PAST MASTERS
166

Short stories in the life+70 years
Public Domain

Mark Hellinger
Anthony Hope
Ethel Lina White
Sinclair Lewis
R Austin Freeman
Ambrose Bierce
Robert E Howard
Elizabeth Gaskell

and more

PAST MASTERS 166

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

7 July 2024

Contents

———————

1: After a Million Years

J. M. Walsh

James Morgan Walsh, 1897-1952

Wonder Stories Oct 1931

Reprinted: *Tales of Wonder*, Autumn 1939

Australian born British author of numerous detective and science fiction novels and stories.

I HAVE NOT enlarged on the mechanical side of time-travelling. The mechanics, at least in theory, are fairly well understood by all who are familiar with this kind of fiction. Once assume that they can be put into practice, and the rest is easy.

Whether the subject has ever before been treated from precisely the angle I have taken, I do not know. I wrote simply to clear my mind of one idea that I believe has never been elaborated before— that time must be accounted for.

To put it more plainly, if I leave here, for instance, at five p.m. on Wednesday, travel a century into the future, and remain there exactly one week, I do not believe that I can return precisely to my own era at five p.m. on the day I started. I have lived a week in the interval. That week must be docked from the period of my existence.

When I return I shall come back, perhaps, to the exact hour of the clock, but I shall be a week older. My calendar will show that seven days have passed from my life. I cannot live those seven days over again; that much is clear. This is not to say, admitting the possibility of time-travelling, that if I gm to have a life-span of seventy years, I may not spend thirty of those years in the twentieth century and the remaining forty in the twenty-fifth century. I cannot live the whole seventy in both centuries; that is all.

———————

I AM the last man; the last of all Earth's teeming millions to be left alive on this once populous planet. I have seen this world, woefully, incredibly aged, bleak and desolate, writhing in its death-throes— yet I have escaped to tell this tale.

So much I write, then turn to look out of my window on the busy, crowded street below. I hear the hum of traffic and I see the movements of people; many thousands of them. I know that I am somewhere in the centre of a city of eight million souls. Not one of them realises the doom ahead, If they did, it would not matter: they will all be dead and gone long before it comes to pass.

Realising all this, my story seems well-nigh incredible, even to myself, who went through it all. So, I can hardly expect it to be believed. But for two things, I should fancy that I had dreamed it all; that I had been the victim of some particularly vivid nightmare. But no dream, no nightmare, could possibly linger with its details so sharply etched in my mind.

And, as I say, there are two things left me from that time; two proofs— if one can call them such— that my experience was not altogether the product of a disordered mind. Why such an adventure should have come to me, of all men, I cannot say. It came— that is all— and I must record it as best I can.

My name is John Harling; my calling that of a real estate broker, surely a prosaic profession. That much, no doubt, is proof for the credibility of my story: my clan is unimaginative; we cannot invent such tales. But let that rest...

My story opens out-of-doors on a summer's day in the third decade of this, the twentieth century. I was, to put it plainly, hiking, dressed in the conventional costume for such a pastime, my rucksack on my back, a staff in my hand. I was making my way along one of those deserted paths among the leafy Surrey hills, a way not yet invaded by the ubiquitous London motorist.

The crest of a rise lay before me. I had nearly reached it, and in my mind there was forming already the pleasant picture of a halt, a drink and a bite beneath the shade of the trees, before I proceeded on my way. There was nothing, then, to teil me that a million years would pass before I drank or ate again.

Abruptly, I saw a flash. Lightning, I thought— out of a clear sky, at that; and I wondered why I had heard no peal of thunder. Then, on the heels of the flash, some branches crashed with a rending sound, as though some heavy object had torn its way through them. A lucky escape for me! The lightning might easily have struck me, instead of that tree towards which I stared. Then I rubbed my eyes. What I saw was so different from what I had expected.

It might have been the original fiery chariot from Heaven. Such was my first, confused thought, for even at a glance, I could see that it was no vehicle with which I was familiar. It seemed much like an aeroplane, minus the wings, yet there was a subtle difference. The body was slightly streamlined, but the nose and tail were blunt, with a cluster of sinister-looking tubes fore and aft. From these a thin, golden vapour rose in lazy wisps.

The machine itself— I could hardly think of it as anything else— was of a kind of metal weird and strange. It was the green of an emerald, so that I might have mistaken it, at first, to be some sort of crystal; but I learned, later, that it was actually metal. The length of the machine was studded with bosses, seemingly of quartz: windows, perhaps, or doors. Their exact function was not evident at the moment.

I stood and stared, even then not quite convinced that my senses were not playing me some strange trick. Then, gingerly, I reached forward with my staff. The machine seemed real enough. More daringly, I tried it with my hand. It was warm to the touch, yet not unpleasantly so.

A DOOR opened in the machine, a section of the side slowly sliding away into the hull; and I waited, wondering what was to be revealed. I think I was more curious than frightened, and the one idea in my mind was that this, undoubtedly, was a visitant from some other planet. To me, first of all men,

was to be given the privilege— or the horror; which, I knew not— of meeting the strangers.

As the door slid gently open, speculation after speculation raced furiously through my mind. I tried to picture a hundred different and alien forms of life, any one of which it might be my lot to view. But I was wrong.

One person only stood framed in the opening, a being in human form. More staggering still, it was a girl; a junoesque figure, clad in something that looked oddly like chain-mail, though it was golden and it seemed to glow a little. The head was bare, but I saw that she held some sort of a helmet in one gloved hand.

I am no weakling; I am built, if anything, on the large size, without unnecessary flesh. But this girl was every inch as tall as I, though, naturally, better proportioned. While we stood and stared at each other, I had the impression that she was quite as surprised at my appearance as I was at hers, and each of us was fumbling for words adequate to the situation.

Then she spoke. It was a soft, musical voice in its way, though it held a hint of power that I did not like. Had she spoken in some language utterly unintelligible, I would not have been at all surprised; the fact that she was using English of a sort— queer, distorted, and to my ears, archaic— was more astounding. Yet it was not hard to follow; one could sense the drift of what she was saying.

Actually, she was asking me what year this was. I told her— 1939. She frowned a little.

"I have made an error in calculation," she said; "but a few years out in a million is not so much, after all."

"A million?" I gasped. Then: "Who are you? What do you mean? Where do you come from?" I asked, all at once,

She smiled a little, as one of superior wisdom might smile to a child.

"I am Leela Zenken," she said, simply, "and I have not come from anywhere— in space. But, in time, I have come from an age a million years ahead of this."

"In that thing?" I said, taking a step forward. She nodded. We were becoming more intelligible to each other, now, our pronunciations seeming less odd.

"Yes. A time traveller; that is it. But. is not this London?" She stared about her at the green trees.

