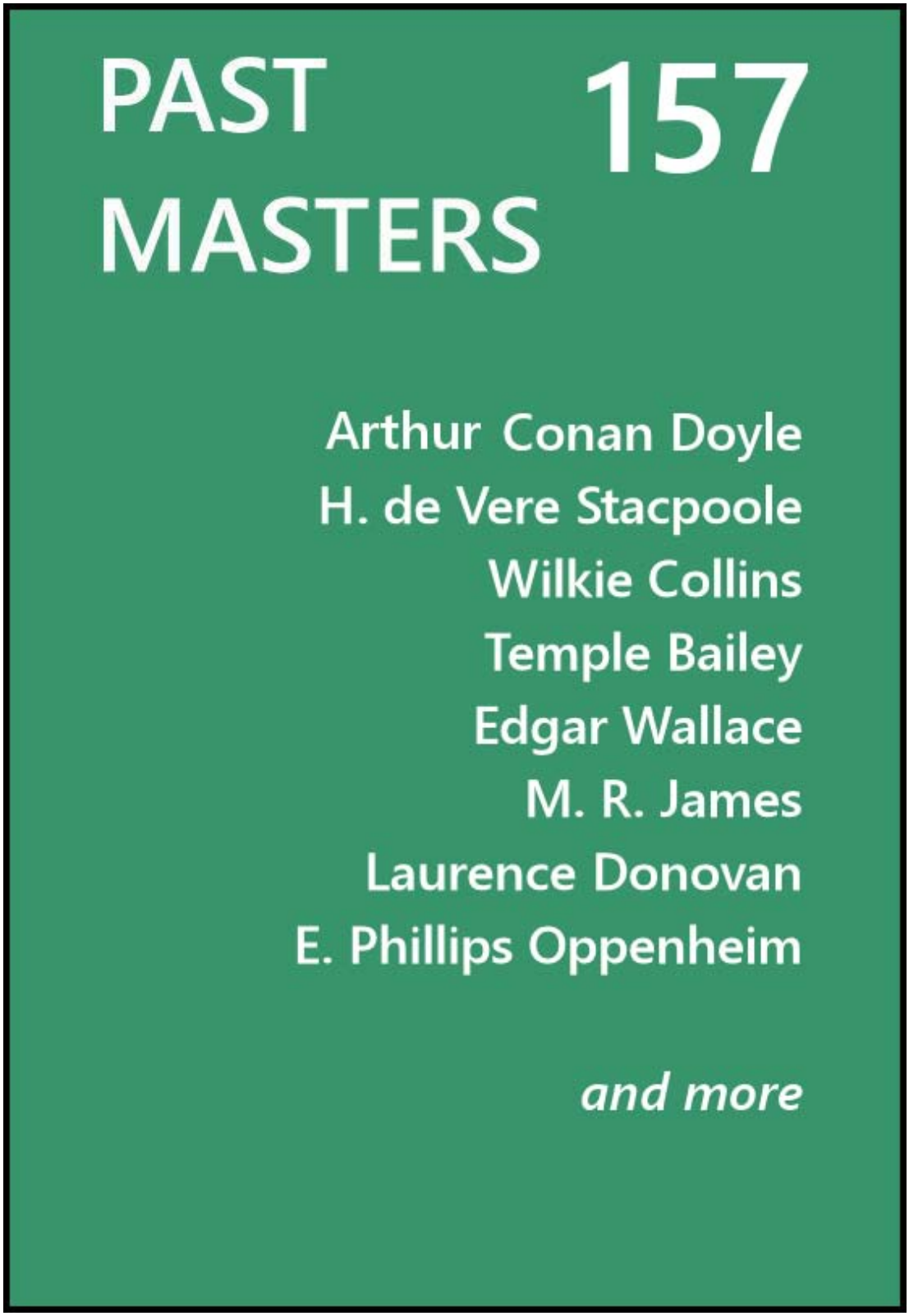
PAST
MASTERS
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PAST MASTERS 157

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

23 March 2024

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1: The Pawnshop Orpheus

Harold Mercer

1882-1852

The Bulletin, 24 Apr 1940

Harold Mercer

PURLEIGH had only just as much interest in church matters as his wife, who liked to consider herself a friend of the parson's wife, could force him to take; but he was booked to do his share at the Old Fogies' Concert. For the concert itself the Rev. Smalltext, a man of ideas, was responsible; instead of the faithful followers of the church, in the interests of the organ fund, being bored by their young, they should arrange for the young to be bored by their own efforts. The way the parson put it, however, was that there was surely enough talent amongst the elders to provide a programme which, because it was unique, would appeal. Maria suggested that Purleigh ought to be able to do something.

"Oh, leave me out," said Purleigh.

"Mr. Smalltext has put you down for an item," said Maria. "I told him that when you were younger you could play any sort of a wind instrument."

"I won't do it!" said Purleigh rebelliously.

"Oh, yes, you will," said Maria; and Purleigh knew then that most likely he would.

If his old ability, discarded as one of the follies of youth, remained, he had no excuse. His parents had shown a measure of inspiration in giving him Orpheus as a second name, although he had tried to forget it, even to the length of sometimes telling the inquisitive that the "O" in J. O. Purleigh stood for "Oliver." It had been for years a mere initial in his signature.

WITH familiarity, the idea of taking the platform ceased to be repugnant. An old ambition was stirred when he created a vision of himself, instrument in

hand, bowing to the plaudits of the audience. He would surprise them, he told himself. At all events he could do better than Brink.

With that thought, his part in the concert gained a definite appeal. Although, as a result of Maria's favor, Brink might some day be his son-in-law, Purleigh disliked him— all the more, perhaps, because he had nothing against Brink. Smug, self-assured, the near-middle-aged man, still unmarried, who had built up a local business and a pious reputation seemed to Purleigh too good to be true. Purleigh infinitely preferred young Bates, with his honest human failings, and he hoped, at times, that Bertha shared his preference, in spite of her mother's disparagement.

To be a concert star Purleigh had to have something to play, the medley of instruments he once possessed having long vanished. As he wanted it cheap, he went into the pawnshop; "musical instruments, saxophones and banjos," the sign put it.

"Hullo! What's this?" he said, fingering a quaint little instrument consisting of three reeds, sprouting away, so to speak, from a mouthpiece.

"I don't know heem," said the shopman. "I puy heem vrom a voreign sailor."

"Queer looking things" remarked Purleigh. He was lifting it towards his lips when the shopman interposed sharply.

"No, no! Nodt here!, Id ees nodt goodt to addract addention."

"Why not?" demanded Purleigh. The shopman shrugged; but his fat, amiable-looking wife smiled into the conversation.

"Ven der sailorman play heem, it made me go— so!" she said, giving a wriggle to her hips and shoulders. She laughed towards her husband. "Heem, doo!" she added.

The shopman looked ashamed at this betrayal of a folly. "I bay der sailorman to sdop heem," he said hastily. "Id was nodt goodt for pizziness." Purleigh had a picture of these two fat people moved to queer movements which was wholly delightful; and that little instrument had to be his. Perhaps this interjection of the wife was only sales talk, anyway. The hastiness of the salesman did not strike him as really significant— except possibly of the worthlessness of the instrument— until later. Still, the queer thing attracted Purleigh ; it was cheap, and if it was a failure he could see about a flute or a piccolo later.

Once out of the shop Purleigh had an overpowering desire to test his long-suppressed musical ability. Once back in his office he took the instrument from his pocket, and put it to his lips.

The result startled him. Notes fantastically wild, yet infinitely sweet, poured into the air; what was more startling was that something like a tumult

seemed to waken around him. He was astonished when his typist, carrying some papers for him, danced into the office like a chorus girl in a comedy.

As the door opened to admit her, a sound from the outer office that was almost, if not positively, one of revelry came in with her. Purleigh, however, was immediately concerned with the usually staid Miss Symonds. Her eyes were glinting wickedly, and the way she bent them upon Purleigh as she danced towards him caused him to dodge away around his desk, thrusting the instrument into a drawer as he moved.

"By Jove!" he ejaculated, half to himself. "By Jove!"

Miss Symonds checked suddenly, her face scarlet with shame, even through her powder.

"Oh, I'm sorry, Mr. Purleigh!" she cried. She was again the staid, and now a very confused, Miss Symonds. The noise outside ceased as suddenly as her dancing. Purleigh made no comment, but his mind was full of wonder. And all the time the longing to put his lips to the triple reeds was with him. His desire was like a drunkard's craving for liquor. It was most extraordinary. Purleigh's knowledge of mythology was not great, but he had heard of magic instruments, and apparently he had queerly become possessed of one. He was not inclined to puzzle over the mystery. What appealed to him was that it would be a huge joke to introduce unexpectedly to a staid church gathering an instrument capable of such remarkable results. He chuckled whenever he considered the possibilities.

What he took home was a tin-whistle, and when he showed his family what he could do with it even Maria, who was inclined to be annoyed at first about his choice of such a cheap instrument, was pleased.

"Dad'll be the star of the evening," cried Bertha.

"Just fancy— merely with- a tin-whistle! "

"I'm sure you'll make a hit," said Maria.

"Too right I will!" Purleigh's laugh seemed unnecessarily boisterous ; he was thinking of the little reed instrument safely hidden in the toolshed.

PURLEIGH'S devotion to his tools became remarkable. Whenever he was wanted, it seemed, it was from the toolshed, where he worked with a closed door, that he emerged. It was from the toolshed he came, for instance, when Maria called him in excitement and alarm about the queer conduct of the fowls. "They've stopped now, but they were going on as if they had all suddenly gone mad, leaping in the air and twirling about."

Purleigh looked at the fowls, which were regarding one another with an absurd appearance of astonishment.

"You must have been dreaming," said Purleigh.

"No, I wasn't dreaming," Maria said firmly. "There's something very queer about everything today. There's hardly a breath in the air, but a few moments ago those trees were swaying, as if there was a heavy wind."

That was not the only queer happening. The next-door people had a cow which was grazed in a paddock at the back, but was brought into the yard for the milking. Its owners, alarmed, brought in the veterinary surgeon after it had developed a habit of leaping about and dancing in a peculiar cowlike fashion all over the flower-beds. Maria, from the verandah, saw its curious antics and called Purleigh; but by the time he had come on the scene— from the toolhouse— the strange antics had ceased, and the cow had resumed its customary docility.

The dog had occasional spasms of madness, during which it turned somersaults and careered round madly, while Maria shut the doors of the house, bolted the windows and screamed wildly to Purleigh. The cat was sometimes affected, and the misbehavior of the fowls was constant. Even Maria herself admitted that she sometimes felt a strange desire to dance— in fact, did dance.

"It was as if there was something in the air," she said. "I don't know what to make of it."

PURLEIGH, of course, did. Yet his courage failed him when the evening arrived. He felt considerable stage-fright. Brink was in the hall to greet the Purleigh party when it arrived.

"I'm glad, Mr. Purleigh, that you are giving us your assistance," he said. "I hope it may mean an— ah— closer association with the church."

"I hope your turn knocks that geyser kite-high," said young Bates aside. Young Bates did not care much for these affairs, but, as Bertha was there, he had come. "Brink only thinks he can sing, anyway."

This to Purleigh was encouragement for which, with the courage oozing out of him, he felt grateful. But the smugness with which Brink insisted that the polite applause of the audience was a demand for an encore to his song put him on his mettle. After the few first notes on his tin-whistle his diffidence went completely. He had not, after all, had the courage to start right off with the magic reeds.

A storm of applause heartened him. There was something curiously appealing no doubt, in a stout, prosperous, middle-aged man producing melody from a tin-whistle. Rev. Smalltext, seated, as chairman, at the corner of the low platform, pounded his podgy hands together as vigorously as anyone; but he looked somewhat askance when he saw that Purleigh, ready to respond to the recall, had put the whistle aside and held in his hand a strange reed-like

instrument. Smalltext did know his mythology. The instrument was very like one associated in it with bacchanal orgies.

Purleigh had decided upon the melody he would play, but, as often happened when he practised this little instrument, he found himself playing something altogether different. It was an extempore brilliancy, note following note automatically; a song of the wild woodlands where everything in Nature was intoxicated with the simple joy of living. Rev. Smalltext had the feeling that it did not sound quite respectable.

"Mr. Purleigh— Mr. Purleigh! Just a minute."

Smalltext's words, spoken in agitation, were almost the first intimation to Purleigh, intent upon his music, that the magic was working as usual. First of all there was a tapping of feet all over the hall, falling into the rhythm of the music; then the audience began to rise, chairs were thrown or pushed aside, and everywhere people were dancing. The disorder was apparent even in the front seats.

Smalltext, agitated, had risen to his feet; but almost at once the agitation vanished, a look of wild, rebel joyance shone on his face, and he gave a leap in the air. Then, as two vessels come together in a collision, he went off the platform with outstretched arms, to join forces with a woman who was dancing on the floor with arms outstretched to him, and whirl away in a wild fandango.

Purleigh, too, was filled with a mad exultation, but it found its expression in the music he was making instead of his feet, and it became wilder and wilder.

Shortly everybody in the hall was dancing. Some, indeed, preserved a degree of sedateness; but Brink was not one of these. He looked, as the magic stirred him, for Bertha, but apparently Bates had whisked her away. He grabbed another woman, and, whirling away with her, was soon the maddest of the mad throng. Even as he played Purleigh followed Brink's progress. He seemed in a curious way distinguishable. All the customary propriety had dropped from him as if it had been a mask.

Suddenly he let go the woman with whom he was dancing, hustled away the man next to him and, seizing his partner, continued the wild whirl with her.

It happened to be Maria!

The sight inflamed Purleigh, but for the life of him he could not cease his playing. He stepped from the platform, playing as he went, trying to make his way to where he had last seen Maria. The press of dancers made his progress slow.

There was a skirmish behind him and then a woman's hands grasped him by the shoulders. "Peter! I've found you! It's you I want to dance with— not anyone else." It was actually Maria speaking! Purleigh felt a glow of strange

gratification. He whirled a little with her, finding it necessary to hold and play his strange instrument with one hand only, but, as the notes seemed to make themselves, that was quite possible. He did not want to stop playing— he felt as if that might go on for ever— but he wanted to get away from the crowdedness of the hall.

The crowd, however, insisted upon going with them. It followed them into the open air, twisting through the doors like soda from a soda-water bottle. It was the strangest sight ever seen in a suburban street— a carnival procession of those who should have been the staidest and most respectable citizens, leaping along the street, dancing, shouting, singing, laughing. The procession was quickly augmented. The people who had been in the street wondering what was going on in the hall were caught in the chaotic revel. It was complicated by the mad gamboilings of cats and dogs moved also by the magic music. When processionists fell over the animals, there was fresh uproar.

And Purleigh couldn't stop. He felt that he had had his fun, but, although he wanted to, he couldn't take the magic reeds from his lips. He wondered a little blankly where it was all going to end, or if it was going to end.

And then, suddenly, it ended.

"You've got her!" Like an enraged bull Brink came charging full tilt at Purleigh. Purleigh was hurled backward, but grapped with him manfully.

THE dancing stopped abruptly. The crowd was still, its members looking at one another stupidly and with astonishment. Purleigh felt the broken pieces of the magic reeds, knocked from his lips and trampled on in the scuffle, beneath his feet, and was glad that there was an end to them. Maria was clinging to his arm, and there was young Bates still gripping Brink after dragging him off Purleigh, with Bertha near him.

"We had better go home, dear," said Maria. "Will you look after Bertha, Mr. Bates? Bring her home for supper and have some with us." She swept past Brink, ignoring him.

Purleigh had a curious gladness in his heart. Maria, with all her domination and queer treatment of him, had wanted him when that spirit of madness stirred; it was a thought that lifted their lives out of the prosaicness into which they had fallen. Young Bates was in favor, too. And he had proved, as he had known all along, that Brink was too good to be true.

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2: The Silver Hatchet

Arthur Conan Doyle

1859-1930

London Society, Christmas Annual 1883

Arthur Conan Doyle

In the tradition of the Christmas horror or ghost story... not reprinted until 1988, more than 100 years after first publication.

ON THE 3RD OF DECEMBER 1861 Dr. Otto von Hopstein, Regius Professor of Comparative Anatomy of the University of Buda-Pesth, and Curator of the Academical Museum, was foully and brutally murdered within a stone-throw of the entrance to the college quadrangle.

Besides the eminent position of the victim and his popularity amongst both students and townsfolk, there were other circumstances which excited public interest very strongly, and drew general attention throughout Austria and Hungary to this murder. The *Pesther Abendblatt* of the following day had an article upon it, which may still be consulted by the curious, and from which I translate a few passages giving a succinct account of the circumstances under which the crime was committed, and the peculiar ieatures in the case which puzzled the Hungarian police.

It appears (said that very excellent paper) *that Professor von Hopstein left the University about half-past four in the afternoon, in order to meet the train which is due from Vienna at three minutes after five. He was accom panied by his old and dear friend, Herr Wilhelm Schlessinger, sub-Curator of the Museum and Privat-docent of Chemistry. The object of these two gentlemen in meeting this particular train was to receive the legacy bequeathed by Graf von Schulling to the University of Buda-Pesth. It is well known that this unfortunate nobleman, whose tragic fate is still fresh in the recollection of the public, left his unique collection of mediaeval weapons, as well as several priceless black-letter*

*editions, to enrich the already celebrated museum of his Alma Mater. The worthy Professor was too much of an enthusiast in such matters to intrust the reception or care of this valuable legacy to any subordinate, and, with the assistance of Herr Schlessinger, he succeeded in removing the whole collection from the train, and stowing it away in a light cart which had been sent by the University authorities. Most of the books and more fragile articles were packed in cases o f pine-wood, but many of the weapons were simply done round with straw, so that considerable labour was involved in moving them all. The Professor was so nervous, however, lest any of them should be injured that he refused to allow any of the railway employes (*Eisenbahn-diener*) to assist. Every article was carried across the platform by Herr Schlessinger, and handed to Professor von Hopstein in the cart, who packed it away.*

When everything was in, the two gentlemen, still faithful to their charge, drove back to the University, the Professor being in excellent spirits, and not a little proud of the physical exertion which he had shown himself capable of. He made some joking allusion to it to Reinmaul, the janitor, who, with his friend Schiffer, a Bohemian Jew, met the cart on its return, and unloaded the contents. Leaving his curiosities safe in the storeroom and locking the door, the Professor handed the key to his sub-curator, and, bidding every one good-evening, departed in the direction of his lodgings. Schlessinger took a last look to reassure himself that all was right, and also went off, leaving Reinmaul and his friend Schiffer smoking in the janitor's lodge.

At eleven o'clock, about an hour and a half after von Hopstein's departure, a soldier of the 14th regiment of Jäger, passing the front of the University on his way to barracks, came upon the lifeless body of the Professor lying a little way from the side of the road. He had fallen upon his face with both arms stretched out. His head was literally split in two halves by a tremendous blow, which, it is conjectured, must have been struck from behind, there remaining a peaceful smile upon the old man's face, as if he had been still dwelling upon his new archaeological acquisition when death had overtaken him. There is no other mark of violence upon the body except a bruise over the left patella, caused probably by the fall. The most mysterious part of the affair is that the Professor s purse, containing forty-three gulden, and his valuable watch, have been untouched. Robbery cannot, therefore, have been the incentive to the deed, unless the assassins were disturbed before they could complete their work.

This idea is negatived by the fact that the body must have lain at least an hour before any one discovered it. The whole affair is wrapped in mystery. Dr. Langemann, the eminent medico-jurist, has pronounced that the wound is such as might have been inflicted by a heavy sword-bayonet wielded by a powerful

arm. The police are extremely reticent upon the subject, and it is suspected that they are in possession o f a clue which may lead to important results.

Thus far the *Pesther Abendblatt*. The researches of the police failed, however, to throw the least glimmer of light upon the matter. There was absolutely no trace of the murderer, nor could any amount of ingenuity invent any reason which could have induced any one to commit the dreadful deed. The deceased Professor was a man so wrapped in his own studies and pursuits that he lived apart from the world, and had certainly never raised the slightest animosity in any human breast. It must have been some fiend, some savage, who loved blood for its own sake, who struck that merciless blow.

Though the officials were unable to come to any conclusions upon the matter, popular suspicion was not long in pitching upon a scapegoat. In the first published accounts of the murder the name of one Schiffer had been mentioned as having remained with the janitor after the Professor's departure. This man was a Jew, and Jews have never been popular in Hungary. A cry was at once raised for Schiffer's arrest; but as there was not the slightest grain of evidence against him, the authorities very properly refused to consent to so arbitrary a proceeding. Reinmaul, who was an old and most respected citizen, declared solemnly that Schiffer was with him until the startled cry of the soldier had caused them both to run out to the scene o f the tragedy. No one ever dreamed of implicating Reinmaul in such a matter; but still, it was rumoured that his ancient and well known friendship for Schiffer might have induced him to tell a falsehood in order to screen him. Popular feeling ran very high upon the subject, and there seemed a dan ger of Schiffer's being mobbed in the street, when an incident occurred which threw a very different light upon the matter.

On the morning of the 12th of December, just nine days after the mysterious murder of the Professor, Schiffer, the Bohemian Jew was found lying in the north-western corner of the Grand Platz stone dead, and so mutilated that he was hardly recognisable. His head was cloven open in very much the same way as that of von Hopstein, and his body exhibited numerous deep gashes, as if the murderer had been so carried away and transported with fury that he had continued to hack the lifeless body. Snow had fallen heavily the day before, and was lying at least a foot deep all over the square ; some had fallen during the night, too, as was evidenced by a thin layer lying like a winding-sheet over the murdered man.

It was hoped at first that this circumstance might assist in giving a clue by enabling the footsteps of the assassin to be traced; but the crime had been committed, unfortunately, in a place much frequented during the day, and

there were innumerable tracks in every direction. Besides, the newly-fallen snow had blurred the footsteps to such an extent that it would have been impossible to draw trustworthy evidence from them.

In this case there was exactly the same impenetrable mystery and absence of motive which had characterised the murder of Professor von Hopstein. In the dead man's pocket there was found a note book containing a considerable sum in gold, and several very valuable bills, but no attempt had been made to rifle him. Supposing that any one to whom he had lent money (and this was the first idea which occurred to the police) had taken this means of evading his debt, it was hardly conceivable that he would have left such a valuable spoil untouched.

Schiffer lodged with a widow named Grugaat, 49 Marie Theresa Strasse, and the evidence of his landlady and her children showed that he had remained shut up in his room the whole of the preceding day in a state of deep dejection, caused by the suspicion which the populace had fastened upon him. She had heard him go out about eleven o'clock at night for his last and fatal walk, and as he had a latch-key she had gone to bed without waiting for him. His object in choosing such a late hour for a ramble obviously was that he did not consider himself safe if recognised in the streets.

The occurrence of this second murder so shortly after the first threw not only the town of Buda-Pesth, but the whole of Hungary into a terrible state of excitement, and even of terror. Vague dangers seemed to hang over the head of every man. The only parallel to this intense feeling was to be found in our own country at the time of the Williams murders described by De Quincey. There were so many resemblances between the cases of von Hopstein and of Schiffer that no one could doubt that there existed a connection between the two. The absence of object and of robbery, the utter want of any clue to the assassin, and, lastly, the ghastly nature of the wounds, evidently inflicted by the same or a similar weapon, all pointed in one direction.

Things were in this state when the incidents which I am now about to relate occurred, and in order to make them intelligible I must lead up to them from a fresh point of departure.

Otto von Schlegel was a younger son of the old Silesian family of that name. His father had originally destined him for the army, but at the advice of hie teachers, who saw the surprising talent of the youth, had sent him to the University o f Buda-Pesth to be educated in medicine. Here young Schlegel carried everything before him, and promised to be one of the most brilliant graduates turned out for many a year. Though a hard reader, he was no book-worm, but an active powerful young fellow, full of animal spirits and vivacity, and extremely popular among his fellow-students. The New Year examinations

were at hand, and Schlegel was working hard— so hard that even the strange murders in the town, and the general excitement in men's minds, failed to turn his thoughts from his studies.

Upon Christmas Eve, when every house was illuminated, and the roar of drinking songs came from the *Bierkeller* in the *Student-quartier*, he refused the many invitations to roystering suppers which were showered upon him, and went off with his books under his arm to the rooms of Leopold Strauss, to work with him into the small hours of the morning. Strauss and Schlegel were bosom friends. They were both Silesians, and had known each other from boyhood. Their affection had become proverbial in the University. Strauss was almost as distinguished a student as Schlegel, and there had been many a tough struggle for academic honours between the two fellow-countrymen, which had only served to strengthen their friendship by a bond of mutual respect.

Schlegel admired the dogged pluck and never-failing good temper of his old playmate; while the latter considered Schlegel, with his many talents and brilliant versatility, the most accomplished of mortals. The friends were still working together, the one reading from a volume on anatomy, the other holding a skull and marking off the various parts mentioned in the text, when the deep-toned bell of St. Gregory's church struck the hour of midnight.

'Hark to that!' said Schlegel, snapping up the book and stretching out his long legs towards the cheery fire. 'Why, it's Christmas morning, old friend! May it not be the last that we spend together!'

'May we have passed all these confounded examinations before another one comes!' answered Strauss. 'But, see here, Otto, one bottle of wine will not be amiss. I have laid one up on purpose;' and with a smile on his honest South German face, he pulled out a long-necked bottle of Rhenish from amongst a pile of books and bones in the corner.

'It is a night to be comfortable indoors,' said Otto von Schlegel, looking out at the snowy landscape; 'for 'tis bleak and bitter enough outside. Good health, Leopold!'

'*Lebe hoch!* ' replied his companion. 'It is a comfort indeed to forget sphenoid bones and ethmoid bones, if it be but for a moment. And what is the news of the corps, Otto? Has Graube fought the Swabian?'

'They fight to-morrow,' said von Sehlegel. 'I fear that our man will lose his beauty, for he is short in the arm. Yet activity and skill may do much for him. They say his hanging guard is perfection.'

'And what else is the news amongst the students?' asked Strauss. 'They talk, I believe, of nothing but the murders. But I have worked hard of late, as you know, and hear little of the gossip.'

'Have you had time,' inquired Strauss, 'to look over the books and the weapons which our dear old Professor was so concerned about the very day he met his death? They say they are well worth a visit.'

'I saw them to-day,' said Schlegel, lighting his pipe. 'Reinmaul, the janitor, showed me over the store-room, and I helped to label many of them from the original catalogue of Graf Schulling's museum. A s far as we can see, there is but one article missing of all the collection.'

'One missing!' exclaimed Strauss. 'That would grieve old von Hopetein's ghost. Is it anything of value?'

'It is described as an antique hatchet, with a head of steel and a handle of chased silver. We have applied to the railway company, and no doubt it will be found.'

'I trust so,' echoed Strauss; and the conversation drifted off into other channels.

The fire was burning low and the bottle of Rhenish was empty before the two friends rose from their chairs, and von Schlegel prepared to depart.

'Ugh! It's a bitter night!' he said, standing on the doorstep and folding his cloak round him. 'Why, Leopold, you have your cap on. You are not going out, are you?'

'Yes, I am coming with you,' said Strauss, shutting the door behind him. 'I feel heavy,' he continued, taking his friend's arm, and walking down the street with him.

'I think a walk as far as your lodgings, in the crisp frosty air, is just the thing to set me right.'

The two students went down Stephen Strasse together and across Julien Platz, talking on a variety of topics. As they passed the corner of the Grand Platz, however, where Schiller had been found dead, the conversation turned naturally upon the murder.

'That's where they found him,' remarked von Schlegel, pointing to the fatal spot.

'Perhaps the murderer is near us now,' said Strauss. 'Let us hasten on.' They both turned to go, when von Schlegel gave a sudden cry of pain and stooped down.

'Something has cut through my boot!' he cried; and feeling about with his hand in the snow, he pulled out a small glistening battle-axe, made apparently entirely of metal. It had been lying with the blade turned slightly upwards, so as to cut the foot of the student when he trod upon it.

'The weapon of the murderer!' he ejaculated.

'The silver hatchet from the museum!' cried Strauss in the same breath.

There could he no doubt that it was both the one and the other. There could not he two such curious weapons, and the character o f the wounds was just such as would be inflicted by a similar instrument. The murderer had evidently thrown it aside after committing the dreadful deed, and it had lain concealed in the snow some twenty metres from the spot ever since. It was extraordinary that of all the people who had passed and repassed none had discovered it; but the snow was deep, and it was a little off the beaten track.

'What are we to do with it?' said von Schlegel, holding it in his hand. He shuddered as he noticed by the light of the moon that the head of it was all dabbled with dark-brown stains.

'Take it to the Commissary of Police,' suggested Strauss.

'He'll be in bed now. Still, I think you are right. But it is nearly four o'clock. I will wait until morning, and take it round before breakfast. Meanwhile I must carry it with me to my lodgings.'

'That is the best plan,' said his friend; and the two walked on together talking of the remarkable find which they had made.

When they came to Schlegel's door, Strauss said good-bye, refusing an invitation to go in, and walked briskly down the street in the direction of his own lodgings.

Schlegel was stooping down putting the key into the lock, when a strange change came over him. He trembled violently and dropped the key from his quivering fingers. His right hand closed convulsively round the handle of the silver hatchet, and his eye followed the retreating figure of his friend with a vindictive glare. In spite of the coldness of the night the perspiration streamed down his face. For a moment he seemed to struggle with himself, holding his hand up to his throat as if he were suffocating. Then, with crouching body and rapid noiseless steps, he crept after his late companion.

Strauss was plodding sturdily along through the snow, humming snatches of a student song and little dreaming of the dark figure which pursued him. At the Grand Platz it was forty yards behind him; at the Julien Platz it was but twenty; in Stephen Strasse it was ten, and gaining on him with panther-like rapidity. Already it was almost within arm's longth of the unsuspecting man, and the hatchet glittered coldly in the moonlight, when some slight noise must have reached Strauss's ears, for he faced suddenly round upon his pursuer. He started and uttered an exclamation, as his eye met the white set face, with flashing eyes and clenched teeth, which seemed to be suspended in the air behind him.

'What, Otto!' he exclaimed, recognising his friend. 'Art thou ill ? You look pale. Come with me to my— Ah! hold, you madman, hold! Drop that axe! Drop it, I say, or by heaven I'll choke you!'

Von Schlegel had thrown himself upon him with a wild cry and uplifted weapon, but the student was stout-hearted and resolute. He rushed inside the sweep of the hatchet and caught his assailant round the waist, narrowly escaping a blow which would have cloven his head. The two staggered for a moment in a deadly wrestle, Schlegel endeavouring to shorten his weapon; but Strauss with a desperate wrench managed to bring him to the ground, and they rolled together in the snow, Strauss clinging to the other's right arm and shouting frantically for assistance.

It was as well that he did so, for Schlegel would certainly have succeeded in freeing his arm had it not been for the arrival of two stalwart gendarmes attracted by the uproar. Even then the three of them found it difficult to overcome the maniacal strength of Schlegel, and they were utterly unable to wrench the silver hatchet from his grasp.

One of the gendarmes, however, had a coil of rope round his waist, with which he rapidly secured the student's arms to his sides. In this way, half pushed, half dragged, he was conveyed, in spite of furious cries and frenzied struggles, to the central police-station.

Strauss assisted in coercing his former friend, and accompanied the police to the station, protesting loudly at the same time against any unnecessary violence, and giving it as his opinion that a lunatic asylum would be a more fitting place for the prisoner.

The events of the last half-hour had been so sudden and inexplicable that he felt quite dazed himself. What did it all mean? It was certain that his old friend from- boyhood had attempted to murder him, and had nearly succeeded. Was von Schlegel then the murderer of Professor von Hopstein and of the Bohemian Jew? Strauss felt that it was impossible, for the Jew was not even known to him, and the Professor had been his especial favourite.

He followed mechanically to the police-station, lost in grief and amazement Inspector Baumgarten, one of the most energetic and best known of the police officials, was on duty in the absence of the Commissary. He was a wiry little active man, quiet and retiring in his habits, but possessed o f great sagacity and a vigilance which never relaxed. Now, though he had had a six hours' vigil, he sat as erect as ever, with his pen behind his ear, at his official desk, while his friend, Sub-inspector Winkel, snored in a chair at the side of the stove.

Even the inspector's usually immovable features betrayed surprise, however, when the door was flung open and von Schlegel was dragged in with pale face and disordered clothes, the silver hatchet still grasped firmly in his hand. Still more surprised was he when Strauss and the gendarmes gave their account, which was duly entered in the official register.

'Young man, young man,' said Inspector Baumgarten, laying down his pen, and fixing his eyes sternly upon the prisoner, 'this is pretty work for Christmas morning; why have you done this thing?'

'God knows!' cried von Schlegel, covering his face with his hands and dropping the hatchet. A change had come over him, his fury and excitement were gone, and he seemed utterly prostrated with grief.

'You have rendered yourself liable to a strong suspicion o f having committed the other murders which have disgraced our city.'

'No, no, indeed!' said von Schlegel earnestly. 'God forbid!'

'At least, you are guilty of attempting the life of Herr Leopold Strauss.'

'The dearest friend I have in the world,' groaned the student. 'Oh, how could I ! How could I!'

'His being your friend makes your crime ten times more heinous,' said the inspector severely. 'Remove him for the remainder o f the night to the— But steady! W ho comes here ?'

The door was pushed open, and a man came into the room, so haggard and careworn that he looked more like a ghost than a human being. He tottered as he walked, and had to clutch at the backs of the chairs as he approached the inspector's desk. It was hard to recognise in this miserable-looking object the once cheerful and rubicund sub-curator of the museum and *privat-docent* of chemistry, Herr Wilhelm Schlessinger. The practised eye o f Baumgarten, however, was not to be baffled by any change.

'Good-morning, *mein herr*,' he said; ' you are up early. N o doubt the reason is that you have heard that one of your students, V on Schlegel, is arrested for attempting the life of Leopold Strauss ?'

'No; I have come for myself,' said Schlessinger, speaking huskily, and putting his hand up to his throat. 'I have come to ease my soul of the weight of a great sin, though, God knows, an unmeditated one. It was I who— But, merciful heavens! there it is— the horrid thin g! O that I had never seen it!'

He shrank back in a paroxysm of terror, glaring at the silver hatchet where it lay upon the floor, and pointing at it with his emaciated hand.

'There it lies!' he yelled. 'Look at it! It has come to condemn me. See that brown rust on it! Do you know what that is? That is the blood of my dearest, best friend, Professor von Hopstein. I saw it gush over the very handle as I drove the blade through his brain. *Mein Gott*, I see it now!'

'Sub inspector W inkel,' said Baumgarten, endeavouring to preserve his official austerity, 'you will arrest this man, charged on his own confession with the murder of the late Professor. I also deliver into your hands, von Schlegel here, charged with a murderous assault upon Herr Strauss. You will also keep

this hatchet'— here he picked it from the floor— 'which has apparently been used for both crimes.'

Wilhelm Schlessinger had been leaning against the table, with a face of ashy paleness. As the inspector ceased speaking, he looked up excitedly.

'What did you say?' he cried. 'Von Schlegel attack Strauss! The two dearest friends in the college! I slay my old master! It is magic, I say; it is a charm! There is a spell upon us! It is— Ah, I have it! It is that hatchet— that thrice accursed hatchet!' and he pointed convulsively at the weapon which Inspector Baumgarten still held in his hand.

The inspector smiled contemptuously. * lies train yourself, mein herr,' he said. ' You do but make your case worse by such wild excuses for the wicked deed you confess to. Magic and charms are not known in the legal vocabulary, as m y friend W inkel will assure you.' ' I-know not,' remarked his subinspector, shrugging his broad shoulders. ' There are many strange things in the world. W ho knows but that— ' ' W hat!' roared Inspector Baumgarten furiously. 'You would undertake to contradict me! You would set up your opinion ! You would be the champion of these accursed murderers! Fool, miserable fool, your hour has come!' and rushing at the astounded Winkel, he dealt a blow at him with the silver hatchet which would certainly have justified his last assertion had it not been that, in his fury, he overlooked the lowness of the rafters above his head. The blade of the hatchet struck one of these, and remained there quivering, while the handle was splintered into a thousand pieces.

'What have I done?' gasped Baumgarten, falling back into his chair. 'What have I done?'

'You have proved Herr Schlessinger's words to be correct,' said von Schlegel, stepping forward, for the astonished policemen had let go their grasp of him. 'That is what you have done. Against reason, science, and everything else though it be, there is a charm at work. There must be! Strauss, old boy, you know I would not, in my right senses, hurt one hair o f your head. And you, Schlessinger, we both know you loved the old man who is dead. And you, Inspector Baumgarten, you would not willingly have struck your friend the sub-inspector?'

'Not for the whole world,' groaned the inspector, covering his face with his hands.

'Then is it not clear? But now, thank Heaven, the accursed thing is broken, and can never do harm again. But, see, what is that?'

Right in the centre of the room was lying a thin brown cylinder of parchment. One glance at the fragments of the handle of the weapon showed that it had been hollow. This roll of paper had apparently been hidden away

inside the metal case thus formed, having been introduced through a small hole, which had been afterwards soldered up.

Von Schlegel opened the document. The writing upon it was almost illegible from age; but as far as they could make out it stood thus, in mediaeval German:

Diese Waffe benutzte Max von Erlichingen um Joanna Bodeckzu ermorden, deshalbbeschuldige Ich, Johann Bodeck, mittelst der macht welche mir als mitglied des Concils des rothen Kreuzes ver liehan wurde, dieselbe mit dieser unthat. Mag sie anderen denselben schmerz verursachen den sie mir verursacht hat. Mag Jede hand die sie ergreift mit dem blut eines freundes geröthet sein.

"Immer Ubel— niemals gut
*Geröthet mit des freundes blut" **

Which may be roughly translated:

This weapon was used by Max von Erlichingen for the murder of Joanna Bodeck. Therefore do I, Johann Bodeck, accurse it by the power which has been bequeathed to me as one of the Council of the Rosy Cross. May it deal to others the grief which it has dealt to me! May every hand that grasps it be reddened in the blood of a friend!

Ever evil, never good,
Reddened with a loved one's blood."

There was a dead silence in the room when V on Schlegel had finished spelling out this strange document. As he put it down Strauss laid his hand affectionately upon his arm.

'No such proof is needed by me, old friend,' he said. 'At the very moment that you struck at me I forgave you in my heart. I well know that if the poor Professor were in the room he would say as much to Herr Wilhelm Schlessinger.'

'Gentlemen,' remarked the inspector, standing up and resuming his official tones, 4 this affair, strange as it is, must be treated according to rule and precedent. Sub inspector Winkel, as your superior officer, I command you to arrest me upon a charge of murderously assaulting you. You will commit me to prison for the night, together with Herr von Schlegel and Herr Wilhelm Schlessinger. We shall take our trial at the coming sitting of the judges. In the mean time take care of that piece of evidence'— pointing to the piece of parchment— 'and, while I am away, devote your time and energy to utilising the clue you have obtained in discovering who it was who slew Herr Schitfer, the Bohemian Jew.'

The one missing link in the chain of evidence was soon supplied. On the 28th o f December the wife of Reinmaul the janitor, coming into the bedroom after a short absence, found her husband hanging lifeless from a hook in the wall. He had tied a long bolster-case round his neck and stood upon a chair in order to commit the fatal deed. On the table was a note in which he confessed to the murder of Schiffer the Jew, adding that the deceased had been his oldest friend, and that he had slain him without premeditation, in obedience to some incontrollable impulse. Remorse and grief, he said, had driven him to self-destruction; and he wound up his confession by commending his soul to the mercy of Heaven.

The trial which ensued was one of the strangest which ever occurred in the whole history of jurisprudence. It was in vain that the prosecuting counsel urged the improbability of the explanation offered by the prisoners, and deprecated the introduction of such an element as magic into a nineteenth-century law-court. The chain of facts was too strong, and the prisoners were unanimously acquitted.

'This silver hatchet,' remarked the judge in his summing up, 'has hung untouched upon the wall in the mansion of the Graf von Schulling for nearly two hundred years. The shocking manner in which he met his death at the hands of his favourite house steward is still fresh in your recollection. It has come out in evidence that, a few days before the murder, the steward had overhauled the old weapons and cleaned them. In doing this he must have touched the handle of this hatchet. Immediately afterwards he slew his master, whom he had served faithfully for twenty years. The weapon then came, in conformity with the Count's will, to Buda-Pesth, where, at the station, Herr Wilhelm Schlessinger grasped it, and, within two hours, used it against the person of the deceased Professor. The next man whom we find touching it is the janitor Reinmaul, who helped to remove the weapons from the cart to the store-room. At the first opportunity he buried it in the body of his friend Schiffer. We then have the attempted murder of Strauss by Schlegel, and of Winkel by Inspector Baumgarten, all immediately following the taking of the hatchet into the hand. Lastly, comes the providential discovery of the extraordinary document which has been read to you by the clerk of the court. I invite your most careful consideration, gentlemen of the jury, to this chain of facts, knowing that you will find a verdict according to your consciences without fear and without favour.'

Perhaps the most interesting piece of evidence to the English reader, though it found few supporters among the Hungarian audience, was that of Mr. Langemann, the eminent medico-jurist, who has written text-books upon metallurgy and toxicology. He said:

'I am not so sure, gentlemen, that there is need to fall back upon necromancy or the black art for an explanation of what has occurred. What I say is merely a hypothesis, without proof of any sort, but in a case so extraordinary every suggestion may be of value. The Rosicrucians, to whom allusion is made in this paper, were the most profound chemists of the early Middle Ages, and included the principal alchemists, whose names have descended to us. Much as chemistry has advanced, there are some points in which the ancients were ahead of us, and in none more so than in the manufacture of poisons of subtle and deadly action. This man, Bodeck, as one of the elders of the Rosicrucians, possessed, no doubt, the recipe of many such mixtures, some of which, like the *agua tofana* of the Medicis, would poison by penetrating through the pores of the skin. It is conceivable that the handle of this silver hatchet has been anointed by some preparation which is a diffusible poison, having the effect upon the human body of bringing on sadden and acute attacks of homicidal mania. In such attacks it is well known that the madman's rage is turned against those whom he loved best when sane. I have, as I remarked before, no proof to support me in my theory, and simply put it forward for what it is worth.'

With this extract from the speech of the learned and ingenious professor, we may close the account of this famous trial. The broken pieces of the silver hatchet were thrown into a deep pond, a clever poodle being employed to carry them in his mouth, as no one would touch them for fear some of the infection might still hang about them. The piece of parchment was preserved in the museum of the University.

As to Strauss and Schlegel, Winkel and Baumgarten, they continued the best of friends, and are so still for all I know to the contrary. Schlessinger became surgeon of a cavalry regiment, and was shot at the battle of Sadowa five years later, while rescuing the wounded under a heavy fire. By his last injunctions his little patrimony was to he sold to erect a marble obelisk over the grave of Professor von Hopstein.

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3: The Garden of Memories

C. A. Mercer

fl. 1902-1912

The Atlantic Monthly, Nov 1902

This US author's very small output comprised a short story, a novelette, and a novel. Nothing else is known.

THE garden looked dreary and desolate in spite of the afternoon sunshine. The lilac and lavender bushes were past their prime; their wealth of sweetness had been squandered by riotous offshoots. The wind played among the branches, and cast changing sun-flecked shadows on the grass-grown paths, narrowed by the encroachment of the box borders that had once lined the way with the stiff precision of troops before a royal progress.

The flowers had the air of being overburdened with the monotony of their existence. They could never have had that aspect if they had been only wild flowers and had never experienced human care and companionship. That made the difference.

The gate hung on rusty hinges; it answered with a long-drawn-out creaking, as it was pushed open by a man who had been a stranger to the place for nearly twenty years.

Yes, the garden was certainly smaller than it had been pictured by his memory. There had been a time when it had appeared as a domain of extensive proportions, and the wood beyond of marvelous depth and density.

He was conscious of a sense of disappointment. The property would scarcely realize as high a price in the market as he had hoped; and it was incumbent upon him to part with it, if he would be released from the narrow circumstances that hemmed him in.

He had arranged to meet the lawyer there that afternoon. One of the latter's clients had already made a bid for the estate. The timber, at all events, would add to the value.

The house faced southward upon the garden. It was here the man had been brought up by an old great-aunt. He guessed later that she had grudged him any of the endearments that death had denied her bestowing upon her own children. Her affections had all been buried before he was born. Besides, he took after the wrong branch of the family.

She must have possessed a strong personality. It was difficult to bring to mind that it was no longer an existent force. Every one, from the parson to the servants, had stood a little in awe of her. He remembered the unmoved manner in which she had received the news of the death of a near relative. It

had overwhelmed him with a sudden chill, that so she would have received tidings of his own. It had taken all the sunshine in the garden to make him warm again.

In the mood that was growing upon him, it would not have much surprised him to find her sitting bolt upright in her carved high-back chair, as she had sat in the time of his earliest recollections,—the thin, yellow hands, on which the rings stood out, folded in her lap. On one occasion she had washed his small hands between hers. The hard lustre of the stones acquired a painful association with the ordeal. The blinds would be partially drawn in the musk-scented parlor, to save the carpet from further fading, for there had been a tradition of thrift in the family from the time of its settlement,—a tradition that had not been maintained by its latest representative.

Like the atmosphere of a dream, the years grew dim and misty between now and the time when summer days were longer and sunnier, and it had been counted to him for righteousness if he had amused himself quietly and not given trouble.

A stream that he had once dignified with the name of river formed a boundary between the garden and the wood. Although it had shrunk into shallow insignificance,— with much beside,— a faint halo of the romance with which he had endued this early scene of his adventures still clung to the spot.

As he came to the stream, he saw the reflection of a face in the water—not his own, but that of one much younger.

It was so he met the boy. The child had been placing stepping-stones to bridge the stream, and now came across, balancing himself on the slippery surfaces to test his work. It was odd that he had remained unobserved until this moment, but that was due to the fact of the water-rushes on the brink being as tall as he.

The boy's eyes met those of the man with a frank, unclouded gaze. He did not appear astonished. That is the way when one is young enough to be continually viewing fresh wonders; one takes everything for granted. He saw at a glance that this other was not alien to him; his instinct remained almost as true as those of the wild nature around.

For his own part, he had an unmistakable air of possession about him. He appeared to belong to the place as much as the hollyhocks and honeysuckle; and yet, how could that be?

'Probably a child of the caretaker,' the man told himself.

He had authorized the agent to do what was best about keeping the house in order. He had not noticed what signs it had to show of habitation. Now he saw from the distance that it had not the unoccupied appearance he had

expected of it; nor the windows, the dark vacant stare of those that no life behind illumines.

'Do you live here?' he asked of the boy.

'Yes.' The boy turned proudly toward the modest gray pile in the manner of introducing it, forgetting himself in his subject. 'It's a very old house. There's a picture over the bureau in the parlor of the man who built it, and planted the trees in the wood. Hannah says—

'Hannah!'

It was a foolish repetition of the name. Of course there were other Hannahs in the world. The old servant of that name, who had told the man stories in his boyhood, had been dead more years than the child could number.

'Yes,— don't you know Hannah? She'll come and call me in presently, and then you'll see her. Hannah says they— the trees— have grown up with the family' (he assumed a queer importance, evidently in unconscious mimicry of the one who had repeated the tradition to him), 'and that with them the house will stand or fall. Do you think the roots really reach so far?'

There was an underlying uneasiness in the tone, which it was impossible altogether to disguise.

As the other expressed his inability to volunteer an opinion on this point, the boy went on, seeing that his confidences were treated with due respect:

'I dug up one myself once— I wished I hadn't afterwards— to make myself a Christmas tree like I'd read about. I just had to hang some old things I had on it. It was only a tiny fir, small enough to go in a flower-pot; but that night the house shook, and the windows rattled as if all the trees in the forest were trying to get in. I heard them tapping their boughs ever so angrily against the pane. As soon as it was light, I went out and planted the Christmas tree again. I hadn't meant to keep it out of the ground long: they might have known that.'

'Have you no playfellows here?'

The boy gave a comprehensive glance around. 'There are the trees; they are good fellows. I wouldn't part with one of them. It's fine to hear them all clap their hands when we are all jolly together. There are nests in them, too, and squirrels. We see a lot of one another.'

This statement was not difficult to believe: the Holland overalls bore evident traces of fellowship with mossy trunks.

The boy did most of the talking. He had more to tell of the founder of the family whose portrait hung in the parlor, and of how, when he—the child— grew up, he rather thought of writing books, as that same ancestor had done, and making the name great and famous again. He had not decided what kind of books he should write yet. Was it very hard to find words to rhyme, if one tried poetry? He was at no pains to hide such fancies and ambitions, of which

his kind are generally too sensitive or too ashamed to speak to their elders, and which are as a rule forgotten as soon as outgrown.

'Shall we go in the wood now?' said the boy. 'It's easy enough to cross over the stepping-stones.'

'Yes, let us go.' The man was beginning to see everything through the boy's eyes. The garden was again much as he had remembered it, inclosed in a world of beautiful mystery. Nothing was really altered. What alteration he had imagined had been merely a transitory one in himself. The child had put a warm, eager hand into his; together they went into the wood, as happy as a pair of truant school boys; they might have been friends of long standing.

'So this is your enchanted forest?' said the man.

'Not really enchanted,' replied the boy seriously. 'I once read of one, but of course it was only in a fairy tale. That one vanished as soon as one spoke the right word. It would be a very wrong word that could make this vanish.' He had a way of speaking of the wood as if it were some sacred grove.

His companion suddenly felt guilty, not quite knowing why.

'Of course some one might cut them down.' The boy lowered his voice; it seemed shameful to mention the perpetration of such a deed aloud. 'It would be terrible to hear them groan when the axe struck them. The young ones mightn't mind so much; but it would be bad for the grandfather trees who've been here from the beginning. Hannah says one would still hear them wailing on stormy nights.'

'Even if they had been felled and carted away?'

'Yes, even then; though, to be sure, there would be no one to hear the wailing if it's true that the house must fall, too, at the same time. But we needn't trouble about that; none of it is likely to happen. You see, if it did, where should I be?'

He laughed merrily. This last argument appeared to him to be quite conclusive. Such an important consideration placed the awful contingency quite out of the question, and transformed it into nothing more than a joke.

The child's laughter died away as they both stood still to listen. Each thought he had heard his own name called.

'It's Hannah,' said the boy; and off he raced toward the house, barely saving himself from running into the arms of another person who had turned in at the gate.

'WHO was the boy who ran round by the espaliers a minute ago? One would scarcely have judged him to be a child of the caretaker.'

The man's heart sank with a dull thud: something had told him the answer before it came.

'Child!' The lawyer looked puzzled. 'I did not see one. No children have any business in this garden; neither is there any caretaker here. The house has been shut up altogether since the old servant you called Hannah died, eleven years ago.'

They had reached the veranda. The westering sun had faded off the windows. It was easy to see that the house was empty. The shutters were up within, and the panes dark and weather-stained. Birds had built their nests undisturbed about the chimney stacks. The hearthstones had long been cold.

'My client is willing to purchase the property on the terms originally proposed,' the lawyer was saying. 'He contemplates investing in it as a building site. Of course the timber would have to be felled—'

A breeze passed through the treetops like a shudder. The younger man interposed:—

'I am sorry you should have had the trouble of coming here, but I have decided to keep the old place after all— stick and stone. It is not right it should go out of the family. I must pull my affairs together as well as I can without that.'

The little phantom of his dead boyhood was to suffer no eviction.

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4: The Funerals of Malachi Mooney

Edward Dyson

1865–1931

The Bulletin, 24 Feb 1900

Edward Dyson
Australian journalist, poet, playwright and short story writer

A NUMBER of Bungaree farmers, called from the fields, stood bare-headed about the sick-bed in attitudes of grievous constraint. Mrs. Mooney, seated on a low stool, wept sluice-heads, with wailing and querulous protestations. She had been replenishing the fountain of tears with whisky, and now cherished a great grievance against Malachi for dying, and the time chosen, and the manner thereof.

"There's hwhisky by the jar, min," said the dying man in a thin wheeze. "Be dhrinkin'."

Hogan gravely assumed authority over the jar, and filled up for the company with judicial impartiality.

"Good luck to ye, Mullocky," said Hogan, raising his cup.

Malachi waved his thin hand in expostulation. He was beyond all chances of fortune in this world, and knew it. Hogan temporised.

"Good luck to ye, Mullocky, pwhere ye're goin'."

"How dar ye doi, Mooney—how dar ye do id?" wailed Mrs. Mooney, throwing her apron over her head, and rocking her body to and fro. The company drank with one action, quite military in its precision, and then looked towards Malachi Mooney for further orders, and Malachi lay peacefully, happily dead with a smile on his lips, and the half-drained mug in his wasted fingers.

"Oh, ye divil! t' be dyin' on me like dthis," moaned Mrs. Mooney under her apron. "I'm disaved in yeh, Mooney! disaved! disaved! Whurra whroo! "

Presently, perceiving that Malachi was beyond argument, she lifted up her voice and filled the house with dolorous cries, and wailed dutifully and monotonously far into the night, when the chant was taken up by eerie, wrinkled old crones, smoke-dried grandmothers lent for the occasion by sympathetic families from the four quarters of the wilderness.

WHAT a wake that was! It lasted all night, and right up to the time fixed for the funeral. There was no end to the willing drinkers, and no limit to the whisky. Indeed, the miraculous manner in which tiny kegs, loaded to the bung, rolled from under the bed on demand, confirmed the local opinion that "Mullocky" Mooney had more than a finger in the snug still, the smoke from which curled so artfully up from a charred trunk on Peter's Hill, and was thoughtfully given a supernatural origin by the neighborly people of the district.

The funeral was advertised to move from the home of deceased at 10 a.m. sharp. It was a long march to the Ballarat old cemetery, and an early start was deemed necessary in consideration of the fact that Hooley's funeral, which happened a month earlier, had been fined for furious driving, by reason of the anxiety of the mourners to reach the graveyard before closing time.

The vehicles began to arrive at seven in the morning, the farmers and settlers driving, and their wives and "childer" loaded in behind. A funeral was a "trate" that didn't happen every day, and it would have been considered a sin to deprive the "byes" and "gurrls" of a bit of "enjymint " that cost nothing. But many of the mourners had been at Mooney's all night, "kapin' the carpse company," and daybreak disclosed a baker's dozen scattered about the farm, sleeping where they fell. One hung over the dog-leg fence "forninst" the house, like an old shirt, with down-swinging arms. Canty, recumbent against the butt-end of a gum, rigid as a stump, slept so profoundly that the old guttural Brahma-pootra had perched on his bald and awful head, and was defying creation with senseless repetitions of his cracked clarion. Others reposed curled against the house, and several dotted the paddock like quaint hieroglyphics, objects of wonderment and noisy speculation to the familiar pigs.

Michael Morrissey was the first to drive up. Michael was to occupy an honourable and responsible position at the head of the procession. He had generously offered the use of his trap as hearse, and it was appropriately draped for that solemn office. This vehicle was an American waggon, and it had been roofed over about two feet from the floor, and was ordinarily used for the conveyance of meat, Michael being a butcher. There was a door at the back, and just room within for Mooney's coffin. Quinn's trotter, The Imp, was

in the shafts. The Imp had been borrowed for the occasion because he was the only black horse in the district; but although his complexion was satisfactory, his disposition quite unsuited him for so grave a duty. He was old, and had a semi-bald tail; but there was a peculiar and aggressive jauntiness about the beast altogether out of harmony with his years and the situation in which he found himself. He held his head high, and pricked his ears, and his tail had a perky elevation that exhibited the bald butt to the worst advantage, and excited popular derision wherever he went.

