PAST MASTERS 164

Arthur Leo Zagat
Willa Cather
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Booth Tarkington
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and more

PAST MASTERS 164

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

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1: One on the Button

C. S. Montanye

1892-1948

Hot Dog, October 1922

ALONG THE MAIN STEM, Kid Push, the light-heavy Box Fighter, was as popular with the bunch as mumps with children. The Crust Floppers had the Kid marked as being the bees knees and the cats tonsils. In the roped enclosure he might have been a Terrible Bologna, but on Broadway they rated him as a regular. And most of the Kid's popularity was due to the fem. sex. Women and Kid Push were as close as pepper and salt.

With another face the Kid would have passed in a jam. He packed the smackers, however, and let his money talk for him. When he wasn't pushing the leather he was up on some of the White Light's roofs tossing the Wild Cow and dating some queen who flashed a shape and a pair of pins with a curve to them. The Kid was crazy about legs. In the ring it was the jaw— after hours the stocking supports.

One night early in September Kid-Push was punishing some bootlegger's "see stars" special up at the Midnite Follies. He held down a ringside table and eyed the bunch with a pair of eyes sharp enough to shave with.

Undressed musical comedy always knocked him for an Arabian cuspidor. He liked to see 'em take it off. The more the merrier, as he told his friends. This night, as he contemplated the merry throng, he thought once or twice of his ccming combat with the One Punch Jersey Jones, the Pride of Montclair. Jones, to his way of thinking, was a set-up. When the gong tapped for the catastrophe he would step in, smack One Punch on the button and drag down his 60 per cent of the harvest. The Pride of Montclair, as the world knew, had a jaw composed of glass.

"Nothing to it!" the Kid thought idly.

He ruminated pleasantly concerning the coming fracas until the famous number of the Midnite Follies unfolded. This was an ensemble of chorines who sang "Take That Off, Teo!" a ballad having to do with pink silk underwear. As the gals came on the Kid lamped a coy little blonde on the left end and sat up straighter. The snapper that took him was a young lady he could not remember as having ever seen before. He stared, blinking.

The girl, young, comely and animated, had a face that drove men to the divorce courts, and a figure that was a soft symphony of warm curves and dazzling white skin. She was featuring a pair of eyes as blue as the laws the reformers were trying to put across, a smile that was as bright as one of the Big Street's electrical signs and a certain swinging, lithe grace that made the Kid feel like a Busy Telephone Wire.

"How long has this been going on?" he asked himself.

When the number was over to a riot of applause the Kid turned to his nearest table mate and begged information.

"The gal in the onion suit," he pleaded. "What's the title?"

In a few minutes he learned. The one that shook his emotions was a beautiful child who answered to the name of Reba Whittington. She had just signed with the show and the Street didn't appear to know much abcut her save that she was sweet to look at and had refused to sell the key to her hotel room for a thousand berries cash— an offer made after the Monday night performance by a Westchester millionaire.

"Huh?" Kid Push thought, fingering the six thousand dollar diamond headlight that adorned his twelve dollar cravat. "So that's that, eh? Well, the bigger they come the sooner,they slip. I'll just ramble around to the stage door and trade a little lip music with this jane. When I want a frail I get her!"

The stage door man took the Kid's card upstairs to the dressing room. In three minutes he was back.

"Nothing doing, sir," he stated. "Miss Whittington says to tell you she don't meet men she hasn't been introduced to."

"Did she say that?" the Kid replied. "Ain't we got merriments. I'll introduce myself. Pardon me while I hold up a wall until she shows."

At ten minutes of one Reba Whittington appeared, gowned for the street. In her smart little Fifth Avenue frock she drew better than a three-alarm fire. The second the waiting Romeo glimpsed her he stepped over and caught her arm.

"Listen, girlie," he said, "I don't think you got the name straight. It's Kid Push. I like your looks. Get me? All right then. Let's blow!"

He fell into step beside her. The girl said nothing until they were in the light smitten gully of Forty-second Street.

Then:

"Where you are going?" she asked gently.

"I'm not particular," he answered. "How about stopping off in some of the class hooferies? I'm a wonderful dancer. And you twist a nasty ankle yourself."

"I'm sorry," the girl said in the same tones, "but I'm tired. I'm going home to my hotel."

"That suits me," the Kid cooed. "I'll stick like cement."

She raised her blue eyes to his.

"I'm afraid you don't understand. This is Thursday night. My sweetie always comes to see me on Thursday nights."

The Kid made a gesture.

"Be yourself, baby! I'd like to meet your John. I'll help entertain him. Come on, let's get home. These bright lights hurt my eyes."

With a shrug the girl crossed the street, heading for the Hotel Irsomnia.

She got into an elevator. So did the Kid. She alighted on the tenth floor. So did the Kid. She unlocked a door and entered a suite. So did the Kid.

"I'm warning you," she said, when she had switched on a tall floorlamp. "There is sure to be trouble."

"That's what I thrive on," was the reply. "Mind if I smoke?"

Without answering the girl entered a bedroom to the left of the chamber, shutting the door after her. The Kid reached for a snipe and polished the big diamond scarfpin. In five minutes the door opened and the girl was back. She had changed to a softly clinging kimona and had her hair down. It hung in a golden cloud over her sloping shoulders, making her look more child-like and charming than ever.

"That's the spirit!" the Kid crooned. "Come on over to Daddy and split a kiss two ways. Right?"

Her answer was to sit down in a wing chair by the window. The Kid went over and dropped down on the arm of it.

"Don't be upstage," he pleaded. "Get rid of that Ritz stuff. Try and you know me and you'll find you'll like me. All the gals fall for me. I don't wanna blow about it but I got a lovely disposition. Let's cuddle."

He was about to take her in his arms when a knock sounded on the door.

"My sweetie," Reba Whittington breathed. "Now aren't you sorry? Come in!" she said in a louder voice.

The door opened and a man entered. It was gloomy beyond the edge of the lamplight. All the Kid was able to see was the shine of a white dress shirt front.

"Have a chair," the Kid invited genially, "but don't figure on stayin' too late. Me and Reba are just getting acquainted."

"Is that so?" the caller replied.

"He persisted in coming," the girl put in.

"You don't tell me?" the newcomer said pleasantly, advancing.

The Kid grinned.

"I'm the persistentist person," he laughed. The next instant he wheeled with a growl.

"Look out there now. Not too close or—"

"Zowie!"

The thud of a flying fist awoke echoes in the silent room. There was a thump, a crash— silence.

The next morning when the Kid awoke it was to find a small bellhop bending over him.

"Gee," the boy said. "Whatcha doing here? And lookit your necktie— it's all pulled to pieces."

The Kid slowly fingered the ruined cravat where once a six grand sparkler had reposed.

"Where am I?" he weakly.

The bellhop snickered.

"This here suite was rented by Miss Whittington— the gal that's goaling 'em all over at the Midnite Follies. But she's went. She checked out last night with her husband."

Kid Push lifted himself another inch from the floor.

"Husband?"

The boy wrinkled his smeller.

"You hear me. Her husband! Some guy. A box fighter and everything. You ought to meet— or did you? He trades wallops under the name of One Punch Jersey Jones, the Pride of Montclair!"

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2: The Revelation of the Dark Slide

Headon Hill

(Francis Edward Grainger, 1854-1927)
In: *The Divinations of Kala Persad*, 1894

I WAS LOOKING through the daily papers in the general room of the detective department of Scotland Yard, when the chief's bell rang and the messenger entered to tell me that I was wanted in the private room.

'Look here, Jackson, said the great man, 'you have nothing very pressing on hand just at present; I want you to run down to Hinton Bay, in Devonshire— it's what they call a rising sea-side resort— and take a look round. There have been several burglaries there lately, and the local men are in a complete fog about it. My own impression is that there is a London gang at work, but you will be better able to form an opinion on the spot. You had better start at once, and take a few days over it.'

I reached Hinton that same evening, too late to do more than engage a room at the hotel and interview the sergeant, who, with two constables, formed the police force of the little place. I had not been two minutes in the sergeant's company before I saw that my chief's assertion that the local men were completely fogged was not at all beside the mark; and in saying this I do not desire to hint that Sergeant Evans and his colleagues had been either remiss in their duties or stupid in their deductions. On the contrary, they happened to be exceptionally acute and energetic specimens of the rural policeman; they had done all that was possible to get upon the track of the thieves; they had made themselves almost objectionably inquisitive as to the respectability and credentials of every visitor staying in the place; and in coming to the conclusion that the criminals were to be looked for outside the limits of Hinton Bay, they had adopted the only theory which recommended itself at this stage of the proceedings to my larger experience.

Briefly, the particulars of the robberies were these.

In the first case the entry had been made into a large house, taken by a well-known London banker for the season, while the family were at dinner. Footmarks showed that two men at least had been engaged, and it was also clear that the pillars of the portico had been used as a means of approach to the windows on the first floor. In the second case, the house robbed was in the occupation of a widow lady with two daughters, and here the burglars had somewhat varied their plan of campaign by selecting as the point of attack the glass door of a conservatory which gave direct access to the dining-room, in which there was much valuable plate. In this case, again, the footsteps on the soft garden mould left no doubt that two men had been 'on the job.'

Contenting myself for the present with these general outlines, I retired to the hotel for the night. Before turning in, I purposely threw myself in the way of the landlord, and seeing that he was a man to be trusted, I took him into my confidence as to the object of my visit. Over a cigar and a 'nightcap' in his private room we went carefully through the guest-book for the past three months, noting the name and description of every visitor who had stayed in the hotel during that period. There was absolutely no one in the list to arouse any suspicion. As a matter of fact, Hinton, though a small place and little more than a straggling village of large houses, was very exclusive and fashionable, and most of the people who came there were sufficiently prominent to be easily identified.

The landlord and I separated for the night, firm in the conviction that at any rate no queer characters had put up at the hotel. 'Of course,' said mine host, 'there are lodging-houses where such people might have contrived to pass muster as respectable, but somehow I don't think the parties you want have been staying in Hinton. You see, the visitors here are as a rule regular frequenters of the place; most of them come year after year, and thus get to know each other. Any outsiders of peculiar habits would soon excite remark.'

After an early breakfast next morning, I went out to look about me. There was no doubt about it that from a burglar's point of view Hinton Bay was an eligible locality. The houses, which had been built especially for the purpose of being let furnished during the summer season, were all large, and most of them were detached. Very few of them were devoted to the mere letting of apartments, such stray visitors as could not afford the luxury of a house to themselves, or the high prices of the hotel, having to content themselves with a slender choice of lodgings at one or other of the various shops. The season was now at its full height, and the pleasant villas were nearly all tenanted with lively parties of holiday-makers, though here and there a house stood vacant, its tenants not yet having arrived.

I was admiring the proportions of one of these empty houses, which stood in one of the three pretty roads leading down to the beach, wishing that I had time and money enough to take it for the season and forget crime and criminals for a while, when a singular figure caught my eye. It was that of a gentleman, dressed in the noticeable costume of a bishop, who was advancing along the road under circumstances which could not fail to attract a stranger's attention. The prelate was very tall and very portly, and moreover he was laden like a packhorse. One hand was occupied with a stout walking-stick, the other carried a camp stool, under one arm was an air-cushion, and on his back was slung a small photographic camera, complete with its tripod stand and all ready for business.

The moment after I noticed him I saw that the bishop was an invalid, unable to walk more than a few paces at a time. He spread out his camp-stool at the side of the road, placed the air-cushion upon it, and taking a seat, calmly surveyed his surroundings. After he had rested a few minutes he rose again, picked, up his impedimenta, and recommenced his laborious progress in my direction. Although though the distance was short, he stopped twice before he came opposite the house on the gate of which I was leaning, and 'camped out' in the same way as before. At his third pause, however, the bishop, instead of proceeding on his way after resting, unslung his camera and set it up in front of the house which I was admiring. From the direction in which the lens was pointing, I concluded that he was going to photograph the building— a surmise which shortly proved correct. Emerging at length from the focussing cloth, which he had placed over his head in the usual fashion, he hobbled a few paces towards me and spoke in the refined and unctuous accents which are generally associated with churchmen of high degree.

'Pardon me for addressing you,' he said 'but would you be so very kind as to stand quite still for a few moments while I take a photograph?'

'By all means,' I replied; 'but perhaps you would rather I got out of your way altogether?'

'No, indeed, my dear sir,' was the-bishop's polite reply; 'pray do not move; you will make an excellent foreground to my picture. I always like to get as much detail in as possible. I shall really take it as a favor if you will remain while I remove the cap from the lens.'

Of course there was nothing for it but to comply; and as it didn't matter to me one way or the other, I stayed where I was; leaning against the gate, while the bishop photographed the house. When he had finished, I strolled up to the spot on the other side of the road where he was packing up his camera.

'An interesting pursuit,' I remarked by way of something to say.

'Most interesting,' replied the bishop, 'though of course my knowledge of it is only that of an amateur. I am making a collection of all the striking architectural features in this most charming place. Some of the houses here are really very fine.'

'I should hardly have thought,' I said, 'that the house you have just photographed shows any special features. It is pretty enough— in fact, I was admiring it myself when you came up— but it. is a common type of house. Indeed, there are many houses here exactly like it.'

The portly prelate shook has fat finger at me playfully.

'The eye of the Philistine, my dear sir,' he remarked; 'the eye of the Philistine! To the artistic sense there are many beauties perceptible in that building not to be found elsewhere. Besides, you must remember that in the

place of exile where my work is situated— the Andaman Islands— I get few opportunities of studying modern architecture. If it was not for my miserable infirmity, I would photograph every house in Hinton.'

'I feared you were an invalid,' I replied sympathetically.

'Creeping paralysis of the spine, my dear sir—a terrible complaint which impedes my locomotive powers, as you see; but I bear it my friend, I bear it— as I trust you would bear an affliction sent you for your sins— with fortitude and resignation.'

The bishop, had by this time got his traps together again, and with a pleasant smile was moving off, while I prepared to prolong my stroll in the opposite direction. For one brief moment however, I stood watching the good man's laborious progress, and as I did so, I noticed that after he had gone a few paces a newspaper fell from one of his pockets. It had evidently worked out while he was stooping to pick up his encumbrances. The bishop did not notice his loss, but trudged on unheeding, so I stepped forward and took possession of the paper, with the intention of restoring it to its owner. I was on the point of calling after him, when my eye was arrested by some blue pencil marks that bore traces of having been recently made at certain points in the body of the journal. Glancing quickly at its title— uncalled-for curiosity is second nature with a detective— I saw that the newspaper was a sporting publication of recent date, and I noticed, further, that the blue pencil marks were placed opposite the names of certain horses which appeared in the programme of that day's racing at a distant turf rendezvous.

One never knows how these impulses take one, but my mind was made up in a moment. Instead of restoring the paper to its owner, I put it carefully away in my own pocket. A colonial bishop stricken with creeping paralysis, and yet so keenly interested in horse-racing as to carry about a sporting paper marked with a selection of the day's ''winners,' was an anomaly which required consideration. The more I thought the matter over, the more puzzled I became.

It is an old theory in the science of detection, that if, in conducting an inquiry on a restricted area, you come across two apparently distinct and isolated mysteries., the chances are that further investigation will prove them to be connected. Here I had found my two distinct mysteries ready to hand— firstly in the series of burglaries committed in the midst of a secluded and irreproachable community; and secondly in a reverend prelate who went about photographing houses, though he could scarcely walk, and who combined an unctuous and priestly manner with a secret penchant for the unclerical sport of horse-racing. Could it be that the bishop was a burglar?

And yet the possibility dwindled to a mere nothing when the arguments on the other side were applied.

First of all he was photographing an uninhabited house, which would be useless to him for the purpose of robbery; there could be no object in his securing a plan of windows and doors behind which no rich plunder was to be found.

Again, it was quite 'on the cards' that a bishop home on a holiday might indulge in a little quiet speculation when he could do so without making an example of himself to his flock. Our profession is one which causes us to be no respecters of persons, and before then I had come across gentlemen in very queer company and engaged in very queer pursuits who would never have been suspected of anything of the kind by their nearest friends. Very likely the bishop had been in the habit of backing his fancy when at college, and wished to renew the sensation just for the fun of the thing.

And, lastly, there was more than one man engaged in the burglary. If my first flash of suspicion was correct, he must have at least one companion, and so far I had only seen him alone.

It was a point easily set at rest, and, with the object of deciding it, I returned to the hotel, preferring to talk the bishop over with my friend, the landlord, to exposing what might turn out to be a very bad hand to the local police. I found the landlord alone in his private room, and told him casually of my curious meeting with the bishop.

'Funny old chap, isn't he?' replied mane host; 'he lodges at Bay Villa, near the post office— been there about six weeks. Pity the poor old man is so shaky on his legs; as he's so keen on photography; it's quite painful to see him trying to get about. He's affable enough. He must have made friends with every man, woman, and child in the place.'

'Is he alone here?' I asked.

'Quite alone. He didn't know a soul when he came here. But that makes no difference to him; he gets into conversation with every one be comes across on the beach, and makes himself at home everywhere.'

'I suppose he takes a good many photographs of the scenery round about— the cliffs and caves, for instance, and snap-shots at the boats and bathers along shore?'

'No; strangely enough, he doesn't care for views. He says he's making a collection of architectural subjects, and he has given Mrs. Newsome, where he lodges, quite a number of his pictures. She wanted him to rent an extra bedroom for a dark room, but Newsome tells me he sends all the negatives up to London to be developed. You see, the poor old fellow is ill, and can't be

bothered with working in a stuffy dark room. Why, he goes to bed every night at 9 o'clock.'

The landlord's information pretty nearly knocked my first wild suspicion on the head. The bishop was alone at Hinton; he retired to rest early every evening, and could not, therefore, be engaged on burglarious enterprises; and he evidently made no secret of his fad for photographing architecture. Besides, supposing he was a bad character in disguise, what earthly use would the picture of an empty house be to him? No! I came to the conclusion that his interest in the turf must be a solitary foible, after all, or, what was still more probable, that the sporting paper didn't belong to him, and that the blue pencil 'selections' had been made by some one else.

But it is a moral with me never to drop a theory, however wild, without seeing it through; so I took a walk up the main village street to the little grocer's shop, in a corner of which the post office was situated. There, on a counter on which pieces of bacon and packets of candles were indiscriminately mixed with telegraph and money order forms, I wrote out a cypher wire to Scotland Yard as follows: —

'Please ascertain at once if Bishop of Andaman Islands is at home on leave.'

Leaving word that I would call for the reply in a couple of hours, I went cut and commenced to work my case in the orthodox manner, calling at the houses where the robberies had been effected, examining servants, and questioning the victims as to the stolen property.

The results were absolutely nil. I found out nothing that had not already been ascertained by the local police, and the clue seemed as far away as ever, except that in both cases circumstances pointed to inform ation having been supplied about the habits of the occupiers. The burglars must have been posted up in the hours of dining and going to bed of the two different households, and yet there were no indications that there were traitors in either of the camps.

By the time I had completed the inquiries the reply telegram was about due, and I turned my steps to the post office to see if at had arrived. Stumbling through the lumber of the grocer's shop to the postal counter, I found that the reply had just come through, and that the young woman, who combined the duties of operator with a general knowledge of tea and sugar, was putting it into the envelope. I took the telegram to the front of the shop where there was more light, and tearing it open spelled out the cypher with the help of my code. This is what I read:—

'There is no bishop of Andaman Islands. Any person calling himself such must be a fraud.'

I had barely time to feel a thrill of triumph run over me, when over the tins of lobster and potted meats that decorated the windows, I saw the shovel-hatted, gaitered figure of my morning's acquaintance advancing towards the door of the shop. Quickly turning to the counter, I inquired for the first article I could think of, and strained my eyes and ears to their acutest pitch. The portly invalid made his way laboriously up the length of the shop to the post office counter, where he handed in a small flat package.

'For parcels post, Miss Williams, if you please,' he said in his bland tones; 'kindly be very careful with it. It contains my dark slide and some fresh negatives, which I am sending to London for development. Fourpence-halfpenny? Thank you.'

Pocketing his change, he took up the camp-stool and air-cushion, and trudged away, as far as I could see without noticing me, though he brushed my shoulder as he passed. Glancing towards the postal counter, I saw that the young woman had placed the parcel with a number of others that were awaiting dispatch. Making a quantity of trifling purchases, I gradually moved down towards the pile, and satisfying myself that the end justified the means, transferred the parcel to my pocket without attracting attention.

Within an hour I was closetted with the principal professional photographer at the county town six miles away. The dark slide, divested of its wrapper, which had been addressed to a Mr. Giles, 300 Gower-street, London, lay on the table before us.

'You want these negatives developed?' said the photographer. 'Certainly, I will set about it at once. They will be ready in about half an hour at the outside, if you will be good enough to amuse yourself here in the meanwhile.' It seemed a long time before the photographer returned. When he did it was with a curious smile that he handed me the negatives, one of which portrayed the house which I had seen taken in the morning, while the other, in place of a picture, revealed the following words:

Dear Fred,—

Fourth house on right from one sent herewith. Family dine at 8. Dinner party on Thursday. Servants will be busy. Easy entrance to first floor from roof of washhouse at back. People keep ready cash in house— probably in large front bedroom, also plenty of sparklers. This will about finish up Hinton. Shall move on to Ilfracombe, and notify you by same means from there.

Yours, N. C.

The revelation was complete. The 'bishop' was a burglar's 'agent in advance,' after all, and my first theory was proved correct. The idea of notifying his accomplices on the invisible surface of a dry plate, which would reveal nothing till it was 'developed,' was a novelty in the annals of crime which would probably never have been discovered had it not been for the sporting newspaper. The campstool and the spinal paralysis had also played important parts in the deception, by enabling the sham invalid to sit down unsuspected when spying upon a likely crib; while the early hours he kept and his affable manners precluded even the wildest imagination from connecting him with the burglaries.

The telegraph was set to work, and while I was busy annexing the portly person of the self-styled 'Lord Bishop of the Andamans,' a posse from Scotland Yard paid a visit to 300 Gowers-treet, where the two other members of the gang were taken by surprise. I got great credit for the capture; but, between ourselves, I think it only shows how our greatest successes are due to chance.

3: The Conjurer

Richard Middleton

1882-1911

In: *The Ghost Ship, and ther stories*, 1912

CERTAINLY the audience was restive. In the first place it felt that it had been defrauded, seeing that Cissie Bradford, whose smiling face adorned the bills outside, had, failed to appear, and secondly, it considered that the deputy for that famous lady was more than inadequate. To the little man who sweated in the glare of the limelight and juggled desperately with glass balls in a vain effort to steady his nerve it was apparent that his turn was a failure. And as he worked he could have cried with disappointment, for his was a trial performance, and a year's engagement in the Hennings' group of music-halls would have rewarded success. Yet his tricks, things that he had done with the utmost ease a thousand times, had been a succession of blunders, rather mirth-provoking than mystifying to the audience. Presently one of the glass balls fell crashing on the stage, and amidst the jeers of the gallery he turned to his wife, who served as his assistant.

"I've lost my chance," he said, with a sob; "I can't do it!"

"Never mind, dear," she whispered. "There's a nice steak and onions at home for supper."

"It's no use," he said despairingly. "I'll try the disappearing trick and then get off. I'm done here." He turned back to the audience.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said to the mockers in a wavering voice, "I will now present to you the concluding item of my entertainment. I will cause this lady to disappear under your very eyes, without the aid of any mechanical contrivance or artificial device." This was the merest showman's patter, for, as a matter of fact, it was not a very wonderful illusion. But as he led his wife forward to present her to the audience the conjurer was wondering whether the mishaps that had ruined his chance would meet him even here. If something should go wrong— he felt his wife's hand tremble in his, and he pressed it tightly to reassure her. He must make an effort, an effort of will, and then no mistakes would happen. For a second the lights danced before his eyes, then he pulled himself together. If an earthquake should disturb the curtains and show Molly creeping ignominiously away behind he would still meet his fate like a man. He turned round to conduct his wife to the little alcove from which she should vanish. She was not on the stage!

For a minute he did not guess the greatness of the disaster. Then he realised that the theatre was intensely quiet, and that he would have to explain that the last item of his programme was even more of a fiasco than the rest. Owing to a sudden indisposition--his skin tingled at the thought of the

hooting. His tongue rasped upon cracking lips as he braced himself and bowed to the audience.

Then came the applause. Again and again it broke out from all over the house, while the curtain rose and fell, and the conjurer stood on the stage, mute, uncomprehending. What had happened? At first he had thought they were mocking him, but it was impossible to misjudge the nature of the applause. Besides, the stage-manager was allowing him call after call, as if he were a star. When at length the curtain remained down, and the orchestra struck up the opening bars of the next song, he staggered off into the wings as if he were drunk. There he met Mr. James Hennings himself.

"You'll do," said the great man; "that last trick was neat. You ought to polish up the others though. I suppose you don't want to tell me how you did it? Well, well, come in the morning and we'll fix up a contract."

And so, without having said a word, the conjurer found himself hustled off by the Vaudeville Napoleon. Mr. Hennings had something more to say to his manager.

"Bit rum," he said. "Did you see it?"

"Queerest thing we've struck."

"How was it done do you think?"

"Can't imagine. There one minute on his arm, gone the next, no trap, or curtain, or anything."

"Money in it, eh?"

"Biggest hit of the century, I should think."

"I'll go and fix up a contract and get him to sign it tonight. Get on with it." And Mr. James Hennings fled to his office.

Meanwhile the conjurer was wandering in the wings with the drooping heart of a lost child. What had happened? Why was he a success, and why did people stare so oddly, and what had become of his wife? When he asked them the stage hands laughed, and said they had not seen her. Why should they laugh? He wanted her to explain things, and hear their good luck. But she was not in her dressing-room, she was not anywhere. For a moment he felt like crying.

Then, for the second time that night, he pulled himself together. After all, there was no reason to be upset. He ought to feel very pleased about the contract, however it had happened. It seemed that his wife had left the stage in some queer way without being seen. Probably to increase the mystery she had gone straight home in her stage dress, and had succeeded in dodging the stage-door keeper. It was all very strange; but, of course, there must be some simple explanation like that. He would take a cab home and find her there already. There was a steak and onions for supper.

As he drove along in the cab he became convinced that this theory was right. Molly had always been clever, and this time she had certainly succeeded in surprising everybody. At the door of his house he gave the cabman a shilling for himself with a light heart. He could afford it now. He ran up the steps cheerfully and opened the door. The passage was quite dark, and he wondered why his wife hadn't lit the gas.

"Molly!" he cried, "Molly!"

The small, weary-eyed servant came out of the kitchen on a savoury wind of onions.

"Hasn't missus come home with you, sir?" she said.

The conjurer thrust his hand against the wall to steady himself, and the pattern of the wall-paper seemed to burn his finger-tips.

"Not here!" he gasped at the frightened girl. "Then where is she? Where is she?"

"I don't know, sir," she began stuttering; but the conjurer turned quickly and ran out of the house. Of course, his wife must be at the theatre. It was absurd ever to have supposed that she could leave the theatre in her stage dress unnoticed; and now she was probably worrying because he had not waited for her. How foolish he had been.

It was a quarter of an hour before he found a cab, and the theatre was dark and empty when he got back to it. He knocked at the stage door, and the night watchman opened it.

"My wife?" he cried.

"There's no one here now, sir," the man answered respectfully, for he knew that a new star had risen that night.

The conjurer leant against the doorpost faintly.

"Take me up to the dressing-rooms," he said. "I want to see whether she has been, there while I was away."

The watchman led the way along the dark passages. "I shouldn't worry if I were you, sir," he said. "She can't have gone far." He did not know anything about it, but he wanted to be sympathetic.

"God knows," the conjurer muttered, "I can't understand this at all."

In the dressing-room Molly's clothes still lay neatly folded as she had left them when they went on the stage that night, and when he saw them his last hope left the conjurer, and a strange thought came into his mind.

"I should like to go down on the stage," he said, "and see if there is anything to tell me of her."

The night watchman looked at the conjurer as if he thought he was mad, but he followed him down to the stage in silence. When he was there the

conjurer leaned forward suddenly, and his face was filled with a wistful eagerness.

"Molly!" he called, "Molly!"

But the empty theatre gave him nothing but echoes in reply.

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4: The Colonel's Tale

Anonymous

Adelaide Observer, 16 June 1888

IT WAS LATE— after midnight; and as we got up from the whist table and gathered around the fire Colonel Thornton said:— "If you men are not too tired, and don't mind sitting up for another half hour, I think I can tell you a good story."

We protested that we were never less tired, and could sit up till morning if necessary so the Colonel began—

"My father, as you know, was a parson, but he took orders late in life after having been fifteen years at the Bar; and the events which I am going to tell you he himself told me as having come directly under his eye when he was a barrister.

" It was at the Monmouth Assizes, in 18—, that a case was tried which beoame the talk of the neighbourhood and country for years after. My father was sitting in the Court of the Assistant Judge, when a note was brought from a friend in the adjoining Court asking him to come and hear a case of more than usual interest, the facts of which were these :—

"Some time before a farmer's house near Monmouth had been broken into and robbed by men disguised and masked, the farmer murdered, and his servant shockingly illtreated, Among other things which were stolen were two old-fashioned silver brooches, curiously inlaid with malachite, heirlooms of the family; and although unremitting search was made and the description of the lost articles made widely known no trace of the murderers could be found.

"A month or two after the murder, however, a police officer, in going through a house in Bristol, noticed a dissipated-looking sailor lying on a pallet and resting his head on a small bundle. He asked him what it oontained, and was told that it was 'only his kit.' The officer, not satisfied, opened the bundle, and almost the first thing to fall out were two brooches made of silver and malachite. Struck by their curious beauty, and wondering how such a wretched-looking fellow could have beoome possessed of them, he suddenly remembered the advertisement and description of the stolen articles.

"How did you come by these?" he enquired.

"The sailor replied, 'By chance. When I came ashore some time ago with plenty of money in my pocket I met an old seaman who was down on his luck, and he offered to sell me these things, which had belonged to his mother. I was pretty flush, and gave him a good price for them, although they were useless to me; and that's all there is about it.'

"The police officer, still dissatisfied, took him into custody. He was sent to Monmouth Gaol, the brooohes were identified, and he was committed for trial at the assize on the charge of theft and murder; and," continued tne Colonel, impressively, "as my father entered the Court this man was being placed in the dock.

"Tall beyond the then average height of man and gannt, with an unkept beard and evil, yellow eye, and though evidently suffering nam long imprisonment, he yet presented a powerful and imposing front. The trial had begun, and he had just been asked the usual question, 'Are you guilty or not guilty?' and bad answered in a hollow voice 'Not guilty, my lord,' when the entrance of one of the Court officials with a gentleman stopped the proceedings for a while; and here I must explain this interruption.

"A few days before a quiet, gentlemanly man— a Captain Forsyth, of Her Majesty's Navy, had arrived at the chief hotel of the town on a fishing excursion, but the weather had been so adverse that he was obliged to look elsewhere for amusement. Turning to the landlord for information, he was told of this trial as exciting considerable interest, and so it came to pass that as the prisoner took his place at the bar Captain Forsyth sent his card to the Judge, who gladly allowed him, as was then the custom, a seat on the Bench,

"The case proceeded. Witnesses were celled to identify the brooches; the servants swore to the figure of the prisoner as resembling that of the murderer; no witness was called for the defence— no one defended him. Everything pointed to his guilt, and the jury retired to their room. In a few minutes they returned, and amid the breathless expectation of the crowded Court the foreman announned their opinion that the man was' guilty.'

"Directly this word was uttered the prisoner, who had been leaning as if for support against the side of the dook, raised himself to his full height, stretohed out both his arms above his head, and looking up exclaimed in a broken voice1 Not guilty!—not guilty!'

"The Judge then asked him, as was usual, If he had anything to say before sentence should be pronounced, and the prisoner cried hoarsely, 'Not guilty, my lord!— not guilty! Before heaven and man I am innocent of this crime. I never set eyes on the murdered man! I did not murder. Oh! Captain, Captain— in his vehemence he addressed tne Judge as if he were his offioer— 'I am as innocent of this crime as the babe unborn.

He paused; then suddenly, in a voice choking with feeling, he exclaimed, 'Yes, yes— only one man can save me now; but he can do it, swear what you may. The Lord be thanked that man is here!'

"A buzz of astonishment ran round the Court; the feeling of awe that had held the audience changed to one of amazement.

" 'Point him out to me,' said the Judge.

" 'The man who can save me,' replied the prisoner, 'sits there beside you,' pointing to the astonished Captain Forsyth.

"The Judge turned to Captain Forsyth and said, 'This man appears to know yon. Is it the case?'

" 'Certainly not!' he replied, mnoh surprised: 'I never saw him before in my life.'

" 'Oh, Captain!' broke ont the prisoner— 'yes, you needn't start; I know you, Captain Forsyth. You are never going to swear away an innocent man's life like that!'

" 'It is curious, my man,'the Captain replied, " that you know my name; but I repeat that I never saw you before in my life.'

" 'What! Not know John Williams, of the *Neptune*, the coxswain of the captain's cutter?'

" 'Yes; I know John Williams, but you are not he; John Williams was the smartest man that ever served under me, and never likely to stand where you are now.'

" 'Captain,' replied the prisoner, 'I tell you I am John Williams. A long illness, a hard bout of drinking, and this cursed imprisonment have made me what I am; and I will prove, it Captain— I will prove it if yon will only listen.'

"The sensation caused by this dialogue was immense. The Judge, the members of the Bar, and the spectators were equally astonised at the curious turn the affair had taken, and, though believing the man to be guilty of a desperate deceit to save his life, were eagerly awaiting what should come.

" 'Captain,' continued the prisoner,' I am accused of murdering a man here on June 25, more than nine months ago. Now, tell me, sir, was not John Williams, your coxswaln, invalided home from the West African on the last day of the month!'

" 'What the man says,' remarked Captain Forsyth to the Judge, 'is perfectly true. Her Majesty's ship the *Invincible* sailed with our invalided men for England on June 30.'

"The prisoner went on— 'Yes, and I arrived in England at the end of July, weak and ill, and getting my prize-money went and drank it all away; and that is how it was that I was found at Bristol, where I had gone for another ship, and ever since then I have been in this accursed gaol.'

" 'The fellow is plausible enough,' again remarked Captain Forsyth. 'He is certainly about the height of Williams. Well, my man, I suppose you can prove what you say?'

" 'Ay, ay, Captain! Do you remember, on the 10th of last June, giving orders for a night raid on the little town off which we lay looking out for slaves?'

"Yes, I do, to be sure.'

"And we were five boats in all; and the first to the beach was the captain's cutter, and first man to jump out was you, Captain?'

" 'Well, this is the most extraordinary thing I ever heard,' and, turning to the Judge, the Captain said, 'Every word of this poor fellow's story is true, my lord. He may have picked it up somewhere, but I can't help beginning to think there's something behind. My ship is still in foreign service, and I have only returned to take charge of another one.'

" 'Well, go on, my man.

" 'One more word, Captain, and may be you will believe me. As we were fighting in the town a great nigger came behind you with his axe, and would have cut you in half before you saw him had not a man rushed between you and stopped him with his cutlass; and yet not quite stopped him, for that infernal nigger's axe slipped down the cutlass and gashed the man's head open. Who was that man, Captain?'

" 'John Williams,' was the reply,' the coxswain of my cutter.'

" 'Ay, ay, Captain, and here is the cut which the axe made' and, bending down, he lifted with one hand the long, untidy hair, and with the other pointed to a huge and fearful scar running for several inches along the side of his head.

"Captain Forsyth leaped from his seat.

" 'Good heavens, you are right! But how you have changed! My lord, this poor fellow had not sailed from the African coast when the murder was committed. It is impossible that he could be guilty of it. Williams, you saved my life; I thank God that I have been able to save yours!'

"At these words every one in the Court stood up and cheered the prisoner with the wildest excitement and enthusiasm. The Judge said that in discharging him he muet at the same time compliment him on hie gallantry, and the foreman of the Jury then and there started a subscription for him which came up to something near £30. Captain Forsyth ordered a chaise to take him post-haste to London for the purpose of removing Williams from a place of such horrible associations and of getting him an appointment from the Admiralty. The people insisted on dragging the chaise out of the town with their own hands. The horses were then put to, and amid deafening cheers they drove off and were never heard of again.

"What was that?" someone asked as the Colonel paused.

"Because it was a hoax!"

"What!" we all exclaimed—"a hoax?" We had listened breathlessly to the tale, which the Colonel certainly told admirably, the perspiration standing on his forehead with with horrible reality he personated the desperate sailor.

"Yes," he said, "a hoax. It was a preconcerted arrangement. The captain was merely a clever accomplice, who played such parts for those of his associates in crime who came near receiving their reward. This was probably his biggest performance; but although it answered well enough then, in these days of telegraphic communication and multiplied navy lists it would be simply impossible."

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5: The Sculptor's Funeral

Willa Cather

1873-1947

Mercury (Hobart) 18 and 25 Feb 1905

McClure's Magazine Jan 1905

Pulitzer Prize winning American novelist and short story writer

A GROUP of the townspeople stood on the station siding of a little Kansas town, awaiting the coming of the night train, which was already twenty minutes overdue. The snow had fallen thick over everything; in the pale starlight the line of bluffs across the wide, white meadows south of the town made soft, smoke-coloured curves against the clear sky. The men on the siding stood first on one foot and then on the other, their hands thrust deep into their trousers pockets, their overcoats open their shoulders screwed up with the cold; and they glanced from time to time towards the south-east, where the railroad track wound along the river shore. They conversed in low tones and moved about restlessly, seeming uncertain as to what was expected of them. There was but one of the company who looked as though he know exactly why he was there, and he kept conspicuously apart, walk-ing to the far end of the platform, returning to the station door, there pacing up the track again, his chin sunk in the high collar of his overcoat, his burly shoulders drooping forward, his gait heavy and dogged. Presently he was approached by a tall, spare, grizzled man clad in a faded Grand Army suit, who shuffled out from the group and advanced with a certain deference, craning his neck forward until his back made the angle of a jack knife three-quarters open.

"I reckon she's a-going' to be pretty late again tonight, Jim," he remarked, in a squeaky falsetto. "s'pose it's the snow?"

"I don't know," responded the other man, with a shade of annoyance, speaking from out an astonishing cataract of red beard which grew fiercely and thickly-in all directions.

The spare man shifted the quill toothpick he was chewing to the other side of his month. "It ain't likely that anybody from the East will come with the corpse, I s'pose?" he went on, reflectively.

"I don't know," responded the other, more curtly than before.

"it's too bad he didn't belong to some lodge or other. I like an order funeral myself. They seem more appropriate for people of some repytation," the spare man continued, with an ingratiating concession in his shrill voice, as he carefully placed his tooth-pick in his vest pocket. He always carried the flag at the G.A.R. funerals in the town.

The heavy man turned on his heel without replying, and walked up the siding. The spare man shuffled back to the uneasy group. "Jack's ez full ez a tick, ez usher," who commented, commiserating.

Just then a distant whistle sounded, and there was a shuffling of feet on the platform. A number of lanky boys of all ages appeared as suddenly and slimily as eels wakened by the crack of thunder; some came from the waiting-room, where they had been warming themselves by the red stove, or half asleep on the slit trenches; others uncoiled themselves from baggage trucks or slid out of express waggons. Two clambered down from the driver's seat of a hearse that stood backed up against the siding. They straightened their stooping shoulders and lifted their heads, and a flash of momentary animation kindled their dull eyes at that cold, vibrant scream, the world-wide call for men. It stirred them like the note of a trumpet, just as it had often stirred in his boyhood the man who was coming home to-night.

The night express shot, rod as a rocket, out of the eastward marsh lands, and wound along the river shore under the long lines of shivering poplars that sentinelled the meadows, the escaping steam hanging in grey masses against the still, pale sky, and blotting out the Milky Way. In a moment the red glare from the head-light streamed up the snow-covered track before the siding and glittered on the wet, black rails. The burly man with the dishevelled red board walked swiftly up the platform toward the approaching train, uncovering his head as he went. The group of men behind him hesitated, glanced questioningly at one another, and awkwardly followed his example. The train stopped, and the crowd shuffled up to the express car just as the door was thrown open, the spare man in the G.A.R. suit thrusting his head forward with curiosity. The express messenger appeared in the doorway, accompanied by a young man in a long ulster and travelling cap.

"Are Mr. Merrick's friends here?" inquired the young man.

The group on the platform swayed and shuffled uneasily. Philip Phelps, the banker, responded with dignity: "We have come to take charge of the body. Mr. Merrick's father is very feeble and can't be about."

"Send the agent out here," growled the express messenger, "and tell the operator to lend a hand."

The coffin was got out of its rough box and down on the snowy platform. The towns-people drew back enough to make room for it, and then formed a close semi-circle about it, looking curiously at the palm-leaf which lay across the black cover. No one said anything. The baggage-man stood by his truck, waiting to get at the trunks. The engine panted heavily, and the fireman dodged in and out among the wheels with his yellow torch and long oil-can snapping the spindle-boxes. The young Bostonian, one of the dead sculptor's

pupils, who had come with the body, looked about him helplessly. He turned to the banker, the only one of that black, uneasy, stoop shouldered group who seemed enough of an individual to be addressed.

"None, of Mr. Merrick's brothers are here?" he asked, uncertainly.

The man with the red beard for the first time stepped up and joined the group. "No," they have not come yet; the family is scattered. The body will be taken directly to the house." He stooped, and took hold of one of the handles of the coffin.

"Take the long hill road up, Thompson; it will be easier on the horses," called the liveryman, as the undertaker, snapped the door of the hearse and prepared to mount to the driver's seat.

Laird, the red-headed lawyer, turned again to the stranger; "We didn't know whether there would be anyone with him or not," he explained. "It's a long walk, so you'd better go up in the back."

He pointed to a single battered conveyance, but the young man snarled stiffly: "Thank you, but I think I will go up with the hearse. If you don't object," turning to the undertaker, "I'll ride with you."

They clambered up over the wheels and drove off in the starlight up the long white hill toward the town. The lamps in the still village were shining from under the low, snow-bur-denied roofs; and beyond, on every side, the plains reached out into emptiness peaceful and wide as the soft sky itself, and wrapped in a tangible, white silence.

When the hearse backed up to a wooden sidewalk before a naked, weather-beaten frame- house, the same composite, ill-defined group that had stood upon the station siding was huddled about the gate. The front yard was an icy swamp, and a couple of warped planks, extending from the sidewalk of the door, made a sort of rickety footbridge. The gate hung on one hinge, and was opened wide with difficulty. Stevens, the young stranger, noticed that something black was tied to the knob of the front door.

The grating sound made by the casket, as it was drawn from the hearse, was answered by a scream from the house, the front door was wrenched open, and a tall, corpulent woman rushed out bareheaded into the snow and flung herself upon do coffin, shrieking : "My boy, my boy! And this is how you've come home to me!"

As Steavens turned away and closed his eyes with a shudder of unutter-able repulsion, another woman, also tall, but flat and angular, dressed entirely in black, darted out of the house and caught Mrs. Merrick by the shoulders, crying, sharply: "Come, come, mother; you mustn't go on like this!" Her tone changed to one of obsequious solemnity as she turned to the banker: "The parlour is ready, Mr. Phelps."

The bearers carried the coffin along the narrow boards, while the undertaker ran ahead with the coffin rests. They bore it into a large, unheated room that smelled of dampness and disuse and furniture polish, and set it down under a hanging lamp ornamented with jingling glass prisms, and before a "Rogers group" of John Alden and Priteilia, wreathed with smilax. Henry Steavens stared around him with the sickening conviction that there had been some horrible mistake, and that he had somehow arrived at the wrong destination. He looked painfully about over the clover-green Brussels, the fat plush upholstery; among the hand-painted china plaques and panels and vases, far some mark of identification, for something that might once have conceivably belonged to Harvey Merrick. It was not until he recognised his friend in the crayon portrait of a little boy in kilts and curls, hanging over the piano, that he felt willing to let any of these people approach the coffin.

"Take the lid off, Mr. Thompson; let me see my boy's face," wailed the older woman between her sobs. This time Steavens looked fearfully, almost beseechingly, into her face, red and swollen under its masses of strong, black shiny hair. He flushed, dropped his eyes, and then, almost incredulously, looked again. There was a kind of power about her face a kind of brutal handsomeness, even; but it was scarred and furrowed by violence, and so coloured and coarsened by fiercer passions that grief seemed never to have laid a gentle finger there. The long nose was distended and knobbed at the end, and there were deep lines on either side of it; her heavy, black brows almost met across her forehead, her teeth were large and square, and set far apart— teeth that could tear. She filled the room; the men were obliterated, seemed tossed about like twigs in an angry water, and even Steavens felt himself being drawn into the whirlpool.

The daughter the tall, raw-boned woman in crepe, with a mourning comb in her hair which curiously lengthened her long face, sat stiffly upon the sofa, her hands, conspicuous for their large knuckles, folded in her lap, her mouth and eyes drawn down, solemnly awaiting the opening of the coffin. Near the door stood a mulatto woman, evidently a servant in the house, with a timid bearing and an emaciated face pitifully sad and gentle. She was weeping silently, the corner of her calico apron lifted to her eyes, occasionally suppressing a long, quivering sob. Steavens walked over and stood beside her.

Feeble steps were heard on the stairs, and an old man, tall and frail, odorous of pipe smoke, with shaggy, unkempt grey hair, and a dingy beard, tobacco-stained about the mouth, entered uncertainly. He went slowly up to the coffin and stood rolling a blue cotton handkerchief between his hands, seeming so pained and embarrassed by his wife's orgy of grief that he had no consciousness of anything else.

"There, there, Annie, dear, don't take on," he quavered, timidly, putting out a shaking hand and awkwardly patting her elbow. She turned with a cry, and sank upon his shoulder with such violence that he tottered a little. He did not even glance toward the coffin, but continued to look at her with a dull, frightened, appealing expression, as a spaniel looks at the whip. His sunken cheeks slowly reddened and burned with miserable shame. When his wife rushed from the room, her daughter strode up to the coffin, bent over it for a moment, and then slipped away to the kitchen, leaving Steavens, the lawyer, and the father, to themselves. The old man stood trembling and looking down at his dead son's face. The sculptor's splendid head seemed even more noble in its rigid stillness than in life. The dark hair had crept down upon the wide forehead the face seemed strangely long, but in it there was not that beautiful and chaste repose which we expect to find in the faces of the dead. The brows were so drawn that there were two deep lines above the beaked nose, and the chin was thrust forward defiantly. It was as though the strain of life had been so sharp and bitter that death could not at once wholly relax the tension and smooth the countenance into perfect peace— as though he were still guarding something precious and holy which might even yet be wrested from him.

The old man's lips were working under his stained beard. He turned to the lawyer with timid difference. "Phelps and the rest are comin' back to set up with Harvey, ain't they?" he asked. "Thank 'ee, Jim, thank 'ee."

He brushed the hair back gently from his son's forehead. "He was a good boy, Jim; always a good boy. He was ez gentle ez a child and the kindest of 'em all— only we didn't none of us over understand him." The tears trickled down his board and dropped upon tbot sculptor's coat.

"Martin, Martin— Oh, Martin! come here," his wife wailed from the top of the stairs. The old man started timorously:

"Yes, Annie, I'm coming." He turned away, hesitated, stood for a, moment in miserable indecision, then reached back and patted the dead man's hair softly, and stumbled from the room.

"Poor old man, I didn't think he had any tears lett. Seems as if his eyes would have gone dry long ago. At his age nothing cuts very deep," remarked the lawyer.

Something in his tone made Steavens glance up. While the mother had been in the room the young man had scarcely seen anyone else, but now, from the moment he first glanced into Jim's florid face and bloodshot eyes, he know that he had found what he had been heartsick at not finding before the feeling, the understanding, that must exist in someone, even here.

The man was red as his beard, with features swollen and blurred by dissipation, and a hot, blazing blue eye. His face was strained— that of a man

who is controlling himself with difficulty— and he kept plucking at his beard with a sort of fierce resentment.

Steavens, sitting by the window, watched him turn down the glaring lamp, still its jangling pendants with an angry gesture, and then stand with his hands locked behind him, staring down into the master's face. He could not help wondering what link there could have been between the porcelain vessel and so sooty a lump of potter's clay.

From the kitchen an uproar was sounding; when the dining-room door opened, the import of it was clear. The mother was abusing the maid for having forgotten to make the dressing for the chicken salad which had been prepared for the watchers. Steavons had never heard anything in the least like it; it was injured, emotional, dramatic abuse, unique and masterly in its excruciating cruelty, as violent and unrestrained as had been her grief of twenty minutes before. With a shudder of disgust the lawyer went into the dining-room and closed the door into the kitchen.

"Poor Roxy's getting it now," he remarked when he came back. "The Merricks took her out of the poorhouse years ago; and if her loyalty would let her, I guess the poor old thing could tell tales that would curdle your blood. She's the mulatto woman who was standing in here a while ago, with her apron to her eyes. The old woman's a fury; there never was anybody like her for demonstrative piety and ingenious cruelty. She made Harvey's life a hell for him when he lived at home; he was so sick ashamed of it. I never could see how he kept himself so sweet."

"He was wonderful," said Steavens, slowly, wonderful; "but until to-night I have never known how wonderful."

"That is the true and eternal wonder of it, anyway; that it can come even from such a dungheap as this the lawyer cried, with a sweeping gesture which seemed to indicate much more than the four walls within which they stood

"I think I'll see whether I can get a little air. The room is so close I am beginning to feel rather faint," murmured Steavens, struggling with one of the windows. The sash was stuck, however, and would not yield, so he sat down dejectedly, and began pulling at his collar. The lawyer came over, loosened the sash with one blow of his red fist, and sent the window up a few inches. Steavens thanked him. but the nausea which had been gradually climbing into his throat for the last half-hour left him with but one desire— a desperate feeling that he must got away from this place with what was left of Harvey Merrick. Oh, he comprehended well enough now the gentle bitterness of the smile that he had been so often on his master's lips!

He remembered that once, when Merrick returned from a visit home, he brought with him a singularly feeling and suggestive bas-relief of a thin faded

old woman, sitting and sewing something pinned to her knee; while a full-rigged, full-blooded little urchin, his trousers sustained by a single gallows, stood beside her impatiently twitching her gown to call nor attention to a butterfly he had caught. Steavens, impressed by the tender and delicate modelling of the thin, tired face, had asked him if it were his mother. He remembered the dull flush that had burned up in the sculptor's face.

The lawyer was sitting in a rocking chair beside the coffin, his head thrown back and his eyes closed. Steavens looked at him earnestly, puzzled at the line of the chin, and wondering why a man should conceal a feature of such distinction under that disfiguring shock of red beard. Suddenly, as though he felt the young sculptor's keen glance, he opened his eyes,.

"Was he always a good deal of an oyster?" he asked abruptly. "He was terribly shy as a boy."

"Yes, he was an oyster, since you put it so," rejoined Steavens. "All though he could be very fond of peoI pie, he always gave one the impression of being detached. He disliked violent emotion; he was reflective, and rather distrustful of himself— except, of course, as regarded his work. He was sure-footed enough there. He distrusted men pretty thoroughly, and women even more, yet somehow without believing ill of them. He was determined, indeed, to believe the best, but he seemed afraid to investigate."

"A burnt dog dreads the fire," said the lawyer, grimly, and closed his eyes.

Steavens went on and on, reconstructing that whole miserable boyhood. All this raw, biting ugliness had been the portion of the man whose tastes were not fined beyond the limits of the reasonable— whose mind was an exhaustless gallery of beautiful impressions, so sensitive that the mere shadow of a poplar leaf flickering against a sunny wall would be etched and held there for over. Surely, if ever a man had the magic wand in his finger tips, it was Merrick. Whatever he touched, he revealed his holiest secret; liberated it from enchantment, and restored it to its pristine loveliness, like the Arabian prince who fought the enchantress, spell for spell. Upon whatever he had come in contact with, he had left a beautiful record of the experience-a sort of ethereal signature; a scent a sound, a colour that was his own.

Steavens understood now the real tragedy of his master's life; neither love nor wine, as may be conjectured, but a blow which had" fallen earlier and cut deeper than these could have done a shame not his, and yet so inescapably his, to hide in his heart from his very boyhood. And without, the frontier warfare; the yearning of a boy, cast ashore upon a desert of newness and ugliness and sordidness, for all that is chastened and old, and noble with traditions.

At eleven' o'clock the tall, flat woman in black crepe entered and announced that the watchers were arriving, and asked them to stop into the dining-room." As Steavens rose, the lawyer said dryly:

"You go on; it'll be a good experience for you, doubtless; as for me, I'm not equal to that crowd to-night I've had twenty years of them."

As Steavens closed the door after him, he glanced back at the lawyer, hitting by the coffin in the dim light, with his chin resting on his hand.

The same misty group that had stood before the door of the express car shuffled into the room. In the light of the kerosene lamp they separated, and became individuals. The minister, in pale, feeble looking man with white hair and blonde chin whiskers, took his seat beside a small table, and placed his Bible upon it. The Grand Army man took a seat behind the stove, and tilted his chair back comfortably against the wall, fishing his quill toothpick from his waistcoat pocket. The two bankers, Phelps and Elder, sat off in a corner behind the dinner-table, where they could finish their discussion of the new usury law and its effect on chattel security loans. The real estate agent, an old man with a smiling, hypocritical face, soon joined them. The coat and lumber dealer and the cattle shipper sat in opposite sides of the hard coal burner their feet on the nickel-work. Steavens took a book from his pocket, and began to read. The talk around him (ranged through various topics of local interest while the house was quieting down. When it was clear that the members of the family were in bed, the Grand Army man hitched his shoulders, and untangling his long legs, caught his heels on the rounds of his chair.

