PAST MASTERS 159

Algernon Blackwood
Edith Wharton
Leroy Yerxa
Arthur Quiller Couch
Henry Lawson
Tom Gallon
Georges Surdez
Bertram Atkey

and more

PAST MASTERS 159

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

5 April 2024

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1: The Curse of the Earlams

Harold Mercer

1882-1952

The Bulletin, 29 Nov 1933

Harold Mercer

DR. EGAN conveyed an impression of exasperation as he removed his stethoscope and placed it on his desk, signalling to Arthur Earlam to put on his clothes.

"You're killing yourself," he said angrily. "There's nothing wrong with you, and yet there's everything wrong with you. What you are suffering from, really, is self-hypnotism."

Arthur Earlam, having put on his coat, let himself fall into the lounge-chair with an air of extreme lassitude, and smiled wanly.

"It's the curse of the Earlams," he said.

"Damn the curse of the Earlams! It wouldn't matter tuppence if you hadn't let it soak into your mind."

Earlam drew himself out of the chair wearily, walked to a desk, as if the exertion was a drain on his energy, and brought from it a leather-bound folio, which he threw on the table as he fell languidly once more into his seat. His action had turned back the leather cover, revealing a handwritten title-page bearing the words "The History of the Curse of the Earlams" in the pointed caligraphy affected by women of the Victorian era.

"It's all in there, explain the mystery as you will. Generation after generation no new Earlam has been born into the world but his father died just before."

"I know. You've shown me that already. I'd like to burn the damn thing," said the doctor irritably. "What made your grandmother write up the wretched business?"

"I suppose she felt proud of belonging to a family that had owned a real live curse for hundreds of years," said Earlam with a bitter laugh. "You can't deny the existence of the curse, if you read that history.

"My father did not marry until he was 64. He died two days before I was born. My grandfather died a week before my father was born. His father had brought his bride to Australia, trying to avoid a curse, already long established, by a change of climate. They were here for five years before my grandfather was born; but when my grandfather did make his appearance his father was dead. My grandfather's grandfather, again, was one of twins, also born after the death of their father. The other twin had an affair with a servant girl, his mother's maid; she gave birth to a child three days after the father died; and my great-great-grandfather died before the birth of my great-grandfather. The chain is pretty complete."

"It's the most ridiculous nonsense I ever heard," Dr. Egan said. "A chain of superstition, carried on from generation to generation."

"It's a poetical idea in a way. The child can only be born by the father sacrificing his own life. Perhaps his personality is required to be passed on in the new life. I feel as if I have in my brain vague memories of events that happened centuries ago."

"In fact, you feel that you are really an Earlam who helped to chop off the head of Charles the First, or tried to prevent it. It's all morbid bunkum, Earlam. You've saturated yourself in the superstition as, very likely, all your forebears did. If you were so impressed by the idiotic legend, why the blazes did you and Mrs. Earlam think of having a child?"

"Before Mary and I married I explained the position. We told ourselves we would do without children; but as time went on I felt that she longed for a baby. I had the same longing, too. We finally decided to defy the curse."

He made a pathetically weak gesture with his arms. "You see it is too strong for us. I'll be dead before the child is born."

"You won't if you throw off your rotten delusions. Don't you see how unfair it is to Mrs. Earlam? You are going to leave her with the feeling that she is almost a murderer— a husband-slayer. Instead of the prospect of the baby's birth being a joy to her, it is hell to contemplate! Do you know that she suggested an operation to me?"

"An operation!" exclaimed Earlam.

"To save you. I refused, of course— it would be murder. It isn't necessary, anyhow. Good God, man, you've got a brain, haven't you? You're something better than a damned abo. who's had a bone pointed at him!"

"You must admit that the curse is a mystery."

"That's the hell of it all— you're proud of it!" The doctor seized the folio from the table. "You'd better let me tear this rotten thing to smithereens."

Earlam, with a start of energy, took it from his hands. The doctor stared at him and, crossing the room, shook his fist at an enlarged portrait on the wall— the picture of an elderly woman, capped.

"You don't seem to have any great fancy for grandma."

"Why should she write a beastly thing like that? I knew the lady better than you did, Arthur, and yet I daresay you didn't care for her."

"I was afraid of her; but she was a great old girl. Lived to be over ninety; and look at the women's movements she led, even when she was old!"

"Led? Was, you mean. She insisted on being the whole thing or nothing. One of those domineering females. You were only a boy when she died."

"Ten years old."

"Yes ; I knew grandma. A woman of iron— and rusted! But I never hated her until I knew your case and found she'd written that thing. It was fastening the shackles of a stupid legend on her descendants. You've got to forget it, Arthur.... For the wife's sake!"

As Egan passed out into the hall, a woman rushed forward eagerly to meet him. The question she wanted to ask was in her face, in her whole bearing.

"There's nothing wrong with him, Mary," said Egan, affecting a boisterousness of manner. "He's suffering from superstition, that's all. Laugh him out of it!"

"Can he be laughed out of it?" she questioned eagerly. "He will live— there is no danger, is there, doctor?"

Egan scarcely knew the answer he shot at her; he meant it to be reassuring. But he cursed under his breath.

He had known Earlam from his infancy; known him for a clean and likeable young man, touched by an effeminacy for which the history of the family— a long line in which the successive sons had never experienced the guardianship of a father— was responsible. It was exasperating to think that he could do nothing to save this fine young man— and the wife who would suffer, too. Earlam was wasting from a sickness for which all his medical science could find no cure.

And Mary must have the feeling that she was carrying within herself her husband's death-warrant.

Mary had never been unduly impressed by the family history of which Arthur had told her. She had regarded his belief in such a bogey as a curious freak ; but in her affection for him had respected it. When he had apparently abandoned the superstition she had been glad, as one who hails the recovery of a loved being from a distressing malady. The discovery that it still lingered and was likely to have terrible results horrified her. Her natural desires, satisfied, would mean the death of her husband. But she conquered her tears. The only way to meet the threatening disaster, to triumph over the supernatural tragedy that was looming over the house, was to remain cheerful, to laugh away, with practical commonsense, the ghosts of the past that had taken possession of her husband's soul; to dismiss them as folly.

"Mrs. Chartres is calling for me, Arthur," she said. "You know what a goose Mrs. Chartres is! She's found a new fortune-teller— Mrs. Chartres believes in all that silly nonsense— and she wants me to go along with her."

"Pooh!— fortune-tellers!" said Arthur.

"I thought it would be a bit of fun," said Mary. "Will you come along with us? I'd like to hear if she says anything about the curse of the Earlams. I bet she prophesies that you live to be a hundred— and probably a nice wife for you next year!"

"I won't go, dear," Earlam said. "But you go if it'll amuse you."

The fortune-teller, discovered in a shabby, semi-detached cottage in a shabby suburb, proved a bore. Mary could not even gain amusement from the eager faith with which Mrs. Chartres, giving at least half the information that was handed back to her, gulped in the prophecies of the greasily impressive and "aitch"-less palmist.

"There's a shadder broodin' over yer," said the palmist as Mary took her turn.

"That's the curse of the Earlams," said Mary to Mrs. Chartres, filling in a careless remark in sheer boredom.

"You're Mrs. Earlam—" Mary could have laughed at the cheap obviousness of it; the mark of the wedding-ring, though Mrs. Chartres had induced her to remove it, was on her finger. "The baby you are to have will be a fine child— a boy. Some trouble threatens your 'usband. But I can see money"

"That'll be my rents. Darcy, my collector, always brings the money along on Mondays; Arthur has it paid in for me next day."

She was glad when it was all over; glad, too, when she had got rid of Mrs. Chartres and could go home, feeling tired and miserable. Her husband was killing himself with a superstition, and she had missed another of the decreasing days of his companionship without doing anything to help him.

The burglary was a clumsy one. Arthur Earlam, wakened by the sounds of furtive movement, was out in an instant. Revolver in hand, he stood in the doorway as he switched the light on.

The burglar turned round with a gasp and stared at him standing there. Without a command his hands went up in token of surrender; Earlam was too astonished, as he stared at the face of the intruder, to give any command. Mary, disturbed for her husband in his weak condition, had leapt from bed as he moved, had tried to persuade him not to face the unknown danger. Still more concerned about the effect of s hock upon his health than for any other consideration, she had rung up Dr. Egan instead of the police. Egan had had Earlam on his mind all the evening; in no time he was at the Earlam home.

A disturbed, half-dressed servant let him in, and in the hall Mary came to meet him and wordlessly led him into a lighted room. He paused, nonplussed. For a moment he thought that the furtive-looking man in the far corner of the room was Earlam himself, strangely aged, bloated curiously and dressed shabbily; but from where he sat, screened by the chair in which he was sitting, Earlam thrust out his head, looking back at him.

"Ah, Egan!" he greeted. "Look what we've got here."

The shabbily-dressed man leapt from his seat.

"Mister!" he appealed. "You tole me you wasn't goin' to call no perlice."

"This isn't a policeman, Honeysett," said Earlam cheerfully. "This is Dr. Egan. Doctor, I want you to meet my friend— my burglar, I might call him. He broke in here to-night, and when I bailed him up he had a nice tale to tell me about being sooled on to the job by his mother. Mother tells fortunes, and gathered from my wife, who went to her with Mrs. Chartres, that there'd be some loose cash in the house to-night. It seems my friend here has never been a burglar before— he's anything but an expert. Doesn't look like an expert, does he? But what does he look like?"

It was a queer group, there at that hour— the invalid Earlam, showing more animation than he had displayed for months, enjoying the situation apparently as he lolled in his chair in his pyjamas; Mrs. Earlam, in a kimono, standing anxiously near him; the doctor, with tousled hair and a glimpse of pyjamas showing through the opened breast of his overcoat; the half-dressed servant, gape-mouthed in the background ; and, before them all, the alarmed and protesting intruder in his shabby clothes, elderly and uncouth, and yet—

"What does he look like?" said Dr. Egan, taking up Earlam's question. "Why, damn it all, he looks like you"

"That's the sweet part of the joke! From what I have gathered from our friend, his mother told him he was safe in burglaring here because his father was my father. Though the Law wouldn't recognise it, he's my half-brother !"

"I ain't persoomin' on no relationship," put in the man who looked so like an older and debauched edition of Earlam. "Me mother says ole Mr. Earlam treated 'er 'andsome, an' she kept 'er word to 'im never ter say nothin'. But there's me been outer work these six munce, an' me mother, pore soul, takin' ter forchune-tellin' ter try an' 'elp, an' the idea came to 'er when th' lydy there, she called an' mentioned some money in the 'ouse. There's me missus an' the kids—"

"Kids?" cried Earlam, springing to his feet. "How many children have you?"

"Four of 'em, all 'elpless. An' look, mister, whatcher goin' to do?" whined the intruder.

"Do?" cried Arthur. "I'm goin' to give you a fiver to go on with, an' get you a job. Jane, take this gentleman down to the kitchen and give him something to eat. Then make him a parcel of food to take home."

His whole aspect was one of animation as he turned on Egan when, spluttering amazed thanks, the burglar followed the half-dressed servant from the room.

"A lot of men would only be horrified to discover a half-brother like that. He's an Earlam— there's no doubting that. And see what it means to me! Long before I was born my father had a son— and lived for twenty-five years after it! And that son has four children and is still alive. That finishes the curse of the Earlams! "

"By Jove!" exclaimed Egan, feeling that a key to a problem had been thrust into his hand. "I see the whole business now! I told you what a domineering woman your grandmother was; how she took your father about with her, chained to her chariot-wheels. She was determined that she would allow no woman to share her son's affections; she used to preach fiercely, too, that a man's conduct should be as chaste as a woman's. She worked up the curse of the Earlams to help her; obviously— though she probably thought he did— your father didn't believe in it much, and his death was by accident, anyway, even if it was a coincidence. The curse of the Earlams is probably a fake from beginning to end."

"You can't say that," said Arthur stiffly.

Egan laughed boisterously at him, seeing that he resented the complete destruction of a family tradition, just as he might have resented a declaration that some old art treasure, prized as a family heirloom, was bogus.

"I don't care whether I can or not. What's happened has done what medicine never could have done. Look at you now —a dying man yesterday, it seemed; as sprightly as a chicken now! "

"It means a lot to me," laughed Earlam.

"Oh, damn you, Earlam! " cried Egan. "I'm thinking of what it means to her."

Arthur turned swiftly to Mary at this reminder, his arms held out to her. The look of strain she had tried hard to conceal had vanished.

"Arthur! Oh, how glad I am!" she cried.

As he took her in his arms he heard the door click as it shut. Dr. Egan, as satisfied as they were, was departing in search of his disturbed sleep.

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2: The Face of the Earth

Algernon Blackwood

1869-1951

Leader (Melbourne, Vic) 26 June 1909

The Pacific Monthly Dec 1911

The first of two stories in this issue by the immensely prolific Algernon Henry Blackwood. Both were in Australian newspapers. Neither are in that invaluable resource, "The Index to the Fiction Magazines" at http://www.philsp.com/

FINKELSTEIN, like many another German, resembled a weak edition of Bismarck. A little way off the appearance was remarkable. Closer, of course, one saw the softness of eye and indecision of jaw that destroyed the illusion.

"I want you to fearful be— of nozzing," he said, looking the young man up and down.

"I am afraid of nothing," said Arthur Spinrobin, believing that the secretaryship was already his.

"Goot," said the old professor, "I take you on!"

And thus Arthur Spinrobin, orphan, penniless, the money provided for his Cambridge education just completed, began the high adventure of his life by a three months' engagement to Professor Adolf Finkelstein. The only qualification was that he should know German, have some knowledge of surveying, and be "afraid of nothing."

Finkelstein, for reasons best known to himself, lived at the time in a little farmhouse of grey stone among the folds of the Dorsetshire hills;, and thither Spinrobin, small, round and active, with cheerful face and sanguine heart, betook himself, as agreed, on 1st September.

"It may lead to something," he said to himself at ''the end of the first' week; "but it's all jolly queer. I wonder if the old boy is a spy— or merely a lunatic."

He remembered that he was expected to be afraid of nothing. Arrest, high treason, and other ominous words occurred to him; but in the end he rejected them all.

"He's one of these Teutonic dreamers— transcendentalist and all that — gone a little bit cracky." Only the map-making puzzled him— uneasily.

For the life they led was not quite ordinary. They had a big sitting room and a bedroom each in the farmhouse that was glad enough to take a couple of boarders. The mornings they spent translating various German passages, beginning with, authors like Novalis and Schlegel, and ending with more modern, writers that Spinrobin had never heard of. While Finkelstein translated into French, Spinrobin did likewise into English— apparently with a view to simultaneous publication in both languages, of some big Essay the German professor was at work on. This Essay was to include these passages, but Finkelstein did not take the secretary into his confidence concerning it. There was an air of mystery, about the whole thing.

And the translated passages always had to do with the one subject, viz., that, the Earth was the body of a great Being— living, conscious; that it had organs and a physiognomy; that the beauty of nature was merely a revelation of its personality; and that human beings could no more realise this than a fly on an elephant could realise that it walked upon a living body differing from its own merely, in size and habits. Some faces are too big to be seen as faces, Finkelstein said one morning to him. Then, leaning forward through the tobacco smoke above their work table he suddenly touched Spinrobin's little turn-up nose with his thick finger.

"The ten million microbes there dwelling," he said with an intenseness that made the secretary start, "do not know they are on a human face, *was*?" For he talked German and English indiscriminately.

The afternoons, they walked together upon the hills, Spinrobin in normal shooting costume, and Finkelstein in baggy grey knickerbockers, elastic-side boots with nails, a loose jacket of Austrian Loden cloth, and a Tyrolese hat. A camera was swung round his shoulder, for he took frequent photographs, which he developed himself.

"Look," he said, pointing, to the smooth, rounded hill-tops about him, treeless, with sheep and cattle feeding in groups. "The cheeks of a great face— see, I photograph it now, and later show you somezing your own little sight cannot take in. Ach! the camera is fine for that. *Wer weisst? Wer weisst*?"

BUT the chalk pits drew him most, and he was for ever taking photographs or making sketches of them, and asking his secretary to draw accurate plans showing the exact relation they bore to one another, and poring over the results on paper at home till the smoke got too thick to see, and he would put them away, with a sigh and discuss plans for the morrow.

In particular there were two pits about a mile apart that interested him, with a third some hundreds of feet below them, very deep, with a ragged edge whose gorse and furze bushes grew in a fringe along the lips.

"There, we have it, I think," he used to say in German, after wandering for hours from one to the other, and studying endless photographs and plans of them at home.

"There we have it. Wait and see if I am not right," which bewildered the secretary hopelessly, until one day, in his chief's absence, he peeped into his bedroom, and saw on the walls his own series of maps, distorted out of all truth or accuracy, with the pits marked in red, and the whole presenting different aspects of a mighty and very dreadful countenance. The two smaller pits were eyes, and the lower deep one with the bushes fringing it like hair, was a mouth— a huge, open, gaping mouth. The sight produced in, him an unpleasant sense of alarm and disgust he was at a loss to account for.

"ACH, not here! Do not stumble here!" the German cried one day when Spinrobin slipped near the edge of the bigger pit, and his face was so white that for a moment it seemed almost as if the depths of chalk be low had shot up some curious message of reflected light upon his skin. And for some reason he never could explain quite to himself, the secretary always avoided that particular pit afterwards. A certain sense of personality pervaded it: and when the Professor told him the stories (corroborated in some measure, too, by the farmer) about the number of sheep and cattle it devoured yearly, the sense of dread— though he laughed at it— increased.

One evening, too, coming home alone, he heard the wind whistling and booming round its white sides, polishing them to smoothness, and the sudden fancy leaped into his brain of a great purring throat.

"Absurd!" he laughed, turning with a run in a safer direction; "this old Finkelstein with his crazy anthropomorphism has got into my imagination."

And that very night they translated long passages from Fechner— told with a hold power and originality that made it all unpleasantly real to the ordinarily cheerful, healthy-minded little secretary.

"Like your own visionary, ze great Blake," exclaimed Finkelstein in the middle, curiously excited (and using a vigorous English phrase utterly

incongruous to the professional type, and picked up heaven knows where!) "zis Fechner has a great imagination that bangs straight through into Reality!"

Thus there gradually grew up about the innocent Spinrobin a queer sense that the world was no longer quite the same as he had hitherto seen it. This Fechner, whom the Professor studied, laid a new spell upon him.

The water for fish, the air for birds; the ether— well, the ether, too, in turn had its own denizens: worlds! The Stars were alive: the planets great spiritual beings; the earth on which he lived was the physical body of some vast intelligence that boomed its mighty way through space just as he himself pattered with quick little footsteps across a field. Moreover, Finkelstein elaborated the theory of his fellow-countryman with singular conviction.

"Ze worlds are ze true angels," he said, "and not imachination is ze music of the spheres. Ach! I vill proof it to everypody when I get out zis great book I write."

Then, puffing his pipe voluminously into his secretary's face, he would become enthusiastic and more confidential.

The worlds, he declared, were some kind of Beings superior to men and animals, but alive and conscious in the same sense. He dwelt upon the analogy till water came into his soft eyes, and his gesticulations threatened the crockery as well as Spinrobin's own astonished features. Arms and legs, he said, after all are only crutches to enable ill-constructed creatures to get about— whereas the worlds have no need for them, being round. Eyes are equally unnecessary, for they find their way through the ether without them infallibly. For lungs— their whole surface is in continual commerce with the winds; and for circulation, the rivers, springs and rains are unceasing. Also all the worlds are in most delicate touch with one another, keenly sensitive to the least variation; and where they grow cold— they die.

"Ach! *Donnerwetter*! they starve!" he would cry, with something between anger and laughter, as though his uncouth imagination were really true.

And Spinrobin, hearing all this from morning till night, and having practical explanations given to him during their walks among the hills, reached a point before long where he became exceedingly uncomfortable. Those maps and tortured photographs haunted his dreams with their suggestions of Faces that it is not good for a man to look upon.

He kept incessant watch upon Finkelstein. It came to him somehow or other that the work, and the walks, and all the rest of it, were a labored pretence. The German dreamer had some very practical, matter of fact purpose behind all his imaginative writing and talking. It made him uneasy.

Once or twice on the hills, he caught Finkelstein looking at him with a singular expression in his eyes an expression that made him inclined, to run, or

to cry for help, or do something to draw attention to themselves and on more than one occasion he was certain he heard someone treading softly in the night about the door of his bedroom. And Spinrobin, though not a coward, was decidedly of the timid order. He did not like it! It bewildered his respectable and commonplace soul.

"There," exclaimed Finkelstein, in his native tongue, one November evening, when a first spray of snow had whitened the hills, "there you see it well. The snow helps to bring out the great whitened face with glorious features! Ach! Ach! In these desolate places where men have done little to obliterate or disturb, you can see more plainly."

He indicated the curious configuration of the hills about them. From the high point on which they stood Spinrobin's awakened imagination easily permitted him to trace the "great whitened face" the enthusiastic German referred to! The pits marked the two eyes, now closed by the shadows of the dusk; and he saw the large, deep, capacious month, gaping wide open beneath its fringe of hair-like trees and bushes. It certainly bore a curious resemblance to a vast face thrust up from below, the features outlined by the powdered snow. The man came close to his side, and began to talk very rapidly.

The secretary's knowledge of German was good, but the other talked so quickly, using such strange phrases and clipping his words with such guttural gymnastics, that he found it difficult to follow. The only thing he gathered generally was that Finkelstein was indulging his imagination, aided by a grotesque humor, in describing the Death of the Earth. The snow and cold made him forecast the time when the body of the earth would be finally dead; and the cause, he declared here came in the grotesque humor— was that she could no longer feed her internal fires. Mouths, channels, monstrous funnels to act as feeding pipes should be constructed, and the old earth should be kept alive for ever. Or she might even be fed through smaller holes like these very pits— he pointed to them, catching Spinrobin suddenly by the arm— just as human beings might be fed through the pores of the skin!

Spinrobin jumped away from his side in the middle of the strange outburst. They had approached nearer to the edge of the big pit than he cared about.

"My imachination runs me away!" cried the Professor. "Come, let us get home to supper. For it is our duty to feed our own bodies before we feed the earth!" and he laughed aloud as he followed his startled secretary down the stony hill path back to the farm.

DURING the next few days he made frequent reference, however, to this bizarre notion of feeding the dying earth through holes in her surface— pores in her skin. Spinrobin watched him more carefully than even before.

Apparently he was not the only person who watched him, for one afternoon that same week the farmer came abruptly into the secretary's bedroom, and asked for a private word with him. Finkelstein was out.

Briefly the man came with a warning. "You seem innocent like," explained he, "but you ain't the first secretary he's had down here, nor the first that's disappeared."

"But I've not disappeared!" gasped Spinrobin.

"You may do though— in the cold weather."

The old man was cryptic and mysterious. He received a big price for his rooms, he explained, but— well, he could not help giving a warning to such a nice young fellow as Spinrobin.

The secretary felt his flesh begin to crawl, and a sudden light dawned upon him. The step of the German already sounded in the hall below, and he turned with a quick question to the friendly farmer. It was guesswork, but apparently it hit the bull's-eye.

"The sheep and cattle, then, that disappear?"

"Oh! But he pays me big prices for them."

The approaching steps of Finkelstein sent the farmer about his business, but Spinrobin went into his room and locked the door. He began to understand things better.

His first quarter was up that week he came to an abrupt decision. Finkelstein could get a new secretary!... and next day when he chose a discreet opportunity to announce his decision with plausible excuses, the Professor merely fixed his watery eyes on his face with the remark in German—

"I regret it. You have been a patient and admirable secretary— just the material I want for my great— my great purpose."

But the phrase "just the material" was ominous and stuck in Spinrobin's mind. Somehow he had come to loathe the man— his voice, eyes, and gestures. His speculations no longer interested him as before. They touched the secret springs of abhorrence and alarm in the depths of him. The figure with Tyrolese hat, baggy knickerbockers and shapeless legs ending in the ridiculous elastic-side boots became cloaked with suggestions of a strange horror he could not in the least explain to himself.

And it was a week later— his last day, in fact— when a sound woke him at two in the morning, and he peeped out of his window, and saw Finkelstein in the moonlight standing with the Loden cloak about his shoulders and throwing up small stones to attract his attention. The moon was reflected in his big spectacles. He carried a long stick. Grotesquely forbidding he looked.

"Come out," he whispered gutturally, holding up a finger to enjoin silence, "come out and see. It is too wonderful! Ach! it is too wonderful!" He was greatly excited, it seemed.

"What?" stammered little Spinrobin, half frightened. It was like a figure in a nightmare, he felt, a figure he was compelled to obey, for his unlined young soul was very sensitive to suggestion, and this German undoubtedly exercised unconscious hypnotic influence over him.

"The pits are working!" continued the thick German, voice. "Only once in a lifetime you see such a thing, p'erhaps. Ach; but quick, come quick. It is the feeding-time. I show you! *Was*? The feeding-time."

A crowd of conflicting emotions in the breast of the shivering Spinrobin— curiosity, fear, wonder and a rash courage of youth urged him to see this extraordinary adventure to its end— found their resultant expression (to this day he cannot quite explain how!) and brought him in a few minutes to the side, of the German outside.

They moved rapidly up the hill. Moonlight lay over the whole tossed landscape of mountain and valley, and a gusty S.W. wind from the sea boomed and echoed in the hollows. He heard it swish through the patches of long grass about their feet and past his ears.

The German, wrapped in his cloak, and holding his long stick partly concealed, led the way. "His calves," thought Spinrobin, "looked just like sausages! At any other time he would have laughed.... Instead, he pattered behind, shivering.

"Hark!" whispered Finkelstein, stopping a moment for breath, after a mile of silent climbing. "Now, you hear it." And the secretary heard in the distance that booming sound of the wind as it rushed like mighty breathing about the mouth of the big pit.

The same intense curiosity that had brought him out on this mad expedition overcame the instinct to turn and run— for his life. Finkelstein, he saw, was making sudden awkward movements under cover of his cloak. They were standing some fifty yards, from the edge now. The great opening gaped there in the moonlight down the steep slope in front.

"It is the great cold," the German was crying, half to himself, "the cold that. means death! She cries for food! Listen." He was very excited. "Ach! The great service you shall perhaps render!"

The wind rose with a wild roar about them, freezingly cold; it shouted horribly In the depths of the capacious opening in the hillside. It cried with shrill, swishing rounds as it rushed through the fringe of bushes that grew along the dizzy edge.

"She cries for you, for you, for you! Ach! You are so privileged as that!" called out Finkelstein, the *crise* of his mania full upon him, and fairly dancing with excitement. "It is only young food she wants. She refuses me again."

And a lot more that Spinrobin did not understand thing, and the ghastly dementia of this crazy German was very clear to him now! He was an active, nimble-footed little fellow, but somehow or other he stumbled at the first step. The German's arm shot out and the rope at the end of the long stick whistled dreadfully in the air as it new towards him, and entangled itself about his legs. It flashed in the moonlight— death in its coils.

Spinrobin yelled and struggled. Finkelstein, breathing hard, came up along the shortening rope hand over hand towards him, pulling him nearer and nearer to the edge.

They rolled and bumped down the precipitous slope, the German just managing to keep out of reach, and the mingled shouting of the two voices rose in wild clamor through the night.

"But why struggle?" cried the lunatic. "There will be no pain, no pain. And you are worth fifty sheep or cattle...!"

The spectacled eyes shone like little lamps of silver.

"You shall come too, you brute!" shrieked Spinrobin, at last catching him by an elastic boot and dragging him down upon the ground with a crash. They rolled a bit. Close to the brink, caught by the fringe of gorse bushes which tore and scratched him (though he only knew it afterwards when he saw the scars!) they stopped. The rope was hopelessly entangled about their feet. For a second the struggle ensued. Spinrobin heard a loosened stone drop past him, and land with a distant clatter far below. He made a tremendous effort. But the German wriggled free, and stood over him.

Spinrobin, dizzy and exhausted, closed his eyes. The wind rose with a booming roar, and to his terrified imagination it seemed, like great arms that spread out a net to catch him as he fell.

"You feed her! You feed her! Ach, it is fine!"

The wind tore away with his words. A moment later he would have toppled over to his death, when one of the gorse bushes, to his utter amazement, stood up right, struck the figure of the German a resounding blow in the chest that sent him spinning backwards to the ground, and at the same instant clutched Spinrobin's feet, and dragged him up into comparative safety.

It was the farmer, who had been disturbed by their leaving the house, and had followed them up the hill. But Spinrobin never knew quite how it happened. He fairly spun— mind and body.

How they managed between them to truss the maniac with the rope and stick, and carry him back, was not without humor; but the; full meaning of the

"Secretaryship" (for which Spinrobin never received his salary) was only apparent some weeks later, when the advertisement caused by the adventure drew out the whole facts.

For Finkelstein, it appeared, with his singular form of homicidal mania, was proved by the joint investigations of the English and German police to have been the author of at least three mysterious "disappearances" of young men who had acted as his secretaries; and his remarkable lunacy that imagined the Earth to be a living Being who required human sustenance to keep her alive.

He, Finkelstein, being High Priest at the Ceremony, is now minutely recorded for all who care to read in the Proceedings of the Psychological Societies of both countries.

3: The Boy Messenger

A Christmas Phantasy

Algernon Blackwood

Burrowa News (NSW) 30 April 1909

IT WAS the afternoon of Christmas Eve. Partly by train, partly on foot, they had come to a charming village, not much more than a dozen miles from London Bridge, and were sitting at tea looking out upon the garden of the inn. The dusk, like a thin veil, gathered silently about them, and a curtain of wintry mist, half moisture from the near woodlands, half smoke from the village, hung over the tumbled cottage roofs and shrouded the crests of the elm trees that circled the green.

A few children played near the well, a line of white geese straggled over from the pond, and a typical village dog strayed dangerously near the hoofs of a typical village donkey that was trying its best to nibble grass where grass there was none. For the rest, the hamlet seemed deserted, the street peopled by shadows only, and the dishevelled yew-tree in the churchyard spread vaguely through the gloom till it embraced the church and most of the gravestones into the compass of its aged arms.

They were an unimaginative party. It is doubtful if any one of them possessed sufficient insight to appreciate the feelings of an untipped waiter— surely the least of tests— and yet, before the eyes of three of them, two girls and a man, this thing plainly happened. True, their accounts varied curiously, when they came, later to compare notes; but then accounts of the simplest occurrence— say, a rabbit running across, a road — will vary amazingly when half a dozen persons who saw it run come to relate their impressions. So that proves nothing; the important thing is that something happened, and the observers started even. The rest remains to be told.

They were waiting for the arrival of another friend, who was to bicycle over and meet them at the inn and then return for the Christmas Eve party, when they realised that the cold had grown suddenly much greater, and one of them— it was the younger girl— made the suggestion that they should go part of the way to meet him.

The proposal was welcomed, and instantly acted upon, and the man and the two girls were up and away in a twinkling, leaving the others behind to nurse the tea against their speedy return.

'The moment we hear the bicycle bell we'll make tea,' they, shouted from the inn porch, as the three forms scattered into the darkness, the voices and footsteps making an unusual clamour in the peaceful little hamlet.

The road, winding like a white stream, and slippery with occasional ice, ran downhill out of the nest of cottages, and the trio followed its course headlong through the gloom, regardless of ruts or loose stones. A couple of villagers, walking briskly by, turned their heads to stare; a dog made a sudden run, barking shrilly; a cat shot silently across the road in front of them; and then, quite suddenly the village was left behind and the broad highway dwindled-into a country lane.

As they ran, the hedgerows flew past like palings with a level top, and the frosty evening air, keen with odours of ploughed fields and dead leaves, stung their cheeks sharply, and whistled in their ears.

They had gone perhaps half a mile in this way, stills urging the pace downhill, and they were running abreast along a clear stretch with nothing to obstruct, so that all had the same point of view, when suddenly — and this is where the accounts first begin to vary— they realised that something stood immediately in the road before them, something that brought them all up instinctively with a dead halt.

How they managed it, going at that pace downhill, is hard to understand— some things apparently possess the curious power of compelling a stop— for they came to a full halt as completely as though they had charged an invisible iron barrier breast-high across the. road. Panting and speechless they, drew up in line as by common instinct— drew up in presence of a fourth.

So far at least, they were all agreed— that it was a fourth. Outlined against the white road where a moment before had been empty dusk of indefinite shape in the mingling of the lights, stock still and bang in the centre of their path— the slang alone describes the uncompromising attitude of the thing— stood this fourth figure, facing them with a deliberate calmness of survey that seemed a little more than insolence, and only a little less than menace. Another second and their headlong rush would have sent them ploughing over it as an ocean liner ploughs over a fishing smack in the night. Moreover, so sudden was the appearance, and so abrupt the halt, that for more than a whole minute they merely stood in silence facing it, and staring back with no thought of doing anything. To each of them the idea came that it was not possible to get past it, that there was no available space. Though actually diminutive, it seemed to fill the entire road just as a mail cart would have done. And, quite apart from this singular deception of sight, each member confessed afterward to an uncommon emotion, which warned them that to force a way past was somehow not exactly the right, or proper, or safe thing to do.

So at first they stood and stared rather helplessly—till at length their startled vision focussed itself better and the man of the party, finding his senses, expressed the relieved conviction of them all with a loud exclamation:

"Why, I declare, it's only a boy after all!" he cried with a laugh.

Yet the words, as soon as uttered, had a false ring about them, for there was that about the figure of this little boy— this diminutive person dressed in clothes of dark green, oddly cut, with the white face and large blue eyes so wide apart in it— there was that about him which made it not difficult to imagine that, if he was something less than a man, he was something more than a boy. His self-possession was perfect. The manner in which he dominated the entire road, gazing up so quietly and fixedly at them— peering it really was— produced an effect of privileged importance that was not calculated according to his mere size at any rate. Aided, perhaps, by the twilight and the background of dark woods, he certainly managed to convey an impression, strangely insistent, of being other than he was— other, at least, than these three saw him.

And, beyond question, each one saw him differently— at first. The picture varied astonishingly. For the elder girl thought it was "a woman or a shadow", and her sister said it looked like an animal on its hind legs, pausing to start in its flight across the road— a hare, for instance, magnified hugely by the dusk— while the man could have sworn, he declared, that at first he saw several figures, a whole line of them, indeed, which had then suddenly telescoped down into the single outline of this diminutive boy. And the three accounts seem very suggestive of the curiously confusing effect produced upon, their sense of sight from the very beginning.

FOR A TIME no one said a word, and up the spines of all three ran chills of various degrees. For the place had turned suddenly lonely; no habitation was in sight; dark woods lay close at hand, with mist creeping everywhere over the sombre landscape; and, immediately in front of them this imp-thing with the glowing eyes and the confident manner, barring their way. It was eerie; though what there could be about a twilight country lane and an inquisitive little boy to make it so, no one of them could understand.

And then, while a stray breeze brought the dead leases whirling about their feet in a little rustling eddy, the embarrassing silence was broken by the fourth itself, who, in a thin, piping, voice, like wind blowing through small reeds, ejaculated a sound that all heard differently.

'Surely it was my name that he called,' was the thought in the mind of each. This, however, they discovered afterwards when comparing notes, and discussing the singular affair from every possible point of view; for at the

actual moment the man of the party, remembering the character of the friend they were come to meet, and his love of practical joking, thought to see his hand in the behaviour of the youngster, and cried again with a faugh:—

'But it's some elaborate trick of Harry's! He has sent the boy ahead to meet us. He is not far off himself at this very moment, and this is his messenger boy!'

But was it really a boy! Did it cast a shadow like the rest of them under the gathering stars? Was it unaccompanied truly, or were those merely shapes or mist that rose and melted so mysteriously into one another beside the hedge yonder? And how was it so vividly impressed upon, the minds of all that the boy stood there with a definite purpose, a deliberate mission, and sought to spell some message to their brains? For, afterwards, it came out clearly, that it was this conception of the messenger— of someone come to tell something— that had impressed and perplexed the unimaginative three far more than the mere differences of sight and hearing?

'Let's go back,' whispered the younger girl. 'He frightens me.'

It was the one who had most reason to wish for the arrival of the 'expected friend, and her voice gave utterance to a secret emotion that was beginning to stir in them all— an emotion of chill presentiment and fear. The imp, however, was far too fascinating for this course to recommend itself just then, and the others soon found their voices and began to ply the little fellow with questions. First of all they asked him who he was and where he lived; and without speaking, he pointed in a vague way, waving his hand generally to include sky and fields as though it were impossible more particularly to give his name or describe the, place where he dwelt.

'He doesn't know who he is, or where he lives,' cried the girl, who wanted, the comforting lights of the inn, and the comfortable presence of the one they awaited. 'He's a goblin— of course, but a very nice goblin,' she added quickly with an odd little forced laugh. The boy had turned his eyes upon her face. They seemed such old, old eyes, she declared afterwards by way of explanation.

'Do you live in the village?' asked the man next.

The boy shook his head with an indescribable gesture of contempt.

'Then where do you live?'

He opened his mouth so that they saw the white line of his teeth, and he began to utter a sound that was not unlike the throaty notes of a big bird. It continued for some seconds, but no words came. He stared at each of them in turn, the stream of sound broken at intervals by tiny explosions from the lips. It almost seemed as though speech were unfamiliar to him, something he could not manage; and was struggling with for the first time. Then they, discovered that the child had a dreadful stammer, but a stammer unlike any Sung they had

ever heard before. It was fully a minute before he managed to produce the words, yet in the direction which he pointed finally there was nothing to be seen but ploughed fields looming darkly, and a few ragged and ungainly elms standing like broken pillars in the night.

'Over there— beyond,' was what he seemed to say.

They began to realise somewhat vividly that it was a late December evening; the night gathered increasingly about them; in the tops of the high elms a faint wind stirred and whispered; the face of the world grew unfamiliar, as though they were plunged in some desolate region where human help availed not. The shadows had come forth in troops and taken possession of the landscape, somehow altering it. For the moment they forgot their immediate purpose of meeting a hungry bicycle-rider and hurrying back to tea at the inn, The passage of time slipped back, as in dreams, to where it was of no account, and they stood there. half fascinated, half-frightened by this imp of a creature who seemed to them about to lift a corner of the veil that hangs ever between the illusions of the broken senses and the realities that lie beyond.

BUT IT was the boy himself who broke the spell by suddenly stepping forward and holding out his hands to them. A smile slipped out of his strange eyes and ran an over his face, making it shine.

'Come,' he said, without any sign now of a stammer, 'Come, and I will show you where I live. Your friend is already there waiting.' And the imp mentioned him by name.

The younger girl— the who most looked forward to his coming— gave a perceptible start, and moved quickly backwards towards the hedge. Something clutched at her heart, and made her horribly afraid.

But at the mention of their friend's name, the man of the party burst into a cheery laugh.

'There!' he cried, 'I told you it was Harry! It's his idea of a Christmas joke. He's gone on to the other Inn, the Black Horse, and sent this imp of darkness to waylay us. Now we shall have two teas to negotiate!'

He clapped his hands and turned to the girls behind him.

'Come on,' he said, 'let's follow the youngster to the Black Horse and then send him to fetch the others.'

Yet the man's words seemed a sham, signifying nothing, or at most merely cheap bravado. They all stood stock still and made no pretence of moving. Their real business was with this boy who hovered there before them between the dusk and the darkness, his hands still outstretched, an air of invitation in his face and manner. It was the boy's message they wanted, yet dreaded to hear, the real message not yet delivered. His eyes, there in the gloom, were so

preternaturally steady, so compelling, so stern almost for a child, the younger girl thought. And they sought ever the one face, disregarding the. other two. For each girl, was positive he looked only into her own eyes, while the man afterwards declared that the boy looked only at him. To each the illusion was perfect.

Thus it seemed an act of inspiration, bringing relief to the uneasy feelings of them all, when the man walked forward towards the imp, and into those outstretched hands dropped coppers. Certainly it was a relief to see him pocket them without an instant's hesitation, for this was an eminently human proceeding. But the thin peal of elfin laughter that followed the action was not what they had expected, and the echoes, that came from the leafless woods beyond, and prolonged the sound, made them all turn sharply, about and try to face in every direction at once. The echoes had seemed so curiously like-real voices. Then the man, by way of protest against the increasing strangeness of it all, resolved to test the spell more vigorously.

'Come,' he cried, laughing rather boisterously, 'we'll play puss in the corner. You shall be puss, and each time you get into a corner you shall have a halfpenny.'

The boy made no audible reply, but danced about lightly in the twilight in the middle of the lane, while the smile flitted over his face like the reflections of an unseen lantern, and the others ran wildly from corner to corner, till the imp had finally won sixpence. It was easy for him to win. The moment he made for a corner, its occupant fled screaming into the lane. It was impossible, they felt, to contest the points of a merely human game with such a creature of the shadows and the dusk.

Then occurred the strangest thing of all.

The game was over and they were girding up their loins to follow the boy to the Black Horse first, and afterwards to their own inn, when, with a quick motion like the rush of a bird, he darted to the younger girl, flung down all the coppers into her hands, before, she even guessed what he was about, whispered, some words close to her face, uttered a shrill cry of laughter— and was gone.

'Oh, Oh!' she cried out piteously— and this time there was real pain and terror in her voice, 'Now I know! Now I know why I was afraid!'

She half fell backwards across a heap of broken stones, and the other, two were swiftly at her side with sympathetic questions of alarm. But she was on her feet again in a second. She ran a few paces down the road to the spot where the boy had so mysteriously vanished. None of them had seen exactly how we went, for one second he was there, and the next he was not there. That was all they knew.

The girl paused and held her hand to her side. She peered into the darkness.

'Harry!' she called faintly; and again with anguish in her voice, 'Harry! Are you there!'

They were, standing in the level space between the two sharp hills. In front of them, after an abrupt turn, the long, white road seemed, to run steeply into the sky. And it was down this hill that the coming bicyclist must shape his dangerous course.

'There!' she cried again suddenly, running to the side, of the road where the hedge ceased, and an open gap led the sight as a single plunge into empty space. 'Oh, I knew it, I knew it!'

And when the others joined her, and peered over the hedge they found themselves looking down into the chasm of a disused chalk pit, at the bottom of which, in the faint glimmer of the lime and the starlight, lay the smashed bicycle, with the lifeless body of its rider outstretched beside it.

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4: The House That Was Lost

Tom Gallon

1866-1914

The Story-teller, Jun 1908

Thomas Henry Gallon

THE EVENTS I set down here occurred some three years ago, and I write of them now with as much wonderment as I regarded them then. Let me say at the outset that I have puzzled and puzzled over the mystery, and have arrived at no actual solution of it, nor do I know whether any solution will ever be arrived at, or whether, even if such is the case, I shall ever hear of it.

I am a commercial clerk, earning a small salary sufficient to keep my wife and two children and myself in modest comfort. My name is Paul Jenner, and I live at No. —, Drawbridge Crescent,— Well, never mind the precise locality. I give you these particulars in order that you may understand that I am a very ordinary and commonplace person, not given to romancing. I want you to understand that I am setting down in bald and simple language what actually happened to me on a certain night in January three years ago.

It was on a Saturday night, and I had, as usual, come home on that day from the City early in the afternoon. It had been a black and foggy day, and I remember that the gas had been lighted in the streets and in the office where I worked from early morning. The fog was very bad at the time I returned home, and I congratulated myself on the fact that I had not to go out again that night. I sat with my wife and the two children in our little sitting-room all the evening, with that comfortable feeling that I was my own master until Monday morning, and that I need trouble about nothing outside the house. In due course the children went to bed, and then it was Mary reminded me of a letter that must be written and posted that night. Sufficient is it for me to say that the letter was to an elderly relative of some means who lived in the country, and who

had taken great interest in the children. My wife (prudent woman) remembered that the following day was the birthday of this relative, and that she should receive proper greeting by the Sunday morning post in the country town in which she lived.

Frankly, I did not want the bother of it, but Mary always knows best in these matters, and so I wrote my note and sealed it up. Let me add here that I had read nothing exciting during the evening— nothing to stir my imagination in any way.

I stamped the letter and proceeded to the front door. Judge of my astonishment when, on throwing it open, I saw nothing but the grey wall of fog coming up to the very house; even the railings, not ten yards in front of our little house, were blotted out completely, I called softly back into the house to my wife to come and look.

"Don't lose yourself, Paul," she said, half laughing. "What a terrible night!"

"I shan't lose myself" I replied, laughing in turn. "The pillar-box is only at the end of the crescent, if I stick to the railings, I can't possibly miss it. Don't wait here," I added solicitously. "I'll leave the door ajar, so that I can slip in easily when I come back. I've left my keys on my writing desk."

Mary went in, and I pulled the door close, and then stepped out boldly for the front gate. Imagine me standing there, just outside my own gate, and with my back to the crescent, knowing that I had to go to the left to find the pillar-box which was at the end of the crescent. There are nine houses, and mine is the third, so that I knew I had to pass six more before reaching the pillar-box. I knew also that the gate of each house had an ornamental centrepiece standing up above it, and that I must touch six of those ornamental centrepieces before I stepped away from the crescent at the end to reach the pillar-box. That I knew would be something of an adventure, for the fog was the densest I have ever seen; I could only see the faint glow of the lamp in the centre of the crescent above me when I came opposite to the lamp-post; the post itself was invisible.

I counted the six gates, and then stood at the end of the last line of railings. I knew that the pillar-box was exactly opposite me. I took three quick steps, and literally cannoned into it. I was a little proud of my own judgement in getting it so nicely. Then I fumbled for the mouth of it, and dropped in my letter.

All this may sound very commonplace and ordinary, but you shall hear what followed. I am an observant man, and I had noticed always that the mouth of the pillar-box faced directly along the crescent, thus standing at right angles to the road. At the moment that I had my right hand in that mouth, therefore, I argued that if I stood out at the stretch of my arm I must be facing

the crescent; I had but to move straight forward again to touch the friendly railings. I was putting that plan into operation, and had let go of the mouth of the pillar-box, when a man, coming hurriedly round the corner, ran straight into me, muttered a gruff apology, and was lost in the fog again in a moment. And in that accidental collision he had spun me round and tossed me aside — and I was lost!

That is literally true. I took a step and found myself slipping off the kerbstone into the road; stumbled back again, and strove to find my way along by sticking to the edge of the pavement. After a minute or two I was so sure of myself that I ventured to cross the pavement, and by great good luck touched in a moment one of those ornamental centrepieces of one of the gates— or so, at least, it seemed. I went on with renewed confidence until I saw certain bushes which topped the railings of one particular house, and then I knew that the next house must be mine. I pushed open the gate with confidence, stepped quickly up the little path, and reached the door. I was right; the door yielded to my touch, and I went hurriedly in.

I had taken off my hat, and had held it towards the familiar hat-stand before I realized that it was not a familiar hat-stand at all; it was one I did not know. I looked round in some confusion, meaning to make good my escape without being observed, and yet wondering into what house I could have come so near my own, when I stopped stock still, with the hat held in my hand, listening. From a room near at hand I heard the sound of a low, long-drawn moan, as from someone in pain. More than that, it was almost the wail of someone in acute terror.

Now l am a mild and inoffensive man, and I confess that my first instinct was to fly. There was the door within a foot of me; I could open it again noiselessly and slip out, and leave whoever was moaning to his or her own trouble. My next instinct, however, was a braver one; I might be able to help. Putting my hat on, and so leaving my hands free, I moved cautiously towards the sound, which was coming intermittently.

I found that the house was built in exactly the same fashion that mine was; there was the same number of steps leading to a room downstairs, which in my case was used as a playroom for the children. I went down these steps slowly and cautiously, with my flesh creeping a little, I must admit, as that weird moaning went on, and almost inclined to turn back with every step I took. But at last I got into the basement, and came to the door of the room from which the sound proceeded. I was in the very act of recklessly thrusting open the door when another sound broke upon my ears that held me still. The sound of someone singing in a raucous voice.

It was a sea song I remembered to have heard when a boy, and the words of which I have forgotten; it was something about "Blow the man down". The door of the room was open a little way, and through the crack of it I was able to peer in; and there I saw a sight that for a moment made me doubt my own eyes. I remember that I rubbed my eyes in a stupid way and looked again, and this is what I saw:

The room was in a neglected state, with strips of wallpaper hanging down from the walls and with a blackened ceiling. There was a table in the centre of it, and at that table a man was seated, with a square black bottle and a glass before him, and a candle burning near his left hand. I can see the whole room now as plainly and as clearly as I saw it then. He was a man so villainously ugly that I had a thought that he was not a man at all, but some hideous thing out of a nightmare. He had very long arms— so long that they were stretched across the table, and his hands gripped the opposite edge of it, a great heavy head, crowned with a mass of red hair, was set low between enormously broad shoulders; his eyes, half closed, were high up and close together on either side of a nose that was scarcely a nose at all; the lips were thick and heavy.

But it was not the man that I looked at first, it was at two other figures in the room. These figures were seated on chairs facing the table at which the man was, and the strangeness of them lay in the fact that each was securely bound to the chair on which he and she sat, for it was a man and a woman. The man, who was quite young was not only bound, but gagged securely also; the woman was more lightly tied to her chair by the arms only, and her mouth was free. She was leaning back, with her eyes closed, and it was from her lips that that strange wailing sound was coming, and mingling with the raucous singing of the man at the table. My first impression was that the man at the table was some sort of unclean, bestial judge, and the others his prisoners.

He stopped his singing to pour some liquor from the square bottle into his glass and to drink it off then he resumed his former attitude, with his fingers locked over the edge of the table. And now I noticed that while the woman, who was, by the way, quite young and very pretty, with a fair, dainty prettiness, still kept her eyes closed, the eyes of the bound man never left that dreadful figure seated at the other side of the table.

"Wouldn't you like to speak, you dog?" said the red-haired man. "What would you give now to have the use of your limbs— the free wagging of your tongue? What would you say to me; what would you do to me?"

The man who was bound could, of course, answer nothing. I saw his face flush and darken, and I guessed what his thoughts were. For myself I was too

fascinated by the scene before me to do anything else than peer through the crack and watch what was going on.

"Lovers— eh?" exclaimed the man at the table. "You thought I was unsuspicious; you thought I knew nothing and suspected nothing — didn't you? While I was safely out of the way you could meet, the pair of you — day after day, and week after week, and this puppy could steal from me what was mine by right."

The woman opened her eyes for the first time and spoke. "It isn't true," she said, a sob breaking her voice. "It was all innocent. Dick and I have done no wrong."

"You lie!" thundered the man, bringing his fist down upon the table with a blow that might have split it "You've always lied— lied from the moment your father gave you to me— from the very hour I married you. You always hated me; I've seen you shudder many and many a time at the mere sight of me. Don't I know it; haven't I felt you stab me a thousand times more deeply than you could have stabbed me with any weapon? You white devil! I've come at last to hate you as much as you hate me."

The woman turned her head slowly and looked at the younger man; a faint smile crossed her lips. In an instant the red-haired man had leapt to his feet, showing me astonishingly enough that he was a dwarf with the shortest legs surely ever a man had. But the bulk of him was enormous, and I could guess, with a shudder, at his strength. He caught up the glass, crossed the room, and flung the contents in the face of the man.

"It's a waste of good liquor— but that's for the look she gave you. I wish there was some death more horrible than any invented yet that I could deal out to you," he added, standing with the glass in his hand and glaring at his victim. "The death I mean for you is too easy."

He walked across to the fireplace in a curious purposeless way, and stirred a great fire that was blazing there. Then from a corner of the room he dragged with ease a great sack that appeared to contain wood and shavings; so much I saw in a rent in the side of it. This he dropped down near the fire, as if in readiness for something, and then went back to his seat, applying himself again to the drink that was on the table. And still I watched, as a man may watch a play, wondering how it will end.

"I got the best of you tonight," he said presently. "You might have been too much for me if I hadn't come upon you from behind; but I was ready and waiting. I've been watching longer than you think, I had everything mapped out clearly days ago. Tonight sees the end of all things for the pair of you; tomorrow sees me miles away from here. You came in secret, you dog— you'll go in secret."

"We have done no wrong," said the woman again. "We loved each other years ago, when we were boy and girl; there was no sin in that."

"Bah!— I don't believe a word of it. Don't I know that in your black heart you've compared the two of us every day of your life since first I saw you. His straightness for my crookedness; his sleek, black hair for my red; his prettiness for this face of mine" — he struck his own face relentlessly with one hand as he spoke— "that women shudder at. Don't I know all that?"

It was the strangest and most pitiful thing that the creature sitting there before his victims suddenly covered his face with his hands and groaned. If ever I had seen a soul in torment, I saw it then, and though I loathed him I could have wept for him. After a moment or two he dropped his hands and seized the bottle, and poured out the last drops into the glass and drank them off; then flung the bottle and glass crashing into the fireplace, as though there was an end to that business. And now, as he got down again from the chair, I saw the eyes of the woman open wide and follow his every movement with a dreadful look of terror in them.

"I'll kill you both— here in the place where you've met— and then I'll fire the house," went on the dwarf "I've planned it all. Look your last on each other, for tonight you die— and this house shall be your funeral pyre!"

"I swear to you," panted the woman eagerly, "by all I hold most holy and most dear, that if you'll let us go, we'll never see each other again. For pity's sake!— for the sake of Dick!"

"For the sake of Dick!" sneered the dwarf. "That shows you in your true colours; that shows who you are and what you are. There's one poor satisfaction left to you; you'll die together."

What held me then it would be impossible to say. I can only plead that in the dreadful thing that followed I was as a man who sits at a play, wondering what will happen next, and with never a thought in him of interfering. I think in my anxiety I had pressed open the door a little to get a dearer view, so that I saw every movement of the dwarf For myself, I had forgotten everything— my own home, and my wife, and the babies who slept in their quiet room above. It was as though I had stepped straight into a new world.

I saw the dwarf advance towards the man in the chair, carrying his right hand stiff and straight beside him, gripping something, I could not tell what it was that he held. I saw him come straight at him, and I saw the eyes of the woman in the opposite chair watching him as one fascinated. Then I saw two movements; one with the left hand of the dwarf, when he struck the other man on the face; then with the right hand, when he raised something that gleamed in the light of the candle and brought it down with a sound that was new and horrible to me on the breast of the other man. And I saw the face of

the man change, and start as it were into new life, and then fall as it were into death. And I saw his head drop forward, and his eyes were closed.

Then, above it all, and yet seeming as a sort of dreadful chorus to it all, rang out the scream from the woman in the other chair. I do not think that the dwarf heard it, he had drawn back from what had been the living man, and was staring like one mad upon what he had done. And still piercing the air of the place rang the scream of the woman— not for her lover alone, but for herself.

That sound seemed at last to break in upon the senses of the dwarf and to call him partially to himself. I had watched him to the point where he drew himself together and crouched like a wild beast ready to spring, with that in his hand that dripped red, when, in some fashion, I flung myself round the partially open door and stumbled into the room. I think I must have been a little mad myself; otherwise, frail and commonplace creature that I was, I could not have battled with this madman. I came upon him from behind and gripped him, seizing him by the throat and by the head, and all the while shouting something to him quite unintelligible.

The attack had been so sudden and so unexpected that I had him, in a sense, at my mercy. He could not know who had attacked him; he struggled madly, not alone to get away from me, but also to discover who I was. I struggled to keep his face away from me, gripped him by the neck and by the hair, and fought with him for what I knew then was my own life. And so struggling we stumbled at last horribly against that still figure bound in the chair and brought it over crashing with us to the floor. And then in a sudden I felt the dwarf inert in my hands, and knew that I had conquered.

What I must have looked like in that room, kneeling there, panting and struggling to get my breath, I cannot now tell; the whole business was so like a nightmare. I remember seeing the dwarf lying there — huddled up and very still. I remember that other figure, bound grotesquely in the chair and lying, still bound, upon its side; and I remember, too, the woman, with her arms close fastened behind her, sitting there and sobbing wildly.

The dwarf must have been stunned, he lay there quite still, with the knife that was dreadfully red fallen from his hand, and lying beside him.

When at last I staggered to my knees I saw that the girl was staring at me with a face that seemed to suggest that here, perhaps, was another ruffian come to kill her.

"Who— who are you?" she asked in a frightened whisper.

"A friend— one who stumbled in by accident," I panted.

"Look at the man that's tied to the chair," she whispered hoarsely. "He can't be dead."

I knew that he was, but still I looked, as she bade me. I had no need to look twice; the poor fellow was quite dead. The blow had been strong and sure. On my knees beside him, I looked up and nodded slowly to her, there was no need for words.

She leaned back in her chair again and closed her eyes. "Set me free," she said in a faint voice.

I could not touch that knife that lay there; in a mechanical, methodical way I took from my waistcoat pocket the decent, respectable little bone-handled penknife I carried always with me. With that I cut her bonds, noting as I did so how cruelly they had cut into the white flesh; and after a moment or two she swung her arms listlessly against her sides and opened her eyes, and then, with an effort raised her hands and pressed them against her temples.

"What will you do?" I asked, looking at her curiously.

"I— I don't know," she said; and then, breaking into weeping, sobbed out "Oh— dear God— that it should have come to this! What shall I do— what shall I do?"

"You must get away," I said, watching the dwarf, who was beginning to stir a little. "If he wakes, you know what will happen."

"I know— I know," she said; and got to her feet and began to move towards that bound figure still lying tied to the chair.

But at that I got before her, and with my hands against her shoulders held her back, and pleaded passionately to her that she should go, and leave the dead alone. She listened, with that strange look in her eyes of a child wakened from sleep and not clearly understanding, but she yielded to me, and stumbled under my guidance to the door.

We had reached it, and I had opened it for her to pass out, when suddenly the dwarf twisted over on to his hands and knees, and then raised himself upright He did not seem to realize for a moment what had happened; then he caught sight of the woman, and, with a snarl, crawled forward and gripped the hilt of the knife. At that she pushed suddenly past me and fled like a hare up the stairs. I heard the swift passage of her footsteps in the little hall of the house— then the slamming of the outer door. And now a quick break from the story. It should be clear that whoever published this tale did not take the time or effort to do it correctly and to check all the text. And now I had to look to myself, for I saw in the eyes of the man that he would not let this witness escape if he could catch him. I had managed to get through the door by the time that he had got to his feet, and in a dazed fashion was stumbling towards me, knife in hand. With a sudden swoop he reached the table and blew out the candle, and at the same moment I ran up the stairs, and in the darkness

stumbled along the hall and fumbled with the catch of the door. By great good fortune I got the door open, and literally fell out into the fog.

I could not see him as he tore after me; in a faintness I had fallen to my knees, and I heard him, as he raced past me, panting heavily. Then the fog swallowed him up, and I knelt there on the pavement alone, shaking from head to foot

I had, of course, no means of knowing exactly which house it was in which I had had my adventure; I could only judge roughly that it must be about the middle of the crescent. I started along again, in the right direction, as I hoped, and thought to find my own house; missed the railings, after going what seemed to be an interminable distance, and came up hard against a pillar-box. Scarcely knowing what I did, I set my right hand in the mouth of it, and performed the same manoeuvre I had done before; advanced three paces, and touched railings again. Stumbling along these, I came blindly to a house that I thought might be mine, walked up the path, and pushed open a door that yielded; and there, with the face of my Mary looking at me in alarm and wonderment, I fell in a dead faint at her feet.