When the friends of the late Malachi Mooney arrived, they walked reverently into the room where Malachi still lay on the bed amongst his monumental candles, and gazed on him for a moment with pensive sadness, as in duty bound.

"Pore mahn, he have the peaceful shmile on him."

"He have, he have."

And after repeating the sentiment several times, with nodding heads and much wise clicking of tongues, having paid their respects to the dead, they withdrew to the kitchen, and devoted themselves to the whisky.

The coffin had been delivered, and stood on two bush stools in the kitchen, decently covered with a black shawl. Mrs. Mooney sat at the foot, adjacent to a pannikin, and continued to upbraid Mooney for his inconsiderate conduct in dying, and "lavin' a lone lorn widdy."

The funeral moved at 11, when it was quite certain that only one baby keg remained. This keg Morrissey took with him on the improvised hearse, as a wise provision for the first half of the journey, which lay through a barren land. Many of the mourners had to be helped into their vehicles, and after the start many remained in only by a miracle. Morrissey led the way, The Imp stepping along with a frivolous kind of a four-footed jig that robbed the cortege at the outset of any pretence to dignity. O'Connor's old waggonette followed, O'Connor driving carefully, strapped down, and Mrs. O'Connor and the "widdy" occupying the back seat. Then came Clark in his spring-cart, driving The Imp's rival, Colleen. After him two or three miscellaneous vehicles, and then a long string of wood drays, each in charge of an unnaturally rigid and solemn Irishman perched on a candle box, and each containing one or two women and three or four children, the former squatting composedly on the bottom of the dray with their substantial feet swinging out behind. A dozen sleepy, unshaven, unshorn agriculturists brought up the rear, riding two abreast on large morbid horses that shuffled moodily through the dust with drooped heads and sagging under-lips.

The women in the drays maintained a shrill conversation along the line, but for the most part the men observed an owl-like decorum until the Travellers'

Rest was reached, that is if the puffing of abbreviated black clays be not considered derogatory to true reverence. Meanwhile, the day being hot and the way dusty, a couple of short halts had served to drain the keg on the hearse. It was a gritty, drought-stricken funeral that descended upon the Travellers' Rest, and when it moved again it left the wayside inn as dry as a powder-mill, having drunk up everything in the bar, and demolished the water-butt.

And now a great spirit of unrest took possession of many of the mourners, and there was much whooping and many manifestations of a wild and unholy desire to convert the procession into something like a steeplechase. The Imp was stepping out gaily with his deceitful double-shuffle, game as a pebble despite his age and infirmities, but it was Clark with Colleen who led the breakaway. Springing up with a whoop and whooroo, Clark whipped his mare alongside the hearse.

"Morrissey," he cried, "I can bate that bumble-footed ould crock to the Pint beyant fer tin bob!"

"Ye can't!" roared Morrissey, all the sportsman stirring within him.

"Ye loi!" Clark fairly shrieked, laying the whip on.

Michael lashed The Imp, and the veteran, scenting a contest, snorted defiance, and hit out with all four afflicted legs at once. Then, bounding over ruts, jumping the boulders, rocking and rearing, the two vehicles went thundering through the dust, Colleen leading and The Imp following, flinging wide his legs with the action of a startled tarantula as he rushed down the hill, his body working with the antic spasms of two pigs in a bag.

The other drivers flogged their stolid horses into unwonted activity, and in this way the mad funeral, strung out a mile long, tore through one affrighted township, scattering sows and sucklings, goats, dogs, poultry, and shrieking children, raising a dust that blotted out half the landscape, and filling men and women with a wonderment that lasted many days. Half a mile beyond, The Imp, with a triumphant tail and starting eye-balls, flung past the Colleen with a rush and a roar, neatly carrying away Clark's near wheel, which went humming ahead down the well-worn track.

Morrissey obtained control over his blood horse and succeeded in pulling up about a mile further on, and there he waited for the rest of the funeral in a humble and contrite frame of mind. The procession arrived in sections, the heavy horses spent and reeking, and the mourners coated thickly with powdered clay that caked rapidly in the sun on their perspiring faces. The women, particularly the stout ones, tumbled and bumped out of all knowledge and restraint, were loud and fierce in their complainings, and the men agreed that it was "ondacent" and "agin religion" to conduct a funeral at a

hard gallop. So Michael led away again, holding his trotter hard, and proceeded as reverently and demurely as was possible with such a horse and so much whisky.

Matty Clark was reported unharmed, and busy fixing a skid in place of the lost wheel. It was expected that he would turn back, and be no more a disturbing element in his neighbor's funeral. The procession travelled into the outskirts of Ballarat without any further misadventure. In fact, most of the drivers and several of the ladies were asleep, and the weary plough-horses drowsed along at their own gait. The Imp, in spite of the apparent sprightliness of his action, was a very slow walker, for the reason that he generally dropped his hoofs in almost the spots from which he had just lifted them, and sometimes behind.

But at this point, cries of warning and of wondernment and disgust ran along the line, and looking back, Morrissey beheld Matty Clark in the distance, erect in his cart, gesticulating like a maniac, and rapidly over-hauling the funeral. Matthew had fixed a sapling under his trap for a skid, and on this and one wheel he presently rattled up alongside the hearse again, oblivious to the threats and expostulations of the mourners.

"Mike Morrissey, ye divil ye!" yelled Mat, red, panting, and furious, "to the cemmethry fer a quid!"

"Niver a won av me," replied Morrissey, hanging on to The Imp.

"Yis, be the powers!" roared Clark, shooting ahead, and slashing viciously at the hearse-horse as he passed.

Michael clung to the reins, and hauled with all his might, but The Imp was not to be denied. Squealing shrilly in reply to the challenge, he broke into his old, ungainly, link-motion combination of canter, amble and trot, and spread himself all over the road in pursuit of Colleen.

A couple of horsemen put their nags to a gallop to head-off Matty Clark, and in this way the funeral broke in upon Ballarat, careering down Humphrey-street, and stirred the city to its depths.

Fortunately Colleen was headed just before reaching the main thoroughfare, and Daly and O'Mara seized upon Matty, who was a small, bristly Hibernian, and fought like a peccary. They they got him down and tied him up. Then, after throwing their turbulent captive into the cart, O'Hara sat on his chest and led the horses, and Daly, driving Colleen, now blown and humbled, took up a subordinate position at the tail of the procession ; while the funeral, which had paused to collect itself once more, moved on, followed by a delighted crowd of children and many envious adults.

Many astonishing funerals had come up out of Bungaree into Ballarat East, but Malachi Mooney's funeral was the most weird and wonderful that ever

invaded any town on the Australian continent, and news of it seemed to have electric passage through the place. The improvised hearse with the well-intentioned effort to rig a pair of plumes of cock's feathers upon it, the strange, jocund horse that hauled it, and the great, red, clayed-up, hairy, wild-eyed Galway man driving, were alone sufficient to have brought the whole population into Bridge-street ; but with the added attractions— the awful procession of drays, their dusty, kiln-dried occupants, and the last vehicle riding jauntily on its skid, the funeral simply stopped business, and took possession of the town, and drew the people after it in crowds.

Morrissey had the reins wound about his wrists, and with his heels dug in and his eyes obtruding and all his faculties intensely concentrated hung to The Imp. The matrons still swung their stout feet, and here and there a worn-out mourner slept in his dray, Heffernan and Moore with their heads suspended over the tail and their mouth sopen.

The police followed too, and eyed the procession dubiously, half-inclined to arrest the whole funeral; but by exercising the severest self-restraint and the greatest caution the mourners contrived to pull through, and arrived at the cemetery with the coffin in good order and condition at half-past four.

After the usual preliminaries the coffin was carried to the graveside by four of the late Mooney's most intimate friends, and, considering all things, their progress down the path was not as devious as might have been expected, but they landed the pine casket with a dump that produced the greatest sensation of the day. The coffin lid had not been screwed down, and it slipped to one side, making a revelation. There were many cries and much commotion when it was seen that the coffin contained packages of sugar and tea and miscellaneous groceries, and nothing more.

Malachi Mooney was not there!

Consternation sat whitely upon every face, and the women crossed themselves vigorously.

"He's bin shpirited away!" wailed the "widdy."

"Did annywon see us dthrop him?" asked the dazed Morrissey in a small, awed voice.

Flynn remembered now having packed the groceries in the coffin the day before. He it was who carted the casket out from Ballarat, and having goods to carry at the same time, packed them into the "piner" for "convanience," and by reason of the thirst that came upon him and possessed him for two days "disremembered ivirything aftherwards."

In truth the late Malachi Mooney still lay undisturbed upon the bed in his humble home in Bungaree, and the last of the yard-long candles guttered in the brass-sockets at his head. The corpse had been forgotten!

And this is how Malachi Mooney came to have two funerals.

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5: The Luck Seller

Vernon Ralston

fl 1900-1920

The Bendigo Independent (Vic.) 7 Sep 1908

IT WAS the first day of Muddlecombe Wakes, and a flood-tide of revelry surged through the little town. Its youths and maidens rode on, and occasionally fell off, revolving horses, till their desire for equestrian exercise was satiated. Then they sought variety in the Grand Aerial Fight Switchback, which gave those who were so inclined such good excuse for accidental embracings, that it might have been advertised as a matrimonial agency. Athletic youths paid their sixpences to stand up for five minutes to the "Negro Middle-weight Champion of the World," and were rewarded with honorable seats which were well worth the money. The more mature attended the mock auctions of jewellery, and discovered how easy it was for involuntary motions of the head to be interpreted as bids; or they hearkened to the eloquence of the quack medicine men, till they could feel in themselves countless symptoms of awful diseases, and had to hurry to purchase the one cure.

But whilst the Austrian Fat Woman, "patronised by, the clergy, gentry and nobility," as the placard outside her van declared, and the Arab Dentist, whose accent savored more of Tipperary than of Mecca, drew molars till his wrist must have ached, and the Handless Dwarf played the piano with his feet in such a style as to suggest that he only needed a decent hair-restorer to become a musical prodigy— yet whilst all these were busy, there was one van which seemed comparatively neglected. It stood in the best position in the Fair. Crowds were perpetually passing it. People looked curiously at the closed van with the gilt sign over it: "The Luck Seller"; yet the proprietor apparently was throwing away his chance of custom by not permitting the traffic to see his wares.

The owner of the Performing Dogs was just remarking to the manager of "The Only Genuine Soudanese Fire-eaters" that the new showman must be a bit slow to miss the first day of the Wakes when people had a bit of money in their pockets, when the door of the Luck Seller's van opened.

A youth brought out a table and placed it on the platform in front. Then he put on the table a huge volume bound in bright red leather. After this, producing a trumpet, the attendant blew a series of piercing blasts.

The passers-by stopped to speculate what the show would be, and soon a crowd laughed and joked before the van.

A tall old man, dressed in a sweeping red robe and a brilliant red steeple-hat, then came forward. His full white beard contrasted splendidly with his

brilliant garments. He stood, calmly dignified, gazing on the crowd till the restless holiday-makers were silent. Then raising his hand to command attention the Luck Seller began:—

"Gentlemen, I see before me many laughing, doubting faces. You think that you behold on this platform the ordinary swindler, the usual quack, the common humbug of a country fair person, who by his quick tongue imposes on the weak minds of the community. I am content that you should regard mo in this light— content that the finger of scorn should be pointed at me— content that I should be the victim of the vulgar jest. But nevertheless the fact remains, and I am the only Luck Seller in the world.

"What is luck, gentlemen? It is the one thing we all need and few of us get. John Burns, a poor man of intellect and energy, became a Cabinet Minister. I see before me men of equal intellect and energy. Why are they not ruling their fellow-men? Because whilst they have everything else they lack luck.

"Sir Thomas Lipton, gentlemen, rose from the proprietorship of a single small grocer's shop to be head of a world-wide business. Why? Industry and intelligence helped him, of course, but without luck they would have been useless. Scores of intelligent and industrious men started in small grocers' shops and are still in small grocers' shops.

"How many poor Scotch boys have emigrated who were Carnegie's equal in brain and energy! Yet why has Carnegie his tens of millions whilst the others are struggling for their daily bread ? Whatever you desire in this world — fame, rank, wealth, applause— you, may gain it if you have the luck. Luck! Luck ! Luck! It is on sale here, and yet I predict that none of you will buy. Here is the Register of the Lucky. Is there a man .in Muddlecombe with the moral courage to come forward and pay a shilling to have Ins name inscribed in it."

''We're not mugs 'ere," interrupted a red-faced gentleman."

The Luck Seller drew himself up to his full height and pointed to the interrupter.

"That very man," he said impressively, "will to-morrow be begging and praying me to sell him luck. I do not ask him to buy it now. I would not sell it him to-day if he went on his knees 'and besought me to do so. I can wait — my revenge will come to-morrow."

"We'll see," chuckled tho red-faced man.

"We shall see. But apart from that, gentlemen, is there one amongst you who will risk his shilling on my word? not one— not a single one? I thank you for your courteous attention, gentlemen. Your opportunity has gone. The Luck Sale for to day is—"

" 'Ere," cried a roughly-dressed man, "I'll have a shilling's worth."

The Luck Seller opened his huge red book. "You were only just in time. What is your name?"

"Job Higginbotham."

"And your address?"

"2, Cherry Garden Street."

"That will do— Mr. Job Higginbotham has purchased for the nominal sum of one shilling the best luck I have to sell."

One of two more applicants came nervously forward.

"No," said the luck Seller, haughtily, "to-day the sale is over. Tomorrow everyone in Muddlecombe will envy the luck of Mr Job Higginbotham. Good afternoon, gentlemen."

With a dignified bow he retired into van and closed the door.

"Well," said Mr. Unwin, the landlord of the Bull, and the-cynical person who had dared to interrupt the Luck Seller, "well— of all the blamed swindles, Gettin' a bob for nowt. I never saw the like. Aye, Job, a fool an' 'is money is soon parted."

Job Higginbotham scratched his head.

"Well, I liked the old gentleman's way o' talking. 'Appen my new luck'll 'elp to give-them keepers the slip.

The proprietor off the Performing Dogs, who had left his charges to his wife whilst he listened to the opening of the new show, observed meditatively to the owner of "The Grand Aerial Flight":

"That ole chap can talk above a bit— if 'e'd jes' kep on 'e'd 'ave drawn a lot in. But jes' as e got a 'old on 'em 'e chucked it. 'E didn't keep at 'em. Now many's the time I've made a man come in to see my dawgs 'oo no more wanted to see dawgs dance than 'e wanted to see rabbits dance. A bit more push an' that ole feller'd make a bit. An' it's profit. Luck costs 'im nothing, 'Tain't as if 'e'd to feed a dozen dawgs."

However, the Luck Seller's van which had closed at six o'clock, remained closed all the evening. Evidently the purveyor of fortune meant to keep his word with the public.

The next morning the postman tapped loudly at Job Higginbotham's door.

"Letter for you, Job— 'ere you are."

"What's this," exclaimed Mr. Higginbotham, "no one ever writes me letter."

"But someone has written you a letter," replied the postman.

"Read it for us, mate," said Mr. Higginbotham. "I ain't used to readin' nothin' but newspaper print."

"This was posted in London afore twelve last night," began the postman with the air of revealing a secret of state. He tore the letter open and surveyed its contents dubiously.

" 'Ere, what's this, what are they sayin' 'ere," cried the amazed postman.

"That's jes' what I want to know," answered Mr. Higginbotham.

"It's from Stubling and Manners, Solicitors, Chancery Lane, London— this is what it says:

Dear Sir,

From inquiries we have made we have ascertained that you are next of kin to Mr. Job Higginbotham, who died intestate in 1818, and whose estate, in consequence of conflicting claims, was thrown into Chancery. May we ask you to call on us to-morrow afternoon, so that you may authorise us to make the formal claim on your behalf? Lest any temporary inconvenience should hinder you from making the journey, we inclose a five pound note to cover any expenses you may be put to. The value of the estate and accumulations is about £40,000.

Yours sincerely,

Stubling and Manvers.

"And 'eres the five pun note, Mr. Higginbotham!" said the postman respectfully. "The letter did ought to 'ave been registered seeing it contained vallerbles, but I shan't mention it as it is you— anyone else'd have to have paid on that letter."

"What's this 'e died intestate?" inquired Mr Higginbotham.

"One o' them internal complaints, same as the King 'ad," explained the postman. "My word, Mr. Higginbotham, you'll be ridin' in your carriage afore a week, is over."

"Suppose it's someone 'aving larks," said the fortunate Mr. Higginbotham.

"Come over to the 'Bull,' Mr. Higginbotham," said the postman with a total disregard of his duties. "If that note's a good 'un you're all right. Folk don't give away five pun notes for larks."

The landlord of the "Bull" surveyed the note carefully and said, "It's all right this, but where did you pick it up; Job?"

Mr. Higginbotham proudly laid the letter before him.

"God 'eavens," cried Mr. Unwin, "it's your luck come."

"Aye, I never thought o' that," cried Mr." Higginbotham; " 'ere, Mr. Unwin, change ns this note. I'm standin' drinks to everybody. Gimme the' biggest pot you 'ave in the 'ouse. Say, what's yours, Postie. 'Ave a quart if you want it an' a good cigar— don't you be shy—'ave a fourpenny."

Half an hour afterwards the postman returned to his round and the news of Job Higginbotham's luck began to spread like wildfire. A crowd of acquaintances rushed to the "Bull" to shake the lucky man by the hand and to partake of his somewhat profuse hospitality. By the time he rose in a somewhat muddled condition to catch the eleven o'clock train for London most of the five pounds had literally been liquidated. Job liberally left all that

remained to be spent in drinking his health, and the landlord readily advanced another five pounds for his expenses.

"You must go first-class, Mr. Higginbotham, an' 'ave a cab at the station. A gentleman in your position must travel in style."

After a jubilant crowd had seen Mr. Higginbotham off, and sung, "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow," at the station, everybody turned towards the fair-ground.

A notice was pinned on the van of the Luck Seller."

"Sale will begin at two o'clock prompt"

A struggling, seething, mass of humanity soon gathered before the van. The Performing Dogs were neglected, the Fire Eaters were left so forlorn that it seemed they would have to subsist on the igneous diet alone, the hobby horses were only patronised by infants, and the Mexican Dwarf played his footless fantasies to vacuity. As the clock struck two the van door opened and the Luck Seller came out.

There were wild shouts: "Put my name down first," "Ere's shillin'."

The Luck Seller held up his hand for silence.

"What does this crowd mean? Yesterday only one man washed to buy. To-day you are tumbling over one another in your eagerness. What is the meaning of it all?"

There were loud shouts of "Job Higginbotham— forty thousand pounds."

"Oh, that is it. I am glad the gentleman who confided in me has received his reward so quickly— a pretty little fortune is £40,000. I wish for his sake it was larger. Is he here? Oh, gone to London— I must reserve my congratulations till a later day. All yesterday, when you all thought me a humbug, he had faith. He believed me— you didn't. Now, I tell you that I am a humbug, an arrant fraud, an imposter. Do you believe me? No, you will never believe me. Then come and buy luck— luck— luck. Half a crown for luck— the best luck was sold yesterday for a shilling. Come and pay half a crown for the luck's that's sold to-day."

The landlord of the "Bull" had fought way to the front and was the first to have his name entered in the register.

The Luck Seller smiled contemptuously.

"Did I not tell you yesterday that you would buying to-day?"

Mr. Unwin was not disposed to argue the point.

" 'Ere," he said, "if it's not as good luck as you're sellin' to-day, I'll give you a quid for eight lots— that ought to make me better off than Job Higginbotham, anyhow."

"Greedy— greedy," said the Luck Seller sadly, but nevertheless he entered. Mr. Unwin's name eight times in the register. Then when the landlord went away to puzzle his head with calculations of what his future fortune would run to, the crowd fought their way to get near the Luck Seller.

It was three hours before the sale of luck was over. There was a pile of gold and silver on the table which made the mouths of other showmen water. At last the stream of money stopped, and the Luck Seller announced, "The Sale for today is over," and retired.

Buyers went home, to discuss with their wives whether they should get motor-cars or whether after all horse and trap wouldn't be safer. The most fashionable dressmaker's was crowded with ladies seeking new costumes. Some happy couples went out in the evening to survey eligible houses which were to let. A slight difference of opinion between Mr and Mrs. Ruffums, as to whether it would be best to buy the Grange or rent the Rectory, resulted in the farmer being removed to the lock-up whilst the latter received treatment at the dispensary for black eyes and various contusions.

Still, in spite of occasional domestic differences, Muddlecombe was full of glee and joyful anticipation of the morrow. And yet the Luck Seller— presumably he was a modest man and desired to avoid the gratitude of crowds— when the church clock struck twelve, harnessed his horse to the van and drove rapidly away into the night.

The advent of the postman the next morning was eagerly expected. By an unfortunate incident the most enterprising draper in Muddlecombe had chosen that day for sending out his sale circulars. Consequently the postman had to call at nearly every house. People rushed out to meet him and snatched the circulars from his hand. It would be difficult to say whether the obliging postman or the enterprising draper was the most unpopular man in Muddlecombe that day, However, people placed their trust in the future and thought of Job Higginbotham in London gathering in the money.

It was three days before Mr. Higginbotham returned. He did not motor from London as he had promised his fellow townfolks. In fact, owing to stress of circumstance he returned afoot. On enquiring at the firm of solicitors in Chancery Lane they had repudiated all knowledge of the letter or the five pound note.

With great presence of mind Mr. Higginbotham had the spree of his life on the money he had borrowed from the landlord of the Bull. And when his money was exhausted he had walked home.

He was just explaining his adventures to a rather gloomy crowd, and the landlord was ruminating on the fate of his five pounds when the postman

entered. With a severe, noncommittal air, as if he had no knowledge of its contents, he handed a post-card to the landlord.

"What's this?" cried the startled publican.

The postman took the card and read it aloud:

My Dear Sir,

On the first day of my sale I sold good luck— Mr. Job Higginbotham, who bought a five pound note for a shilling, will, I think, admit this. But through pure absent-mindedness I omitted to announce on the second day I was selling Bad Luck. Didn't you buy a pounds worth?

6: The Middle Bedroom

H. de Vere Stacpoole

1863-1951

The Novel Magazine, Dec 1918

Henry de Vere Stacpoole

ARE ALL living creatures represented in the human race, so that we find shark men— or, at least, men with the instincts of sharks— sloth men, cat men, tiger men, and so on? Le Brun started the idea, I believe, and I take it up as bearing on the case of Sir Michael Carey, of Carey House, near Innis Town, on the west coast of Ireland.

I would ask another question before starting on my story: If a man were to give way to his natural instincts and retire from the world would he develop, or, rather, degenerate, along the line of his main instinct? Who can say? I only know that Sir Michael, the builder of the house that took his name, was known a hundred years ago amongst the illiterate peasantry as "the spider," that so dubbed on account of his mentality and general make-up, he lived alone in his house like a spider in a gloomy corner, that, according to legend, the devil came and took him one dark night, leaving neither rag nor bone of him and that his ghost was reputed to haunt Carey House and the country round, ever after.

The next of kin, Mr. Massy Pope, tried to live in the house. He left suddenly on account of the "loneliness" of the situation and succeeded in letting the place, with the shooting and fishing rights, to a hard-headed Englishman named Doubleday.

Doubleday didn't believe in ghosts nor care about them, snipe was his game and cock; he was a two-bottle man— it was in 1863— and if he had met with a ghost any time after ten o'clock he would scarcely have seen it, or seeing it, would not have cared. But his servants were the trouble. They left

one day in a body, being softheaded folk and unfortified and having a very good reason of their own. Then some years elapsed and the story of the next let, as told to me by Micky Feelan one day, out shooting, was as follows:

WHEN Mr. Doubleday had gone, sor, the house laid empty, spilin' the country for miles round, not a man would go into the groun's to trap a rabbit nor a woman enter its doors to lift a window, and Mr. Pope squanderin' his money to advertise it. That's the man he was, he wouldn't be bet by it, rowlin' in riches what did it matter to him whether it lay let or empty, not a brass farthin', but he wouldn't be bet by it, it was like a horse that wouldn't rise at a ditch and he'd canther it back and try it again and lather it over the head, squanderin' his money in the advertisin' till all of a sudden he got a rise out of a family be name of Leftwidge.

Dublin people they were, with a grocer's shop in old Fishamble Street. There was a dozen of them, mostly childer and one red-headed strip of a girl to do the cookin'. Twenty pound a year was the rent, I've heard tell, and they lived mostly be trappin' rabbits, the boys doin' a bit of fishin' and the groceries comin' from the shop where the ould father stuck at work in his shirt sleeves while the rest of the lot was airin' themselves in the counthry.

Be jabers, they were a crowd, ghosts! Little they cared about ghosts shamblin' about widout shoes or stockin's and the boys wid their sticks and catapults killin' hens be the sly and maltreatin' the country boys like Red Injuns, the shame of the county.

Norah Driscoll was the name of the redheaded slip and many a time me mother has seen her wid her apron over her head rockin' and cryin' wid the treatment of them boys and the botheration of the rest of them, for there was a matter of a dozen or more, rangin' like the pipes of an organ from Micky the eldest son six fut and as thin as a gas pipe, to Pat the youngest not the height of your knee.

Well, sor, the ghost lay aisy at the sight of the lot of them and didn't let a word out of it for a full mouth. Then one day, Norah Driscoll was goin' along the top flure passage whin the band begin to play. The bedrooms was mostly on that passage and the house agent had warned them against havin' anythin' to do with the middle most bedroom, for, says he, there's rats there that can't be got rid of and that's the cause of all the trouble in the lettin' of the house, says he. It would be a hundred and twenty a year rent, only for them rats, says he, so they're worth a hundred a year to you if you just keep the door shut and don't bother about the noises they do be makin' at odd times— sometimes it's like as if they was sneezin' and blowin' their noses and sometimes it's like as if they was walkin' about with their brogues on and sometimes it's like as if they

was cursin' and swearin'. Don't you mind them, he says, but keep sayin' over and over to yourself they're worth a hundred a year to me. That's what he tould Mrs. Leftwidge.

Well, sor, Norah was moonin' along the passage, sent to fetch duster or somethin' when she opened the dure of the middle bedroom be mistake. There was no furniture in it, not as much as a three-legged stool and the blind was down, but a shaft of the sun struck through be the side of the blind and there in the middle of the flure was sittin' a little old man dressed as they was dressed a hundred years ago in an ould brown coat wid brass buttons and all and the face of him under his hat topped the sight of him, for Norah said it wasn't a face, but more like one of those masks the childer make out of a bit of paper with holes in it.

The screech she let out of her as she banged the dure to, brought the family runnin' from downstairs, and the boys slammed open the door to get at the chap but there wasn't a speck of him.

"It's a rat she saw," says Mrs. Leftwidge, "Downstairs wid the lot of you or I'll give you the linth of me slipper— and open that dure again if you dare."

Down they went, Norah bawlin' and the old woman pushin' her and nothin' more happened that day till the night. Half a dozen of the little ones slep' in the same room with their mother to save the light and be under control, and gettin' on for twelve o'clock the old woman, snorin' wid her mouth wide, was woke from her slape be one of the childer.

"Mummy," says he, "listen to the bagpipes." She lifted herself on her elbow, but, faith, she could have heard it with her head; under the clothes, for the dhrone of the pipes filled the house comin' from the middle bedroom.

Next minit the whole lither of them was in the passage, the old woman with a gutherin' candle in her hand, and as they stood there keepin' time with their teeth to the tune of the pipes, the noise of it suddenly let off and the handle of the middle bedroom dure began to turn.

They didn't wait to see what was comin' out; no, your honour, you may bet your life they didn't, they was half of them under their beds the linth of that night and next mornin' they began to pack to go back to Dublin, gettin' their old traps together and strippin' the garden to take back wid them in hampers. Micky, the second boy, was sent runnin' to hire two cars to take them to the station, for the railway in those days had just come to Drumboyne, twelve miles away, and whilst he was gone they tore up the potatoes and cut the cabbages and faith they'd have taken the flurin' away if they'd had manes to shift it.

Well, there they were strapped and ready to go when Mrs. Leftwidge, sittin' in her bonnet on the boxes and atin' a sandwidge, suddenly stops her chewin' and looks about her like a hen countin' her chickens:

"Where's Pat?" says she.

Pat was the youngest, as I've tould you, sor, a bit of a chap in petticoats, no size at all and always gettin' astray.

"I don't know," says one of the boys, "but faith, I hear him shoutin' somewhere upstairs."

Upstairs they all rushed led by the woman and they hadn't no sooner reached the top passage than they seen Pat bein' whisked through the open dure of the middle bedroom, dragged along be somebody's hand, and when they reached the dure, there was Pat bein' dragged up the chimney.

It was one of them big ould chimneys a man could go up, and the heels of the child was disappearin' when Mrs. Leftwidge lays hold of a fut and pulls, bawlin' murder Irish, till the thing in the chimney let go its holt and Pat comes into the grater kickin' like a pup in the shtrangles and liftin' the roof off with the hullabaloo of him.

She tuck him be one fut like a turkey and down she runs with him and into the garden and there when they'd soothed him he gives his story, how he'd been playin' in the passage when a little ould man, the funniest ould man he'd ever seen pokes his head out of the bedroom dure. Pat, poor divil, bein' sated at his play couldn't get his legs under him wid the fright, he could only sit and shout whilst the head of the little ould man pops in and out of the dure-way like the head of a tortoise from its shell.

Then out he comes the whole of him and grabs the child be the hand and whisks him off into the bedroom and goes up the chimney heels and first haulin' Pat after him. Goes up like a spider.

Well, they was sittin' about on the boxes they'd hauled out of the house waitin' for the cars and tryin' to squeeze more of the news out of Pat, when up comes the cars wid Sergeant Rafferty and Constable O'Halloran on wan of them, to see they weren't takin' the house away wid them— they'd got that bad name in the county.

And when the sergeant heard the story, up he went to the bedroom and down he comes again.

"Here," says he to O'Halloran, "take this lot off to the train and go to the barracks and fetch me two carbines wid buck shot ca'tridges— the same ould Forster used to shoot the boys with, bad luck to him— and look slippy," says he, "for I'm a brave man, but I don't want to be no longer here be myself than's needful."

Off the cars went wid the family packed like flies on them an' in a matter of a couple of hours back comes the constable wid the guns. Up they go to the bedroom.

"Stick your head up the chimney," says the sergeant.

"I'll be damned if do," says the other.

"Well, then, shut it," says the sergeant, "and keep still."

They listened but they didn't hear nothing at all. Then the sergeant begins talkin' in a loud voice, winkin' at the other.

"There's nothin' there," says he, "it was a ghost they saw and it's gettin' on easy I am meself. Let's get off back to Drumboyne and have a glass and lave the ould house to look afther itself."

"I'm wid you," says the constable and downstairs they tramped, makin' as much noise wid their big boots as a rigiment of soldiers. Then in the hall they sits down and begins takin' off their boots.

"All the same," says the constable as he pulled the laces, "I'd be just as aisy in me mind if I was three miles off trampin' on the road to Drumboyne."

"So would I," says the sergeant, "and it's there I'd be only I'm thinkin' of promotion."

"I'm thinkin' of ghosts," says the constable wid the bootlace in his hand.

"Go on unlacin' your boots," says the other, "and don't be a keyoward, this is no ghost. Ghosts can't pull childer up chimneys."

"Faith, you seem to know a lot about them," says the constable, "but it's I that am thinkin' it's holy water and Father Mooney ought to be on this job instead of you and me and guns."

"And how would you get holy water up the chimney?" axes the sergeant.

"Wit a squirt," replies him, "and how else?"

"Squirt yourself out of them boots," Says the sergeant, "or it's me ramrod I'll take to you, and now follow me," he says, "and walk soft."

Wid the loaded guns in their hands up they wint makin' no more sound than shaddas in a wall, and when they got to the room down they squats one on each side of the chimney.

They hears nothin' for a while, but the tickin' of the sergeant's watch and the sounds of their own hearts goin' lub-a-dub. Then comes a cough. It wasn't a right sort of cough, for, let alone that it was comin' down a chimney, it sounded to be the cough of a chap that had died for want of water and lain in a brick kiln afther.

The constable said next day he'd have been up and off only the sound cut the legs from under him, the sergeant wasn't much better and there they sat sayin' their prayers and listenin' for more.

They waited near an hour hearin' nothin', and then all at once began a noise, a scratchin' and a scrabblin' like a cat comin' down a drain pipe.

"It's comin' down," shouts the constable.

"Begob it's not," says the sergeant and wid that he shoves the muzzle of his gun up the flue and fires.

He fired from fright to keep it up, so he said at the inquest, but, be jabers, he brought it down like a cock pheasant, turnblin' and clawin' and when they stretched it out on the flure it was a man right enough. A bit of an ould man as brown as a spider, and there he lay dead as a grouse wid the buckshot holes in him and not a drop of blood no more than if he'd been made of cardboard.

"Cover the face of him," says the constable, for that was the sort of face he had, better than I can tell you, and havin' nothin' to cover it they turned him face down, and made off runnin' to Drumboyne for the residint magistrit.

Well, sor, when they took that chimney down they found a room off it, all littered with bones and birds' feathers and rats' tails. It wouldn't do to be tellin' you of that room, more than it had no winda to it and had been built on purpose be Sir Michael Carey when he put the house up. He'd took to live in it, for that was the way his heart was, and at long last he took to live nowhere else, and that was how the sergeant brought him down and he must have been a matter of a hundred and tin years of age, they reckoned.

He had his bagpipes to cheer him and frighten away tinints and he'd be out be nights scavengin' for food— they say they found the bones of childer in the room, but may be that was a lie got be him tryin' to drag Pat Leftwidge up the flue— but faith I wouldn't put it beyond him. For that chap was a spider, sor, they said his face was the face of a spider, and his arms and legs no better.

He'd begun in the shape of a man, maybe, but the spider in him got the bether of him. Look, there's all there's left of the house, sor, thim walls beyond the trees. They set a light to it to get shut of that room and if you knew the truth of it all, you wouldn't blame them.

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7: The Love Affair of Bella Delmain, Actress: an Idyll

E. Phillips Oppenheim

1866-1946

The Bellman, Minneapolis, 11 Nov 1908

Edward Phillips Oppenheim

Story produced by Roy Glashan and Francis Golding

SHE sat in the middle of the lounge in the small smoking-room adjoining the bar of the Savoy Hotel and around her a little court of admirers, including the reporter, who was busy taking down the words of wisdom which flowed from her lips, and the boy who wrote things and stood a little apart from the group. She was pretty or not, according to the accident of the moment, and she had little wavy golden curls coming from unexpected places, a wonderful smile with which her eyes seemed to have something to do, and she was chic from the tips of her patent shoes to the angle of the green feather on her hat. She explained her likes and dislikes in pert little phrases, which seemed to afford her admirers continual delight. New York was really her home, but London was great— everyone had been real good to her and she was going to have another song next week. In the middle of it all, she caught the adoring gaze of the boy who wrote things, who wasn't really a boy at all, but who came from the country and was painfully shy. Someone whispered in her ear and she suddenly beamed upon him.

"Say, are you the Mr. Rankin who writes those delightful stories?" she asked him sweetly.

He stammered out something to the effect that he did write stories and she moved up to the corner of the lounge.

"You must come and sit right down by me," she declared. "I want to know how you think of all those wonderful plots."

This was where things began. Presently the reporter, finding that there was no more material for him, went away and left the boy who had been his companion behind. One by one the others dropped off, and presently the girl rose, too.

"I must go back and get a sandwich or something before I go to the theatre," she remarked, looking at her hat in the glass.

The young man Rankin was suddenly bold.

"Won't you come into the café with me and have something?" he asked eagerly.

She hesitated for a moment and glanced at him furtively. They were certainly rather a queer looking couple, she neat and chic and expensive, he in ill-fitting country clothes, an unfashionable collar and impossible tie. He was just as conscious as she was at her ease, and though the *maître d'hotel* handled him gently, he showed a lamentable ignorance in those small amenities which a smart young woman expects from her male escort. However, they got through the meal somehow, and after first undertipping and then overtipping the waiter, dropping his hat and treading upon her gown, they got out of the place. When he told the driver of the hansom to drive to the Carlton Theatre—stage door— he felt that he had begun to live at last.

He ventured to ask her to supper, but she had had enough for the present, and declined. But she was in her way a kindly little soul, and when she saw how disappointed he was, she made him some amends.

"You can look in for half an hour after the show if you like," she told him, "20 Carlton Mansions."

"What time may I come?" he demanded breathlessly.

"Any time, not before twelve," she answered.

He walked down to the Embankment afterwards. He felt the absolute need of being somewhere where he could think. He was an impressionable young fool, of course, but after all, he was honest and those were beautiful thoughts which came to him as he walked slowly along, his eyes travelling over the dark, slowly flowing water to the glittering arc of lights below. Up and up and up he lifted her, up beyond the stars, to the divine company of the women who had ruled the world, through the hearts of its conquerors. And yet no higher than his foolish heart which had taken her in for all the days...

IT was half past twelve when he knocked with beating heart at the door of her room. The luxury of the place rather oppressed him, wholly unused to such things—the smoothly running lift, the spacious corridors with their heavily

piled carpets, the shaded electric lights, the pleasant warmth and the somewhat supercilious air of the servants. A voice called out "come in," and he entered.

She was lolling in an easy chair opposite the door. A man was sitting on its arm and she was laughing up into his face. Several other girls in negligé attire were in the room and half a dozen men. There were sandwiches and whiskey and soda upon the sideboard, the remains of a supper upon the table. It was not at all like what he had expected.

She half rose from her chair and introduced him to everybody. He felt that it was rather a trying moment. All the men were in evening dress and obviously belonged to a set with which he had come little into contact. They all spoke a few words to him and one of the girls tried to draw him into conversation. But, nevertheless he felt hopelessly an alien. They talked in a shibboleth which he did not understand; their jokes, their laughter, their flying remarks all seemed to be founded upon a common and intimate acquaintanceship. He did his best but he felt himself a ghastly failure. His hostess came over at last and sat by his side. There was no doubt at all that she was a kindly person.

"I'm afraid you're bored, as they say over here," she began.

"I'm not," he answered with unexpected boldness, "but I hate to see that fellow sit on the arm of your chair."

Then the laugh came— the laugh which he loved. Perhaps the others thought he had been amusing. He only knew.

"Why, where should he sit?" she demanded. "Wouldn't you sit there, if I asked you to? Come, I'll sit on yours. Now you can't be jealous, can you? Get me a whiskey and soda, there's a dear boy."

He went to the sideboard and mixed one. When he came back she was talking to someone else. He waited for her with the tumbler in his hand, a little awkwardly. Presently she noticed him and came over, but she continued her conversation across the room all the time. He saw that it was a very good-looking man with whom she was talking and that they seemed on excellent terms. He felt himself growing pale with misery. Suddenly she seemed to remember him again and seated herself once more on the arm of his chair.

"Say," she remarked, looking at him critically. "I thought that all you Englishmen always changed your clothes for the evening."

He felt his cheeks grow furiously hot.

"I— I forgot all about it to-night," he answered.

"What have you been doing?" she asked.

"I went for a walk," he answered. She looked at him as at some being whom she wholly failed to understand. "For a walk!" she repeated a little vaguely for a person of her direct habit of speech.

Suddenly it flashed in upon him—the whole vast incongruity, the eternal differences whose barrier between them must reach even to the skies, between the dreamer with his head in the clouds and this charming acute little person, whose feet were very much upon the earth. It was the moment which might have been the moment of his salvation. A second later and he might have broken away, lived down his pains and come out, a few years older perhaps, but his own man. The merest chance intervened. The illuminating flash fired his eyes, transformed his somewhat homely features. He seemed to her for the moment almost attractive. She bent down and lightly touched his lips with hers.

"Silly boy," she murmured.

Then indeed his case was hopeless.

SHE agreed with some misgivings, to dine with him on the following day—Sunday. She had been invited to join another party, which she should have preferred, but another girl had been asked first and she was piqued. Nevertheless she had misgivings, and they were justified. He had forgotten to engage a table at the fashionable restaurant which she named, and when they arrived they were relegated to an uncomfortable corner. He had ordered no flowers, his evening clothes were old-fashioned and she was almost certain that he was wearing a made-up tie. The maître d'hotel openly patronized him, when he attempted to order the dinner; he chose the wine recommended by the waiter, which was so sweet as to be almost undrinkable, and his nervous attempts at conversation were almost painful. She did her best to help him.

"Say," she commanded, "don't try to talk any more about the theatre. Tell me the things which interest you. Where do you write your stories? How do the thoughts come to you?"

He began to rhapsodize— to talk about the things he loved, the place he lived in, where the west wind blew salt across the marshes and the incoming tide rent long streaks of silver into the brown land. He told her of the white winged birds, the winter sunshine, the wonderful fascinating loneliness of the forgotten village from which he came. And after a moment or two's blank wonderment, she was bored. She hid it at first with gentle yawns behind her fan. He was blind to the hint, and went on— rushing against his fate. A burst of laughter from that other table towards which she had so often covertly glanced, caused her to turn her head. A hand was waved to her, a signal flashed back. A moment or two later, two of the men were by her side.

They spoke courteously to her companion— they had both been at the flat on the night of his visit. They even tried to avoid the appearance of ignoring him, but the thing was hopeless from the first. She was one of those who

demands the right to be amused, as the ordinary person demands to live. Her companion had failed— failed utterly in every way. She felt herself aggrieved and the limits of her good-nature had been reached. The rest is quite easy to guess. A sort of amalgamation of the two parties took place. No one was rude to Rankin—they were all too well bred, but the thing came home to him. When the party dissolved he slipped away unnoticed— certainly unmissed.

AFTER that he began to slip and then to fall. He did no work and he lived— he scarcely knew how. He haunted the places where she was to be seen; when he could afford it he leaned over the rail of the gallery of her theatre. He was never obtrusive, a half-cut and a few evasions had been sufficient for him. Yet she was often conscious, uncomfortably conscious of him. Occasionally she saw a shabby, half-starved figure gliding way from the front of her flat when she came out, or lurking in the shadows of the narrow street in which was situated the stage door of the theatre which she still graced. At first it made her uncomfortable— afterwards, with the divine commonsense of her race and sex, she put him out of her mind as a crank— nothing to be thought of seriously. Then one day she met the reporter and he stopped her in the street.

"By the way," he asked, "do you happen to remember a young man who was with me at the Savoy, one day— a young idiot by the name of Rankin?"

She looked at him curiously. "I guess so," she answered. "What about him?"

"Nothing much," he answered, "only the idiot's disappeared— gone under, from all I can hear, and a good many people are anxious to find him out."

"Why?" she asked.

"Some uncle up in the north has left him £80,000," he answered. "Lucky fellow if he ever turns up to claim it. I can't make out what went wrong with him. Clever chap in his way, but not balanced."

MISS BELLA DELMAIN was very thoughtful for the rest of that evening. She had been having a good many late nights, she had missed rehearsal once or twice and the audience had left off encoring her one song. A new piece was being talked of and as yet the manager had said nothing to her about her part. For the next few evenings she looked about outside her flat and outside the stage door. At last she was successful. He was flitting away into the shadows but she caught him firmly by the coat sleeve.

"Why, isn't that you, Mr. Rankin?" she exclaimed. "Why do you always run away from me?"

He was speechless, but his appearance told its story. Her voice sounded very pretty and sympathetic.

"See here," she said, "it's time you quit this foolishness. You've got to come and have supper with me to-night."

He drew a quick, sobbing breath.

"Look at me," he gasped. "Fancy me supping with anyone. Let me go. I'm content. I've spoken to you once more. That's enough. I'm going to end it to-night."

"Rubbish," she said firmly. "Now listen to me. It doesn't matter a bit about your clothes. Take this and borrow what you want. I shall expect you outside at half past eleven."

She smiled at him, the same smile, and flitted in through the stage door. He found himself standing there with a gold net purse in his hand and a new life bounding through his veins. He felt the sovereigns, a dozen of them at least. Then he staggered down the street!

THE odd part of it was that their marriage is or seems to be a success. She flirts a little, of course, but discreetly; he has begun to write again and there is some talk of a play. They live in a handsome flat and entertain continually, a pleasant but somewhat Bohemian crowd. They own a motor car and go South for the winter. They are well-known figures at certain West End restaurants and he has learned to order a dinner. But they had been married a year before he dared to ask her the question, which had been on his mind since the day he met the reporter in the Strand and had a drink with him. He asked it after a little dinner at the Savoy and she leaned back in her chair and looked at him under half closed eyes and that delightful smile.

"Say, Arthur," she murmured with her irresistible drawl, "are you satisfied with your wife?"

"Of course I am," he answered fervently.

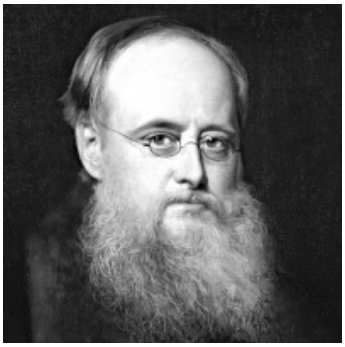
"Then don't ask silly questions," she told him.

8: The Devil's Spectacles

Wilkie Collins

1824-1889

The Spirit of the Times, (New York) 20 Dec 1879,
as "The Magic Spectacles."
Bath Herald (UK) 20, 27 Dec 1879 with the author's preferred title
"The Devil's Spectacles".



William Wilkie Collins

1. Memoirs of an Arctic Voyager

'HE SAYS, SIR, he thinks he's nigh to his latter end, and he would like, if convenient, to see you before he goes.'

'Do you mean before he dies?'

'That's about it, sir.'

I was in no humour (for reasons to be hereafter mentioned) for seeing anybody, under disastrous circumstances of any sort; but the person who had sent me word that he was 'nigh to his latter end' had special claims on my consideration.

He was an old sailor, who had first seen blue water under the protection of my father, then a post-captain in the navy. Born on our estate, and the only male survivor of our head gamekeeper's family of seven children, he had received a good education through my father's kindness, and he ought to have got on well in the world; but he was one of those born vagabonds who set education at defiance. His term of service having expired, he disappeared for many years. During part of the time he was supposed to have been employed in the merchant navy. At the end of that long interval he turned up one day at our country house, an invalided man, without a penny in his pocket. My good father, then nearing the end of his life, was invalided too. Whether he had a fellow-feeling for the helpless creature whom he had once befriended, or whether he only took counsel of his own generous nature, it is now needless to

inquire. He appointed Septimus Notman to be lodge-keeper at the second of our two park gates, and he recommended Septimus to my personal care on his deathbed. 'I'm afraid he's an old scoundrel,' my father confessed; 'but somebody must look after him as long as he lasts, and if you don't take his part, Alfred, nobody else will.' After this Septimus kept his place at the gate while we were in the country. When we returned to our London house the second gate was closed. The old sailor was lodged (by a strong exertion of my influence) in a room over a disused stable, which our coachman had proposed to turn into a hayloft. Everybody disliked Septimus Notman. He was said to be mad; to be a liar, a hypocrite, a vicious wretch, and a disagreeable brute. There were people who even reported that he had been a pirate during the time when we lost sight of him and who declared, when they were asked for their proof, that his crimes were written in his face. He was not in the least affected by the opinions of his neighbours; he chewed his tobacco and drank his grog, and, in the words of the old song, 'He cared for nobody, no, not he!' Well had my poor father said, that I didn't take his part nobody else would. And shall I tell you a secret? Though I strictly carried out my father's wishes, and though Septimus was disposed in his own rough way to be grateful to me, I didn't like him either.

So I went to the room over the stables (we were in London at the time) with dry eyes and I sat down by his bed and cut up a cake of tobacco for him, and said, 'Well, what's the matter?' as coolly as if he had sent me word that he thought he had caught a cold in the head. 'I'm called away.' Septimus answered, 'and before I go I've got a confession to make, and something useful to offer you. It's reported among the servants, Mr Alfred, that you're in trouble just now between two ladies. You may see your way clear in that matter, sir, if death spares me long enough to say a few last words.'

'Never mind me, Septimus. Has a doctor seen you?'

'The doctor knows no more about me than I know myself. The doctor be—!'

'Have you any last wishes I can attend to?'

'None, sir.'

'Shall I send for a clergyman?'

Septimus Notman looked at me as directly as he could— he was afflicted with a terrible squint. Otherwise he was a fine, stoutly-built man, with a ruddy face profusely encircled by white hair and whiskers, a hoarse, heavy voice, and the biggest hands I ever saw. He put one of these enormous hands under his pillow before he answered me.

'If you think,' he said, 'that a clergyman will come to a man who has got the Devil's Spectacles here, under his pillow, and who has only to put those

Spectacles on to see through that clergyman's clothes, flesh, and what not, and read everything that's written in his secret mind as plain as print, fetch him, Master Alfred— fetch him!'

I thought the clergyman might not like this, and withdrew my suggestion accordingly. The least I could do, as a matter of common politeness, after giving up the clergyman, was to ask if I might look at the Devil's Spectacles.

'Hear how I came by them first!' said Septimus.

'Will it take long?' I inquired.

'It will take long, and it will make your flesh creep.'

I remembered my promise to my father, and placed myself and my flesh at the mercy of Septimus Notman. But he was not ready to begin yet.

'Do you see that white jug?' he said, pointing to the wash-stand.

'Yes. Do you want water?'

'I want grog. There's grog in the white jug. And there's a pewter mug on the chimney-piece. I must be strung up, Master Alfred— I must be strung up.'

The white jug contained at least half a gallon of rum and water, roughly calculated. I strung him up. In the case of any other dying person I might have hesitated. But a man who possessed the Devil's Spectacles was surely an exception to ordinary rules, and might finish his career and finish his grog at one and the same time.

'Now I'm ready,' he said, 'What do you think I was up to in the time when you all lost sight of me? The latter part of that time, I mean?'

'They say you were a pirate,' I replied.

'Worse than that. Guess again.'

'I tried to persuade myself that there might be such a human anomaly as a merciful pirate, and guessed once more.

'A murderer,' I suggested.

'Worse than that. Guess again.'

I declined to guess again. 'Tell me yourself what you have been,' I said.

He answered without the least appearance of discomposure, 'I've been a Cannibal.'

Perhaps it was weak of me— but I did certainly start to my feet and make for the door.

'Hear the circumstances,' said Septimus. 'You know the proverb, sir? Circumstances alter cases.'

There was no disputing the proverb. I sat down again. I was a young and tender man, which, in my present position, was certainly against me. But I had very little flesh on my bones and that was in my favour.

'It happened when I went out with the Arctic expedition,' Septimus proceeded. 'I've forgotten all my learning, and lost my memory for dates. The

year escapes me, and the latitude and longitude escape me. But I can tell you the rest of it. We were an exploring party, you must know, with sledges. It was getting close to the end of the summer months in those parts, and we were higher than any of them have ever got since to the North Pole. We should have found our way there— don't you doubt it— but for three of our best men who fell sick of the scurvy. The second lieutenant, who was in command, called a halt, as the soldiers say. "With this loss of strength," says he, "it's my duty to take you back to the ships. We must let the North Pole be, and pray God that we may have no more invalided men to carry. I give you half an hour's rest before we turn back." The carpenter was one of our sound men. He spoke next. He reported one of the two sledges not fit for service. "How long will you be making it fit?" says the lieutenant. "In a decent climate," says the carpenter, "I should say two or three hours, sir. Here, double that time, at least." You may say why not do without the sledge? I'll tell you why. On account of the sick men to be carried. "Be as quick about it as you can," says the lieutenant: "time means life in our predicament." Most of the men were glad enough to rest. Only two of us murmured at not going on. One was a boatswain's mate; t'other was me. "Do you think the North Pole's the other side of that rising ground there?" says the lieutenant. The boatswain's mate was young and self-conceited. "I should like to try, sir," he says, "if any other man has pluck enough to go along with me." He looked at me when he said that. I wasn't going to have my courage called in question publicly by a slip of a lad; and, moreover, I had a fancy to try for the North Pole, too. I volunteered to go along with him. Our notion, you will understand, was to take a compass and some grub with us; to try what we could find in a couple hours' march forward; and to get back in good time for our duty on the return journey. The lieutenant wouldn't hear of it. "I'm responsible for every man in my charge," says he. "You're a couple of fools. Stay where you are." We were a couple of fools. We watched our opportunity, while they were all unloading the broken-down sledge; and slipped off to try our luck, and get the reward for discovering the North Pole.'

There he stopped, and pointed to the grog. 'Dry-work, talking,' he said. 'Give us a drop more.'

I filled the pewter mug again. And again Septimus Notman emptied it.

'We set our course northwest by north,' he went on; 'and after a while (seeing the ground favoured us) we altered it again to due north. I can't tell you how long we walked (we neither of us had watches)— but this I'll swear to. Just as the last of the daylight was dying out, we got to the top of a hillock; and there we saw the glimmer of the open Polar Sea! No! not the Sound that enters Kennedy's Channel, which has been mistaken for it, I know— but the

real thing, the still and lonesome Polar Sea! What would you have done in our place? I'll tell you what we did. We sat down on some nice dry snow, and took out our biscuits and grog. Freezing work, do you say? You'll find it in the books, if you don't believe me— the further north you get in those parts, the less cold there is, and the more open water you find. Ask Captain M'Clure what sort of a bed he slept upon, on the night of October thirtieth, 'fifty-one. Well, and what do you think we did when we had eaten and drunk? Lit our pipes. And what next? Fell fast asleep, after our long walk, on our nice dry snow. And what sort of prospect met us when we woke? Darkness and drizzle and mist. I had the compass, and I tried to set our course on the way back. I could no more see the compass than if I had been blind. We had no means of striking a light, except my match-box. I had left it on the snow by my side when I fell asleep. Not a match would light. As for help of any sort, it was not to be thought of. We couldn't have been less than five miles distant from the place where we had left our messmates. So there we were, the boatswain's mate and me, alone in the desert, lost at the North Pole.'

I began to feel interested. 'You tried to get back, I suppose, dark as it was?' I said.

'We walked till we dropped,' Septimus answered; 'and then we yelled and shouted till we had no voices left; and then we hollowed out a hole in the snow, and waited for daylight.'

'What did you expect when daylight came?'

'I expected nothing, Master Alfred. The boatswain's mate (beginning to get a little light-headed, you know) expected the lieutenant to send in search of us, or wait till we returned. A likely thing for an officer in charge to do, with the lives of the sledging party depending on his getting them back to the ships, and only two men missing, who had broken orders and deserted their duty. A good riddance of bad rubbish— that's what he said of us when we were reported missing, I'll be bound. When the light came we tried to get back; and we did set our course cleverly enough. But, bless you, we had nothing left to eat or drink! When the light failed us again we were done up. We dropped on the snow, under the lee of a rock, and gave out. The boatswain's mate said his prayers, and I said Amen. Not the least use! On the contrary, as the night advanced it got colder and colder. We were both close together, to keep each other warm. I don't know how long it was, I only know it was still pitch dark, when I heard the boatswain's mate give a little flutter of a sigh, and no more. I opened his clothes, and put my hand on his heart. Dead, of cold and exhaustion, and no mistake. I shouldn't have been long after him but for my own presence of mind.'