"Sp'ose there'll be a will, Phelps?" he queried in his weak falsetto.

The banker laughed disagreeably, and began trimming his nails with a pearl-handled pocket-knife.

"There'll scarcely be any need for one, will there?" he queried in his turn.

The restless Grand Army man shifted his position again, getting his knees still nearer his chin. "Why, the ole man says Harve's done right well lately," he charged.

The other banker spoke up. "I reckon he means by that Harve ain't asked him to mortgage any more farms lately so as he could go on, with his education."

"Seems like my mind don't reach back to a time when Harve wasn't bein' edycated," uttered the Grand Army man.

There was a general chuckle. The minister took out his handkerchief and blew his nose sonorously. Banker Phelps closed his knife with a snap. "It's too bad the old man's sons didn't turn out better," he remarked, with reflective authority. "They never hung together. He spent money enough on Harve to stock a dozen cattle farms, and he might as well have poured it into Sand

Creek. If Harve had stayed at home and helped nurse what little they had, and gone into stock on the old man's bottom farm they might all have been well fixed. But the old man had to trust everything to tenants, and was treated right and left."

"Harve never could have handled stock none," interposed His cattle man. ''He hadn't it in him to be sharp. Do you remember when he bought Sandofs mules for eight year-olds, when everybody in town knew that Sander's father-in-law give 'em to his wife for a wedding present eighteen years before, an' they was full-grown miles then?"

Everyone chuckled, and the Grand Army man rubbed his knees with a spasm of childish delight.

"Harvey never was much account for anything practical, and he shore was never fond of work, began the coal and lumber dealer. ''I mind the last time he was home ; the day he left when the old' man was out to the barn helping' his hand' hitch up to take Harve to the train, and Cal. Moods was patching' up the fence, Here, he comes out on the stop and sings out, in his lady-like voice: "Calf. Meal, Calf. Boots I please come cord my trunk I'"

"That's Harve for you," approved the Grand Army man gleefully. "I kin hear him howlin' yet, when he was a big feller in long pants, and his mother used to whale him with a rawhide in the barn for letting' the cows git foundered in the cornfield when he was driven 'em home from pasture. He killed a cow of mine that-a-way once; pure-bred Jersey and the best milker I had, an' the ole man had to put up for her. Harvey, he was watching the sun set acrost the marshes when the anamile got away; he argued that sunset was uncommon fine."

"Where the old man made his mistake was in sending the boy East to school," said Phelps, stroking his goatee and speaking in a deliberate, judicial tone. "There was where he got his head, full of trapesing to Paris and all such folly. What Harvey needed, of all people, was a course in some first-class Kansas City business college."

The letters were swimming before Steavens's eyes. Was it possible that those men did not understand that the palm on the coffin meant nothing to them? The very name of their town would have remained for ever buried in the postal guide, had it not been now and again mentioned in the world in connection with Harvey Merrick's. He remembered what his master had said to him on the day of his death, after the congestion of both lungs had shut off any probability of recovery, and the sculptor had asked his pupil to send his body home.

"It's not a pleasant place to be lying while the world is moving and doing and bettering," he had said, with a feeble smile; "but it rather seems as though we ought to go back to the place we came from in the end. The townspeople

will come in for a look at me, and, after they have had their say, I shan't have much to fear from the judgment of God. The wings of the Victory in there— "with a weak gesture toward his studio— "will not shelter me."

The cattleman took up the comment.

"Forty— young for a Merrick to cash in; they usually hang on pretty well. Probably he helped it along with whisky."

"His mother's people were not longlived, and Harvey never had a robust constitution," said the minister mildly. He would have liked to say more. He had been the boy's Sunday-school teacher, and had been fond of him but he felt that he was not in a position to speak. His own sons had turned out badly, and it was not a year since one of them had made his last trip home in the express car, shot in a gambling house in the Black Hills.

"Nevertheless, there is no disputing that Harve frequently looked upon the wine when it was red, also variegated, and it shore made an uncommon fool of him," moralised the cattleman.

Just then the door leading into the parlour rattled loudly, and everyone started involuntarily, looking relieved when only Jim Laird came out. His red face was convulsed with anger, and the Grand Army man ducked his head when he saw the spark in his blue, blood-shot eyes. They were all afraid of him. He was a drunkard, but he could twist the law to suit his clients' needs as no other man in all Western Kansas could do, and there were many who tried. The lawyer closed the door gently behind him, leaned back against it, and folded his arms, cocking his head a little to one side. When he assumed this attitude in the court-room, ears were always pricked up, as it usually foretold a flood of withering sarcasm.

"I've been with you, gentlemen, before," he began in a dry, even tone, "when you've sat by the coffins of boys born and raised in this town; and, if I remember rightly, you were never any too well satisfied when you checked them up. What's the matter, anyhow? Why is it that reputable young men are as scarce as millionaires in Sand City? It might almost seem to a stranger that there was some way something the matter with your progressive town. Why did Reuben Sayer, the brightest young lawyer you ever turned out, after he had come home from the university as straight as a die, take to drinking, and forge a cheque and shoot himself? Why did Bill Morris son die of the shakes in a saloon in Omaha? Why was Mr. Thomas's son, here, shot in a gambling house? Why did young Adams burn his mill to beat the insurance companies, and go to the pen?"

The lawyer paused and unfolded his arms, laying one clenched fist quietly on the table. "I'll tell you why; because you drummed nothing but money and knavery into their ears from the time they were knickerbockers, because you

carped away at them as you've been carping here to-night, holding our friends Phelps and Elder up to them for their models, as our grandfathers held up George Washington and John Adams. But the boys, worse luck, were young, and raw at the business you put them to; and how could they match coppers with such artists as Phelps and Elder? You wanted them to be successful rascals, they were only unsuccessful ones, that's all the difference. There was only one boy ever raised in this borderland between ruffianism and civilisation who didn't come to grief, and you hated Harvey Merrick more for winning out than you hated all the other boys who got under the wheels. Lord, Lord, how you did hate him! Phelps, here, is fond of saying that he could buy and sell us all out any time he's a mind to but he knew Harve wouldn't have given a tinker's damn for his bank and all his cattle farms put together; and a lack of appreciation, that way, goes hard with Phelps.

"Old Nimrod, here, thinks Harve drank too much, and this from such as Nimrod and me!

"Brother Elder says Harve was too free with the old man's money— fell short in final consideration, maybe. Well, we can all remember the very tone in which Brother Elder swore his own father was a liar, in the County Court, and we all know that the old woman came out of that partnership with his son as bare as a sheared lamb. But maybe I'm getting personal, and I'd better be driving ahead at what I want to say."

The lawyer paused a moment, squared his heavy shoulders, and went on: "Harvey Merrick and I went to school together, back East. We were in dead earnest, and we wanted you all to be proud of us some day. We meant to be great men. Even I, and I haven't lost my sense of humour, gentlemen, I meant to be a great man. I came back here to practice, and I found you didn't in the least want me to be a great man. You wanted me to be a shrewd lawyer— oh, yes! Our veteran here wanted me to get him an increase of pension, because he had dyspepsia; Phelps wanted a new county survey, that would put the widow Wilson's little bottom farm inside his south line; Elder wanted to lend money at 5 percent a month, and get it collected; old Stark here wanted to wheedle old women up in Vermont into investing their annuities in real estate mortgages that are not worth the paper they are written on. Oh, you needed me hard enough, and you'll go on needing me and that's why I'm not afraid to plug the truth home to you this once.

"Well, I came back here, and became the shyster you wanted me to be. You pretend to have some sort of respect for me said yet you'll stand up and throw mud at Harvey Merrick, whose soul you couldn't dirty and whose hands you couldn't tie. Oh, you're a discriminating lot of Christians! There have been times when the sight of Harvey's name in some eastern paper has made me

hang my head like a whipped dog and again, times when I liked to think of him off there in the world, away from all this hog-wallow; doing his great work, and climbing the big, clean up grades he'd set for himself.

"And we? Now that we've fought and lied and sweated and stolen and hated as only the disappointed strugglers in a bitter, dead little western town know how to do what have we got to show for it? Harvey Merrick wouldn't have given one sunset over your marshes for all you've got put together, and you know it. It's not for me to say why, in the inscrutable wisdom of God, a genius should ever have been called from this place of hatred and bitter waters; but I want this Boston man to know that the driver has been hearing here to-night is the only tribute any truly great man could over have from such a lot of sick, side-tracked, burnt-dog, and poor sharks as the here-present financiers of Sand City; upon which town may God have mercy!"

The lawyer thrust out his hand to Steavens as he passed him, caught up his overcoat in the hall, and had left the house before the Grand Army man had found time to lift his ducked head and crane his long neck about at his fellows.

Next day Jim Laird was drunk, and unable to attend the funeral services. Steavens called twice at his office, but was compelled to start East without seeing him. He had a presentiment that he would hear from him again, and left his address on the lawyer's table; but if Laird found it he never acknowledged it. The thing in him that Harvey Merrick had loved must have gone under ground with Harvey Merrick's coffin, for it never spoke again, and Jim got the cold he died of driving across the Colorado mountains to defend one of Phelps's sons, who had got into trouble out there by cutting Government timber.

6: A Coachful of Ghosts

The Story of a Noble House in the Reign of Terror

Eleanor C. Price

1847–1933

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"MONSIEUR le Vicomte de Maury." This announcement made one evening in January, 1792, at the outer drawing room door of the Château de Grou, had rather a singular effect on six well-bred people who were sitting there.

The old Marquise, enthroned in a high armchair beside the yawning chimney with its wood-fire, made an exclamation, and threw a half-fierce, half-laughing glance at her son the Marquis, who started up from the table where he was playing backgammon with his wife's cousin, the Chevalier de Mazan. The younger Marquise, a thin, precise-looking woman of five-and-forty, pinched her mouth up into its most forbidding expression, and raised her eyes with a frown from the tapestry-frame over which she and her daughter-in-law, the Comtesse de Grou, were bending and blinding themselves. The Comte, seeing his father's hasty movement, got up too from his chair in the background, and came forward one or two steps with a dignified slowness which was in itself a reproof to his perturbed relations.

There was no time to say or do anything. The visitor, welcome or not, walked forward into the room and met these six pairs of eyes, curious, angry, contemptuous, cold, astonished, haughty. Not one friendly look, not one sign of welcome. The visitor's cheeks, already ruddy from the cold air outside, took a deeper shade as he exchanged formal bows with the inmates of this inhospitable salon. His appearance at least did not deserve such a reception. A handsome, spirited-looking young man, a head and shoulders taller than the other gentlemen present, with one of those expressive faces that give unprejudiced people an instant feeling of liking and confidence. At the Château de Grou, however, M. de Maury was regarded as an enemy, for several reasons, and it was not without hesitation that the old Marquise brought herself to treat him as an equal, and politely motioned him to a chair.

"Sit down, monsieur, I beg of you," said she. "You are out late this evening, but perhaps it is the fashion. It is long since I lived in Paris, and I do not know what they do there now."

"Pardon me, madame, for appearing at such a strange hour," said M. de Maury. "But, as you may imagine, it is only an affair of the greatest importance that has brought me here at all."

"Indeed! And to what do we owe this unusual honour?" said the Marquise blandly,

"Madame, it is— it may be— a matter of life and death."

"Is it possible? Before we come to anything so serious, may one ask for the last news from Paris? I should not care to leave the world in a state of ignorance. What are your good friends the patriots doing now, monsieur?"

"There is no special news this week, madame. It is still disturbed, of course, but the people will calm down in time. If the Constitution we have made is allowed to work, we shall have peace and prosperity, in which all our past confusion will be forgotten."

"Then, monsieur, we shall all have to pray for bad memories," said the Chevalier.

"What is your saint, your hero, doing? M. de Lafayette— what do you call him— Motier?" said the Marquis, laughing. "By-the-bye, let me apologize for my ill-trained servants, who gave you your title at the door. The fact is, monsieur, I forget who you are. Citoyen—"

"Bernard Lavigne," said the young man, smiling a little. "One must be willing to sacrifice empty distinctions at the wish of the nation. But, monsieur— let me ask you— was anything great and sublime ever done without a touch of absurdity in the doing it?"

"Perhaps not; but one wants the sublimity to excuse the absurdity," said the Marquis. "And to speak candidly, I have seen absurdities enough, and horrors enough, in these last two years; but my very strongest spectacles have not availed to detect the sublimity."

"There is something sublime on the tapis now, however," said the old Marquise. "A matter of life and death. Will Monsieur de Maury break it to us before he enters on the subject of Monsieur de Lafayette?"

"Madame," began Bernard, with a little hesitation.

His eyes wandered once or twice round the room, as if to reassure themselves of something.

"Do not disturb yourself," said Madame de Grou. "All our hearts are strong enough to bear bad news. At least, I can promise that you will see no weakness."

The Vicomte bowed.

"A report has reached us, madame," he said, "that you are thinking of emigration. It has spread itself in the town and in the neighbouring villages. People say that you mean to drive away in state in your large coach with all your household, without any attempt at concealment. Mesdames et messieurs," he went on, rising from his chair, and looking earnestly round on all the dimly-lit faces, "believe what I say, and do not distrust me. In the present state of people's minds, you cannot attempt anything more dangerous. Your carriage will not be allowed to pass. Seeking liberty, you will find yourselves in prison. I warn you honestly, and as a friend."

There was a moment's pause after the young man had spoken.

"And as a friend, what would you advise us to do?" said the Marquis.

"Ah, cher monsieur, thank you a thousand times! Will you indeed trust me, and take my advice? Then let me implore you to stay here, and not to think of emigration. You are comparatively safe here. There are still some who respect you. And my father's influence will do a great deal for your protection. Ah, let me hear that you have given up all thoughts of this mad and dangerous scheme."

The Chevalier glanced at the Comte and laughed a little sneeringly, as he leaned over the backgammon board. Marquis smiled too.

"And this is your new French liberty!" he said. "A man cannot drive away from his house in his own carriage with out being stopped and imprisoned. Curious, truly!"

"One has not far to seek for an explanation in this case, my dear Marquis," said the Chevalier de Mazan, nodding his head with a side glance at M. de Maury. "In fact, you may take it as a general rule that, where the people rise unexpectedly, they are egged on to it by some person superior in birth to themselves— some person with a motive. But such persons are too apt to spoil their own game by a lurking wish to stand well with all parties."

Monsieur de Mazan was generally considered the genius, the wit, and the wise man of the family. Everybody hung upon his words, smiled, and looked to see how they were taken by the object of them.

"I am glad to think," said Bernard, "that Monsieur de Grou does not share in the vile suspicions of monsieur his cousin. He has known me too long—"

"And have I had any reason to increase my esteem with my knowledge?" said the Marquis, with a little bow.

The young man was about to answer, when an appearance at the door which separated the salon from another room beyond checked the words upon his lips.

A girl, dressed in white, very slim and graceful, with a small fair face and large frightened blue eyes, stood still in the tapestry-framed doorway, and gazed at him. His low bow seemed to bring her back to herself. She answered it with as weeping courtesy, and glided round with light steps on the polished floor, behind the two younger Mesdames de Grou and their frame, to a corner behind the old Marquise's chair.

"Have you brought me my fan, Léonore?" said the old woman.

"Here it is, madame," said the girl, in a low voice, putting it into her hand.

But while she spoke and moved she never took her eyes away from the Vicomte de Maury, who stood opposite to her with his face to the whole circle. Her entrance seemed to silence them all for a moment. The Chevalier still

smiled, with a snake-like contentment, keeping his black eyes fixed on Bernard; but the Marquis looked a little disturbed, and his face twitched angrily.

The young Comtesse de Grou, a weak, impatient-looking little person, glanced up at her husband, who was standing near her, with an expression which said, "Finish this scene, for pity's sake!" And the Comte, stepping forward with a Louis-Quatorze air, ventured to ask M. de Maury whether they might expect any further information.

"I have warned your family of their danger, monsieur," replied Bernard quietly, "and I still hope, not without avail, I must endure your suspicions, which I might have expected. I am happy to know that there is one person, at least, who will not share in them."

"Never, never!" came a quick half-whisper from behind the Marquise's chair.

Bernard bowed gratefully, "Allons, this is too much!" said the Chevalier, in a low tone, to M. de Grou. "Will you complete this business, or must!?"

But the old Marquise was doing it for them.

"Adieu, then, monsieur," she said, rising. "We beg ta offer you our thanks. If your warning is founded on fact, we probably shall never meet again. I would only ask you to use your influence and that of monsieur votre père to make our stay in prison as short as possible."

M. de Maury bowed low, and walked out of the room. The Marquis waved his son back, and followed him himself.

"Listen to me a moment, mon cher," he said, drawing him aside in the anteroom. "I believe myself that you are honest in your way. But you see you are in bad odour with De Mazan and the ladies. He is jealous of you, and they are all on his side."

"Pardon, monsieur— not *all*, or where would be his jealousy?"

"Ah! I did not count the demoiselle herself. But listen: I will give you a chance, on my own responsibility. Emi grate with us. Trust yourself to that same dangerous coach. When we are safe over the frontier, you can quarrel with De Mazan— shoot him, if you like— and then you have your chance."

"You are very good, monsieur, but my lot is cast in with France. As to that coach— if you would but believe the danger!— ah, let me at least save mademoiselle your niece!"

"It is impossible," said the Marquis, turning away. "I have given my word to De Mazan. I cannot break it if I would."

"What horror! what barbarity! To sacrifice such a life—"

"Let us say no more. Someone is coming. I thank you for your good intentions. Adieu, adieu!"

The Marquis de Grou tripped back into the salon, looking quite old and grave, and the Vicomte de Maury left the château.

MLLE. LÉONORE DE GROU D'ISAMBERT was an important person in her family. Her father had married— an unusual step for a younger son, and, what was more extraordinary still, had made a love-match with— the heiress of the Isamberts, thus possessing himself of a fine château and a large estate, and becoming quite independent of his own people. But he did not long enjoy his good fortune. He and his wife both died young, and their one child was taken charge of by her grandmother, the old Marquise de Grou.

Léonore was a quiet timid girl, and her submission to the stately, severe, domineering old lady was unusually complete and unquestioning, even for that country and that time. She was to marry M. de Mazan, a cold-hearted man of the world, more than twenty years older than herself. Clever, well-bred, aristocratic, an altogether delightful person, said the De Grou chorus whenever he was mentioned. Only the little Marquis sometimes held his peace; there were one or two points on which he differed with his wife's brilliant cousin. Nothing that signified, of course; only slight doubts whether it was really possible to be cruel, grasping, ungenerous, and yet hold the front rank among gentlemen.

No regular contract had yet been made between M. de Mazan and Mlle. d'Isambert, but everyone understood that the match was to be, and approved of it. Those fine estates could not be in better hands than the Chevalier's. His connection with the family was also an advantage. Léonore was already eighteen, and the marriage might have taken place before this had it not been for the great disturbances in France, which had a restraining effort on the Chevalier's eagerness.

Her château was near Paris, in the thick of the Revolution; and he thought it might be as well to wait for quieter times, and not to hamper himself just now with a young unwilling bride. Her family would take care that she did not escape him.

And this emigration scheme would take her away from the influence of young Bernard de Maury. His father, the Comte de Maury, the De Grou's nearest neighbour, had never been very friendly with them, having a way of considering his humanity before his nobility, quite against all their traditions. But till within the last year or two Bernard had been a frequent guest at the Château de Grou; the Marquis liked him, and an old childish friendship between him and Léonore had advanced into something not the less sweet because it was hopeless, and because in its language there were few spoken words.

Even now Bernard was not without his allies in the château, though perhaps they were not very powerful ones. There was an old woman, Pernette Flicquet by name, who had been nurse to Mlle. d'Isambert, Léonore's mother, and to Léonore herself. It was in her charge that Léonore had come from Isambert to Grou, after her mother's death.

Pernette's daughter Jeanneton had also come in the suite of the little demoiselle, and not long after had received permission from the Marquis to marry Luc Bienbon, a garde chasse of M. de Maury's. Pernette had at once established herself in antagonism to the old Marquise, who often threatened to turn her off, but always ended by granting a contemptuous forgiveness, knowing that the sharp, plain-spoken, republican old woman was almost indispensable to Léonore.

"Allez!" said Madame de Grou, "Pernette talks all the nonsense you can imagine, but she is good at heart. Who cares for her and her tongue? Let her stay."

If Pernette and her daughter could have poisoned M. de Mazan, and given their young lady to Bernard de Maury, they would have been troubled with few scruples. But the great Grou household was too much for them, and till now they had only grumbled.

The preparations for driving off in the family coach went on quite openly. The ladies superintended the packing of their wardrobes, and Pernette, with sour acquiescence, received the Marquise's order to get ready Mlle. d'Isambert's best gowns and jewellery.

"Hé!" said Pernette, "a fine present for the nation! Madame is determined it shall have everything. Now if I had my will, we should bury a few chests in the courtyard."

"For you to dig up when we are gone, my good Pernette?" said Madame de Grou.

"As madame pleases. But where mademoiselle goes, certainly I go," answered Pernette coolly.

"What! You mean to venture yourself in this dangerous coach? Seriously, have you heard any of these reports that we shall drive ourselves straight to the guillotine? Or is it all in Monsieur le Vicomte de Maury's imagination?"

At that moment Pernette's heart was softened towards the old lady, who seemed to appeal to her as a friend, looking at her with eyes full of human anxiety, but not a touch of fear.

"Madame la Marquise knows what those dogs of villagers are," said she.

"I have only heard from my daughter what her husband says— that it is a great danger. M. le Vicomte has more sense than most of these gentlemen. He knows what he is talking about."

"But we do not trust him," said the Marquise, shaking her head. "He and his father are false and dishonourable. Go, Pernette, do as I tell you, and send mademoiselle to me."

"Ah, these poor nobles!" said Pernette, as she trotted off to do her duty. "I have but half a heart for the patriots. But if we can save the sweetest of them all, the others must go their own way."

Certainly the household had no lack of warnings. During the next day or two, the dogs of the château howled almost unceasingly; the Grou ghost, a white flying figure, who used sometimes to sweep with a rustle of wings and garments over the head of anyone who found himself benighted outside the walls, was suddenly endued with a voice, and screamed and sobbed at night round the towers like an Irish Banshee: so the story goes.

Mlle. d'Isambert had a strange and rather terrible dream, which she told to Pernette, and also to her grandmother. They both laughed; but the dream left its impression, and had its consequence.

"Madame," said Léonore to the Marquise. "I dreamed that the large coach with the six brown horses was drawn up yonder, under our windows, on the green beyond the moat."

"And why not at the door?" said Madame de Grou.

"Indeed I do not know. It stood there, and you were all getting in. *I saw you, one by one, as I looked out of my window— you, my aunt, my uncle, my cousins, and Monsieur le Chevalier.*"

"And not yourself? That was droll enough."

"I was in my room— the door was locked and the window was barred, so that I could not get out. Ah, how terrified I was! I called to you, but you did not hear. I ran up and down the room; I shook the door; I tried to squeeze myself through the bars of the window. I thought I was left alone in the château— you had all forgotten me. The coach moved off round the grass— it was night, you know, and there were lanterns burning, and I saw frost sparkling on the ground. Then I tried again and pushed myself through the bars, and clambered down the wall through the ivy— I do not know how. Then I ran through the cold wet grass and overtook the coach just as it turned to go down the hill. I sprang to the door and held on with both hands, and cried out to you to take me in. Ah, now comes the frightful part of the dream! The people in the coach— they were not you— it was full of *ghosts— strange luminous forms, through which I saw their skeletons.* Heavens! what a terrible sight! I fell backwards into the grass; and then I awoke."

For once Léonore forgot her awe of her grandmother, crouched down by her side, and hid her face against her stiff satin gown. Madame de Grou looked down at her with a smile of mixed affection and contempt. "A wonderful

dream, truly!" said she. "But it has not been the custom of our family to dream terrors any more than to feel them. However, my dear Léonore, console yourself. Your safety is very important; and when we emigrate, you certainly will not be forgotten or left behind. Foolish girl, have a little more courage, and learn to laugh at your dreams. Stand up— there is someone coming."

"Shall you tell the others, madame?" asked Léonore, rising to her feet.

"I certainly shall not repeat such absurdities," answered Madame de Grou. "And if you must have your terrors, pray keep them to yourself."

The young Comtesse came tripping into the room, to ask some question of her grandmother; and Léonore, who was not fond of her cousin, withdrew into a window, and looked out across the wintry landscape. The château stood high perched on a hill, with woods behind, and a broad slope of parkland, crossed by avenues, dividing it from the little town of Grou, which crept and established itself up the sides of the valley. Behind the long blue ridge opposite was the village of Maury and its château, smaller and less important than Grou, but held for many centuries by a race without any stain upon their name, foremost always in the wars and councils of the province. But now they were traitors to their order; and if a lady of Grou let her eyes wander across the faint smoke and dark roofs in the valley to those heights beyond, which always caught the last western sun, it would have been an insult to suppose that her well-trained thoughts could stray as far as the Château de Maury.

IT HAD never been the custom of the lords of Grou to shut their gates against anybody; they were far too proud to be suspicious. Thus there were peasants going in and out of the courtyard at all hours, and thus Luc and Jeanneton were able to pay as many visits as they pleased to their good mother Pernette.

On one of those days of suspense, before any attempt was made to carry out the emigration plan, at about five in the evening, Léonore was sitting in the window of her own room. She had escaped from the salon half an hour before, and had been trying to strengthen and console herself by reading the Imitation, but now the fast-fading light obliged her to lay the book down. Her long white fingers were folded over its brown cover, and her face was turned towards the window.

The sky was very clear, but the landscape was already shrouded in twilight: nothing was plainly to be seen but the ridge of distant hills, which could only bring sad thoughts to her mind. In the pale, unconscious, immovable face there was a desolate resignation; at eighteen Léonore had nothing to hope for; her fate was fixed; even a wish was wrong and forbidden.

She would hardly have confessed what it was that she wanted; after all, her life was like the lives of all other French young ladies. And if it was not arranged quite to please her, why, was it not right to give up one's own will? was this world ever a happy place? Certain high precepts of the book she had been reading were in her mind as she sat, and made her ashamed of her discontent, but a little more despairing too; how could she ever reach such heights of willing self-denial?

"My pretty one will be perished, sitting here," said the voice of old Pernette. "And she will lose all her senses if she dreams too much over that book of madame's."

"It is a very beautiful good book, Pernette," said Léonore, slowly rousing herself, and turning her blue eyes from the window to her old nurse's anxious withered face.

"That may be," said Pernette. "I can't read, as mademoiselle knows, and I am quite contented. I never saw anything but sighs and frowns come from reading those books. Madame la Marquise is always in a demon of a temper after she has done her reading. Mademoiselle has the temper of an angel, on the contrary, but she will make herself sad and dismal, and that is all the worse for her poor servants. Now she is not in a good humour, and I came to beg her to do something for me."

"What is it, then, Pernette? My humours make no difference to you," said Léonore, smiling very sweetly.

"Mademoiselle, my daughter Jeanneton is in the garden at the foot of the turret-stairs. She has a special message which she will give to no one but our little princess herself. Will she be wrapped up in this great cloak, and go down to speak to poor Jeanneton?".

"Why could not she come here?" asked Léonore. But she got up, and Pernette hastily put the cloak round her shoulders.

"Dame, she was in a hurry. She had a reason of her own, ma petite."

Mademoiselle d'Isambert, accustomed to trust her old nurse implicitly, followed her out of the room and down a winding staircase, which opened by a little turret-door into a corner of the garden between the walls and the moat. A few evergreens made a shelter, and close by there was a bridge of planks laid over the moat for the convenience of the servants, who were thus able to take the shortest way to the village.

Jeanneton, in her high starched cap, jacket and short petticoats, was standing on the grass outside the turret-door.

"What have you to say to me, Jeanneton?" said Léonore's low sweet voice in the doorway,

"Would mademoiselle step outside? There was a person who— wished to speak to her," stammered the femme Bienbon— la Bienbonne, as her neighbours called her.

"Quick, petite!" whispered Pernette. "Yonder— in the shadow of those bushes! It is an affair of life and death!"

Though Léonore was timid, she was by no means a coward, and she stepped down from the doorway and glided across the grass, like a slender ghost in the twilight, till she reached the bushes that Pernette pointed out to her. A man was standing there, withdrawn in the shadow. He started forward and kissed her hand.

"Ah, monsieur, is it you?" exclaimed Léonore, under her breath.

"Do not be angry with your poor friend, mademoiselle. Léonore, you know me very well. You trust me, do you not?"

"You need not ask that."

She raised her pale face, looking at him wistfully. Her own strong feelings had suddenly driven out all thought of the proprieties, of her stern grandmother, of the Chevalier, of the stiff and horrified circle at the château. Her ruling thoughts now were of pride in her lover and joy in his presence. He was so different from all the other gentlemen she knew, with his frank manners and generous instincts To compare him with M. de Mazan, it was indeed "Hyperion to a satyr;" but Léonore's devout comparison was of the Archangel Michael to his great adversary.

One need hardly say that, for anything either of them knew, it might have been a warm summer evening when they stood there under the bush. But after a minute or two a little of the girl's anxious timidity came back to her.

"Is it safe for you to be here?" she whispered. "Why did you come?"

"Léonore, first, will you do as I ask you? Promise me that."

"Ah, if I could, mon ami; but I dare not! It is very wicked of me to be here now. But you know those women cheated me. And I am not really sorry, for I longed to thank you for coming that night to warn us, like a good true friend."

"Then they have not changed their plans? It is still to be *that terrible coach*?"

"O yes; and I think it will end in our all dying. I dreamt of it"— and she shivered— "I won't tell you my dream, though you would not laugh at it as my grandmother did. But are you angry, Bernard, that I cannot make you that promise? What did you want me to do? I will do it if I can."

"Let me take you away with me, now, into safety. You must consent. If you care for me in the least, you will."

"And leave the others to their fate?" she said, after a moment's pause.

"It is the fate they have chosen for themselves," he answered passionately. "Why should these people, in their obstinate running on death, be allowed to drag you with them? It is a horror— an unheard— of tyranny! If you can refuse me now, you never loved me! Come, my angel."

"How is it that you can save me, and not them?" said Léonore, holding back from him.

"Because you will be safe at Maury. My father will welcome you as his daughter. And the people have no rage against you— how could they have? But in such times the innocent go with the guilty. You will come with me?"

"Do not ask me— I cannot!"

"Ah, then, pardon my mistake! I had a foolish notion that you cared for me, mademoiselle," said Bernard, setting his teeth, and beginning to walk away.

"Bernard, stay! If my life would save yours, you would soon see— What am I saying? Be patient, and listen to me. I am very miserable; but one's duty must come first— you always used to think so. How could I leave my grandmother to go through this danger alone? I have belonged to her all my life— how could I steal away and desert her now like a coward? I always was stupid and cowardly; I know it very well. But this thing I will not do, it is too dishonourable. I am bound to my family, and I must stay with them. Ah, let us both try and bear it bravely. Go away and forget me: that is the best thing you can do."

"Then you will stay here and forget me?" said De Maury.

Léonore shook her head, while her tears ran fast.

"Well, my queen, my fairy, my crowned saint," he said, suddenly falling on one knee, "this I swear to you! If you will not save yourself, you shall be saved! You are not angry with me for that? But as to your anger, I see I must risk it."

"If you run yourself into danger for my sake, I shall indeed be angry. Ah, Jeanneton, what is it?"

"Mademoiselle, Madame le Marquise is coming up stairs!"

"Heavens! Adieu, Bernard! If she knew of this, she would kill me!"

M. de Maury watched the white flying figure cross the grass and dart in at the tower-door. Then he pulled his slouched hat over his face, and slowly and carefully left the precincts of the château. He almost forgot his disappointment, on his way down the hill, in the necessity of making fresh plans. And whatever future dangers and difficulties might be, it was inspiriting to find how thoroughly worthy she was— this gentle timid maiden of Grou— of a brave man's devotion.

THE NEXT afternoon a family council was held in the salon. Léonore, who had not been called to it, was sitting by the wood-fire in her grandmother's

large room, busy with some embroidery, when her cousin, the young Comtesse, came in and joined her. She walked up to the fire and stood there shivering

Léonore had never had much sympathy with this youngest of the Mesdames de Grou, whose ways were often those of a child without its attractiveness; but now, lifting her eyes to her face, she saw there something quite new. The Comtesse was flushed and agitated, and was looking down at her cousin with a tearful, trembling nervousness.

"What is it, ma cousine?" said Léonore. "Have you been in the salon? What have they decided?"

"Something dreadful!" said the Comtesse. "I declare to you, if I live through this night, it will be only to die of terror afterwards. Yes, I know I ought to be ashamed of myself. You may well look surprised; you thought you were the only coward in the house— at least, our grandmother always says so. But here is another to keep you company."

"What is it all about," said Léonore.

"We start tonight, child— imagine! Figure to yourself what a terrible scene it will be! *And the coach is not to come to the door, but to be drawn up on the green yonder*; and we shall drive away by the cart-road into the country, so as to avoid the town altogether. Madame Grandmother and Xavier de Mazan have arranged it all. What do you think of it? To me it seems a detestable plan; but what is my little voice! M. de Grou, of course, obeys his mother, and Madame de Grou has no opinion at all; and François never will disagree with Xavier; so there we are. But if you chose to speak to Xavier, it might make some difference."

"My dear, you are quite mistaken. I am nobody."

Léonore had laid her needle down, and was gazing at the red logs. The short afternoon would soon die away into twilight; then would come the evening, *and then life or death*! The Comtesse stood beside her cousin, a strange contrast to Léonore's dreamy grace, with her stiff little figure, high heels, and mountain of thickly-powdered hair.

"But why do you dislike this plan so much?" said Léonore, without looking up,

"O, because I hate the dark," said the Comtesse petulantly. "I am afraid of it, I tell you, and all the horrid flashing lights; I think it is much more dangerous than daylight. So cold too. I wish we could stay here. I don't believe anyone would hurt us. They would be a set of ungrateful monsters if they did. Tell me the truth now, Léonore: do you think we shall be allowed to pass?"

"I don't know— no, I think not."

"Then it will be the fault of those odious De Maurys." The little Comtesse quailed before the angry flash of her cousin's eyes, generally so soft and timid.

"You have no right to say a word against them! If they could save us, we should be safe, though certainly we have not deserved anything from them. De Maury— if nobility went by worth, theirs would be the noblest name in France."

The Comtesse shrugged her shoulders, threw up her hands and laughed.

"Well, Léonore, this is very fine, my dear child. You are quite enthusiastic. But if one may venture to advise you, don't let Xavier de Mazan hear anything like that."

"I do not care what he hears; it makes no difference to me," said Léonore. "If one must die, must give up all, it is at least a blessing to have known something good and noble on earth."

"Mon Dieu, my cousin," said the Countesse more seriously. "is it right for a demoiselle to talk in this way? I assure you one might almost imagine that you were in love with that young De Maury. But I will not be so unkind as to repeat what you say. Only pray take care, and control yourself a little."

"Why should I hide it, especially now?" said Léonore, looking up into her cousin's face with shining eyes, but without any change of colour or variation of voice. "If you have found it out for yourself, so be it. I love him with all my heart! And I would rather die tonight than escape safely out of the country and be married— ah!"

Her voice suddenly failed, and she hid her face in her hands, with something between a groan and a cry.

"Léonore, you freeze me with horror!" said her cousin. "Heavens! is it possible that I should have lived to hear such words from a relation— from a demoiselle de Grou? You feel shame, do you not? You well may. Unwomaniy, degraded! I cannot believe my ears! The girl must be mad!"

"No," said Léonore. "But I have told the truth, perhaps for the first time in my life, and I am glad of it."

"And I am sorry," said the Comtesse, with dignity. "to find you so unworthy of your name. I will try to forget what you have said, unfortunate girl. A year hence, if we live, you will be thankful to me for not reminding you of it."

A rustle, and a few measured taps upon the boards, told Léonore that her cousin was leaving the room. She sat still, with her face hidden, cold and stiff with a misery too great for tears. After some time she heard a distant bustle in the château, and sounds of her grandmother returning. In her present state of mind, feeling unable to meet her, she left her frame there by the fire, and went through her own room and up some steps into a little room in the turret,

where there was no furniture but a table, a *prie-dieu* chair and a crucifix on the wall.

Here, in summer, Léonore was accustomed to spend a good deal of her time; no heat could penetrate those old white walls, and only at a certain time in the morning did the sun force his way through the ivy veil of the single loophole window, and throw a tender garland of leafy shadows round the crucifix. But now the little room was very cold, and already in twilight. Léonore knelt down, hoping presently to feel stronger and calmer. Then she would go to her grandmother, and once more entreat her to take Bernard's advice, and give up this wild scheme. Perhaps she might listen; if not, by tomorrow at this time where might they not be?

LÉONORE knelt on, her forehead bowed upon the chair, her clasped hands stretched out and drooping forward. The sun was gone down, the hills of Maury had lost their last rosy tints, and the stars were beginning to come out; but it was quite dark in the little oratory, and her prayers had passed insensibly into dreams. At first they were peaceful and pleasant ones, but after a time they changed, and her terrible dream of a few nights before came back to her with more than its first horror: *the coach drawn up in that strange place*— an idea which Madame de Grou had, indeed, boldly utilized— her own agony and terror at being left behind; her escape down the wall; *her overtaking the coach and seeing the ghosts, who now seemed to stretch out their long rattling hands to seize her and drag her in among them*— it was all too terrible, and Léonore awoke screaming, and found herself cold, weary, faint, and trembling on her knees in the turret-room.

She had no means of knowing the time, but felt sure that she had slept there for hours, it was so very dark and cold. Getting up with difficulty, she moved to the door and tried to open it, but could not succeed; it seemed to be fastened on the outside. Then she knocked, and called "Pernette" in a voice that seemed to refuse to be heard, feeling all the time as if she was dreaming on still; and then, as there was no answer, she sat down where she had been kneeling before, and leaning her chin on her hands, gazed up at the narrow window. Through its thick greenish glass she could just discern one star, large and bright, looking in upon her in her loneliness, and suddenly bringing to her mind what Bernard had said the evening before, If you will not save yourself, you shall be saved.

She had not thought much about that; it seemed so impossible: she must submit to the same fate as her relations, and no one could save her from it. Still the words roused an instinct of life in her weary mind; she no longer thought she was dreaming, and began to wonder what they were all doing,

how she was to get out, whether they had all gone away hours ago, and left her behind. No, that could not be.

Then she noticed some strange shadows and flashes of light which were falling now and then on the arched stone sides of that window, and glimmering on the glass. Sounds began to reach her ears— a rattle of harness, a creaking of wheels, a buzz of many voices. Léonore sprang to her feet, full of a new waking terror of being left behind. Could her grandmother have forgotten her, after all, and Pernette too? Might the door have been locked by mistake, and would she be left here to starve?— for there was no scrambling out of that window, as in her dream! That would be more dreadful than the guillotine. Again she knocked on the door, called, listened, but could hear nothing, and felt sure that the door at the foot of the stairs must be fastened as well as this. The reality was more dreadful than any dream. Locked up and forgotten! The peasants would perhaps burn the château, and there would be no escape for her, unless by any chance Bernard knew that she was still there, and came to look for her. Ah, it was too terrible!

She stood shivering in the dark, and did not know what to think or what to do. After watching the lights and shadows on the window as they flashed and fell, an idea occurred to her: she might at least see what they meant. She dragged and pushed the heavy table underneath the window, lifted the chair upon it, and so managed to climb up on the deep sloping windowsill. Clasping the bar with one hand, she opened the window with the other, and plunged it among the frosted ivy-leaves, tearing them from their stalks and scattering them. Then, bending her head forward, she could see the green beyond the moat, and on it a dark mass under a sky of stars, with torches flickering and men crowding about it. Is was the Marquis's great coach! The harness chains rattled, as the horses stamped and tossed their heads, but feet of horses and men were silent on the grass, and Léonore, looking down at them, shivered with cold, for the scene was like a wild unearthly dream. The people seemed to be in great haste, running backwards and forwards between the coach and the side-door of the château. Presently the servants stood aside, two advancing with flaring torches in their hands, and six people, two-and-two, came stepping carefully across the grass to the coach-door.

Léonore could not see their faces, but she knew each one well. First, the old Marquise and her son; then the younger Marquise and her son the Comte; then the Comtesse and the Chevalier de Mazan.

Léonore leaned forward as far as she could, and waved her hand into the frosty darkness, crying out in a voice that trembled and failed,

"Madame, are you going away without me? I am locked up here: you are leaving me behind!"

Perhaps the voice was hardly strong enough to reach her grandmother's ear; yet the old Marquise stopped suddenly and turned back from the coach-door as she was about to get in. There was a pause, a little hurried talk among the group of Léonore's relations. But their momentary hesitation was soon over; to the girl's amazement they got into the coach one after another, the servants drew back, the postilions cracked their whips, and with many a groan and rumble the great vehicle moved off round the grass in the direction of a rough cart-road into the country, by which they hoped to escape any pursuit.

It was Léonore's dream, *repeated for the third time*, only she was a prisoner, and reality, fortunately for her, would not let her even try to overtake them. She still clung to her window till the last sound of the coach was lost in the distance, and even afterwards; for, tiring as her cramped posture was, it at least gave her a sight of the stars, and of the dim world on which they were shining. She clung there till another sound rose slowly on her ears— the angry roar of a crowd coming up from the village. They came nearer and nearer, crowding up the hill, till she could see the flare of the torches they carried, and hear their voices, which seemed to die away into a low resolute growl as they approached the château. But a few words were carried to her by a light cold wind which swept over their heads, and then rustled the leaves beside her window:

"*Fire, fire! Burn the wild beasts in their den*!"

Léonore felt her brain reeling, and her senses failing suddenly. She let herself slip from the windowsill to the table, and then to the floor, where she fell down heavily and lay still.

MADEMOISELLE d'Isambert woke from her fainting fit to find herself outside the château, on the edge of the moat, in the dark shadow of those same trees and bushes under which she had met her lover the evening before. He was beside her now, supporting her head on his arm, and her hair and face were wet with the cold water that he had been splashing over her. Cold it was indeed, for the moat was partly frozen, but perhaps it answered his purpose all the better.

"Léonore," he whispered. "keep yourself perfectly still. We are in great danger, but I shall save you. Can you stand up? I am afraid to let you lie on this grass."

With the instinct of obedience that seldom failed her, she rose at once, and stood leaning on his arm. But the things she had seen were not to be forgotten, even in the peace and safety of his presence.

"*They all went away in the coach*," she whispered, "*and left me behind*. Did my grandmother forget me? O, what could it mean?"

"Patience! You will know all someday; and your grandmother will be glad too," said Bernard, his voice trembling a little as if he was deeply moved.

"Are they safe, do you think? I wonder why she went without me. I wish I knew. What are all those people doing out there? They have not burnt the château yet?"

"No. When they are gone, I will take you away to a safe place."

Bernard stood quite still, holding her fast, and listening intently to all the strange noises that broke upon the beautiful night, the hoarse voices, the tramping feet, the wild laughter and cries of triumph, inside and outside of the whole building. Lights were flashing in the windows, and many of the mob were busy destroying and pulling to pieces the stately rooms; but many, too, were waiting outside for something, and presently a horrid yell announced that it was coming. The Vicomte de Maury knew very well what it was, and drew his rescued treasure a little closer. To her it was still like a dream; only now, under all the terror, there was a vague sense of happiness.

Slowly rumbling along the uneven road, heavy wheels were approaching the château. The horses' feet could not be distinguished from the tramp of many men that accompanied them. It was with a certain frightful solemnity, worthy of the Great Revolution, that *the Marquis de Grou's coach was escorted back to his own door*. From their hiding place Bernard and Léonore saw it come slowly up, saw the crowd part to receive it, saw it stop where it had stopped before, and, by the lights that were glaring and flickering all about, saw the door opened, and *those six people made to descend*. Not that any force was necessary, for each one of them, even the little Comtesse de Grou, stepped out with as calm and proud a grace as if he or she were arriving at Versailles, instead of drawing nearer to the guillotine. Only the old Marquise, as her son gravely offered her his hand to walk into the house, waved him back and turned towards the mob with an air of fearless command.

"Where is that old traitress, Pernette Flicquet? Can any of you tell me? What has she done with my granddaughter, Mlle. d'Isambert?"

She waited a moment, but met with no answer, and the Marquis, taking her hand, led her once more across their old threshold.

"Ah, let me go to her! I must, I must!" exclaimed Léonore.

"No, Léonore, you shall not," said Bernard de Maury.

She was half fainting again, and the strong young man lifted her in his arms like a child, and carried her across the moat by the plank-bridge, down the hill and across the valley to his father's house, while all the good patriots of the neighbourhood wore occupied in sacking the Château de Grou, before escorting its owners away TO PRISON AND THE GUILLOTINE!

The one that was saved of that doomed family found herself e prisoner too, but her jailers were the Vicomte de Maury, old Pernette, and Jeanneton. It was not till many days after that terrible night that she was calm and well enough to listen to the history of how it all happened.

Of course she had been locked in the oratory by friendly hands. The departure of the coach had been hurried on by a rumour which came up that evening from the village, that the people of Grou, led on by a patriot from the nearest large town, would be at the château in an hour's time. The coach was ordered round at once, the last arrangements were hurried through, and only just before starting did the Marquise discover that her granddaughter was missing. The turret door was locked, and the key had disappeared. Pernette too was nowhere to be found.

The Marquise declared at first that nothing would induce her to start without Léonore; but all the rest of her family were of a different opinion, and even the Chevalier could not see any reason for sacrificing six valuable lives.

Then the little Comtesse had stepped forward, and had said in the hearing of them all: "I do not think you need disturb yourself, madame. Léonore has probably escaped to Maury. It was only this evening that she confessed to me her love for M. le Vicomte." After this the Marquise seemed half stunned, and made no further resistance to going with the rest.

When the coach had driven off, Pernette came out of the cupboard hidden with tapestry, where she had sat and listened, admitted M. de Maury at the turret-door, and guided him to the room where they found Léonore insensible: *Thus she was saved in spite of herself*.

THE GRANDCHILDREN of Madame la Comtesse de Maury, née de Grou d'Isambert, tell this story to their friends as they show them the old château, still grand, though defaced and half ruined by its experiences of revolution. And then, as we stand looking out on the green parterre beyond the moat, which is now drained and planted as a garden, a fair young Léonore de Maury, with the large frightened blue eyes of her grandmother, looks at us and says, in suddenly lowered tones, "*And— will you believe me?— to this day, on frosty mornings in January, one sees the traces of a coach and six upon the grass out there*."

It seems impossible to doubt her word, but English love of evidence makes us ask the young lady if she has seen these spectral impressions herself. Up go her pretty hands, shoulders, and eyebrows, in despair at our incredulity.

"Mais oui! certainement!" And after that, what is one to say?

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7: Cutting a Long Story Short

Harold Mercer

1882-1952

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"WELL, to cut a long story short," said Snigsby, "they both got married."

"Who got married?" I asked, for the mixed reminiscences of the doings of many people left me in doubt as to the hero and heroine of his narrative.

Snigsby had been the keeper of lodgings for years, though his wife did most of the keeping; and, having very little except time to spend, but plenty of that, he was very discursive in detail. Likewise, he was a man who hated to be brought too suddenly to a point, so he began the whole narrative over again.

"There was this young feller I was talking about with the queer notions, ad the girl that was supposed to be married to him I was telling you of, and the actor-chap I mentioned. You heard me telling you of them, didn't you? Well, they got married."

"Have it your own way," I said: "but I thought you were telling me mainly about the young woman who used to wait at the top of the stairs for the young fellow while her husband was sleeping off the drink. Was it they who got married?"

Snigsby looked at me in a resigned sort of way."

"This young feller," he said— "this young feller he comes to the house and says to me one day, 'Have you got a room?' 'Well, what d yer think we have got?' I says. 'We dont sell oysters.' 'That's the sort of answer I like to get,' he says with a laugh, 'Let's see your best— a double.' Well, he takes the best double, and after him shakin' hands that way I made sure I got the money in advance. I'm suspicious of them, sort of thing.

"The girl arrives with him half an hour later, and a fine pair they was. She does what cooking they do on the balcony, and keep mostly to themselves an' there's nothing to complain about; but the missus says to me one night— you know what women are!— 'Them people ain't married,' she says; and she keeps worrying me about it, as if it mattered to me as long as they were respectable.

"They weren't neither, an' he didn't make no bones about it. He didn't believe in marriage, he didn't, and he said so. Like a lot of young fellers he was proud of gettin' up against other people's ideas. A bit raw he was, like a lot of youngsters who kid themselves a lot of things before they've been grilled on the fire of life, which sometimes overdoes 'em.

"Well, because I like the two of them, and partly because of what the wife says about their not being married, I takes a friendly interest in them. The wife likes them,. too, an' when, after she's been worryin' me, I says, 'All right, I'll tell 'em we want the room,' she says, 'No; but I wish to speak to the priest about

them. So they went on living in sin at our house, and enjoym it. And, to cut a ong story short, I think they got as much outer it as if they d been married.

"But, though that was all right for a few weeks, it didn't last long. After a time I got wise that the girl wasn't as happy as she seemed to be. It wasn't that I listened at the door," he explained with a defiant look, "but I heard a. good deal of what they had to say. Picked it up, as you might say.

"Everything would be going merry and bright, an' you'd think they was Adam and Eve living in Eden with only one chair worth sitting on in it, when she'd say, strokin' his hair most like, 'Don't you think it'd be better if we got married?' and he'd just laugh an' say, 'I couldn't love you any more if we did!' But once started she'd keep on. 'Supposing there was a baby,' she'd say, an' he'd laugh and say it'd make no difference; fifty marriages couldn't make it more their baby. In the morning, when she went about the house after he'd gone there was a troubled sort of look at the back of her eyes.

"After a time the way she kept coming back to the same old point got to irritating him, as you know that sort of thing does, Instead of answering in a lover-like way he'd get impatient and say: 'lf I did a thing that I don't believe in, it'd be the end of love between, us'; or, 'Again! I tell you I don't believe in marriage!' Later on she'd flare back sometimes, and say he was conceited with his ideas, and he'd learn sense when he was older. Generally they'd make it up; but once he left the room so quick that he nearly fell over me. I was only fixing up the oilcloth.

"A couple of days later he got in a temper and went out of the house for ever; but he was back in half an hour with some stout and oysters to dry her tears. By this time things weren't working at all smooth. In general they was just as much in love with one another as ever; but, to cut it short, her nag about marriage was wearing on him, and the things a man says when he's angry were hurting her. I'm not blaming her. mind you; a woman naturally feels that her position's insecure when she ain't married, and she just goes on making it insecure or hopeless because of her anxiety.

"There was this actor-chap staying in the house, and he took an interest in the pair. He was a lonely sort of chap, who, though he was grey at the sides of his hair, was still youngish. He used to bring home supper, and have it with ns in the kitchen sometimes, and then he'd say, 'That poor little lady upstairs! She'll lose that husband of hers if she's not careful. He's young and restless.' Or something like that.

"One night, when he's a bit potty, the actor-chap stays with me after the wife's gone to bed, and gets some more beer.

" 'My wife—' he begins suddenly, and stops. Then he gets up in a restless sort of way as if he's going off to bed; then he comes back, sits on the table and helps himself to another glass.

" 'Didn't know you were married,' I says.

" 'Neither I was,' he said, the beer making him confidential. 'But the little girl who should have been my wife'

"He stopped, and when I said, as a sort of lead for him to go on, 'Your wife?' he just says:

" 'She's married. Good night. I'll take one of those bottles upstairs with me.' And upstairs he goes.

"That puts me wonderin'. The actor-chap is on the burst nearly all next day, and he scares the girl when, meeting her on the stairs, he squeezes her hand, and keeps holding it while he tells her that if ever he can do anything for her he'll do it. That night I bought some beer, an' after the wife had gone to bed I told him that another glass might pull him together,

" 'Last night I told you— something,' he says. 'That little lady upstairs reminds me of my own little girl. We never thought of getting married— at least I never thought of it; it didn't seem to matter, anyway, as long as we cared about one another. There always seemed to me something sordid about the marriage business, just as—' He stopped there, because, of course, even if we knew otherwise, the people upstairs were supposed to be married.

" 'I went on a tour,' he says, 'and had to leave her, because she wasn't engaged by the show, and me own salary wasn't too good; and one of the first letters I get contains news, and she says I must marry her and do it right off. Well, I was willing if it would make her more comfortable, so I wrote saying I'd marry her when we got back. The tour was supposed to be tour weeks, but it lasted six, and then we went to Melbourne. I wrote saying she had no need to come down, as I was finishing after the first piece; but again I was kept on, in an indefinite sort of way.'

" 'Damn it!' he says, and drinks a full glass off and walks away restlessly, and comes back and fills another glass.