I shook my head. "You are perhaps twenty miles from the nearest part of Greater London," I told her. "It doesn’t extend as far as this— yet. Perhaps in fifty years—"

She did not wait for me to finish, but ‘darted inside the machine, was gone a few seconds, and returned.

"That is it!" she said, breathlessly. "An error. Fifty years out in time, and thirty feet in space. In my day, the land— this point— is that much higher. But you— what are you; what do you do?"

I told her. Though, at first, she did not understand the function of a real estate broker, she did at length; and she did not seem so pleased.

"I had hoped for, perhaps, a scientist." She was watching my face as she spoke, and some passing shadow must have given her a wrong idea of what was in my mind. "I mean," she added hastily, "I wanted one who would not discredit what he cannot understand."

It was all Greek to me. That some object lay behind her words I did not doubt, but at the moment, it was not apparent.

"What, exactly," I said, "do you want, and what is it you hoped to do?"

HER answer was evasive enough, in one sense. "I had hoped to reach the year 1985," she said. "My reasons—" She waved them aside, unuttered, perhaps because they were no concern of mine. "It is a strange world to me; a strange time, a strange people. But we seem to understand one another. If this had been 1985, no doubt you would have helped me."

One idea after another chased through my mind. After all, even though it was not 1985, why should I not help her? I was young, unattached, with no relatives, no one but myself to worry about... and this was adventure, of a sort that I might never come across again.

"Why shouldn’t I help you now?" I said, greatly daring. She looked me up and down.

"You are of the wrong age," she said, deliberately. "I go fifty years ahead."

"But the people of fifty years’ time should not be so radically different from what they are to-day," I protested.

"That is true. I might, after all .

She looked back again into the interior of the machine, thought for a moment, then: "Come," she said.

I had little or no idea what was in her mind, but I obeyed her invitation and stepped inside. No sooner was I in, than she touched a lever and the door closed. She touched another lever, and there came a roar of sound from outside.

"What are you doing?" I asked bluntly.

"Raising the machine," she said, calmly. "I miscalculated before. It has taught me a lesson. In the years, the land has risen. If we went back to my own day, we might arrive to find ourselves thirty feet under the earth. In fifty years’

time, who knows but that we might come to rest inside a building, with disastrous consequences?"

"Then we are not yet travelling in time?"

"No; only rising. It is better to do the travelling in free air."

"I see." I bent over the bank of keys and dials in front of her, and tried to make something of their arrangement, but I could not. The theory of timetravelling I had read of, vaguely: the idea of time being like a river. One could travel with the current, drift from source to mouth. Mechanically, one could quicken one's speed on that river; beat the drift of the current, as it were. The faster one moved, the farther behind would be left the particular patch of water that surrounded the boat when one started. Conversely, the boat could travel against the current.

That much, admitting the analogy between the flow of time and the flow of a river, was clear enough. The mechanical means necessary to achieve this result were a trifle more complicated, however. Her explanation of it all was necessarily brief. Some of it I grasped, and some I did not. In many respects, the science of her age was couched in terms unintelligible to me.

She cut her explanation short. "Are you ready? Then please sit down." She pointed to one chair, and seated herself "in the other. "We will start our flight through time. Not long; only fifty years."

She leaned forward, and set a pointer on one of the dials, then pressed a button immediately beneath it. The machine seemed to behave crazily. I had an impression of walls whirling and dissolving, and I fancied I heard a stifled cry from the girl. Then... nothingness.

I CAME back to myself abruptly, with a growing sense of strangeness, a feeling that all was not as it should be. The girl herself had slid to the floor; her head was resting against the back of the chair, and her eyes were closed. The bank of keys ahead of her looked oddly twisted; the glass stuff of some of the dials had broken, and everything looked crushed and crumpled as though it had struck heavily against something.

But the machinery could wait. I turned to the girl, wondering how I could revive her, but she saved me the trouble. Her eyes opened, flickered, closed again; then, with an effort of will, opened once more, and remained open.

She sprang to her feet with a little cry, glanced at the dials, then rushed to one of the port-hole-like objects and stared through it. She remained there for some time. What she saw, I do not know, but when she turned back to me it was with an expression of consternation on her face. .

"I have failed," she said. "But the fault is not altogether mine. First, my original miscalculation, then the jolt the machinery received when I landed in your era; both together may have caused it."

"Tell me," I said, with a sense of tightness about my heart, "just what has happened."

She looked me squarely in the eyes, and— I liked this— though she felt the fault was hers, she did not flinch before my gaze.

"It is this," she said, a trifle unsteadily. "I am back here in my own age, and you with me, a million years ahead of yours. The machinery did not function as it should have done. The moment I pressed the lever we were shot, with an extreme time-velocity, back to the point from which I started."

"Well," I said, for one age seemed quite as good as another, now I had taken to time-travelling, "I don't see that it matters much, as far as I am concerned."

"But you don't understand," she said quickly, with consternation in her voice. "Unless I can manage to repair the machinery, which I doubt, you are marooned in time, a million years ahead of your day. That in itself might not matter so much to you, or to me, were it not that the days of this Earth, which is the home of us both, are numbered. Is that not sufficiently appalling for you?"

It was. I sat down heavily, and stared at her unbelievingly. For the moment, I did not know what to think. The prospect was too stupendous for me to take it all in. She left me to my thoughts.

In a little while, I saw that she was opening the door that led outside the machine, and she beckoned me to come with her.

"But first," she said, "you must put this on." It was a suit similar to the one she was wearing, designed, I learned, to protect the wearer against any extremes of cold that might be met.

Something of my numbed state I had put down to the shock which her announcement had given me. Now, I began to realise that the air was cold, almost like the blast of a refrigerating chamber. Perhaps the Earth was passing through another ice-age. That may have been what she had meant. Or perhaps the planet had tilted again, as it had already done more than once in its history, and the poles had shifted. I did not know. I could only wait and see for myself what had happened. At least, she made no move to enlighten me then, but instead seemed all impatience to proceed with whatever business she had in mind.

We stepped out of the machine. I had expected to find myself in the open air, but instead, looking up, I saw that we were in a vast building made of some

transparent substance like glass. The air in it was keen, almost icy, and I looked in vain for signs of life. We two seemed the only human beings alive.

The girl did not speak, but merely motioned me to follow her. We passed through the huge building to one section of it that had been partitioned off into rooms. Since they, too, were made of the same glass-like substance as the rest of the building, it looked as though the divisions had been made more for the convenience of work than for the sake of privacy. Despite the warmth given out by the electricallyheated suits we were wearing, the girl shivered a little.

"It's colder than it was," she said in a low voice. "The power must be giving out, the heaters running down. I pray nothing has happened. I have been away so long..."

"Why? What does it all mean?" I asked.

"Presently," she returned. "It is a long tale. I cannot tell it all to you, now. First I' must learn what has happened."