'Your presence of mind? What did you do?'

'Stripped every rag of clothes off him, and put them all on myself. What are you shivering about? He couldn't feel it, could he? I tell you, he'd have been frozen stiff before the next day's light came— but for my presence of mind again. As well as my failing strength would let me, I buried him under the snow. Virtue, they say, Master Alfred, is its own reward. That good action proved to be the saving of my life.'

'What do you mean?'

'Didn't I tell you I buried him?'

'Well!'

'Well, in that freezing air, the burying of him kept him eatable. Don't you see?'

'You wretch!'

'Put yourself in my place, and don't call names. I held out till I was mad with hunger. And then I did open my knife with my teeth. And I did burrow down in the snow till I felt him—.'

I could hear no more of it. 'Get on to the end! I said. 'Why didn't you die at the North Pole?'

'Because somebody helped me to get away.'

'Who helped you?'

'The Devil.'

He showed his yellow old teeth in a horrible grin. I could draw but one conclusion— his mind was failing him before death. Anything that spared me his hideous confession of cannibalism was welcome. I asked how the supernatural rescue happened.

'More grog first,' he said. 'The horrors come on me when I think of it.' He was evidently sinking. Without the grog I doubt if he could have said much more.

'I can't tell you how many days passed,' he went on; 'I only know that the time was nigh when it was all dark and no light. The darker it got, the deeper I scooped the sort of cavern I'd made for myself under the snow. Whether it was night, or whether it was day I know no more than you do. On a sudden, in the awful silence and solitude, I heard a voice, high up, as it were, on the rock behind me. It was a cheering and a pleasant voice, and it said, "Well, Septimus Notman, is there much left of the boatswain's mate by this time? Did he eat short while he lasted?" I cried out in fright, "Who the devil—?" The voice stopped me before I could say the rest. "You've hit it," says the voice, "I am that person; and it's about time the Devil helped you out of this." "No," says I, "I'd rather perish by cold than fire any day." "Make your mind easy," says he, taking the point, "I don't want you in my place yet. I expect you to do a deal more in the way of degrading your humanity before you come to me, and I

offer you a safe passage back to the nearest settlement. Friend Septimus, you're a man after my own heart." "As how, sir?" says I. "Because you're such a complete beast," says he. "A human being who elevates himself, and rises higher and higher to his immortal destiny, is a creature I hate. He gets above me, even in his earthly lifetime. But you have dropped— you dear good fellow— to the level of a famished wolf. You have gobbled up your dead companion; and if you ever had such a thing as a soul— ha, Septimus!— it parted company with you at the first morsel you tasted of the Boatswain's mate. Do you think I'll leave such a prime specimen of the Animal Man as you are, deserted at the North Pole? No, no; I grant you a free pass by my railway; darkness and distance are no obstacles to Me. Are you ready?" You may not believe me; but I felt myself being lifted up, as it were, against my own will. "Give us a light," I says, "I can't travel in the dark." "Take my spectacles," says he, "they'll help you to see more than you bargain for. Look through them at your fellow mortals, and you'll see the inmost thoughts of their hearts as plain as I do, and, considering your nature, Septimus, that will drop you even below the level of a wolf." "Suppose I don't want to look," says I, "may I throw the spectacles away?" "They'll come back to you," says he. "May I smash them up?" "They'll put themselves together again." "What am I to do with them?" "Give them to another man. Now then! One, two, three— and away!" You may not believe me again; I lost my senses, Master Alfred. Hold me up; I'm losing them now. More grog— that's right— more grog. I came to myself at Upernavik, with the Devil's Spectacles in my pocket. Take them, sir. And read those two ladies' hearts. And act accordingly. Hush! I hear him speaking to me again. Behind my pillow. Just as he spoke on the rock. Most polite and cheering. Calling to me, as it were, "Come, Cannibal— come!" Like a song, isn't it? "Come, Cannibal— come!"'

He sang the last words faintly, and died with a smile on his face. Delirium or lies? With the Spectacles actually in my hands, I was inclined to think lies. They were of the old-fashioned sort, with big, circular glasses, and stout tortoise-shell frames; they smelt musty, but not sulphurous. I possess a sense of humour, I am happy to say. When they were thoroughly cleaned, I determined to try the Devil's Spectacles on the two ladies, and submit to the consequences, whatever they might be."

2. Memoirs of Myself

WHO were the two ladies?

They were both young and unmarried. As a matter of delicacy, I ask permission to mention them by their Christian names only. Zilla, aged seventeen. Cecilia, aged two and twenty.

And what was my position between them?

I was the same age as Cecilia. She was my mother's companion and reader; handsome, well-born and poor. I had made her a proposal, and had been accepted. There were no money difficulties in the way of our marriage, in spite of my sweetheart's empty purse. I was an only child, and I had inherited, excepting my mother's jointure, the whole of the large property that my father left at his death. In social rank Cecilia was more than my equal; we were therefore not ill-matched from the worldly point of view. Nevertheless, there was an obstacle to our union, and a person interested in making the most of it. The obstacle was Zilla. The person interested was my mother. Zilla was her niece— her elder brother's daughter. The girl's parents had died in India, and she had been sent to school in England, under the care of her uncle and guardian. I had never seen her, and had hardly heard of her, until there was a question of her spending the Christmas holidays (in the year when Septimus Notman died) at our house.

'Her uncle has no objection,' my mother said; 'and I shall be more than glad to see her. A most interesting creature, as I hear. So lovely, and so good, that they call her The Angel, at school. I say nothing about her nice little fortune or the high military rank that her poor father possessed. You don't care for these things. But, oh, Alfred, it would make me so happy if you fell in love with Zilla and married her!'

Three days before, I had made my proposal to Cecilia, and had been accepted— subject to my mother's approval. I thought this a good opportunity of stating my case plainly; and I spoke out. Never before had I seen my mother so outraged and disappointed— enraged with Cecilia; disappointed with me. "A woman without a farthing of a dowry; a woman who was as old as I was; a woman who had taken advantage of her position in the house to mislead and delude me!' and so on. Cecilia would certainly have been sent away if I had not declared that I should feel it my duty, in that event, to marry her immediately. My mother knew my temper, and refrained from giving Cecilia any cause of offence. Cecilia, on her side, showed what is called a proper pride; she declined to become my wife until my mother approved of her. She considered herself to be a martyr; and I considered myself to be an abominably treated man. Between us, I am afraid we made our good mother's life unendurable— she was obliged to be the first who gave way. It was understood that we were to be married in the spring. It was also understood that Zilla was bitterly disappointed at having her holiday visit to us put off. 'She was so anxious to

see you, poor child,' my mother said to me; 'but I really daren't ask her here under present circumstances. She is so fresh, so innocent, so infinitely superior in personal attractions to Cecilia, that I don't know what might happen if you saw her now. You are the soul of honour, Alfred; but you and Zilla had better remain strangers to each other— you might repent your rash engagement.' After this, it is needless to say that I was dying to see Zilla; while, at the same time, I never for an instant swerved from my fidelity to Cecilia.

Such was my position, on the memorable day when Septimus Notman died, leaving me possessor of the Devil's Spectacles.

3. The Test of the Spectacles

THE FIRST PERSON whom I encountered on returning to the house was the butler. He met me in the hall, with a receipted account in his hand which I had sent him to pay. The amount was close on a hundred pounds, and I had paid it immediately. 'Is there no discount?' I asked, looking at the receipt.

'The parties expect cash, sir, and charge accordingly.'

He looked so respectable when he made this answer, he had served us for so many years, that I felt an irresistible temptation to try the Devil's Spectacles on the butler, before I ventured to look through them at the ladies of my family. Our honest old servant would be such an excellent test.

'I am afraid my sight is failing me,' I said.

With this exceedingly simple explanation I put on the spectacles and looked at the butler.

The hall whirled round with me; on my word of honour I tremble and turn cold while I write of it now. Septimus Notman had spoken the truth!

In an instant the butler's heart became hideously visible— a fat organ seen through the medium of the infernal glasses. The thought in him was plainly legible to me in these words: 'Does my master think I'm going to give him the five per cent off the bill? Beastly meanness, interfering with the butler's perquisites.'

I took off my spectacles and put them in my pocket.

'You are a thief,' I said to the butler. 'You have got the discount money on this bill— five pounds all but a shilling or two— in your pocket. Send in your accounts; you leave my service.'

'To-morrow, sir, if you like!' answered the butler, indignantly. 'After serving your family for five-and-twenty years, to be called a thief for only taking my perquisites is an insult, Mr Alfred, that I have not deserved.' He put his handkerchief to his eyes and left me.

It was true that he had served us for a quarter of a century; it was also true that he had taken his perquisite and told a fib about it. But he had his compensating virtues. When I was a child he had given me many a ride on his knee and many a stolen drink of wine and water. His cellar-book had always been honestly kept; and his wife herself admitted that he was a model husband. At other times I should have remembered this, I should have felt that I had been hasty, and have asked his pardon. At this time I failed to feel the slightest compassion for him, and never faltered for a moment in my resolution to send him away. What change had passed over me?

The library door opened, and an old schoolfellow and college friend of mine looked out. 'I thought I heard your voice in the hall,' he said; 'I have been waiting an hour for you.'

'Anything very important,' I asked, leading the way back to the library.

'Nothing of the least importance to you,' he replied, modestly.

I wanted no further explanation. More than once already I had lent him money, and, sooner or later, he had always repaid me. 'Another little loan?' I inquired, smiling pleasantly.

'I am really ashamed to ask you again, Alfred. But if you could lend me fifty pounds— just look at that letter?

He made some joke, suggested by the quaint appearance of the Spectacles. I was too closely occupied to appreciate his sense of humour. What had he just said to me? He had said. 'I am ashamed to ask you again.' And what had he thought while he was speaking? He had thought. 'When one has a milch cow at one's disposal, who but a fool would fail to take advantage of it?'

I handed him back the letter (from a lawyer, threatening 'proceedings') and I said, in my hardest tones, 'It's not convenient to oblige you this time.'

He stared at me like a man thunderstruck. 'Is this a joke, Alfred?' he asked.

'Do I look as if I was joking?'

He took up his hat. 'There is but one excuse for you,' he said. 'Your social position is too much for your weak brain— your money has got into your head. Good morning.'

I had been indebted to him for all sorts of kind services at school and college. He was an honourable man, and a faithful friend. If the galling sense of his own narrow means made him unjustly contemptuous towards rich people, it was a fault (in my case, an exasperating fault), no doubt. But who is perfect? And what are fifty pounds to me? This is what I should once have felt, before he could have found time enough to get to the door. As things were, I let him go, and thought myself well rid of a mean hanger-on who only valued me for my money.

Being now free to visit the ladies, I rang the bell and asked if my mother was at home. She was in her boudoir. And where was Miss Cecilia? In the boudoir, too.

On entering the room I found visitors in the way, and put off the trial of the Spectacles until they had taken their leave. Just as they were going a thundering knock at the door announced more visitors. This time, fortunately, we escaped with no worse consequences than the delivery of cards. We actually had two minutes to ourselves. I seized the opportunity of reminding my mother that I was constitutionally inaccessible to the claims of Society, and that I thought we might as well have our house to ourselves for half an hour or so. 'Send word down stairs,' I said, 'that you are not at home.'

My mother— magnificent in her old lace, her admirably-dressed grey hair, and her finely falling robe of purple-silk— looked across the fireplace at Cecilia— tall, and lazy, and beautiful, with lovely brown eyes, luxuriant black hair, a warmly-pale complexion, and an amber-coloured dress—and said to me, 'You forget Cecilia. She likes Society.'

Cecilia looked at my mother with an air of languid surprise. 'What an extraordinary mistake! she answered. 'I hate Society.'

My mother smiled— rang the bell— and gave the order— Not at home. I produced my spectacles. There was an outcry at the hideous ugliness of them. I laid blame on 'my oculist,' and waited for what was to follow between the two ladies. My mother spoke. Consequently I looked at my mother.

[I present her words first, and her thoughts next, in parenthesis.]

'So you hate society, my dear? Surely you have changed your opinion lately?' ('She doesn't mind how she lies as long as she can curry favour with Alfred. False creature.')

[I report Cecilia's answer on the same plan.]

'Pardon me; I haven't in the least changed my opinion— I was only afraid to express it. I hope I have not given offence by expressing it now.' ('She can't exist without gossip, and then she tries to lay it on me. Worldly old wretch!')

What I began to think of my mother, I am ashamed to record. What I thought of Cecilia may be stated in two words. I was more eager than ever to see 'The Angel of the school,' the good and lovely Zilla.

My mother stopped the further progress of my investigations. 'Take off those hideous Spectacles, Alfred, or leave us to our visitors. I don't say your sight may not be failing; I only say change your oculist.'

I took off the Spectacles, all the more willingly that I began to be really afraid of them. The talk between the ladies went on.

'Yours is a strange confession, my dear,' my mother said to Cecilia. 'May I ask what motive so young a lady can have for hating Society?'

'Only the motive of wanting to improve myself,' Cecilia answered. 'If I knew a little more of modern languages, and if I could be something better than a feeble amateur when I paint in water colours, you might think me worthier to be Alfred's wife. But Society is always in the way when I open my book or take up my brushes. In London I have no time to myself, and, I really can't disguise it, the frivolous life I lead is not to my taste.'

I thought this— (my Spectacles being in my pocket, remember)— very well and very prettily said. My mother looked at me. 'I quite agree with Cecilia,' I said, answering the look. 'We cannot count on having five minutes to ourselves in London from morning to night.' Another knock at the street door contributed its noisy support to my views as I spoke. 'We daren't even look out of the window,' I remarked, 'for fear Society may look up at the same moment, and see that we are at home.'

My mother smiled. 'You are certainly two remarkable young people,' she said, with an air of satirical indulgence— and paused for a moment, as if an idea had occurred to her which was more than usually worthy of consideration. If her eye had not been on me at the moment, I believe I should have taken my Spectacles out of my pocket. 'You are both so thoroughly agreed in disliking Society and despising London,' she resumed, 'that I feel it my duty, as a good mother, to make your lives a little more in harmony with your tastes, if I can. You complain, Alfred, that you can never count on having five minutes to yourself with Cecilia, Cecilia complains that she is perpetually interrupted in the laudable effort to improve her mind. I offer you both the whole day to yourselves, week after week, for the next three months. We will spend the winter at Long Fallas.'

Long Fallas was our country seat. There was no hunting; the shooting was let; the place was seven miles from Timbercombe town and station; and our nearest neighbour was a young Ritualistic clergyman, popularly reported in the village to be starving himself to death. I declined my mother's extraordinary proposal without a moment's hesitation. Cecilia, with the readiest and sweetest submission, accepted it.

This was our first open difference of opinion. Even without the Spectacles I could see that my mother hailed it as a good sign. She had consented to our marriage in the spring, without in the least altering her opinion that the angelic Zilla was the right wife for me. 'Settle it between yourselves, my dears,' she said, and left her chair to look for her work. Cecilia rose immediately to save her the trouble.

The instant their backs were turned on me I put on the terrible glasses. Is there such a thing in anatomy as a back view of the heart? There is such a thing assuredly when you look through the Devil's Spectacles. My mother's private

sentiments presented themselves to me, as follows: 'If they don't get thoroughly sick of each other in a winter at Long Fallas I give up all knowledge of human nature. He shall marry Zilla yet.' Cecilia's motives asserted themselves with transparent simplicity in these words, 'His mother fully expects me to say "No." Horrible as the prospect is, I'll disappoint her by saying "Yes."'

'Horrible as the prospect is' was to my mind a very revolting expression, considering that I was personally included in the prospect. My mother's mischievous test of our affection for each other now presented itself to me in the light of a sensible proceeding. In the solitude of Long Fallas, I should surely discover whether Cecilia was about to marry me for my money or for myself. I concealed my Spectacles, and said nothing at the time. But later, when my mother entered the drawing-room dressed to go out for dinner, I waylaid her, quite willing to go to Long Fallas. Cecilia came in dressed for dinner also. She had never looked so irresistibly lovely as when she was informed of my change of opinion. 'What a happy time we shall have,' she said, and smiled as if she really meant it?

They went away to their party. I was in the library when they returned. Hearing the carriage stop at the door I went out into the hall, and was suddenly checked on my way to the ladies by the sound of a man's voice: 'Many thanks; I am close at home now.' My mother's voice followed: 'I will let you know if we go to the country, Sir John. You will ride over and see us?' 'With thee greatest pleasure. Good-night, Miss Cecilia.' There was no mistaking the tone in which those last four words were spoken. Sir John's accent expressed indescribable tenderness. I retired again to the library.

My mother came in, followed by her charming companion.

'Here is a new complication,' she said. 'Cecilia doesn't want to go to Long Fallas.' I asked why. Cecilia answered, without looking at me, 'Oh, I have changed my mind.' She turned aside to relieve my mother of her fur cloak. I instantly consulted my Spectacles, and obtained my information in these mysterious terms: 'Sir John goes to Timbercombe.'

Very short, and yet suggestive of more than one interpretation. A little inquiry made the facts more clear. Sir John had been one of the guests at the dinner, and he and Cecilia had shaken hands like old friends. At my mother's request, he had been presented to her. He had produced such an excellent impression that she had taken him in her carriage part of his way home. She had also discovered that he was about to visit a relative living at Timbercombe (already mentioned, I think, as our nearest town). Another momentary opportunity with the Spectacles completed my discoveries. Sir John had proposed marriage (unsuccessfully) to Cecilia, and being still persistently in

love with her, only wanted a favourable opportunity to propose again. The excellent impression which he had produced on my mother was perfectly intelligible now.

In feeling reluctant to give her rejected lover that other opportunity, was Cecilia afraid of Sir John, or afraid of herself? My Spectacles informed me that she deliberately declined to face that question, even in her thoughts.

Under these circumstances, the test of a dreary winter residence at Long Fallas became, to my mind, more valuable than ever. Single-handed, Cecilia might successfully keep up appearances and deceive other people, though she might not deceive me. But, in combination with Sir John, there was a chance that she might openly betray the true state of her feelings. If I was really the favoured man, she would, of course, be dearer to me than ever. If not (with more producible proof than the Devil's Spectacles to justify me), I need not hesitate to break off the engagement.

'Second thoughts are not always best, dear Cecilia,' I said. 'Do me a favour. Let us try Long Fallas, and if we find the place quite unendurable, let us return to London.'

Cecilia looked at me and hesitated— looked at my mother, and submitted to Long Fallas in the sweetest manner. The more they were secretly at variance, the better the two ladies appeared to understand each other.

We did not start for the country until three days afterward. The packing up was a serious matter to begin with, and my mother prolonged the delay by paying a visit to her niece at the school in the country. She kept the visit a secret from Cecilia, of course. But even when we were alone, and when I asked about Zilla, I was only favoured with a very brief reply. She merely lifted her eyes to Heaven, and said, 'Perfectly charming!'

4. The Test of Long Fallas

WE HAD had a week of it. If we had told each other the truth we should have said, 'Let us go back to London.'

Thus far there had been no signs of Sir John. The Spectacles informed me that he had arrived at Timbercombe, and that Cecilia had written to him. But, strangely enough, they failed to disclose what she had said. Has she forgotten it already, or was there some defect, hitherto unsuspected, in my supernatural glasses?

Christmas Day was near at hand. The weather was, so far, almost invariably misty and wet. Cecilia began to yawn over her favourite intellectual resources. My mother waited with superhuman patience for events. As for myself, having literally nothing else to amuse me, I took to gratifying an

improper curiosity in the outlying regions of the family circle. In plain English, I discovered a nice little needle-woman, who was employed at Long Fallas. Her name was Miss Peskey. When nobody was looking, I amused myself with Miss Peskey.

Let no person of strict principles be alarmed. It was an innocent flirtation, on my side; and the nice little needle-woman rigidly refused to give me the smallest encouragement. Quite a young girl, Miss Peskey had the self-possession of a mature woman. She allowed me time to see that she had a trim little figure, soft blue eyes, and glossy golden hair; and then, in the sweetest of voices, respectfully requested me to leave her to her work. If I tried to persuade her to let me stay a little longer, she rose meekly, and said 'I shall, most unwillingly, be compelled to place myself under the protection of the housekeeper.' Once I attempted to take her hand. She put her handkerchief to her eyes and said, 'Is it manly, sir, to insult a defenceless girl?' In one word, Miss Peskey foiled me at every point. For the first week I never even got the chance of looking at her through the Devil's Spectacles.

On the first day of the new week the weather cleared up wonderfully; spring seemed to have come to us in the middle of winter.

Cecilia and I went out riding. On our return, having nothing better to do, I accompanied the horses back to the stables, and naturally offended the groom, who thought I was 'watching him.' Returning toward the house, I passed the window of the ground-floor room, at the back of the building, devoted to the needlewoman. A railed yard kept me at a respectful distance, but at the same time gave me a view of the interior of the room. Miss Peskey was not alone; my mother was with her. They were evidently talking, but not a word reached my ears. It mattered nothing. While I could see them through my Spectacles, their thoughts were visible to me before they found their way into words.

My mother was speaking— 'Well, my dear, have you formed your opinion of him yet?'

Miss Peskey replied, 'Not quite yet.'

'You are wonderfully cautious in arriving at a conclusion. How much longer is this clever contrivance of yours to last?'

'Give me two days more, dear madam; I can't decide until Sir John helps me.'

'Is Sir John really coming here?'

'I think so.'

'And have you managed it?'

'If you will kindly excuse me, I would rather not answer just yet.'

The housekeeper entered the room, and called my mother away on some domestic business. As she walked to the door, I had time to read her thought before she went out— 'Very extraordinary to find such resources of clever invention in such a young girl!'

Miss Peskey, left in maiden meditation with her work on her lap, smiled to herself. I turned the glasses on her, and made a discovery that petrified me. To put it plainly, the charming needlewoman was deceiving us all (with the one exception of my mother) under an assumed name and vocation in life. Miss Peskey was no other than my cousin Zilla, 'the Angel of the school!'

Let me do my poor mother justice. She was guilty of the consenting to the deception, and of no more. The invention of the trick, and the entire responsibility of carrying it out, rested wholly and exclusively with Miss Zilla, aged seventeen.

I followed the train of thought which my mother's questions had set going in the mind of this young person. To justify my own conduct, I must report the result as briefly as I can. Have you heard of 'fasting' girls? have you heard of 'mesmeric' girls? have you heard of girls (in the newspapers) who have invented the most infamous charges against innocent men? Then don't accuse my Spectacles of seeing impossible sights!

My report of Miss Zilla's thoughts, as they succeeded each other, begins as follows:

First Thought: 'My small fortune is all very well; but I want to be mistress of a great establishment, and get away from school. Alfred, dear fellow, is reported to have fifteen thousand a year. Is his mother's companion to be allowed to catch this rich fish, without the least opposition? Not if I know it!'

Second Thought: 'How very simple old people are! His mother visits me, invites me to Long Fallas, and expects me to cut out Cecilia. Men are such fools (the writing master has fallen in love with me) that she would only have to burst out crying, and keep him to herself. I have proposed a better way than fair fighting for Alfred, suggested by a play I read the other day. The old mother consents, with conditions. "I am sure you will do nothing, my dear, unbecoming to a young lady. Win him, as Miss Hardcastle won Mr Marlow in She Stoops to Conquer, if you like; but do nothing to forfeit your self-respect." What astonishing simplicity! Where did she go to school when she was young?'

Third Thought: 'How amazingly lucky that Cecilia's maid is lazy, and that the needlewoman dines in the servants' hall! The maid had the prospect of getting up before six in the morning, to be ready to go in the chaise-car with the servant who does the household errands at Timbercombe— and for what? To take a note from her mistress to Sir John, and wait for an answer. The good

little needlewoman hears this, smiles, and says, "I don't mind how early I get up; I'll take it for you, and bring back the answer."'

Fourth Thought: 'What a blessing it is to have blue eyes and golden hair! Sir John was quite struck with me. I thought at the time he would do instead of Alfred. Fortunately I have since asked the simple old mother about him. He is a poor baronet. Not to be thought of for an instant. "My Lady"— without a corresponding establishment! Too dreadful! But I didn't throw away my fascinations. I saw him wince when he read the letter. "No bad news, I hope, sir," I ventured to say. He shook his head solemnly. "Your mistress" (he took me, of course, for Cecilia's maid) forbids me to call at Long Fallas." I thought to myself what a hypocrite Cecilia must be, and I said modestly to Sir John, to keep up appearances. Our private arrangement is that he is to ride over to Long Fallas to-morrow, and wait in the shrubbery at half-past two. If it rains or snows he is to try the next fine day. In either case the poor needlewoman will ask for a half holiday, and will induce Miss Cecilia to take a little walk in the right direction. Sir John gave me two sovereigns and a kiss at parting. I accepted both tributes with the most becoming humility. He shall have his money's worth, though he is a poor baronet; he shall meet his young lady in the shrubbery. And I may catch the rich fish, after all!'

Fifth Thought: 'Bother this horrid work! It is all very well to be clever with one's needle, but how it disfigures one's forefinger! No matter, I must play my part while it lasts, or I shall be reported lazy by the most detestable woman I ever met with— the housekeeper at Long Fallas.'

She threaded her needle, and I put my Spectacles in my pocket.

I don't think I suspected it at the time; but I am now well aware that Septimus Notman's diabolical gift was exerting an influence over me. I was wickedly cool, under circumstances which would have roused my righteous indignation in the days before my Spectacles. Sir John and the Angel; my mother and her family interests; Cecilia and her unacknowledged lover—what a network of conspiracy and deception was wound about me! and what a perfectly fiendish pleasure I felt in planning to match them on their own ground! The method of obtaining this object presented itself to me in the simplest form. I had only to take my mother for a walk in the near neighbourhood of the shrubbery— and the exposure would be complete! That night I studied the barometer with unutterable anxiety. The prospect of the weather was all that I could wish.

5. The Truth in the Shrubbery

ON the next day, the friendly sun shone, the balmy air invited everybody to go out. I made no further use of the Spectacles that morning: my purpose was to keep them in my pocket until the interview in the shrubbery was over. Shall I own the motive? It was simply fear—fear of making further discoveries, and of losing the masterly self-control on which the whole success of my project depended.

We lunched at one o'clock. Had Cecilia and Zilla come to a private understanding on the subject of the interview in the shrubbery? By way of ascertaining this, I asked Cecilia if she would like to go out riding in the afternoon. She declined the proposal— she wanted to finish a sketch. I was sufficiently answered.

'Cecilia complains that your manner has grown cold toward her lately,' mother said, when we were left together.

My mind was dwelling on Cecilia's letter to Sir John. Would any man have so easily adopted Zilla's suggestion not to take Cecilia on her word, unless there had been something to encourage him? I could only trust myself to answer my mother very briefly. 'Cecilia is changed towards me'—was all my reply.

My mother was evidently gratified by this prospect of a misunderstanding between us. 'Ah!' she said, 'if Cecilia only had Zilla's sweet temper.'

This was a little too much to endure— but I did endure it. 'Will you come out with me, mamma, for a walk in the grounds?' I asked.

My mother accepted the invitation so gladly, that I really think I should have felt ashamed of myself— if I had not had the contaminating Spectacles in my pocket. We had just settled to start soon after two o'clock, when there was a timid knock at the door. The angelic needlewoman appeared to ask for her half holiday. My mother actually blushed! Old habits will cling to the members of the past generation. 'What is it?' she said, in low uncertain tones. 'Might I go to the village, ma'am, to buy some little things?' 'Certainly.' The door closed again. 'Now for the shrubbery!' I thought. 'Make haste, mamma,' I said, 'the best of the day is going. And mind one thing—put on your thickest boots!'

On one side of the shrubbery were the gardens. The other side was bounded by a wooden fence. A footpath, running part of the way beside the fence, crossed the grass beyond, and made a short cut between the nearest park gate and the servants' offices. This was the safe place that I had chosen. We could hear perfectly— though the closely-planted evergreens might prevent the exercise of sight. I had recommended 'thick boots' because there was no help but to muffle the sound of our footsteps by walking on the wet

grass. At its further end, the shrubbery joined the carriage road up to the house.

My mother's surprise at the place that I had chosen for our walk would have been expressed in words, as well as by looks, if I had not stopped her by a whispered warning. 'Keep perfectly quiet,' I said, 'and listen. I have a motive for bringing you here.'

The words had hardly passed my lips, before we heard the voices of Cecilia and the needlewoman in the shrubbery.

'Wait a minute,' said Cecilia; 'you must be a little more explicit, before I consent to go any farther. How came you to take my letter to Sir John, instead of my maid?'

'Only to oblige her, Miss. She was not very well, and she didn't fancy going all the way to Timbercombe. I can buy no good needles in the village, and I was glad of the opportunity of getting to the town.'

There was a pause. Cecilia was reflecting, as I supposed. My mother began to turn pale.

Cecilia resumed. 'There is nothing in Sir John's answer to my letter,' she said, ' that leads me to suppose he can be guilty of an act of rudeness. I have always believed him to be a gentleman. No gentleman would force his way into my presence, when I wrote expressly to ask him to spare me. Pray how did you know he was determined only to take his dismissal from my lips?'

'Gentlemen's feelings sometimes get the better of them, Miss. Sir John was very much distressed—'

Cecilia interrupted her. 'There was nothing in my letter to distress him,' she said.

'He was distressed, Miss; and he did say, "I cannot take my answer this way— I must and will see her." And then he asked me to get you to walk out to-day, and to say nothing so that he might take you by surprise. He is so madly in love with you, Miss, that he is all but beside himself. I am really afraid of what might happen, if you don't soften his disappointment to him in some way. How any lady can treat such a handsome gentleman so cruelly, passes my poor judgement!'

Cecilia instantly resented the familiarity implied in those last words. 'You are not called upon to exercise your judgement,' she said. 'You can go back to the house.'

'Hadn't I better see Sir John first, Miss?'

'Certainly not! You and Sir John have seen quite enough of each other already.'

There was another pause. My mother stood holding by my arm, pale and trembling. We could neither of us speak. My own mind was strangely agitated.

Either Cecilia was a monster of deceit, or she had thus far spoken and acted as became a true and highly-bred woman. The distant sound of horses' hoofs on the park road, told us both that the critical moment was at hand. In another minute, the sound ceased. Sir John had probably dismounted, and tied up his horse at the entrance of the shrubbery. After an interval, we heard Cecilia's voice again, farther away from us. We followed the voice. The interview which was to decide my future destiny in life had begun.

'No, Sir John; I must have my question answered first. Is there anything in my letter— was there anything in my conduct, when we met in London— which justifies this?'

'Love justifies everything, Cecilia!'

'You are not to call me Cecilia, if you please. Have you no plainer answer to give me?'

'Have you no mercy on a man, who cannot live without you? Is there really nothing in myself and my title to set against the perfectly obscure person, to whom you have so rashly engaged yourself? It would be an insult to suppose that his wealth has tempted you. What can be his merit in your eyes? His own friends can say no more in his favour than that he is a good-natured fool. I don't blame you; women often drift into engagements that they repent of afterwards. Do yourself justice! Be true to the nobility of character— and be the angel who makes our two lives happy, before it is too late!'

'Have you done, Sir John?'

There was a moment of silence. It was impossible to mistake her tone— Sir John's flow of eloquence came to a full stop.

'Before I answer you,' Cecilia proceeded, 'I have something to say first. The girl who took my letter to you, was not my maid, as you may have supposed. She is a stranger to me; and I suspect her of being a false creature with some purpose of her own to serve. I find a difficulty in attributing to a person in your rank of life the mean deceit which answers my letter in terms that lead me to trust you, and then takes me by surprise in this way. My messenger (as I believe) is quite insolent enough to have suggested this course to you. Am I right? I expect a reply, Sir John, that is worthy in its entire truthfulness of you and your title. Am I right?'

'You are right, Miss Cecilia. Pray don't despise me. The temptation to plead with you once more—'

'I will speak to you, Sir John, as candidly as you have spoken to me. You are entirely wrong in supposing it possible for me to repent of my marriage engagement. The man, whose false friends have depreciated him in your estimation, is the only man I love, and the only man I will marry. And I beg you to understand, if he lost the whole of his fortune to-morrow, I would marry

him the next day, if he asked me. Must I say more? or will you treat me with the delicacy of a gentleman, and take your leave?'

I don't remember whether he said anything or not, before he left her. I only know that they parted. Don't ask me to confess what I felt. Don't ask me to describe what my mother felt. Let the scene be changed, and the narrative be resumed at a later hour of the day.

6. The End of the Spectacles

I ASKED myself a question, which I beg to repeat here. What did I owe to the Devil's Spectacles?

In the first place, I was indebted to my glasses for seeing all the faults, and none of the merits, in the persons about me. In the second place, I arrived at the discovery that, if we are to live usefully and happily with our fellow-creatures, we must take them at their best, and not at their worst. Having reached these conclusions, I trusted my own unassisted insight, and set myself to ascertain what the Devil had not helped me to discover in the two persons who were dearest to me— my mother and Cecilia.

I began with Cecilia, leaving my mother time to recover after the shock that had fallen on her.

It was impossible to acknowledge what I had seen through the Spectacles, or what I had heard at the shrubbery fence. In speaking to Cecilia, I could only attribute my coldness of manner to jealousy of the mere name of 'Sir John,' and ask to be pardoned for even a momentary distrust of the most constant and charming of women. There was something, I suppose, in my contrite consciousness of having wronged her, that expressed itself in my looks and in my tones. We were sitting together on the sofa. For the first time since our engagement, she put her arm around my neck, and kissed me, without waiting to be kissed first.

'I am not very demonstrative,' she said, softly; 'and I don't think, Alfred, you have ever known how fond I am of you. My dear, when Sir John and I met again at that dinner party, I was too faithful to you to even allow myself to think of him. Your poor mother irritated me by seeming to doubt whether I could trust myself within reach of Timbercombe, or I should never have consented to go to Long Fallas. You remember that she invited Sir John to ride over and see us. I wrote to him, informing him of my engagement to you, and telling him, in the plainest words, that if he did call at this house, nothing would induce me to see him. I had every reason to suppose that he would understand and respect my motives—'

She paused. The rich colour rose in her lovely face. I refused to let her distress herself by saying a word of what had happened in the shrubbery. Look back, if you have forgotten it, and see how completely the Spectacles failed to show me the higher and nobler motives that had animated her. The little superficial irritabilities and distrusts, they exhibited to perfection; but the true regard for each other, hidden below the surface in my mother and in my promised wife, was completely beyond them.

'Shall we go back to London, to-morrow?' I asked.

'Are you tired of being here with me, Alfred?'

'I am tired of waiting till the spring, my angel. I will live with you wherever you like, if you will only consent to hasten the transformation which makes you my wife. Will you consent?'

'If your mother asks me. Don't hurry her, Alfred.'

But I did hurry her. After what we had heard in the shrubbery I could look into my mother's heart (without assistance), and feel sure that the nobler part of her nature would justify my confidence in it. She was not only ready to 'ask Cecilia,' then and there— she was eager, poor soul, to confess how completely she had been mislaid by her natural interest in her brother's child. Being firmly resolved to keep the secret of my discovery of her niece, I refused to hear her, as I had refused to hear Cecilia. Did I not know, without being told, what child's play it would be to Zilla to dazzle and delude my innocent mother? I merely asked if 'the needlewoman was still in the house.' The answer was thoroughly explicit: 'She is at the railway station by this time, and she will never enter any house of mine again.'

We returned to London the next morning.

I had a moment's private talk with the station-master at Timbercombe. Sir John had left his friends at the town, on the previous day. He and Zilla had met on the platform, waiting for the London train. She had followed him into the smoking-carriage. Just as the station-master was going to start the train, Sir John opened the door, with a strong expression of disgust, and took refuge in another carriage. She had tried the baronet as a last resource, and he had slipped through her fingers too. What did it matter to Zilla? She had plenty of time before her, and she belonged to the order of persons who never fail to make the most of her advantages. The other day I saw the announcement of her marriage to a great ironmaster, a man worth millions of money, with establishments to correspond. Bravo, Zilla! No need to look for your nobler motives with the naked eye.

A few days before I became a married man I was a guest at the dinner table of a bachelor friend, and I met Sir John. It would have been ridiculous to leave the room; I merely charged my host to keep my name concealed. I sat

next to the baronet, and he doesn't know, to this day, who his 'very agreeable neighbour' was.

Instead of spending our honeymoon abroad, Cecilia and I went back to Long Fallas. We found the place delightful, even in the winter time.

Did I take the Devil's Spectacles back with me?

No.

Did I throw them away or smash them into small morsels?

Neither. I remembered what Septimus Notman had told me. The one way of getting rid of them was to give them to some other man.

And to what other man did I give them?

I had not forgotten what my rival had said of me in the shrubbery. I gave the Devil's Spectacles to Sir John.

7. Between the Reader and the Editor

ARE we to have no satisfactory explanation of the supernatural element in the story? How did it come into the Editor's hands? Was there neither name or address on the manuscript?

There was an address, if you must know. But I decline to mention it.

Suppose I guess that the address was at a lunatic asylum? What would you say to that?

I should say I suspected you of being a critic, and I should have the honour of wishing you good morning.

9: Mountain Mercury

Temple Bailey

1869-1953

The Cavalier, March 1909

Irene Temple Bailey

FAR up the mountain America could see the rural carrier on his sure-footed little steed. At first he had seemed just a black speck against the sapphire sky behind him. Then, as he came nearer, he wig-wagged a welcome with his red bandanna.

America had a little shawl about her shoulders, for, in spite of the sunshine, the February day was cold, and she used it for an answering signal. Then, smiling, she waited.

"You're mighty anxious," said the young man on horseback, as she ran down the road to meet him.

"It's St. Valentine's Day," she told him archly, "and I'm lookin' for one."

He handed her a little box.

"Well," he said shortly, "you've got it."

The girl's eyes were like stars as she untied the string.

"If I'd 'a' known," he went on slowly, as he watched her, "if I'd 'a' known that New York fellow was sendin' you somethin' nice, I'd have gone him one better."

"Oh! " she caught her breath quickly, "but you couldn't go him one better than this, Jeff."

She held up for him to see, a sparkling jeweled heart, swung on a slender chain.

"There's a card in the box," she went on, and read it with eager eyes.

Jefferson bent down from the saddle.

"What does he say?" he demanded masterfully.

"I ain't goin' to tell you." She stood away from the horse. "It wasn't intended for any one but me."

"Well, you're goin' to read it to me." His head was up,- and his bronzed young face was stern.

"I ain't goin' to read it to you. How'd. you like to have me read your letters to some other fellow?"

He waived the question.

"I'm goin' to read what's on that card," he reiterated.

He dismounted and came toward her.

For a moment she seemed to meditate flight; then her blue eyes met his brown ones in defiance.

"You can't force me to give it to you."

"Yes, I can." Again his face was stern. "If you don't give it to me, I'll take it from you, 'Meriky."

Something in his air of quiet determination touched the primitive in the girl. It was thus that men made themselves master of her kind. It was thus they won the women of the mountains.

"Oh, well," she said sulkily— but back in her eyes smoldered admiration.

He took the card and read the verses aloud, and his lazy drawl seemed to add romance to the words:

This jewel, dear, is but the sign
Of my own heart; both, sweet, are thine.
I send them as a Valentine
To one I love.

"I guess he loves you, all right," he said slowly.

"Yes." Her tone was exultant.

"And he wants to marry you?"

"Yes."

Jeff tore the card into little bits.

"Don't! " she cried.

"Let the four winds take it," he said bitterly. " I knew there was trouble ahead when that man came up from New York to paint in the hills. You hadn't ever seen such a man, and he hadn't ever seen such a woman as you— you had the beauty of a wild bird, and he was used to seein' tame ones. That's why he fell in love with you, and that's what would make you unhappy if you married him.

"You ain't fit to be caged in that little flat of his. I went there when I was in New York, and I felt like I was in a trap. He showed me the electric lights that

had shades like flowers, and his pictures, and some old faded rugs, but I kept thinkin' how you'd die among all those tall buildings with all that noise—"

She shook her head, and the color came and went in her cheeks.

"But he'd give me pretty clothes," she said. "Don't you think I'd look nice in a junk silk dress and a pink hat with a feather?"

"You look nice in anything," he said fiercely, " to me. You look nice in that old gingham you've got on, with that worsted shawl around your shoulders. But he'd have to dress you up— and then you wouldn't be the girl he fell in love with in the hills— and held compare you to those city women, and after a while he'd be ashamed of you."

"Oh, how dare you, Jeff!" Her voice'shook with indignation.

"He would," the man went on dog gedly. "You don't talk like them, and you don't act like them— it's kinder to him to give him up—"

"But he said he'd learn me, and give me the things to look right in."

He came and stood over her.

"Is love nothin' but clothes?" he demanded. "Are you willin' to sell your chance of happiness for a pink silk dress?"

She drew away from him.

"I don't think it's very honorable for you to talk that way," she said, "seein' he's the man I'm goin' to marry."

His eyes blazed.

"Ain't I brought you his letters every week since he left?" he demanded. "Do you think I didn't want to fling 'em in the river?"

"Oh, well, you had to bring 'em," was her taunt. "You're the mail-carrier.

"No, I didn't have to bring 'em." His lithe young figure was drawn up to its full height. "I didn't have to bring 'em. I might have flung 'em in the river. I ain't afraid of the. President, or no government officer, when it comes to gettin' the girl I want. But I wasn't goin' to work that way. I wanted you to have his letters. To chose fair and square between us. And now's your chance, 'Meriky. This morning, here and now."

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HE REACHED out and took the jewel from her hand and laid it in his big palm, beside a little rosy heart-shaped pebble, worn smooth by the waters of the mountain stream.

"That's what I brought you for' my valentine," he said slowly; "and at first I was ashamed to give it to you when I saw the present he had sent. But now I ain't ashamed. I'm offerin' you the best I've got. No man loves you like I do— not that artist. He's just taken with your face and' figure. But I've cared since I

was a kid, and I'm goin' to care till I die. I'm goin' to care after I'm dead and meet you in Heaven."

As he flung the words at her the girl caught her breath.

"Oh, Jeff," she whispered, "you mustn't say such things—"

"Which heart will you take"— his voice was tense— "his, that cost a lot of money, or mine, that didn't cost a cent? Which will you take, 'Meriky?"

She shrank from the decision.

"I told you just now I was goin' to marry him," she wavered.

Something in her tone gave him hope.

"Look here, girl," he wheedled; "look here. I want to show you somethin'. You get up here behind me on Baldy, and we'll go back a bit up the mountain."

She stared at him.

"What you goin' to do?" she queried doubtfully.

"I'm goin' to show you somethin'," he reiterated. "You come along, honey."

She shook her head.

"I'm not goin' anywhere with you, Jeff."

"Why not?"

She struggled for composure.

"I don't know," she whispered.

He dropped his hands on her shoulders.

"Look at me." he commanded, and as she raised her scarlet face he said slowly: "You're afraid you'll give in?"

"Oh, I don't know. I don't know."

"You know how I love you, girl," he said simply.

Her eyes, lifted to his, seemed to see into the very depths of his tender soul.

"I'll go, Jeff," she said timidly, and he lifted her on the old horse.

The roads that wound up the hill and into the forest were muddy with the melting of the last snows. As they went along Jeff read to his lady-love the verse that was to have accompanied the rosy pebble heart:

If you love me as I love you,
Our hearts will be forever true.

"It's pretty," she said softly.

"Not like his," Jefferson said. "I can't talk like the city chaps, but I can beat 'em all to death lovin' you, 'Meriky."

"Don't," she insisted. "What have you got to show me, Jeff?"

"You wait a minute," he said.

Deeper and deeper they went into the heart of the woods. About them was the silence of the winter. The bare trees looked ghostly in the pale sunshine.

And then all at once they came to a circle of the pines, vivid emerald among their dead surroundings.

As Jeff guided the horse into the midst of the circle America gasped.

"Oh, Jeff—"

"I built it last spring," the boy said proudly, as he led her up the steps of the tiny cabin; "and I put all the things in it. I never thought of your lovin' anybody else, and I just got ready for you, and thought how you'd like it. And then he came, and at first I thought I ought to let him have you. He was rich, and could give you everything. But after I went to New York last fall I just wouldn't give you up to that kind of life."

He lifted her over the threshold, and for a moment held her in his arms.

"Why, honey," he whispered, "in the mornings we could stand here and see the sun rising through that cut I've made in the pines, and at night the wind would sing us to sleep."

He put her down, and stood away from her, breathing quickly.

"How do you like it?" he asked after a moment, unsteadily, and waved his hand toward the fireplace.

It was a great cavern of stone, fit to hold a backlog that would last a week.

"I could see you kneelin' in front of it," he said softly, "and the fire makin' your cheeks pink. I can't think of any other woman there, 'Meriky."

"Jeff!" There was a note of trouble in her fresh young voice.

He held out his arms to her.

"Come here," he said masterfully, and with face aflame she came to him and laid her burning cheek against his coat.

His voice shook as he looked at her.

"But there ain't any other woman goin' to be there, is there, honey?"

And the radiance in her eyes answered him.

10: Judson Sees it Through

Albert Dorrington

1874 - 1953

The Bulletin, 26 Jun 1929

Albert Dorrington

THE *Araluen* had picked up her gang-ways and was well out of Colombo Harbor. It was going to be a hot run to Fremantle. All the well-known figures were on board, including little Humphrey Judson and his three hide trunks. Humphrey had noted many old faces climbing the gang-ways, the faces of men he had known in Sydney, wool-brokers, stock-breeders from Queensland and the Downs, with here and there a moist-browed theatrical agent trailing the company's props aboard.

And there was Zilla, the fortune-teller, buzzing along the alleyways like a fat queen bee. Despite the fact that Zilla had been previously rejected by the Commonwealth immigration officers as an undesirable, she was making another effort to land, knowing that her expenses would be more than covered after working the ship both ways.

"My brother Amelio keepa da shop in Owstralia," she piped. "He senda for me. Someone speak for Zilla, who was trown out, one year to-morrow. We shall now see if one man on da quay stoppa Zilla from her just right. There-a will be Mussolini to hear from. *Signore*, there-a will be war!"

Undesirable or otherwise, Zilla made her to-and-fro trips profitable enough among the easy-going passengers, eager to listen to her flattering prophecies. Even old Jimmy McNeil had crossed her palm with gold when she told him that his classy Maranoa would win the Melbourne Cup. As everyone on board the *Araluen* knew that Jimmy ate, slept and woke with Maranoa on his mind, it was an easy one for Zilla.

On board also was Lizzie O'Gorman, whose husband lent money at ten-twenty-fifty per cent, without risk to himself or his heirs. Lizzie had her suite amidships, and was returning to Australia alone. Her cabin-trunks were packed with bargains from the Rue de la Paix.

Humphrey Judson was short and round as a Pickwick fat boy, was probably forty and a hopeless munclier of chocolates and tinfoil sweets. It was difficult to assess him. He had been known to leave a profitable game of poker in the for'rd saloon to romp with the kids in the steerage. He had been marked down as a crook by many travellers; but in ten years of constant journeyings not a single complaint had been registered against him. The professional spielers avoided him in sheer disgust, for he lost little and won only small sums, hardly enough to cover his generous tips to the cabin and table stewards.

This night he listened to the voice of Zilla fluting among the honeymoon couples and spinster tourists.

"Leta me see your hand, my preeta leddy. Leta Zilla breeng the magic eye to your preeta hand. I tella fortune to *il Duse*, our Benito, an' alia da preeta ladies of Napoli. I discover dreams of happiness in your life. Zilla from Napoli will gife you a magic chart. It will show love an' -danger; it will show where-a der is money" an' sickness!"

Judson sank with a despairing sigh into a deck-chair. "Gets away with a Premier's salary on a low racecourse tale like that!" he lamented, half aloud.

Within a sheltered corner, away from the glare of the deck lights, a young man lay stretched in a cane chair: Beside him were a slim pair of crutches. He was cheerfully fragile, and responded to Judson's frequent sympathetic glances with boyish grins. He was accompanied by a wistful-eyed girl, tall and pretty as a northern poppy. Yet to Judson's professional scrutiny the scorching breath of a desert had faintly tanned her cheeks.

Towards this frail couple Zilla, the gipsy, pirouetted. "Tella your fortune, my pretta gentleman. You crossa my palm wit a leetle money. I tella you of da fever an' da misfortune you meet among da cotton-growers. Dey taka your money en' your preeta leetle wife's savings. Dey turn you adrift on da desert when you haf no more. Your fortune, my pretta gentleman?"

Judson moved in his chair uneasily at sound of a crisp bank-note rustling in the young man's hand. His voice sounded thin and cheerful above the babel of noises as he placed the money in the gipsy's palm.

"For the love of Mike, Zilla, let us alone! The fever and the cotton's true enough. Try and pick a winner for the Caulfield and keep it to yourself." A soft titter ran along the deck.

A steward passing nodded briskly in Judson's direction. "Young Mr. Chatterton Shirley, sir! Picking up wonderfully in the sea air!" Bending over

Judson's chair, liis voice fell to a whisper. "Cleaned up for twenty thousand pounds! He's broke, poor chap, and different from the young Mr. Chatterton Shirley that treated us all so well when he went out to the Soudan."

If Chatterton Shirley still bubbled with boyish humor, his slender, dreamy-eyed girl-wife was the kind of angel that Humphrey Judson imagined every sick and broken-down kid should possess for a wife. Much better than a mother, he told himself. Nina Shirley was a wife and pal to this fever-racked, rug-covered boy in the deck lounge. They chuckled over things like two children at, a fair. And this four hundred feet of saloon deck beat all the fairs and zoos between Cairo and Cockatoo Island.

At night Judson observed Nina Shirley enter the cardroom and take her place among the staid women bridge-players. Two shillings a hundred. He watched Nina's play from the angle of a professional tourist who had seen fortunes won and lost in a couple of sittings.

She played well and with every nerve in her young body. She played just a trifle grimly, because, as Judson was aware, they wanted money.

He met her one midnight on the saloon stairs a few days before they reached Fremantle.

"Any luck?" Judson inquired, halting for a mornent to break the ash from his cigar.

She looked at him quickly, her eyes aglow with excitement. "I've won twenty pounds!" she told him in a whisper. "Twenty little golden goblets!"

"Good!" Judson sighed pleasantly, although he was past the period when the suggestion of a twenty-pound scoop could affect his pulse. "Stick to the little party you're playing with. Don't get lured to the big-money tables where Lizzie O'Gorman deals the aces. And don't play with those Queensland squatters," he advised in a passing whisper. "They're alligators and eat babes!"

Nina's hand fell lightly on his arm. There was swift understanding in her eyes. A moment later she was racing in the direction of the woollen rug and the cane lounge-chair.

"Poor little beggar! Gone to tell him of her luck! 'Struth! The crows'll get her sooner or later!" Judson murmured, passing to his cabin.

All day the passengers had been preparing for the costume dance that was to take place on the big promenade deck. From nearly every cabin amidships came the sound of feminine laughter and excitement.

Judson observed the purser pass hurriedly along the corridor and enter the stateroom set apart for Mrs. Lizzie O'Gorman. Something had happened ! A few moments later he appeared in the corridor, tense-browed and fiddling with his notebook and pencil. The sound of Lizzie O'Gorman's voice reached

Judson in a sobbing under-breath. Stewards came hurriedly from nowhere and departed. Judson took soundings.

At 6 p.m. Mrs. O'Gorman had taken her jewels from the purser's custody with the intention of wearing them at the dance. She had put them in a drawer, and was called away for only a few minutes by a lady member of the dance committee. Returning to her stateroom, she found the jewels gone! Among the missing collection were five emerald and ruby rings, a sapphire pendant and a tiara of diamonds of rare brilliance and color. A recent valuation had set their market price at fifteen thousand pounds!

Judson knew Lizzie as a woman of wealth and accustomed to the yearly run home. A big rawboned person of fifty-five, with the jaw of a cruiser-weight boxer, she spent little or no time in the land that had lifted O'Gorman to his present state of glittering affluence.

"Keep it quiet," the purser was saying; "no use bleating it up and down the ship. Plenty of time between here and Adelaide to go through all the spielers' cabins. The stuff hasn't left the ship and won't if we keep our heads."

"Fifteen thousand pounds!" Humphrey Judson took a grip of himself. Yet, judging by some of the jewel collections nipped from the dressing-tables of travelling celebrities, the valuation was not excessive.

With a handful of caramels in his pocket, Judson took a turn up and down the promenade. Nina Shirley and Chatterton were resting in a sheltered corner. In another hour the dancers would take possession of the deck. He halted beside the cane lounge.

"Feeling better?" he inquired with genuine interest,

The young cotton-grower shook himself into an upright position, and accepted a caramel with a boyish grin from the irrepressible Humphrey.

"I shall go in for some kind of light farming," the youngster confided, without answering Judson direct. "The Soudan was no place for me. I'll give Aussie a show now."

"And I used to dream of lions"— Nina held out her tiny hand for a caramel— "in that awful Soudan."

"Always a sign of luck to dream of a lion," Judson told her seriously. "Lions always bring luck. Elephants get you into trouble. I lost five pounds at poker one night on account of an elephant dream I had. Wish a few healthy lions would come and cheer me up to-night!"

"Oh, let's talk about farms!" Nina laughed. "Chattelton is really longing to settle in South Australia."

"Farms have to be bought," the young invalid sighed; "I'm such a crock it will be months before I can earn the price of my milk!"

At the first sign of the dancers trooping up from the dining-hall Judson stole to a less-frequented part of the deck. The night was blue at the length of one's arms, the sea a mirror of the unutterable, star-gemmed sky. The ship was a living well of perfumes, of familiar boronia and oils of yasmeen, that floated up from the red-carpeted cabins and corridors. In the shadow a voice was softly prattling.

"Leta Zilla tella your fortune, my preeta lady— Zilla of Napoli, who has the protection of the great Benito."

Judson drew breath sharply as he turned from the shelter of No. 5 lifeboat and confronted the gipsy queen.

"Come, read my hand, Zilla," he greeted. "Here, by this boat: it's quite secluded."

Zilla whirled on him, her dark eyes probing his unemotional face. "I told the preeta gentleman his fate long, long ago," she intoned with swift side-glances along the deck. "You will be vera happy"

"After you've shown me that little lot from O'Gorman's dressing-table!" he interrupted in a whisper. "Then we'll talk about the price of caramels. Have one, Zilla? It will stop that tickling in your throat."

Zilla remained transfixed for an instant, like one staring at naked steel. Her eyes blazed. "You fat crook!" she said in an undertone.

"You fat crook!"

"That's me," Judson admitted pleasantly. "Only you needn't say it twice."

"You peeg!" Her fingers struck like talons at his coat-sleeve. "Feedin' on da work of others. Feedin' on da poor wimmens who take a few twinklets for herself! Peeg, peeg, peeg!"

Judson unrolled a caramel. "Let's come down to the brassware, Zilla! My game in life and your game in life. Try any of your capers on this deck and I'll have you pinched."