" 'It was my fault. Moving from town to town, I forgot to write often, and all that. When I got to Sydney I found my little girl married.

"'I knew about it before. She wrote me saying that she had been waiting and waiting, and was quite satisfied that, being away, I had forgotten her. She had written to me in Auckland, asking me-finally if I was the same (the letter followed me all over the place, and reached me later) and then she had married— for the sake of the child.

" 'She told me when I met her— I had felt like killing her, but I got over that— that she would always love me, but she asked me if I loved her to make

things easier for her, and let her alone. And it's my child! That's where— Good-night!' he says suddenly.

"Next day, fancying he may have offended her, he apologises to the girl upstairs, and after that they get quite friendly; and once or twice they have walks together. Her young feller he gets flashes of rage when he hears of it. Well, to cut it short, there's the situation, those two quarrelling every night, and the actor-chap getting as friendly as can be.

"One night there's a worse row than ever. The young chap goes out furious, but comes back after a time and finds the girl talking to the actor-chap at the top of the stairs.

" 'Hullo!' he says to the actor-chap in a fighting sort of way.

" 'I had just come in,' said the actor-chap quietly, 'and Mrs. Brian had asked me if I'd seen you.'

"Well, he couldn't say anything after that; but afterwards the two were wrangling for an hour, and I heard him say that he'd come back then, but it was the last time he'd stand any nonsense on the marriage business.

"Next day the girl looks pretty doleful; and the actor-chap, meeting her, gets her, after a lot of-persuadin', to go to a matinée to cheer her up. The young feller is in by the time they reach home, and for a moment I thought there was going to be a row. But the actor-chap carries it off well, and there was nothin' doin' till the two were in their room.

" 'Well, why don't you marry me?' says the girl.

"He was in a flame in a minute, and shot out of the house. And he didn't come back, neither.

"So, to finish up," said Snigsby, "they got married."

"What!" I said. "The girl and the actor? And what became—"

"I'm telling you," said Snigsby, ponderously. "The next afternoon young Brian passes the girl standing in the street near a marriage-shop close to where he works. He was going to pass without noticing her, but he turned back.

" 'What are you doing, here?' he demanded, harshly.

" 'I'm going to be married,' she said, with a sort of defiance.

" 'What?'

" 'What right have you to object? You won't marry me yourself!'

He seemed staggered and went pale.

"Come on," he said suddenly, taking her by the hand and moving towards the marriage-shop.

" 'What do you mean?' she says.

" 'Will you? With me?' he says.

"When it was over they came out, but Brian didn't seem too happy.

" 'I didn't think you thought anything of that actor-fellow,' he said glumly.

" 'Neither I do,' she said.

"He seemed more pleased, but not entirely glad.

" 'But you came here to marry him,' he said.

" 'I didn't,' she answered. 'I came here because I thought I was bound to meet you. I came to marry you. Oh, Jack!' You know how a woman can say that!

"Well, he kissed her there, in the street. When they came home that night he had some champagne and cakes with him, and he brought some down for us to share with them— said they were keeping up a sort of birthday.

"When the actor-chap came home after the show I told him. He didn't waste time: he goes out and gets some beer just as the pubs were closing, and keeps me up, laughing and singing, till morning. I never see a man so happy in my life."

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8: Winter Evening, *or,* Ghost Stories

Anonymous

Robert Merry's Museum, Jan 1843

Over vale and over hill
Winter's bitter breath is sweeping—
In the wood the owlet shrill,
Cries like suffering mortal weeping.

Now the farmer's door is tight—
Now the crackling hickory burns;
And to cheer the stormy night,
Old cronies tell their tales by turns.

ONE COLD WINTER EVENING, three boys happened to be together, named James, Ezra, and Stephen. They sat by the blazing hearth— for I am telling of what happened in the old-fashioned days, of broad flues and hickory fuel— without candles, for the light of the burning logs was sufficient to give the room a cheerful aspect. Out of doors the air was keen and bitter, and though the Moon shone brightly, the light snow wreaths were driving on the wind, and occasionally came in spouts against the windows, rattling like hail upon the panes.

The boys, naturally enough, talked of the weather for a time, and then of the news, and by-and-by of other topics. At last it was proposed that one of them should tell a story. The scene can be best described in the way of dialogue.

James. Come, Ezra, you tell us a story.
Ezra. Well, you tell one first.
J. O, I'm not good at telling a story.
E. Won't you tell one, Stephen?
Stephen. I'll tell one after you.
E. What shall I tell about?
S. O, anything—tell a ghost story.
E. Well, I will tell a ghost story.

There was once a house near New London, in Connecticut, situated on a lonely road, about a mile from any other dwelling. The man who built it was a farmer; and here he lived, with his wife and two children, for three years, when at last they began to hear a bell faintly ringing at night, apparently in the walls of the house.

Not much was thought of it at first, but it was so frequently repeated, that it began to attract the attention of the family. They then listened, and every

night, about nine o'clock, it began to ring. The people were very superstitious, and soon they were dreadfully frightened. When they went to the spot where the mysterious sound seemed to come from, it appeared to issue from another place. Sometimes it was quick and lively, and again it was slow, and apparently at a distance. At one time it seemed to be in the parlor, and then it was in one corner of the kitchen.

The family became more and more alarmed; when the night set in, they gathered close together, and as soon as the ringing began, their faces grew pale, and they either sat in fearful silence, or whispered to each other, "there it is! there it is!"

Thus matters went on for several months, until at last the farmer and his family became so miserable that they sold the place, and removed to another town. He had not said much about the cause of his removal, for he feared people would laugh at him; and besides, he apprehended that the story might injure the character of the house, and thus prevent his selling it at a fair price.

But, by some means or other, after he had gone, the story got about, and for nearly two years the house was unoccupied. During this period it acquired the name of the "haunted house," which, together with its lonely situation, rendered it difficult for the person who had bought it, to find any one willing to hire it. But at last a person who did not believe in haunted houses, leased the place, and with his family went there to reside.

For about a month they heard nothing of the awful visiter, and feeling quite secure against his return, they were accustomed to make sport of the fears of their predecessors. While they were actually cracking their jokes upon the subject one winter night, about the hour of nine, there was a sudden tinkling of a bell, distinctly heard, as if in one of the rooms above.

There was a sudden start among all present. "Hark! hark!" was whispered by several voices. They listened intently; all was silent as death, when again the bell was heard, apparently more distant, but still as distinct as before! The cheeks of the wife and children grew pale, and the face of the man himself was touched with a kind of awe.

"It is certainly a bell," said he, "and no ghost."

"But who rings it?" replied his wife, drawing her chair close to his, and shivering from fear; "who rings it?"

"I cannot tell, my dear," said he, "but we will try to find out." Accordingly he took a candle, and followed the sound from one room to another. He heard it distinctly, though faintly, sometimes near, and sometimes far; but he could by no means detect the cause. At last the sound ceased, and the distracted family went to rest.

The next night the same scene occurred. At the hour of nine, the frightful notes issued again, as if from the very walls of the room, and exciting the fears of all, still baffled every attempt to discover the cause. Unlike the former proprietor, who believed that some ghost or spirit caused the bell to ring, the present occupant rejected such a notion as absurd; and though a cold, creeping sensation would sometimes chill his blood, still he took every opportunity to endeavor to detect the truth.

While he was one evening sitting by the fire, the tinkling sound was heard more distinctly than usual, and instead of issuing from the wall, undefined and spirit-like, it seemed now to come distinctly from a cupboard in one corner of the room. The man arose, went to the cupboard, and opened the door. Instantly a small hand-bell fell from a crevice in the wall, over the cupboard, upon the floor. It had a small string tied to it, and it was now discovered, that by this string the rats were accustomed to pull about the bell in their gambols, thus giving it a tinkling sound, which seemed to issue from the walls, giving it the awful and mysterious character, which had occasioned so much terror and distress.

E. Well, that's a good story; and it puts me in mind of one which I heard Captain Lewis Smith tell. It happened when he was somewhere in the Jerseys fighting the revolution, as he calls it. It seems there was a sergeant Kitely, who, when he returned to the camp one night, declared that he had seen a spirit. He was evidently frightened, for his teeth chattered as if he was half dead with cold, and for a long time he could not muster sufficient courage to tell the story. At last he was prevailed upon to relate it, which he did as follows:

"It was a raw, blustering night," said he, "when I had occasion to walk down a lane, to the house of an old woman by the name of Warlock, who washes for the regiment. It was dark, and I had some difficulty in finding the place. At last I found it, and knocked at the door. But there was no answer returned. I lifted the latch, but I could see nobody in the house. The fire was out, but in a corner of the room under the bed were two bright, fiery balls, which I knew to be the eyes of a cat, but they seemed to be twice as large as common.

"This made me a little skittish, for I then happened to remember that the old beldam herself is reputed a witch; and I thought to myself, that perhaps after all, it was she, sitting there under the bed, rolling up her fiery eyes at me, and pretending to be a cat. As I thought this, the eyes seemed to grow bigger and bigger. I then shut the door, and prepared to run.

"Just as I was about to start, I saw a thing as white as the driven snow and in the shape of an old woman, flying and flapping in the air, and lifting up her arms, and seeming to threaten me in the most awful manner. I tried to run, but

my feet stuck to the ground. I should have screamed, but my tongue clung to the roof of my mouth, and my hair rose up so as to throw my hat off my head.

"How I contrived to pick it up I cannot say, but I heard the footsteps of some one near, and this I believe gave me courage. I caught my hat and ran as fast as my legs would carry me. A voice called after me, but I felt as light as a feather, and bounded forward like a school-boy's ball, with a sturgeon's nose in the centre. It seems to me that I went two rods at every step, and so I soon reached the barrack. But if I live to the age of Methuselah, I shall never forget the fiery eyeballs of the cat, or how old dame Warlock leaped up and down in the heavens, seeming to me as tall as a steeple."

This was the substance of Kitely's marvellous story. But as soon as it was told, Captain Smith burst into a loud laugh. This made the sergeant very angry, whereupon the captain proceeded to say that it was he who called after him at the door of old dame Warlock; and that the ghost he saw was only a shirt which the old dame had washed and hung to a clothes-line, and the night being windy, it was frolicing in the gale, and jumping up and down, just as the sergeant had described. This explanation excited a laugh among the company, and though it was at the expense of the sergeant, he seemed really glad to be thus relieved of his terror.

J. Very good— very good indeed, though I can hardly conceive how any one could take a piece of linen for an old woman.

E. Why, I suppose it was because the man's imagination was excited: he had, no doubt, a touch of superstition in him, and this it was that deceived him. A person who is superstitious— one who believes in ghosts and witches, and such things— is very likely to fancy that he sees them. Such a one is always meeting with wonders, particularly at night: a stump, a post, a bush, to his eye, has arms, legs, eyes and ears; nay, it generally moves about, and often seems to do more than mortals are able to perform.

S. Then you don't believe in ghosts?

E. Not at all. I believe that all the ghost stories are either the inventions of wicked people, or the delusions of indulged and ill-directed imagination: fancies of those who have first been led to adopt false opinions, and have then become the dupes of these opinions.

S. You are quite a philosopher; but let me tell you a tale of one who was as incredulous as yourself. There was once a physician in Connecticut, who had occasion to stay late at night with one of his patients. It was past one o'clock when he mounted his horse to return home. It was a cold, clear winter's night, and the moon shone with uncommon brilliancy.

The physician had occasion to pass by a small but lonely grave-yard, situated at the farther extremity of a field, near the road. As he was passing by,

he cast his eye toward the grave-yard, and what was his amazement to see a figure, as if of a woman, clothed in dazzling white, proceeding slowly across the field toward the little group of tombstones.

It was almost as light as day, and it appeared impossible that the seeming vision could be an illusion, yet the physician being an habitual unbeliever in ghosts and apparitions, conceived for a moment that his senses must have deceived him. He passed his hand across his brow, as if to clear his eye, and recalled the events of the day, to discover if he was not dreaming. He then looked again, and still the image was there, gliding, as if upon the air, and with a noiseless step, over the snow crust, toward the graves.

For a moment the mind of the physician wavered between a chill, creeping feeling of awe and superstition, and an intense desire to know the truth. At last the latter triumphed; and fastening his horse to a fence, he proceeded directly toward the object of his wonder. It continued to recede from him, but at last it sat down upon a grave stone, near a heap of fresh earth, removed for a tomb.

The physician approached— yet paused a moment to contemplate the mysterious figure. It seemed a woman, and as the clear moonlight fell upon the face, it appeared cold as marble, though touched with an indescribable air of melancholy. With a resolute step he advanced and laid his hand upon the shoulder of the figure. It screamed and fell to the earth.

The physician lifted the form from the ground, and discovered it to be a woman whom he knew, and whose child had died three days before. It had been interred in the little burial ground, and in her sleep the mother had walked across the snowy fields, wrapped in a sheet, to visit the spot where her infant reposed!

E. So, so, master Stephen, your story after all but confirms my theory— that these tales of ghosts are only tales of illusion.

S. True— true; and I agree that your theory of the matter is right. In ancient days, there no doubt was such a thing as witchcraft— but there is nothing of the kind now; and we may be sure that he who tells a tale of ghosts, is no more to be believed than he who tells a tale of fairies. Fairies and ghosts are, in fact, as well authenticated, the one as the other.

9: The One Hundred Dollar Bill

Booth Tarkington

1869-1946

McCall's, January 1923

THE new one hundred dollar bill, clean and green, freshening the heart with the colour of springtime, slid over the glass of the teller's counter and passed under his grille to a fat hand, dingy on the knuckles, but brightened by a flawed diamond. This interesting hand was a part of one of those men who seem to have too much fattened muscle for their clothes: his shoulders distended his overcoat; his calves strained the sprightly checked cloth, a little soiled, of his trousers; his short neck bulged above the glossy collar. His hat, round and black as a pot and appropriately small, he wore slightly obliqued, while under its curled brim his small eyes twinkled surreptitiously between those upper and nether puffs of flesh that mark the too faithful practitioner of unhallowed gaieties. Such was the first individual owner of the new one hundred dollar bill, and he at once did what might have been expected of him.

Moving away from the teller's grille, he made a cylindrical packet of bills smaller in value— "ones" and "fives"— then placed round them, as a wrapper, the beautiful one hundred dollar bill, snapped a rubber band over it; and the desired inference was plain: a roll all of hundred dollar bills, inside as well as outside. Something more was plain, too: obviously the man's small head had a sportive plan in it, for the twinkle between his eye puffs hinted of liquor in the offing and lively women impressed by a show of masterly riches. Here, in brief, was a man who meant to make a night of it, who would feast, dazzle, compel deference and be loved. For money gives power, and power is loved; no doubt he would be loved. He was happy, and went out of the bank believing that money is made for joy.

So little should we be certain of our happiness in this world. The splendid one hundred dollar bill was taken from him untimely, before nightfall that very evening. At the corner of two busy streets he parted with it to the law, though in a mood of excruciating reluctance and only after a cold-blooded threatening on the part of the lawyer. This latter walked away thoughtfully with the one hundred dollar bill, not now quite so clean, in his pocket.

Collinson was the lawyer's name, and in years he was only twenty-eight, but already of the slightly harried appearance that marks the young husband who begins to suspect that the better part of his life was his bachelorhood. His dark, ready-made clothes, his twice soled shoes, and his hair, which was too long for a neat and businesslike aspect, were symptoms of necessary economy; but he did not wear the eager look of a man who saves to "get on for himself."

Collinson's look was that of an employed man who only deepens his rut with his pacing of it.

An employed man he was, indeed, a lawyer without much hope of ever seeing his name on the door or on the letters of the firm that employed him, and his most important work was the collection of small debts. This one hundred dollar bill now in his pocket was such a collection, small to the firm and the client, though of a noble size to himself and the long-pursued debtor from whom he had just collected it.

The banks were closed; so was the office, for it was six o'clock and Collinson was on his way home when by chance he encountered the debtor: there was nothing to do but to keep the bill overnight. This was no hardship, however, as he had a faint pleasure in the unfamiliar experience of walking home with such a thing in his pocket; and he felt a little important by proxy when he thought of it.

Upon the city the November evening had come down dark and moist. Lighted windows and street lamps appeared and disappeared in the altering thicknesses of fog, but at intervals, as Collinson walked on northward, he passed a small shop, or a cluster of shops, where the light was close to him and bright, and at one of these oases of illumination he lingered a moment, with a thought to buy a toy in the window for his three-year-old little girl. The toy was a gaily coloured acrobatic monkey that willingly climbed up and down a string, and he knew that the "baby," as he and his wife still called their child, would scream with delight at the sight of it. He hesitated, staring into the window rather longingly, and wondering if he ought to make such a purchase. He had twelve dollars of his own in his pocket, but the toy was marked "35 cents," and he decided he could not afford it. So he sighed and went on, turning presently into a darker street.

When he reached home, the baby was crying over some inward perplexity not to be explained; and his wife, pretty and a little frowzy, was as usual, and as he had expected. That is to say, he found her irritated by cooking, bored by the baby, and puzzled by the dull life she led. Other women, it appeared, had happy and luxurious homes, and during the malnutritious dinner she had prepared she mentioned many such women by name, laying particular stress upon the achievements of their husbands. Why should she ("alone," as she put it) lead the life she did in one room and a kitchenette, without even being able to afford to go to the movies more than once or twice a month? Mrs. Theodore Thompson's husband had bought a perfectly beautiful little sedan automobile; he gave his wife everything she wanted. Mrs. Will Gregory had merely mentioned that her old Hudson seal coat was wearing a little, and her husband had instantly said: "What'll a new one come to, girlie? Four or five

hundred? Run and get it!" Why were other women's husbands like that— and why, oh, why— was hers like *this*?"

"My goodness!" he said. "You talk as if I had sedans and sealskin coats and theatre tickets *on* me! Well, I haven't; that's all!"

"Then go out and get 'em!" she said fiercely. "Go out and get 'em!"

"What with?" he inquired. "I have twelve dollars in my pocket, and a balance of seventeen dollars at the bank; that's twenty-nine. I get twenty-five from the office day after to-morrow— Saturday; that makes fifty-four; but we have to pay forty-five for rent on Monday; so that'll leave us nine dollars. Shall I buy you a sedan and a sealskin coat on Tuesday, out of the nine?"

Mrs. Collinson began to weep a little. "The old, old story!" she said. "Six long, long years it's been going on now! I ask you how much you've got, and you say, 'nine dollars,' or 'seven dollars,' or 'four dollars,' and once it was sixty-five cents! Sixty-five cents; that's what we had to live on! Sixty-five cents!"

"Oh, hush!" he said wearily.

"Hadn't you better hush a little yourself?" she retorted. "You come home with twelve dollars in your pocket and tell your wife to hush! That's nice? Why can't you do what decent men do?"

"What's that?"

"Why, give their wives something to live for. What do you give me, I'd like to know! Look at the clothes I wear, please!"

"Well, it's your own fault," he muttered.

"What did you say! Did you say it's my fault I wear clothes any women I know wouldn't be *seen* in?"

"Yes, I did. If you hadn't made me get you that platinum ring—"

"What!" she cried, and flourished her hand at him across the table. "Look at it! It's platinum, yes; but look at the stone in it, about the size of a pinhead, so's I'm ashamed to wear it when any of my friends see me! A hundred and sixteen dollars is what this magnificent ring cost you, and how long did I have to beg before I got even that little out of you? And it's the best thing I own and the only thing I ever did get out of you!"

"Oh, Lordy!" he moaned.

"I wish you'd seen Charlie Loomis looking at this ring to-day," she said, with a desolate laugh. "He happened to notice it, and I saw him keep glancing at it, and I wish you'd seen Charlie Loomis's expression!"

Collinson's own expression became noticeable upon her introduction of this name; he stared at her gravely until he completed the mastication of one of the indigestibles she had set before him; then he put down his fork and said:

"So you saw Charlie Loomis again to-day. Where?"

"Oh, my!" she sighed. "Have we got to go over all that again?"

"Over all what?"

"Over all the fuss you made the last time I mentioned Charlie's name. I thought we settled it you were going to be a little more sensible about him."

"Yes," Collinson returned. "*I* was going to be more sensible about him, because *you* were going to be more sensible about him. Wasn't that the agreement?"

She gave him a hard glance, tossed her head so that the curls of her bobbed hair fluttered prettily, and with satiric mimicry repeated his question. "'Agreement'! Wasn't that the agreement! Oh, my, but you do make me tired, talking about 'agreements'! As if it was a crime my going to a vaudeville matinée with a man kind enough to notice that my husband never takes me anywhere!"

"Did you go to a vaudeville with him to-day?"

"No, I didn't!" she said. "I was talking about the time when you made such a fuss. I didn't go anywhere with him to-day."

"I'm glad to hear it," Collinson said. "I wouldn't have stood for it."

"Oh, you wouldn't?" she cried, and added a shrill laugh as further comment. "You 'wouldn't have stood for it'!"

"Never mind," he returned doggedly. "We went over all that the last time, and you understand me: I'll have no more foolishness about Charlie Loomis."

"How nice of you! He's a friend of yours; you go with him yourself; but your wife mustn't even look at him, just because he happens to be the one man that amuses her a little. That's fine!"

"Never mind," Collinson said again. "You say you saw him to-day. I want to know where."

"Suppose I don't choose to tell you."

"You'd better tell me, I think."

"Do you? I've got to answer for every minute of my day, have I?"

"I want to know where you saw Charlie Loomis."

She tossed her curls again, and laughed. "Isn't it funny!" she said. "Just because I like a man, he's the one person I can't have anything to do with! Just because he's kind and jolly and amusing, and I like his jokes and his thoughtfulness toward a woman when he's with her, I'm not to be allowed to see him at all! But my husband— oh, that's entirely different! He can go out with Charlie whenever he likes and have a good time, while I stay home and wash the dishes! Oh, it's a lovely life!"

"Where did you see him to-day?"

Instead of answering his question, she looked at him plaintively and allowed tears to shine along her lower eyelids. "Why do you treat me like

this?" she asked in a feeble voice. "Why can't I have a man friend if I want to? I do like Charlie Loomis. I do like him—"

"Yes! That's what I noticed!"

"Well, but what's the good of always insulting me about him? He has time on his hands of afternoons, and so have I. Our janitor's wife is crazy about the baby and just adores to have me leave her in their flat— the longer the better. Why shouldn't I go to a matinée or a picture show sometimes with Charlie? Why should I just have to sit around instead of going out and having a nice time, when he wants me to?"

"I want to know where you saw him to-day!"

Mrs. Collinson jumped up. "You make me sick!" she said, and began to clear away the dishes.

"I want to know where—"

"Oh, hush up!" she cried. "He came here to leave a note for you."

"Oh," said her husband. "I beg your pardon. That's different."

"How sweet of you!"

"Where's the note, please?"

She took it from her pocket and tossed it to him. "So long as it's a note for *you* it's all right, of course," she said. "I wonder what you'd do if he'd written one to me!"

"Never mind," said Collinson, and read the note.

Dear Collie:

Dave and Smithie and Old Bill and Sammy Hoag and maybe Steinie and Sol are coming over to the shack about eight-thirty. Home brew and the old pastime. *You* know! Don't fail.

Charlie.

"You've read this of course," Collinson said. "The envelope wasn't sealed."

"I have not," his wife returned, covering the prevarication with a cold dignity. "I'm not in the habit of reading other people's correspondence, thank you! I suppose you think I do so because you'd never hesitate to read any note *I* got; but I don't do everything you do, you see!"

"Well, you can read it now," he said, and gave her the note.

Her eyes swept the writing briefly, and she made a sound of wonderment, as if amazed to find herself so true a prophet. "And the words weren't more than out of my mouth! You can go and have a grand party right in his flat, while your wife stays home and gets the baby to bed and washes the dishes!"

"I'm not going."

"Oh, no!" she said mockingly. "I suppose not! I see you missing one of Charlie's stag parties!"

"I'll miss this one."

But it was not to Mrs. Collinson's purpose that he should miss the party; she wished him to be as intimate as possible with the debonair Charlie Loomis; and so, after carrying some dishes into the kitchenette in meditative silence, she reappeared with a changed manner. She went to her husband, gave him a shy little pat on the shoulder and laughed good-naturedly. "Of course you'll go," she said. "I do think you're silly about my never going out with him when it would give me a little innocent pleasure and when you're not home to take me, yourself; but I wasn't really in such terrible earnest, all I said. You work hard the whole time, honey, and the only pleasure you ever do have, it's when you get a chance to go to one of these little penny-ante stag parties. You haven't been to one for ever so long, and you never stay after twelve; it's really all right with me. I want you to go."

"Oh, no," said Collinson. "It's only penny-ante, but I couldn't afford to lose anything at all."

"If you did lose, it'd only be a few cents," she said. "What's the difference, if it gives you a little fun? You'll work all the better if you go out and enjoy yourself once in a while."

"Well, if you really look at it that way, I'll go."

"That's right, dear," she said, smiling. "Better put on a fresh collar and your other suit, hadn't you?"

"I suppose so," he assented, and began to make the changes she suggested.

When he had completed his toilet, it was time for him to go. She came in from the kitchenette, kissed him, and then looked up into his eyes, letting him see a fond and brightly amiable expression.

"There, honey," she said. "Run along and have a nice time. Then maybe you'll be a little more sensible about some of *my* little pleasures."

He held the one hundred dollar bill folded in his hand, meaning to leave it with her, but as she spoke a sudden recurrence of suspicion made him forget his purpose. "Look here," he said. "I'm not making any bargain with you. You talk as if you thought I was going to let you run around to vaudevilles with Charlie because you let me go to this party. Is that your idea?"

It was, indeed, precisely Mrs. Collinson's idea, and she was instantly angered enough to admit it in her retort. "Oh, aren't you *mean*!" she cried. "I might know better than to look for any fairness in a man like you!"

"See here—"

"Oh, hush up!" she said. "Shame on you! Go on to your party!" With that she put both hands upon his breast, and pushed him toward the door.

"I won't go. I'll stay here."

"You will, too, go!" she cried, shrewishly. "I don't want to look at you around here all evening. It'd make me sick to look at a man without an ounce of fairness in his whole mean little body!"

"All right," said Collinson, violently, "I *will* go!"

"Yes! Get out of my sight!"

And he did, taking the one hundred dollar bill with him, to the penny-ante poker party.

The gay Mr. Charlie Loomis called his apartment "the shack" in jocular depreciation of its beauty and luxury, but he regarded it as a perfect thing, and in one way it was: for it was perfectly in the family likeness of a thousand such "shacks." It had a ceiling with false beams, walls of green burlap, spotted with coloured "coaching prints," brown shelves supporting pewter plates and mugs, "mission" chairs, a leather couch with violent cushions, silver-framed photographs of lady friends and officer friends, a drop light of pink-shot imitation alabaster, a papier-mâché skull tobacco jar among moving-picture magazines on the round card table; and, of course, the final Charlie Loomis touch— a Japanese manservant.

The master of all this was one of those neat, stoutish young men with fat, round heads, sleek, fair hair, immaculate, pale complexions, and infirm little pink mouths—in fact, he was of the type that may suggest to the student of resemblances a fastidious and excessively clean white pig with transparent ears. Nevertheless, Charlie Loomis was of a free-handed habit in some matters, being particularly indulgent to pretty women and their children. He spoke of the latter as "the kiddies," of course, and liked to call their mothers "kiddo," or "girlie." One of his greatest pleasures was to tell a woman that she was "the dearest, bravest little girlie in the world." Naturally he was a welcome guest in many households, and would often bring a really magnificent toy to the child of some friend whose wife he was courting. Moreover, at thirty-three, he had already done well enough in business to take things easily, and he liked to give these little card parties, not for gain, but for pastime. He was cautious and disliked high stakes in a game of chance.

"I don't consider it hospitality to have any man go out o' my shack sore," he was wont to say. "Myself, I'm a bachelor and got no obligations; I'll shoot any man that can afford it for anything he wants to. Trouble is, you never can tell when a man *can't* afford it or what harm his losin' might mean to the little girlie at home and the kiddies. No, boys, penny-ante and ten-cent limit is the highest we go in this ole shack. Penny-ante and a few steins of the ole home-brew that hasn't got a divorce in a barrel of it!"

Penny-ante and the ole home-brew had been in festal operation for half an hour when the morose Collinson arrived this evening. Mr. Loomis and his

guests sat about the round table under the alabaster drop light; their coats were off; cigars were worn at the deliberative poker angle; colourful chips and cards glistened on the cloth; one of the players wore a green shade over his eyes; and all in all, here was a little poker party for a lithograph.

"Ole Collie, b'gosh!" Mr. Loomis shouted, humorously. "Here's your vacant cheer; stack all stuck out for you 'n' ever'thin'! Set daown, neighbour, an' Smithie'll deal you in, next hand. What made you so late? Helpin' the little girlie at home get the kiddy to bed? That's a great kiddy of yours, Collie."

Collinson took the chair that had been left for him, counted his chips and then as the playing of a "hand" still preoccupied three of the company, he picked up a silver dollar that lay upon the table near him. "What's this?" he asked. "A side bet? Or did somebody just leave it here for me?"

"Yes; for you to look at," Mr. Loomis explained. "It's Smithie's."

"What's wrong with it?"

"Nothin'. Smithie was just showin' it to us. Look at it."

Collinson turned the coin over and saw a tiny inscription that had been lined into the silver with a point of steel. "Luck," he read—"Luck hurry back to me!" Then he spoke to the owner of this marked dollar. "I suppose you put that on there, Smithie, to help make sure of getting our money to-night."

But Smithie shook his head, which was a large, gaunt head, as it happened— a head fronted with a sallow face shaped much like a coffin, but inconsistently genial in expression. "No," he said. "It just came in over my counter this afternoon, and I noticed it when I was checkin' up the day's cash. Funny, ain't it: 'Luck hurry back to me!'"

"Who do you suppose marked that on it?" Collinson said thoughtfully.

"Golly!" his host exclaimed. "It won't do you much good to wonder about that!"

Collinson frowned, continuing to stare at the marked dollar. "I guess not, but really I should like to know."

"I would, too," Smithie said. "I been thinkin' about it. Might 'a' been somebody in Seattle or somebody in Ipswich, Mass., or New Orleans or St. Paul. How you goin' to tell? It's funny how some people like to believe luck depends on some little thing like that."

"Yes, it is," Collinson assented, still brooding over the coin.

The philosophic Smithie extended his arm across the table collecting the cards to deal them, for the "hand" was finished. "Yes, sir, it's funny," he repeated. "Nobody knows exactly what luck is, but the way I guess it out, it lays in a man's *believin*' he's in luck, and some little object like this makes him kind of concentrate his mind on thinkin' he's goin' to be lucky, because of course you often *know* you're goin' to win, and then you do win. You don't win when

you want to win, or when you need to; you win when you believe you'll win. I don't know who it was that said, 'Money's the root of all evil'; but I guess he didn't have *too* much sense! I suppose if some man killed some other man for a dollar, the poor fish that said that would let the man out and send the dollar to the chair—"

But here this garrulous and discursive guest was interrupted by immoderate protests from several of his colleagues. "Cut it out!" "My Lord!" "*Do* something!" "Smithie! Are you *ever* goin' to deal?"

"I'm goin' to shuffle first," he responded, suiting the action to the word, though with deliberation, and at the same time continuing his discourse. "It's a mighty interesting thing, a piece o' money. You take this dollar, now: Who's it belonged to? Where's it been? What different kind o' funny things has it been spent for sometimes? What funny kind of secrets do you suppose it could 'a' heard if it had ears? Good people have had it and bad people have had it: why, a dollar could tell more about the human race— why, it could tell all about it!"

"I guess it couldn't tell all about the way you're dealin' those cards," said the man with the green shade. "You're mixin' things all up."

"I'll straighten 'em all out then," said Smithie cheerfully. "They say, 'Money talks.' Golly! If it *could* talk, what couldn't it tell? *No*body'd be safe. *I* got this dollar now, but who's it goin' to belong to next, and what'll *he* do with it? And then after that! Why, for years and years and years, it'll go on from one pocket to another, in a millionaire's house one day, in some burglar's flat the next, maybe, and in one person's hand money'll do good, likely, and in another's it'll do harm. We all *want* money; but some say it's a bad thing, like that dummy I was talkin' about. Lordy! Goodness or badness, I'll take all anybody—"

He was interrupted again, and with increased vehemence. Collinson, who sat next to him, complied with the demand to "ante up," then placed the dollar near his little cylinder of chips, and looked at his cards. They proved unencouraging, and he turned to his neighbour. "I'd sort of like to have that marked dollar, Smithie," he said. "I'll give you a paper dollar, Smithie," he said. "I'll give you a paper dollar and a nickel for it."

But Smithie laughed, shook his head and slid the coin over toward his own chips. "No, sir. I'm goin' to keep it— awhile, anyway."

"So you do think it'll bring you luck, after all!"

"No. But I'll hold on to it for this evening, anyhow."

"Not if we clean you out, you won't," said Charlie Loomis. "You know the rules o' the old shack: only cash goes in *this* game; no I. O. U. stuff ever went here or ever will. Tell you what I'll do, though, before you lose it: I'll give you a dollar and a quarter for your ole silver dollar, Smithie."

"Oh, you want it, too, do you? I guess I can spot what sort of luck you want it for, Charlie."

"Well, Mr. Bones, what sort of luck do I want it for?"

"*You* win, Smithie," one of the other players said. "We all know what sort o' luck ole Charlie wants your dollar for: he wants it for luck with the dames."

"Well, I might," Charlie admitted not displeased. "I haven't been so lucky that way lately— not so dog-*gone* lucky!"

All of his guests, except one, laughed at this; but Collinson frowned, still staring at the marked dollar. For a reason he could not have put into words just then, it began to seem almost vitally important to him to own this coin if he could, and to prevent Charlie Loomis from getting possession of it. The jibe, "He wants it for luck with the dames," rankled in Collinson's mind: somehow it seemed to refer to his wife.

"I'll tell you what I'll do, Smithie," he said. "I'll bet two dollars against that dollar of yours that I hold a higher hand next deal than you do."

"Here! Here!" Charlie remonstrated. "Shack rules! Ten-cent limit."

"That's only for the game," Collinson said, turning upon his host with a sudden sharpness. "This is an outside bet between Smithie and me. Will you do it, Smithie? Where's your sporting spirit?"

So liberal a proposal at once roused the spirit to which it appealed. "Well, I might, if some o' the others'll come in, too, and make it really worth my while."

"I'm in," the host responded with prompt inconsistency; and others of the party, it appeared, were desirous of owning the talisman. They laughed and said it was "crazy stuff," yet they all "came in," and, for the first time in the history of this "shack," what Mr. Loomis called "real money," was seen upon the table as a stake. It was won, and the silver dollar with it, by the largest and oldest of the gamesters, a fat man with a walrus moustache that inevitably made him known in this circle as "Old Bill." He smiled condescendingly, and would have put the dollar in his pocket with the "real money," but Mr. Loomis protested.

"Here! What you doin'?" he shouted, catching Old Bill by the arm. "Put that dollar back on the table."

"What for?"

"What for? Why, we're goin' to play for it again. Here's two dollars against it I beat you on the next hand."

"No," said Old Billy calmly. "It's worth more than two dollars to me. It's worth five."

"Well, five then," his host returned. "I want that dollar!"

"So do I," said Collinson. "I'll put in five dollars if you do."

"Anybody else in?" Old Bill inquired, dropping the coin on the table; and all of the others again "came in." Old Bill won again; but once more Charlie Loomis prevented him from putting the silver dollar in his pocket.

"Come on now!" Mr. Loomis exclaimed. "Anybody else but me in on this for five dollars next time?"

"I am," said Collinson, swallowing with a dry throat; and he set forth all that remained to him of his twelve dollars. In return he received a pair of deuces, and the jubilant Charlie won.

He was vainglorious in his triumph. "Didn't that little luck piece just keep on tryin' to find the right man?" he cried, and read the inscription loudly. "'Luck hurry back to me!' Righto! You're home where you belong, girlie! Now we'll settle down to our reg'lar little game again."

"Oh, no," said Old Bill. "You wouldn't let me keep it. Put it out there and play for it again."

"I won't. She's mine now."

"I want my luck piece back myself," said Smithie. "Put it out and play for it. You made Old Bill."

"I won't do it."

"Yes, you will," Collinson said, and he spoke without geniality. "You put it out there."

"Oh, yes, I will," Mr. Loomis returned mockingly. "I will for ten dollars."

"Not I," said Old Bill. "Five is foolish enough." And Smithie agreed with him. "Nor me!"

"All right, then. If you're afraid of ten, I keep it. I thought the ten'd scare you."

"Put that dollar on the table," Collinson said. "I'll put ten against it."

There was a little commotion among these mild gamesters; and someone said: "You're crazy, Collie. What do you want to do that for?"

"I don't care," said Collinson. "That dollar's already cost me enough, and I'm going after it."

"Well, you see, I want it, too," Charlie Loomis retorted cheerfully; and he appealed to the others. "I'm not askin' him to put up ten against it, am I?"

"Maybe not," Old Bill assented. "But how long is this thing goin' to keep on? It's already balled our game all up, and if we keep on foolin' with these side bets, why, what's the use?"

"My goodness!" the host exclaimed. "*I'm* not pushin' this thing, am I? I don't want to risk my good old luck piece, do I? It's Collie that's crazy to go on, ain't it?" He laughed. "He hasn't showed his money yet, though, I notice, and this old shack is run on strickly cash principles. I don't believe he's got ten dollars more on him!"

"Oh, yes, I have."

"Let's see it then."

Collinson's nostrils distended a little, but he said nothing, fumbled in his pocket, and then tossed the one hundred dollar bill, rather crumpled, upon the table.

"Great heavens!" shouted Old Bill. "Call the doctor: I'm all of a swoon!"

"Look at what's spilled over our nice clean table!" another said, in an awed voice. "Did you claim he didn't have *ten* on him, Charlie?"

"Well, it's nice to look at," Smithie observed. "But I'm with Old Bill. How long are you two goin' to keep this thing goin'? If Collie wins the luck piece I suppose Charlie'll bet him fifteen against it, and then—"

"No, I won't," Charlie interrupted. "Ten's the limit."

"Goin' to keep on bettin' ten against it all night?"

"No," said Charlie. "I tell you what I'll do with you, Collinson; we both of us seem kind o' set on this luck piece, and you're already out some on it. I'll give you a square chance at it and at catchin' even. It's twenty minutes after nine. I'll keep on these side bets with you till ten o'clock, but when my clock hits ten, we're through, and the one that's got it then keeps it, and no more foolin'. You want to do that, or quit now? I'm game either way."

"Go ahead and deal," said Collinson. "Whichever one of us has it at ten o'clock, it's his, and we quit!"

But when the little clock on Charlie's green painted mantel-shelf struck ten, the luck piece was Charlie's and with it an overwhelming lien on the one hundred dollar bill. He put both in his pocket. "Remember this ain't my fault; it was you that insisted," he said, and handed Collinson four five-dollar bills as change.

Old Bill, platonically interested, discovered that his cigar was sparkless, applied a match, and casually set forth his opinion. "Well, I guess that was about as poor a way of spendin' eighty dollars as I ever saw, but it all goes to show there's truth in the old motto that anything at all can happen in any poker game! That was a mighty nice hundred dollar bill you had on you, Collie; but it's like what Smithie said: a piece o' money goes hoppin' around from one person to another— it don't care!— and yours has gone and hopped to Charlie. The question is: Who's it goin' to hop to next?" He paused to laugh, glanced over the cards that had been dealt him, and concluded: "My guess is 't some good-lookin' woman'll prob'ly get a pretty fair chunk o' that hundred dollar bill out o' Charlie. Well, let's settle down to the ole army game."

They settled down to it, and by twelve o'clock (the invariable closing hour of these pastimes in the old shack) Collinson had lost four dollars and thirty cents more. He was commiserated by his fellow gamesters as they put on their

coats and overcoats, preparing to leave the hot little rooms. They shook their heads, laughed ruefully in sympathy, and told him he oughtn't to carry hundred dollar bills upon his person when he went out among friends. Old Bill made what is sometimes called an unfortunate remark.

"Don't worry about Collie," he said, jocosely. "That hundred dollar bill prob'ly belonged to some rich client of his."

"What!" Collinson said, staring.

"Never mind, Collie; I wasn't in earnest," the joker explained. "Of course I didn't mean it."

"Well, you oughtn't to say it," Collinson protested. "People say a thing like that about a man in a joking way, but other people hear it sometimes and don't know they're joking, and a story gets started."

"My goodness, but you're serious!" Old Bill exclaimed. "You look like you had a misery in your chest, as the rubes say; and I don't blame you! Get on out in the fresh night air and you'll feel better."

He was mistaken, however; the night air failed to improve Collinson's spirits as he walked home alone through the dark and chilly streets. There was, indeed, a misery in his chest, where stirred a sensation vaguely nauseating; his hands were tremulous and his knees infirm as he walked. In his mind was a confusion of pictures and sounds, echoes from Charlie Loomis's shack: he could not clear his mind's eye of the one hundred dollar bill; and its likeness, as it lay crumpled on the green cloth under the drop light, haunted and hurt him as a face in a coffin haunts and hurts the new mourner.

It seemed to Collinson then that money was the root of all evil and the root of all good, the root and branch of all life, indeed. With money, his wife would have been amiable, not needing gay bachelors to take her to vaudevilles. Her need of money was the true foundation of the jealousy that had sent him out morose and reckless to-night; of the jealousy that had made it seem, when he gambled with Charlie Loomis for the luck dollar, as though they really gambled for luck with her.

It still seemed to him that they had gambled for luck with her, and Charlie had won it. But as Collinson plodded homeward in the chilly midnight, his shoulders sagging and his head drooping, he began to wonder how he could have risked money that belonged to another man. What on earth had made him do what he had done? Was it the mood his wife had set him in as he went out that evening? No; he had gone out feeling like that often enough, and nothing had happened.

Something had brought this trouble on him, he thought; for it appeared to Collinson that he had been an automaton, having nothing to do with his own actions. He must bear the responsibility for them; but he had not willed them.

If the one hundred dollar bill had not happened to be in his pocket— That was it! And at the thought he mumbled desolately to himself: "I'd been all right if it hadn't been for that." If the one hundred dollar bill had not happened to be in his pocket, he'd have been "all right." The one hundred dollar bill had done this to him. And Smithie's romancing again came back to him: "In one person's hands money'll do good, likely; in another's it'll do harm." It was the money that did harm or good, not the person; and the money in his hands had done this harm to himself.

He had to deliver a hundred dollars at the office in the morning, somehow; for he dared not take the risk of the client's meeting the debtor.

There was a balance of seventeen dollars in his bank, and he could pawn his watch for twenty-five, as he knew well enough, by experience. That would leave fifty-eight dollars to be paid, and there was only one way to get it. His wife would have to let him pawn her ring. She'd have to!

Without any difficulty he could guess what she would say and do when he told her of his necessity: and he knew that never in her life would she forego the advantage over him she would gain from it. He knew, too, what stipulations she would make, and he had to face the fact that he was in no position to reject them. The one hundred dollar bill had cost him the last vestiges of mastery in his own house; and Charlie Loomis had really won not only the bill and the luck, but the privilege of taking Collinson's wife to vaudevilles. And it all came back to the same conclusion: The one hundred dollar bill had done it to him. "What kind of a thing *is* this life?" Collinson mumbled to himself, finding matters wholly perplexing in a world made into tragedy at the caprice of a little oblong slip of paper.

Then, as he went on his way to wake his wife and face her with the soothing proposal to pawn her ring early the next morning, something happened to Collinson. Of itself the thing that happened was nothing, but he was aware of his folly as if it stood upon a mountain top against the sun—and so he gathered knowledge of himself and a little of the wisdom that is called better than happiness.

His way was now the same as upon the latter stretch of his walk home from the office that evening. The smoke fog had cleared, and the air was clean with a night wind that moved briskly from the west; in all the long street there was only one window lighted, but it was sharply outlined now, and fell as a bright rhomboid upon the pavement before Collinson. When he came to it he paused, at the hint of an inward impulse he did not think to trace; and, frowning, he perceived that this was the same shop window that had detained him on his homeward way, when he had thought of buying a toy for the baby.

The toy was still there in the bright window: the gay little acrobatic monkey that would climb up or down a red string as the string slacked or straightened; but Collinson's eye fixed itself upon the card marked with the price: "35 cents."

He stared and stared. "Thirty-five cents!" he said to himself. "Thirty-five cents!"

Then suddenly he burst into loud and prolonged laughter.

The sound was startling in the quiet night, and roused the interest of a meditative policeman who stood in the darkened doorway of the next shop. He stepped out, not unfriendly.

"What *you* havin' such a good time over, this hour o' the night?" he inquired. "What's all the joke?"

Collinson pointed to the window. "It's that monkey on the string," he said. "Something about it struck me as mighty funny!"

So, with a better spirit, he turned away, still laughing, and went home to face his wife.

10: Among The Man Gods

Ross Cox

Australasian (Vic), 5 July 1873

fl 1870s

Irish born Ross Cox came to Australia as a youth during the 1850s gold rush. His second son, Erle Cox, author of "Out of the Silence" and other novels, was born in 1873. This is most likely the first time this story has been seen in 150 years.

"IS HE DUMB, doctor?" I asked.

"Not dumb," said the doctor, "for he occasionally mutters to himself, but he has spoken to no one in the asylum for the eleven years I have had charge, what age would you take him to be?"

I looked at him again, and my mind received the same strange jar that I had experienced when first beholding him— an impression of past and long forgotten existence— an indefinable sensation that seemed to remove me from the present and reality to some remote realm of fancy, that I might have seen, perhaps, in my dreams, but that had passed so completely from my recollections as to make attempt at defining it painful.

A weary face— an eye from which hope or expectation had fled forever— an aspect of utter dejection, as of one who felt that Heaven and earth were against him, and that be must now bear without a struggle the worst that fate could do. His eye looked at you, or through you, with no more recognition than the eye of a picture, but still without a trace of the restlessness of insanity. A vacant look, no doubt; but not the vacancy of idiotcy.

Gazing, as he did, straight at us, he saw neither the doctor nor me, nor the long corridor in which he sat, nor the bright June sunshine pouring through the windows, and dancing and flickering around him as it came in broken gleams through a forest of leaves without. But it was evidently because his thoughts were away on something else, and that he regarded us no more than he did the idle flies that danced and buzzed on the window pane. His steady gaze into vacancy had such a Strange effect on me that, for a time I was quite unconscious of my old friend's question, and it was with an effort that I comprehended him when he repeated it.

"Oh, his age?" said I. "Why he looks any age you like. He looks as if he'd never been young, or couldn't grow older. I suppose you know what his age is?"

"Well, that's the very question I can't answer," said the doctor, "though I'd give something to be able. Up to my coming here the books of the asylum were a muddle, and no record of cases was kept. I can neither tell you when he

was admitted, his name, his age, nor anything about him, and he won't answer a word to the questions we put to him."

"But surely," said I, "some of the attendants will know. He can't be old enough to have grown out of every one's recollection."

"There's the puzzle," replied the doctor. "I have a keeper who has been employed here for 40 years, and he declares this man was in the asylum when he came, looking precisely as be looks how, and that he' was reputed then to have been the oldest patient in the house. Of course that's nonsense, but I can declare he hasn't changed for eleven years in the slightest."

"Does he do any work like the rest?" I asked.

"Oh dear, no," said the doctor. "Just look here at his hand, and you'll see he has not been used to much in the way of work."

I will remember to my dying hour the strange sensation that ran through me as I took the cold; finely-formed, white hand in mine to examine it. A corpse would have taken as much notice of me as he did. His eyes, still looking through me, were away in some far-off scene of some remote past, and my touch seemed to affect his senses no more than the tone of my voice. As impassive as a wax figure, as coldly indifferent to my touch as a statue, he allowed me to examine his hand, open his fingers, look at his palm and comment on its appearance, while I felt all the time guilty of an impertinence that made me most thoroughly ashamed of myself.

"Yes," continued the doctor, as we walked away, "it's the strangest case I have ever met with. He frequently doesn't move for weeks, but will allow us to do as we like with him, giving one the impression that he doesn't consider it worth his while to make any objection. I believe he understands everything that passes around him— or could, if he chose to take the trouble. As you see him to-day I have seen him every day for the last eleven years. I have tried to rouse him by galvanism, but beyond a momentary gesture of impatience, it made no impression on him. He has been in the greatest peril two or three times from dangerous patients, and was, I am certain, sensible of it, but he made no effort of the slightest kind to save himself. Take him by the hand and lead him, and he will walk, but leave him, and I believe he would stand for a week in the same position. He is a perfect puzzle to me."

And dinner being ready, the doctor gave his puzzle up, and chatted off to old times and scenes, when we were both boys together at school, and such a host of recollections were called up that it was not till I found that I had to hurry to catch the last train that I remembered the mysterious lunatic.

"I know you hate writing, old fellow," said I, as I shook hands in parting, "but I'd feel awfully thankful for a line if you can make anything out of that queer case upstairs."

He promised, and I thought forgot all about it; But ten years afterwards, from the other side of the world a packet came to me, enclosed with the following note:

Dear old Boy,

I keep my word with you; I never made anything more out of that case you took such an interest in the day I saw you last, but he has made away with himself. Not suicide— a bolt. One day he nearly frightened the wits out of our senior keeper, who had never heard him speak before, by asking for a pen, ink and paper. He got them and set to, writing hard.

The next morning all that remained of him was the bundle of Mss. which I send you, and though there was a hue and cry raised for him through the whole country, we have never heard of him from that day to this. Who knows! He may turn up somewhere Australia. So keep your eye out for him

I'd like you to return his queer account of himself when you have read it, and tell me what your opinion is.

Ever yours.

THIS is the queer account:

AN INDESCRIBABLE horror settled upon mankind when the leading astronomers of every country definitely announced that the course of our world was nearly run.

By a series of the most exquisitely accurate observations— carried out for hundreds of years by one generation after another of scientific observers— it was found that every circuit our planet made enlarged the circumference of its orbit, that our years were gradually lengthening, and that, at last, our earth was doomed to either remaining stationary in space, or of going off on some independent and utterly unknown path of its own through the fathomless depths of the stellar system.

I was born about twenty years before, according to the calculations of science, the great parting was to take place, and the solemnity of the times gave a tone of melancholy to my mind that I have never been able to shake off. The inhabitants of the world awaited with fixed and resolute despair the terrible fate that impended; a fate so imminent that the only question the philosophers had now to discuss was as to the particular part of its orbit our earth would be in when it was to part the Sun's company.

Our course was very neatly ran, the life of our beautiful world was fast drawing to an end, and the extinction of our race seemed but a question of days, when I fell in love. Love at such a time may seem impossible; hope, the very food on which love feeds, was denied us, but though time was drawing to an end, we looked forward to an eternity beyond it, and I told my love, and my love whispered me back, that when the last day came, and the awful doom

foretold fell upon us, we would bear it clasped in each other's arms, hand in hand and cheek to cheek.

Our marriage was the last that took place in our planet. On my twenty-first birthday, and within a week from the time I brought my wife home, the long-looked-for change took place, and our world, loosened from the chain that held it to the sun, took its flight, none knew whither, through the realms of space that lay between us and the stars.

I need hardly say that mankind watched with the most intense interest for the result of our severance from the solar influence. But it soon became evident that no immediate ill effects were to be apprehended from our erratic course. Contrary to general expectation, we continued to revolve diurnally, and had consequently our changes of night and morning with accustomed regularity. Indeed, it took several months of the closest observation before the astronomers could declare with certainty that the face of the sun was growing smaller. Our planet had been the exterior one of our system, and the sun had not in historical times appeared much larger than some of the larger planets or fixed stars of the first magnitude. It now gradually dwindled in size, but so slowly that the change was quite imperceptible, except by means of instrumental observation, and our people, having recovered from their terror, and seeing things going on pretty nearly as before, settled down by degrees to the same pursuits that engaged them in old times.

The first great change that became apparent was that death instead of life appeared to be annihilated. Sickness ceased everywhere, and mankind acquired a strength of health such as mortals had never felt before. And with this bodily health came a mental, that caused cowardice to disappear , as disease had done. The strange events that marked our time as the most memorable since the creation produced a sense of exaltation, even in the minds of women, that would have led them to view without shrinking the consummation of any doom the fates might decree.

All fear of destruction from loss of solar heat appeared at an end. In a year's time the temperature of the earth was not lowered by the appreciable fraction of a degree, nor was there any probability of our suffering from loss of light, many stars now shining with a brilliancy that gave us little cause to regret the loss of the sun's rays. Death still continued absent from us, but no new life was born, and the idea began to dawn on us— slowly, but with increasing force as years went on— that age had ceased to effect us, that time as well as death had left the earth, and that a reign of immortality had set in.

Very many years passed with little apparent change. The astronomers had long since decided that our path through space was a perfectly straight one, and that we were moving forward at a rate exactly proportionate to our late

orbital velocity. Our apparent direction was towards a small star which had lately become visible to the naked eye, but with which our men of science had long been familiar through the aid of instruments. This star, or its immediate vicinity, had been pronounced our destination almost from the first, and speculations concerning it engrossed the attention of every thinking mind. Little could be told with accuracy, but from calculations respecting the rays of light, our ablest astronomers were of opinion that at our present rate of progression we would take at least 100,000 years to reach it. But they could not even guess what acceleration of speed might take place when we got within the influence of its attraction, and there was always the possibility of our being drawn away from our present track by some of the other stars on our way.