WE CAME to a room. The floor was bare, but the walls were covered with a profusion of dials, keys, and plates not unlike television screens. She studied the apparatus carefully for some seconds, then made some adjustments with switches and levers. One of the television screens glowed into life, and I became aware that I was looking at a vast building, similar in some respects to that which we were in.

She made other adjustments, localising the view, so that we were looking at one particular section of the building, vastly magnified. It was full of people; men and women dressed after the fashion of the girl by my side. They were sprawling about in all manner of attitudes, but every one of them was dead, frozen. The cold of space had crept in and killed them where they lay.

An hour or more we spent there, while the girl searched one screen after another, the television eye roaming from one point of the globe to another, and always with the same result. Nowhere on the whole Earth was there life! It was a dead world...

At last, with a little moan, she turned away, then dropping abruptly to a crouching position on the floor, buried her head in her hands and began to sob.

After a million years, the sex had changed but little. I caught her by the arm and raised her, a little roughly, perhaps, but I felt she needed to be shaken out of her despair.

"Tell me," I said, "what has happened. I am still very much in the dark. I think it is time that I should know."

She faced me, with burning eyes. "It is all my fault," she declared venemently. "I was the last hope of my race, and I have failed... lamentably."

"But how? All may not yet be lost. Perhaps I can be of some help. Who knows?"

"I doubt it," she said, almost sullenly; "but it is right that you should know. I have brought you here. It is for you to judge me."

With that she started her tale, making it, under the circumstances, necessarily brief. Some of what she said I understood and some I did not. In many ways, the science of her age was a million years ahead of ours, and yet they had forgotten many of the things we know.

It was a tale of a world suddenly faced with the prospect of dissolution. The Solar System, swimming into some uncharted reach of space, encountered a stretch of unknown substance, a gaseous entity, a hole in space— no one seemed able to say, with any degree of certainty, just what it was— that possessed the singular power of intercepting the life-giving rays of the Sun.

"Then," I interrupted, "it is not a case of a dying Sun? The Sun still lives?"

She nodded. "Look,"' she said, and pressed a button. One of the television screens came to life, and I found I was looking at the sky, not materially changed from that which I had known. The Sun was climbing towards the zenith, no smaller, no larger than I remembered it, but it was a sickly red in hue. I could look at it without hurt to the eyes; I might have been regarding it through heavily smoked glasses.

"Go on," I said. I was beginning to understand a little.

She went on. This unknown element, a substance with the power of shutting off the heat of the Sun in much the same way that a lead shield will cut off the emanations of radium, augured death for the Earth. Time was short. From the day the fantastic properties of this unknown element had first been discovered, scarcely two years were left, before the curtain would be drawn completely between the Sun and its family of planets.

The scientists of the world were mobilised. Some suggested one thing, some another, but none of their suggestions were of any practical help. In the million years that had passed since my day, secrets had been discovered and lost again, inventions made and destroyed. There had been conflicts between the nations, between the inhabited planets, even; civilisations had risen and perished; a graph of human progress would have shown a series of alternating peaks and depressions. Old records that might have been of use had been lost, or destroyed, whenever the red lust of destruction had been let loose.

IT NARROWED down to this in the end: to save humanity, some means of replacing the Sun’s heat must be found. The desperate need spurred men on

to further efforts, the while the glass-roofed cities were built, in the hope of staving off the final calamity for years if all else failed.

Old records, such as remained, were feverishly searched. Mention was made in them, from time to time, of the discovery of a principle of atomic energy, light- and heat-giving. If such a thing could be re-discovered, the world would be saved, for it was felt that the blotting-out of the Sun's power was only temporary; that in the course of time the Solar System would have passed out of the area of malefic influence.

Feverish work, almost to no purpose. But Leela Zenken had her own ideas. Her mind ran on the possibilities of time-travelling. If she could construct a machine that would take her back through the myriad years, she might be able to make contact with one or other of those men of the past who claimed to have discovered the principle of atomic energy.

For a time, she was laughed at. For time-travelling was but a theory then, as now. The mechanical difficulties seemed insuperable. But she worked away, making this experiment and that, failing always, yet always seeming within measurable reach of success. And at last it came. She discovered the vibratory rate necessary to make travelling through time a feasible proposition.

Yet even then, much remained to be done. She must search backward through time, a long and wearying process, for the data on which she had to work was meagre. Some of the alleged discoverers of the power she sought must have been charlatans, since there was no record of their discoveries ever having been put to practical use— an unthinkable thing, had they done what they claimed. In this, she overlooked one solitary possibility.

Her search began. She left her world almost in despair: so many things had failed that they had little faith in this last hope. She came back through time, pursuing her enquiries. But the people of other ages treated her badly. She met with incredulity, contempt, derision; everything but belief and help. In some eras, she was even regarded as a mad-woman.

Once, during one of the interplanetary wars, she was treated as an invader, and barely escaped without injury. The machine itself was slightly damaged, before she could get it to start.

At length, she came across one item of information that looked explicit. A scientist in the year 1985 had made the discovery she sought. His word had been doubted; he had been jeered at, and when at last he had succeeded in convincing the world, his experiments were regarded as too dangerous to be allowed to continue. In a fit of anger, or because of broken hopes, he destroyed his apparatus, with everything that could throw any light on what he had done, and ended by destroying himself and his laboratory.

That, it seemed, was what actually happened, though popular account had it that an experiment had gone wrong. And to Leela, it appeared that if she could reach the man while he was in his first flush of enthusiasm, before he found his invention and its possibilities ignored, she might get the formula from him, might even persuade him to return with her.

But the damage to her machine had thrown her calculations out of gear, and instead of reaching 1985, she landed in my year, as I have described. She could not face the prospect of travelling alone again, and the need for company was what actually decided her to take me with her.

SEVERAL points, made by no means clear to her, presented themselves to me.

"All is not lost, yet," I tried to console her. "Perhaps, if you can repair the machine, you can travel back again, find the man you sought, and set your return here for a date before the others have perished."

She shook her head. "One factor I have overlooked," she pointed out. "The past is immutable. I cannot go back and change the order of things. They have happened in a certain way. I cannot make them happen in any other. The future, yes; that I can influence. Events yet to come are still in a state of flux. The future can be moulded; but the past, no. "To make it clearer, there is no record that I ever reached that scientist of the year 1985; there is no record that I succeeded in my mission, and returned in time to save my people. Therefore, it is hopeless to try. I should have realised it before."

"But you have taken me out of the past," I protested. "Isn't that upsetting the order of events?" :

Again she shook her head. "No," she said. "Somewhere it has been recorded that you made this time-trip, that you and I met. If you had lived your life without our having met, I could not have gone back and brought incidents into that life that had never occurred. You understand?"

"Dimly," I said. "I fancy I see what you're driving at. But tell me why you should have come back to your own era too late? I should have imagined that you would have been able to return to the exact date you left."