"Peenched!" she exclaimed. "Who peench?"

"A fellow named Moriarty, from the water police. "He'll be waiting at the Outer Harbor at Adelaide. "He'll give you a free ride up town and throw you into penal servitude you old bat!"

Zilla shrank into the shadow of the boat, warding him off with her jewelled hands.

"I want to see those rings and the tiara, Zilla!" He waved his finger. "I saw you slip into her cabin the moment she answered the call of the dance committee. I must say, Zilla, you busted open that drawer like a sledge-hammer hitting an egg."

Zilla shook herself until her ear-rings trembled. Rage seemed to blind her for an instant. He stood away, watching her closely.

"I've seen you take money from those poor women in the steerage," he told her. "First day you came aboard you snapped a pound-note from Chatterton Shirley— and it was damn-near his last! I'm no saint, Zilla, but I tell you you've worked this ship like a bushranger."

Zilla's rage quickly abated; her lips appeared to be repeating an incantation. She made a gesture in the direction of her cabin.

"I go feefty-feefty in the share-up," she said suddenly. "Come along, an' look out for da bunk-eyed steward-cat. She follow me here an' dere. Come!"

Inside the cabin Zilla took from the lining of a rug five emerald and ruby rings, a sapphire pendant and a diamond tiara of exceptional brilliance.

"Dees woman O'Gorman sent fora me to cut da cards an' tell her fortune while she dressed fora da dance," Zilla explained as Judson contemplated the jewels in her hand.

"Sent for you!" He regarded her thoughtfully, shook his head as she offered to place some of the gems in his hand. "They are wonderful," he said under his breath. "But you are a great artist, Zilla."

"You will take half?" she persisted, thrusting the five emerald and ruby rings towards his pocket.

Judson backed out of the cabin as though he had been offered a pet snake. "Sorry, Zilla; to tell the truth, I've always found rubies unlucky. You are a great artist, Zilla!"

"Ees that all?" Zilla faced him in the cabin doorway, eyes blazing, chin out-thrust. She had been trapped into a confession of her guilt. Her long, henna-stained fingers dug into the folds of her dress.

Judson held up a warning hand. "Don't worry about your bit of steel, Zilla. I'm not a policeman. You're welcome to all you've taken. I give you my word."

He was gone in a flash, and soon was back in his own cabin.

THE STEWARDS heard Judson singing in the bathroom shortly after daybreak. He appeared on deck among the groups of early promenaders, his cheeks aglow. There had been a short stay overnight at Fremantle. Owing to a strike no one had gone ashore.

"Morning, Mrs. Shirley. How's the boy?" he greeted on the saloon stairs as the crowd trooped in to breakfast.

"Happy as a baby," she told him with a laugh. Then in a lower voice: "There was a robbery in one of the cabins last night. There were police on the gangway while we tied up at Fremantle. A lady's jewels, I believe."

"Serve her right!" Judson said quietly. "Some people treat their jewels like dirt. Actually I've known stewards rescue pearls and sapphires from the

dustpan! A bathroom is simply a place where women leave their rings and watches and bangles."

After breakfast Judson sought a chair adjoining the one occupied by Lizzie O'Gorman. She favored him with a scowl as he stretched himself contentedly in the brilliant sunshine. In the last eight years she had never fathomed his purpose in life. He lived at the best Australian hotels, and was favorably known to the manager at her bank in Adelaide.

"Morning, Mrs. O'Gorman," he murmured. The seats beside them were as yet unoccupied. It was too soon after breakfast.

Lizzie looked big and florid as she wallowed in the health-giving air. She glanced steadily at Judson's figure, his immaculate cravat, his creased pants, his patent-leather shoes resting on the bottom rail. Her hard, blue eye travelled from the point of the shining toecap to the cigar between his fingers.

"What is your line, little man?" she inquired at last.

Judson inhaled a chestful of sea air with gusto. The pink bloom on his cheek was really reminiscent of Pickwick fat boys.

"My line, Mrs. O'Gorman, is pleasure. I watch the Pacific gulls and the travelling turtle of both sexes. There's a lot of fun on a ship if people will only take a look round. Only last night," he declared in a confidential tone, "while crew and passengers were talking of the strike at Fremantle, I had the pleasure of handling your lost jewels."

Lizzie O'Gorman seemed to gather herself into a bolt-upright position to look at Judson.

"You what?" she cried. "You handled my stolen jewels!"

"Seven pieces in all," he assured her blandly. "Stuff from the Rue Kamel, Cairo: value about one hundred piastres! And that's that, if I may say so."

Very slowly and with a painful effort at self-control Lizzie O'Gorman subsided into her chair. A clammy dew gathered on her forehead. For several moments her face was twisted.

"You damned snifter!" she said at last. "What's your game?"

"Watching the turtles," he assured her with increasing good humor. "The wonder is." he added meditatively, "that even old Zilla was taken in by such rubbish. It wouldn't deceive a child."

A frozen silence followed his declaration.

One or two passengers fell into their accustomed chairs. The purser went past, halted near them undecidedly, changed his mind and then hurried for'ard.

Judson followed the purser's movements with a show of interest.

"That fellow," he said in a guarded undertone, "signed your declaration of loss and your claim on the Royal Packet Assurance Corporation for the fifteen

thousand pounds. He attested to the fact that your jewels had been stolen after being taken from his eharge. That written declaration and claim went ashore last night with the mails. The purser is rather a decent sort," he went on steadily, "but he didn't suspect when he signed the declaration that the real jewels he brought from the ship's strongroom are still in your keeping. He doesn't know that you put a fistful of brass and glass where Zilla could steal them when ydu sent for her to come to your cabin."

Lizzie O'Gorman pounded her knee with a clenched fist. "Shut up!" she ordered savagely. "I'm thinking."

"If you think from now till the day of judgment you won't alter the fact that you're trying to swindle an insurance company out of fifteen thousand pounds. I've seen a few good men fall down on these easy-looking schemes that creep into people's heads at night after the wine and the music. Instead of proving a short-cut to Easy-street they end in a wagon ride to gaol."

Lizzie O'Gorman lay back in her chair breathing in stifled sobs. Her red face had become ashen. Judson's voice fell like soft whip-cuts on her senses.

"The danger-point lies in your declaration of loss. You assume that this fat flop of a gipsy Zilla will disappear with your bogus jewels. Nonsense! They'll search her like a common pickpocket when she's going ashore."

"And then?" came from the huddled-up Lizzie in the deck-chair.

Judson grinned as he drew his patent-leather shoes from the rail. "The insurance detectives will be on to your little scheme like starving bees. Zilla will squeal for all she's worth when they rip that stolen junk from the lining of her rug."

"What— what would you do?" She almost choked, unable to bear the silence that followed his warning.

Judson shook his head. "If you try talking to Zilla she'll take fire and yell to the purser and passengers. And when the purser suspects the trick you've played on him he'll lead you down the gangway into the arms of Nobby Jukes from the Adelaide Police Commissioner's office. You won't like Nobby, Mrs. O'Gorman. He's spent his life among insurance swindlers. He'll be waiting on the gangway."

A stifled word escaped Lizzie O'Gorman. All her life she had played the big bluff game. The scheme to rob the insurance people had come as an inspiration. It looked so simple. Yet, with the cold logic of facts issuing from this glossy, pink-cheeked little crook beside her, she saw she had been a fool to tempt Zilla with the bogus gems. She realised too late that there were other ways she might have adopted to substantiate the fact of her loss. There had never been any need to drag in this wandering gypsy. Lizzie O'Gorman clenched her fists.

"Can't you give me a tip, little man?" she begged, as Judson rose to go. "There's nothing of the policeman about you, after all," she added with an attempt at flattery. "You've helped many a lame dog in your day."

He turned on her slowly and then looked at his watch. "Lord, be merciful!" he said under his breath. "It's this yellow-faced Zilla that's going to put you in the waggon. Your written demand for compensation is now on its way to Adelaide."

Judson stared hard at the glittering expanse of water and shook his head. "A ship's a prison," he told her. "The music is coming, and you'll have to stand up!"

THE A*RALUEN* reached the Outer Harbor on time. It was midday, with the usual crowd of loiterers watching the vessel's movements from the distant pier. Everyone was going ashore.

Zilla was squeezed among a group of passengers on the upper-deck. Her solitary cabin-bag and rug had been cleverly sandwiched between piles of shore-going trunks and wraps.

Judson, standing near the funnel-stays, glanced earnestly at the pier. Beside him, leaning on his crutches, was Chatterton Shirley. Nina with him.

Judson regarded them thoughtfully. The boy had been the victim of a gang of foreign land-jobbers. Broken in health, he had been cast adrift to take his chance on the wheel of life. Heigho!

"We're sorry to leave the ship," Nina said with a sigh. "It was a temporary home, at least."

Judson discovered that they were making for the Gawler Hotel, where they hoped to rest for a couple of days until Nina found a cheaper place.

Judson remembered suddenly that his walking-stick and umbrella had been left below. A soft voice hailed him in the corridor.

"Hi, little man, are you going ashore?"

Lizzie O'Gorman peeped from the curtains of her stateroom-door, beckoning desperately.

"I'm off," he told her brusquely. "Can't take any chances."

"Stay awhile," she begged. "Do me a favor and take this ashore." She indicated a small parcel on her cabin table.

Judson drew away, apprehension in his movements.

"Nobby Jukes and a couple of plain-clothes men are taking the air on the wharf. You might get past," he added with a shrug. "One of these days a camel will get through the eye of the needle. Anyway, I wish you luck!"

Lizzie clutched her hands in an agony of despair as the tender bumped alongside. In a few moments the detectives would be on board seeking her out.

"Listen," she pleaded as he moved away. "I don't want to throw my beautiful jewels through the port window. Do the detectives know you?"

"As a gentleman only. But I'm not ready to walk into trouble on that account."

"For pity's sake, listen! My jewels are worth twenty thousand anywhere. What kind of a man are you to see a hunted woman throw the price of a children's hospital into the sea?"

Judson waited to allow a couple of stewards to pass. When they had gone he faced her quickly. "I'll take the stuff ashore," he announced. "But you'll first hand me a cheque for two thousand pounds."

Her eyes blazed. "I'm trusting you with the parcel," she snapped. "You may demand your own terms for the service you've done— after we get past Jukes and the others"

Judson smiled, his fat-boy smile. It was evident her proposition amused him. "I've seen some rather ugly finishes to these jewel-slipping experiments," he replied. "I once saw a little chap like myself try to oblige a nice kind lady, after your own heart, in a similar predicament. Insurance fraud, too! The moment he had passed the queue of waiting detectives, she ran after him and accused him of absconding with her diamonds. He got five years. But she cleared herself from a trap like the present one."

"How will my cheque help?" she quavered.

"At least it will show we're working the swindle together," he retorted, "if you should feel disposed to charge me with the theft of your jewels— after I leave the ship."

Lizzie disappeared into her stateroom.

"Payable to bearer," he prompted in an undertone. "At your King William-street bank. Nothing else will do."

The voice of the second officer was heard requesting passengers to step down the gang-way. Some distance along the deck a couple of plain-clothes men were rifling Zilla's belongings. Her angry protests fell dead on the searchers' ears,

"Nothing but cheap Egyptian rubbish," one of them declared, dropping the rings and tiara back among her weird collection of curios.

While their attention was focussed on Zilla's other belongings, Findlay signed to a red-faced man standing at the gangway-foot. The red-faced man was covering his swift up-and-down glances at the descending passengers from

the shelter of a large newspaper, over which he was bending. He caught Findlay's gesture.

"Hello, Jud!" he murmured. "Anything interesting?"

"Bring your paper up here, Nobby. I've got a touch of gout in my right hand!" Judson confided in a low voice. "Too much sugar. come up!"

Nobby slapped Judson's shoulder as they shook hands. His left eyelid drooped slightly as a small parcel slid into his palm under cover of the newspaper.

"You see, Nobby." Judson explained sadly, "I had to save them from the fishes. Tin Lizzie's little outfit. Same old tale. She wanted the jewels and the money. I'm doing this because I didn't want to see a desperate woman throw emeralds overboard and make your company pay for it. Go easy with her, Nobby. I promise she'll never do it again."

Nobby Jukes wrung Judson's hands in sheer joy. "She's a bad member," he said, "but we'll have to let it go at that."

Judson merely nodded as ho tripped down the gangway at the moment Lizzie O'Gorman emerged from the saloon-way and faced Jukes.

"Pardon, Madame," he began with a grim little smile. "I am happy to say your lost jewels have been recovered. If you will sign this receipt I will return them to you now."

JUDSON entered the bank in King William-street, and received a cheerful smile from Mr. Binker, the cashier. Always at the end of the trip Judson had a few cheques to cash.

"It's a pleasure to see you again, Mr. Judson," he greeted warmly. "Things are going rather badly in Europe, eh?"

"Beastly!" Judson agreed, placing O'Gorman's cheque on the counter. "I really had to rob a tomb in Egypt to pay my expenses. An old game of mine, Mr. Binker, opening tombs in Egypt."

The cheque was in order. Judson took a thousand pounds in notes and allowed the balance to pass to his credit. A few moments later he was outside in time to meet Mrs. O'Gorman rounding the corner of Rundle-street at top speed.

"A neat little clean-up!" she commented bitterly. "I wonder you have the face to come out in the daylight!"

AT THE Gawler Hotel Judson discovered Nina and Ghatterton seated in the vestibule, while an over-heated booking-clerk was explaining the difficulty of finding rooms. All the accommodation was booked in advance. It was Race Week.

Judson beckoned to the clerk. "Mr. and Mrs. Shirley are my friends," he intimated. "My room is at their service if you have no objection."

The book-keeper suddenly discovered that he had none. Judson escorted Chatterton to the room. "My boy," he said thoughtfully, "I'm going to make a proposal. A friend of mine at the Sturt is running a profitable flower-and fruit-farm. He wants to go to Eng- land. Now if Mrs. Shirley will take hold of this little place it would prove a nicer way to Easy-street than buying land in Southern Egypt."

Nina's lips quivered as she caught his meaning. She could run the place until this poor wreck of a husband found his health again. She did not speak. She could not.

Two days later Judson returned to them with the transfer near completion. "Please don't thank me," he begged. "When you are quite settled among the flowers I'll ask you to let me come down and rest for an odd week-end."

"You are going away again?" Nina asked almost in dismay as he turned to the door. Judson munched a caramel slowly, his eyes twinkling.

"My business runs east and west. Get on wfith it now, little girl, and make that farm pay."

Judson went back to the *Araluen*. She was his lucky ship.

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11: Outwitting the Law

Katharine Tynan

1859-1931

The Weekly Tale-Teller, 12 June 1909

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Katharine Tynan Hinkson

JOHN AND JAMES Scully kept an inn on the Portsmouth Road. It was a famous inn in its way, though since the brothers succeeded to its ownership it had changed names. From 'The George of England' it had come to be called 'The Two Brothers,' and the sign, which was a crowned head, had been exactly duplicated on both sides.

John and James Scully were twins; it might be more correct to say that they were two halves of one whole; for no one could tell them apart. In babyhood and childhood John had worn a blue ribbon to distinguish him from James. It was said that there was a further difference is that John screamed more lustily than James. Their mother used to say she knew them apart. Perhaps she did in babyhood, though there were many that doubted it. In later life she was less certain.

Of course, the extraordinary likeness between the two led to endless confusion. It would have been worse in our less simple, more complicated days.

'The Two Brothers' was a most picturesque inn. It had a beautiful black and white front which used to attract much admiration from the passengers going through on the coach. It was gabled and the door projected in a square bay which had over it a little room the same size and shape as the entrance-hall below. The rooms were low, though well-lit by their oriels; and were mellowed with age and wood-smoke to a beautiful colour. They were furnished with good old-fashioned furniture, as old as the inn itself, and there was enough good old china and pewter and silver and brass and copper to stock a museum. A most desirable home for anyone— 'The Two Brothers.'

Outside it was as good as within. There were fine old gardens and kitchen gardens, an orchard, and many acres of meadow-land, with copses and pleasant sheets of water. It had great ranges of stabling and a wide yard with galleries running around it. The coaches all stopped there; and it was a well-known house of call for all travellers on the Portsmouth Road.

The brothers had grown to man's estate seeming to be entirely satisfied with each other and to desire nothing else. But, to be sure, one of them must marry to keep the family going for the inn. The inn had been so long in the hands of the Scullys that they were as proud of it as Sir John Poynings, of Hazelmere, or Lord Fulke of Bastions.

'You must get married, lad,' said John to James.

'You must get married, lad,' said James to John.

But neither seemed anxious to marry on his own account.

The prospect of marriage for either remained indefinite for a time, till Lady Fulke brought home with her a waiting-maid from France— Babette, they called her. She had smooth, pale skin, with a slight ruddy-brown tint through its pallor. Her eyes were the very colour of the October ale for which 'The Two Brothers' was famed. Her hair had the same red-brown colour and was smooth as a looking-glass, except where a stray curl or two fell on her white neck. She had a light, tripping step and the neatest of figures. Infatuated men compared the broken English that fell from her lips to the songs of birds. She was always neatly and sweetly dressed— shining from the crown of head to her little buckled shoes. She had all manners of lovers; and it was known that Lady Fulke had said of her that she was the first woman she had ever had who kept the gentlemen at a distance.

She might have had her pick of husbands— a farmer, a miller, a wheel-wright, a shopkeeper, a valet— she had lovers by the dozen. But a wonder and expectancy came upon the people when it was known that James and John Scully were both among her lovers, and that she was kindly disposed to one of them.

'And that will be the end of the wonderful love between the two brothers,' said the wiseacres.

But they were wrong. When James and John became aware of each other's plight, each was anxious to give way to the other. Babette settled the question for them. She chose James. The neighbours said she didn't know which was which. It was unlikely she should know when those who had watched the Scullys, grow up from the cradle did not. She only laughed her soft delightful laughter and said, to the bewilderment of the folk, that she knew '

parfaitement well.' She could not understand the confusion between the two in the minds of other folk.

'Why, James's hair he curl so. The features resembled much, but the expression, *Mon Dieu*, no, it was not alike at all.'

She was quite sure herself that she knew at all events.

Some time in the spring Babette, to the great grief of Lady Fulke, was married to James Scully and went to live at 'The Two Brothers.'

One would have said before that the inn lacked no attraction, but so bewitching a hostess did Babette make that by contrast the old days, without a woman— and such a woman— were dull and dreary. The amity between the two-brothers was quite unbroken. John did not grudge James his happiness, and so far from being jealous seemed to have transferred a portion of his affection to his brother's wife.

With Babette as hostess— Babette, the maker of delicate French dishes— the inn came to have a greater vogue than ever before. People visited it now who had not in the old days. Occasionally fashionable folk came down from London. It was an idyllic spot; the French cooking was a great attraction as a relief from the perpetual roast beef, which, however, visitors could have if they desired. Never was such a pretty hostess outside an opera; and the strange likeness between the two brothers added to the piquancy of the thing for the fine folk.

The three lived in perfect happiness for a couple of years— happiness only increased by the arrival of a baby who was the image of Babette. John adored the baby, who, in time, returned his affection in full. At a year old Babs began to walk and follow her uncle about. At two years she was his constant companion. James used to laugh and say that the child cared more for Jack than for her own father. Babette would look on well pleased. She had so great an affection for her brother-in-law that— with a difference— she hardly loved him less than her husband. She had compunction over him, too, because she had chosen James before him and John showed no sign of consoling himself

When James and Babette urged him to marry, saying that it would make no difference in their way of living since 'The Two Brothers' was big enough to house two families, John only shook his head. It was as though James's, happiness satisfied him— they being as two halves of a whole— he had no desire to marry. James and Babette and Babs were enough for him. He adored Babette, but it was in a curious impersonal way which had nothing in it that his brother's wife need shrink from.

There came a time when there was an event in the neighbourhood which attracted high folks and low folks alike. It was no less than the hanging of a discharged soldier who had killed a coastguard. The hanging was to take place

at Winchester, and for days before all the country folk were tramping that way, meaning to enjoy the fun and festivity, which attended such ghastly events. But nothing would induce Babette to go. She screamed and covered her eyes were her pretty hands when the thing was so much as named to her.

To be sure, James and John were both going. They set off together in a gig the day before the hanging. They counted to be home the day after it. They set off in high spirits, passing the tramping procession on the road, many of whom rubbed their eyes and stared in amazement at the two figures and faces side by side, each exactly like the other.

They were within a mile or two of Winchester when John who had fallen silent for some time back, suddenly announced his intention of returning.

'Something has come over me,' he said 'that the woman and child will need help. They are all mad to see the hanging. Supposing Ostler Bob and Jemima should both desert her? I've remembered something I did not like— a whispering in corners.'

'If there was anything wrong,' said James, 'wouldn't I feel it, the husband and father, not you? Come along, Jack, and enjoy yourself. How Babette will laugh when she heard how you wanted to turn back!'

John went on a little way, but his trouble increased. The end of it was he would go back. James, who laughed at him, climbed out of the gig at the point of the road where the spires of Winchester began to show clear, and gave the reins to John.

'I shall enjoy it less without you, Jack,' he said, sorrowfully. 'But— you were always an obstinate fellow.'

John drove back at a pace that made old Grenadier wonder what had come to him. He was sorry for the beast, being tender-hearted, who had come within a mile of his stable and must now take the long road back without resting. But it could not be helped. He talked to Grenadier as he drove, explaining things to him, and it would almost seem as if the horse understood that the woman and child, who petted and fed him with apples and sugar, might be in peril, for he shook his ears and trotted along with spirit. It was night when they reached the inn. Within some four miles of it John had caught sight of a couple riding in a carrier's cart who resembled to his mind Ostler Bob and Jemima, the waiting-maid. He could not be sure for the darkness, seeing them only by lantern-light, but his suspicion made him on fire to reach the inn.

The hanging had brought down a good many rough characters from London. Supposing some of them were to break their way into the inn and find only the woman and child defenceless?

The front of the inn, all bolted , and barred, looked secure enough; when he reached it. Grenadier, almost dead-beat, made a last spurt to enter the

stable-yard. John glanced towards the house. A window that overlooked the gallery showed a light: Babette was putting the child to bed. A little bit of a French song floated out to him. He smiled to himself, unharnessing Grenadier and leading him to his stall. Why, he might have stayed for the hanging after all. He came into the yard, still smiling.

He glanced up at the lit window where Babette's slender shape had passed and repassed. Good Heavens! What was it he saw? What heard? There was a stifled scream. A grotesque shadow of a man wearing a wig, with a three-cornered hat, a smartly-cut coat from one side of which protruded the point of a sword, showed Itself on the blind. There was something, someone in his arms. The shapes rocked to and fro in a kind of struggle. He could see the man's hand on Babette's mouth. As he reached the gallery he heard the child scream.

He flung himself at the lit window, having no patience to go round by the doors. The pane cracked. His shoulder was through the glass. The window gave way with him. He was in the room on the floor; springing to his feet, the blood running down his face, into his eyes and blinding him. All the time the child was screaming to madden him.

He dashed away the blood from his eyes. The man had let go Babette, and was advancing upon him in a threatening attitude.

'How dare you intrude on a gentleman, rascal!' he said, haughtily.

John sprang upon him with a hoarse cry. Down the two men went in a struggling mass on the floor. The man— John had recognised him as a middle-aged roué, Lord Lacklands, who was a cousin of Lord Fulke's. Lord Lacklands had his sword. He tried to use it but he was underneath John and had no power. And suddenly it was plucked from his clasp.

'Stab, John, stab!' he heard a woman cry. The next instant the cold steel was between Lord Lacklands ribs; there was a jet of blood from his mouth. John stabbed with a will. In a few minutes there was nothing of Lord Lacklands but a bloodless mass of flesh and a saturated heap of fine, fashionable garments.

John was tried for his life. Lord Lacklands was a nobleman, the possessor of great estates. Was such a one to be wickedly done to death by a common fellow, the keeper of an inn on the Portsmouth Road? If such were permissible why, there was no safety for peers and gentlefolk.

At Winchester John was tried for his life. He defended himself in a speech of simple eloquence which got into the broad-sheets of the time; despite all that could be said or done, John was condemned to death. He had not asked for a long day, and be was not given one. Within a week of his sentence he was condemned to be hanged in front of Winchester Jail.

Here now was a tragedy! The poor people were on John's side. So were some of the gentry. Lady Fulke came and took Babette in her arms, and swore that her husband should go to the King to win John's reprieve. Lord Lacklands had been a notorious evil-liver and had richly deserved his fate. When Babette cried out that it was she who put the sword into the hands of John and bade him strike, and that therefore she should hang instead of John, her ladyship consoled her, saying that a woman should do all things in defence of her honour.

There was a deal of feeling against the judge who had condemned John, who was a loose-liver himself, and therefore little likely to be on the side of virtue. But all that could be said and done could not alter matters. At the moment the country was under the shadow of a national calamity. An amiable princess was dead in the flower of her youth; and the king was plunged in such grief that it was not easy to approach him.

There was but a week to the hanging. The garden and orchard of 'The Two Brothers' were out in the most heavenly bloom. Nightingales were singing in the copses. And in Winchester Jail lay John Scully, awaiting death on the. gallows.

There was a terrible shadow of trouble on 'The Two Brothers'.

Babette was distracted. She saw what no-one else saw, that if John died James would die, too, naturally— they being as two halves of one whole. She would lose not only a dear and devoted brother, but a husband beyond praise. James visibly wasted in these days, when he sat with his head in his hands, neither sleeping or eating.

But a few days before the execution, if anyone had been there to notice it, a wonderful change came over James who had looked to be dying. Babette had whispered in his ear. After that whisper he got up like a man reprieved, went out to the stable yard and ordered, the gig. Bob, the ostler, who was terribly conscience-stricken over his share in the tragedy, got out Grenadier and harnessed him in the gig. He scarcely dared look at James, except from under his eyes, as he stepped into the gig, followed by Babette and little Babs.

'Alas!' said Bob as they drove away, 'there they go to see the last of poor Master John! 'Tis a sad day for "The Two Brothers", for I doubt that Master James'll be long after him. And all to result from the wiles of a female, for had not Jemima led me astray the thing would never have happened!'

James, indeed, kept his miserable look till he was well on the high road. Then he became more cheerful and presently he was laughing at the pranks of little Babs with a discreet laughter which, became hushed when anyone approached.

'There goes poor James Scully to his brother's hanging,' the women said, coming to their cottage doors to look after him. And the men nodded solemnly to him, sparing him a 'good day', for how could any day be a good day to James Scully that saw him drive to his brother's hanging?

And now, mark what happened! By special favour of the governor of the jail John and James were permitted a last interview together. The last the warder saw of them, locking, them in together, was of the two in a tender embrace. When he came back, after pacing the corridor fifteen minutes by the clock, and looked in saying 'Time's up!' what did he see?

People said he must have had a hand in it; but that he stoutly denied.

There on the stone bench of the cell sat not one John Scully, but two!

There was a heap of ordinary clothes newly-warm from a man's body; and both men were exactly alike clothed in prison clothing. The warder stared and scratched his head. He sent for the chief warder, who, in turn, sent for the governor. They all came and stared at the two men, as like as peas, looking love on each other. But which was which, that no man could discover. An under-warder suggested that the wife and child be brought. But at that the others cried "Shame!", the governor leading the cry, although immediately afterwards be tried to look as though he had said nothing.

The governor washed his hands of it. He could hang one man, but, then he knew not which he had tried and sentenced so to the disappointment of some, and the joy of others, the hanging was postponed while a message was sent to London post-haste, to acquaint the authorities with what had happened. The messenger came back as fast with a reprieve. My Lord Fulke had reached the king's ear, although with scant hope to get a reprieve in time to save poor John. Neither the king nor the queen had any tolerance for libertinage, and so the king's messenger brought the order of release for John Scully.

It was said, that the king laughed so much at the manner in which the brothers had outwitted the law that it put him on the road to recovering his natural spirits.

SOME TIME after the Royal Pair jogged down to 'The Two Brothers,' for all the world like a pair of cits going to Hampstead for a Sunday outing. They each gave John and James their hand to kiss; and the homely little queen patted Babette on the shoulder with a kindness that made Babette her slave for life.

'Dell me den,' said the king with his strongly-marked German accent, 'what boot it in your thoughts to blay this most excellent shoak upon chustice?'

John and James looked at each other, then at Babette.

'Vriend,' said the queen, 'I good haf tolt you it was the vife.'

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12: Behind the Jungle
Eleanor Gates, 1875-1951
Frederick Moore, 1881-1947
The Popular Magazine 7 Oct 1924

Eleanor Gates; Frederick Ferdinand Moore

Gates was an author, playwright and movie producer; Frederick Ferdinand Moore was a novelist, short story writer and war correspondent. They collaborated on several novelettes.

"YOU'RE dead are you, Mr. Ramsay," asked Captain Woodford, "that you want me to land you and your traps on that beach ahead there? You're dead sure?"

Dawn was just at hand. Straight before the schooner, upheaved above the dark level of the ocean, was an island which, its top line a saw tooth of needle-pointed mountains, looked to be; in that light, a thing of two dimensions, as if it were only a plum-colored shadow against the deepblue sky.

The skipper was the elder of the two men, big-framed, so that he looked to be emerging— at cuffs, waist and trouser ends— from a short-coated suit of tan crash that showed too much of his checkered gingham shirt. Tipped jauntily on his graying hair was a worn cap, the broken visor shading a pair of spectacled eyes which just now were fixed upon his only passenger in some concern.

Ramsay did not answer at once, but he turned from where he was leaning, sidewise, against the after end of the cabin roof, and gave the skipper a prolonged and inquiring stare. He was on the near side of thirty, but looked even younger under his green-lined sola topi. He was of the wiry, lean, alert type that is given to pushing out across new borders. The trimness of his figure was accentuated by his dress— khaki riding trousers, a khaki shirt with two breast pockets, and high brown boots dulled by much oiling, the whole finished off by a pistol belt that held an automatic, and a second strap, worn over his right shoule on which was slung a pair of binoculars.

"You've said something like that to me before, captain," he observed at last, slowly.

"I've said it before for the same reason that I'm saying it now, Ramsay— I'm anxious about your going ashore on Auka."

"Anxious?" In a face which the salt breeze had whipped to ruddiness Ramsay's eyes, gray, straight looking, fearless, narrowed to give the other a still keener examination.

Captain Woodford went on, a trifle haltingly: "I haven't been definite, Mr. Ramsay, because I didn't want you to feel I was prying into your business." Then, with an embarrassed shifting of the feet, "And I don't want to know it now. Only— well, hasn't anybody said anything to you about this island?"

"Several things, captain." The reply was more than noncommittal; it was provocative.

"I see. And you're going anyhow, eh?"

Ramsay's look veered ahead once more. Now that saw-toothed purple shadow was gone. In its place stood up a crescent of bare, sharp-pointed mountain peaks, their tops brightened to a pale amethyst, their lower slopes dressed out in masses of green. At their precipitous feet, along this south end of the island, ran a white strip of sand upon which a few dots were moving like brown ants.

"Perhaps I haven't heard what you've got in mind," he conceded.

"Auka's got a bad name," asserted the captain. "Ever heard that?"

"No. What's the reason for it?— if you don't mind my asking."

"Ask is just what I want you to do. And I'm mighty glad I brought up the subject again if you're in the dark. Only I wish I could tell you something that'd— that'd—"

"Keep me aboard here?"

"Well, make you cautious, anyhow. But I can't. I can't say truthfully that I've ever heard more than what you'd call hints, and they've been whispered; and all I've seen is eyebrows going up and down, and shoulders doing the same, and men giving you a queer sort of a slant with their eyes when anybody mentions Auka."

"What have you gathered from all this?"

Captain Woodford took off those unseamanlike spectacles, blew his breath on them noisily and gave them a careful polishing. "That things are wrong on Auka," he answered presently.

"Gin? Gun running? Fighting? What, captain?"

"There I am again!" exclaimed the skipper, with a short laugh. "I can't call off one actual charge or tell you a single fact about the place. You know how it

is with gossip in these ports out here— places get a bad name. But the best I could ever get was that there was some kind of hidden deviltry on the island."

"Natives gone back to their old customs, I suppose?"

"Can't say as to that. But things go on— foul play of some kind that ain't healthy for whites to come across."

"Think it's cannibalism?"

"No, not man eating, either. Nobody seems to know just what— except that men 've landed there, and 've never been heard from again."

Strangely enough, instead of appearing checked or discouraged by the statement, there suddenly came into Ramsay's eyes a gleam of something like satisfaction, like triumph— as if he were hearing what he best liked to hear. But as if he were anxious to hide his feelings, once more he faced toward that strip of beach, at which the schooner, as she advanced, was bowing gravely.

"Captain, I can see some of the natives!"' he exclaimed. "Whats more, I'm so farsighted that I'm sure they're women and they're carrying something."

Captain Woodford gave a mirthless laugh. "If they're carrying something," he observed dryly, "they're sure to be women."

The younger man understood. "The women do the work, eh?" he hazarded.

"All of it. So in case you've got any supplies to pack around—"

"They won't pack for me," declared Ramsay with finality. "Not if I know it. Is that what's wrong with Auka— mistreating their women?"

"There is a story I've heard," the skipper rejoined by way of reply. "It's about these Auka women. It's more of a legend than a story, though, because it goes way back into the history of the island before the white man's time. It tells something on this order: Once there was a big storm down in this part of the Pacific and it swept two big war canoes all the way from some other island to this one. The canoes were filled with warriors— about sixty to each boat. When they landed they fought the Auka men and killed every last one.

"The women had disappeared into the jungle. From the steep side of those peaks there, keeping their children from making any outcries, they looked down on the beach and the native settlement and watched the battle. When they saw their own men had been finished they were afraid to return, thinking they might be killed. So they pressed on across the mountains to the slopes of the farther side, which are gradual. The conquerors followed them, discovered where they were hid, killed every boy, and brought the women and girls back as captives.

"I'm told that ever since that time there's been a standing feud between the men and women of Auka. The Auka women say that there are two tribes on the island. One tribe is the women, the other is the men."

"That's why the women do the carrying, eh?" observed Ramsay. "They're slaves."

"Exactly. Now, nobody stands for the truth of that yarn, but I understand there's a strange thing about Auka that makes a man believe it must be true. It's this: Even to-day the natives yonder don't live in family groups. The women and the children live about in huts, here and there. But the men live in several 'long houses,' as they call 'em."

"Club life."

The captain showed a full complement of strong teeth in a grin. "Yes. And it's considered very weak and lady-like in a native clubman if he gives up life in one of the men's houses and goes to live 'alonga Mary.' It's the stylish thing, as we'd say, to make occasional family visits. But that's all. As for the boys, when they come to a certain age, say fifteen, they leave home and go through a ceremony that's like riding the goat. It enters 'em for life in one of the long houses."

"Don't wonder there's a bad state of affairs on the island," declared Ramsay.

"Men dog lazy. They'll fish a little or trap pigs and deer. Rest of the time they just soldier it and break all sleep records."

"And that's the flock of birds I'm depending on to help me through a hard job," grumbled Ramsay, not without a touch of humor. "But isn't there at least one native gentleman you can recommend?"

Captain Woodford thrust out his chin. "I can tell you one to keep away from good and plenty," he answered. "You'll recognize him— biggest man on the island. I've seen him a time or two— alongside my schooner, only, in a boat. He's the one islander that's got a mustache. That's the headman, old Mabu."

"The chief?"

"Well, he bosses 'em, though they say he isn't the chief by rights. Why they say it, I don't know. But I've heard some talk of crooked work in the line of succession— that was a few years back. At present, I can't tell you how things stand— can't remember because I never got it clear. But somewhere in the whole matter there's queer business."

"And this Mabu— he doesn't have a single white man on the island? Not even a missionary ?"

"There's a white there, but he's anything but a missionary. I don't know why he stays, because he doesn't keep a store. And no trade. But it's a heavenly place, as you can imagine by looking at it. And perhaps he's a sort of prime minister to Mabu. His name is Chettle."

"Got control of the headman, you think?"

"Owns him— body, soul and breechclout. Got him in the hollow of his hand. And as there's no other whites around, and as Chettle speaks the native lingo, you'll understand why the Auka people can't speak English."

"That'll make it awkward for me, won't it? H'm. And is Mabu against white men?"

"They say he is. Dead set against 'em! Chettle and his brown gang won't have anybody. Whites don't set foot on that beach there once in three or four years and then don't get any farther than the edge of the jungle."

"Then the chief and his prime minister wouldn't want me poking around up in the interior?"

"Well, I can't answer that, Ramsay. I'd say straight off that you won't get the chance. On the other hand, as I don't know why you're going, it may just happen that they'll be glad to have you come. You see, it depends."

Now Ramsay began to pace to and fro on the deck; and his manner showed subdued excitement. "So only this Chettle's got a foothold, eh?" he observed. "You think, captain, that they put trespassers out of the way?"

"I think visitors just naturally get out. But if they didn't, and anything happened to them, who'd be the wiser? It's a damned desolate place, you know."

Ramsay halted. "Captain," he declared, "I'm going to tell you something. But, first, I'm going to ask you a question: Suppose there's something valuable on the island that neither Mabu nor Chettle knows about, because they're too lazy to look around, or wouldn't guess it was there unless they were shown it? And suppose I go there and find it?"

He was guarding his meaning and the other understood that he was about to hear something particularly interesting. "You've got me flat aback," he admitted, with a wag of the head.

"Captain, have you ever heard any gold yarns about Auka?"

"Gold?" Woodford stared at the younger man. "Gold! I wonder, now, if there's anything in that, Ramsay! What makes you say gold?"

"I'll tell you. In Singapore a certain official in a bank told me that they keep getting consignments of it— not small nuggets, but dust. The consignments are regular. Also, they've been coming for some time. Their character indicates that they're coming from the same locality— the same island. The quantity proves that somebody has struck it rich but is keeping it under cover. Now I happen to know this S'pore banker pretty intimately. In fact, our families are tied by marriage. In some way, during this last year, my kinsman has been able, he thinks, to locate the source of the dust supply. As I'm a mining engineer he sent back to the States for me. Thats why I'm here."

The skipper nodded solemnly. "I see. So that's it. Gold on Auka and Chettle getting rich. The story holds water. I mean that if you've got the straight of things here, it explains a lot— the fact that whites aren't wanted and that Mabu and Chettle are so thick. You see, a native chief would have to do his banking through a white man. If he's got a man working with him who won't give him away to other whites, why, it's a perfect arrangement, isn't it? And it keeps all sorts of men from swarming here on a gold hunt. But—"

Ramsay laughed. "Oh, I know what you're going to say. If there is gold ahead there it'll make my visit all the more dangerous."

"It might. But, Ramsay, why couldn't your Singapore banker be sure about Auka? The man that brings the gold— haven't they asked him questions?"

"I should say they have! But he doesn't know any more about the source of the stuff than we do. As I understand it, he pays so much for each consignment; then he's able to get just enough to pay him for his trouble."

"But the man he gets it from— what about him?"

"Money's been spent to run the truth down. We know four men through whose hands the dust goes. But we don't know the fifth, or the sixth, or the tenth. In other words we don't know Man Number One."

"Ramsay," went on the skipper, "on second thought I believe that when you picked out Auka you were right! Yes, sir, this explains everything! Don't you see? I mean the bad gossip about disappearances and the fact that whites are kept off and the way that Mabu and Chettle stand together, because probably Mabu's the only native on the island who's getting anything out of the diggings."

Ramsay grinned. "I think I'm right, too. That's why I was so tickled when I heard you say what you did a bit ago. As you've concluded, every single thing just seems to nail my guess right. The source of those gold shipments is right straight ahead there!"

"But look here, man!" went on Woodford. "Don't you see that if there is gold in here— a great deal of it— Chettle isn't going to stand by and let you, a mining engineer, into the place?"

"He won't want to," answered the younger man, "but just the same I'm going in."

"You'll meet up with trouble thick as bees on a mango."

"Likely to, yes. But I'm going to take a chance. I've had a tight squeak or two before this, captain, and come through all right. A Hindu seer once told me that the Forces are on my side— whatever that means. Well, they seem to be— so far."

"But if your luck should turn," Woodford said gravely. 'You know, all the gold in the ground isn't worth a man's life.

"Here's an island rich in gold, say. The inhabitants aren't getting any of it, or being helped along by what is, at least, partly theirs. Instead, a man who seems to be a scalawag of the first water stands to get away with a few million dollars.

"You're not going to be safe a minute," argued Captain Woodford, as if he had just made up his mind about the matter for a second time. "That's sure. Every minute you must keep your weather eye lifting. Use your ears, your eyes, your brains, and— if you have to— your gun." Behind the polished lenses of his spectacles his look was anxious.

"Trust me! I'll watch out every second."

The captain pondered for a minute. "I think I may be able to help you," he declared. "Il be coming north in about two months. This morning, when I take you ashore, I'll let Chettle know, in your presence, that on my way back I intend to stop and pick you up."

"That's mighty kind of you!" exclaimed Ramsay gratefully. "I appreciate that and I know it'll help me."

"We'll agree— also in front of him— that on no account are you to go before I come. And Ill say to you that if you're not here on the beach I'm to wait you. Understand? That means he's got to deliver you or there'll be trouble."

"It can't help but make a difference in the way hell treat me," asserted Ramsay. "At the same time it'll make a difference in the way I'll be able to treat him. This island boss won't dare go too far. I'm going to feel easier in my mind, captain, knowing youll surely come back this route."

"I'll be back if a jimmycane doesn't harvest me in," vowed the skipper with earnest significance.

The two men shook hands.

ii

WHEN, shortly after sunup, the longboat from the schooner thrust its prow into the hot sand of Auka, on the beach there was a significant absence of native men.

"Order's probably gone out to keep away from us," Woodford hazarded. "So the gentlemen, knowing they couldn't very well keep us from landing, are going to snub us by staying up in their clubhouses. But they'll watch us."

Of women there were plenty— curious brown beings, ill-shaped, their lips stained red by sireh, their dress consisting of a square of trade cotton or tapa cloth. These came swarming about the strangers, chattering their excitement over having visitors and offering for sale a varied list of the island's products:

oysters from the rocks, fish out of the sea, breadíruit, raw and roasted, pawpaws, and bananas.

All were furtive-eyed. Most of them were heavily burdened. Many had small children astride the hip. Other children were carried by being mounted, each on his mother's neck, small hands clasped about her forehead, small legs to either side of her head. The others were bent with loads of fuel or fruit. One woman, old and gray and witchlike, had swung across her crinkled back the limp, bristly carcass of a newly killed pig.

"Here are the slaves and the drudges," said the captain.

"How nervous they all seem," Ramsay pointed out. "Scared to death. Like children who're afraid of the switch."

When Ramsay's luggage and supplies were landed by a second boat the babble of amazement grew. Then black eyes and black heads were turned away from the beach toward several extensive roofs of bleached. thatch.

"What's the next move?" Woodford wanted to know. "Shall we sign one of 'em to go fetch the chief?"

"I don't believe I care to send for anybody," decided the younger man. "It's my experience that if you're going to try to put anything over in a cheeky way, why, the more high-handed a man is, the better. So I'm not going to ask permission, or wait around. Before you go I mean to be settled under my own canvas."

A site for the tent was chosen in short order; then, while the women of Auka lingered, exclaiming and marveling, several of the sailors put up Ramsay's commodious cloth house under the supervision of Captain Woodford. Into it went the various pieces of luggage, the boxed stores of provisions, and other supplies that were cased in tin, all so stacked as to form a circular wall.

"Haven't they ever seen a tent before?" asked the younger man, struck by the conduct of the women.

The captain laughed. "That isn't what's the matter," he answered. "What they're not used to is seeing men do any work."

One stayed a little apart from the others, farthest away, and on tiptoe, ready for flight. This was how it came about that Ramsay was able to note her carefully. She was young— not more than sixteen or seventeen, her hair held back from her oval, brown face by a strip of yellow cloth. Slender, she was, and as wild-eyed as a deer. Seeing herself observed, suddenly she gave a start and was gone.

Ramsay was fully settled before any male of the island made his appearance. The newcomer was a signal for the headlong scattering of the clustered women, who sped in all directions.

"The chickens go," announced Woodford, "and here comes the hawk."

It was Mabu. One unique feature made that evident— the heavy black mustache. Black was the predominating color of the chief, a huge, burly fellow, clouted, but otherwise naked, armed with a long fishing spear, and gayly adorned with a tattooing that laced his body in a colorful net.

At closer range he displayed other interesting features. His chest was slashed into deep furrows and high ridges, this being, in his tribe, the savage mark of manhood. His head was matted with hundreds of short, tight ebony curls. He had small narrow eyes like the eyes of a serpent. To either side of each pupil in the small area of white there were scarlet touches where the tiny blood vessels had broken.

His nose, through which was thrust no ornament, was Semitic in type, rather than Negroid, and he had the long, thin jaw of a white man. His parted lips showed him to be yellow toothed. When he halted he thrust forward a foot that was calloused almost to the hardness of a hoof.

"Going to be cold in your reception of him?" asked Woodford. "What's the proper thing in this case, Ramsay? A present?"

"A gift would be considered a sign of weakness," Ramsay answered. "So would a smile. He's been sent to look me over and make a report. I'll stake him to a cigarette and let it go at that."

Mabu took a leisurely survey of both men while he puffed Ramsay's offering. Presently, having said nothing, he turned himself about and went stalking away, using his spear as if it were an alpenstock.

"That's his way of letting us know we're not welcome," Ramsay explained.

Mabu was gone and there were only a few children loitering near, craning and whispering, when a score or more of the islanders came past, but rather as if by accident than design. When they were close they halted and stared, their faces set and unsmiling.

"Committee of welcome," observed RamSay ironically.

"Sent to give us a scare," added the captain.

They were young. But among them was not one so large as the chief. However, what they lacked in height they made up in straightaess of carriage. But their bodies were undeveloped. Down the leg they showed too much calf, a sign of inactivity. In spite of their evident lack of exercise each one of them was inclined to be overthin.

Their only weapons were light spears tipped with iron. The earrings they wore were of bone; their armlets were of brass wire or colored beads. A few had tin bands about the forearm or bracelets of iron.

"No sign of gold," Ramsay pointed out.

He and the captain made note of their appearance and attitude with as much indifference as possible, giving the group no prolonged stare, only an

indifferent glance or two. Presently, without having uttered a greeting, the group suddenly made off, plunging out of sight among the trees.

"Well, how do you feel about 'em?" the captain wanted a know.

"The only chap I'm concerned about," returned Ramsay, "is the prime minister."

The sailors went back in the longboat. Woodford and Ramsay set up the latter's folding cot and arranged the mosquito net. Already the captain's men had gathered wood for the cooking fire and for a bonfire which was to be lighted later on. It was not the younger man's intention to return to the schooner even for supper. He got out his cooking kit, went to the near-by jungle edge for fresh water, put coffee over a flame, and the two sat down to smoke and wait.

But it was not until toward evening that the white counselor of Auka Island made his appearance— a tall man, not so heavy as Mabu, and not so picturesque. Instead of a breechcloth he had on a pair of faded blue trousers which had been cut off unevenly just above the knee. A worn cartridge belt held them in. Under this, its butt of blue steel half concealed, was thrust a full revolver.

He was a coarse-featured man, his full mouth overlong, with a tendency to droop at the ends, his under jaw protruding, so that his expression reminded Ramsay of a bulldog. To look at, he appeared to be ignorant; but his eyes, which were striking, had in them a malevolent keenness. They were not only small eyes and set close together, but they were unnaturally round. Above each the hair of the eyebrow, instead of arranging itself in a curving line, was bunched and grew long, so that it formed a thick tuft.

As he halted before the tent he took a Chinese pipe from his mouth. "How-dydo!" he began, his traveling glance making the salutation general. There was an unpleasant nasal note in his voice.

Neither Ramsay nor Woodford was more than barely cordial. "Give him a cool reception," had been Ramsay's decision. "Independence is what this gentleman won't understand, especially as he thinks he's running Auka à la king."

Without being asked to, Chettle sat; then leisurely, through the haze of his own smoke, by turns he eyed the other two, those round eyes squinting, his under lip pendulous, his big sunburned body exuding a rank odor of tobacco.

"I suppose things go about as usual with you," Woodford inquired, but without any real show of interest, "since I saw you last?"

Chettle's retort was a question: "So you been here before?"

"Oh, quite some time ago."

"M'm-huh."

He turned to Ramsay next. He did not ask any questions, or volunteer any remarks. What he did was to stare. As the younger man returned his look he held it unpleasantly long. Then, detail by detail, he noted carefully the stranger's dress. The keynote of his whole scrutiny was a bold impudence.

Presently he spoke: "Travelin' for pleasure?"

Ramsay gave him a cool smile. "I'm a petrologist."

"What's that?"

"A student of rocks and stones."

"Got plenty of 'em here."

"Naturally." Then seizing this opportunity to be frank concerning the object of his coming. "But have you ever noticed anything unusual about the rocks of Auka? Have you got any marble, or granite, or ore rock— that is, I mean quartz?"

For a long moment Chettle did not answer. Then, "I don't know much about rocks and so forth," he observed with something more than a touch of irony. "Plenty of black lava hereabouts."

"It's not a big island," Ramsay observed. "It won't be much of a job to study."

"Not much," returned Chettle. Now there was a new note in his voice—a challenge.

Ramsay caught it. And instantly opened the question boldly. 'Never found any signs of gold here, have you?" he asked.

Chettle's look wavered. A perceptible tremor passed over his face. Then, as if attempting to recover himself, he sat straight and grew muscularly tense. "Go-o-old?" he drawled, not able, however, to hide unmistakable emotion. "Whatever give y' that idea?"

"The results on other islands in these seas," Ramsay answered.

Chettle humped his shoulders as a sign of his disbelief. "Ain't no gold on Auka," he asserted, still avoiding the other's eyes.

"Well, here's where you may get a surprise,' Ramsay went on. "I'm a miner. When I've had a good look over the island I'll know."

Chettle nodded. "I suppose so," he returned.

Now Captain Woodford took a share in the conversation. "Mr. Ramsay'll want to take a jaunt into the interior," he said.

"I'll want to start in from the north, where all the streams are," Ramsay supplemented. 'You see, if there's any free gold on Auka it'll show itself in the stream beds. Of course, if I find anything worth while, you as headman, and the people of the island, will have to be paid fairly for the right to mine."

Chettle had ignored the captain, as if he felt resentment both for the latter's presence and interference. But as Ramsay finished speaking he showed

a sudden and surprising affability. Picking up a short length of bamboo, and squatting on the heels of a pair of rubber-soled cloth shoes, he scraped smooth the dry sand between him and Ramsay and drew an outline.

Roughly what he shaped was an arrowhead with serrated edges. Its base was to the north, its tip to the south. Crisscross marks located the mountain chain that, curving from east to west, loomed over the settlement. Northward, from the farther slopes of these mountains, ran three diverging rivers.

"Here you are," he declared frankly. "Auka's three-cornered, as you might say. To get up behind the mountains we sail along the east coast, round the northeast corner, and land somewhere along the north end. From there the climb's easy."

"I want to take it slow," Ramsay told him.

Once more the skipper broke in. "You'll have all the time in the clock," he remarked carelessly. "Because as I said before, it'll take me a full two months to come by for you. But I won't be in any hurry either. So if you're not on the beach when I anchor, here I'll wait till you turn up."

Instead of seeming troubled or annoyed by the captain's announced plan to return to Auka, for some reason Chettle appeared to be pleased—at least so it appeared to the visitors.

"You'll need men for your trip," he pointed out to Ramsay. "But that's one thing we've got a plenty of—good strong Kanakas. Leave that to me and I'll see that you get the right gang."

"Thanks." A meaning glance shot from Ramsay to the skipper. "I'll pay them well. But— I don't want to give you too much trouble, Mr. Chettle— any responsibility. By the way, what about the climb up those streams? I suppose it'll be pretty stiff work getting through from the coast."

"Not a-tall! Not a-tall!" vowed Chettle emphatically. "The men you take'll know how to break trail through jungle. If you take enough of 'em, so's each one don't have to be loaded down too much, why, you'll make it easy."

"Splendid. Your advice is going to be very valuable to me. And I want to ask, can you suggest a native who'll be able to act as guide on the trip?"

Chettle fixed those round eyes upon Ramsay. "There's just as many guides on Auka," he declared, "as there is men. So that's one thing you won't have to worry about. Anyhow, as I don't get much chance to see new white folks once in a coon's age, while you're on the island I'm going to Stick around with you. So I'll hike along with you as guide."

Captain Woodford stirred, then rose. "I'll be signaling for my boat now," he observed. "Because I must be on my way south. Im glad, before I leave, to know that Mr. Chettle's planning to go with you, Ramsay. I know he'll look after you and have you back here on the beach two months from now when I

come by. So remember what I say: Here I'll be and here you must be— dead or alive."

iii

IN THE NEXT few days Ramsay was able to learn several things concerning the situation on Auka. He confirmed what Captain Woodford had said about Chettle's being the real ruler of the island and about the illtreatment of the women. He discovered that laziness was the prevailing shortcoming of the males and that there was not even one small plantation of any kind under cultivation. Also, though elsewhere in the South Seas native children were being schooled and given moral and medical attention, on Auka they were wholly neglected.

There was one thing which he suspected, but as yet could not prove: That the men of the island, from the youngest to the eldest, were being controlled through the use of a powerful liquor, either of native or foreign make, which was being furnished them in abundant quantities. What else could account for the strange, wild sounds that, of a night, came down to him through the palm grove from the long houses hidden in the jungle?

He was to learn still another thing, this when he had been on the beach a week, with Chettle still delaying the start of the expedition on the pretext that certain men whom he wanted for the trip were away on a hunt. And this other thing which he was to learn was to prove the most surprising of all.

One night, late, as he lay asleep just within the door of his tent, the sound of a step roused him. Suddenly he found himself awake, sitting bolt upright and on the alert for treachery. Next, he saw, standing on the sand strip in the full moonlight at a little distance away, the figure of a man.

It was a strange figure— nude, tall and gaunt. To one side of a face which could be seen only dimly fell a long black skein of straight hair that was like the tail of a horse. As the light glinted on a pistol in Ramsay's hand a voice spoke, a deep voice that was strikingly musical but low and cautious.

"A friend to talk with the stranger." The English was good but touched with a curious accent, the chief feature of which was a certain preciseness.

"Come this way," Ramsay returned. He was kneeling now, facing directly out. Behind him and to either side that barricade made of the luggage and stores was more than a partial protection against a bullet. As the figure moved slowly nearer the tent, while he watched it closely he also listened intently for any movement of a confederate.

When the figure was ten feet away, "That's far enough," declared Ramsay. "Who are you?"

A prompt halt. The man so near was more striking in appearance than ever. About his loins was a narrow breechcloth; about his forehead, to keep back the hair, a winding of vine. In spite of that long mane of black, because of his speech Ramsay took him to be a white man; for the broad chest was unmarred by healed stripings of cut flesh, and his arms, hanging at his sides, were clean of tattooing and unadorned by bracelets or beads.

"This be Ammar-al," he answered, as if Ramsay would understand.

So this was a native! "I've never heard of you," returned Ramsay.

The visitor gave a quick, understanding nod of the head. "The women, they had much of fear," he explained.