IT HAS TO BE recorded that I never found the house again. I know everyone that lives in Drawbridge Crescent— all highly respectable people, of humdrum lives. Over and over again, in clear weather, I have walked to that pillar-box and have closed my eyes, and have tried to remember what steps I took on that particular night, after a stranger had cannoned into me and twisted me round, but all in vain. Whether in some house in some other road nearby lies the body of a man who was foully murdered on that particular night; or whether in one of the innocent- looking houses of the Crescent itself the crime was committed; or whether, in some strange supernatural fashion, I saw that night a deed committed that had been committed long before, I shall never know. That it is no mere figment of the imagination, and that something really happened that night, is proved by one fact. My wife, in raising me from the floor that night when I fell at her feet, found my fingers locked close upon something, and, forcing them open, disclosed what it was.

A tuft of red hair!

———————

5: The Padre's Story

E. Tilden Dowling

fl. 1880s.

Once a Month: 1 Feb 1886

I can find nothing about the author except that his wife had a baby in 1889; and this 1885 Marriage Notice:

DOWLING-RYAN.-On the 13th October, at Middle Park, South Melbourne, by the Rev. Charles Bell; Edward Tilden, eldest son of Edward H. Dowling, late of Moulmein, British Burmah, to Nannie Frances, second daughter of Dr. William Ryan, of Riverview, Ennistymon, County Clare, Ireland

I HAD OBTAINED a holiday, and, gladly leaving the dull routine of the office, I had accepted the repeated invitation of my friend, Father G—, to spend such time as I desired with him, at his faraway missionary residence on the frontier of British Burmah.

I had known Father G— for some considerable time, our intimacy having begun when he was attached to a portion of his regiment, stationed several years before at Moulmein. Although professing different forms of religion, we had always been on the best of terms; the subject of creeds being one which we rarely touched upon, experience having shown to both of us that this particular kind of discussion was better left alone.

Father G— was devout, sincere, and kind alike to rich or poor; he was an earnest missionary, and worked among his people with a zeal that endeared him to all. And he was a pleasant companion— one who could beguile the tedious hours that fall to the lot of sojourners at frontier stations, with rare anecdotes of adventures "by flood and field." His narratives would hold his audience spellbound, and help to pass interestingly the long evenings when the steady downpour of rain rattled on the palm-leaf covered roof. And on occasions, when his duty was done, he would accompany his friends and visitors, gun in hand, and vie with the sturdiest of us, in expeditions into the jungle, or along the low-lying land that bordered the river, where every one was sure of having as much shooting as would satisfy the most enthusiastic of sportsmen. And all the while his cheery voice would be heard relating some story of a by-gone expedition, or breaking out into a merry ring of laughter at the ludicrous mishap of some one of the party. Heedless of the danger of rat-holes, although repeatedly cautioned, the unfortunate would suddenly be brought to earth, or rather to mud, presenting so woebegone and comical a

spectacle, that one must needs laugh in spite of the angry looks of the injured one.

But to proceed with the story. I had accepted the invitation of the worthy Father at last, and, on arriving at my destination, found I was not the only visitor. The majority of the men were not known to me, and most of them were military officers doing civilian duty in one form or another. Among them was a quiet, soldierly man, Major S—, whom I had never seen before, but of whose reputation for gallantry I had often heard. The time passed pleasantly for all of us, and a feeling of good-fellowship prevailed, that helped to make my stay a most enjoyable one, and one that I shall ever remember with feelings of great pleasure.

One evening we were seated in the verandah of the house occupied by the Rev. Father — dinner was just over and we had lighted our cigars and given ourselves over to complete enjoyment. There had been a steady downpour of rain till midday, when it had gradually cleared up— the clouds having rolled away— leaving the firmament in undisputed sway of the moon, which seemed to shine with brighter radiance than usual. The evergreen trees were covered with a flood of light, and the raindrops sparkled like countless diamonds, while the river in the distance, having caught the radiance, seemed like a broken line of molten silver, as it twisted and turned in the landscape.

It was a calm, peaceful night, broken only by the hum proceeding from the Burmese village, that was wafted occasionally towards us; the yelping at intervals of a pariah dog, or the weird notes of some predatory owl, abroad on this peaceful night, on hungry, murderous thought intent, causing fear and trembling to the birds that nestled still farther into the eaves of the house where they had sought protection among the palm-leaf thatch.

A balmy breeze was blowing, and its soothing influence had fallen upon the group seated in chairs of all sorts of shapes and sizes, their forms in every variety of attitude. The smoke rising from their cigars imparted to the air an odour that seemed so penetrating and sleep-giving, that any one coming upon the scene would have imagined we were wrapped in blissful slumber. But not so. Soon the stillness was broken by a voice, requesting the "Padre " to relate some of his experiences of the denizens of the jungle, which received this response:

"Ah! Major, I think it is your turn now; the man who has lived as long in this country as you have, should be able to recall some stirring times. And yet, most modest of men! who has ever heard of a story from you? Why, your friends have not even heard your account of the storming of the Shway Dagohn pagoda at Rangoon, although someone with whom we are all well acquainted did marvellous deeds of prowess on that occasion, and covered

himself with glory, and, may I say, with wounds? I do not doubt their existence, Major"— this on a slight stir from the recumbent, soldierly form— "yet you know, ocular demonstration would go a long way towards satisfying the sceptical.

"But you wish for a story, so here goes a true one— though one I scarcely like to tell, for I seem to live through all the horror of it. I have not told it for years, but had just recalled it to memory when you spoke.

"Fifteen years ago I was stationed with a portion of the regiment I was attached to at T—; some of you, I daresay, know the place, which is nice enough in the dry season, only for the monotony, but not altogether to my fancy in the rains.

"We had a very quiet time of it, the Dacoits we had been sent up to suppress having disappeared, after some slight correction, and we had settled down to the ordinary routine of cantonment duty, unrelieved by the minor pleasures that men are able to make for themselves in more civilised places.

"It was at the end of the dry season, and we were expecting orders of recall, when one day I strolled out into the jungle unattended, to have a shot at the green pigeons that abounded at no great distance. For some time past we had heard from the Burmese that a gigantic boa had been seen near the river a few miles down, but we had paid little heed to the rumour. You know the Burmese are sometimes addicted to magnifying fact, till it altogether assumes the garb of fiction, and we had surmised that in this instance a cobra had gradually developed in the minds of an ever-credulous people, till it had assumed proportions that befitted the name of boa. But I had practical demonstration that in this instance the rumours were true, and this is how it happened.

"I can clearly remember the day. I had started in the early morning, when the sun had not got hot enough to evaporate the moisture on the leaves of the plants, which, growing so near the river, had not been as much affected by the dry weather as the undergrowth farther away, and were consequently fresh and green. The jungle which I was approaching, through some cleared land, seemed alive with sound; the screeching of the parrots was heard above all, as these active birds flew from tree to tree, and eagerly searched for the fruit that still remained. Occasionally the wail of a monkey was heard ; and even the bullfrogs, not content with the quantity of sound they had emitted during the night, still entreated for rain in their own peculiar way.

"I sauntered along slowly. The morning was beautiful; alas! soon to be succeeded by the fierce rays of the sun, making walking anything but a pleasure, and causing me to seek the cool of the house.

"After leaving the cleared space, I got into the jungle, which I had to traverse for some distance before I reached the pigeon ground. Unslinging my gun I had good sport, so that I was able after a while to sit down on a fallen log and contemplate with satisfaction the forms of a number of beautiful green pigeons; which a short time since had been disporting among the branches of the trees, the sun shining on their green plumage, and making them resplendently beautiful. Death had robbed the ruffled plumage of a great part of this splendour, and I soon began to speculate on their appearance at dinner, the thought of which, in connection with the pigeons, having succeeded in driving away the pity I felt at the necessary slaughter. My thoughts after a while drifted unconsciously towards home, the home that I had left as a young man, and a yearning seized upon me to revisit the scenes of my youth. But then I was disturbed by something that nearly put an end to my life. All of a sudden I heard a rustling sound behind me, and before I had time to look round, I saw the huge head of a boa close to my face. I was paralysed at the suddenness of the occurrence, and remained still for some time gazing with horror at the boa. Before I had overcome my fright, and thought of escape, I felt that the monster had coiled itself twice round my body. Then, for the first time, I comprehended the danger I was in. I managed to stagger to my feet, and seized the reptile with both hands by the neck, just under the head.

"I thought of my gun, but that was useless, for I could not reach it, having placed it against a tree at some distance from the log on which I sat down, and the coils preventing me from making towards it. The weight of the reptile very soon caused me to sink upon my knees. I was still holding it firmly by the neck, as the boa swayed backwards and forwards before my face. I was a younger man in those days, still, sheer desperation must have added to my strength, else I would not have been able to hold on as I did. Death was very near, I thought, as my eyes followed the swaying head clasped in my hands.

"Backwards and forwards it went, the glistening eyes seeming to fix my gaze. I knew I had no chance for life, unless something intervened; but with the courage of despair I held on. Every moment I expected to feel the folds getting tighter and tighter, but they did not; perhaps the hold I had of the reptile's neck retarded its movements. I was in great mental agony, and how long this lasted I cannot tell. I had become very faint, and my brain grew dizzy. I felt I could not hold on any longer, as my arms were growing weak with the great strain.

"Suddenly I bethought me that some of the Burmese from the village might be in the jungle, gathering wood, and tried to cry aloud. I succeeded in uttering a faint cry, but I was by this time very weak, and I did not expect that I would be heard. I was beginning to lose consciousness, and viewed the ugly head, still

clasped in my hands, in an apathetic way, wondering where it would all end. My eyes were becoming misty, when I saw two dusky forms emerge from the brushwood, and then came a blank."

Silence reigned for a few seconds, as Father G— sank back into his chair at the close of this portion of his tale, quite overcome by the recital. We, his audience, could imagine, but very faintly, what a powerful effect the adventure must have produced at the time, when it could move him so strongly even now. He soon recovered, and proceeded:—

"Four weeks after, I found myself lying on a bed in a comfortable-looking room, and learnt from the attendant nurse, one of our own lay sisters, who seemed overjoyed at my recovery, that I was at the house of Father X—, in Rangoon. This puzzled me at the time, till slowly came back the memory of the awful occurrence of that day; and, weakened as I was, the thought of it caused me to swoon again. From this I soon recovered, and learned the sequel of my adventure.

"Two Burmese, who were cutting wood in the jungle, had heard my faint cry; and came upon the scene just as I swooned, and rolled on one side, still holding the neck of the reptile in my closed hands. With great courage one of them approached, and with one stroke of his *hdá*— you know how sharp those fellows keep their *hdás*— severed the head from the body. The monster writhed in its agony, and I was severely bruised. Soon, however, they drew my unconscious body away, and carried me to the camp, from which I was taken down the river as soon as possible, the doctor thinking I would get on better away from the place, if I gained consciousness. As I have told you I lay for weeks; my life was despaired of; I was seized with delirium, and in this state fought and killed, and was overcome by, innumerable boas. My good constitution enabled me, by the help of Providence, to recover ; and now I am here, not much the worse, as you see, for the terrible adventure."

"And the boa; what became of that?" I asked.

"Some of the men had its skin taken off and placed at my disposal, as soon as I rejoined. I could not, however, bear the thought of having it in the house, so tendered it to the Museum for acceptance. It is still there, and I am told on good authority, that it is the largest boa that has ever been heard of.

"Of course I rewarded my deliverers, and purchased the *hdá*— I dare say you have noticed one hanging in my room ; well that is the identical one,

and as long as I live I shall not part with it.

"That is my story, Major. It was a narrow escape I had, and few men, I think, could say, as I can do, that they were once in the deadly embrace of a boa constrictor."

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6: In the Heart of Old Delhi

Clarence Herbert New

(as "Culpeper Zandtt")

Blue Book, Jan 1922

IN the bazaars and jewel-shops of the Chandni Chowk they will tell you that the way of the Angresi and the way of Hind are as the poles apart, and that never the two by any chance meet. They will say, with a sniff and the flinging a pinch of dust over the shoulder, that the average Occidental is by way of being a fool in his straightforward plunging at everything— as transparent as rock crystal in his ideas and methods. From which, his thoughts—his probable actions, his goings and comings— are so easy to read as to be common talk of the bazaars and caravansaries, and there is little which goes on among the governing class which is not discussed with complete understanding among ayas and wallahs and babus and khitmutgars wherever they of brown skin and yellow squat together for a smoke or a frugal meal, or mere gossip for gossip's sake.

Thus, Asaf Aimal— calculating his gains in the dim recesses of his jewel-shop in the Chandni Chowk— was also considering whether by chance a certain Captain Pottinger of a Sikh regiment would have among his possessions family heirlooms in the way of jeweled rings or pins to sell, when his circumstances should become a bit more desperate and compelling. For it was known that the Captain's syce had whispered to Chuckram Jeejetsee —the Parsee expert in sick pearls— certain observations which indicated a very low condition in his master's finances and a still lower one in his frame of mind. Carry the thing far enough and, as all Delhi knew, there would be pawnings in the Chandni Chowk, after dusk, if anything were left to pawn or sell.

Usually the Angresi had a graded succession of low-water marks in the personal things they were compelled to dispose of, and it often fell out that the lowest of all proved the best bargain. A famous polopony, for example, had been supposed the property of three different men until a fourth came upon a run of hard luck and was forced to sell him after disposing of pretty much everything else. So the bazaars and the jewel-shops and the pawnshops waited with the inexhaustible patience of the East, as in a million similar cases before, for that which comes to him who waits, in the fullness of time.

MEANWHILE, in club and regimental mess, some one occasionally wondered if Jim Pottinger were not going it a bit strong— due for a cropper, presently; but nobody knew a hundredth part as much concerning his personal affairs as the brown and yellow men all about them. Pottinger was slow pay, these days, even upon regimental matters and I-O-U's— but most subalterns

come upon such periods at one time or another, and so none of his associates thought for a moment of refusing to play cards with him or lend small sums when in funds.

Matters came to a climax one night when he accompanied a couple of brother officers to the quarters of a handsome widow on the Ridge, where there was usually rather stiff play before the evening was over— but with such varying fortune as to stamp Helen Wythe-Ranald as a thoroughbred sport who played absolutely straight at everything she went in for. Luck had been against the widow and her partner during most of the evening, until they were five thousand rupees to the bad; but they began to pick up after eleven and stood winners at one in the morning by over seven thousand rupees. Of this amount Pottinger owed nearly four thousand and was compelled to give an I-O-U for it— not possessing a tenth of the amount or knowing where under the sun he could raise it. His pay was mortgaged for months ahead. Borrowing was becoming difficult for any sum larger than pocket-money. He had no rich relatives, no expectations upon which he could realize, and his personal effects wouldn't bring over three thousand rupees even at top prices.

Pottinger was a younger son who had gone into the army as a matter of course. In the German War he had done as well as the average, no better— invalided home with a couple of wounds, and then transferred to an Indian regiment of Sikhs until he should have entirely recovered. During his war service there had been little object in, or time for, gambling for anything but small stakes. In Delhi, among the resident army people he found both play and expenses much higher, and as so many thousands have done before him, he plunged— to recoup. Like the others, he only got deeper into the quicksand of debt and impending disgrace.

Leaving the Wythe-Ranald house on the Ridge with a Naval Reserve lieutenant who had been recently ordered to Delhi with his report upon the killing of his former chief,— a Resident Commissioner in upper Burma,— the Captain accompanied Brandon to his quarters in one of the new government buildings for a final pipe and chat before retiring; Lieutenant Brandon had commanded, on the Salwin River, an armed houseboat used by Colonel Sir Martin Jephson as his official headquarters in the hillprovince of Mong Klang and neighboring territory at a time when the Resident Commissioner was murdered by a Japanese secretary of the American railway magnate, Henry K. Brundage— for reasons unknown. Afterward Brandon had acted for several months as Deputy Commissioner until the Colonel's successor arrived to take over the administration of British interests in that section. Then he was ordered up to Government headquarters at Delhi to give his account of Jephson's murder and the general conditions in Mong Klang, where an

American archeologist, Jardine, recently had been recognized as the lawful Prince— having been the duly constituted heir of the late Rajah.

At the old Mogul capital, friends in the Service had suggested that he cram for an official examination and see if he couldn't win a commissionership for himself, inasmuch as he had been thoroughly familiar with provincial administration while serving under Sir Martin. So it happened that when they reached his quarters, Brandon's *khitmutgar* said one of the officers on the "civil" side had left word that he'd be glad to quiz the Lieutenant for half an hour if he cared to come over. It was a chance he couldn't afford to miss—but he didn't wish to appear discourteous to Pottinger, who had proved himself good company upon several occasions.

"I say, old chap! Make yourself comfortable here in my den for half an hour, until I get back. Gunga will mix a couple of pegs for you, and there are illustrated gazettes just out from home. Eh? Gunga's a satisfactory old bird— he'll not disturb you unless he hears you clapping your hands."

POTTINGER settled down in a Bombay chair and loaded his pipe. He'd been in two minds about going off to his own quarters instead of waiting for the Lieutenant's return at that time of night, but had some vague idea of talking a bit with the Naval Reserve man— he couldn't say just why, unless it was the urge to describe the fix he was in and ask advice. For at the moment Pottinger saw no alternatives but either to shoot himself or to resign from the Service, disgraced for life, and try to make a living somewhere under another name. His breeding and family pride made shooting appear the only way out— but to his surprise, in this introspection, something kept whispering to him: "Chuck it all—and begin again somewhere! If you manage to make a go of it, you can send back the money to clean up these old debts. If you don't— well, what's the odds? You'll be getting along somehow, and nobody'll know you!"

While lounging in the bamboo chair,— smoking, thinking it over,— he had subconsciously picked up a little bronze Buddha from Brandon's table-desk and was admiring the perfect modeling of the image— a reproduction of the famous Kamakura figure. He remembered hearing the Lieutenant say that it had belonged to his much-admired chief, Sir Martin Jephson, and that after his murder he had kept it as a souvenir, at the Rajah's suggestion. Presently, the little bronze slipped from his fingers and fell upon the floor. As he picked it up, hoping that no injury had been done by his carelessness, the plug of teakwood and plaster which had sealed the bottom of the hollow figure dropped out upon his lap. Looking up inside to see just how the plug had been fitted, he noticed a wad of cotton wool with corners of a gleaming something sticking through, in places. Poking at this with his finger, the mass, came out and

unrolled in his hand, revealing a blazing crimson jewel of approximately one hundred and fifty carats, as nearly as he could judge.

Pottinger felt that he was scarcely breathing at all— the thing, if genuine, was too unbelievably priceless and beautiful. Then he found himself glancing from the corners of his eyes to see if the khitmutgar had heard the thing fall and was coming in. Apparently-not. The door was closed— nobody else in the room— no sound of footsteps in the little hall. His mind began to race. He had never heard of a garnet or ruby of this size— except—? Wait a bit! Wouldn't it correspond very closely with that marvelous stone, the Glowing Ember, said to have been mined in Burma, cut in Amsterdam, shrouded in mystery for three years, reappearing at the Governor's ball in Singapore during the previous winter in the possession of an American girl, stolen during the ball, never seen after that? To the best of Pottinger's recollection, the descriptions of the Glowing Ember tallied very closely with this wonderful thing in his hand. But— a million dollars, gold, had been mentioned as merely a tentative price for the big ruby, its value being probably higher! The perspiration began trickling down inside his collar. He wondered if Lieutenant Brandon knew of the ruby's concealment inside the bronze Buddha? Impossible! No man of sense would leave such a thing in a place where any dishonest khitmutgar might get away with it!

Brandon's first impulse would be to rent a box in the safety-vault of some bank and put the stone there. As for Sir Martin Jephson, who had used the Buddha for a paper-weight on his desk through many years, had he known what was inside of it? Possibly— because the image had been in his possession much longer than when the ruby was first heard of in Amsterdam. Had he concealed the stone in such a place, himself, for reasons which made such an act seem reasonably safe? Again— possibly. Had he told Brandon what was in it when he lay dying? Absurd! There had been no suggestion of Brandon's keeping the Buddha at all until after Sir Martin's death. So— it was morally certain that Brandon had no knowledge of the stone. He would never know it had been concealed in the bronze unless Pottinger told him— in which case such an honest course should entitle the Captain to share whatever it brought when sold, because by keeping his mouth shut he might have the entire amount for himself.

At this point in Pottinger's bewildered line of reasoning, it suddenly occurred to him that he was losing precious minutes in restoring the Buddha to its original condition, inasmuch as that was the only feature which gave no time for reflection. As a matter of fact, all this had flashed through his mind in probably less than three minutes— a man's brain works pretty fast under such conditions. Glancing about to see what might be done in the way of fastening

the plug inside the base of the image again, his eye fell upon a large stick of sealing-wax which Brandon had used on his official documents. The plaster, when originally poured in upon the teak plug, had set fairly hard— but incessant dampness during the rains had softened it almost to a crumbling point. So he poured the melted wax upon the wood and the inner bronze of the image instead— and when pressed home, the plug appeared to be fastened quite firmly— enough so, at least, to hold until Brandon or his khitmutgar dislodged it. Placing the Buddha upon its pile of papers again, the Captain leaned back in his chair for reflection— the wonderful stone having been placed in the inside pocket of his waistcoat, as he happened to be in cit's that evening.

He had practically decided upon telling Brandon of his find when the Lieutenant came back—and suggesting an even split with him on the value of the stone. This seemed the only course that a gentleman could pursue in the circumstances— and Pottinger's breeding had been sufficiently good for most emergencies. But in a moment or two it occurred to him that the Naval Reserve officer— being himself the sort of man who does certain things or doesn't do certain others simply because gentlemen do or avoid doing them— would at once return the stone to the American girl, Miss Armitage, because it had been unquestionably her property when last seen. The Lieutenant wouldn't see— couldn't be made to see— how he could honorably do anything else. To be sure, there were the rewards offered by Miss Armitage and the Straits Government— two thousand and one thousand pounds, respectively. His half of these would very nearly set Pottinger upon his feet again, financially—enough so, at least, to make gradual payment of the remainder within the possibilities.

But the more he thought of the various hands through which the jewel must have passed since the night of the Governor's ball, and the cynical ignoring of Grace Armitage's ownership in each instance, the more it seemed to him absurd that there should be any question of hunting up a former owner for anything of such fabulous value. And yet— Brandon had met and liked Miss Armitage— also the Rajah of Mong Klang, from whom it was rumored that she had originally obtained it, after saving his life on a B. P. steamer.

Pottinger began to feel aggrieved at this insurmountable obstacle to his course of honorable action. He had always considered himself a gentleman, with the instincts of one— a man of honor. To explain the finding of the jewel and offer to go halves with the Lieutenant, seemed a thoroughly honorable course in the circumstances— one which would be approved by every acquaintance he had among the decenter set. But there seemed to be a limit beyond which one might be too damned honorable for everyday life. In this

world, it's a case of every man for himself— scratch for a living as best he may, He simply can't afford sentiment. Very good! What then? Well—he had the ruby, hadn't he? He certainly had. Well?

WHEN the Lieutenant returned, Pottinger began to get nervous. He wasn't quite so sure that Brandon was unaware of the jewel's hiding-place. Gunga had not reéntered the room after bringing the brandy-pegs which his master had ordered for the Captain. There was no indication of any hole or crevice through which he might have spied upon what had been going on there. The Buddha was exactly where Brandon had left it— holding down some of his papers. If lifted, the base probably wouldn't come out again until it received another heavy blow. In short, unless he kad been spied upon by some one, there was nothing whatever to connect Pottinger with the ruby, as even across the room, nobody could have determined just what the object was which fell out into his hand. None the less, he had the impression, in spite of all his arguments, that he was acting like a cad— until something occurred to him which seemed to strengthen his position. Circumstances pointed to the almost certain assumption that it had been Sir Martin Jephson who concealed the stone in the Buddha. If so, he must have been fairly sure that it was actually the great ruby stolen from Miss Armitage. He might have intended returning it to her at the time he was killed— but he had not done so. If the stone were not hers, then it must rightfully belong to Jephson's heirs, if he left any, and not in any way to Brandon— who had certainly made no effort to look them up as far as anyone knew. You see? It's not so difficult to reason out some justification in a case like the Captain's if one puts his mind upon it. But though he felt better about it as concerned his recent acquaintance, the Naval Reserve man, he was still ill at ease— and soon went off to his own quarters. One doesn't go about with a milliondollar ruby in his pocket, calmly, without thinking of the thing.

Once in his living-room, after dismissing his striker and locking the door, the Captain was concerned with providing a safe hiding-place for the jewel. He couldn't get at the safety-vault of any bank until the next day, and he knew it would arouse comment if he suddenly rented one at a time when he was known to be very hard up. Among other things acquired in his months of plunging had been a secondhand but fairly decent car— which naturally brought the accumulation in his quarters of various automobile accessories. While racking his brain to think of some method by which he might safely conceal his find, his eyes fell upon a tire-valve in which he had meant to insert a fresh washer— and a roll of tire-tape. Wrapping the ruby in tissue-paper to keep the tape from sticking to it, he placed the tire-valve against one end and wrapped the two in a solid mass with many thicknesses of tape until the

lump— with one end of the valve projecting— looked like something upon which he had been experimenting— possibly an automatic bulb-connection to go inside the tire itself. Which is to say it looked like nothing which anyone familiar with automobile parts would recognize, and yet like something that might prove an excellent idea if it could be made to work. Such an object might have lain upon Pottinger's table or remained in one of his pockets for months without anyone being curious enough to meddle with it. In spite of this, he didn't sleep that night, and looked rather the worse for wear in the morning.

AFTER a good breakfast, however, and a ride up the Grand Trunk Road, he began to get some of his nerve back— and to speculate upon where or how he might sell the stone with some degree of secrecy. A jewel of premier class is not disposed of without the transaction becoming known, as a rule— unless sold at a ridiculous sacrifice. Pottinger's first idea was to apply for leave, go home to London and endeavor to find a purchaser there or in Amsterdam. But in the first place he would have had to borrow the steamer-fare— and would be facing the certainty that any. house or dealer wealthy enough to buy such a stone must recognize it at a glance, and demand explanation of his assumed ownership, which would require a good deal of ability in imaginative lying. So it appeared certain that he must sacrifice the stone for a price much below its value to somebody who might take a chance on purchasing it for speculation. If obliged to do that, there was probably no better market in all the world than the jewel-shops of the Chandni Chowk, right there in Delhi— the only question being to ascertain, without betraying his secret, who of all the Oriental dealers was a reasonably honest man to deal with and how to put through the transaction with such a man confidentially enough to prevent its becoming known.

At this point in his reasoning Pottinger had what he considered an excellent idea. Imitating, passably, the handwriting of a correspondent in Hongkong, he wrote a letter to himself in which the supposed correspondent desired information concerning the most trustworthy jewel-dealer in Delhi— one who had a reputation for honest dealing, and sufficient standing to make a purchase of fairly large amount. After creasing and crumpling this letter, he placed it in an envelope recently received from his friend and then went out to consult some of his brother officers upon the matter with the idea of exhibiting the letter as his reason for so doing.

His first thought was to bring up the subject at mess and discuss the question generally around the table, but this seemed to involve altogether too much publicity— invite comment which he desired to avoid. Presently it occurred to him that the one man who would be likely to have reliable

information upon the subject was Major Carmichael of the Indian Secret Service— an officer who could and did go among all classes of natives, in disguise, without detection. He found the Major in his private office, over in one of the new Government buildings— but a brother officer and a civilian whom he introduced as a Mr. Garford were with him. Pottinger's first impulse was to wait until he could talk with the Major alone, but finding that Carmichael was leaving by train within two hours, presumably for Bombay, he decided that he couldn't wait for the officer's rather indefinite return. So, explaining that he had dropped in for a bit of information, he read that portion of the supposed letter from Hongkong referring to the jewel-dealers in Delhi.

"I suppose, Major, that one could scarcely do better than refer my correspondent to Jadukishan Abdulla and Comp'ny— eh? They have about the largest shop— seem to be quite responsible. Eh?"

"They're all very well for tourists— any class of people which expects to be more or less' done, an' pays two or three prices without overmuch grumbling. That's not to say Abdulla an' his partners are dishonest, mind. An Oriental is taught from childhood to be a close trader, never to pay the asking-price for anything. For example, if your correspondent had some bits of jewelry to sell, an' knew their value,— really knew something about jewels in the open market today, an' what constituted value in them,— he'd not come off so badly with Abdulla. He wouldn't get the top price, of course, but he'd get a more or less reasonable one, all things considered— an' the check would be perfectly good for the full amount. On the other hand, if he merely knew what some relative or acquaintance had claimed the stuff to be worth, he'd be offered some ridiculous price which he could take or leave as he pleased.

"Now, if I were your correspondent,— or you, if he places the sale in your hands,— I'd wait until an hour after dark an' then go to the shop of Hop Feng. You'll fancy it's closed, because there'll be nothing but a dim light in the window if any at all. But Hop usually does business up to quite a late hour if he thinks it worth while. A coolie will admit you, take you through an inclosed passage to a much larger godown in the rear of the shop. In fact, if you'd ever dealt with his relative Chang Feng of Singapore, you'd find the arrangement almost identical When a Chinaman works out a good satisfactory arrangement in anything, he sticks to it for centuries."

"Fancy I've seen that little shop of Hop Feng's— down near the Burra Bazaar, is it not? Aye! But is the Chink in a large enough way of business to make a purchase running into thousands if it were offered to him? It's quite possible that my correspondent has some such thing in mind from the way he writes— I believe his family are wealthy."

"The Bank of Upper India has paid Hop's draft for more than one *lakh* of rupees, to my knowledge. Aye— an' it wouldn't surprise me if they honored his draft for a quarter of a *crore* in some particular emergency. A Chinaman of Hop Feng's class not only has his own personal accumulations behind him, you know, but is also in position to call upon God knows what big tong or association of tongs for backing if he needs it. Of course, there's no such word in their language— they refer to such associations as 'benevolent societies,' but they cover pretty much everything by the term."

"You think Hop would deal honestly with a chap—eh?"

"More so than most white men. If you go to Hop yourself, use my name if you like— as an introduction. He doesn't really know what my work is in the Secret Service, but I'm of the opinion that he has a dev'lish sight more information concernin' my movements at times than I care about."

AFTER Pottinger had left the room, Mr. Garford remarked that if for any reason he had been getting information for himself rather than for some one in Hongkong, the Major had very tactfully indicated an excellent excuse. At this, Carmichael and his brother officer exchanged a look which instantly told Garford he had hit the mark— but the Major answered in a noncommittal way that neither admitted nor denied the implication.

"Oh, I fancy Pottinger himself would have no occasion to deal with Hop Feng. He's not by way of bein' wealthy, you know— sufficiently to speculate in jewels— not the sort of chap who'd be havin' family heirlooms to dispose of."

This was no more than acting according to the code of the Service, which tacitly barred either of them from discussing a brother-officer's affairs with strangers— though each was convinced that Pottinger was rather deep in the hole and trying to pawn whatever he had. This Garford— Bill Garford, as they'd heard him called by a man who seemed to know him well— was presumably an ex-shipmaster who had made considerable money in speculation of one sort or another. A rough character, sometimes, judging by his occasional speech, but good company for all that.

As for Garford himself, the inquiring Captain had started an interesting line of thought. It had been rumored in the Straits that elimination of every other. possibility indicated Garford as the man who had stolen the great ruby from Miss Armitage at the Governor's ball, but. there had been no shadow of proof, and it was quite certain that he hadn't it after being stripped to his underclothes by a gang of coolies who attacked him on the way down from Government House. For once, rumor and circumstantial evidence had a solid foundation. Garford had stolen the Glowing Ember at the ball and then lost it during the attack upon him. From that moment, he had been obsessed with

the determination to find and get the jewel back if he spent two or three years at the task— which was mainly his reason for drifting up to Delhi. He knew the Chandni Chowk for one of the greatest jewel-markets in the world and had a feeling that, sooner or later, the stone would turn up there for disposal.

MEANWHILE, Pottinger determined to lose no time in seeing Hop Feng. He would at least know better where he stood, whether he disposed of the stone or not. Major Carmichael would have left on the Bombay Express some hours before dinner, and the other officer, Lieutenant Harms, was to accompany him. Garford, the civilian, was a stranger in Delhi, who would not be likely to prowl about the city after dark, unless with a party. Nobody else knew of any possibility that the Captain might visit the Chinese merchant that evening. Nobody had a suspicion of what he carried about so carelessly in his pocket, or his life wouldn't have been worth two annas in the narrow twisting alleys of old Delhi after dark. Shortly after eight o'clock he knocked at the door of Hop Feng's shop, and after some questioning upon the part of the coolie who opened the door, was admitted— the door being secured with a heavy bar after he was inside. This hesitation upon the coolie's part was pure camouflage, as every jeweler and pawnbroker in the Chandni Chowk was expecting the Captain Sahib to show up almost any evening with personal effects of one sort or another. Just as Carmichael had descxibed the place, he was taken through a passage into a large building in the rear, piloted between towering bamboo cases of Oriental goods this way and that, until they came to a wonderfully furnished room which Hop used as living-quarters and private office. And the dignified Chinese would not discuss anything in the way of business until his visitor had partaken of delicious tea, rice-cakes and wine— followed by far better cigars than the Captain had ever smoked. Presently, however, they came to the question as to whether Hop Feng would consider the purchase of a very valuable stone— would be willing to pay cash for it?

Like most Chinamen of the merchant class, Hop: didn't care to have every customer. know that he was a man of education who spoke three or four languages fluently— sometimes this was a disadvantage. But in Pottinger's case, after he had mentioned the Major's name, there was nothing to be gained by continuing the conversation in pidgin.

"I am in business, Captain, to purchase or sell most anything of value— probably quite able to pay whatever an article is worth, though for any large amount you'd have to accept my check upon the Bank of Upper India. One does not keep a *lakh* of rupees in the house, you know. What is it you wish to sell, if I may ask?"

POTTINGER unwrapped the tire-tape, separated the valve from something wrapped in tissue, and then laid the lump of crystallized fire upon the onyx guesttable between them. Motioning for the Captain to keep it out of sight for a moment or two, Hop clapped his hands for one of the coolies—and had a blackiron lantern fetched in which had but a single half-inch opening in one side and an intense white light within. When the coolie left the room, Hop placed. the ruby against the hole in the lantern, letting this concentrated white light shine through it. The effect was simply marvelous.

"Where did you get this stone, Captain Sahib?"

"Why— really, you know, I fancy that's none of your affair, eh? The ruby belongs to me, of course— or has been placed in my hands to sell for the owner, which amounts to the same thing. Either you consider purchasing it— or not. That's the business between us!"

"Very good— if you prefer putting it that way. This ruby is worth. upwards of four million rupees if appraised by any responsible house and purchased from a bona-fide owner. I will give-you, without asking further questions, fifty thousand rupees."

"What! You admit that it is worth four millions and then have the nerve to offer me but fifty thousand!"

"As the Captain Sahib appears to know nothing about precious stones, I will tell him why. Rubies have been found up to eight or nine hundred carats, it is true— but invariably, every one of them except this has been cloudy or contained flaws when above twelve or fourteen carats. The Glowing Ember was cut in Amsterdam more than three years ago and is supposed to have been found in upper Burma. No other ruby of its size and perfection has ever been mined— there is no record of another having been cut. I never saw the stone myself— have no proof that this is it. But the lapidaries who cut it, anyone who has once handled it, could swear positively to the jewel anywhere in the world that it may appear. Now, if I purchase this ruby from you, I do it purely as a matter of speculation, with the knowledge that if found in my possession by anyone who could establish a legal claim to it, the jewel would be confiscated— inasmuch as I could not plead ignorance in the purchase. I must dispose of it to somebody willing to purchase it knowing these conditions— willing to pay me a handsome profit and take the chance of keeping it in his possession for at least seven or eight years, when the statute of limitations might bar a claim of former ownership. Of course the American memsahib would not pay any such price as I offer you, for her own property.

"As it happens, I think I know of such a purchaser— though it may be difficult to negotiate with him. H-m-m? Pottinger Sahib, I will take the chance of giving you seventy-five thousand rupees for the stone— now. And I think

you will do well to accept that amount rather than run the risk of complication, probable arrest, if the stone is found. in your possession. Of course, if you prefer not selling at such a sacrifice, I shall not mention where I happened to see the ruby. This is entirely a matter between ourselves. At present sterling exchange, I'm offering you very nearly fifty-four hundred pounds— call it that, if you prefer English money."

It didn't take Pottinger more than a moment or two for decision. Such an amount would not only clean up everything he owed but would leave enough capital, if well invested, to pay the bulk of his running expenses from the interest before drawing upon his pay. It was very far from the million or so which he held in his hand with the ruby, but he could get the cash at once with no further questions asked. He might never get as much for the jewel even if it were not found in his possession and confiscated. So he took Hop Feng's draft, found next morning that it was perfectly good, opened a new account in another bank—and passes out of the story. But he did profit somewhat by the lesson. He lived within his means and became rather popular from the taciturn habit which seemed to grow upon him. In his inner consciousness he knew himself for a cad— technically a thief. And he tried to over; come the possibility of a similar break in future. Lieutenant Brandon didn't know until mere chance revealed the fact, some years later, that the great ruby had ever been in his possession— and has no idea whatever as to when or by whom it avas taken out of the little Buddha.

HALF an hour after Pottinger left the shop in the Chandni Chowk, Hop Feng came out and sauntered down a narrow street toward the Moti Bazaar as if he had all the time in the world and was going nowhere in particular. Even under the arc-lights of the main thoroughfare, he appeared to be plainly dressed, but a closer inspection would have shown that his dark under-jacket was of creamy brocaded satin, his quilted over-vest of silk that would have been a bargain at twenty rupees the yard, and the tight-fitting trousers of equally expensive material. On the top of his black skull-cap was an agate button. Whether it was excessive presumption upon his part to wear it, none but a Chinese aristocrat could have said— and even such a one might have hesitated about questioning it after a glimpse at the man's clothes and bearing.

Now, the Occidental who rambles about the district north of the Kashmir Gate during the evening—through the civil and military lines—finds himself in the beginnings of a cosmopolitan city which is the new capital of India. It is well policed; many of the newer buildings and residences are magnificent; there are Europeans in evidence along most any of the streets or roads. But let him penetrate south of Queens Road in the old walled city, and he may almost

expect to meet Genghis Khan, Haroun al Raschid or Shah Jehan around the next corner. He is back in the land of the Arabian Nights— among manners, customs and architecture which have changed but little in forty centuries. Hence the white tourist should have considerable knowledge of Oriental life and watch his step if he would avoid adventures of a more or less serious nature. Officers of the Indian Secret Service know this district from one end to the other— traverse it with impunity because, when not in disguise, they are well known, and at other times are able to pass as Hindu, Pathan, Ghurka or Bengali without detection. There are also people in the Civil Service and a limited number of commercial Europeans who go through it at night with more or less immunity. But aside from these, the person looking for adventure is likely to be gratified unless, by his appearance, he is too poor and worthless to meddle with.

A hundred paces behind Hop Feng, as he threaded his way through dimly lighted and twisting alleys— under projecting *mashrabiyehs* or solid archways— came a man who kept pretty well in the shadows but didn't lose sight of him for more than a second or two— a white man, in an old suit of clothes and a rough knockabout hat that was pulled down over his eyes. Less than half that distance behind him, came two powerfully built Shantung coolies who could have been on his back in two or three jumps at any time. Their braided straw sandals were noiseless on the ground, and they understood keeping out of sight a good deal better than the Caucasian, from their lifelong practice at it.

GARFORD hadn't the slightest idea where he was going, but he was on his way— playing a hunch that Pottinger's business with Hop Feng had been to dispose of something running to considerable more value than anyone supposed. The former shipmaster had no definite reason for thinking anything of the sort, but it seemed to him that the Captain acted like a man who had on his mind something too big to handle— something which he had neither the nerve nor the experience to put through successfully. If this reasoning were anywhere near the mark, if Pottinger actually sold anything of considerable value to the Chinaman, and ke in turn had any definite idea where it might be disposed of at a handsome profit, Hop Feng would be likely to go out and try to see his prospective customer shortly after the Captain left him. The greater the value of whatever he had to sell, the more certain he was to go out— with some place not a teahouse or gambling-joint as his destination.

As to whether he might actually have the thing on him— well, that was a toss-up, depending a good deal upon the character of his customer.

After many twists and turns in the labyrinth south of the Chandni Chowk, Hop switched under an archway and beyond it into a street barely seven feet wide— with the fronts of several Oriental houses on one side and a high red-sandstone wall on the other. At a small but heavy door in this wall the Chinaman knocked— not in any previously arranged manner, but as an Oriental knocks, which is markedly different from the pounding of a Caucasian.

In a moment or two a small wicket in the door opened to frame a swarthy face. Hop's credentials appeared to be worth considering— for the *khitmutgar* inside closed the wicket and went off to carry the message. And this seemed to Garford the psychological moment for him to act. If the Chinaman had the thing on him, it might be gotten then and there— once inside the wall, it would be too late. If he hadn't it, the adventurer at least knew where his possible customer lived and might consider him later.

Hop Feng had lived too long, through too many years of rough experience, to imagine for a moment that the chance of his being attacked for whatever he might happen to have on him in one of the darker, narrower streets was negligible. He invariably discounted the possibility and took certain precautions. The great ruby, for example, was by no means carefully hidden in a secret pocket; the hands of a searching enemy were far too likely to detect a lump of that size through his clothes. Instead it was carelessly wrapped in a wad of soiled newspaper and rested in a pocket-of his voluminous left sleeve where he could put his right hand upon it instantly. And his hearing was exceptionally acute.

Thus, when he heard the faint thuds of Garford's running footsteps behind him, the wad of newspaper was in his hand. Springing upon him from behind, Garford naturally gripped the Chinaman's throat to prevent him from making any disturbance— and when Hop allowed his knees to give out under the double weight, they went down on the ground in one confused heap— against the old stone wall. So Hop was able, with his extended arm, to place the wad of dirty paper behind a little tuft of grass against the base of the wall as surely as if that had been his intention all along.

GARFORD didn't expect much of a chance to go through the Chinaman at his leisure, and so worked with amazing quickness— passing his free hand over every part of his victim's body, locating several lumps in inner pockets, but none which felt to him like either a large stone or a jewel-case. And he probably hadn't been at work twenty seconds before the Shantung coolies, Hop's bodyguard, were upon dis back in turn— and would either have knifed or choked him to death had it not been for a low whistle and the more or less silent arrival of four Sikh police, who methodically untangled the struggling

figures until the ex-shipmaster could be weeded out and shoved a little distance down the alley. A low voice from an unrecognizable shadow against the wall said in his ear: "Get back to the civil lines outside the wall, you fool— and don't try this sort of thing in old Delhi! You had a narrow escape, just now— the advantage is always too much against you in a place like this!"

Glancing back, the struggling knot of figures seemed to have silently disappeared. As far as he could see, he was alone and he instinctively started off— following the excellent advice which had been given him. But what he didn't see and wouldn't have understood, was the way the police released the two coolies, escorted them down the alley to the next turn and then disappeared. They knew all about Hop Feng's bodyguard and were not interfering with them. As for Hop, he calmly picked himself up, brushed off his clothes as well as he was able in the darkness, picked up his wad of dirty newspaper from the base of the wall, and in another moment was admitted through the heavy door in the wall by the khitmutgar.

Returning to Garford, who was now wandering aimlessly along the narrow street beyond the archway: it soon occurred to him that Hop. Feng would have little difficulty in convincing the native police, if they really were police, that he was at that gate in the old wall upon legitimate business, waiting for admission. He would be able to give the name of the person who lived inside— undoubtedly would be permitted to go in and attend to whatever affair brought him there. If so, well— if so— h-m-m! If it were only possible to get within the inclosure, some open window or door might give one a glimpse of the Chinaman, the person upon whom he was calling, and what they were doing together. Garford turned about and walked back— silently, but rather briskly, as one does when moving with a definite object.

Once through the old archway, he stood in its pitch-black shadows and examined the outline of the wall as well as he could against the brilliant stars. Passing his hand up and down on the stones, he found that time and erosion had crumbled away portions of many until an active man, particularly, a sailor, as he had been, could manage to get a foothold, here and there. As the wall was at least eighteen feet high he risked a nasty fall the higher he got— but the thing wasn't impossible. There were plenty of active Hindus who might have gone up that wall like monkeys, in daylight, but who never would dream of attempting it, day or night, because of the certain death awaiting them on the other side if caught. Anywhere east of Suez— like some more civilized localities— it is the lawful customary proceeding to kill an intruder in one's house surrounding grounds.

GARFORD understood this, of course, in a general way—but a man who risks his life every day or so for years acquires a certain contempt for danger which carries him through unbelievable risks and adventures until he finally, in most cases, does get it where the getting is fatal.

After listening intently for a moment or so to be sure nobody was approaching, he very carefully began to climb. Twice his foot slipped, leaving him to hang by the tips of his fingers until he could find another toe-hold— but in less than ten minutes he was on the top, within reach of a cypress-tree sufficiently compact in its foliage to risk a jump into it. The tree was shaped like a poplar— the sort one sees in Persian gardens and all through Kashmir. It was impossible to penetrate as far as the trunk—but he got a firm grasp of the outlying branches as he landed against them and let himself down, hand under hand, as any sailor does when going down a rope. In his descent there was no noise other than a slight rustling which couldn't have been heard ten feet away. On the ground he found himself in a square inclosure approximately a hundred and fifty feet each way, as nearly as he could judge. Surrounding it were high walls— the upper portions of other dwellings and, along one side, what appeared to be a more extensive garden of some neighboring house. Nearly the whole of Delhi within the old seventeenth-century wall is closely packed with buildings if one judges by the appearance of the narrow streets through which he passes, but in the rear of these or the frequent red-sandstone wall on one side, are oases of completely shut-in open ground connected with more pretentious dwellings.

Now, the exterior of the wall had presented a thoroughly squalid appearance. For many years the inclosure inside had been probably as much so— as many an Oriental, spending much of what he had to secure that amount of privacy, would not go farther and beautify it unnecessarily at a much heavier expense. But the last purchaser evidently had been a person of wealth and taste. Even in the starlight, Garford could see that the little hundredand-fifty-foot inclosure had been made a thing of exquisite beauty. In the center was a marble tank of crystal-clear water with a single jet rising twelve feet or more into the air before it broke and fell back in spray. Along the sides of the garden were Persian cypresses and arborvite planted so thickly and of such height that they concealed the surrounding walls— everything but the tops of a few houses.

At the farther end of the garden the cypresses were thinned away to permit views of it from mashrabiyehs running up to a height of three stories in the facade of what had been an old sandstone house, refaced with marble. And when the adventurer began hunting for a door, he felt along the blank wall until he came to the farther corner, where a small postern of heavy teak

appeared to be firmly barred from the inside. There was no other opening in the wall of the house lower than the second-story *mashrabiyehs*, eight' feet above his head— no other entrance to the garden save the little door in the street wall. If anyone happened to catch him there before he had time fo climb over the wall again, it was a death-trap— for all its natural loveliness.

AFTER examining the house-door and softly testing it, Garford decided that any idea of forcing an entrance without discovery was out of the question. This left but the grilled windows, or mashrabiyehs, and the roof— if he could gain access to them. Searching about as well as he was able in the starlight, he presently noticed that one of the cypresses was growing so near the house that its upper branches were not more than six feet from the farther series of bays with their *mashrabiyehs*— and it occurred to him that if he went up hand-over-hand by the ends of the branches, on the side toward the house, the more slender upper trunk of the tree would be pulled over toward it with his weight until he could reach one of the grilles.

It required unusual muscular control and practice at that sort of thing, because the yielding branches doubled the effort required— but he managed it in a few minutes and got a fair hold with his fingers upon one of the grilles. To pull himself up by these was an easier matter— the heavier cross-framing giving an occasional precarious foothold. Eventually he reached a section of the open grilling through which he could see the interior of a spacious room.

A low *musnud*, covered with silk-mohair rugs, ran partly along one side of the room within eight feet of the bay. Among a pile of silk cushions squatted a rather corpulent man whose long caftan of amber-colored satin and ropes of pearls about his neck indicated a native prince of high rank. His hair and black mustache were closely trimmed in the European fashion. By his movements and command of English one inferred that he was accustomed frequently to go about in European clothes— even to pass for a heavily tanned white man, at times. Opposite him, at the edge of the musnud, sat Hop Feng upon other-cushions— his agate button procuring for him some recognition of aristocracy which would not have been accorded to a mere shopkeeper.

It was apparent that the two had met before in a business way— though the Maharajah of Burrancore was much too wealthy and prominent a man to frequent the bazaars.

"You were speaking, Hop Feng, of a ruby weighing approximately a hundred and fifty carats— of perfect color and water, perfectly cut? And you know as well as I do that there is but one such ruby in the world— the property of an American memsahib now in Singapore, though it was stolen from her some months ago. Are you suggesting that I buy that ruby from you?"

"I am asking if Your Highness cares to purchase a very similar ruby whose history I know nothing about. Perhaps it is the Glowing Ember— perhaps not. I can obtain it for you by paying a rather considerable sum— that is, nevertheless, far below the value of the stone. Which is to say, I am offering you one of the world's great jewels. The Nizam has his own great diamond. The Gaekwar of Baroda has the Star of the South. His Highness of Indore has the famous scarf of pearls, worth millions. Is it not fitting that a fourth great prince of Hind— the Maharajah of Burrancore— should be the possessor of another great jewel in the same class? Would he not risk possible claims upon it for the sake of having such a ruby?"

"H-m-m— it need not be shown publicly for some time! And for that matter, a Maharajah of Hind is not to be held accountable for the source from which he obtains his jewels if he pays for them in good faith. Let me see the ruby! Oh— youre quite safe with it, here— at least, I'm not that kind of a thief!"

HOP drew from his sleeve the beautiful glowing thing and held it out upon the palm of one hand. The Maharajah was dazed, as he sat there looking at it. And the unsuspected shadowy figure clinging by toe and fingers to the mashrabiyeh outside, nearly slipped to the ground. Presently a low murmur came from the Maharajah's lips.

"What is thy price— O thou who comest to me in the night with such a thing? What price?"

"Will Your Highness give as much as two *lakhs*— now— and take the chance of possible claims upon the stone?"

(The *Lakh* is one hundred thousand rupees— the *crore*, one hundred lakhs.)

"Two *lakhs*— for a jewel worth possibly half a *crore*! Art thou in earnest, O friend?"

"Can happen! If I ask more, I shall not get it from anyone who knows what the stone probably is; yet it is the greatest bargain in a thousand at the price."

"I have considerably more than the amount on deposit in the Bank of Bengal and the Bank of Upper India— can give you checks at once if you care to accept them!"

"Can do. But— has Your Highness a place secure enough to keep such a jewel— before it can be placed in a safety-vault?"

The Maharajah laughed— and clapped his hands. To the eunuch who immediately came in through a door at the farther end of the big room, he said a few words in Hindustani—and in a few moments he returned with fountain-pen and check-book, followed by a veiled woman, richly dressed. Holding out

the jewel to the woman, whose oval face above her "yashmak" indicated great beauty, the Prince said:

"Look well upon this, O light of my heart— for, next to thee, it is my greatest treasure. It is my desire that thou shalt keep it— rendering up to me the jewel when there is occasion for my wearing it at durbar or other occasion. Guard it— as thou guardest thyself,"

At this moment the adventurer outside the mashrabiyeh did slip— tripping loose a handful of the grille— and fell, with enough disturbance to attract their attention. According to all human chance, he should have broken a limb or his back— and been finished by the khitmutgars whom the Prince summoned as soon as he realized what had happened. But Garford caromed outward against the cypress and managed to grasp its branches so that he slid to the ground with no worse damage than somewhat lacerated hands. This time he was scared, and reached the little gate in a few seconds— his only possible chance for escape— clawing over it frantically to find how or where it was fastened. With the luck of a fool, his hands fell upon an iron bar which swung upward from its sockets on a swivel; then he found bolts at the top and bottom. He slipped through just as three powerful khitmutgars came running along the marble edge of the tank. In the blackness of the archway, down the narrow street, he squeezed himself against a wall until they ran by him; then turning back, he silently walked the other way until he had made several turns and come out upon a wider thoroughfare leading to the Chandni Chowk. Wiping the sweat from his face and neck, he drew a long sigh both of relief and exasperation:

"Ph-e-e-w! That was a close call! The Chink really Aad it all the time—damn him! Almost in my fist when I had him down! The Glowin' Ember itself! An', now a Ma'rajah's favorite dame cops it, in a Mohammedan harem, where a guy might hunt an' hunt an' hunt till he was baldheaded, supposin' he gets himself in an' out of such a place alive! The Glowin' Ember— in the keepin' of a harem dame! Good-night!"

7: Cold Steel

Georges Surdez

1900-1949

Adventure, 1 Aug 1932

Georges Arthur Surdez

FORBACH was well known in the Foreign Legion. Marshal Lyautey, military governor of Morocco, had once called him from formation, after a review at Fez, to present him to a party of official visitors

"Rudolph Forbach, of the Legion. He was with me in the Tonkin. I was middle aged, listening to my first bullets, and he was young, hearing old music! Forbach, ladies and gentlemen, Adjutant Forbach— a Legionnaire of the grand epoch!"

The Alsatian was a gigantic, bony man, with long limbs. Once deemed the handsomest man in his regiment, his head was covered with thick, fur-like gray hair and his dissipated, tanned face was lighted by child-like, innocent blue eyes. Esteemed in Legion history, his span was tremendous. His first important campaign had been Dahomey; he often told of fighting against the Amazons of King Behanzin. He had followed Gallieni and Lyautey in Tonkin and Madagascar and, already a veteran, had witnessed the decorating of the First Regiment's flag in 1906.

Men who had been his company commanders, his lieutenants, were colonels and generals. Often a staff automobile would stop beside the marching battalion, and officers with white mustaches, medals glittering on their chests, would leap out to greet Forbach.

"My good old Rudolph! Still solid and on the job?"

"I carry on, *mon Général*."

He was somewhat erratic in his conduct, because he had the self-righteousness of old soldiers. His unkind crities attributed his peculiarities to

indulgence in white wine. They pointed out that from three to six quarts a day pouring down a man's throat, year after year, might well affect his brain. But those who really knew him said that his conceit came from the fact that he considered the Legion his family. Having enlisted at sixteen and having stayed with the Corps since, he could recall little else.

He was perhaps fifty-three; but to men who averaged two years under thirty, to his second in command at Ain-el-Rab, Middle Atlas, he appeared to be a patriarch. He was laughed at occasionally, hated at times, but granted a sort of awed veneration.

There were forty-odd Legionnaires stationed at Aim-el-Rab, which was not a military post, not even a blockhouse, but a mere hamlet on the sloping bank of a narrow torrent slashing across a valley; a huddle of mud built huts, swarming with flies, swept by the dusty wind. There was little for the soldiers to do, even less to drink. At best, there would have been sulkiness and rancor; but, with Forbach in charge, all would have been well had not Lieutenant Lavoine of the Colonial Infantry arrived to supervise them.

To start with, the Legion detachment was isolated from other units of the Corps, for the sector of Ait-Bazza had been taken over by the Native Infantry upon completion of the outposts. The amen were casuals, members of various groups of specialized workmen left behind to do construction work when their companies had evacuated, and had been reassembled into a military formation for the need of the moment. The neighboring tribes, although severely handled in a recent campaign, were showing signs of discontent with the approach of Summer. Ain-el-Rab closed an outlet badly guarded by Blockhouse No. 4 on one side and Guard Tower No. '9-on the other. The Legionnaires were a sort of cork in a bottle's neck.

They obtained supplies from Blockhouse 4, but as it was occupied by Native Infantry and a traditional rivalry existed between the Legion and the Tirailleurs, food was doled out to them grudgingly, and they seldom were issued their rightful allowance of wine. Forbach had cheered 'them up, promising that he would obtain their recall from regimental headquarters at Meknes, and pointing out to them that all their protestations brought pure joy to the infantrymen.

"Can't last forever. Look at me! How many dirty holes do you think I've been in? Plenty one day, starvation the next— that's the Legion."

Forbach rather enjoyed himself. His rank of adjutant, peculiar to the French Army, placed him midway between sergeant-chiefs and sub-lieutenants. He had many privileges, and independent command was pleasing to his pride. It looked well to have his mail addressed— Post Commander, Ain-el-Rab. He had ordered the yards cleaned, loopholes knocked in the walls, organized a routine

of patrols and detailed hunting parties to bring in game that amply made up for the shortage of canned meats. As he often told his second, Cambard, an ambitious young chap of twenty-four, all this reminded him of outpost life on the Chinese border.

His life's great burden, paper work, was taken from his shoulders by Cambard, who enjoyed it and would relax from adding columns of figures and composing reports by opening his text-books and studying for a commission. The Legionnaires were, almost without exception, disciplined, clean men who made little trouble when sober and 'had little opportunity to get drunk.

FORBACH was returning from a patrol in the valley one afternoon when Cambard, perspiring, out of breath, much Edited: met him two hundred yards from the first houses of Ain-el-Rab.

"Listen, Rudolph, keep your temper! An officers come— fellow named Lavoine, of the Tirailleurs. Says the major commanding the region has put him in charge—"

"They may want to establish a more important post here," Forbach pointed out, "and he's come to investigate just how—"

"No. He's come to make trouble, Rudolph."

"Trouble? What for?"

"You remember that row you had with the major?"

"Sure."

Forbach shrugged. Before his detachment had been assigned to Ain-el-Rab, the major in command of the Ait-Bazza sector had ordered the Legionnaires to replace a half company of his own battalion in the quarries. The adjutant had obeyed, naturally, but had communicated with his colonel, as was his duty. And the Legion officer had telegraphed that, the detachment being composed of specialized workmen, the men should be employed at their trades or as a military unit. This was a small quarrel, of a type not known in any army, and the adjutant had thought nothing more of it.

"You remember," Cambard went on, "T told you at the time that the Old Man had it in for you. Blames you for making a kick, and can't see it's his fault for not obtaining authorization first from the regiment. You wouldn't listen to me when I told you what the sergeants at Ait-Bazza told me. The mess orderlies repeated to them that he said he would teach you not to—"

"Teach me?" Forbach stiffened. "Say, I have been in the army longer than he has. If any guy comes along after thirty-four years and can teach me— So you think this Lavoine wants to make trouble for me? I'll show him where."

Forbach had been let alone by officers for many years. In the Legion it was well known that he knew regulations and traditions much too well to risk

punishment, and that his speeches and his actions would be upheld. As a general rule, officers outside the Legion avoided contact with him because he had a sharp tongue, was sensitive and usually could find high placed friends to intercede in his favor. That the major should forget this was a great blow to his pride. And if there was anything that Forbach never avoided, it was trouble. To him, caution smacked of cowardice, and cowardice was much worse than murder.