"Let me explain. This is how it presents itself to me. When I travel in time the process is, to all intents and purposes, instantaneous. I do not expend time, so to speak, in the way that _I expend power. I do not live that time; I merely pass through it. But when I reach any desired era, and stop travelling, time begins again for me.

"I spent fifteen minutes stationary in your year, talking to you. That is fifteen minutes out of your life-period, and mine. You have that fifteen minutes less to live. My searchings through the centuries cost me the matter of

a year, in accumulated time, outside of the influence of the time-machine. That year, also, has gone out of my life. It is part of the allowance of my existence that I have expended.

"Now can you see that I could not possibly have returned here to the exact date on which I left? The amount of time I spent in other centuries, when I was not actually time-travelling, amounted to a year. That year must be subtracted from the sum of my existence. Therefore, I must arrive back to find that a year has elapsed here in my absence."

"Then," I said, "if I were to remain here a year, and then could return, I would find it 1940, not 1939?"

"That is it, exactly," she agreed, then looked at me with wide-eyed horror. "But," she said, slowly, "the machine is broken."

"You may be able to repair it. There is no harm in trying."

She thought, with knitted brows, for a full minute.

"Why not?" she said at length. "There is nothing to stop your returning, even if I cannot go."

"You may be able to come with me," I suggested. "There is no reason why you should not. Even what you have told me does not debar you. You must live the full period allotted to you, either here or in some other era."

THERE may have been a flaw in my reasoning. Perhaps so, perhaps not; at any rate, she seemed convinced. No doubt she wished to be convinced. After all, I was a‘man and she a woman, not altogether repugnant to each other, and whatever else had changed, a million years had wrought but little alteration in the fundamentals of human nature.

At least, she set to work with an almost feverish haste. But for my suggestion, I really believe she would have done as the others had done; would have let in the cold of space and died by her own act, reasoning that it was better to pass out in a few moments of exquisite agony than to linger day by day, seeing the thread that bound her to life grow frailer and thinner, until at last it snapped. But I, I flatter myself, gave her something to live for, the human heart being what it is.

I could not help her. She would not let me, preferring to work feverishly alone, while I occupied my time in various ways. I could not go outside the building in which we were housed, for to do so would have been to court the frozen death. I had my camera with me, and a supply of films, and would dearly have liked to have taken many photos; but I compromised. Some of the television screens were still functioning, their power not yet drained; and by their aid I secured some photos worth preserving, though whether they would

be credited I cannot say. At least, as records, they were worthwhile to me alone.

Daily, the red disk of the Sun grew more dim, and the cold increased. The glass surface of the building, now, was frosted over so that it was opaque, and we began to feel the chill bite of the cold in our bones. The power that warmed the building was running out, and I was heartened by Leela's announcement that a few days more would see the repairs completed. I wished that she would let me help her, but every time I broached the subject she refused my offer, saying that it was work that only one could do, that it was intricate, and that with my lack of knowledge I would be more of a hindrance than a help.

However, I found much to occupy me. The building itself was a storehouse of strange appliances. I had wondered quite a lot, since I arrived, why the power that warmed the building should have lasted so long after all other power had run out in the buildings— one might almost call them cities — that had once been inhabited. The answer was very simple, it seemed.

The building was small, compared with the others we had seen on the screens; the amount required to warm it was not great, and since it was stored solar energy, it could be kept unused for quite a while. Leela, as a matter of fact, had started the motors immediately upon our arrival, and had run them at only half-capacity ever since. Knowing that there was no way of replenishing the supply, once it was exhausted, she had been careful.

One discovery I made, while her work held her to the machine. In one of the compartments at the farthest end of the building— one that we seldom went to, since the cold there was more intense— I found a series of apparatus not unlike the switchboard of a telephone system; and exploring further, I found head-phones. One day, in an idle hour, I put on the head-set and snapped one switch after another, simply to see what would happen. Great was my sur prise to hear a voice in my ear.

I NEARLY dropped the phones, in excitement, then recovered my equanimity as I realised that I was listening to something in the nature of a mechanical reproduction, a phonographic record, or whatever corresponded to it in this age. My idle working of the switches had released one that set the machine in operation. I listened to the end— a short record, it was— and then switched back. Sure enough, the voice, metallic and measured, began all over again. I had paper and pencil in my pocket, and for reasons of my own, I took a transcript in shorthand of what the voice was saying. That finished, I looked round the switch-board to see if there was anything that would show me where the voice was coming from.

There was much that I did not understand, but I was able to puzzle out enough to realise that the record I had heard was being transmitted from the building we had first seen in the television screen. Probably it had been so adjusted that anyone attempting to call the place would immediately set the machine in motion.

I went back to Leela in a thoughtful mood. The moment I reached her, I could see by her face that success had come at last. She had repaired the machine: we could start as soon as I liked.

The news decided me to say nothing about my own experience. Yet on one point I felt I must satisfy myself, before I allowed her to take the decision.

"Leela," I said, "are you prepared to come back with me to my own age, to stay with me there always, and never know a life apart from me?"

She looked at me oddly, I thought.

"Why," she said, "do you ask that?"

"Because," I answered steadily, "I would not care to think that you were doing this simply to save me from being marooned here in time. In the while we have been together, I have grown to think of you as someone I would not care to have pass out of my life again. You have brought something into it that it had never known before— love!"

"And you, too," she said softly, "have brought it to me. If I were not going back with you, I would not care what became of me. I have failed in what I tried to do; I have lost all my own world held for me, and had you not come to make up that loss for me, I..."

She did not finish, but said abruptly: "Let us go, before I begin to say foolish things."

We went. I think, in one way, she was reluctant to go, for she shed a tear before she put her hand to the keybank and moved the lever that would bring us back to this year of grace.

We arrived on the very spot where we had taken off. I made a careful calculation before we ventured out, and found that we had spent two months and three days away; then, satisfied of that, we opened the door and stepped out into the full sunshine of a living world.

"What will we do with the machine?" I asked, as we turned and stared at it. "It will be a bit difficult to explain away, won’t it?"

"This," she said, answering my first question and ignoring the other.

I saw that she held a Jength of cord in her hand, and that the other end of it disappeared into the machine. Even . then, I did not realise what it was she intended doing. Abruptly, she jerked the cord. It was twitched out of her hand; the machine rocked crazily, seemed to dissolve, and before my astonished eyes, vanished utterly.

I took a step forward and caught her by the arm. "What have you done?" I cried.

"Sent it back to my own time," she said. "It is better thus. Without it, I will not be tempted..." To do what, she would not say.

THAT was three years ago. We have been very happy since. No cloud has marred the serenity of our lives; yet sometimes I fancy Leela's thoughts go back— or forward, if you will— to the days that are yet to come.