"What do you want?"

"To say— swift— what you must know.

He leaned forward and. Ramsay saw a strange and a nobly beautiful face. The skin of it was not so dark as was the skin of any Aukan whom he had seen. Plainly it was not darker than olive. The nose, instead of bending inward just between the eyes and spreading out widely in thick nostrils above the upper lip, was high and thin and straight. As for the eyes, they were not small and nipped in at the corners, but large and set wide apart. What their color was he could not tell. They looked black.

With his pistol Ramsay pointed at a spot before his tent opening. "Sit down."

Ammar-al made a long step forward. As he again came short, out of the jungle toward the left sounded the call of some night bird, quick, but soft, plaintive, low. He gave a start and turned his head that way. "I will sit another time," he whispered. Now, no. They tell me to go back. But I say this, friend: You will not know all true things of Auka —and live."

That was all. Before Ramsay could reply, or rise, the other was gone, running swiftly down along the beach. Behind him as he fled streamed his long shadow, like a floating mantle.

A moment, and that shadow joined itself with the shadow of the jungle. Ramsay, still looking at the dark spot where the other had disappeared, was almost ready to believe that his senses had deceived him and that the man had never come.

iv

AND NOW it was Ramsay who was anxious to delay the start, determined to speak again with that strange visitor of the night and learn more from him. When, three days later, Chettle, on his way for a morning dip in the sea, stopped long enough to say that the men who had been away had returned

and that the boats could be loaded, Ramsay, while expressing great satisfaction over the news, secretly resolved to make immediate departure impossible.

"I'm not feeling any too well," he declared. "Don't know just what's the matter, but my bones ache."

"Dengue fever, maybe," said Chettle, blinking those tuíted eyes.

"You've just about hit it," the other conceded. "I'll take some quinine for a day or two and keep still."

That day, and the following two, he kept to his tent, lying down most of the time and rarely showing himself. Between sunup and night he contrived to sleep a good deal, which made it possible for him to stay awake during the night. And it was midway of the fourth night that what he was expecting so anxiously came to pass.

The tall, gaunt, unclothed figure appeared as before, running up the sand swiftly. And in a moment Ammar-al was seated close to Ramsay, his legs folded under him, the light of the moon full in his face. Ramsay was able to see that this strange visitor of the night was part white, part native. The proof of this lay not only in the light tint of the skin, but in his eyes. They were a light, clear blue!

"I can stay only a short time," he told Ramsay, panting with his run.

"Chettle doesn't know you are here?"

"He thinks I am in the prison place."

"Prison! He's got one, has he? That's why he hasn't let me wander around as I'd like to!"

"For an hour I have been let out— but I must go back soon."

"Why has he locked you up?"

"I am true chief of Auka."

Ramsay stared. He did not question that this man was of high rank. But if he were the island's chief, why was he not properly tattooed and ridged across his chest with the knife?

"He likes Mabu better," added Ammar-al. "So he keeps me out of his road. Mabu is easier for handling."

"Then coming here to see me like this— it is dangerous?"

"Chettle and his men are asleep. Even the man who always watches you is asleep."

"Ves, but are you not afraid they will wake up?"

"No," was the answer. Then speaking quick and earnestly, and leaning forward, a hand resting on either knee, "I said before, if you know too much about Auka you wil not live. But you have stayed here, close by the edge of the water. That is good. What of the days to come? Do you keep here?"

"I'm going around to the northern side, and from there into the center of the island."

Ammar-al gasped at the news, lifting and dropping his hands.

"No? What do you hunt? Deer? Pig?"

"Gold."

"Ah!" He gazed beyond Ramsay, deep in thought.

"You have heard there is gold here— or not?"

"Our men lie upon their bellies and blow upon the river sand. The sand is driven away by the breath and a little yellow is left— perhaps a piece made smooth by long washings of water. By blowing, each man is able, of a day, to bring away some of the yellow from the gray, and this he trades to Chettle."

Ramsay took a deep breath. So it was true! There was gold on Auka! Probably a great deal! Which would indicate that he had chosen the very island which was furnishing the S'ngapore bank with shipments.

"I am interested to hear what you say."

"It is dangerous to know."

"I understand. But if I made a bargain with Chettle, so that he will gain more than he gains now?"

"Now, whether he gets much or little, he gets all. Can you offer him all?"

Ammar-al shook his head. "You would be in danger. I know. All the reasons I cannot say, because I do not know all the reasons. Only, some things are done here which are against the good of the people. These things I hate. But the people love them. That is why they are against me— are glad to see me fastened away— and follow Chettle."

"What are these things?"

"Palm wine is one, and also gin is one. By the word of the coast guard these are taboo."

"I understand. But if the women find that you are out of your lockup won't they tell on you?"

"Some would. But only one woman knows— the one who sets me free. On Auka it is believed by the men that the women, if they go about in the dark, meet the spirits of the men of their own tribe, who were slain, and are loved by them. So it is forbidden for a woman to leave her hut after sundown."

"But you spoke of other things beside drink. What do you mean?"

"Gambling. And the whipping of women. You have seen how the women go?— timid, always, and stealing about swiftly, not daring to disobey, or rest. Also, I hear whispers of matters which are worse, only of these I do not know."

"Ever had missionaries here?"

"Back a long time. Not since the man who teaches me to speak your tongue. He was the last. One day he spoke of his wish to climb to the highest

peak on the island. He went, and Chettle, then a trader, went with him. The teacher never came back."

"Killed?"

"They said he came to a steep place and fell."

"And you think they will try something of the kind on me?"

"I know it."

"But why haven't they got rid of you?"

"They cannot shut the mouths of all the women. And they fear what the women might tell."

"You're pretty popular with the women, eh?" Ramsay smiled.

He was rewarded by an answering smile, the first he had seen on that grave face. "Yes. You see, they do not hold that I am of the men's tribe."

"How does that happen?"

"I am the son of an Aukan woman and a man of white blood." As he talked, through his hands he drew that long black hair that was like the tail of a horse.

"I see. That explains it. I know the story of the tribes. But, Ammaral"— Ramsay knew he was hearing the truth, and felt that there was no evil craft in this man— "I'm not going to be frightened out of seeing the streams that fetch down he gold. Can you give me any good advice about my trip?"

"It would be better for you if you did not go."

"I've made up my mind."

"Then I would say this: Visit first the middle river. Never go unarmed. Be watchful always, night and day. Do not trust any one. If you see that you are to be attacked, shoot at once, and shoot to finish."

"I'll do that."

"Now I will say a thing of wonder to you: I am afraid for your life. But for years I have been hoping for a man of your kind to come— to come for any reason. Because by coming he might help me and my people. I feel that you are the right man."

"Well, I don't promise that I'll be able to rid the island of our friend Chettle," countered Ramsay.

"We cannot tell how all this will turn out," Ammar-al answered. "But I must think how I can help you. And if I can help you, will you then help me?"

Ramsay put out a hand. "We'll shake on it," he said heartily.

As their fingers met, again, from somewhere up beyond the belt of tall palms there came that call which was like the note of a bird, and Ammar-al rose with Ramsay's hand in his.

"Good night— I will come again. if I can't, I shall do all in my power—"

He turned and sped. And once more Ramsay was left to wonder and conjecture. He took the whole of the night for it, not being able, even toward daylight, to fall asleep.

"The real chief!" he marveled. "And a prisoner! That would be news for Woodford! And he's quite a human being, or I miss my guess! But what are the other things that are wrong with Auka? Something queers going on here—something even this chap doesn't know. And there's gold here! Il bet Chettle is as rich as a maharajah and getting richer every turn of the clock! Probably's got a million now, as the captain thinks, but is hanging on for more. Well, just as Ammar-al says, if Chettle can help it he won't let me know what's here and live to tell about it. On the other hand, if things go right for me and I can find out what I want to know and manage to get the upper hand of this precious white incubus, why, I've got Ammar-al on my side, and the women with him, and the men can always be bought."

Twice a day he had been giving his firearms a close examination, making sure they were clean of rust and in perfect order. In this task he occupied the hour of the dawn.

"It's a chance," he told himself, and could hear his own heart pounding under his shirt. "And if the old Hindu's right this time, if the Forces will stay on my side—"

v

REPEATEDLY Ramsay turned over in his mind the question of his danger. He did not minimize it; neither could he bring himself to feel that things would go wrong with him. But in case they should, he was anxious to study out a way by which proper punishment might follow for Chettle, the island be ridded of him, the people loosed of their virtual slavery, and the true chief of Auka restored.

He determined to write out a report of the two visits of Ammar-al and tell of the latter's information and warnings. This he did, stuffmg the pages, which were addressed to Captain Woodford, into a greenglass bottle which he corked and buried in the sand in the very center of his tent. If Ammar-al could come again before the boats were launched for the trip north he would show the young chief where the bottle was hid.

But if Ammar-al could not come again? "Why didn't I ask him to make known to me some woman that could be trusted!" he mourned.

About the advisability of going he had not changed. "They lie on their bellies and blow the sand," he recalled. "And in that primitive way they manage to get a good lot of gold. What couldn't be cleaned up if proper methods were used! Well, I'll see that Ammar-al and his friends get what's

coming to them if Pm helped through this. Because there's going to be enough for everybody!"

At the end of the week that followed he found that Chettle was growing impatient on the score of any further delay. Twice each day the boss of Auka appeared at Ramsay's tent, inquiring about his state of health and reminding the stranger of an oncoming change in the monsoon— a change that would make the proposed trip, if not actually hazardous, then certainly unpleasant.

"I won't go if a big blow's on," he declared. "And I won't let the boats go."

There came a morning when Ramsay dared no longer delay his decision. "I'm feeling much better," he admitted. "Suppose we say the day after to-morrow."

"Settled!" Chettle returned, the heavy down-hanging lips spreading in a grin.

All that day and all of the next Ramsay slept as much as possible. That night and the night following he kept on the alert.

Ammar-al did not come. But in the latter half of the second night, as Ramsay sat watching and listening, he heard a lightrunning patter of feet and the breathing of a runner. Rising to one knee and looking out he saw the one who was approaching— a short, slender figure. As it came abreast the tent it paused, on tiptoe, as if ready for instant flight. And Ramsay recognized the girl he had noticed the first hour of his arrival— that one whose eyes were like the eyes of a deer and whose hair was tied back by a strip of yellow cloth.

She did not speak. Instead, as she caught sight of his face she beckoned him, advanced a step, beckoned again, and more insistently, then as he came out to follow her led away along the beach, hurrying in the direction which had twice been taken by Ammar-al.

At the surf edge, away from the palms, the light was almost as bright as day. But while Ramsay could see about him plainly, he could not be sure that he was not being watched, since the trunk of any tree might be concealing an observer. However, despite the risk, he determined to go on. If this were a trick of Chettle's, his own weapons were ready and he would make them score for him; but because his guide was a woman, Ramsay felt sure that he was being taken to the deposed chief.

When, at the bare heels of the native girl, he reached the wide, shadowy band which marked the edge of the jungle, she halted, turned those scared eyes on him and held out her hand. He took it with his left and she led him into a blackness which was so dense that it seemed palpable, like a thick, warm mist. But she knew the way in the dark and at once his feet could feel the path which was taking them through what from the moonlit beach behind had appeared to be an impenetrable tangle of growing things.

They went slowly and cautiously, making little noise. In Ramsay's free hand he held an automatic pistol, crooking the arm before his face to guard against the branches that hung across the trail. Thus the two traveled until there showed, ahead, a shield of dazzling light.

It puzzled Ramsay and he halted. "Can that be the sky?" he asked himself.

His guide did not urge him to go on, but waited, not stirring. Presently, close at hand, some one coughed. Then she drew him forward, bringing him out of the jungle to the natural wall of trees and vines surrounding a little clearing. And he was able to see that what had startled him was a small hut, square built and with a sloping roof, upon which the moonlight glinted with a brightness that was almost blinding.

"Is it made of glass?" Ramsay wondered.

"Come, Mr. Ramsay."

The voice was Ammar-al's. Relieved, Ramsay stepped into sight, the giri still preceding him. Ten feet more and he knew that the shimmering structure before him was made of new, unrusted corrugated iron, and guessed rightly that this was the island prison.

In the nearest side of the hut a low, narrow half door opened, and through it came a whisper: "Come in. Tani will keep watch."

Ramsay stooped and entered. But what kind of room he came into he did not know, for here once more was pitch blackness. The heat of the place was almost unbearable.

"I began to be afraid I wouldn't see you again before I left," he told Ammar-al. "What's been the trouble? Is Chettle keeping his men sober?"

"Not that," was the answer, "but this."

Ammar-al's hand reached to touch. his visitor, find one of the latter's hands, and guide it floorward until it came in contact with a hard surface that felt like polished stone.

"Leg irons, eh?"

"And Chettle does not think that any woman would dare to break the taboo and leave her house at night when the spirits are about."

Losing no time, Ramsay sat and told of his written message to Woodford, of the bottle, and the spot where it could be found. "I've told him," he explained, "that if I don't come back from the gold hunt he's to inform the authorities and demand Chettle's arrest. To-night lll add something about this jail of yours, so that you'll be turned loose."

"Write of Tani,' begged Ammar-al. "She is never afraid, but, also, she is never safe."

Ramsay promised. "I want to put in more about you," he went on. "Tell me everything you can. I've never seen another man down in these islands who's

like you. We have a saying back where I came from that a silk purse can't be made out of a sow's ear. And I know you've got good stuff in you. Let me have your story, so that I can put it down. Maybe it'll bring you the right kind of friends, and help."

"I can tell you how I am what I am," Ammar-al answered, "and different from the other men of Auka. But perhaps the story is like many you have heard of these seas, which are traveled by men from countries a long way off. Mine is not an old story of itself, because it goes back only forty years. It was that long ago when there appeared, on the level ocean toward the east, several dark spots, above them a cloud of black. These were great ships; and toward evening of that day they were letting down their anchors in the deep water which is not far from shore.

"They were ships of war— five of them, and they had put in to refresh before turning homeward to their own country. They were ruled by a great man. My father often told me that this man was tall— much taller than any of the men of Auka; and his eyes were blue, like mine. My mother told me that her mother told her how, just as the moon was going, this man left his ship in a small boat. Some others were with him and they were coming to the shore to take part in a feast which the chiefs were to spread.

"It was that same night that this great man met my grandmother. She was a very young girl and she was the most beautiful of all the girls of Auka. With flowers in her hair and about her ankles she danced in the moonlight with the other girls when the men were finished with the feast. Afterward, before the little boat went back to the ship, she walked with the tall man, he holding her hand. At that time, on this island, always there was a missionary and the people could speak English. So the girl who is now my grandmother was able to talk with the ruler of the warships and tell him how sad she was to think that he must go. As they walked together apart, already she loved him, and she asked him that surely he would come back.

"He did not come back. But my grandmother, looking out to see him come, and waiting for him, had what could comfort her somewhat. This was the little one— the son of the tall man who had blue eyes. And the eyes of this baby son were also blue. She called him after his father— Ammar-al, which was the best way she could say 'Admiral,' not knowing that 'Admiral' was a very high word meaning he was chief of those ships. When the child grew up, and chose my mother, and I was born, I, too, had those same blue eyes. And my father, pleased to see their color when first I looked into his face, called me also after my grandfather.

"While my father lived this island saw happy days. My father said that he belonged neither to the tribe of the men nor to the tribe of the women,

therefore he was able to be just to both.. My father was more white of skin than I; I think his heart was whiter, too. The trader who was here in those days was an honest man. My father would have no other kind. And he gave hearty welcome to the missionaries. That was how I came to learn.to speak and read and write.

"Then suddenly, when I was only eleven, my father died, and it was now that bad times fell upon Auka, for, first, Chettle came, and the good trader left —or disappeared, I do not know which. The missionary who lived here also went, as I have already said. Next, from another island, I do not know where, came Mabu."

Ramsay drew a deep breath. "I thought that bird wasn't like the other men!" he exclaimed.

"You know the rest," the deep, low voice went on. "I was put aside, where the few visitors to Auka could not see me. My books were not burned. So I tried to be content, and study, and wait until I was grown. The women were always comforting me—my mother and the rest. They said Chettle might die or other white men come who would want to put Chettle out of power. So that is how it has been—a long waiting. But when I was fifteen Chettle had a prison built for me. Since then I have lived in many prisons, this being the newest."

"And the last!" Ramsay broke in. "Ammar-al, whether I come back from this trip or not this will be the end of Chettle's rule on Auka. I have written down about the drinking—"

Ammar-al reached out in the dark to touch the white man. "More than drink is wrong here," he declared. "But of that I cannot speak for sure—it is a suspicion. Mr. Ramsay, there are several things which are no longer lawful on any of the islands in these seas—evil things, hated by governments and missionaries, and others who are clean. But I believe that some of these things come about on Auka. Which of them, who can say but the men themselves? The women do not know. Nor do I. why can a white man, and a man who is not of the tribe, hold the true islanders away from what they know is right? Yes, something more than drink is wrong."

"I'm going to know what it is," declared Ramsay. "But as I don't know now, I intend to say as much as I can about it on that paper I've put into the bottle. Ammar-al, we must smash their clock."

The young chief laughed in his throat. "That day would be a day for the giving of a feast," he returned. "Mr. Ramsay, shall I tell you what I have dreamed for this island? To put the children to school; not so much to teach them to read and write. No. This is the reason: to put the boys along with the girls, so that there shall no longer be two tribes, but only one. Because, Mr.

Ramsay, whatever may be black on this island, one thing is the blackest of all— the suffering of the women."

"You're right!" Ramsay could not help marveling how this part native was thinking as a decent white man would think. "And, Ammar-al, you're a worthy cousin to men and women in some country a long way from here."

"I often think of them," was the quiet rejoinder. "Great ladies, Mr. Ramsay, and perhaps men who are high in standing. Yes, I should like to think I am fit as a cousin. It, is strange, you think, that though only a quarter of my blood is white I seem to think only of the things of the white man— such as the fair using of the women and the children, and their education, and that their souls shall be right in the sight of God when they shall come to die. All these things— would you call them ambition?"

Ramsay's laugh was friendly and pleased. "The upward urge," he suggested. You'e a quarter white, Ammar-al, but that quarter is strong in you— stronger than the blood that is brown. And so you dream of advancing your people. Fine! And, by George, it's going to happen if I come out of this with my life!"

"Perhaps you would take more time— stay on the beach until the ship returns, go with it, and come again with more men?"

Ramsay moved impatiently. "The natives aren't armed," he argued. "Actually Ive got just Chettle to handle. No, Ammar-al, I don't want to do what you suggest. It's too roundabout and would eat up a lot of time. I'll go as I've planned. I won't be backed down."

Again Ammar-al touched his companion. "I think you must not stay here longer," he warned.

Ramsay got up. "Before I leave let me give you a pistol," he suggested. "Here! Take one of these two I'm wearing."

"No. I do not understand that kind. The other kind, like the ones Chettle has, I have had laid on my hand to hold and to look at. I would not know how to use one of yours."

"You'd hurt yourself, likely," Ramsay agreed. "But I wish I could give you a gun, because if Chettle accidentally finds out that we've been together you'd be in danger."

Once more there sounded that low laugh. "I am always in danger," answered Ammar-al.

"There's one thing I can give you that you can't hurt yourself with," Ramsay went on, "and that's a file. I'll send it back with the girl. You've probably never seen one, but they're three cornered, and will cut through those things on your legs."

"You will not forget to hunt for gold along the middle river of the three? And you will not trust Chettle?"

"Listen to me, Ammar-al: I'm going to behave myself just as long as that gentleman behaves himself and not a second longer. Once he shows his hand— bingo!"

vi

IN ALL, counting the white and the brown, there were thirty men who took the trip by sea from the sharp south tip of the arrowshaped island to a point midway of the broad north coast. They made several stages of the water journey during those night hours that were moonlit, and those hours of the day that, whether early or late, were cool. Whenever the heat was on they rested at points along the coast. At the last stop of all, where the middle river poured into the ocean, the whole party landed and the five boats were beached.

All the way Ramsay suffered a strange feeling of loss, of being cut off from one upon whom, almost without knowing it, he had leaned. He felt this loss all the keener because, not understanding more than a half dozen words of the Aukan dialect, he was not able to talk with the men in his canoe.

They chattered freely among themselves— in their queer, unmusical, guttural tongue. And he watched them, keen to note every change of expression, but especially how they looked when Chettle spoke to them. Sometimes they turned their dark faces toward him suddenly. Their brows gathered, as if he were a puzzle to them. Their eyes, resting on him, brooded. And always they kept up a talking, low and somehow disturbing.

For companionship Ramsay found himself making much of Chettle's dog, a white-marked, black mongrel, young, intelligent, eager for notice. To guard against a shortage of fresh meat for the white men's table three rattan crates of chickens had been brought along. Much to the astonishment of the natives Ramsay often took thought even of the fowls, feeding them and seeing that they had plenty of drink. On land, the familiar feathered creatures gave a friendly, homely touch to the camp. And he liked to listen when, the expedition afloat, from the boats ahead the voices of the cocks cheerily welcomed the dawn.

At such times strange thoughts came into his brain. "They will not come back," he reflected. "And am I also being taken like a chicken to the block?" Yet it was not fear that he felt then. Sure that ahead conflict awaited, what moved him was the thought of action: he yearned for the chance to get about settling affairs.

When, the equipment and supplies parceled out among the natives, the start of the land trip was made, it was Chettle who' led the line. The other white man was allotted a place toward the rear, behind him coming only Mabu and one other. Within half an hour of leaving the hidden boats Ramsay felt certain that what he had heard and surmised about the source of gold on Auka was true; also, more than ever he believed that his danger was real— that a fight was inevitable. For, the beach left behind, and the men strung out in a long, winding, snaky line, he found that they were traveling a clear, recently used, well-worn track!

As it began to come under his brown boots and he stared down at it he knew that travelers other than pigs and deer and wild cattle used the way. "It's a road!" he declared. "And not only have bare feet made it, but bare feet are keeping it worn— hundreds of bare feet!"

Something was taking the men up this trail. What was that something? To Ramsay there was just one answer. "This," he told himself, "is where the Singapore gold comes down!"

The track made him self-conscious.' Far ahead, his big bare shoulders carrying nothing heavier than the barrel of a shotgun, walked Chettle. He had made light of the gold idea. He had enlarged on the difficulty of getting up through the jungle to the higher reaches of any Aukan stream. While here, leading sure and open, went this road which was wide enough for a fullpacked man!

"Yes, and it's so good it could be traveled on a motor cycle!" added Ramsay.

What would the white leader reply if he commented on the track? He determined to make the test. "I say, Chettle!" he called out. "I'd describe this as mighty easy going."

"Better'n I thought," was the answer. "Guess we'll get along pretty good."

"Looks as if elephants had been traveling this route."

"Hunters, most likely."

After that the path was not again mentioned. But it gave Ramsay much to think about. He's deliberately taking me up it, he declared. "Why?— if it gives him dead away. Right now he knows that I know he's lied to me flat about the streams and all the rest of it. But he doesn't care if he is given away. Because he doesn't intend to let me come back."

Having made up his mind to that, nevertheless Ramsay did not once think of getting himself out of danger's way— by pretending an illness that would return him to the boats or by deliberately taking to the jungle and losing himself. He went steadily on, farther and farther into a wild tangle where, if he were murdered and left, all trace of him would be completely lost. There was,

to sustain him in his boldness, the thought of Woodford, who had made himself a pledge of security; also, as Ramsay himself had said, he had been in other tight places and come through safely.

"The Forces!" he remembered. '"They're with me." Then laughed at his own superstition.

"I'll say he's a cheeky customer," he mused. "My seeing this sidewalk where he said there wasn't a trail hasn't fazed him one bit! My brain can't take in such brass. But that's always the way when a normal man mixes in with a murderer. Especially after what the skipper said, I can't imagine Chettle's daring to go right ahead with his plans. What I shall do is go exactly as far as he goes."

As the line traveled an ascent that was gradual, instead of growing fainter or narrower the track got steadily better and harder packed. Ramsay noticed stems and leaves alongside; not just freshly broken off by the natives he could see, but brought to ground by other travelers.

"They go up here every day," he declared.

Halts had to be made frequently. Chettle's carriers were beach men used to the sea and the oars but not to climbing under a load. Also, the atmosphere of the jungle was like that of a high-temperatured hothouse. Worn by their unaccustomed march and sweating with their burdens the Auka men slept each time they touched the leafstrewn, moss-carpeted ground; and the sound of their breathing made a strange chorus that was like the breathing of one great animal.

At mid-morning a long halt was made. Long before then the tall, slender coconut trees of the shore side had given place to larger and taller trees of various kinds, their lofty tops bound together by blossoming vines. Underneath there prevailed a still, verdure-tinted twilight that was less like air than like a warm, green flood. Through it, going as might go so many bright-scaled fishes in a marine garden, dipped and rose mammoth butterflies, showing their gorgeously ringed and scrolled wings.

While Ramsay rested he stretched himself on his back and looked upward through the binoculars. Afterward he and Chettle had lunch under a great banyan and Ramsay tried to talk casually about the surroundings. He stirred the ground with the heel of his boot. Here were decades and decades of fallen, rotting leaves, of vines and creepers, the whole mixed with crumbling stone and forming a soil of unsurpassed richness.

"What crops would grow in this ground!" he exclaimed. "Rich? Say, this land is a treasure house! Your people could have gorgeous coffee and pepper plantations."

Chettle gave a weary shake of the head. "What's the use to plant?" he demanded. "Right in sight is a shipload of rattan, and hard wood, and dammar— not to mention fruit, and gutta, and nibongs."

The natives kept apart— even Mabu. But by a quick glance now and then Ramsay was able to note that, now the beach and the boats were left behind, the brown men had undergone some subtle change. On the sand at the island's sharp southern point he had thought of them as like any other settlement of islanders in the South Seas. But here, out of sight of any building and tucked away in the forest, their aspect was different. Against the brown boles of the trees and amid the green hangings of the jungle they fitted in, and their naked bodies were scarcely to be seen. The place was wild and they were a wild part of it.

A change had come over even the chickens. In the boats and on the shore they had cackled and moved about restlessly in the crates. Now, their heads thrust out of the openings between the strands of rattan, they kept quiet and still but stared about them at the strangeness with round, black, bulging eyes.

As toward the latter part of the day the journey was resumed a denser and still denser jungle was treaded. Now there were no more short stretches that were gentle of ascent. 'The way was steeper and not so straight; yet it was significant that it had still so much width that the packs of the carriers rarely were brushed by the growth forming its two walls.

About the intruders into that forest bright-eyed parrakeets darted in swift flashes of color and screamed in resentment before disappearing into the low growth. From higher up came the plaintive cooing of ring doves— a sound which reminded Ramsay of that low call which, on two occasions, had sent Ammar-al hurrying away from the tent and out of sight. Often brilliantly hued birds that Ramsay could not recognize swung up from the path, crying out in fright on seeing that line of weighted men who, from overhead, might well be mistaken for some mammoth, manylegged jungle-infesting dragon.

The second portion of that first day's journey was not a long one. Comparatively early a stop was called for the night, and camp made where there was a fair-sized open site which plainly had served the purpose of a resting place on many another occasion. Ramsay's tent was pitched to one side of the clearing and floored with the large square of rubber-lined cloth he had brought along.

Chettle settled with the whole space of the camp ground between him and the tent. The former did not ask his men to erect much of a roof for their leader's shelter. Upon wirelike strands of rattan were laid boughs and branches. Underneath the green roof, on a bed of ferns piled high, was spread Chettle's sleeping mat.

"To-night, at least," Ramsay said to himself, "the gentleman isn't bothering about privacy."

The cooks levied on the chicken crates and soon a brace of fowls were being boiled for the white men over a supper fire. To feed the natives there was put on a stew of rice and fern vegetables. While the kettles steamed the weary Aukans lolled in groups, resting. Now and then they turned their white-rimmed eyes toward where the two white men sat. Always they kept up a steady talking that was scarcely more than a murmur, it was so low. It was, to Ramsay, not a little disquieting.

The gloom of that forest twilight rapidly ~ deepened. Supper finished, the natives spread their mats between shelter and tent and dropped upon them. In the dim light, tossing their brightly tattooed arms and legs they gave a strange effect. They did not look to be an aggregation of men; it was as if, here in the open, great manylegged, gay-patterned, snakish monsters were lying and writhing.

Suddenly, upon the great upper floor that was the top of the jungle, darkness came like the shutting of a trapdoor. Ramsay excused himself, pleading that he was tired, and sought his tent. But he did not lie down. As he sat, looking out through his V-shaped door, he noted and with curiosity, that here and there among the lounging men were springing up for an instant little sparks, or flames.

"Fireflies?" he asked himself.

He crept nearer to his door; and a moment later knew there were no fireflies in the camping space, and understood what it was that the men of Auka were doing. The native closest to him lighted a match and held it before his own face; which enabled Ramsay to see that the man was putting the flame to the bowl of a small pipe.

The tiny light sank once, twice, and a third time, as the breath of the smoker drew it against the bowl. Then it went out, when there floated to Ramsay's nostrils a smell which was not of the jungle. It was somewhat like the smell of burned sugar, sweetish, yet strange.

Opium!

The heart of the white man leaped to his throat—at the boldness of it, now that the expedition was in the jungle. They've been cautious until to-night," he thought. "But Chettle doesn't care any longer what I know. It's no use to pull the wool over my eyes about their hitting the pipe as long as I'm on to the fact that Auka's full of gold."

At once several things were made clear to Ramsay. Ammar-al had referred to "whispers of matters which are worse"— worse than gin, or palm wine, or the murdering of missionaries, or the whipping of women. It was this that was

worse! Ramsay, himself, had wondered how Chettle was able absolutely to handle and control the Auka men. Here were shown both the explanation and the proof. Chettle had the male inhabitants of the island fast in that awful, never-loosing, degenerative clutch of a drug.

And now Ramsay understood how it happened that, on occasions, Ammar-al had been able fearlessly to come forth from his prison and move about. Nightly the inhabitants of the men's houses were sunk deep in poppy dreams.

"This is the mess of pottage that the poor devils have taken in return for their birthright of gold!" he reflected. "Well, now I know two of Chettle's secrets. And a man's always in danger if he possesses a secret that another man doesn't want him o have. Thats my danger now. Am I going to pay high for what I know?"

For the first time the thought of his situation was disturbing. And again there occurred to him that idea of flight. Should he change his mind about it, wait until past midnight, creep aside into the forest, and lose himself?

"I'll be hanged if I will!" he vowed. "Before I go scuttling away like a mouse into a hole I'll cross over to Chettle's hunky and put a slug of lead into him. Just let him start something! And I'll see the business through."

His bed was made up at the tent door. But he did not lie down on it. Instead, having stuffed some ferns into it so that it appeared to be occupied, he drew back toward the rear of the tent, and half sat, half lay, an automatic ready in his hand. Thus, keeping watch, in brief moments he took his sleep.

Near by and unknown to him there was another watcher, small, and brown of body, who crouched as silently as a shadow. And hour after hour, as the hot night passed, that sentinel's eyes were fixed upon the spot where stood his tent, and a pair of sharp ears listened, listened for the sound of the slightest move.

vii

RAMSAY heard the first bird note of the new day. It was answered by sleepy, troubled cluckings from the chicken crates. The morning air was of a grateful, summery softness. Cutting it sharply hither and thither went the.wings of early flyers, while queer calls came out of the jungle. Gradually the opening of the tent became more clearly defined, as the dark lightened to that tint which was like sea water. Next, in what seemed one joyous moment, the camping place was filled with sunlight and song.

Then of a sudden, he started, leaning forward, and staring at something lying upon the mosquito netting of his unused bed. That something consisted of three yellow jungle flowers, large and beautiful and heavy with perfume.

Following the first moment of his surprise at finding them there he told himself that the blossoms had fallen from overhead. But as he picked them up he found they were bound together by a strong threadlike grass.

"What does this mean?" he wondered.

Over the morning coffee Ramsay did not mention the circumstance of the bouquet. He suspected that Chettle had tossed the three blossoms into the tent— it was as if, with a sort of malign humor, he was, Ramsay, told himself, "presenting the flowers ahead of the funeral." For on that heavy face there was a curious but controlled smile; the round, tufted eyes were pinched together as if each were drawn, like the opening of a bag, by a gathering string, and the full lips were slightly parted.

"He thinks I'm caught squarely," concluded Ramsay. "And already landed. He's brought me around the island on the pretext that I'm to have my prospecting trip. As a matter of fact this excursion's been taken so that he can make away with me and not one of the women be the wiser."

As the packs were being taken up he felt that the natives had a knowing look in their black eyes. They had eaten scarcely any breakfast. But cheerfully enough they took their places on the trail and the second day's march began. As before, Chettle led. As before, Mabu made the end of the file.

Ramsay did not care where Mabu walked. The white man had come to feel something like contempt for the big, curly-headed one, who wore no arms— not even a knife. The other natives never came to Mabu for orders. He was merely a figurehead

Above the jungle top the sunlit sky was a bluish gray; but the line walked through a gloom of green. Even toward mid-morning this gloom scarcely lightened, for pendulous branches fairly roofed the trail. The dog thrust his muzzle into the growth at either side. And sometimes, as if scenting or seeing him, forest dwellers that were themselves unseen went scurrying away.

Once during the morning the dog uttered a terrified howl. Following it, Chettle fired his revolver. Involuntarily Ramsay's hand went to the butt of his own weapon and he half expected the impact of a bullet. But nothing significant was to happen yet. Ahead, in the path, was only a young wild pig. At sight of it there was much chattering among the natives and Ramsay found himself grinning in relief. Supper would mean fresh piglet baked in fragrant leaves amid hot stones.

As on the day before a stop was made during the period of greatest heat. The place chosen proved to be a- more frequently used camp than the one where the expedition had spent the previous night. Indeed, it had been occupied by other men probably only a few hours before. While the carriers

were still in line Ramsay spied the fresh prints of feet and saw that ferns which had been used for beds were hardly wilted.

"Native miners," he guessed. "Been here within twenty-four hours. Evidently my friend intends to gladden my eyes with a real view of the rich ground before he takes any action. Well, perhaps he has to keep up a pretense of carrying out my wishes. There may be men along with us that he can't altogether trust."

At the next halting place, where camp was pitched for the second night, a new shelter was found standing. This Chettle took without troubling to make any comment on it. Signs were abundant that several men had occupied the ground recently.

Once more the cooking fires were lighted. But this time these were used mainly to heat stones which were piled ready to one side— stones which had, perhaps, often served the purpose to which the cooks now put them. The rocks red-hot, the pig was filled with them, wrapped in fragrant ferns, and placed in a pit lined with the remaining hot rocks.

Two hours later the two white men once more took their supper together. Chettle filled Ramsay's tin plate with the delicious steamed meat, then filled his own. That there was no danger to be apprehended from the food was proven by the fact that Chettle ate promptly of his share. His countenance still wore that lurking smile, but he was pleasant and fairly talkative.

Now they were well above the belt inhabited by mosquitoes and could sit outside the leaf lodge in the cool of the forest without being tortured. But comfortable as the evening was, before dark filled the open space Ramsay sought his tent. As he sat smoking and pondering, gradually the sounds of the camp grew less. The cooking fires were already smoldering. Already, too, those tiny glimmerings which marked the lighting of the opium pipes were springing up here and there. Soon came silence in the camp; then, from somewhere toward the east and not far, could be heard a faint murmuring. It was not the sound of human voices, but the voice of a stream.

In spite of himself, Ramsay found himself lulled. His cigar burned itself out. Tired from his broken sleep of the previous night he found it hard work to keep his eyes from closing. Again and again he roused himself; just as often his head tipped forward until his chin was on his breast, and his thoughts, in spite of themselves, merged into those of a dream.

Then suddenly— he did not know how late it was— he was awake and sitting bolt upright. Even as he realized where he was, and that, somehow, all was not well, there sounded in the warm stillness a piercing, agonized scream.

It was the scream of a woman.

viii

THAT CRY of pain and terror died away.

"A woman!" breathed Ramsay. "But what woman? How can a woman be here? And what has happened to her?"

Again there was silence. Softly, he crawled forward to his bed, leaned close to the tent door and looked out. The light in the camping space was dim. But when he had looked for a few moments he could see the outlines of the sleeping figures of the natives. Evidently none had heard the scream. For not a man was so much as stirring a hand.

"How can I help her?" he asked himself. And could find no answer to that, for he did not know from what direction the scream had come, and to go out and search about in the blackness would be both useless and foolhardy. "Had I better call to Chettle?" he wondered next. But realized that if Chettle had been the cause of the woman's outcry, he, Ramsay, would receive no reply.

He decided to keep quiet and attempt to trace any movement in or about the camp. Almost holding his breath he listened. And could hear nothing but the stream.

Half an hour or more later he became aware of a sudden darkening outside the tent. Clouds were obscuring the small patch of sky that was visible overhead. With surprising quickness those clouds emptied themselves— of a very flood.

Now the sleeping men bestirred themselves, sitting up or rising. Some went outside as if to seek the shelter of the forest. And Ramsay, more on account of his weapons than his clothes, donned his slicker. This proved to be a prudent thing to do; for soon the cloth roofing above him was sodden and leaking with the driving of so much water earthward.

But the storm was over in a short while, stopping as suddenly as it had begun. However, the natives did not return. As Ramsay squatted on his heels, watching his tent door, what he heard was the rain falling from the leaves of the forest. The steady drip, drip, drip, was like the feet of men who were always creeping nearer and nearer, now cautiously, now more quickly and boldly, but never arriving.

Not a wink of sleep was for him. After what seemed an interminable wait, again the birds cheeped, the cocks crowed and the light stole down from the tops of the trees. Then he heard the dialect of the Auka men, and here they came trooping into sight, their tattooed skins shining. Some wore fresh leaves bound round their foreheads. Others had thrust a flower into the hair. In their manner was something of the festive. They laughed a great deal, and loudly. They ran and played pranks.

"Looks as if they're celebrating something," he declared. "But if they don't know what happened in the night maybe they've been told their hard work's over. Well, this is when I must keep my wits about me." As nonchalantly as possible he went out to hang his bedding and the rubber-lined floor square in the fresh morning air.

Chettle called to him. 'Hear that rumpus in the night?" he asked.

"Thought somebody had a nightmare," Ramsay answered, grinning.

"Nightmare, nothing! My dog got up and acted funny. So I stuck my head out and here was somebody close to my shelter. I thought it was one of the boys. But when I took hold of his arm it turned out to be a Mary."

Ramsay pretended surprise. "A girl?" he cried. "But that's easy to understand. The lady's followed because she's charmed with one of your carriers."

Chettle guffawed. "You're right!" he pronounced. "Sure, that's it! Well, she can come along if she's so set on it."

Ramsay had no glimpse of any girl. He would have liked to ask how it had been possible for her to join the party. She had not been smuggled along in one of the boats. Had she come from the settlement by crossing those dark, sharp mountains?

He would also have liked to ask Chettle if the latter had let go of that arm he had seized and what had happened to the girl. But Ramsay knew that he would only get lies for an answer. So he said nothing more about the matter.

One thing was certain: The incident had made a change in Chettle. All that morning, as he walked, Ramsay could see that the man ahead seemed on the alert. So did the burly native on the end of the line. His mustache hung over a mouth that was grim. Often when Ramsay turned his head quickly he found that Mabu was watching behind him.

Ramsay drew his conclusions as to the reason for the conduct of these two. If Chettle had killed the girl whom he discovered in the night, then he was not sure that another woman was not somewhere near, having come to spy; if he had not killed her the pair feared her eye and her tongue.

"This having two tribes on the island may be a lucky thing for me," Ramsay told himself.

Just before the midday camp was reached something happened. Ramsay heard the dog give warning— excitedly, yet not with that kind of barking which meant game. At once the barking changed to yelps; evidently the animal was being hushed with kicks and blows. The line came to a sudden halt. As there was a bend in the track just ahead, a bend which prevented Ramsay's seeing Chettle and the foremost natives, the former, curious to learn what had

occasioned the halt, stepped from the path and made as if to pass forward to one side of the burdened men.

At this, those in the angle of the trail quickly closed in to bar it, and barred it further by flinging their loads down across it. Ramsay, though he gestured the men aside, found that he was not allowed to pass. However, almost at once, the forward command was given, the loads were hoisted, and the steady climb began again. Angry and thoroughly suspicious, Ramsay hung back a little, and beyond the turn examined the jungle walls closely. These were so tightly woven as to be almost impenetrable. But at the spot where he judged that Chettle must have been standing when the halt was made be was able to see that the braided festoons of the vegetation were freshly broken, and had been parted, and pushed to either side to make an opening. "We met some one," he concluded. "They're tucked away in there as we go by."

At the tear in the curtain of vines he swerved from it, and laid his hand on his pistol. He could see nothing, hear no movement. But he felt that through the green lacings eyes were watching the rest of the procession—and him.

He guessed who the down-traveling natives were men who had been higher, blowing out the gold dust that was marketed at Singapore. "The next camping place will tell something," he concluded.

The next camping place did tell. A fire was burning. 'There were feathers strewn about—the bluish plumage of wild pigeons. Ramsay was able even to guess—and he thought accufately—just how many men had spent the night on the ground; for in all there were five heaps of rain-soaked ferns, each holding the print of a man's body.

The way grew steeper, the path better drained of the rain that had fallen upon it. Now, oftener than had been the case lower down, the way led into open spots, where the climbing vines and the creepers, draped ever in graceful loops from the great trees, were like the artistic hangings in some vast, high-walled, irregularly shaped hall.

At one point, when a short stop was made for rest, Chettle came weaving his way back through the carriers, his shirt hanging limp upon him and marked by dark areas which were wet with sweat.

"How do you like this grade?" he wanted to know.

"Steep enough," Ramsay answered. "But a man's paid for his climb. Never saw more beautiful country in my life. Look at this place! I don't wonder that some poet once said that the groves were God's first temples."

Chettle turned, boring the other man with those keen, round eyes. In his look was plain disdain. "So you're one of the fellers that believe in a God?" he observed, lips twitching as if the idea appealed to him comically.

The question was manifestly an insult. Ramsay decided to ignore it. "I notice that the elevation seems to have cleared away my dengue," he said.

From time to time during the afternoon they crossed a stream, this on large trees which had been cut down, trained to fall in the right direction, and squared off along the top to make a fairly wide and thoroughly safe bridge. These crossings gave Ramsay: his first sight of water, which had been plentiful enough during the whole of the journey but had been brought into camp by the natives.

Higher and higher toiled the line. Once when Ramsay chanced to turn about, with arm upraised to ward off the sweeping blow of a pendant rattan, he found himself looking down upon the sea— faintly blue, far stretching, its edge fringed with inlets which, at that distance, made scallops on the shore line, each scallop looking tiny enough to be emptied by one dip of a spoon.

After rounding the breast of a mountain, under jungle trees that leaned out streamward until their branches mingled with those of trees rooted deep in the dark earth of the opposite bank, the trail came to a sudden stop. Ahead loomed up one of those needlelike mountain points. To the left, foaming, the stream, now gravelly bedded, was like running crystal.

The natives had scarcely halted when there was a sudden excited hubbub among them. They called shrilly to one another, gestured, and ran about. Plainly something had gone wrong.

Then Chettle called to Ramsay: "Seen my dog this last half hour?" he wanted to know.

The younger man puzzled. "Come to think of it," he replied, "I don't believe I've seen him since the morning stop."

Chettle went plodding down the path a ways, the very stoop of his shoulders and the look of the back of his head eloquent of annoyance and concern. He stopped now and then to whistle and call. When he came back his lips were moving with his curses.

"Wouldn't 've lost that dog for a lot," he complained. "The fool must 've trailed off after a pig or somethin'."

"He'll come on," declared Ramsay cheerfully. "You can't lose him, Chettle— not along a trail as plain as this."

The space for the camp was not so large as any of the others had been. But there were, to Ramsay, certain things about it that were very much in its favor. One of these was that his own tent could, be pitched against a rocky wall which here formed a considerable cliff on the side farthest from the stream. With the wall at his back and with plenty of ammunition he felt that he might be able successfully to stand off a sudden assault.

Chettle's shelter was erected on the extreme edge of the river bank, from where there was a fall of fully fifteen feet to the water. Ramsay noted that great care was taken with the house of branches, as if in preparation for a long stay. Stakes were driven into the ground to hold up a carefully laid thatch. The walls were woven tightly, the whole making a commodious dwelling.

It was while Ramsay sat resting and smoking and watching the natives work that he suddenly remembered, and with a start which sent the blood to his head, how well situated his own abode was for any attack from above. A well-aimed boulder sent down from the cliff top could, in a manner that might seem accidental even to the Aukan men, absolutely wipe him out.

He pondered what he ought to do. If he moved to Chettle's side of the camp he would be too close to that gentleman. As for the lower side, the trail divided it, and to right and left of the trail blocks of stone were thickly strewn about, leaving clear no level spot big enough for the tent. As for the upper border of the stopping place, there already the supper fires were being lighted, while bundles and natives and the last of the chicken: crates covered the ground.

"I certainly was an idiot to pitch where I have," he mourned. "But then I can dig out as soon as it gets dark— safest thing to do, anyhow. This is the end of this particular gold track. Whatever happens will happen right here."

As soon as the welcome aromas of the evening meal began to spice the air Ramsay descended to the stream to bathe himself before eating. The pool he chose was several rods down the stream, where it widened slightly and flowed less swiftly. On the bank of the pool he trampled some ferns, stood upon them to take off his clothes, then carrying his weapons and cartridge belt to the edge of the river, laid them close to hand and let himself slip into the velvet cool of the water.

Delicious as was his bath, and invigorating, he did not fail to keep watch of his pistols and clothes. He kept watch about him, too, suspecting that an effort might be made to catch him unarmed and at a disadvantage. However, where he splashed he could see not only Chettle but Mabu. That was reassuring, for he did not fear the natives, feeling himself a match for them all.

He was out again, dried, and into fresh clothes when directly across the river from him, at the base of that cliff, which was here not so high, he thought he caught a movement. Pistol in hand he stepped behind a tree. There, as the light swiftly faded from gray to darker gray, he waited, silent, watchful, finger on trigger.

Suddenly his whole body prickled as if from an electric contact and under his topi his hair rose up on end. For now he saw, rising slowly against the black wall of the cliff— what?

The gently upward-floating. Thing was at one moment perfectly spherical and not larger than the head of a man.: Next, swelled, it became somewhat irregular and elongated. In the growing dark it shone out faintly luminous.

Halfway up the wafting glow veered, like a candle flame in a soft wind, then faded. Again before Ramsay's staring eyes was only the black background of stone.

"Ramsay! Hey, there! Come to supper!" It was Chettle, shouting from the camp.

"All right."

He left the tree and started back. He told himself that what he had just seen was only a phosphorescent light— a pocket of swamp gas, released, perhaps, by the slight disturbance of some rotting vegetation at the base of the wall. If it was not such a will-o'-the-wisp, then it was a globe of fireflies.

But neither of these explanations satisfied him and he was not able to shake off an uncanny feeling.

ix

SUPPER was eaten at a table lighted by two lamps that were the polished halves of a coconut shell half filled with ranksmelling coconut oil. Ramsay tried to be casual, particularly wishing Chettle not to surmise that anything unusual had happened. And he put himself out to be cordial so that his companion would believe that Ramsay had no fear of treachery.

But he could not eat; and he was not able to talk freely because his mind kept recurring to what he had seen. There's something queer about this trip up here," he concluded. "There was that scream of a woman, and the disappearance of the dog, and now—this. Is it possible that my old Hindu was right? That when I'm in a tight place I'm watched over by the Forces?"

Before the white men left their table the men of Auka had once more given themselves up to the slavish demands of their pipes. From where he sat, sipping a cup of chocolate and having a cigarette, Ramsay was able, by the light of the dying fires, to count them, Mabu among the rest, all lying relaxed and drunk with smoke.

Following two nights of broken rest, he longed for sleep and he knew he must have it. But when Chettle disappeared into his green shelter and steadily registered his presence there by a series of long-drawn, unmusical, foghorn snores, Ramsay did not lie down. On his feet, and forcing himself to keep awake by applying, by turns, an eye or an ear to a small break in the front of his tent, he waited until the old moon was gone behind the last of those towering needle points of mountains to the west.

Then, in that camp ground, encircled by jungle and stone, the stars gave little light. He loosened the cloth of his tent on the downriver side, wriggled out as noiselessly as a snake, stood up, a hand on the cliff to guide him, and stole away. He kept in the inky shadow of the rock wall, and for his comfort took with him, tucked under an arm, the rubber-lined square.

Rod after rod he went, straight toward that spot from which had come the light. "If the Forces are here to help me," he told himself half whimsically, "I'm not going to run away from them." Presently, against his face he felt the cool fingers of some tall ferns. He stepped in among them until he judged himself to be well hidden. Then lay down, wound in the square, and feeling fear no longer, slept.

When he awoke the sky was already brightening. Instead of returning directly to his tent, and thus, perhaps, revealing his absence from it during the night, he jogged downstream to that bathing place, stripped, limbered himself with setting-up exercises, swam, dressed, and strolled campward whistling.

He found Chettle already up. But between the thatched hut and Ramsay's tent the score of natives were still stretched; each in his sleeping mat and with his pipe where it had fallen from his fingers at nightfall.

Chettle was all excuses for them. "The Auka native ain't much on climbing," he observed with a grin. "The last two days has tuckered these fellers out."

"Dead to the world," agreed Ramsay.

"You said it. But let 'em lay. They wouldn't be no use to us, anyhow. We'll come back later on for some chow. Thought we might as well track up across the slope here and see if we can run into any signs of the yeller stuff." He led the way over the steep and rocky ground.

Ramsay, trailing, sensed that the inevitable clash was now only a short few minutes ahead. "Were not here looking for pay sand," he thought. "While his men are still asleep he wants to put me quietly out of the way. Well, let him try it! Let him make a move!" Angered, it came into his mind to wound Chettle so that the latter would be helpless. "But; no, I won't do that," he decided. "PI wait until there isn't a doubt that his intentions are rotten. Then TIl kill him." Aloud he asked, "Do you hear that deep roar, Mr. Chettle?"

"Ye-ah. Must be falls."

"And big ones."

What Ramsay had heard was a low, heavy tone. It grew to a throaty growl. Before long the two were in sight of a great mass of water which breasted whitely outward over a high ledge before plunging a hundred feet.

Still leading, Chettle suddenly veered sharply. It brought them through a thick belt of low ferns and out upon a rocky bank which, a sort of promontory, afforded a view of the pool which was under the cataract. 'The quieter

stretches of this sheet of water were a black-green, for the morning light had not yet fallen upon them. A part of the pool the tumbling flood churned to foam. About the foam circles of waves lifted like milky ruffles.

"Gorgeous!" pronounced Ramsay.

But Chettle suddenly had come short and abruptly headed about. There was a strange expression on his heavy face. "Guess we'll go down grade," he said. "That'll save us a bad climb before breakfast."

Ramsay realized that something had turned his guide. Pretending to be freeing his foot from an entangling vine he checked himself long enough to peer over the bank— upon a narrow sandy beach which bordered the nearer side of the pool. Upon it, stretched, face down, was a native.

One glance gave Ramsay the meaning of what he saw. The brown man was not a member of the expedition; he was some Aukan who was "blowing gold."

But as he straightened and followed Chettle, he understood that the latter was not getting away because he feared that Ramsay might see the primitive mining operation. There was another reason, and a black one. Owing to the roar of the water the native had not heard the two white men above him on the bank. It was Chettle's intention that neither should the native see him and his companion.

"This is going to be a private murder," Ramsay told himself ironically. Now he was mindful of each movement of the man ahead, whose big hands, at every step, were putting aside branches and hanging vines.

They were a quarter of a mile on the lower side of the camp, pressing their way downstream, when Ramsay had proof that his suspicions were correct. Suddenly, on the brink of the river, once more Chettle stopped and turned. The same thought was in the minds of both now, for each lifted his right. hand to the weapon hanging on his thigh. But Chettle was the quicker of the two. Standing face to face with the younger man, he drew a deep breath that was like a snarl, aimed straight at Ramsay's breast and pulled the trigger.

The weapon did not go off; there was only a click, dull, flat— the striking of the hammer against steel.

In that instant Ramsay was appalled. His mouth wide, his breath stopped, he stood against the bore of the revolver. What moved him was not fear, and not surprise; it was the certainty of, and the horror of realizing, this -man's hideous treachery.

Chettle cursed. Ramsay sprang back. Chettle did not draw a second weapon nor try a second shot. Instead, as Ramsay, waking to action from that momentary stunned condition, jerked his own pistol free, Chettle caught at the other's hand. Then for a long minute the two struggled for the possession of the pistol— silently, desperately.

Chettle, the heavier of the two, won in that test of sheer muscular strength. He bore Ramsay to his knees, though keeping himself on his feet, and as the younger man strained, groaning, gradually twisted the revolver clear of his hold.

But Ramsay was the quicker brained of the two. In the same moment that Chettle let go in order to step back and fire, Ramsay plunged at him, using his head as a battering-ram; and Chettle, with a grunt, stumbled backward into some low growth. As he fell, up over his head he tossed the arm holding Ramsay's pistol. The weapon flew from his hold, described an arc, and, as Ramsay darted away toward the camp and the supply of weapons and ammunition, struck the stream below, sending up a thin spurt of water.

x

AS RAMSAY tore along his brain worked fast. He asked himself if the natives would try to bar his way— and set upon him. If he were able to gain-Chettle's shelter, would he find any weapons? Amd would these be as useless as the one Chettle had just snapped?

He could hear the latter lumbering heavily after him and cursing vociferously. Nevertheless Ramsay slowed as he neared the camp, this to see how the land lay. He made a strange discovery. Every Auka man was still on his mat!

He went leaping into his own tent, searched out another pistol and his supply of ammunition, then made across the camp ground, stepping over one native after another. They lay so motionless that he almost thought them dead. The sight of them stretched about in awkward positions in the clear morning light was startling.

At Chettle's door he stopped, crouched, and tried to get a glimpse of the oncoming enemy. The latter was not in sight. Then as, scarlet and winded from his run, he swung aside the matting that made the door of the shelter; and entered, he made a second discovery, and one far more amazing than the first. He looked into the blue eyes and prison-pale face of the young chief, Ammar-al.

He could have shouted with joy and relief. He tried to.speak, but choked. He reached for the hand of the other, shook it and clung to it, panting and grinning, and ighting to get back enough breath with which to ask a score of questions.

Ammar-al began to speak: "I saw it was best to wait here, so that Chettle could not come back into his house." Then, taking a look out through a small

opening in that side which commanded a view of the end of the path, he added quietly, "I knew he could not shoot you."

"He tried to!" Ramsay answered. "Aimed straight at me and pulled the trigger! The gun didn't go off—a bad shell, or dampness, or something. Ammar-al, I was saved by a miracle!" At the thought of the marvelous good fortune which had been his, he grew cold and trembled from head to foot.

Ammar-al nodded gravely. "I did it," he explained. "In the night, when he was sleeping, I reached my hand to his revolver, and leaving it in his belt, very softly, with one finger, I touched it. The round piece of steel which holds the cartridges turns easily. Out of it I took each bullet, as I might lift the seeds from an evil fruit." To the face of the young chief came one of those rare smiles.