Of the inhabitants of the world during this abnormal state of affairs I have little to say. As we rolled on through space my love for my dear wife became stronger and purer. She showed as few traces of time as the unchanging stars that shone so serenely around us. The life that would have seemed an eternity without love passed as quickly as if we had to count it by years and days. Our tastes and dispositions, always similar, became so completely identical that it seemed as if one being inhabited two bodies. Our bodies only were separate; soul, mind, and thought were one.

Century followed century, and the star to which all eyes were turned stood out more brightly with a greater brilliancy, indeed, than the sun we had left, which was now waning in light as the other waxed. It would be utterly impossible to give the faintest idea of the extreme accuracy with which all the changes that took place in the heavens were noticed. Being now free to devote, not a miserable lifetime of a few years, but a practical eternity to one engrossing pursuit, men of science were able to defy error, and our path through the stars was mapped with as much certainty as if they had been thoroughly familiar with it.

The most distinct recollection I retain of those far-off times is the steadiness, notwithstanding its apparent slowness, of our progress through space. We still counted time by periods equal in length to our old revolutions round the sun, and at the end of a hundred such years the entire heavenly system seemed as unaltered as it had been at the beginning. But slowly and quietly as he marched, Time's progress could still be counted. The time came when our old sun vanished from our sight, with all his fellow ring of planets; for centuries he still remained visible with the aid of telescopes, but even these failed at length, and our philosophers had to report that all they could now tell about the former centre of our system was that he formed part of a nebulous

lustre, still visible, but with ever-decreasing brightness, to the powerful glasses through which it was watched.

But there were no mourners for the sun in the presence of the exquisite beauty of the star to which we tended, now growing in splendour and glory as year after year rolled on. Its glorious rays banished the twilight gloom in which we had lived so long, and all creation derived new life and strength from its life.

Anxiety respecting our fate ceased. It was enough to know we were daily nearing this glorious goal, and if our progress were to end in death, no one dreaded a death which would plunge us into such a heaven of brightness.

Our philosophers never ceased their observations for a day. We were, indeed become a world of observers, and watched every phase of our progress with an interest that increased as the new sun grew. The nature and extent of the great world with which we were forming so strange and involuntary an acquaintance was the one problem that engrossed every thought and exercised the highest faculties of the deepest thinkers on our earth.

The conclusion was forced upon us that this sun did not shine with a light of its town. It had now grown so vastly in size that its diameter filled two degrees of the whole arc of our heavens. Yet, although the temperature of our earth was sensibly increased, and the light emitted was so powerful that the half of our earth turned away from it was as well lit up as our old noon-day time used to be by our old sun, we were able to gaze upon it with the naked eye, and its heat, when drawn to a focus by a powerful lens, though considerable, was as nothing to what it should have been if transmitted from a sun of fire.

Neither did its edges show the slightest irregularity, as might have been expected had it been a flaming mass. It loomed on us with a softened and beautiful glow, a lustrous radiance that invited the gaze of man. If the hypothesis of our philosophers was correct, this light was a reflected one, and we were speeding to a world where it was possibly the conditions of life were similar to our own, though its size must be so immeasurably greater that our minds, skilled as we were in the science of the stars, and occupied for ever with problems respecting them, were utterly unable to form even the slightest conception of its magnitude.

Our progress, though gradual as from the first, could now be traced more distinctly. At the commencement of our long journey, and when this star showed but a feeble twinkle, that for centuries scarcely increased, we looked upon ourselves as immortals launched, upon an infinite career of eternity. But as that faint light became brighter, as the speck grew into a bright star, and the star into a sun; as the sun grew in size and glory till one after another of the

lesser lights of the heavens faded out; as its diameter increased to one, two, three, and four degrees of the heavenly arc— the littleness, the nothingness of our own atomic life slowly and imperceptibly began to dawn upon us, and our limited capacities reeled under the gigantic and oppressive visions of the illimitable vastness towards which we were now rapidly rushing.

Our onward flight through space did not, however, appear to be in anyway accelerated as we neared our destination. The men of science were of opinion that, in consequence of the comparatively small amount of matter in our globe, its pace would not be quickened by gravitation till we got to the coating of atmosphere that surrounded the great ! world, and from which the exquisitely brilliant light we received was emitted, and when that time came they hoped that the resistance of the atmosphere would counteract the effect of gravitation.

We were at last part of a new world— within its atmosphere as well as its attraction. Our own covering of air saved us, of course, from actual contact with that of the greater world; but it surrounded up on every side as -the sea would a stone flung into it. Our whole sphere became equally illuminated with the flood of light we were bathed in. An ineffable effulgence pervaded the nethermost ends of the earth. Night and winter existed no longer, and for hundreds of years mankind knew no change from the glorious summer day in which we floated. No other star now shone in our heavens. The sky on every side was veiled in overpowering light. The outlines of the great world itself faded away as we approached it, and our men of science had at last to acknowledge the impossibility of any longer making calculations respecting our progress or position.

The problem now to be practically solved was, what would be our fate when we fell upon the surface of this world? Would our atmosphere act as a shield to save us from destruction? Our philosophers thought so, or at least that it, combined with the greater density of the atmosphere that surrounded ours, would save us from the blow that must of course have been annihilation. It is needless to describe the hopes and fears of that time. I have to describe the reality, and slowly and gradually, through long centuries of doubt and expectation, now little more than an instant too short to be recalled, the reality fell upon us. Our world had reached its goal— we ceased to advance— we ceased to revolve— and yet the end appeared as far off as ever!

WE LIVED in a time of wonders. Strange and utterly unknown sounds and sights came, we know not how or from where, around and about as. There was nothing violent or sudden in these phenomena. A deep, sweet, loud, all-pervading sound would circle the earth, hang for long years over the

mountains and seas, and die into the past as softly as it came. And yet every second that rolled through our heavens, starting from a faint whisper and swelling into notes that would have drowned the deepest thunder, fell upon our ears as naturally as the cadences of familiar music.

After centuries of patient observation and intense attention, the wonderful theory was established that we heard the voices of the Man Gods who inhabited the infinite world into which we had thus casually drifted! No sooner was the idea originated than every ear was on the alert, and discovery followed discovery with what might be called in our extended periods of time startling rapidity.

Instruments of exquisite accuracy registered the beginning, the highest pitch, and the gradual dying away of the celestial harmonies that now never for a year left our heavens silent, and at length a key was found to the utterances, and we began to comprehend the language of the Man Gods

IT MUST NOT be imagined that during this time our astronomers were idle, It was solely through their observations that we became aware of the fact that our world had ceased revolving. Through the long day us which we passed our existence, every side of the world was brilliantly illuminated, but one-half, which we came to call the upper hemisphere, was both brighter and warmer than the other. The Man Gods' voices and the other celestial sounds came to us first on the upper hemisphere, and after long and careful investigation, a difference was found counting by our poor old time, of 13 or 14 hours between the first striking of a sound or change of tone on the topmost part of the upper hemisphere, and its being heard in the lower-most of the nether.

The astronomers, always on the watch, though they had neither sun nor stars to observe, found phenomena in the surrounding luminous immensity to richly repay them for their labours. At immeasurable distances in the heavens vast forms came to be distinguished by the aid of powerful telescopes.

It was from these forms that the voices proceeded, and the irresistible conclusion was forced upon us that we were at last in the telescopic view of the beings to whom we gave the name of Man Gods.

For all the terrible eternity that the mortals of our poor lost world may still be doomed to live, scattered though they be over all the starry systems of the universe, none can ever forget the form of the Man God who was first distinctly mapped out. He appeared to stretch away into infinite space, to the whole heavens, while our earth lay like a pebble at his god-like feet. His voice it was we heard most frequently echoing round our globe, and when we came to connect his words, and attach a significance to them, we found that he and

some others, whom we were not yet able to perceive, were searching on the ground for us.

His voice is now in my ears. It swells high and sinks low through centuries that change the whole face of this earth I am compelled to live in. I hear him encouraging the others to search, and repeating that the 'thing' he saw fall was somewhere about their feet, and to be careful not to stand upon it.

A startling noise broke over us, nearer than anything we had yet heard, louder and shriller, and with such a vehemence and fury of sound that the mountains shook, and the ocean was convulsed with the uproarious torrent. It Was a wild, inarticulate cry of delight, a flood of funny boyish joy, the most cruel mirth that ever burst over a world, which, when we were able to analyse and understand, we found to be the voice of a young Man God exulting at having found 'the thing.'

I can repeat in a few moments, as time is measured in this perishing world, the words that hung for ages over us, that employed the "keenest intellects and the most powerful minds among us to render it into our language, and that, simple as they were in themselves, were to us words of the most awful doom.

The young Man God was the first to see the world, and gave utterance to the loud cry that had so startled us, and his words were found to be

"Papa, papa! Here is the thing on the grass! Will I pick it up?"

The father Man God's answer rolled to us from the remotest space after long years of silence, words probably heard by the child as soon as they were spoken.

"No, my boy. Let it be. I will take it up myself!"

THE MAN GOD held our world in his hand. Our glorious career of immortality must now be drawing fast to a close. It seemed impossible that anything could save us from the approaching destruction, and yet every change came upon us so slowly and gradually, there was such an utter absence or violence in the most wonderful revolutions we passed through, that existence went on as calmly and naturally as though every step we took had been ordained from the beginning.

The imponderable matter composing the great Man God's being, and our own coating of atmosphere, saved us from injury as he held us in his fingers and attentively surveyed our world. He said to those around him that he thought it was a minute meteoric body, but of a kind he had never seen before. He would, however, put it under the microscope and see what he could make of it.

And at this time, by the most wondrous effort of the human intellect that the mind of man had ever made, we were able to compare the time as we always counted it on our little earth with that of the great Man God Land. I have said that our astronomers never ceased their observations. They were able to pronounce almost to a day when it was that the Man God's mighty fingers first enclosed us. They knew the number of years it took to raise us from the ground to a height sufficient to allow him to look at us. And while he examined us they were as alive to all the wonders in our heavens as in the time long past when we sped on our path through the stars.

One of the phenomena that strongly excited their curiosity was a sharp metallic sound, that came apparently from a part of the heavens about equal to that from which the voice of the Man God seemed to proceed. It had nothing of the fullness or volume of the awful words that rumbled like melodious thunder round our sphere; but it was as distinctly audible to us as the loudest pitch of the voice. Careful observations showed that the sound was repeated with mechanical regularity, at intervals, according to our old time, of 110 years, and for many centuries the source of the sound was a problem we thought it utterly impossible to solve. But the genius of man, even in our atom of the universe, was equal to the task. Our philosophers devoted their entire energies to the stupendous undertaking, and I am now proud (miserable mortal that I am !) to say that to me is awarded the credit of unravelling the mystery.

I will merely give the results, as the elaborate calculations, and the long train of thought necessary to establish them, might prove as wearisome for me to write as it did to work them out, and as it might be for others to read.

I found the sounds to proceed from the tickings of the watch in the Man God's pocket. Every tick of this great watch tolled over our earth the passing of more than a century, and from this simple discovery we were able— by the help of figures that dazzled the profoundest arithmeticians, and would, indeed, have made them mad, but that no disease of mind or body could exist among us— to calculate the awful duration of time in the Man God's Land.

Accepting this view as correct, and there was absolutely no disputing it, then this theory must likewise be adopted, From the creation of our earth through the countless ages during which it had existed as a planet, and for the hundreds of thousands of years that had elapsed since it started on its independent course, but apart of a day had passed over the Man God Land! This, of course, fully accounted for the awful slowness of the sounds and movements around us. One of our years was but the hundredth part of a second to a Man God, And what to us was a long eternity was to them a careless minute of time, forgotten as soon as past.

THE MAN GOD carried us as a child might carry a thistledown, through illimitable space to his dwelling.

We lay in the hollow of his hand, and were able to count the pulsations of his mighty heart. Through countless years, during which our race never worked up to a higher and more perfect state, he carried us, but with such care that we were scarcely able to distinguish a movement

He came at last to his home, and then occurred the terrible catastrophe that had for ever separated me from my kind, and condemned me to be a solitary and friendless fugitive through the great universe.

There were many parts of our world that in its early days were uninhabitable. About our poles and within our frigid zones were numerous beautiful lands, where long ago the cold and ice held sway, and man had

I been unable to penetrate. In the altered condition of affairs these desert spots bloomed out as brightly as the most favoured lands on our globe. The vegetable and animal life upon them were all that the heart of man could desire. Flowers that took their glorious hues from the brilliant stars that had illuminated our earth in its long coarse; trees laden with the fruits of every land, birds and insects of a thousand colours, and forms hitherto unknown to us, made, these once barren islands wildernesses of delight, to which holiday-seekers repaired when they sought a few years' change from the life of mental activity that kept every man's nerves' strained to the utmost pitch. For many scientific observations, too, these positions were very important, and there were always volunteers to be found ready to bury themselves for lengthened periods away from the society of friends and men of science, that they might assist to work out some of the great problems so constantly offering for solution.

I was one of these— an humble helper in the work by which we immortal atoms were endeavouring to read the story of our fate as it unrolled itself before us. I had undertaken a series of observations, which were to extend, in all, over about half a century, and the position assigned to me was a small island at our extreme south pole.

My wife and a few of my dearest friends accompanied me, and on this lovely spot, which was our home for forty years, I spent one of the happiest moments of my prolonged life.

The commission of philosophers who were directing the inquiry— it referred to the exact form of the Man God's hand sent to the island to see how my work was progressing; and I prevailed on my wife and friends to return in the ship with the result of my observations so far, with the understanding that I was to be sent for in a few years, when my task would be completed. Could

we have foreseen the terrible future in store for us— for me, rather, alas! for of them or their fate I am condemned to eternal ignorance— no power in all the earth would have separated us ; but, blinded to danger by long security, no doubts disturbed our minds, and we parted for ever as though we were parting for an hour.

I was alone in my island— I have ever been alone since. The everlasting light of the God Man's world was around me, and there was neither darkness in the air nor clouds in the mind to disturb me in my work.

IT CAME with a suddenness to which we had long been strangers, and with the first appearance of danger it was too plain that hope must be abandoned. Our world was being moved rapidly about. I saw through my telescope a vast blade descending from the heavens. It pierced our atmosphere, and then, with awe-struck soul and senses paralysed with terror, I listened to the sounds which, coming from the very bowels of the earth, proclaimed, with the noise of a thousand earthquakes, that the world was being rent asunder!

Surely no other human being ever was doomed to undergo such a long agony of horror as I passed through while that terrible disruption was being completed. The rocks and mountains shook and toppled. Enormous waves thundered with such force on the rock-built coasts as to tear away vast tracts of the land, and then receding left the ocean dry and barren as the surface of an extinct planet. The earth cracked into great chasms, into which the rivers rushed and never reappeared, and storms of frightful force swept over the land and put their seal on this scene of ruin.

I waited on with the calmness of despair for the end.

The now hated voice of the Man God began again to wake the echoes of my awful solitude, and as he words became intelligible the cause of this calamity dawned upon me.

He had cut away the segment of our our globe of which my island was the centre, for the purpose of examining it in a microscope!

"Dead, dead to my kind! Never, never more shall these arms enfold my wife again!"

BUT SOON such scenes of wonder began to unfold around me that even I, numbed in heart and crushed under such a load of woe, felt myself constrained in my own despite to look about me with interest.

My slice of the world had passed into a region of such brilliancy of light as to overwhelm and confound my senses. Flowers and trees burst into unimagined colours, and my powers of vision were so strengthened that I could actually see the plants grow as they shot up around me. Such light as

angels might be expected to see round the throne of heaven I saw— a light that poured even into my sad soul a kind of sensuous joy.

The voice of the Man God told me where I was. The heavenly light in which I was plunged came from the reflector of the microscope, in which I was placed for observation.

I looked, listened, and observed from a compulsion of the senses. With such a light it would have been impossible to close my eyes to the beautiful sights around me. With such a voice as the Man God's thundering for ever in my ears I could not but hear; so that, in the sense of knowing what took place during this phase of my existence, I was an observer— a passive one, indeed, but yet with a mind sufficiently alive, to be able to give a short narrative of what passed.

The Man God commenced his examination. I heard some hurried exclamations of surprise come from him, apparently addressed to a companion, whose voice I could hear, from some immeasurable distance in space questioning him as to what he saw.

"Why, it's a miniature world!' he said. "There are trees, and mountains, and rivers. Stop! I give you my word I see an insect, formed exactly like ourselves, and a building that appears to be a house. Yes, I'll let you look in a minute, but I can't take my eyes off him."

"The Man God had seen me! His own words announced it, and an irresistible impulse seized me to look into his eye. I placed my powerful telescope, which was constructed so as to sweep every part of the heavens, in a vertical position, and was soon able to get the exact focus of his glass. Looking upward as he looked down, our range of vision met, and insect as he called me, my eye met that of the Man God without flinching.

How long I gazed into its wonderful depths I know not. I had ceased to take account of time, and my own world faded: from my mind at being thus transported into his. One conclusion was forced upon me; his eye was human like my own. He on his side, arrived at the same conclusion respecting me, for, turning to his companion, he said,

"Come here, my dear, and see; I have discovered an animalcule that I'm half afraid to let you look at, for fear you'll lose your heart. Just look at his eye."

How shall speak of this being that now took her place at the microscope? Her eye, as the Man God's, met mine, and after the first eager glance of curiosity I noticed that its expression changed, and a sweet feminine softness, calling up memories of my dear lost wife, came into it.

"It's a very sad eye, dear," said she. "I'm afraid the poor little mite is unhappy at the treatment we've given him."

These words of sympathy were slowly spoken. Unconscious as I was of the flight of time, I know that many centuries must have rolled over from the time the first soft note of her voice was heard in the heavens till the last lingering echo died away. For all this time l lay watching her lovely eye, drowned in its luminous depths, till its lustrous beauty filled the void in my heart, and supplied the companionship I so eagerly longed for. It was not love I felt for her. I never for a moment forgot my own darling wife, and could she have now seen my heart, she would have known it was as truly hers as ever; bet the beauty of this beings eye, the sweetness of her voice, and the pitying words she spoke, cause me to feel emotions of the tenderest kind.

As she ceased speaking I stepped out into her full view, and throwing myself on my knees, passionately prayed her to reunite my island to my old world.

Alas! my words were unheard, or I have little doubt she would have granted my prayer, but my supplicating attitude touched her woman's heart.

Turning to the Man God she said he must not torture the little thing, whatever it was, any more. His answer was that she could do what she liked with it as he had plenty more.

Another change. I was taken from the microscope by the hands of the Man God's wife.

"Go, poor little scrap," said she, as she threw me into the open air; "I wouldn't hurt you for the world!"

The force with which she sent me away was sufficient to carry me into space. Such a speck as the piece of the world of which I was the sole inhabitant had, I suppose, too little matter in it to come under the attraction of the gravity of the God Man's Land.

My island went off on another long journey through the universe. What time has passed, what path I have travelled, I cannot tell— cycles of years, distances not to be expressed by figures.

I watched the God Man's Land, that held all dear tame in life, fade as gradually on my sight as it had before loomed upon it, in the happy old times— a bright orb that filled the sky, a glorious star of the first magnitude, a little speck undistinguishable among the million stars that stud the universe, till in the end I only know the position in the heavens it occupies, all sight of it having faded away for centuries before I found my present resting place in this world.

This miserable little world! This world so like my own, and still so hateful to my sight! The awful curse of having to live for the practical eternity of a God Man's life, which I carry with me, cuts me off from all communion with the perishing race of mortals that inhabit it. Their longest lives are not a second of

my time— they are born, grow to manhood, and die, almost before I can recognise their features.

What to me are the joys or sorrows of a race, a generation of whom passes away with every pulsation of my heart? Before I could stretch out my hand to wipe the tears from the eves of a weeping maiden, I would see, as I have seen, her beauty fade with withered old age, and forgotten by all who were once ready to fight the world for her sake. The ambitions of men, and the loves of women, the wars of nations and creeds, and the rise and fall of empires, sweep in a restless current before me without awakening interest or curiosity.

"My body is in this earth, but my soul is countless millions of miles away with my poor lost world; at this very moment, perhaps, undergoing microscopic examination in the now invisible God Man's Land."

HERE ENDS the queer story.

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11: Snake Drums, Booming

Arthur Leo Zagat

1895-1949

Dime Mystery Aug 1934

Chapter 1

DUSK, slowly creeping between drab facades, made a grimy canyon of the Harlem sidestreet, and lingering fingers of gray light quenched the radiance of street lamps to mere spots of brightness. Puzzled lines furrowed Nell Carter's piquant face as, long-legged, boyish, in the tailored lines of a tweed suit, she mounted a chalk-scrawled stoop.

"Queer," she muttered. "Wonder where everyone is."

Up and down the block other front steps were crowded with black, brown, and yellow tots, half-clothed and noisy; with slatternly Negro women, gossiping; with flashing-toothed bucks and pluck-browed high-yellow wenches. But there was no one in front of the shadowed vestibule Nell entered. No one. And in this neighborhood of crowded warrens that of custom spilled their teeming life into the open, that was altogether strange...

Uneasily, the girl felt that in the inscrutable eyes watching her from those other stoops, the slitted, speculative eyes of an alien race, there lurked some furtive expectancy. Her own gray-irised glance sought the nimbus of Neon luminance hat marked Lenox Avenue, and she halfturned as if to retreat. Tiny white teeth caught up the thin red line of her lower lip. "The supervisor said I was not to make any calls after dark," she muttered to herself, "that it wasn't safe for a white woman to be alone here at night. .. Maybe I ought to take the subway and go home."

Nell's gloved hand tightened decisively around the leather-lined document case under her arm. "It's silly to be afraid," she told herself. "Half the people around here are on Relief; if I didn't come around with their food tickets every week they'd die like flies. They're human after all. Grateful. They wouldn't let anyone hurt me. And besides, it's my own fault that I'm so late. I can't let those six little Thompson children go hungry overnight, just because I've been trying to find out why my other clients suddenly can't get along on what the city gives them when it was plenty till a month or so ago."

The relief-worker's brow puckered as she was reminded of the worrying problem, and she opened the paint-peeled door almost mechanically. She couldn't understand. That starved look had reappeared on the faces of the children; again in the eyes of the adults was the same dumb misery that she had seen when she first began giving them relief. Something had gone wrong— dead wrong. She sighed. "If they'd only help me to help them. If

they'd only talk. But they won't, they just get stony-faced and evasive when I question them. Scared-looking, too."

She strode down a long hall toward the narrow stairs she knew to be at the rear. What little light seeped in through the dirt-streaked glass panel in the entrance door served only to emphasize the dismal -murk within, to bring into being eerie shadows that lurked in crannies and cloaked formless, intangible menace. As Nell passed each black pool she found herself fighting a scalp-tingling impression that it came alive behind her, that it slithered soundlessly after her.

Odors closed about her; stench of filth and eternally sunless dankness that was underlaid by the musky, other-racial fetor to which all her months of service in Harlem had not accustomed her. Disquiet stirred more and more queasily within her as she became aware of the uncanny hush that pervaded the tenement, the pall of soundlessness where accustomed pandemonium should reign. No shrill voices screamed from one open door to another, there was no scampering of childish feet, no boisterous singing and no brawling such as was the constant accompaniment of her daily round. The place seemed to quiver with silent fear.

Uncarpeted, splintered steps creaked under the social-worker's tread, her heels clicked loudly against wood. The Thompsons were on the top floor, Nell recalled, six children and two grown-ups in a tworoom flat. There hadn't been a morsel of food in the place when she had made her first call, last week, and she had rushed back to the office and pleaded with Miss Bailey because of the emergency.

Still in that uncanny hush she passed the first landing, reached the second. It was almost pitch-dark here. Tiny feet scuttered past her and Nell gave vent to a little scream. She could never get quite used to the rats that infested these dwellings. Two dots of red glow were the rodent's eyes, watching her. Hinges creaked somewhere. A line of gray light widened as a door opened, slowly. A whisper reached her. "Oh, Miss Carter!"

NELL gasped, startled. She could see a black hand silhouetted in the aperture. It beckoned to her, and the whisper came again, urgently. "Miss Carter." She remembered whose door this was, and the pounding of her heart quieted. She moved nearer, and saw a familiar face peering timorously out.

"I haven't your ticket today, Mr. Brown," she said. "It isn't due yet."

Eyes rolled whitely in a chocolate face overlaid with ashen tint. "Ah doan' want no ticket, missie. Ah wants to tell you sompin', I wants to tell you to go 'way from here."

"What do yor mean?' Nell flared. "I don't understand you..."

The black's voice cringed, was entreating. "Please doan' get mad, Miss Carter. Ah doan' mean nothin' bad. Ut ain't good for you to be here jest now. You done been so good to us Ah doan' want nothin' to happen you."

The girl found courage in the other's fear. "Why, Mr. Brown. What could happen to me in this house? I'm taking care of every family here except the Thompsons, on the top floor, and I'm going up to see them now."

"The Thompsons!" A groan seemed wrenched from the man, and his lips were purple. "Oh Lawd-a-mussy! That's where....! Doan' go there, missie. Not there!"

Nell's scalp tightened under her jaunty little hat. "What's the matter with them? What's going on? Why shouldn't I go there?"

"Doan' ask me. Doan' ask." A mask dropped suddenly over Brown's face, the stony, unreadable expression grown too familiar in the past weeks. "But that ain't no place for white folks."

"Rastus," a feminine voice shrilled from within. "You close that do' quick!' Terror quivered in the thin tones. "Close it or—"

The man's head twisted. "Hush up," he called, warningly. "Hol' yuhr tongue, Mamie." He turned back to Nell, his thick-lipped mouth twisting. "Please doan' go up there— Oh Lawd!"

He had slammed the door shut before Nell realized that the squealed exelamation was wrenched from his livid lips by a scraping, ominous sound from above— a sound like a bare foot rubbing furtively against wood. She was cold all over, but she forced herself around till she could stare with widened eyes up the dark ascent, Something bulked up there, black against black. It was coming down, slowly, step by step, coming toward her!

She was rigid. Her throat worked, but she could make no sound. The Thing neared, was on the landing. A stench folded around her, fetid, a scent that spoke somehow of mouldering human bodies cast unburied on the green-scummed bosom of a swamp. It was almost on her; she felt rather than saw its nearness, and fear was an icy stream in her veins.

The Thing slithered past, gliding uneannily. Against dim luminance from below Nell saw its shape, saw that it was a bent, wizened old man. From his gaunt, black face eyes fastened on her, momentarily, eyes that burned redly from deepsunk pits. They seemed to sear her with hot evil, then they were gone and the twisted shape vanished into shadow. But it left the very atmosphere charged with a vibration of hate, of utter malevolence. Nell shuddered, swayed and caught at the door-jamb behind her for support.

For a moment she clung there, the floor heaving under her feet. Panic had her in its grip, fear of things unseen, of forces beyond the Known. Some weird thing from out the past of these people, some uncanny mystery from the

steamy jungles of their ancestral Africa, was reaching out for the children of the Dark Continent who huddled, afraid, in this city tenement. This was no place for white folks. She must run, she must get away from it before it had her, too, in its slimy, reptilian grip! She pushed herself away from the wall, took one step toward the stairs that dropped down to light and safety...

And then she stopped. Her mouth twisted, wryly. She was being puerile, childish. She was in a jitter over nothing: a dark hallway, a scared Negro, a whitehaired old Negro who wore no shoes. Were these things going to frighten her away from her job? If so, she might as well give it up. She turned and mounted higher.

She was still afraid; the pumping of her heart thumped in her ears. *Thud. Thud. Thud*. No— it wasn't her blood, it was a dull thudding from without, sourceless. *Thud. Thud. Thud*! The slow pound of a drum. Of a jungle drum! Vibrant as a snake's tongue... .

Step by step Nell mounted, and step by step the thump of the tom-tom marked her climb. Thud. Thud. Thud. It was coming from above, from the lightless region to which she climbed. It was warning her, warning the white woman to keep away, to flee from mysteries forbidden to her race. *Thud. Thud. Thud*. It was all about her as she reached the topmost landing, was receiving her into the pound of its slow terror, was beating in every cell of her being.

Thud. Thud. It had halted in midbeat! The silence was like a thunderclap.

Almost inaudible, a mumbling chant trailed out of darkness. It was coming from straight ahead of her, and for all its faintness something in its intonation sent tremors of fear rippling along her spine. She stared into the blackness, and gradually became aware that the veriest filament of light made an angle near the floor. And it was from just that point that that eerie sound was coming. Nell crept closer, some strange fascination conquering fear. Her hand slid along dirt-slimed wood, 'found a doorknob. It responded to the pressure of her cold fingers, turned. The door moved noiselessly, and the light-thread widened. A gap appeared, just enough for her to peer through.

Hazy twilight made the utterly bare room just visible. The walls were dampsmeared, faded wallpaper peeled away in long strips. The floor was age-gray, splintered. And on it squatted one whose toothless mouth mumbled the incantation she had heard.

Fingers of fear tightened at the girl's throat. This was the man, the very man, who had descended a moment before; and no one had passed her on the way up! His dull black face sloped back from thick, protruding lips to a wig of frizzed white wool that pressed low over gogglelike, sunken eyes. The enormously wide nose was so flat that it scarcely broke the simian, slanting

line of his aboriginal profile. From under a scarlet robe, veiling his body, splayed black toes peeped out. And the sleeves of that robe flapped away from pink-palmed hands whose ebon fingers played with—a tiny wooden doll!

Chapter 2
Witch-woman

NELL'S eyes narrowed. A scarlet, woolen string had been wound around the curious figurine, and the strange being was unwinding it. Slowly, slowly, with infinite patience, the red thread came away, and there was something in the leisurely motion of his hands, in the weird syllables that blubbed from his monstrous mouth, that reeked evil.

A moan wrenched the girl's eyes away from this uncanny sight, a low moan pregnant with anguish. The sound had come from behind her—from where she knew the Thompsons' flat to be. It came again. Soundlessly she closed the door on the weird sight she was watching, and forced herself to that other door across the hall.

Her rap on its panels was loud, terribly loud. But there was no response from within. She knocked again. Even the moaning had stopped. For all the evidence of her senses the flat was deserted. But someone was there, someone ill, in distress. Someone who needed help! The door opened as she tried the knob.

A candle flickered on a dilapidated mantle. Its yellow beam lit a room hardly more furnished than the one she had just seen. A broken-legged chair, a kitchen table. A bed on which dirt-gray rags were tumbled, half-concealing a human form. The face that turned toward her from the pillow was skull-like; fever burned in its pain-ridden eyes. On the floor a semicircle of ragged children, squatted like so many brown monkeys, their cheeks hunger-hollow.

From the other side of the cot a woman, brown arms crossed over an ample bosom, exclaimed, "Who dat?"

Nell kept her voice steady. "Miss Carter. From the Home Relief. I've brought your tickets."

Mrs. Thompson came around the bed, reaching a hand whose boniness contrasted startlingly with the rotund curves of her kimonoed figure. "Gimme," she grunted. "Gimme."

"Wait a minute. I want to have a talk with you first." Nell had dispensed only emergency relief last week; on this visit she was supposed to probe more deeply into the family's affairs, discover what other aid they needed. Clothing? Medical care? Her expert eyes roved the children's faces. Good Lord, they couldn't have had much to eat since she was here! What had been done with

the vouchers she had gone to so much trouble to obtain? Here was the old problem again!

"No need talkin'. Gimme the tickuts an' go 'way."

Nell didn't resent that. The attitude was all too familiar and she knew how to meet it. But something else was troubling her. She sniffed. What was that pungent aroma— like aromatic leaves burning? Where were those wisps of smoke coming from, coiling greasily in the air? They seemed almost alive, almost like gray serpents twisting. Her eyes followed them. That was not shadow in the farther corner, where the candle-light did not reach, It was an old woman, haunched over a caldron suspended from a tripod of three sticks bound by a red cloth. The smoke was coming from that iron pot, and underneath it a little fire of splintered wood burned on a metal plate. Bits of scarlet cloth were twisted in the multitudinous tiny braids that bristled from the black crone's head, and her beady eyes glittered as they watched the intruder. From outside came the faraway honk of an automobile horn, the rumble of a passing truck, the murmurous voice of New York. Otherwise Nell might have been in some mountain hut in Haiti, some thatched kraal in faraway Dahomey. She stared incredulously, her skin prickling. And then her training came to her aid. Never show surprise, wonder, in dealing with your clients. Accept all that you see without comment. Be nonchalant, poised. She brought her eyes back to the Thompson woman.

"Yes, Mrs. Thompson. There is need to talk. You see," she managed a smile, "we want to help you all we can, not just hand out tickets."

The other's eyes were hostile.

"You kain't help us. No'un kin help us 'cept—"

WAS it the old woman's sudden movement that had halted the sentence, the sharp hiss that came from her? Nell ignored it. "Oh yes, we can help you," she urged gently. "For instance, your husband seems to need a doctor. I'll order one sent in tomorrow morning, and it won't cost you a cent. What is the trouble with him anyway?"

"Nothin'. Ain't nothin' de matter a' doctor kin help."

The investigator abandoned the point, tried another angle of attack. "And then you don't seem to have been getting the right things for the children to eat. They look just as poorly as before. What did you get with your orders?"

The mother's mouth worked. "Got de right things. Ain't no 'un kin tell me whut my kids need to eat."

"I have no doubt. But perhaps you didn't get enough. Maybe I can tell you where to go to get more for the amount on your tickets. Your grocer may be cheating you— we sometimes catch one doing that. We don't want your

babies to be hungry when the city gives you enough for them. We want them to grow up healthy and happy even if your husband hasn't any work. We want them to be strong men and women with straight bones and sturdy limbs. Don't you?"

"Sho do." The woman's voice broke, and a tear rolled down her brown cheek. "But—" her lips quivered— "but there don't seem to be no way. Not ef'n Ah is gwine save Pompey from—" Her hand went suddenly to her mouth, and fright widened her eves.

Nell realized something unintended had slipped out, potinced on it. "Mrs. Thompson," she said sternly. "I know what you've been doing. You haven't used the wouchers for food, you've given them to somebody because your husband is sick. Haven't you?"

"I— I—"

"You have! Who was it? This woman? This—" the word witch almost slipped out— "old lady?"

"Y-Yes." The monosyllable ripped from the 'Negress' tortured lips. Then she tossed her head defiantly. "Mam' Julie be a mamaloi from Haiti. She be the on'y one kin save Pompey from de bocor who make de death ouanga against him, de witch-doctor who unwin' de thread of his life. Ah's got to pay her an' Ah ain't got no money." Her choked voice rose at the end to a shriek.

Nell gasped. She had plunged into unexpected depths here, was touching incredible things. For an instant, inborn, unacknowledged terror ran riot within her, fear of Black Magic, of unreal, horrible things from the earth's beginnings.

"So that's what it is!' Her small fists clenched, her eyes flashed. "You've been giving your children's food to a witch. A witch! Great Heavens! And she's been selling the tickets to some grocer at halfprice. Well, it's going to stop—stop right now. Do'you hear me?"

Mrs. Thompson's eyes were like a trapped animal's; they darted from Nell's irate face to the crone's darkly brooding countenance. "Ah kain't," shé groaned. "Ah kain't stop now. We'll all die ef'n Ah does."

"It is going to stop," Nell repeated, her voice quivering. "I'm going out right now to call up the Children's Society and the Health Department. They'll clear out this mess, quick enough."

"No," the mother screamed. "No! Doan' do thet. They'll take my chillun away from me. They'll take 'em away an' not let me see 'em no moah. Oh please doan'. Please." She thumped to her knees, clawed at the hem of Nell's skirt. "Please doan'." The youngsters were crying openly, sobbing and wailing in a harsh chorus of fear and grief.

THE white woman bent, put her hand on the mother's shoulder. "I don't want to do it," she said, the anger gone from her tones. "I don't want to take your children away. But I shall have to, for their own good, unless you promise me you'll stop this witch business. If you'll swear to use the vouchers properly, if you'll let me send in a doctor tomorrow to treat your husband and promise to do what he says, I'll let you keep them."

Mrs. Thompson looked up at her, her dark face working in anguish. Words trembled on the pendulous lips. But from the corner where the crone still haunched an angry hiss came, sibilant, venomous. It pulled Nell's eyes to it. She saw quick movement among. the rags cloaking the hag, saw something dart from them, a green flash that stopped, suddenly, and was an emerald snake, coiling! From its uplifted, diamond head a scarlet tongue flickered, and its face was shudderingly human, quiveringly demoniac.

The scene froze; a nightmare paralysis held Nell rigid Only her eyes were alive. They mirrored the shadowed room, the sick man on his filthy cot, the tortured woman kneeling at her feet; the black sorceress haunched over her caldron and the coiled reptile, its scales green-glowing, its darting tongue like a tiny flame. They saw, as through a mist, the half-circle of gray-faced, starved pickaninnies. ...

It was the silence, the close-lipped, brooding silence of the mamaloi, that was so terrible. If only the hag had spoken, if only those thrust-forward, wide lips had opened to pour forth entreaty, argument, invective, the white girl could have found words to combat her. But she squatted there on her haunches, a, crouched, scarce-human threat, and mumbled strange cadences that never lifted to the level of hearing. And all the while her little fire flickered bluely, the gray smokecoils drifted from her black-bellied pot and undulated heavily in mid-air, the green snake poised its affrighting head above its spiraled tail... .

A child whimpered. Nell's eyes flicked to its face— and the spell was broken! The tot, no more than three, was bigbellied with famine, sunken-cheeked. She could almost see Death's finger trace his mark on the tiny brow. No! Not if Nell Carter could prevent it. "Well," she pushed out between clenched teeth. "Well, how about it? Do you promise?"

The woman's body quivered, jelly-like. Her lips moved soundlessly, and Nell knew that she prayed. From somewhere came a breath of cleaner air and the snake uncoiled, skittered back to its hiding place in the *mamaloi*'s rags. The torture went out of the mother's eyes and a light came into them, a light that had not been there before. "Ah, promises," she said. "An' may de good Lawd he'p me keep mah promise." She sobbed. "Ah'll gib de vittles to mah chillun."

"Good woman!" Warmth swept through Nell's veins, exhilaration at her triumph. "Here are your tickets, then." She zipped open her document-case, fumbled within. "You sign here, remember...." Her voice was crisp, businesslike once more.

The black crone lifted to her feet. She upended the black caldron, spilling its contents on the stick-fire, quenching it. She glided across the room. From the corner of her eyes Nell watched her, saw her stop at the door. And now, suddenly, her sere face was contorted with hate— with something more fearful than hate. Her shaking, clawlike hand was upraised— and from between her twisting lips strange accents squealed. The meaning Nell could not fathom, but the syllables burned deep into her brain:

Aia bombaia bombe!
Lama Samana quana!
Evan vanta, & Vana docki!

No, the girl did not know the meaning of the sounds, but she knew that it was an invocation to obscene gods whose abode was in the foul morasses of some distant jungle, knew beyond doubt that the priestess of evil was crying malediction down upon her, was cursing her with an ancient curse.

The crone threw a pinch of green powder into the air— and vanished. But Nell shuddered as she realized that there were yet before her those long flights to the street, those long dark flights where shadows ctawled— anything might happen!

Chapter 3
The Goat Without Horns

THERE was light on the landing below Nell Carter when she left the Thompson apartment, a pin-point flame that danced and flickered at the tip of a flyblackened bracket, serving only to make the shadows that lay in the door embrasures blacker still, Those shadows were like huge black beasts, lying in silent wait for her. She could almost see them breathe.

The girl hesitated, her hand on the grease-smudged banister. Should she turn back, send one of the children out for a policeman to escort her from the building? Her small mouth twisted in a mocking smile at the thought. She was getting as jittery, as superstitious, as the Negroes themselves. Afraid of the dark, like a five-year-old! And besides, if she did that, if she betrayed her trepidation now, all that she had gained in the recent conflict of wills would be

lost. The witchwoman would regain ascendancy over the Thompsons, and the children would go hungry once more. She had to go ahead, alone. She had to.

The start was the hardest. Once in motion, running down step after step, the tattoo of her heels somehow comforting, courage seeped back to her. One flight was behind her. She whisked past the landing, started another. In moments now she would be out in clear, clean air, away from the gloom of this fear-filled house, away from its grisly, weird silence. And she would never again enter a Harlem tenement after sundown!

This next landing, just ahead! Why was it unlighted? Why was it so dark, so unearthly dark? What were those green spots of light that appeared so startlingly, that leaped up at her bringing blackness with them?

A bubbling shriek formed on Nell's lips— was never uttered! For the black was tangible, all about her, was a cold, clammy ebon jelly that swamped her, that bore her down, struggling, that flowed over her, weighty, choking, reaching its chill tentacles into her mouth, her nostrils.

She struck at it with her fists; they sank into the soft mass without effect. She kicked, frantically, frenziedly. The Thing gave way before her struggles with little, sucking noises, infinitely fearful. She could get no air, but grave-smell was in her nostrils and gigantic emerald orbs whirled before her eyes. Whirled dizzily, growing till they were world-size, cosmitsize— whirled till her brain was whirling too— till green evil took possesion of her senses— of her very soul. ... Somewhere a serpent hissed, sibilantly. ...

A DRUM THUMPED, muffled. *Boom. Boom. Brrroom! Boom. Boom. Brrroom*! The savage sound beat into Nell's brain; beat life, consciousness back into it. Boom. Brrroom! She opened her eyes.

She could see neither drum nor drummer, though the muffled beats went on, slow, unending. She could see nothing but walls of stone, a floor of stone whereon lay the half-shell of a coconut, a little light floating on some liquid within it. Above was vaulted darkness; ahead of her the dim illumination was swallowed by darkness. From somewhere out there came the ominous drum-beat. *Boom. Boom. Brroom*! She was lying on something soft, and it was soothing to the weariness that ached dully in every fiber of her body. But there was a steel band around her wrist, a chain from it that arcked to a ring sunk deep im the stone wall beside her, that clanked as she moved! Nell sat up, her heart pounding, and screamed! The shrill sound echoed nd re-echoed—and the unseen drum mocked her with its muffled unresonance. *Boom. Boom. Brroom*.

She screamed again, "Help! Help!" and again her voice was swallowed into echoing 'silence. She lifted to her feet, surged against the chain. The ring bit into her arm cruelly, jerked her back.

Wings fluttered, in the shadow to her left. Nell twisted to the sound. Something white was moving there, something white and small. The wind of her sudden motion flared the shell-light a bit, and she saw that it was a rooster, a white rooster, saw that a chain from a band around its ankle was fastened to a ring in the wall.

Boom. Boom. Brroom.

God Almighty!

Eyes were on her, eyes bored into her back. The girl, wild-eyed, swung around at the end of her tether. A bearded face stared at her from the other edge of the candle-light; a bearded face, long flat nose, glittering eyes. Horns! A goat! A white-skinned goat was chained to the wall as the rooster was, as she herself was chained! A goat!!

Boom. Boom. Brrroom.

Goat! Rooster! Girl! Icy fingers stroked Nell Carter's spine. White girl! White rooster! White goat! Where had she read of that combination, that somehow unholy, meaningful combination?

Brroom. Bom. Bom. Brroom. The drum cadence changed suddenly. *BOOM*! And stopped. Another sound slithered into the girl's consciousness, the padding sound of bare feet. It came from the long reach of shadows there ahead, came nearer, nearer. Horror was approaching.

Nell quivered as she stared past the faint light. Horror was approaching—was in the nimbus of pale luminance. It was staring at her with baleful eyes. Horror in the shape of a weazened black man, a scarlet turban hiding his white hair, scarlet robe draped about his age-bent form. The Thing on the stairs, the squatted sorcerer who unwound life from a tiny wooden doll, stood there in the flickering light of the shelled candle. And triumph edged the thick oval of his protruding lips!

GREEN coil slid over his shoulder, around his neck. The green snake lifted its diamond head and seemed to whisper into the papaloi's ear! : The chain clanked as Nell shrank back. And the sound roused fury in her. "You —let me go! Let me go at once! How dare you do this to me? How dare you?" The evil smile on the black face deepened, became more sinister. "I dare all. These are my precincts, not yours. It is you who have intruded— you who must make recompense."

Nell felt surprise at the preciseness of his utterance, the purity of his speech. Strange, utterly strange, coming from that barbarically bedecked

ancient. It was more eerie, more uncanny, somehow, than everything else that had happened. But she straightened, tossed her head. "I have intruded! By trying to help your people, by trying to save them from their own folly?"

"By crossing the ancient gods!" The slow words dripped from him, coldly menacing. "By bringing your white philosophy, your white religion, into the domain of Legba and Dambella. By daring to deprive Ayida Oueddo, the serpent goddess, of her due!" At this last queer name the snake's head jerked, minutely, as if it had heard its own name spoken.

"I have no concern with your gods!" Nell retorted, eyes smarting with anger. "My clients can worship the devil himself for all I care. But when that worship takes the bread from the mouths of their children it is my concern, and all your tricks and mummery aren't going to keep me from fighting it."

The baleful glow crept back into the old man's eyes. "Tricks! Mummery! You know better than that, white woman, you have feit the night itself grow real about you and overwhelm you, who have looked deep into the eyes of Papa Agoué himself. How came you here? By tricks and mummery ?"

"I—" The girl's mouth opened, and closed again. What was it that had overwhelmed her there on the stairs, that vast outpouring of black nothingness that was yet solid? What were those green eyes that had stared into hers and grown large, whirled large as the cosmos? She had sunk deep, deep, into their depths... .

"Ah, you cannot answer me. But I know it. I, *Véduno of Védumnu*. I, Ti Nebo, priest of the ancient rites, I know! And she knows—" his hand went up to stroke the snake's head that bowed to meet it— "the living incarnation of Ayida Quedda. She knows. But enough of this. You have tasted of the power of voodoo." He broke off, and suddenly his face was a stony, horrific mask from which tiny eyes glittered like black, hard marbles. "Have you heard, by chance, of the goat without horns?"

Something in the way he asked the question, in the slow, malevolent way the words dripped into the dim vault, struck new terror into Nell's heart. "The goat without horns!" What was there about the phrase that made it so infinitely, obscenely menacing? Nell, wordless, shook her head.

"You have not? But you can guess its meaning. Well— if you would not be the goat without horns this very night, listen to me, white woman, and obey!"

SHADOWS crawled behind Ti Nebo, black shadows that were alive. Fear was a living presence in the dim reaches of this stone chamber that was out of the world she knew, "What do you want of me? Nell whispered. "What do you want?"

The ancient nodded slowly. "You are to go among us with ears that hear not, with eyes that see not. You are not to question what is done with the vouchers you bring. You are to open no door that is not opened to you. And you are to forget, utterly, what you see this night."

Ears that hear not! The meaning crawled snakelike into Nell's shrinking brain. Eyes that see not! And the alternative—the goat without horns! What, in the name of God, *was the goat without horns*? Frightened speculation beat at her bewildered brain. The horned goat stalked to the end of its chain, she saw that its blue eyes were fixed on the black priest. And she saw in those eyes, in those animal eyes, a brooding horror of things unseen, unguessable! Fear in the eyes of a goat!

What was it a goat could fear? Death? What does a beast know of death? Did that horned beast see something she could not see, some monstrous shape, some formless elemental hovering about the scarlet-robed papaloi around whose neck coiled a green snake with a half-human face? She shivered. It was cold, deathly cold. But the cold was within her.

Starving children grow cold before they die! Other eyes swam before her vision, piteous, entreating eyes watching a mother's hands for food that would never be given to them. Eyes of hungry children. A voice spoke; she was. startled to hear that it was her own. "No! Never! You can kill me, do anything you. want with me, but never while I live will I let those little children starve! Never!"

The snake arched above Ti Nebo's scarlet turban, a curve of emerald threat. And somehow the papaloi's visigae took on the uncanny, half-human, wholly demoniac cast of the reptile's countenance, "You will live," his tones, suddenly deep, intoned. "You will live— and you will obey!"

And, on the word, he vanished! Nell tried to tell herself he had merely stepped back into shadow—but no pad, pad of the naked, splayed black feet came out of the darkness.

As if fascinated, the girl strained toward the tiny flickering flame in the coconut shell, stared at it, and shuddered. This was New York, she told herself, New York and not some mountain hut amid the tumbled crags of Haiti. Outside somewhere were automobiles, and traffic lights, and blue-uniformed policemen patroling. This was New York— but she knew that in this vaulted cellar— it must be the basement of the tenement she had entered, was it only an hour ago?— in this stonewalled enclave she was as far from the great metropolis as if some genie had transported her to the jungle depths of the Voodoo Isle.

The Voodoo Isle! From its dark mountains something had come across the seas, a foul something had come to this black Harlem, this gathering of dark-skinned races in the heart of white New York.

Voodoo! In Africa, in Haiti, in Jamaica, deep in the miasmic depths of the Dismal Swamp, in the night-shrouded mystery of the cotton-fields, in the mysterious, mangrove-screened bayous of the Mississippi's delta, wherever the children of its primeval votaries had been gathered to fulfill their toilsome destiny, the mysterious snake-worship had followed to take its toll. And now it had followed them once again, to the northern city where civilization had reached its flower. It was here, here in New York. And she, because she had threatened its reign, because she had snatched one victim from its coils, she was in its dread clutch. Black, slimy, mysterious... she was its prisoner— she and the rooster and the goat. Great God! What were they going to do with her? What would happen next?

"You will live— and you will obey!" The voice of the weird priest of the weird religion rang in her ears. Nell sank to her knees and prayed to her white God, prayed for strength to withstand the horrors that were to come.

Chapter 4
"Papa Legba Open de Gate!"

IN THE darkness a drum was beating, thumping its savage rhythm, pounding its primeval cadence. From beyond the darkness it came, from beyond the flickering halo of light cast by the little flame floating within the shell that looked like half a blackened skull. *Boom. Boomboom. Boom*. Another joined it, and another. Pounding, booming sound reverberated within the vault, reverberated within Nell's aching brain. *Boom. Boomboom. Boom*.

Now that booming, that dreadful booming was loud; now it died down, drifting away, it seemed, so that it was a faint mutter of rolling thunder in the distance, of cadenced, rhythmic thunder. Now it was nearing again, louder, louder; *boom, boomboom, boom*; and with it other sounds were coming, the shuffling of many feet, the low chanting of many voices. Louder the boom of the drums, louder the chart of the singers; nearer, nearer, till Nell could distinguish words:

Papa Legba open de gate!
Papa Legba open de gate!
Papa Legba youah chillun come!
Papa Legba open de gate!

Over and over, over and over, boom of drum and chant of singers, till ther own heart pounded in time with the pounding chant, thudded in time with the thudding words:

Papa Legba open de gate!
Papa Legba youah chillun come!
Papa Legba open de gate!

The gate to what, a fearsome voice whispered in the ear of the shuddering girl. The gate to what?

Shuffling feet, many shuffling feet, made whispering sound in the darkness, many feet shuffling in time to the pound of the drums, to the thump of the chant. *Boom. Boom. Boomboom. Boom*.

Papa Legba open de gate!

The fetid smell of close-packed bodies came to Nell; sweat-smell, toil-smell, jungle-smell underlying all. Somewhere out there in the blackness was a throng of unseen, swaying to the thud of the drums, intoning the mysterious unmusical chorus. Thud. Thud. Thudihud. Thud.

Then silence crashed. Quivering silence more dreaful than sound. Long silence in darkness that veiled what horrors? The girl strained at her chain, strove to pierce the gloom with aching, frightened eyes.

A single voice, a cracked female voice, squealing:

Ayida Ouedda, goddess of snakes,
Come to us, come, as the lightning breaks!

And lightning glare ripped the darkness, flared blindingly! It vanished— but a picture persisted in the white woman's dazed eyes— a picture of a huge coiling serpent in mid-air, a serpent with a woman's face, black and eerily beautiful; and beneath it a sea of upturned black faces, of black hands raised imploring, beseechingly to the snake-woman.

Now light was growing in the darkness beyond; dim light, sourceless. The faint muttering of drumheads rubbed by black hands grew as the light grew. Space extended itself as brightening light revealed arch after stone arch progressing on and on— till far down at the other end Nell could see squatted forms, row upon row; shiny faces, black, and brown, and lighter tan; could see white eyes rolling, white teeth gleaming.

The drummers were nearer, here close to the shell-light, gigantic naked Negroes sweating as their black hands rubbed gray skins stretched taut over

upright cylinders that were the drums. And such drums! Hollowed tree-trunks cut off, the wood age-blackened. The center one three feet tall, the others shorter, uneven. And around each cylinder a snake was carved, carved so lifelike that for an instant Nell thought they moved.

There was a long table here too, stretched across the space, a table covered by a white cloth. And on it a conelike mound of cornmeal surmounted by an egg, a small wooden snake stretched horizontally atop an upright stick, a wooden bowl. And a long-bladed, crueledged knife....

The drums were talking, growling in forgotten accents a tale from out of vanished years, a tale of angry jungle gods demanding propitiation; a tale of long-buried threat, of reawakened fear.

To the left of the altar Ti Nebo stood, a figure of dread in his scarlet robe, his lurid turban. To the right, where the drummers were, stood the old crone Nell had fast seen bent over a black caldron. But age was somehow gone from her figure now. She stood erect, lithe, springy as Nell herself. From her shoulders, too, hung a scarlet robe.