It has taken me all this time to summon up courage to tell her of that last experience of mine in what, for want of a better term, I call the telephone-room of the building that was her experimental laboratory. To my surprise, she took it better than I had hoped.

"They did not think you would return," I told her. "They believed that you had failed, and were lost in time. But they prepared, in case you did come back. There is a chance that they were not dead; that many of them are but in a state of suspended animation. There was a new discovery made while you were away, a drug somewhat similar to that we call avertin. It could suspend animation completely, over a short period, but whether its effects would be lasting over years was problematical.

"Some of the population were willing to try, at any rate, and were given the drug. From first to last, it was all a pure gamble, you see. A few of your scientists believed that the Solar System would pass out of the region of this strange gas— if it was that— in a century or so, but they admitted they might be wrong. The majority were almost certain the Earth was doomed. They hoped that if it was not, that if this was but a passing phase, the warmth of the rejuvenated Sun would bring life back to those who were in a state of suspended animation.

"They gambled on everything; on the potency of the drug, its ability to protect against the inevitable cold, and on their hopes that the Sun would once again shine out as before. Nowhere was there any degree of certainty, for they were dealing with exceptional circumstances, and had nothing on which to base their calculations, other than the hopes they had in mind."

"No, I do not blame you," she repeated at the end. "You did what you thought was for the best. Had you told me then, when my mind was in turmoil, I might have taken a course that I would have regretted afterwards. No, I do not regret that I am here with you."

What else she said does not matter. Nevertheless, the fact remains that Leela has the knowledge and the means to build another time-machine, and if she will to send us travelling again. We have discussed the matter between us, without reaching any definite conclusion.

Were we to go forward again, a century or so ahead of her day, we might find the world awakened once more. On the other hand, we might not. It would be more than heart-breaking find, at last, a world locked in a slumber that had become eternal. While we not know for certain, we can sustain our minds with the hope of possibilities....

Yet, I do not know. Some day we may decide to build another machine to take the risk of black disappointment, and solve at last the enigma that perplexes us both.

_____

2: After The Verdict

Holman Day

1865-1935

The Popular Magazine, 7 Aug 1928

A GRIN wreathed and wriggled under the beard of the foreman of the jury, when he and the men of the panel came onto their feet at command of the court.

"Not guilty, your honor," reported the foreman, questioned.

"So say you all?" demanded the judge.

"So say we all," was the ragged chorus the jurymen beamed on the judge.

Then the folks in the crowded courtroom whisked united gaze to the man in the prisoner's dock. He had been snatched from the shadow of the noose; the cause on trial had been a murder case.

The verdict surely called for a display of supreme joy; they would not have been surprised to see Jensen Wayter leap and skip and shake his sides in glorious laughter.

There was surprise. It was more than surprise— it was dumfounded astonishment which constrained the onlookers— checked the cheers ready for utterance.

Wayter had scruffed his shaggy mane into horrent fierceness. Greeting the verdict, he pulled down his eyebrows with a malignant scowl. He rolled his lips away from his teeth. His mien was that of an infuriated catamount at bay. His expression took on more savage malevolence when the simpering foreman stepped toward the dock to congratulate.

Wayter roughly dashed aside the outstretched hand and raised a clenched fist as if about to damage a fatuous smile beyond repair. While the foreman hesitated, another man came bustling forward— the young lawyer assigned to the case by the court as the prisoner's counsel. He was full of the triumph, cackling laughter.

Wayter raised both fists and snarled, now resembling still more ferociously a treed catamount.

Dozens of men in the courtroom had started forward. They stopped in their tracks, fanning each other's ears with whispers and mutterings.

Chadwick, justice presiding, rose slowly, not from his armchair, but with it. The chair was sticking to his haunches but the spectacle before him was absorbing his attention too closely to make a big chair's weight of any importance, at that moment. Ben Chadwick, so men estimated by looking him over, weighed all of three hundred pounds. "What the—" He shut off his growl and swallowed the expletive, remembering in season, fortunately, that he was now a newly appointed judge, was holding his first term of court, had just

finished his first trial of a case. Being a judge, so he sourly reflected, he could not employ his usual hammerand-tongs language in smashing to the heart of something which puzzled him.

Irefully, communing with himself, he was wishing that he had never consented to be a judge. This was not a new wish; it was merely a continuation of a queer grouch. He had been fairly forced into becoming a judge. Because most men of the law aspire so earnestly to be judges, are so gratified when they become judges, the peculiar mental state of Justice Chadwick should be clarified a bit, even at the risk of holding up the story at a dramatic point.

However, it is not really a holdup. Chadwick bulks in the story as hugely as he did physically, standing there with the armchair sticking to his flanks. The man and his methods, his peculiarities, even, must be set forth at once for a better understanding of his performance in the events to be related— events having to do with Jensen Wayter and others, following on and after that verdict.

In the North Country considerable of a story, by itself, was made out of "Big Ben's" appointment by the governor of the State.

The governor, Timber Baron Sam Chase, was a native of the same far-flung border county and had been a fishing pal of Ben ever since the two were boys. On a teeterboard, when they had become man-grown, the two would about balance each other.

One day Governor Chase rode into the village where Ben had his law office in a small building standing by itself. Taking Ben's size into account, the relative proportions of building and inmate suggested to callers the penning of a great Dane in a regulation dog kennel. In the summer, clients usually found it more convenient to stand outside, lean elbows on the sill of an open window and get their law without the flavor of Ben's pipe smoke.

Well, the governor rolled himself cumbrously off the rear seat of his sagging limousine, plodded up the path, and stepped upon a wooden box which Ben had set out for a doorstep. The box crashed under the weight.

Notified by crash and curses that somebody was without, Ben lumbered to the door and opened it.

The governor was jumping up and down, trying to kick the penning sides of the box from his feet.

Ben critically surveyed the lettering on the side of the box. "What you got your feet in there for, Sam? Can't you read? It says, 'Canned Peaches for the Best Trade.' And you've gone to work and packed in politics."

"You whoodled-doodled old hystramus of a trapdoor spider, is this the way you set your web for the trade you get?" raged the governor, managing to kick out one side of the box casing.

"Outside of those sentiments, Sam, it's a fine day and I'm glad you have called. Howdy! Come in!" He extended his fat hand, grabbed the governor's waving fist, and derricked the caller- up. "Straddle, Sam! - Straddle high! Yowl! make it," Ben adjured the irate governor.

In the office the governor demanded, "Why don't you have a decent and sensible doorstep?"

"The box has been stout enough for everybody but you and me. You haven't called round till now. As for me, I always straddle. I take the short cut, Sam."

"Shortcut! Yah! Short cut!" Chase barked the words. "You have always preached and practiced the short cut, even when we went barefoot in the woods."

"I still practice the plan, Sam," returned Ben amiably. "In law and life generally! I wish I could make the cuts even shorter in law. But the court system seems made up of circles these days."