"You're a wonder!" declared Ramsay. His pistols were in good order. He was holding one in each hand. "I owe you more and more! Well, you can depend on it that if I live I'll square the bill."

After that, for a while, they did not speak again, only watched to every side. They did not give much attention to that wall of the shelter which was turned toward the stream, knowing that the bank was too high and sheer to be scaled from the water by anything larger or less agile than a monkey. But Chettle did not approach near enough to show himself.

Presently one or two of the islanders began to rouse, yawning languidly. Soon all were sitting up, talking a little and looking about them stupidly. It was plain that they were not hungry, for not one of them went near the supplies. When, finally, they got to their feet they went prowling off into the jungle.,

"Too much drug last night," Ramsay observed, speaking low. "So that he could kill me and not one of them be the wiser." His lean face drained itself of blood as his anger suddenly mounted.

"That's why there wasn't any danger of his piling rocks down on my tent in the night. To smash me that way would give him away. So he coaxed me out this morning to shoot me, bury me before the carriers were awake, cover the grave with leaves, wipe out every trace of the crime. m if Woodford charged him with murder—"

"He could say you came here, went away, and did not return."

"Exactly! Like his dog."

With a silent laugh Ammar-al gave a jerk of the head that loosened the long, black, horse's tail of hair which was coiled around his neck, and sent it swishing down his bare shoulders. "I killed the dog," he chuckled.

"You! But how did you get here, Ammar-al?"

The young chief again wound his throat with his scarf of hair. "Between two dead volcanoes."

Ramsay gasped. "A woman came with you, too!"

The blue eyes of the other grew somber. "Tani. She was beside your tent, watching. He must have come creeping near it. She cried out to. warn you—"

"And?"

"I do not know. I heard nothing of her then, when the jungle was so still that the falling of a leaf was a sound. Afterward, in the rain, I went about with the men, they not thinking who I was. Chettle slept. Tani was nowhere."

"Let's hope she's safe, poor little thing! If she isn't, the bottle won't reach Woodford, will it?"

Ammar-al sought a new vantage point, looked out, satisfed himself that no one was approaching, then answered: "We are the ones who will reach Captain Woodford."

"Chettle was plotting to kill me all the way up. It just shows how little he fears Woodford's coming back. Well, I'll say that he's carrying things with a high hand! I suppose that's the way men get when they're away off from civilization and out of reach of the law. But we're away off, too, where a coast-guard cutter can't get to us. So we'll be the law."

Once more the young chief assented. "If Chettle goes back to his long house," he replied, "only our two spirit bodies will go with him. But, if we go back—"

"Right again. If he doesn't take to his heels, if he fights us, we'll settle the whole business here. Ammar-al, in the next few hours there's going to be some ghost making." As his companion moved about, once more, watching, Ramsay took time to make a swift examination of Chettle's stores. And found water, food, brandy, tobacco, extra weapons, and cartridges by the hundreds.

The firearms were in prime condition. He laid them out in a handy line. And it was while he was leaned over the small arsenal that an idea came to him. '"Ammar-al," he said, "I suppose you've heard of the Great War that was fought not so long ago?"

Ammar-al considered the matter, the tips of his fingers pressing against either side of his forehead.

"The only war I have heard about," he returned, "was that one between a country called Spain and another country called America. I was, at the time, a little boy."

Ramsay grinned. "That war was a tea party," he declared. Then, as the other looked more puzzled than ever, "I mean that it was a small affair—no more than what you would call a feast. No, there was a second, and a big one. To save themselves from being cut into bits by the bullets the men of both sides dug ditches that were many times longer than Auka is long; and they got down into them and burrowed."

The young chief understood. 'You watch," he said, "because you know how to use the pistols. This ground has no roots, is full of rain, and soft. And here I have coconut shells that are iron hard."

"But here are mining tools! Chettle was pleased when he found I was bringing this shovel along. He took charge of it. That's what he meant to use to scoop out my grave."

"I will dig" said Ammar-al. As he dug, feverishly, and with all his strength, making a saucerlike hollow in the center of the house of branches, and throwing the moist, rich loam into a bank that soon surrounded them on every side, they sank steadily by inches. Ammar-al became stained a redbrown to the thighs. As for Ramsay, he was reminded of his long months in the French trenches.

"Part of the time in the very boots I've got on!" he thought. "Well, by thunder, if this all isn't as strange and unreal as a nightmare!"

It was less than a half hour later that the two were given proof of the wisdom of their digging in. Ramsay was looking out mountainward when his ear caught a sound. He stared into the wall of heavy growth, then suddenly covered his eyes and threw himself flat in that damp hollow, pulling Ammar-al down with him.

And in that same moment, together, came the blast of a shotgun, and ripping through the greenery of the hut, a shower of lead.

x

A SECOND blast came, then a third. After that Chettle held his fire.

To Ramsay the silence that followed the three shots was one fraught with strain. Not because he felt himself in danger, however, but because, lying pistols in hand, he found it difficult to keep himself from answering the attack.

"You're hit?" he whispered to Ammar-al.

"No."

"Curl in against this side— close," and Ramsay pulled at the shoulder of his companion, urging the latter to move away from the center, and against that wall of the round trench which was nearest to the enemy and his rain of iron pellets.

"I forgot all about that pump gun of his" Ramsay went on. "He planted it out in the brush somewhere, so that if he was cut off from this place he'd have it to fall back on."

For half an hour or more they lay motionless, listening, listening. All the while they could hear some one moving about in the jungle above them, but at

some little distance away. When there followed a loud rustling, Ramsay got up stealthily and peeped out, but could see no one.

"He won't come down," he assured Ammar-al. "He won't dare. Doesn't know whether he did me any harm or not, you see, and he wouldn't care to risk stopping a bullet."

After that, one hour followed another without incident. Outside the embankment of earth which Ammar-al had thrown up were Chettle's supplies. Cautiously the water, brandy, and some biscuits were lifted over into the shallow pit; and by turns the beleagured men ate and drank sparingly. Next, in preparation for the night to come, they decided, alternating, to sleep.

The rank smell of the moist ground burdened the air of the shelter like thick smoke, and conduced to sleep, and despite their situation neither man had any trouble in falling into a doze. Ramsay rested first; wishing to be awake when the green-brown light of the interior began to fail.

When night came, and neither could see the face of the other, there began again, but now on the heavily grown slope below them, that strange, steady rustling. From time to time, too, they could hear a lowspoken word. Evidently some sort of work was going forward in which Chettle was directing the efforts of the natives.

However, during the short time that the aging moon lighted the open space about the shelter, Ramsay caught no glimpse of any one. "I suppose they're getting ready for a rush," he told Ammar-al. "Well, if it comes, I'll get a few before they get me."

Throughout the day neither of the two men had trusted himself near that door of matting. But when dark came, for a moment Ramsay drew the curtain aside and leaned out— far enough to feel about on the ground. Early in the morning, when he came up from his bath, he had dropped that square of rubber-lined cloth. Now he found it.

Contrary to his expectations the night passed peacefully. But when the darkness thinned toward morning of the new day, as if it were being brushed aside by a light wind that came down from the sharp summits of the mountains, it was plain to both men that peace and quiet were only a prelude to future warfare. For, on looking out toward the downhill direction of their green lodge, they saw, newly set up among the tall ferns, ten feet or more of stone wall, forming a high, bullet-proof barrier.

"Ha-a-a!" breathed Ramsay. "The gentleman'll stay behind that!"

However, he and the young chief did not fail to watch toward the uphill side of the lodge, to guard against an attack from a quarter which might be considered more unexpected.

But as the morning passed, not even one of the Auka men was glimpsed. And it became evident to the two what plan Chettle had under way. Ramsay and Ammar-al had supplies; however, these were limited, and, being surrounded, they could not come by any more. On the other hand, Chettle had a score of hunters at his command. Which made time the main element of the contest. In time, more drinking water would be a terrible necessity. Hunger, also, would make its demands. While the man on the outside would only have to wait.

"This" Ramsay remarked dryly, "is what you'd call a siege."

He did not relish this being penned up to be fired upon. It was too much like the game of hide and seek he had been forced to play in France. And the sight of those evenly piled rocks was exceedingly exasperating.

The face of the islander, however, was perfectly composed; his blue eyes were steady and devoid of anger. This grandson of an admiral showed not a trace of either irritation or impatience.

Here was no superior officer to command Ramsay to sit and silently endure and wait. "To-night," he said to Ammar-al, "suppose we make a sneak of it and get Chettle when his attention is fixed on this place?"

Ammar-al did not favor the suggestion. "The Auka men are watching us from every side," he pointed out. "If we go from here, and we do not kill Chettle, and we cannot return, then we must live in the jungle."

"We can always do that," Ramsay added. "So we'll just stay where we are. But we won't sit around in here and steam until we're suffering for a swallow of the creek, and taking in our belts. No, sir!"

He determined to influence the course of events and whispered an outline of his plan to Ammar-al. To begin with, there was that certain boyish trick which he had seen American soldiers play upon their adversaries, the Germans— the age-old trick of the bullet-decoying hat-on-a-stick.

He tried it. First, he set the matting at the door in motion. Instantly Chettle's bare head lifted for a second above the stone wall, those round eyes squinted inquiringly, then he dropped from sight again.

It being certain that Chettle was watching, Ramsay now hung his topi on the end of the shovel handle, and very cautiously thrust the white headgear between one side of the matting and the thatch.

At that, again, in quick succession, the shotgun blazed— *bang*! *bang*! *bang*!

Following the third shot there was a moment of silence. Then Ramsay uttered a cry— shrill, piercing, full of pain.

Above the wall no head was lifted. From inside the hut came no sound. But half an hour later, once more the end of the shovel was thrust into Chettle's

sight. This time to it was tied a small cloth square which was one of Ramsay's handkerchiefs.

It was the white flag of surrender.

xii

THE SIEGE was over.

But when Chettle spied the signal, he did not show himself, evidently fearing treachery. However, having taken plenty of time in which to consider the matter, he called to Ramsay from behind that stone barrier.

"Give up, do you, in there?" he demanded.

It was not Ramsay who answered, but Ammar-al, and he spoke in his precise English: "We now make a finish of the fight."

A muttered exclamation of amazement; another period of silence; then, "That ain't you, is it, Ammar-al?"

"This be Ammar-al," replied the young chief.

Chettle delivered himself of a volume of curses. But still he did not trust himself in the open. "Come out of that and let me have a look at you," he commanded; and, as Ammar-al hesitated to obey, "Come on! Don't be afraid! I won't shoot!"

Brown fingers shoved at the piece of matting. Past it was thrust a head wound thickly by a dark cloth. From the cloth and forward over one shoulder fell that long black mane of Ammar-al's. As his earthstained body followed, and he stood in plain sight just at the door of the hut, through his hands, in that way which was habitual, he drew his hair nervously.

Chettle, as cautious as ever, viewed the figure through some chink in the rock wall. "So the Marys turned you loose, did they, Mister Ammar-al?" he inquired with ironical politeness. "Well, I guess when I get back to the beach I can make 'em a little sorry for that. Yes, I think maybe I can."

"No woman helped me," denied Ammar-al.

"No-o-o! You don't say! You picked the lock yourself, eh?" The wrapped head nodded. "I cut the iron of my chain with iron," he explained. "Mr. Ramsay sent me the small iron piece with three corners which made the cutting."

"He did!"— again that mocking tone. "So he stuck in his nose, did he? And you was so glad that here you come, to take all this trouble for a feller you never set eyes on before. Well, what's he got to say for himself?"

"Nothing," was the low answer. "By one of the small bullets through the eye to the brain, the stranger— is dead."

"Dead!" The statement completely restored Chettle to good nature; and from behind the stone wall came a 'burst of harsh laughter, which prolonged itself into a series of chuckles.

"Dead," repeated the young chief. His chin sank to his breast.

Now Chettle assumed a tone of sympathy. "Say, but that's bad news!" he declared. "It sure is! Such a fine young feller, he was, too. A grand, smart young feller!"

Ammar-al raised his head. "I ask," he said earnestly, "that his body be laid here, deep in the ground."

Chettle indulged in another chuckle. "Easy!" he answered. And, after a short wait, "Then do we go back home and keep our mouths shut?" he asked. "It was the fever carried off Mr. Ramsay, wasn't it, Ammar-al?"

"It was the fever," replied the young chief. He bowed in assent, spread his hands in a gesture of resignation, and stepped from sight.

Immediately Chettle's voice could be heard, giving an order in the island dialect— proof that some of the natives, at least, were close by. And presently, as the white cloth was taken from the handle of the Shovel, and the shovel itself was thrown out into the middle of the open space, here, walking fearsomely, with black eyes rolling, came two Aukans. They advanced, and picked up the shovel.

First of all, jabbering to each other, they measured off the length of a long body upon the ground. Then, by turns, they fell to digging Ramsay's grave.

They handled the shovel clumsily; and even in that loamy earth made but slow progress. Also, being unused to such labor; soon both stopped their work and disappeared into the jungle to rest. Then two others came forward and not quite so timidly. However, when these two hunted the shade there was a temporary cessation of the work which lasted during the whole period of greatest heat.

Meanwhile, Chettle had not again spoken; nor had he shown himself, which indicated that he did not yet thoroughly trust what Ammar-al had told him. On the other hand, he had not asked the young chief to throw Ramsay's pistols out of the hut— probably for the reason that, if Ramsay were not really dead, even several pistols could not insure his own safety against attack, since he did not know exactly how many weapons the young miner had brought with him.

On the other hand, if Ramsay was dead, his pistols would be useless to Ammar-al, who, as Chettle knew, did not understand the use of firearms.

Late in the afternoon the digging was resumed. And when the grave was waistdeep Chettle showed impatience, and cut the work short by calling out in the Auka tongue for the men to enter the near-by shelter and fetch the body.

It was a task which the natives did not relish. They approached that matting door hesitatingly, Chettle urging them on, even threatening them.

Ammar-al made matters easier for the two. Once more the door matting was shoved aside. Then he stepped out and, holding the hanging aside, motioned the men to enter. Having leaned to peer into the green house and satisfy themselves that they were not in danger, they entered.

The body was in the bottom of the circular pit. Already, so far as it was possible, it had been prepared for burial. About it, wound closely, was that rubber-lined square. It had been so arranged that the most of it was wrapped about the head and shoulders of the dead; and because of this there protruded those high, brown, army boots.

Outside, Ammar-al lamented silently, gently swaying his body from side to side in the native fashion; while with grunts and low-spoken words, the natives lifted Ramsay's still limp form out of the pit to the level ground, then sprang up beside it, took it up by the head and feet, and bore it forth.

Down the clearing, at one end of the stone wall, Chettle now rose into sight, a revolver in either hand. And as the natives staggered with their burden toward the heap of. freshly turned-up ground he came 'strolling forward, thrusting one of his weapons into its holster. On his heavy mouth was a curious, twisted smile.

It grew to a wide grin as Ammar-al, who had moved across the camping place beside his dead friend, suddenly threw himself beside the body and, swaying in the manner of the mourning native, broke forth into a plaintive wail.

Another mourner joined in. Above, at the top of that rocky wall, sounded the plaintive cries of a woman.

Without halting, Chettle looked up. 'So that's where you are, is it?" he inquired pleasantly. "Well, Tani, if I get hold of your wrist again there's likely to be a little lesson handed out as to what happens when a Mary don't mind her own business. Yes, somebody'll have a taste of rattan." And he laughed.

Then with a sudden show of annoyance, as he came near to Ammar-al, "Oh, shut up and get back out of my way!" he ordered. To insure prompt obedience, and to give force to his command, he lifted a foot and kicked the kneeling figure.

It stood, and fell back a step. The next moment, even as Chettle was thrusting an inquiring foot against the body prone on the ground, there was a muffled explosion that made the Aukans scream out in terror and bolt for cover; while Chettle gave a strangled cry, dropped the revolver he was holding, and flung up his right hand. From it jetted a stream of red.

But he did not look at his wounded hand. It was as if he did not yet know he was hurt. And he did not attempt to draw a second weapon with his other

hand. Like a man suddenly struck dumb, what he did was to stare, his heavy mouth gaping wide.

He stared, not into the face of Ammar-al, but into the face of Ramsay!—Ramsay, to whose head covering was tied that long, black horse's tail of hair cut from the head of the young chief! Ramsay, with every square inch of his body smeared dark with earth.

"Why— Why—" Chettle was gasping.

"Hate to trick you like this," Ramsay declared good-naturedly.

Appalled, as well as shocked, Chettle's look wandered like that of a drunken man. And all at once he caught sight of his right hand. He clutched the wrist of it to lessen the flow of blood. Then dropped to his knees and pressed his shattered hand under his armpit.

"Get up!" Ramsay urged him. "And let me tie you, or you'll bleed to death."

But Chettle could not stand. He sank sidewise to the ground and sat, white, shaken, the cruel smile gone from his face, his round eyes imploring. "Oh, help me!" he begged. "Don't let me die!"

From three sides was coming the sound of stampeding feet, as hidden men, struck with fear at the sight of their fallen master, deserted him and fled as if for their lives. Ramsay, leaving his gibbering patient for a moment, and using a pocketknife, hastily cut the strands of rope and vine that bound the prostrate body of the young chief about arms and chest, and booted feet. Then he undid the smothering folds of the heavy cloth from over the face.

Ammar-al up once more, Ramsay had a vision of that native which was penned up in the part white, who shrieked out such wild, strange words in the guttural Aukan tongue that Chettle drew away as from a spear. Those blue eyes were ferocious, and covered by a glaze. Making a queer picture in Ramsay's khaki-colored clothes, he hung above the wounded white man as if he ached to tear, to avenge, to kill.

Ramsay thrust himself between the two. "Ammar-al!" he pleaded. "Listen! Let the cutter deal with him! Not you! Listen, old man! All that prison business is over! Think of that! He can't ever have another word to say on this island!"

Ammar-al listened, but as if the dengue were racking him, his body took on a trembling.

Ramsay laid a hand on his shoulder; and to divert him from the mania that had seized him, gently shook him. "Ammar-al," he went on, *think of what's ahead! Your people will be one tribe! And you will have plenty for them—gold to pay for schools and teachers—"

Ammar-al answered hoarsely. "He made the men into fiends," he charged. "He striped the backs of the women. He sent the children to live with the pigs."

"I know! I know!" Ramsay comforted. "But the gambling, and the whipping, and the drugs—they're all gone! Gone for keeps! That's all over, Ammar-al. And Auka Island's going to have the biggest feast in its history! Ah, the old Hindu was right. Ammar-al! He was right! The Forces were on my side!—and look here! Listen! Have you forgotten who you are now?"

Ammar-al straightened. His body ceased to quake as little by little the flame of his wrath subsided. Then his eyes cleared, and once more Ramsay saw on that pale, olive face one of those rare smiles.

"No," he answered.

"Ha-ha-a-a!" triumphed Ramsay. "Chief of Auka!"

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13: The Tell-Tale Button

Alfred S. Burrage

(Alfred Sherington Burrage, 1850-1906)
Weekly Times (Vic.), 20 Sep 1890

Burrage was a writer of many serials and stories, often in the boys' paper "The Young Englishman". This story was first published in "The Weekly Budget", UK, which appeared 1861-1910.

ONE DREARY night in November, when the air was full of fog, murk, and drizzling rain, I wended my way homeward, with almost empty pockets, and the full knowledge that my land-lady would greet me with a smirk and a smile, which would turn to a frown when I told her that I had "been disappointed in the city."

I was living in a street of a new suburb of London, with houses on each side exactly alike— as near like toy Noah's arks without the boats as I can compare them to: The denizens of Shakespeare Avenue, as it was called, were a queer lot. A lofty-minded and awe-inspiring gentlemen, who wore frock-coats in the morning, and hats of the shiniest silk, resided in the two stuccoed— I was going to say stuck-up— houses at the top, but we dwindled down to fustian and baskets of tools at the other end.

It was very late and I was as damp and cold as a frog when I turned into Shakespeare Avenue on this memorable night. We boasted of but three lamps, the middle one being generally extinguished, either by boys or a spirit of obstinacy on its own part, and it needed one well acquainted with the thoroughfare to alight upon any particular house after dark. After passing the first lamp I found myself in a black tunnel, with a gas-jet flickering mournfully at the other end, and I was just rehearsing a nice, neat, and hopeful little speech to conciliate my landlady, when I hipped over something lying direct in my path, and fall sprawling on the not too even pavement.

Before l could rise I was attacked by a terrier that yelped and howled dismally at me. I knew by the dog's cries that the poor brute had been wounded or ill-treated in some manner, and I beat it off with my hat as gently its possible, scrambling meanwhile to my feet as well as I could. I discovered that the cause of my downfall was a man apparently in the sound sleep of intoxication.

I could get no word out of him, and as to raising him, that was beyond my strength, for he was a bulky man, weighing between sixteen and seventeen stone; but I contrived to drag him under the over-hanging privet hedge of a

front garden, fully convinced that if a constable did not find him soon, no harm would come to him while the terrier was near.

"The drunken brute has kicked the dog and yet the poor creature remains faithful to him," I thought, as I reached home. "If the terrier had bitten him instead of fixing to set his teeth into me, I should feel some consolation for my trouble."

My land-lady had gone to bed, tired, I suppose, of waiting up for her impecunious lodger, and lighting the lamp, I examined the slight injuries I had sustained, consisting of scratched hands, a grazed chin, and the loss of a piece of skin from my right knee. My clothes did not appear the worse for the fall, as the rain had washed the pavement as clean as a new platter; so I thought the best thing I could do was to go to bed. Yet I was not satisfied. The figure of the man with the limping, yelping dog beside him haunted me; and I was about to set out in search of assistance, when I heard, the sound of hurrying footsteps, the shrill call of a policeman's whistle, and a repetition of the dog's mark of disapprobation.

"I need not trouble myself about him now," I murmured. "I had better think of myself, and be off to bed before I lay in a stock of rheumatism that may last me a lifetime.''

The affair had so absorbed my attention for the time that I had forgotten to glance at the mantelshelf to see if there were any letters for me. There were two— one in the handwriting of a certain young lady in the country; but I had scarcely the heart to open it, for while she was far away, fondly hoping that I was on the road to fame, for her sweet sake as well as my own. I was sitting almost penniless, shivering with cold and treading the dark paths of despair.

I read the letter through, kissed it, and, returning it to its envelope, took up the other.

"Ah!" said I, glancing at the embossed address on the reverse side. "The old story, I suppose. My work is not suitable for— Hullo! what's this? Hurrah!"

Dear Sir,

If you will favour us with a call on Monday, at noon, we may be able to discuss the manuscript you left with us to our mutual advantage.

Here was a stroke of luck indeed, and I could have danced very joy. a ne letter meant not only money for my present needs, but perhaps work that would keep me going for many a month. I blessed the writer of the letter, the postman who brought it, and everybody, not forgetting the man who had fuddled his head, whom I hoped might be let off with a caution, and went to bed in the happiest frame of mind.

On the following morning I was up betimes, and, examining my coat (the only presentable one I then possessed), I discovered that I had lost a button, which had fallen off, as buttons have the habit of doing, from the back part of it. There was nothing singular in the pattern of the button, but I had not one to match it, so I interviewed my landlady on the subject, and she, elated with the prospect of getting her money on the following day, removed the remaining button and fitted my rather shabby coat with two new ones.

After breakfast I went for a stroll, little dreaming that I was the most observed of all observers. I noticed that a gentlemanly-dressed man paid marked attention to me, and kept in my track until he overtook a friend, parted with him after exchanging a few words. At the time I put it down to idle fancy, but I could not help thinking that the other man was dogging my footsteps.

When I stopped, to retrace my steps be walked straight past me, but I saw him again before the day was over, for, happening to glance out of the window late in the afternoon, I noticed him on the other side of the avenue, talking to an individual who looked like a milkman who had just completed his round and was going home.

The truth, the almost hideous truth, that forms the sequel of this story never entered my head for a moment, and with a light and thankful heart went to church in the evening, and on returning home, stumbled against somebody standing hear the house that sheltered me. I begged his pardon, but instead of returning the compliment, he seized me roughly by the arm and swung me round into the clutches of the man I had taken for a milkman, who, before I could realise the true position in which I was placed, had collared and handcuffed me.

"What have I done? There is some mistake," I gasped.

"If there is, you will have the opportunity of explaining it soon enough," said he in plain clothes. I had scarcely recognised in him as the man whom I had seen in the Avenue, when up came the gentlemanly individual who had first followed me.

"You had better say nothing," said the man who had caught me by the arm. "We are police officers, and you will be charged with highway robbery with violence on the person of Mr. John Hallerton, of Acacia Mount. If you do say anything, I caution you that it will be taken down in writing and used in evidence against you."

The accusation, combined with the suddenness of the arrest, took my breath away, and left me trembling in every limb. I could say nothing, and do nothing but stare vaguely at the men, who marched me away to the nearest police-station.

What happened then I scarcely know. The place seemed to be illuminated with revolving gas-jets, in which certain men in blue uniforms were indescribably mixed up. I heard something about a button, scratched hands, a grazed nose, and then I was in a cell, the door of which was banged noisily.

The reaction set in. I was innocently accused of an atrocious crime, and such a one as only the lowest type of humanity would think of committing, and I ran to the door, hammered at it with hands and feet, and demanded to see an inspector, or anybody to whom I could make an explanation. A gruff voice on the other ride of the door informed me that unless I wished to make my quarters more uncomfortable than they were, I had better be quiet and go to sleep.

Sleep! Groaning in the bitterness of my heart, and the sense of my wrongs tingling in every nerve, I threw myself down on a bench, and buried my face in my hands.

Slowly the true state of affairs dawned into my mind. Mr. John Hallerton was the man I had tripped over in the Avenue; he had been attacked by a band of wretches, but the robbery had been thwarted by the dog, which, being small and black, had escaped their notice until it was yelping at their heels.

Pooh! What had I to fear? I could give the very best account of myself. Dozens of people in the City knew that I was a respectable man, and doubtless before the morning I should be set at liberty, with an apology from the police authorities. I had stammered out my address, and it subsequently appeared that one of the plain-clothes men had made prompt inquiries about me, returning to the station with the news that I had informed my landlady I was going somewhere on Monday to receive plenty of money.

The long, dreary night passed away, and at nine o'clock I was furnished with a plain breakfast, allowed to wash my face and hands, and then taken for a ride in that hideous conveyance known as a police-van. I had suffered horrors enough, but more were in store for me, for I had to sit in a room with a pack of foul-mouthed, callous scoundrels, who laughed at my misery, and told me I should get used to it after I had done a few "stretches"— the slang for terms of imprisonment.

At last my case was called on, and I was put into the dock, guarded by two warders. An inspector rose, facing the magistrate, said that he would only adduce sufficient evidence as Mr. Hallerton was lying at the hospital in a precarious condition, and legal aid would be needed to complete the case.

Then, to my amazement, I heard how I had been tracked. A button had been found near the assailed man, and it had been noticed by a detective that two new ones were attached to the back of my coat. The scratches on my hands were alluded to, and then my landlady— I saw her step into the witness-

box as through a gauze curtain— was called, and produced the other old button, which she had removed from my coat.

The magistrate, in a calm, business like voice, warned me not to say anything for the present, saying that I was remanded for a week, and the burly gaoler touched me on the shoulder, indicating that it was time to make a move. I implored the magistrate to listen to me, and I got through a number of sentences, half of which stuck in my throat, the last one dying to a murmur, when the clerk of the court— I shall never forget the mild benevolence of his face, and the learning of his eyes through his spectacles— said, "Take him away! Next case."

At that moment there was a commotion outside the court, and a woman's voice screamed out: "I am bad— I was born bad— but I'll not see an innocent man suffer for the guilty. Let me pass. Don't hold me, policeman. I tell you I will pass!"

The door flew open, and a young woman, whose bonnet was on one side of her head, and her hair tumbled, rushed into court.

"Don't take that man away!" she cried, pointing to me. "He is innocent— as innocent as the babe I buried only a month ago. Bill Kilden, the man who has ill-used me times out of number, forced me to watch Mr. Hallerton, and to play the part of a beggar. I did so, and while he was listening to my lying story, Bill came up and struck him down from behind."

There was a commotion in the court, but I heard nothing but the words of the woman ringing in my ears.

"See," she continued, pointing to her dress, "where the dog tore my skirts. It attacked Bill, too, biting his hand— you'll see the teeth-marks upon it— but he kicked the dog from him, and was stooping down to rob the fallen man when he heard the sound of footsteps, and ran away."

"This is a very remarkable confession," the magistrate said. "Is anything known about the man Kilden?"

A detective— my milkman— rose, and informed his worship that Kilden was known as a member of a dangerous gang of thieves, but no suspicion in this particular case had been attached to him. I was "put back," as the police have it, until later in the day, when I was brought up again; but my place in the dock was now occupied by a scowling ruffian.

"I've been put away by that woman," he said, turning to the witness-box; "but I'll make it right for her when I come out."

Bill Kilden never had the chance of making anything right or wrong in the outside world. He succumbed under the sentence of fourteen years' penal servitude; but the woman who saved me still lives, a quiet, pale-faced creature, who resides in a cottage not far from where these words are being

penned, and who is supposed to have a small independency, which she adds to by doing plain needlework.

Harking back for a moment, the words of the inspector are as plain before me as if they were printed in poster type.

"We thought we had the right man in you, sir; but I'm glad we were on the wrong tack. Only fancy a simple thing like a button and an accidental tumble nearly destroying a man's liberty, and perhaps killing him! Bill Kilden must have been a perfect fiend to the woman, or she would never have rounded on him. If there were a few more like her, we should have less trouble in clearing up mysteries."

"And save many an innocent man from being sent to prison," I put in.

"I don't think I can agree with you, there, sir," the inspector replied. "You have had a queer experience, and whenever you are in company, you can tell a good story of the awkward predicament from which you have luckily escaped."

14: Merrill's Savings

Algernon Gissing

1860-1937

Northam Advertiser (WA) 24 Dec 1910

Younger brother of George Gissing; author of some 30 novels and numerous articles and short stories. This story was not in any of his short story collections.

HERBERT MERRILL crept home like a criminal, with his heavy bag in one hand and an umbrella in the other. In reality he was a most exemplary character. But he was oppressed with shame. This thin was unworthy of him. The temptation had been wholly irresistible, and he had succumbed. His heart was as heavy as the bag he so stealthily carried. Yet whom was he wronging? Were they not his own? Was not every penny, of it his own lawful saving, gathered from his own honest daily toil in the bookseller's and stationer's shop wherein he served as assistant? But to make the action worse, out of shame he had lied to the cashier at the bank. This was the sting. It seemed little less than forgery. Yet again, what else could he have done? How otherwise explain the whole action? Could he candidly have confessed his depraved miserly curiosity to revel for a night in the tangible vision of his whole, worldly savings? Impossible! Yet he had lied, and this became the heaviest aspect of the matter as he drew near home.

The young man had been well brought up. From boyhood he had bad a saving's bank book, and penny, after penny had been duly entered. Once safely paid over the counter ftp power on earth could induce the boy to draw the sum out again. He had been taught to consider such an act as little short of a crime. If he did foolishly wish to squander any insignificant fraction of his money it must be deducted , from the coins when actually in hand. Money in the bank was money done with.

Still, he had never seen his wealth, and scarcely realised that he possessed it. This uneasy fact haunted him with ever increasing persistency. Latterly it had become intolerable. He was now twenty-four. Appetite failed him and he grew pale. At length one night in June he brought home. his bank book, and it showed three hundred and six pounds to his credit. That was the. last straw. "

Over three hundred pounds! He might speak to Julia— he might marry! But first he must handle and gaze on his substance. He could not believe in it otherwise. He must drink deeply of the conscious visible joy of possession. Hence the heavy bag, the stealthy movements, the locked door of his chamber when everybody else was in bed. He had drawn out the whole of his wealth in sovereigns. Here at last they were. He had earned and saved them faithfully,

and now his smothered affections need no longer haunt him with a sense of something not quite proper and honourable.

The next day was Sunday. As he shaved himself he saw that he did not look his best. A slight cut did not improve appearances. But Merrill was resolved. That day should reveal to him Julia's mind; and the next— why, every pound could be paid in again, and the thing be as if it had never cast its cloud over his existence.

He, of course, went to his Sunday school class. Everybody told him how ill he looked. But the only eyes for whose anxious gaze he was longing never encountered his at all. Julia was not there.

Merrill got through his duties somehow, overwhelmed again with the iniquity of his impatience and inattention. Never had his boys shown themselves so insubordinate. As soon as it was possible he dismissed them and laid hold upon Julia's substitute.

"Where is Miss Turner?" whispered he.

"Her mother is so ill she could not leave her," was the reply. "She sent me word last night."

"Oh!" said Merrill in dismay.

But a few minutes later he had resolved upon a bold course. Not within his remembrance had he failed in attendance on morning service. To-day he turned deliberately away from the door. His truancy, however, was not for the purpose of returning to gloat over his riches. He traversed some byways amongst gardens so long as church bells were ringing, but as soon as they had stopped he was at Mrs. Turner's door.

Julia opened it. She was not prepared for this, and the girl looked exceptionally beautiful as a deep blush suddenly overspread the pale and anxious features. Merrill coloured no less.

"May I come in?" said he.

"Why did you not let me know?"

As soon as the door was shut, an impulsive intimate tenderness sprung up in Merrill. No matter what he betrayed now, with his hand on Julia's arm he accompanied her into the room.

"But why did you not let me know? Surely I have the best right to be near you in trouble, to help and comfort you. Haven't I?"

Julia faltered that she did not know. The visitor had not paused to consider that the situation was only altered in his own mind, and that he had given his secretly-cherished idol no hint before of his relaxation of his scrupulous restraint.

"Don't know!" said he, all his frame quivering as he tightened his fingers on her own. "Then will you know now, Julia? Will you let me be near you? Will you give me the right to do anything and everything for you?"

"You are always kind to me."

"Now I want to be more than kind."

A bell rang.

"That's mother,'' said Julia, and escaped from his grasp.

In fluttering expectancy Merrill paced the parlour. Now that the reins were loosened a nobler passion than love of savings fired his soul. Never before had he suspected what his feelings toward Julia really were, and through her towards all womanhood. The world, the universe had suddenly assumed the tender and beauteous form of a woman. Unmindful even of impiety he bowed down and gave up his soul to her with religious ardour.

Half an hour elapsed ere Julia returned. Merrill heard, the step approaching, and fixed glowing eyes on the figure as it came in. Julia was more composed, and as the now undisguised lover stepped toward her with open arms she held up a reproving hand.

"Do not talk to me like this, Mr. Merrill," said she. "I must not listen to it. Be kind to me as you have always been. For that I am grateful."

Merrill was thunderstruck. "Do you not care for me?" he stammered.

"As friends... but not in the way you mean."

Julia was distressed, for the man collapsed utterly. He had never even distantly reckoned with such an alternative. It had always seemed to him that Julia was only waiting until he had accumulated those three hundred pounds. In his bewilderment his mind reverted, to that hoard as the only firm spot in a tottering universe, but the gold grinned back at him with wholly new and unrecognised features.

"I must go. Forgive me, Miss Turner."

Julia was distressed, and was murmuring some kind words as she followed him into the passage, when there was a loud knock on the street door. The young woman's heart was in her throat.

There was no escape. She stepped forward to open the door, and in came a laughing, sprightly figure. Merrill for an instant thought of the doctor, but his eyes met those of Jim Rodney.

"Ho, Merrill, you here!" cried Jim, as he held out his hand. But Merrill shot past him without a word, and fled without ever looking back.

"Is that it?" cried Rodney, as he folded her in an embrace and flung a gay laugh into the rear.

"He never gave a hint until today," said Julia, not relishing the joke. "I should have thought he knew."

"He knows now, anyhow," chuckled Jim.

And Merrill certainly did know that something like darkness and confusion had overwhelmed his soul. Jim Rodney, the only man he really hated, and of whose irregular life he knew too much. She could accept his attentions; she could be in love with him! Oh, the hideous deception of woman! What could it all mean?

On and on and out of the town fled Herbert Merrill, without ever looking back. As he followed a long, straight road, houses became fewer, fields and market-gardens were interspersed. At length he reached an open common. He left the road and plunged into the gorse and bracken.

Two or three times he came upon contented lovers, basking rapturously in the June sun. Each glimpse gave him a fresh sting. Finally he dropped into a secluded hollow and flung himself on the grass in a state of hopeless abandonment quite new to one of so regular and methodical an existence as his, In an agony of doubt he sat up at length.

His eyes fell at once on a female figure standing a few yards away on the rim of the little hollow in which he lay. She was gazing fixedly at him. The sun caught her features, which to Merrill seemed of transcendent loveliness, but they were agitated by distress or suffering.

The two stared at each other for some seconds, and then the girl, as if coming to herself, said "I beg your pardon."

But Merrill leapt up.

"Please don't go," he entreated.

The other looked back in astonishment.

"You can't help me," she said.

"I should be glad to try."

After a moment's hesitation the young woman took Merrill at his word, and, stepped down to him in the hollow. Apparently she, was in the extremity of distress. His sympathy at first only evoked a flood of tears, which completely melted Merrill. He ventured to lay his hand upon the daintily gloved one, and after a time, in response to his earnest and tender entreaties, she disclosed her woe.

There was nothing extraordinary in her story. Lifelong toil in a milliner's establishment, an unsuccessful father, an ailing mother. Through no fault of her own she had been dismissed from her situation after a bad season, and, in spite of all her efforts, she had failed to find any fresh employment.

Merrill made various prudent suggestions. She had already tried them all. The work-house alone was before them. They had already had time given to pay their rent, but on the 1st of July it would end. Then they would be sold up.

"No, no, you shan't be that," said Merrill decisively.

The woebegone features were raised suddenly, and the red, wet eyes fixed on him.

"But we must;, be. There is no help for it."

"I will pay your rent for you— if— if you will let me," stammered Merrill. "I can't bear to see your lovely eyes wet with tears. It is a wicked world. It is not right that women should have to suffer like this. Will you let me help you till you find a place?"

A nervous smile played on the man's features as he gazed intently into the girl's face.

"How can I? What will they say?"

"Who say?" thundered Merrill, "I am free. I may help anybody I like. If you let me do it, whom else do I trouble about?"

After some diffidence and prevarication, the damsel accepted the stranger's generosity with becoming gratitude. Another couple in passing peered into the hollow and laughed. But Merrill was reckless. By a flash of intuition he had weighed his glittering hoard of savings with beauty in distress, and had not found a moment's hesitation. He was lonely and wretched, he said, but not for want of money. He had regular work, and had saved a good bit. Would she come for a walk with him? They could help each other.

"What would you think of me if I did?" said the girl coyly.

"Think of you!" said Merrill, in blind earnest. "I should think you— an angel."

"That is too much," smiled his companion.

And they did undertake their walk, going on and on into the country. Dinner, and then tea, they obtained at country inns, and not until the sun was lowering did the pair come to the town again. An appointment was made for the morrow, when Merrill undertook to bring with him the sum necessary for rent.

He kept the appointment. But he had not repaid his savings into the bank that day. It was from no set design— merely that he could not find courage to return to the bank with his burden and— tell one more lie. The money was safely locked up in his big box, and he did his best not to think of it.

Still, Merrill could not help finding that he had launched upon a wholly new existence. On the Tuesday he met Jim Rodney accidentally in the street and the latter, in good humour, tried the friendly course of an explanation. Merrill stood this time and listened.

"Yes, I suppose I was a fool," he admitted. "Tell her it's all right. It was my fault."

Merrill's only refuge was in Emily Carr. With the help he had afforded, all the young woman's tears had vanished. She was gay and hopeful. Every

evening on his release from the shop she was awaiting him, and their rambles were prolonged till the last of the summer twilight.

On the Friday night, as they parted, Emily said casually, "What shall we do on Sunday?"

"Yes, Sunday," observed Merrill, and a strange medley of thoughts assailed him. "What church do you go to?" Each evening through the week he had meant to ask it, but had put it off.

"Sometimes, one and sometimes another," said Emily. "But let's have a walk. Never in my life shall I forget last Sunday."

Merrill eventually agreed, . and when he got home he wrote a note about his Sunday-school class. It was a lovely day, and they took train a little way into the country. Though quiet and subdued at first, Merrill roused himself in the sunlit fields, and became as attentive and ardent as Emily, could wish. He was eloquent on the subject of women. It was wrong that they should: have to go out to work. There was only one place for a woman— in a man's heart and as an angel beside his hearthstone. That and several more rapturous days Merrill spent with her. He knew the full joy of accepted love now. He could think even of Julia tenderly and charitably, not without compassion also. Poor girl, would she not have to find out her mistake?

Emily had her ring, and with the definite engagement Merrill found himself able to recover the threads of his life. First of all he returned regularly to his Sunday-school and other religious duties. The difference with Emily over this was only a slight one, and he was not at all alarmed at her steadily declining to join him in his course. He was a bashful man, and it would save him a good deal of trouble. All would be right afterwards.

He had readily acquiesced in the suggestion that it was really not worth while for Emily to seek fresh work, for he had told her frankly that he wished to be married soon. Indeed, on her tender shame-faced suggestion had he not supplied her with various sums for the preparations?

When, therefore, in a determined mood towards the end of September Merrill found courage to recount his savings, he was disturbed to discover that in one way and another upwards of £50 had melted from his store. It was a Saturday night he made the discovery, and after some hours of sleeplessness he went to the Sunday-school in a thoughtful mood. For one thing he would have a quiet, serious talk to Emily that afternoon.

For the first time for many weeks Mrs. Turner was at church again. The first glimpse of her kind, familiar, features sent a pang of uneasiness through Merrill. He tried to glance at her without exciting her observation, but once unawares her eyes caught his, and she sent him that old, sweet, gentle smile which smote him to the heart. He coloured to the roots of his hair. She simply

asked him if he would come to tea that afternoon. It was long since she hard seen him. Merrill said, he would. But he had not gone, far before discovering the difficulty he had created.

There had been already disagreement over Sunday between Emily and himself. When he had to announce that there could be no tea on the common that afternoon he readily foresaw another. It was not until he had; finished dinner that he hit upon the idea of taking Emily with him to Mrs. Turner's. The opportunity was really an excellent one for making a commencement in the task from which he had shrunk. It would, besides, free him from a good deal of the constraint he must inevitably suffer in facing Julia if she happened to be present. It was really a brilliant inspiration, and Merrill set off to call for Emily in quite a vigorous state of mind.

When he came to the house he was daunted. Somebody, was playing on the piano an air from the "Mikado." He must have made a mistake; but no, it was No. 42. There it was on the door. Merrill's soul fell. For an instant, he thought of flight, buts no choice was left him, for a window above was thrown open, and in a radiant voice Emily herself called out to him, "Come in, old boy. My brother the actor's here. Such fun. Let yourself in."

And, smiling unsuccessfully, Herbert Merrill went in. He had not before heard a word of this distinguished brother. Emily had run downstairs and met him at the foot. She kissed him demonstratively.

"Come in to him. He's just your sort."

Overwhelmed with doubts on the subject, and feeling no less, guilty than if he was entering a public-house, Merrill went into the room from which the piano sounded. The notes ceased abruptly, and a long-haired young man wheeled round on, the music-stool with effusive cordiality.

"Gus, this is " Emily began.

"Hah, Merrill, old man," swept in the actor, stretching out a hand: "No introduction needed for us, eh? I have heard all about you. I can see we shall hit it. A thousand congratulations."

The visitor was speechless. In spite of the cordial greeting, he could not compel his tongue to utter a word. He gazed with a fatuous smile at his prospective brother-in-law, but saw only his collar waistcoat, and watch-chain. Emily and Gus, however, joyfully took up the talking, and it was speedily arranged that all three of them should take a stroll together.

"I'm— I'm awfully sorry, though," faltered Merrill, "we shall have to be back by tea-time. I've got an invitation, Emily, from an old friend, and I thought you and I would go there together."

"Oh, hang!" said the girl, who frankly adopted her brother's mode of speech. "No, no, I can't do that to-day. Give it up, Bert. You really must. I want you altogether to-day."

"But I have promised," pleaded Merrill. "I'm sure you will like her. It is only a dear old lady."

"Then that settles it," laughed Emily boisterously. "No old ladies for me to-day. I tell you, Bert, we'll go and make a royal time of it at Winthorpe. Isn't that it, Gus?"

"By all means."

And the affair seemed settled. But whilst brother and sister were getting ready, Merrill fled from the house. He knew no other way. The whole atmosphere so startled and unnerved him that he could not think coherently. Nor did he collect his senses until he got home.

Emily and Gus looked at one another. On the face of the latter was a serio-comic expression, considered irresistible by his associates. Emily was pure tragedy.

Gus took off his soft brown felt hat again.

"It's you I must congratulate, Emm," he remarked sagely, as he drew his hand over his back hair round the collar. "I really shouldn't have thought it. it's awfully clever. It quite settles the point. You can get your hundred out of him. He's good for a hundred."

"A hundred!" hissed Emily. "He shan't pay a penny less than two hundred for this job, I can promise him."

"I think you are right. Two hundred would be better. But don't squeeze too hard. Even he would wriggle."

And Gus took his place at the piano.

Merrill reached Mrs. Turner an hour before tea-time. A shy little servant let him in, and assured him that her mistress was alone. Miss Julia was out. As soon as he was seated, the fragrance and colour of this simple home made Merrill tremble with emotion. He looked into the fire and listened to his companion's quiet talk with confused and remorseful agony. He could hear the strains of that piano far off, and they grated upon every fibre. Even the figure of Emily— these new and unsuspected tones of her voice— he shrank from himself in horror. Mrs. Turner's voice was only vague music to his ears. He did not hear what she was saying. But the name of James Rodney at last roused him.

"Isn't it dreadful? Who can we know nowadays?"

Merrill was in such confusion that he was only thinking of himself and his own crimes. But he caught more of his companion's words, and started up. She could not be meaning him!

"But what is it? What has happened, Mrs. Turner?"

"Haven't you heard? James was arrested last night for robbing his employers."

"Poor Julia!" muttered Merrill aghast, and again stared dolefully in the fire.

They talked for a long time, but before Julia could return from church Merrill had departed. The confession of his engagement for the first time had revealed to him the full madness of it. The original passion in which he had abandoned himself to the bewitching Emily had for some time been subsiding, but nothing had in the least prepared him for the shock of that afternoon at No. 42.

His first impulse was never to see Emily again, but reflection showed him the impossibility of this. On reaching his lodgings, however, he wrote a letter to her, and before going to bed he went out and posted it. So engrossed was Herbert Merrill in the purely human and emotional side of his experience that through all the genuine distress and humiliations of that day no thought of the English law at any moment occurred to him. That he had grossly wronged Emily Carr, that his was the duty to find out first their suitability to one another, he incessantly admitted, but he did not get beyond that.

It was with considerable astonishment, therefore, that he opened a letter which was delivered at his lodgings in the morning. It ran thus, and he read it, or tried to read it, several times :

Sir,

We are instructed by Miss Emily Carr of this town, to approach you on the subject, of an alleged breach of promise of marriage, which we understand had been entered into between yourself and her. As these matters can generally be more amicably arranged by word of mouth, we shall be glad if you will kindly call at our office at your earliest! convenience, or give us the name of a solicitor with whom we may discuss. the 1 matter in case you should prefer that course.

We are, sir,

yours obediently,

Watson and Giles.

Merrill went to this office accordingly, and in a brief conversation admitted the promise and the breach. The lawyer was a pleasant good-humoured man, and played about the situation in a paternal way. But it was to no purpose. Merrill was now resolved. That morning he had learned more fully the details of Jim Rodney's disgrace

"Then there is only the unpleasant alternative," said the solicitor in his professional tone. "Our client will not hear of any settlement for less than two hundred pounds."

Then Merrill was visibly thunderstruck. The lawyer was busy and sounded his bell. They could allow a week for consideration, but after that—

Merrill was bowed out. Two hundred pounds! All but the whole of his remaining savings.

Every night that week Merrill counted over two hundred sovereigns in a vacant mechanical manner, but dared not again count what there was beyond. On the last day that was allowed him he slunk once more along the pavement with a heavy bag in his hand. His destination was not the bank. When he got home the bag was empty— at least, it contained only a stamped acquittance from every claim for and on account of, etc., etc.

For some weeks Merrill was mysteriously ill. But he spent Christmas Day at Mrs. Turner's, and after that he grew rapidly better. It was, however, several months longer before Merrill and Julia compared their experiences. After that Merrill's frequent topic of conversation was the amount of a man's savings necessary to justify marriage. It was ultimately fixed at something considerably under three hundred pounds. But then Merrill had succeeded in obtaining a very much better situation.

15: The Mezzotint

M. R. James

1862-1936

In *Ghost Stories of an Antiquary*, 1904

Montague Rhodes James

SOME TIME AGO I believe I had the pleasure of telling you the story of an adventure which happened to a friend of mine by the name of Dennistoun, during his pursuit of objects of art for the museum at Cambridge.

He did not publish his experiences very widely upon his return to England; but they could not fail to become known to a good many of his friends, and among others to the gentleman who at that time presided over an art museum at another University. It was to be expected that the story should make a considerable impression on the mind of a man whose vocation lay in lines similar to Dennistoun's, and that he should be eager to catch at any explanation of the matter which tended to make it seem improbable that he should ever be called upon to deal with so agitating an emergency. It was, indeed, somewhat consoling to him to reflect that he was not expected to acquire ancient MSS. for his institution; that was the business of the Shelburnian Library. The authorities of that might, if they pleased, ransack obscure corners of the Continent for such matters. He was glad to be obliged at the moment to confine his attention to enlarging the already unsurpassed collection of English topographical drawings and engravings possessed by his museum. Yet, as it turned out, even a department so homely and familiar as this may have its dark corners, and to one of these Mr. Williams was unexpectedly introduced.

Those who have taken even the most limited interest in the acquisition of topographical pictures are aware that there is one Londondealer whose aid is indispensable to their researches. Mr. J.W. Britnell publishes at short intervals

very admirable catalogues of a large and constantly changing stock of engravings, plans, and old sketches of mansions, churches, and towns in England and Wales. These catalogues were, of course, the ABC of his subject to Mr. Williams: but as his museum already contained an enormous accumulation of topographical pictures, he was a regular, rather than a copious, buyer; and he rather looked to Mr. Britnell to fill up gaps in the rank and file of his collection than to supply him with rarities.

Now, in February of last year there appeared upon Mr. Williams's desk at the museum a catalogue from Mr. Britnell's emporium, and accompanying it was a typewritten communication from the dealer himself. This latter ran as follows:

We beg to call your attention to No. 978 in our accompanying catalogue, which we shall be glad to send on approval.
Yours faithfully, P.J.W. Britnell

To turn to No. 978 in the accompanying catalogue was with Mr. Williams (as he observed to himself) the work of a moment, and in the place indicated he found the following entry:

"978. Unknown. Interesting mezzotint: View of a manor-house, early part of the century. 15 by 10 inches; black frame. £2 2s.

It was not specially exciting, and the price seemed high. However, as Mr. Britnell, who knew his business and his customer, seemed to set store by it, Mr. Williams wrote a postcard asking for the article to be sent on approval, along with some other engravings and sketches which appeared in the same catalogue. And so he passed without much excitement of anticipation to the ordinary labours of the day.

A parcel of any kind always arrives a day later than you expect it, and that of Mr. Britnell proved, as I believe the right phrase goes, no exception to the rule. It was delivered at the museum by the afternoon post of Saturday, after Mr. Williams had left his work, and it was accordingly brought round to his rooms in college by the attendant, in order that he might not have to wait over Sunday before looking through it and returning such of the contents as he did not propose to keep. And here he found it when he came in to tea, with a friend.

The only item with which I am concerned was the rather large, black-framed mezzotint of which I have already quoted the short description given in Mr. Britnell's catalogue. Some more details of it will have to be given, though I cannot hope to put before you the look of the picture as clearly as it is present

to my own eye. Very nearly the exact duplicate of it may be seen in a good many old inn parlours, or in the passages of undisturbed country mansions at the present moment. It was a rather indifferent mezzotint, and an indifferent mezzotint is, perhaps, the worst form of engraving known. It presented a full-face view of a not very large manor-house of the last century, with three rows of plain sashed windows with rusticated masonry about them, a parapet with balls or vases at the angles, and a small portico in the centre. On either side were trees, and in front considerable expanse of lawn. The legend "A.W.F. sculpsit" was engraved on the narrow margin; and there was no further inscription. The whole thing gave the impression that it was the work of an amateur. What in the world Mr. Britnell could mean by affixing the price of £2 2s. to such an object was more than Mr. Williams could imagine. He turned it over with a good deal of contempt; upon the back was a paper label, the left-hand half of which had been torn off. All that remained were the ends of two lines of writing: the first had the letters— ngley Hall; the second,— ssex.

It would, perhaps, be just worth while to identify the place represented, which he could easily do with the help of a gazetteer, and then he would send it back to Mr. Britnell, with some remarks reflecting upon the judgment of that gentleman.

He lighted the candles, for it was now dark, made the tea, and supplied the friend with whom he had been playing golf (for I believe the authorities of the University I write of indulge in that pursuit by way of relaxation); and tea was taken to the accompaniment of a discussion which golfing persons can imagine for themselves, but which the conscientious writer has no right to inflict upon any non-golfing persons.

The conclusion arrived at was that certain strokes might have been better, and that in certain emergencies neither player had experienced that amount of luck which a human being has a right to expect. It was now that the friend— let us call him Professor Binks— took up the framed engraving, and said:

"What's this place, Williams?"

"Just what I am going to try to find out," said Williams, going to the shelf for a gazetteer. "Look at the back. Somethingley Hall, either in Sussex or Essex. Half the name's gone, you see. You don't happen to know it, I suppose?"

"It's from that man Britnell, I suppose, isn't it?" said Binks. "Is it for the museum?"

"Well, I think I should buy it if the price was five shillings," said Williams; "but for some unearthly reason he wants two guineas for it. I can't conceive why. It's a wretched engraving, and there aren't even any figures to give it life."

"It's not worth two guineas, I should think," said Binks; "but I don't think it's so badly done. The moonlight seems rather good to me; and I should have thought there were figures, or at least a figure just on the edge in front."

"Let's look," said Williams. "Well, it's true the light is rather cleverly given. Where's your figure? Oh yes! Just the head, in the very front of the picture."

And indeed there was— hardly more than a black blot on the extreme edge of the engraving— the head of a man or woman, a good deal muffled up, the back turned to the spectator, and looking towards the house.

Williams had not noticed it before.

"Still," he said, "though it's a cleverer thing than I thought, I can't spend two guineas of museum money on a picture of a place I don't know."

Professor Binks had his work to do, and soon went; and very nearly up to Hall time Williams was engaged in a vain attempt to identify the subject of his picture. "If the vowel before the ng had only been left, it would have been easy enough," he thought; "but as it is, the name may be anything from Guestingley to Langley, and thereare many more names ending like this than I thought; and this rotten book has no index of terminations."

Hall in Mr. Williams's college was at seven. It need not be dwelt upon; the less so as he met there colleagues who had been playing golf during the afternoon, and words with which we have no concern were freely bandied across the table— merely golfing words, I would hasten to explain.