THROUGH the muttering talk of the drums a hissing sounded. Nell saw that the cheeks of the woman, of the *mamaloi*, were puffing in and out, in and out, like a pulsating bladder. It was she hissing, snakelike. A sinuous wave rippled through her body, another. She was turning, hissing and writhing, in serpentine fashion. A scream aborted in the girl's throat as she saw beady eyes glittering in the black face, saw a red tonguetip darting in and out, in and out, flickering as the snake's tongue had flickered. The voodoo priestess was advancing now, advancing in a curious glide, while still she hissed, while still her little body undulated, while still her red tongue flickered between her lips. She moved erect, yet somehow it seemed she crawled— crawled on her belly along the floor! The chained white bird was rigid, its red comb erect, its little eyes fastened on the snake-face of the coming mamalot. Her black hands writhed out from her scarlet robes, as the green snake had writhed from her rags. Her fingers touched the bright steel chain— and it fell apart.

Faster the drums thumped, faster, faster. Staccato thumping, grandfather of jazz!

Black hands clutched the rigid bird, lifted it high in the air. The drums rumbled in triumph, and Ti Nebo's arms thrust above his turbaned head as the cock lifted. The sorcerer's voice was like ripping silk: "Ybo, the hour is come. The hour is come, Ybo. The hour of blood."

Was it from the drums that the soundless vibration came, the vibration that filled all space, the reverberant vibration that was a presence in the room? Was it from the snake drums, booming?

It was the drums that pounded, pounded, frenziedly in a tangled, quick, yet ordered rhythm as the *mamaloi* whirled, spun like a top, faster, faster, till she was a mazy whirl of scarlet at the apex of which was her black snake-face and the white, wing-beating shape of the sacrificial cock. And suddenly a black hand darted, reptilian, to the rooster's neck. A sudden twist, and the comb, the head was gone as still the priestess whirled. Blood spurted from the headless neck, spurted fountain-like....

Ti Nebo had seized the wooden bowl, had snatched the headless bird from the whirling woman's hands. The blood poured into the bowl... wings beat feebly against the *papaloi*'s arms. . . . The priestess collapsed, lay writhing on the stony floor... the drums muttered into silence.

And Nell felt pent-up breath whistle from between her white lips. The warm smell of new-spilled blood was sweet in her nostrils, the jungle-rhythm of the drums was in her brain. A cry burst from her throat, a cry that had the very timber, the very sound of the shrill, exultant cries that burst from these other throats, the black throats of the staring, swaying crowd far back in the buried voodoo temple.

An exultant cry! Oh God!

The blood-spattered priest whirled to her. There was triumph in his face! No! Please God, no! She was not as these. Not as these. Not yet! Nell's hand flew to her mouth, from which that cry had come, and her heart pounded.

"Our Father which are...." She murmured the childhood prayer. And suddenly she knew that these things she was witnessing were foul and horrible.

Triumph faded from the *papaloi*'s face. He signed to the drummers. A new rhythm pounded on the quivering air.

"You will live— and you will obey," was what he had said. Obey that blackfaced devotee of a religion of blood and fear?

Never!

But the drums were beating, and the scarlet-clad priest was sprinkling meal on the floor, sprinkling strange designs of intertwined circles, stars, tangled lines. The drums thudded, and the ranged congregation beyond were silent in a hush of expectancy. Nell saw them clearly.

Why! These were no savage votaries of a savage faith. These were her clients, the men and women she had fed and clothed, whom she had aided in their distress. There was Abe Johnson, there Mima Lewis, there Erasmus Jones. Hattie Carbo's eyes were white orbs glowing out of black and twitching face. And in the very front row, conflict evident in every line of his contorted,

chocolatebrown countenance, was Rastus Brown. Rastus, the man who had warned her, defying his own fears, warned her to flee this house accursed.

The drums had called them here, the old drums and the old gods. The drums had called them here for their own undoing. And Nell knew, now, that the struggle in which she was engaged, the battle with the forces of ancient evil, was not for herself alone. She was fighting for them, for the bodies, the souls of the childlike, pitiable people who had been her wards these many weary months. If she failed, if the prophecy of the papaloi came true, and living, she obeyed his command to go among them unseeing, unhearing—then they were lost. Souls and bodies they were lost. For that to which she was to blind herself, to deafen herself, would be their exploitation by the unholy pair!

Iron entered Nell Carter's soul, iron of the old Crusaders, of the Puritans, ' of the missionaries who carry the Cross into distant, hostile lands. She would not fail, she could not fail.

And the drums boomed, softly, and the red-robed papalot traced weird patterns with trailing corn-meal. The gory sorceress groveled before the uncanny altar, and something breathed in the room that was neither man nor beast.

And the horned goat watched her with its blue eyes in which fear lurked—and something else.

He knew!

Chapter 5
Goat Cry in Human Throat

TI NEBO was finished with his traci ing of powdered designs. He moved slowly back to his post at the altar's left. The black crone lifted, stood swaying at the right. The, tempo of the booming drums quickened, grew more ominous.

What horror was to confront her now Nell could not know, but she knew that the time of her supreme test was at hand.

The drums thumped and chanting voices took up the rhythm once again, chanting voices pounding:

Papa Legba open de gate!
Papa Legba open de gate!
Let her pass to de promised lan'!
Papa Legba open de gate!

Let *her* pass.... Nell's throat choked as she heard the change in the invocating : "Let her pass to de promised lan'." It was she they meant. Nell

Carter, and the "promised land"—oh mockery—was the dim half-world ruled by the jungle gods!

Papa Legba open de gate!

As the drums thumped the eerie light dimmed, that hitherto had illumined the cavern. No, it did not dim, it drew in, its margins narrowed, till all she could see was the white clothed altar, and the statuesque, red-cloaked figures at its either end! These, and the crumpled heap of blood-spattered feathers that once had been a proud white cock.

Papa Legba open de gate!

A blue flame sprang into being, where was the central triangle of the design Ti Nebo had made. It ran swiftly along the powdery lines till the whole pattern was a tracing of eerie flame. Nell saw that the powder itself was not burning? that the fires above it almost touched it.

Let her pass to de promised lan'!

The *mamaloi* was moving. Her black hands reached for the wooden bow], closed around it. She moved along the table, lifted the bowl to the priest's thick lips, He drank the still warm blood of the sacrificed cock!

Papa Legba open de gate, the moaning chorus intoned, and the drums beat their savage rhythm.

Nell was crouched now, her eyes, widened and aching, glued to the two servitors of pagan rites. They were coming toward her, two black-faced grotesques blood-robed, pacing toward her in measured cadence with the measured beat of the drums.

And before. them a shadow moved, *a shadow that was not theirs*!

The edge of that shadow touched the hem of Nell's dress, blackness ran up her clothing like quicksilver, swallowed her form, her arms. She was in the center of a sphere of blackness, blackness absolute, and her being shrank to a tiny pinpoint of white light within that blackness.

Fear was in that blackness, and horror, Crawling things were in it; things that slithered the steamy earth before the human race began. Terrors were in it, terrors of the jungle night when man hid in his caves and his hollowed tree-trunks and shuddered till daylight came again. All the primitive fears of mankind were in it, the fears of little Man in a cosmos he did not understand. And the beat of the drums thumped through it, promising relief, promising safety from all the fears, all the terrors that stalked the night. "Bow to

Damballa," they boomed their message. "Bow to Ayida, the serpent goddess, and she will guard you from harm."

At last the little white light began to grow, and the blackness retreated before it. And Nell Carter was herself again.

But she was no longer chained to the stone wall of the haumfort, the underground temple of voodoo. She was in the open space before the altar, and the weird blue fire was burning all about her, tracing the design the papalot had made. It was burning all about her but there was no heat in its flame. She was crouched in that open space, and crouched on its haunches before her was the white goat.

Its blue eyes gazed into hers, and her gray ones gazed back, and it seemed to Nell that a current flowed between them. It seemed that something from within her was flowing out along that current and something from within him was returning to take its place.

All the while the booming of the drums was like thunder in that narrow place, like thunder in the mountains, like the voice of an angry god growling his wrath.

And cry formed in Nell Carter's throat, *the blatting cry of a goat*!

SHE fought against it, fought against the animal cry tearing at her voicecords, fought to keep it from bleating forth submission to the dark power of voodoo.

Steely light flashed between the goat and her, darting light, and Nell knew a knife hovered above her, a knife in the hands of the ebony papaloi, a knife that in another instant would flash across the goat's throat and hers, spilling their blood to the glory of the jungle gods. Goat-bleat quivered on her lips. Her chin lifted as the goat's head lifted, she and the goat offered their throats to the stroke. Exultation clamored in the girl's veins, exultation that she had been chosen for the sacrifice, that her blood would mingle with goat's blood for Dambella to drink, for Ouedda. ...

A hysterical voice screeched, somewhere: "Papa Legba! Papa Legba open de gate for me and not de white. Not de white, Papa Legba! Not de white!'

Nell's eyes flicked to the shock of the sound. A woman was hurtling across the space beyond which black rows watched, a girl whose hands clawed sleazy fabric from ivory breasts; breasts round and palpitant and hard-nippled. Nell saw her corded, stretched neck; her head, thrown back, strained back as Nell's own was strained; saw froth flying from her redlipped, screaming mouth; saw eyes that "were black flame.

"I am de goat widout horns," the girl shrilled. Wiry hair writhed like tiny snakes around: her frenzied face. Silk ripped— and the bounding Negress was a lithe, naked thing of the jungle, a wild, unhuman thing hurled toward the knife of sacrifice by a power outside itself. "*I— I am de goat*!"

Wrath, red wrath exploded in Nell at this blasphemy. She—she was the appointed one, the one the gods had honored! This—

"Not de white, Papa Legba. *Not de white*! *I'm de goat*!"

Wrath vanished as the crazed Virago's words penetrated. She— she was Nell Carter! She was the white! White! Oh God! She remembered now.

The spell was broken. The white girl lifted from her crouch, liited and screamed with white lips, "No! God help me! What am I doing? No!"

A growl behind her, a ferocious growl of baffled rage, twisted her around. Ti Nebo, his aboriginal visage contorted with fury, leaped for her, his thirsty blade sweeping in a long arc. Nell sprang to meet him. Her little hand clutched his knife-wrist, her other joined it, and she clung, swaying, to keep the cruel steel trom her flesh.

He clawed her, ripped long weals in the skin of her cheek. The furrows seared like living flame. She shrieked in anguish —shrieked, but held her grip.

There were shouts behind her, the pound of running feet. The papaloi jerked, almost tore from her grasp, lifted her from the floor, but she held on. Frantically, desperately, she held to the grip on the skinny black wrist that the knife might not reach her.

The onrushing throng was almost upon her. She felt their hot breath, heard the thunder of their coming. In seconds now they would be upon her, would tear the profaner of their mysteries to bits.

They would kill her, but at least they would not have swayed her to their will.

A black form loomed at her side. A hoarse voice shouted. Fists lifted. This was the end!

But the fists crashed into the grimacing, terrible face of the sorcerer! His arm tore from her grasp, his wizened form sprawled across the altar, crashed with it to the floor. An arm swung around her waist, lifted her. The hoarse voice shouted in her ear, "Miss Carter, it's all right. It's all right, Miss Carter."

She twisted, saw the face of her rescuer. It was Rastus Brown!

SOMEONE plunged at them, and Brown's clenched hand crashed into a swart face. Maelstrom of fighting. Voices shrieked, "Kill her! Kill de white!" Other voices screamed, "Let her through!"

Animal growls all about her. Snarls, and the howls of wounded men. Smack of fists on flesh. Black faces, brown faces, yellow faces, teeth bared, eyes rolling. Blood-lust in rolling white eyes. Maelstrom of fighting.

But in Nell's heart joy leaped. A carol of joy in her throat.

Some, at least, of her wards had remembered. Some, at least, were safe from the spell of voodoo. Her long lone fight had not been in vain!

"It's all right, Miss Carter. All right." Good voice, brave voice of Rastus Brown in her ears as they forged through the mélée. Brave Rastus Brown, chocolate-faced, level-eyed, with gratitude in his soul for the white girl who had brought food to him and his when he was starving, clothed them when they were naked.

And others too, remembered. A phalanx was forming around her, a fighting triangle of fighting men, and they were moving faster now toward the door she could see far back in that cellar, a cellar that was no longer a *haumfort* but a basement beneath a Harlem flat.

Faster and faster they moved. They crashed the door, poured up the steps. They were in the vestibule. And suddenly there was silence.

A policeman was framed in the doorway, his nightstick gripped in his hand, his white face peering into the gloom. "What's goin' on here?" he roared. "What's all the yellin'?"

"Oh Lawdy," someone groaned in the crowd. "De cops! Now we— git it."

Nell jerked away from Rastus Brown's arm, pushed to the front. "Nothing, officer," she said lightly. "I'm late with my food tickets and the boys were all waiting down here in the hall for me. Were they making too much noise?"

"An' who're you?"

"Nell Carter, from the Home Relief." She was in the shadow; she hoped he could not see that she was hatless, her suit in rags. She hoped he could not see the livid weals on her cheek.

"From the Home Relief! Hell, Lady, you shouldn't be going around here at night."

"I have to bring their tickets to them, Officer. And besides, nobody would harm me here. The boys will look out for me. Won't you?"

"Yas'm," they chorused from the darkness around her. "Nobody ain't gwine hurt you w'ile we's aroun'."

The cop grinned in the light of the street-lamp. "I guess they wouldn't at that. They know which side their bread is buttered. Good-night."

"Good-night, Officer."

Nell watched the policeman stroll down the stoop, then she turned to the crowd. "Thank you, men. But why did you let me go through all that? Why didn't you get me out of there long ago?"

"We was scared o' the voodoo man," Brown's voice answered. "But when we saw as how he didn't have no power over you we wasn't ascared no more."

The smile vanished from Nell's tones. She was very grim. "He had no power over me because I didn't let him have, because I knew his tricks were all mummery and fraud. And if you believe that, if you hold on to that thought, he'll never have any more power over you. Remember that, will you?"

"Yes'm, we sho' will. He was a fakir, sho' 'nuff. We ain't gwine give him no moah uv ouah food tickuts. You-all needn't be scared o' that."

"All right. Now good-night."

"Good-night, Missie Carter. De good Lord bless you."

Wearily Nell Carter descended the stoop into the street. She had won. But a queer thought slid through her tired brain. "Was he a fakir?" it asked. "What of the man dying upstairs, because he was unwinding a string from a little wooden doll made in the man's image? What was it that overwhelmed you on the stairs? What was the shadow that crawled over you and engulfed you so that all there was left of you was a tiny, shining light no bigger than the point of a pin?"

Music on Seventh Avenue was like the beat of jungle drums, serpent drums, booming....

12: The Black Stone

Robert E. Howard

1906-1936

Weird Tales, Nov 1931

"They say foul beings of Old Times still lurk
In dark forgotten corners of the world,
And Gates still gape to loose, on certain nights,
Shapes pent in Hell."
— Justin Geoffrey

I READ OF IT FIRST in the strange book of Von Junzt, the German eccentric who lived so curiously and died in such grisly and mysterious fashion. It was my fortune to have access to his *Nameless Cults* in the original edition, the so-called *Black Book*, published in Düsseldorf in 1839, shortly before a hounding doom overtook the author. Collectors of rare literature are familiar with *Nameless Cults* mainly through the cheap and faulty translation which was pirated in London by Bridewall in 1845, and the carefully expurgated edition put out by the Golden Goblin Press of New York in 1909. But the volume I stumbled upon was one of the unexpurgated German copies, with heavy leather covers and rusty iron hasps. I doubt if there are more than half a dozen such volumes in the entire world today, for the quantity issued was not great, and when the manner of the author's demise was bruited about, many possessors of the book burned their volumes in panic.

VON JUNZT spent his entire life (1795-1840) delving into forbidden subjects; he traveled in all parts of the world, gained entrance into innumerable secret societies, and read countless little-known and esoteric books and manuscripts in the original; and in the chapters of the Black Book, which range from startling clarity of exposition to murky ambiguity, there are statements and hints to freeze the blood of a thinking man. Reading what Von Junzt *dared* put in print arouses uneasy speculations as to what it was that he dared *not* tell. What dark matters, for instance, were contained in those closely written pages that formed the unpublished manuscript on which he worked unceasingly for months before his death, and which lay torn and scattered all over the floor of the locked and bolted chamber in which Von Junzt was found dead with the marks of taloned fingers on his throat? It will never be known, for the author's closest friend, the Frenchman Alexis Ladeau, after having spent a whole night piecing the fragments together and reading what was written, burnt them to ashes and cut his own throat with a razor.

But the contents of the published matter are shuddersome enough, even if one accepts the general view that they but represent the ravings of a madman. There among many strange things I found mention of the Black Stone, that curious, sinister monolith that broods among the mountains of Hungary, and about which so many dark legends cluster. Von Junzt did not devote much space to it— the bulk of his grim work concerns cults and objects of dark worship which he maintained existed in his day, and it would seem that the Black Stone represents some order or being lost and forgotten centuries ago. But he spoke of it as one of the *keys*— a phrase used many times by him, in various relations, and constituting one of the obscurities of his work. And he hinted briefly at curious sights to be seen about the monolith on midsummer's night. He mentioned Otto Dostmann's theory that this monolith was a remnant of the Hunnish invasion and had been erected to commemorate a victory of Attila over the Goths. Von Junzt contradicted this assertion without giving any refutory facts, merely remarking that to attribute the origin of the Black Stone to the Huns was as logical as assuming that William the Conqueror reared Stonehenge.

This implication of enormous antiquity piqued my interest immensely and after some difficulty I succeeded in locating a rat-eaten and moldering copy of Dostmann's *Remnants of Lost Empires* (Berlin, 1809, "Der Drachenhaus" Press). I was disappointed to find that Dostmann referred to the Black Stone even more briefly than had Von Junzt, dismissing it with a few lines as an artifact comparatively modern in contrast with the Greco-Roman ruins of Asia Minor which were his pet theme. He admitted his inability to make out the defaced characters on the monolith but pronounced them unmistakably Mongoloid. However, little as I learned from Dostmann, he did mention the name of the village adjacent to the Black Stone— Stregoicavar— an ominous name, meaning something like Witch-Town.

A close scrutiny of guide-books and travel articles gave me no further information— Stregoicavar, not on any map that I could find, lay in a wild, little-frequented region, out of the path of casual tourists. But I did find subject for thought in Dornly's *Magyar Folklore*. In his chapter on *Dream Myths* he mentions the Black Stone and tells of some curious superstitions regarding it— especially the belief that if any one sleeps in the vicinity of the monolith, that person will be haunted by monstrous nightmares for ever after; and he cited tales of the peasants regarding too-curious people who ventured to visit the Stone on Midsummer Night and who died raving mad because of *something* they saw there.

That was all I could gleam from Dornly, but my interest was even more intensely roused as I sensed a distinctly sinister aura about the Stone. The

suggestion of dark antiquity, the recurrent hint of unnatural events on Midsummer Night, touched some slumbering instinct in my being, as one senses, rather than hears, the flowing of some dark subterraneous river in the night.

And I suddenly saw a connection between this Stone and a certain weird and fantastic poem written by the mad poet, Justin Geoffrey: *The People of the Monolith*. Inquiries led to the information that Geoffrey had indeed written that poem while traveling in Hungary, and I could not doubt that the Black Stone was the very monolith to which he referred in his strange verse. Reading his stanzas again, I felt once more the strange dim stirrings of subconscious promptings that I had noticed when first reading of the Stone.

I HAD BEEN CASTING ABOUT for a place to spend a short vacation and I made up my mind. I went to Stregoicavar. A train of obsolete style carried me from Temesvar to within striking distance, at least, of my objective, and a three days' ride in a jouncing coach brought me to the little village which lay in a fertile valley high up in the fir-clad mountains. The journey itself was uneventful, but during the first day we passed the old battlefield of Schomvaal where the brave Polish-Hungarian knight, Count Boris Vladinoff, made his gallant and futile stand against the victorious hosts of Suleiman the Magnificent, when the Grand Turk swept over eastern Europe in 1526.

The driver of the coach pointed out to me a great heap of crumbling stones on a hill near by, under which, he said, the bones of the brave Count lay. I remembered a passage from Larson's *Turkish Wars*: "After the skirmish" (in which the Count with his small army had beaten back the Turkish advance-guard) "the Count was standing beneath the half-ruined walls of the old castle on the hill, giving orders as to the disposition of his forces, when an aide brought to him a small lacquered case which had been taken from the body of the famous Turkish scribe and historian, Selim Bahadur, who had fallen in the fight. The Count took therefrom a roll of parchment and began to read, but he had not read far before he turned very pale and without saying a word, replaced the parchment in the case and thrust the case into his cloak. At that very instant a hidden Turkish battery suddenly opened fire, and the balls striking the old castle, the Hungarians were horrified to see the walls crash down in ruin, completely covering the brave Count. Without a leader the gallant little army was cut to pieces, and in the war-swept years which followed, the bones of the noblemen were never recovered. Today the natives point out a huge and moldering pile of ruins near Schomvaal beneath which, they say, still rests all that the centuries have left of Count Boris Vladinoff."

I found the village of Stregoicavar a dreamy, drowsy little village that apparently belied its sinister cognomen— a forgotten back-eddy that Progress had passed by. The quaint houses and the quainter dress and manners of the people were those of an earlier century. They were friendly, mildly curious but not inquisitive, though visitors from the outside world were extremely rare.

"Ten years ago another American came here and stayed a few days in the village," said the owner of the tavern where I had put up, "a young fellow and queer-acting— mumbled to himself— a poet, I think."

I knew he must mean Justin Geoffrey.

"Yes, he was a poet," I answered, "and he wrote a poem about a bit of scenery near this very village."

"Indeed?" mine host's interest was aroused. "Then, since all great poets are strange in their speech and actions, he must have achieved great fame, for his actions and conversations were the strangest of any man I ever knew."

"As is usual with artists," I answered, "most of his recognition has come since his death."

"He is dead, then?"

"He died screaming in a madhouse five years ago."

"Too bad, too bad," sighed mine host sympathetically. "Poor lad— he looked too long at the Black Stone."

My heart gave a leap, but I masked my keen interest and said casually: "I have heard something of this Black Stone; somewhere near this village, is it not?"

"Nearer than Christian folk wish," he responded. "Look!" He drew me to a latticed window and pointed up at the fir-clad slopes of the brooding blue mountains. "There beyond where you see the bare face of that jutting cliff stands that accursed Stone. Would that it were ground to powder and the powder flung into the Danube to be carried to the deepest ocean! Once men tried to destroy the thing, but each man who laid hammer or maul against it came to an evil end. So now the people shun it."

"What is there so evil about it?" I asked curiously.

"It is a demon-haunted thing," he answered uneasily and with the suggestion of a shudder. "In my childhood I knew a young man who came up from below and laughed at our traditions— in his foolhardiness he went to the Stone one Midsummer Night and at dawn stumbled into the village again, stricken dumb and mad. Something had shattered his brain and sealed his lips, for until the day of his death, which came soon after, he spoke only to utter terrible blasphemies or to slaver gibberish.

"My own nephew when very small was lost in the mountains and slept in the woods near the Stone, and now in his manhood he is tortured by foul

dreams, so that at times he makes the night hideous with his screams and wakes with cold sweat upon him.

"But let us talk of something else, *Herr*; it is not good to dwell upon such things."

I remarked on the evident age of the tavern and he answered with pride: "The foundations are more than four hundred years old; the original house was the only one in the village which was not burned to the ground when Suleiman's devils swept through the mountains. Here, in the house that then stood on these same foundations, it is said, the scribe Selim Bahadur had his headquarters while ravaging the country hereabouts."

I learned then that the present inhabitants of Stregoicavar are not descendants of the people who dwelt there before the Turkish raid of 1526. The victorious Moslems left no living human in the village or the vicinity thereabouts when they passed over. Men, women and children they wiped out in one red holocaust of murder, leaving a vast stretch of country silent and utterly deserted. The present people of Stregoicavar are descended from hardy settlers from the lower valleys who came into the upper levels and rebuilt the ruined village after the Turk was thrust back.

Mine host did not speak of the extermination of the original inhabitants with any great resentment and I learned that his ancestors in the lower levels had looked on the mountaineers with even more hatred and aversion than they regarded the Turks. He was rather vague regarding the causes of this feud, but said that the original inhabitants of Stregoicavar had been in the habit of making stealthy raids on the lowlands and stealing girls and children. Moreover, he said that they were not exactly of the same blood as his own people; the sturdy, original Magyar-Slavic stock had mixed and intermarried with a degraded aboriginal race until the breeds had blended, producing an unsavory amalgamation. Who these aborigines were, he had not the slightest idea, but maintained that they were "pagans" and had dwelt in the mountains since time immemorial, before the coming of the conquering peoples.

I attached little importance to this tale; seeing in it merely a parallel to the amalgamation of Celtic tribes with Mediterranean aborigines in the Galloway hills, with the resultant mixed race which, as Picts, has such an extensive part in Scotch legendry. Time has a curiously foreshortening effect on folklore, and just as tales of the Picts became intertwined with legends of an older Mongoloid race, so that eventually the Picts were ascribed the repulsive appearance of the squat primitives, whose individuality merged, in the telling, into Pictish tales, and was forgotten; so, I felt, the supposed inhuman attributes of the first villagers of Stregoicavar could be traced to older, outworn myths with invading Huns and Mongols.

THE MORNING after my arrival I received directions from my host, who gave them worriedly, and set out to find the Black Stone. A few hours' tramp up the fir-covered slopes brought me to the face of the rugged, solid stone cliff which jutted boldly from the mountainside. A narrow trail wound up it, and mounting this, I looked out over the peaceful valley of Stregoicavar, which seemed to drowse, guarded on either hand by the great blue mountains. No huts or any sign of human tenancy showed between the cliff whereon I stood and the village. I saw numbers of scattering farms in the valley but all lay on the other side of Stregoicavar, which itself seemed to shrink from the brooding slopes which masked the Black Stone.

The summit of the cliffs proved to be a sort of thickly wooded plateau. I made my way through the dense growth for a short distance and came into a wide glade; and in the center of the glade reared a gaunt figure of black stone.

It was octagonal in shape, some sixteen feet in height and about a foot and a half thick. It had once evidently been highly polished, but now the surface was thickly dinted as if savage efforts had been made to demolish it; but the hammers had done little more than to flake off small bits of stone and mutilate the characters which once had evidently marched in a spiraling line round and round the shaft to the top. Up to ten feet from the base these characters were almost completely blotted out, so that it was very difficult to trace their direction. Higher up they were plainer, and I managed to squirm part of the way up the shaft and scan them at close range. All were more or less defaced, but I was positive that they symbolized no language now remembered on the face of the earth. I am fairly familiar with all hieroglyphics known to researchers and philologists and I can say with certainty that those characters were like nothing of which I have ever read or heard. The nearest approach to them that I ever saw were some crude scratches on a gigantic and strangely symmetrical rock in a lost valley of Yucatan. I remember that when I pointed out these marks to the archeologist who was my companion, he maintained that they either represented natural weathering or the idle scratching of some Indian. To my theory that the rock was really the base of a long-vanished column, he merely laughed, calling my attention to the dimensions of it, which suggested, if it were built with any natural rules of architectural symmetry, a column a thousand feet high. But I was not convinced.

I will not say that the characters on the Black Stone were similar to those on that colossal rock in Yucatan; but one suggested the other. As to the substance of the monolith, again I was baffled. The stone of which it was composed was a dully gleaming black, whose surface, where it was not dinted and roughened, created a curious illusion of semi-transparency.

I spent most of the morning there and came away baffled. No connection of the Stone with any other artifact in the world suggested itself to me. It was as if the monolith had been reared by alien hands, in an age distant and apart from human ken.

I returned to the village with my interest in no way abated. Now that I had seen the curious thing, my desire was still more keenly whetted to investigate the matter further and seek to learn by what strange hands and for what strange purpose the Black Stone had been reared in the long ago.

I sought out the tavern-keeper's nephew and questioned him in regard to his dreams, but he was vague, though willing to oblige. He did not mind discussing them, but was unable to describe them with any clarity. Though he dreamed the same dreams repeatedly, and though they were hideously vivid at the time, they left no distinct impression on his waking mind. He remembered them only as chaotic nightmares through which huge whirling fires shot lurid tongues of flame and a black drum bellowed incessantly. One thing only he clearly remembered— in one dream he had seen the Black Stone, not on a mountain slope but set like a spire on a colossal black castle.

As for the rest of the villagers I found them not inclined to talk about the Stone, with the exception of the schoolmaster, a man of surprizing education, who spent much more of his time out in the world than any of the rest.

He was much interested in what I told him of Von Junzt's remarks about the Stone, and warmly agreed with the German author in the alleged age of the monolith. He believed that a coven had once existed in the vicinity and that possibly all of the original villagers had been members of that fertility cult which once threatened to undermine European civilization and gave rise to the tales of witchcraft. He cited the very name of the village to prove his point; it had not been originally named Stregoicavar, he said; according to legends the builders had called it Xuthltan, which was the aboriginal name of the site on which the village had been built many centuries ago.

This fact roused again an indescribable feeling of uneasiness. The barbarous name did not suggest connection with any Scythic, Slavic or Mongolian race to which an aboriginal people of these mountains would, under natural circumstances, have belonged.

That the Magyars and Slavs of the lower valleys believed the original inhabitants of the village to be members of the witchcraft cult was evident, the schoolmaster said, by the name they gave it, which name continued to be used even after the older settlers had been massacred by the Turks, and the village rebuilt by a cleaner and more wholesome breed.

He did not believe that the members of the cult erected the monolith but he did believe that they used it as a center of their activities, and repeating

vague legends which had been handed down since before the Turkish invasion, he advanced the theory that the degenerate villagers had used it as a sort of altar on which they offered human sacrifices, using as victims the girls and babies stolen from his own ancestors in the lower valleys.

He discounted the myths of weird events on Midsummer Night, as well as a curious legend of a strange deity which the witch-people of Xuthltan were said to have invoked with chants and wild rituals of flagellation and slaughter.

He had never visited the Stone on Midsummer Night, he said, but he would not fear to do so; whatever *had* existed or taken place there in the past, had been long engulfed in the mists of time and oblivion. The Black Stone had lost its meaning save as a link to a dead and dusty past.

IT WAS WHILE RETURNING from a visit with this schoolmaster one night about a week after my arrival at Stregoicavar that a sudden recollection struck me— it was Midsummer Night! The very time that the legends linked with grisly implications to the Black Stone. I turned away from the tavern and strode swiftly through the village. Stregoicavar lay silent, the villagers retired early. I saw no one as I passed rapidly out of the village and up into the firs which masked the mountain slopes with whispering darkness. A broad silver moon hung above the valley, flooding the crags and slopes in a weird light and etching the shadows blackly. No wind blew through the firs, but a mysterious, intangible rustling and whispering was abroad. Surely on such nights in past centuries, my whimsical imagination told me, naked witches astride magic broomsticks had flown across this valley, pursued by jeering demoniac familiars.

I came to the cliffs and was somewhat disquieted to note that the illusive moonlight lent them a subtle appearance I had not noticed before— in the weird light they appeared less like natural cliffs and more like the ruins of cyclopean and Titan-reared battlements jutting from the mountain-slope.

Shaking off this hallucination with difficulty I came upon the plateau and hesitated a moment before I plunged into the brooding darkness of the woods. A sort of breathless tenseness hung over the shadows, like an unseen monster holding its breath lest it scare away its prey.

I shook off the sensation— a natural one, considering the eeriness of the place and its evil reputation— and made my way through the wood, experiencing a most unpleasant sensation that I was being followed, and halting once, sure that something clammy and unstable had brushed against my face in the darkness.

I came out into the glade and saw the tall monolith rearing its gaunt height above the sward. At the edge of the woods on the side toward the cliffs was a

stone which formed a sort of natural seat. I sat down, reflecting that it was probably while there that the mad poet, Justin Geoffrey, had written his fantastic *People of the Monolith*. Mine host thought that it was the Stone which had caused Geoffrey's insanity, but the seeds of madness had been sown in the poet's brain long before he ever came to Stregoicavar.

A glance at my watch showed that the hour of midnight was close at hand. I leaned back, waiting whatever ghostly demonstration might appear. A thin night wind started up among the branches of the firs, with an uncanny suggestion of faint, unseen pipes whispering an eery and evil tune. The monotony of the sound and my steady gazing at the monolith produced a sort of self-hypnosis upon me; I grew drowsy. I fought this feeling, but sleep stole on me in spite of myself; the monolith seemed to sway and dance, strangely distorted to my gaze, and then I slept.

I OPENED MY EYES and sought to rise, but lay still, as if an icy hand gripped me helpless. Cold terror stole over me. The glade was no longer deserted. It was thronged by a silent crowd of strange people, and my distended eyes took in strange barbaric details of costume which my reason told me were archaic and forgotten even in this backward land. Surely, I thought, these are villagers who have come here to hold some fantastic conclave— but another glance told me that these people were not of the folk of Stregoicavar. They were a shorter, more squat race, whose brows were lower, whose faces were broader and duller. Some had Slavic or Magyar features, but those features were degraded as from a mixture of some baser, alien strain I could not classify. Many wore the hides of wild beasts, and their whole appearance, both men and women, was one of sensual brutishness. They terrified and repelled me, but they gave me no heed. They formed in a vast half-circle in front of the monolith and began a sort of chant, flinging their arms in unison and weaving their bodies rhythmically from the waist upward. All eyes were fixed on the top of the Stone which they seemed to be invoking. But the strangest of all was the dimness of their voices; not fifty yards from me hundreds of men and women were unmistakably lifting their voices in a wild chant, yet those voices came to me as a faint indistinguishable murmur as if from across vast leagues of Space— or *time*.

Before the monolith stood a sort of brazier from which a vile, nauseous yellow smoke billowed upward, curling curiously in an undulating spiral around the black shaft, like a vast unstable serpent.

On one side of this brazier lay two figures— a young girl, stark naked and bound hand and foot, and an infant, apparently only a few months old. On the other side of the brazier squatted a hideous old hag with a queer sort of black

drum on her lap; this drum she beat with slow, light blows of her open palms, but I could not hear the sound.

The rhythm of the swaying bodies grew faster and into the space between the people and the monolith sprang a naked young woman, her eyes blazing, her long black hair flying loose. Spinning dizzily on her toes, she whirled across the open space and fell prostrate before the Stone, where she lay motionless. The next instant a fantastic figure followed her— a man from whose waist hung a goatskin, and whose features were entirely hidden by a sort of mask made from a huge wolf's head, so that he looked like a monstrous, nightmare being, horribly compounded of elements both human and bestial. In his hand he held a bunch of long fir switches bound together at the larger ends, and the moonlight glinted on a chain of heavy gold looped about his neck. A smaller chain depending from it suggested a pendant of some sort, but this was missing.

The people tossed their arms violently and seemed to redouble their shouts as this grotesque creature loped across the open space with many a fantastic leap and caper. Coming to the woman who lay before the monolith, he began to lash her with the switches he bore, and she leaped up and spun into the wild mazes of the most incredible dance I have ever seen. And her tormentor danced with her, keeping the wild rhythm, matching her every whirl and bound, while incessantly raining cruel blows on her naked body. And at every blow he shouted a single word, over and over, and all the people shouted it back. I could see the working of their lips, and now the faint far-off murmur of their voices merged and blended into one distant shout, repeated over and over with slobbering ecstacy. But what that one word was, I could not make out.

In dizzy whirls spun the wild dancers, while the lookers-on, standing still in their tracks, followed the rhythm of their dance with swaying bodies and weaving arms. Madness grew in the eyes of the capering votaress and was reflected in the eyes of the watchers. Wilder and more extravagant grew the whirling frenzy of that mad dance— it became a bestial and obscene thing, while the old hag howled and battered the drum like a crazy woman, and the switches cracked out a devil's tune.

Blood trickled down the dancer's limbs but she seemed not to feel the lashing save as a stimulus for further enormities of outrageous motion; bounding into the midst of the yellow smoke which now spread out tenuous tentacles to embrace both flying figures, she seemed to merge with that foul fog and veil herself with it. Then emerging into plain view, closely followed by the beast-thing that flogged her, she shot into an indescribable, explosive burst of dynamic mad motion, and on the very crest of that mad wave, she dropped

suddenly to the sward, quivering and panting as if completely overcome by her frenzied exertions. The lashing continued with unabated violence and intensity and she began to wriggle toward the monolith on her belly. The priest— or such I will call him— followed, lashing her unprotected body with all the power of his arm as she writhed along, leaving a heavy track of blood on the trampled earth. She reached the monolith, and gasping and panting, flung both arms about it and covered the cold stone with fierce hot kisses, as in frenzied and unholy adoration.

The fantastic priest bounded high in the air, flinging away the red-dabbled switches, and the worshippers, howling and foaming at the mouths, turned on each other with tooth and nail, rending one another's garments and flesh in a blind passion of bestiality. The priest swept up the infant with a long arm, and shouting again that Name, whirled the wailing babe high in the air and dashed its brains out against the monolith, leaving a ghastly stain on the black surface. Cold with horror I saw him rip the tiny body open with his bare brutish fingers and fling handfuls of blood on the shaft, then toss the red and torn shape into the brazier, extinguishing flame and smoke in a crimson rain, while the maddened brutes behind him howled over and over that Name. Then suddenly they all fell prostrate, writhing like snakes, while the priest flung wide his gory hands as in triumph. I opened my mouth to scream my horror and loathing, but only a dry rattle sounded; a huge monstrous toad-like *thing* squatted on the top of the monolith!

I saw its bloated, repulsive and unstable outline against the moonlight, and set in what would have been the face of a natural creature, its huge, blinking eyes which reflected all the lust, abysmal greed, obscene cruelty and monstrous evil that has stalked the sons of men since their ancestors mowed blind and hairless in the tree-tops. In those grisly eyes were mirrored all the unholy things and vile secrets that sleep in the cities under the sea, and that skulk from the light of day in the blackness of primordial caverns. And so that ghastly thing that the unhallowed ritual of cruelty and sadism and blood had evoked from the silence of the hills, leered and blinked down on its bestial worshippers, who groveled in abhorrent abasement before it.

Now the beast-masked priest lifted the bound and weakly writhing girl in his brutish hands and held her up toward that horror on the monolith. And as that monstrosity sucked in its breath, lustfully and slobberingly, something snapped in my brain and I fell into a merciful faint.

I OPENED MY EYES on a still white dawn. All the events of the night rushed back on me and I sprang up, then stared about me in amazement. The monolith brooded gaunt and silent above the sward which waved, green and

untrampled, in the morning breeze. A few quick strides took me across the glade; here had the dancers leaped and bounded until the ground should have been trampled bare, and here had the votaress wriggled her painful way to the Stone, streaming blood on the earth. But no drop of crimson showed on the uncrushed sward. I looked, shudderingly, at the side of the monolith against which the bestial priest had brained the stolen baby— but no dark stain nor grisly clot showed there.

A dream! It had been a wild nightmare— or else— I shrugged my shoulders. What vivid clarity for a dream!

I returned quietly to the village and entered the inn without being seen. And there I sat meditating over the strange events of the night. More and more was I prone to discard the dream-theory. That what I had seen was illusion and without material substance, was evident. But I believed that I had looked on the mirrored shadow of a deed perpetrated in ghastly actuality in bygone days. But how was I to know? What proof to show that my vision had been a gathering of foul specters rather than a mere nightmare originating in my own brain?

As if for answer a name flashed into my mind— Selim Bahadur! According to legend this man, who had been a soldier as well as a scribe, had commanded that part of Suleiman's army which had devastated Stregoicavar; it seemed logical enough; and if so, he had gone straight from the blotted-out countryside to the bloody field of Schomvaal, and his doom. I sprang up with a sudden shout— that manuscript which was taken from the Turk's body, and which Count Boris shuddered over— might it not contain some narration of what the conquering Turks found in Stregoicavar? What else could have shaken the iron nerves of the Polish adventurer? And since the bones of the Count had never been recovered, what more certain than that the lacquered case, with its mysterious contents, still lay hidden beneath the ruins that covered Boris Vladinoff? I began packing my bag with fierce haste.

THREE DAYS LATER found me ensconced in a little village a few miles from the old battlefield, and when the moon rose I was working with savage intensity on the great pile of crumbling stone that crowned the hill. It was back-breaking toil— looking back now I can not see how I accomplished it, though I labored without a pause from moonrise to dawn. Just as the sun was coming up I tore aside the last tangle of stones and looked on all that was mortal of Count Boris Vladinoff— only a few pitiful fragments of crumbling bone— and among them, crushed out of all original shape, lay a case whose lacquered surface had kept it from complete decay through the centuries.

I seized it with frenzied eagerness, and piling back some of the stones on the bones I hurried away; for I did not care to be discovered by the suspicious peasants in an act of apparent desecration.

Back in my tavern chamber I opened the case and found the parchment comparatively intact; and there was something else in the case— a small squat object wrapped in silk. I was wild to plumb the secrets of those yellowed pages, but weariness forbade me. Since leaving Stregoicavar I had hardly slept at all, and the terrific exertions of the previous night combined to overcome me. In spite of myself I was forced to stretch myself on my bed, nor did I awake until sundown.

I snatched a hasty supper, and then in the light of a flickering candle, I set myself to read the neat Turkish characters that covered the parchment. It was difficult work, for I am not deeply versed in the language and the archaic style of the narrative baffled me. But as I toiled through it a word or a phrase here and there leaped at me and a dimly growing horror shook me in its grip. I bent my energies fiercely to the task, and as the tale grew clearer and took more tangible form my blood chilled in my veins, my hair stood up and my tongue clove to my mouth. All external things partook of the grisly madness of that infernal manuscript until the night sounds of insects and creatures in the woods took the form of ghastly murmurings and stealthy treadings of ghoulish horrors and the sighing of the night wind changed to tittering obscene gloating of evil over the souls of men.

At last when gray dawn was stealing through the latticed window, I laid down the manuscript and took up and unwrapped the thing in the bit of silk. Staring at it with haggard eyes I knew the truth of the matter was clinched, even had it been possible to doubt the veracity of that terrible manuscript.

And I replaced both obscene things in the case, nor did I rest or sleep or eat until that case containing them had been weighted with stones and flung into the deepest current of the Danube which, God grant, carried them back into the Hell from which they came.

It was no dream I dreamed on Midsummer Midnight in the hills above Stregoicavar. Well for Justin Geoffrey that he tarried there only in the sunlight and went his way, for had he gazed upon that ghastly conclave, his mad brain would have snapped before it did. How my own reason held, I do not know.

No— it was no dream— I gazed upon a foul rout of votaries long dead, come up from Hell to worship as of old; ghosts that bowed before a ghost. For Hell has long claimed their hideous god. Long, long he dwelt among the hills, a brain-shattering vestige of an outworn age, but no longer his obscene talons clutch for the souls of living men, and his kingdom is a dead kingdom, peopled only by the ghosts of those who served him in his lifetime and theirs.

By what foul alchemy or godless sorcery the Gates of Hell are opened on that one eery night I do not know, but mine own eyes have seen. And I know I looked on no living thing that night, for the manuscript written in the careful hand of Selim Bahadur narrated at length what he and his raiders found in the valley of Stregoicavar; and I read, set down in detail, the blasphemous obscenities that torture wrung from the lips of screaming worshippers; and I read, too, of the lost, grim black cavern high in the hills where the horrified Turks hemmed a monstrous, bloated, wallowing toad-like being and slew it with flame and ancient steel blessed in old times by Muhammad, and with incantations that were old when Arabia was young. And even staunch old Selim's hand shook as he recorded the cataclysmic, earth-shaking death-howls of the monstrosity, which died not alone; for a half-score of his slayers perished with him, in ways that Selim would not or could not describe.

And the squat idol carved of gold and wrapped in silk was an image of *himself*, and Selim tore it from the golden chain that looped the neck of the slain high priest of the mask.

Well that the Turks swept that foul valley with torch and cleanly steel! Such sights as those brooding mountains have looked on belong to the darkness and abysses of lost eons. No— it is not fear of the toad-thing that makes me shudder in the night. He is made fast in Hell with his nauseous horde, freed only for an hour on the most weird night of the year, as I have seen. And of his worshippers, none remains.

But it is the realization that such things once crouched beast-like above the souls of men which brings cold sweat to my brow; and I fear to peer again into the leaves of Von Junzt's abomination. For now I understand his repeated phrase of *keys*!— aye! Keys to Outer Doors— links with an abhorrent past and— who knows?— of abhorrence spheres of the *present*. And I understand why the cliffs look like battlements in the moonlight and why the tavern-keeper's nightmare-haunted nephew saw in his dream, the Black Stone like a spire on a cyclopean black castle. If men ever excavate among those mountains they may find incredible things below those masking slopes. For the cave wherein the Turks trapped the— *thing*— was not truly a cavern, and I shudder to contemplate the gigantic gulf of eons which must stretch between this age and the time when the earth shook herself and reared up, like a wave, those blue mountains that, rising, enveloped unthinkable things. May no man ever seek to uproot that ghastly spire men call the Black Stone!

A Key! Aye, it is a Key, symbol of a forgotten horror. That horror has faded into the limbo from which it crawled, loathsomely, in the black dawn of the earth. But what of the other fiendish possibilities hinted at by Von Junzt— what of the monstrous hand which strangled out his life? Since reading what

Selim Bahadur wrote, I can no longer doubt anything in the Black Book. Man was not always master of the earth— *and is he now?*

And the thought recurs to me— if such a Monstrous entity as the Master of the Monolith somehow survived its own unspeakably distant epoch so long— *what nameless shapes may even now lurk in the dark places of the world?*

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13: The Witching of Elspie

Duncan Campbell Scott

1862-1947

In: *The Witching of Elspie, A Book of Stories* 1923

In 19th Century Quebec: Loup-Garou

IT was my father who spoke first; and he spoke to the Curé, Monsieur de Gonzague, who sat with his hand on a church book, and beside him on the table an aspirator for the holy water.

"Look at her now," said my father.

The Curé looked up at Elspie McGibbon who had been plying her knitting needles. She had let them drop into her lap and was gazing straight at one of the candles with never a movement of her eyelids.

Gradually a curious fey expression crept over her face, her mouth grew long and wan and her beauty all drawn awry; the pupils of her eyes began to dilate and flutter. No one breathed and the wind, striking the shutter a moment before, quieted, and nothing moved without or within. Pere de Gonzague rose to his height and made the sign of the cross over her and spoke a few words in the Latin and sprinkled her with holy water. But the maid never heeded; the distrait look still hung upon her face; her hands were laid useless in her lap.

"He must be near," said my father under his breath, and I wondered how he dared to speak, for the flesh was moving cold upon my bones. Suddenly a sound came from without and I felt as if some one had struck my head with a mallet. The sound was like a footstep outside the window upon the gallery which ran all around the house. First a soft padded stroke, then a clump, clump, like a footstep if the foot were half flesh and half bone.

It came slow and powerful and we all rose to our feet except my mother who was overcome, and could only put her hands before her face, and Elspie McGibbon who still gazed wofully at the candle without seeing anything. There we stood as if waiting for the judgment. Pere de Gonzague, my father, my uncle Bartholemie, strong Jacques Boudin the farmer, and the housekeeper Annette Valois. The sound came nearer and nearer, then it ceased and began as suddenly on the other side of the house. We drew closer together.

"Here, your honour," said Jacques, "I will go out and face it."

He spoke to my father. He took up one of the candles and went to wards the door. Pere de Gonzague followed him and I came after. When Jacques reached the door and opened it I saw through the moonlight over his shoul der dark shadows in the elms and in a moment "paff" came a stroke of wind like a breath, and blew out the candle.

As we stood, scarcely breathing, the noise sprang up before us so that we all started back, and as suddenly it seemed to walk beyond the windows of the parlour where the light shone through chinks in the close wooden shutters. A great dread got hold upon me and I longed for my heart to beat. I heard Jacques saying under his breath, "It is gone," and a long crying came up from the banks of the river. It was just then, my mother said, that Elspie gave a great deep sigh and shut her eyes. When she opened them she picked up her knitting and began clicking the needles as if she had been asleep.

"Were you dream ing, Elspie dear?" asked my mother.

The girl smiled, "Yes, I was dreaming."

"And did you see the tall man again?" She nodded her head and smiled like a maid who has a sweet secret.

Annette came running to us to say she had waked.

"Down to his cabin I go," said Jacques, who was a resolute fellow.

"I go with you," I said. I stepped before the Curé and as I went on, clutching Jacques, I felt the holy water drop on me. We went through the lilac bushes heavy with scent, out into the white road under the elms. Soon we saw the moonlight flooding the Becancour and heard the rushing of the stream over the shallows. Even at some distance we could discern the regular outline of the house with its low walls and heavy overtopping roof. When we came to it there was no light and no sound. We walked around it slowly and Jacques laid his ear to the door. Joubert was not within.

When we returned the women had retired, my father had gone home with the Curé, and my Uncle Bartholemie was sitting with all the candles still lighted. When my father came back we counselled together. We were on our Seigniory in the County of Nicolet, just two days from Quebec, when this thing happened.

Joubert had come up to the house and cast the evil eye on Elspie McGibbon. Annette found her leaning at the buttery door in a trance with all the blood gone from her face, and Joubert gazing at her with a horrid smile. She screamed and flew out at him, and when the maid came back to her senses she said that a tall handsome man, who had beautiful eyes and a voice like a flute, had spoken to her.

It was Joubert who had spoken to her, Joubert with his harelip and his terrible whine. Jacques Boudin, the farmer, when he heard it, laid his hand on his head and swore by the saints to tear Joubert's heart out of his body. Every year we had come to the Seigniory with Elspie his love had grown stronger, and now it was fairly arranged that he should marry her.

The year before she was a slip of a girl romping at her work, now she was a young beauty, the masses of red brown hair piled upon her shapely head, her

dark blue eye vivid with light, and above everything the charm of her movement, her grace, which is to a woman what cadence is to music; and Joubert had cast upon her his evil eye.

We counselled together upon what should be done but our plans did not go any farther than that night. My father would not look any further, saying that Pere de Gonzague was to rummage in some old books he had and might find an ancient Curé for the evil eye. So it was decided that Jacques should sit up all night in the dining room out of which opened the large room where Elspie and Annette slept; and I would hear of nothing else than that I was to watch with him.

My father went to bed and Jacques and I sat facing one another; the broad oak table between us. The house was quiet, very quiet; again and again we trimmed the candles and I found myself thinking what a pleasant thing it was to watch all night when I woke up in broad day and found Annette placing the dishes for the morning meal.

Elspie during the forenoon seemed herself again, helping Annette as her duty was, but moving about with more languor than usual, and sometimes stand ing as if a vision had risen in her mind and charmed her. Every one watched her and it seemed impossible for Joubert to come near the house without our knowl edge. But just after dinner we missed her suddenly; she seemed to disappear as we looked at her.

We each ran in a different direction to look for her and down I went to the bee-hives which stood in a circle behind some cedars at the foot of the garden. There she was, standing before Joubert, not near him, with her head slightly on one side, her arms hanging limply from her shoulders, her hands open and relaxed.

When Joubert saw me he dropped one shoulder and began to cringe and fawn like a dog afraid of a beating. His loose mouth tightened at one corner and his grey teeth shone in the folds of his lips. I seized Elspie by the arm, turned her about and led her to the house as easily as if she were blind. Looking over my shoulder at the door I glimpsed Joubert's head and shoulders sliding along behind the hedge.

So soon as Elspie came to herself we had a scene, for Annette broke into a fit of weeping that seemed more violent than ordinary, for she was a thick, well governed person, and no one had ever before seen a tear in her eye. When she got quieted in my mother's room, with salts of lavender, she told, between sobs, what she had been keeping back, that in Beauce, when she was a young girl, she had known of just such another witching of a maid by an old devil, and noth ing could be done about it; they even burned him out of his hole, and carried the girl to the convent, and cut off her hair, and the nuns said

a myriad of prayers daily in her behalf; so many were the prayers that you could fairly see them flying out of the window like pigeons.

But all of no use, the old "loup-garou" got her at last and they lived together and had children, nine of them, all idiots, each one more terrible than the last. After this recital Annette relapsed into tears. My mother, after a while, called Elspie into her room where it was cool and dusky, and when she got her employed in turning the linen in the presses, she asked her whom she was talking with by the bee-hives.

"The man I was telling you of; the tall, dark, strong looking fellow." My mother said she had not seen him and asked who he was.

"Oh!" said Elspie, with a peculiar shy smile, "I do not know his name; that I must not ask. But he came a long, long journey to see me here. He is a rich man; he has a domain in Portneuf where he digs silver and gold out of holes in the earth."

My father had come in and was listening by the door and my mother wrung her hands toward him, so distraught was she by the pity of it all. My father spoke quickly from where he stood and asked Elspie if she did not know well that it was old Joubert to whom she was talking. She laughed under her breath, a thing she would not have dared to do if she had been herself, she was so careful in respect for my father.