"And right now—speaking of courts!" The governor pushed papers to one side on a corner of the table and perched himself there, distrusting the splint chair set forth for clients. "You know how hard it is for the session of the supreme court at the shire to handle matters for this county. County's so big."

"Uh-huh! That's why I paid my expenses and hollered so loud down at the legislature for the special act establishing a superior court up here." Ben leaned back in his broad chair and lighted a corncob pipe.

"Your holler turned the trick. So all right! Now I'm using my say and appointing you the superior judge. Thank the good Lord, they don't vote for judges in this State. Meaning no slur for you!"

Ben leaned forward and banged the pipe on the table, scattering coals and ashes, "I won't take the job— dang me blue if I will!"

The governor thudded down 'his fist and shouted with a timber boss' manner and vehemence:

"I'm running this State, and when I draft the best man for the particular job, then he shoulders his ax and gets busy. You know me, Ben! And another thing: Where's your friendship for an old chum?"

"But I ain't judicial timber, Sam," lamented Ben, touched by the shrewd and sure appeal of friendship. "I'm too much of a short-cutter to be a judge."

From that moment the "hog wrassle" was on.

Men in the street heard the booming of voices, without understanding what Sam Chase and Ben Chadwick were scrapping over.

All they knew was that an hour later the governor rode away in his limousine, grinning complacently, and that Big Ben was outside his office with fragments of the doorstep box in both hands, threatening to heave them.

At any rate, Chadwick became the county's first superior judge. In one especial plan he adopted his own methods, getting the O. K. of the chief justice on the scheme to move the court about to this town and that, using halls, schoolhouses, or even church vestries. Cases could be tried at the heart of matters, he maintained, where witnesses would be handy, costs of travel could be saved, and the truth might be arrived at more surely in surroundings familiar and natural to parties concerned.

Before Judge Chadwick came to hold his first sitting his plan was nicknamed "the cart-tail court."

That first session was at Frayne Center, a village away upcountry in the mountain regions. Court sat in the vestry of the Union meeting house.

He gave the Wayter murder trial precedence of all other cases. "To set my teeth in good!" he told himself.

Jensen Wayter, brawny, shaggy mountaineer, was accused of shooting and killing one Ansy Ward, nailing him through a window when Ward was standing up beside Julia Wayter, Jensen's sister, the two in process of being duly and properly united in marriage.

Jensen, a man who allowed a violent temper to engineer his fists and to slat his tongue all too frequently, had beaten Ward up on several occasions and had threatened to kill him. But the sister had picked her man. She would not admit that Ward was this and that, as her prejudiced brother insisted.

Therefore, the prosecution had established motive.

The county attorney, in addition, produced a witness who swore that he had been outside the parson's house that night and had seen Jensen Wayter shoot to kill. This witness was elderly, saturnine Jode Krause, who spat speech from one side of a sardonic mouth and stoically, even brazenly, endured the judge's boring stare. Whether Krause's grudge was specific or general, Big Ben could not determine; but if he knew men, he informed himself, here was a man consumed by grudge.

Jensen Wayter had refused to hire a lawyer. Ben appointed a young fellow whom he knew and wanted to help in getting a start. Before the trial the case looked good for a tyro's success, because a flock of witnesses from the mountain settlement had volunteered to establish a perfect alibi. And they did so in testimony under oath.

The young lawyer did not put Jensen Wayter on the stand. The sullen accused indicated no desire to take the stand, either. He indicated not much of anything else except black, bitter grouch all through the trial.

And so we come to the moment when the presiding justice, absorbed by a peculiar situation, stood with a chair sticking to his haunches, and an acquitted man was threatening joyous friends. In his soul, Ben Chadwick, who thought he understood man and the workings of human nature, was wordlessly billy-bedamning the puzzle while he plucked the chair off his person.

The clerk of the court stood on tiptoe beside the bench and muttered, getting the judicial ear: "Your honor, I'm afraid Wayter is about ready to blow up."

Murmured the judge in reply: " 'Twould be too bad to have a bomb like him wreck the only building where the parsons and the Sunday-school teachers can hold forth." Then he bellowed: "Sheriff, take your bailiffs and clear this room!"

The crowd obediently flowed from the open doorway.

Wayter sat back on his chair in the dock.

Noting that his aids were having no trouble with the throng, the sheriff strode and clapped the acquitted man on the shoulder.

"Hyper out of here, friend! What are you waiting for— a thirty-day notice on a post card of how you've been let to go free?"

"I don't want to go out o' here just yit awhile," the man grumbled.

"Court has ordered—"

But the judge broke in on the sheriff's loud tones.

"Court orders a recess. Court orders Wayter to be escorted to my chambers."

The twist of a smile worked on the broad face when Big Ben mentioned "chambers." His retiring room was the cubby-hole where the books of the Sunday-school library were kept.

"Better come along, Mr. County Attorney," the judge suggested. "Something queer here. The verdict usually is the last page. But there seems to be a 'continued in our next' in this case."

"Yes, your honor." Walking behind the bulk of the judge the attorney glanced over his shoulder at the visage of Wayter. The man was coming willingly enough with the sheriff. But the visage was still an arabesque of ugly resentment.

The expression was not mellowed one whit when Wayter stood in front of the judge. The latter pulled his corncob pipe from a pocket, a little canister of tobacco from his hip, grunting with effort of reaching, and stuffed the blackened bowl.

"Well, brother," he said, "pretty nice crowd of neighbors you've got."

The mountaineer scowled more deeply. He muttered.

From the window, while Wayter remained silent, the sheriff reported: "I'll say you must be popular up where you live, my man! The whole crowd of witnesses is still standing by out there in the street. Guess they're going to give you three cheers and a ride on their shoulders."

Wayter cursed in growls.

The judge tamped down his pipeload and lighted it, after dragging a match across a wide expanse of trousers leg. When he had spouted a soulful puff or two he fanned away the smoke with a hand that would match measurably a small ham. His pipe putting him back to normalcy, he suspended his judicial rôle and became plain, blunt Ben Chadwick, curious as a magpie, always solicitous in the troubled affairs of a fellow man.

"Look a here, Wayter, what the hell is the trouble with you, anyway?"

That down-to-earth, matter-of-fact, man-to-man query jumped the other. Surprise wiped off his countenance some of the hostility.

"I'm not on the bench right now, brother. I'm loafing and smoking and I'm Ben Chadwick. And it's my nature to h'ist the cover and see what's bubbling over a hot fire. Now what's it all about, your imitating a fussed-up bobcat when I mentioned how nice your neighbors are?"

"If there's anything up in my place hated more than they hate me, it's a skunk stealing chickens," said Wayter.

"So— so!" purred Ben. "For a special reason or on general principles?"

"I ve sassed most all of them in times back, and have licked a plenty. I've got a tantrum temper."

