder, his trousers covered with blood, and the works of the Dutch clock, his loot, tied in a neat parcel. So rejecting this, your only suggestion, the whole tale became, as I say, inexplicable, and, *therefore*, profoundly uninteresting. Yes, therefore, it is a perfectly valid conclusion. Do you ever trouble your head about problems which you know to be insoluble? Did you ever bestow much thought on the old puzzle of Achilles and the Tortoise? Of course not, because you knew it was a hopeless quest, and so when you told me the story of a country girl who had disappeared I simply placed the whole thing down in the category of the insoluble, and thought no more about the matter. I was mistaken, so it has turned out; but if you remember, you immediately passed on to an affair which interested you more intensely, because personally. I need not go over the very singular narrative of the flint signs; at first I thought it all trivial, probably some children's game, and if not that a hoax of some sort; but your showing me the arrow-head awoke my acute interest. Here, I saw, there was something widely removed from the commonplace, and matter of real curiosity; and as soon as I came here I set to work to find the solution, repeating to myself again and again the signs you had described. First came the sign we have agreed to call the Army; a number of serried lines of flints, all pointing in the same way. Then the lines, like the spokes of a wheel, all converging towards the figure of a Bowl, then the triangle or Pyramid, and last of all the Half-moon. I confess that I exhausted conjecture in my efforts to unveil this mystery, and as you will understand it was a duplex or rather triplex problem. For I had not merely to ask myself: what do these figures mean? but also, who can possibly be responsible for the designing of them? And again, who can possibly possess such valuable things, and knowing their value thus throw them down by the wayside? This line of thought led me to suppose that the person or persons in question did not know the value of unique flint arrow-heads, and yet this did not lead me far, for a well-educated man might easily be ignorant on such a

subject. Then came the complication of the eye on the wall, and you remember that we could not avoid the conclusion that in the two cases the same agency was at work. The peculiar position of these eyes on the wall made me inquire if there was such a thing as a dwarf anywhere in the neighbourhood, but I found that there was not, and I knew that the children who pass by every day had nothing to do with the matter. Yet I felt convinced that whoever drew the eyes must be from three and a half to four feet high, since, as I pointed out at the time, anyone who draws on a perpendicular surface chooses by instinct a spot about level with his face. Then again, there was the question of the peculiar shape of the eyes; that marked Mongolian character of which the English countryman could have no conception, and for a final cause of confusion the obvious fact that the designer or designers must be able practically to see in the dark. As you remarked, a man who has been confined for many years in an extremely dark cell or dungeon might acquire that power; but since the day of Edmond Dantes, where would such a prison be found in Europe? A sailor, who had been immured for a considerable period in some horrible Chinese *oubliette*, seemed the individual I was in search of, and though it looked improbable, it was not absolutely impossible that a sailor or, let us say, a man employed on shipboard, should be a dwarf. But how to account for my imaginary sailor being in possession of pre-historic arrow-heads? And the possession granted, what was the meaning and object of these mysterious signs of flint, and the almond-shaped eyes? Your theory of a contemplated burglary I saw, nearly from the first, to be quite untenable, and I confess I was utterly at a loss for a working hypothesis. It was a mere accident which put me on the track; we passed poor old Trevor, and your mention of his name and of the disappearance of his daughter, recalled the story which I had forgotten, or which remained unheeded. Here, then, I said to myself, is another problem, uninteresting, it is true, by itself; but what if it prove to be in relation with all these enigmas which torture me? I shut myself in my room, and endeavoured to dismiss all prejudice from my mind, and I went over everything *de novo*, assuming for theory's sake that the disappearance of Annie Trevor had some connection with the flint signs and the eyes on the wall. This assumption did not lead me very far, and I was on the point of giving the whole problem up in despair, when a possible significance of the Bowl struck me. As you know there is a 'Devil's Punch-bowl!' in Surrey, and I saw that the symbol might refer to some feature in the country. Putting the two extremes together, I determined to look for the Bowl near the path which the lost girl had taken, and you know how I found it. I interpreted the sign by what I knew, and read the first, the Army, thus: 'there is to be a gathering or assembly at the Bowl in a fortnight (that is the Half-moon) to see the Pyramid,

or to build the Pyramid.' The eyes, drawn one by one, day by day, evidently checked off the days, and I knew that there would be fourteen and no more. Thus far the way seemed pretty plain; I would not trouble myself to inquire as to the nature of the assembly, or as to who was to assemble in the loneliest and most dreaded place among these lonely hills. In Ireland or China or the west of America the question would have been easily answered; a muster of the disaffected, the meeting of a secret society, Vigilantes summoned to report: the thing would be simplicity itself; but in this quiet corner of England, inhabited by quiet folk, no such suppositions were possible for a moment. But I knew that I should have an opportunity of seeing and watching the assembly, and I did not care to perplex myself with hopeless research; and in place of reasoning a wild fancy entered into judgment; I remembered what people had said about Annie Trevor's disappearance that she had been "taken by the fairies" I tell you, Vaughan, I am a sane man as you are, my brain is not, I trust, mere vacant space to let to any wild improbability, and I tried my best to thrust the fantasy away. And the hint came of the old name of fairies, "the little people", and the very probable belief that they represent a tradition of the prehistoric Turanian inhabitants of the country, who were cave dwellers: and then I realized with a shock that I was looking for a being under four feet in height, accustomed to live in darkness, possessing stone instruments, and familiar with the Mongolian cast of features! I say this, Vaughan, that I should be ashamed to hint at such visionary stuff to you, if it were not for that which you saw with your very eyes last night, and I say that I might doubt the evidence of my senses, if they were not confirmed by yours. But you and I cannot look each other in the, face and pretend delusion; as you lay on the turf beside me I felt your flesh shrink and quiver, and I saw your eyes in the light of the flame. And so I tell you without any shame what was in my mind last night as we went through the wood and climbed the hill, and lay hidden beneath the rock.

'There was one thing that should have been most evident that puzzled me to the very last. I told you how I read the sign of the Pyramid; the assembly was to see a pyramid, and the true meaning of the symbol escaped me to the last moment. The old derivation from *πνρ,* fire, though false, should have set me on the track, but it never occurred to me.

'I think I need say very little more. You know we were quite helpless, even if we had foreseen what was to come. Ah, the particular place where these signs were displayed? Yes, that is a curious question. But this house, is, so far as I can judge, in a pretty central situation amongst the hills; and possibly, who can say yes or no, that queer, old limestone pillar by your garden wall was a place of meeting before the Celt set foot in Britain. But there is one thing I

must add: I don't regret our inability to rescue the wretched girl. You saw the appearance of those things that gathered thick and writhed in the Bowl; you may be sure that what lay bound in the midst of them was no longer fit for earth.'

'So?' said Vaughan.

'So she passed in the Pyramid of Fire,' said Dyson, 'and they passed again to the underworld, to the places beneath the hills.'

End