"That's what I'm afraid of," Cambard protested. "Youre so hot headed! Listen, there's one thing neither you nor anybody else can get away with, and that's insubordination. When I say they're out to get you, I mean they're out to get the Legion, because they know how proud we are of you in the outfit. He'll give so many orders that you'll get sore, and you'll interfere for the sake of the men— and there he'll have you. Your pension is due soon, anyway, and they'd like nothing better than to have it rushed through for 'the good of the service'."

Forbach paused thoughtfully. Cambard was right. Lavoine would have much on his side to counter any argument; he would say that Forbach, a veteran, had been too conceited to obey, and that even those who protected him knew well that the adjutant sought trouble wherever he came in contact with members of other units. Over and above him, the major and Lavoine sought to strike at the colonel who had backed him up. Forcing Forbach before a disciplinary council would amount to proving the regimental commander wrong.

"You're not so dull, Cambard," the Alsatian admitted. "What happened?"

"He came with the supply trucks, and naturally, after the lorries had gone down the trail, I went back to the office, for I didn't see him alight. He came in, started bellowing at me for not guarding the place more carefully, said that a hundred men could have entered just as he had. Then, before I could get out to warn you, he had everything changed in the office. Took your table for himself right away and had your greatcoat taken to your quarters. Yelled because we were using part of the room as a clothes closet and supply store for noncoms. And he said to get you at once so that he could tell you what he thought of the way things were run."

"All right," Forbach snapped. "Come along. I'll show you something."

The proper plan had been formulated in his mind instantly. He entered the office, stood at attention after saluting, and, although he grew red under Lavoine's hard stare sweeping him from head to foot, introduced himself briskly—

"Adjutant Forbach, post commander, Lieutenant."

As he spoke, he recalled that he had seen and heard of Lavoine before. The man was not liked in his own regiment. He was tall, slender, with a slight stoop, and appeared almost forty. He had thick yellow hair and protruding blue eyes; the rest of his face was all bony chin and jaws.

"That's not quite accurate now," he stated, softly. "I am in charge here, Lieutenant Lavoine. You shall learn to know me as a just chief, but one who will not tolerate sloth. My first impression is very bad. No sergeant to meet the convoy of trucks; sentries seated and smoking. I understood that you were an old Legionnaire, and everywhere I hear nothing except 'Legion cleanliness'. I come here unannounced. I enter this office like a café. Everything is slack, dirty, filthy, disgusting. Your men look like the forty thieves. A sow could not find her offspring in your yards. Things will have to change, to snap up, immediately."

Forbach could have explained that the moment when a convoy of trucks passed the hamlet might be called a respite for the sentries, who knew, from the presence of the machines and the troops protecting them that they were safe from surprise. And he could have asked Lavoine how he could contrive to keep dust away when every shift of the wind brought in additional quantities from outside. But this would have been a departure from the system he had decided to adopt.

"At your orders, Lieutenant," he said simply, staring straight ahead.

"No explanations to offer?"

"None, Lieutenant. I am sorry. We'll try to do better."

"Eh— you're Adjutant Forbach?"

Lavoine asked.

"Yes, Lieutenant. At your service."

Lavoine was evidently puzzled, helpless. His whirlwind attack had dashed itself into thin air. There was nothing that he could punish Forbach for, as no instructions had been issued for the routine of the outpost.

"Dismissed."

Outside, Forbach smote Cambard on the back.

"See? From now on everything he says is correct. I've seen the trick work before. He'll get sick of it long before we will."

Cambard, less experienced, seemed doubtful. He believed, it was evident, that an officer was accustomed to silence and prompt obedience and would notice nothing unusual. But Forbach was sure of the result.

NEITHER the adjutant nor Cambard spoke to the men, but in some mysterious fashion all caught Forbach's cue at once. Perhaps an orderly had lingered to listen at the door. And it was an odd spectacle, that afternoon, to

see Lavoine stalk angrily, grumbling and swearing, before respectful soldiers who accepted the most unjust reproaches without offer of explanation or visible resentment.

The lieutenant, who had come prepared to face mutinous, sulky men— he knew that Legionnaires would resent the sending of an outsider to command them— found privates carrying out orders at the double. The chap he indicated as orderly, a hard faced, dignified soldier wearing the military medal, accepted instantly and took care of his belongings as if he had been a Legion officer. When his old mare arrived the following day, a man volunteered to care for her, and she was attended to like a racing thoroughbred.

Within two days, Lavoine's face was a constant purple from repressed rage. He felt himself unpopular, was aware that the men laughed at him behind his back, but had no opportunity to make a single remark. He tried to get a single man to break, to talk back and, when he failed in this, tried to win one over as an informer with money and privileges. The private took the bill, thanked him for the favors, but did not appear to understand what was expected of him in return.

During the third night Lavoine ordered the men out for inspection at three. The Legionnaires tumbled out, lined up in the yard, without an oath, a protest, or the least hint of anger. Miraculously, each one had his brushes, his reserve rations and the regulation number of cartridges.

"They look like Ali Baba's forty thieves," Lavoine said again, in desperation. "I want them shaved tomorrow morning."

And he was greeted at drill, during the forenoon, by forty shaven faces. Mustaches and beards carefully raised for weeks had been sacrificed without a whimper. Lavoine could find nothing to say. But he led them out for a practise march, with full kit. This was greatly needed, according to him, although each private walked sixteen miles every other day on patrol or hunting detail. He took them along the trails for forty kilometers, doing route step and march in formation at irregular intervals. When the water ran short, he quickened the pace. When he spotted a man perspiring, lagging behind, he would trot his mare to his side, lean from the saddle, saying:

"Come on— you're wonderful marchers in the Legion! Why, in my old company, no man ever shows fatigue, and we're nothing but ordinary soldiers!"

Swinging back to their quarters, the men sang; athletic games were organized during the evening: Lavoine had failed to break their spirit. On the fifth day he ordered all peddlers away, stating that they were spies; and the men were short of liquids, soap and tobacco. Good humor seemed to prevail, nevertheless. The lieutenant could age understand it.

He tried to break young Coo that evening, to tease him into a hasty word or gesture. He knew the affection linking the two noncoms, felt that For-`bach would break his reserve to assist his friend. Or perhaps Lavoine no longer desired to punish any one, but felt himself in honor bound to win the odd game forced upon him.

"Cambard, come here."

The sergeant crossed the office, came to attention. He knew what to do, for there was a tacit code. One was presumed to answer questions fully, never volunteering a word.

"You are a Frenchman, Cambard? Thought so. Very intelligent man. Working for a commission, eh? Enlisted on impulse, to get away from some trouble or other? A girl?"

Cambard had failed in the written examinations for military school, because, sent to Paris with much money and little control, he had frequented cafés more often than lycées. Instead of waiting for the next year's examinations, he had decided to go through the ranks to achieve his goal, and the Legion had seemed obvious as the best place to learn. But Lavoine, at Ain-el-Rab, was always right.

"Yes, Lieutenant, a girl."

"Have a cigaret?" Lavoine pushed the box forward. Cambard was puzzled, then decided to accept. "Tell me, is this an unusual group of Legionnaires, or are they like others?"

"They're an average lot, Lieutenant."

"Why, they're no trouble at all— eh!" Lavoine lifted his voice, snarled, "Don't light that cigaret in here! You presume on my kindness. I have given orders against smoking in the office. I gave you that cigaret to smoke when off duty."

Cambard started, was about to toss the cigaret on the table. But this was not the game. He drew out a case of hammered silver banded with goid and carefully stored the smoke.

"I thank you, Lieutenant."

"You may leave, Cambard," said Lavoine, who seemed somewhat ashamed of himself.

It was on the sixth day that he struck an angle of attack that could not be laughed off. He posted an order, stating that some of the men were in the habit of cutting up bullets into tiny fragments, to bring down small birds; this process injured the rifling. He concluded that, lest the order be ignored or evaded, all hunting was forbidden. And he reminded them all that unauthorized use of cartridges was a court-martial offense. All patrol leaders

would be held responsible if any one of their men lacked his supply of ammunition, held to account for the last cartridge.

The men turned the difficulty at first by hiring shotguns from natives. Lavoine ruled against it, explaining that it was likely to bring the men in contact with civilians for the purpose of plotting desertion. This was ridiculous, but would hold good until investigated.

On the eighth day of Lavoine's reign one of the patrols brought in a large wild boar, already cut to pieces. Lavoine emerged from the office, ordered the men to open their pouches and show their cartridges. He sniffed at the guns. Finding no cartridges missing, he ordered a general checkup. Without result. And when he stood, raging and powerless, Corporal Barlier, known far and wide as a cold-blooded humorist, strode forward to explain.

"Lieutenant, we were walking along the trail, when this boar breaks from the bushes and rushes by. Without thinking of anything in particular, mechanically as it were, I let him have it. Down he went, stone dead! Then I began to think it would be shameful to waste the meat. Had it chopped up and brought along." The corporal drew his bayonet from the scabbard, clean and oily. "Didn't hurt my blade, Lieutenant."

Lavoine squatted to seek for bullet holes. But he realized how foolish this close scrutiny seemed, for Legionnaires were past masters at camouflage. And the next day the patrols returned as usual, bags stuffed with quail and other birds, with hares, all presumably dropped with stones. The officer guessed what was happening, that the men were purchasing cartridges from the soldiers of the patrols coming from the blockhouse. But he could do nothing about it, and thus allowed matters to go smoothly for more than a week.

"He's done for," Cambard suggested.

"Not him; I know the type," Forbach replied. "Listen, Cambard, I'm doing this for the Legion. But the swine will pay for it. I have only a few more months to serve, then I get pensioned. I'll find him again, after that!"

Cambard, who wore the crossed swords of a master-fencer and had taught athletics, would have hesitated to tackle the older man. He sighed, probably at the thought that he was unlikely to witness the. encounter. It would be a scene worth witnessing, one that would live long in Legion yarns.

During the feud the men at Ain-el-Rab had forgotten the political situation, which was growing tense. And they were startled when a runner came from the blockhouse one morning, rushing into the office.

LAVOINE came out almost immediately, beckoned to the bugler and ordered him to get the men together. Then he addressed Forbach and Cambard: "Negotiations are attempted with the tribes, but planes are

reporting masses of natives in the ravines south of us. From inside information just communicated all outposts, an attack is planned for tomorrow or the followmg day. A show of force is expected to delay their action, and give time for reenforcements to arrive from Meknes. For our part, we are to make a demonstration in the general direction of Guard Tower 9, then return here, pack our stuff and move up to the blockhouse until trucks come to take us eastward. As soon as the patrols are back, inform me, and we can make the demonstration."

"They've noticed the blockhouse's signal, Lieutenant, and are coming in now,' Cambard said. He indicated the white walls of the small fort on a distant hill. A red Bengal flare was recalling fatigue parties and patrols.

"All right," Lavoine agreed. He lighted a cigaret, waited until the returning Legionnaires had lined up with the others, then uttered an unexpected order, "Attention— inspection!"

He strolled down the line, flicking a pouch open, pulling a knapsack suspender, criticizing the distribution of weight elsewhere. He appeared absorbed, tense, lighted by some strong inner joy.

The men were in splendid condition, light khakis washed and scrubbed almost white, boots shining, buttons agleam. But they were all a trifle gaunt and worried. For several days they had lived in an atmosphere of madness. Forty-odd men playing a game against one who was powerful; forty-odd men scolded, held down, deprived of liberties, prey to boredom, milling endlessly under the ardent sun, shifting piles of dirt from one spot to another.

Taking advantage of a Legion ban on certain publications, Lavoine had withheld all books, magazines and newspapers printed in foreign languages. And he had revived an old regulation against the playing of cards for money. The change in habits, the constant oppression, had driven some of the younger privates to the verge of nervous collapse, and many showed twitching faces.

Lavoine himself showed the strain. He had been too nervous to sleep more than a few hours at a stretch, had not eaten much. But now he apparently had regained a measure of spirit.

Forbach understood why when the officer reached the men of the returning patrols. They had come in excited, because of the signals, had probably neglected ordinary precautions, lulled as they were by Lavoine's recent indifierence. The adjutant knew his suspicions would be confirmed when the lieutenant ordered them to slide back the bolts of their rifles, to open their pouches.

"This rifle has been fired," Lavoine announced, addressing a private. Without hesitation he unbuckled the fellow's canvas bag, brought out a hare. "Shot, this time. You had a warning, my lad. Sergeant, take his name and make

a report—deterioration of government material, waste of ammunition. If you get away with less than six months, I'll marry your sister."

The man's jaws quivered; muscles lumped his pale skin. But his eyes remained straight ahead, as if he had not heard. Lavoine chuckled with pleasure, went to the next man and produced a brace of birds from his bag, sniffed his rifle.

"This one, also! Sergeant, his name and a report, please."

Forbach kept steady with an effort. Lavoine was winning, had turned the game into a debacle for the Legionnaires. For one of the rules had been to avoid giving the officer opportunities to inflict severe punishment. The men stirred restlessly, a wind of revolt swept them, but the adjutant steadied them with his example. For the moment Lavoine held the upper hand.

"So much for these two," the lieutenant resumed in a brisk tone. "As for the rest, I am going to give you all a lesson in discipline and obedience. When troopers are untrustworthy, won't carry out orders, they should not be armed. Today we are marching out on a demonstration, without cartridges! Corporals, gather the ammunition. I have sent for a squad of Tirailleurs to guard them here for you. Legionnaires, you shall promenade before the enemy without cartridges because you misused, those trusted to you!"

As he spoke, Lavoine lashed his leggings with his riding stick; then watched, whistling between his teeth as the order was earried out. He was deriving intense satisfaction from the incident, knowing what a humiliation it inflicted upon the men, for it was not merely a sort of unofficial degradation, but it was schoolboys' punishment. Lavoine would relate this story and it would spread. This would expose every member of the detachment to ridicule for the length of his stay in the Legion. And it would be greeted as a good joke on the Corps itself.

"What if we are attacked, Lieutenant?" Forbach asked.

"No attack until tomorrow. Information is sure."

"Information is never sure in Morocco, Lieutenant."

Lavoine hesitated; vague dismay rose in his eyes. But for his pride, he would have reconsidered, for he had been in Africa long enough to be aware that the natives seemed inspired by a sixth sense for propitious undertakings at small risks. However, he had spoken, and the joke was too good to spoil—forty-odd Legionnaires walking before a foe, without cartridges!

"If we are attacked, Adjutant? Why, you men are Legionnaires and fond of cold steel! You use bayonets so well against boars that much less tough, less mobile targets, such as human foes, can offer no serious problem."

Forbach did not insist. After all, his responsibility was covered and, like the majority of veteran noncoms, he dreaded responsibility worse than death. The

demonstration would not take them more than three miles from Ain-el-Rab and, in an emergency, they could fall back rapidly. Should he make a fuss, it would only expose the whole regiment to more ridicule.

"Adjutant, the order is for you also. And you, Sergeant."

The two obeyed. Forbach was puzzled more and more, for he did not know whether this was: one of the cases provided for in regulations, when an inferior has not only the right but the duty to assume initiative and interfere with a chief. But Lavoine was neither drunk, ill nor insane.

And should the demonstration be carried out without incident, many would uphold his decision as correct. Such measures were recommended to obtain a grip on sulky, undisciplined men. At Charleroi, during the first days of the World War, a colonel had ordered his battalions to drill under fire until the men: steadied to their job. The story of the North African conquest offered several similar episodes.

AS SOON as the squad of Native Infantry arrived to guard supplies and ammunition, the detachment marched out behind Lavoine. The day was clear, there was nothing different in the atmosphere; but Forbach knew that every man in the detachment felt as he did, oddly light, unprotected, nude. The familiar weight of the cartridges was missing. The rifle, usually a source of comfort, had become merely a stick. Legionnaires fingered the smooth, dark walnut stocks feverishly. The air seemed filled with a choking menace.

"Wonder if we'll manage to get a boar." Lavoine bent from the saddle to speak banteringly to Forbach. "I have been curious to see just how it was done."

They reached the foot of the slope on which stood Guard Tower 9. It was identical in structure to such small forts in the Middle Atlas, resembling a gigantic, up-ended match box made of concrete, surrounded by a few strands of barbed wire. Four to six men were stationed there, relieved every three days. No sign of the enemy was seen on the way, and the planes, which had been soaring overhead shortly after dawn, had vanished.

When the halt was called, the Legionnaires breathed easier, for when Lavoine gave the next order they would be within an hour's march of their cartridges. But the lieutenant dismounted, stretched his legs, grinned.

"We'll rest. Stack arms."

The men obeyed; but although they sat down or sprawled on the grass with outward indifference, they could not keep their eyes from wandering from the officer to their empty rifles. This halt was another humiliation. Forbach became worried, thinking that a prolonged stay might puzzle the enemy's spies, doubtless concealed in the bushes of the distant slopes.

"Barlier!" Lavoine beckoned to the corporal, handed him a small stone. "I don't expect you to find a boar— but surely you can locate a rabbit, one single, little rabbit? Use this to kill it."

Barlier saluted, accepted the pebble and strode some distance from the rest, pretending to be waiting for game. This made a bizarre scene, these men exchanging joking words without a smile, with the consequent undercurrent of mirth flowing through their nervousness. Without orders, at the risk of displeasing the officer, Forbach detached four men to points of vantage. He missed the ordinary routine, the placing of automatic riflemen, the alert, cheering self-confidence of the men.

"An hour should be enough," Lavoine said, glancing at his watch. "Seventeen minutes left, Adjutant."

Cambard saw that the officer was perspiring. He understood that the tension was severe for Lavoine. In case of trouble, the officer would have a difficult explanation to make to his chiefs. But Lavoine evidently possessed a certain type of courage. He was willing to gamble his career for pride. He reasoned, very likely, that the natives could not know that the Legionnaires were without atnmunition, therefore would not attack before the day scheduled for their onrush.

Several men rose, pointed. Another green Bengal flare lifted from Blockhouse 4. Then one of the sentries posted by Forbach returned, reported that armed men were scrambling down the slopes. A plane appeared, circled above the blockhouse several times. Something must have occurred to cause this agitation.

"Halt over," Lavoine snapped.

Forbach consulted his watch and saw that the waiting time had been cut eight minutes. The men hastily formed threes and marched away.

"The hills are swarming with natives," a Legionnaire shouted.

"The plane— look! The plane is coming down on us!"

Some of the men who had served in the World War broke ranks and dodged into the bushes beside the trail as the machine swooped low over their heads. The reconstruction of the scene had been too exact for their quivering nerves, and they expected the ripping of a machine gun, the explosions of air bombs to follow. Forbach was glad, for the moment, that no rifle had been loaded.

"Message! He's dropped a message!"

Barlier was running down the trail to pick up a note fastened around a bit of metal with an elastic.

The men were straggling back to formation, shamefaced, grinning, as the lieutenant unfolded the paper. He scanned it rapidly, passed one hand over his lips in an unconscious gesture of dismay, and handed it to Forbach.

The adjutant read it, stammering the words, for he could not. read im silence. The news spread from one end of the detachment to the other.

"Blockhouse signals enemy closing on guard tower. Six men within short of food and water. Beg you assure their immediate relief and withdrawal to blockhouse."

There were men up there, six men who counted on the Legion for salvation. Forbach saw forming in the faces of his soldiers his own desperate resolution. It would be madness, absurd self-sacrifice, but the Legion had never been looked to in vain. A surge of unreasoning heroism swept them all.

"We must go back and get ammunition," Lavoine broke in, dully.

"Would mean two hours," Forbach protested. "The slobs will have closed in by that time and it will be too late."

"No cartridges— can't be helped, Adjutant."

"Can't be helped?" Forbach laughed loudly, all irresolution wiped out.

His powerful hands ripped Lavoine from the saddle, and at the same time he kicked the mare in the belly. She galloped away toward Ain-el-Rab. Then the adjutant took the revolver. from his chief's holster and slid it into his tunic.

"You can make monkeys out of us, you can march us out without cartridges, but you can't make the Legion quit those boys up there! There's no time to go for cartridges? All right! Well go without them." Forbach laughed louder. "You wanted to see Legionnaires use the bayonet? Come along and see. Cold steel? Splendid!"

He turned to the Legionnaires.

"What do you say? Do we go up there with the forks and bring those fellows out?"

For answer, the men whirled about and ran in the direction they had come from, with a sort of fervent, almost drunken verve, sweating, grinning. It was one of the moments when life meant little. And Forbach, urging Lavoine before him, knew that it was for such things they had come; that reckless selfsacrifice and high venture had been the lure to draw them from all corners of the world.

Suddenly the men's faces set; a strange, ominous calm came over them. The automatic rifle in the tower had opened fire. The enemy was near. Forbach ran easily, his brain numbed. With forty men properly armed, there would have been every chance of success. As it was, he felt it would be a useless gesture. But that gesture had to be made.

The first shot was fired at them, more shots; the first man fell. Forbach was beside him in two leaps, picked up the bayoneted rifle. He signaled to Cambard to take the right of the line.

"Down awhile, everybody. Get your breath before starting up that slope! There are cartridges in the tower, and we can kid them a few minutes that we're holding our fire!" He knelt himself, breathed deeply. Then he was up, lifted his hands. "Fix bayonets! *En avant, la Légion*!"

The bugler slung his rifle, as steel bristled along the line. He wiped his lips with the back of one hand, brushed the mouthpiece of his instrument against his trousers. Then the sprightly, ardent notes of the charge resounded. Forbach went in the lead, one hand on Lavoine's shoulder. A scattering of shots greeted them, and hillmen were seen running, at startling speed, rifles swinging low as they crouched.

"They know!" Barlier shouted. "Look at them coming at us in the open!"

Whether by instinct or reasoning, the mountain warriors had guessed that the rifles of the detachment were useless. Their own guns emptied, instead of dodging to cover to reload as usual, they closed in with knives, clubs and rifle butts. They appeared greedy for close conflict with these men who had so often mowed them down at long range with the deadly precision of their bullets.

"Lie down when they're close in," Forbach called to Lavoine, suddenly remembering that the officer was altogether unarmed.

And he hurled him to the ground as the first opponent leaped at them from behind a bush. At the same moment the two parties clashed along the entire line, men whirled nearby, but Forbach could pay no heed to them.

As always in bayonet fighting, he felt that he was living in a nightmare, both his own movements and those of his foe seeming unreal, utterly deliberate and slow. He saw the straight, needle-like blade of a home-made dagger come in sight beneath the rifle's bole, which the native clutched with one hand. The point rose toward his chest. And his own right hand traveled to meet a wrist, his fingers gripped a bony forearm. The warrior's face, was very near his eyes, and he saw the contraction of his effort in the gathering muscles of his jaws, saw flecks of spittle clinging to the straggling beard and mustache.

At the same time there rose in his mind a contrasting picture of himself, his face tense and suddenly white, contorting with hatred and terror, for he was afraid, mortally afraid of the steel, as all men are at heart, and knew that in his eyes could be read the same speculation he read in those of his enemy. In a few seconds who would be alive?

The arm rose resistlessly; the blade ripped through the thin cloth. He felt the touch of the metal on his bare flesh. But the blade rasped on an obstacle,

the revolver in his tunic, then tore through the garment, unstained. Forbach's left hand ripped the rifle from the other's grasp. The weapon hurtled back until the handle of the bayonet was firm in the adjutant's fist. And the Legionnaire stabbed upward as with a knife.

The mountaineer collapsed gently, as if his body had been hinged. Forbach looked about, saw men rising, and as they swayed their heads warily to seek new danger their eyes met his with dim recognition and intense astonishment that they were still alive. The adjutant saw Lavoine among them, clutching a curved knife. The fool had attacked a hillman with his bare hands— and had won! Bayonets jabbed, butts swung, crushing out tenacious life in men who refused to die.

FORBACH saw the Barbed wire within two hundred yards.

But heedless of the shots fired upon them from the tower, the mountain people faced the Legionnaires. Both parties understood they were struggling for the same prize, the cases of reserve ammunition stored in the building.

"Into them!" Forbach shouted.

There was no need for him to push Lavoine now. The officer sped like a frightened hare. He had picked up a rifle and seemed avid to use the bayonet. He found what he sought, threw his whole weight into the blow, tumbled on his prone foe. When he rose, Forbach saw that his arms were red to the elbow, his tunic spattered with blood. Then the adjutant looked down at his own hands, and saw that they also were moist, sticky, red.

He took another deep breath and went ahead.

Again there was that confused, chaotic clash, the mêlée, with grunts, shouts, screams. Forbach was deafened by the detonation of a rifle close to his face, felt prickling burns on his neck and cheeks, while the stench of burnt powder filled his nostrils. The man who had missed him point-blank closed in. But this time Forbach was wary, and with a swift, deft motion he avoided the clutching fingers.

Forbach stepped to one side, as in the fencing drill, gained clearance, - then rammed the blade home. Foolishly the other sought to ward off the lunge with one arm, and the twenty-two inch spike pierced through the biceps to reach the breast beyond.

A step backward to recover, and he was ready again. Some one clutched at his legs, and he reversed the rifle to smash down with the butt. It was a wounded Legionnaire groping for support. The adjutant shook him off. He could be picked up on the way down— if any one ever came down!

The air was filled with thunder, and the tack-tack-tack of a machine gun dominated the tumult, while an immense shadow swept the struggling men.

The plane! The intervention of the aviators gave the Legionnaires a respite. They rushed upward.

Forbach tore his trousers on the wires, got through to the cleared space between it and the wall. Legionnaires were knocking off the lids of boxes thrown tó them from the platform; cartridges were tossed into eager hands.

"Where's the sergeant in charge?" Forbach called.

"Up here— come on in—"

Forbach entered the building. There was light in the small room, flooding through the trapdoor in the platform's flooring. Empty shells jerked out of the automatic rifle tumbled down, glittering, struck with sharp little clicks on the rungs of the ladder, clearly audible above the hammering detonations.

"Come down out of there. We've got to leave," Forbach shouted, "and that plane can't handle them forever."

"All right, coming down— just a few rounds more," the Tirailleur promised.

The Legionnaires outside were shooting rapidly. Forbach heaved a grunt of relief. With ammunition, the retreat could be covered, the wounded picked up. Success was a certainty with no greater risks involved than are usual in combat. Cambard came in, escorting Lavoine.

"He wants to see you." The sergeant held a handkerchief to his brow, which was slashed open. "Say, we left seventeen on the way up and—"

Lavoine pushed him aside violently to face Forbach. The lieutenant's face was grimy, and as he passed one hand over his eyes his tears mingled with the dust and soot on his face.

"You know, it's up to me! Adjutant, an old soldier like you will understand. I can't face court-martial; I can't live with those lives on my conscience! This man is trying to keep me from it. He reasons— he reasons—"

"Cambard, get out and stay out. You're needed with the men," Forbach snapped. When the sergeant had left, he looked at the officer with quick sympathy. "I get you! You want your gun, eh?"

"My gun, yes, my gun."

"Listen, you've treated us rotten, but you behaved like a man on the way up. You're a soldier, and you get the gun." The veteran drew the weapon, an old-fashioned service revolver, from his tunic, removed five shells which he held in his hand, and presented it to Lavoine, butt first as was proper. "One cartridge's enough."

"Thanks," the lieutenant whispered.

"Better wait until the guys upstairs have gone; the less they see the less they'll talk. Nobody'll know you did this yourself. I'll say you were hit."

The adjutant stood on the first rungs of the ladder, shouted:

"Eh, you, up there! Staying all day?"

When the sergeant and his automatic rifle crew had slid down and darted out of the door, Forbach nodded to Lavoine.

He knew that the officer hated him deeply, indirectly held him responsible for what had happened. And he wondered whether Lavoine would not chance shooting him down first, to take one of the remaining shells for himself later.

But Lavoine thought only of his own remissness, of the seventeen casualties he would have to account for before a court of brother officers. Despair and shame had wiped out thought and hatred.

Forbach heard the shot and mounted the stairs. Lavoine was dead. Forbach picked up the weapon, for arms must not be allowed to fall into the hands of the enemy. Then he turned toward the door to join his detachment. But before leaving he halted for a last duty. He turned, stood at attention and saluted.

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8: The Strange Case of Alan Corwin

George L. Knapp

1872-1950

Blue Book, Jan 1922

"WHAT'S the matter, Isabel?" Isabel Penfield stopped toying with the ears of the Alsatian police dog beside her, looked up and made a fairly successful effort to smile.

"Nothing very much, Doctor. Only— I'm frightened a little— about Alan."

"What's the conceited scamp been doing now?" Dr. Freeland demanded.

"He— he wants—" She seemed to have difficulty in stating her case, and the old physician stated it for her:

"He wants to marry you? That's all right; anybody would. He isn't trying any cave-man stunts, is he?"

"No," said Isabel, laughing.

"Shouldn't think he would, while Cap's around." This with a glance at the dog, who pricked up his ears and thumped his tail on the floor in recognition. "Doesn't Alan know you're engaged to John?"

"Yes, but— he persists in thinking that the engagement was arranged by our parents, and doesn't count. They did want it, but—" She paused, flushed and then went on defiantly: "We've ratified the arrangement. Alan wont see it that way. He— insists that John has no— right to me, as he puts it. I told him I had some rights in the matter myself; and for a moment, I thought he would strike me. He didn't, though."

"Nice behavior for the man who's, supposed to be John Fairchild's closest friend," commented Doctor Freeland. Isabel took up the word eagerly:

"Doctor, that's just the point I want to talk to you about. I believe Alan hates John, hates him bitterly. It sounds silly, but I believe it's true. I've felt for a long while that it hurt Alan's vanity to have John helping him so many times. He thanks John, of course, and he's really returned the favors to some extent, once or twice, but— I'm sure he hates John, just the same."

"You'll be a psychologist, if you don't look out, young lady," warned the doctor. "When was this interview at which Alan lost his charming temper?"

"Yesterday. He called me up this morning and wanted to come over to see me this afternoon. Then— I wish I'd thought twice before doing it— I wrote him a letter and sent it by special messenger."

"Telling him what?" asked the practical physician, as Isabel paused in her story.

"Telling him that I loved John Fairchild, and meant to marry him, and that I wouldn't marry Alan Corwin under any conditions," said Isabel. "And— I'm afraid. Not for myself—he'll be disagreeable, but he wont hurt me. I'm afraid for John."

THE DOCTOR'S laugh rumbled out, frank and satisfying.

"That's the last thing you need worry about, Isabel. John's safe. Alan isn't going to shoot him from ambush, and if he doesn't do that, he can't do anything. John could break Alan in two; John has more money and a fifty times better standing in the community than Alan ever will have. His egotism may make an unpleasant scene or two, but that's the worst you have to expect. Poor Alan—always his own worst enemy!"

"His only enemy," corrected Isabel.

"I gather you haven't spoken to John about this?"

"No. I hate to shatter his faith. He's been standing up for Alan so long that it's come to be a habit. School, college, business, over in France— and I know Alan hates him for every favor. I must tell John very soon, though. You think it's foolish, Doctor, but— I'm afraid."

"Of course, you've said nothing to your father?"

"If I had, you'd have heard the explosion, clear here! Dear, peppery old Dad! He simply can't abide Alan."

"Did Aunt Nellie hear the interview?"

"No, but she's down on Alan too. She tried to tell me a dream about him this morning, but I dodged it. You are my only confidant, Doctor."

"And I'm not much good, eh? Well, here's a piece of sound advice. Suppose you and John get married, right away."

"You think that—"

"Would tie Alan's hands? Certainly. I think he's helpless now, but if you want to make sure of it, there's the plan. Let me suggest it to John."

"All right," said Isabel with a little flush. They rose together, and he took her hands.

"Go back by way of the office, my dear," he said, "and have John take you out to lunch. I may say a word to him before you get there." She nodded, stood on tiptoe to kiss him, and left him looking after her with affectionate eyes. Of all the numerous '"kids" he had helped bring into the world and watched over to maturity, there was none of whom he was fonder than Isabel Penfield. If she had a rival in his regard, it was the "six feet of common sense" whom she was to marry.

ii

IF Dr. Freeland could have looked into Alan Corwin's law-office, he might have changed his mind about the absence of danger. Corwin sat alone, staring fixedly at the wall. He sat rigid, with military erectness, but the fingers of his right hand drummed softly on the desk at his side. By almost any signs that would be put into words, he was calm; yet a child would have known that the man was in a savage temper. It would have taken an older and shrewder observer to see that his anger was not so much controlled as concealed, that even here, in the privacy of his office, he was wearing a mask; but the fact, once grasped, was plain enough. His black eyes now and then broke their steady stare to give lightning-like side glances toward the door or the desk; there were twitchings of his lips which seemed the suppressed beginnings of a snarl; and even the involved rhythm of his drumming was instinct with menace for some one.

An interruption roused him— a disreputable but profitable client, Mellis by name, whom Corwin had cleared from the well-grounded charge of dealing in contraband drugs. The man gave evidence of having come on important business, but he did not state it. He sensed the storm raging behind the sallow mask, asked a couple of trivial questions, and withdrew. Corwin followed him to the door, spoke to the girl in the outer office, locked himself in and sat down to his silent drumming again.

Isabel's letter lay open on his desk. Her picture, the eyes dancing with mischief, instead of clouded as Dr. Freeland had last seen them, stood near it. Farther back was the photograph of a man in football costume, with stalwart frame and frank, forthright-looking eyes, and a tangle of curly hair. This was John Fairchild, Alan's closest friend but his successful rival, the man whom Alan now hated with the greatest bitterness he ever had felt— and he was rather famous as a hater, too.

Corwin turned to his desk, picked up his friend's picture with a soft, deliberate movement that somehow suggested the clutch of a strangler, studied it for a full minute; then with a negative shake of the head he put it down with equal softness, and took the letter. This detained him but a moment; he threw it down, rose, paced the office three or four times and seated himself again.

"Deliver me from my friends!" he quoted aloud, and the malignity he had been hiding flashed out, the mask dropped, and anyone who knew him could have followed his thoughts.

John Fairchild was his enemy. True, Fairchild always had been kind to him, had defended him when others criticised, fought his battles in school, helped him out of scrapes in college, loaned him money, thrown him legal business. Fairchild had been a loyal friend in the training-camp, a rock of support in the brief but feverish season overseas. But all the time he had been a foil and a reproach to Alan Corwin.

"He's made small of me!" muttered Corwin. He had heard a Southern mountain soldier use the words to explain a savage assault on a comrade. '"He's made small of me." It was true. By the simple process of being big himself, John Fairchild had made small of Alan Corwin. John's generous kindliness had thrown the lesser man's selfseeking petulance into sharp relief. John's sound sense made the other's brilliancy seem petty. Alan had been decorated for valor displayed in getting his company— with John's help—out of a tight place which a little foresight would have avoided. John had not been decorated, but he did his full measure of work and was described by his general as an officer who never wasted a man. Isabel was right. Alan hated John; and Alan Corwin, with his hatred at this pitch, was a dangerous enemy for anyone. He knew as he sat there that one of the chief motives of his life had been his desire to outdo John Fairchild; and now—

"By God, I'll beat him this time!" he exclaimed. He caught up Fairchild's picture, crumpled the slight frame, tore the photograph across, crushed the pieces and flung them in the farthest corner of the room. For a moment he stood glaring; then the mask came over his face again, and he went out.

iii

"HONK! Honk!" The horn sounded time after time before Corwin noticed it at all, and then only to curse the noise. Then he heard his name called, and looked up. John Fairchild was signaling him from a touring car across. the street.

"Come on and go for a ride!" called Fairchild, moving ahead to the crossing. Corwin swore to himself, opened his lips to shout refusal, changed his mind and started across. This might be a good time to pump Fairchild, if nothing more. Not till he reached the car did he see that his rival was not alone. Dr. Freeland was sitting beside him.

"Pile in, Alan," commanded Fairchild. "Were going out to the Institute Hospital; Dr. Jimmy's got something to show us about Johnson. I was going to your office when the Doctor saw you mooning along."

It was too late to turn back; besides, Johnson had been in Alan's company, and he was expected to show interest. He did so, cursing mentally the

demands of fool philanthropists who compelled sensible people to waste time on underlings. "What's happened to Johnson?" he asked. "Not worse, I hope."

"Better, from what Jimmy says," returned Dr, Freeland, for Fairchild was paying strict attention to the wheel. "He seems to think he has scored a triumph, so we're going out to see. By the way, we're all bound to secrecy.

"All right," said Alan. The subject bored him already, but offered a ready change. "That dope-fiend still with Jimmy at the hospital?" he demanded.

"Don't speak that way, Alan," said the old physician in mild reproof. "It isn't Lee's fault. Yes, he's still there, and with Jimmy to oversee him, he's one of the finest operators in America."

Corwin only grunted in answer. The traffic jam thinned, and Fairchild spoke over his shoulder, eyes still at the front:

"What were you grousing about when we tooted for you, Alan?"

"How did you know I was grousing?" came the sharp retort.

"Oh, you looked as if you were having one of your nice, quiet hating spells."

"Perhaps I was," said Corwin. Fairchild, occupied with a crossing, did not notice the peculiar tone of the reply. Dr. Freeland did, and his brows drew down in a quick movement as he stared at the speaker and remembered Isabel's alarm.

Once out on the West Drive, with a reasonably clear field, Fairchild gave the engine gas till the indicator showed just one mile less speed than that sanctioned by law, and held the car at that pace for mile after mile with scarcely a quiver of the needle. He was a driver with whom the most nervous people felt safe. His big hands looked able to twist the wheel out of its socket, if need arose; and more comforting than his strength was the assurance of his watchfulness. There was no tension, no 'strain about his pose; he bore his part in the scattering conversation, but he was driving first and talking afterwards, and it was clear that nothing escaped him. There were several cars nearer the scene, but it was Fairchild's horn that roused a careless nursemaid whose charge had toddled to the curb and was stepping down into the street. She swooped on the young adventurer with an insane shriek.

"If people will trust their brats to hirelings—" remarked Corwin acidly.

"Why, people who aren't hirelings must watch out," said Fairchild, waving his hand at the nursemaid as they swept by. In a few minutes more they were climbing the grade to the Institute Hospital.

The two ex-officers made a notable contrast as they stood for a moment before entering the building. Corwin was of moderate height, but Fairchild was inches taller and far sturdier. Corwin was immaculate in dress and retained something of the military bearing; Fairchild was easy-going in clothes and attitude. Corwin was dark, with sallow skin and blue-black hair that gave

plausibility to the tradition of an Oriental strain in the family; Fairchild had the hazel eyes and chestnut hair typical of that mixed breed called Anglo-Saxon. The contrast between the two men went much deeper than appearances. Corwin had more intellect than character; in Fairchild, solid character ruled an intellect much keener than it usually got credit for being. Perhaps I can sum it up best by saying that you instinctively compared Corwin to some member of the cat tribe, varying from a black panther to a domestic tabby, according to his mood and your measure of acquaintance with him; Fairchild quite as naturally suggested a dog, a shaggy sheepdog, for example, with something of the mastiff size and grip to him, a creature to be trusted to the uttermost.

CORWIN stood aside with a bow to let Dr. Freeland enter first. Fairchild put a helping hand under the older man's elbow coming up the steps. James Emory, wonder-worker of the Institute- Hospital though still in his thirties, and known to them all as "Dr. Jimmy," was in the hall to greet them.

"What's this about Johnson?" demanded Dr. Freeland.

"I think you'll find him improved, at least," said Emory, with an enigmatic smile. He was boy enough— artist enough— to love a dramatic display of his powers, and had no notion of spoiling the scene he had prepared by talking about it.

"If you've cured that leg in this time, you've performed a miracle," said Freeland as they entered the surgeon's private office.

"See for yourself, " said Emory. "Here he is.'

The door opened, and Johnson approached them, walking with a cane. He knew all present, and his hand flashed to salute as he recognized his former captain. Corwin answered negligently.

"These gentlemen want to see that damaged leg of yours, Johnson," said the surgeon.

"All right," returned the man obediently. He leaned his cane against the wall, dropped the loose hospital pajamas, and stood barelegged for inspection.

"Sit down, man, sit down!" exclaimed Dr. Freeland. Johnson did so, and the old physician, his face showing profound surprise, knelt before him to study the outthrust limb. When he saw it last, the bones of the lower leg were like rotten wood, splinters of them were working loose and coming out through open sores every day, and no treatment seemed to help. Now the entire space from knee to ankle showed sound and firm, though marked by scars. The doctor glanced at the other leg, then stooped to look more closely, started up, took the man by the ankles and brought his feet together. He held them thus for a full minute, glancing at each limb in turn, put them down gently and turned to the surgeon.

"It's a most amazing case," he said. "I congratulate you, Jimmy— and you too Johnson."

"Purty near's good as new, aint it?" said the man.

"Just about," said Freeland, smiling. At a nod from the surgeon, Johnson drew on his pajamas and went out. Dr. Freeland waited till the door closed, and his first question mystified his non-medical hearers:

"Does he know?" This with a jerk of the thumb in the direction Johnson had taken.

"Doesn't even guess," said the surgeon, smiling.

"Good— don't let him know," said Freeland. "How on earth did you get your material?"

"Well, first, what on earth are you savants talking about?" demanded Fairchild, grinning. "Take pity on two poor dubs, and let us in on the secret. We wont peach."

"Why,— this is very confidential, of course,— I've grafted a new leg on Johnson in place of the one the shell smashed." The two ex-officers looked blank incomprehension at the statement, and so the surgeon repeated it. "As for the material, that was a stroke of luck. You remember those yeggs that broke jail a few weeks ago, and how one of them was run over and smashed by an auto? That happened a quarter of a mile up the road here, and they brought him in, head crushed, back crushed, unconscious, not a half-hour of life in him, but his legs all right. I didn't shorten his span any, but Lee and I took his leg and put it on Johnson, and it's grown fast."

"Graft on a human leg!" exclaimed Corwin, stupefied.

"Why not?" said the surgeon. "Carrel grafted on a dog's leg, years ago, and several of us have done the same thing since. A man is much easier to work with than a dog."

"The real difficulty was with the blood vessels, wasn't it, until you invented that absorbable button for uniting them end to end?" asked Dr. Freeland.

"Yes," said the surgeon, "that simplified matters. It has enabled me to do something else, too. Wait."

HE took up the telephone and asked for Dr. Lee. In a few moments Lee entered. He was a tall, gaunt man, with clean-shaven face, long hands, long arms, long legs, a parchment skin, and feverbright eyes with pinpoint pupils. That he was a user of drugs could not be doubted by anyone who had the slightest knowledge of the subject, but as one looked at the fine features and patient hopelessness of his face, the term by which Corwin had referred to him seemed inexcusably brutal. He greeted the visitors, and his face lighted for a moment as he saw Dr. Freeland, who rose to shake hands with him.

"Lee deserves more than half the credit for Johnson's case," said Emory, "—as well as for the one I want to show you now. Is there anyone you can send for Tony, Lee?"

"I'll get him myself. Magno's here, by the way."

"Is he? Can you keep him out of the way till Tony comes, and then send him in?"

"Yes, I'll manage it."

He withdrew. Soon an interne entered, leading a dog of mixed breed in which mastiff seemed the dominant strain. Dr. Emory took him and unfastened the leash. "Look out for squalls," he said to his guests. "Down, Tony."

Tony was quiet. In a moment the door opened, and Dr. Lee ushered in a middle-aged Italian, who bowed to the surgeon, but had no time to speak. The dog gave a bark and sprang at him. The Italian, starting back in surprise and alarm, slipped and fell. Fairchild sprang to seize the dog, but the surgeon intercepted him, exclaiming: "Look! Look!"

Fairchild looked. The dog was licking the Italian's face, barking joyously, wriggling from nose to tail, giving every sign of a glad reunion with a beloved master. The man, his fear overlaid by surprise, sat up and tried to thrust back the eager animal. Dr. Emory spoke:

"Here, Tony! Here! Down!" The dog subsided, and the Italian struggled to his feet.

"Tony?" he said, pointing to the animal. "You calla heem Tony?"

"Yes. We couldn't save your Tony, so I got you another one. How do you like him?"

"Deesa bigga brute?" inquired the Italian. "How he know me?"

"I told him about you," said the surgeon, laughing.

"What else he know?"

"Lots of tricks. Try him."

The Italian tried him, and at each performance of the animal, the trainer's wonder grew. Here was a dog who did exactly what the previous Tony had done. After the third or fourth exhibition of this uncanny wisdom, the man stopped, crossed himself and faced the party.

"Smart, alla right. Devil smart, too. Signor—"

"You can't have him unless you promise to treat him well," said Emory sharply.

The Italian looked at the dog, then at the surgeon,*then round on the group and so back to the dog once more. He needed such an animal. It was a prize to find a creature that fitted so exactly in the dead Tony's place. He was afraid, but economic determinism triumphed.

"I take him. I treat heem alla right." He spoke of compensation, which was waved aside; he expressed his thanks, which no doubt were sincere; but as he went out with the eager dog, he voiced his real feelings:

"Ah!" he said. "I no lika deesa business!"

"TIMMY!" exclaimed Dr. Freeland, "did you transplant the brain from his dog into this animal?"

"Lee and I did together. What do you think of it?"

"As a stunt, it's marvelous, but it makes me afraid!"

"Why?"

"I don't quite know. Will you do it again?"

"I think not. The operation was under an anesthetic, of course, but the knitting of the nerve-trunks seemed extremely painful, I don't know why. The poor fellow howled, and I didn't dare give him morphine."

"If I said that the pain was nature's protest against too great an interference with her rules, you'd say I was an old fogy, I suppose?"

"Not that, but a little old-fashioned, perhaps," returned the surgeon, smiling.

"But, good heavens," exclaimed Fairchild, "is a creature's entire personality lodged in the brain?"

"Just about, among the higher animals," said the surgeon. "In a man even more so than in a dog. It doesn't matter whether you hold that personality is manifested through the brain or created by the brain, the connection remains the same. If you put the brain of an ignorant plantation negro in the skull of a Harvard professor, the creature which the outer world took for the professor would talk an Africanoid dialect and be afraid of ha'nts. The white man would furnish the house, but the negro would inhabit it."

"You couldn't do it with a man, could you?" asked Corwin.

"Certainly, if I had the chance," answered the surgeon. "Of course, I never will get it."

"Thank heaven for that, Jimmy!" remarked Dr. Freeland, earnestly. "Nature made the body a pretty fair index to the brain. Change the signs, put a rascal's instincts back of the face of an honest man— why, lad, it would be a conspiracy against the human race!"

The surgeon laughed. Corwin looked bored. "I think the rascals are the interesting people, Doctor," he said, with the superior air affected by pacifists and sophomoric critics. Fairchild rose suddenly, stood listening a moment, then opened the door. "Here's something a blamed sight better worth while than an argument on anatomy," he said, and stepped into the hall. A phonograph

somewhere near was playing a superb record of César Franck's "Panis Angelicus."

Corwin swore under his breath, and then resumed his pose of superior tolerance. "What John hears in that sappy stuff is beyond me," he remarked; but John paid no heed. He stood motionless till the music ended, then turned back into the office with a long breath.

"That makes me feel better," he said.

"Shall we go?"

But Dr. Freeland wanted to wait for a talk with Lee, and would go downtown by another route when his talk was over. The younger men left without him.

iv

CORWIN had made up his mind to force the issue with Fairchild, and asked if they could not drive on for a chat before turning back. Fairchild answered with a cheery "Of course," and headed up the steep, curving road beyond the hospital. The powerful car made little of the grade, but John jerked his thumb at the steep slope at the side, and voiced his protest against carelessness. "Ought to put a high parapet on this road," he said. "Car might go over there some day."

Corwin did not answer. They reached the level ground at the top, and John gave Alan a friendly pat on the knee. "Fire when you are ready, old man," he said. "What is it?"

"It's about Isabel," said Corwin without hesitation.

Fairchild's look showed little of the surprise he felt at this announcement. "That's a subject that interests me," he said. "What about Isabel?"

"Do you think it fair, John, to hold Isabel to that old arrangement made between her parents and .yours before either of you could have seriously thought of marriage?"

John slowed down, tossed away his cigar, and looking straight ahead, asked:

"Fair to whom, Alan?"

"Fair to Isabel, first of all?" returned Corwin. "After that, is it fair to others?"

Fairchild's jaw set for a moment in a rather grim line, and then relaxed.

"Suppose you say just what you want, Alan."

"I want an even start," said that consummate egotist; "—or as near an even start as I can get. I love Isabel too—a great deal more, I think, than you do. I

want this French matrimonial arrangement called off, let each suitor start fair, and may the best man win."

It was as Isabel had said; John had formed the habit of taking care of Alan Corwin. With any other man, even John's good temper would not have permitted the discussion to last another moment. But the habit was strong. He only asked, in a voice carefully controlled:

"Did Isabel tell you to say this to me?"

"No, of course not. But she feels bound by the old agreement."

"Did she say so?"

"Not in so many words."

"In any words, Alan?" John thought he had brought the matter to a focus, but the nimbler brain evaded the issue with a flank movement.

"I am not hiding behind Isabel's skirts, John," said Alan with an air of exasperated virtue. "I am speaking on my own authority, and asking you for what I consider fair play. Your father and Isabel's planned your marriage before she was out of short dresses or you out of knee pants. Your father is gone—I felt I had lost the last grown friend who understood me when he died; but Isabel's father lives, and has ` kept the plan alive—he's always had a prejudice against me. The only course I had was to come to you. I must say you haven't made it easy."

"I hadn't noticed any embarrassment on your part," said John, with sharper sarcasm than he often permitted himself. He raised his hand in signal to any car behind, turned out of the road, and stopped.

"You've a wrong idea about some things, Alan," he 'said, quietly, though there was no lack of decision in his voice. "A little thinking ought to put you right. My father was past sixty when I was born; I was only fifteen when he died. He couldn't have ordained our marriage, you see. As for Isabel's father, I've heard you say that she winds him round her finger, and it's true. Her mother died before my father did. My mother lived long enough to get my cable after the Armistice, but she was always your friend, as you know. I'm reminding you of these things to show you that it was impossible for Isabel's parents and mine to arrange our marriage if we hadn't agreed with them."

"You don't deny that the arrangement was made?" interrupted Corwin.

"I don't deny that our folks wanted us to get married, and said so, rather early. But neither Isabel nor I ever thought of their wishes as binding. We were pals from our kindergarten days. I fought her battles just as—"

"Just as you did mine?" said Corwin with a sneer, as John stumbled for a word. "You needn't remind me of it. I know how the ledger stands."

"You make it hard to talk with you and keep one's temper, Alan," said John. "I had no idea of reminding you of an obligation. I mean to say that Isabel and I liked each other as children, and the feeling has grown. Perhaps the talk of our parents gave me an advantage, but if so, that can't be helped now. The engagement is of our making, not theirs, and I shall not make a move to break it. If you want to ask Isabel to break it, I sha'n't stop you."

"You won't?" The sneer was a little too pointed this time.

"I could stop you very easily, Alan," said John. His big hand dropped on Alan's slim wrist, and though the touch was gentle, it was the gentleness of padded steel. John went on:

"Isabel has made her choice, and I don't think she wants to change it. If she does, it's her right, but she'll have to say so herself. You get a little wild, sometimes, Alan. You've made yourself believe you've got a grievance, but you haven't. Besides, I know you. If you were to marry Isabel, you'd be weary of your bargain in half a year. You want things only until you get them—II've watched you. Now, I think we'll go back to town."

HE turned the car and started back.

Alan Corwin, baffled and raging, sought round and round the subject for a new opening, and found none. In desperation he repeated his former attack.

"John, I insist that you call off that old parental arrangement and start over."

Even John's good nature might not have been proof against this preposterous demand; but he had himself well in hand, and he was profoundly sorry for anyone who could not marry Isabel Penfield, and he recognized the old, familiar note of hysteria in Corwin's voice. Unluckily he took the old, familiar way of dealing with it. "There, Alan," he said, putting out his hand. "We wont talk about it any more now."

"We wont?" Corwin fairly shrieked the reply. To be patronized, as he considered it, by the man he was trying to browbeat and bully was the last straw. Caution was gone, the last rag of regard for consequences vanished. "We wont talk about it? By God, we will, and we'll do something about it, too! You needn't think you can ride over me with your money and your big fists, damn you! We'll settle this right here!"

They had just started down the hill above the hospital as Corwin sprang up, clutching at the wheel with one hand and reaching for his hip pocket with the other. The sweep of a big arm flung him back in the seat and clamped him there so tightly that he could not draw his automatic, but the momentary shift of John's eyes and Alan's drag at the wheel brought disaster. The car went over the edge, tipped, tottered and then rolled crashing down the steep hill.

Corwin heard the shriek which testified that their misfortune had been seen. He saw the windshield shiver into javelin heads at the first crash— one of them cut his face as it passed. He felt a terrific shock near the base of the spine as the car rolled over him, but as he came uppermost again on the turn, the arm that was holding him went limp, and he drew up his right hand without thinking what it contained. There was another shock, followed by a burning pain through his body; the car rolled on without him, and then came blankness.

CORWIN struggled back to consciousness with a stinging sensation on his tongue. Aside from that, he seemed disembodied. Dr. Emory was stooping over him.

"Listen, Captain Corwin, can you understand me?"

"Yes." His mind was clear, but he felt very tired.

"You and Fairchild have been close friends all your lives?"

"Yes." It was none of this meddler's business, anyway.

"You grew up together; you know all his friends well— all?"

"Yes."

"Captain Corwin, listen carefully: is there any reason why you should not take Fairchild's place and carry on his work?"

A dim adumbration of what the question meant reached Corwin's consciousness, and he fastened to the chance like a leech.

"None whatever," he said faintly. "Is— he hurt?"

"You are both hurt. Your body is a wreck. Your back is broken— your pistol went off, and the bullet pierced both kidneys. Captain Fairchild's body is unhurt, but a piece of glass has driven in above the left eye, and torn the whole front of his brain to bits. His mind is dead; if his brain heals, the shrinking scar-tissue will kill his body. You saw what I did with the dogs. Shall I do it with you?"

"You mean?"

"Put your brain in his skull, yes."

"Do it."

"Do you give me your pledge to live his life, honorably. and fairly?"

"Yes, of course. Do it."

"I may fail, and there may be very great pain?"

"Do it. Give me his body and I will do his work. I— I loved him. Quick!"

Almost with the word he caught the whiff of ether, and then, for an indefinite season, he knew no more.

CORWIN'S next sensation was one of vague discomfort. He did not locate it, did not know whether it was mental or physical, did not think about it at all. The lower, more basic braincenters, last to lose their grip and first to regain it, did not bother about distinctions between body and mind. They registered discomfort, and nothing more.

The uncomfortable feeling became stronger, and was not constant. There was some implication here which troubled him; but at first the gradually waking higher cells could make nothing of it. Then after several lapses into complete unconsciousness, a word struggled up out of some black void— time. That was it. Time was passing, and the discomfort was growing worse. And these intervals— there were many of them before he could define them, even by a word, but at last it came— *sleep*. He was uncomfortable except when asleep. He would go to sleep.

He did so; at least, he lost consciousness. When he awoke again, the discomfort was stronger still. He was lapped in a blanket of tingling sensations— this idea did not frame itself in words, but he forbore to search for them. Something else was troubling him even more, and he fumbled dumbly for an indefinite period before he could get a handle for it— light. Flashes of light were stabbing him, and the tingle had become a burning. He found the word for that now, but he could not follow it out. Sleep— let him sleep.

There was another spell of unconsciousness, which perhaps was slumber— another and another, before he awoke with a goodly share of his mind ready for work. The flashing and burning distracted him, but a word which he had been seeking now came readily— *space*. It no longer seemed important. Something had happened, something that explained all this discomfort and burning. Fairchild— yes, he hated Fairchild, but he was getting at it, now. Fairchild, quarrel,— the cause of the quarrel did not come to him,— accident. People suffered after accidents, but that was not it. Suddenly out of the void came the surgeon's questions, and his own imperious reply, and a sickly sweet smell; and then, before he could fuse these images into one, they disappeared in blankness.

They must have pieced themselves together while he was unconscious, for he understood them perfectly when he next awoke. He had told the surgeon to put his brain, Alan Corwin's brain, in the body of John Fairchild. This must have been done. Then this pain, and the light that seemed intolerable, and the roaring noise that he now catalogued for the first time, must be the result of that transplanting. A dog had howled. That had something to do with the matter— he did not know what. The main thing was that he, Alan Corwin, was

taking possession of the body of John Fairchild, and the body was protesting against the demoniac seizure. Even as he recalled the phrase, a terrific pain struck him so fiercely that he lost consciousness again.

For a season thereafter Corwin's life consisted of periods of intolerable agony, interrupted by spells of partial or complete unconsciousness. He did not tell himself that his arms, legs or body hurt— *he* hurt; he was one vast, frightful pain. He lost thought of time. He ceased to count. He did not know whether there were ten such alternations of pain and sleep, or a hundred.

Then came another variation. He woke with a feeling that he had been unconscious longer and more completely than usual, and that some change had happened in the meantime. He pondered idly for a time before realizing what it was; the pain was less. It had sunk to a tingle again. His arm— the right one?— was bothering him, and there was a numb prickle that seemed to come from his thighs. The fact lay idle in his consciousness for a spell; then he grasped its meaning, and felt the first throb of doubt. Had he a body again, or not? Those grisly war-stories of men who complained of pain and cold in amputated limbs came to him. Was he in similar case, or had he really arms and thighs? Had the nerve-trunks knitted, or—

He was breathing! Columbus never made a more important discovery. He tried to hold his breath, but that was beyond his power. The nerve-wires had knitted enough to tell him that he had a chest and which was rising and falling in even movement, but would not transmit the order to halt. The flashes of light had ceased to trouble him, but he could not see. The buzzing and roaring were less, but he listened vainly to catch an intelligible sound. It was hard work, being a supplanting demon. He would go to sleep.

HE slept soundly for hours. When he awoke, his mind was a blank; then this very blankness began to have a meaning. He sensed this, vaguely at first, then more directly, and began to fumble for the explanation. Was he dead, a mere disembodied spirit? He rejected that notion without knowing why. Was he— even as he sought to frame another guess, he caught the truth. He was not in pain. The nerve-trunks had joined; the brain of Alan Corwin had taken possession of the body of John Fairchild, and the composite being was whole again!

He felt an exulting assurance on this point, and then, contradictorily enough, sought to test it. The first trial succeeded; he could hold his breath for a few seconds. The second failed; he could move his eyelids, but could not see, and the effort brought back those flashes of light that had stabbed him so cruelly before. He dropped that experiment and tried to move his arms— John Fairchild's arms, he corrected himself. He failed again, but the difficulty

seemed outside his body. Very well, could he move the fingers? He could; and for minutes he lay in infantile content, opening and closing his hands. He tried to move his feet, but could not tell whether he managed it or not. He paused, trying to devise a new test, and there came an interruption.