"Usually doesn't get a man a thing. However, in that case just ended, they fixed you out with a perfect alibi, brother."

But the gimlet did not penetrate as a borer had hoped.

Wayter cursed again.

"Trig that stuff!" commanded the sheriff. "Don't forget this is Judge Chadwick."

The justice flapped his hand tolerantly. "Oh, go ahead and ease off high pressure, brother. I do a little cussing, myself, on occasions." He pushed shut the glass door of one of the book cases. ''Sunday-school books!" he commented significantly. "Brother, didn't I hear you slip the word 'liar' into that string of cuss words?"

"That's what they done on the witness stand— they lied."

"Huh! Thought that alibi was a speck too perfect for an honest one," stated the judge, after he had swapped looks with the county attorney.

"I'll take the gaff on the thing! I never asked 'em to lie," declared Wayter. "Gimme the noose— I don't care."

Ben, puffing smoke, signaled to the prosecutor.

"Wayter, you have been acquitted of the charge of killing Ansy Ward," stated the attorney. "We can't hang you after that verdict. We can't try you again on the same charge. That's the law."

"If that's law then law better be tinkered up to make it sensible— make it fit what a man is asking for," growled Wayter.

"Are you aiming to confess you killed Ward?" drilled the attorney.

"T didn't kill him, but I want to save the bother of another trial. I never killed nobody. But they're expecting me to go ahead now and kill a man. They all want him killed. That's why they swore me off to make me the goat. They think I'm bound to do the killing. I'll prob'ly do it. I'll be put through hell till I do. So go ahead and arrest me."

The sheriff shook his head when Wayter walked toward him.

"You can't be arrested for mere tongue wagging," protested the attorney. "It wouldn't be the law."

"What the blue blazes is the law good for, then?" It was shouted savagely.

The judge chuckled. "I've asked myself the same question about some of the law— as the law is administered," he confessed, smoothing his statement with a smile. "But I warn you not to do that killing, brother."

"But you don't know what kind of hell I'll be put through when I get back to the mountains."

"Suppose you give us a peek by lifting the lid of that hell?"

Wayter slashed his flattened hand through the air, refusing. "I've been told right now and here as how telling ahead ain't took no account of by the law. What's the use? It's mountain stuff. I couldn't make you understand. You'd have to see it." He was again in a state of high excitement. "The law can't do nothing, hey? It can only stand back and let things happen, hey? Well, take your cussed old law and rub it with arnicky and sing it to sleep." He went to the window and shook his fist at the men massed before the building. He swore ferociously at them.

"Look here, brother," Ben protested; "that's hardly the kind of stuff to be coming from the window of a judge's chamber, and in the presence of Sunday-school books. You'd better go to some spot where there's a good breeze— and cool off."

Wayter glared at the sheriff. "I'd like to go back to that cell to wait for that gang to get tired, if I can't sit in the courtroom or stay here."

"The judge says for you to get out. If you don't go sudden, I'll be heaving you out."

Big Ben beamed complacently on the noisy departure.

"But, your honor," pleaded the prosecutor, urged by the nature of his office, "seems as if we ought to put that man under bonds."

"I'm afraid bonds won't handle this matter, Mr. County Attorney. I'm letting him go because I want him to go. To be sure, we have had a trial and an acquittal. That's as far as the court can go. But it looks to me as if the main trouble must be attended to after the verdict."

Ben arose ponderously and walked to the window.

Wayter came in sight, leaping from the main door. He stopped on the top step. The crowd gave him three cheers while he shook his fists over his head and clamored threats.

A spokesman stepped forward. "Jense, hain't ye got no more gratefulness for friendly doings than what you're showing? We're lotting on making a perade of it back home."

"You damnation old bumblebees, do you think you're fooling me for a second? You're torching the fire and blowing the bellers and gitting ready to make me white-hot and use me. Gimme free passage and stay away from me."

The throng did not disintegrate.

Announced the spokesman: "We have stood behind you, Jense. We didn't let grudge git ye! Not our grudge nor anybody else's spite. And that's being blasted high-minded on our part. If you ain't got no gratefulness nor sense of duty left in you, it'll be put in— proper. And you know why it ought to be done. Enough has been said."

"On the saying part, I agree with you,' acknowledged Wayter with venom. He proceeded instantly to action.

Iron rails guarded the sides of the building's stone steps.

Revealing his brute strength, Wayter wrenched free one of the rails; the cement holding the standards had crumbled in weather stress.

Whirling above his head the formidable weapon, he drove at the throng of witnesses whose words on the stand had brought him free of the hangman's rope.

Panic seized upon them; they ran in all directions.

Shaking his head and flopping his shaggy mane, Wayter strode off along the street leading out of Frayne Center. Before he turned a corner and disappeared he seemed to remember that he was carrying property which was not his own. With the motions of a hammer thrower, he whirled the heavy rail and heaved it toward the building from which he had taken it.

"Indicating a certain amount of inherent honesty!" the judge remarked.

"I'm afraid something mighty bad is in a way to happen up in the hills," mourned the apprehensive county attorney.

The judge looked in turn at sheriff and prosecutor. "I'm sure I can trust your discretion as county officers, men. If you let your hold slip on that discretion, I'll raise the devil with you. You understand, eh?"

"Yes, your honor,' was the earnest pledge in duet.

"As I have said, and as I believe, the big thing too often happens after the verdict; when that verdict is acquittal and the grudge is left sharp and is even rewhetted. I understand perfectly well a judge is not expected to meddle after the verdict. But I warned Governor Chase that I am not good judicial timber. I have no business being on the bench. I'm afraid I'm too cussed human. Too much curiosity in me! starting in to make a regular plumb fool of myself. Because I'm going to suspend court right now and go up in the mountains. I'm aiming to find out what the blue blazes is the matter with Jense Wayter and the rest of 'em."

"It's what I call good sense, even if it isn't regular judicial procedure, your honor," indorsed the county attorney.

"You bet it's a good plan," the sheriff agreed. "I'm knowing to it there's been a lot of trouble up there, though it isn't clear what it's all about. I haven't been called on to make arrests and so I don't know the inside."

"Let's hope I'll get on the inside," prayed Big Ben.

"I'll go along and see that nothing happens to you, your honor," pledged the sheriff pompously.

"Same here— and in the interests of the prosecutor's office," said the attorney.

The judge straightened, threw back his shoulders. Never had Ben Chadwick loomed more hugely within four walls. Supremely efficient, for himself and by himself, looked he!

"Gentlemen, wherever did you get the notion that I need nurses or guards, no matter where I go?"

Both stammered disclaimers, surveying his bulk with respect.

"Mr. Sheriff, court will convene."

While his honor stood behind the desk on the platform of the assembly room, allowing the sheriff to go through with the proclamation: "All persons who have anything to do before the honorable justice—" the judge reflected that few persons that afternoon were displaying any more interest in the aforesaid court, following the verdict in the Wayter trial.