"No, your honour," she replied, "it was not Joubert, I know Joubert; this man is fine and handsome, has the look of the rich in his eye. Joubert is the fellow with a mouth like an old hound, his hair is full of mould and he has forgotten the feel of a sou between his fingers. I will tell your honour," she added, stand ing up, blushing like a pink peony, and with a little movement of grace and deference, "that this gentleman has asked me to marry him and live on his domain in Portneuf."

"And what about Jacques Boudin, honest strong Jacques Boudin?" said my father in his deepest voice.

"Jacques Boudin," said Elspie as if striving with her memory; "Yes, yes, yes"; she repeated these words slowly with a sigh between each. You could see her mind struggling like a little storm-beaten boat trying to land on a familiar shore.

They told me this at once and I went and told Jacques Boudin. He sat down and bent his great stubborn looking back, and let his head hang down to his knees. He was mighty enough to have broken Joubert with his own hands, but he knew that would not break the spell.

All at once an idea came into my mind.

"Jacques," I said, "we will save her from him. I have an idea; only do you wait, I will see the Curé and then I will tell you, you must help me." Help! He

drew up to his full six feet, and two tears, as hard as white marble, stood in the corners of his eyes. He held my hand so fast that I had to pull one foot off the ground. If my plan was to be carried out that night I must lose no time, so off I went to see Monsieur de Gonzague. He had turned over all his books but never a Curé for the evil eye could be found. When I told him my idea, he put his head on one side and pondered.

"Well," he said at length, "carry it out, I will do my part."

Hardly waiting to thank him I hastened down to the forge and had a talk with Hector, the blacksmith, and before I left him he was working with a will.

Then I went on to Joubert's den which stood about four hundred yards from the river, in a thicket of trees and undergrowth. As I came down the path I saw him seated on his door-step, but he did not see me until I stood before him, so intent was he on the work that he was doing. He had a small piece of dried skin laid upon his knees and was working at it with his fingers. He wore only a pair of breeches and a The former was well patched with clouts of shirt. The buckskin, the latter was whole but open at the throat, showing a fell of coarse hair at his breast.

His hands were enormous; each joint seemed as long as an ordinary human finger. His nose jutted like a promontory. Tufts of hair grew in the whorls and on the lobes of his ears. His head was sunken in at the temples, his eyes were wild and light. His skin was flushed unnaturally as if a fire was burning underneath; and drops of sweat as large as beans stood out on his brow. His hair was black as pitch and hung in points on his shoulders, so matted was it with dirt that showed grey upon it. His feet were bare.

"Oh, Master Philemon," he said, sniffing the words out, "you are here at Joubert's little house?"

He never raised his head, his eyes jumped one look at me and then fell back. His fingers kept clawing at the piece of skin.

"Yes," I said. "What are you working at?"

"Oh, nothing at all, just a little fancy of my own."

"You were up at the house to-day?" I said. He was perfectly motionless in a twinkle and held himself together just as I have seen a rat stop dead still to listen when alarmed.

"Yes, yes, Master Philemon," he replied, relaxing his muscles.

"You're a sly old wolf," I said. "Our Elspie is crazed after you, and is all for marrying you."

"Ah!" he said, and moistened his lips with his bright tongue.

"You'll have to spruce your place up a bit before you bring her here to live."

I could see a foul table and a broken pot on the hard sand floor.

"Not a bad place," he whined, "a sound roof from the rain."

"Bah! a girl of her quality needs more than a shelter. Look you, Joubert, before you come up to see her again you must wash your shirt; it's heavy with grease, man; you'd better go down to the river and pin it down in the current for half a day."

He looked down at the loathesome garment and fingered it.

"You're friend to me, Master Philemon, you're friend to me."

"I'd do far more than that for you," I said; "that's a bit of good advice."

With that I left him and went back to Hector who had forged me an iron cross about six inches in the standard and three inches in the cross piece, and where they were joined he had fitted an iron handle a good two feet in length; and he had for me one of those braziers, which roofers use, filled with charcoal for Hector was a Jack of all the metal trades.

I hid the brazier in the bushes by the path to Joubert's, and carried the cross to the Curé who blessed it for me through and through. Then back I went to the manoir, carrying my well fashioned con secrated bit of iron, and found Jacques.

I was late for supper, and I had to hear that my mother had gone to bed with a terrible pain in her head. Every one was wrought far beyond the usual anxiety, for affairs gone wrong, save Elspie, and she was a-dreaming. They had been attentive of her and Annette reported with a shiver that she had taken the crucifix off the wall of her room, a sure sign that she had been bewitched, and was looking into her clothes-chest as if preparing for a journey.

My father walked heavily up and down the room with his hands behind him. He thought well of Elspie who had been reared in our family since she was taken a little orphan from the foundling hospital. Her parents were Scotch people. She was a great aid and help to my mother. My father had planned her marriage with Jacques Boudin, and now everything was marred and in confusion by reason of an old villain whom he had suffered to live on his land and occupy one of his houses. The neighbours' gossip about him, that he was a were-wolf, a loup garou, he had never heeded, and to requite him this power had struck into his own family.

Pere de Gonzague came in after an hour. My father heard with a sigh that no help could be got from his old folios, but I left them certain that the Curé would win over my father to the second part of my plan, which was contingent upon the success of the first. I knew that they would all watch Elspie and prevent her from slipping away, and I went out to join Jacques Boudin.

When it was dark, before moonrise, we found the brazier and struck off the path into a dense growth of hazel which covered two arpents or more to the river bank. Our plan was to work back to Jou bert's from the river, but when I

broke through the bushes upon the bank I saw a figure below me on a sand bar.

The moon was floating up and long points of silver light shone upon the water. We listened; we could hear the swishing of something in the water, and a gaunt figure rose once and again on the sand bar. Then I knew that Joubert had taken my advice! Back we went till we had struck the path which the old fellow had worn from his den to the water side. Then we took to the bushes. Jacques placed himself about twenty feet nearer the water than my station. Soon I had the brazier alight and glowing, and before long when I took the iron out of the fire I could see the cross all red against the dark hazel leaves.

We must have been there an hour when Jacques whistled. Joubert was coming up the path, in his hands he carried his shirt, wringing it and snapping the water out of it as he came. Just as he passed Jacques stepped out and pinioned him from behind. He called out to me, "Loup-garou, loup-garou," and as they advanced I met them with the iron white hot.

Joubert was forced on and half carried by Jacques. I put the brand of the cross on his breast as nearly over his heart as I could, and Jacques spun him round like a top and I burnt him on the back a trifle deeper. Whatever the creature was made of I cannot tell, for he never uttered a sound; and when Jacques let go he loped up the path like a wolf and was out of sight in a turn behind the bushes. We made a detour and went back to the manoin.

Then to carry out my plan there was a great bustling and hurrying, and disputing, and harnessing of horses, and some demurring on the part of Elspie McGibbon. Around came the calash and the quatre roux and away we went to the St. Lawrence landing; my father, Annette, Elspie, Jacques and myself, and two drivers.

Before midnight I had the satisfaction of seeing our sloop slide away in the moonlight, beginning her first tack for Trois Rivieres. The drivers and myself jogged slowly homeward to Becancour. They are separated at least, whatever else comes of it, I thought.

In the morning Joubert had disappeared and he was never again seen in these parishes. Not even by rumour did he visit the haunt of his evil spirit.

And not many weeks after strong Jacques Boudin sailed over to Trois Rivieres with all our family, for we thought well of him, and there was a wedding in the Cathedral. As years went by I forgot Joubert and his deviltry.

Many years after I was visiting the monastery of La Trappe in the hills above Oka. My companion was a notary from St. Basil who was well acquainted with the monks and their institution.

"There is one monk here who flagellates himself, Father Philemon; come, it is his hour, let us have a look at him!"

We went from one cool hall into another: soon a door opened and there came a procession of monks. They stopped; one in the midst of them threw back his cowl and bared his body to the waist. There was something curiously familiar to me in his countenance. Taking a leather thong while his brethren chanted, he began to beat himself over the shoulders and the breast. By and by my companion nudged me.

"Look," he said, "it is considered a miracle."

On his back and breast came out in a deeper red the sign of the Cross. In a moment I had recognised him.

It was Joubert

14: Under The Depth Charge

Douglas Newton

Wilfrid Bernard Michael Newton, 1884-1951

The Wireless Weekly, July 11, 1942

FROM the periscope eyepiece, the German Cornmander said: "Still misty. Visibility a couple of cables only... Nothing in sight. We'll go up."

The second-in-command, frowning over the bubble in the inclinometer, rapped: "Stand by to surface. Blow forward tanks."

His sombre face tightened as the submarine kicked and staggered under the action of the air-manifold. Even the Commander's big geniality dropped as he turned to look at his second. Slowly, almost wearily, the big ship steadied under trimming, and they heard the wash and clatter of waves that told them the conning tower had broken surface.

The Commander thrust back the hatch and clambered on to the bridge; the second, following slowlyr said almost with a groan:

"Thicker than ever—it would be! This trip is under a curse!"

"Ah, but a familiar mist, George," the Commander said. His fleshy and good-tempered face was thrusting this wav and that, and he was sniffing. "Smell it— how I know that reek of the Tidal Bank! We are home, old boy— *heimat*!"

"Home!" George Kulp looked at him sidelong. "A long way yet to the *Vaterland*, Peter."

"But you *have* got an ugly dog on your back, old chagtf" the big man laughed, though his eyes, strangely steady and of an odd latent power, examined his companion shrewdly. "You said that as though you really feared never reaching it— or reaching it."

George Kulp gave almost a gulp, while his eyes scampered seaward, as though frightened of meeting his friend's. He muttered. "Perhaps I do," but did not say which fear he meant.

The Commander's ewes softened under the other's emotion. He put his hand on his friends shoulder with a clumsy but real affection.

"We're through the worst, old fellow. In a couple of hours we should be inside our minefields."

"Yes," George Kulp muttered, yet seemed forced to add: "They patrol these waters pretty thoroughly— air and sea."

Peter Breeman frowned a little, but it was anxious compassion. Old in the submarine service, he knew the signs of shattered nerves too well, and it hurt him even more that his oldest and best friend should have cracked like this. He was surprised, too. George had actually seemed keener and harder than

himself, for he had that fanatical, almost semi-religious spirit that made many men impervious to danger and strain.

But perhaps such a nature made it worse for such men when their nerve began to go. It gave them a sense of inescapable doom. George had been like that all this voyage— yes, and before. Even while he had spent the last days of shore leave at the Breeman house, George had been strange— black and gloomy, and sure this voyage was fore-qrdained to disaster.

All through it that mood had grown stronger, until it seemed as though his strange nature really was convinced that they were "under a curse," as he had just said. It was the way the strain worked on his kind of mind, no doubt; and if he, Peter Breeman, had only known it was coming he might have been able to protect his friend by arranging for a shore transfer. As it was, the voyage had been all that made such a state of mind worse; continuous bad weather, no successes, several close shaves from surface craft, while a terrible dusting the enemy air patrols had given them in the Atlantic had been the final stroke.

That black hour, after the bombs had damaged that forward valve, had seemed to bring the poor old chap to the point of breaking.... Another such experience and his brain might go.... He said quickly:

"With this mist they're more helpless than we are. We have nothing more to fear.... In a few hours it wall be all over. And a long spell on shore for you and me, George. We deserve it. eh?"

George Kulp said nothing, stood brooding at the sea, his hands gripping the bridge-rail with a queer, fierce intensity. He must be jerked out of that. And Peter Breeman knew just how to do it. He said casually: "I wonder if Helga will be at the docks to meet us?"

George Kulp's only answer was a sort of snarl, and his face grew blacker. Then he muttered: "She won't. We're days overdue."

The Commander's good-tempered lips quirked cunningly, as he noted that George was more interested than he wanted to show. He continued blandly:

"I'll send her a radio signal once we're through the mines. She'll be there, if I know my Helga. And we'll dine at that little place behind the Arsenal, eh. George? One of our old Helga meals. What shall we eat—"

"For God's sake!" George Kulp burst out. "Shut up!" And then, striving to control himself, "We're not in yet.... To talk like that..."

THE Commander's lips still smiled. He wasn't dissatisfied. He'd jolted George out of his brooding, anyhow. He had known that mention of Helga would do that. So much of their long friendship was bound up with Helga. Helga, with her sweetness and prettiness, had won a big place in George's heart.

Marrying Helga had, in fact, added to their comradeship instead of breaking it up— which was so often the way when one of a pair of friends took himself a wife. Helga understood George; she welcomed him into their life as she would welcome a brother.

"And you'll come home with us, George, of course," he went on. "Let Helga cosset you for a bit before you go back to your city flat—"

"Damn you, shut up! What the devil are you—" George began ferociously, and, as Peter Breeman gaped amazed, the quartermaster behind them let out a shattering yell.

None of them had heard the plane. It came with the skill of the R.A.F., while the fog blanketed it almost to the moment it was on them. But abruptly it was there, hovering like a great grey shadow above them.

It banked and swooped like a vulture, and they heard the chatter of its machine-guns a moment before the roar of its engines stunned their ears.

Luckily, its pilot was as startled at coming on them in the mist as they. His bullets threshed a line! of spouts along th e sea and rang on their plating without doing harm. He was too close and going too fast to risk wasting bombs. He spun on his tail like a flash, but before he could whirl about they had tumbled into the control chamber, George and Breeman slamming the hatch after them, and the diving alarm was ringing through the ship.

Their vents clacked open as the plane came back and over, its bombs shooting down like black ink-drops as their decks slid below water. Most missed badly, but one pooped off a cable or so to port, throwing up a giant plume of tormented water and making the submarine heel and shudder in every plate.

George, at the gauges, was livid and sweating. He knew how weak their valves had been since their narrow escape in the Atlantic. On his face was a look that told Breeman that he felt that the curse that had dogged this trip was about to strike them. Even Peter Breeman knew that, quite apart from a direct hit, any lucky explosion might wreck their valves and blot them out.

The quality in his eyes that belied his genial face took command. He was grim, hard, cool. "Drop her to a hundred!" he snapped; then, knowing that George was a weak spot, he ordered: "Test every valve, George."

He took his place at the helm as George kicked open the hatch and dropped into the bowels of the ship, it was as well he did. One of the faulty valves stuck while the other tanks filled. The ship lost trim, canted and rolled until men were flung against the side-plating.

And as she canted, they heard the boom, boom, boom of bombs smashing off about them, and the last was terribly close I * e

The ship bucked like a horse, heaved and struck forward sharply that her nose must have come clean out of the water. There were shouts and curses throuughout her length, and every light went out.

"That got her! We're done," the helmsman screeched, and he would have yelped more, but Peter Breeman's voice cut back: "Shut up! Keep your station." Peter's hands were on the controls, feeling them with the sensitive sureness of long experience. The ship wallowed almost to her beams, righted and went down flat.

"By heck!" Peter Breeman shouted. "that bomb blew the valve clear— the tank's filling."

It was filling with a vengeance. He had to flood the other tanks sharp to keep even keel, flood them beyond his plan, for in a minute there was that soft, scraping jar that made everyone cry, "Bottom!"

THEY stood rigid in the pitch darkness, silent, listening, all ears, listening for sounds more deadly even than bombing. They heard that.

There was another set of detonations, but thick, heavy and far away. Breeman sighed relief:

"That's his full clutch— and anyhow, we're too far under to be hurt."

He felt for and put his mouth to the blowpipe, shouted: "Below there! Inspect ship: report damage."

Ghost voices began relaying messages. Forward compartment still watertight, nothing coming inside... Engine-room: no plates started. Engines seem all right. Several leads had fused, but until they were located nothing certain could be said.

George Kulp crawled back while the voices called. He said in a shaking voice: "Everything seems tight enough. That valve's gone, though."

"If that's all, we're not so bad," Peter said with resolute cheerfulness. "We can limp home in spite of it."

"If that is all," George rasped.

"I doubt it is. I think the air-manifold's wrecked and we're here for good."

"Well, we'll wait a bit before we weep," Peter Breeman said evenly,

They waited in the dark, not using their own torches for fear of wasting precious light in that world of blackness. Men below were using them.

They heard the clink of steel tools on steel, the grumble and admonition of men laboring at strain, Occasionally a light passing below glinted up through the hatch, giving a will-o'-the-wisp glimpse of the men in the control room.

Peter Breeman saw George Kulp's face as he passed. He was crouched against the wall, gnawing at his knuckles. He had the look of a man who knew himself doomed.

It was as silent as the tomb down there below the sea— a silence so still, so thick, that every small sound became a shock. A dreadful silence in which they could hear their fate coming to them too easily.

It was the helmsman who put a name to the thudding that Breeman had tried to hope was only the beating of his heart in his ears. George Kulp corrected him.

"No— two of them. Heading this way. That plane wirelessed for surface patrols, of course."

They heard the dreadful beat of the British destroyers grow louder and louder. They throbbed up and up, like the deepening drum-beat of some dreadful "Bolero." Nearer and nearer. Louder and louder. They could tell by the silence from below that the men there had heard and were listening to death.

Breeman said as curtly as he could: "The mist will help us. They won't find it easy to locate us."

"That plane will have dropped a buoy," George Kulp said with a flat fatalism. Breeman snapped loose then, cursed him for a weakling in half a dozen words, before remembering George was his best friend, and a sick man.

But George was right. The pounding of the destroyers grew to thunder, coming straight at them; then checked, swerved and swung. They had sighted a buoy; they were quartering to drop their depth-charges at regulation points.

And the first one went off... It was well away, but the submarine lifted and slid and bumped, and the shock of the concussion made men fall and cry out.

The second, nearer. The plates seemed to crack and buckle all about them. A man below began to scream, "They got us! They got us dead! We're finished! God help us, boys..."

The third seemed to do it. The crash punched the very air out of their bodies. There were cracklings and smashings throughout the ship, men raving...

It was a moment before Peter Breeman grasped that one of the raving voices was George's. George had gripped his body tight; with his mouth so close that his breath was hot on Peter's cheek, he was pouring out a wild stream of words "...knew we were doomed!... Knew it from the first!... Punishment for my sin!... Helga... wife of my best friend... Unforgiveable disloyalty..."

"Helga?" Breeman found himself shouting back. "What do you mean— Helga?"

"Your wife, Helga... she and I... the night you were called to headquarters... If you had not left us alone we might have fought our love. Now we're doomed... no longer keep silent... I must clear my soul..."

The helmsman was shouting:

"That fourth explosion was half a mile away..." They could hear him giggling and chuckling in hysterical laughter. They heard men shouting. "Quiet! Quiet! Listen!... They are farther away... They're going away...!"

They all hung still in a deadly, terrible quietude, hanging on the throb of the destroyers. It was farther away. It grew more distant... It grew stronger, it faded; stronger, then almost out of hearing before returning again The destroyers had lost them— how, they did not know. Perhaps an explosion had sunk the mark-buoy or blown it adrift, or they had lost direction as one can so easily in mist.... But they had lost them. There came the moment when a voice shouted almost deliriously:

"Gone! They've gone!"

And another voice was shouting:

''Luck, boys! We're all right. The engine-room says it's only a lead of the air-manifold gone— it'll soon be fixed ..."

In five hours the submarine was nosing towards the quayside of its home port; two men, who had yet to speak again to each other, stood on its bridge, stiff, silent, staring towards the quay, wondering whether the wife— and mistress— had dared to come to welcome them.

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15: The Panthon Cat

Harold Mercer

1882-1952

Bulletin, 6 Sep 1939

"IT'S no wonder they call a cat a cat; I'm sure I there isn't another animal that is more like a woman than is a cat, besides the tomcat having nine wives, which is scandalous," said Mrs. Parsley astonishingly. "I have had tenants who have kept cats; and experience does it, as is a well-known classified saying."

My landlady paused to enable me to consider the truth of her outburst of unnatural history, but her "conversational delibility" was in good working order, and she went on almost immediately.

"Especially there was that black cat Tibby, that belonged to Mr. and Mrs. Cuddlehop, which was killed time and again and frightened the tenants by coming back as a ghost each time. Which it was enough to frighten anyone to see it sitting in the sun washing its face, as cats do, when you knew it was a thousand feathers deep, as the song says, lying drowned in several feet of water in Rushcutters' Bay.

"Never shall I forget the way the Major looked when he told me. Not by the widest sketch of the illumination could it be said that the Major had been sober for two days; and he looked as if he had the delirium with trimmings— he was shaking like an aspirin, with his eyes all bleary and unshaven.

" 'Look at that animal; it'll drive me mad, Mrs. Parsley,' he says. 'I drowned that cat, Mrs. Parsley— three days ago! It's driving me out of my mind to see it there when I know it's dead!'

" 'But if it's alive it can't be dead,' I says.

"That only made him wilder; he said he was not a supercilious man who believed in ghosts, but that cat was a panthom if ever there was one, because, after he had half emptied a bottle of whisky to get over the shock of seeing it alive he had gone down to where he had drowned it. When he dragged the bag out of the water there was Tibby in it as dead as a ninepin. The Major had to have another half-bottle of whisky to recover from the shock of seeing that, and he started drinking properly, especially every time he saw that cat.

"There were cold bicycles running down my back when he told me, for only half an hour earlier I had nearly stroked that cat, which seemed more friendly than usual. But people didn't stroke Tibby much because it used to scratch and bite without the least invocation.

"Myself, I'm rather fond of cats, which is very friendly animals as a rule, and like to be petted an' make out they are very fond of you as long as you feed them and let them do just what they like; which is like them women cats. But this Tibby wasn't a friendly one; it was the most disagreeable cat you ever saw.

"Directly them Cuddlehops came I thought there seemed something sinecure about it, and about them, too, which seemed very lazy people, and just like that cat, especially about the eyes. I wouldn't have let them into the flats if I had known that that cat was to be like one of them panthoms that haunt old houses.

"But, there, if we could only read into the starry past as we can into the futurity a lot of my tenants would never have been my tenants only over my dead body.

"THAT cat,' says Mr. Cuddlehop the first day, 'is nineteen years old.'

" 'That's a little over two years for each of its nine wives,' says Mr. Slompack, though I didn't think it was the kind of cat that had nine wives.

" 'That's its age all the same,' says Mr. Cuddlehop. 'Why it was with its aboriginal owner four years before we took charge of it fifteen years ago. If I caught anyone trying to injure Tibby I'd murder him.'

"That was a shock to hear him say the cat had belonged to blacks, though they may have counted for it being so savage; and I didn't like to hear Mr. Cuddlehop talk about murder either. Which he must have guessed that that cat wouldn't be liked.

"It hadn't been in the flats two days before everybody hated it, and Mrs. Turner said it had a devil. It had gone for me, ferocious as a tiger, when I went to pat it. And Mr. Slompack and a lot of others had been scratched and bitten. Mr. Wassail said it was probably being so old that made it disagreeable until it scratched Mrs. Wassail, and she gave him such a time about if he was a man he'd go and talk to Mr. Cuddlehop. What a lot of people did have words with Mr. Cuddlehop, especially them that had birds. That Tibby wasn't too lazy about going after birds, which it seemed to believe a bird in the cage was worth two in the bush.

" 'It's nat'ral for a cat to go for birds,' says Mr. Cuddlehop, sour-like. 'If people are silly enough to keep birds. There ain't no profit in keeping birds.'

" 'There isn't any profit in keeping cats,' says Mr. Slompack.

" 'Oh, ain't they?' says Mr. Cuddlehop, cunninglike. Which Mrs. Turner says that perhaps they was a pair of witches and Tibby was their witch-cat, and that was how they got their money. 'There's evil spirits in this house since they came, anyway; and I should know because, being an invalid who might die any day, I'm physic,' she says.

"Seeing how nervy she was I was glad she didn't hear about Tibby being a dead cat alive about the place. If she thought that a dog howling showed she was going to die I don't know what she would have thought of that.

"It was Miss Perry who came downstairs screaming one night, saying that the cat had been scratching at her window, and she wasn't going to have dead

cats coming into her flat. She had got to know about the Major having killed it, so I got Mr. Slompack and Mr. Wassail to help me lead her into my flat, where she had histories.

" 'My good woman, you must be reasonable,' says Mr. Slompack. 'Tibby isn't a dead cat.'

" 'Oh, yes it is!' said Mr. Wassail. 'The thing's been giving me the creeps. To see that cat about the place when I knew it was killed— it's made me feel queer.'

" 'Yes,' I said, 'the Major drowned it in Rushcutters' Bay.'

"Mr. Wassail stared at me like a codfish out of the water that passes under the bridge.

" 'No, he didn't,' he said. I shot it. I saw a chance one night when it was in the yard. That was a week ago. It was dead all right, and I carried it away and put it in one of the garbage-boxes at the end of the lane. You might remember; the next day the Cuddlehops made all that fuss about Tibby being missing. When it came back again next day I was astoundered. It's made me feel creepy ever since.'

"Well, of all the blunders that never cease! I didn't know whether I was on my heads or my tails, as the saying is. And they all were the same way when I told them, only Miss Perry had histories worse, and I'm sure she would have fainted if Mr. Slompack hadn't got round the other side of the table so that he wouldn't have to catch her if she fell. Which it was enough to drive people extracted. According to what he said, Mr. Wassail had shot that cat three days before the Major had drowned it, and yet there was that animal in the yard, which we could hear it meowing below my window.

"Mr. Slompack said that about there being stranger things than our foolish Sophies dream about, and Miss Perry said she'd never be able to sleep in a house where there was a cat which was only a panthom of a cat. Which I said I wasn't going to have things like that in my flats, and I would give them Cuddlehops notice; but Mr. Slompack didn't see how I could do that, and anyway if the cat was a panthom it might stay behind. Which he said that he didn't believe in panthoms, and that the Major and Mr. Wassail must have been mistook.

"We might have been talking about it until now but that meowing in the yard suddenly ended in a cat scream; there was a dreadful bumping sound, and then there was quiet.

"Mr. Cuddlehop was coming down the stairs when we all went out to see what was the matter. 'Somebody's been trying to hurt Tibby,' he says. 'lf I find who it is I'll half-murder him.'

"Downstairs he went; we could hear him calling 'Tibby, Tibby' out in the yard, which he kept on doing for a long time while I was trying to get Miss Perry to go up to her flat and not be historical and the men were helping. And then up the stairs comes Mr. Bootle, who has Number 21.

" 'Well, that's the finish of Cuddleshop's cat,' he says. 'lt tripped me up on the stairs when I was coming in last night, and scratched me. I said I'd get the brute; and I got it in the yard with a batten.

" 'You killed it?' asked Mr. Slompack, which I thought he was going to censor him.

" 'Too right I did,' says Mr. Bootle. 'Old Cuddlehop will have to do a lot of calling. I took the body down the street and threw it down the drain.'

" 'You'd better not let Cuddlehop know ; he'll be ropable,' said Mr. Slompack.

"'I don't care if he knows,' says Mr. Bootle; 'but he won't know unless you people put the show away.'

"There was Mr. Cuddlehop wandering about the yard and the lane all night calling Tibby ; and next day, when there wasn't any cat about the place, it seemed that that was the last of it, even if it was a panthom.

"THE day after that, as I was working in my kitchen with the flat door open to hear anyone coming up the stairs, I felt something rub against my leg. It was like that pome says about the schooner *Haspirate*: she shuddered and paws like a frightened steed, then leaped a table's length—only it was up in the air I leaped. For it was that Tibby that had rubbed against my leg! And it wasn't only that I knew that cat had been shot and drowned and bashed on the head, but it was uncandy, as they call it, for Tibby to be so friendly.

"I was that terrified that I was up at the Cuddlehops' flat hammering at their door and telling them to take their cat and get out before I knew where I was.

" 'Why should your nerves be in this state of k.os. because our cat came into your flat, Mrs. Parsley?' asked Mrs. Cuddlehop. 'I hope you're not irresponsible for poor Tibby having disappeared once or twice.'

" 'Me?' I cries, flappergasted; of course I didn't want to tell them about me knowing that Tibby had been killed. And because of what Mr. Cuddlehop said about murdering anyone who hurt Tibby, I didn't want to let on about the Major and Mr. Wassail and Mr. Bootle.

" 'I don't like cats that are a boney distension in the place,' I says, 'and there's something uncandy about Tibby.'

" 'Well, Mrs. Parsley, we like our flat here,' says Mr. Cuddlehop, 'and we intend to stay. If we go we'll want to know who tried to hurt Tibby first. Not

that, anybody could hurt that cat. Even if they killed it, Tibby would still come back.'

"You talk about them witches that there Shakspeare wrote about that were for ever blowing bubbles, bubbles, toil and troubles! I felt as if I was standing alongside their scald-can, in that flat with them people, especially when the cat came in meowing just as if it was a friendly animal; and glad was to get out, all shaking as I was. And who should I meet on the stairs but that Mr. Bootle, who looked as if he'd seen a ghost.

" 'Mrs. Parsley,' he says, 'I'm sober, ain't I?'

" 'For all I know,' I says, sharp.

" 'I haven't had a drink,' he says, 'but I could have sworn I saw that cat Tibby running up the stairs just now ; and yet I know that Tibby crossed the Sticks. Which I took him to mean the backyard fence.

" 'Look! There it is! 'he cries, grabbing my arm, which upset me more than I was already, and pointing up the stairs. 'I must be suffering from depressions. I think I will go and have a drink.'

"From the noise he made when he came home that night, he certaintly did.

"IT was terrible having a panthom in the house, especially when I was scared to tell the Cuddlehops that I knew the cat was dead. By this time everybody had heard that that cat had been killed, though not many knew how often; and though everybody was a bit ashamed of believing there could be such a thing as a panthom cat everybody was uncomfortable.

"That cat seemed to have a devil in it, too; now that it knew that people knew it was dead, it pretended to be friendly, and tried to come up to people to be petted, or scratched at flat windows to be let in. When some women gave a scream you knew it was that, or if there was a hurry of footsteps and the slam of a door it was someone getting away from that Tibby, which was following them.

"As Mr. Slompack said, there was an estate of tendon in the whole place; that's what made it give me quite a shock when some visitors came and asked about them Cuddlehops and if they owned a cat, especially when the elderly gentleman said he was an executioner, which he didn't look like. In fact, he looked a very mild old gentleman. But the young man who was with him seemed angry.

" 'There, you see, there is a cat, and it's name is Tibby," said the old gentleman.

"'But nineteen years old! It's preprosperous!' says the young man.

" 'This isn't idol's curios, Mrs. Parsley,' says the old gentleman, which very polite he was. 'I am the trusty executioner of a estate in which the Cuddlehops

are disinterested— and so is this young man, Mr. Hardy. We came to see the Cuddlehops, but as they didn't seem to be in their flat Ah, here they are!"

"Them Cuddlehops were coming up the stairs puffing like them gramorpoises. They was very polite to the old gentleman, which it seems his name was Mr. Deedswell, although the way they looked at young Mr. Hardy was like them daggers withdrawn, as they say.

"'Why, come to the flat, Mr. Deedswell,' says Mrs. Cuddlehop. 'You know we're always glad to see you! And I suppose young Mr. Hardy will want to come, too.'

"'Yes, I'll come,' he says, and gives a laugh. 'Just because I know I'm not wanted.'

"But just as he was following them there comes that young Miss Taylor that shared an upstairs flat with a friend, coming down the stairs. They both stared at one another, flappergasted.

"'Edna!' he cries. Then he dashes up a few stairs to meet her. Not being a peeping Tom that hears no good of themselves, I don't know what they said; but when I came out of my flat again there she was sitting on the lounge at the top of the stairs.

" 'You know that young gentleman?' I says.

" 'Yes,' she says, with that telltale blush, as them books say, which tells the way the last straw is blowing. 'I've known Mr. Hardy a long time, in fact Well, Mrs. Parsley, I thought he was too wild, so I moved from where I was staying. He didn't know I was here ; and I was surprised to see him. I'm waiting for him.'

" 'Not that I expect it will make any difference,' she adds, 'although he says he will stop being wild and settle down if I'm— if I'm friends with him again. He says he's trying to get some money which will help him make a fresh start.'

"My heart was all aflutter to think that there was roomance, which I could see it was, on my very stairs. That was something, I says to myself, to take my mind off panthom cats. But it seemed it wasn't, because the first thing I hears them talking about when I passed, casual-like, was cats.

"THAT was after Mr. Deedswell and Mr. Hardy had come away from the Cuddlehops' flat, Mr. Hardy talking as angrily as the horns of the bull in the pome ; but Mr. Deedswell was shaking his head.

" 'You're a preduseed party, Ron,' he says. 'I just take the facts as I find them.'

" 'But' Mr. Hardy was beginning to say something when "he saw Miss Taylor sitting on the couch. He told Mr. Deedswell that he would see him in the office, and went over to her.

" 'All you've got to do, Edna,' is what I heard, which it was after they'd been talking a long time, 'is to get the cat into your flat. Then you can put it into a basket and bring it down to me. Oh,' he says, when she says something, speaking very low, 'the cat won't be hurt. I'll send it to my cousin's little daughter up at Tamworth.'

" 'Oh, it's stealing, Ron!' she says.

" 'They're cheating, Edna,' he says. 'lt's for you and me. I want you, darling ; and that wasting my money as I did is a back number. When I get a start again'

"I couldn't take so long passing up the stairs that I could hear any more; but having heard so much I had an idea what was happening when I saw Miss Taylor go down the stairs in the morning with a dress-basket, and I thought I heard a 'meow' come from it. A little later there was that Mr. Cuddlehop going all over the place asking people if they had seen the cat and calling 'Tibby, Tibby.' Very upset and angry he seemed. But for my part I was glad if Miss Taylor had got the thing away, which it seemed to me if it wasn't killed again it couldn't have a ghost.

"The whole place seemed relieved at that panthom cat being gone ; the tenants grinned when they heard Mrs. Cuddlehop and, soon, Mr. Cuddlehop, too, going about calling Tibby; and the Major nearly kept sober.

"And then there was that Tibby back again!

"Which it didn't seem possible to me after it had been killed three times and then sent to Tamworth. But there it was, giving me the creeps again.

"That Mr. Deedswell had returned, and Mr. Hardy, looking like that corn-curing hero they wrote the song about, with him, which it was him that called out when they met Mr. Cuddlehop on the stairs, 'Where's that cat of yours now?' Which it seemed plain he knew it was over the hills and fade away, as the saying goes, at Tamworth.

" 'Mr. Hardy insisted that I should come, Mr. Cuddlehop,' says Mr. Deedswell, almost apologetic.

" 'Oh, did he?' sneers Mr. Cuddlehop. 'lt's about the cat, is it? Well, what about that ?'

"There before my horridified eyes was that cat coming along the corridor; and when Mrs. Cuddlehop calls 'Tibby!' it comes at a run. For a moment I was putrified to the spot; but as it came nearer it was too much for me. I just gave a yell and rushed away to shut myself in my flat.

"When I could recollect my censers, as they say, I heard-them men arguing there. 'Oh, well, you win— for the time being,' I heard Mr. Hardy say at last; and then there he was tapping at my door asking me where Miss Taylor was. Which I told him she was down in the yard drying her hair, she having told me she would do that. He went down so quick that he fell right over a case that

was lying near the door. I heard the clatter and what he said, which was hardly the words of a gentleman.

"As the Bible says, little strings make great causes spring in the air, and I didn't know then that that was to have a big result.

"But what I did know was that them Cuddlehops was going to go. It was too much for me to have a cat in the house which was there after it had been killed and was in Tamworth and here at the same time; and I thought to myself that if that panthom cat still stayed after the Cuddlehops was gone I would have to get them Fistical Researchers to see what they could do to get rid of it. Why, I was almost frightened to go about my flats because of the shock of seeing that Tibby that should have been dead. But go up to the Cuddlehops and tell them to go I did, though it was in fear and trembling I did it.

" 'It's that Ron Hardy put you up to this, Mrs. Parsley,' says Mrs. Cuddlehop. 'All right; we'll go— but we will stay here till our week's up. And you may be sorry.'

"The way she said it made my blood all cordial. I began to think they and that cat of theirs had something to do with the devil, as Mrs. Turner said; what they might do made me frightened. And when I woke in the morning with the whole place seeming full of yells and banging on doors, as if panderharmoniums was let loose, it seemed to me that that Nemo's Sis had come home to roost, as the saying is. And the first thing I saw was that Tibby sitting on one of my chairs!

"That cat seemed to have a devil in it, too; now that it knew that people knew it was dead, it pretended to be friendly, and tried to come up to people to be petted, or scratched at flat windows to be let in. As Mr. Slompack said, there was an estate of tendon in the wholeplace."

"How I got to the door I don't remember, but I was almost as historical myself as them women who had been hammering at it, talking about panthom cats being all over the place and having got into their flats. And that was just as things was.

"THAT panthom cat seemed to have broken up into a dozen Tibbys; some of the men were chasing them out, not liking them any more than we wimmen did. But it seemed as if it could be nothing but the devil's work, a cat that was dead dividing itself into a whole lot of cats which, when you looked at them, was the same, and everyone of which, if anybody said Tibby, looked as if it had been called.

"It was Bethlehem let loose, with us women all grouped together, some screaming when more of them cats rushed past; I'm sure if it hadn't been for Mr. Slompack some of us would have gone mad.

"But the darkest cloud is always before the silver lining; and Mr. Slompack came down the stairs with his hand on a young man's coat collar which he was pushing ahead of him. And Mr. Cuddlehop was following, saying the boy had a message for him and he would deal with him.

" 'No,' says Mr. Slompack, 'this young man has something to say which the people in this place ought to hear. It'll set their minds at rest. Out with it, youngster; say why you brought all those cats.'

"It made them plantations in my heart not so bad to hear them cats had been brought instead of being Tibby split up into a crowd of 'em.

" 'Me father said Mr. Cuddle'op could keep 'is own cats,' says the young man, which it seemed he was glad to speak. 'There was us with black cats all over the place, and all called Tibby, so that whenever Mr. Cuddle'op wanted a cat it was there fer 'im. Dad didn't know why Mr. Cuddle'op wanted the so-and-so cats, and why 'e always took the eldest; but when Mr. 'Ardy told 'im that Mr. Cuddle'op 'ad been makin' over five quid a week out of it, an' only payin' 'im a few deeners, 'e got sore. 'E ses, "Mr. Cuddle'op can keep 'is own blasted cats 'imself"; an' sent me in with them.'

" 'Well, who's the winner, now, Cuddlehop?' says a voice I reckernised; and there, coming out of the crowd what had gathered round the stairs, I saw that Mr. Hardy there with Mr. Deedswell, as if they was them solemnised twins, in spite of the difference in their ages. And Mr. Deedswell did look a an executioner, as he said he was, the way he looked at Mr. Cuddlehop.

" 'I wouldn't have found out about that farm where you kept your cats for emerging agencies,' says Mr. Hardy in a jubilee tone of voice, 'if you hadn't left a crate with the farm address on it, and your name, lying in the yard where I fell over it.'

" 'So, Mr. Cuddlehop,' says Mr. Deedswell slowly, 'you rang the changes with those cats. You always had a new one when one died. I was too easy as a trusty executioner.'

" 'You cheated me, Cuddlehop,' he says. 'You can be persecuted for fraud. It's an interdictable defence, Cuddlehop; and your game is up.'

"Which all that was said was Confucius worse, confound it, as the saying is, to me; only I was glad to know them cats wasn't ghosts, and it was Balaam to my soul to see them Cuddlehops, who had made such a lot of trouble, leave the place like conflicted thieves, as if staying in the place where their probity had been exposed was girls and wormwood to them. It was Mr. Slompack who explained what it was all about.

" 'Open profession is good for the sole, Mrs. Parsley,' Mr. Slompack, said (which that is why, I daresay, you never hear of a policeman with corns on his feet). 'I must confess that those cats made me feel creepy. It seems that Mr.

Hardy's grandmother was very fond of a cat named Tibby, and when she made her last willing testimonial she provided a trust fund of five thousand in Collingwood bonds to provide for the cat. As long as Tibby lived, the income was to go to Mr. and Mrs. Cuddlehop, who were old servants, if they looked after Tibby. Those Cuddlehops were caretakers for a time, but after a while they decided, being lazy people, that they might live on Tibby for good by having cats looking like it ready to take its place when it died.

" 'This Deedswell seems to have been an easy-going executioner, and as long as he saw a cat now and then he was satisfied. But young Hardy found out about there being some more money to come to him when the cat died. He was an orphan from when he was four, and when he got his money, when he became an adulterer, he was mainly occupied in spending it. It was when he met a girl who made him feel he wanted to settle down, and he wanted some money to make a real start, that he became curious and started to worry the Cuddlehops. Well, he's bowled them out, and he'll get the money now.

" 'I think I'd better wake 'em up,' says Mr. Slompack grinning. 'They've been sitting in the lounge all the morning close together, and they seem full of oblivion that it's long past lunchtime.'

"Which that course of true love did certainly seem to be running to smoodge with those two. And after all that panthom cat, although it seems it wasn't a panthom after all, was the one that had brought them together. Which so they tell me they have a black cat in their house now, and they call it Tibby."

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16: The Gewgaw

Richard Dehan

(Clotilde Graves) 1863-1932

In: *The Cost of Wings and Other Stories*, 1914

THE iron doors of the auction-room were closed tightly as the valves of an oyster shell; the forward rush of a smartly attired throng awaited their rolling back in the polished steel grooves. It was to be a woman's field day; the contents of a notable jewel casket were to be dispersed under the hammer. And the *bonne-mouche* of the occasion— a superb blue diamond of sixty-five carats, a gem worthy to rank among the historic stones of the world, fit to be counted among the treasures of a Sultan or to blaze upon the bosom of an Empress— was discussed by watering mouths. Some of them were old and some of them were young, but all were tinted with the newest shade in lip bloom, and all wore the same expression of almost sensual desire. Paradise plumes fought together as wonderfully hatted heads bent and swayed and nodded in animated discussion. The stone had brought a hundred thousand louis and the Grand Monarque's own patent of nobility to the Portuguese adventurer who had stolen it from a Hindu temple midway in the seventeenth century. It had gleamed between the wicked, white breasts of the Duchesse de Berry, the shameless daughter of the Régent d'Orleans, at that final supper on the Terrace of Meudon. It had been seized by the Revolutionists in the stormy days of 1792, and had mysteriously vanished from the Garde Meuble, to reappear in the taloned clutches of a London money lender and gem dealer, notorious as a rogue among the spendthrift fine gentlemen of White's and Crockford's. And it had been bought by a big banker, and bid for by a Tsar, and sold to a great Tory nobleman, and left as an heirloom, and given to an Italian opera singer, and got back by arbitration and made a ward in Chancery, and sold in Paris by sanction of the Court; and now the woman who had bought and owned and worn it— sometimes as the swinging central stone of a tiara, at other times as the pendant to a matchless collar of black pearls— was dead, and Briscoe's famous auction-room, which is the chief clearing-place of the world, was about to witness a new record in progressive bidding.

The live women who had known and envied the dead owner of the blue diamond clustered thick about the iron doors, and loaded the atmosphere of the crowded place with their perfumes, and chattered like the inmates of the parrot house at the Zoological Gardens. Not one of them but would have given her soul in exchange for even a lesser jewel if Satan had appeared at her elbow and suggested the exchange. He did come to one of them. She was a pretty woman, still almost young; she was beautifully dressed in painted silken muslin, and wore a whole king bird of Paradise in her Paris hat. The bronze-

gold wires of the wonderful tail, tipped with vivid emerald at the ends, curved and sprang about the wearer's well-waved and well-dressed head like living snakes of incredible slenderness. The rich red plumage of the dead creature's head and throat gleamed like rubies; the delicate feather tufts that sprang from beneath the wings quivered with her every movement; the orange bill held a seed, cunningly placed; the cobalt-blue legs were perched upon a rose stem. To insure such beauty in the plumage the skin must be torn from the living bird. Any woman might be happy in possessing such a hat; but this one was miserable.... She wanted the big blue diamond.... And this urbane, polished person, elegantly attired, had told her that, if she chose, it might be hers in exchange for a possession only half believed in— to wit, the woman's soul— disposed of to a personage held, until that psychological moment, to be non-existent.

This was not the devil of St. Dunstan, with horns and a tail, or the cloaked and ribald wine seller of St. Anthony, or the lubberly fiend of Luther, or the clawed and scaly tempter of Bunyan. Nor did this personage bear the least resemblance to the swaggering, scarlet-and-black, sinister Mephistopheles of Goethe, as represented by the late Sir Henry Irving— upon whom be the Peace of Heaven!— but the woman entertained no doubt that it was the very devil himself. In this urbane and polished gentleman in the light gray, tight-waisted frock-coat and trousers of Bond Street cut, from beneath whose snowy, polished double collar flowed a voluminous cascade of pearl-colored cravat pinned with a small but perfect pigeon's-blood ruby; whose lapel bore a mauve orchid, whose immaculate white spats, perfectly polished patent boots, slender watch-chain, jade-headed walking stick, and pale buff gloves, betokened the most studied refinement and the most elegant taste, the daughter of Eve recognized the hereditary enemy of the Human Race.

She did not scream or turn ghastly with mortal fear; her Crême Magnolia and Rose Ninon were quite too thick for that. But her heart gave a sickening jolt, and fear immeasurable paralyzed her faculties, and her veins ran liquid ice— or was it liquid fire?— and for one swooning instant, under the regard of those intolerably mocking, unspeakably hateful eyes, the life in her seemed to dwindle to a mere pin's point of consciousness. But she revived and rallied, and the terror passed.

"Come!" he said, "you do not fear me— we have been friends too long; and to me, who know the world so well, and to you, who know it and are of it, there is nothing so undesirable as to create a scene." His voice was polished, gracious. It caressed like the touch of velvet, even if it crisped the nerves as velvet does. "You know me.... I know you, and how your heart is set upon this jewel that is to be sold to-day. Rest easy! Though you have with you in that

gold chain purse-bag notes for fifteen thousand pounds, ten thousand of it raised by what rigorous moralists ... those unpleasant persons! ... might call unlawful means...."

"Hush!" she cried, trembling, unable to remove her eyes from that face— long, oval, benevolent— with wide, arched brows and features exquisitely regular, framed in long waving hair— dark auburn mingled with gray— which fell nearly to his collar and mingled with a curling beard of natural growth. She trembled as the thought shot through her that it caricatured a Face that hung, pictured with a Crown of Thorns, above the cot in her child-daughter's nursery; and her thought was mirrored in those intolerable eyes, and the sculpturesque lips smiled in impious mockery.

"Ah, yes! It seems to you I bear some likeness to— shall I say a distant— or an estranged Friend of yours.... But I have many other faces, and you have ... other friends. Do not be afraid, or waste time in denying, the money is only borrowed; you are your young daughter's mother, as well as trustee and executor under her father's will.... And, surely, you may borrow the ten thousand pounds at a pinch for an investment? Besides, you will put it back before any unpleasant inquiries are made by your fellow-guardian and co-trustee. The manager of the Bank was quite deceived by the second signature upon the deed of withdrawal, so admirably counterfeited, so.... No, no, I do not wish to alarm you! Be quite at ease upon this matter, really so innocent and easily explained away. But with regard to your project of buying the Blue Diamond— you have no chance of carrying out your plan, not the faintest. Between those sedate persons already assembled by high privilege behind these shut iron doors an understanding has already been arrived at. The Diamond will be put up to public auction and actively bid for, it is true; but the Diamond is already bought and sold." His tone was of the gentlest sympathy, but the mockery in his glance and the gibing irony of his dreadful smile were to the baffled woman like white-hot irons laid upon a bleeding wound. "Mr. Ulysses Wanklyn, whose great duel with Mr. Cupid Bose at the De Lirecourt sale over that Régence commode of marqueterie thrilled all London, will be the winner of the treasure at ninety-four thousand guineas. Paragraphs in the afternoon papers— most excellent publications I find them, and supremely useful— will refer to the coup as 'the climax of screeching finance,' and 'the hall-mark on an enhanced standard of jewel-values.' And Messrs. Moreen and Blant, who will retire, ostensibly beaten, from the field after a bid of eighty-eight thousand, will be condoled with by writers who are quite aware that Wanklyn, Bose, Moreen, Blant, and half a dozen others constitute the Blue Diamond Purchasing Syndicate, capital ninety-four thousand guineas."

The wearer of the king bird of Paradise caught a sharp breath, and bit her sensuous, scarlet-dyed underlip fiercely. Stung to desperate courage by baffled desire and the thwarted jewel-lust that had robbed even her child and made of her a forger, she even dared to question....

"If that is so," she said, with angry, dark eyes and a rebelliously-heaving bosom, "why did you whisper to me just now that I could have the Diamond for my own if I gave you ... as the people do in the old German legends ... my Soul in exchange for it?"

He smiled, and caressed the strange, orchidaceous flower he wore with perfectly-gloved fingers.

"Have you not heard me called the Father of Lies ... the Arch-Deceiver?"

Rage intolerable possessed and rent her. She said hoarsely, and in tones unlike her own:

"You can give me the Blue Diamond, and I will have it— *at your price*!"

"You are really a woman of excellent sense," he said— and she was afraid to look because she knew how he was smiling. "Present good for future gain!... Doubtless you will recall the quotation, but so uncertain a futurity is well bartered for such a jewel as they have in there. Think— you will snatch it from the great dealers— from the private connoisseurs. You will hold and display and flaunt it in the face of society. You will be beautiful— wearing it! You should be envied, wearing it! You may be happy— doubtless you will be so! And now, just as a mere form, prick your left wrist slightly with this diamond-pointed pencil and inscribe your name upon a leaf of these ebony tablets. First, though, be pleased to remove that ... ahem!... miniature religious symbol from your golden chain. The Crucifix means nothing to you— you do not even remove it when you draw your wedded lover to your embrace— but I am an old-fashioned personage, and my prejudice extends back over nineteen hundred years— to the reign of Herod Antipas, and is practically unalterable. So ... thanks! That will serve me excellently!"

From the woman's hand something fell with a golden tinkle to the parqueted floor. A surge of the crowd drove her forward, her French heel crushed what she had dropped. The diamond pencil pricked the white wrist between the buttons of her dainty glove; she withdrew it, a little scarlet bead glistening on the shining point, and hesitated, only an instant, looking at the offered tablets of ebony and gold.

"Come, sign!... It will be over in an instant, and, believe me, you will feel far more comfortable afterward!" She remembered that her dentist had employed the same phrases only a day or two before in persuading her to consent to the removal of a decayed incisor. That tooth's successor— a perfect, polished example of human ivory— gleamed as her lips drew back in a

nervous laugh provoked by the absurdity of the analogy. She scrawled her signature, and the promise was fulfilled. She was calm— at ease— had no more worrying doubts and silly scruples. He wore no indiscreet expression of proprietorship; his lips did not even smile. And if there was mocking triumph in his eyes, his discreetly dropped lids concealed it.... He bowed profoundly as he took the ebony tablets, and then he lifted his gloved left hand and laid a finger on the iron doors. And they rolled apart, revealing the great safe with many patent locks, and the auctioneer at his desk, and the clerk at his; and the chosen already in their seats, and the elaborate preparations for the elaborate farce that was to be played, all ready. A savage rage boiled up in her as she looked at the smug faces of the secret Syndicate, actors well-versed in their separate parts. But the pressure of the chattering, screaming, perfumed crowd behind her carried her over the threshold, and her companion too. Packed tightly as sardines in the confined space about the rostrum, Society waited the great event. And a bunch of master-keys was produced by the senior partner of Briscoe's, and with much juggling of patent locks the great safe gave up the big, square jewel-case containing the famous collection, and a sibilant "*Ss's!*" of indrawn breaths greeted the lifting of its lid.

"Do not look at me! Listen— and look at the jewels," whispered the smooth, caressing voice in the ear of the woman who had just signed away her soul in exchange for the sensation of the day. And as a giant commissionaire bearing pearl ropes and tiaras, bracelets and rings and necklaces, nervously paraded up and down the central aisle left for his convenience, and the chattering and screaming of the society cockatoos redoubled, in envious admiration of each swaggering, glittering, covetable gewgaw, the devil told the woman very plainly how the thing was to be done.

"The stone that I shall give you is an exact replica in a newly-invented paste of the stone that is the price of what I have bought from you. When the commissionaire brings round the Blue Diamond, touch the jewel boldly— take it in your hand, as it is permissible to do— and substitute the paste. Have no fear! I will undertake that the act is undetected. Thenceforth wear your prize undismayed; boast of it as you will. The one— the only— drawback to your perfect happiness must be that society will believe your jewel to be false, while you have the exquisite joy of knowing it to be genuine. So take *this*, and act as I have counseled. Two hours to wait before you can dare to escape with it, for the Blue Diamond will be the last lot of the day. But what are two hours, even spent in a vitiated atmosphere, with such a prize your own, hidden in your glove or in your hand? A mere nothing! And here comes the commissionaire with the Diamond.... Only an alumina in hexagonal arrangement crystallized in the cooling of this planet you call 'the World' as arrogantly as though there

were no others, and yet how unique, how exquisite! See how the violet rays leap from the facets, even the noblest sapphire looks cold and pale beside the glorious gem. Murder has been committed for its shining sake over and over again in ages of which your history has no cognizance. It has purchased the faith of Emperors and the oaths of Kings. Rivers of blood have flowed because of it. Peerless women have laid down their honor to gain it. And it will be yours ... yours! Quick, the commissionaire is coming. School your hand to steadiness; no need to hide your lust, for all faces wear the same look here. Only be quick, and have no fear!"