Up to date all his sensations save two had been within the body he had taken for his own. Something was restraining his arms, and something was blocking his eyes. Now came a sensation from without. At first it was merely a curious vibration, a rather pleasant jarring. Then he recognized it as sound, yes, musical sound; and it ceased to be pleasant and became charged with some disagreeable recollection. It grew louder, clearer, more distinct, sweeping in rhythmic waves into his consciousness; and suddenly, though the lips of John Fairchild. did not move, the brain of Alan Corwin registered a petulant curse. Why did he have to be wakened by the tune which the hated Fairchild had paused to hear with delight, the sappy "Panis Angelicus"?

He wanted to weep in sheer self-pity. The emotion was too much for him and he dropped off to sleep again.

AT Corwin's next awakening, he was still without pain, though there was a tingling sensation in one thigh—yes, the right. His toes felt uncomfortable too, but not seriously. He drew a deep breath, and noticed that his mouth was open. He tried to close it, found that he could do so, and could move his tongue— found also that he was atrociously hungry. He renewed his experiments with the arms; they tried to answer his will, but were manacled in some fashion. So were the feet. What did they mean by tying him this way and letting him starve? A vague groan escaped him and received instant answer.

"Are you awake?" His suspended breathing must have been taken for an answer, for he heard light footsteps, and then the same voice, a little farther away, said: "Captain Fairchild is awake." "Always Fairchild," he thought petulantly, and then remembrance came so suddenly that he gasped. He was Fairchild now, and he must play his part, or the supplanting demon would be detected and driven out, and—

Reassuring, competent fingers dropped on his pulse, and Dr. Emory's voice said:

"Captain Fairchild, can you hear me?"

"Um-m-m!" It was the nearest he could come to speech, but it sufficed.

"All right; don't try to talk. See if you can squeeze my finger."

He put a passionate desire into the grip.

"Fine! The nerve-trunks have knitted splendidly. Now, if you are hungry, squeeze again."

The fingers closed so tightly that the surgeon laughed aloud.

"You're all right. Now, see if you can swallow."

A few drops of liquid touched his tongue, and he swallowed them without difficulty. At first he only sensed that they were wet, then that they were warm, then that they had a taste, a good taste. He drank eagerly till the supply ceased, and the surgeon's voice said:

"Now to sleep again. Perhaps tomorrow you can talk."

vi

NEXT morning, when asked how he felt, Corwin answered: "A—ight."

It was his first essay in speech in his new personality, and filled him with pride.

"That's fine," said the surgeon. "Any pain?"

"Nuh!" It was really less articulate than that, but it served. Dr. Emory spoke in a lower tone:

"Miss Penfield is here to see you. Can you remember that you are Captain Fairchild if I let her come in for a moment?"

His voice was grave, but the false Fairchild did not notice this. He had not thought of Isabel since the accident, but the news of her presence filled him with exultation. Isabel would be his now. He cleared his throat and spoke, struggling painfully for control of his tongue:

"I —ember. Shuh— in."

"Don't try to talk," the surgeon warned him.

She came so quietly that the impostor, wrapped in his exultant egotism, did not hear her till she spoke. "John," she said softly, and touched his hand. He gripped her fingers as hard as he could and wrestled with his tongue again. "Belle!" he said, and felt her start; Alan often called her that. ''Is—bel," he managed, recognizing his blunder. She dropped on he: knees beside the bed and kissed his lips.

"Oh, John!" she said. "I'm so glad! I mustn't talk to you, and get you excited; but it's you, it's you, and you're getting well!"

Probably any other man in the city would have felt shame to cheat such wholehearted love as spoke in every tone; but the impostor gathered the pilfered affection to himself, and gloried in it. He returned her kiss fervently if awkwardly; then: "Good-by till tomorrow, dear heart!" And he heard her go out.

HE slept nearly the whole day— they had to waken him for meals— and put in an unbroken twelve hours that night. A whole series of days and nights of the same character followed, save that Isabel's visits were longer, and each time she came, he said a few more words. They had taken off the restraining

bandages, and though his eyes were still covered, it was with a thin pad, through which he could distinguish light. Strength and confidence were flooding into him with every hour of rest; he did not realize that the real trials might be ahead. The pain that had wracked him was no more than a memory, and he chuckled at times to think how easy the demoniac seizure had been accomplished. Then came a day on which Dr. Emory said:

"I think, Captain Fairchild, that you can stand a thorough examination now, and perhaps a little talk afterwards."

"Sure," said the false Fairchild promptly.

The surgeon first darkened the window that the light might not be excessive, and then uncovered the injured man's eyes. A very few moments made it certain that the optic nerves, at least, were knitted fully. The interloper could see, with both eyes or with either, and with both halves of each eye. He could tell such colors as could be used fairly in a test in the dim light, judge distances fairly well, respond in all ways as if eye and brain had been born together. The surgeon passed to other matters.

"Now we'll give you a general look-over," he said. He stripped the patient, tapped his reflexes, tested the command of each separate group of muscles and the response to touch. The left foot was not yet under perfect control, and there were parts of the back where even a sharp prod from a needle caused no sensation whatever; but the result, all things considered, was marvelously perfect:

"Tired?" asked the surgeon, when he had made sure of this.

"No," said the false Fairchild. "What else?"

"Nothing else in the testing line. I want to talk to you about— other things."

THE man on the bed was silent, wondering, and for the first time in many days, a little afraid. The surgeon was frowning and perplexed. "Captain," he said after a pause, "we've taken a big responsibility on ourselves already. I don't think we should make it any bigger."

"Do you want me to die?" demanded the impostor.

"No, no!" exclaimed Emory, laughing at the tragic tone. "Not at all. I want— here," he said, changing horses in his speech. "When I proposed that operation, I didn't know that the real Fairchild was engaged to be married. I don't think you've any right to carry out that engagement."

"How can I help carrying it out?" asked the false Fairchild after a pause.

"Not easily, I admit. But I think you can find an honorable way to do it, if you want to."

"I don't want to," said the man, abruptly. "But I couldn't if I did, and there's no reason why I should. Listen, Dr. Emory: It was a neck-and-neck race between— the other man and myself, which should. have her. He won—" And unseemly bitterness was creeping into his voice, and he had the wit to stop, get control of himself and go on in a more gracious way. "He won, and he deserved to; he was the better man. But I know I could win her now if I had my own body. Why should this body be a handicap, and bar me?"

"I DON'T like deceiving a woman, in any way," said Dr. Emory. He saw the difficulties, and he was not nimble enough in argument to meet the clever pleader who was confronting him, but his instincts were "I don't mind your stepping into the other man's business and property; you've promised to use them honorably, and of course you will; besides, you sacrificed some property of your own. But the lady— we've no right to dispose of her, Captain."

"But Doctor, I can't back out," insisted the false Fairchild. Opposition had roused his desire for Isabel to the fighting pitch, but he was battling with all the canniness in him. "What on earth could I say? What excuse could I give? How could I help acting like an intolerable cad— unless, of course, we tell her the truth."

"She wouldn't believe it, if we did," said the doctor. "I see the difficulty; but at least, there mustn't be any hurry. Let the lady have plenty of chance to get acquainted with the new Fairchild. Has she noticed any change?"

"No."

"I've made things easy for you," said Emory, not realizing that he was giving a weapon to a man who would have no scruples about using it. "I told them— Miss Penfield and her father— that there were some memories which you probably never would recover, and others that would come back slowly. The scar over your left eye helps to make that plausible."

"Thank you," said the impestor, seeing his advantage and determining to make the most of it.

"Dr. Freeland has been out to see you every day," went on Emory.

"Does he know?" asked the false Fairchild quickly.

"Not a word. No one knows but myself, Dr. Lee and Miss Lang, the nurse. We got along with one nurse, partly because we happened to be short but more to narrow the circle and make sure the secret wouldn't leak. I've a notion that Dr. Freeland wouldn't approve the experiment."

"He's an old fogy!" exclaimed the impostor impatiently.

"In some ways, yes, but he's the kindest and fairest man I ever knew. He pulled Dr. Lee out of the pit, and got me to give him a chance here, and nobody ever made good any finer."

"He still takes dope, doesn't he?" asked the false Fairchild.

"A regular ration, which we've found it impossible to reduce. But so long as we keep him from getting any more,— and it's very rarely that he feels the call for more, — he does superb work. You wouldn't be talking to me now if it weren't for his skill, and he wouldn't be alive if it weren't for Dr. Freeland. I think the old gentleman's here now."

"Send him in," said the interloper. He knew the old physician's kindness— none better; and he knew, too, that this kindly, gentle helper was uncommonly difficult to deceive. But there was no chance that he could hit on the truth here.

"John, boy," said Dr. Freeland, "you've been imitating all the seven sleepers at once. How are you this morning?"

"Feeling fine." It had been the real John Fairchild's stock response to such a question. Freeland sat down on the bed, took the big hand in both his own and petted it, soothingly. Even so had he petted the hand of Alan Corwin once, when that boy, then sixteen years old, had fallen sick while his flighty mother was away on some wild goose chase. The memory was almost too poignant to be endured.

"You're pale enough to interest the ladies, and that scar over your eye is going to be a fine beauty-mark. I might call you the Balafre, if he weren't such a scoundrel. Odd, but it gives you something of the dark look that Alan had, sometimes. Poor Alan!"

"Poor Alan," repeated the man on the bed, with different meaning but entire sincerity.

"Some day you must tell me about the accident," said Freeland. "Its rather puzzling to some of us. Well, I wont keep you awake any longer. Good-by, my boy."

He released the hand he was holding, caressed the sick man's forehead, and went out.

vii

WAKING early next morning, the interloper determined to try his control of his new habitation.

Placing both hands cautiously, he raised himself to a sitting posture. It was easy, but for a moment it caused such dizziness that he expected to fall. This passed, and he looked about. The knobs in the bedclothes which marked the position of his feet seemed farther away than was right, until he remembered that John Fairchild topped Alan Corwin by fully five inches. He glanced around at the room, an unusually pleasant hospital room with a vase of roses on the

little stand by the window. Even in the subdued light, he could see that they were the rich red tone that the real Fairchild had loved so well, and he growled petulanitly. Roses were too common, too bourgeois to interest the supplanter; he wanted something more outré, and if ordinary folk found it a bit repellant, so much the better.

He rubbed the newly healed scar on his forehead to allay a slight itching, and as he replaced his hand on the bedclothes, noticed it with a start. How big and strong it was— the kind of hand that could crush the life-out of an enemy, if the owner willed! He had seen it bend pokers and straighten horseshoes and tear decks of cards; he had seen it last when it flung a furious pigmy back into a seat, and pinned him there helplessly until released by the overturning of the car. Was this hand really his, after all? Would it obey its new master, or betray and crush him? Like all selfish egotists, he was profoundly superstitious at bottem; and this thought was so disquieting that he sank back in bed with a groan.

Two hours later, Dr. Emory found him still glooming.

"How's the grip this morning, Captain? Ouch! Now the other— go slow, man; my hands are my fortune! How is the head?"

"All right."

"No aches or pains?"

"None to speak of."

"Good! I think you can sit up a little tomorrow."

The inerloper answered with a crooked smile:

"I sat up this morning."

"You rascal! How did it go?"

"All right. Dizzy for a while, but that passed."

"What are you so glum about, then?" asked the surgeon. He closed the door and went on in a lower tone: "Are you worried over what I said about getting married?"

"A little," returned the false Fairchild. He had not thought of the subject that morning, but it was as good an evasion as any.

"There's no need of worry. If the lady is suited with the new Captain Fairchild, after a reasonable acquaintance with him, Tm willing to act as best man. All I want is to insure fair play. Now—" he reached for something on the stand at the head of the bed— "take a look at yourself."

"No, no, no!" exclaimed the interloper, turning away and shutting his eyes. "I don't want to look! Take it away!"

"You're not disfigured," said the surgeon.

"I don't care! I don't want to look! Take it away!"

"I've taken it away," said Emory, .replacing it on the stand. "But see here, Captain, this wont do. You must get used to your new face. I realize that it will be something of a shock, but the longer you wait, the greater that shock will be. After all, it wont be a strange face to you. It is that of your dearest friend."

"I know I'm foolish, but I can't help it, just now," returned the impostor, opening his eyes. "As soon as I'm out of bed, I want to take a look at myself, all over. I'm trying not to see even my hands until then."

ISABEL came an hour later, and her arrival lifted the man from his gloom—for a time. It would have been a strange man indeed, whom Isabel Penfield could not cheer. With her sparkling black eyes, olive skin, red lips, broad forehead and slightly end-up nose, she was extremely good to look at; and her frank, boyish comradeship made her the best of companions. Also it was clear to the most casual inspection that she was deeply in love with John Fairchild, and the impostor masquerading in Fairchild's body was not above securing love by false pretenses.

"Do you realize, Isabel," he said, "that this is the first time I've seen you since the accident?"

"I do." She smiled; then her face went grave. He thought she was going to ask a question, but she only said:

"That terrible accident!"

"It was— rather bad," he agreed.

"It might have been worse," she answered.

"Yes, we both might have been killed."

"Or the wrong one might have been killed," she said gravely. Once more it seemed as if she meant to ask a question, but once more she changed her mind and merely smiled. He felt worried and aggrieved.

"What do you mean by that?" he asked.

"I mean that if anyone had to go, we're all glad, and I most of all, that it wasn't you."

So that was the way she felt, was it? Willing, nay; eager that Alan Corwin, with his great abilities and unusual nature, should be slain as a sacrifice to save the fathom of commonplace clay that was— that had been— John Fairchild. That was her return for Alan Corwin's passionate love!. A cold anger began to grow in him, overlaid for the time by his ever-ready self-pity.

"I see," he said. "Poor Alan!"

"Yes, poor Alan! But his only real troubles were of his own making, John. They were the natural result of his disposition."

"Isn't that rather ungenerous?" he returned. The phrase was one which the real John Fairchild had used frequently, and which Alan Corwin in his proper

person never used at all. Isabel smiled at the well-remembered words, and could not know that they were a mask.

"Perhaps," she said. "Truth is ungenerous, sometimes." Then, sensing his distaste for the subject, though never dreaming the cause, she brought up another topic:

"Aunt Nellie was coming with me to see you today, but some one of her mystical societies cast a shoe or staged a lecture or something, so she had to postpone it. You know how seriously she takes such things."

"I know," he said shortly. He considered Aunt Nellie the most tiresome person in the world, but for all that, her constant patter of supernatural matters impressed him. Isabel laughed reminiscently, and went on:

"The day of the accident, she had a vision of you. You were going under a dark cloud, and she will have it you're there yet."

"She's always— been given to visions."

The pause and change of voice showed that he meant to say something else. Isabel did not know what, but she could not help seeing that he was depressed, and when it became evident that her efforts could not enliven him again, she left. The impostor turned his face to the wall and meditated on the folly and uncharitableness of the world toward its men of genius.

THAT afternoon Corwin was permitted to stand and take a few steps, carefully guarded. The next day he did the same, and the next he crossed the bedroom unaided. The following morning a large standing mirror was brought in, placed near the window, and Dr. Emory said:

"Sure you don't want me?"

"No," said the impostor. "I— I'd rather be alone, the first time."

"All right; no one will come for an hour, unless you ring. You wont find the ordeal a hard one. Id give a good deal for such a physique, myself."

The false Fairchild nodded and smiled, waited till he was alone, then slipped out of bed. Carefully averting his face from the mirror, he moved to a chair at one side, where he could not see his reflection. His steps were noticeably better than the day before, but he was not thinking of them. He was half remembering some lines of poetry— Kipling's, were they not?— about the queen who could not face her looking glass. Isabel was fond of quoting them and so he supposed John Fairchild had learned them; and since he was John Fairchild now, he must learn them too. At every turn something tried to force him into the mold of the personality that was gone, and he ground his teeth.

"He's making small of me still," he muttered.

He took off his pajamas, and steadying himself by the chair, shut his eyes, stepped before the mirror, and opened them.

For a moment his stare was uncomprehending. He knew what he should see, could have given an accurate description of the face and figure of John Fairchild; but to see that face and figure thrown back at him from a mirror fairly stupefied him for a moment. This huge, stalwart man, with a fresh scar over one eye and a bandage still perched turbanwise on his head— what had he to do with these? The broad chest, the mighty arms and thighs, seemed to mock and dwarf the personality that ruled them. Alan had envied John Fairchild his physical strength a thousand times, but possession of that strength brought a sense of unreality rather than of satisfaction.

He roused himself, and began to study this new house of his spirit, smiling crookedly at the phrase. He was looking at curly brown hair, instead of straight black; the forehead was broader than that to which he was accustomed; the eyes had the frank, forthright look which he remembered—and despised. They were hazel eyes too, and he wondered how any woman could admire them. The stubble of beard was thicker than he remembered, and lighter even than the brown hair. The mouth seemed to have a habit of smiling; the strong chin held no menace; the whole head, poised on its white column of a neck, was that of a man who had looked upon the world and found it good.

Everything about this creature in the glass was frank and aboveboard, "obvious," with no shadows of concealment or half-lights of intrigue. And the new owner of this face and body, loving devious ways from the cradle, would have to content himself with the insipid life that had satisfied John Fairchild, outwardly, at least, or meet the wondering wrath of the community. Nay, there might be more direct penalties. He glanced at the wrists, which a duelist might have envied, and the hands whose grip was like a vise; and the superstitious fear of these hands came back with such force that he turned abruptly away, gathered up his pajamas and crawled back into bed.

viii

CORWIN was glum all that day. The surgeon spoke prosaically of digestion, but for once he was wrong. The impostor had wakened suddenly to the fact that there were real dangers and difficulties connected with his course; and always a creature of extremes, he overrated them now because he had ignored them before. He was depressed as well as angered, too, by the annoyances, the confining limits of his position, the fact that he was expected to carry out the traditions of conduct which the real Fairchild had established. That vanished rival was still "making small" of the creature who had inherited his place and body. Besides, the very worst and most callous human being likes to inspire a little regard on his own account, and the false Fairchild was made

to feel every day that he was accepted, honored, loved solely because he was supposed to be the real Fairchild, and that Alan Corwin had been regarded almost everywhere with varying feelings of dislike and distrust.

He wondered darkly how long it would be before the surgeon learned the real state of affairs between Corwin and the friends of John Fairchild. Penfield and his daughter were strangers to Emory; Dr. Freeland was an old and close friend, but he had a genius for holding his tongue; and though he never trusted Corwin, always had been kind to him, On the face of things, there seemed little danger, but the impostor was afraid. He did not know of his real safeguard— namely the fact that James Emory was so specialized and absorbed in his profession that his purely human contacts were casual and fragmentary to a degree.

Penfield breezed into the room next morning, cheery, affectionate, talkative.

"John," he declared, "it's a sight for sore eyes, the way you're improving."

"It doesn't seem over-rapid to me," said the impostor, trying to choose words that would sound in character, and succeeding so well that the old man laughed.

"Bless the boy! You're no more impatient than we are, John. You're coming home with us the minute Dr. Emory will let you leave. He's awful finicky about you, and of course he's right. The men at the factory have been asking about you every day."

"Tell them I'm very much obliged," said the impostor as Penfield paused.

"I will. They all like you, John, and I'll be mighty glad to have you back on the job, where you can help keep things level... Why, what's the matter?"

"You mustn't count on me— too much— for a while," said the false Fairchild, moistening lips that suddenly had gone dry. Here was another ghastly trap opening before him. He took refuge in the plea of lapsed memory which Dr. Emory had supplied. "You know— my head was messed up a little, inside," he went on, again making an effort to choose Fairchildian words, "and I've forgotten some things. It must seem. very strange to you, but— I can't remember the foreman's name."

"Not strange a bit," was the answer, though a barely perceptible pause belied the hearty words. ''Name's McAndrews. You used to call him the hymn man, after 'McAndrews' Hymn' in Kipling— you remember? Then when we went to making stuff for the Allies and he cleaned up the chaps that were trying to burn us out, you called him the he man. It's all right; things'll come back in time, and if they don't, you can learn 'em over again. You remember about the smash-up?"

"Oh, yes," said the impostor, and then went cold all over; for Penfield shut the door, and standing with both hands on the bed, asked:

"How did that happen, John? They can't make me believe it was just an accident. You're not the sort of driver that has accidents. Alan's pistol was out, too, lying near him when they picked him up. Had you been quarreling?"

"N-not to amount to anything." He dared not make his denial too positive, lest it should prove that some one had seen and heard something significant before the crash,

"I should say it amounted to enough!" said Penfield grimly. "You're trying to shield him, John. I believe he drew that pistol on you!"

THE old man straightened up as he spoke, else he would have felt the impostor shiver. But in spite of its terror, the nimble brain back of John, Fairchild's honest forehead was racing at top speed, and Penfield's words gave the harried man a clue. He would be magnanimous, and cover his rival's fault with the mantle of forgiving silence.

"You're imagining things," he said, trying to speak lightly. "I wasn't shot, and— Alan's dead, you know."

"And a good job he is," was the emphatic reply. "You're protecting him, and it's just like you, but he hated you. Oh, I don't expect you to admit it, but Isabel says so too. He was a bad egg if ever there was one. Now, I've been talking too much, and here comes Isabel to arrest me."

The door opened, and Isabel crossed quickly to the bedside. The impostor caught her hand as a drowning man might clutch a rope, then partly controlled himself as her father spoke from the doorway:

"John Fairchild, you've offended me! You haven't called me Father Tom once!"

"Father Tom!" said the impostor as naturally as he could. "Don't be cross, Father Tom!" But as the door closed, his nerve gave way, and he clung to Isabel as a frightened babe clings to its mother.

"Oh, Isabel, stick by me, for God's sake, do! Don't fail me! Tl go mad if you fail me! I thought I was all right, but— I can't remember lots of things, and folks will think I'm crazy! Stand by me, please! You wont throw me over, will you, just because I forget things and— and seem different, some ways?"

"How can you ask?" she answered, putting her arms around his neck and kissing him. "There's one way to reassure you. Have you forgotten the license we got just before the accident?"

"I had forgotten it, yes," he answered, as though he remembered when it was called to his attention. He had not the remotest idea what she meant.

"I took it home, you remember, and it's there, all ready for use. We can be— married this morning, if you wish!"

One half the impostor's mind cast itself back on the trail, explaining events in the light of this newer knowledge and finding new causes of hatred and self-pity as it went. The other grasped the amazing refuge offered him. To get married now, before any slip betrayed him, before some babbler warned the surgeon, who surely could not remain ignorant much longer— what a heaven-sent opportunity!

"Would you, Isabel?" he almost gasped.

"Of course," she said simply. "Wait."

She left the room, and ten minutes later came back. "I telephoned Aunt Nellie," she said. "She's bringing the license and the clergyman. Then I caught Dad before he left and telephoned Dr. Freeland. They'll be here soon."

His answer was inarticulate, and perhaps the better for that. They waited, the impostor trembling all the time lest the surgeon should come up, be apprised of the plan and make, objections. This did not happen. In a half-hour or a little more, Dr. Freeland arrived. Two minutes later Aunt Nellie entered the bedroom, shaking her gray curls, which she still wore in the fashion of a past generation, and handing over the license to Isabel.

"You're under a dark cloud still, John," she said. "But I'm given to hope this may lift it."

"Dr. Emory is busy in the operating room— will be till twelve o'clock," said Penfield. "Oughtn't we to wait for him?"

"No," said Isabel, reading aright the appeal which she saw in the bridegroom's eyes. The impostor, relieved himself, lightened the slight tension with a jest.

"Poor old bachelor!" he said. "I don't want to make him too jealous."

It was a simple ceremony, quickly performed, but the circumstances made it impressive. Dr. Freeland's eyes were moist as he kissed the bride, and when Penfield gave the pair his blessing, his voice was husky. The minister presented his report for the bridegroom's signature. The interloper took the pen, put it to the paper, then dropped it and his face went white.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed in a low tone. "I can't write!"

There was awed silence for a moment, but Dr. Freeland spoke cheerfully. "The agraphia persists, does it?" he said. "That's nothing; I've been letting Jimmy do the thinking on this case or I'd have expected it. Make your mark, John."

"Why not copy your signature?" asked Penfield. "I've got that report of yours here— took it home to study last night." He presented the last of several sheets, one which contained only two or three lines of typewriting and the

bold signature, "*John Fairchild*." The supplanter took it. The others turned to listen to the minister's story of another hospital wedding at which he officiated; but Freeland looked quietly to see how the bridegroom came on with his task, and what the Doctor saw startled him.

The man was not copying the signature in any ordinary sense. He was drawing it, as a skillful forger might do, beginning at the end and working back. It was a difficult job; he was doing it extremely well— and the Doctor could not remember that John Fairchild had that much artistic ability. Alan had, but not John. Seeing was believing, of course, but the old physician felt oddly troubled.

ix

FEW human beings have the communal conscience which by rights might belong to the ant, and feel remorse at any action which goes beyond accepted practice or thwarts the public will. A wise clergyman once remarked that he never knew a man to show deathbed repentance for slipping dutiable goods past a customs inspector. Unless his acts result in some definite trouble for some one, the average man does not feel the need of repentance —at least, in the absence of publicity. But every man who has undertaken to chart a new path of conduct for himself learns that conventional codes, with all their absurd trimmings and reasonless taboos, still embody a mass of human experience which it seldom pays to despise.

Dr. Emory's action in transposing brains did not trouble his moral nature a whit. Why should it? He had no doubt that it was illegal; but the law, as such, meant nothing in his scientific life. He had saved one personality instead of suffering two to be snuffed out, and believed he had done a good deed. There was nothing, at first, to tell him that the personality he had saved was evil; and having seen Alan Corwin get his decoration for valor, Dr. Jimmy was prepared to believe the very best of his patient. But when he came down from the operating-room to find that this patient had disregarded his injunction, and hastened a marriage which by every rule of decency and fair play should have been postponed if not prevented, the surgeon was in a fine wrath.

The impostor met him cannily. It was not his cue to make the surgeon angry enough to disregard consequences, or convince him that his duty required him to speak out. Therefore the false Fairchild admitted his wrongdoing, but excused it by his love of Isabel and his utter lonesomeness. He was perfectly willing to appear somewhat weak, and did so. He was so humble and contrite and withal so unsatisfactory that the surgeon, baffled and sore but with the first flush of his temper gone, flung away and told the story to Dr.

Lee. The uncannily bright eyes watched Emory with an unwinking stare till the recital was finished, and then the tall man said:

"I might have known he'd do that."

"Why do you say that?"

"I've been hearing things. Dr. Freeland dropped a word that means a lot, coming from him—"

"He'd find a good word to say for the devil," said Emory sulkily.

"Yes, he's even said some good words for me. Well, he dropped something that showed he was sorry for Corwin, but didn't think him much of a loss. Then Miss Lang,— who's been away, nursing her mother, you know,— she wrote one of the girls that she would have something to tell you and me about one of our patients. I've a guess that means Corwin."

IT was the kind of comfort in which Job's friends dealt so largely, but the surgeon could not better it. He had a warning sense that this trick marriage was a sign of more moral delinquency than appeared on the surface; but proof was lacking, and even if it were present, what could he do?

One result of the wedding was to get the impostor away from the hospital somewhat earlier than would have been the case otherwise. He had been told that at least three weeks more must pass before he could go home, .but when he brought up the subject again, ten days after the marriage, the surgeon assented at once. He would not neglect his: patient, but he was secretly glad to get rid of him.

Before the hour for his departure came, the interloper wished he had suggested going at least the day before. Miss Lang had returned the previous evening, full of family confidences and gossip concerning the "late" Alan Corwin—to find that, as she put it, the mischief was done, and the false Fairchild married to Isabel Penfield. The news shut her up like a clam; she did not even report at any length to Dr. Emory; but the next morning, just before he was ready to leave, she marched straight to the impostor's room. Isabel was there, but that made small difference to Harriet Lang. Her lips were closed by the seal of her profession; she could not expose the man; but she could throw a scare into him, and she did.

"Good morning, Captain Jacob," she said in that sweetly icy tone which women use when they want to commit mayhem and are constrained to be polite instead. "Em sorry I wasn't here in time for your wedding, but I've brought you a little present. I've put a mark in it at a place that will interest you, I think— though the first Jacob bought his brother's birthright, he didn't get it for nothing."

She held out a small Bible, bound in the usual flexible leather, with a bookmark showing near the front of the volume. Not familiar enough with Scripture to catch the allusion, but sensing her hostility,— as who would not?— the false Fairchild accepted the gift, murmuring a confused word: of thanks, and Miss Lang departed. Isabel took the book, and found that the book-mark was placed at the story of Jacob, and that the verses telling of the birth of Esau and his brother were scored with a red pencil.

"Jacob, the supplanter," she said wonderingly. "What on earth does Miss Lang mean by calling you Jacob and giving you this?"

The word "supplanter" told what she had meant plainly enough, and the false Fairchild felt a little sick. "I can't imagine what she meant," he said weakly, — "unless," he added with a flash of inspiration, "unless she referred to you. She knew Alan quite well, I believe, and she may— perhaps she thought—"

He stopped as if embarrassed, and Isabel sniffed.

DR EMORY said good-by in the upper hall. Dr. Freeland, who had come to act as medical attendant on the way home, waited in the car outside. Penfield and Dr. Lee steadied the supplanter down the steps. At the foot of them, Lee stifled an exclamation and turned back into the hospital without saying farewell. The departing patient climbed laboriously into the car, and as he settled back on the cushions, he saw the dope-runner, Dave Mellis, idling with careful carelessness down the walk.

"Come to bring Lee some dope," was the supplanter's mental comment. "Hope he gets enough to kill himself."

They reached the Penfield home without incident, and the chauffeur tooted the news of their approach. Aunt Nellie came out on the porch to meet them, Captain Jinks with her. Isabel, Penfield and the Doctor got down; then the chauffeur reached up a hand to help the bridegroom, but was rebuffed.

"I'm all right!" he exclaimed with pardonable petulance. He descended, cautiously but firmly enough, and Cap sprang forward with a bark of welcome. Here was the big master who had brought him over from France, and who, it-seemed, was coming home with the mistress— Cap hoped he came to stay. The great dog bounded up with paws on the man's breast, reaching to lick his face— and then all at once checked himself and jerked back. He dropped on all fours and stood looking up with an expression of utter surprise, his lip lifted slightly over his long eyeteeth.

"Why, what's the matter, Cap?" exclaimed the supplanter. At the sound of the voice, the dog started forward again, but again checked himself, this time

fairly in mid-air, and backed over toward his mistress, his eyes never leaving the false Fairchild's face.

"Cap, I'm surprised at you!" exclaimed Isabel. The dog acknowledged the reproof with a whine and a lick of her hand, but he went no nearer the supplanter. Dr. Freeland struck in to relieve a situation that was becoming awkward.

"Cap evidently doesn't care for antiseptics; he smelled too many of 'em in France. He scents something on John's clothes, I suppose. Lucky our own noses aren't so keen. Now, John, let's see if you can climb those steps."

He climbed them with little difficulty, and in congratulations on the feat, Cap's peculiar actions were forgotten for the time. But Dr. Freeland, coming away a few minutes later, found the dog smelling at the steps where the supplanter had climbed them, and wearing a look of almost superstitious bewilderment that was comic enough in an animal. Yet the old physician did not feel at all inclined to laugh.

"I wish you could talk, old boy," he said, "or that I could smell," he added in shameless contradiction of the sentiment he had expressed so brief a time before. "You've got hold of something that's hidden from us, and Pd give a lot more than I can afford to know what it is."

PENFIELD called on the physician that evening, and after beating about the bush for a time, came out with the real object of his visit. "Doctor," he asked, "what do you suppose was the matter with Cap today?"

"I haven't the slightest idea," returned Dr. Freeland.

"He doesn't mind surgical dressings," said Penfield.

"I know it," returned Freeland. said that to get things moving. Nellie was beginning to have visions."

"You benevolent old fraud!" remarked Penfield calmly. Then his brow furrowed, and after a full minute he asked:

"Doctor, do you suppose, if we had a sense of smell like Cap's, we could—detect the approach of insanity before it showed in other ways?"

"No," said Freeland. "At least, I see no reason to think so. What put that into your head?"

"John's different, somehow," said Penfield. "Isabel doesn't see it or wont admit it, but I do, though I can't tell what it is."

"Of course he's different," returned the Doctor. "Anyone is when sick or hurt. John had injuries and shocks which for days kept him unable to move a muscle. His brain has been injured, though apparently his reasoning faculties are not affected at all. He's had to learn to write all over again, and some of his

memories seem gone clean away. Of course these things make a difference in his behavior."

"Well, that may be it," said Penfield. "Isabel thinks he's all right, only weak."

"I'll back Isabel's judgment against a dog's any day," said Dr. Freeland. Penfield laughed assent, then added:

"But Cap has pretty good judgment, too. He never liked Alan."

"True," said Freeland, and they both fell silent. Neither had the slightest guess at the truth; but the name, and the odd way in which it came to be mentioned, roused a subconscious instinct of warning in both men.

x

DR FREELAND and the surgeon agreed that it would be unwise for the supplanter to undertake any traveling as yet; so after a couple of weeks of steady improvement, when his strength was nearly back to par, Penfield and Aunt Nellie went away for visits to friends, and left the young people to enjoy their honeymoon at home. It was a delightful arrangement, and for a time they enjoyed it to the full, undisturbed by Aunt Nellie's parting declaration that the dark cloud which enveloped John Fairchild the day of the accident was upon him still. A big, beautiful home, faultless service, a lovely wife and no responsibilities whatever— the supplanter's confidence came back, and his egotism waxed fat under such treatment. Yet even in this halcyon time there were difficulties. He could see that Isabel missed something. He considered himself an expert lover and did his best to please, but the marriage of one personality could not fulfill the courtship of another. Isabel was careful to keep away from any subject which might test his memory, and accepted without question his pleas of forgetfulness, but it was plain that her honeymoon was not quite what she had hoped it would be.

Captain Jinks, too, was not satisfied, and his dignified disapproval and unanswered questing were not easy to bear with calmness. He never came directly to his new master if he could help it. Generally he lay at a little distance, studying the supplanter with big brown eyes that had a look of uncanny intelligence in them; and often, when the man was seated, Cap would come behind, and sniff silently at his leg or side. Most exasperating of all, the dog, in ways which no one could either describe or mistake, made it clear that he considered it necessary to remain on guard over his mistress when she was in the company of her husband. Not once during the honeymoon did he leave the two alone together except at Isabel's direct order; but the moment Penfield returned, the great dog, after an enthusiastic greeting, sallied forth to

renew acquaintance with the neighborhood, thrash aspiring rivals who had grown cocky during his retirement, and in general make good his position as chief of that corner of the canine world.

Music was sometimes a cross and sometimes a comfort. The real Fairchild had loved music without any deep knowledge of it, in spite of a passable tenor voice and a compulsory acquaintance with the piano. He loved any ringing melody, had a strong liking for music of a religious character, and likewise for that of a lighter nature. He set Arthur Sullivan far above Debussy, loved Franck, Verdi, Massenet and even Donizetti, and loathed most of the so-called ultra-modern school. Alan Corwin, on the other hand, had an unusual knowledge of and gift for music, but the curious twist in his nature showed here as elsewhere, and he affected the cacophonies of Richard Strauss and the caterwaulings of Scriabine. And now, as the supplanter sat each evening while Isabel, a real mistress of the piano, played Chopin and Beethoven, or turned to the phonograph and put on song after song from the older operas, he felt that the lot of a possessing demon was not quite so pleasant as might be imagined.

ONCE alone in the living-room, Corwin sat down at the piano himself. The big fingers which he had learned to trust for rough strength were in the way here, but a few minutes with the scales helped their docility so that they performed better than they ever had done for their original master. Mindful, at first, of his supposed character, he played a light, tinkly thing from Nevin, then a part of the twelfth nocturne of Chopin; then, forgetting himself, he began to pound out some of the weird chords of Schoenburg. He had gone only a few bars when some instinct warned him; he came to a stop with a fumble, shook his head mournfully, and turned to see Isabel.

"Why, John, dear, that's the best I ever heard you play," she said. "But where did you learn that last?"

"I used to hear Alan play it," he said. "Queer thing, I wonder what it is? I could play when I let myself go, but the minute I began thinking about it, I was lost."

She kissed him, took the piano herself, and for an hour played the old, melodious things which the real Fairchild had loved so well, and which the impostor regarded as old-fashioned and absurd. He wriggled and squirmed, but he could not protest.

CORWIN improved the opportunity to learn more of the business in which he would be obliged to take a hand. It surprised him to find that only twenty per cent of the stock of the company stood in John Fairchild's name. Penfield had nearly twice that amount; Isabel and Dr. Freeland each had a fair-sized

block; and a number of employees, especially McAndrews, held smaller amounts. Fairchild's holdings were worth perhaps one hundred and fifty thousand dollars, paid him twelve thousand a year in dividends in ordinary times, and his salary as vice president was four thousand more— the Penfield Piano company did not run to extravagant salaries. It was a very comfortable estate; even with his lucky speculations in "war baby" stock, Alan Corwin had left less than twenty thousand dollars to some distant cousins whom he regarded with even more contempt than he felt for the most of mankind; but the supplanter felt a curious grievance that the fortune did not come up to his expectations.

It was a sample of Corwin's instinctive turning to underhand ways that even during the honeymoon he began a careful inquiry, not finished until months afterward, into the means taken to guard the affairs of the company from fraud. I do not think he had at this time any intention of committing fraud, but if he had any such idea, it was baffled. Matters had been very carefully arranged to avoid even the suspicion of wrongdoing during the minority of John Fairchild, and the system had worked so well that it was continued after the need for it had passed. It would be difficult indeed for even an inside swindler to make a haul at all commensurate with the risks.

PENFIELD came back in due time, and the supplanter found himself compelled to face active life. He dreaded it consumingly, but could find no excuse for idleness. He was as strong as a horse; in his previous incarnation, as he sometimes called it to himself, he never had dreamed of such power. Aside from an occasional headache, usually brought on by spells of brooding, he was perfectly healthy. Everyone was sure that steady work would be good for him. So once more acting, not as he wished but as was ordained for him, he went down to renew acquaintance with the factory. Naturally, one of the first men he met, was McAndrews.

"Ye're lookin' fine, John," said the foreman, taking his hand with a quiet fervor which meant much from the self-contained Scot.

"I'm feeling well, too," said the supplanter. "You don't seem to have aged any, Mac." The foreman ignored the compliment, and went on:

"I canna tell ye, lad, how glad we are that ye're the one that came through. Say nothin' but good o' the dead, aye; but yon was a lucky accident in more ways than one. God bless ye, John, an' your wife with ye, an' send ye bairns as fine as yoursel's!"

It was a greeting that might warm any man's heart; but to the supplanter, it was gall and wormwood. Always, always, these dolts and blockheads and jealous simpletons were making small of Alan Corwin in behalf of John

Fairchild. He ground his teeth together angrily, but the foreman did not notice, and Isabel called from the doorway:

"Come, John; let's go up to the roof."

He followed her, mechanically, but when they reached the roof and she walked fearlessly up to the low parapet, he stopped appalled. Here was another thing he had forgotten. Isabel spoke:

"Come see how funny the people look from here."

He covered his face with his hands and sat down. John Fairchild thought as little of heights as a steeple jack might, but Alan Corwin never had been able to look down from a lofty place. The supplanter shivered, but his genius for deceit came to his rescue.

"I can't!" he exclaimed hoarsely. "That roll, down the hill, you know. It makes me see it to look down." He added a furious curse at his weakness, which at least had the merit of sincerity. Isabel came to him motheringly.

"Poor boy! I don't wonder, not a bit! That must be a perfect nightmare to you; and you never say a thing, just grin and bear it. Come, we'll go down."

He had the wit to hang back, as though loath to admit defeat.

"I wonder if I'll ever be right again," he said in a low tone, as if hardly conscious that Isabel were near. '"There's no danger—" he broke off, shook his head, looked at his wife and rose.

"I know now how Alan felt," he said. "I never did, before. Please don't tell Father Tom."

She gave the assurance readily, but she did not promise to keep the matter from Dr. Freeland.

A FEW days later came a special meeting of the stockholders of the company, of which he had been hearing at intervals since before leaving the hospital. He had made adroit inquiries and picked up all the information he could from minutes of previous meetings, but naturally failed to ask the one question needful. Penfield, as president of the company, rose to speak. He expressed the common pleasure that the young vice-president was ready for duty once more, and then took up the business of the meeting.

"You all know that when the Armistice came, the Government canceled its contracts with us and sent men to make an adjustment of compensation. They made their own estimates, taking account of the changes .made in the factory to do .war work, and fixed the sum to which we were entitled at a little over one hundred thouand dollars, a check for which was received some months later.

"I thought from the first that this sum was too generous, but waited until an important stockholder should return from the other side. He came, and I

laid the matter before him. We agreed that many of the changes in the factory were to our advantage, even in our regular work. He then made a careful inquiry, and laid his report before me just prior to the accident which affected us all so keenly. I have had time to go over his figures since, and agree with them. The recommendation, which I indorse, is that we return to the Government"— he consulted a slip of paper— "$32,455."

"In the name of common sense, what for?" The supplanter had lost himself during the explanation, drawing figures on the blotting paper before him, but he roused in time to hear the recommendation, and his protest came with a blurt. It was received with a gasping silence which ought to have warned him, but the impatient recklessness that had cost his company so many lives in the Argonne hurried him on now. "Is anybody else giving back money to the Government? Not in a million years! Then why should we hand over thirty-two thousand dollars? If they've made a bad deal, let 'em sweat for it."

He stopped suddenly. McAndrews' eyes were boring into his own. They shifted for a moment to the paper, then came back to his face. He pushed the blotter away so angrily that it fell on the floor, and as he did so, caught a glimpse of Isabel's face, blank with amazement not untinged by fear. Dr. Freeland spoke with a quick, enforced cheerfulness:

"This is a rotten deal we've given you, John, but we didn't mean to. I remember now your telling me how completely business details had gone out of your head. I don't wonder the plan seems crazy when you get it without any explanation." He came round the table, dropped one hand on the supplanter's shoulder, and reached the other toward McAndrews, who reluctantly put something into it. Penfield spoke:

"This is embarrassing, John, and I hope you'll forgive me. You're so well most ways that I— I forget. You worked out these figures and made this recommendation yourself."

The supplanter sprang up; a look of amazement swept his face, followed by a flash of fury, as he dropped back into his seat.

"I— I can't remember a thing," he said after a moment. "I'll have to take your word for it. Isabel, will you vote for me? You know what I ought to do; and"— he managed a ragged smile—"I don't seem to know myself."

He scribbled a few words, stopped, regarded them for a moment with staring eyes, crumpled the sheet and put it in his pocket. Then, slowly and carefully, he wrote a proxy for, his wife, signed it and hurried out.

CORWIN neglected the elevator and tramped down the stairs, bubbling mutiny at every breath. These fine-haired people prated about honor and gave away money that anybody but a fool would keep, but they did not scruple to spring traps on him, and humiliate and make small of him. He hated them all. They were all like John Fairchild, curse them! They wanted to keep him in prison, and make him over into a commonplace fool. Well, he had foiled John Fairchild, and he would beat some of the rest of them before they were through.

He turned the wrong way on the second floor and came out at the side of the building where material was received. A motor truck was standing there, and its driver, a burly negro, was quarreling with the pony-sized receiving clerk. As the supplanter came out, the truckman spat the filthiest name he could think of at the clerk, and dared him to fight. The next instant the negro was lying in the alley with a hundred sparks dancing before his eyes. A hand like a steel vise closed on his collar and yanked him to his feet; another hand gripped his right wrist and pinned it behind him in the hammer-lock that means a broken arm if the victim struggles; and then he was propelled toward the street by a series of kicks that felt like the caresses of a piledriver. At the sidewalk his captor turned him round, gave him a final booting that landed him in a tumbled heap ten feet back in the driveway, and spoke in the tones of one who aches to kill:

"Do whatever the clerk tells you; then get out and don't come back!"

The supplanter walked on without waiting to hear the comments of the clerk or the terrified whimper of the truckman. The exercise had made him feel better, and he knew his order would be obeyed. There was some comfort in being John Fairchild. One could sweep opposition out of the way by sheer strength. True, the real Fairchild never had done this— more fool he. But now his mighty muscles were subject to a brain that knew how to use them. If only he could keep them subject, if those terrible hands could be kept from turning on their master!

The superstitious thought made him pause in his stride, and looking up, he saw Dave Mellis on the other side of the street. Instantly the supplanter crossed in the middle of the block, came up behind the dope-runner and touched him on the shoulder. Dave wheeled with a jerk, and the bulge in his right-hand coat pocket looked too big for a fist.

"Good morning, Dave," said the supplanter quickly.

"Oh, good morning, Captain Fairchild; you startled me." The smuggler was relieved but puzzled, and the impostor made a quick decision.

"Where can we go for a talk?" he demanded. Dave's eyes opened wide in wonder and narrowed in suspicion.

"What about?" he asked.

"Dope, among other things," returned the false Fairchild. "Here's a restaurant that will do, I think." He guided the smuggler inside, piloted him to an empty corner table, and gave an order. Then:

"How's business now, Dave?"

"On the blink," returned Dave guardedly.

"You had a good trade when— Corwin got you out of that squeeze. What's happened to it?"

"Gone blooey," said Dave shortly. He was more puzzled at every word. Here was a man reputed to be of the most sensitive honor, talking as if he meant to horn in on the illicit drug business. Dave could use a partner just now, needed one badly, in fact; but this—

"Can't you get the stuff?" inquired the supplanter easily. Dave did not reply. "Or haven't you a safe place to store it?"

This touched the sorest spot of the trade, as the supplanter knew it would. It is easy— for one who knows the game— to smuggle cocaine, morphine and kindred drugs. It is easy to find customers for these poisons. But to store them where they will be accessible, and yet safe from the authorities, from needy addicts and from one's own fellow-crooks— this is not easy at all. If this man with a social position and a reputation for honesty would consent to act as receiver— "How much do you know?" Dave demanded suddenly.

"All that Corwin could tell me," returned the supplanter. For once he was enjoying his inforced disguise.

"An' that was plenty," declared Dave with emphasis. "He was one wise guy, that chap. He could skin a live cat without lettin' it squeal, an' he surely charged enough for showin' the trick!"

"You don't want a man to help you for nothing, do you?" asked the supplanter, glorying inwardly in this sinister praise. "You know Corwin delivered the goods."

"He did— what was left of 'em after he'd got his slice," agreed Dave. "Say, what you driving at?"

"At a good thing, I hope."

"You don't need the money."

"I need something else, though. I need some excitement to make life worth living. After what we had over there, this peace business is too slow. There's no salt to it. I want something that's alive."

"Unh," grunted Dave noncommittally. He had heard that complaint before, had voiced it sometimes himself. He knew one chap, a disturber in camp, but a hero in the trenches, who had held up a bank single-handed, just to get once more the thrill of combat. Nobody would expect this big, handsome man to

feel that way, but Dave reflected sagely that-you never can tell. He took the plunge.

"I've got a bunch of gow," he said. "Its safe; but I can't keep going to it. The bulls would get wise; they keep an eye on me some, anyway. If I could find some one to store the lot for me an' slip me a bunch as I needed it, why, I wouldn't be stingy."

"You can't afford to be," retorted the supplanter. "Where is this dope?"

"What lay do you want?" came the counter-question.

"Fifty-fifty, at least. If you stall any longer or there's much trouble about it, I'll want more. Now, where is it?"

This time Dave told him— not directly, for the roundabout road was the only one which the dope-runner knew how to travel; but after ten minutes of questioning the false Fairchild had the facts before him, mixed with protestations for which he cared nothing and warnings which he was inclined to respect. He remembered that bulging pocket.

They separated, and the supplanter resumed his walk, better satisfied with himself than at any time since waking in his present character. He could run something of his own life, after all. These people couldn't make small of him altogether. And for the first time he began to speculate on going clear away, and beginning a career that would be his own, on the other side of the globe.

He might have been less complacent if he could have heard two conversations back at the factory. Penfield kept Dr. Freeland after the meeting, got rid of the others and then demanded:

"Doctor, what the devil did that mean?"

"Oh, nothing much, I suppose," returned the physician. He was weary of inventing explanations that did not satisfy himself. "Dr. Johnson says that a sick man is a damned rascal, you know. There's a lot of truth in it."

"Rot!" answered the peppery manufacturer. "John Fairchild isn't sick, and he couldn't be a damned rascal while he was in his right mind. What's happened to him? You say he isn't insane, but what is the matter?"

"I can't explain it, Tom, but you're making too much of it. We know he's forgotten a lot of things; so why be surprised if he forgets those that made him want to turn back this money?"

"No good," said Penfield, but he dropped the subject.

Down on the first floor, the undersized clerk was reciting the saga of the driveway to McAndrews. "He kicked him out to the street an' then kicked him back," said the clerk for the tenth time. McAndrews shook his head.

"That's the first time I ever heard o' John Fairchild hurtin' anybody or anything more than was needful," he pronounced. His mind went back to that sketch on the blotter which Fairchild had thrown to the floor, and which Dr.

Freeland had confiscated. It was a well-drawn profile view of Penfield, and this was the first time McAndrews had ever known John Fairchild to do anything of that sort, either.

xii

DOUBTLESS it would have a good effect on wayward youth to say that the supplanter got into immediate difficulties with the lynx-eyed sleuths of the federal Government, but it would not be true. His cunning was too great, his disguise in the body of an honest man too hard to pierce, and the poison itself too easy to handle. He secured the stuff without the slightest trouble, and stored it in a locked private closet at the factory. Peddling it out to Dave was not quite so simple, but it was managed. Generally the two men met in a movie show; they went in separately and came out separately, but sat near each other inside, and a package of dope passed one way and a package of bills the other. The authorities were giving only vague attention to Mellis since he was cleared, and of course they did not think of Fairchild in this connection at all.

But while direst suspicion was lacking, the supplanter was conscious of a change of attitude toward him. The atmosphere of confidence and affection which he had inherited' ftom the real Fairchild, who had lived in it all his days, was giving way to one of doubt, worry and undefined distrust. He felt this and chafed under it, but he was helpless.

Oddly enough, one of the things that worried him most was the attitude of the dog. Here was a creature whose distrust was instant, open and avowed; and the supplanter told himself that this was a symbol of what would happen when the piffling humans around him knew as much as Captain Jinks—and he was right.

Human civilization is based upon the eye, which may be one reason why it cannot be trusted in the dark. Most animals build on scent. Cap's nose told him that something was wrong, that some unpleasant and dangerous change had taken place in the kindly master who brought him back from France; and he trusted his nose and was wise.

ONE day Isabel's father found her in tears, and when he questioned her as to the cause, she was too wretched to evade. A baby was coming to their house; and the father of that baby actually growled and complained when told of the expected arrival. Hardly had she spoken when Isabel was seized with fear lest her peppery parent raise a storm, but he kept still. The forbearance must have cost him a pretty effort.

He was not quite so self-contained when an incident happened at the factory. The supplanter was really doing his best there, but in spite of himself he managed to antagonize the men. One of them offended him in some trifling matter, and was discharged on the spot. There was no union to take up the case, but the other employees laid it before McAndrews, and asked that the man be taken back. The foreman carried the request to the front office, and met a prompt refusal.

"I fired him, and he's going to stay fired," said the supplanter.

"But, John—"

"You may call me Mr. Fairchild or Captain Fairchild. We'll cut out the 'John' business."

The Scotchman gave a long look which made the impostor wince. John Fairchild had sat on this man's knee as a kid, had listened to his stories and songs, loved him like a near and dear relative. It was a mistake to take the high hand with him now, but the supplanter was too stubborn to change. Penfield was exasperated.

"Oh, come, John!" he exclaimed. Don't act like a spoiled kid. Dan's a good man, and he didn't mean any harm. Take him back!"

"Nothing doing," said the false Fairchild sullenly.

"Then, by heavens, I'll hire him back myself!" shouted Penfield, springing up and shaking his finger at the sulky man. "I wont have the morale and loyalty of the force sacrificed to your stupid spite! I'll hire him!"

"Then you'd better buy my stock!" returned the supplanter quite as loudly. "You can't ride over me this way and get away with it! If that man comes back, I resign, and you'd better buy me out before I look for another market! You can't run over me! You might make it work with that damned fool—"

He stopped abruptly, caught up hat and overcoat and stalked out. He had started to say "that fool of a Fairchild," had stopped barely in time, and the narrowness of his escape terrified him.

IN the office he had left, the two men looked at each other, and McAndrews spoke.

"We'll have to take care o' Dan some other way, I'm thinkin'. We can't have this kind of a row, not now, anyway." He was thinking of Isabel, and Isabel's father knew it, and was grateful.

"What's the matter with him, Mac?" he demanded in distress. "He isn't the same person since the smash. It's John's body, but where in the world is John's nature? I can't understand it."

"The hands are the hands o' Esau, but the voice is the voice o' Jacob," quoted McAndrews. "I'm thinkin' that the folks in old times that talked about

possession of devils was wiser than we've given 'em credit for. If the soul of that limb of Satan, Alan Corwin, was in John Fairchild's body the noo, 'twould explain things better than I ever look for anything else to explain 'em."

Outside the door, the supplanter heard, shivered— and tiptoed down the stairs.

xiii

HE took the left-hand turning, as he had done months before, but this time by design, to avoid curious eyes in the front office. He reached the driveway unseen, stopped short, and dodged back into the building. Dr. Freeland was just going in at the front. This was an accident; there had been no time for him to come in response to a summons; but the supplanter felt the call most inopportune. The old physician's kindly tolerance and gentle helpfulness could not mask his shrewd, straight-thinking mind. He would forgive anything in the world save cruelty, but the supplanter knew that his conduct had been cruel to a degree— to the discharged man, to McAndrews, to Penfield, to Isabel, when she should hear of it. He turned, took the stairs three steps at a time, and hurried into the office he had just left.

"Father Tom!" he exclaimed. "Please forgive me! Bring Dan back and tell him— anything you please; I'll stand for it. I don't know what makes me have these blind rages since— lately. Generally, I keep 'em to myself, and you all think I'm sulking when I'm trying hard to be civil. I've been a brute, and I'm sorry. Please ask 'em to forgive me, doctor, while I go out and walk it off."

"God bless the boy!" exclaimed Penfield, throwing an arm around the young man and grasping his hand. "You don't need anyone to plead for you. It's all right! Go take your walk, and next time you feel that way, just tell Father Tom. It's all right, isn't it, Mac?"

McAndrews nodded, though his eyes showed that he had misgivings. Dr. Freeland had more. He reproached himself for lack of charity, though no man needed such self-discipline less, but there was something, something about the penitent outburst that was not like John Fairchild, and that brought up vaguely unpleasant memories of some one else.

The supplanter presented himself at dinner in a better humor than he had shown for weeks. Part of this was acting; he had gone too far and was trying to get back into favor; but more was due to an interview with Dave Mellis that afternoon. Dave had found the possibilities of the dope-running business greater than he could utilize alone, and approached the supplanter with an offer of partnership, which was accepted after drastic revisions. Mellis vowed

that the supplanter was worse than, a highway robber, and perhaps he was, but he had his way.

He had about made up his mind to leave. The thought, toyed with for months, had become definite and guiding. He could not live up to the reputation of John Fairchild. He could not stand the steady, unexciting work; and the restraints and humiliations of his new position had become intolerable. But he had no notion of making a penniless exit, and since the factory could not be looted, he meant to gather money by other means. Some lingering instinct of decency made him feel, too, that he should stay until the child was born and the mother recovered; or perhaps that was just the excuse which he gave to himself when planning his dope-running.

Oddly enough, in all Corwin's speculations on the subject, he never thought of the plain, straightforward course of going to Penfield and Dr. Freeland, telling the truth, getting Dr. Emory to back him, and asking for his release. That was too obvious and commonplace to appeal to his oversubtle intellect.

AT last came the day for which he had waited. He was called home from the office and hurried to his wife's room, genuinely anxious— but he did not enter. Lying before the door was Captain Jinks; and as thé man came up, the big dog rose with bristling mane and bared teeth, and. warned him back. The supplanter stopped, started forward again, and again the dog rumbled an unequivocal veto. Dr. Freeland came out of the chamber and stood staring, then sought to intercede.

"It's all right, Cap," he said. "Let him in, old boy."

But Cap stood his ground and refused to budge. He knew that his mistress was sick. Perhaps he understood the nature of her trouble, for more goes on in those shaggy heads than we realize. Anyway, she was ill, and this man whom Cap did not trust must stay out until the lady was well. Corwin's temper began to rise, but the doctor caught his arm.

"Go in through your own room," he said. "Don't quarrel with the old chap. He's doing the best he knows for his mistress. We'll go in through your room."

They did so, and the young man behaved like an exemplary husband. When Dr. Freeland came out a few hours later, leaving a sturdy boy and a delighted mother behind him, the dog was still on guard. The physician stooped over him.

"Cap, old fellow, isn't there any way that you can tell me what it is? No way at all? Well, we'll have to rub along, wont we? You'll do your duty— I wish I were half as sure of doing mine."

The dog licked his face but did not rise. The supplanter, coming quietly out of his own door, saw and heard it all.

xiv

BY the time Isabel was well, the supplanter's desire to leave had become a passion. His own name for the proposed departure was "escape."

He was in prison, he told himself, and would remain there as long as he tried to pass for John Fairchild. Public opinion, or rather public expectation, was a force whose power and pervasiveness he had never dreamed. He had looked to this reincarnation, as he called it, to give him the wealth and power he had lacked in his former estate; but the wealth was in such form that he could not use it, and instead of power, there was slavery. Everyone around seemed to claim a vested right to a certain behavior from John Fairchild, and he had to make good the claim. He could not choose a bit of music or a moving-picture show to suit himself; he must be careful of John Fairchild's taste in clothing and eat John Fairchild's meals. All the bizarre struts and poses for which his soul longed were taboo. The wheels of the commonplace had caught him, and unless he broke away, he would be ground to shreds in their cogs.

We must keep this in mind, I think, in judging his behavior. He was subjected to a strain that few natures could bear with credit, and that he was unfit to bear at all. His outward submission was compensated by blind inward rages, or clandestine adventures which need not be recorded, since they had no bearing on the outcome. Being compelled to act like a better man than he was made him feel like a worse one, which is an equation that no professional reformer understands.

Nor was it only that he was in prison. He stood in constant dread of something worse, of exposure. How this was to come, he never succeeded in explaining to himself. There was no direct evidence against him. Dr. Emory was pledged to silence; so was Lee, though the supplanter shivered when he thought of the supposed irresponsibility of that "dope fiend." Miss Lang he did not trust, but she would not speak while her superior officer kept still. Meanwhile, Alan Corwin was occupying John Fairchild's body, drawing John Fairchild's income, living— though this had ceased to give him the thrill of triumph he once felt— with the woman who had promised to be John Fairchild's wife. It seemed impossible to imagine a break in his defenses; yet there were days together when he thought of little else.