I suppose an hour or more to have been spent in what is called common-room after dinner. Later in the evening some few retired to Williams's rooms, and I have little doubt that whist was played and tobacco smoked. During a lull in these operations Williams picked up the mezzotint from the table without looking at it, and handed it to a person mildly interested in art, telling him where it had come from, and the other particulars which we already know.

The gentleman took it carelessly, looked at it, then said, in a tone of some interest:

"It's really a very good piece of work, Williams; it has quite a feeling of the romantic period. The light is admirably managed, it seems to me, and the figure, though it's rather too grotesque, is somehow very impressive."

"Yes, isn't it?" said Williams, who was just then busy giving whisky-and-soda to others of the company, and was unable to come across the room to look at the view again.

It was by this time rather late in the evening, and thevisitors were on the move. After they went Williams was obliged to write a letter or two and clear up some odd bits of work. At last, some time past midnight, he was disposed to turn in, and he put out his lamp after lighting his bedroom candle. The picture lay face upwards on the table where the last man who looked at it had put it,

and it caught his eye as he turned the lamp down. What he saw made him very nearly drop the candle on the floor, and he declares now that if he had been left in the dark at that moment he would have had a fit. But, as that did not happen he was able to put down the light on the table and take a good look at the picture. It was indubitable— rankly impossible, no doubt, but absolutely certain. In the middle of the lawn in front of the unknown house there was a figure where no figure had been at five o'clock that afternoon. It was crawling on all-fours towards the house, and it was muffled in a strange black garment with a white cross on the back.

I do not know what is the ideal course to pursue in a situation of this kind. I can only tell you what Mr. Williams did. He took the picture by one corner and carried it across the passage to a second set of rooms which he possessed. There he locked it up in a drawer, sported the doors of both sets of rooms, and retired to bed; but first he wrote out and signed an account of the extraordinary change which the picture had undergone since it had come into his possession.

Sleep visited him rather late; but it was consoling to reflect that the behaviour of the picture did not depend upon his own unsupported testimony. Evidently the man who had looked at it the night before had seen something of the same kind as he had, otherwise he might have been tempted to think that something gravely wrong was happening either to his eyes or his mind. This possibility being fortunately precluded, two matters awaited him on the morrow. He must take stock of the picture very carefully, and call in a witness for the purpose, and he must make a determined effort to ascertain what house it was that was represented. He would therefore ask his neighbour Nisbet to breakfast with him, and he would subsequently spend a morning over the gazetteer.

Nisbet was disengaged, and arrived about 9.30. His host was not quite dressed, I am sorry to say, even at this late hour. During breakfast nothing was said about the mezzotint by Williams, save that he had a picture on which he wished for Nisbet's opinion. But those who are familiar with University life can picture for themselves the wide and delightful range of subjects over which the conversation of two Fellows of Canterbury College is likely to extend during a Sunday morning breakfast. Hardly a topic was left unchallenged, from golf to lawn-tennis. Yet I am bound to say that Williams was rather distraught; for his interest naturally centred in that very strange picture which was now reposing, face downwards, in the drawer in the room opposite.

The morning pipe was at last lighted, and the moment had arrived for which he looked. With very considerable— almost tremulous— excitement, he

ran across, unlocked the drawer, and, extracting the picture— still face downwards— ran back, and put it into Nisbet's hands.

"Now," he said, "Nisbet, I want you to tell me exactly what you see in that picture. Describe it, if you don't mind, rather minutely. I'll tell you why afterwards."

"Well," said Nisbet, "I have here a view of a country-house— English, I presume— by moonlight.

"Moonlight? You're sure of that?"

"Certainly. The moon appears to be on the wane, if you wish for details, and there are clouds in the sky."

"All right. Go on. I'll swear," added Williams in an aside, "there was no moon when I saw it first."

"Well, there's not much more to be said," Nisbet continued. "The house has one— two— three rows of windows, five in each row, except at the bottom, where there's a porch instead of the middle one, and— "

"But what about figures?" said Williams, with marked interest.

"There aren't any," said Nisbet; "but—"

"What! No figure on the grass in front?"

"Not a thing."

"You'll swear to that?"

"Certainly I will. But there's just one other thing."

"What?"

"Why, one of the windows on the ground-floor— left of the door— is open."

"Is it really? My goodness! he must have got in," said Williams, with great excitement; and he hurried to the back of the sofa on which Nisbet was sitting, and, catching the picture from him, verified the matter for himself.

It was quite true. There was no figure, and there was the open window. Williams, after a moment of speechless surprise, went to the writing-table and scribbled for a short time. Then he brought two papers to Nisbet, and asked him first to sign one— it was his own description of the picture, which you have just heard— and then to read the other which was Williams's statement written the night before.

"What can it all mean?" said Nisbet.

"Exactly," said Williams. "Well, one thing I must do— or three things, now I think of it. I must find out from Garwood"— this was his last night's visitor— "what he saw, and then I must get the thing photographed before it goes further, and then I must find out what the place is."

"I can do the photographing myself," said Nisbet, "and I will. But, you know, it looks very much as if we were assisting at the working out of a tragedy

somewhere. The question is, Has it happened already, or is it going to come off? You must find out what the place is. Yes," he said, looking at the picture again, "I expect you're right: he has got in. And if I don't mistake there'll be the devil to pay in one of the rooms upstairs."

"I'll tell you what," said Williams: "I'll take the picture across to old Green" (this was the senior Fellow of the College, who had been Bursar for many years). "It's quite likely he'll know it. We have property in Essex and Sussex, and he must have been over the two counties a lot in his time."

"Quite likely he will," said Nisbet; "but just let me take my photograph first. But look here, I rather think Green isn't up to-day. He wasn't in Hall last night, and I think I heard him say he was going down for the Sunday."

"That's true, too," said Williams; "I know he's gone to Brighton. Well, if you'll photograph it now, I'll go across to Garwood and get his statement, and you keep an eye on it while I'm gone. I'm beginning to think two guineas is not a very exorbitant price for it now."

In a short time he had returned, and brought Mr. Garwood with him. Garwood's statement was to the effect that the figure, when he had seen it, was clear of the edge of the picture, but had not got far across the lawn. He remembered a white mark on the back of its drapery, but could not have been sure it was a cross. A document to this effect was then drawn up and signed, and Nisbet proceeded to photograph the picture.

"Now what do you mean to do?" he said. "Are you going to sit and watch it all day?"

"Well, no, I think not," said Williams. "I rather imagine we're meant to see the whole thing. You see, between the time I saw it last night and this morning there was time for lots of things to happen, but the creature only got into the house. It could easily have got through its business in the time and gone to its own place again; but the fact of the window being open, I think, must mean that it's in there now. So I feel quite easy about leaving it. And, besides, I have a kind of idea that it wouldn't change much, if at all, in the daytime. We might go out for a walk this afternoon, and come in to tea, or whenever it gets dark. I shall leave it out on the table here, and sport the door. My skip can get in, but no one else."

The three agreed that this would be a good plan; and, further, that if they spent the afternoon together they would be less likely to talk about the business to other people; for any rumour of such a transaction as was going on would bring the whole of the Phasmatological Society about their ears.

We may give them a respite until five o'clock.

At or near that hour the three were entering Williams's staircase. They were at first slightly annoyed to see that the door of his rooms was unsported;

but in a moment it was remembered that on Sunday the skips came for orders an hour or so earlier than on week-days. However, a surprise was awaiting them. The first thing they saw was the picture leaning up against a pile of books on the table, as it had been left, and the next thing was Williams's skip, seated on a chair opposite, gazing at it with undisguised horror. How was this? Mr. Filcher (the name is not my own invention) was a servant of considerable standing, and set the standard of etiquette to all his own college and to several neighbouring ones, and nothing could be more alien to his practice than to be found sitting on his master's chair, or appearing to take any particular notice of his master's furniture or pictures. Indeed, he seemed to feel this himself. He started violently when the three men came into the room, and got up with a marked effort. Then he said:

"I ask your pardon, sir, for taking such a freedom as to set down."

"Not at all, Robert," interposed Mr. Williams. "I was meaning to ask you some time what you thought of that picture."

"Well, sir, of course I don't set up my opinion again yours, but it ain't the pictur I should 'ang where my little girl could see it, sir."

"Wouldn't you, Robert? Why not?"

"No, sir. Why, the pore child, I recollect once she see a Door Bible, with pictures not 'alf what that is, and we 'ad to set up with her three or four nights afterwards, if you'll believe me; and if she was to ketch a sight of this skelinton here, or whatever it is, carrying off the pore baby, she would be in a taking. You know 'ow it is with children; 'ow nervish they git with a little thing and all. But what I should say, it don't seem a right pictur to be laying about, sir, not where anyone that's liable to be startled could come on it. Should you be wanting anything this evening sir? Thank you, sir."

With these words the excellent man went to continue the round of his masters, and you may be sure the gentlemen whom he left lost no time in gathering round the engraving. There was the house, as before, under the waning moon and the drifting clouds. The window that had been open was shut, and the figure was once more on the lawn: but not this time crawling cautiously on hands and knees. Now it was erect and stepping swiftly, with long strides, towards the front of the picture. The moon was behind it, and the black drapery hung down over its face so that only hints of that could be seen, and what was visible made the spectators profoundly thankful that they could see no more than a white dome-like forehead and a few straggling hairs. The head was bent down, and the arms were tightly clasped over an object which could be dimly seen and identified as a child, whether dead or living it was not possible to say. The legs of the appearance alone could be plainly discerned, and they were horribly thin.

From five to seven the three companions sat and watched the picture by turns. But it never changed. They agreed at last that it would be safe to leave it, and that they would return after Hall and await further developments.

When they assembled again, at the earliest possible moment, the engraving was there, but the figure was gone, and the house was quiet under the moonbeams. There was nothing for it but to spend the evening over gazetteers and guide-books. Williams was the lucky one at last, and perhaps he deserved it. At 11.30 p.m. he read from *Murray's Guide to Essex* the following lines:

161/2 miles, Anningley. The church has been an interesting building of Norman date, but was extensively classicized in the last century. It contains the tombs of the family of Francis, whose mansion, Anningley Hall, a solid Queen Anne house, stands immediately beyond the churchyard in a park of about 80 acres. The family is now extinct, the last heir having disappeared mysteriously in infancy in the year 1802. The father, Mr. Arthur Francis, was locally known as a talented amateur engraver in mezzotint. After his son's disappearance he lived in complete retirement at the Hall, and was found dead in his studio on the third anniversary of the disaster, having just completed an engraving of the house, impressions of which are of considerable rarity."

This looked like business, and, indeed, Mr. Green on his return at once identified the house as Anningley Hall.

"Is there any kind of explanation of the figure Green?" was the question which Williams naturally asked.

"I don't know, I'm sure, Williams. What used to be said in the place when I first knew it, which was before I came up here, was just this: old Francis was always very much down on these poaching fellows, and whenever he got a chance he used to get a man whom he suspected of it turned off the estate, and by degrees he got rid of them all but one. Squires could do a lot of things then that they daren't think of now. Well, this man that was left was what you find pretty often in that country— the last remains of a very old family. I believe they were Lords of the Manor at one time. I recollect just the same thing in my own parish."

"What, like the man in Tess of the D'Urbervilles?" Williams put in.

"Yes, I dare say; it's not a book I could ever read myself. But this fellow could show a row of tombs in the church there that belonged to his ancestors, and all that went to sour him a bit; but Francis, they said, could never get at him— he always kept just on the right side of the law— until one night the keepers found him at it in a wood right at the end of the estate. I could show you the place now; it marches with some land that used to belong to an uncle of mine. And you can imagine there was a row; and this man Gawdy (that was the name, to be sure— Gawdy; I thought I should get it— Gawdy), he was

unlucky enough, poor chap! to shoot a keeper. Well, that was what Francis wanted, and grand juries— you know what they would have been then— and poor Gawdy was strung up in double-quick time; and I've been shown the place he was buried in, on the north side of the church— you know the way in that part of the world: anyone that's been hanged or made away with themselves, they bury them that side. And the idea was that some friend of Gawdy's— not a relation, because he had none, poor devil! he was the last of his line: kind of spes ultima gentis— must have planned to get hold of Francis's boy and put an end to his line, too. I don't know— it's rather an out-of-the-way thing for an Essex poacher to think of— but, you know, I should say now it looks more as if old Gawdy had managed the job himself. Booh! I hate to think of it! have some whisky, Williams!"

The facts were communicated by Williams to Dennistoun, and by him to a mixed company, of which I was one, and the Sadducean Professor of Ophiology another. I am sorry to say that the latter when asked what he thought of it, only remarked: "Oh, those Bridgeford people will say anything"— a sentiment which met with the reception it deserved.

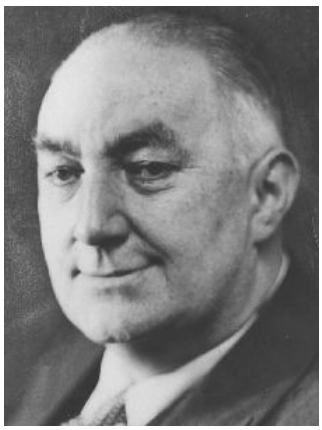
I have only to add that the picture is now in the Ashleian Museum; that it has been treated with a view to discovering whether sympathetic ink has been used in it, but without effect; that Mr. Britnell knew nothing of it save that he was sure it was uncommon; and that, though carefully watched, it has never been known to change again.

16: The Christmas Princess

Edgar Wallace

1875-1932

The Windsor Magazine, Dec 1923



Richard Horatio Edgar Wallace

THERE WERE TIMES when John Bennett Watson (abbreviated for office purposes to "J. B.") wished he were not the Managing Director of the Western Commercial Corporation; moments when he envied the manager of the Broad Street branch of the Southern & Eastern Bank. This in spite of the fact that he was a normal man of thirty-something, without any business worries whatever, enjoying the best of health and an income which, at a moderate estimate, was twenty times larger than the hard-worked bank manager.

J. B. was a man who in no circumstances interfered in other people's affairs; meddlers, he loathed; outside folks who knew how things could be done better, he abominated, and yet there were certain domestic arrangements of the Southern Bank that he would alter.

Gray, the manager, a harassed little man with a straggling beard, came over to see him about a draft, and John made an awkward dive to the matter that at once intrigued and irritated him.

"You are very busy at the bank, Mr. Gray?"

"Yes," sighed Gray, rising and gathering up his documents, "too busy! With the annual audit coming on, the slump in industrials, the heavy cash balances I must carry to meet end-of-the-quarter demands, I look like having a happy New Year! Good morning!"

"I was working late in my office the other night," said John hastily, arresting the official's departure, "and, looking across the road, I saw a girl working at eleven o'clock— she was still working when I left, and the next morning I saw her at her desk when I arrived."

The manager scratched his beard.

"Who can that be, now?" he asked absently. "Oh yes, that is Miss Welford. She was secretary to our late accountant. Poor fellow! He died leaving things in a terrible muddle, and if it wasn't for the fact that she has an instinct for banking and has got his department work at her finger-tips, I should be in a fearful muddle. She is the only member of my staff that I would leave on the premises by herself, I assure you!"

"I thought I'd met her somewhere," said John carelessly and most untruthfully.

"I dare say," said the bank manager. "She is the sort of girl who has moved in a very good set. Her father lost his money in the rubber slump. By the way, rubber is a market that looks like reviving, Mr. Watson."

"I dare say," said John, to whom the fluctuations of the rubber market meant less than nothing. "I think I remember her— Annie Welford, isn't it?"

The manager shook his head.

"I don't know— 'F. G.,' her initials are." He frowned. "I never trouble about the names of people. Oh yes, it's Frances; that's the name. I've often thought she's quite a good-looking girl."

"You've often thought that, have you?" said John scornfully.

The man was scarcely human, and yet he was loath to let him go, and searched around in his mind for some excuse for detaining him.

"Where do you go for Christmas, Mr. Gray?"

"Home," said the other, showing the first sign of animation. "The two days in the year I look forward to are Good Friday and Christmas Day. Christmas is the one day I can't work and can be really a perfectly happy man! I sit in front of a fire, and my children read to me or tell me Christmas stories, and that's my idea of a perfectly happy day."

"Great heavens!" said John, aghast. "You are human, after all! Though I confess that, if anybody tried to tell me a Christmas story on Christmas Day, I should go and look for a hatchet. And your staff— do they work?"

"I'm sorry to say that headquarters won't allow that," said the manager regretfully. "It would add to my enjoyment considerably if I knew that somebody else was working."

John took an instant dislike to him, had thoughts of changing his bank.

"Do you mean to tell me you would let her— them, I mean— work on Christmas Day? Why, it would be disgraceful!" he said hotly.

When the bank manager had gone, John strode over the carpeted floor of his office and stood, staring across at the trim figure visible— more visible than he had hoped— from the window.

"Quite a good-looking girl!"

He smiled at the impertinence of the man. She was beautiful, the complete satisfaction of all his uncatalogued requirements. If he could only hear her speak! He shrank from the possibility of disillusionment. What would she do on Christmas Day? he wondered. Hold revel in her suburban home, possibly in the company of her sweetheart. He made a little grimace at the thought.

Yet it was perfectly ridiculous to suppose that such a girl would be without admirers, and that from their hosts she should not have given preference to one over all the rest.

If Gray had been just a little more human, it would have been possible to secure an introduction, though he shrank even from that prospect.

He was staring at her when the girl looked up, saw his dim figure behind the window-pane, and, as though conscious that she had been the object of his scrutiny, got up quickly from the table, switched on the light, and pulled down the shade. It was the first time she had ever noticed him, he reflected glumly, and it was not very pleasing that her acknowledgment of his admiration should be so emphatically resentful.

John Watson went back to his bachelor flat in St. James's with a feeling that the day had not been well spent, and that something in this one-sided intimacy had gone out of his life. He could no longer picture himself speaking to her, could weave no more dreams in which she played a complacent and agreeable part. Drawing the blind seemed to shut out even the visions that a pipe and a fire and a sprawling terrier bring to the most unimaginative. He must needs fall back upon the Princess.

Her Serene Highness had been a figure of speculation from the day when old Nurse Crawley, who attended his infant needs, and was locally credited with being possessed of the devil, predicted that he would inherit a great fortune and marry a princess— a faith from which she never wavered all the days of her life. Fortune had come unexpectedly and vastly, and had been doubled and trebled by his own peculiar genius. But the Princess remained amongst the glowing and shadowy shapes of the fire, less tangible than the blue smoke that curled from his pipe.

And now the Princess bored him. He wanted to meet "F. G. Welford." He wanted badly to meet her: first, to apologize for his rudeness, and then to ask her... well, just to ask her if life held any greater attraction than the balancing of a late accountant's books.

The blind was drawn the next morning when he looked out. It was drawn on the morning of Christmas Eve. He had brought his bag to the office and lost two trains in the hope that she might relent. She was inexorable. He always traveled to Tatterdown by train because the cottage (it had been his father's

before him) had no accommodation for a car, and somehow his big limousine did not attune with the atmosphere of that faded and fragrant place.

The taxi-cab that took him to the station was half-way up Broad Street when he saw her. She was walking toward the office; had evidently been out to tea; and his cab was near enough to the sidewalk to give him the nearest view of her face he had yet had. He drew his breath at the sight of her, and for a second was seized with an insane desire to stop the cab, get out, and, on some desperate excuse or other, speak to her. But before he could commit that folly, she was gone.

Gray was a slave-driver, he decided, a sweater, a man of no sensibility or feeling. Christmas Eve! And to allow a girl to work.... Perhaps the cunning devil had lied to him, and she was working on Christmas Day. He hated the unhappy Mr. Gray, hated his baldness, his beard, and all that was of him. Such a man had no soul, no proper appreciation of values. He was a cold-blooded exploiter of all that was best and noblest in humanity.

By the time he had reached Bullham Junction, John Bennett Watson was better balanced in mind, could chuckle at his own extravagances without wondering at them, which was ominous.

There was no conveyance at the station, and he walked through the one street of Bullham to the Red Lion.

"Excuse me, Mr. Watson."

He turned, to see the rubicund countenance and the blue coat of a policeman.

"Happy Christmas, Mr. Watson. You going out to Tatterdown?"

"Why, yes, sergeant, as soon as I can get a cab."

"Likely you'll see my dog Mowser round about the village; he's a rare fellow for Tatterdown. There's a dog there he's always fighting. Will you send him home with a flea in his ear? Give him a whack and he'll go. Getting into bad habits, that dog. Comes home in the middle of the night and scratches the door till I let him in."

J. B. smiled and promised.

Mowser, a bedraggled wire-haired terrier, he found literally on the doorstep of the cottage, and Mowser's feud had evidently found expression in violence, for he was slightly tattered.

John took him in and fed him. The hour was late, and he decided to send him back in the morning— an arrangement wholly agreeable to Mowser, who finished his scrap and went to sleep under the kitchen table.

So small was Tatterdown Cottage that the man and his wife who acted as caretakers had no accommodation and slept at the village— a risky proceeding, as an insurance company had told him, but one which he

preferred, for there were memories about this little house with its thatched roof and Elizabethan chimneys which were very pleasant, and the presence of strangers was insufferable. Here, for ten years, John Watson had wakened to hail the Christmas morn and listen to the silvery bells of the parish church, and had spent the morning in the sheltered garden, tending those hardy plants that reveal their treasures in bleak December. For ten Christmas Eves he had sat, huddled up in the big, chintz-covered chair, with a pipe and a book and his pleasant thoughts, listening to the drip of rain or the thin whine of the wind, or watching, on one never-to-be-forgotten Christmas Eve, the snowflakes building white cobwebs in the corner of every pane.

It was half-past eleven, and he had risen with a yawn to stretch himself preparatory to going upstairs to bed, when there came to him from outside a sound which was familiar. He passed down the little passage, unbolted the front door, and stepped into the garden.

Out of the darkness came the peculiar and distinctive sound of an aeroplane's engines that were not running sweetly, and presently, peering overhead, he saw the shadow of great wings. Suddenly a blinding white light showed in the skies, illuminating fields and road, so brilliant that Tatterdown Parish Church, a mile away, was visible. The light swooped in a circle, coming lower and lower, and finally vanished behind the privet fence of the Hermitage field, its radiance throwing the trim boundary hedge into silhouette.

Going back into the cottage for his coat, Watson ran through the garden, across the road, and, vaulting the gate, stumbled over the frozen plough-land to the place where the landing lights of the big machine were flickering to extinction.

"Hello!" called a voice, and John answered the hail, and presently came up with the two men who were standing by the under-carriage. One was lighting a cigarette, and the newcomer caught a momentary glimpse of his face, long, white, and blackly bearded. The other he could not see, but it was he who spoke.

"Where are we?" he asked.

"Tatterdown, six miles from Pelworth," Watson answered. "You got down without accident?"

There was no reply for a few seconds, and then the bearded man laughed softly.

"We got down, but not without accident," he said, a dry note in his voice. "Is there a house where..."

Here he stopped and said something to his companion in an undertone. The short man grunted an inquiry in the same tone, and:

"I'll ask," he said. "Are we near to a village?"

"No— not nearer than a mile," said Watson. "I have a cottage, but it is rather isolated."

"Wife and family?"

John laughed quietly.

"No," he said; "I am all alone."

Again the whispered colloquy.

"It may sound a little— unusual and impertinent, these questions," said the tall man at last, "but we have a passenger who, for State reasons, is traveling incognito. I must take you this much into my confidence and tell you that she ought not to be within a thousand miles of England. May I therefore rely upon your discretion?"

Dumbfounded, John Watson listened, his sense of adventure piqued.

"Certainly, you may rely upon me," he said. "I am a bachelor and live alone— I usually come to Tatterdown to spend Christmas— and I haven't even a servant in the house. I was born here, and have a certain sentimental feeling towards the place. I am giving you confidence for confidence. My name is Watson, by the way."

"Thank you," said the other simply. "My name is James— Colonel Alfred James."

He walked towards the machine, and John heard him speak.

"You may descend, Highness," he said.

His eyes now accustomed to the darkness, J. B. saw a slim figure descend, and waited whilst the two men and the woman spoke together in a whisper. So far as he could gather, the lady said little, but the conversation continued for so long that John began to feel the cold.

"Will you come this way?" he called.

"Lead on," said the gruff voice of the smaller man, and the owner of Tatterdown Cottage led the way to the gate, and, after some delay, opened it and ushered them across the road into the cottage.

The tall Colonel James followed, carrying two heavy bags; then came the girl; and thirdly, the shorter of the two, a round, red-faced man with a slight moustache and a pair of small eyes that were set a trifle too close together.

The big man deposited the bags on the floor of the sitting-room.

"I present you, Mr. Watson, to Her Serene Highness, Princess Marie of Thurgen," he said. "Her Highness has a very dear friend in London, but owing to the War and the restrictions which have been placed upon Germans visiting England, it has been necessary for Her Highness to make a surreptitious and in some ways unauthorized trip to London. Whilst we realize that to land in England without a passport and without the necessary authority from the Home Office constitutes a technical offense, my friend and I have gladly

undertaken the risk to serve one to whose father we are under a heavy debt of obligation."

All the time he had been speaking, John's wondering gaze had never left the girl's pale face. She stood with eyes downcast, hands lightly clasped in front of her, and only once during the interview did she look up. Presently John found his voice, though he spoke with extraordinary difficulty.

"I shall be happy to place my room at the disposal of Her Highness," he said.

"You have no telephone here?" asked the little man suddenly.

John shook his head.

"No," he said, with a half-smile, "we have nothing quite so modern at Tatterdown Cottage except a very modern bathroom leading from my room. May I show Your Highness the way?"

The tall man inclined his head gravely.

"Will you go first, please?" he said.

Lighting a candle, John went up the narrow stairs, opened the door of his chamber, a cozy room with its old four-poster and its log fire smouldering in the grate.

"This will do very well," said the tall man, who had followed him. "In here, Your Highness."

He put his hand on the girl's arm and led her into the room. Then, coming out quickly, he closed the door behind him. At the foot of the stairs stood the little fat man, grotesquely huge in his leather coat and as grotesquely ridiculous in his leather headgear.

"Her Highness is comfortable," said the bearded man. "You can go to work on the machine. Do you think you can get it right by the morning?"

"I ought to have it right in two hours," said the other, "but we couldn't possibly take off in the dark. I don't know the size of the field. It's plough-land, too, and that'll make it a bit more difficult, but I'll certainly be ready for you at daybreak."

With that he was gone, leaving John alone with the colonel.

"Will you come into the sitting-room?" asked John.

"I think not," replied James. "You see, Mr. Watson, my responsibility is a great one. Certain things have happened in London which have reduced Her Highness to the verge of despair. She has enemies— personal enemies, you understand?— who would not hesitate to take her life."

He pulled up his leather coat, and from his pocket slipped out a long-barrelled Browning and snapped back the jacket.

"I will not detain you any longer, Mr. Watson. You may go to bed with the full assurance that you have rendered an inestimable service to what was once the greatest ruling house in Germany."

John laughed softly.

"Unfortunately," he said, "I have no bed, and if you mean that you are going to sit up all night, you have relieved me of a great embarrassment, for I should have had no place to offer you but the settee in my sitting-room. You are welcome to that."

James shook his head.

"I will remain here," he said, and sat on the lower stair. Suddenly he got up. "Is your sitting-room beneath your bedroom?"

John nodded.

"Should I hear any— any noise above?"

"Undoubtedly," said John. "Every floor in this old house creaks."

"Then I will join you. It is inclined to be draughty here."

He accompanied his host into the sitting-room and stripped the leather coat he was wearing, pulled off his helmet, and sank, with a luxurious sigh, into the deep arm-chair that John had vacated when the sound of the aeroplane's engines had come to his ears.

"Christmas Eve, eh?" said the colonel. He extracted a cigarette from the case and tapped it thoughtfully on his thumbnail. Then, seeing John's eyes resting on the pistol that lay on the table by his elbow, he asked: "Looks a little theatrical, don't you think? I suppose firearms are not in your line, Mr. Watson?"

"I have an automatic at my London flat," said John, with a smile, "but I can't say that I get a great deal of pistol practice. Do you seriously mean that you would use that in certain extremities?"

The big man blew a cloud of smoke to the ceiling and nodded.

"I mean that," he said curtly.

"How fascinating!" said J. B. "And how unChristmaslike!"

The other smiled broadly.

"There are one or two things about you that puzzle me," J. B. went on slowly.

"Such as—?"

"Well," he hesitated, "did the Princess come to where the aeroplane was? I presume it was somewhere outside of London?"

"We picked her up in a car," said the other shortly.

"I see," said J. B. "How queer!"

"What is queer?" frowned James.

"The whole thing," said J. B. Watson. "You can't say that it is a usual experience for a bachelor to have a princess drop on to him from the clouds. And, for a reason which you won't want me to explain, I am especially interested in princesses. It goes back to a very old prophecy that was made by my nurse."

There was a slight movement above their heads.

"Excuse me," said James, and, rising quickly, ran up the stairs.

The sound of a low-voiced conversation floated down to John Watson, and, after a while, the footsteps of James upon the stairs. When he came in he was looking a little worried.

"Did Her Highness require anything?"

"Nothing." This time the man's voice was curt. "She wanted to know when the machine would be ready, that is all."

They sat in complete silence for half an hour till John rose.

"I'll make some coffee, or I shall go to sleep. And you would like some coffee too?"

James hesitated.

"Yes, I think I should. I'll come with you and see you make it," he said.

A sleeping Mowser lifted his wiry head inquiringly as the two men came into the kitchen, and watched them with unconcern, till, realizing that nothing in the shape of food was imminent, he tucked his head between his paws and went to sleep again.

James took a chair and watched the percolator working without comment, and J. B. could not escape a feeling that he stood in relationship to the man as a convict stands to a prison guard, and this impression was strengthened when, the coffee made, his guest walked behind him to the sitting-room again. It was some time before the steaming cups had cooled sufficiently to drink, and John took a sip and made a wry face.

"Do you take sugar?" he asked. "Because I do."

He went back to the kitchen, but this time the man did not accompany him. But he was standing in the doorway when J. B. returned.

"You took some time to find it," he said gruffly, and saw that his tone was a mistake, for he went on, with a laugh and a return to his old suavity: "Forgive my infernal cheek, but this little adventure of ours has got on my nerves."

"I couldn't find it," said John. "My caretaker discovers a new place to hide her stores every visit I make to the cottage."

He dropped two lumps into his coffee and stirred it, and, finding that the bearded colonel desired to do nothing more than to smoke an endless chain of cigarettes, he took down a book from the shelf and began to read.

Presently the heavy boots of the smaller man sounded on the paved pathway outside the cottage, and John jumped up.

"That must be your friend," he said, and went to admit him.

The pilot, for such he seemed to be, came in, grimy of face and black of hands.

"I've put it right," he said. "You can be ready to move as soon as you like. I have explored the field, and there's plenty of room to take her off."

"Go back to the machine and stand by," said the other sharply. And then, to John: "I am extremely obliged to you for courtesy, and I'm glad we have not had to trespass longer on your hospitality than was necessary. And may I add the thanks of the Princess to mine?"

"You may," said John.

James ran up the stairs and knocked at the bedroom door.

"I am ready, Your Highness."

There was a pause, and then the key was turned and the door opened. It closed again upon the man, and all that John Watson could hear was the murmur of voices through the ceiling.

He laughed softly, pure joy in every note. So old Nurse Crawley had been right, after all, and a princess had come into his life, and the prophecy might yet be fulfilled.

The door was opened, two pairs of feet descended the stairs, and presently James stood in the light of the table-lamp, which flowed through the open door of the sitting-room into the passage. In each hand he carried a bag, and behind him was a muffled figure in a fur coat, who kept her face steadily averted from John's eyes.

"I thank you again, Mr. Watson. If I have put you to any expense—"

"None whatever," said John politely.

He stood with his back to the fire and watched. He heard James put down his bag and turn the handle of the door, but it did not move. He tried again, feeling for the bolts, and finding that the door was of stout oak and the lock of ancient solidity, he came back to the sitting-room.

"I can't open your door, Mr. Watson."

"Very true," said John pleasantly, "very true!"

The man's brows gathered in a frown of suspicion.

"What do you mean— very true?" he asked harshly.

"You can't open it because I've locked it, and the key is in my pocket," said John.

Instantly the automatic appeared in James's hand.

"Give me that key," he said coldly, "or there'll be a village tragedy that will mystify the reporters. I ought to have shot you anyway," he said, "and, by God, if you don't— give me that key!"

John shook his head. His hands were still behind him, and, with a smothered exclamation of rage, the man pressed the trigger. There was a dull click.

"I took the precaution of unloading your pistol when you went upstairs an hour or two ago, Mr. James, or Colonel James, as the case may be," said John in his conversational tone. "I have also sent, attached— via the back door— to the collar of a small and intelligent dog, an urgent message to the Bullham police to put in as early an appearance as possible. I've been expecting them for the last five minutes."

With a roar of rage the big man sprang at him, and, as he did so, John withdrew his right hand and struck at his assailant with the poker, which it had held throughout the interview. Quick as a cat, the man dodged the blow, and in another instant he had gripped the other in his powerful hand. John wrenched his left arm free and struck twice at the man, but his padded coat softened the blows, and it was not until a lucky blow caught Colonel James under the jaw that he went floundering to the ground. There was the sound of voices outside. John took the key from his pocket and flung it at the foot of the terrified girl.

"Open the door, quick, Miss Welford!" he hissed, and turned to leap on his half-maddened adversary, who had thrown open his coat and was groping for a second pistol. Before it could be drawn, the room was full of people, and he went down under the weight of two policemen and the local blacksmith.

"THIS is the real miracle-play," said John. "But to make the miracle complete, you've got to stay here and have dinner, Miss Welford."

"But what I can't understand is, how you recognized me?" asked the puzzled girl.

"I not only know your name, but I know the whole story," said John. "You were working at the bank late, and these two gentlemen, who must have long planned the coup, broke into the vault to secure the very large sum in ready cash which would be on the bank premises on Christmas Eve. They then discovered that you were among the treasures that the bank contained—"

"I heard the noise and went down. They took me away with them in the car because they were afraid that I should identify them. I had no idea that, when the machine came down, they swore that, if I betrayed them, they would not only kill me but kill you also. They had to explain me, so I became a princess. But how did you know that I was not?"

"I knew you were a princess all right," said John. "I've known you were a princess ever since I started peeping into your palace window."

She drew a long breath.

"Oh, were you the man?" she said. "I've often wondered since. I never knew you."

"You know me now, and you will know me much better. Will you stay and have Christmas dinner with me?"

She looked at him quickly, then dropped her eyes.

"I think I will," she said. "I owe you so much, Mr.—"

"On Christmas Day," he interrupted, "I am 'John,' even to my enemies," and she smiled.

"I don't feel like an enemy," she said.

17: Dr. Gabriel's Experiment

Dr. Alexander Wildey

fl 1880s

Temple Bar, Oct 1889

DR. GABRIEL'S EXPERIMENT with its extraordinary result has been thoroughly sifted by many learned and scientific societies. Indeed I believe the whole scientific world has at last been forced to accept if not to understand the facts in connection with it. It is not so, however, with the outside world— the lay public; exaggerated accounts have found their way into the daily papers; rapacious contributors to weekly light literature have eagerly seized upon the weird truth to build upon it a tower of sensational fiction; writers of leading articles totally ignorant of the true story have gone so far as to accuse those directly concerned of wilful fraud.

To those who have known Dr. Gabriel, and have enjoyed his friendship; to those who have been his fellow-workers in science and have learned to appreciate his genius; these misunderstandings, these ridiculous exaggerations are especially painful. It is, then, under such circumstances that I have been requested to write clearly, and as far as possible without the use of scientific terms, all that is known of this remarkable experiment.

Dr. Gabriel has been well known in medical circles as the rising oculist of St. Joseph's Hospital. His indefatigable efforts have largely added to the literature of his special subject. His investigations and experiments in optics and the surgery of the eye have placed him in the front rank of his profession, and have secured for him a lasting reputation.

Our acquaintance, I regret to say, was not extensive; occasionally we have met at the house of his colleague Dr. Benson, sometimes in the hunting field and rarely in society.

There is no necessity to describe his personal appearance, suffice it to say that it needed but a glance to assure one that he was a man of keen intellect and a gentleman. His manner, always courteous, was somewhat too reserved to please most people, although amongst his intimate friends this reserve was found to cover a mine of humour and good nature.

From Dr. Benson I have learned much concerning the oculist's private life, his work at the hospital, his inventions and experiments, and the esteem in which he was held by his colleagues.

A little more than a year ago, Dr. Gabriel married the beautiful daughter of a celebrated artist, a girl who, without being in the least degree a blue-stocking, had received a far higher education than most English women. She interested herself greatly in her husband's studies and by her artistic abilities

was enabled to be of considerable service to him in preparing drawings to illustrate his great work on the 'Eye.' Much of her time was spent in such useful labour.

No wonder then these two were more united than the majority of married people.

Although Mrs. Gabriel's beauty was of such an high order as to have made it an easy matter for her to reign as a leading star in society, society's prizes had no temptation for her. Entirely devoted to her husband and his work, her happiness was perfect. Truly Dr. Gabriel was a fortunate man to have won such a companion in toil and recreation! But their happiness was short lived. They had been married but one year— one year of unbroken gladness— when, the summer session having passed, Dr. Gabriel put science and practice entirely away, and prepared to spend his month's vacation in Alpine climbing. His wife never hesitated to share this toilsome pleasure; strong and robust, it was just the exercise most fascinating to her energetic nature. The story of her fate is a short one. One morning the daily papers contained a short account of "another frightful accident in the Alps." Mrs. Gabriel and a guide were killed by a mass of falling rock. Dr. Gabriel, though much injured, recovered. On his return to England he gave up all professional work. A ghastly change had taken place. In his haggard face and grey hair, few could recognise the great oculist who had been the picture of strong and energetic manhood. His colleagues and fellowprofessors endeavoured to persuade him to return to his practice and hospital work, but in vain. He would see but few friends, and for some time Dr. Benson only was admitted. This excellent man was much alarmed at his condition, but failed to arouse the widower from the despondent state into which he had fallen.

Weeks passed, and still no signs of improvement appeared. Dr. Gabriel's seclusion became even more profound, so that it was with difficulty Dr. Benson could obtain access to him.

Rumours were circulated that the shock of his wife's death and the injuries he himself had sustained had affected his mind, but these reports were emphatically denied by those friends who were successful in obtaining an audience. The household servants, too, declared that beyond his excessive reserve there was nothing unusual in his manner. They said he spent most of his time in his laboratory, where he frequently remained the whole day and the greater part of the night, and was evidently absorbed in an experiment of great interest.

Let me here introduce myself in order to explain the part taken by me in the events which followed. I will first state that I have no connection whatever with the medical profession. Being of independent means and of a somewhat

scientific torn, I have devoted much time to the study of photography, especially those branches so seldom attempted by amateurs, viz., enlarging and reproducing. In this way I have been able to be of service to many eminent histologists and microecopists— including my friend Dr. Benson— men who have no time to register the result of their researches by this means themselves. The work has an indescribable fascination for me; I have studied under the most celebrated professors of photography both in this country and on the Continent, and I think I can say without vain boasting, that I can hold my own against any amateur or professional in this art. By this means I became acquainted with many colleagues of Dr. Gabriel, and from them heard many details of his works.

One night after a meeting of the Histological Society, we were rediscussing the speech of the evening when Dr. Benson, who had been called away an hour or two previously, returned, his genial countenance pretematurally grave and anxious. He soon told us that he had just come from Dr. Gabriel, who had become suddenly and unaccountably stone blind! Such an announcement at once stopped all further discussion on the “cholera bacillus,” the subject of the meeting, and Dr. Benson was eagerly questioned for further information.

“The case completely baffles me,” said the physician. “Dr. Gabriel declares that on awaking this morning, he found that he had entirely lost his sight— he appears totally unable to distinguish light from darkness. I have carefully examined the optic discs with the ophthalmoscope,” continued he, “without being able to make out the faintest change in retina; and there are no symptoms which would lead one to believe he had sustained any cerebral lesion. I have never been so puzzled by any case in my life.”

Many theories to account for this phenomenon were at once advanced by some of the younger men present, most of them holding that the blindness resulted from mischief set up in the brain by the accident in the Alps. To this, Dr. Benson could not agree, his great experience in these cases leading him to expect symptoms which were conspicuous by their absence in Dr. Gabriel’s misfortune.

“There is a remarkable mental condition here,” added the doctor, “which, although it does not bear upon the question from a pathological point of view, is as interesting and surprising as it is inexplicable. It is this. Dr. Gabriel, in losing his sight, has also lost all melancholy, all his former depression of spirits; in fact, he has quite returned to his natural cheerful condition. During my short interview he never once expressed any regret at this crowning calamity, and although fully convinced that he would never see again he appeared in no way distressed.”

There were many grave faces and significant nqds as Dr. Benson concluded. Poor Gabriel, they believed him mad.

Time proved that neither Dr. Gabriel's extraordinary return of cheerfulness nor his loss of sight was of a transitory nature; both were perfectly incomprehensible. There was one thing, however, evident enough to the uneducated as well as to the professional eye— it was, that in spite of the great improvement in spirits, our friend's health was rapidly and surely failing. This decline was as mysterious as the blindness. Those who believed they had traced the latter to cerebral lesion, the result of the accident, declared the former to be quite in accordance with their diagnosis. Whatever it was, this fact remained, Dr. Gabriel was steadily sinking.

One day a messenger brought me the following letter from Dr. Benson:—

Dear A.,

In a few hours Gabriel will be no more. I have received from him a sealed document, in which, he states, will be found information that may offer some explanation as to the cause of his blindness. He desires a post-mortem examination to be made upon his body immediately after death, if possible. He fully believes that something of unparalleled interest will be discovered should the examination be carefully conducted. In order that it may be as complete as possible, he wishes any abnormal discovery to be at once photographed. For many reasons it is undesirable to employ a professional photographer. Knowing that you have much spare time, I venture to feel sure you will assist us in this matter. If you have no other engagement, please hold yourself in readiness to start at a moment's notice.

In haste,

Yours sincerely,

Henry Benson.

I readily agreed to give my services whenever they might be required, and prepared such apparatus as I was accustomed to use on similar occasions.

Early one morning Dr. Benson called for me on his way to Gabriel's house. He had just received information that the poor oculist was *in articulo mort*is. We arrived a few minutes before the end. Quietly we entered the darkened chamber. How difficult it was to believe that those intelligent eyes, even in these last moments so lustrous and deep, could be absolutely sightless; wide open, they were turned as if searchingly upon the face of the physician, as with his fingers lightly on the patient's hand he leaned over the bed. But there was no reflection of the doctor's grave and anxious look— a peaceful smile spread over the handsome features, flickered for a moment, and there remained stereotyped in death. Sadly we left the room and joined a few professional friends who, like myself, had been invited to attend. Dr. Benson then produced the sealed document mentioned in his letter, and read aloud as follows:

"My experiences during the past few months have been so abnormal— in every respect so inexplicable and apparently so far beyond the bounds of human reasoning, that, believing I should be regarded as a madman were I to publish them, I earnestly request that the facts which I am about to relate may be hidden from all but those present at the autopsy, should the examination of my dead body fail to bring forth confirmatory evidence. It is now many months since the accident in the Alps severed me from my dear wife. The sunshine of my existence was changed to the darkest gloom of despondency. No twilight of fading health broke the suddenness with which the night fell upon me. My own injuries were not as serious as have been supposed, and I do not believe my present condition is in any way connected with them. The brain concussion and shock impaired my mental faculties in one respect only— I could never perfectly recall my wife's face. For hours I have tried to conjure up her image, to form a dream-picture, without success. Her portraits were to me as likenesses of some other woman. There were her features certainly— the shape and pose of her beautiful head— but not she— not my darling. The phantoms of those long-forgotten, old schoolfellow patients, hosts of casual acquaintances would pass before me with maddening distinctness; but the *one* who had made my life of monotony a brief era of happiness, was hidden even from my mind's eye.

"For a few weeks I returned to professional duties and endeavoured to forget my misfortunes in hard work. Whatever success I achieved in the day was undone at night. Sleep came but fitfully— no dream gave even a shadowy glimpse of the happy past.

"It was about this time I experienced a remarkable sensation, by what means produced I cannot say. Certain I was that occasionally, in the room, at my side, bending over me, waiting, watching, was my wife's soul, spirit, or whatever the immortal form may be. No physical sign existed, no sound, nothing visible or tangible, yet the conviction was overwhelming. Never a believer in things supernatural, I fought resolutely against the idea, till at length convinced in spite of reason, I devoted all my energies to the study of psychology and its literature, in feeble hope of arriving at the mystery's solution. Volume after volume I threw aside in disgust. Hundreds of cases somewhat similar to mine I found recorded, and as many ridiculous theories advanced to account for them, hut not one that would bear scientific investigation. Who would credit my story? who would not believe me to be the victim of a morbid imagination?

"A clue, however, came at last, and from a most unexpected quarter. Once while sitting in my study, I felt the indescribable sensation slowly stealing over me; all excitement and horror had long passed, for these 'visitations' were now

frequent I only longed once more to behold my beloved wife. I looked up from the book I was reading, vainly seeking the invisible form. The night was far advanced— everything was still, not a stir or rustle disturbed the silenca Presently the sound of a slight splash caused me to glance in the direction of a small globe aquarium placed in a far comer of the room. I was surprised to observe the evident agitation of the golden carp it contained. That they were extremely terrified I detected in a moment, having studied their habits very closely. Yet there was no apparent cause for such excitement. It was impossible that the slight movement in raising my head could produce such an effect. No cat, dog, or other animal was in the apartment. Was it possible that the ‘presence’ hidden from me was visible to these lower creatures?

“Night after night I carefully watched the tiny aquarium. On each occasion the disturbance amongst its occupants was coincident with the phenomenal sensations!

“Here was food for reflection! a possible means of grasping the grand secret of the supernatural The task was now to find in what respect the vision of these fish differs from our own.

“Now the sense of sight is the perception of light and shade. Colour is but a part of light, for the ordinary white solar light is a combination of all the colours of the spectrum. Moreover, it is a fact that when light is passed through a prism, and broken up into the beautiful colours of the rainbow, there are rays beyond the red and violet ends which are quite imperceptible to us, but that they do exist can be demonstrated by their effects upon certain chemicals. The sensitive plate of a camera receives them and shows the presence of celestial bodies whose beams have no effect upon the human retina. Thus photographs are taken of suns which have long ceased to shine; kettles of boiling water can be photographed in the dark. Therefore we must admit our own eyes are but very imperfect perceivers. But how about the so-called ‘lower animals?’ Has not one of our most celebrated living naturalists proved by his experiments upon ants that these insects are clearly sensitive to rays beyond the violet? What they see is probably a colour perfectly inconceivable to us. Is it not possible that the so-termed ‘ghostseers’ may be gifted with retina sensitive to these ultra rays?

"Would not this theory account for many remarkable cases of persons beholding apparitions, and in which circumstantial evidence seems to point to the honesty of those visited ? Because we cannot as yet understand these phenomena we call them ‘delusions.’ Must it ever be beyond the power of science to supply us with a means of increasing our sense of sight in this direction ?

“Such were the questions suggested by the splash of a tiny gold fish! To answer them in a practical form was the task I now set myself. I determined to carry out an elaborate series of experiments upon the visual apparatus of fish; taking into consideration the changes light must undergo in passing through the refracting media of the curved glass of the aquarium and the bubbling water it contained. My goal was to see the unseen— to construct an apparatus which should enable the human eye to perceive the ultra rays. Whether I succeeded or no can be proved only upon the dissecting table. Perhaps, after all, I am mad, and the phenomena which I am about to relate are but hallucinations of a morbid mind.

“I do not intend to describe in detail the progress of this novel study, nor to disclose the various discoveries which enabled me to succeed after many weary failures.

“The startling and altogether unsuspected consequences of my success compel me to believe that I have overstepped the moral bounds of scionce, and that I should be increasing my guilt were I to enable others to follow in my path. It must be sufficient for me to say that the medium I constructed through which I was to behold the dead was, to all appearances, an arrangement of coloured lenses. It was not long before I had an opportunity of testing my discovery. One night I awoke with the consciousness that my wife was present I even knew that she was bending over me. I could almost imagine her breath upon my cheek. My optical apparatus lay on a table within easy reach— with a palpitating heart I placed it before my eyes. For a moment I was dazzled by a brilliant flash of light; then, clothed in indescribable colours, I beheld the face of my dead wife. To give the very faintest idea of these marvellous hues is utterly impossible. They could no more be imagined than one could conceive a new sense. Nothing in our earthly experience can give the least notion of their enchanting beauty. Yet the face did not appear unnatural— on the contrary, it seemed perfectly real and substantial. It was my beautiful wife transcendentally beautiful. Impulsively I sprang towards her, throwing aside the lenses in my ecstasy. They fell upon the floor, shivered to atoms. Yet the brilliant image remained before me in all its loveliness. In the excitement of the moment this did not seem strange. I was in a semi-delirium.

“How long I continued in this ecstatic state I cannot tell. I remember being aroused by the opening of the bedroom door, and the Toice of my valet informing me that it was time to arise. I turned in the direction of the sound but could see nothing except my wife’s features. I did not for a moment suspect the troth. I believed my sight was temporarily impaired, as is naturally the case after gazing at an extremely bright object. But before long I awoke to the fact that I was blind to everything but my wife’s imaga This remained

permanently before me, but not in its original hues— still more beautiful tints gradually eclipsed the others, probably their complementary colours. This final apparition has never left me. Whether my lids are closed or open, my wife is always before my eyes. At times I feel her presence, but her voice is dumb for ever.

"It had never occurred to me, during the time I was elaborating my experiment, that the ultra rays might have an injurious effect upon the retina. I now believe that these rays of unusual light have produced a pathological change in this membrane. It is for those who conduct the examination of my remains to prove by actual demonstration the truth of my story."

DR. BENSON laid the paper on the table. Some time elapsed before the impressive silence was broken. Each one present remained absorbed in reflection upon these extraordinary revelations. At last it was suggested that the ghastly object of the meeting should be carried out. This is not the place for me to describe the details of the examination. It is enough to say that as Dr. Gabriel had anticipated, in a part of the retinal membrane of both eyes, what is known as the "visual purple" was found to be permanently bleached, forming two "optograms," or natural (?) photographs, which clearly defined the outline of a beautiful head.

These optograms were immediately enlarged by photography. The two pictures thus obtained were placed together and viewed through an ordinary stereoscope.

On looking through the instrument, as I am doing at this present moment, I see the dim and misty image of a female head, like an unfinished sketch of a beautiful model. It is difficult to believe that it is an actual photograph of a disembodied spirit. Yet such it is, and without doubt a witness to the truth of Dr. Gabriel's story and the success of his experiment.

Dr. Gabriel's death remains a mystery. Nothing was found at the examination which could in any way explain it.

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18: The American's Tale

Arthur Conan Doyle

1859-1930

London Society, Christmas Annual 1880

One of Conan Doyle's Christmas supernatural tales.

'IT AIR STRANGE, it air,' he was saying as I opened the door of the room where our social little semi-literary society met; 'but I could tell you queerer things than that 'ere— almighty queer things. You can't learn everything out of books, sirs, nohow. You see it ain't the men as can string English together and has had good eddications as finds themselves in the queer places I've been in. They're mostly rough men, sirs, as can scarce speak aright, far less tell with pen and ink the things they've seen; but if they could they'd make some of your European's har riz with astonishment. They would, sirs, you bet!'

His name was Jefferson Adams, I believe; I know his initials were J. A., for you may see them yet deeply whittled on the right-hand upper panel of our smoking-room door. He left us this legacy, and also some artistic patterns done in tobacco juice upon our Turkey carpet; but beyond these reminiscences our American storyteller has vanished from our ken. He gleamed across our ordinary quiet conviviality like some brilliant meteor, and then was lost in the outer darkness. That night, however, our Nevada friend was in full swing; and I quietly lit my pipe and dropped into the nearest chair, anxious not to interrupt his story.

'Mind you,' he continued, 'I hain't got no grudge against your men of science. I likes and respects a chap as can match every beast and plant, from a huckleberry to a grizzly with a jaw-breakin' name; but if you wants real interestin' facts, something a bit juicy, you go to your whalers and your frontiersmen, and your scouts and Hudson Bay men, chaps who mostly can scarce sign their names.'

There was a pause here, as Mr. Jefferson Adams produced a long cheroot and lit it. We preserved a strict silence in the room, for we had already learned that on the slightest interruption our Yankee drew himself into his shell again. He glanced round with a self-satisfied smile as he remarked our expectant looks, and continued through a halo of smoke.

'Now which of you gentlemen has ever been in Arizona? None, I'll warrant. And of all English or Americans as can put pen to paper, how many has been in Arizona? Precious few, I calc'late. I've been there, sirs, lived there for years; and when I think of what I've seen there, why, I can scarce get myself to believe it now.

'Ah, there's a country! I was one of Walker's filibusters, as they chose to call us; and after we'd busted up, and the chief was shot, some on us made tracks and located down there. A reg'lar English and American colony, we was, with our wives and children, and all complete. I reckon there's some of the old folk there yet, and that they hain't forgotten what I'm agoing to tell you. No, I warrant they hain't, never on this side of the grave, sirs.

'I was talking about the country, though; and I guess I could astonish you considerable if I spoke of nothing else. To think of such a land being built for a few Greasers and half-breeds! It's a misusing of the gifts of Providence, that's what I calls it. Grass as hung over a chap's head as he rode through it, and trees so thick that you couldn't catch a glimpse of blue sky for leagues and leagues, aad orchids like umbrellas! Maybe some on you has seen a plant as they calls the "fly-catcher," in some parts of the States?'

'*Diancea muscipula*,' murmured Dawson, our scientific man par excellence.

'Ah, "Die near a municipal," that's him! You'll see a fly stand on that 'ere plant, and then you'll see the two sides of a leaf snap up together and catch it between them, and grind it up and mash it to bits, for all the world like some great sea squid with its beak; and hours after, if you open the leaf, you'll see the body lying half-digested, and in bits. Well, I've seen those flytraps in Arizona with leaves eight and ten feet long, and thorns or teeth a foot or more; why, they could— But dam it, I'm going too fast!

'It's about the death of Joe Hawkins I was going to tell you; 'bout as queer a thing, I reckon, as ever you heard tell on. There wasn't nobody in Montana as didn't know of Joe Hawkins— "Alabama" Joe, as he was called there. A reg'lar out and outer, he was, 'bout the darndest skunk as ever man clapt eyes on. He was a good chap enough, mind ye, as long as you stroked him the right way; but rile him anyhow, and he were worse nor a wild-cat. I've seen him empty his six-shooter into a crowd as chanced to jostle him agoing into Simpson's bar when there was a dance on; and he bowied Tom Hooper 'cause he spilt his liquor over his weskit by mistake. No, he didn't stick at murder, Joe didn't; and he weren't a man to be trusted further nor you could see him.