The eyes of the commissionaire were fastened upon the woman's white, ringed, well-manicured hand, as in its turn it lifted the Blue Diamond— slightly set in platinum as a pendant— from its pale green velvet bed. But yet she effected the exchange. The substituted paste jewel was borne on— the paroquets and cockatoos chattered and screamed as loudly over the false stone as they had over the real, which lay snugly hidden in the thief's fair bosom. The syndicate of dealers played out their farce to its end, and Mr. Ulysses Wanklyn, to the infinite chagrin of Mr. Cupid Bose, and the gnashing discomfiture of Messrs. Moreen and Blant, secured the paste diamond at ninety-four thousand pounds. And amidst cries and congratulations the day ended. And the woman, with her price in her bosom, escaped into the open air, and signaled to the chauffeur waiting with her motor-brougham and drove home. Fear and triumph filled her. When would the theft be discovered? How soon would voices in the streets begin to clamor of the stolen gem? How should she who had stolen it ever dare to wear or to vaunt it, with Scotland Yard— with the detective eyes of all the world upon her? She had been befooled, duped, defrauded; she moaned as she bit her lace handkerchief through.... She reached her dainty boudoir just in time to have hysterics behind its locked and bolted doors. And when she had quieted herself with ether and red lavender, she drew the Blue Diamond from its hiding-place, and it gleamed in her palm with a diabolical splendor, as though the stone were sentient, and knew what it had cost. Could the great dealers be deceived— a probability quite impossible— she would be at liberty to wear this joy, this glory, to see its myriad splendors reflected in envious eyes. She kissed it as she had never kissed her child or any of her lovers— with passion, until its sharp facets cut her lips. And, as she kissed it, her quick ears were alert to catch the shoutings of the newsmen in the streets. But there were none. She dined in her boudoir, and slept, with the aid of veronal; and in the morning's newspaper there was not a wail, not a word! She gave the king bird of Paradise hat to her maid— she was so pleased, so thankful! The afternoon papers, and those of the next day and the next, were dumb upon the subject of the daring theft of the big Blue

Diamond from Briscoe's famous auction-room. She grew more and more secure. And one never-to-be-forgotten night she put on a Paquin gown and went to a great reception at a ducal house with the Blue Diamond as pendant to her pearl-and-brilliant collar. She counted on the cockatoos screeching, but they did not screech. The eyes that dwelt on the Blue Diamond were astonished, surprised, covertly amused, contemptuous.

"That is for luck, I suppose, dear?" cooed one of her intimate friends. "I mean that large blue crystal you are wearing.... I bought some last winter at a jeweler's in the bazaar at Rangoon— they find them with moonstones and olivines and those other things in the *débris* at the Ruby Mines, I understood. I must have mine mounted. By the way, do you know that— — " (she mentioned the name of a great financier of cosmopolitan habits and international fame) "has bought the Blue Diamond from Ulysses Wanklyn for a hundred and ten thousand pounds: *She*"— her voice dropped a little as she referred to a lady upon whom the great financier was reputed to have bestowed his plutocratic affections— "will be here to-night. Probably she will wear it! They say she was absolutely determined on his getting it for her, and so.... *À porte basse, passant courbé*, especially when the circumstances are pretty. *What* do you say? You heard it had been discovered by the dealers that the Blue Diamond had been found to be false ... a paste imitation, or a cut crystal like that thing you are wearing? Oh, my dear, how quite too frightfully absurd a *canard*! As though Ulysses Wanklyn and Cupid Bose and Blant, and all the other connoisseurs, could be deceived! What a very remarkable-looking man that is who is bowing to you!... The graceful person with the Apostolic profile and the beautiful silky beard"— and the intimate friend gave a little shudder. "And the extraordinary eyes that give one a crispation of the nerves?..."

It was he— her Purchaser— moving suddenly toward her through the throng of naked backs and bare bosoms.

"I hope," he said, and bowed and smiled, "that you are satisfied with the result of our ... negotiations the other day?" Then, as the fashionable crowd parted and the Great Financier walked through the rooms, his imperious mistress upon his arm, her husband looking amiable behind them, he added, indicating the swinging central pendant of the lady's superb diamond tiara, with a wave of a slender white-gloved hand, "My substitute was convincing, you think; you suppose it has deceived even the experts? Not in the least— the substitution of the paste stone for the Blue Diamond was discovered as soon as the public had quitted the auction-room. But Messrs. Wanklyn and Bose and my other very good friends who lay down the law in jewels as in other things, to Society, agreed not to lose by the fraud. The paste has the *cachet* of their

approval, and has been sold for a great sum. 'What water!' the world is crying. 'What luster!' 'How superb a gem!' While you, my poor friend, who display upon your bosom the real stone, have merely been credited with a meretricious taste for wearing Palais Royal jewelry. Pardon! I have not deceived you— or not in the way you imagine.... I said the Blue Diamond should be yours.... It is! I said you should be envied; you should, certainly. It is a thousand pities you are only sneered at. I said you might be happy.... It is most regrettable that you do not find the happiness you looked for. *Au revoir*, dear lady, *au revoir*!"

She felt indisposed, and went home....

17: The Olive

Algernon Blackwood

1869-1951

Pearson's Magazine, July 1921

HE LAUGHED involuntarily as the olive rolled towards his chair across the shiny parquet floor of the hotel dining-room.

His table in the cavernous *salle a manger* was apart: he sat alone, a solitary guest; the table from which the olive fell and rolled towards him was some distance away. The angle, however, made him an unlikely objective. Yet the lob-sided, juicy thing, after hesitating once or twice *en route* as it plopped along, came to rest finally against his feet.

It settled with an inviting, almost an aggressive air. And he stooped and picked it up, putting it rather self-consciously, because of the girl from whose table it had come, on the white tablecloth beside his plate.

Then, looking up, he caught her eye, and saw that she too was laughing, though not a bit self-consciously. As she helped herself to the *hors d'oeuvres* a false move had sent it flying. She watched him pick the olive up and set it beside his plate. Her eyes then suddenly looked away again— at her mother— questioningly.

The incident was closed. But the little oblong, succulent olive lay beside his plate, so that his fingers played with it. He fingered it automatically from time to time until his lonely meal was finished.

When no one was looking he slipped it into his pocket, as though, having taken the trouble to pick it up, this was the very least he could do with it. Heaven alone knows why, but he then took it upstairs with him, setting it on the marble mantelpiece among his field glasses, tobacco tins, ink-bottles, pipes and candlestick. At any rate, he kept it— the moist, shiny, lob-sided, juicy little oblong olive. The hotel lounge wearied him; he came to his room after dinner to smoke at his ease, his coat off and his feet on a chair; to read another chapter of Freud, to write a letter or two he didn't in the least want to write, and then go to bed at ten o'clock. But this evening the olive kept rolling between him and the thing he read; it rolled between the paragraphs, between the lines; the olive was more vital than the interest of these eternal "complexes" and "suppressed desires."

The truth was that he kept seeing the eyes of the laughing girl beyond the bouncing olive. She had smiled at him in such a natural, spontaneous, friendly way before her mother's glance had checked her— a smile, he felt, that might lead to acquaintance on the morrow.

He wondered! A thrill of possible adventure ran through him.

She was a merry-looking sort of girl, with a happy, half-roguish face that seemed on the lookout for somebody to play with. Her mother, like most of the people in the big hotel, was an invalid; the girl, a dutiful and patient daughter. They had arrived that very day apparently. A laugh is a revealing thing, he thought as he fell asleep to dream of a lob-sided olive rolling consciously towards him, and of a girl's eyes that watched its awkward movements, then looked up into his own and laughed. In his dream the olive had been deliberately and cleverly dispatched upon its uncertain journey. It was a message.

He did not know, of course, that the mother, chiding her daughter's awkwardness, had muttered:

"There you are again, child! True to your name, you never see an olive without doing something queer and odd with it!"

A youngish man, whose knowledge of chemistry, including invisible inks and such-like mysteries, had proved so valuable to the Censor's Department that for five years he had overworked without a holiday, the Italian Riviera had attracted him, and he had come out for a two months' rest. It was his first visit. Sun, mimosa, blue seas and brilliant skies had tempted him; exchange made a pound worth forty, fifty, sixty and seventy shillings. He found the place lovely, but somewhat untenanted.

Having chosen at random, he had come to a spot where the companionship he hoped to find did not exist. The place languished after the war, slow to recover; the colony of resident English was scattered still; travellers preferred the coast of France with Mentone and Monte Carlo to enliven them. The country, moreover, was distracted by strikes. The electric light failed one week, letters the next, and as soon as the electricians and postal-workers resumed, the railways stopped running. Few visitors came, and the few who came soon left.

He stayed on, however, caught by the sunshine and the good exchange, also without the physical energy to discover a better, livelier place. He went for walks among the olive groves, he sat beside the sea and palms, he visited shops and bought things he did not want because the exchange made them seem cheap, he paid immense "extras" in his weekly bill, then chuckled as he reduced them to shillings and found that a few pence covered them; he lay with a book for hours among the olive groves.

The olive groves! His daily life could not escape the olive groves; to olive groves, sooner or later, his walks, his expeditions, his meanderings by the sea, his shopping— all led him to these ubiquitous olive groves.

If he bought a picture postcard to send home, there was sure to be an olive grove in one corner of it. The whole place was smothered with olive groves,

the people owed their incomes and existence to these irrepressible trees. The villages among the hills swam roof-deep in them. They swarmed even in the hotel gardens.

The guide books praised them as persistently as the residents brought them, sooner or later, into every conversation. They grew lyrical over them:

"And how do you like our olive trees? Ah, you think them pretty. At first, most people are disappointed. They grow on one."

"They do," he agreed.

"I'm glad you appreciate them. I find them the embodiment of grace. And when the wind lifts the under-leaves across a whole mountain slope— why, it's wonderful, isn't it? One realises the meaning of 'olive-green'."

"One does," he sighed. "But all the same I should like to get one to eat— an olive, I mean."

"Ah, to eat, yes. That's not so easy. You see, the crop is—"

"Exactly," he interrupted impatiently, weary of the habitual and evasive explanations. "But I should like to taste the *fruit*. I should like to enjoy one."

For, after a stay of six weeks, he had never once seen an olive on the table, in the shops, nor even on the street barrows at the market place. He had never tasted one. No one sold olives, though olive trees were a drug in the place; no one bought them, no one asked for them; it seemed that no one wanted them. The trees, when he looked closely, were thick with a dark little berry that seemed more like a sour sloe than the succulent, delicious spicy fruit associated with its name.

Men climbed the trunks, everywhere shaking the laden branches and hitting them with long bamboo poles to knock the fruit off, while women and children, squatting on their haunches, spent laborious hours filling baskets underneath, then loading mules and donkeys with their daily "catch." But an olive to eat was unobtainable. He had never cared for olives, but now he craved with all his soul to feel his teeth in one.

"Ach! But it is the Spanish olive that you *eat*," explained the head waiter, a German "from Basel." "These are for oil only." After which he disliked the olive more than ever— until that night when he saw the first eatable specimen rolling across the shiny parquet floor, propelled towards him by the careless hand of a pretty girl, who then looked up into his eyes and smiled.

He was convinced that Eve, similarly, had rolled the apple towards Adam across the emerald sward of the first garden in the world.

He slept usually like the dead. It must have been something very real that made him open his eyes and sit up in bed alertly. There was a noise against his door. He listened. The room was still quite dark. It was early morning. The noise was not repeated.

"Who's there?" he asked in a sleepy whisper. "What is it?"

The noise came again. Some one was scratching on the door. No, it was somebody tapping.

"What do you want?" he demanded in a louder voice. "Come in," he added, wondering sleepily whether he was presentable. Either the hotel was on fire or the porter was waking the wrong person for some sunrise expedition.

Nothing happened. Wide awake now, he turned the switch on, but no light flooded the room. The electricians, he remembered with a curse, were out on strike. He fumbled for the matches, and as he did so a voice in the corridor became distinctly audible. It was just outside his door.

"Aren't you ready?" he heard. "You sleep for ever."

And the voice, although never having heard it before, he could not have recognised it, belonged, he knew suddenly, to the girl who had let the olive fall. In an instant he was out of bed. He lit a candle.

"I'm coming," he called softly, as he slipped rapidly into some clothes. "I'm sorry I've kept you. I shan't be a minute."

"Be quick then!" he heard, while the candle flame slowly grew, and he found his garments. Less than three minutes later he opened the door and, candle in hand, peered into the dark passage.

"Blow it out!" came a peremptory whisper. He obeyed, but not quick enough. A pair of red lips emerged from the shadows. There was a puff, and the candle was extinguished. "I've got my reputation to consider. We mustn't be seen, of course!"

The face vanished in the darkness, but he had recognised it— the shining skin, the bright glancing eyes. The sweet breath touched his cheek. The candlestick was taken from him by a swift, deft movement. He heard it knock the wainscoting as it was set down. He went out into a pitch-black corridor, where a soft hand seized his own and led him— by a back door, it seemed— out into the open air of the hill-side immediately behind the hotel.

He saw the stars. The morning was cool and fragrant, the sharp air waked him, and the last vestiges of sleep went flying. He had been drowsy and confused, had obeyed the summons without thinking. He now realised suddenly that he was engaged in an act of madness.

The girl, dressed in some flimsy material thrown loosely about her head and body, stood a few feet away, looking, he thought, like some figure called out of dreams and slumber of a forgotten world, out of legend almost. He saw her evening shoes peep out; he divined an evening dress beneath the gauzy covering. The light wind blew it close against her figure. He thought of a nymph.

"I say— but haven't you been to bed?" he asked stupidly. He had meant to expostulate, to apologise for his foolish rashness, to scold and say they must go back at once. Instead, this sentence came. He guessed she had been sitting up all night. He stood still a second, staring in mute admiration, his eyes full of bewildered question.

"Watching the stars," she met his thought with a happy laugh. "Orion has touched the horizon. I came for you at once. We've got just four hours!" The voice, the smile, the eyes, the reference to Orion, swept him off his feet. Something in him broke loose, and flew wildly, recklessly to the stars.

"Let us be off!" he cried, "before the Bear tilts down. Already Alcyone begins to fade. I'm ready. Come!"

She laughed. The wind blew the gauze aside to show two ivory white limbs. She caught his hand again, and they scampered together up the steep hill-side towards the woods. Soon the big hotel, the villas, the white houses of the little town where natives and visitors still lay soundly sleeping, were out of sight. The farther sky came down to meet them. The stars were paling, but no sign of actual dawn was yet visible. The freshness stung their cheeks.

Slowly, the heavens grew lighter, the east turned rose, the outline of the trees defined themselves, there was a stirring of the silvery green leaves. They were among olive groves— but the spirits of the trees were dancing. Far below them, a pool of deep colour, they saw the ancient sea. They saw the tiny specks of distant fishing-boats. The sailors were singing to the dawn, and birds among the mimosa of the hanging gardens answered them.

Pausing a moment at length beneath a gaunt old tree, whose struggle to leave the clinging earth had tortured its great writhing arms and trunk, they took their breath, gazing at one another with eyes full of happy dreams.

"You understood so quickly," said the girl, "my little message. I knew by your eyes and ears you would." And she first tweaked his ears with two slender fingers mischievously, then laid her soft palm with a momentary light pressure on both eyes.

"You're half-and-half, at any rate," she added, looking him up and down for a swift instant of appraisement, "if you're not altogether." The laughter showed her white, even little teeth.

"You know how to play, and that's something," she added. Then, as if to herself, "You'll be altogether before I've done with you."

"Shall I?" he stammered, afraid to look at her.

Puzzled, some spirit of compromise still lingering in him, he knew not what she meant; he knew only that the current of life flowed increasingly through his veins, but that her eyes confused him.

"I'm longing for it," he added. "How wonderfully you did it! They roll so awkwardly—"

"Oh, that!" She peered at him through a wisp of hair. "You've kept it, I hope."

"Rather. It's on my mantelpiece—"

"You're sure you haven't eaten it?" and she made a delicious mimicry with her red lips, so that he saw the tip of a small pointed tongue.

"I shall keep it," he swore, "as long as these arms have life in them," and he seized her just as she was crouching to escape, and covered her with kisses.

"I knew you longed to play," she panted, when he released her. "Still, it was sweet of you to pick it up before another got it."

"Another!" he exclaimed.

"The gods decide. It's a lob-sided thing, remember. It can't roll straight." She looked oddly mischievous, elusive.

He stared at her.

"If it had rolled elsewhere— and another had picked it up— ?" he began.

"I should be with that other now!" And this time she was off and away before he could prevent her, and the sound of her silvery laughter mocked him among the olive trees beyond. He was up and after her in a second, following her slim whiteness in and out of the old-world grove, as she flitted lightly, her hair flying in the wind, her figure flashing like a ray of sunlight or the race of foaming water— till at last he caught her and drew her down upon his knees, and kissed her wildly, forgetting who and where and what he was.

"Hark!" she whispered breathlessly, one arm close about his neck. "I hear their footsteps. Listen! It is the pipe!"

"The pipe— !" he repeated, conscious of a tiny but delicious shudder.

For a sudden chill ran through him as she said it. He gazed at her. The hair fell loose about her cheeks, flushed and rosy with his hot kisses. Her eyes were bright and wild for all their softness. Her face, turned sideways to him as she listened, wore an extraordinary look that for an instant made his blood run cold. He saw the parted lips, the small white teeth, the slim neck of ivory, the young bosom panting from his tempestuous embrace. Of an unearthly loveliness and brightness she seemed to him, yet with this strange, remote expression that touched his soul with sudden terror.

Her face turned slowly.

"Who *are* you?" he whispered. He sprang to his feet without waiting for her answer.

He was young and agile; strong, too, with that quick response of muscle they have who keep their bodies well; but he was no match for her. Her speed and agility out-classed his own with ease. She leapt. Before he had moved one

leg forward towards escape, she was clinging with soft, supple arms and limbs about him, so that he could not free himself, and as her weight bore him downwards to the ground, her lips found his own and kissed them into silence. She lay buried again in his embrace, her hair across his eyes, her heart against his heart, and he forgot his question, forgot his little fear, forgot the very world he knew....

"They come, they come," she cried gaily. "The Dawn is here. Are you ready?"

"I've been ready for five thousand years," he answered, leaping to his feet beside her.

"Altogether!" came upon a sparkling laugh that was like wind among the olive leaves.

Shaking her last gauzy covering from her, she snatched his hand, and they ran forward together to join the dancing throng now crowding up the slope beneath the trees. Their happy singing filled the sky. Decked with vine and ivy, and trailing silvery green branches, they poured in a flood of radiant life along the mountain side. Slowly they melted away into the blue distance of the breaking dawn, and, as the last figure disappeared, the sun came up slowly out of a purple sea.

They came to the place he knew— the deserted earthquake village— and a faint memory stirred in him. He did not actually recall that he had visited it already, had eaten his sandwiches with "hotel friends" beneath its crumbling walls; but there was a dim troubling sense of familiarity— nothing more. The houses still stood, but pigeons lived in them, and weasels, stoats and snakes had their uncertain homes in ancient bedrooms. Not twenty years ago the peasants thronged its narrow streets, through which the dawn now peered and cool wind breathed among dew-laden brambles.

"I know the house," she cried, "the house where we would live!" and raced, a flying form of air and sunlight, into a tumbled cottage that had no roof, no floor or windows. Wild bees had hung a nest against the broken wall.

He followed her. There was sunlight in the room, and there were flowers. Upon a rude, simple table lay a bowl of cream, with eggs and honey and butter close against a home-made loaf. They sank into each other's arms upon a couch of fragrant grass and boughs against the window where wild roses bloomed ... and the bees flew in and out.

It was Bussana, the so-called earthquake village, because a sudden earthquake had fallen on it one summer morning when all the inhabitants were at church. The crashing roof killed sixty, the tumbling walls another hundred, and the rest had left it where it stood.

"The Church," he said, vaguely remembering the story. "They were at prayer—"

The girl laughed carelessly in his ear, setting his blood in a rush and quiver of delicious joy. He felt himself untamed, wild as the wind and animals. "The true God claimed His own," she whispered. "He came back. Ah, they were not ready— the old priests had seen to that. But he came. They heard his music. Then his tread shook the olive groves, the old ground danced, the hills leapt for joy—"

"And the houses crumbled," he laughed as he pressed her closer to his heart—

"And now we've come back!" she cried merrily. "We've come back to worship and be glad!" She nestled into him, while the sun rose higher.

"I hear them— hark!" she cried, and again leapt, dancing from his side. Again he followed her like wind. Through the broken window they saw the naked fauns and nymphs and satyrs rolling, dancing, shaking their soft hoofs amid the ferns and brambles. Towards the appalling, ruptured church they sped with feet of light and air. A roar of happy song and laughter rose.

"Come!" he cried. "We must go too."

Hand in hand they raced to join the tumbling, dancing throng. She was in his arms and on his back and flung across his shoulders, as he ran. They reached the broken building, its whole roof gone sliding years ago, its walls a-tremble still, its shattered shrines alive with nesting birds.

"Hush!" she whispered in a tone of awe, yet pleasure. "He is there!" She pointed, her bare arm outstretched above the bending heads.

There, in the empty space, where once stood sacred Host and Cup, he sat, filling the niche sublimely and with awful power. His shaggy form, benign yet terrible, rose through the broken stone. The great eyes shone and smiled. The feet were lost in brambles.

"God!" cried a wild, frightened voice yet with deep worship in it— and the old familiar panic came with portentous swiftness. The great Figure rose.

The birds flew screaming, the animals sought holes, the worshippers, laughing and glad a moment ago, rushed tumbling over one another for the doors.

"He goes again! Who called? Who called like that? His feet shake the ground!"

"It is the earthquake!" screamed a woman's shrill accents in ghastly terror.

"Kiss me— one kiss before we forget again...!" sighed a laughing, passionate voice against his ear. "Once more your arms, your heart beating on my lips...! You recognised his power. You are now altogether! We shall remember!"

But he woke, with the heavy bed-clothes stuffed against his mouth and the wind of early morning sighing mournfully about the hotel walls.

"HAVE they left again— those ladies?" he inquired casually of the head waiter, pointing to the table. "They were here last night at dinner."

"Who do you mean?" replied the man, stupidly, gazing at the spot indicated with a face quite blank. "Last night— at dinner?" He tried to think.

"An English lady, elderly, with— her daughter—" at which moment precisely the girl came in alone. Lunch was over, the room empty. There was a second's difficult pause. It seemed ridiculous not to speak. Their eyes met. The girl blushed furiously.

He was very quick for an Englishman. "I was allowing myself to ask after your mother," he began. "I was afraid"— he glanced at the table laid for one— "she was not well, perhaps?"

"Oh, but that's very kind of you, I'm sure." She smiled. He saw the small white even teeth....

And before three days had passed, he was so deeply in love that he simply couldn't help himself.

"I believe," he said lamely, "this is yours. You dropped it, you know. Er— may I keep it? It's only an olive."

They were, of course, in an olive grove when he asked it, and the sun was setting.

She looked at him, looked him up and down, looked at his ears, his eyes. He felt that in another second her little fingers would slip up and tweak the first, or close the second with a soft pressure—

"Tell me," he begged: "did you dream anything— that first night I saw you?"

She took a quick step backwards. "No," she said, as he followed her more quickly still, "I don't think I did. But," she went on breathlessly as he caught her up, "I knew— from the way you picked it up—"

"Knew what?" he demanded, holding her tightly so that she could not get away again.

"That you were already half and half, but would soon be altogether."

And, as he kissed her, he felt her soft little fingers tweak his ears.

———————

18: Unconvivial Isle

Roy W. Hinds

1887-1930

Argosy, 2 Aug 1919

THE storm, as evanescent as the threads of a dream, had passed when Pickard awoke. His sleep had been deep, and aside from the inevitable tippler's headache, he didn't feel so bad. He shuffled from the bunk-galley into the cabin; and then, with bright daylight streaming through the port-holes and windows, he saw the havoc. A cold fear laid hold of him, as though a massive hand of ice were squeezing out his life.

Instinctively Chester. Pickard felt that he was alone. Only men who have been left to die in waste-lands feel that utter desolation of heart that flings the earth from beneath their feet and peoples the surrounding solitudes with countless spears of danger. He swung open the companionway doorway and dashed to the deck.

Pickard saw that the *Turtle Dove*, her superstructure swept as clean as a vulture-picked carcass, rested at a slight angle in the water. He assumed she was on a reef, though as he peered over her side he saw nothing but water, flashing brightly in the after-storm sunlight of the semitropics.

A hundred yards away was land— a brilliant stretch of green-verdured foliage tucked in from the sea by a wide hem of white beach. He stared, but apart from flitting birds he saw no sign of life. On every other side there was nothing but the smooth face of the sea, serene and quiet— utterly exhausted after a night of disastrous revelry.

Pickard raced about the swept deck and cried down hatchways for his companions of the previous day; but only the sound of his own hoarse voice came back to him. He then reasoned that, in storm, most of the men would have been in the pilot-house, and the pilot-house had been torn away and scattered before the gale. He stumbled down the companionway into the fireroom and engine-room. The fire was dead, and there was no sign of the men whose duties had been there. They probably had gone on deck when the craft struck, and were claimed by the sea.

He was alone, as forsaken as a solitary rude cross in the desert. He fell upon the floor and sobbed in utter despair.

Chester Pickard was not a coward, and it wasn't long before a calm settled over his agitated soul. The desire of youth for life rose higher and higher, and he hastened back to the deck, grim-faced for the struggle he felt lay before him.

"Poor devils!" he exclaimed, thinking of the companions so lately flung to a raging sea. "Poor Britter!" Chester had become very fond of Britter.

ii

CHESTER Pickard, broker's clerk, was a convivial young man who spent most of his non-working hours in seeking companions with whom to drink, and, above drinking, talk. Had Chester been deaf and dumb, he never would have taken a drink. But he was not deaf and dumb; many a harassed bartender in New York could make affidavit to that.

It had been his habit, after leaving his work, to repair with a few companions to a certain cozy saloon in the financial district. These young men would drink and chatter an hour or so, and then his companions would leave Chester clinging like a wet rag to the bar, after they had had what Broadway calls sufficient and the Bowery calls "all youse can hold."

Somehow Chester, who had no home ties, couldn't bring himself to go to his boarding-house after a certain number of drinks. It was the same performance every time they foregathered. Chester would plead with all, and then with individuals to stick around a while; but they were wiser.

The bartender in this particular saloon would refuse to sell Chester more drink or even to talk with him, so the young man would fare forth. If he found convivial companionship, he would stick until the last. Failing to find companionship, he would go home. He never drank unless he could do so with friend or acquaintance.

On a certain afternoon in May Chester became very drunk and, in leaving the saloon, wandered in a strange direction. He soon arrived at a point where the city was completely turned around, like a signpainter's "S"; he was steadily progressing down-town. He stepped into a saloon. The bartender was busy and was rather curt in his "What'll it be, sir?"

Chester took a high-ball and attempted to draw the bartender into conversation. That gentleman uttered a word or two, as pleasantly as he could; but it was plain that he was as bered as a Senate stenographer. Chester soon took his departure. His wanderings finally brought him to a doubtful saloon on the waterfront near the Battery. Formerly he had sought company in brighter places, but to-night he felt in a strange mood, so he entered the sailors' hangout.

There was a motley crowd at the bar and lounging about the place. Fumes of vile tobacco and vicious whisky almost impelled him to retreat, but various shaggy eyes had turned his way, and he felt better by assuming a boldness and breasting the bar. He was cautious enough to order a glass of beer. The bartender, a hulking, broad-jowled individual, set a huge scoop of beer in front

of Chester, and he sipped it tentatively. Soon he finished the beer and, becoming more reckless, he ordered a highball.

When Chester awoke he was lying, as naked as a peeled apple, on a rude bunk. He was conscious, first, of burning thirst, and second, of a raw chill. A blanket was lying huddled against the wall, and he pulled it over his twitching body.

His quaking nerves settled down slightly when the chill passed, and suddenly he came completely to his senses. He realized that he had awakened in a strange room, and had a vague fear that office-time had passed.

His blinking gaze fell upon the bottom of another bunk only a yard above his throbbing head. A swishing roar assailed his ear-drums, and he was conscious of a rolly, tossy sensation. Used, however, to tossy mornings-after, he didn't think this strange.

A pillar of gray light streamed across his bunk from an opening two feet above his head. Chester saw that he was in a very narrow room— nothing more than a cell— for there was but a narrow aisle between his bunk and the farthest wall.

Chester raised up on his elbow. A volcano was raging in his vitals, and his head wabbled drunkenly. He peered through a round glass window. He was at sea!

For the fraction of a minute he gazed, stupefied, upon the limitless expanse of swelling waves and the dipping gulls wheeling like black plumes against a leaden sky. The nauseating sickness of the morningafter submerged in a swell of terror, and he leaped from the bunk. His terror was brief. Anger gripped him.

He grasped a bare arm that protruded from the bunk above. A tall man, clad in flannel pajamas, sat up on the edge of the bunk, bent his head from the low ceiling, disinterred a pair of slippers from the disarray of his bed-clothing, and in a moment swung lightly down to the floor.

"Good morning!" the man greeted cheerily. He was a nice-looking chap, a little older than Chester, with an engaging smile. "Here"— and he pulled some garments, rough clothes of the sea, from a locker under Chester's bunk— "get on some clothes before you freeze to death. I had you all covered up when you laid down, but you must 've done some heavy kicking in the night. Get on some clothes, and then we'll talk."

"And we'll talk about the quickest way to get me ashore," said Chester angrily. "I suppose I'm shanghaied— I've heard of such things— but it won't be well to try to keep me shanghaied."

"We'll talk about that later," said the man pleasantly. "I'd dress if I were you."

"Where are my own clothes?"

"I expect they're dry by this time: you fell out of the boat, you know, when we brought you aboard. Don't remember that, eh? I don't suppose you do; it was a peach of a jag you had on. Your clothes are out in the cabin; but, as long as you're at sea, why don't you dress in these? Your own clothes are hardly suitable "— and the man smiled— "for rough weather, and it looks as though we're going to have some."

Chester was calmer now, and he realized that anger would gain him nothing. Besides he was cold. He found a complete outfit of clothing, heavy and rough, but comfortable, and a sou'-wester hat. His host also proceeded to dress in similar garments, and it wasn't long before they stepped from the bunk-galley into a small cabin. The cabin was low-ceilinged, like that of unusually small vessels, but it was comfortably furnished and cozy.

"My name is Britter," the man said. "I told you last night, but I expect you've forgotten that. Yours, if I remember right, is Pickard. Now then, Mr. Pickard, we'll have a little drink, and then we'll have breakfast. By that time we'll feel better, and be able to understand each other. I'll tell you now, though, that you weren't shanghaied— that is, strictly speaking. We did, I admit, take advantage of the fact that you were soused; but we didn't shanghai you. You came aboard of your own accord. We stated our proposition to you, and you liked it. Of course, you don't remember that. You probably wouldn't have accepted it if you'd been sober— but we'll talk of that later."

Britter brought forth from a locker a bottle and glasses, and each man swallowed a stiff drink. It settled Chester's nerves and he felt better. The adventure of the situation was gripping him now, and within his soul a strong, keen enjoyment was springing up. Chester Pickard, the broker's clerk, at heart was a soldier of fortune, too optimistic to quarrel with fate. Britter opened a door and stepped up a short companionway, shouting to a sailor standing on deck near the forward rail.

"Tell Moxey we'll have breakfast now," he called. ' Breakfast for two—in the cabin."

Chester, silent, alternately gazed at the tumbling sea and the hospitable Britter. He wasn't sure but what he liked him.

"My pardner, Dorsey, the man who was with me last night," Britter explained, "didn't come along. He's coming next trip."

"Supposing you let me in on the secret of just why I'm aboard this ship," suggested Chester. 'I confess a mild interest in the affair."

"In a few minutes," smiled the host. Then he grew serious. "I know you're not aman with a family," he said. "At least, you told us that last night; you said

you had nothing in the world to hold you in New York except an ordinary clerk's job. I think you're sport enough not to worry. Am I right?"

"I'm not worrying especially. I'm curious."

"I'll lay every card on the table as soon as Moxey brings the breakfast and clears out. In the mean time, we still have this bottle. Here's Moxey now; let's hustle in another drink before we eat."

Moxey, a red-faced ship's cook, took from a wide-bottomed basket tin dishes laden with fried bacon and potatoes and biscuits. He poured mugs' of fragrant coffee from a steaming pot and then withdrew.

"Now I'll explain a little," Britter volunteered when they were seated. "This schooner is the *Turtle Dove*, and Dorsey and I chartered her to take our first cargo of stock down to Caliana. We told you all about it last night, but it's better to go over it all again.

"Caliana you never heard of— that's what you said. Well, Caliana is a republic about tlie size of a voting precinct down in the mountains of the Isthmus. By a little political manipulation, and particular care in mixing drinks, we've cornered the liquordispensing privileges of the whole republic, which means two saloons— one in each of the country's two cities. Dorsey is coming down next month with more stock—"

"You mean that this ship is loaded with booze?" Chester asked.

"I'd say she was loaded with booze!" Britter assured him. "Twenty thousand dollars' worth of assorted booze—that's what's in her belly this minute. Everything from a dash of bitters to refreshments for a national convention. You never saw more kinds of booze in your life. Everything except beer— beer's too bulky. Those niggers down there don't want beer, anyway. They want sure-fire booze.

"The president of Caliana is a cross between a Mexican mule-driver and a Yucatan nigger. He made a trip to New York about three months ago, and wandered into a saloon Dorsey and me were running on Tenth avenue. We took a look into his wallet and then introduced him to a system of mixed drinks that almost made him take out citizenship papers in the States.

"Nev-ar will I go myself back to Caliana!" he says. "I will organize myself to be a ceetezen of these great country where lives the liberty-loving gin-rickee! Another one of them what you call a Bronx cockatoo, pleese— and long may she wave!"

"He hung around our place three days, during which we learned a lot about Caliana and accumulated a fine system of profit-sharing ideas.

"When the executive sailed for home, Dorsey went with him, with the saloon business of the republic in his pocket.

" 'It won't be necessary, your highness,' Dorsey told the president, 'for you to go to New York for an eye-opener. We will bring you a couple of American saloons and educate your noble people up to a proper standard of self-government and delirium tremens.'

"It took a little money, too, and a dicker by which the president will be properly reimbursed; but he got legislation which absolutely gives us a monopoly on the booze business for three years. If this president is reelected, we'll get an extension.

"But whether we last longer than three years or not, we're bound to clean up. The country's full of gold, and those niggers are very illiterate when it comes to drinking— never having had anything but rum to get educated on. When we inoculate them with our curriculum of milk punches, gin fizzes, and brandy high-balls, they'll fight to lay their gold on the bars.

"That's the reason that I put to sea with this cargo of blind staggers."

"That all sounds very nice," commented Chester, "but I don't see yet why you were so anxious to get me into it. What do you want me for— an advertisement, or something like that?"

"No, no, my boy," Britter hastened to assure him. "We have two saloons to run; Dorsey will take care of one and I'll look after the other. But we've got to have a traveling agent— a man of good appearance and more than ordinary intelligence. We've got to have a man who can keep the politicians lined up— politically and at the bar. He's got to go back and forth between the two towns, you know, and do the honors at the bar. He's to be the high exalted drink-buyer of the republic— a man who can do it and make an impression, and at the same time lead the natives into reckless spendthriftiness. A highly sociable man is what we want. And, if you'll pardon me, you struck Dorsey and myself as being intelligent, of good appearance, and sociable to a high degree. For money you need have no worry. At the end of three years you'll have a small fortune— and— and free drinks for three years."

"A continual round of pleasure for three years, eh?"

"That's it. Do you like the proposition?"

"I'll take a look at the country," Chester said. Breakfast being over, he reached for the bottle. "I might like it," he went on. "The job of custodian of a nation's conviviality rather appeals to me— providing I can talk all I want to. I guess I can pick up enough of their lingo to get by on. But first teach me to say, 'What 're you going to have?' That's a line that'll get you by in any country."

But alas! The elements did not regard with favor this project to boozify a decadent nation. The *Turtle Dove* met her fate on a reef, and Chester Pickard, having got hopelessly drunk during the final tussle with the hurricane, slept

blissfully and snoresomely; while his shipmates, sober, were tossed into the sea.

iii

ON the storm-wrecked deck of the *Turtle Dove*, Chester Pickard did not long debate whether to remain aboard the craft or to brave the unknown land that lay a hundred yards away. His only safety lay on land, as the small ship, or what was left of her, might break up at any moment.

The boats having been carried away, he spent the greater part of the day constructing a raft. Occasionally he stopped in his work of ripping away timbers from the structure of the ship to gaze into the green of the shore, but he saw nothing but bright-feathered birds.

His raft built, he brought up from the mess-galley all the provisions, and there was quite a stock. Very carefully he slid the raft overboard, holding it safe by a hawser-rope. It was a a laborious task, but he got the provisions on the raft. He stripped the cabin of all clothing and tools. He found Britter's revolver and three boxes of cartridges. He found cigars, a pipe, and a good supply of tobacco. Also he found matches enough, with economy, to last him a year. Never was marooned mariner more kindly treated by fortune!

Armed with a long strip of scantling which he had pulled from the hulk of the *Turtle Dove*, Pickard poled ashore over the now smooth sea and dragged the provisions high and dry. Then he poled back to the stranded craft, for she still held treasure in her shattered vitals.

He could not salvage much of the bottled goods from the cargo that had been destined for parched Caliana. The bottles had been smashed for the most part, although here and there he picked a sound flask— whisky, cordials, and liqueurs. But he trundled keg after keg of whisky to the deck. He found smaller kegs of port and sherry and brandy, and he brought them all up. Feverishly he worked, and it was getting dark before he got the last keg ashore. Then he sank exhausted on the beach, surrounded by a veritable kingdom of booze.

After a time he opened one of the whisky bottles and took a swig. It gagged him, but once down, it also stimulated. He rummaged among the provisions and found tinned meats and biscuits. He drew a dipper of port wine from one of the kegs that had been fitted with a spigot, and made a hearty meal.

He lay on the beach, just at the fringe of gently-nodding palm-fronds, and gazed through the smoke of a fragrant cigar at the crescent moon setting gemlike in the starstudded bowl of tropic sky. The wine and velvet-swish of the sea lulled his nerves. He fell asleep on the beach— well fed, half drunk— and

dreamed serenely of his favorite saloon in far New York, and of being in convivial conversation with the bartender.

The island— for island it proved to be— was turned into a habitable spot. Before he had been there a week Pickard had fashioned a dwelling of rocks and boughs. He was fortified against privation for a considerable time. The island abounded in coconuts and berries. Being a good shot with the revolver, he added to his provisions by bringing down a few birds. He also obtained fish from the beach, having rigged up a few traps.

All men, whether their life has been amid the plenty of cities or the scantiness of deserts, become ingenious— conjure up the talents of primitive man— when cast on lonely shores. Their every move is directed at fulfilment of nature's first law, and they look more keenly to the future than other men. Pickard was no exception, and he planned wisely and with an ingenuity that surprised even himself.

But, strange to say, since the second day on the island he had not taken a drink of the booze. He had moved it all into a cave that set well away from the beach, and as he worked to build a habitation, he told himself that he would celebrate when his comforts were assured. He would get drunk for a week— a wild, care-free drunk, in which he would roam and roister about the beach and groves, bottle in hand. He set great store by this contemplated orgy.

As he worked day after day, however, his nerves became steady, and he found himself enjoying a fulness of health that set his blood tingling. Wholesome food and fresh air, with no booze, and regenerating manual labor were bringing him far away from the life of a sodden broker's clerk, cooped up by day in an office and dissipating by night. He cared not in the least for a drink.

It was on the afternoon of his fourth day on the island, and he was softly whistling as he worked at the hut, when he turned, startled, at an unusual sound in the undergrowth near at hand. His hand instinctively went to the revolver which he always carried in his belt.

Pickard found himself staring into the face of an unusual species of ape— half baboon, half chimpanzee it seemed— with a fringe of red whiskers beneath an undershot chin. The animal's face was covered by short, black hair, and this, in contrast to the reddish-gray of his pelt, gave him a funereal expression, the solemnity of which was enhanced by a pair of large, doleful eyes. He stood upright, one long arm hanging at his side and the other looped over a bough slightly above his head. The animal was about four feet tall.

"Well,"thought Chester, "he doesn't seem to be afraid of me."

He soon procured a biscuit and tossed it toward the solemn-visaged caller. The biscuit fell near the latter's feet, but it did not frighten him. He regarded it

very intently; profoundly, in fact, as though the matter called for all his wisdom. Finally he swung down to all-fours and picked the biscuit from the ground. Then he sat back on his haunches and nibbled at the gift, regarding Chester in that somber manner of the small boy next door who has just lost his mother.

"I wonder what makes him so sad," thought Chester.

The biscuit proved to be the entering wedge for a warm friendship. The ape was cautious at first, as became an aristocrat, but he finally exhibited all the devotion of a dog for this strange creature who seemed to be engaged in altering the island. He followed Chester about the beach and groves, accepting the titbits offered him in the gravest of manner. He never lost his solemn and grief-stricken demeanor.

"Robinson Crusoe called his man Friday because he found him on Friday," thought Chester. "I think it was Sunday that this monkey-undertaker came to me. I'll call him Sunday."

After a time this name was contracted to "Sunny," which seemed to be a witticsm on his personal cloudiness.

His habitation constructed, Pickard found time hanging heavily on his hands. After breakfast one morning he went into the booze-cave and drew off half a dipper of whisky from one of the kegs. He took a gulp and then hurled the dipper to the ground.

"It's all out of gear," said he. "There's no fun in drinking booze when you haven't got anybody to talk to."

Thereafter he spent his time roaming about the island, always in company with the doleful Sunny, and in pacing the beach, looking for a sail or the smoke of a steamer. He always kept a fire burning at night on the sand, and by day he carried a blanket which he could wave to attract attention.

For six months he scanned the horizon. Not a drink of booze had he taken since he had hurled the dipper to the floor of the cave. He yearned at times for the companionship of humans, and dreamed of the hilarious parties he could have if he had some one to talk to. He craved companionship— not the booze— and, lonely, his thoughts more and more reverted to the lost delights of his old haunts, the mellow conviviality.

Six months had passed when, in the dead of a starlit night, he was awakened by strange sounds and the scampering of many feet outside his hut. He grasped his revolver and cautiously peered out.

A half dozen dark forms were visible about the entrance to the booze-cave. They looked like the forms of midgets, but Pickard recognized the figure of Sunny towering six inches over his companions. He had caught glimpses of

these figures at isolated points on the island, and he knew them to be brothers and sisters of Sunny.

Sunny seemed to be the center of attraction. One by one these curious creatures approached him, and when they stepped away Pickard observed that they frisked about and otherwise disported themselves. Then he saw Sunny lift the discarded dipper to his face. In a few minutes the apes were hilariously scampering about, and Sunny now was down on all-fours, leaping and cavorting about in a manner that shocked Pickard, when he remembered the usual solemn dignity of his companion.

"Well, what do you know about that?" Pickard exclaimed mentally. "The little devils are getting soused!"

He was indignant for a moment and had an impulse to go out and drive them away; and then he felt ashamed of himself.

"I'd be a nice one, wouldn't I?" he thought. "As many times as I got drunk in the States— think of me kicking on a gang of monkeys putting up a party!"

Of a sudden the scampering ceased, and the smaller animals fled behind Sunny. They had seen Pickard peering from the hut.

Sunny gazed upon Chester. He gazed brazenly, and even in the dim starlight Chester could see that Sunny's solemnity had faded and he seemed in a delightful ecstasy. Sunny boldly approached the hut and plucked with his drunken paw at Pickard's sleeve.

"Tsck, tsck, tsck, tsck, tsck!'' chattered Sunny.

"Why, the little devil's talking Russian to me!" exclaimed Chester.. "And I'm blamed if I don't think he wants me to take a drink!"

"Tsck, tsck, tsck, tsck, tsck!" rattled Sunny, frisking away and returning with the dipper.

The other apes were now scampering and chattering in a perfect bedlam of drunken hilarity. They grew bold and surrounded the dumfounded Pickard. Their chattermg continued, and seemed like a call to his soul.

"At last, at last!" cried Chester, "I've got somebody to talk to!" He gulped at the dipper and drained it. "At last, at last!" he almost sobbed, as he felt the clouds of loneliness scurrying away.

Then, side by side with the dissolute Sunny, he went to the cave, surrounded by a merry party.

It was a wild night on the island.

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19: "The Writer-Upward"

Albert Payson Terhune

1872-1942

Popular Magazine, 20 May 1922

"FURTHERMORE, HOWADJI," said Najib, appearing at the door of the tent and rousing Kirby from the perusal of a sheaf of month-old American newspapers, "furthermore, Howaji, it is a pleasureful thing to be thus be writtenupward. But—"

"What?" queried Logan Kirby, glancing at him, in perplexity.

"To be be writtenupward, of an assuredly," repeated Najib, adding, as Kirby's brain still failed to grasp his meaning, "by this Melvin person, Howaji. You told me, yourself, he came himself hitherward from over than six thousand miles to bewrite us upward. He—"

"I told you Mr. Herbert Melvin came here to write us up," corrected Kirby. "Or rather to write up the Cabell Smelting Company's antimony mine here. That meant he wanted to look over the mine and ask us questions about its operation and output and all that sort of thing; and look over our books. Then he will write an article about it for the Mine Journal that sent him to Europe and the Near East to get a series of expert articles on a dozen or more mines, from the Hartz Mountains to Arawak— mines owned by American concerns and operating on this side of the Atlantic. That's what I meant, when I said he had come here to 'write us up.' Mr. Melvin is

"Just as I speeched it, Howaji," said Najib. "I said it was a pleasureful thing to be bewritten upward. But this writer-upward person— this Melvin person— "

"When you speak of an American," chided Kirby with some sharpness, knowing the stark need of impressing upon Oriental employees a reverence for the dominant race, "give him his title. "Say 'Mister Melvin' or 'Melvin Howaji.' Not—"

"Excusingly, Howaji," protested Najib stubbornly. "He does not merit it that I should be-mister him. He is not a Howaji. He is not a mister. He is a person. A hell-person, Howaji."

Angrily Kirby got to his feet. But Najib did not flinch. The fat little Syrian stood his ground stolidly.

Kirby checked his first impulse to break his riding switch over the shoulders of the presumptuous native for daring to speak thus of an American and a guest. Something in Najib's unwontedly tense earnestness made him pause.

Logan Kirby had lived long enough in the East to learn more about Oriental nature than it is granted to ninety-nine Occidentals in a hundred. Here,

apparently, was something out of the common— something which might make inquiry wiser than chastisement.

KIRBY had been born in Syria. And he had spent his boyhood in his father's big mission house at Nabous. Going to New York, he had taken the "mines course" at Columbia and had found a job with the Cabell Smelting Company on Broad Street.

A few years later the Cabells had sent him out as manager to their lucrative little antimony mine in the heart of the pink-brown mountains of Moab, three days' journey east of the Jordan. There his knowledge of Arabic and of Oriental human nature had made him invaluable to his employers in a thousand ways.

His mine superintendent and factotum and adoring satellite was Najib, a squat Damascene who once had misspent two blissful years with an all-nations show at Coney Island and who had acquired there a smattering of a language he mistook for English, of which he was so vastly proud that he would speak to Kirby in no other tongue, unless stress of overstrong emotion made him lapse into his native Arabic.

Kirby now stared in bewilderment at his superintendent. Najib, at news of Melvin's impending arrival at the Cabell mine, had been as happily excited as a child. For the two days of the guest's sojourn he had overwhelmed him with attentions. Hence Kirby's amazement at the sudden change of front.

Kirby himself had been as delighted as Najib when Melvin had written him from Brindisi of a projected stop at the Cabell mine during a tour of American-owned properties. A laudatory article in so powerful an organ as the *Mine Journal*, would do much for Logan's prestige and for that of the little mine in whose interests he was toiling so hard. At the very least such an article ought to mean a raise of salary to him; and it might even lead to his transfer to some less God-forsaken region.

Thus, he had granted to Melvin every facility for seeing the mine at its best; and he had offered the journalist the cream of such rough-and-ready hospitality as the mine afforded.

Now, during the guest's brief absence on a morning's ride among the nearer hills, Najib had come to him with this hint of unpleasantness.

"Speak up!" commanded Kirby. "Say whatever you've got to say. Forget, for once, that you're an Oriental, and come to the point. What are you driving at, when you speak that way of Mr. Melvin?"

"I bewent me to his tent, yonder, but just now, Howaji," serenely answered Najib. "He had left in his wnriding trousers his bunch of keys. One of them befitted itself right sweetsomely into the key mouth of his trunk. I Ry

"You mangy little pest!" raged Kirby. "Do you mean to say you went through a guest's luggage and—"

"Only to put it into an orderliness, Howaji, if need was. But need was not. It was neatful. And in it was his portfolio; full of words on many pages, in groups, and all printed forth in fair clearitude with a type machine. And the first one entitled itself, 'The Grunauer Mine: a Model Plant.' And the article bepraised that Grunauer Mine and its manager as if they were Es Semme and the Prophet— on whom be the peace of Allah and the ages of the ages! I do not know what the Grunauer Mine may be, Howaji. But of an assuredly it is a mine of much splendor and wealth, if all be true that this Melvin hell-person has bewritten himself upward about it. He—"

"Najib!" groaned Kirby.

Then he gave up the struggle to teach this Syrian a glimmering of a notion as to his own depravity in meddling with the locked papers of others. Najib, missing the look of utter disgust wherewith his chief favored him, prattled on.

"There were other articles, too, Howaji; all begrouped by theirselfs with a metal clasp. And some praised high the mines they spoke of and some praised low. But one was not praiseful at all. It was hellful. This one was not all finished. But it becalled itself, 'Cabell Antimony Mine—a Worthless Property; Wretchedly Managed.' It—' "

"What!" gasped Kirby, amazement making him forget his contempt for the prying of his henchman.

"If I lie, may the Seventh Circle of Gehenna burn me to eternity!" said Najib.

He was groping with dirty hands into the folds of a dirtier abieh as he spoke. He fished out a sheaf of typed manuscript pages.

"Here it is, Howaji," said he, proffering the unfinished article to Kirby. "Beread yourself of it. It makes smaller of yourself and of the mine's management and of the output and of all, than the smallness of a flea. And it bespeaks itself merrily of me— of ME, Howaji— as a 'lazy monkey; fit companion for his boss.' Offspring of 'six thousand carrion crows and a trillion sick she camels that he is, this Melvin person! May his remains find refuge in the stomachs of hogs and vultures! May his grave be dug up by pariah dogs! May his father's bones—"

Najib had dropped into fluent Arabic, so fiercely excited was he. Now, breaking off in his invective, he thrust the manuscript again toward Kirby.

"But read it for yourself, Howaji!" he begged.

"Take that thing back to Mr. Melvin's tent," ordered Kirby, without touching or so much as looking at the proffered papers, "and put it back where you found it."

"But, Howaji!" stammered the dumfounded Najib. "It is as I tell you," he insisted. 'He is a hell-person. If he were not a guest and sacred by the guest law, it might be a mirthsome and wise deed to kill him."

"*Tamam*!" rasped Kirby, jerking his thumb toward the guest's tent.

With a resigned sigh Najib pattered off to obey the mystifying command.

Left alone, Logan Kirby sat long and motionless, his unseeing eyes upon the pinkish peaks of the barren mountains that stretched away to the horizon beyond his tent door. His brain was in a jumble.

This man, Melvin, had come with proper credentials. He was a financial writer of some slight note. Kirby had often seen his name as author of articles and treatises in trade papers devoted to mining. The *Mine Journal* was not only the most powerful, but the most honorable periodical of its kind in America. Having been sent out to write this series of expert articles on the various American-owned mines across the Atlantic, why should Melvin have written such cruel and damaging lies about the Cabell mine and about the managership of the man who was his host and fellow countryman?

It did not make sense to Kirby from any angle. He was making the very best of the little mine, in every way. Such an article, appearing in a paper of the *Mine Journal*'s prestige, would do much harm to the mine and would brand Kirby, throughout the profession, as an incompetent. It meant the end of his career. True, he and the Cabells might bring suit for libel. But libel, at a distance of more than six thousand miles, is a slow and costly and difficult thing to establish.

What could be the motive for so blackguard! ahd lying an attack?

As Kirby sat there, the jingle of bells and the droning song of an Arab sounded along the steep trail which wound upward toward the mine from westward. Up the trail rode a native muleteer— the man who brought the twice-a-week mail to Kirby from Jerusalem. Across his pillowlike saddle sprawled the mail sack. The muleteer was singing, in Beirut dialect, through his nose and in one minor tone:

"Seek to the depths of my heart, O belovéd! And there thou shalt find naught but love for thee. Thine eyes are like to sunshine. Thine arms are—"

The inspired singer paused in this catalog of his mythical sweetheart's physical geography long enough to shrill at his mule:

"*Tella, abras*! Move, one-eyed child of Shaitan and a dead pig! Move, ere I rip the rotting flesh from thy useless bones! *Tella*!"

This zeal for speed was due to his glimpse of Logan Kirby in the tent door. Kirby took from him the mail sack, unlocked it and shook out on the tent's deal table the pitiful handful of letters and papers and magazines. Pushing the

papers to one side he seized avidly on the half dozen letters— his sole personal link with the home land from which he was an exile.