YET he did not leave, even at the self-appointed time; for a fear sharper if less disquieting than his vague dread of a catastrophe held him back; the fear of poverty. He had been born to penury, had felt some of its sharpest touches

when a child, had climbed well above it by luck and effort, and 'would not, dared not, go back to it. As John Fairchild he had no profession. As John Fairchild he had forfeited the money he had gained in stock speculation. So, postponing though not abandoning the thought of looting the wellguarded factory or of compelling his fatherin-law to buy his stock, the supplanter multiplied his deals with Mellis. The two of them had almost a wholesale business in the illicit drug-trade by this time, and the profits were prodigious.

There was a new grievance in his life, the baby. Aunt Nellie announced the morning after the child's birth that the dark cloud which had been hanging over John Fairchild was lifted, but the person masquerading under that name did not find it so.

In general young babies are human dumplings, with only vague resemblances to their ancestors; but there are exceptions, and Penfield Fairchild was one of them. He bore a remarkable likeness to his father. His features, sketchy théugh they were, had the same outline. His ears were the exact shape of Fairchild's; his little arms had the same contour below the elbows. His hands and feet were miniature copies of his father's; his eyes opened in the same direct, forthright fashion, and though of the slaty color common in newborn infants, the light hair was a guarantee against their darkening. From top to toe, he was John Fairchild's baby; and the supplanter felt aggrieved, as if the man whose place he had taken had made small of him once more.

FOR Isabel, the baby was a godsend, a gift that brought back all the gentle, lovable remembrances of John Fairchild, and thrust into the background the deficiencies of the person supposed to be John Fairchild now. It must be admitted that the person himself was thrust into the background likewise. Several million fathers have had this experience, and several million more will have it, and there is no sort of use in kicking against the pricks. Man made it the wife's job to look after her husband, but nature made it the mother's job to look after her offspring; and when nature and man clash, there is only one ending. It is much better to take a back seat as gracefully as possible, and wait for the young mother to realize that the husband and father still lives, and would like to be counted a person of some trifling importance at his own fireside.

I need hardly say that the supplanter did not look at matters in this philosophical light. In fact, he took the situation so badly that Isabel felt constrained to mention the subject to the doctor.

"He just hates the baby," she exclaimed with a muffled sob.

"My dear, that is your imagination," returned Dr. Freeland. "He's jealous of the baby; that is a very common occurrence; but as for hating him—nonsense!"

"I wish it were," said the young woman, putting the child in his buggy. "Dr. Freeland—" she added after a pause.

"Yes, Isabel," he said as she stopped.

"Nothing," she answered, shaking her head. "When I try to put it in words, I wonder if I've lost my senses. But it's true."

"Isabel, I can believe more impossible things than the Red Queen ever thought of. What's true?"

But she only shook her head again, and did not answer.

IN spite of the supplanter's apprehensions on other scores, he believed that he was playing safe in his illicit drug-traffic. His partner thought so too. Dave complained bitterly that he took all the risks and did all the real work, yet was obliged to divide with a man who did nothing but provide a storage place for the "gow," and hand it over to the distributor from time to time. The supplanter gloried in his advantage and insisted on his pound of flesh; and—then came the inevitable happening to show that his security was an illusion.

He brought a suitcase of dope to the office one day, just after closing time. Penfield had left, though as it chanced, he was still in the building. The supplanter was unpacking his unlawful treasure when the telephone rang. Careless through long immunity, he answered the call, and when the conversation ended, turned to see McAndrews just setting down one of the cans of opium.

"Put that down and get out of here!" he roared; and then, as McAndrews, startled but dignified; moved to comply, the supplanter added.

"What the devil do you mean, spying on me in this way?"

McAndrews halted near the door. "I had no mind to be spyin'," he returned, his native burr showing strongly, and his voice rasping. "I ask your pardon, but I was no aware ye were dealin' in secret merchandise. Ye should ha' warned me."

"What do you mean by that?" The supplanter's face was white, and his big hands were opening and closing in an ominous way; but Mac's blood was up too, and he scorned to flinch.

"I mean that I'm no accustomed to gear or dealin's round these pairts that will na bear the light!"

The supplanter charged like a mad bull. McAndrews was strong of muscle and long of arm, but he was a child compared to the rushing giant. A half-guarded blow cut open his cheek; another, smashing into his mouth, sent him

down in the doorway; and as he gamely strove to rise, he was knocked flat again. He was vaguely conscious of an outcry, and then relaxed, senseless.

WHEN he revived, his face was wet, there was a sting of whisky in his throat, and Penfield was bending over him.

"My God, Mac!" exclaimed the old man. "What started this?"

McAndrews blinked a few times,—his eyes had escaped damage,—put up his fingers and jerked out a loose tooth, then looked up at his employer.

"Tis naething ye need bother about," he said. "I've been here too long, I doubt me. I think the place belongs to me, an' get impudent wi' the young master. 'Tis time for me to go."

"But, Mac—" exclaimed Penfield.

"Dinna bother!" said the Scotchman shortly. He tried to shake his head, but it was aching too furiously for such treatment. Mr. Penfield's stenographer came in from the outer office.

"Dr. Freeland is here," she said. The physician followed her in.

"I dinna need a doctor!" cried McAndrews, but when he tried to rise, he staggered. "Easy, there!" exclaimed the doctor, catching his elbow and guiding him to a seat. A brief examination showed that the visible injuries were not serious.

"Are you hurt anywhere on the body?" asked the physician. :

"No, no!" said McAndrews; and then, under the combined influence of the shock, the pain and the whisky; he clutched the doctor's arm, and poured forth his forbodings:

"Are ye a physician to souls, Dr. Freeland? Can ye exorcise devils? If ye can, your patient's the man that mashed me! Ye may call me a loon, but 'twas the soul o' Alan Corwin glarin' out o' the eyes o' John Fairchild when he rushed me! The fair body o' John Fairchild has become the habitation o' devils, an' the chief de'il o' all's the spirit o'? Alan Corwin!"

"You may be right, Mac," said the physician quietly, and the agreement astounded the foreman more than any opposition could have done. "Now, how did this happen?"

The foreman told, choking back his excitement to make his tale sober and true. "I tell ye, I dinna know this minute what was in his damned cans! I'm no objectin' if a man wants somethin' better than homemade hooch! Td like a taste mysel. But to bash me up like that— John Fairchild never could ha' done it," he concluded solemnly.

"I believe you," said Freeland. He waved Penfield to silence, thought a moment, then spoke.

"Have you keys that will open everything in— John's office, Tom? Good! Let me have them. Miss Randall, will you stay with me? I want you to witness a burglary, and maybe act as a messenger. My bones are not very spry, nowadays. Tom, you take Mac home, and both of you keep still till you hear from me. No, I wont talk yet, not till I have something to say."

They followed his bidding. Left alone, the doctor and Miss Randall searched the office. The cans which caused the row were gone, but at the back of a locked drawer, they found forty papers of cocaine and four small packages of morphine. The doctor confiscated the lot, left in their place substitute packages of soda which Miss Randall brought from the nearest drugstore, put things as nearly as possible in their original condition, telephoned that he would not be home for dinner, and left.

xv

DR FREELAND went into his office.

It was deserted at this hour, and he wanted to be alone. McAndrews' impassioned declaration had crystallized something which the Doctor now knew had lain in his mind for weeks, and he wanted to examine it. He took a sheet of paper, and set down in his neat, precise handwriting:

The Present John Fairchild

Goes into furious rages over trifles. So did Alan Corwin.
Draws portraits of people round him when thinking or listening. So did Alan.
Dislikes children. So did Alan.
Is afraid on a high place. So was Alan.
Is harsh, cruel and of doubtful honesty. Alan was the same.
Is mixed up in illicit drug-traffic. Alan cleared a drug-peddler.
The dog hates him. The dog hated Alan.

He studied the list for a few minutes, and then it blurred as memories took shape before his eyes. He saw a returned soldier with a "new leg" taken from a dying brigand. He saw an Italian animal-trainer, frightened half to death at a strange-seeming dog that insisted on loving him, and that answered to the name and performed the tricks of his former pet. The man who had performed these miracles was the same one who had tended John Fairchild and Alan Corwin. Dr. Freeland reached for the telephone.

"Ah," he said, as he waited for the connection, "I no lika deesa business!"

He liked it less when he got to the hospital. Dr. Emory met him with righteous anger and deep worry in every line of his face, took him to the

private office, and spoke abruptly without waiting to learn the older man's errand.

"Somebody's been trying to kill Dr. Lee," he said, "and very nearly succeeded. I've known for quite a while that he was getting more than his allowance of drugs. Last night he took an overdose, intentionally. We found him in time and brought him through, and this afternoon he told me the story. Somebody's been sending him morphine through the mails for weeks— no name, no message, just a little package of dope. He didn't take it at first, but then some came when he was overtired, and he did take it, and last night, he thought he'd gone so far he'd better end the whole business. That's what the fellow who sent it must have counted on, Doctor, and I think it's murder!"

"It's attempted murder," said Freeland, very gravely. "And the person you suspect is the one now called John Fairchild."

"Yes," said the surgeon grimly. "'You've guessed it; I don't know how, but it's true. I've been a wise fool, Dr. Freeland, a man whose techhique had outrun his philosophy; but I'm willing to pay forfeit. I'll stop that fellow now if I have to go to prison with him— it would serve me right if I did!"

HE told the story, with no attempt to evade blame, and repeating his willingness to tell it in open court, let the consequences be what they might. The old physician cut in on his self-reproaches.

"There, there, Jimmy!" he said, as if the world-famous operator were a troubled boy, to be soothed and helped out of a scrape. "Stop cursing yourself. I wouldn't have let you do it if I had been here, but good may come of it yet. Did you transplant anything except the brain?"

"No."

"You're sure, are you, Jimmy?"

"Good heavens, Dr. Freeland, would I tell you what I have, to begin lying now?"

"I believe you," said Freeland. "Cheer up, boy; good has come of it."

"You mean—"

"Yes." The Doctor's nod interrupted the question. "Now, just sit tight. I don't think anyone will question what you do, but if anyone does, don't answer. I can handle this business— but it will be a mess."

WHEN McAndrews fell, the supplanter stood raging over him for an instant, then whirled abruptly into his room. The cans of opium which had excited the foreman's curiosity were standing on the desk. He put them back in the suitcase, tried the drawers of his desk to see if they were locked, and slipped out of the side door. He could hear them fussing with McAndrews, hear his

father-in-law's peppery swearing; but he did not stop. He hailed a taxi, gave a direction and flung himself back on the seat, cursing his luck, his associates, and at last his hands. They had played him false— he raised them and studied them curiously— but not quite in the manner that he had feared. The rages which were comparatively harmless in a slim man of modest strength were deadly when backed by such weapons as these.

His first halt was at a Chinese shop which had ordered the opium. He carried in the suitcase, bidding the taxi wait. The Chinese sucked his lips at the rashness of such a method of delivering forbidden goods, but accepted them.and paid the required money. As the supplanter was about to leave, the Celestial made a gesture of delay, wrapped up a third-rate vase very carefully and put it into the suitcase. "Makee flont," he explained concisely. "So. Me take."

He carried the suitcase to the taxi and put it in, giving a last warning not to "bleak" the precious contents. The clever camouflage, invented and carried through on the spur of the moment, put the supplanter in a better humor. He drove to the apartment which Dave Mellis had taken since prosperity began to dawn on him, and leaving the suitcase in the taxi, went up with a quantity of morphine in a thick paper sack. Dave was at home, and his eyes narrowed at sight of his visitor.

"What the devil are you coming here for?" he demanded hospitably, as soon as the door was closed.

"To get rid of this," returned the supplanter, handing over the morphine. Dave took it, and gave him a long look,

"What's the big idea?" he inquired. "This ain't in the game. Why don't you keep it at your joint till I want it?"

"Because hell's broke loose there," answered the false Fairchild shortly. He gave a sketchy version of the row, and Dave's look became colder and more hostile still.

"Did he pipe what was in the cans?" he asked.

"No. He couldn't. They were closed."

"Then what did you slug him for?"

"He made me mad," said the supplanter sullenly. Dave studied his big visitor a full minute before replying.

"Fist-fightin's a mistake," he said at length. "It leaves the other guy alive— an' sore. When I'm ready to soak a guy, there aint no comeback, see?"

"I see," said the supplanter disgustedly. He understood that Dave was trying to scare him, but did not suspect the reason, and was not impressed. "Put that stuff out of the way and get the kale," he commanded. "I can't stay here all night."

"I can't give you the money today," said Mellis, who had over a thousand dollars on his person at that moment. "I wasn't expecting you. You'll have to wait." He moved to the window, looked out for a few moments, then said:

"Stay here for a minute till I put this where it'll be safe."

He went out with the word. Dave had picked a luxurious flat, after the manner of prosperous crooks, but he had not wholly neglected the elements of his business. The janitor was a "hophead," a user of dope, and in return for a small amount of the poison, had given Dave the key to the basement. He slipped down there now, hid the morphine in a can of ashes that would not be emptied till the next day, and came back.

"I'll see you with the money next week," he said. The supplanter had doubts on that score, but did not mention them. "See that you do," he answered shortly, and left. He passed the night at a Turkish bath establishment, and after a late breakfast, started for home.

Dave Mellis passed the night momentarily expecting arrest. There is honor among thieves, no doubt, but the thieves do not believe it. They are looking constantly for the double cross, and in the long run seldom suffer disappointment. Dave fully believed that his partner had got in trouble, and squealed to the police; and was genuinely surprised when the dawn of a new day found him still free, and his flat unsearched.

xvi

PENFIELD had gone to the office early for a conference with Dr. Freeland. He had told Isabel of the row, and she was angry and amazed at the assault on McAndrews. Dr. Freeland's share of the story had not reached her. She was in the living-room, with the baby, of course; and when Cap gave a low growl and she looked up to see her husband entering, she had no thought of personal danger. The man noted her reproachful look, and advanced, sneering.

"Passing judgment on me, as usual, I suppose," he said.

"I'm afraid you've passed judgment on yourself, John," she answered. "Mac is old enough to be your father."

"He's old enough to mind his own business!" retorted the supplanter. "He got just a little of what was coming to him."

Even after a year and more of increasing disillusionment, Isabel was amazed at the brutality of the remark. It was unbelievable that John Fairchild could say such a thing. She had heard what McAndrews had said the night before, about demoniac possession and the transmigration of souls, and she did not wonder. Something of the same feeling had come to her more than

once. John fairly looked like Alan, as he stood glowering there. The baby awoke, and announced that he was ready for lunch. His mother picked him up.

"Give him here a minute," commanded the supplanter.

"It's time to nurse him, John," said Isabel; but he reached out his big hands and took the child, who naturally raised a protest at this postponement of commissary activities.

"It's time to spank him!" said the supplanter in an ugly tone. "Shut up!" he added to the child, and when the order was not obeyed, gave the baby a sharp shake. Captain Jinks came to his feet with bared teeth as Isabel snatched the baby away.

"Give me that kid!" ordered the man furiously.

"Not while you're in your present temper, John," returned Isabel. She was pale, but with wrath rather than fright. The supplanter started toward her. Captain Jinks came between with a warning growl. The man kicked at him, and even as the dog avoided the stroke, rushed forward and clutched the baby's dress. Isabel cried out in the first real fear she had felt; and on the instant, there was a flash of dun-colored fur, and the supplanter dodged back, his right hand slashed to the bone. A roar, a savage snarl, the splintering smash of a chair that missed its mark, and Isabel fled with the baby, while behind her, tipping over the phonograph, knocking vases from the mantel, slipping and tripping on costly rug and polished floor, wolf and cave-man fought.

A strong man, fighting coolly and prepared to take punishment, can kill with his bare hands the strongest dog that ever breathed, if they are in close quarters where the man can come to grips. But the big living-room was all in Cap's favor, his antagonist flinched at punishment and was anything rather than cool; yet the battle soon was going against the dog. Twice he slashed himself free after the man had secured a grip that a stancher fighter would have made decisive. Twice he was forced to take refuge under the grand piano until driven out by missiles. He had broken ribs and a smashed foot, and the struggle was all but over when Isabel, leaving Aunt Nellie with the baby at a neighbor's, came back to save her protector. She sent the man sprawling with an unexpected push, seized Cap's collar, and retreated. The supplanter reached the porch in time to see them going into the house next door.

He turned back, looked at the wrecked room, and groaned. He looked at his wounds, and his snarl was animal in its fury. Cursing under his breath, he wrapped his hands in clean handkerchiefs, draped his overcoat around his shoulders and went out. A passing taxi stopped at his hail, and Isabel saw him carried downtown.

DR. FREELAND'S telephone was ringing furiously when he reached his office after the conference at the factory. He uttered an exclamation of anger as the first words of the message reached him, but smiled before it was finished. "Don't worry about me," he answered. "Of course I'll attend to him. I rather fancy that is he at the door now." He hung up the receiver, called "Come in!" and as the expected figure appeared in the doorway, nodded and spoke:

"Yes, Alan, I was looking for you. Close the door."

The supplanter was too full of grievances and troubles to notice the name. He dropped his overcoat and tried to struggle out of his coat. The doctor helped him. Cap had given a grim account of himself; the man was bleeding from half a dozen hurts. The doctor laid out his dressings.

"Dr. Jimmy could do this better," he said, "but I don't think he'd care to attend to you again, Alan. Now—"

This time the name registered. The fury in the man's eyes was replaced for an instant by blank terror; then veiled as his instinctive cunning sought to cover up till he learned how much the doctor knew.

"Alan?" he said. "You mean John, don't you?"

"No, Alan," said the physician, smiling grimly. "I mean you."

"Doctor—"

"I've talked with Jimmy, Alan. He told me the whole story; about Lee and all. I had everything else figured out before."

"You did, did you?" The hazel eyes were almost black with rage and fear. Dr. Freeland knew what McAndrews had seen the evening before. The supplanter studied the physician for a moment, and then said, in a tone all the more fearful for its calmness:

"Do you know of any reason why I shouldn't kill you?"

"None at all, Alan, except that you'd be hanged for it," returned the old physician placidly. "You can't reach Dr. Jimmy, you see, so it will do you no good to silence me. I've attended to that, and taken some other measures too."

"Written it down, I suppose, to be used against me?"

"Of course," said the doctor simply. "John wouldn't have guessed that, Alan. Now, before killing me, you'd better let me dress those bites."

The supplanter held out his hand. He winced and writhed as the Doctor worked, groaned now and then, but spoke no word. His storm of passion had left him strangely weary. The doctor finished his ministrations and took up the injured man's coat.

"Put this on, Alan, and sit down. I want to talk to you."

"Don't call me Alan!" he exclaimed peevishly.

"Would you rather I said Jacob?" asked the doctor. "That's what the nurse called you, but I think we'd better stick to your real name. Of course, you understand that you must go away."

"I'm willing," he answered shortly. He had longed and plotted for escape, but now that it had come, he seemed too tired to enjoy it.

"You will sign over the stock that stands in John Fairchild's name to the baby, with Isabel as trustee and guardian. Mr. Penfield will give you twenty thousand dollars, that being the value of your estate when you tried to murder John, and stole his body instead. You are to sign a paper which my lawyer is drawing up for you, take this money, partly in cash and partly in a draft on any country you care to name, and take the next boat going in your direction."

"How do you know I will?" demanded the supplanter, sneering.

"Because if you refuse, you go to an asylum for the criminal insane. Don't make any mistake, Alan. You are netted. We can't prove your real identity without dragging in Dr. Jimmy, but we don't need to prove it. We can show that you are a criminal, a peddler of contraband drugs, and no jury in this city would believe John Fairchild could do those things unless insane. Your outbreak this morning clinches it."

The supplanter's mind was not working at its best, but he saw the situation. "Oh, I'll go, all right,' he agreed. "You've got me, but it happens I was trying to get money to get away, anyhow."

"The money would have been ready any time you had asked for it and told the truth, Alan."

"I suppose, in your passion for morality, you are going to send Dr. Emory away too?" he sneered.

"I don't blame Jimmy, Alan. He was carried away by the enthusiasm of the artist, and you lied to him, and tricked him. I blame you. You tried to kill your friend, and then, when through your act he was helpless and unconscious, you stole his body. What use have you made of it, and the opportunities that went with it?"

"Not very good, I suppose."

"You cheated the surgeon who gave you this new lease of life by marrying a trusting woman under false pretenses, contrary to your promise to him. You have turned away the host of friends who loved John Fairchild, and consorted with a drug-smuggler. You assaulted an innocent old man, tried to kill a faithful dog, tried to murder the assistant surgeon who served you; but you have done something that almost makes amends. You have given John Fairchild a son. That boy is his, Alan, not yours. Your brain is merely a mutilation, a cancer in John Fairchild's body, and neither mutilations nor cancers are inherited.

"Nature is not mocked, Alan. She has her own ways of restoring the balance. That baby will bring a blessing on Jimmy's experiment yet."

"I hope he does," was the unexpected answer. "Tell Isabel— I'm sorry, won't you? Maybe I wont be so— so bad if I don't have to live up to somebody else's reputation."

"I hope that's true, Alan." The old physician's eyes softened as he thought— not for the first time— of the grinding test to which that ill-trained nature had been subjected, and grew stern as he remembered Dr. Lee and Cap and the baby. "Do you want to take your own name when you get abroad?" he asked.

"I think so. Here, Doctor—" His bandaged hand was clumsy, but he resurrected a thin book from the inner pocket of his vest, and gave it over. "There isn't much you don't seem to have guessed, but it's all written down there, and maybe you'll think kinder of me after you've read it."

THE departure of John Fairchild for Argentina was a nine-days' wonder. The family explained that his health had been undermined by the accident, and he needed a long sea-voyage which the baby was too young to share. Dave Mellis gave some cronies a different explanation; other people had other views, and were still airing them when a cablegram from Buenos Aires made the subject of surpassing interest for a brief space, and then quenched it forever. "John Fairchild" had died suddenly during the voyage and been buried at sea."

Isabel wept a little when she read the message, and then turned to the one question that really mattered: "Doctor, are you sure about the baby?"

"Perfectly sure, my dear," answered Dr. Freeland, as gently as if he had not replied to the same query fifty times before. "Here, young man,"— lifting the youngster from the rug where he was kicking up his heels under Cap's jealous guard— "you're the one certain winner in this game. Go comfort your mother— and see that you keep the habit!"

———————

9: The Daffodil Dame

Bertram Atkey

1880-1952

Blue Book, Jan 1923

Another "Easy Street Experts" caper

"FAR be it for me to make personal remarks about a lady," observed the Honorable John Brass as he leaned restfully back in his chair between courses one evening at the Astoritz, "but that goldfinch sitting in the corner on your right, has certainly had a considerable spell!"

Colonel Clumber studied the lady— a willowy, daffodil blonde, whose beauty would have been striking even at the Astoritz, where beauty is a commonplace, had not her charming face been veiled by the disconcerted expression to which Mr. Brass had directed his partner's attention.

"She looks to me," continued the old adventurer, "as if she is in a state of mind where her dinner is doing her no good at all— harm, in fact. And that's a pity— a very great pity— for I wouldn't deliberately deny that she is a dame who looks about my style. However, dinner first, dalliance second; and here, unless I make a serious error, are the cailles *à la Maréchale*. I'm sorry I'm bound to own that she is beaten a length and a half by these quails."

He nodded solemnly at the savory example of high-class cookery before him, and rather like a serious man saying grace before an eagerly anticipated meal, he muttered, musingly:

"Let's look, now— *cailles*— quails, in fact —boned, stuffed with veal and liver, and braised, then sliced, put in molds lined with chicken farce and poached, dressed round a pile of savory rice, garnished with asparagus points and broad beans and served with *sauce madère*— amen! I allow no blonde to come between *quails à la Maréchale* and me," he added, and proceeded to prove it up to the hilt.

Later he and his partner returned to consideration of the lady. There may be men who, during the last few laps of a leisured and perfect dinner, can witness unmoved a beautiful woman in distress, but neither the Honorable John nor his partner was one of them.

"Not having my gift for noticing details like a hawk, probably it has escaped your attention that she is worried about money —in fact, is desperate about it," stated John presently.

Colonel Clumber glanced redly from under his formidable brows at his partner.

"If you've noticed anything but the contents of your glass and plate for the last half-hour, you've done it so secretly that it's been invisible," he growled. 'How do you know she's worried about money?"

"She's counted the contents of a little note-case three times in the last half-hour— and made it less every time," replied the Honorable John with perfect good humor. "No woman with a sufficient wad ever does that, and very few men of the kind who dine here. No, squire, you can take it from me, that there is a short-circuit in Daffodil's budget or I have lost my remarkable powers of observation."

HE paused to invite attention to the perfectly useless condition of his liqueur glass, a defect duly and swiftly remedied. "Twice," continued the Honorable John, his jocund visage reddening one shade with emotion and old brandy, "twice the tears have welled up into her eyes— and twice she has fought 'em back; three times— as I said— she has counted her money, and three times it has given her bad news; twice she has shivered as though she felt cold— though I'll admit I'm not surprised at that, taking the present fashion for evening dress into consideration; and lastly"— he drained his glass— "she has just wirelessed as clear an SOS signal to me as ever a broad-minded, chivalrous, man o' the world responded to."

He rose massively.

"Just wait here, squire, while I see what her trouble is. She's got a sweet face when she smiles, and I like her eyes. I'm going to throw her a life-buoy— if she cares to produce a reasonable reason for it. Softhearted as a child! I confess it. Pay the bill, and if I signal to you, come across."

He rose and ambled across to the table at which sat the Daffodil Dame.

"Soft-hearted!" sneered his partner, watching him, "yes— soft-hearted like a buffalo. I guess anybody would be softhearted after the champagne he's inhaled tonight!" He felt reluctantly for his notecase, while the Honorable John bowed as gracefully as could be expected before the lady.

BY the time the Coloned had paid the bill, the Honorable John was sitting opposite the willowy one, talking gravely. But the Colonel had not: long to wait in sulky loneliness. Almost immediately his partner beckoned him, and nothing loth, he completed the trio around the table.

"Let me present my good friend Colonel Clumber, to you, dear Mrs. Glenster-Neyshe," requested the Honorable John, adding with heavy urbanity: "Squire, be grateful for the privilege of making the acquaintance of a lady to whom I have long paid homage."

The Colonel looked grateful, and accepted the lady's invitation to sit. Nobody knew better than he that the old rascal beside him had never seen

beautiful Mrs. Glenster-Neyshe before in his life— but because much experience and no little profit had long since taught him the wisdom of promptly returning his partner's lead, he appeared to believe implicitly what he was told.

"The Colonel is my partner, child, and you may speak as freely of your little difficulty to him as to me. Now, this trouble of yours— tell me quite freely and frankly what's wrong, and I think we can promise to put it right for you. Anyway, we'll take a slant at it— I mean we'll look at it and consider the way out— Hey, Squire?"

The Squire agreed cordially.

"Ah, thank you so much, dear Mr. Brass," replied Madam Daffodil. 'Let me think for a moment— it is all so mixed up and distressing. I— I have been so foolish."

She reflected, the partners watching her more or less sympathetically. Now that they were nearer, they saw that her beauty was not quite so distractingly young and fresh as it had seemed from their table, but nevertheless she was an unusually lovely woman.

"I know now that what has happened to me is the result of my own folly," she began. It was not a markedly original opening— indeed, it is probable that Eve, hoeing vegetables on the small-holding outside Eden, frequently made much the same observation to Adam, but it sounded candid and fell as sweetly, trippingly and naturally from her full, curved lips as it does from those of any other lady.

The Honorable John made sounds of encouragement.

"But I am really desperate," she continued. "You see, my husband is in Amsterdam on business. He has been away a week now, and it was very lonely for me. I endured the loneliness for a week, and then I did the first foolish thing. He had given me a little present before he left— fifty pounds to spend. And I was weak enough to allow myself to be persuaded by a friend to go with her to a house in the West End where— she said— they had a most exciting and amusing game. It was a kind of race-game. I have not seen anything like it before, but it is easy to describe. There is a big box with twelve holes in the side. Twelve strings come out of these holes— they are fastened to a— a— rod— isn't it called an axle?— inside the box. The strings are about ten feet long and reach down a long table and at the end of each string is a sweet little model ivory horse, each of a different color.

"You can bet on these horses. When the axle inside the box is revolved the strings are wound up on— on— I think they are called cams— things like swellings on the axle. They are of different sizes, and so the horses are never drawn up to the box at equal speeds. The "two-to-one-against"' horse— Red—

has its string attached to a bigger cam than the four to one against, and so on— and the horse on the biggest cam should always win. But somehow— isn't it odd?— he doesn't, you know, owing to the way the coils of string sometimes slip instead of winding steadily, one coil over the other.

"IT is so fascinating. And quite fair— you may examine the box as often as you like. I won seventy pounds last night there. But today— this afternoon— I lost it again, and my fifty pounds as well— and"— her fine eyes widened and were startled at the very thought— "the emerald necklace my husband left in the secret drawer of his desk. Geoffrey is a diamond merchant— that is why he has gone to Amsterdam. I wore the necklace. I— I oughtn't to have done that. And when I kept losing and losing, I lost my head— and when the proprietor of the game offered to lend me five hundred pounds on the security of the necklace, I let him have it. And then I lost the five hundred pounds! And what will Geoffrey say?" She buried her face in her hands— quietly, without flourishes, attracting no attention— and left the partners to guess for themselves what Geoffrey would observe— which they did without any difficulty at all. For a moment they watched her in silence. A little sob escaped through her slim pretty fingers.

"She is overwrought," said the Colonel softly.

"Distraught, in fact," agreed the Honorable John, and at once ordered three liqueur brandies.

"Can't bear to see 'em cry," he muttered, and continued aloud: "Don't cry, my dear— don't sob. I've no doubt my partner and I can help you— not the slightest. You poor, unlucky little soul, leave it to us."

He leaned across the table and gently pulled the Daffodil Dame's hand from her charming face.

"Why, you don't need to worry yourself seedy," he said. "I don't doubt for one moment that we can get your necklace back for you. And we have all the evening before us. Listen to me, my dear. We are going to help you. Can't think of a better way to spend an evening, in fact. Shall enjoy doing it, hey, Squire?"

"Sure, sure," acquiesced the Colonel eagerly.

"We may not look very talented in that direction, my dear, but, as luck would have it, we happen to be no slouches at race games ourselves— I mean, we understand 'em. That horses-on-strings game is but one of the many we understand. We can pick winners every time, practically speaking. And so, all you have to do is to be a good little girl and drink up that spot of brandy, which will do you good, and come and watch us win your necklace back for you. Am I right, Squire?"

"Certainly," rumbled the Colonel with emphasis.

A gleam of hope dawned in the eyes of the Daffodil Dame.

"Oh-h! But— really? Do you really mean that?"

"Try us," said John with a grim smile.

"I can hardly believe my good fortune. You know— I ought to tell you— to warn you— that I am afraid that the house is really a gambling den!"

John chuckled.

"Yes, yes, my dear. I've no doubt it is. But can you find it again?"

"Oh, yes, quite easily."

"Well, that's your part of the campaign. You show us the place—and leave the rest to us. Hey, partner?"

The Colonel was ready, aye, and willing.

"Men who have won money on real live race-horses ought not to have much trouble in picking up a packet over race-horses on strings that come out of a box," he declared humorously.

She thanked them passionately, drank her liqueur "like a good girl," and in ten minutes they were on their way.

AS the Honorable John had very truly said, neither he nor his partner was in any sense a "slouch" at race-games. What they did not know about these, and all kindred devices for separating the toiling (financial) bakers of this world from their (financial) dough, would not have filled a saloon-bar liqueur-glass; but oddly enough, their knowledge and experience blunted itself in vain against the gentle little pastime at which, on behalf of the Daffodil Dame, they occupied themselves for the next four hours or so.

The gambling den, of which she had spoken in such tones of awe and terror, proved to be a very large, very comfortably furnished drawing-room in a quiet street off one of the fashionable squares. The "guests" present throughout the whole evening were never more than forty or fifty— quiet, well-dressed, reasonably sober people, on the whole, who bet in large sums, some of them winning quite heavily; and the hosts were a couple of good-looking gentlemen, calling themselves brothers, youngish, with easy manners and a publicschool style, known to the assembly as Tommy and Chris.

Tommy officiated at the electric box in which revolved the cam-shaft hauling the steeds; Chris hovered around, receiving the guests as they arrived with their money, or gracefully speeding them out as they left— without their money. A lean man, with a very closely shaven but still darkblue chin, who looked like an ex-actor— as indeed he was, without the hyphen— acted as croupier. There was a buffet at one end of the room, where an attentive, butlerlike person administered restoratives or stimulants with a slightly paternal air that was not unpleasing.

The smiling Chris, receiving the Daffodil Dame and her cavaliers, had made no secret at all of the transaction of the necklace.

"Ah, dear Mrs. Glenster-Neyshe, I feel that you have come to win away from us that charming necklace, haven't you?" he said as he shook hands. Dropping his voice a little, he added: "I would like to wish you good luck— the very best of good luck. Take my advice, and back Blue— he is in good form tonight, and is winning more than I have ever known him."

"Something gone wrong with his cam, hey?" laughed the Honorable John pleasanily.

Chris smiled with good-humor.

"That is what I said to Tommy," he answered— "though what there is to go wrong I honestly don't know. But Tommy and Milvale— the croupier— only laughed. They say it is just 2 series of runs— you get these odd runs in every game. And of course the box is open to inspection... . No, I think Tommy is right. It's just Blue's lucky night. I should be inclined to bank Blue heavily— but don't let me influence you. Come and see the game working."

Deeply interested, the partners did so.

"THEY found it extremely simple, even as the Daffodil Dame had stated. The camshaft bore six cams and was driven by a little dynamo, the tiny gear-wheel of which meshed with a large gear wheel on the shaft. To each cam was attached one end of a ten-foot cord, the other end of the cord being attached to a race-horse modeled in colored ivory. The race-horses were drawn to the end of a long polished table— to the "Starting Post"— lined up there exactly level; and, the bets having been made, Tommy pressed a button and the cam-shaft inside the box revolved. Because the diameter of Silver's cam was very much larger than, for instance, Red's, theoretically it would coil up more of Silver's cord in one revolution of the shaft than Red's cam— thus causing Silver to travel faster and consequently giving it a better chance to win, as was reflected in the odds laid by the croupier against Silver— two to one, whereas Red's price was ten to one. But actually, owing to the erratic way in which the cords wound themselves, there was no real certainty as to which horse would reach the side of the box first—that is to say, win. A cord would wind up sometimes in a series of perfect coils side by side or in a large overlapping coil, this governing the speed of the horse.

It was delightfully uncertain and therefore very fascinating.

The Honorable John had had a thoroughly bad day's racing— on the second favorite, Green— before he had been in the room twenty minutes.

He became a little bloodshot in the right eye as he suddenly switched off Green and took a twenty-pound flyer on Red— a ten-to-one chance. Red ran

well for half the course; then his cord-coil slipped, and he had only finished about half the course when Silver rapped his ivory nose against the ebony box, an easy winner by two lengths.

The Honorable John's other eye went bloodshot, and he sheered off to the buffet, where he commanded champagne in no uncertain fashion.

"This is a game and a half you've got here, my lad," he stated to the butler.

"Yes, indeed, you may say so, sir," replied that one. "You find the ponies fascinating, sir?"

"I find 'em damned expensive," corrected John.

He finished his glass of champagne and sweetened the butler with a pound note.

"Any tips for the next race?" he asked facetiously—but not wholly without significance.

"Some of our gentlemen have done well by backing Green consistently, sir. Consistently and persistently. Though, speaking for myself, I have a weakness for Blue."

The Honorable John returned to try out fifty pounds' worth of the butler's weakness, Blue.

Blue won once during the next hour— on the occasion when the Honorable John's good money was intrusted to Gold, which lost by a very short nose.

JOHN returned for moral support from the butler and the buffet— meeting Colonel Clumber, scowling ferociously, on his way.

"Are you going or coming, Squire?" he said curtly. "The champagne is the safest bet in this establishment. Join me."

The Colonel, nothing loth, joined him, and together they utterly ruined a bottle of really fine champagne.

"And how much have these bone Arabs set you back in your accounts, Squire?" demanded John.

"More than I intend to leave here when closing time takes place," growled the Colonel. "If I can't beat a nursery game of pretty gee-gees like this, you can call me a four-flusher from Quitterville."

He cocked a lurid eye at his partner.

"D'you think there's a joker in the ebony box?" he asked softly.

The Honorable John, restored by the noble wine which he had consumed, smiled comparatively blandly.

"I don't know— yet; I can't say— at present. But I got a whiff, as you may say— just a whiff— of the lurking rodent a minute or so ago. I can't honestly say I've smelt a straightforward rat yet— but there's a slight tinge of mouse in

the atmosphere. I'm giving another couple of hundred a chance— and perhaps the mouse will grow into a full-sized old English rat."

He dropped his voice.

"Some of the people here have won heavily, but they may be—" He broke off abruptly, turning to greet the Daffodil Dame, who was swaying up to them with deep distress still writ large upon her lovely face.

"How have you been succeeding, please?"' she asked in plaintive tones. "I have been dreadfully unlucky. You know I have not made a single bet of more than ten shillings, and my luck has fluctuated so! I have not one single penny left, and if I were not afraid, I would go home and have a cup of tea and go to bed at once. Oh, I wish I had never seen this place."

The Honorable John patted her beautiful arm gently.

"Bear up, my dear; this race-meeting isn't over yet," he reminded her. "Take a little refreshment and wait till the numbers go up for the last race. I have got my eye on these ivory mustangs, and they know it— and if they don't all jump into the box in sheer terror before I've finished with them, you can call me no judge of a thoroughbred," he concluded, beckoning the gentleman with the corkscrew in his tail pocket.

A LITTLE later the Honorable John rose.

"I am going to see Red," he declared. "It's just come into my mind, like a flash of Chinese fire— Red!"

He swung massively across to the table and put fifty pounds on Red three times in succession.

Red lost handsomely every time.

But the Honorable John did not keep his promise to startle the little animal and his companions clean into the box by the power of the human eye alone.

On the contrary, he beamed upon the little "bone Arab" as though he loved it, and proceeded to intrust another fifty to its care.

It was at least halfway home, when the dilated nostrils of White, winning easily, tapped the side of the box. The Honorable John beamed some more, and reduced his bets to pound notes. His note-case, which at the beginning of the séance had looked so portly, was assuming the appearance of a limp book-cover without any literature inside it.

It was nearing three o'clock in the morning when he and the frankly maddened Colonel, the only visitors left (except the Daffodil Dame, who was still watching with strained attention) made their last bets— a modest ten pounds apiece on Gold.

Silver won—and Messrs. Tommy and Chris announced that, for tonight, the séance was ended.

"After all, you good sportsmen are not in the vein— but you can have your revenge tomorrow!" said Chris smilingly.

Instantly, and more like a mechanical device than a man, the blue-chinned croupier rose, bade them a polite good night and left. Evidently he had no more financial interest in the place than was provided for by his weekly salary and tips from heavy winners—if any.

The butler-like laddy also faded away.

"Well, perhaps you're right, you boys— all good things come to an end," chuckled the Honorable John, fingering his empty note-case. "Even a bale of notes big enough to choke a python— like mine was."

His glance roved across to the Daffodil Dame, as the debonair Tommy came up, clutching a bottle of champagne and five glasses.

"A glass of wine to christen the advent into our circle of two good sportsmen, I think, what?" suggested Thomas, and became busy with the wire round the cork.

The Honorable John nodded indulgently.

"Well, well, if I had won five hundred instead of losing it, I should have expected you boys to moisten it with me, no doubt," he purred, like an old bear with his nose buried in the honey-cupboard of a wild bees' nest. "And I guess my friend"— he glanced at the Colonel— "will be glad to drown the memory of his loss in a little refreshment—hey, Squire?"

The Colonel growled a reluctant acquiescence. The wine foamed and sparkled.

"BUT BEFORE we drink to the pastime of kings," said the Honorable John, "I should like to make an appeal to you two boys on behalf of the charming little lady on my right. May I?"

"Certainly," smiled Tommy and Chris. "You have here as pretty a game as I ever remember butting into— pretty, fascinating and profitable. It has run me fairly off my hind-legs tonight, and my friend off his also. And neither of us are men easily knocked off our stances. We have lost a lot of very good money— but we can afford it. But with Daff— with Mrs. Glenster-Neyshe here, it is otherwise and different. She, poor little soul, has lost what she can't afford— and what is not hers to lose. I mean her hubby's emerald necklace. It's part of his business stock, and if he is dreaming about it, far off in Amsterdam, so to put it, he dreams that it is fast asleep in its secret drawer in his desk at home. Well, we know— just we five here together— that Daff— that Mrs. Glenster-Neyshe has lost that necklace here this afternoon. And what I want to point out to you two boys is that it means blue ruin to Mrs. Glenster-Neyshe. Her husband loves her and trusts her— and love is a very beautiful thing. So is

trust. I don't like to feel that you two nice, gentlemanly young sportsmen are willing to ruin Mrs. Glenster-Neyshe— and if I am any judge of men, you are not willing. My friend and I came here to win back that necklace for this lady. We've failed— the ponies were too slick for us. It's cost me pretty nearly five hundred pounds in cold cash. You have that money, boys. So I am going to ask you, Tommy and Chris, to return that necklace to this lady, free gratis and for absolutely nothing— as an act of sportsmanship!"

He leaned toward the proprietors of the "ponies," his heavy face a little flushed, his gray-green eyes a trifle hard.

"You've won from my partner and myself, all told, something like a thousand pounds tonight. I want to ask you to show that you are generous winners. Let this little lady off," he asked them.

Messrs. Tommy and Chris stared, clearly a little disconcerted at the modest request.

Even the Daffodil Dame's fine eyes shone with sheer surprise.

Chris spoke.

"This is— er— novel, what? D'you mind if we chat it over?"

They retired, talking together for a few moments, speedily came to a decision and returned, smiling.

"We are perfectly willing to return the necklace," said Chris, bowing to the Daffodil Dame, "tomorrow."

"Tomorrow!" echoed the Honorable John.

"You see, the necklace is not here. Mrs. Glenster-Neyshe lost it this afternoon. We do not live here— for obvious reasons. The necklace was put in a safe at my flat after our afternoon session here. That is all. If Mrs. Glenster-Neyshe will call here tomorrow afternoon, it shall be waiting for her. She may take it freely— without feeling in any way indebted to us or under any obligation."

"Oh, thank you— thank you so," said the Daffodil Dame, and burst into tears— at least, she covered her face with her hands.

"Well said, Tommy and Chris!" boomed the Honorable John, and patted the lady's shapely shoulder. "There, there, my dear, den't cry. All's well! 'Your troubles are over. Nothing to do now but be happy. Be good, and don't gamble any more with hubby's stock-in-trade, and you will be happy!"

He rose ponderously.

"Slip your cloak on, my dear, and come with us— we'll put you in a taxi and send you home.— Good night, Tommy— good night, Chris. Must take another whirl at your ebony box some of these nights. Let me catch Red in form, and I'll put a kink in your bank balance yet, hey, boys?"

They cordially invited him to try whenever the mood was on him; and so, a minute or so later, they left, with their grateful protegée.

"WELL, my dear, that's that," said the Honorable John as he shook hands with the Daffodil Dame. "Be a good girl in future and leave the ponies to those who understand 'em—"

"Like you, for instance," snapped the Colonel acidly, apparently jealous of the way in which his partner seemed to assume possession of the entire copyright of the dame.

The Honorable John laughed.

"Like me, yes— in a manner of speaking," he agreed.

He escorted the now volubly grateful lady to their big limousine for which he had telephoned at about midnight.

"We're going to send you home in our car," he said, still fatherly. "Go straight to bed when you get home, and have a good, long, luxurious sleep. Don't hurry to get up early; eat a sensible, substantial breakfast,— never neglect breakfast, my dear,— then fetch the necklace, put it back where you took it from, and spend the rest of the day making yourself sweet and pretty for hubby when he gets back from Amsterdam. There, that's sound advice— if I were your papa, I couldn't give you sounder advice!"

The Colonel, listening with ill-concealed impatience to this little lecture, glanced at Sing, the Chinese slave and worshiper of the Honorable John, who usually drove the limousine about town,— when not engaged upon the production of meals,— and his lips opened. But they closed again without sound. The driver was not Sing the Chink.

The Colonel shot a look at his partner, who was opening the door for the Daffodil Dame. What was this? Had the old buffalo a card up his sleeve still? It was quite likely— nobody knew better than the Colonel that quite the last man to leave without protest a big bale of notes behind in an obvious gambling-den was the Honorable John.

Then they said au revoir to the lady, and the great car slid smoothly away. A white hand fluttered for an instant at the window, and the Honorable John waved back.

"I suppose you're aware that the driver of the car wasn't Sing?" asked the Colonel.

John was lighting a cigar.

"Hey, Squire? Oh, yes, I knew that. In fact, I arranged that over the phone just now. You see, I needed Sing to drive us home."

"I don't get your idea," said the Colonel. "I don't get it at all. If you wanted Sing to drive us home, why didn't you let him bring the limousine, and we could have given Daffodil a lift home. Is Sing bringing the touring-car for us?"

"No, not the touring-car— the taxi!" replied John absently, looking down the street.

"A taxi— what taxi?"

"Oh, the one that I bought cheap the other day," said John casually. "You remember how it amused you at the time— but—"

A belated-looking taxi turned into the street.

"This should be Sing," announced John. "Keep your eyes open, and follow my lead!"

The Colonel made a noise expressive of angry bewilderment.

"This gambling has gone to your head, old man. Yow're getting a bit mixed up, aren't you? Why use a cheap, ramshackle, secondhand taxi when we've got two first-class cars of our own?"

The Honorable John did not immediately answer his partner. Instead he raised his voice in a hoarse bawl that must have startled more than one denizen of the street from his or her slumbers. "Hoi— taxi!" he bellowed.

THE taxi ground itself to a standstill by the curb. It was driven by a yellow-faced person with slanting eyes and a hard, a very hard, visage— Sing.

Before the Honorable John could speak, the door of the house behind them swung open, and Messrs. Tommy and Chris, the race-game experts, stepped out, well-mufflered and overcoated against the chill night air. Each carried a leather attaché-case.

"Why, gentlemen, not gone yet?"

"Why, hullo boys! No. We sent that little woman home in our car, and have only just succeeded in getting this taxi," said John genially. "Which way are you going, you two boys, hey? West? Good. That's our way. We'll give you a lift— might wait here a month for another taxi at this hour of the night."

He stepped in and they heard him sit down with a thud that shook the taxi.

"Tell the driver what corner he is to drop you at."

"Why, thanks very much— it's only a quarter of a mile— still, it's late for walking. Squat in, Tommy!"

Chris told the idol-faced driver where to drop them, and followed his partner in, the Colonel bringing up the rear.

A grim smile was hovering at last on the hard lips of the Honorable John's hefty partner.

He had noted that which indicated to him that his old hunting companion was not yet passing into senility. Like the Honorable John on his right, he flung

his overcoat open, and jamming both hands into the pockets of his dinner jacket, leaned back facing "the boys," a big cigar gripped between his teeth.

"Well, you two boys certainly trimmed us two poor old boobs tonight," said the Honorable John genially. "That is certainly a sweet game. Do pretty well at it?"

Tommy was modest.

"We have our ups and downs, naturally, what? But we get a modest living."

The Honorable John passed his cigarcase, and they helped themselves. The Colonel, expecting it, felt a slight warning pressure of his partner's elbow as Chris struck a match, and politely held it to his pal's cigar,

"I've been wondering whether you two would really have returned that necklace to Daffodil if there had really been a necklace at all— if she had lost it— and if she had really been your victim instead of your decoy, you man-eaters!" said the Honorable John then very swiftly, very distinctly, and with a rasp in his voice like the sound of a file on hard metal:

"Sit still! Keep your hands still— up— up, damn you!" he ground out; and the change from friendliness to ferocity in his voice was startling.

"Use your eyes, you cam-experts! Look! Move your hands, and we'll spray you!"

Pale-faced behind a wispy cloud of cigarsmoke Messrs. Tommy and Chris stared, their hands at the level of their mouths. They were wise, for the two partners were facing them, each with his hands buried in the pockets of his dinner-jacket— and something hard inside those pockets was pointed directly at the gambling-den proprietors.

The Honorable John withdrew one hand. It contained a small but businesslike automatic pistol, the muzzle of which he jammed into Tommy's overcoat where it covered his solar plexus.

Faithfully the Colonel followed his example. Then the Honorable John romoved, Tommy's neat brown leather attaché-case from his side.

Minutely the Colonel copied him in the case of Chris.

"That's better— a great deal better," said the Honorable John, an echo of good humor in his voice.

"Highway robbery, you'd call this, hey?" he continued.

"It is! And you will pay for it," snarled Chris.

"Yes?"

The Honorable John nodded.

"At the corner of the next street there will be a constable on duty," he said, chuckling."Shall I tell the driver to stop at him so that you can give us in charge?"

They glanced at each other and were silent.

"Answer that— do we stop or not?"

"No! "— sullenly.

"Why not?"

No answer.

"You wont tell me, hey? Very well, I'll tell you. You wont appeal to any policeman to save you from us because the cams on the shaft in your ebony box are variable and adjustable— and you know it, you young thieves! You can increase the circumference of any one of those cams to almost any extent you like, whether the shaft is revolving or not—and that means that you can allow any horse to win you like. Am I right?"

A SPASM of acute anguish contorted the good-looking faces of "the boys."

"Ah, then that's settled. .... See if they are armed, old man," said John.

The Colonel speedily satisfied himself that they were not, and the Honorable John rapped on the glass behind Sing's ear.

"We part here," he announced.

Chris spoke shrilly, horrified.

"But there's three times as much in those bags as you lost, you hog!" he objected. The Honorable John shook his head.

"When you have lived as long as I have, my boy, you will have broken yourself of the foolish habit of making unnecessary remarks," he observed as the taxi drew up.

Not four yards away shone the light over the murky portals of the police-station.

"Get out, you boys," invited John. "But before you go, let me tell you that you are running a low-down and unclean business. Take my advice and close down before you are closed. I've half a mind to give you in charge now. If you weren't so young— and foolish— I would. But if your den is running three nights from now, look out for trouble. I've no doubt you'll only open up somewhere else, anyway— so the best thing, in fact the only thing, I can do is to sequestrate— impound— take away— your capital. May keep you out of mischief that way— but I doubt it."

The door swung open, and reluctantly the swindlers stepped out. A policeman on the steps of the station surveyed them idly.

"Good night, my boys," said the Honorable John.

"Good night," they replied shortly, and the Colonel swung the door shut again. Sing swung the taxi off on the home trail.

"A perfect pair of scoundrels," said John, sadly. "How much is there in the bags?"

IT panned out at something between three and four thousand pounds.

"Not bad, though it might have been better. On the whole I'm dissatisfied— very," said John, over a nightcap.

"Were you ever satisfied in your life?" inquired his partner caustically. "How did you get wise to the scheme, anyway?"

John laughed.

"Quite simple, Squire. When I entered that den, I was very nearly as dense in the head as you. I really believed this Daffodil had been plucked. She was a magnificent decoy— but she made one or two little mistakes. Only details— iittle things that anybody like you would never notice— but which couldn't get past a man with a wonderful natural gift for noticing details— like me. In the first place, she never told the butler what she wished to drink when we invited her to take refreshment. He knew. He poured her out a Maraschino— as no doubt he had poured her many a one before. That opened my eyes to the fact that she was an old hand there.

"And when I decided in my mind that she was a decoy, I speeded up the revolutions of my brains till I made myself giddy. I watched the winners and watched Tommy's hands. He was the lad who pressed the electric button to start winding the horses. He used the right hand for the button. Every time Silver won, Tommy's lily-white left hand rested carelessly in the same spot on the box; every time Green won, his paw also rested in the same spot— a different one from Silver's spot. And so on. I decided that Tommy could enlarge the cams quite a good deal, as required. I wasn't far wrong, hey?"

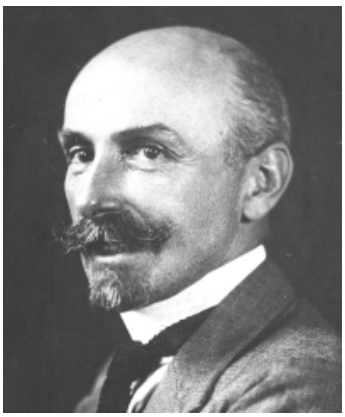
The old rascal chuckled as he held his glass to the light. "I knew I was right when they couldn't produce the lost necklace. They hadn't won one to produce. Daffodil invented it— a fairy necklace, and no doubt, a fairy husband. Yes, you've got to hand it to me again," he continued complacently. "You've got a very observant man for a partner—hawk-eyed and fox-witted, in fact— and you may as well admit it. I remember you were very much amused at my idea of buying a taxi— refused to pay for a half-share at the time, hey? J'll have to trouble you for that half-share now, Squire? Y'see, I had studied the thing— worked it out,— and you can take it from the old man that there are times— and may be more— when a private taxi is more valuable than a private limousine. Those crooks would have been suspicious of getting into a private car with all that money on them, but they fell for an obvious thing like a lift in a taxi! Pass the brandy.

10: The Punishment of Life

Ambrose Pratt

1874-1944

The Australian Magazine, 30 March 1899



Ambrose Goddard Hesketh Pratt

Australian author of mostly historical novels, some 30 in all, plus numerous non-fiction books, and a handful of short stories.

A TAP came to Gil Peret's door.

"A note for M'sieur," said a servant, offering Gil Peret a letter on a salver.

Gil Peret, clad in a dressing-gown, was engaged in waxing his moustachios before a mirror. He paused, bending a little forward, while he softly rubbed one of the waxed ends between the forefinger of his right hand and the thumb of his left, in order to impart to it the proper curl.

He was a very handsome man, was Gil Peret, but, nevertheless, he was accustomed to leave nothing undone in the matter of toilet that could at all improve his appearance.

"You may leave it on the mantel," he remarked, after a moment, turning his head from side to side the while to better study the effect, which must have pleased him, from the satisfied expression of his face.

"But a gentleman waits below for an answer, said the servant.

"A gentleman?" queried Gil Peret, "or a lacquey?"

"A gentleman, M'sieur."

"So early;why, it is not yet twelve. Offer the gentleman some refreshment, Pierre, and ask him to wait. By-the-bye, who is he?"

"M. Fecamp, M'sieur."

"Tell M. Fecamp I shall not be long, Pierre."

Gil Peret removed his dressing-gown and stood up in shirt and trousers, a graceful willowy figure, approaching six feet high.

He had fixed a collar round his neck, and was busily engaged tying his cravat when a second tap came to the door.

"Come in," he said, easily; "you, Pierre, again; what is it?"

"M. Fecamp begs that you will read his letter at once, he very much desires to speak with you."

"A man must dress," grumbled Gil Peret, proceeding tranquilly with his cravat.

"I assure you M. Peret is but just dressing," said Pierre to someone just outside the door.

"M. Peret, I am sure, will admit said a deep bass voice.

Gil Peret raised his eyebrows and shrugged his shoulders;his gestures were very expressive, he told himself, for he still regarded his reflection in the mirror. "Pierre!" he called.

"M'sieur."

"Is it M. Fecamp's voice which I have just heard without?"

"Yes, m'sieur; it was."

"Be good enough to say to M. Fecamp that he will excuse my receiving him in my dressing-room: I shall be delighted to—"

"It is I who must ask you to excuse me for troubling you so far, M'sieur," interrupted the deep bass voice, and almost immediately a stoutly-built, middle-aged gentleman, with iron grey moustache and imperial and deep set but large black eyes entered the room, bowing profoundly to its master.

"I am charmed to see you, M. Fecamp," said Gil Peret languidly.

"Pierrre, a chair for M. Fecamp. That will do; you may go."

M. Fecamp sat down and glanced about him for some seconds, amazed at the fripperies of Gil Peret's toilet table with its quantities of cosmetics, scent pots, and powder puffs! and the gaudy feminine drapings on the walls. Gil Peret flushed a little— perhaps annoyed by the contemptuous glances of the older man.

"To what am I indebted for the honour of this visit, m'sieur?" he asked, with facile politeness.

"I have at length made up my mind," answered M. Fecamp, quietly.

"Ah indeed, that is very clever of m'sieur, doubtless: but may I ask a little more definiteness? I cannot see—"

"I shall explain," replied M. Fecamp. "You have, perhaps, suspected that l am aware of your relations with my wife?"

Gil Peret shot a quick look at M. Fecamp, but the other's face was impenetrable.

"My relations with Madame Fecamp?"

"Yes; the attentions you pay to Madame."

"Madame is most charming. I have for her a profound respect— an absolute esteem," said Gil Peret.

" That is Possible, m'sieur; I say nothing about that. I refer to your intimacy with Madame, my wife!"

Gil Peret regarded M. Fecamp with seeming amazement.

"lntimacy! that is too strong a word, m'sieur!" he said deprecatingly.

"You think so? I cannot believe you say quite what you mean—at least, you are deceiving yourself?"

"Does M. Fecamp insinuate that I have uttered an untruth?"

"I never insinuate anything, Msieur.

"Then I fail to understand you."

"What I wish to know, M. Peret, before we commence'the discussion which is before us, is whether or not you are aware that I am acquainted with the fact that you are my wife's lover?"

Gil Peret started back with an exclamation, and stared for several moments at his companion, a thousand thoughts chasing each other through his mind.

"But you are jesting, Monsieur— you are cool, calm, collected; your hand is not shaking, it rests on the tranquil as the wood itself. Your eyes stare at me without quivering an eyelid. Your face has its usual colour. Your lips are smiling like the lips of a painted picture. Ah, bah! Monsieur, you are jesting!"

"I am not jesting, Monsieur."

"If you were not jesting you would come to me with eyes on fire, thundering, bellowing, demanding satisfaction. That is not so— you are cool as ice, and you are smiling, are jesting, but it is a sorry joke, Monsieur."

"I assure you l am not joking, M. Peret. I have know for some three weeks that you are my wife s lover."

"You are mistaken, Monsieur. You do Madame Fecamp a grand injustice." .

"You are not serious, Monsieur?"

"I swear to you—"

"Do not swear, Monsieur. Is not that a painting of Madame beside your bed?" . . . mprp

"But, Monsieur, a circumstance so trivial— a mere painting! Did you come to my room to collect proofs foster your suspicions?"

Gil Peret looked perplexed. "If Monsieur would explain."

Fecamp nodded. "The house. No. 17, Rue de Cahors," he said quickly, looking piercingly at the other. Gil Peret threw out his hands, which trembled in spite of himself, in a gesture of entreaty.

"The 17th, 19th, and 23rd of April; the 3rd, 5th, 16th of May. To-day is the 17th May," went on Fecamp

"You have assuredly paid spies to watch Madame," said Gil Peret with a sneer.

"It is not unlikely," replied M. Fecamp tranquilly.

"Well?"

"I have experienced great difficulty in determining what is best to be done under the circumstances. That is what has prevented me from calling upon you before."