'Now at the time I tell on, when Joe Hawkins was swaggerin' about the town and layin' down the law with his shootin'-irons, there was an Englishman there of the name of Scott— Tom Scott, if I rec'lects aright. This chap Scott was a thorough Britisher (beggin' the present company's pardon), and yet he didn't freeze much to the British set there, or they didn't freeze much to him. He was a quiet simple man, Scott was— rather too quiet for a rough set like that; sneakin' they called him, but he weren't that. He kept hisself mostly apart, an' didn't interfere with nobody so long as he were left alone. Some said as how he'd been kinder ill-treated at home— been a Chartist, or something of that

sort, and had to up stick and run; but he never spoke of it hisself, an' never complained. Bad luck or good, that chap kept a stiff lip on him.

'This chap Scott was a sort o' butt among the men about Montana, for he was so quiet an' simple-like. There was no party either to take up his grievances; for, as I've been saying, the Britishers hardly counted him one of them, and many a rough joke they played on him. He never cut up rough, but was polite to all hisself. I think the boys got to think he hadn't much grit in him till he showed 'em their mistake.

'It was in Simpson's bar as the row got up, an' that led to the queer thing I was going to tell you of. Alabama Joe and one or two other rowdies were dead on the Britishers in those days, and they spoke their opinions pretty free, though I warned them as there'd be an almighty muss. That partic'lar night Joe was nigh half drunk, an' he swaggered about the town with his six-shooter, lookin' out for a quarrel. Then he turned into the bar where he know'd he'd find some o' the English as ready for one as he was hisself. Sure enough, there was half a dozen lounging about, an' Tom Scott standin' alone before the stove. Joe sat down by the table, and pat his revolver and bowie down in front of him.

' "Them's my arguments, Jeff," he says to me, if any white-livered Britisher dares give me the lie." I tried to stop him, sirs; but he weren't a man as you could easily turn, an' he began to speak in a way as no chap could stand. Why, even a "Greaser" would flare up if you said as much of Greaserland! There was a commotion at the bar, an' every man laid his hands on his wepin's; but afore they could draw we heard a quiet voice from the stove: "Say your prayers, Joe Hawkins; for, by Heaven, you're a dead man!" Joe turned round, and looked like grabbin' at his iron; but it weren't no manner of use. Tom Scott was standing up, covering him with his Derringer; a smile on his white face, but the very devil shining in his eye. "It ain't that the old country has used me over-well," he says, "but no man shall speak agin it afore me, and live." For a second or two I could see his finger tighten round the trigger, an' then he gave a laugh, an' threw the pistol on the floor. "No," he says, "I can't shoot a half-drunk man. Take your dirty life, Joe, an' use it better nor you have done. You've been nearer the grave this night than you will be agin until your time comes. You'd best make tracks now, I guess. Nay, never look black at me, man; I 'm not afeard at your shootin'-iron. A bully's nigh always a coward." And he swung contemptuously round, and relit his half-smoked pipe from the stove; while Alabama slunk out o' the bar, with the laughs of the Britishers ringing in his ears. I saw his face as he passed me, and on it I saw murder, sirs— murder, as plain as ever I seed anything in my life.

'I stayed in the bar after the row, and watched Tom Scott as he shook hands with the men about. It seemed kinder queer to me to see him smilin' and cheerful-like; for I knew Joe's bloodthirsty mind, and that the Englishman had small chance of ever seeing the morning. He lived in an out-of-the-way sort of place, you see, clean off the trail, and had to pass through the Flytrap Gulch to get to it. This here gulch was a marshy gloomy place, lonely enough during the day even; for it were always a creepy sort o' thing to see the great eight- and ten-foot leaves snapping up if aught touched them; but at night there were never a soul near. Some parts of the marsh, too, were soft and deep, and a body thrown in would be gone by the morning. I could see Alabama Joe crouchin' under the leaves of the great Flytrap in the darkest part of the gulch, with a scowl on his face and a revolver in his hand; I could see it sirs, as plain as with my two eyes.

' 'Bout midnight Simpson shuts up his bar, so out we had to go. Tom Scott started off for his threemile walk at a slashing pace. I just dropped him a hint as he passed me, for I kinder liked the chap. "Keep your Derringer loose in your belt, sir," I says, "for you might chance to need it." H e looked round at me with his quiet smile, and then I lost sight of him in the gloom. I never thought to see him again. He'd hardly gone afore Simpson comes up to me and says, "There'll be a nice job in the Flytrap Gulch to-night, Jeff; the boys say that Hawkins started half an hour ago to wait for Scott and shoot him on sight. I calc'late the coroner 'll be wanted to-morrow."

'What passed in the gulch that night? It were a question as were asked pretty free next morning. A half-breed was in Ferguson's store after daybreak, and he said as he'd chanced to be near the gulch 'bout one in the morning. It wara't easy to get at his story, he seemed so uncommon scared; but he told us, at last, as he'd heard the fearfulest screams in the stillness of the night. There weren't no shots, he said, but scream after scream, kinder muffled, like a man with a scrape over his head, an' in mortal pain. Abner Brandon and me, and a few more, was in the store at the time; so we mounted and rode out to Scott's house, passing through the gulch on the way. There weren't nothing partic'lar to be seen there— no blood nor marks of a fight, nor nothing; and when we gets up to Scott's house, out he comes to meet us as fresh as a lark. "Hullo, Jeff!" says he, "no need for the pistols after all. Come in an' have a cocktail, boys." "Did ye see or hear nothing as ye came home last night?" says I. "No," says he; " all was quiet enough. An owl kinder moaning in the Flytrap Gulch— that was all. Come, jump off and have a glass." "Thank ye," says Abner. So off we gets, and Tom Scott rode into the settlement with us when we went back. ' An all-fired commotion was on in Main-street as we rode into it. The 'Merican party seemed to have gone clean crazed. Alabama Joe was gone, not a darned

particle of him left. Since he went out to the gulch nary eye had seen him. As we got off our horses there was a considerable crowd in front of Simpson's, and some ugly looks at Tom Scott, I can tell you. There was a clickin' of pistols, and I saw as Scott had his hand in his bosom too. There weren't a single English face about. "Stand aside, Jeff Adams," Bays Zebb Humphrey, as great a scoundrel as ever lived, "you hain't got no hand in this game. Bay, boys, are we, free Americans, to be murdered by any darned Britisher?" It was the quickest thing as ever I seed. There was a rush an' a crack; Zebb was down, with Scott's ball in his thigh, and Scott hisself was on the ground with a dozen men holding him. It weren't no use struggling, so he lay quiet. They seemed a bit uncertain what to do with him at first, but then one of Alabama's special chums put them up to it. "Joe's gone," he said; "nothing ain't surer nor that, an' there lies the man as killed him. Some on you knows as Joe went on business to the gulch last night; he never came back. That 'ere Britisher passed through after he'd gon e; they'd had a row, screams is heard 'mong the great flytraps. I say agin he has played poor Joe some o' his sneakin' tricks, an' thrown him into the swamp. It ain't no wonder as the body is gone. But air we to stan' by and see English murderin' our own chums? I guess not Let Judge Lynch try him, that's what I say." "Lynch him f' shouted a hundred angry voices— for all the rag-tag an' bobtail o' the settlement was round us by this time. " Here, boys, fetch a rope, and swing him up. Up with him over Simpson's door !" "See here though," says another, coming forrards; "let's hang him by the great flytrap in the gulch. Let Joe see as he's revenged, if so be as he's buried 'bout theer." There was a shout for this, an' away they went, with Scott tied on his mustang in the middle, and a mounted guard, with cocked revolvers, round him; for we knew as there was a score or so Britishers about, as didn't seem to recognise Judge Lynch, and was dead on a free fight.

'I went out with them, my heart bleedin' for Scott, though he didn't seem a cent put out, he didn't. He were game to the backbone. Seems kinder queer, sirs, hangin' a man to a flytrap; but our'n were a reg'lar tree, and the leaves like a brace of boats with a hinge between 'em and thorns at the bottom.

'We passed down the gulch to the place where the great one grows, and there we seed it with the leaves, some open, some shut. But we seed something worse nor that. Standin' round the tree was some thirty men, Britishers all, an' armed to the teeth. They was waitin' for us evidently, an' had a businesslike look about 'em, as if they'd come for something and meant to have it. There was the raw material there for about as warm a scrimmidge as ever I seed. As we rode up, a great red-bearded Scotchman— Cameron were his name— stood out afore the rest, his revolver cocked in his hand. "See here, boys," he says, "you've got no call to hurt a hair of that man's head. You hain't

proved as Joe is dead yet; and if you had, you hain't proved as Scott killed him. Anyhow, it were in self-defence; for you all know as he was lying in wait for Scott, to shoot him on sight; so I say agin, you hain't got no call to hurt that man; and what's more, I've got thirty six-barrelled arguments against your doin' it." "It's an interestin' pint, and worth arguin' out," said the man as was Alabama Joe's special chum. There was a clickin' of pistols, and a loosenin' of knives, and the two parties began to draw up to one another, an' it looked like a rise in the mortality of Montana. Scott was standing behind with a pistol at his ear if he stirred, lookin' quiet and composed as having no money on the table, when sudden he gives a start an' a shout as rang in our ears like a trumpet. "Joe!" he cried, "Joe! Look at him! In the flytrap!" We all turned an' looked where he was pointin'. Jerusalem! I think we won't get that picter out of our minds agin. One of the great leaves of the fly-trap, that had been shut and touchin' the ground as it lay, was slowly rolling back upon its hinges. There, lying like a child in its cradle, was Alabama Joe in the hollow of the leaf. The great thorns had been slowly driven through his heart as it shut upon him. We could see as he'd tried to cut his way out, for there was a slit in the thick fleshy leaf, an' his bowie was in his hand; but it had smothered him first. He'd lain down on it likely to keep the damp off while he were awaitin' for Scott, and it had closed on him as you've seen your little hothouse ones do on a fly; an' there he were as we found him, torn and crushed into pulp by the great jagged teeth of the man-eatin' plant. There, sirs, I think you'll own as that's a curious story.'

'And what became of Scott?' asked Jack Sinclair.

'Why, we carried him back on our shoulders, we did, to Simpson's bar, and he stood us liquors round. Made a speech too— a darned fine speech— from the counter. Somethin' about the British lion an' the 'Merican eagle walkin' arm in arm for ever an' a day. And now, sirs, that yam was long, and my cheroot's out, so I reckon I'll make tracks afore it's later,' and with a 'Good-night!' he left the room.

'A most extraordinary narrative!' said Dawson. 'Who would have thought a *Diancea* had such pow er!'

' Deuced rum yarn!' said young Sinclair.

'Evidently a matter-of-fact truthful man,' said the doctor.

'Or the most original liar that ever lived,' said I.

I wonder which he was.

19: Red Harvest

Laurence Donovan

1885-1948

Speed Detective, Oct 1945

MAIDA LAYTON shivered as if from cold, although the Florida night was hot and humid. Her watch showed a few minutes past one A.M. A brilliant red moon skirted the ragged edges of a coming Everglades thunderstorm, with white lightning in the black clouds.

Bill Carlin would be coming along soon. Seen close up, the girl's face was a tight, white mask, with terrified brown eyes and a broad forehead under coiled coppery hair.

Maida stood beside an R.F.D. mailbox half a mile up the turnpike from the Ezra Varden orange ranch where she was employed. A message from Bill Carlin had directed her to meet him here.

It was an odd hour, but Maida had been keeping other dates at odd hours after midnight. They had been dates with her past. Dates with shame and public disgrace, perhaps with death, or so Maida believed.

Maida had not seen Bill Carlin for more than a year. She hadn't communicated with him for several months. Now he was back from the Southern Pacific with a medical discharge from the army. Maida couldn't even guess how Bill Carlin had learned of her being on the Ezra Varden ranch or of her becoming involved in the activities of a criminal bank robber and killer.

Maida knew only that she still loved Bill Carlin. She intended to see him and make this a definite break. Perhaps Carlin would tell her how he had come to know that for weeks she had been meeting Pete Lomax, an ex-convict, at two o'clock in the morning each Friday night, and sometimes on Tuesday nights.

SALLY ADEN, a close girl friend in Miami, had broken a promise of confidence with Maida to inform Bill Carlin of this. For Sally had known so well the attachment between Maida and Bill that she had laid aside all scruples. Sally Aden had gone to Bill Carlin with letters received from Maida, after she had learned that Carlin had been verging upon a nervous breakdown over Maida's strange behavior and her disappearance from the Florida tourist city.

"I gave my word of honor not to tell," had been Sally's words. "Possibly I'll hate myself for it. But there are a few things in life that come ahead of so-called personal honor. I'm telling you the truth, Bill Carlin, because Maida needs you, and you need Maida."

Which was all of Sally Aden's part in this. But it was the reason for Maida being here on the highway at this odd hour of one A.M., waiting by the R.P.D.

box that Bill Carlin had named in his phone message. A coupe came along fast and pulled up with squealing brakes. Half a minute later Maida was held tight in Bill Carlin's arms.

"You shouldn't have come, Bill," protested Maida breathlessly. "If you knew all of the truth, you wouldn't be here. There's nothing you can do. I should have told you about myself when I met you two years ago. Now it's too late."

She drew away from the arm that had encircled her. Bill Carlin was tingling with this contact after so long a time. He could see that Maida was staring ahead, stony-eyed. Bill's voice was tinged with bitterness.

"I know enough of the truth," replied Bill. "You suddenly quit an important position in a war plant to come to this Esra Varden orange ranch. You've made yourself valuable here to Varden and his wife, Jane, handling their books and managing the business end."

"That doesn't help any, Bill," said Maida hopelessly. "Now I want you to drive back to Miami and forget everything."

Bill Carlin shook his head and his gray eyes were hard. He had once been a state trooper. After that he had worked as an investigator out of the district attorney's office in this same county.

"We'll get this straight, darling," he said decisively. "You didn't tell me, but I knew you were married to Pete Lomax, convict and killer, when you were only fifteen. You're twenty-three now. You divorced Lomax five years ago. Lomax finished a stretch for robbery at Raiford. Now you're meeting Lomax twice a week at two o'clock in the morning. Why?"

The girl's coppery head moved stubbornly.

"Pete Lomax traced me here," said Maida. "I'm helpless."

"There's the county law," said Carlin. "Lomax has robbed a dozen stores and banks in three months. Rewards are offered."

"No! Oh, no! I can't call in the law!" There was acute terror in Maida's voice. "Probably I'll have to go away with Pete Lomax as he is demanding. I should never have had a dream of happiness."

The red moon was lost momentarily in a flash of lightning. Maida shrank closer to Bill.

"I made this tonight, Maida," stated Bill," I found out that you have been meeting Lomax every Friday night at two o'clock. That is half an hour from now. You don't haye to meet him tonight. Go back to the house and leave it to me."

Carlin was amazed by the panic in Maida's voice.

"No— Bill! I can't tell you why. I love you more than I ever did. But that can't change what I don't dare tell even you."

BILL CARLIN had been a state copper and investigator long enough to read into Maida's words more than she was telling.

"What has Pete Lomax on you, Maida?" he demanded to know.

"Nothing— not a thing, Bill!" It was too much a cry of fear.

Bill knew Maida was lying. Bill's voice became harsh, implacable.

"You're meeting Pete Lomax where the Varden lane reaches the Indian Creek road," he said. "You have fifteen minutes to keep the date. In the past six weeks Pete Lomax has murdered three good citizens, Maida. You run along and keep your date with him, but this time I'll not be far behind."

"No, Bill! Please! He's a killer! And if you capture him alive and put him in jail, it will be— no, Bill, don't do that for my sake!"

Bill Carlin had the answer now. Pete Lomax was holding something over Maida of which she was in deadly terror.

"I promise, Maida," said Bill slowly. "Give my word I won't put Pete Lomax in jail. You run along now and keep your date."

Bill Carlin's mind was made up. To him Pete Lomax represented the same breed he had been knocking over in the South Pacific. There was a skit of rain and a crash of bright thunder over Indian River as Maida impulsively kissed Bill, then sprang from the coupe. Bill looked to the clips of his two automatics. If there was something that had terrified Maida Layton, he judged that could only come by Pete Lomax being left alive.

"Too bad, Pete," grunted Bill. "But you're keeping your last date with the finest girl in the world who got mixed up with you when she was a school child. I knew that back in a Miami office more than a year ago."

LIKE ALL Everglades thunderstorms, this one unleashed all the furies of thunder and lightning and cloudburst rain. The unpaved road to the Varden lane turned to sticky gumbo and Bill, cussing, had to abandon his car. He had planned to arrive at the moment when Maida first met Pete Lomax. The mud and rain held him-back. But presently he saw what looked like a few fireflies dancing in the rain ahead. These were at the junction of the Varden lane and the Indian Creek road.

"There ain't no other answer!" boomed a coarse voice as Bill separated the fireflies into ranch lanterns and flashlights. "She killed him— bashed in his head with that old tire iron. I've been hearin' he's Pete Lomax the bank robber. I knowed Maida had been sneakin' out nights, but I didn't think she was meetin' him."

The voice was that of a rough-looking orange-picker. The scanty, white, chin whiskers of old Ezra Varden were wagging.

"Sure, 'nough looks like he got rough and hit her, an' she had the tire iron ready," said Ezra. "Split his skull nigh in two. Maida's been a good girl, and I wouldn't never think she'd be mixed up with any city gangster."

Bill Carlin swung to the edge of the circle of half a dozen persons. Ezra Varden had an expansive wife who looked about three times his size. There were three orange-picking hands. Nate Toler weighed two hundred pounds and stood six feet. Jim Lassiter was a small, dark man with polished black eyes. Jason Lubitz was a fat man of German extraction and talked with a guttural accent.

But Bill's eyes were fixed upon Maida, although he hung back for the moment. The girl evidently had been picked up from the mud alongside the car. Nate Toler was weighing an old-fashioned tire iron in his hand. Maida had a dazed, vacant look. She kept repeating her denial.

"He was like that when I got here," she said. "His head was hanging over the side of the window."

"You've got a bruise on your chin, Maida," said Jim Lassiter, the small dark man. "You real sure your boy friend didn't hit you, and you grabbed up that tire iron and let him have it?"

Maida's dark eyes were stricken with fear. "I've told you he was like that when I got here," she said dully. "There was blood and I think I fainted. I must have struck my chin on the running board of the car. I don't know what happened after that until you were helping me to my feet."

Old Ezra Varden and his good wife seemed unimpressed by Maida's story.

"You've been a good girl for work an' keepin' my books," said Ezra. "But since you took to sneakin' out at two o'clock in the morning, it ain't looked so good. I kinda figured you must o' been meetin' some man. But seein' this dead feller is a thief, he likely had somethin' on you."

He had little difficulty finding the flat rock in the rain.

"You, too, Mr. Varden?" cried out the girl.

Bill Carlin stepped into the circle of light. All eyes turned to him.

"If she did kill Pete Lomax, I think the girl's done the state a big favor," stated Bill. He was unprepared for the reply of Ezra Varden.

"Ain't no way helpin' it," said Ezra. "Murder's murder an' it's a job for the sheriff."

Bill Carlin went immediately to Maida and put one arm around her mud-soaked figure. Nate Toler laughed harshly.

"Looks like little Maida has got a heap o' boy friends," he jeered.

OF ALL those present. Bill Carlin liked the big Nate Toler the least. The three orange-pickers, he could tell, were transient drifters who moved from

one crop to another. They never were to be trusted and seldom were on any terms of intimacy with the families of the ranchers. Maida was clearly in a daze, had been unconscious. The fixed look upon her face was that of horror.

Pete Lomax was not a pretty sight. The tire iron had split through his skull from in front, almost to the nose. Ezra Varden jumped about and gave conflict¬ ing orders. Bill Carlin had but the one thought. "Tell me, Maida," he said quietly.

"You didn't do this?"

A light of sick understanding came into her eyes. She murmured, "You too, Bill? He was like that when I arrived. There was something I wanted to look for in the car. I slipped on the wet running board and struck my chin. The next thing I knew I was being pulled around and Jason Lubitz was yelling into my ear, 'You bane one killer!' I had had only a glimpse of— of—that in the car. I had only one great fear, Bill, that you had somehow got here ahead of me."

"Me?" exclaimed Bill.

"I knew what you had in mind," the girl said quietly. "You judged that if Pete Lomax held anything over me, you would see that the threat was ended."

"Whassay? Whassay?" shrilled Ezra Varden, cupping one ear as though he was not hearing. "Anything that is said will be used against her. My wife and I worked our fingers to the bone to give this girl a chance and this is how she pays it back."

By this time, Bill Carlin had firmly decided that Maida had not and could not have murdered Pete Lomax, in the gruesome manner that was shown. Yet he had never faced five more hostile people, than the Vardens and their three orange pickers. He looked at Nate Toler and his powerful arms. It would have been so simple for the big orange-picker to have used that tire iron. Ezra Varden brought everything to a showdown, as Bill had Maida sitting on the running board of the car and was wiping the mud from her face. "Come on folks," said Ezra Varden. "We have to get us up to the house and call the county sheriff—" Ezra paused and looked around. He then looked straight at Bill Carlin. "You're the young fella used to be the state trooper," twanged Ezra Varden. "Me and Maw guesses you was sweet on this girl, Maida. We thought she was a good girl but good girls don't meet hold¬ up men and bank robbers at two o'clock in the morning. Mebbe so he knowed something about Maida. Tonight she got desperate, so she toted that tire iron all the way up from the old garage and used it." Maw, who was a voluminous woman with three sets of chins and some three hundred pounds of figure, boomed out, "Come on Ezree! Let's get to the house and have the sheriff over. If we have to be standing for the disgrace, there's no way out of it." Ezra pointed to Jason Lubitz and Jim Lassiter and said, "Come along and get back to your beds, so's you'll be

fitten for something come tomorrow! Nate, you stay right here! Here's my old Betsy and you see to it there ain't ary funny moves."

Ezra proffered Nate Toler a rusted revolver which Bill Carlin suspected might do more harm to the man who fired it than the one at whom it was aimed. The Everglades rain had increased in intensity. It was sloshing down now.

Bill said to Maida, "Let's get in the back of the car."—the car was a sedan—"No sense in getting soaked any more this way."

"Oh, no you don't!" shouted Nate Toler. "You let the gal set out here and take it! The rain weren't bothering her none when she came to meet this ex-convict." Bill had known of this but it maddened

Toler. Moreover, Bill was doing some fast thinking. He pulled Maida inside the car. She shrank away from the horror in the driver's seat.

"Tell me, Maida," he said. "What more is there behind this? I happen to know from tonight's papers that Pete Lomax pulled a stickup this afternoon in which he gathered in some nine thousand, cash."

Maida didn't answer.

"I'm having a look-see," he said.

FIVE MINUTES later Bill had examined every part of the car and the clothing of the corpse. Except for a small amount of silver in the dead Pete Lomax's pocket, his search yielded nothing. Maida was sobbing like a hurt child.

"Bill," she whispered so that Nate Toler could not hear. "I have to tell you. Pete has been caching his money with me. I don't know how much money there is now. It is what he has taken in six or seven holdups."

Bill Carlin whistled softly. What Pete Lomax had taken in six or seven holdups would run into real dough.

"Why, Maida? Why did you do it?"

"He told me, Bill, that if I didn't he would see that I was taken in on a holdup murder at a filling station that he had committed when I was only fifteen years old. I was driving the car. I thought he got out to make a phone call. He didn't tell me until an hour afterward that he had killed a man in the filling station, But he said now that makes no difference under the law. Even though I have a divorce, I'm still implicated in that murder."

Bill Carlin swore furiously. Then he said, "He's been making a fool of you. You never could be held for what happened back there. He frightened you until you were unable to think clearly. By the way, he must have been bringing you the nine thousand dollars he got in the holdup today but he hasn't got it on him. What have you done with all the other money that Pete turned over to you."

"I buried all of it," she said. "Under a rock at the southeast corner of the big red cattle barn. I thought Pete would have more tonight."

Bill's voice was grim.

"I haven't a doubt but that Pete did have more tonight. You haven't got it. The one who killed him took it. Maida, you can't afford to be arrested. If you tell the story you just told me, you will be implicated in all of Pete's holdups and killings by hiding that money. Maida, you have to trust me. We can't wait for the sheriff. There is one little thing, just one little thing I have to find out."

He slipped from the car. Big Nate Toler stood there dangling the rusted revolver in his fingers. Bill Carlin cupped his hands and started to light a cigarette. His right foot flew up. He kicked the old gun from Nate Toler's hands.

Carlin's terrific left tore through Nate Toler's guard smashing his fingers upon his teeth. It was followed up by a right that sounded like wood clunking on wood when his knuckles met Nate Toler's chin.

"Come on, Maida! Don't ask questions!'' Bill said. He caught her hand and they went plunging through the swampy ground over toward the tidal shore of Indian River. There was no evidence that Nate Toler had come out of his knock-out sleep. Maida and Bill reached Indian River. It was not far above the rushing ocean channel at Fort Pierce. Innumerable fishermen's boathouses were strung along the shore. The rain was pelting down in a solid deluge. Bill got Maida inside one of the boathouses and wanted to put his coat around her. She refused. "I don't think I'll ever be cold or hot again. Bill, what's going to happen to me?"

"Not a thing!" grated through Bill's teeth. "Not one damned thing! But tell me darling, exactly how I can get my hands on the money you've been saving for Pete Lomax?"

"I told you, Bill! At the southeast corner of the big red barn. I put it all in a hole I scooped out under a flat rock that is lying there. I could just barely lift the rock. I moved away all the dirt.

THEY WERE a mile or more from the dead man in the car, and half a mile from the Ezra Varden ranch house. Bill stepped outside and listened. Although the wind was in the right direction, there was no sign of an alarm being raised. He held Maida to him, when he got inside, and kissed her.

"Stay right here, sweetheart," he said. "Don't leave this boathouse for any reason whatsoever. When they start looking for you they will be looking for my car. That's one reason I didn't take you there. Also, I'm not leaving the Varden farm until I have the truth."

She clung to him for half a minute. Bill slogged back to the swampy ground toward the outlines of the coral hill that rose a hundred feet or more behind

the Varden farmhouse. He had heard no sound of an alarm when he reached the red barn.

He had little difficulty finding the flat rock. For a long minute he swore volubly in whispers. He had come upon what he fully expected. The flat rock very evidently had been overturned recently. A hole had been scooped out beneath it. He might have imagined he was mistaken, except that he saw the green corner of one small packet of banknotes protruding from the dirt. It was a flat package of about five hundred dollars in small bills. It had apparently been overlooked. The remainder of the Pete Lomax murder loot had been removed.

Bill Carlin paused to decide upon his next move. Then he heard shouting and wild oaths. Undoubtedly Nate Toler had been found. Naturally it had been dis¬ covered that Maida and he had disappeared.

At the distance in the slashing rain, Bill could not distinguish one voice from another. It was just a jabbering. For the moment he was set back on his heels. The small packet of half a grand would be insufficient as evidence. He knew he must find that other money.

In the boathouse Maida had told him she had counted something like seventy thousand dollars that Pete Lomax had trusted to her. That did not include the last holdup money of Pete Lomax's. While all of the excitement still seemed to be centering around the murder car, Bill decided it might be worth while to have a look-see in the Ezra Varden ranch house.

He thought of the three itinerant orange-pickers, the dark-faced Jim Lassiter, the big, crude German Jason Lubitz and Nate Toler the giant orange picker. They might have brains enough, any one of them, to take the money but their one instinct would be to hide it in their own rooms. Then he had another sudden and startling thought which caused him to murmur to himself.

"No. If one of the tramp pickers had taken that money, he would be far away from here, now."

Bill decided to make a quick search of the house. He went along the side of the barn in the darkness and the rain. He walked around the corner. A powerful arm that seemed to come from nowhere, locked about his throat and jerked his head back, strangling him and choking off his breath, almost cracking his spine.

For a minute he fought with all he had, with punching fists that could find no target on the figure holding him so inexorably from behind. He felt his senses going. His lungs were aching for air. His attacker finished it swiftly. A rabbit punch caught him across the back of his neck. He went down in a well of darkness.

BILL CARLIN did not know, when he awoke, how long he had been lying there in the rain and mud. It might have been minutes or hours. He turned his head slowly and it felt as if his neck were a rag. His throat muscles ached and there was still a dizzying sensation at the base of the brain. He managed to get weakly to his feet.

By this time the clatter of angry voices in the vicinity of the murder car had ceased, but there was angry shouting in the vicinity as if several people were yelling at each other. Bill tried to fix the direction. It didn't come from the house. It seemed to come from the side of the steep coral hill up back of the barn. It sounded as though the voices were issuing from insdie the hill, perhaps from some cave.

Bill was thinking fast. The Varden ranch had been on his beat when he was a state patrolman. Thus he knew of the hurricane cellar that Ezra Varden had hollowed out of the hill for the protection of his family and his hands from the ripping winds. It was high enough so that the tidal waters backing up from Indian River would not touch it.

There was no interference as Bill reached the entrance of the hurricane cellar. The heavy storm door swung half open. There was a light inside the cellar. Just as Bill reached hearing distance he heard the sharp voice of the dark Jim Lassiter.

"You can't get away with it, Ezra Varden! You and your dumb missus are going to split that dough."

The guttural tone of Jason Lubitz interrupted.

"I bane not so sure," he said heavily. "Why should it be they make a split, Lassiter? They's around eighty thousand dollars and that would not be, what you call, peanuts. Would there be any good sense in the leaving of it? We did not kill Pete Lomax. We did not steal the money. What is finders will be, like you say, the keepers. Just you and me, Lassiter, we split between us."

Then the cracked voice of Ezra Varden rose high.

"You danged fools! You wouldn't get out of the county. We'll get the girl for the killing of Pete Lomax. We'll put it on her and this smart one, they call Bill Carlin. I knowed danged well he would get away with the girl and that's why I left that dumb Nate Toler on guard. The girl will hide out and she'll bo afraid to squawk."

Bill heard someone running toward the cellar. Bill was hidden behind the outswinging door as Nate Toler rushed past him into the lighted space inside. Evidently Toler had just regained his senses. And he had heard Ezra Varden call him dumb.

"So I'm dumb, am I?" he roared. "You give me an old gun you knowed wouldn't shoot. You wanted the girl to make a break to get away, knowing that would be against her. What is all this money?"

A flashlight and a ranch lantern were burning in the depths of the storm cellar. Bill chanced a look inside. Gray-haired Ezra Varden had his small frail figure back to the wall. Beside him was the mammoth Maw Varden. Up to now Bill had been trying to guess which one had throttled him and perhaps believed he had been left dead out by the barn. He was guessing no longer. He was looking at the tremendous arms of Maw Varden.

He made a mental note to find the murder tire iron. He was sure now he knew whose fingerprints would be on it. Jim Lassiter and Jason Lubitz swore violently at the entrance of Nate Toler. It was evident that they had no thought of cutting the eighty thousand dollars three ways.

Bill saw it happen. He realized then that the swarthy Jim Lassiter was the really vicious one among them. Lassiter sprang at Nate Toler and there was a flash of a knife in his hand as he drove it straight for Nate Toler's heart. Lassiter underestimated the strength and the rough and tumble fighting ability of big Nate Toler. The knife sliced Toler's shoulder but Toler's big knee had jammed up into the pit of Lassiter's stomach which threw him backward.

IT WAS as if this was the moment that sly, little Ezra Varden had been waiting for. With Lassiter and Toler entangled, Bill saw that Jason Lubitz was holding his gun loosely as he turned to watch them.

"Now all of you, get your hands up!" snapped the voice of Ezra Varden. "I'll blow the hindsights off the first one of you that makes another move!" Ezra Varden was holding a new and efficient blue steel automatic at waist level.

Maw Varden who spoke but little, laughed harshly.

"You lunkheads! You thought you would get away with it! When we tell the sheriff how I got Pete Lomax and smashed his head when he pulled a gun, there'll be ten thousand dollars reward money coming to me. And if the sheriff even starts thinking about all this dough, no matter what the girl says, it will sound like a crazy story. We know nothing about it. Paw and me will see to it now that none of you three ever talk. We'll tell the sheriff how the three of you jumped on us on account of ten thousand dollars I took off Pete Lomax when he tried to kill me tonight. Yes, we'll even let the girl go."

There was a snicker from little Ezra Varden. "And she ain't going around advertising that she had been hiding out money, blood money, for Pete Lomax."

Bill Carlin was seething inside. He saw what was coming and it amounted to the coldest blooded killing he had ever witnessed, and Bill Carlin had seen

some killing in the South Pacific. That blue automatic in Ezra Varden's hand could rub out the three closely grouped orange-pickers before they could move in their own defense. Bill's hand went to his shoulder holster. That gun was gone. But the other automatic that he had always carried snuggled in his belt lying close to his thigh was there.

Bill could hear the distant chugging of motors. A glance toward the Indian River road showed a string of vague lights in the rain.

"You called the sheriff too soon," whispered Bill to himself. "He'll come in right handy now." He clicked off the safety and cut loose one shot. Ezra Varden screamed. His automatic fell to the floor and his thin arm dangled loosely.

Big Nate Toler yelled, to Bill's surprise, "You are all a bunch of dirty thieves and killers and I'm sorry I ever got me a job here. There ain't anybody touching that dough."

Nate Toler whirled. The first slam of his fist deposited Jason Lubitz in one corner. He dealt with Jim Lassiter in a crude but effective fashion. His heeled boot kicked Lassiter in the stomach so hard that Lassiter went down heavily dropping his knife from him. Maw Varden swore hoarse, terrible oaths that might have come from the toughest male killer. She hurled her great weight upon Nate Toler. BILL CARLIN closed and bolted the heavy door of the hurricane cellar. "This is once the big wind is all locked inside," he said grimly. Then an ironi¬ cal thought came to him. "Maw Varden busted Pete Lomax's skull," he muttered. "And you can't make that out a crime on account of ten thou¬ sand reward being offered for Lomax, dead or alive. The Vardens were making out to put the killing on Maida and steal the seventy grand she had been scared into caching for Lomax." Bill Carlin grinned wryly. "But the dough's all there in the storm cellar and any story they tell has to be accepted, unless— no— there is really but one crime that can be proved and that would be their attempt to frame the Lomax killing on Maida."

Bill ran his fingers through wet, tousled hair.

"By the holy catspaw!" he grunted. "Nate Toler turns out to be honest but dumb. Lassiter and Lubitz would have been thieves on their own account, but they picked out a hurricane cellar for an argument."

Bill Carlin had to admit that he had never been confronted by a more tangled situation. Intent to commit a crime could not be used as evidence. Bill's mind turned to veteran Sheriff Gerrity. When Bill had been a state copper, he had tossed the credit in several tough cases to the sheriff.

"Anything to keep Maida out of this," said Bill, as three cars turned into the lane.

Ezra Varden was nursing a slug-busted arm. Maw Varden looked dazed from the going over big Nate Toler had given her.

When he opened the storm cellar door, Bill had given Sheriff Gerrity a hint of what he might expect to find inside. Lassiter and Lubitz were slowly getting to their feet. Big Nate Toler had Ezra Varden's automatic. His heavy voice rumbled.

"If there ain't nothin' the law can git you for, I'll run you two thievin' liars out of the county myself! That feller Carlin hit me and knocked me cold, but I had it comin'! I'm only good and sore because Maw Varden got Pete Lomax, and now she'll collect ten thousand dollars reward money!"

Bill Carlin groaned. But at least Maw Varden had reason to forget all about Maida and the frame-up that had been planned.

SHERIFF GERRITY'S wind-burned face was wrinkled with thought as he took in the scene in the storm cellar. Flat packages of money were piled on the floor. Nate Toler was still holding a gun upon the Vardens, Lassiter, and Lubitz. Three deputies followed Sheriff Gerrity.

Doc Carson, the county coroner, had been brought along to make a clean-up job. A pair of state patrolmen wheeled their motorcycles up and waited outside. Maw Varden was the first to break out.

"Sheriff, them orange-pickers was tryin' to steal the money that Pete Lomax had cached out behind the barn!" she shrilled. "I've been wakeful nights, an' I seen this Lomax drivin' into our lane and plantin' his money behind the barn! Tonight I was waitin' for him! He pulled a gun on me, but I'd picked up a tire iron and I belted him good over the head!"

Ezra Varden nursed his broken arm and nodded. Big Nate Toler stared at Maw Varden as if she belonged to a zoo.

"An' to think I've been workin' for such folks," he grunted. "Now that all o' you missed stealing the Lomax money, you ain't sayin' nothin' about Maida Layton killin' Lomax, like you was claimin' before your thievin' scheme got blowed skyhigh."

"Good fella!" grunted Sheriff Gerrity. He was watching Bill Carlin. He had known how it had been between Maida Layton and Bill before Bill had gone to the South Pacific.

"Seems as how when Ezra called my office he did say it was the girl that had murdered Pete Lomax," went on Sheriff Gerrity. He looked at Bill. "I notice that Maida Layton isn't here?"

Maw Varden had more words than sense.

"That's because this smart Bill Carlin helped her escape!" blurted Maw Varden.

"You danged old fool!" grated Ezra Varden. Sheriff Gerrity smiled grimly. He spoke to Doc Carson. "Seein' there was a ten thousand reward up for Pete

Lomax, dead or alive, we've got to be cautious, doc," said the sheriff. "Offhand, what would you say the inquest show? You saw the body?"

Doc Carson stroked his grey sideburns thoughtfully and puckered his lips.

"Well now, according to what I'd have to tell a coroner's jury," said Doc Carson solemnly, "I'd expect a verdict that Peter Lomax came to his death at the hands of a person or persons unknown."

"Why, you—" Maw Vardon turned turkey red with rage. "You can't do that to me. I killed Pete Lomax an' I can prove it. I—"

"That wasn't what you told us," drawled Nate Toler. "You came right ought before me and Lassiter and Luvitz and said the girl done it. That's why you was callin' the sheriff."

"All right boys!" said Sheriff Gerrity to his deputies. "Take this Lassiter and Lubitz and start 'em up the highway. If they ever show their ugly mugs in my county again, I'll put 'em on the chain gang for ten years."

Sheriff Gerrity turned to Ezra and Maw Varden.

"I'm thankin' you Maw Varden for watchin' Pete Lomax cache his holdup money," the sheriff said with a crooked grin. As for you, Ezra, I reckon you could find a buyer for your orange grove in short order. I'd say it shouldn't take you more than thirty days, because after then I'm expectin' to find you've moved out of my county with all your holdin's."

Big Nate Toler said, "I guess I'll be findin' me another pickin' job."

"Be a lot steadier workin' around the county garage and doin' some drivin' for me," said Sheriff Gerrity. "I've been lookin' for a husky fellow I can trust."

Sheriff Gerrity walked outside with Bill Carlin.

"I guess you know pretty much of everything, Gerrity," said Bill.

"Like hell an' all I do!" growled the sheriff. "Take names now. I never can seem to remember them: I'm danged sure I'll forget the name of Maida Layton before I get back to town. I'm surmising that won't be her name long, anyway."

"IT'S LIKE THIS," said Bill Carlin solemnly. "My office business is getting away from me. I can't hire a secretary in town. I've figured out there's only one thing I can do."

Maida was snuggled close to him in the small car, a blanket around her rain-soaked clothes.

"And what have you figured out, Bill?" she said faintly. "Bill, you're sure what happened doesn't matter? I might still be held for something—"

"You crazy little coot," said Bill. "You were only fifteen. You had no part in any crime. So you want to know what I've figured out, huh ? It'll be cheaper. I'm going out tomorrow and marry me a secretary."

"Bill?" Maida's voice was fainter. "You mean you've picked out a wife so you can have a secretary?"

"That's right, darling," and Bill slid the car into a parking space. A few minutes later Maida spoke with a little laugh.

"Yes, I'll be your office wife, Bill," she said with new life in her voice. "But you'll soon get over the idea you're getting a secretary cheap. This one will cost you plenty."

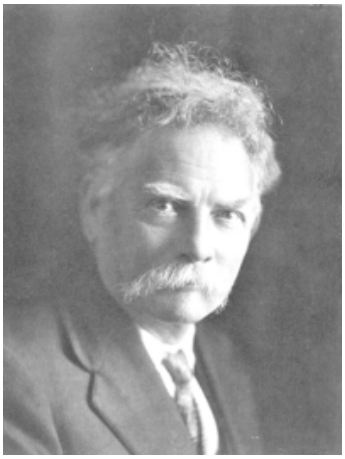
20: The Case of Black Eckert

Edward S. Sorenson

1869-1939

Punch (Vic.) 8 Dec 1903

In: *Quinton's Rouseabout*, 1908 (collection)



Edward Sylvester Sorenson

IT WAS a hot, blistering day, and Trooper Eckert, having ridden twenty miles from town that morning, smacked his lips expectantly as he sighted the wayside pub at Tooloon. Ned Tracey kept good grog and was liberal with it, but where he got the bulk of it was what was engaging Eckert's attention. He had discovered quite accidentally that several scattered back block hotels got their supplies from Tooloon, and as he knew that very little loading went out by the teams for Tracey he had a suspicion that there was a plant somewhere in the neighbourhood.

"There's a stripe to be won at Tooloon, or I'm not fit for me position," he muttered, as he led his horse into the bark-covered stable at the back.

His keen eyes were ever alert for tracks, particularly in the direction of the rugged hills across the creek. There was a road leading to a waterhole two miles down the course, whence Tracey carted his water. Eckert had seen him arrive with a load as he crossed the flat, and the cart, containing a big galvanised-iron tank, was standing between the stalls and the back of the hotel. The peculiar top attracted his attention: it fitted on like the lid of a billycan. Climbing on the wheel, he lifted it up and peeped in. Foot-steps coming in his direction disturbed him, and he hastily climbed down. But he had seen enough to excite an older head than his. He was only thirty, with a dark, stern cast of countenance, and his eagerness for promotion made him as stern and relentless as he looked. They called him "cruel," and he was variously known about the locality as "Black Eckert," "Eckert, the dog" and "the Black

Snake." He was so well hated that there was hardly a man in the district he could rely upon for information or assistance if the exigencies of a case demanded it. The majority were "mum"— they didn't know anything; others purposely led him astray. So he never trusted anybody implicitly.

"There's only two classes in this part of the country," he said one day to Tracey— "them that's in gaol an' them that ought to be— an', God willin', I'll make the numbers a little more equal; there's too many outside."

To-day, having made some valuable discoveries and seeing promotion looming ahead, he was less sinister than usual. He found Tracey doing something to the lock on his till. Tracey always managed to be busy at something in the bar when there was a sixpence about.

"You didn't happen to see a man go past here on a skewbald horse this morning, did you?" asked the trooper.

"I did, then," said Tracey.

"Had the horse a star an' a snip?"

"He had."

"Was the man a big, burly sort of a fellow?"

"He was. I remarked it as he passed widout so much as callin' for a nip."

"With a big, shaggy beard?" added Eckert.

"Tremenjus big, an' shaggy, as you say," Tracey agreed.

"Well, that ain't the gentleman I'm looking for," Eckert returned.

"Isn't it?" said Tracey, a little sharply.

"The man I want hasn't a hair below his eyebrows," Eckert continued. "Let's try a glass of that beer of yours, Tracey. I don't know how it is, but I can never get any beer like yours in town. Where do you get it?"

"That's Townsville beer, Trooper. But 'tain't so much where it comes from as the way I keep it. That's a secret I learned from th' old man."

"He learnt you a trick or two, I'll warrant. I've heard the Sergeant say he was pretty smart in his day."

"He was," said Tracey, with a touch of pride, "as smart as any a one here or there."

"And sly, too, I'll wager," added Eckert.

"As to that," said Tracey, "it's purty evident that slyness an' smartness go hand-an' fut."

"Not always," the trooper dissented. "Some people are too honest to be sly. But I must be moving, or the man without the shaggy beard will be giving me the slip. He's gone down the creek, I noticed by the tracks. I hope I'll overtake him at the waterhole."

"I hope you do," said Tracey. "An', by that token, you'll be back for tea?"

"I'll be back in any case. So long-for the present."

Black Eckert had malignantly described Ned Tracey as he had seen him a fortnight before, riding out of town. Though he often had a night's spree and a free and easy time generally when he visited Tooloon, he did not like Tracey. He would rather see someone there after his own heart— one who would "lay him on" occasionally. Tracey fooled him, and charged him for everything, so that his trips to Tooloon were expensive. His ideal publican was one who would treat the Force to every thing free of cost, not to speak of extras, as he put it. He hated Ned Tracey and felt a glow of satisfaction as he rode away from his rough-and-ready caravansary. He was on the track of that which would place him prominently before the public eye, which would be flashed and published all over Australia and bring him reward— and the promotion he fretted for. Tracey had an illicit still, worked on a large scale, in the vicinity. In the pseudo water-tank on the cart he had seen several closed kegs, the smell of which was unmistakable. His approach to the hotel had been observed and the unloading of the spirits had been delayed in consequence. This was unfortunate for Tracey, thought Eckert, for he had now only to follow the track of the dray to find the still.

In this, however, Black Eckert was mistaken. At the waterhole was a pump, built on a strong and rather elaborately-made stand, with a bark roof over it: and here the wheel tracks ended. The cart had been backed to the pump, which was high enough to run water, by means of a snout, into the tank if desired. Knowing that water had not been brought from here that day, Eckert at once became deeply interested in this pump. It looked innocent enough, in all conscience, and yet there must be a secret about it somewhere. The suction pipe descended straight into the water between four square uprights. These were not solid, but made of pine battens, a device often adopted for strength and cheapness where suitable timber is scarce. But any kind of rough bush uprights would have suited as well in this instance, and so, ever suspicious, he thought the batten squares must have some special service other than appeared to the casual observer.

Mounting the stage, he saw that these uprights formed the four corners of a box-like square in which the pump was set. A little examination revealed that the top pulled out in two sections, one from each side of the pump. Having removed these, he saw the whole secret at a glance, and, in spite of himself, he felt an admiration for the man who had so cunningly planned it. In each upright was a small pipe: one of them came to the top of the box, and appeared to be a speaking-tube: the other three were four inches shorter, and were each fitted with a small brass tap. Standing in the box was a short piece of curved piping, which screwed on to any of the three, and was ostensibly used to connect the pipes with a keg or other receiving vessel. He screwed it

on to one and turned the tap. The result was a flow of unmistakable brandy. The trooper's admiration increased, and there being a jam tin on the stage he treated himself to a stiff nip. Then he tried No. 2: but that was dry. The Pipe smelt strongly of beer, so he surmised that beer was only "laid on" when required, as the pipes might turn it. He tried the third pipe, and got a swig of what would pass in a labelled bottle for medium whisky— in fact, it had the same taste as Tracey's "Glenlivet" and "Old Scotch." The trooper was now lost in admiration.

"By the hokey frost," he muttered, "but this caps all the smart dodges a man could find in a blue moon. Yer not too slow, Ned Tracey. Yer a genius—an' all the more credit to me for ferretin' out the secret. There's a stripe for me in this, or I'm much mistaken."

His next move was to find the direction of the still. The flow of liquor from the pipes told him that it was situated at a higher level than the stage, and so he must look for it among the rugged hills across the creek. Armed with a long stick, he searched the water carefully from the bottom of the uprights, and ascertained that they went straight across into the opposite bank. Taking a line by them he sighted up the hill, and found that the course took him close by a shepherd's hut, the top of which was just discernible over the cap of the first ridge. The shepherd was employed by Tracey, and the sheep-pens were close to the hut.

"I'll have another drop of that brandy before I start," he soliloquised, "an' by the hokey, I'll fill me waterbag, too!"

He climbed up again and, first filling the bag, ran out a good nobbler into the jam tin, which he drank leisurely, making appreciative comments thereon.

"It's good grog Tracey makes. 'Tis a pity I have to spoil his little game. 'Twould be a handy place for a camp when I'm after thieves or other vagabonds. Gallons o' grog for the takin', spoutin' out like artesian water. But duty is duty— an' there's a stripe hangin' to it. Tracey."

Tracey's grog was strong, and already Black Eckert was filled with a spirit of recklessness. Otherwise he was quite sober, though he rode up the hill with a clatter that was not discretionary. Leaving his horse at the sheep-pen, he walked across to the hut. Smoke was issuing from the chimney, but there was no response to his knock on the door. It was fastened with a padlock, and this he immediately unlocked with a skeleton key. The first thing he noticed on entering was that the few glowing coals in the fireplace gave out no smoke whatever. Yet a fair volume of smoke was issuing from the top of the chimney! He went out and back again three or four times before he discovered the ruse. There was a double wall at the back of the fireplace, and between these there was evidently a flue which carried the smoke from a fire underground. This hut

was, then, but another blind, like the pump, and it suggested to him the locale of the still.

Just behind the hut was a deep, wooded gorge, with a sheer drop of fifty feet. The fall began from some jutting rocks, twenty yards to the right, and it was towards this spot that the tell-tale pipes were directed. The trooper returned to his horse, and took another pull from the bag, as a preliminary to further investigations.

" 'Tisn't everybody that has a brandy-bag— an' brimming at that— to carry with him when he rides about the bush," he commented with much satisfaction, as he pressed the stopper in.

The way along under the face of the cliff was rugged and strewn with loose stones, which the trooper, not too certain on his pins, set rolling as he went. When he got opposite the hut he could see nothing but a heavy festoon of vines, hanging over the rocks like a dense green curtain. A close search revealed a faint track— a crushed leaf, a scratch on a stone— ascending towards it. With difficulty he climbed up, and on parting the vines his hand clutched the hidden pipes, following the face of the cliff round to the level ground, whence, he opined, they ran straight to the creek. Not a little excited, he now picked his way along with more care, and presently he found himself at the entrance of an enormous cave.

The place reeked with the fumes of malt, and Eckert felt his blood tingle at the magnitude of his accomplishment. He stood, a couple of paces in, blinking in the unaccustomed gloom. Slowly objects before him began to take shape— casks, cases, bags— and far in there was a rough staircase which, he calculated, gave access to the hut, the top being hidden. Presumably, under the cow-hide mat he had noticed near the bunk.

"Stand!" The order came clear and sharp from both sides of him simultaneously, and brought him up with a jerk. Turning in the direction of the voices, he saw a masked man standing like a statue on each side of him, and each had him covered with a rifle.

"I am sorry to see you here, Black Eckert," said the man on his right.

"I have no doubt of that," said Eckert, calmly.

"No one but our look-out saw you come in, Eckert," continued the man, "and you will be lucky if anybody sees you go out."

" 'Twill be worse for you, me man, if you try any hanky-panky tricks with me. Put your arms down an' surrender quietly now."

The other man laughed harshly.

"You've done a fine piece of work to-day, Black Eckert," he said, "and you deserve credit for it."

"I'll get it, too!"

"What do you reckon you'll get for it?" the other asked, quickly.

"A hundred quid, I think— an' perhaps a stripe," said Eckert, defiantly.

"It seems a pity to baulk you, Trooper; but it would be a greater pity to spoil our little plans here. What do you think of our grog? You sampled it pretty well at the pump."

The wrinkles deepened under Eckert's eyes.

"I heard Ned Tracey make the remark to-day that slyness an' smartness went hand-an'-foot. I believe him."

He turned to the man who had been sneaking.

"You're an old man, I think, an' I fancy I've heard your voice before."

"I'm pretty old." the man replied. "You knew me once, Black Eckert; but I'm dead now."

"What's that?"

"I'm dead now," the man repeated.

"Rot! How can you be?"

"I mean I'm legally dead."

"I don't understand you."

"You remember Duncan Coyle, I think?"

"He's dead," said Eckert.

"Legally," the other corrected.

"I buried him— le's'ways, I helped to bury him— two years ago on the Ten-mile Sandhill."

"You buried him alive, you dog; and well you knew it," the man returned, savagely. "Duncan Coyle never harmed you, Eckert; but he knew something against you— something to do with a tracker who was killed, accidentally, when you were both drunk on duty. So, when you were sent to find Duncan Coyle, who'd wandered off from Tracey's in the horrors, and you found him lying speechless on the Ten-mile Sandhill, you saw your chance. You made Toby, the black tracker, dig a hole in the sand with a wooden spade of your own fashioning, and you flung him in and covered him up. You reported that he'd been dead two days and smelt badly. Your sable henchman, of course, corroborated. Luckily, the grave had been sunk across a wombat-hole, and Coyle happened to drop face against the burrow, and so got enough air to live until the cool sand livened him up a bit; then he fought his way out. You were no doubt drunk at Tracey's by that time."

Eckert, nibbling his moustache, had stood eyeing the speaker closely, his face now an ugly pallor. The man removed his mask, and came nearer.

"Don't forget for an instant," he warned, "that my mate has you covered all the while. Do you know me now?"

"You are Duncan Coyle, sure enough," said Eckert, hoarsely. "I thought you were dead at the time I found you—"

"You lie!" said Coyle. "But what's the use of argument? I can't harm you now— unless you force me. We are quits."

"I don't see the point," said Eckert, surlily.

"Our illicit product has dulled your wits," sneered Coyle. "I am the responsible party for everything here, and even if you had not more to lose than you can possibly gain by reporting what you have discovered, you can't proceed against a man who is legally dead. You can only take the plant and claim the reward if we don't blow the cave to smithereens with dynamite when the approach of a posse of police is telephoned to us. In any case, your present position is preferable to what awaits you if your ambition overrides your common sense. What say you, Black Eckert?"

"You have nothing to lose," said the trooper, reflectively. "If you hold your peace, then, I will give you the £100, and we'll cry quits!"

"You think more of the credit than the money, Black Eckert," Coyle answered; "but that isn't all. It's Ned Tracey's scalp you're after now— but you'll have to put me under another sandhill before you get it... We're quits as it is, and I prefer to let it stand at that."

"You have the big end of the stick," said the trooper, sulkily. "What now?"

"You can go!" said Coyle. "But don't forget that you will be closely watched from here to the pub."

Black Eckert lost no time in getting out of the cave. He cursed his luck bitterly as he climbed down the cliff; the opportunity of a lifetime had come within his grasp, and had been snatched from him by the ghosts of the past. He might wait till Coyle passed out by the effluxion of time, seeing that Coyle was an old man: but there were others who had seen and heard all in the cave, and he did not know who they were.

Chagrined and heavy at heart, he recognised at once that the plant was not for him to spring. Then he sought what little consolation he could from the fact that he owed his life on the present occasion to his misdeeds of two years ago. Reaching his horse, he took a deep draught from the bag to drown his disappointment, but instantly spat it out, with a wry face. The bag was filled with cold water. A muttered oath escaped him, as he looked vengefully towards the hut. There was nothing suspicious-looking about the structure; nevertheless, he had an idea that the lookout man was somewhere in the roof. He didn't bother looking, however; he sprang into the saddle and rode hard back to the pub, as though the ghosts of a thousand crimes were at his heels.

"So yer didn't get that joker?" said Tracey, as he dismounted in front of the bar.

"No," the trooper answered. "When slyness and smartness go hand-an'-foot, Tracey, it takes some cleverness to do the catching."

"Well, it do, as you say," Tracey returned. "You'll be stoppin' for tea, I think you told me?"

"No," said Eckert. "I'll have a glass of your beer; then I'll be off. I have a report to go by to-morrow's mail. I had forgotten it."

He reached town late that night, and next morning he wrote his report. It was in the form of an application for removal to another district, as his health was failing in consequence of the trying climate. Two months later the petition was granted and Black Eckert passed from the ken of Ned Tracey and Duncan Coyle, a soured and disappointed man.