The top letter bore the imprint of the Cabell Company's main office on Broad Street, New York City. This Kirby tore open first. And then for a space he forgot the others. For glancing down the typed page dictated by the company's vice president, he read:

Herbert Melvin, the free-lance writer, is making a tour of Europe and the Near East, preparing a series of articles for the Mine Journal*. But I do not think you will be troubled by him. He is likely to give Cabell Mine a wide berth. He is clever; and, though nothing can be actually proven against him, the people who know him best say he is twice as crooked as he is clever.*

For example, he sent an emissary to several American owners of European and Occidental mines, telling them of his proposed trip and intimating— in a way that could not be brought home to him— that any private contributions toward his foreign traveling expenses, et cetera, would be repaid by a flattering write-up of the donor's mining interests, out there; the larger the contribution, the more flattering the writeup.

I refused to see his emissary, who called here, twice. Then Melvin himself took a chance and called. I saw him. He approached the topic of a bribe with infinite tact and said not one word I could hold him on. But he made his meaning so plain that I proceeded to tell him, very exhaustively, what I thought of him. Then I risked a suit for assault and battery by ejecting the miserable crook bodily from my office.

So I don't think you'll be troubled by a visit from him. He is likely to give the Cabell Mine the silence cure. Naturally, the Mine Journal *will act in entire good faith in publishing his articles. Bates, the editor, is Melvin's cousin and is almost the only man alive who clings to a fond belief in Melvin's squareness. I hear, in a roundabout way, that Fosdick, of the Grunauer Mining Corporation, slipped the grafter a thousand dollars for the promise of a write-up that will send the mine's stock soaring. I don't know how true that is.*

Kirby's reading was interrupted at this interesting point by the clatter of cantering hoofs on the trail. Herbert Melvin, spruce and smiling in natty riding clothes, swung down from his pony at the tent door, toss ing the reins to Najib, who chanced to be inching toward the tent, and came swaggering blithely up to where Kirby sat.

"Great ride!" he exulted. "It's given me a wolf's appetite for lunch. Can we eat a bit early, old man? I've the rest of my packing to do. I start for Jerusalem at three, you know."

"I know," said Kirby heavily, adding, "Do you send any of your articles from Jerusalem; or do you wait till you get back to New York and turn them all in at once?"

"I'm finishing up the last one," answered Melvin, eager as ever to talk of his own exploits. "I've a half hour's work to do on it, before I leave. Then I'm going to mail the whole lot from Jerusalem. The series begins in about three months.

Yours was the last mine on the list. I'm going to loaf around Paris for a couple of months before I go home. So I'm glad to get the whole dozen articles off my hands and on their way before then. I—hello!" he broke off, at sight of the papers and letters on the table. ''Mail's in, eh? Nothing for me, I suppose?"

"Nothing for you," returned Kirby in that same heavy voice. "But one that is all about you. Here it is."

He handed Melvin the Cabell Company letter he had been reading. Melvin's alert eyes skimmed the pages. His expression did not change. When he had finished the perusal he calmly thrust the letter into his coat pocket. :

"Unless I am much mistaken," he said quietly, "that will form all the evidence I need for a five-figure libel suit against your company and its president. A writer, like myself, has no other asset as valuable as his literary honor. This letter assails my literary honor. And I ie

"And you hold that honor at five figures?" interposed Kirby. "Mr. Melvin, you are my guest— though an uninvited and undesired and dishonest guest. But here hospitality means more than at home. I don't wish to shame my hospitality by taking that letter from you by force. Kindly give it back to me."

He took a step forward as he spoke. Melvin's right hand went melodramatically to the butt of a pearl-handled revolver which hung ostentatiously at the belt of his motion-picture riding suit.

Through the open door, on noiseless bare feet, slipped a squat little figure. It paused for an instant behind the unsuspecting Melvin. Then it slipped out again, unobserved by the guest. In the doorway of the tent, on his way out, Najib paused only for the fraction of a second. He paused to wink at Kirby, over Melvin's shoulder, and to hold up for momentary view the Cabell letter he had so deftly lifted from the loose-hanging outside pocket of the riding coat.

Then he was gone.

Kirby halted in his own advance toward the melodramatic visitor. Turning aside he moved back to the table.

"H'm!" remarked, Melvin, shoving back the weapon into its holster. "A gun is an excellent deterrent to forcible robbery."

"Robbery of what?" asked Kirby sulkily.

"Of the letter you wished to take from me," retorted Melvin. "I hardly think you planned to take my watch, as well. The letter—"

"What letter?" asked Kirby, still sulkily; though he was at trouble to keep his mouth straight.

"The letter that is going to lose you your job and win me something more than fifteen thousand dollars in the courts," said Melvin, dropping his hand into his pocket to emphasize his words.

Then he went silent and began to grope fidgetingly through the voluminous pocket— jettisoning from its depths a gold cigarette case and a silk handkerchief and other articles of vertu; but no letter. After which he dug into the other side pocket. Then angrily he ransacked his clothes, pocket after pocket, and glanced about the floor at his feet, on the chance that it might have fallen out.

"Maybe you left it in another coat," suggested Kirby, unkindly. "Oh perhaps— more likely— you dreamed the whole thing. Yes, that must be it. You dreamed it. Now if only I could succeed in dreaming that you had been out here, disgracing America and the hospitality of a fellow American, we'd both be content. Lunch will be ready in ten minutes. You won't mind eating alone? I expect to be too busy down at the mine to eat this noon. I'm afraid I'll even be too busy to come out of the shaft long enough to say good-by when you go."

He walked out of the tent and set off for the mine shaft, leaving Herbert Melvin gaping after him in furious bewilderment. On the way, Kirby met Najib. In silence, the little Syrian handed him the purloined letter.

"Thanks," said Kirby.

"You are full of welcome, Howaji," replied Najib. "It was a pleasure. And, besides, I beliked its reading. I—"

"I'm going down the shaft," interrupted Kirby. "Let me know when Melvin Howaji and his groom have gone. I don't want to be disturbed till then."

But Najib did not let him know. Three o'clock arrived. Then four, and then five. Kirby sent one of the fellaheen to make inquiries and to bid Najib come to him.

The *fellaheen* returned with tidings that Melvin Howaji had departed shortly before three o'clock with his groom and baggage mule and said that Najib had received a message by the hand of some village boy, an hour later, and had also left camp.

Puzzled and vexed, Logan Kirby plodded up the hill to his own tent. There, pinned to the deal table, alongside his unread mail he found a soiled slip of paper—the wrapper of one of his magazines—on which was scrawled, in Arabic:

Kirby Howaji— on whom the blessings of the All-Compassionate :

Word has come to me of the death of my father's son and my half brother, Imbarak Abou-Nasif, at Damascus. He has left me much wealth. Therefore, I go in all haste to set his house in order and to claim that which is my own before the effendina of the Serail can seal his effects. It may be that I shall be gone for a month. It may be that I shall be gone for a year. But I shall return. That I swear on the beard of my father. May he lie where rose leaves shall fall upon his tomb! I grieve to leave you without farewell. But there was need of haste and you bade me not to disturb you. When I am gone, think not harshly of me that I have left you nor doubt that I shall return. The way is long and there is ever peril from wandering

Badawi in the mountain passes. And I am no warrior. So I am taking with me two of the fellaheen whom I can trust—for I have promised them much baksheesh. We shall all return to serve you. That I swear.

Logan Kirby swore loudly and fluently. It was bad enough to have his job and his future wrecked by Melvin without losing the services of his superintendent and two of the fellaheen for an indefinite time.

Luckily it was a slack season at the mine. But, carrying the small force he did he could ill spare a single worker. Moreover, Najib was his one human companion in the loneliness of the long evenings when the jackals and wolves fought over carrion in the valleys below and the eerie "laugh" of the hyena woke the hilltop echoes. Kirby was fond of the queer little native; he foresaw he should miss him acutely.

Shrugging his shoulders and calling to his aid such fatalistic Oriental philosophy as Syria had taught him, Kirby made ready to face the stretch of lonely shorthandedness. In the East one must either become philosophical or else one must be ready to face a nervous breakdown.

Yet the time dragged for the unhappy Kirby even more annoyingly than he had expected. He dreaded the inevitable day when word must come to him of the publishing of the article which would wreck his future and bring such cruel injury to the mine he loved. Eagerly he tore open every copy of the fine Journal which the post brought. Eagerly he scanned every letter from the home office. He lost weight and he slept badly. This for three interminable months,

Then on a bright morning, at the end of the rainy season, three bedraggled men plodded up the trail toward his tent. They were dirty and ragged and thoroughly disreputable. Also, they were on foot, in this region where the taking of a long journey on foot betokens poverty. It. required a second glance for Kirby to recognize the trio as Najib and the two missing fellaheen.

The *fellaheen* slunk off toward the mine huts down near the mouth of the shaft. Najib kept on toward the wondering Kirby. The little Syrian's dirty face was one vast smile. Before he was within ten feet of Logan he began to shout glad greetings.

"You miserable little renegade!"' stormed Kirby, trying to be indignant. "I ought to discharge you! I ought to thrash you and then throw you out of camp. There's one comfort, though," with an appraising glance at Najib's rags, "you don't seem to have profited much by the 'much wealth' your half brother left you. He—"

"No, Howaji," meekly assented Najib, adding, "though for the sake of my family's honor it is but of a rightness that I should say if I had ever had a half brother, he would of an assuredly have been a most wealthful man. And I believe he would undoubtlessly have bewilled it all to me. He—"

"It was a lie, then, about your half brother dying? You worthless—"

"All men must die, Howaji," said Najib piously. 'Even half brethren. Indeed, per chancely, half brethren may die as easily as whole brethren, if it be the will of Allah. In His sight, all are of an equalness."

"What crazy idiocy are you blithering?" snorted Kirby. 'Where have you been? And—"

"This morning, Howaji," returned Najib, diving into his *abieh* in search of something, "this morning I have been past the Mejdel khan, where slept the post muleteer last night. He still beslept himself as we passed; he being a slumbersome person. So I beopened me the mail bag and brought the post. I—I counted the time and it beseemed me it would be now. And I was aright. See?"

He handed Kirby two or three letters and then held up for his inspection an open copy of the *Mine Journal*.

Across the top of the page at which he had opened the magazine were blazoned the words:

AMERICAN-OWNED MINES IN EUROPE AND THE EAST.
A Series By Herbert D. Melvin.
No. 1.—THE CABELL Mine: A Model Plant.

Brief Review of the Best-Managed and Best-Paying Concern, for its Size, East of New York.

His eyes bulging, his brain aghast, Logan Kirby ran his eyes over the two thousand words of glowing praise that followed. The mine was described as a miracle of efficiency and of high-grade production. Kirby's exploits as manager were all but fulsome in their laudatory word-painting. He was held up as perhaps the only man in America who could have lifted so hopeless a venture from foredoomed failure to affluence.

Even Najib came in for a word of praise as a rarely competent superintendent and a born leader of men. The mine's output was exalted to the skies for both quality and quantity. Words were not spared to depict an institution for whose excellence the highest compliments were too feeble.

At the end of the article was the promise:

Next Month: The Grunauer Mine.

Dazed, Kirby raised his eyes from their incredulous scanning of the magazine. Najib, grinning blissfully, fidgeted in front of him. Kirby tried to

speak. But he could only gulp. Najib, thrilling with the true Oriental love for story-telling and for dramatic effects, struck an attitude and began to declaim.

"Furthermore, Howaji," he said, "I enseech you to begladden yourself. We are not downward and outward, as we feared us we would be. We have much kudos and much raisements of salary in store for us. Wherefore, let us be rejoiceful and make merry. *Alla-hu-akbar*! *Mahmoud saidnah rasoul Allah! Es*—"

"Najib!" gurgled Kirby, pointing shakily to the magazine in his hand. "What—"

"Be of a calmness, Howaji," begged Najib, dropping back into English. "Do not let my rejoicesomeness beget your goat. I will tell you. Hark yourself to my words of blessedness."

Then, patteringly at times and at times with dramatic halts and always with wealth of gestures, Najib launched forth upon his story.

"I befeared me that Melvin person might lose his way on the journey to Jerusalem," he began. 'Wherefore I followed after. And with me I betook two ignoranceful *fellaheen* who are as my worshiping sons— because that I know of a murder which would emplace them in the prison for their life. Also because I bepledged that you would pay them a hundred *mejidie* each."

"Of a patientness, Howaji, I plea you! We came upon Melvin Howaji and his groom at the guest hut at the foot of Nebo. It was late in the night. They beslept themselfs with sweet snore soundings. The groom we wokened. And when we had talked Softsomely to him for a space and when he saw our knifes and when we beswore ourselfs solemn what we would do if he tarried, he journeyed himself away from thither with much speed and no noisiness. Perchancely he is journeying yet. For he went with much earnestness of feet.

"Then, while the Melvin person still made sweet snore sounds we tied that poor Melvin person with ropes. And when he awokened we were carrying him from the trail. To the shrine of the holy Fathma we carried him. He was of a willingness to be carried. Or, if not, he did not say he was not of a willingness. Though of a perhaps that may have been by reason that we had gagged him."

"Najib!"

"It was of a needfulness, Howaji. For my heart is of much softness and it sorrows me to hark the cries of distressedness. So I begagged the poor person. The Howaji remembers the shrine of the holy Fathma? Silly fellaheen think it is now the haunt of afrits. So they besteer them clear of it. And it is far off the path of others. It is a safesome place; and it is comfortful, too, except for the wet and the fat spiders and the fleas and such like and the darkness of the inside of it. And there that sad Melvin person has been beliving himself for four pleasant months. Until this morning. He bP

"No!" cried Kirby, in sharp repulsion.

"But yes, Howaji. He abided there for four months— that we might not abide jobless, perhapsly for life. A noble person, Howaji; and a fine sacrificer. For a day he did scant else but enhowl himself to a pitisome hoarseness. Then he grew hungered and most thirsting. And he listened with a little kindness when I bespoke him."

"When your—"

"When I enseeched him to take his little typing machine and becopy two of his articles, Howaji, with some small changes to them. I made him becopy that article about the Grunauer Mine and alterate its name to Cabell Mine and its output from aluminum to antimony and its place to the mountains of Moab and its manager and his superintendent to you and my lowly self. It was easy. For he had the Grunauer article to becopy by."

"Do you actually mean you—"

"It was of a difficultness, Howaji. For three days we had to plea at him and keep him with no feeding and with but such water as he could belick from the wet walls of the shrine of the holy Fathma. And the spiders and the fleas were of an evilness that wrathed him. Oh, Howaji, I was so sorrowed for that poor unhappy person in his hungriness and his thirstings and his fleas that I wept tears. I wept tears whenever I looked upon his miserableness. -So I forbeared to look.

"But on the fourth day he sent one of the fellaheen for me. And he surrenderized himself at me and did even as I had bidded him. Only, he sought to betrick me and do it wrong. So I unfed him for another hot day. And then he did it right. I read the first article writing and the second, side by their sides, and he had done it aright. Even as you behold it now. Then I encoaxened him to make the Grunauer article as he had at first made the Cabell one. And this he did with less crossfulness."

"But why on earth—"

"If all the articles were of a like sweetness," explained Najib, "ours would not beshine itself so gloryingly in the printed word as if the next one spoke evil of the other mine. So, when the two were done, I built me a fire and I burned the two articles and all his other ten articles in that fire, with much incantfulness. This I told him I did to belift a curse from our mine. But I did not burn them. I burned blank articlepages. Yet he enthought himself they were the ones he had becopied so fairly.

"In his portfolio were letters. One was to the sheik of the *Mine Journal*. It had been written the day he departured from here. And it was in a fine thick wrapping, with all the articles. It told the *Journal* sheik that here were all the articles and that he was bepostaging them from Jerusalem. In that packet I put

the two alterated articles and I benumbered them 'one' and 'two' and I emplaced them to the top of the others. Then, while the two fellaheen guarded him, I journeyed me to Jerusalem and to the post-*serail* there and I beposted the packet to the place addressed on its wrap. I had often beposted our mine mail for you; and I had wisdom of how it was done."

"You blackguard!" groaned Kirby. "I don't—"

"He had told that the articles would commence to bepublish theirselfs in three months," resumed Najib, unheeding. "I had not a pure trust in that Melvin person. Even though he had thought he beholded me burn them, he is a suspicionful person. I befeared me he would send a telegraph to the Mine Journal to watch for a trick. So I kept him as my honorful guest until the first article and the second article could beprint theirselfs. Last night I set him at freeness. And he—"

"You idiot!" roared Kirby. "It was rotten enough for you to do such a vile thing as to kidnap him and hold him prisoner in that hole of a shrine and tamper with his mail! But don't you know what will happen now? The minute he gets to Jerusalem, he'll go to our consul and make formal com plaint! Soldiers will be sent up here to arrest you—and perhaps take me along as an accomplice. The mine is likely to lose its concession and—"

"Tame yourself, Howaji!" cooed Najib. "Tame yourself and become ungoated. He will do none of those wicked and ungratesome and treacherous deeds."

"But—"

"There were other letters in his locked portfolio, Howaji. And when the time hung with a heaviness I beread me of them. One was to his brother and it enbragged itself of the money he had begotten for each of the praisings he gave to mines; and how he was going to unbusiness our mine because Cabell Effendi— may he be the sire of a hundred warrior sons!— had insulted him in New York in the *serail* of the company on the Street That Is Called Broad. And there was another letter to a woman who was not one of his wifes. And in that lovesome letter he told how his wife would 'raise hell' if it were known about the woman he loved. Forthermore, Howaji, there was a letter to a man who had been darkposting him— no, 'blackmail' was the pretty word, whatever it may mean— and promising more money when he should be in Paris. And there were other letters. I—"

"Good Lord!"

"I have them here," finished Najib. "I told him we should betreasure them in the case that he might do us ill. He will not."

"Najib!" stammered Kirby dizzily, after a long pause wherein the little Syrian wriggled bashfully and looked expectant. "You mangy crook! If you had

one atom of understanding as to the damnableness of the thing you've done—
"

"And how it has besaved us our darling job, Howaji," supplemented Najib, "and won us kudos and baksheesh from the company's sheik——"

"Oh, what's the use!" sighed Kirby, giving up the fight and ashamed of himself for his own sensation of joyous relief. '"What's the use!"

"Of an assuredly, Howaji!" assented Najib. "What is the use? The use is larger than one man can say it. And it is a gladsome use that will mean wealth for us. As your wise feringhi proverb enspeeches itself: 'When thieves fall out, honest men— honest men gather no moss.' Or is it that they 'make strange bedfellows?' *Bismillah*!"

———————————

20: The Squire of Dames

Perceval Gibbon

1879-1926

The Blue Book Magazine, Jul 1916

THE house at Passy stood back from the road behind a gray stone wall, pierced by a gate of iron bars which conceded to the passer-by no more than a glimpse of a green and sunlit disorder of garden. To either side of it, isolated in their gardens, stood other houses similarly screened from view. <A solicitous privacy, the secrecy of those who would have no secrets,—which is half the trick of respectability,— lay along the quiet road like a shadow. Mr. Neuman—'Pony" Neuman to his intimates—was not yet past flavoring an atmosphere. He had just jerked the bell-handle which hung beside the gate of iron bars and inclined his head to listen for the agitated jangle of the bell at the other end of the wire; and there had come to his mind a recollection of those machines one sees in saloons at a certain kind of touristresort— a glass box containing improbable-looking dolls, rigid in frozen attitudes of interrupted action. One inserts a coin into a slot; there is a click and a whir; and the dolls start suddenly into a spasmodic caricature of action. Mr. Neuman, in his time, had spent many small coins on these miracles— there was a simple side to his mind; and he stood smiling as he waited.

He was a man of somewhere near forty years of age, short, bulky in the shoulders, with a pink, brisk face that would have been pleasant and commonplace enough but for the chill and wariness of the eyes. Standing in the sunlight under the wall, leaning upon his cane, his gray gloves carried loosely in his hands, his gray Hamburg hat pushed a little back from his sleek forehead, the small, thoughtful smile still inhabiting his face, he made the effect of a man intimately at home among the complexities of civilization, sophisticated to the tips of his manicured nails. Even his attitude in that empty, eyeless road had the quality of a posture that had been rehearsed; he flicked his boot with his cane with the gesture of an actor-manager.

FOOTSTEPS padded softly upon the brick path within the gate; Mr. Neuman, moving nothing but his eyes, glanced up. Between the overgrown lilacs that bordered the path there lumbered into view a stout and elderly maidservant, carrying a large, old-fashioned key.

She came to the gate, made a motion as though to insert the key in the lock and then paused, staring at Mr. Neuman through the bars. Her large face, weathered like a winter apple, lowered at him heavily, between stupidity and suspicion. There was a pause of silence and mutual inspection.

"You rang?" she inquired at last.

Mr. Neuman nodded. "Some little time ago,' he replied pleasantly. "Madame Dupontel lives here, I believe? I wish to see her."

"Uh!" It was a grunt; the woman continued to stare at him defensively. But it was a trick of Mr. Neuman's trade to be difficult to withstand, and his manner of a very delicate insistence had its effect. "I do not know whether Madame is disengaged; however—"

She bent to the lock and opened the gate, squealing upon its hinges. Mr. Neuman stepped through.

"You need not give yourself the trouble of locking it again," he said airily. "I shall not detain Madame for long."

She grunted again, but submissively, and left the gate unlocked. Mr. Neuman followed her along the path, smiling,

A rustic arch, over which a decrepit climbing rose clawed and sprawled, opened from the path toward the house, where it rose above the dank and riotous green of its unkempt garden. Mr. Neuman, pacing in the rear of his stout, deliberate guide, looked up at it with a shrewd curiosity. It was, he noted with satisfaction, a largish, extravagant-looking sort of house, one of those excrescences of suburban Paris, all arches and cupolas and cornices, which are the ensign and expression of bourgeois wealth and taste. The roof of the veranda projected like a heavy brow—as if the whole house scowled.

The front door, in which were panels of virulently colored glass, opened from the veranda; near by, some bulging and much-used wicker chairs stood around a weather-beaten wicker table. Here, with her hand upon the door, the stout servant made a last stand.

"But what name shall I say to Madame?" she demanded plaintively.

MR. NEUMAN hung his cane by its crook to his left arm and produced from his breast-pocket his neat gold cigarette-case. From it he extracted a card.

"Give her this," he commanded. He glanced at the chairs. "And I will wait here."

She seemed as if she would demur; he cut her short at her preliminary grunt by moving away and seating himself. He let himself down into the sturdiest of the chairs, crossed one neat leg over the other, inspected his spats and settled his hat upon his brow. She was watching him open-mouthed. Suddenly he looked up at her with that little sophisticated smile of his; she vanished.

"Ha-ha!" said Mr. Neuman under his breath. ''Not used to visitors here, eh?"

He composed himself to wait, settling himself in the creaking basket-chair in an attitude of debonair serenity, conscious that each of the windows along

the veranda commanded a view of him as he sat. Mr. Neuman had a just pride in his ability to stand inspection; it was one of his professional assets ; many a man had scrutinized him at leisure and afterwards lost money to him.

The accident that had directed his steps toward the house at Passy had happened providentially. Mr. Neuman had had a bad season at Monte Carlo: the wealthy youth whom he was "nursing" there was all but ripe for the slaughter; it wanted but a day or two to the moment when he could be plucked like a fowl and never know who had got the feathers—and then there had appeared upon the scene a worldly and hard-bitten friend who had taken the callow one under his own capable wing and brought all Mr. Neuman's patient labors to naught.

It was with an alertness sharpened by necessity that Mr. Neuman, from his obscure hotel in Paris,— he never lingered upon the field of a defeat,— surveyed his world, cocking his practiced ears for the first whispered hint of a resource. And after the afternoon following his arrival, as he sat in his window smoking a thoughtful cigarette, while the talkative chambermaid sorted his linen for the laundry, the hint had arrived. Mr. Neuman had a charming way with hotel servants— they would talk freely to him where a detective would have found them dumb: he listened idly while the chambermaid volunteered reminiscences of her career in that and other hotels and as a bonne a tout faire in various private houses. She mentioned several employers; at the name of one of them Mr. Neuman interrupted with questions.

"Monsieur knows Madame Dupontel, then?" she inquired when Mr. Neuman had noted down the address of which she had spoken.

"Oh, yes," smiled Mr. Neuman. "I knew her before she was married."

"And is it true, as she says, that she was formerly an actress?"

"Quite true," replied Mr. Neuman. "And a very good actress too, once."

"*Tiens*," said the girl. "A fat old thing like that!"

Mr. Neuman smiled at her benevolently, as she knelt on the floor beside the pile of his shirts, and she was encouraged to continue her autobiography. But the smile was really for the memory she had evoked of Madame Dupontel as Mr. Neuman had known her,— "Dutch Kate" she was then,— who had made her profit for years by being simply a "fat old thing," too plump and fussy ever to be suspected of shrewdness.

It was by virtue of just that quality of "fat-old-thingness" that Kate had brought off the crowning and final coup of her career. An elderly widower, holiday-making at Boulogne, had fallen into bad hands, and Kate, taking compassion on his sheer foolishness and helplessness, had come to the rescue and steered him clear of the toils. Within a month she had married him— him and his wholesale grocery business and his investments— and had vanished

from that furtive world where to-day is a peril and to-morrow a menace, where the memory of youth is a pain and the prospect of age a terror.

In the "sporting" bars of Paris, where men of very quiet manners meet in the afternoons and exchange queer news of the world's capitals, there were glasses raised to the memory of the departed.

"Well, old Kate's gone. She's out of it now; here's luck to her!"

None had thought of preying on her; there is no world without its ethic, and loyalty to one's kind is the most elementary of the virtues. But now Mr. Neuman had learned that Kate was a widow; he knew she was well-off; and he couldn't at present afford to waste a chance.

THE glass-paneled front door creaked and opened inwards about an inch. Mr. Neuman did not move; he continued to gaze, with his air of pleasant meditation, upon the untidy garden. This lasted for about a minute; then the door was pulled wide open from within, and a stout woman in pink came forth toward him. Mr. Neuman jumped to his feet and removed his hat.

"Madame Dupontel?' he inquired with smiling politeness.

The stout woman stopped short and stared at him; Mr. Neuman, bowing and not ceasing to smile, returned her scrutiny. Six years of security and ease had done their work upon Dutch Kate; she had become a creature in the likeness of an over-filled sack, a figure abundant and unwieldy. Her vast bosom strained the cloth of her dress; over it her face was flabby and obese, absurd and pitiful under its thick powder and crowned with its too elaborate coiffure.

Mr. Neuman waited to let her speak. He had seen that she was first fearful and then puzzled; she had failed to recognize him, and now her face was merely uncomprehending. Suddenly it cleared ; he marked its change to a glad relief. She stepped forward, holding forth both her pudgy, be-ringed hands, with a little inarticulate cry of unmistakable joy.

"Why— why— it's Pony!" she cried. "Old Pony Neuman, of all the people in the world! An' me thinkin'— but I thought, when I seen you through the crack of the door, that there was a kind of familiar look about you."

She gripped his hand in both of hers, jigging on her feet and prattling excitedly. Under his mask of pleased acquiescence Mr. Neuman was asking himself: "What's all this— some game of hers?"

"I wondered if you'd recognize me," he said aloud, "after all this time. Lemme see: must be going on for seven years, Kate, now."

"Reco'nize you! Why, Pony, I'd know you anywhere. You aint changed a bit. An' the relief it is to me to find it's you an' not— not who I was afraid it was— well, there!"

Mr. Neuman nodded, smiling. She was sincere enough, evidently; this was no game.

"But we don't want to stand out here," said Madame Dupontel. "Come on in the house, Pony. I may be a widder but I can give you a real drink all the same."

"Charmed," replied Mr. Neuman. "Charmed !"

THE *salle à manger*, in which presently he found himself seated, facing his hostess across a dining table, with a bottle and siphon at his elbow and a glass before him, was at the back of the house; its window overlooked the untidy spaces of the garden.

"There's a million things I want to ask," declared Madame luxuriously, settling her fat arms on the table. "You're the first of the old lot that I seen since me marriage. Like a breath of fresh air you are, Pony."

Mr. Neuman's smile acknowledged the compliment. He could talk and look about him at the same time; and his eye, wandering to the window, dwelt appreciatively upon the evidences it revealed of solid solvency.

"And Lou Morris?" Madame Dupontel was asking. "What became of him?"

She was avid for news of that lawless cosmopolitan underworld of which she had once been a citizen. Six years of freedom from its constraints and perils had not quelled in her the zest for its adventures and strange contacts. She asked, by name and nickname, after delicate-handed bandits in Petrograd, Berlin, Ostend and London— after the great Conroy, who operated vastly like a financier; after Madame Olivant, who dealt in family jewels; after Punch Lapinsky, who had escaped from Siberia. To Mr. Neuman, who had come at her cautiously, calculating with care the angle of his approach, it seemed that she was throwing herself open to attack.

"Oh, him!" he answered. '"He's dead— drank and doped himself to death. But say, Kate; this is a nice little place you've got here. Pretty comfortable, aint you?"

He spoke casually, not changing his tone from its level of trivial good nature. But at the last words he looked across the table, and his frozen and remorseless eyes— his business eyes— fixed her. It was time to get to work.

The stout woman sighed. "Oh, comfortable enough, 's far as that goes," she answered.

He noted the tone of discontent; he put it down to a foolish and romantic yearning after old times.

"It goes a good long way," he said. "I don't see what you've got to complain of. You haven't got to keep your eyes peeled for chances; you don't find

yourself, after two months' work, countin' your shirts to see how many you can do without. Try changin' with me for a bit if you're not satisfied: I sha'n't kick."

She glanced up. "Had a bad season, Pony?"

MR. NEUMAN nodded. "Up against it,' he replied shortly. He emptied his glass and set it down, leaned his arms on the table and waited. It was always his method to let the enemy attack first; his strength lay in counter-attack. In any crisis of his enterprises, Mr. Neuman was always to be seen, silent and watchful, waiting for his opponent to show his form.

The stout woman sighed heavily and shook her head.

"I wasn't kickin'," she said. '"That's not it, Pony. I got troubles that you don't know about. Why, to-day, when Julie come in and said there was a monsieur waitin' to see me, you could 'a' knocked me down with a feather. I'm bein' blackmailed, Pony."

"Wha-at—?" demanded Mr. Neuman, in strong surprise. 'You're being—what—?"

Her slack mouth drooped dolorously. "Blackmailed," she repeated. "That's right, Pony; there's a feller got after me— an' I'm payin'! You see, Pony, my late 'usband, he was a good feller and he didn't know— not rightly he didn't— about what my work used to be. I'd told him I was a actress, an' he believed it. An' now there's his sister an' her 'usband— very respectable, in the printin' trade; an' their son an' daughter; an' his old aunt, ninety-one years of age. An' I'd sooner pay anything, Pony— I'd sooner be bled white than have 'em all know."

Her soft, voluminous voice, the uncomely trouble of her big, thickly powdered face, the mere fluid-looking mass of her as she leaned upon the edge of the table, with the roly-poly arms in their tight sleeves outstretched and the shapeless jeweled hands joined restlessly, the pungency of the scent with which she was sprinkled—the effect cf these seized Mr. Neuman by the scruff of his senses and held him goggling and gaping. He sat in his place and stared.

"Rotten, aint it?' said Madame Dupontel drearily. "I don't wonder you're took aback, Pony."

Mr. Neuman picked up his glass, found it empty and turned upon the bottle at his elbow.

"Who's the fellow?" he demanded.

"I don't think you know him, Pony," answered Madame. "He ain't in your class. Bat Samuels, his name is. He was a hotel tout in Boulogne once— one o' them fellers that meet the steamers. That's how he came to know me."

Mr. Neuman poured himself a drink, measuring it from the bottle to the glass with the care of a chemist.

"Bat Samuels," he repeated. "Samuels, eh? Lemme think a bit! Why, you don't mean that rat that used to nark for the Streté—him that was a witness against that Apache crowd? Little man with a scraggy neck and black teeth—not him?"

Madame nodded. "That's him, Pony; that's Bat."

"An' how much has he had?"

MADAME went into figures. "But it aint the amounts; it's him comin' here himself, sometimes two or three times in a week, an' drunk as often as not. I never hear that bell ring now but I go off into a tremble, expectin' to hear that croak of his outside, and see him grinnin' and hiccoughin' in the door an' showin' them beastly teeth he's got. And lately he aint satisfied with what he used to get; he's raisin' his figures."

"He'll eat you alive," said Mr. Neuman grimly.

He drank from his glass, emptying it at a draught; it was a gesture that emphasized the speech. From across the table the fat woman was looking at him piteously.

"To-day, when I found it was you instead o' him, I could ha' jumped for joy." She paused. "Pony, now you're here, couldn't you— couldn't you help me a bit?"

There was, perhaps, in all Paris and its environs (as the maps say), no man less subject than Mr. Neuman to the sentimentalities which dull the edge of business. Even as Madame had commenced her appeal, he was considering, calmly enough, the advisability of getting a share of the plunder while any yet remained, and still calmly, had abandoned the project. The little rat-man who narked for the Sûreté,— was, in other words, a spy of the police upon his fellow-felons— with his scraggy neck, his black teeth and his general vileness, had taken the wind out of his sails. Even an international crook may be careful of his company; and Mr. Neuman couldn't work on the heels of Bat Samuels. It was a decision deliberate and reasoned, owing nothing to sentiment; yet, when he looked up at the large, foolish face opposite to him, waiting in a twitching tension of hope for his answer, something that had lain dead within him till now awoke.

Madame Dupontel saw the sudden flush of red that surged into his face and his quick movement in his seat. He swore crisply— Mr. Neuman seldom swore— and brought his fist down on the table with a crash that made the bottles jump.

"You bet I'll help you!" he said strongly, relaxing himself in the luxury of a frank emotion.

"Ah!" The fat woman sighed happily. "You always was a good feller, Pony."

"That's all right, Kate." Mr. Neuman was serious, with the gravity of determination; he looked a very adequate and resolute person when he chose. 'You're one of us, you are; we can't have these outsiders goin' to war on us like this. I reckon I can fix this Bat Samuels for you. Where'll I find him?"

She shook her head. "He never gave me no address, Pony. You see, he comes himself. That's nearly the worst part of it; it does scare me so."

"Ah, well!' Mr. Neuman reached for his hat and cane and rose. "I s'pose I can find him. It's a marvel to me that that Apache crowd that he split on hasn't fixed him long ago. Still, you needn't worry any more, Kate; I'll handle him now."

HE had risen likewise. She looked at him across the intervening table with admiration and utter trust, in which there was mixed something of a fearful secrecy. "What you goin' to do to him, Pony?" she asked, lowering her voice. Then in a pregnant whisper: "You aint thinkin' o' nothing rough?"

Mr. Neuman shrugged his shoulders and frowned. "Lord knows," he answered. "Roughing isn't in my line; I'll know better when I've seen the man. But it don't matter to you, old girl; this is my business now."

"An' it couldn't be in better hands," agreed Madame Dupontel warmly. "I'm safe with you. An' the blessin's of a helpless widder on you, Pony— a pore old widder's grateful blessin's!"

Mr. Neuman laughed and made his farewells. He was aware of a mixture of emotions, and some of them were new to him. Partly he felt like a fool and partly like a loser who has thrown away a game he could have won; but there was likewise a sense of having acted a spirited and generous part to an appreciative and applauding audience, and of being in fact rather a noble and vigorous person. It put a new jauntiness into his gait as he walked away from the gate of iron bars; he swung his gold-mounted cane dashingly. It was only when he turned and looked back to wave to Madame, where her vastness projected from the gateway like a great pink bubble, that he remembered how the hidden house had reminded him of the glass boxes in which the mechanical dolls waited to be made alive. At the memory, some of the confident brightness and complacency faded from his face.

"I'll never waste a cent on one of those fakes again!" declared Mr. Neuman seriously. "An' as for Bat Samuels, I bet I'll make him dance, anyhow."

To the ordinary dweller in the daylight world it might appear an affair of difficulty to trace in Paris a man who desired to remain hidden, who belonged,

besides, to a species which only survives by virtue of its skill in keeping out of sight. To Mr. Neuman, however, with his peculiar knowledge and his special sources-of information, the task was not formidable. He knew what he had to look for—the trail which such a one as Bat Samuels, with money to spend, would leave across the lower floor of the underworld. By early evening, he was already following that trail.

His inquiries had taken him up the hill towards Montmartre and into a small and unpretentious café near the Place Pigalle. Already the lights were ablaze in the twilight along the Boulevard Clichy; the quarter was settling down to its hectic evening industry of manufacturing "night life" to the crude taste of the tourist. But in the small café there endured an almost studious quiet. The half-dozen or so of men who sat in couples at the little tables were unobtrusive in appearance and low-voiced; the proprietor, behind his zinc-topped counter, was big and jolly of feature without any corresponding jolliness of expression; the single servant of the place was a sluttish middle-aged woman with a strong mustache and the jowl of a hanging-judge. Hither, in the natty splendor of his well-cut clothes, with his debonair and comely presence, entered Mr. Neuman.

Wary eyes turned upon him from the groups at the tables; Mr. Neuman met them with a chill and masterful calm.

"Good evening, my big one," he greeted the somber host. "*Ca va toujours*?"

The large man all but smiled. "*Tiens*!" he exclaimed. "It is Monsieur Neuman!"

He extended across the counter a hand like a sponge, big and yellow and soft, and Mr. Neuman shook it with condescending warmth. Behind him, in a rustle of whispers, he heard his name pass from mouth to mouth. He was here on ground where his eminence was recognized.

He leaned an elbow upon the bar, crossed one ankle over the other and let his cane dangle from his wrist.

"A vermouth, I think, for us both," he commanded. "Your vermouth used to be worth drinking when I was here before. How long ago is that?"

The proprietor, busy with the bottle, shook his large sleek head. "A year?" he ventured. "Two years?"

"Time passes,' said Mr. Neuman oracularly. He clinked his glass with the other's and drank critically: "Ye-es; it is still drinkable. And what," he inquired carelessly, "—and what is the news now?"

He took a cigarette from his gold case, leaning still upon the bar, listening with an air of idle good-nature to the proprietor's chronicle of gossip. In that shabby place of shadows he was refulgent; among those slouching customers he stood like a king. They were plebeians of their kind, the journeymen of their

craft; he was an aristocrat and a master. He felt the homage and envy of their regard as he leaned, smoking and smiling, waiting for the large man to come to the name he was anxious to hear.

IT came at last. Mr. Neuman took his cigarette from his lips and regarded it attentively.

"Spending money, is he?" he said reflectively.

"Every night," replied the proprietor. "It is curious. He is not working, and yet he has money like that! Perhaps we shall hear of something soon— a closed house in the suburbs with only dead people in it, or there is a body in the Bois that has not been found yet."

Mr. Neuman was not shocked; he merely nodded indifferently. He was in a world now where burglary and murder were industries like other industries. It was not his world; he was present rather in the guise of a distinguished foreigner; but it was not his business to be critical of the habits and manners of the natives.

"Comes here, does he?" he inquired.

The proprietor shook his head. "No," he said, and his slow eyes traveled across the room, carrying Mr. Neuman's with them. At a table against the wall, a man sat alone. Mr. Neuman's raised brows asked a question.

"Yes," answered the other, sinking his-voice. '"The Skinner, we call him— Jacques the Skinner. He was one of that gang that Samuels gave evidence against. You remember? Two went to the guillotine and five to New Caledonia. So, you see— Samuels would not come here."

Mr. Neuman saw quite clearly. He turned and looked at the Skinner with interest.

"I've heard of him," he said. "Is he sober? Because, now I'm here, I'd like a little talk with him, if it could be managed."

"But he is always quite sober," protested the proprietor. "A very pleasant poor fellow— Jacques! He will be proud. I will arrange that for you in a moment."

"Do," requested Mr. Neuman.

The table at which Mr. Neuman seated himself was that nearest the window; he placed himself at it with his back to the quiet street. The Skinner, after a whispered conference with the proprietor, came drifting across to it.

"Absinthe," he said, in reply to Mr. Neuman's ritual opening remark, and let himself tumble limply into his chair.

UNDER the light, he was visible as an emaciated boy, of perhaps twenty years of age, upon whose meagerness of frame the shabby black clothes hung

slackly. His face, drooping above his shallow chest, was dead white; the line of the thin lips across it was like a narrow gash; it was still as a countenance of stone. Till the absinthe was brought, he neither moved nor spoke; Mr. Neuman, watching him, felt, despite his connoisseurship in the varieties of man, an impulse of disgust that was half fear— the creature was so utterly evil that save when he was doing evil he was scarcely alive at all. He existed in a torpor of absinthe and foul imagination till he woke to grisly crime.

The scowling waitress brought the liquor; the clatter of the glassware on the iron table seemed to rouse the Skinner. His stagnant eyes took in its presence slowly ; he heaved himself upright as if with extreme effort, put out long, bony hands to the bottles and looked across them at Mr. Neuman for the first time. In the light of that glance, all seeming of feebleness fell from him; it was as though he had unsheathed for a moment the poisonous and lethal soul of which his flimsy body was the scabbard.

He mixed his complicated drink expertly, tasted it and set it down. Mr. Neuman, who had been watching him with fascination, leaned forward over the little table and began to talk.

The small café slumbered and whispered about them; men entered and left; the waitress went heavy-footed about her work; behind his bar, the proprietor champed and snorted over his evening meal. None disturbed the murmured conference at the table by the window. If any glanced at Mr. Neuman, it was merely the tribute of interest which obscurity pays to success; but none took a seat near enough to overhear, and none made any comment. Mr. Neuman explained, making play with a white forefinger; from time to time the Skinner nodded a reply; for the rest, he listened. Three times the scowling waitress, answering the wave of a hand, renewed the supply of absinthe.

"Then," said Mr. Neuman finally, "that's fixed, eh? If I find him tonight, I'll steer him round to Massy's bar before midnight. I'll know by then where his room is, an' I'll leave word with that one-eyed waiter there. "I suppose I can depend on you to keep sober "

The Skinner only looked up for answer. Mr. Neuman was ready for him this time; he met that narrow cutthroat gaze with his own icy and dominating stare. Their eyes fought for a space of moments; it was the Skinner's which gave way first.

"Well, don't forget!" said Mr. Neuman, driving home the warning with a frowning nod. The Skinner's thin lips parted in soundless acquiescence. "Because," added Mr. Neuman, "I shouldn't forget it if you did."

He rose; the big proprietor came shuffling forth to walk to the door with him and bid him a deferential farewell. But he asked no questions; his was the house in which embarrassing questions were never asked.

THERE is, among the more innocent and childish attractions of the Boulevard Clichy, an establishment which opens from the pavement like an electric-lighted tunnel, inhabited by rows of slot-machines which furnish canned music, moving pictures and the like wonders to whomsoever will furnish the due coin. There are likewise machines with which one gambles feebly, staking ten centimes upon the possibility that it will fall from the slot through a system of obstacles into a certain tray and yield a return of perhaps a franc.

Mr. Neuman, drifting along the rank of slots, forgot his resolution never again to be a patron of mechanical dolls; there were one or two machines which he found interesting; and he came quite casually up to the little group that was watching a speculator at play with the mechanical gambler. He heard the tinkle of the coin inserted, the choke of the works as it was swallowed, the rattle of the money's descent to the all-but-inevitable forfeit. He pressed nearer, and across the shoulders of the onlookers he had a glimpse of the man who played.

He said nothing; a man in Mr. Neuman's business must rid himself of the habit of exclamation; but for a moment he smiled.

He worked his way through the group about the player, feeling in his pockets for small change, till he stood beside the machine. He watched another small coin go tumbling to its fate; then he reached for the slot with his own contribution.

"What do you do? Just put it in?" he asked of the man who had been playing.

"Shove it in an' press this knob," answered the other.

Mr. Neuman did as he was directed, saw his coin engulfed, and laughed.

"You won anything?' he inquired, producing another.

"No," replied the stranger with an oath. "An' I'll bet you don't neither. These things aint meant to win with."

HE was a man of anything between twenty-five and thirty-five years, smallish of stature, whose every aspect and attitude were marked by a quality of mere meanness. Something at once ungainly and furtive was salient in him; his long neck stood out of his collar with a suggestion of indecency; his narrow face was timid and impudent; and when he grinned at the loss of Mr. Neuman's second stake, he showed a mouth like an old graveyard, foul with ruined and blackened teeth— a very carrion-worm among men. Mr. Neuman, sacrificing coins alternately with him, smiling, chatting, putting out. his trained

talents of captivation, could well understand how that figure of squalid menace upon her doorstep had terrified Madame Dupontel.

"Well," he said, when two francs' worth of change had enriched the proprietor of the machine, "this thing's certainly got an appetite, but I don't see myself standing here and feeding it all night. I'm going to get a drink or two."

He nodded to his companion as though to leave him; it had not taken him long to get the measure of Bat Samuels,

"Le's 'ave a drink together," suggested Samuels promptly.

Mr. Neuman nodded indifferently.

"Come on, then," he said, and Samuels went.

The Boulevard Clichy blazed and surged; above it, the summit of Montmartre rose in cliffs of building; below, Paris glowed and sparkled in vivacious beauty. Over all, a clear night sky, powdered with stars, arched like a dome, and the clamor of the moment was strident in the ears of eternity. Along the Boulevard, threading through the throng of the pavements, went Mr. Neuman, that suave and accomplished squire of dames, and Bat Samuels, who spent with both hands the money he knew he could have for the asking and the moments upon which he set no value. j

From one place for the solace of unquiet souls to another they wandered in a companionship of increasing intimacy; it was nearing midnight as, with linked arms, they bore down upon the flaming enticement of Massy's bar.

"Whadier doin' to-morrer ?" inquired Samuels then. "What say to comin' 'ome to my room with me an' sleepin' there an' then goin' the rounds together again?"

"Well." Mr. Neuman was doubtful. "I don't know about that. Where is your room?"

And Bat Samuels, pointing to the hill above them, gave his address.

"I got a good room— none o' yer lousy attics for me," he added. '"There's a sofa in it; you'd be all right, an' tomorrer we'll 'ave a real old bust."

Mr. Neuman gave a sidelong glance at the profile of the man who held his arm and offered him the shelter of his dwelling and spoke of to-morrow as though he carried it in his pocket. He hesitated a moment.

"I'll come home with you, if you like," he said then. "But as to to-morrow— we'll see!"

Bat Samuels jeered. "You think that a little spree like this'll make any difference? Why, I don't call this drinkin' at all—crawlin' along from one place to another all the evenin'. You don't want to worry about me; I'll be lively enough in the mornin'."

He shouldered his way into Massy's bar, with Mr. Neuman following at his heels. A one-eyed man served them with liquor and walked across to the counter with Mr. Neuman to fill his handsome gold cigarette case for him.

IT was close upon two o'clock when they turned at last from the boulevard into the narrow uphill street which led towards Samuels' lodging. Mr. Neuman still walked with his accustomed gait, cane and gloves in hand, a civilized and responsible figure ; Samuels lurched somewhat and was voluble and noisy; his hoarse talk covered Mr. Neuman's silences as they left the lights behind them and went up between the high, silent houses under the quiet glory of the heavens. He was elaborating his program for to-morrow; the word was frequent on his lips; there was a moment when it seemed to Mr. Neuman, whose nerves were tautening like a banjo string, that he emphasized it in derision, that he knew what was prepared for him and was mocking his enemy.

"I'll show you more o' Paris than y'ever saw in yer life," the hoarse voice boasted. "I'll tell you— this ol' town's 'ot—red-'ot— but you want to know yer way about. Now, to-morrer, I'll take you to a place I know— you'll see—"

He stopped; they had reached the door of a gaunt tenement which lifted rank upon rank of dark windows, with here and there a lighted one, above their heads. Samuels fumbled for the bell which should rouse the concierge in her bed to pull the cord which would open the door.

"This your place?" asked Mr. Neuman.

"This is it," answered Samuels. "Goo' place, too— you'll see." He added, with a meaningless vanity: " 'Spectable people live 'ere!"

The door clicked; Samuels pushed it back, revealing the dimness of a stone-flagged entry out of which a dark stairway ascended. The curtained glass door of the concierge's hutch showed the faint and dull glow of a light within.

"Come on!" bade Samuels, entering. Mr. Neuman still hesitated upon the threshold. "Wha's the matter?"

"Sure it's all right?" asked Mr. Neuman.

"Course it's all right," cried Samuels. His face in the gloom showed white and horrible, like some gruesome mask hanging in midair. "Think I'd bring you 'ere if it wasn't?"

Mr. Neuman shrugged his shoulders; it had the look of a movement of surrender; he entered at the door which his urgent host held open for him. Samuels let it go when he was within and it swung to and closed itself with a hollow slam.

From the concierge's room a querulous voice called indistinctly through the glass door. Samuels shouted his name.

"Now!" he said, and led the way up the stone stairs, upon which his footfalls echoed noisily.

"Now!" repeated Mr. Neuman under his breath, and followed him.

THE unlighted stairway circled in its well from landing to landing; upon each, dumb doors showed their blank and solemn countenances to the pair who went by, the unsteady man who led the way, the sober one who followed. None looked out upon them; they mounted in the silence of the sleeping house unseen, measuring the moments of their ascent with the tread of their deliberate feet upon the steps.

" 'Ere's where I live," said Samuels, at a door upon the third story. He made play with a key, stabbing at the lock with it. The door yielded at the thrust of his groping hands. "'Ullo! I must 'a' left it unlocked. Queer! Come on in, an' I'll turn on the light."

Mr, Neuman, upon the threshold, put one hand to the doorpost and held by it. He heard Samuels lurching about in the darkness of the room, bumping against the furniture and swearing. "Never can find that blarsted switch. Where the 'ell is the thing? Ah!"

His hand, brushing along the wall, had found what it sought; the switch clicked; the room was suddenly full of light.

"An' now—" began Samuels.

He turned towards where Mr. Neuman waited in the door and stopped short, the words jolted from his lips at sight of the lean, black-clad figure, spare and dangerous as a thin knife, that stood, motionless, voiceless, at his very elbow. Mr. Neuman, gripping the doorpost, had a view of his face, imbecile with terror, incapable even of an outcry. And he saw, too, the face of the Skinner, white as bone, and the vivid red of the thin lips that widened as he watched into a slow smile. There was an instant during which none moved; then Mr. Neuman, with a hand that wavered, drew the door towards him and shut himself out from the room.

AFTERWARDS, what he remembered most powerfully was that interval of waiting in the darkness upon the landing, gripping the banisters and listening—straining his ears in a horrible and fascinated eagerness for sounds that should filter through the closed door. The house, which had been so silent, seemed to pulsate about him with the scores of lives it harbored, to reverberate to the beating of hearts; but from that room in which the Skinner and Bat Samuels were closeted there came no sound— not a cry, not the thud of a blow or a fall.

He saw the line of light below the door disappear; the Skinner in there, his work done, had turned it out. The door opened noiselessly, and Mr. Neuman was aware that he had come out, a shadow of a presence from which he shrank. The shadow spoke.

"*C'est fini*,' it breathed. "It is finished." Then after a pause: "You would like to see?"

Mr. Neuman shook his head violently, forgetful of the darkness. "No," he whispered. "Come out of this, quick! I'll— I'll be sick or something in a moment."

He could not see,— he was glad of that,— but he knew that the Skinner was smiling. He braced himself for the ordeal of descending the long staircase with this companion at his side.

IN the *salle à manger* of the house at Passy, Madame Dupontel leaned upon the dining table and beamed admiringly at Mr. Neuman, seated opposite to her. Bottles and glasses colored the interview with the hues of hospitality; a strong sun lighted the prospect of the garden.

"So," said Mr. Neuman, concluding his remarks, "you can take my word for it, Kate— you'll not be troubled any more. You and he won't meet again."

He had still his outward spruceness, all that polish and outward finish which a man can buy from tailors and haberdashers. If the pinkness of his face was less pink, if he seemed tired and older, he had already explained that he was not sleeping well of late.

"Well, Pony," said Madame Dupontel, "you don't need to hear me say I'm grateful; you know that without me tellin' you.. But I would like to know how you fixed him."

Mr. Neuman's face twitched in a half-involuntary grimace.

"Leave it at that, Kate," he said. "You were in a mess, and I got you out of it. That's enough for you to be sure of."

Madame Dupontel shrugged. "Well, if you say so, Pony," she yielded. "Any'ow, I'm grateful to you for what you done, 'owever you done it. You been a gentleman to me, Pony."

Mr. Neuman waved her compliments from him.

"Yes, you 'ave—a gentleman to me. An' now, since you've 'ad a bad winter— you said the other day you was up against it— if a thousand francs, or two thousand, would see you through it—"

She had her purse upon the table; she opened it while she spoke, and her absurd shapeless fingers fluttered the crisp edges of a bundle of paper money.

"It'd be a pleasure to me," she added.

Mr. Neuman gave a small shudder; the eyes with which he looked at her had a touch of wildness and his smile was an effort.

"No," he said hastily. "No, thanks, Kate. Between a gentleman and a lady, you know— no, I couldn't take any money for what I've done for you."

The whisky-bottle, catching a ray of the sun, winked at him. He reached for it eagerly.