"Indeed."

"Yes. It is as I say. I presume you have been congratulating Madame on possessing a blind fool for a husband, M. Peret."

"Well, we were undecided whether you were blind or complaisant. L am relieved to find that though you are not blind you are at least complaisant, monsieur. I suppose a question of money. How much do you require?"

"You would doubtless pay a good sum to escape having your name connected with divorce proceedings, monsieur?"

"I am not a very rich man; do not be rapacious. How much do you want?"

"I am not in need of money, thank you, Monsieur."

"Good God! You intend then to sue for a divorce?"

"It would be an interesting diversion without doubt to hold up an honourable name to be pecked at by the jackdaws of the courts, Monsieur. But even the knowledge that so charming a gentleman as M. Gil Peret would most certainly share my infamy, cannot compensate me for certain disadvantages the system appears to me to possess."

Gil Peret regarded the tranquil countenance of M. Fecamp with an increased respect, striving in vain to gather a meaning from the fathomless eyes and imperturbable features before him.

"Do you wish to fight a duel with me, Monsieur?" he asked at length.

M. Fecamp smiled. "The thought occurred to me, it is true, and disturbed me for some time," he confessed. "But it seems to me that if I were to fight a duel with you I should voluntarily resign the advantage over you which I now possess— a proceeding which I cannot refrain from condemning as most foolish."

"What advantage over me do you possess?"

"You have injured me. I have a moral and legal right of redress from you."

"That is so. But it appears to me that a duel would exactly afford that redress."

"It is unlikely, monsieur, that you can have given this subject the amount of consideration which I have bestowed upon it," said M. Fecamp, drily. "You must understand that I have occupied myself with this matter alone for three weeks past."

"Is it possible? I congratulate Monsieur on his powers of deliberation. For me, I would have settled the matter in three minutes."

"What would M. Peret have decided upon?"

"A duel, undoubtedly."

"It is impossible that such a course could commend itself to one's reason, M'sieur, though I confess it might appeal strongly to one's instincts."

"I should consider myself a coward not to avenge a dishonour, or to die in the attempt," said Gil Peret, warmly.

"M. Peret is a younger man than I," observed M. Fecamp, "and he has hitherto impressed me as being possessed of intelligence."

"You flatter me, M'sieur."

"I have no such intention."

"M'sieur has not yet informed me of his objection to duelling as a means of satisfaction."

"A thousand pardons. It is briefly this: l am an indifferent swordsman, I have never used a pistol. M'sieur Peret has the reputation of being an expert with both."

"It vastly surprises me to know that M. Fecamp is afraid of me," said Gil Peret, with a sneer.

"I am distressed that you should take such a view of the case, M'sieur; it is— pardon me— so narrow-minded. You must confess that there is no obligation upon me to fight you, therefore if I choose to take my revenge in another way why should you call me a coward? Besides that I have pointed out my reasons to you— you must see that by fighting a duel with you, I resign the advantage given me by the right ot redress which is undoubtedly mine, and moreover at the same time I place my life at your disposal, to take at your pleasure. What I need is revenge. It seems to me that I should not be revenging myself by giving M'sieur the privilege of sticking a sabre in my loins, or driving a bullet into my brain without hope of retaliation. If M. Peret is a reasonable man he will withdraw his remark."

"I confess that what you say appears to be reasonable. I offer you my apologies," said Gil Peret.

M. Fecamp bowed gracefully. "I accept them," he replied.

"You announced to me some moments ago that you had made up your mind, M'sieur. You have said that you will not sue for a divorce, and that duelling does not please you. Is it that you intend to—er— er?" Gil Peret hesitated.

M. Fecamp smiled. "Kill you," he suggested.

"You alarm me, M'sieur," said Gil Peret, satirically.

"I had thought of arranging for your death, M'sieur, but reflection informed me that it would be difficult, nay, almost impossible, to escape detection, and I do not propose to execute a revenge that can rebound on myself."

Gil Peret appeared agitated; he gazed with a feeling of consternation on the stern countenance of M. Fecamp, amazed at the deliberate selfishness and deep calculations of his adversary.

"What is it, then, that you intend?" he cried.

"I had thought, M'sieur, of entrapping you and Madame in my chalet, and essaying on your bodies some mediaeval instruments of torture which I have collected. M'sieur is aware that I have studied archaeology?"

"No," muttered Gil Peret with a shudder.

"At first this idea pleased me," said M. Fecamp, reflectively, "especially as it offered facilities for wresting from you your wealth by inducing you to sign necessary documents therefor under the influence, say, of the thumbscrew— or the boot."

Gil Peret gazed upon his companion, fascinated with horror at the cold cruelty and indifference of his tone and expression.

"I had thought, too," continued M. Fecamp, "of compelling each in turn to be the executioner of the other. First you of Madame, then Madame of you; giving the lady, as is becoming, the last word. I confess this attracted me for some time, to the exclusion of any other idea, involving, as it does, such excellent opportunities, as one proceeds, to improve upon and extend the delights of revenge from an experimental into an exact science. The advantages of such a system are so apparent that I need not detail them for M'sieur."

"You have given up this idea, M'sieur— why?" asked Gil Peret, with an involuntary shiver.

The calm and placid enunciation of M. Fecamp's schemes for revenge was fast unnerving the younger man. He tried to assure himself that his enemy was a visionary, a madman; that these arrangements which he had planned so viciously and so quietly were impossible of execution. But the expression of the steel-grey eyes bent so steadily upon him possessed nothing of the fire of lunacy, while it all too strongly evinced a settled hate and a depth of energy and purpose which promised beforehand the accomplishment of anything M. Fecamp might ultimately decide upon.

The older man shook his head in answer,

"I was unhappily forced by circumstances to abandon it, M'sieur, although the scheme had my entire sympathy. My confidential servant, upon whom I depended for assistance necessary in its accomplishment, I grieve to say died the day before yesterday."

Gil Peret gave a sigh of relief, but instantly the thought came to him, "What next?" and the look of anxiety re-appeared in his eyes. "May I offer you my condolences,

M'sieur?" he asked affectedly, but the sneer could not settle, for his lips were twitching.

"Thank you," said Fecamp, gravely; "have I your permission to continue?"

Gil Peret nodded;he feared to speak lest his voice should tremble.

"This left me almost as I stood before," said M. Fecamp; "having unlimited ambition for an unexampled revenge I was annoyed to discover my means in any way limited. lat last determined to seek assistance, and yet I feared to make anything of my private affairs the property of another. Not only was there no one whom I could trust to assist me, but none of my acquaintances happen to be conspicuous for invention, nor could I depend upon them to respect my wishes and prejudices. Suddenly it occurred to me that there is another person at least as interested as myself in the arrangements I have in contemplation, and this person, fortunately, happens to be already acquainted with the state of my domestic affairs, so that there would not even be the necessity to make a confidant of him. Moreover, he is a man whom I believe possesses a capital brain. I determined to go to him, and that is what I meant, M'sieur, when I informed you that I had made up my mind."

Gil Peret stared at M. Fecamp— dazed a little.

"That is what you meant when you said you had made up your mind?" he repeated, frowning nervously.

"M'sieur has grasped me perfectly."

"Why, who is this man?" demanded M. Peret, with a strange look.

M. Fecamp rose and bowed profoundly to his companion.

"His name is M. Gil Peret," he answered.

Gil Peret stared in the eyes of M. Fecamp as if he were magnetised, but no word came from his lips, and his hands grasped the sides of the chair upon which he was sitting with a force which was perhaps unconsciously exercised. Does not this plan commend itself to M'sieur? M'sieur is silent," said M. Fecamp.

Gil Peret roused himself with an effort, but a certain nervousness held sway over his muscles one and all.

"My God, how strange!" he muttered.

"Strange, strange, M'sieur? An unusual course to adopt, perhaps, but not unnatural. Anything which is done or can be done is at once removed from the province of un-natural. Pouf! this is done;therefore it is natural and proper and right. Do you follow me, M sieur?

"To come— to— me! My God— like—Ah!" Gil Peret raised his hands to place over his eyes, but they soon dropped to his sides again as if he had lost the power to use them, while always he gazed like a man in a trance into the marble countenance ot M. Fecamp.

"I am here," said M. Fecamp.

"Go from me. Go— go— go!" cried Gil Peret.

"Presently, presently; a little discussion at first, if you please; then we shall see."

"What do you want with me?"

"Your advice."

"Upon what?"

"Many things, M'sieur. I wish to learn from your own lips something of your character, in order that I may judge which, among the plans I have invented, may be best applied to your case. I feel sure M'sieur will help me."

"You are mad, utterly mad."

"M'sieur has made other statements which I have already disproved;this one I can only contradict, but M'sieur may rely upon my word that I am perfectly sane."

Gil Peret sprang to his feet and walked quickly towards the door, where a button was situated communicating with an electric bell at a distant portion of the house;he placed his finger upon this button. "M. Fecamp, he said, icily "I find that I have enjoyed your eccentric conversation long-' enough. I offer you a thousand apologies, but I must ask you now to excuse me, as a matter of business demands my attention."

M. Fecamp s keen eyes, following his enemy s movements unwaveringly, noted that Gil Peret had not yet pressed the button. "Sit down, I beg of you, M sieur," he said, calmly.

"You must excuse me."

"It is impossible."

"Pardon me, you must go.",

"I shall not move from here until we have understood each other."

Gil Peret's face flushed with a sudden passion, and he pressed the button.

"You are an uninvited guest; I shall compel you to leave me," he said, hotly, advancing towards the other.

M. Fecamp smiled a terrible smile, and put his clenched hand on the table beside him. "You see that hand, m'sieur?"

Gil Peret stopped and regarded the outstretched hand with an inexplicable feeling of dread and aversion. M. Fecamp's hand was white as that ot a lady, but its muscles were of iron, and closed as it was with a power seemingly

abnormal, its sharp, strained outlines silently evidenced invincible determination in the mind that controlled it.

From M. Fecamp's hand Gil Peret's glance travelled slowly to his eyes, and with an immense effort of will he sneered in the other's face.

"Ah! bah!" he said, contemptuously.

"That hand, M'sieur, three weeks ago habitually grasped yours as a friend. Since then, by your own act, it has been endowed with a strength irresistible by you. It is your master— you are its slave." These words were accompanied by a glance so pitiless, so terrible, that Gil Peret felt a coldness touch his heart-strings as he gazed.

"Sit down, Monsieur," said M Fecamp, in a voice that rang like a trumpet through the room.

Gil Peret silently obeyed him

"You shall tell the servant who comes in answer to your ring that you must not be disturbed."

A tap came to the door, immediately followed by the entrance of Pierre

"You rang, M'sieur?" asked the servant.

"It was to inform you that I am out to all who may call," said Gil Peret, in a strange, subdued voice.

"To all, M'sieur?"

"To all!"

"Yes, M'sieur; and—?"

"That is all; you may go, Pierre."

The door slammed behind the retreating figure of the servant.

"It is well, M'sieur; I thank you," said M. Fecamp.

Gil Peret was silent.

"Do you fear death, M'sieur?" asked M. Fecamp.

Gil Peret shrugged his shoulders.

"You compel me to listen to you, M'sieur, but you cannot force me to answer your questions."

"I shall perhaps find a means. Do you fancy yourself in love with Madame my wife?"

Gil Peret was silent.

"Will you not answer me, M'sieur?"

Gil Peret was silent.

"If Madame were at this moment to present herself at your door wishing to inform you that your name— in full, M'sieur— has been branded by my orders in flaming irons across the fair skin of her breasts"

"My God!" cried Gil Peret, starting forward with flashing eyes.

"And is refused admittance according to the direction you have but just given to your servant," continued M. Fecamp,

"You devil!" cried Gil Peret, springing up with a bound, to be instantly forced into his seat again and held as in a vice by an iron hand.

"Softly, softly, M'sieur. Sit still, I entreat you," said M. Fecamp, in a mocking voice.

Gil Peret struggled vainly for a moment, then at last cried pantingly:

"For God's sake, M'sieur, tell me is this true?"

"One moment, M'sieur. Let me see; what question did I ask you first? Ah, yes! Do you fear death? I require a true answer, M'sieur."

"Yes, I fear death," said Gil Peret, brokenly, "but not if Madame— for God's sake, M'sieur, is Madame—?"

"The second question you refused to answer," said M. Fecamp, interrupting quietly, "was: do you love Madame my wife? Perhaps, M'sieur, you will give me an answer now?"

"My God, yes, I love her. Tell me, have you been so fiendish as you say? Ah, m'sieur, you torture me. Reply, I entreat you!"

M. Fecamp smiled. "I have not harmed madame so much as you have."

"But have you branded her with irons, as you said?"

"How absurd you are, m'sieur. You betray yourself; you admit the magnitude of the injury you have inflicted on madame," said M. Fecamp with a mocking laugh.

Gil Peret fell back hopelessly. "You do not know what love is or you could not be so cruel," he muttered despairingly.

"And yet it seems to me that I have loved my wife. You know so much about me, m'sieur, that I feel I can entrust you with more. L am not a demonstrative man, m'sieur, but none the less for that I have feelings— l have a heart. I loved madame. I loved her honourably, and I married her. I did not spend my time in whispering love-talk in her ear, but in my heart I felt it speaking to me all the while, and I feared to impart its secret often lest the shrine be sacrileged. My love was, ah, too sacred far for these vulgar tricks of speech, words; for these any lying tongue may use; and when my heart was tenderest I was oftenest silent. I fondly dreamed until three weeks ago that I was mated to a heart that loved and understood me." He paused.

"You will not, perhaps, understand what I have said, m'sieur, for you are of those whose love dissolves into words like butter in the sun," M. Fecamp concluded with a sneer.

"I understand," replied Gil Peret, with a strange look.

"You can imagine, then, that I was surprised to discover what a mistake I had made in my wife."

"Surprised," echoed Gil Peret.

M. Fecamp smiled. "Ay," he said, and stared before him at the wall.

You suffered," said Gil Peret, in a low voice.

"Ay, I suffered, and for every pang I have suffered I shall revenge myself a thousandfold!" He glared at Gil Peret with eyes filled with unquenchable hate, and his fist thundered on the table as he rose from his chair, overcome for a moment by the feelings he had held so long in check.

Gil Peret looked up at him without moving, a strange tender smile faintly touching his mobile lips, but like a flash M. Fecamp regained his self-control and silently reseated himself.

"You have come to me for revenge?" asked Gil Peret.

M. Fecamp nodded;he was still a little unnerved by his outbreak, and his face was white even to the lips.

"You shall have it then!" said Gil Peret, softly.

M. Fecamp glanced at his enemy enquiringly, and this time was met by eyes which encountered his through a mask of utmost softness.

"What do you mean?" he cried impatiently for the first time, a little baffled.

"I have injured you; revenge yourself! I shall not prevent you. You were right, m'sieur, to come to me for assistance. I promise it to you!"

Gil Peret bowed his head humbly to the other.

M. Fecamp passed his hand over his eyes. "You are not serious," he stammered."

"I am serious."

"Prove it to me."

"I am ready to do what you wish."

"Swear to me that you will obey me until my revenge is complete!"

"I swear."

"Even although by obeying me you should reach a felon's cell?"

"Even so, m'sieur."

"Even though by obeying me you should die?"

"Even so, m'sieur."

"Even though by obeying me you should kill yourself?—for should I kill you I should be punished. Will you kill yourself, m'sieur?"

"If that be your command, I shall obey you— but upon one condition."

"And that is?"

"That you will promise to take no revenge upon madame, your wife."

"Bah! she is a woman; I cannot touch her."

"Then shall I kill myself, m'sieur?"

M. Fecamp made no reply, but with his head buried in his arms thought deeply for some moments. At last he looked up.

"What has disposed you to be so suddenly submissive, m'sieur?" he asked, suspiciously.

"The knowledge that you love madame," answered Gil Peret.

"How has that affected you?"

"It has shown me— realised for me as nothing else could— the injury I have done you. It has overwhelmed me with shame for most wantonly destroying your happiness, most wantonly murdering your peace." Gil Peret's face betrayed an emotion full of pain.

"Wantonly, wantonly! What do you mean by that?"

"Alas! that I have indeed done these things without reason; I have not even love as an excuse. I have been madame's lover, but I never loved her."

"You are lying to me. Only a moment ago you said you loved madame."

"I lied to you then: it seemed necessary. I am not lying now. I repeat to you I have never loved madame."

A flash of joy passed over the face of M. Fecamp. He took two small vials from his pocket, and read their labels to himself.

These vials contain two different poisons," he said, slowly., ''One of them, when taken, causes death by agonising degrees, while its victim would writhe under tortures keener and more poignant than ever those inflicted by the thumbscrews or the rack. The other, an hour after it is taken, induces a peaceful sleep, in the midst of which death comes like the phantom of a dream and steals one's soul away to heaven— or— hell."

Gil Peret watched the two vials with a fascinated gaze, and a sudden horror of death made him feel cold, as if touched by an icy wind, so that he shivered. M. Fecamp regarded him mercilessly, smiling at his emotion.

"Will you keep your oath?"

Gil Peret gazed at him entreatingly;he could not speak.

"In consideration of the assistance you have promised me, and to encourage you to keep that promise, I intend to administer the painless poison only," said M. Fecamp, grimly, and as he spoke he smashed one of the vials into fragments on the wall. A strong odour of almonds immediately filled the room.

Gill Peret groaned.

"I am not prepared for death," he faltered.

"Who is?" asked M. Fecamp.

Gil Peret put his hands over his face.

M. Fecamp emptied the contents of the remaining vial into a glass which stood upon the table. "Pray!" he said, solemnly.

Gil Peret started up.

"What!" he cried, horrified. "Already?

"Pray!" repeated M. Fecamp.

"I cannot!" gasped the other.

M. Fecamp raised the glass up to the light. "That is a pity, m'sieur," he said. "I know no one else who ought to pray *for me*!"

"Pray for you! What is it that you say?" gasped Gil Peret.

M. Fecamp put the glass of poison to his lips, and swallowed its contents at one draught.

"That is precisely what I said, m sieur, he replied,

"My God, what have you done?" cried Gil Peret, dazed with surprise and horror at the other's act. "You have drunk the poison yourself!"

M. Fecamp laughed aloud— a strange, low laugh, filled with mockery and scorn of all things, even of himself. Then he leant back with a sigh, and, taking his watch from his pocket, held it open in his hand before him. "In two hours," he said slowly, "madame, my wife, will be a widow, possessing ample means. In six months, to allow her a period to mourn her loss, she will marry again. I wish, m'sieur, that you shall contrive to be her second husband."

Gil Peret came forward swiftly, tears flowing from his eyes; entreaties, protestations from his lips. "It is I who should die, not you. My God! if I had only known you How unhappy l am! Ah, how noble you are. What a revenge."

"Be silent, slave that you are!" thundered M. Fecamp, whose eyes glittered with anger. He rose from his chair and put his hat on his head.

"Attention!" he shouted, as if he were an officer drilling a recruit.

Gil Peret stood before him frozen into submission, and unconsciously adopted the military attitude.

"Understand that I hate you, M'sieur Peret. My revenge is more far-reaching than you think. You will be marrying a woman you have confessed you do not love. She was unfaithful to me, who loved her. Shall she be any more true to you?"

Gil Peret shuddered.

"I go now," said M. Fecamp, "to find a convenient place to rest in. But a few moments more and the drug will commence to act, and I shall sleep— sleep— Ah, my God, when, where shall I awake?" he muttered to himself. He sighed deeply, then pulled himself together with a start and moved towards the door erect and soldier-like, pausing when he had opened it for a last look at Gil Peret.

"Remember your oath! Remember my orders!" he said, sternly.

Gil Peret saluted like a soldier his officer on parade M. Fecamp turned to descend the stairs.

"Stay!" cried Gil Peret.

"What is it?"

"Forgive me the wrong I have done you. For God's sake, M'sieur, forgive me! M'sieur, you are dying. As you hope for forgiveness hereafter, forgive me now!"

M. Fecamp glanced at his enemy, then burst forth into a peal of most horrible laughter, mirthless and musicless, which however, stopped suddenly as it had commenced.

"What a joke!" he muttered, almost inaudibly. "I forgive you! What a humourist you are, M'sieur, to ask me. Forgive you? Ha, ha!"

With a short repetition of his former hideous, scornful laughter, M. Fecamp shut to the door, and disappeared from other's view.

M. Peret staggered blindly forward, overcome with a painful excitement

"M'sieur!" he cried, "M'sieur!" then suddenly threw out his arms and pitched headlong to the floor.

11: The Test of Fire

Henry Leverage

Carl Henry, 1879-1931

Golden West Magazine Nov 1930

OLD MAN JACKSON looked the part of a killer. He was tall, raw-boned, cadaverous, with a gorilla-like stoop to his shoulders and a length of arm that linked him with a primal brute that was one span nearer savagery than civilization.

He had set his trap at Cloud-Cap Inn— a log and bark lodge situated where the western spur of Old Baldy jutted out like a harsh promontory. Old Baldy was a remote and high mountain.

Jackson studied the few guests who came his way with a savage glare, appraised their belongings, had his son cook most of the meals they required, and then sent them to bed with an oath and a candle. The living room of Cloud-Cap Inn contained an enormous fireplace. The guest rooms were upstairs, reached by a notched pole in lieu of a ladder.

A fugitive from San Quentin who had escaped with Big-scar Guffman, disappeared after announcing his intention of hiding at Cloud-Cap Inn. The fugitive, who was a yegg bankrolled with two thousand dollars, went the way of other of Jackson's guests.

Big-scar climbed the slope of Old Baldy with a desire to find out exactly what happened to Micky Gleason, late of San Quentin. He felt that he would be more than a match for Jackson, whose unsavory reputation was known in the Underworld.

It was a case of a grizzly climbing up to a timber wolf.

Big-scar looked the part of a desert prospector. He wore a money-belt that seemingly bulged with money.

Andrew, Jackson's son, who was given to poaching, sat cleaning his shotgun and toasting his shins before the great fireplace, when his father, followed by Big-scar, came through the leather-hinged door of the Inn. A wink at Andrew from Jackson indicated another "paying guest." Andrew rose, glanced at his father and Big-sear, reached, secured a burning stick and lighted a briar-wood pipe after scooping a few flakes of tobacco from his pocket.

"Gettin' cold," he remarked.

Jackson unwound a scarf from his neck, thrashed his arms, pointed toward a chair and invited Big-scar to sit down. The yegg roamed the living room with his eyes. He crossed one knee over the other and drew forth a five-cent cigar. It was the kind of cigar kept in country grocery stores. He too opened his coat

and revealed, so that the innkeeper could see it, a chamois belt such as miners use to carry their wealth.

The yegg's survey of the living room of Cloud-Cap Inn was intended to be disarming. He wondered exactly how Micky Gleason had been bumped off by Jackson. How had the escaped convict's body been disposed of? The fireplace looked like a likely spot. A body could be changed to cinders there.

"This guy," thought Big-scar, "is goin' to bite off more than he ken chew when he starts on me. In th' meantime I'll see if I ken find a clue to Micky, the best pal a crook ever had."

Jackson misinterpreted Big-Scar's gaze around the living-room. 'Lookin' for supper, eh? Wal, there ain't any! This good-fer-nothin' son of mine won't work— he's a poor cook— so I'll rustle around an' scrape up a few scraps. Where you goin' from here, stranger?"

HIS father's question interested Andrew, who removed the pipe from his mouth and regarded the guest.

"I don't exactly know," said the yegg. "There's a trail leadin' up th' road a piece that I might take. It heads toward th' place I wuz born in— an' I'm going home. I've made my pile— an' it's time to settle down."

"A middlin' pile?' queried Jackson.

"Considerable!" admitted Big-scar.

Jackson went toward the door leading into the cook-shack; tins rattled; a sheet-iron stove started roaring; bacon odor floated through the Inn. The yegg pulled the chair nearer Andrew and the fire and watched Jackson's son oiling the shotgun.

"Been huntin'?" queried the yegg.

"Nope," said Andrew. "It's again' th' law to do any huntin' in these parts— except wolves an' bears— an' there ain't many of those. I was just fixin' th' gun."

Big-scar pulled out another five-center and lighted it; Jackson appeared with a frying pan; Andrew rose and reached to the shelf over the fireplace, where he stood his shotgun upright. There was a great ledge of rock there, behind which a man could almost hide himself.

The son warmed his back; watched Big-scar eat ravenously, while his father stood by. The scion of the Inn tapped the tobacco from his pipe, crossed the floor and began putting on heavy boots, a woolen sweater and a coon-skin cap.

"I'm goin' to hike over to Arnold's place," he said. "I won't be back until late. Want anything at th' store?"

Jackson sliced a loaf of bread with a hunting knife, threw the slices toward the yegg and said: "There, gol durn you!" and turned upon his son.

"Bring in some wood before you go!"

Andrew brought in the wood— a heaping stack— which he placed near the fireplace, rubbed his hands a moment, glanced at one corner of the room, then slouched through the door and was gone down the frosty trail that led to Arnold's— seven miles from Cloud-Cap Inn.

Jackson and Big Scar were alone in the tavern. They were not likely to be disturbed; no travelers came to Cloud-Cap Inn late at night.

The yegg, who gave the name of Peterson, smoked another cigar while Jackson gathered the remains of the supper and dumped them in the cook shack. The old man returned, cut off a chunk of black tobacco, felt the edge of a bright hunting knife, appraised Big-scar's thick neck suggestively, then sat down with his boots extended toward the fireplace.

Champing yellow teeth, crossing his long ankles, twisting once and a while, Jackson drove his guest into a yawn and a suggestion that it was "Near time to go to bed."

"Go to bed, gol darn you! There's a candle! There's th' stairs— that pole. You'll find a blanket on th' end of a cot. You'll need it— long toward mornine

Unconsciously Big-scar's glance fixed upon the lean hunting knife in Jackson's hand.

"Any danger ov robbery here?"

"Hell no! Go on to bed!"

The yegg took the candle, moved from the yellow light cast by the leaping flames in the fireplace, and climbed the notched pole. Jackson slowly turned his bristled chin, eyed the shadows at the top of the pple, heard his guest stumbling over the planks; then, like a sigh, a cot squeaked and the candle-flame was snuffed.

A nipping cold crept through the bark-filled crevices between the logs of Cloud-Cap Inn. Jackson piled more wood on the flames and stirred the ashes with an iron ramrod. Each time he rose from his chair his glance swung toward the notched pole and the opening above that led to the attic bedrooms. He got up finally, listened, heard only the whine of the wind, tested the edge of his knife, and started across the floor. The door leading outside could be barred with a long piece of timber. Jackson took this precaution, inclined his head, waited, and then moved stealthily to the pole. He clamped the knife with his teeth and wound his arms around the improvised ladder. Up he went, notch by notch.

A crunching of frozen gravel outside the Inn caused him to turn his head like a savage wolf. Down he slid, doubled up, eyed the door, heard a shout and then an authoritative knock.

Jackson let his knife slide into a pocket; he opened the door and faced Jim Farr— game warden of Baldy Park.

"HOWDY!" said Farr, stamping in. "Howdy, Jackson!" The game warden puffed a frosted breath through his mittened fingers. Suddenly his eyes were on Jackson. "Thought I'd drop in. Where's that son of yours?" Jackson knew the reason for Farr's visit; he was looking for poachers. "You thought you'd drop in, eh? Well, what d'yu expect to find here?" Game Warden Farr pulled open his coat, revealing a silver-plated badge on his skin vest, drew a chair close to the fire, leaned forward, toasted his hands, then, after a second scrutiny of the room, remarked:

"Somebody's been shootin' birds— up th' road a piece."

" 'Twasn't my son, Andrew."

Farr was non-committal; he picked up a stick, opened a jack-knife with his teeth, and began whittling. Jackson snarled, dug in his pocket, found a plug of tobacco, and he too began whittling. Both men had lived too long in the west to waste words.

Farr rose from the chair, stood regarding the shotgun that stood on the shelf-wide mantle over the fireplace, pocketed his jack-knife, after snapping it shut, and turned.

"Your boy's goin' to get in trouble sooner or later, Jackson. He's hid them birds— no use to hunt for them. But next time—"

Jackson whetted the hunting knife on the back of his hand; stared at Farr's resolute features, then suggested the door with an impatient jerk of his thumb.

"I'm goin' to bed."

"All right!" said Farr.

A gust of frost came into the Inn when the game warden strode out. Jackson braced his knee against the door, closed it, and started for the attic.

He had no fixed plan concerning his guest. The mention of "considerable money" was a spur that guided his steps. Many times there had been robbery and murder at Cloud-Cap Inn.

The innkeeper did not know that his intended prey was one of the most desperate and resourceful crooks living. He had almost forgotten the bumping-off of Micky Gleason.

Big-scar, while Jackson was being detained by the game warden, had inspected the attic floor. His light was formed by tiny matches cupped in his mammoth palms. A second fireplace, on the upper floor, was almost as large as the one downstairs. The ashes in it were cold. There was an iron shutter back of it. The yegg fell back on the cot and waited for Jackson.

The innkeeper paused when he reached the notched pole. He eyed the dying fire in the fireplace, heard the whimpering wind and remembered that if Andrew went to Arnold's place— a small settlement in Baldy Park, where his son had a girl— he wouldn't return until long after midnight. It was only ten o'clock by an alarm clock that hung near an elk's head on the cabin wall.

A loud snoring came from above.

Jackson pulled himself through the opening, sat down, removed his boots, pinched each damp stocking, then he drew ou. the lean hunting-knife and felt the edge with his thumb.

THE yegg was quiet; Jackson got to his feet and noiselessly approached his prey. He leaned over the cot and felt for the money-belt. A man, particularly in the West, always wore his belt when sleeping in strange inns.

It was not in Jackson's mind to pilfer the belt ; he wanted to find out how much money his guest possessed. A better idea than robbery at the Inn was the old murderer's plan: he would trail his guest at daybreak, when he took the homeward trail, and knife him then.

Holding the point of the huntingknife at the yegg's throat, Jackson felt with his free hand and touched the chamois-skin belt.

Big-scar doubled his knees slightly, ready to spring.

"This is a tough old bird," he thought. "I'm knife-shy, meself, an' any guy who uses one ought tu be croaked."

Jackson felt around the yegg's waist. He heard the clink of metal. There was also crinkling paper in that belt.

Lightly opening one flap of the belt he leaned and looked at a number of doubled bills. His greed overcame his prudence; he pulled down the blanket an inch and looked again. This time the sharp knife-point pricked Big-scar in the neck; the yegg hinged upward with a blood-curdling cry; he kicked out his feet and leaped from the cot.

The swishing knife missed him by inches; Jackson lunged again. He kicked aside the cot and charged over the attic floor. Big-scar pretended to bleat like a lamb and ran in a circle.

There were other rooms in the attic through which both men stumbled. Jackson was on the point of slashing the yegg more times than once. Each time Big Scar escaped death by a clever twist. His coat ripped from his shoulder ; one shoe almost tripped him up.

A fleecy bank of clouds swept the sky clear of stars; the attic grew dark — illuminated in one place where the pole ran through the floor. Toward this opening Big-scar stumbled; dived along the rough planks, grasped the pole, and disappeared from Jackson's sight— like a grizzly falling from a precipice.

Jackson glanced downward. His guest to all appearances had broken his neck. He lay doubled up in a quiverless heap.

There issued from Jackson's throat a gloating snarl. He believed there would be no necessity of slitting the stranger's throat or tailing him in the morning. He began descending the notched pole.

Big-scar lay apparently dead. He eyed the innkeeper's feet coming toward him.

"So you broke your neck, eh?" muttered Jackson. "That saves me a lot. I'll take that belt an' chop some wood and burn you up— like I did the others."

The yegg held his breath when Jackson removed the money belt. The innkeeper was in too much of a hurry to notice that the supposed gold pieces were iron washers.

FAR away a wolf's lone howl came through the night; a cluster of stars sent light down on the frozen earth; logs cracked and a twig snapped. Jackson went to the door, barred it carefully, dragged at the yegg's heels and moved him toward the hearthstone. He rolled him on the cold embers. He then went out of the living room, by a back door through the cook shack, and began chopping great arms full of pine knots.

Big-scar compared the innkeeper's blows to a hangman building a scaffold. The yegg stared upward and saw that the chimney ran straight to the second floor.

He started removing his clothes and cocked an automatic.

"What that mountain buzzard's got comin' to him is plenty. I got tu get a confession out of him about me pal, Micky. How'll I do it?"

Big-scar glared at one corner of the room, where Andrew had undoubtedly hidden the poached birds. He found them and was ready for Jackson when he returned. To all appearances the yegg lay in the fireplace dead to this world. Jackson watched the blaze, backed from the heat of it, poked at the bed of hot coals, and rubbed his hands.

The black smoke blinded his usual cunning.

He thought everything had been taken care of in case Andrew returned and asked questions. The money belt was safely hidden under the floor.

There remained but to sit down and keep the fire roaring.

The innkeeper had often stated he had no conscience. The excitement of fighting the guest, disposing of possible clues, bringing in the wood, had slightly tired the old man. He started dragging a rustic-looking chair near the fireplace, paused, looked toward the cook-shack and drew his tongue along his lips. He needed a bracer; there was a quart of moonshine on the shelf, between a vinegar bottle and a can of baking powder. Jackson went to this

bottle, opened it, and gulped. He replaced the bottle, and finished moving the chair near the fireplace. He sat down and extended his legs toward the flames.

Grimly the old man watched the process of effacing evidence; he felt glad the prospector was a creature so unimportant he would never be missed.

A heat that was furnace-like issued from the cavity ; Jackson dug his heels in the planks and pushed his weight away until his shins ceased baking. He crossed his legs, felt the liquor die within him, belched, then rose and leaned toward the flames. Apparently the body was not altogether consumed, the flames were dying.

The innkeeper lunged toward the woodpile, gathered up the most resinous of the sticks, and tossed them in the fireplace. He added a knotty log, then sprang back. Flames, jets of smoke, tongued vapors, rolled from the fireplace and curled around the mantel. Andrew's gun was in danger of being scorched; the clock's face blackened. Jackson watched the fire and saw it die to some degree; a shift of wind drove the flames around the edge of the stones. He moved to the cook-shack and sampled the moonshine. A fire was within him, when he returned to the chair, that was hotter than any caused by logs and sticks; he laughed in drunken victory, pulled out the hunting-knife and sliced off a piece of tobacco.

Getting on his feet he searched the room and found a short iron bar with which he jabbed the cooling mass in the fireplace. He tossed up embers, broke a log open, stabbed to the heart of the coals. There seemed no trace of bones.

"I did a good job this time," he said deep in his throat.

Above him, near the notched pole, a pair of revengeful eyes stared downward.

Jackson had infinite patience. There might be a bone uncharred or a button or something in the fireplace. He first laid down the iron bar, then went to the shack, where he emptied the bottle, then he returned and added more logs to the fire. It was a satisfying blaze that drove him to pull the chair further back, and regard his own hearthstone drunkenly.

TWO o'clock came; Jackson swung his head and eyed the barred door. It was time for Andrew to return from Arnold's. The innkeeper had little fear that his poaching son would discover any trace of the guest. The old man had made up his story: The guest was not satisfied with the accommodations at the inn and had gone on— that was all.

The dead liquor in the old man's stomach gnawed at his nerves; he twitched and squirmed. A chill crept up his legs; he shivered. Wind moaned over the stone chimney, rattled the ill-fitting sashes of the inn; the dying logs lowered the temperature. Jackson dropped his chin within the collar of his

coat. He stared unseeingly at the stones at the side of the fireplace. They were cemented together, in conglomerate formation.

Suddenly his unseeing eyes opened as if drawn to a spot between the stones. He blinked, raised his chin and stared.

The spot between the stones was still there; Jackson dropped his lower jaw. Balefully he eyed this spot; a muttered series of oaths came from his throat. He got up from the chair and advanced upon the fireplace.

Out went one finger; it touched the stones.

"Blood!"

Back fell the innkeeper, his hands reached the chair; his fingers coiled around it; he gained an erect position with a great effort.

"Blood!" he repeated.

Slowly one hand came before him; he regarded the finger that had touched the stones; it was carminehued. He looked at the fireplace. Was it fancy that now there was another red spot between the stones, higher up?

The innkeeper's stare roamed the stonework of the fireplace, rested upon the mound of embers, then a chilling shiver ran down the old murderer's spine. He believed the mound moved; changed shape; grew larger as if the guest was trying to come from the pile.

This fancy passed; Jackson realized that the illusion was only a trick of the flames and curling heat. He shelved forward his shoulders; with bent, shaking knees he went closer to the stones. His head lowered and he regarded the spots of blood; there were many of them— between each stone, almost.

He wiped away a spot, smeared his palm, saw another, reached for it, and tripped upon a log. The hands that grasped the mantel stone saved him from falling into the flames; he retreated and touched the chair. It maddened him; he pushed it aside and began cireling the room, keeping his face over his left shoulder as he stared toward the fireplace.

Before his fevered eyes red spots danced, and the room, chilled below the freezing point, became a tormenting inquisition.

He tore off his coat, rolled up his sleeves, mopped his brow, and continued staggering in a circle, watching the stones about the fireplace. He stumbled, snarled, stopped, and saw one blood spot that had widened into a trickling stream.

"God!" he cried. "The stones are mocking me!"

He went mad, tore at his throat and shirt; bared his chest and flailed his arms in the air. Advancing, retreating, keeping the fireplace in view, he shuffled about the inn. The strength that had been his changed to water— his brain reeled— muttered curses dropped from his trembling lips. Above him Big-scar grinned. The dancing flames from the embers wove ghostly shapes

and shadows; Jackson shifted his eyes to the stones; more blood carmined the cement; the room reeked like a graveyard.

Over the innkeeper came a final rage; one that stiffened his muscles; knotted his fists; brought his chin from off his sweat-covered chest. He bent, reached, prehensively moved his fingers, then leaped toward the fireplace. He was down on his knees, tossing the embers upward; scattering brands and coals. His hair caught fire; he fell back, planted his hands on the planks, rebounded, shrieked, then pounded the floor.

A voice sounded when the air of the room was still.

"You murderer!"

JACKSON believed a grave-digger had come to take the corpse; he worked his way over the floor, clutched at the wooden bar, lifted it, and rolled back when he saw nothing outside.

Inward he staggered and started milling. Now and then he stared at the bloodspots that flecked the stones by the fireplace.

Big-scar moved away from the opening where the notched pole was and rummaged around on tiptoes until he found one of Jackson's suits and a pair of the innkeeper's boots. He put on the suit which was sizes too small for him, pocketed the automatic and sat down while he pulled on the boots.

He listened, with one ear cocked sideways.

Jackson was blabbering in the living room. He was kneeling in front of the dying fire, staring at the stones.

"Blood!" He whimpered. "I've killed a dozen fools an' one has left blood to haunt me. I killed that lunger and that peddler and I got the two thousand from the convict Mickey Gleason. His ashes went over the cliff. He didn't leave any blood. He didn't!"

The yegg heard enough. The innkeeper believed the dummy Big-scar left in the fireplace had been a body.

It was time to force a confession. Sliding down the notched pole, like a fireman at a third-alarm, Big-sear landed on the floor with a thud. Jackson did not startle. Over the planks went the yegg until he leaned and reaching tapped the innkeeper's shoulder. He tapped a second time.

"I know who you are," croaked Jackson. "You're the game warden come to take me to the jail."

"Look around!' commanded Bigsear.

Jackson tore his eyes from the blood spots. He slowly swung his chin over his shoulder. His lower jaw dropped agape.

"Who am I?" asked Big-scar.

A yell issued from Jackson's throat that rattled the windows. Again the innkeeper tore his throat.

"You— you're *Death*!" he slobbered. "You're the guest I burnt up!"

Big-scar saw Jackson dart for the cook-shack door. The innkeeper stumbled, fell, raised himself and plunged outwardly. A cry sounded when he crashed through underbrush and over a cliff.

The yegg listened. He lunged over the room and lifted down three partridges from the shelf above the fireplace.

"Good thing," he muttered. "The murderer's son, Andrew, hid these poached birds where I found 'em. It wuz blood from these, thawin' out, that drove him tu that confession about me pal, Micky."

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12: The Room of Mirrors

Arthur Quiller-Couch

1863-1944

Ainslee's Magazine, Sep 1899

A LATE hansom came swinging round the corner into Lennox Gardens, cutting it so fine that the near wheel ground against the kerb and jolted the driver in his little seat. The jingle of bells might have warned me; but the horse's hoofs came noiselessly on the half-frozen snow, which lay just deep enough to hide where the pavement ended and the road began; and, moreover, I was listening to the violins behind the first-floor windows of the house opposite. They were playing the *Wiener Blut*.

As it was, I had time enough and no more to skip back and get my toes out of the way. The cabby cursed me. I cursed him back so promptly and effectively that he had to turn in his seat for another shot. The windows of the house opposite let fall their light across his red and astonished face. I laughed, and gave him another volley. My head was hot, though my feet and hands were cold; and I felt equal to cursing down any cabman within the four-mile radius. That second volley finished him. He turned to his reins again and was borne away defeated; the red eyes of his lamps peering back at me like an angry ferret's.

Up in the lighted room shadows of men and women crossed the blinds, and still the *Wiener Blut* went forward.

The devil was in that waltz. He had hold of the violins and was weaving the air with scents and visions— visions of Ascot and Henley; green lawns, gay sunshades, midsummer heat, cool rivers flowing, muslins rippled by light breezes; running horses and silken jackets; white tables heaped with roses and set with silver and crystal, jewelled fingers moving in the soft candle-light, bare necks bending, diamonds, odours, bubbles in the wine; blue water and white foam beneath the leaning shadow of sails; hot air flickering over stretches of moorland; blue again— Mediterranean blue— long façades, the din of bands and King Carnival parading beneath showers of blossom:— and all this noise and warmth and scent and dazzle flung out into the frozen street for a beggar's portion. I had gone under.

The door of the house opposite had been free to me once— and not six months ago; freer to me perhaps than to any other. Did I long to pass behind it again? I thrust both hands into my pockets for warmth, and my right hand knocked against something hard. Yes... just once....

Suddenly the door opened. A man stood on the threshold for a moment while the butler behind him arranged the collar of his fur overcoat. The high

light in the portico flung the shadows of both down the crimson carpet laid on the entrance-steps. Snow had fallen and covered the edges of the carpet, which divided it like a cascade of blood pouring from the hall into the street. And still overhead the *Wiener Blut* went forward.

The man paused in the bright portico, his patent-leather boots twinkling under the lamp's rays on that comfortable carpet. I waited, expecting him to whistle for a hansom. But he turned, gave an order to the butler, and stepping briskly down into the street, made off eastwards. The door closed behind him. He was the man I most hated in the world. If I had longed to cross the threshold a while back it was to seek him, and for no other reason.

I started to follow him, my hands still in my pockets. The snow muffled our footfalls completely, for as yet the slight north-east wind had frozen but the thinnest crust of it. He was walking briskly, as men do in such weather, but with no appearance of hurry. At the corner of Sloane Street he halted under a lamp, pulled out his watch, consulted it, and lit a cigarette; then set off again up the street towards Knightsbridge.

This halt of his had let me up within twenty paces of him. He never turned his head; but went on, presenting me his back, a target not to be missed. Why not do it now? Better now and here than in a crowded thoroughfare. My right hand gripped the revolver more tightly. No, there was plenty of time: and I was curious to know what had brought Gervase out at this hour: why he had left his guests, or his wife's guests, to take care of themselves: why he chose to be trudging afoot through this infernally unpleasant snow.

The roadway in Sloane Street was churned into a brown mass like chocolate, but the last bus had rolled home and left it to freeze in peace. Half-way up the street I saw Gervase meet and pass a policeman, and altered my own pace to a lagging walk. Even so, the fellow eyed me suspiciously as I went by— or so I thought: and guessing that he kept a watch on me, I dropped still farther behind my man. But the lamps were bright at the end of the street, and I saw him turn to the right by the great drapery shop at the corner.

Once past this corner I was able to put on a spurt. He crossed the roadway by the Albert Gate, and by the time he reached the Park railings the old distance separated us once more. Half-way up the slope he came to a halt, by the stone drinking-trough: and flattening myself against the railings, I saw him try the thin ice in the trough with his finger-tips, but in a hesitating way, as if his thoughts ran on something else and he scarcely knew what he did or why he did it. It must have been half a minute before he recovered himself with a shrug of his shoulders, and plunging both hands deep in his pockets, resumed his pace.

As we passed Hyde Park Corner I glanced up at the clock there: the time was between a quarter and ten minutes to one. At the entrance of Down Street he turned aside again, and began to lead me a zigzag dance through the quiet thoroughfare: and I followed, still to the tune of the *Wiener Blut*.

But now, at the corner of Charles Street, I blundered against another policeman, who flashed his lantern in my face, stared after Gervase, and asked me what my game was. I demanded innocently enough to be shown the nearest way to Oxford Street, and the fellow, after pausing a moment to chew his suspicions, walked with me slowly to the south-west corner of Berkeley Square, and pointed northwards.

'That's your road,' he growled, 'straight on. And don't you forget it!'

He stood and watched me on my way. Nor did I dare to turn aside until well clear of the square. At the crossing of Davies and Grosvenor Streets, however, I supposed myself safe, and halted for a moment.

From the shadow of a porch at my elbow a thin voice accosted me.

'Kind gentleman—'

'Heh?' I spun round on her sharply: for it was a woman, stretching out one skinny hand and gathering her rags together with the other.

'Kind gentleman, spare a copper! I've known better days— I have indeed.'

'Well,' said I, 'as it happens, I'm in the same case. And they couldn't be much worse, could they?'

She drew a shuddering breath back through her teeth, but still held out her hand. I felt for my last coin, and her fingers closed on it so sharply that their long nails scraped the back of mine.

'Kind gentleman—'

'Ay, they are kind, are they not?'

She stared at me, and in a nerveless tone let one horrible oath escape her.

'There'll be one less before morning,' said I, 'if that's any consolation to you. Good night!' Setting off at a shuffling run, I doubled back along Grosvenor Street and Bond Street to the point where I hoped to pick up the trail again. And just there, at the issue of Bruton Street, two constables stood ready for me.

'I thought as much,' said the one who set me on my way. 'Hi, you! Wait a moment, please'; then to the other, 'Best turn his pockets out, Jim.'

'If you dare to try—' I began, with my hand in my pocket: the next moment I found myself sprawling face downward on the sharp crust of snow.

'Hallo, constables!' said a voice. 'What's the row?' It was Gervase. He had turned leisurely back from the slope of Conduit Street, and came strolling down the road with his hands in his pockets.

'This fellow, sir— we have reason to think he was followin' you.'

'Quite right,' Gervase answered cheerfully. 'Of course he was.'

'Oh, if you knew it, sir—'

'Certainly I knew it. In fact, he was following at my invitation.'

'What for did he tell me a lie, then?' grumbled the constable, chapfallen.

I had picked myself up by this time and was wiping my face. 'Look here,' I put in, 'I asked you the way to Oxford Street, that and nothing else.' And I went on to summarize my opinion of him.

'Oh! it's you can swear a bit,' he growled. 'I heard you just now.'

'Yes,' Gervase interposed suavely, drawing the glove from his right hand and letting flash a diamond finger-ring in the lamplight. 'He *is* a bit of a beast, policeman, and it's not for the pleasure of it that I want his company.'

A sovereign passed from hand to hand. The other constable had discreetly drawn off a pace or two.

'All the same, it's a rum go.'

'Yes, isn't it?' Gervase assented in his heartiest tone. 'Here is my card, in case you're not satisfied.'

'If *you're* satisfied, sir—'

'Quite so. Good night!' Gervase thrust both hands into his pockets again and strode off. I followed him, with a heart hotter than ever— followed him like a whipped cur, as they say. Yes, that was just it. He who had already robbed me of everything else had now kicked even the pedestal from under me as a figure of tragedy. Five minutes ago I had been the implacable avenger tracking my unconscious victim across the city. Heaven knows how small an excuse it was for self-respect; but one who has lost character may yet chance to catch a dignity from circumstances; and to tell the truth, for all my desperate earnestness I had allowed my vanity to take some artistic satisfaction in the sinister chase. It had struck me— shall I say?— as an effective ending, nor had I failed to note that the snow lent it a romantic touch.

And behold, the unconscious victim knew all about it, and had politely interfered when a couple of unromantic Bobbies threatened the performance by tumbling the stalking avenger into the gutter! They had knocked my tragedy into harlequinade as easily as you might bash in a hat; and my enemy had refined the cruelty of it by coming to the rescue and ironically restarting the poor play on lines of comedy. I saw too late that I ought to have refused his help, to have assaulted the constable and been hauled to the police-station. Not an impressive wind-up, to be sure; but less humiliating than this! Even so, Gervase might have trumped the poor card by following with a gracious offer to bail me out!

As it was, I had put the whip into his hand, and must follow him like a cur. The distance he kept assured me that the similitude had not escaped him. He

strode on without deigning a single glance behind, still in cold derision presenting me his broad back and silently challenging me to shoot. And I followed, hating him worse than ever, swearing that the last five minutes should not be forgotten, but charged for royally when the reckoning came to be paid.

I followed thus up Conduit Street, up Regent Street, and across the Circus. The frost had deepened and the mud in the roadway crackled under our feet. At the Circus I began to guess, and when Gervase struck off into Great Portland Street, and thence by half a dozen turnings northwards by east, I knew to what house he was leading me.

At the entrance of the side street in which it stood he halted and motioned me to come close.

'I forget,' he said with a jerk of his thumb, 'if you still have the entry. These people are not particular, to be sure.'

'I have not,' I answered, and felt my cheeks burning. He could not see this, nor could I see the lift of his eyebrows as he answered:

'Ah? I hadn't heard of it.... You'd better step round by the mews, then. You know the window, the one which opens into the passage leading to Pollox Street. Wait there. It may be ten minutes before I can open.'

I nodded. The house was a corner one, between the street and a by-lane tenanted mostly by cabmen; and at the back of it ran the mews where they stabled their horses. Half-way down this mews a narrow alley cut across it at right angles: a passage unfrequented by traffic, known only to the stablemen, and in the daytime used only by their children, who played hop-scotch on the flagged pavement, where no one interrupted them. You wondered at its survival— from end to end it must have measured a good fifty yards— in a district where every square foot of ground fetched money; until you learned that the house had belonged, in the twenties, to a nobleman who left a name for eccentric profligacy, and who, as owner of the land, could afford to indulge his humours. The estate since his death was in no position to afford money for alterations, and the present tenants of the house found the passage convenient enough.

My footsteps disturbed no one in the sleeping mews; and doubling back noiselessly through the passage, I took up my station beside the one low window which opened upon it from the blank back premises of the house. Even with the glimmer of snow to help me, I had to grope for the window-sill to make sure of my bearings. The minutes crawled by, and the only sound came from a stall where one of the horses had kicked through his thin straw bedding and was shuffling an uneasy hoof upon the cobbles. Then, just as I too

had begun to shuffle my frozen feet, I heard a scratching sound, the unbolting of a shutter, and Gervase drew up the sash softly.

'Nip inside!' he whispered. 'No more noise than you can help. I have sent off the night porter. He tells me the bank is still going in the front of the house— half a dozen playing, perhaps.'

I hoisted myself over the sill, and dropped inside. The wall of this annexe— which had no upper floor, and invited you to mistake it for a harmless studio— was merely a sheath, so to speak. Within, a corridor divided it from the true wall of the room: and this room had no window or top-light, though a handsome one in the roof— a dummy— beguiled the eyes of its neighbours.

There was but one room: an apartment of really fine proportions, never used by the tenants of the house, and known but to a few curious ones among its frequenters.

The story went that the late owner, Earl C—, had reason to believe himself persistently cheated at cards by his best friends, and in particular by a Duke of the Blood Royal, who could hardly be accused to his face. The Earl's sense of honour forbade him to accuse any meaner man while the big culprit went unrebuked. Therefore he continued to lose magnificently while he devised a new room for play: the room into which I now followed Gervase.

I had stood in it once before and admired the courtly and costly thoroughness of the Earl's rebuke. I had imagined him conducting his expectant guests to the door, ushering them in with a wave of the hand, and taking his seat tranquilly amid the dead, embarrassed silence: had imagined him facing the Royal Duke and asking: 'Shall we cut?' with a voice of the politest inflection.

For the room was a sheet of mirrors. Mirrors panelled the walls, the doors, the very backs of the shutters. The tables had mirrors for tops: the whole ceiling was one vast mirror. From it depended three great candelabra of cut-glass, set with reflectors here, there, and everywhere.

I had heard that even the floor was originally of polished brass. If so, later owners must have ripped up the plates and sold them: for now a few cheap Oriental rugs carpeted the unpolished boards. The place was abominably dusty: the striped yellow curtains had lost half their rings and drooped askew from their soiled vallances. Across one of the wall-panels ran an ugly scar. A smell of rat pervaded the air. The present occupiers had no use for a room so obviously unsuitable to games of chance, as they understood chance: and I doubt if a servant entered it once a month. Gervase had ordered candles and a fire: but the chimney was out of practice, and the smoke wreathed itself slowly about us as we stood surrounded by the ghostly company of our reflected selves.

'We shall not be disturbed,' said Gervase. 'I told the man I was expecting a friend, that our business was private, and that until he called I wished to be alone. I did not explain by what entrance I expected him. The people in the front cannot hear us. Have a cigar?' He pushed the open case towards me. Then, as I drew back: 'You've no need to be scrupulous,' he added, 'seeing that they were bought with your money.'

'If that's so, I will,' said I; and having chosen one struck a match. Glancing round, I saw a hundred small flames spurt up, and a hundred men hold them to a hundred glowing cigar-tips.

'After you with the match.' Gervase took it from me with a steady hand. He, too, glanced about him while he puffed. 'Ugh!' He blew a long cloud, and shivered within his furred overcoat. 'What a gang!'

'It takes all sorts to make a world,' said I fatuously, for lack of anything better.

'Don't be an infernal idiot!' he answered, flicking the dust off one of the gilt chairs, and afterwards cleaning a space for his elbow on the looking-glass table. 'It takes only two sorts to make the world we've lived in, and that's you and me.' He gazed slowly round the walls. 'You and me, and a few fellows like us— not to mention the women, who don't count.'

'Well,' said I, 'as far as the world goes— if you must discuss it— I always found it a good enough place.'

'Because you started as an unconsidering fool: and because, afterwards, when we came to grips, you were the under-dog, and I gave you no time. My word— how I have hustled you!'

I yawned. 'All right: I can wait. Only if you suppose I came here to listen to your moral reflections—'

He pulled the cigar from between his teeth and looked at me along it.

'I know perfectly well why you came here,' he said slowly, and paused. 'Hadn't we better have it out— with the cards on the table?' He drew a small revolver from his pocket and laid it with a light clink on the table before him. I hesitated for a moment, then followed his example, and the silent men around us did the same.

A smile curled his thin lips as he observed this multiplied gesture. 'Yes,' he said, as if to himself, 'that is what it all comes to.'

'And now,' said I, 'since you know my purpose here, perhaps you will tell me yours.'

'That is just what I am trying to explain. Only you are so impatient, and it— well, it's a trifle complicated.' He puffed for a moment in silence. 'Roughly, it might be enough to say that I saw you standing outside my house a while ago; that I needed a talk with you alone, in some private place; that I guessed, if you

saw me, you would follow with no more invitation; and that, so reasoning, I led you here, where no one is likely to interrupt us.'

'Well,' I admitted, 'all that seems plain sailing.'

'Quite so; but it's at this point the thing grows complicated.' He rose, and walking to the fire-place, turned his back on me and spread his palms to the blaze. 'Well,' he asked, after a moment, gazing into the mirror before him, 'why don't you shoot?'

I thrust my hands into my trouser-pockets and leaned back staring— I dare say sulkily enough— at the two revolvers within grasp. 'I've got my code,' I muttered.

'The code of— these mirrors. You won't do the thing because it's not the thing to do; because these fellows'— he waved a hand and the ghosts waved back at him— 'don't do such things, and you haven't the nerve to sin off your own bat. Come'— he strolled back to his seat and leaned towards me across the table— 'it's not much to boast of, but at this eleventh hour we must snatch what poor credit we can. You are, I suppose, a more decent fellow for not having fired: and I— — By the way, you did feel the temptation?'

I nodded. 'You may put your money on that. I never see you without wanting to kill you. What's more, I'm going to do it.'

'And I,' he said, 'knew the temptation and risked it. No: let's be honest about it. There was no risk: because, my good sir, I know you to a hair.'

'There was,' I growled.

'Pardon me, there was none. I came here having a word to say to you, and these mirrors have taught me how to say it. Take a look at them— the world we are leaving— that's it: and a cursed second-hand, second-class one at that.'

He paced slowly round on it, slewing his body in the chair.

'I say a second-class one,' he resumed, 'because, my dear Reggie, when all's said and done, we are second-class, the pair of us, and pretty bad second-class. I met you first at — — . Our fathers had money: they wished us to be gentlemen without well understanding what it meant: and with unlimited pocket-money and his wits about him any boy can make himself a power in a big school. That is what we did: towards the end we even set the fashion for a certain set; and a rank bad fashion it was. But, in truth, we had no business there: on every point of breeding we were outsiders. I suspect it was a glimmering consciousness of this that made us hate each other from the first. We understood one another too well. Oh, there's no mistake about it! Whatever we've missed in life, you and I have hated.'

He paused, eyeing me queerly. I kept my hands in my pockets. 'Go on,' I said.

'From — we went to College— the same business over again. We drifted, of course, into the same set; for already we had become necessary to each other. We set the pace of that set— were its apparent leaders. But in truth we were alone— you and I— as utterly alone as two shipwrecked men on a raft. The others were shadows to us: we followed their code because we had to be gentlemen, but we did not understand it in the least. For, after all, the roots of that code lay in the breeding and tradition of honour, with which we had no concern. To each other you and I were intelligible and real; but as concerned that code and the men who followed it by right of birth and nature, we were looking-glass men imitating— imitating— imitating.'

'We set the pace,' said I. 'You've allowed that.'

'To be sure we did. We even modified the code a bit— to its hurt; though as conscious outsiders we could dare very little. For instance, the talk of our associates about women— and no doubt their thoughts, too— grew sensibly baser. The sanctity of gambling debts, on the other hand, we did nothing to impair: because we had money. I recall your virtuous indignation at the amount of paper floated by poor W— towards the end of the great baccarat term. Poor devil! He paid up— or his father did— and took his name off the books. He's in Ceylon now, I believe. At length you have earned a partial right to sympathize: or would have, if only you had paid up.'

'Take care, Gervase!'

'My good sir, don't miss my point. Wasn't I just as indignant with W—? If I'd been warned off Newmarket Heath, if I'd been shown the door of the hell we're sitting in, shouldn't I feel just as you are feeling? Try to understand!'

'You forget Elaine, I think.'

'No: I do not forget Elaine. We left College: I to add money to money in my father's office; you to display your accomplishments in spending what your father had earned. That was the extent of the difference. To both of us, money and the indulgence it buys meant everything in life. All I can boast of is the longer sight. The office-hours were a nuisance, I admit: but I was clever enough to keep my hold on the old set; and then, after office-hours, I met you constantly, and studied and hated you— studied you because I hated you. Elaine came between us. You fell in love with her. That I, too, should fall in love with her was no coincidence, but the severest of logic. Given such a woman and two such men, no other course of fate is conceivable. She made it necessary for me to put hate into practice. If she had not offered herself, why, then it would have been somebody else: that's all. Good Lord!' he rapped the table, and his voice rose for the first time above its level tone of exposition: 'You don't suppose all my study— all my years of education— were to be wasted!'

He checked himself, eyed me again, and resumed in his old voice:

'You wanted money by this time. I was a solicitor— your old college friend— and you came to me. I knew you would come, as surely as I knew you would not fire that pistol just now. For years I had trained myself to look into your mind and anticipate its working. Don't I tell you that from the first you were the only real creature this world held for me? You were my only book, and I had to learn you: at first without fixed purpose, then deliberately. And when the time came I put into practice what I knew: just that and no more. My dear Reggie, you never had a chance.'

'Elaine?' I muttered again.

'Elaine was the girl for you— or for me: just that again and no more.'

'By George!' said I, letting out a laugh. 'If I thought that!'

'What?'

'Why, that after ruining me, you have missed being happy!'

He sighed impatiently, and his eyes, though he kept them fastened on mine, seemed to be tiring. 'I thought,' he said, 'I could time your intelligence over any fence. But to-night there's something wrong. Either I'm out of practice or your brain has been going to the deuce. What, man! You're shying at every bank! Is it drink, hey? Or hunger?'

'It might be a little of both,' I answered. 'But stay a moment and let me get things straight. I stood between you and Elaine— no, give me time— between you and your aims, whatever they were. Very well. You trod over me; or, rather, you pulled me up by the roots and pitched me into outer darkness to rot. And now it seems that, after all, you are not content. In the devil's name, why?'

'Why? Oh, cannot you see?... Take a look at these mirrors again— our world, I tell you. See— you and I— you and I— always you and I! Man, I pitched you into darkness as you say, and then I woke and knew the truth— that you were necessary to me.'

'Hey?'

'*I can't do without you!*' It broke from him in a cry. 'So help me God, Reggie, it is the truth!'

I stared in his face for half a minute maybe, and broke out laughing. 'Jeshurun waxed fat and— turned sentimental! A nice copy-book job you make of it, too.'

Oh, send my brother back to me—

I cannot play alone!

Perhaps you'd like me to buy a broom and hire the crossing in Lennox Gardens? Then you'd be able to contemplate me all day long, and nourish your fine fat soul with delicate eating. Pah! You make me sick.'

'It's the truth,' said he quietly.

'It may be. To me it looks a sight more like *foie gras*. Can't do without me, can't you? Well, I can jolly well do without you, and I'm going to.'

'I warn you,' he said: 'I have done you an injury or two in my time, but by George if I stand up and let you shoot me— well, I hate you badly enough, but I won't let you do it without fair warning.'

'I'll risk it anyway,' said I.

'Very well.' He stood up, and folded his arms. 'Shoot, then, and be hanged!'

I put out my hand to the revolver, hesitated, and withdrew it.

'That's not the way,' I said. 'I've got my code, as I told you before.'

'Does the code forbid suicide?' he asked.

'That's a different thing.'

'Not at all. The man who commits suicide kills an unarmed man.'

'But the unarmed man happens to be himself.'

'Suppose that in this instance your distinction won't work? Look here,' he went on, as I pushed back my chair impatiently, 'I have one truth more for you. I swear I believe that what we have hated, we two, is not each other, but ourselves or our own likeness. I swear I believe we two have so shared natures in hate that no power can untwist and separate them to render each his own. But I swear also I believe that if you lift that revolver to kill, you will take aim, not at me, but by instinct at a worse enemy— yourself, vital in my heart.'

'You have some pretty theories to-night,' I sneered. 'Perhaps you'll go on to tell me which of us two had been Elaine's husband, feeding daintily in Lennox Gardens, clothed in purple and fine linen, while the other—'

He interrupted me by picking up his revolver and striding to the fire-place again.

'So be it, since you will have it so. Kill me,' he added, with a queer look, 'and perhaps you may go back to Lennox Gardens and enjoy all these things in my place.'

I took my station. Both revolvers were levelled now. I took sight along mine at his detested face. It was white but curiously eager— hopeful even. I lowered my arm, scanning his face still; and still scanning it, set my weapon down on the table.

'I believe you are mad,' said I slowly. 'But one thing I see— that, mad or not, you're in earnest. For some reason you want me to kill you; therefore that shall wait. For some reason it is torture to you to live and do without me: well, I'll try you with that. It will do me good to hurt you a bit.' I slipped the revolver into my pocket and tapped it. 'Though I don't understand them, I won't quarrel with your sentiments so long as you suffer for them. When that fails, I'll find another opportunity for this. Good night.' I stepped to the door.

'Reggie!'

I shut the door on his cry: crossed the corridor, and climbing out through the window, let myself drop into the lane.

As my feet touched the snow a revolver-shot rang out in the room behind me.

I caught at the frozen sill to steady myself: and crouching there, listened. Surely the report must have alarmed the house! I waited for the sound of footsteps: waited for three minutes— perhaps longer. None came. To be sure, the room stood well apart from the house: but it was incredible that the report should have awakened no one! My own ears still rang with it.

Still no footsteps came. The horse in the stable close by was still shuffling his hoof on the cobbles, no other sound....

Very stealthily I hoisted myself up on the sill again, listened, dropped inside, and tiptoed my way to the door. The candles were still burning in the Room of Mirrors. And by the light of them, as I entered, Gervase stepped to meet me.

'Ah, it's you,' I stammered. 'I heard— that is, I thought—'

And with that I saw— recognized with a catch of the breath— that the figure I spoke to was not Gervase, but my own reflected image, stepping forward with pale face and ghastly from a mirror. Yet a moment before I could have sworn it was Gervase.

Gervase lay stretched on the hearthrug with his hand towards the fire. I caught up a candle, and bent over him. His features were not to be recognized.

As I straightened myself up, with the candle in my hand, for an instant those features, obliterated in the flesh, gazed at me in a ring, a hundred times repeated behind a hundred candles. And again, at a second glance, I saw that the face was not Gervase's but my own.

I set down the candle and made off, closing the door behind me. The horror of it held me by the hair, but I flung it off and pelted down the lane and through the mews. Once in the street I breathed again, pulled myself together, and set off at a rapid walk, southwards, but not clearly knowing whither.

As a matter of fact, I took the line by which I had come: with the single difference that I made straight into Berkeley Square through Bruton Street. I had, I say, no clear purpose in following this line rather than another. I had none for taking Lennox Gardens on the way to my squalid lodgings in Chelsea. I had a purpose, no doubt; but will swear it only grew definite as I came in sight of the lamp still burning beneath Gervase's portico.

There was a figure, too, under the lamp— the butler— bending there and rolling up the strip of red carpet. As he pulled its edges from the frozen snow I came on him suddenly.

'Oh, it's you, sir!' He stood erect, and with the air of a man infinitely relieved.

'Gervase!'

The door opened wide and there stood Elaine in her ball-gown, a-glitter with diamonds.

'Gervase, dear, where have you been? We have been terribly anxious—'

She said it, looking straight down on me— on me— who stood in my tattered clothes in the full glare of the lamp. And then I heard the butler catch his breath, and suddenly her voice trailed off in wonder and pitiful disappointment.

'It's not Gervase! It's Reg— Mr. Travers. I beg your pardon. I thought—'

But I passed up the steps and stood before her: and said, as she drew back:

'There has been an accident. Gervase has shot himself.' I turned to the butler. 'You had better run to the police station. Stay: take this revolver. It won't count anything as evidence: but I ask you to examine it and make sure all the chambers are loaded.'

A thud in the hall interrupted me. I ran in and knelt beside Elaine, and as I stooped to lift her— as my hand touched her hair— this was the jealous question on my lips:

'What has *she* to do with it. It is *I* who cannot do without him— who must miss him always!'

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13: The Puzzle Chart

Ernest Favenc

1845-1908

Evening News (Sydney) 7, 14 Oct 1899

IT was in one of the worst parts of Western Australia that we pulled up and looked over the most uninviting landscape a man could see anywhere in Australia. We halted on the top of a ridge considerably higher than its fellows, and from there looked over a dry and barren expanse of country, of which the only constituent parts were stones, mulga, and spinifex.

Not a living thing was visible; not even a kite hovering in the air; the whole was absolute desert of the worst kind, destitute not only of life, but of anything that could support life. The sun was about two hours off setting; the sky was cloudless; the day had been excessively hot; and our horses stood badly in need of water.

We looked at each other in some dismay.

'Let's have a squint at that chart,' said Ned. I took it from my saddle pouch, and together we went over it.

Yes, we had followed the directions quite correctly, but the country we had arrived at was of an entirely different character to what we had been led to expect; in fact, it could not well have been more different.

'Thirty miles back to the last water,' groaned Ned. 'Here's a fix; and all thanks to believing in that blooming old chart. The man was looney before he died.'

'Loony or not, we've got to get out of this somehow.'

I looked around, and noticed a desert gum much older and higher than its fellows— in fact, it was a wonder to see so tall a tree in such a position. It was but a short distance away, and I told the black boy to go and climb up it, and see if he could see anything from the higher elevation. As a blackfellow naturally does, he looked all round the tree before commencing the ascent; then he called to us to come over, which we hastily did.

'Whitefellow cut 'em,' said the boy, pointing to some marks on the tree.

They were old, but had been cut deep at the time, and the desert gum grows slowly, and the letters were easily distinguishable.

'CLIMB' we both spelled out together.

'Hurrah!' shouted Ned; 'we've struck oil after all.'

'Up you go, Tommy Dod!' I said to the boy. The twisted trees of that part of the country are easy to climb, and Tommy was soon as high as he could safely go. He was so long in speaking that we both impatiently cried out to know if he saw anything.

'Yowi. Over there,' and he pointed down the very valley along which we had been hopelessly gazing.

'What name?' I asked.

'Land tumble down,' he said; ' 'nother fellow country come up.'

Both Ned and I guessed the truth at once. What from our elevation, we had taken for the end of the valley, was really an abrupt fall to better and different country. We mounted, and, not having much time to spare, pressed on as fast as the nature of the country allowed.

We got to the abrupt decline about half an hour before sundown, and to our joy saw, no great distance beneath us, the patch of open country through which ran the tea-tree creek marked on the old chart, for which we were in search. But for the accident of finding the old tree, which seems to have been purposely omitted from the chart in order to mislead people, or, as it might have been in our case, lure them to their death, we should certainly have missed what we sought.

However, we thought nothing about this as we hurried down the steep decline, and made for the creek where, according to the rough chart, we should find water. This turned out to be the case, and we were soon comfortably camped.

It is now time to relate how this chart, or tracing, came into our possession. About one hundred and twenty miles from where we then were was an outside mining camp called Goram Gerup. Ned and I had been working there for some twelve months and knew the story of Loony Jones, who periodically made an excursion into the bush to search for something, which evidently he could not find.

The last time Looney Jones came back he was bad with fever. He camped near us, and we looked after him a bit, but lie was too for gone, and eventually died. Before dying, however, he gave us the ragged and much-worn chart, which he averred was the key to wealth, if we could only follow the track indicated on to its end. He had been vainly trying for more than a year, and gradually lost all he had in the vain search. Where he himself got the chart from he would not reveal, and Ned and I always suspected that he had murdered a man for it.

This belief was now changed into a certainty, as if it had been honestly come by the donor of it would have told him the secret of the tree. If a man missed that guide, he might wander amongst the spinifex gullies until he was worn out, and his horses dead. Evidently Jones had never struck the tree.

'I vote we have a day's spell here,' I remarked to Ned, just before finally turning in. 'There's grass and water, the nags want a rest, and we will poke about and see where we are.'

'Right,' returned Ned, and the next moment we were off on a long dreamless sleep until morning.

THE PATCH of open country was but small, and surrounded by the barren spinifex ridges. The presence of the water was easily accounted for by the fact that where we were was a sort of basin or depression, into which all the drainage and rainflow of the surrounding country found its way. Naturally we both looked first in the direction, in which the little creek ran in the hope of seeing a gorge of some sort, although none such was indicated on our chart, which, by the way was pretty well undecipherable from constant handling. But the creek ended, as it began, in dry sand; it only formed a kind of channel to receive the scanty drainage of the surrounding ridges, never enough to flow any distance.

Ned drew my attention before we left to the number of parrots and pigeons who were coming in to water.

'No more about here, old man,' he said, 'or they would not muster up in that fashion.'

'Well, we're all right,' I replied, 'we need not shift camp from here until we know where we're going to.'

We rode according to the route marked on the chart, and in seven or eight miles it landed us on the shoulder of a high spinifex ridge. From there we could see nothing of any consequence, and as the track marked on the chart took a sharp turn to arrive at this object point we were naturally surprised.

Vainly we looked around, no striking object of any sort was in view, nothing tout rough mulga, spinifex, and stones.

'There's another plant in this,' said Ned, 'This here old chart is as full of tricks as a monkey. Let's have a good look at the thing?'

We looked, and were further mystified by observing that there was a gap in the line of route marked. Evidently this point was another little trap, and I began to see that the chart had been for the sole benefit of the man who made it, and these gaps and breaks were intended to put others off the scent if the chart was lost. Evidently the maker of the chart depended on his memory at these points, and I argued that there must be some striking object in view.

Bearing this in mind. I looked most carefully all round, but could see nothing in any way uncommon. Telling Ned to stop still, I rode slowly up and down the ridge once, twice, thrice. Suddenly I caught it— at least, I caught sight of what I was sure was the guide mark.

On a ridge about a quarter of a mile away was a boulder, and from one point which I passed I had suddenly caught sight of it transformed into the semblance of a man's head. I shifted my position and lost it. Only from the one

place did the outline of the rock lend itself to the illusion. The face was so grotesque and absurd that I could not help laughing; and Ned came riding up.

Ned was not in a good temper

'Blowed if I see anything to laugh at about here,' he said. 'The man who'd laugh in this sort of country would sing comic songs at a funeral.'

I pointed out the rock to him, and at last he saw the resemblance to the man's face.

'That must be it,' he agreed with me; 'let us ride over and see the next move.'

'My turn now,' said Ned when we reached the boulder, and dismounting: he climbed on top.

Standing up he gazed all round, rather disconsolately at first, but presently he brightened up.

'Come up here,' he said, and I climbed up and stood beside him.

'Do you think that's it?' he asked, and pointed to a belt of black scrub.

I soon noticed what he meant. Through the scrub, visible only from where we stood, was a clear track like a road, although, of course, that was impossible. What it really was, was that the two scrubs almost met, leaving but a small gap between them. This from where we were looked like a cleared road. Seen from down below the scrubs overlapped, and the space was not visible.

'Do you think that is the place?' asked Ned rather doubtfully.

'Taking all things into consideration, I do. That had better be our next dart, but it is no good going on to-day— to-morrow will be time enough.'

We returned to camp, and entered on a more complete examination of the chart than we had yet bestowed on it.

By means of a strong magnifying glass, which we carried for prospecting purposes, we made out much more than we had formerly found on it, so much had been half obliterated. In places there were sentences written in a sort of crabbed round hand.

One ran: *'Here you will find the first fruits of your toil*.'

'Shouldn't mind some fruit just now,' I remarked.

'What sort of fruit do you think he means?' said Ned, who had not yet recovered his temper. 'Expect to get raspberries and strawberries growing on the spinifex and oranges and peaches on the mulga?'

'Now, we'll straighten it out,' I said, not heeding Ned's sarcasm.

By means of a pocket compass and a makeshift protractor I followed up the course. The maker had put no indications of the cardinal points on his map, and I had to run it from laying out the course we had already come. But the worst of it was, I had no means of arriving at his scale of miles, as in all

probability a man who was so intent upon wrapping up his secret so that he alone could unravel it would be likely to alter his scale so as to bother one still more. When I had finished I made out that, if the scale was the same all the way through, the end of our journey, by many devious twists and turns, was about seventy-five miles away, but the same point could be reached in about forty to fifty miles by making straight across. This, however, considering the eccentric character of the map, the nature of the country we were in, and the general unreliability of everything, was too rash an undertaking to contemplate.

'We're well off here,' said Ned, 'and we won't shift until we know for certain where we are going to.'

This sentiment I duly endorsed. A couple of tender bronzewing pigeons, split open and broiled on the coals, had restored Ned's temper, while the billy, bubbling alongside the fire with a stew of parrots, rice, and preserved potatoes, nicely flavored, in it, cooking for breakfast, made him feel content.

Next morning we were away pretty early.

Our camp and spare horses could be safely left to take care of themselves, as we had not seen track or sign of a blackfellow, either old or new, as yet; so we took Tommy with us, for three pairs of eyes were better than two. We made straight for the gap in the scrub that we had noticed, and were about entering it when an exclamation from Tommy made us look round. He had been looking back, and boulder on the ridge had caught his eye. No wonder he called out. From the side we now were the ludicrous likeness to a face was wonderful— a mocking face— the face of a sardonic and spiteful old man.

'Looks from here as though he was laughing at us,' said Ned.

'Perhaps he is,' I returned, as we started on again.

When we got out of the scrub the same dreary array of spinifex ridges confronted us, the only change being that in the distance, about fifteen miles away, there was a peak visible. I consulted the map, and found that, according to my working of it, our track should go to that peak or very near it In fact, it was at that spot on the map that the writing occurred about 'first fruits.'

'Tell you what, Ned, I said, 'I'll toss you who goes on to that peak. The other can go back to camp, and bring out a horse with the two big water bags on, and meet the one. who goes there?'

'I'm on,' said Ned. 'It's no good our taking all the horses out there, and I bet there's no water.'

I had a coin in my saddle pouch, and we tossed and I won. Ned looked disappointed.

'Never mind,' he said, 'I expect you will do better than I should. I'll be here with the water, never fear. And if you don't come back tonight?'

'Say to-morrow night, or to-morrow at twelve. Then you can follow up,' I returned.

I had made a rough copy of the map, so I gave Ned the original for safety. I collected all the food we had brought out for a midday meal, took both water bags and Ned's cartridges and started.

I had a good fresh horse, and one which I had lately shod, so did not anticipate any difficulty. Bush riding by oneself is always lonely, but riding through such lifeless country as that was, is something more than lonely. During the fourteen or fifteen miles to that peak, I never heard a sound or saw a living creature, except a tiny lizard or some ants.

The approach to the peak was across a sandy plain, on which loose boulders were scattered about. Out of this plain the peak arose, bare, gaunt, and glistening with heat. It was a kind of red rock, unlike the usual run of the solitary peaks of that region, and I rode round it looking for an easy means of ascent, for there was nothing about the foot of it worthy of notice, while from the top I might see what was meant by the 'first fruits,' or, at any rate, have an extended view ahead.

I soon found a pretty easy assent, and determined to take it. Just opposite was a clump of dead saplings, and to one of these I tied my horse, took the full waterbag off— I had emptied one— and hung it on a tree. Then I started up the peak.

I suppose I must have been about halfway up, when I heard an affrighted snort from my horse. I looked down. He, one of the quietest of animals, was hanging back on his reins, his ears cocked, snorting with terror, although I could see nothing. Instantly the dread of being left to get back on foot flashed across me. Calling to him so that he should recognise my voice, I began hastily to descend.

As I did so a good-sized boulder, how detached I know not, came bounding down from the top of the hill, and passed perilously close to me. I got down somehow, but too late. The dead branch to which my horse had been tied had broken, and he was making his way campward along his outward track. I looked carefully round but could see absolutely no sign of anything that could have frightened my horse.

Suddenly a blind unreasoning fear assailed me. I had only one desire, to get away from the presence of the peak. I could see nothing, could hear nothing, but I felt the place was not good for me. Congratulating myself, even in my flurry, on my precaution in having taken the waterbag off the saddle, I took it in my hand and started off back on the track.

THAT walk back through the awful desolation of that country was a nightmare that I remember still, and dream of at times. Always I fancied that there was some threatening presence following me up with dire intent. I could not help glancing fearfully around now and again, as if it was possible there could be any living thing in that dread, drear desert but myself. It was horrible, this feeling of fright, which might overpower a man under some strange circumstances at the dead hour of night, but here, under the blazing sunshine, in was unnatural, and out of all reason.

It was nearly sundown when I was hailed by a welcome shout ahead, and I saw Ned breasting the rise, coming cantering towards me, leading my runaway horse. What a change that human about in that wilderness made in my feelings. At once I regained my nerve, and the superstitious terror that had dogged my track vanished like the quick passing of a fleeting shadow.

'Not hurt?' asked Ned anxiously, as he pulled up alongside of me.

'No,' I answered; 'Jimba and I both got a fright about nothing.'

It was with a thankful feeling of intense relief that I put my foot in the stirrup again, and as we rode home, I told Ned all about it.

'When you were half way up, what did the country already look like?' he asked.

'I never looked: I blundered down the hill so fast to catch Jimba before he got away, that I forgot all about it, and then that gibber coming down upset me still further.'

'We'll make an early start,' said Ned, 'and take Tommy with us to mind the nags while we go up the peak.'

To this I agreed, and a good feed when I got back to camp, and a night's sleep, made me inclined to laugh at myself the next morning, when, before the largest of the constellations had laded out, we were on our way back to the mysterious peak.

We rode quickly, leaving Tommy to follow more slowly with the pack horse. When we reached the peak, we rode carefully all round it, looking for tracks, but with the exception of mine of the day before, we could find nothing. We examined the stone that had nearly capsized me, and found it weather-worn almost to the shape of a globe; it may have been just ready to topple over, and by a strange coincidence, had fallen at the very time when I was ascending the hill. In fact, that must have been the case, for there could be nobody human, at any rate, waiting at the top of the peak to roll it down on the first comer. I felt none of the strange terror I had felt the day before, the companionship of my mate seemed quite sufficient to banish any superstitious feeling of that sort.

On the arrival of Tommy, we commenced the ascent, leaving him in a clear space, in full view of us. Slowly and carefully we went up, hardly looking abroad, until at last we gained the top, and both stood silently gazing around.

What did we see? In the immediate neighborhood the same dreary desert, to which our track seemed now wedded; beyond, low ranges, square-topped, and clothed for the greater part with black scrub, showing mostly a precipitous face for the last hundred feet of their summit. These, unpromising-looking ranges bounded our view nearly all the way round, but when we came to look at right angles to the course we had been following there was a depression in the range, and it looked as though a creek formed in the basin in which we then, were and found its way through this depression.

At times we fancied we could trace here and there the timber of a creek, but it was by no means a certainty, although we both felt sure, from the lay of the surrounding country, that a creek must exist. On consulting the map, we found that the track led in that direction.

Ned pointed out to me the place whence the boulder had been dislodged. A patch of fresh colored rock, different from the weather-worn surface around. So small was it that the stone must have been poised most delicately, right on the brow of a sloping rock. The least tremor would have started it.

'It strikes me, Ned,' I said, 'that is the first fruits the map speaks of.'

Ned nodded assent.

'We must keep our eyes open,' he replied. 'This old chart's dangerous.'

It was now about noon, so we decided to send Tommy back to camp, and take a short ride in the direction of the apparent creek. Before descending we took another look round, but no sign of life was visible, no smoke anywhere.

Tommy was glad to see us back again. He said that he felt frightened, but he couldn't tell why.

'Horse frightened, too,' he said. 'Mine think it dead fellow sit down here.'

'What for you think it dead fellow sit down here?' demanded Ned.

'Baal mine know; only mine think it. Stone sit down there.' He indicated a pile of stones a short distance away, which had escaped my observation. We rode over, and looked at it. It certainly looked like a grave. It was a pile about six feet long, and three broad, and had been built up by human hands.

'Blackfellow do this?' asked Ned of Tommy.

'Baal blackfellow,' said Tommy, emphatically. 'White fellow.'

We started to work putting the stones on one side. As we went on we found that the hole, grave, or whatever it was, was filled with stones; nor had we far to go, for it was evident that the loose, shifting sand had not permitted the sexton to go very deep.

In a short time a shrivelled body showed through the stones, and, working hastily, we soon had it uncovered. The dry, hot sand had reduced it to a mummy, but it had preserved the clothes and hair. The body was that of a man of strong build, with a black beard and black hair, most of which had, however, fallen off on the blanket on which he was lying.

We examined the grave thoroughly to see if anything had been buried with him which could give us a clue to his story, but found nothing beyond the belt and pouch he had on, for he had been buried in all his clothes; this we took for future examination. What we did discover, however, was that the man had not died a natural death, his skull being fractured just over the left temple.

We filled the grave in again with the stones, and by that time it was getting late and we started for camp. After tea we examined the pouch. It contained a piece of tobacco, shrivelled up like a withered stick, a pistol cartridge, and a well-worn envelope containing two or three papers. We fell with eager curiosity on these.

The first one we opened was a bill for £6 10s from the Blank Hotel, Fremantle, and Ned, after turning it over and upside down, put it aside with the remark that it was not receipted. The next paper was a newspaper cutting, stuck upon a piece of note paper with marginal notes in lead pencil.

This promised to be more interesting, and it was, The newspaper cutting was to the effect that James Bornstock had returned to the camp at Goram-Gerup, after a long prospecting trip. He reported finding likely-looking country, but had obtained no satisfactory results. He also reported the death of his mate by thirst. This was what the printed matter contained; the marginal annotations ran as follows:

'Bornstock's a liar. I must look him up.'

This with regard to getting no satisfactory results from the country. Opposite the line about losing his mate was scribbled:

'I must take a hand now, Bornstock won't come back without me.'

'But he did,' put in Ned, as we finished, reading.

'Mr. Bornstock, whoever he was, seems to have been clever at losing his mates,' I returned.

'Well, If Loony Jones killed him, it was only tit for tat,' said Ned.

The next paper proved the most interesting of all to us. There was a. circular mark drawn on it, and a straight line extending from it some distance. Along this line was written, *'Keep northeast; never mind rest*.'

'Does that round mark mean the peak?' said Ned.

'I should think so,' I answered, fanning out the Chart. 'What is the bearings of that depression?'

'North-east.'

'Here are, then. The track makes a lone course to the north-east, and then wanders about all roads.'

'Bravo and bully for us! but what a lot of lives this bit of paper is accountable for?' and Ned touched the frayed old map. 'See; there's the unknown mate of Bornstock's; then the man whose body we found; lastly, Bornstock himself; and only for a lucky fluke you and I might have been added to the list.'

'Well, shall we chance it, and make a move to-morrow morning?' asked Ned.

'Yes, there seems nothing else to do. We can always make back here, and by going straight to that opening, instead of round to the peak, we can cut off at least five or six miles.'

On that conclusion, we went to sleep, and next morning broke camp, bag and baggage. As we approached the dip in the range, we saw that a dry sandy creek did form, and assumed large proportions as we went on, but the bed was hopelessly dry, and looked as though it had been waterless for years. As we went on the ranges closed in on us more than we had expected.

I stopped, and consulted the chart, and found that, according to it, we should turn off at an angle that would bring us on to a south-east course.

'Well, Ned,' I said, 'shall we follow the chart or the creek?'

'The creek for me,' answered Ned; 'I'm sick of that puzzling old chart; besides, I think from, the look of things that there is going to be a change of scene directly.'

'Go ahead,' I returned, 'we can always turn back and follow up the other course.'

In about half an hour a black reef of rocks was visible stretching right across our track. The banks of the creek, too, were now much shallower, and the creek was much wider. As we got closer we could see that the reef crossed the creek and ran on to the corresponding range on the outer side. It seemed an impossible wall to take horses over. The bed of the creek was now one clean-swept, smooth rock; no sand or any debris was visible.

When we reached the rocky wall and dismounted, neither of us spoke, and we mutually turned and went down to the bed of the creek. It fell over a precipitous rock of about a hundred feet in depth, and stretched before us was a lovely valley, bordered by sharp-peaked ranges, some with red, rugged faces, glinting in the sunlight— others covered with dark scrub.

The valley itself, although of no great size, was evidently well-grassed, and free from the odious spinifex. Plains separated by belts of scrub lay before us, and through it all wound the creek, now apparently well-watered, for the trees in the bed and on the bank were green and densely foliaged. Parrots were

swarming everywhere, and their noisy chattering rose even to where we were standing. We could see flocks of white corellas, slate-colored galahs, black cockatoos, and others flitting about, shrieking and scolding.

Ned advanced to the edge, and looked over, then he called to me. Below at the foot of the smooth rock was a deep, dark waterhole, formed by the rare floods that now and again swept down the creek.

I drew Ned back, for the rock was as slippery as glass, and an unwilling plunge down was not advisable. To get the horses down was the next trouble, and it was only after some hours that we managed to find an available break over the wall-like reef, and a descent the other side. At last we were safe down, and soon had fixed up a comfortable camp.

'It must have been a long time since the interesting Mr. Bornstock's visits to these parts,' I remarked to Ned. 'We have not seen the ghost of a track yet.'

'That dead man was a pretty plain track,' said Ned; 'but I wonder there is not some sort of an available track up and down this wall.'

'I don't, it would have betrayed him at once, probably he went up and down a different way every time.'

'Well, anyhow, we had better go over this valley now we are here. There's an hour or two of sun yet. Shall we ride down, the creek a mile or two?'

I assented, and we caught our horses and started. The creek was well watered with shallow pools, fringed in places with a growth of rushes. Ducks flew up as we approached, and occasionally a lonely jabiru rose hastily in affright.

'How is it there are no niggers about?' I said.

'I can't make it out. I've seen one or two very old camps, but that is all,' answered Ned. 'One should think this place-would be a paradise for them.'

I assented, and as it was getting late we turned back.

Half-way to camp we came across Tommy making along our tracks. He was terribly frightened, and begged us not to camp where we were that night. It seems that noticing a good many wallabies amongst the rocks, he had gone along the wall to try and get a shot at one, and in about half a mile had come upon a scene which had frightened the life out of him. We went out to look at it.

From twenty to thirty bodies of natives, half mummies, half skeletons, lay there. A hideous massacre had been perpetrated at some time, and men and women and children had been rounded up against the face of the rocky wall and shot down. It was the most ghastly sight Ned or I had ever seen, and we gazed in horror at it. There was no mistake that it was the hands of some murderous whites which had done the deed, for many of the skulls had unmistakable bullet holes in them.

'Some of Mr. Bornstock's work?' Queried Ned.

'Yes, and that other man's. Don't you see, he must have been here with Bornstock to be able to write those directions. He helped him to slaughter these poor devils, and then when Bornstock got rid of him, why he killed two birds with one stone. Got rid of a witness and of a man who knew his secret.'

'That's it,' said Ned. 'Loony Jones would have made another if he had come out this far, but he must have killed Bornstock before he got to the marked tree, and, of course, couldn't pick up the trail.' We had dismounted, and were looking at the poor wretches around us. Ned turned over a rotting dilly bag with his foot. The contents rolled out, and we saw the gleam of gold amongst it.

Picking it up it proved to be a good-sized specimen containing more than an ounce of gold.

'We are close to It,' said Ned.

'Yes, but I'm sick of the whole thing. It reeks with blood. How many more shall we find?'

'There's a good moon, suppose we bury these remains to-night; it's more than I'd do for Bornstock if we found him.'

I agreed, and by the light of a nearly full moon we dug a hole large enough to contain the wretched remains of the massacre, and put them mercifully out of sight.

We slept sound after our work, and next morning started early, both feeling that we had about come to the end of our trip. Five miles down the creek we came on to auriferous country and some old workings in a gully leading down from one of the ranges, the first sign, beyond the dead bodies, that we had yet seen of the white man's former presence.

For more than a fortnight we prospected that place industriously, but, beyond the merest show, we obtained nothing. The auriferous belt was small, and dwindled off higher up the range, and was overlaid by the desert formation.

We tried the old workings, and got a little shotty gold that had been left behind, but the extent of the work that had been done, and the way it had been followed, it was evident that the former prospectors had struck a patch, and worked it out for all it was worth. We tried some of the dirt left on the bank, and got a little gold out of that; then we decided to give It up and return.

I had an idea of taking up the country and selling it for pastoral purposes; that, with the little gold we had got, would give us something over our expenses.

'I wonder what Bornstock did with the gold?' said Ned the night before we started back, 'and why he brought men as mates out here?'

'He must have been threatened by the blacks when by himself, and wanted company, and help.'

'I suppose so,' answered Ned, 'anyhow, I don't think that he took the gold into Goran Gerup, He planted it somewhere, and I guess I know where.'

Ned turned his back defiantly to me, and would say no more. Next morning he said he wanted to go round by the peak, and we went round.

'Now, old man, we are going to open that grave again.'

I started, and Ned's idea flashed across me at once, and we set to work; The corpse lay there as we had left it, only, perhaps from being exposed to the air, it seemed to have, shrunk up more.

'I wonder if the blanket will bold to lift him out; he's light enough, poor devil,' said Ned. We tried, and lifted the body out with ease. Underneath was another one!

'This is a family vault,' said Ned. 'This must be mate No. 1. But he must come out.' He was more of a skeleton than the other, and he was soon deposited on the brink of the grave. Then we searched.

The gold was there, underneath the two murdered men. Altogether it finally gave us about £5000 each. We put the dead men back, packed our treasure, and started, vowing never to revisit the spot.

On our way back, after passing the tree marked 'climb,' we kept a sharp lookout for the scene of the tragedy in which Loony Jones must have had a hand; but we did not find it.

Bornstock, the murderer, and probable a madman, is the only one whose bones lie somewhere— unburied, picked by crow and dingo.

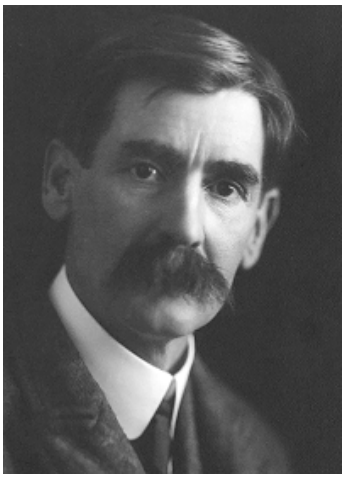
———————————

14: His Father's Mate

Henry Lawson

1867-1922

The Bulletin, 22 Dec 1888



Henry Archibald Hertzberg Lawson

Henry Lawson's first published short story. He was 21. Chapter 6 did not have a title in the original.

1: Worked Out

IT WAS Golden Gully still, but golden in name only, unless, indeed, the yellow mullock-heaps, or the bloom of the hillside wattles furnished it with a claim to the title. But the gold was gone from the gully, and the diggers were gone, too, after the manner of Timon's friends when his wealth had deserted him. Golden Gully was a dreary place— dreary even for an abandoned gold-field. The tortured earth, with its wounds all bare, seemed to make a mute appeal to the surrounding bush to come and hide it; and as if in answer to its appeal the scrub and saplings were beginning to close in from the foot of the range. The wilderness was reclaiming its own again.

The two dark, sullen hills that stood on either side were clothed from tip to hollow with gloomy scrub and scraggy box-trees. The top of the western hill was shaped somewhat like a saddle, and, standing high above the eucalypti, on a point in position and appearance resembling the pommel, were three tall pines. These lonely trees, seen for miles around, had caught the yellow rays of many a setting sun long ere the white man wandered over the ranges.

The "predominant note" of the scene was a painful sense of listening, that never seemed to lose its tension, a listening as though for the sounds of digger-life, sounds that had gone and left a void a void accentuated by the signs of a

former presence. Years had passed since the army of diggers vanished to new rushes, like other armies, leaving its stragglers and deserters behind. These were men who were too poor to drag families about— men who were old and feeble, men who had lost their faith in Fortune. They dropped unnoticed from the ranks, and remained to scratch out a living among the abandoned claims.

Golden Gully had its little community of fossickers, who lived at the foot of the gully, in a cleared patch, called "Spencer's Flat" on one side and "Pounding Flat" on the other, but they lent no life to the scene— they only haunted it. The stranger might think the hand of man had not touched the ground for years, until he came suddenly upon a coat and hat lying at the top of some old shaft. These, and the thud of a pick in the shallow ground underneath, told him of some fossicker below rooting out what little "wash" remained.

2: "Isley"

ONE afternoon towards Christmas a windlass was erected over an old shaft of considerable depth at the foot of the gully. Next morning a green-hide bucket attached to a rope on the windlass was lying near the mouth of the shaft, and beside it, on a clear-swept patch, was a little mound of cool, wet wash-dirt.

A clump of saplings near at hand threw a shade over part of the heap, and in this shade, seated on an old coat, was a small boy of eleven or twelve years, writing on a slate.

He had fair hair, blue eyes, and a thin old-fashioned face— a face that would scarcely alter much as he grew to manhood— and was clad in a pair of trousers, upheld by a strip of hide, and a cotton shirt. He held the slate rigidly, with a corner of its frame pressed close against his ribs, while his head hung to one side, so close to the slate that his straggling hair almost touched it. The lad was regarding his work fixedly out of the corners of his eyes, whilst he painfully copied down the head-line, spelling it in a different way each time. In this laborious task he appeared to be greatly assisted by a tongue that lolled out of the corner of his mouth and made an occasional revolution round it, leaving a circle of temporarily clean face. His little, clay-covered toes also entered into the spirit of the thing, and helped him not a little by their energetic wriggling. He paused occasionally to draw the back of his small brown arm across his mouth.

Little Isley Mason, or, as he was afterwards called, "His Father's Mate," had been a general favourite with the fossickers, and even with the diggers, from the days when he used to rise in early morning and run across the frosty flat. Long Tom Hopkins— nick-named "Tom the Devil"— would often tell how Isley

once came home at breakfast-time naked, after his run in the long, wet grass, with the information that he had "lost his shirt."

Later on, when most of the diggers had gone, and Isley's mother was dead, he was to be seen about the place with bare, sun-browned arms and legs, a pick and shovel, and a gold-dish, in diameter equalling about two-thirds of his height, with which he used to go "a-speckin' " and "fossickin' " among the old waste-heaps. Long Tom was Isley's special crony, and would often go out of his way to "lay the boy onter bits o' wash and likely spots," lamely excusing his long yarns with the child by the explanation that it was "amusin' to draw Isley out."

Isley had been sitting writing for some time when a deep voice called out from below:

"Isley!"

"Yes, father."

"Send down the bucket."

"Right."

Isley put down his slate, and going to the shaft dropped the bucket down as far as the slack-rope reached; then, placing his left hand above the bole of the windlass, and the right beneath, he let it slip round between his palms until the bucket reached the bottom. A sound of shovelling was then heard for a few moments, and presently a voice cried:

"Wind away, sonny!"

"Thet ain't half enough," said the boy, peering down. "Don't be frightened to put it in, father. I kin wind up a lot mor'n thet."

A little more scraping, and the boy braced his feet well upon the mound of clay which he had raised under the handle of the windlass to make up for his deficiency in stature.

"Now then, Isle'!"

Isley wound up slowly but sturdily, and soon the laden bucket appeared above the surface; then he carried it in short lifts and deposited its contents with the rest of the wash-dirt.

"Isley!" called his father again.

"Yes, father."

"Have you done that writing-lesson yet?"

"Very near."

"Then send down the slate next time for some sums."

"All right."

The boy resumed his seat, and fixing the corner of his slate well into his ribs, humped his back and commenced another wavering line.

3: Pictures on the "Face"

TOM MASON was known on the place as a silent hard worker. He was a man of about sixty— tall and dark-bearded. There was nothing uncommon about his face, except, perhaps, that it had hardened, as the face of a man might harden who had suffered a long succession of griefs and disappointments. He lived in a little hut under a peppermint-tree at the far end of Pounding Flat, where his wife had died about six years before, and the memory detaining him— though new rushes had broken out, and Mason was well able to go— he had never left Golden Gully.

He was kneeling in front of the "face," digging away by the light of a sperm candle stuck in the side. The floor of the drive was very wet, and his trousers were heavy and cold with clay and water; but the old digger was used to that sort of thing. His pick was not bringing out much today, however, for he seemed abstracted, and would occasionally pause in his work, while his thoughts wandered far away from the narrow streak of wash on the "face."

He was digging out pictures from a past life. They were not pleasant ones, for his face was stony and white in the dim glow of the candle.

Thud, thud, thud, the blows became slower and more irregular as the fossicker's mind wandered into the past. The sides of the drive seemed to vanish slowly away, and the "face" retreated far out beyond a horizon that was hazy in the glow of the Southern Ocean. He was standing on the deck of a ship and by his side stood a brother. They were sailing southward to the Land of Promise that was shining there in all its golden glory! The sails pressed forward in the bracing wind, and the clipper-ship raced along burdened with the wildest dreamers ever borne in a vessel's hull! Up over long blue ocean ridges, down into long blue ocean gullies.

On to lands so new, and yet so old, where above the sunny glow of the southern skies blazed the richly-gilt names of Ballarat and Bendigo. The deck seemed to lurch, and the fossicker fell forward against the face of the drive. The shock recalled him, and he lifted his pick once more.

The blows again slacken as another vision rises before him. It is Ballarat now. He is working in a shallow claim at Eureka, his brother by his side. The brother looks pale and ill— has been up all night dancing and drinking. Out behind them is the line of blue hills, in front is the famous Bakery Hill, and down to the left Golden Point. Two troopers ride up over Specimen Hill. What do they want?

They take the brother away handcuffed. Manslaughter last night. Cause, drink and jealousy.

The vision is gone again. Thud, thud, goes the pick, it counts the years that follow— one, two, three, four, ten, twenty, and then it stops for the next scene— a selection on the sunny banks of a bright river in New South Wales. The little homestead is surrounded by vines and fruit-trees.

Many swarms of bees work under the shade of the trees, and a wheat-crop is nearly ripe on the hillside.

A man and a boy are engaged in clearing a paddock just below the homestead. They are father and son. The son is a powerful lad of about seventeen years.

Thud, thud, again. Horses' feet! Again comes Nemesis in troopers' uniform.

The mail was stuck up last night about five miles away, and a refractory passenger shot. The son had been out "shooting" with some "friends."

The troopers bear the son away handcuffed: "Robbery under arms."

The father was taking out a stump when the troopers came. His foot is still resting on the spade, which is half driven home. He watches the troopers take the boy up to the house, and then, driving the spade to its full length, he turns up another sod. The troopers reach the door of the homestead; but still he digs steadily, and does not seem to hear his wife's cry of despair. The troopers search the boy's room and bring out some clothing in two bundles; but still the father digs. They have saddled up one of the farm-horses and made the boy mount. The father digs. They ride off along the ridge with the boy between them. The father never lifts his eyes; the hole widens round the stump; he digs away till his brave little wife comes and takes him gently by the arm. He half rouses himself and follows her to the house like an obedient dog.

Trial and disgrace follow, and then other misfortunes, disease among cattle, drought, and poverty.

Thud, thud, thud, again! But it is not the sound of the fossicker's pick— it is the fall of sods on his wife's coffin.

It is a little bush cemetery, and he stands stonily watching them fill up her grave. She died of a broken heart and shame. "I can't bear disgrace! I can't bear disgrace!" she had moaned all these six weary years, for the poor are often proud.

But he lives on. He holds up his head and toils on for the sake of a child that is left, and that child is— Isley.

And now the fossicker sees a vision of the future. He seems to be standing somewhere, an old, old man, with a younger one at his side; the younger one has Isley's face. Horses' feet again! Ah, God! Nemesis once more in troopers' uniform!

THE fossicker falls on his knees in the mud and clay at the bottom of the drive, and prays Heaven to take his last child ere Nemesis again comes attired as of old.

4: "Tom the Devil"

TOM HOPKINS' profile, at least from one side, certainly did recall that of the sarcastic Mephistopheles, but the other side of his face, like his true character, was by no means devilish. His physiognomy had been much damaged, and one eye removed by a blast in some old Ballarat mine. The blind eye was covered with a green patch, which gave a sardonic appearance to the remaining features. He was a stupid and heavy, but good-natured Englishman. He stuttered a little, and had a peculiar habit of wedging the monosyllable "why" into his conversation at times when it served no other purpose than to fill up the pauses caused by his stuttering; but this by no means assisted him in his speech, for he often stuttered over the "why" itself. This peculiarity gave a flavour of originality and humour to Tom's utterances.

The sun was low, and its yellow rays reached far up among the saplings of Golden Gully, when the lumbering Tom came down by the path that ran under the western hill. He was dressed in cotton shirt, moleskin trousers, faded hat and waistcoat and blucher boots. He carried a pick over his shoulder, the handle of which was run through the heft of a short shovel that hung down behind, and he had a big dish under his arm. He paused opposite the windlassed shaft and hailed the boy—

"See— why— here, Isley!"

"What is it, Tom?"

"I seed a young— why— magpie up in the scrub, and yer oughter be able to catch it."

"Can't leave the shaft; father's b'low."

"How did yer father know there was any— why— wash in the old shaft?"

"See'd old Corney in town Saturday, 'n he said thur was enough to make it worth while balin' out. Bin balin' all the mornin'."

Tom came over, and letting his tools down with a clatter, he hitched up the knees of his moleskins and sat down on one heel.

"What are yer— why— doin' on the slate, Isley?" said he, taking out an old clay pipe and lighting it.

"Sums," said Isley.

Tom puffed away at his pipe a moment.

"'Taint no use," he said, sitting down on the clay and drawing his knees up. "Edication's a failyer."

"Listen at 'im!" exclaimed the boy; "d'yer mean ter say it ain't no use learnin' readin' and writin' and sums?"

"Isley!"

"Right, father."

The boy went to the windlass and let the bucket down. Tom offered to assist him, but Isley, proud of his strength, insisted on winding by himself.

"You'll be a strong— why— man some day, Isley," said Tom, landing the bucket.

"Oh, I could wind up a lot more'n father puts in. Look how I greased the handles! It works like butter now," and the boy sent the handle spinning round with a jerk to illustrate his meaning.

"What did they call you 'Isley' for?" queried Tom, as they resumed their seats; "it ain't yer real name, is it?"

"No; my name's Harry. A digger used to say I was an isle in the ocean to father 'n mother, 'n then I was nick-named Isle 'n then Isley."

"You hed a— why— brother once, didn't yer?"

"Yes; but thet was afore I was borned. He died, at least mother used to say she didn't know if he was dead; but father says he's dead as fur's he's concerned."

"And yer father hed a brother, too. Did yer ever— why— hear of him?"

"Yes, I heard father talkin' about it wonst to mother. I think father's brother got into some trouble over a squabble in a bar where a man was killed."

"And was yer— why— father— why— fond of him?"

"I heered father say that he was wonst, but thet was all past."

Tom smoked in silence for a while, and seemed to look at some dark clouds that were drifting along like a funeral out in the west. Presently he said half aloud something that sounded like "All, all— why— past!"

"Aye?" said Isley.

"Oh, it's— why, why— nothin'," answered Tom, rousing himself "Is that a paper in your father's coat-pocket, Isley?"

"Yes," said the boy, taking it out.

Tom took the paper and stared hard at it for a moment or so.

"There's somethin' about edication there," said Tom, putting his finger on a tailor's advertisement. "I wish you'd— why— read it to me, Isley— I can't see the small print they uses nowadays."

"No, thet's not it," said the boy, taking the paper; "it's something about—"

"Isley!"

"'Old on, Tom, father wants me."

The boy ran to the shaft, and resting his hands and forehead against the bole of the windlass, he leant over to hear what his father was saying.

Without a moment's warning the treacherous bole slipped round, a small body bounded a couple of times against the sides of the shaft, and fell into the well-hole at Mason's feet, where it lay motionless!

Heaven had listened to the fossicker's prayer. Nemesis could come now.

5: "He Never Knowed"

"MASON!— Jim!"

"Aye?"

"Put him in the bucket and lash him to the rope with your belt!"

A few moments, and—

"Now, Tom!"

Tom's trembling hands would scarcely grasp the handle, but he managed to wind somehow.

Presently the form of the child appeared, motionless, covered with clay and water, while Mason, climbing up by the steps in the side of the shaft, slowly neared the light.

Tom tenderly unlashed the boy and laid him under the saplings on the grass. He then wiped some of the clay and blood away from the child's forehead, and dashed over him some clay-coloured water.

Presently Isley gave a gasp and opened his eyes.

"Are yer— why hurt much, Isley?" asked Tom.

"Ba-back's bruk, Tom."

"Not so bad as that, old man."

"Where's father?"

"Coming up."

Silence awhile, and then—

"Father! father! Be quick, father!" Mason reached the surface and came and knelt by the other side of the boy.

"I'll, I'll— why— run for some— why— brandy," said Tom.

"No use, Tom," said Isley, "I'm all bruk up."

"Don't yer feel better, sonny?"

"No— I'm— goin' to— die, Tom."

"Don't say it, Isley," groaned Tom.

A short silence, and then the boy's body suddenly twisted with pain.

But it was soon over. He lay still awhile. and then said quietly— "Good-bye, Tom!"

Tom made a vain attempt to speak. "Isley," he said, "I — "

But the child turned and stretched out his hands to the silent, stony-faced man on the other side.

"Father— father, I'm— goin'!"

A shuddering groan broke from Mason's lips, and then all was quiet.

Tom had taken off his hat to wipe his forehead, and his face, in spite of its disfigurement, was strangely like the face of the moody man opposite.

For a moment they looked at one another across the body of the child, and then Tom said quietly—

"He never knowed."

"What does it matter?" said Mason, gruffly; and taking the dead child in his arms, he walked towards the hut.

6

IT WAS a sad group that gathered outside Mason's hut next day. The wife of Martin, the store-keeper, had been there all the morning, and one of the women had used up her husband's white shirts in making a shroud.

One after another the fossickers took off their hats and entered, stooping through the low door. Mason sat silently at the foot of the bunk, his head supported by his hand, and watched the men with a strange, abstracted air.

"Tom the Devil" had ransacked the camp in search of some boards for a coffin. "It will be the last I'll be able to— why— do for him," he said.

At last he came to Mrs. Martin. That lady took him into the dining-room, and pointed to a large white table, of which she had been very proud.

"Knock it to pieces," she said, taking off the few things that lay upon it.

Tom turned it over and began taking the top off.

When he had finished the coffin a fossicker's wife said it looked too bare, and she ripped up her black riding-skirt and made Tom tack the cloth over the coffin.

There was only one vehicle available as a hearse, and that was Martin's old dray; so about two o'clock Pat Martin attached his old horse, Dublin, to the shafts with sundry bits of harness and plenty of old rope, and dragged Dublin, dray and all, across to Mason's hut.

The little coffin was carried out, and two brandy-cases were placed by its side in the dray to serve as seats for Mrs. Martin and Mrs. Grimshaw, who mounted in tearful silence.

Pat Martin lit his pipe and mounted on the shafts. Mason fastened up the door with a padlock. A couple of blows on one of his sharp points roused Dublin from his reverie; with a lurch to the right and another to the left he started, and presently the little funeral disappeared down the road that led to the "town" and its cemetery.

7: "Father, Do you Want Another Mate?"

ABOUT six months afterwards Tom Hopkins went on a short journey, and returned in company with a tall, bearded young man. He and Tom arrived after dark and went straight to Mason's hut. There was a light inside, but when Tom knocked there was no answer.

"Go in; don't be afraid," he said to his companion.

The stranger pushed open the creaking door and stood bare-headed just inside the doorway.

A billy was boiling unheeded on the fire. Mason sat at the table with his face buried in his arms.

"Mr. Mason!"

There was no answer, but the flickering of the firelight made the stranger think he could detect an impatient shrug in Mason's shoulders.

For a moment the stranger paused irresolute, and then, stepping up to the table, he laid his hand on Mason's arm, and said, gently—

"Father, do you want another mate?"

But the sleeper did not— at least, not in this world.

———————————

15: Freddie Funk's Madcap Mermaid

Leroy Yerxa

1915-1946

Fantastic Adventures, Jan 1943

NEPTUNE, son of Saturn and conspirator against Jupiter, smashed his trident angrily in the sea bottom and cursed. His chariot halted and the graceful dolphins that drew it toward the courts drifted idly in the green water. "Damn it!"

"Nep" shouted so loud that the dolphins jerked in their harnesses and he sat down again ungracefully. He howled louder and with great emotion. "Damn it, Strider, I told you to get rid of that girl, Aquanis."

Strider, dwarfish court attaché, wriggled a fin nervously, and stuttered in a manner so befitting one of a low position.

"I'm— I'm so sorry, your majesty. But this girl, Aquanis, is— well— I'm afraid she's out of control."

Neptune's statuesque body stiffened.

"By the gods, man," he howled and almost fell over, "for a month this greentailed wench has made eyes at every young man in my navy. Now she must go, and if you can't do the job, I'll handle it myself."

"But— your majesty!" Strider squirmed on his fish half and looked miserable. "Aquanis is a most lovely young lady. It would be a mistake to do away with such beauty."

Neptune considered the angles for a moment and then a salty grin split his lips.

"We won't have to kill her," he said slowly. "We'll pawn her off on an Earthling for a while. I never did like those weak sailers of ships. Perhaps a touch of Aquanis' deviltry will put salt in their brine. Maybe she is just what some Earthling needs to give him an appreciation for the better..."

"But how?" Strider, almost groveling before the master now, hoped *he* wouldn't figure in the task of disposing of Aquanis.

If the truth were known, he, like most other men in Neptune's green sea kingdom, had fallen head over fin in love with the gorgeous little court hussy. Her floating bronze hair, lakelue eyes, and pouting coral lips had him on his ear, or tail, most of the time.

Neptune laughed. It was a booming, deep laugh that sent a school of small sea creatures scurrying from under the green coral that shelved his city.

"How? I'll take her to Earth myself. I haven't been up since the World's Fair and that fountain in Grant Park is the 'nuts.' Verily! Chicago is the place. Aquanis will fit in well there."

He jerked the long thongs in his hand and the dolphin team darted forward again, thrashing the sea wildly in an effort to please their speed-loving god, Neptune.

FREDDIE FUNK rounded the corner at Michigan Avenue on all sixteen and whistling loudly, approached the gay splash of paintings along the outer wall that bordered Wacker Drive. Freddie Funk was happy this sunny spring morning. The outdoor art show brought in a few extra greenbacks and his pocketbook had been empty for a long time.

Still whistling badly off-key, he found an empty spot against the sun-splashed wall, opened his folder of paintings, and arranged them carefully around the stall. He stepped back a few feet, tipped his curly thatched head to one side and examined the display with approving gray eyes.

"Pretty bad, aren't they, son?"

Freddie Funk turned grimly and found himself staring into the eyes of a strong old man with a thick, weedy-looking beard. He framed a scorching reply.

"If you're referring to my work...?"

He hesitated and his mouth dropped open widely. The hefty old character had a booth next to his own. But the paintings! There must have been two dozen of them. The most beautiful reproductions of undersea life he had ever seen.

"Golly!" His eyes narrowed slightly with respect. "You've done some fine work."

The old gent stood up and made a low sweeping bow.

"I do only my humble best," he said. "Just the scenes that are most familiar to me."

Freddie Funk had forgotten his own smelly collection of alley paintings.

"Familiar?" *There was something strangely familiar about the old man himself*. The tough-hided face, rope-like hair, green eyes that looked straight through Freddie, gave him that feeling that he was drowning in them.

"I'd say you'd have to be a fish to get paintings like those."

Green-Eyes smiled and bent over his small box of paints and art material. When he straightened again, he held a long drawing pencil toward Freddie with a promising gesture.

"Here," he said wryly, "try it, and you might be surprised."

Freddie Funk took the pencil gravely. Bending to look for its hidden qualities, he felt a sudden gust of wind from the river. Was it his imagination, or did water hit his face in a salty mist?

His head jerked upward and eyes spilled open in surprise. Green-Eyes had vanished— vamoosed. Gone as though the river had reached over the wall and swallowed him into it.

The paintings were still there, but Lord, what a change. He stared at them in disbelief. Where before there had been fine-colored fish and undersea fauna, now he found only ugly green streaks running up and down the canvasses.

Completely unnerved by the trying experience Freddie Funk arose hurriedly, gathered his belongings, and beat a hasty retreat to the Avenue. This time he did not whistle. A look of fright that could only be eclipsed by a glimpse of death itself, had settled in grey lines across his handsome face. Freddie Funk's long legs carried him with surprising haste toward the apartment studio on Wabash. In his right hand he still clutched the drawing pencil that Green Eyes had thrust toward him.

TRY as he might, Freddie could not throw from his mind memories of the strange afternoon. He still toyed with the thoughts of the old man's familiarity. Sitting before the drawing-board, he picked up the drawing pencil that had been bequeathed him by the stranger. He made a few experimental lines across a clean sheet of paper. The point moved slowly. *In fact it moved of its own accord.*

He felt a force exercising itself as the lead traveled in delicate lines and circles against the paper's clean surface. This pencil was drawing something without his help. He held on tightly and let it work.

No one, Freddie thought, could ever buy a sketching pencil like this one. He watched with pretended disinterest as the point switched about under his fingers. Slowly a face appeared. Then a lovely neck and a smooth sheen of long hair. He blushed and felt that he should hide his head as the upper part of the girl came out on the paper. A slim shaded mid-section that was calculated to start tears of emotion in the eyes of the strongest male.

Two perfect unveiled breasts appeared. They left so little to the imagination that for the first time in his artistic life, Freddie Funk shivered with anticipation at the work on his drawing-board.

But the pencil wasn't finished. It dipped down and started to draw the lower portion of the dream girl. This time the blush turned to a frown. An expression of distrust and faint disappointment worried Freddie's forehead. The completed drawing was before him. The pencil seemed to relax and wilt a bit in his sweaty fingers. It had completed a picture of the most perfect mermaid his mind had ever conceived.

He sat back quietly admiring the work. He tried to believe that this girl was from his own mind. It was no use. Why not admit it? She had all the wild abandon and perfection that had been given to the paintings Green-Eyes had exhibited on Wacker Drive.

Freddie Funk sighed. He uttered the wish of any strong man. The thing that Neptune had planned on. Looking straight into the paper eyes of the mermaid he said lustily,

"I'd give up a square meal any day to have a look at the real product. Golly, but I wish she were real!"

S-P-L-A-S-H!!

STARTLED, Freddie jumped to his feet. Stumbling over his chair, he sprawled full length across the carpet. He lay very still.

There was a loud gurgle of water from the bath adjoining his room. Then little human sounds of excited bewilderment. Sitting up cautiously, Freddie tried to bring his wits into a compact working group.

He stood up slowly and sidled toward the bath. At the door he hesitated.

There was a girl in Freddie Funk's bathtub.

He pushed the door open a little more and peeked in with all the terrible guilt in his soul bursting up in masculine curiosity. It wasn't a nice thing to do, but she had no business being there in the first place.

There she sat in the tub, water around her waist. Her eyes were green in a gentle sort of way that at once made it his favorite color. Her skin was as white and pure as milk. Her hair, like burnished copper, swept down about her shoulders until she was almost hidden beneath it.

"H'lo," she said, and two rows of sparkling teeth flashed between red lips. "Come on in. The water's fine."

She shook her head and the silken hair fell away, taking his breath from him.

"How...?" He stammered and stopped again abruptly.

"Don't stand there like a blue-nosed shark," she cried in mock anger. "Can't you see I need a towel?"

She did, but definitely. Round firm hillocks of marble had only partly retreated behind her drifting hair. Trying not to stare, Freddie retrieved a towel from the hook and tossed it to her.

"How did you get in here?" He tried to tone his voice at an angry level. "If the landlady finds out..."

She laughed mockingly.

"You wished for me," she reminded him, and retreated into the folds of the big bath towel. "Are you disappointed?"

Freddie Funk remembered the drawing. Then the lower half of her must be fish! His brain started to whirl.

"Are you— you...?"

"A mermaid?" She winked solemnly. "Well, there's one way of finding out."

He blushed furiously and stared at the soapy veil of water that hid her body from the waist down.

"Look, I'm just a nice young guy trying to figure things out. Don't get me wrong."

"Then I'll just have to show you myself." A devilish little grin parted her lips.

A spray of water hit Freddie Funk squarely in the face, and he saw a green scaly tail flip in abandon as she flopped it above the water.

He turned pale. "Don't ever do that again," he begged.

"Then will you believe I'm a mermaid?"

"BUT how...?" He sat down weakly on the dressing-table chair beside the tub, and dried his face. "I mean— well— things like this just don't happen."

"My, aren't you the funny person!" He had a strange feeling that she was laughing at him. "Well, it's like this. My name is Aquanis. It seems that Neptune is getting too old. He can't stand the sight of a pretty young thing twisting his navy around her fingers. He decided to send me here where someone can appreciate my beauty, and at the same time his navy can be rid of temptation."

She wriggled her shoulders enticingly and leaned toward him.

"So," Freddie scowled, "without considering the complications that might arise from setting a mermaid down in the middle of my bathtub, he pawned you off on me."

Aquanis started to weep softly.

"Oh dear! No one seems to want me around. Don't you think I'm beautiful?"

She started to draw the towel away from her shoulders.

"No! Don't, please! You're too *darn* nice, that's the trouble." In his anxiety for her feelings, he stood up and patted her comfortingly on the back. Little bumps of gooseflesh came up on his arm from the warmth of the contact, and he stopped hastily. "Now everything's all right. Just don't cry."

She brushed a small hand over her eyes to wipe away the last tear. The sun came through again.

"Then you do like me?" she pouted.

"Like you!" He grinned. "Kid, you're all right. And now how long since breakfast? You must be getting hungry."

"I could stand a bite," Aquanis admitted. "Can you get fresh ones around this strange place?"

His chin dropped.

"Fresh what?" He knew with a terrible certainty what the answer would be.

"Why silly! Fresh fish, of course! I could just eat my tummy full of tiny fresh sea horses right this minute."

Freddie Funk turned his head away, collected his scattered brain cells and asked:

"Would raw perch do?"

"I never tasted them," Aquanis admitted. "They might be good."

He gulped hurriedly and retreated to the door, then turned toward her with a sickly smile.

"I'll be back in a few minutes," he said. "Anything else?"

"Oh, yes!" she fairly squealed in anticipation. "After my tummy's full, I want to go everywhere and find out what kind of a city this is. Nep says it's quite a 'joint,' whatever he means by that."

Freddie left the apartment hurriedly.

The fish store down the street was still open. Feeding the mermaid Aquanis was only the beginning of his problems.

Freddie Funk's mind was functioning with remarkable clarity when he returned to the apartment. Aquanis had made herself at home in the tub, and was stretched out glamorously in a pose that would have made Homer himself follow Ulysses over the brink in search of the mermaids.

FREDDIE FUNK went on a shopping tour at Marshall Field's. He had been fortunate enough to sell a very prosaic painting to an unsuspecting art collector. He was also unwise enough to tell Aquanis of his luck. At her bidding, he was humbly following a chic little clerk through a blush-building array of feminine apparel.

"A long evening gown," he heard himself muttering. "Red, and very long, if you please."

When it arrived, he snatched it up hurriedly and paid the price.

"And did you wish anything else?" The feminine creature that hovered over him made the misery worse.

"Just— well, if you can give me one of those— those things..." He made a subtle little twin motion with his hands, trying to think just what size Aquanis might take.

The clerk nodded understandingly.

"What size does your wife take?" She said *wife* in a tone that made him feel like hiding in the woodwork.

He muttered something vaguely under his breath, pointed to a silky wisp that hung from a counter, and packed it quickly out of sight in his pocket. With a heavy, curiously thumping heart, Freddie started for home.

Aquanis had combed her hair out into flashing sunlight while he was gone. He tossed the packages across the threshold and closed the door hurriedly as she cried out in delight. He could hear interesting little giggles as she wriggled into the new luxuries.

"Does the— er— thing-a-ma-jig fit?" He tried to sound casual. Aquanis giggled again, then laughed a low pleased laugh.

"You'll be surprised," she answered. "Come in."

She was seated on the small chair as he opened the door. The long crimson gown covered every last inch of those embarrassing fins and scales. Hair fell about" her shoulders crowning a face more lovely than he had ever seen.

Freddie gulped.

"You're lovely! Almost as though....”

She bit her lip and smiled dimly.

Freddie crossed the room in a stride and picked her up in his arms. Aquanis cuddled her head against his shoulder happily.

"You *do* like me?" she asked in a worried voice.

Something like a shiver passed through Freddie, and he carried her into the studio.

"You poor kid," he said, "We're going to have a good time even if..."

"Even if I'm not like other people." She tried hard not to cry.

"Even if everyone in town wonders why I have to carry you everywhere I go. I sort of like it."

AQUANIS was startled by the lights on State Street. She wondered with wide green eyes at the size and beauty of the city. At the Chez Paree and the Ivanhoe Freddie tried to carry her around as casually as possible, only to find himself the object of much curious attention from other patrons. Although others were startled at this sleek young man who carried his lady in red like a knight of old, they soon forgot and stared with envy at the little mermaid with the hidden rudder.

At one o'clock he broke down under the load and sat her down in Grant Park beside the great colored fountain. For a long time Aquanis snuggled close to him, her lips buried against his neck. Freddie Funk had forgotten she was a mermaid. The night was very warm. Aquanis suddenly felt confined and uncomfortable in the folds of the gown.

"I'm going swimming," she announced calmly.

Freddie stiffened in fright.n

"Oh, no!" he said. "You really shouldn't."

"The fountain is so pretty," she said, and pouted. "If anyone comes by, I'll just sit still and they'll think I'm part of it."

Freddie thought of the slim body under the thing-a-ma-jig, and shook his head.

"You don't know much about Chicago," he said.

She started to wriggle away from him.

"I'll scream, and when someone hears me, I'll flip up my gown and show 'em I'm a fish."

Freddie considered the problem carefully.

"You're a devil," he said grimly. "But if you must, all right. Please duck under if someone comes too close."

"I promise." She wriggled out of the warm clothing and flipped into the water.

"Oooh!" she said, letting it cover her shoulders. "It feels good. Come on in."

Freddie shivered at the thought. "No thanks," he said. "I'd rather not."

"Killjoy!"

"Nope. I want to sleep in my own bed tonight. Never did like the jail."

Aquanis stretched out in the warm water and leaned her elbows on the side of the pool. She put her lovely head against her hands and looked at him questioningly.

"All these other girls we saw tonight," she said thoughtfully. "Do you like them?"

"They're nice," he agreed. "Just so -so."

"Gee," she sighed, "I wish I were like them. You'd like me then, wouldn't you?"

"I like you..." His voice trailed off then, dropped into his shoes. Heavy footsteps burst from the bushes beside the walk.

"SO!" the blue uniform howled, swinging his night stick threateningly. "Caught you, didn't I?"

"Caught who?" It was Aquanis, her silvery voice filled with curiosity.

"Just what I thought," the policeman bellowed. "A lady in the fountain. Come out of there, Miss, before I come in after you."

He pushed Freddie aside roughly and approached the pool's edge. Aquanis sat up, her soaked hair leaving little but a lack of modesty to clothe her.

"The water's nice," she said. "Please come in."

The policeman gulped and turned away, not too hurriedly.

"Sure and I'll give you just one minute to come out of there. Just one minute." Under his breath he added "A naked woman in the pool, is it, O'Shannagon? Did you have too much beer this night?"

A brilliant thought was collecting in Freddie Funk's mind. He could smell the faint aroma of ale wafting to him from O'Shannagon's lips. Hoping that

Aquanis would be clever enough to catch his plan, he turned upon the bewildered policeman.

"Officer," he announced solemnly, "I believe you've been drinking."

"Young man!" O'Shannagon said, and burped loudly.

"What did I tell you?" Freddie turned to Aquanis, winking slyly. "I'll bet he even thinks you're a girl."

She grinned.

"Silly," she said. "He's just drunk enough to think I'm a fish."

O'Shannagon had suffered enough, and turned on them furiously.

"I'm running ye both in," he roared.

Then his eyes popped wide open, closed tightly in disbelief, and opened again reluctantly. Those two beers had sure done some funny things. The girl in the fountain had flipped the lower part of her body above the shallow water. He stared aghast at a long green tail, complete with scales and fins.

"Sure and I'm seein' mermaids," he moaned. "By the Shade of Saint Patrick, I *am* drunk." The night-stick dropped from his limp hand. He twisted on his heel and rushed away across the lawn.

IT WASN'T with too gentle a touch that Freddie Funk assisted his mermaid sweetheart from the water fountain. He stood guard by the clump of bushes that bordered the walk, while with some difficulty she again donned the evening gown and other flimsy essentials. There was a certain amount of forgiveness in Freddie Funk's heart as he carried her back across the park with the burnished hair drifting down around his shaking shoulders.

He hailed a cab and they were soon back at the studio. Locking the door quickly he breathed a sigh of relief. For the time-being they were safe from O'Shannagon and his ilk.

With Aquanis once again installed in her porcelain throne, Freddie sat down just outside the bathroom door. All the problems of the world were on his shoulders. He knew from the splashing water and gurgling laughter that Aquanis was once more enjoying her almost perpetual bath.

This was a hell of a predicament. He couldn't go around the rest of his life carrying her in his arms. Suspicions were bound to arise on all sides after the novelty had worn off. Horrible visions arose in Freddie Funk's mind. He dreamed of the day when through some crazy trick of fate he might slip on a banana peel and unveil the whole horrible secret. The fish peddler was already growing suspicious of Freddie's insatiable appetite for fish. Desperately he stood up and started to pace the floor. The sounds in the bathroom had quieted and he wondered for a moment if she were still there.

"Aquanis," he called softly. No answer. He went to the door and listened. She was sobbing pitifully. He turned away, and with heavy shoulders and a drooping heart, walked to the drawing-board. For the first time he realized that he was in love with a red-head mermaid. He sank down in the chair and brushed something akin to a crocodile tear from his eye.

Suddenly the sad droopy look on his face brightened and his shoulders straightened. There on the drawing board before his eager eyes was the same beautiful drawing of Aquanis that he had created with the magic pencil. The same image that had brought the girl living and breathing into his bachelor domain. More than that, the magic pencil was still lying on the table where he had cast it aside after being startled by that first embryonic splash from the bathroom.

Why, if he had created this gorgeous creature with a few simple lines of a pencil, couldn't he return her to Neptune by erasing what he had drawn?

A LUMP gathered in his throat and stuck there. No amount of gulping would wash it away. To send her back now would be a little less than murder. Most terrible yet, murder of someone he had learned to love dearly.

"Aquanis," he called softly.

This time she heard him and the sobbing stopped.

"Yes," she answered in a very quivery little voice.

"You're not very happy here, are you?"

"Oh, darn it!" Her voice was filled with returning spirit. "The top half of me is delirious with joy, but the bottom half seems— so— unnecessary."

Freddie's brain was thinking over an idea that would put modern science to shame. His brow clouded and little furrows of mistrust dug their way across his forehead. "Well, maybe...."

"Listen, kid," he shouted. "Are you game to try something?"

The voice that came back through the door sounded anything but game.

"Just— just so long as you don't send me away."

He picked the pencil up hurriedly and said in a not too confident voice.

"Tell me if it hurts."

Leaning over the drawing board, he erased just the tiniest section of her tail fin. A loud cry of surprise came from the tub.

"Oooh!"

"Did it hurt?"

Aquanis giggled. Evidently she was still hidden under the water and had experienced some queer emotion that startled her but brought no pain. Beads of perspiration popped out on Freddie's cheeks. With quick little jerking motions of his arm, he erased the entire lower part of her fish body, and left

only the lovely head and undulating smoothness of her upper half on the paper.

A SCREAM of protest came from the bathroom. "Oh my goodness, Freddie," in a voice filled with bewilderment, "there's only half of me here."

He couldn't stop now.

"Just sit tight," he shouted hoarsely, "everything is going to be all right."

Now she was laughing at him.

"But how can I sit?" she cooed sarcastically. "There's nothing to sit on."

FORTUNATELY for Freddie, and more fortunate for Aquanis, Freddie Funk had studied well the more subtle proportions of the human body. With his head close to the drawing board, he sketched below the already completed part of her body, a pair of long graceful legs attached to rounding hips that were almost beautiful enough to sway even on canvas. Dexterously, he completed a newer and much more enticing Aquanis. A perfect creature, much more suited to the life of sidewalks and Chicago night life.

Before he looked up from the board, Freddie knew the penciled operation had been a complete success. Little squeals of laughter and the sound of wet pattering feet on the floor beyond the door told him that his happiness would soon be complete.

He dropped the pencil, rushed to the door and threw it open. A startled cry fell from the girl's lips.

"Freddie!"

He realized immediately that although she was very attractive, it would be more convenient right now if he could give her an extra pair of arms. The two which she had were busily and hopelessly attempting to conceal an entire consignment of newly acquired charms.

With a happy gulp, he blushed to the color of an over-ripe tomato, and stumbled back to the drawing board. Hastily he sketched the necessary clothing around his ex-mermaid's body.

"There!" he said. "Can you come out now?"

He turned momentarily to find her standing in the doorway blushing modestly under the new housecoat.

"What are you drawing now?" she asked.

He grinned happily. Aquanis tripped lightly across the room and leaned over his shoulders. Freddie Funk was sketching a flowing, satiny wedding-gown, complete with lace veil, wedding-ring and corsage.

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16: The Blond Beast

Edith Wharton

1862-1937

Scribner's Magazine, Sep 1910

Celebrated prolific American author of "The age of Innocence", and much more, including some 85 short stories.

IT had been almost too easy— that was young Millner's first feeling, as he stood again on the Spence door-step, the great moment of his interview behind him, and Fifth Avenue rolling its grimy Pactolus at his feet.

Halting there in the winter light, with the clang of the ponderous vestibule doors in his ears, and his eyes carried down the perspective of the packed interminable thoroughfare, he even dared to remember Rastignac's apostrophe to Paris, and to hazard recklessly under his small fair moustache: "Who knows?"

He, Hugh Millner, at any rate, knew a good deal already: a good deal more than he had imagined it possible to learn in half an hour's talk with a man like Orlando G. Spence; and the loud-rumouring city spread out there before him seemed to grin like an accomplice who knew the rest.

A gust of wind, whirling down from the dizzy height of the building on the next corner, drove sharply through his overcoat and compelled him to clutch at his hat. It was a bitter January day, a day of fierce light and air, when the sunshine cut like icicles and the wind sucked one into black gulfs at the street corners. But Millner's complacency was like a warm lining to his shabby coat, and heaving steadied his hat he continued to stand on the Spence threshold, lost in the vision revealed to him from the Pisgah of its marble steps. Yes, it was wonderful what the vision showed him… In his absorption he might have frozen fast to the door-step if the Rhadamanthine portals behind him had not suddenly opened to let out a slim fur-coated figure, the figure, as he perceived, of the youth whom he had caught in the act of withdrawal as he entered Mr. Spence's study, and whom the latter, with a wave of his affable hand, had detained to introduce as "my son Draper."

It was characteristic of the odd friendliness of the whole scene that the great man should have thought it worth while to call back and name his heir to a mere humble applicant like Millner; and that the heir should shed on him, from a pale high-browed face, a smile of such deprecating kindness. It was characteristic, equally, of Millner, that he should at once mark the narrowness of the shoulders sustaining this ingenuous head; a narrowness, as he now observed, imperfectly concealed by the wide fur collar of young Spence's expensive and badly cut coat. But the face took on, as the youth smiled his surprise at their second meeting, a look of almost plaintive good-will: the kind of look that Millner scorned and yet could never quite resist.

"Mr. Millner? Are you— er— waiting?" the lad asked, with an intention of serviceableness that was like a finer echo of his father's resounding cordiality.

"For my motor? No," Millner jested in his frank free voice. "The fact is, I was just standing here lost in the contemplation of my luck"— and as his companion's pale blue eyes seemed to shape a question, "my extraordinary luck," he explained, "in having been engaged as your father's secretary."

"Oh," the other rejoined, with a faint colour in his sallow cheek. "I'm so glad," he murmured: "but I was sure—" He stopped, and the two looked kindly at each other.

Millner averted his gaze first, almost fearful of its betraying the added sense of his own strength and dexterity which he drew from the contrast of the other's frailness.

"Sure? How could any one be sure? I don't believe in it yet!" he laughed out in the irony of his triumph.

The boy's words did not sound like a mere civility— Millner felt in them an homage to his power.

"Oh, yes: I was sure," young Draper repeated. "Sure as soon as I saw you, I mean."

Millner tingled again with this tribute to his physical straightness and bloom. Yes, he looked his part, hang it— he looked it!

But his companion still lingered, a shy sociability in his eye.

"If you're walking, then, can I go along a little way?" And he nodded southward down the shabby gaudy avenue.

That, again, was part of the high comedy of the hour— that Millner should descend the Spence steps at young Spence's side, and stroll down Fifth Avenue with him at the proudest moment of the afternoon; O. G. Spence's secretary walking abroad with O. G. Spence's heir! He had the scientific detachment to pull out his watch and furtively note the hour. Yes— it was exactly forty minutes since he had rung the Spence door-bell and handed his card to a gelid

footman, who, openly sceptical of his claim to be received, had left him unceremoniously planted on the cold tessellations of the vestibule.

"Some day," Miller grinned to himself, "I think I'll take that footman as furnace-man— or to do the boots." And he pictured his marble palace rising from the earth to form the mausoleum of a footman's pride.

Only forty minutes ago! And now he had his opportunity fast! And he never meant to let it go! It was incredible, what had happened in the interval. He had gone up the Spence steps an unknown young man, out of a job, and with no substantial hope of getting into one: a needy young man with a mother and two limp sisters to be helped, and a lengthening figure of debt that stood by his bed through the anxious nights. And he went down the steps with his present assured, and his future lit by the hues of the rainbow above the pot of gold. Certainly a fellow who made his way at that rate had it "in him," and could afford to trust his star.

Descending from this joyous flight he stooped his ear to the discourse of young Spence.

"My father'll work you rather hard, you know: but you look as if you wouldn't mind that."

Millner pulled up his inches with the self-consciousness of the man who had none to waste. "Oh, no, I shan't mind that: I don't mind any amount of work if it leads to something."

"Just so," Draper Spence assented eagerly. "That's what I feel. And you'll find that whatever my father undertakes leads to such awfully fine things."

Millner tightened his lips on a grin. He was thinking only of where the work would lead him, not in the least of where it might land the eminent Orlando G. Spence. But he looked at his companion sympathetically.

"You're a philanthropist like your father, I see?"

"Oh, I don't know." They had paused at a crossing, and young Draper, with a dubious air, stood striking his agate-headed stick against the curb-stone. "I believe in a purpose, don't you?" he asked, lifting his blue eyes suddenly to Millner's face.

"A purpose? I should rather say so! I believe in nothing else," cried Millner, feeling as if his were something he could grip in his hand and swing like a club.

Young Spence seemed relieved. "Yes— I tie up to that. There *is* a Purpose. And so, after all, even if I don't agree with my father on minor points…" He coloured quickly, and looked again at Millner. "I should like to talk to you about this some day."

Millner smothered another smile. "We'll have lots of talks, I hope."

"Oh, if you can spare the time— !" said Draper, almost humbly.

"Why, I shall be there on tap!"

"For father, not me." Draper hesitated, with another self-confessing smile. "Father thinks I talk too much— that I keep going in and out of things. He doesn't believe in analyzing: he thinks it's destructive. But it hasn't destroyed my ideals." He looked wistfully up and down the clanging street. "And that's the main thing, isn't it? I mean, that one should have an Ideal." He turned back almost gaily to Millner. "I suspect you're a revolutionist too!"

"Revolutionist? Rather! I belong to the Red Syndicate and the Black Hand!" Millner joyfully assented.

Young Draper chuckled at the enormity of the joke. "First rate! We'll have incendiary meetings!" He pulled an elaborately armorial watch from his enfolding furs. "I'm so sorry, but I must say good-bye— this is my street," he explained. Millner, with a faint twinge of envy, glanced across at the colonnaded marble edifice in the farther corner. "Going to the club?" he said carelessly.

His companion looked surprised. "Oh, no: I never go *there.* It's too boring." And he brought out, after one of the pauses in which he seemed rather breathlessly to measure the chances of his listener's indulgence: "I'm just going over to a little Bible Class I have in Tenth Avenue."

Millner, for a moment or two, stood watching the slim figure wind its way through the mass of vehicles to the opposite corner; then he pursued his own course down Fifth Avenue, measuring his steps to the rhythmic refrain: "It's too easy— it's too easy— it's too easy!"

His own destination being the small shabby flat off University Place where three tender females awaited the result of his mission, he had time, on the way home, after abandoning himself to a general sense of triumph, to dwell specifically on the various aspects of his achievement. Viewed materially and practically, it was a thing to be proud of; yet it was chiefly on aesthetic grounds— because he had done so exactly what he had set out to do— that he glowed with pride at the afternoon's work. For, after all, any young man with the proper "pull" might have applied to Orlando G. Spence for the post of secretary, and even have penetrated as far as the great man's study; but that he, Hugh Millner, should not only have forced his way to this fastness, but have established, within a short half hour, his right to remain there permanently: well, this, if it proved anything, proved that the first rule of success was to know how to live up to one's principles.

"One must have a plan— one must have a plan," the young man murmured, looking with pity at the vague faces which the crowd bore past him, and feeling almost impelled to detain them and expound his doctrine. But the planlessness of average human nature was of course the measure of his

opportunity; and he smiled to think that every purposeless face he met was a guarantee of his own advancement, a rung in the ladder he meant to climb.

Yes, the whole secret of success was to know what one wanted to do, and not to be afraid to do it. His own history was proving that already. He had not been afraid to give up his small but safe position in a real-estate office for the precarious adventure of a private secretaryship; and his first glimpse of his new employer had convinced him that he had not mistaken his calling. When one has a "way" with one— as, in all modesty, Millner knew he had— not to utilize it is a stupid waste of force. And when he had learned that Orlando G. Spence was in search of a private secretary who should be able to give him intelligent assistance in the execution of his philanthropic schemes, the young man felt that his hour had come. It was no part of his plan to associate himself with one of the masters of finance: he had a notion that minnows who go to a whale to learn how to grow bigger are likely to be swallowed in the process. The opportunity of a clever young man with a cool head and no prejudices (this again was drawn from life) lay rather in making himself indispensable to one of the beneficent rich, and in using the timidities and conformities of his patron as the means of his scruples about formulating these principles to himself. It was not for nothing that, in his college days, he had hunted the hypothetical "moral sense" to its lair, and dragged from their concealment the various self-advancing sentiments dissembled under its edifying guise. His strength lay in his precocious insight into the springs of action, and in his refusal to classify them according to the accepted moral and social sanctions. He had to the full the courage of his lack of convictions.

To a young man so untrammelled by prejudice it was self-evident that helpless philanthropists like Orlando G. Spence were just as much the natural diet of the strong as the lamb is of the wolf. It was pleasanter to eat than to be eaten, in a world where, as yet, there seemed to be no third alternative; and any scruples one might feel as to the temporary discomfort of one's victim were speedily dispelled by that larger scientific view which took into account the social destructiveness of the benevolent. Millner was persuaded that every individual woe mitigated by the philanthropy of Orlando G. Spence added just so much to the sum-total of human inefficiency, and it was one of his favourite subjects of speculation to picture the innumerable social evils that may follow upon the rescue of one infant from Mount Taygetus.

"We're all born to prey on each other, and pity for suffering is one of the most elementary stages of egotism. Until one has passed beyond, and acquired a taste for the more complex forms of the instinct—"

He stopped suddenly, checked in his advance by a sallow wisp of a dog which had plunged through the press of vehicles to hurl itself between his legs.

Millner did not dislike animals, though he preferred that they should be healthy and handsome. The dog under his feet was neither. Its cringing contour showed an injudicious mingling of races, and its meagre coat betrayed the deplorable habit of sleeping in coal-holes and subsisting on an innutritious diet. In addition to these physical disadvantages, its shrinking and inconsequent movements revealed a congenital weakness of character which, even under more favourable conditions, would hardly have qualified it to become a useful member of society; and Millner was not sorry to notice that it moved with a limp of the hind leg that probably doomed it to speedy extinction.

The absurdity of such an animal's attempting to cross Fifth Avenue at the most crowded hour of the afternoon struck him as only less great than the irony of its having been permitted to achieve the feat; and he stood a moment looking at it, and wondering what had moved it to the attempt. It was really a perfect type of the human derelict which Orlando G. Spence and his kind were devoting their millions to perpetuate, and he reflected how much better Nature knew her business in dealing with the superfluous quadruped.

An elderly lady advancing in the opposite direction evidently took a less dispassionate view of the case, for she paused to remark emotionally: "Oh, you poor thing!" while she stooped to caress the object of her sympathy. The dog, with characteristic lack of discrimination, viewed her gesture with suspicion, and met it with a snarl. The lady turned pale and shrank away, a chivalrous male repelled the animal with his umbrella, and two idle boys backed his action by a vigorous "Hi!" The object of these hostile demonstrations, apparently attributing them not to its own unsocial conduct, but merely to the chronic animosity of the universe, dashed wildly around the corner into a side street, and as it did so Millner noticed that the lame leg left a little trail of blood. Irresistibly, he turned the corner to see what would happen next. It was deplorably clear that the animal itself had no plan; but after several inconsequent and contradictory movements it plunged down an area, where it backed up against the iron gate, forlornly and foolishly at bay.

Millner, still following, looked down at it, and wondered. Then he whistled, just to see if it would come; but this only caused it to start up on its quivering legs, with desperate turns of the head that measured the chances of escape.

"Oh, hang it, you poor devil, stay there if you like!" the young man murmured, walking away.

A few yards off he looked back, and saw that the dog had made a rush out of the area and was limping furtively down the street. The idle boys were in the offing, and he disliked the thought of leaving them in control of the situation. Softly, with infinite precautions, he began to follow the dog. He did

not know why he was doing it, but the impulse was overmastering. For a moment he seemed to be gaining upon his quarry, but with a cunning sense of his approach it suddenly turned and hobbled across the frozen grass-plot adjoining a shuttered house. Against the wall at the back of the plot it cowered down in a dirty snow-drift, as if disheartened by the struggle. Millner stood outside the railings and looked at it. He reflected that under the shelter of the winter dusk it might have the luck to remain there unmolested, and that in the morning it would probably be dead of cold. This was so obviously the best solution that he began to move away again; but as he did so the idle boys confronted him.

"Ketch yer dog for yer, boss?" they grinned.

Millner consigned them to the devil, and stood sternly watching them till the first stage of the journey had carried them around the nearest corner; then, after pausing to look once more up and down the empty street, laid his hand on the railing, and vaulted over it into the grass-plot. As he did so, he reflected that, since pity for suffering was one of the most elementary forms of egotism, he ought to have remembered that it was necessarily one of the most tenacious.

ii

"MY CHIEF aim in life?" Orlando G. Spence repeated. He threw himself back in his chair, straightened the tortoise-shell *pince-nez,* on his short blunt nose, and beamed down the luncheon table at the two young men who shared his repast.

His glance rested on his son Draper, seated opposite him behind a barrier of Georgian silver and orchids; but his words were addressed to his secretary who, stylograph in hand, had turned from the seductions of a mushroom *soufflé* in order to jot down, for the Sunday *Investigator,* an outline of his employer's views and intentions respecting the newly endowed Orlando G. Spence College for Missionaries. It was Mr. Spence's practice to receive in person the journalists privileged to impart his opinions to a waiting world; but during the last few months— and especially since the vast project of the Missionary College had been in process of development— the pressure of business and beneficence had necessitated Millner's frequent intervention, and compelled the secretary to snatch the sense of his patron's elucubrations between the courses of their hasty meals.

Young Millner had a healthy appetite, and it was not one of his least sacrifices to be so often obliged to curb it in the interest of his advancement; but whenever he waved aside one of the triumphs of Mr. Spence's *chef* he was

conscious of rising a step in his employer's favour. Mr. Spence did not despise the pleasures of the table, though he appeared to regard them as the reward of success rather than as the alleviation of effort; and it increased his sense of his secretary's merit to note how keenly the young man enjoyed the fare which he was so frequently obliged to deny himself. Draper, having subsisted since infancy on a diet of truffles and terrapin, consumed such delicacies with the insensibility of a traveller swallowing a railway sandwich; but Millner never made the mistake of concealing from Mr. Spence his sense of what he was losing when duty constrained him to exchange the fork for the pen.

"My chief aim in life!" Mr. Spence repeated, removing his eye-glass and swinging it thoughtfully on his finger. ("I'm sorry you should miss this *soufflé,* Millner: it's worth while.) Why, I suppose I might say that my chief aim in life is to leave the world better than I found it. Yes: I don't know that I could put it better than that. To leave the world better than I found it. It wouldn't be a bad idea to use that as a head-line. '*Wants to leave the world better than he found it.*' It's exactly the point I should like to make in this talk about the College."

Mr. Spence paused, and his glance once more reverted to his son, who, having pushed aside his plate, sat watching Millner with a dreamy intensity.

"And it's the point I want to make with you, too, Draper," his father continued genially, while he turned over with a critical fork the plump and perfectly matched asparagus which a footman was presenting to his notice. "I want to make you feel that nothing else counts in comparison with that— no amount of literary success or intellectual celebrity."

"Oh, I *do* feel that," Draper murmured, with one of his quick blushes, and a glance that wavered between his father and Millner. The secretary kept his eyes on his notes, and young Spence continued, after a pause: "Only the thing is— isn't it?— to try and find out just what *does* make the world better?"

"To *try* to find out?" his father echoed compassionately. "It's not necessary to try very hard. Goodness is what makes the world better."

"Yes, yes, of course," his son nervously interposed; "but the question is, what *is* good—"

Mr. Spence, with a darkening brow, brought his fist down emphatically on the damask. "I'll thank you not to blaspheme, my son!"

Draper's head reared itself a trifle higher on his thin neck. "I was not going to blaspheme; only there may be different ways—"

"There's where you're mistaken, Draper. There's only one way: there's my way," said Mr. Spence in a tone of unshaken conviction.

"I know, father; I see what you mean. But don't you see that even your way wouldn't be the right way for you if you ceased to believe that it was?"

His father looked at him with mingled bewilderment and reprobation. "Do you mean to say that the fact of goodness depends on my conception of it, and not on God Almighty's?"

"I do… yes… in a specific sense…" young Draper falteringly maintained; and Mr. Spence turned with a discouraged gesture toward his secretary's suspended pen.

"I don't understand your scientific jargon, Draper; and I don't want to.—What's the next point, Millner? (No; no *savarin.* Bring the fruit— and the coffee with it.)"

Millner, keenly aware that an aromatic *savarin au rhum* was describing an arc behind his head previous to being rushed back to the pantry under young Draper's indifferent eye, stiffened himself against this last assault of the enemy, and read out firmly: " *What relation do you consider that a man's business conduct should bear to his religious and domestic life?*"

Mr. Spence mused a moment. "Why, that's a stupid question. It goes over the same ground as the other one. A man ought to do good with his money—that's all. Go on."

At this point the butler's murmur in his ear caused him to push back his chair, and to arrest Millner's interrogatory by a rapid gesture. "Yes; I'm coming. Hold the wire." Mr. Spence rose and plunged into the adjoining "office," where a telephone and a Remington divided the attention of a young lady in spectacles who was preparing for Zenana work in the East.

As the door closed, the butler, having placed the coffee and liqueurs on the table, withdrew in the rear of his battalion, and the two young men were left alone beneath the Rembrandts and Hobbemas on the dining-room walls.

There was a moment's silence between them; then young Spence, leaning across the table, said in the lowered tone of intimacy: "Why do you suppose he dodged that last question?"

Millner, who had rapidly taken an opulent purple fig from the fruit-dish nearest him, paused in surprise in the act of hurrying it to his lips.

"I mean," Draper hastened on, "the question as to the relation between business and private morality. It's such an interesting one, and he's just the person who ought to tackle it."

Millner, despatching the fig, glanced down at his notes. "I don't think your father meant to dodge the question."

Young Draper continued to look at him intently. "You think he imagined that his answer really covers the ground?"

"As much as it needs to be covered."

The son of the house glanced away with a sigh. "You know things about him that I don't," he said wistfully, but without a tinge of resentment in his tone.

"Oh, as to that— (may I give myself some coffee?)" Millner, in his walk around the table to fill his cup, paused a moment to lay an affectionate hand on Draper's shoulder. "Perhaps I know him*better,* in a sense: outsiders often get a more accurate focus."

Draper considered this. "And your idea is that he acts on principles he has never thought of testing or defining?"

Millner looked up quickly, and for an instant their glances crossed. "How do you mean?"

"I mean: that he's an inconscient instrument of goodness, as it were? A— a sort of blindly beneficent force?"

The other smiled. "That's not a bad definition. I know one thing about him, at any rate: he's awfully upset at your having chucked your Bible Class."

A shadow fell on young Spence's candid brow. "I know. But what can I do about it? That's what I was thinking of when I tried to show him that goodness, in a certain sense, is purely subjective: that one can't do good against one's principles." Again his glance appealed to Millner. " *You* understand me, don't you?"

Millner stirred his coffee in a silence not unclouded by perplexity. "Theoretically, perhaps. It's a pretty question, certainly. But I also understand your father's feeling that it hasn't much to do with real life: especially now that he's got to make a speech in connection with the founding of this Missionary College. He may think that any hint of internecine strife will weaken his prestige. Mightn't you have waited a little longer?"

"How could I, when I might have been expected to take a part in this performance? To talk, and say things I didn't mean? That was exactly what made me decide not to wait."

The door opened and Mr. Spence re-entered the room. As he did so his son rose abruptly as if to leave it.

"Where are you off to, Draper?" the banker asked.

"I'm in rather a hurry, sir—"

Mr. Spence looked at his watch. "You can't be in more of a hurry than I am; and I've got seven minutes and a half." He seated himself behind the coffee—tray, lit a cigar, laid his watch on the table, and signed to Draper to resume his place. "No, Millner, don't you go; I want you both." He turned to the secretary. "You know that Draper's given up his Bible Class? I understand it's not from the pressure of engagements—" Mr. Spence's narrow lips took an ironic curve

under the straight-clipped stubble of his moustache— "it's on principle, he tells me. He's *principled* against doing good!"

Draper lifted a protesting hand. "It's not exactly that, father—"

"I know: you'll tell me it's some scientific quibble that I don't understand. I've never had time to go in for intellectual hair-splitting. I've found too many people down in the mire who needed a hand to pull them out. A busy man has to take his choice between helping his fellow-men and theorizing about them. I've preferred to help. (You might take that down for the *Investigator,* Millner.) And I thank God I've never stopped to ask what made me want to do good. I've just yielded to the impulse— that's all." Mr. Spence turned back to his son. "Better men than either of us have been satisfied with that creed, my son."

Draper was silent, and Mr. Spence once more addressed himself to his secretary. "Millner, you're a reader: I've caught you at it. And I know this boy talks to you. What have you got to say? Do you suppose a Bible Class ever *hurt* anybody?"

Millner paused a moment, feeling all through his nervous system the fateful tremor of the balance. "That's what I was just trying to tell him, sir—"

"Ah; you were? That's good. Then I'll only say one thing more. Your doing what you've done at this particular moment hurts me more, Draper, than your teaching the gospel of Jesus could possibly have hurt those young men over in Tenth Avenue." Mr. Spence arose and restored his watch to his pocket. "I shall want you in twenty minutes, Millner."

The door closed on him, and for a while the two young men sat silent behind their cigar fumes. Then Draper Spence broke out, with a catch in his throat: "That's what I can't bear, Millner, what I simply can't *bear:* to hurt him, to hurt his faith in *me!* It's an awful responsibility, isn't it, to tamper with anybody's faith in anything?"

iii

THE twenty minutes prolonged themselves to forty, the forty to fifty, and the fifty to an hour; and still Millner waited for Mr. Spence's summons.

During the two years of his secretaryship the young man had learned the significance of such postponements. Mr. Spence's days were organized like a railway time-table, and a delay of an hour implied a casualty as far-reaching as the breaking down of an express. Of the cause of the present derangement Hugh Millner was ignorant; and the experience of the last months allowed him to fluctuate between conflicting conjectures. All were based on the indisputable fact that Mr. Spence was "bothered"— had for some time past been "bothered." And it was one of Millner's discoveries that an extremely

parsimonious use of the emotions underlay Mr. Spence's expansive manner and fraternal phraseology, and that he did not throw away his feelings any more than (for all his philanthropy) he threw away his money. If he was bothered, then, it could be only because a careful survey of his situation had forced on him some unpleasant fact with which he was not immediately prepared to deal; and any unpreparedness on Mr. Spence's part was also a significant symptom.

Obviously, Millner's original conception of his employer's character had suffered extensive modification; but no final outline had replaced the first conjectural image. The two years spent in Mr. Spence's service had produced too many contradictory impressions to be fitted into any definite pattern; and the chief lesson Millner had learned from them was that life was less of an exact science, and character a more incalculable element, than he had been taught in the schools. In the light of this revised impression, his own footing seemed less secure than he had imagined, and the rungs of the ladder he was climbing more slippery than they had looked from below. He was not without the reassuring sense of having made himself, in certain small ways, necessary to Mr. Spence; and this conviction was confirmed by Draper's reiterated assurance of his father's appreciation. But Millner had begun to suspect that one might be necessary to Mr. Spence one day, and a superfluity, if not an obstacle, the next; and that it would take superhuman astuteness to foresee how and when the change would occur. Every fluctuation of the great man's mood was therefore anxiously noted by the young meteorologist in his service; and this observer's vigilance was now strained to the utmost by the little cloud, no bigger than a man's hand, adumbrated by the banker's unpunctuality.

When Mr. Spence finally appeared, his aspect did not tend to dissipate the cloud. He wore what Millner had learned to call his "back-door face": a blank barred countenance, in which only an occasional twitch of the lids behind his glasses suggested that some one was on the watch. In this mood Mr. Spence usually seemed unconscious of his secretary's presence, or aware of it only as an arm terminating in a pen. Millner, accustomed on such occasions to exist merely as a function, sat waiting for the click of the spring that should set him in action; but the pressure not being applied, he finally hazarded: "Are we to go on with the *Investigator,* sir?"

Mr. Spence, who had been pacing up and down between the desk and the fireplace, threw himself into his usual seat at Millner's elbow.

"I don't understand this new notion of Draper's," he said abruptly. "Where's he got it from? No one ever learned irreligion in my household."

He turned his eyes on Millner, who had the sense of being scrutinized through a ground-glass window which left him visible while it concealed his

observer. The young man let his pen describe two or three vague patterns on the blank sheet before him.

"Draper has ideas—" he risked at last.

Mr. Spence looked hard at him. "That's all right," he said. "I want my son to have everything. But what's the point of mixing up ideas and principles? I've seen fellows who did that, and they were generally trying to borrow five dollars to get away from the sheriff. What's all this talk about goodness? Goodness isn't an idea. It's a fact. It's as solid as a business proposition. And it's Draper's duty, as the son of a wealthy man, and the prospective steward of a great fortune, to elevate the standards of other young men— of young men who haven't had his opportunities. The rich ought to preach contentment, and to set the example themselves. We have our cares, but we ought to conceal them. We ought to be cheerful, and accept things as they are— not go about sowing dissent and restlessness. What has Draper got to give these boys in his Bible Class, that's so much better than what he wants to take from them? That's the question I'd like to have answered?"

Mr. Spence, carried away by his own eloquence, had removed his *pince-nez* and was twirling it about his extended fore-finger with the gesture habitual to him when he spoke in public. After a pause, he went on, with a drop to the level of private intercourse: "I tell you this because I know you have a good deal of influence with Draper. He has a high opinion of your brains. But you're a practical fellow, and you must see what I mean. Try to make Draper see it. Make him understand how it looks to have him drop his Bible Class just at this particular time. It was his own choice to take up religious teaching among young men. He began with our office-boys, and then the work spread and was blessed. I was almost alarmed, at one time, at the way it took hold of him: when the papers began to talk about him as a formative influence I was afraid he'd lose his head and go into the church. Luckily he tried University Settlement first; but just as I thought he was settling down to that, he took to worrying about the Higher Criticism, and saying he couldn't go on teaching fairy-tales as history. I can't see that any good ever came of criticizing what our parents believed, and it's a queer time for Draper to criticize *my* belief just as I'm backing it to the extent of five millions."

Millner remained silent; and, as though his silence were an argument, Mr. Spence continued combatively: "Draper's always talking about some distinction between religion and morality. I don't understand what he means. I got my morals out of the Bible, and I guess there's enough left in it for Draper. If religion won't make a man moral, I don't see why irreligion should. And he talks about using his mind— well, can't he use that in Wall Street? A man can get a good deal farther in life watching the market than picking holes in

Genesis; and he can do more good too. There's a time for everything; and Draper seems to me to have mixed up week-days with Sunday."

Mr. Spence replaced his eye-glasses, and stretching his hand to the silver box at his elbow, extracted from it one of the long cigars sheathed in gold-leaf which were reserved for his private consumption. The secretary hastened to tender him a match, and for a moment he puffed in silence. When he spoke again it was in a different note.

"I've got about all the bother I can handle just now, without this nonsense of Draper's. That was one of the Trustees of the College with me. It seems the *Flashlight* has been trying to stir up a fuss—" Mr. Spence paused, and turned his *pince-nez* on his secretary. "You haven't heard from them?" he asked.

"From the *Flashlight?* No." Millner's surprise was genuine.

He detected a gleam of relief behind Mr. Spence's glasses. "It may be just malicious talk. That's the worst of good works; they bring out all the meanness in human nature. And then there are always women mixed up in them, and there never was a woman yet who understood the difference between philanthropy and business." He drew again at his cigar, and then, with an unwonted movement, leaned forward and mechanically pushed the box toward Millner. "Help yourself," he said.

Millner, as mechanically, took one of the virginally cinctured cigars, and began to undo its wrappings. It was the first time he had ever been privileged to detach that golden girdle, and nothing could have given him a better measure of the importance of the situation, and of the degree to which he was apparently involved in it. "You remember that San Pablo rubber business? That's what they've been raking up," said Mr. Spence abruptly.

Millner paused in the act of striking a match. Then, with an appreciable effort of the will, he completed the gesture, applied the flame to his cigar, and took a long inhalation. The cigar was certainly delicious.

Mr. Spence, drawing a little closer, leaned forward and touched him on the arm. The touch caused Millner to turn his head, and for an instant the glance of the two men crossed at short range. Millner was conscious, first, of a nearer view than he had ever had of his employer's face, and of its vaguely suggesting a seamed sandstone head, the kind of thing that lies in a corner in the court of a museum, and in which only the round enamelled eyes have resisted the wear of time. His next feeling was that he had now reached the moment to which the offer of the cigar had been a prelude. He had always known that, sooner or later, such a moment would come; all his life, in a sense, had been a preparation for it. But in entering Mr. Spence's service he had not foreseen that it would present itself in this form. He had seen himself consciously guiding that gentleman up to the moment, rather than being thrust into it by a

stronger hand. And his first act of reflection was the resolve that, in the end, his hand should prove the stronger of the two. This was followed, almost immediately, by the idea that to be stronger than Mr. Spence's it would have to be very strong indeed. It was odd that he should feel this, since— as far as verbal communication went— it was Mr. Spence who was asking for his support. In a theoretical statement of the case the banker would have figured as being at Millner's mercy; but one of the queerest things about experience was the way it made light of theory. Millner felt now as though he were being crushed by some inexorable engine of which he had been playing with the lever…

He had always been intensely interested in observing his own reactions, and had regarded this faculty of self-detachment as of immense advantage in such a career as he had planned. He felt this still, even in the act of noting his own bewilderment— felt it the more in contrast to the odd unconsciousness of Mr. Spence's attitude, of the incredible candour of his self-abasement and self-abandonment. It was clear that Mr. Spence was not troubled by the repercussion of his actions in the consciousness of others; and this looked like a weakness— unless it were, instead, a great strength…

Through the hum of these swarming thoughts Mr. Spence's voice was going on. "That's the only rag of proof they've got; and they got it by one of those nasty accidents that nobody can guard against. I don't care how conscientiously a man attends to business, he can't always protect himself against meddlesome people. I don't pretend to know how the letter came into their hands; but they've got it; and they mean to use it— and they mean to say that you wrote it for me, and that you knew what it was about when you wrote it… They'll probably be after you tomorrow—"

Mr. Spence, restoring his cigar to his lips, puffed at it slowly. In the pause that followed there was an instant during which the universe seemed to Hugh Millner like a sounding-board bent above his single consciousness. If he spoke, what thunders would be sent back to him from that intently listening vastness?

"You see?" said Mr. Spence.

The universal ear bent closer, as if to catch the least articulation of Millner's narrowed lips; but when he opened them it was merely to re-insert his cigar, and for a short space nothing passed between the two men but an exchange of smoke-rings.

"What do you mean to do? There's the point," Mr. Spence at length sent through the rings.

Oh, yes, the point was there, as distinctly before Millner as the tip of his expensive cigar: he had seen it coming quite as soon as Mr. Spence. He knew that fate was handing him an ultimatum; but the sense of the formidable echo

which his least answer would rouse kept him doggedly, and almost helplessly, silent. To let Mr. Spence talk on as long as possible was no doubt the best way of gaining time; but Millner knew that his silence was really due to his dread of the echo. Suddenly, however, in a reaction of impatience at his own indecision, he began to speak.

The sound of his voice cleared his mind and strengthened his resolve. It was odd how the word seemed to shape the act, though one knew how ancillary it really was. As he talked, it was as if the globe had swung around, and he himself were upright on its axis, with Mr. Spence underneath, on his head. Through the ensuing interchange of concise and rapid speech there sounded in Millner's ears the refrain to which he had walked down Fifth Avenue after his first talk with Mr. Spence: "It's too easy— it's too easy— it's too easy." Yes, it was even easier than he had expected. His sensation was that of the skilful carver who feels his good blade sink into a tender joint.

As he went on talking, this surprised sense of mastery was like wine in his veins. Mr. Spence was at his mercy, after all— that was what it came to; but this new view of the case did not lessen Millner's sense of Mr. Spence's strength, it merely revealed to him his own superiority. Mr. Spence was even stronger than he had suspected. There could be no better proof of that than his faith in Millner's power to grasp the situation, and his tacit recognition of the young man's right to make the most of it. Millner felt that Mr. Spence would have despised him even more for not using his advantage than for not seeing it; and this homage to his capacity nerved him to greater alertness, and made the concluding moments of their talk as physically exhilarating as some hotly contested game.

When the conclusion was reached, and Millner stood at the goal, the golden trophy in his grasp, his first conscious thought was one of regret that the struggle was over. He would have liked to prolong their talk for the purely aesthetic pleasure of making Mr. Spence lose time, and, better still, of making him forget that he was losing it. The sense of advantage that the situation conferred was so great that when Mr. Spence rose it was as if Millner were dismissing him, and when he reached his hand toward the cigar-box it seemed to be one of Millner's cigars that he was taking.

iv

THERE had been only one condition attached to the transaction: Millner was to speak to Draper about the Bible Class.

The condition was easy to fulfil. Millner was confident of his power to deflect his young friend's purpose; and he knew the opportunity would be

given him before the day was over. His professional duties despatched, he had only to go up to his room to wait. Draper nearly always looked in on him for a moment before dinner: it was the hour most propitious to their elliptic interchange of words and silences.

Meanwhile, the waiting was an occupation in itself. Millner looked about his room with new eyes. Since the first thrill of initiation into its complicated comforts— the shower-bath, the telephone, the many-jointed reading-lamp and the vast mirrored presses through which he was always hunting his scant outfit— Millner's room had interested him no more than a railway-carriage in which he might have been travelling. But now it had acquired a sort of historic significance as the witness of the astounding change in his fate. It was Corsica, it was Brienne— it was the kind of spot that posterity might yet mark with a tablet. Then he reflected that he should soon be leaving it, and the lustre of its monumental mahogany was veiled in pathos. Why indeed should he linger on in bondage? He perceived with a certain surprise that the only thing he should regret would be leaving Draper…

It was odd, it was inconsequent, it was almost exasperating, that such a regret should obscure his triumph. Why in the world should he suddenly take to regretting Draper? If there were any logic in human likings, it should be to Mr. Spence that he inclined. Draper, dear lad, had the illusion of an "intellectual sympathy" between them; but that, Millner knew, was an affair of reading and not of character. Draper's temerities would always be of that kind; whereas his own— well, his own, put to the proof, had now definitely classed him with Mr. Spence rather than with Mr. Spence's son. It was a consequence of this new condition— of his having thus distinctly and irrevocably classed himself— that, when Draper at length brought upon the scene his shy shamble and his wistful smile, Millner, for the first time, had to steel himself against them instead of yielding to their charm.

In the new order upon which he had entered, one principle of the old survived: the point of honour between allies. And Millner had promised Mr. Spence to speak to Draper about his Bible Class…

Draper, thrown back in his chair, and swinging a loose leg across a meagre knee, listened with his habitual gravity. His downcast eyes seemed to pursue the vision which Millner's words evoked; and the words, to their speaker, took on a new sound as that candid consciousness refracted them.

"You know, dear boy, I perfectly see your father's point. It's naturally distressing to him, at this particular time, to have any hint of civil war leak out—"

Draper sat upright, laying his lank legs knee to knee.

"That's it, then? I thought that was it!"

Millner raised a surprised glance. "*What's* it?"

"That it should be at this particular time—"

"Why, naturally, as I say! Just as he's making, as it were, his public profession of faith. You know, to men like your father convictions are irreducible elements— they can't be split up, and differently combined. And your exegetical scruples seem to him to strike at the very root of his convictions."

Draper pulled himself to his feet and shuffled across the room. Then he turned about, and stood before his friend.

"Is it that— or is it this?" he said; and with the word he drew a letter from his pocket and proffered it silently to Millner.

The latter, as he unfolded it, was first aware of an intense surprise at the young man's abruptness of tone and gesture. Usually Draper fluttered long about his point before making it; and his sudden movement seemed as mechanical as the impulsion conveyed by some strong spring. The spring, of course, was in the letter; and to it Millner turned his startled glance, feeling the while that, by some curious cleavage of perception, he was continuing to watch Draper while he read.

"Oh, the beasts!" he cried.

He and Draper were face to face across the sheet which had dropped between them. The youth's features were tightened by a smile that was like the ligature of a wound. He looked white and withered.

"Ah— you knew, then?"

Millner sat still, and after a moment Draper turned from him, walked to the hearth, and leaned against the chimney, propping his chin on his hands. Millner, his head thrown back, stared up at the ceiling, which had suddenly become to him the image of the universal sounding-board hanging over his consciousness.

"You knew, then?" Draper repeated.

Millner remained silent. He had perceived, with the surprise of a mathematician working out a new problem, that the lie which Mr. Spence had just bought of him was exactly the one gift he could give of his own free will to Mr. Spence's son. This discovery gave the world a strange new topsy-turvyness, and set Millner's theories spinning about his brain like the cabin furniture of a tossing ship.

"You *knew,*" said Draper, in a tone of quiet affirmation.

Millner righted himself, and grasped the arms of his chair as if that too were reeling. "About this blackguardly charge?"

Draper was studying him intently. "What does it matter if it's blackguardly?"

"Matter—?" Millner stammered.

"It's that, of course, in any case. But the point is whether it's true or not." Draper bent down, and picking up the crumpled letter, smoothed it out between his fingers. "The point, is, whether my father, when he was publicly denouncing the peonage abuses on the San Pablo plantations over a year ago, had actually sold out his stock, as he announced at the time; or whether, as they say here— how do they put it?— he had simply transferred it to a dummy till the scandal should blow over, and has meanwhile gone on drawing his forty per cent interest on five thousand shares? There's the point."

Millner had never before heard his young friend put a case with such unadorned precision. His language was like that of Mr. Spence making a statement to a committee meeting; and the resemblance to his father flashed out with ironic incongruity.

"You see why I've brought this letter to you— I couldn't go to *him* with it!" Draper's voice faltered, and the resemblance vanished as suddenly as it had appeared.

"No; you couldn't go to him with it," said Millner slowly.

"And since they say here that *you* know: that they've got your letter proving it—" The muscles of Draper's face quivered as if a blinding light had been swept over it. "For God's sake, Millner— it's all right?"

"It's all right," said Millner, rising to his feet.

Draper caught him by the wrist. "You're sure— you're absolutely sure?"

"Sure. They know they've got nothing to go on."

Draper fell back a step and looked almost sternly at his friend. "You know that's not what I mean. I don't care a straw what they think they've got to go on. I want to know if my father's all right. If he is, they can say what they please."

Millner, again, felt himself under the concentrated scrutiny of the ceiling. "Of course, of course. I understand."

"You understand? Then why don't you answer?"

Millner looked compassionately at the boy's struggling face. Decidedly, the battle was to the strong, and he was not sorry to be on the side of the legions. But Draper's pain was as awkward as a material obstacle, as something that one stumbled over in a race.

"You know what I'm driving at, Millner." Again Mr. Spence's committee-meeting tone sounded oddly through his son's strained voice. "If my father's so awfully upset about my giving up my Bible Class, and letting it be known that I do so on conscientious grounds, is it because he's afraid it may be considered a criticism on something *he* has done which— which won't bear the test of the doctrines he believes in?"

Draper, with the last question, squared himself in front of Millner, as if suspecting that the latter meant to evade it by flight. But Millner had never felt more disposed to stand his ground than at that moment.

"No— by Jove, no! It's not *that.*" His relief almost escaped him in a cry, as he lifted his head to give back Draper's look.

"On your honour?" the other passionately pressed him.

"Oh, on anybody's you like— on *yours!*" Millner could hardly restrain a laugh of relief. It was vertiginous to find himself spared, after all, the need of an altruistic lie: he perceived that they were the kind he least liked.

Draper took a deep breath. "You don't— Millner, a lot depends on this— you don't really think my father has any ulterior motive?"

"I think he has none but his horror of seeing you go straight to perdition!"

They looked at each other again, and Draper's tension was suddenly relieved by a free boyish laugh. "It's his convictions— it's just his funny old convictions?"

"It's that, and nothing else on earth!"

Draper turned back to the arm-chair he had left, and let his narrow figure sink down into it as into a bath. Then he looked over at Millner with a smile. "I can see that I've been worrying him horribly. So he really thinks I'm on the road to perdition? Of course you can fancy what a sick minute I had when I thought it might be this other reason— the damnable insinuation in this letter." Draper crumpled the paper in his hand, and leaned forward to toss it into the coals of the grate. "I ought to have known better, of course. I ought to have remembered that, as you say, my father can't conceive how conduct may be independent of creed. That's where I was stupid— and rather base. But that letter made me dizzy— I couldn't think. Even now I can't very clearly. I'm not sure what *my* convictions require of me: they seem to me so much less to be considered than his! When I've done half the good to people that he has, it will be time enough to begin attacking their beliefs. Meanwhile— meanwhile I can't touch his…" Draper leaned forward, stretching his lank arms along his knees. His face was as clear as a spring sky. "I *won't* touch them, Millner— Go and tell him so…"

v

IN THE study a half hour later Mr. Spence, watch in hand, was doling out his minutes again. The peril conjured, he had recovered his dominion over time. He turned his commanding eye-glasses on Millner.

"It's all settled, then? Tell Draper I'm sorry not to see him again to-night— but I'm to speak at the dinner of the Legal Relief Association, and I'm due there

in five minutes. You and he dine alone here, I suppose? Tell him I appreciate what he's done. Some day he'll see that to leave the world better than we find it is the best we can hope to do. (You've finished the notes for the*Investigator?* Be sure you don't forget that phrase.) Well, good evening: that's all, I think."

Smooth and compact in his glossy evening clothes, Mr. Spence advanced toward the study door; but as he reached it, his secretary stood there before him.

"It's not quite all, Mr. Spence."

Mr. Spence turned on him a look in which impatience was faintly tinged with apprehension. "What else is there? It's two and a half minutes to eight."

Millner stood his ground. "It won't take longer than that. I want to tell you that, if you can conveniently replace me, I'd like— there are reasons why I shall have to leave you."

Millner was conscious of reddening as he spoke. His redness deepened under Mr. Spence's dispassionate scrutiny. He saw at once that the banker was not surprised at his announcement.

"Well, I suppose that's natural enough. You'll want to make a start for yourself now. Only, of course, for the sake of appearances—"

"Oh, certainly," Millner hastily agreed.

"Well, then: is that all?" Mr. Spence repeated.

"Nearly." Millner paused, as if in search of an appropriate formula. But after a moment he gave up the search, and pulled from his pocket an envelope which he held out to his employer. "I merely want to give this back."

The hand which Mr. Spence had extended dropped to his side, and his sand-coloured face grew chalky. "Give it back?" His voice was as thick as Millner's. "What's happened? Is the bargain off?"

"Oh, no. I've given you my word."

"Your word?" Mr. Spence lowered at him. "I'd like to know what that's worth!"

Millner continued to hold out the envelope. "You do know, now. It's worth *that.* It's worth my place."

Mr. Spence, standing motionless before him, hesitated for an appreciable space of time. His lips parted once or twice under their square-clipped stubble, and at last emitted: "How much more do you want?"

Millner broke into a laugh. "Oh, I've got all I want— all and more!"

"What— from the others? Are you crazy?"

"No, you are," said Millner with a sudden recovery of composure. "But you're safe— you're as safe as you'll ever be. Only I don't care to take this for making you so."

Mr. Spence slowly moistened his lips with his tongue, and removing his *pince-nez,* took a long hard look at Millner.

"I don't understand. What other guarantee have I got?"

"That I mean what I say?" Millner glanced past the banker's figure at his rich densely coloured background of Spanish leather and mahogany. He remembered that it was from this very threshold that he had first seen Mr. Spence's son.

"What guarantee? You've got Draper!" he said.