All mere spectators had departed. Inside the bar railing a dozen lawyers were thumbing their dockets in the civil suits which were to be tried. A dozy and drab atmosphere had succeeded the excitement of the murder case.

"Proceed, gentlemen!" requested the judge, after he had wedged himself between the arms of his chair.

An elderly lawyer rose. "May it please your honor, the case of Bangs versus Simpson, in which cause I appear for the plaintiff, is marked for trial succeeding the criminal case. But I was wholly unprepared for such celerity in the Wayter

trial. I believed it would continue for at least two more days. Therefore, my witnesses and—"

"I see, I see, Brother Doane," snapped the judge crisply. "And I take it you other gentlemen are in the class of Brother Doane— not ready for the word 'go,' eh?"

They arose in a body and regretfully confessed.

"No blame is attached," said his honor. He beamed. He was relieved. As a lawyer he had guessed at their unreadiness when he was talking to the county attorney. "I will give you all day to-morrow to make your preparations. In the meantime"— he drawled and smiled and made the situation insignificant by what seemed to be jest— "in the meantime, I say, maybe the court will go fishing."

He walked back to the cubby-hole "chambers," escorted in due form by the sheriff.

Again he filled his pipe, meditating, his eyes on vacancy. When he had lighted up and was haloed with smoke wreaths, he pulled close to the table, secured a pen and a sheet of paper, and prepared to write.

Over his shoulder, after penning date and place, he said, "Mr. Sheriff, go get a hitch. for me, with driver, and have it ready in front of the tavern. Two horses and " He hesitated a moment in order to chuckle. "Better make it a jigger wagon, if you can't find a double-stout buckboard."

The sheriff repressed his hilarity till he was outside on his way to the livery stable. All this was new stuff from a judge, he reflected, but it showed more promise of getting results in that peculiar region than the usual methods of cut-and-dried law.

And Ben wrote this:

To His EXCELLENCY, GOVERNOR CHASE: State House.

See here, Sam, I value the honor and so forth and so on, but I haven't the time right now to express my full appreciation. But you know how my heart stands in your case. You slipped the banana peel of friendship under me and I fell. I'm slow and heavy, but I'm on my feet again. Once more I tell you I'm not judicial timber. I'm hanging up court to go chasing after something which hasn't been settled by a verdict, so I feel. If the chief justice ever hears of such a play by a judge— meaning me, because no other judge in the State would be such a damphool— aforesaid C. J. will throw a fit. So I'm resigning. This doesn't sound formal, but it is. It's the way you and I have to talk to each other, you old hardshell turtle. Get me? I'm off on a job. Maybe killing somebody, for all I know. So you'd better announce the resignation p.d.q. to save scandal for your judgment and the administration.

Hastily, but meaning it whole hog,
BENJAMIN FRANKLIN CHADWICK
(Official when thus signed in full).

He rammed the folded sheet into an envelope, licked the flap, pounded his fist to seal it.

"That's ethical, at any rate!" he declared, using the fist for emphasis.

Likewise he enunciated, when he again pounded his fist to secure the postage stamp: "And it saves my hide as judge!"

On the way to the tavern he dropped the letter in at the post office and grunted relief.

He used the same kind of a grunt to express satisfaction when he tested the strength of the buckboard, sitting in and. filling the middle seat. His baggage was a saggy little valise.

"Looks like I'm intending to make quite a stop of it, Mister Sheriff," he remarked, when the officer handed over the satchel, holding it out on a forefinger. "But court will be in session day after to-morrow."

This promise was based on Ben's resolve to turn the civil cases over to the Frayne Center trial justice. They were minor affairs and could come within that limited scope of jurisdiction.

At the foot of the mountain Chadwick ordered his driver to hang up at a wayside inn till the next day.

"But I can git ye up that ro'd all right, judge. It's steep and crooked, but my critters can make a haul of it, though."

"I can't afford to have the prevention- of-cruelty folks after me, Dick. I'm an honorary president of the county society. And the doc tells me I can stay down around three hundred, if I walk enough."

So Big Ben, chuckling, tackled the mountain road.

He went slowly for two reasons: the climb was tough, and he wanted to enter the settlement after dark.

Nightfall did not bother him. He was in familiar territory. Beyond the settlement toward which he was bound there was a trout pond where he had spent many a successful day in times past, paddled by old Ike Trufant in a flat-bottomed boat.

It was comforting to Ben when he reflected that now "Angleworm Ike" might serve as a helpful guide in matters apart from fishing.

So, plowing ponderously through the darkness, unobserved, meeting nobody, because Ike's cabin was on the outskirts of the little village, the judge came at last to his destination. No other habitation was in sight. Ike was within, alone. The judge peered through an uncurtained window and made sure. Then he walked in without knocking.

"H'lo!" said Ike casually.

Just as casually Ben replied with a, "Hello!"

The old chap was rewinding the joints of a rod. He kept on with the task after the caller had dropped himself between the arms of a chair, the sturdiness of which had been tested by him in the past, pulled out his pipe and stoked plentifully.

"How many hosses did it take to haul you up the hill?" queried the host with caustic humor. "You must weigh down a lot heavier now, being as how ye're a jedge."

"Eight! And hard pulling!"

"Yas? No doubt they skinched the team, considering what the lo'd was. Come fishing ?"

"Maybe! Are they biting?"

Ike shifted his quid from one jaw to the other.

"You're going to lie. I know the symptoms. How good the fishing was last week— how good it'll be next week, if I'll stop over," snapped Ben. "You can't tell the truth about fish. But I want the truth from you about another matter. What the blue lick is all the trouble up here— Wayter and the rest?"

"I'm keeping out of it— toes, tongue, and tripe. You know my style, 'Hippo.' Goshamitey, excuse me! A jedge don't relish nicknames no more."

"You stick to 'Hippo,' as you've always done, Angleworm. If you try to call me 'Judge' while you're talking to me you'll be climbing a five-barred gate all the time. Now out with your yap on what I asked of you."

"Shan't talk."

Ben hoisted himself out of the chair's depths, shook the cabin with pterodactyl tread and stood over the scrawny old man.

"I ain't on no witness stand," Ike quavered. "You can't put me there. They tried to yank me down to court and I wouldn't go."

"Along with the rest of those liars? Of course not. It was good sense You're ace-high in my estimation, and always have been, Angleworm. I have come to you for some truths. It's only between us two, like we have passed the bait can and the bottle, times past. Nobody is going to know what you tell me."

"You wont be yanking me into court?"

"Angleworm, I have resigned as judge. The job doesn't suit me. I'm merely up here as an everyday man to straighten things out."

"There's nobody who can do it better, Hippo," declared the old fellow with unction. "And that being the case, I ain't going to be backward with help."

Ben went back to his chair and puffed complacently, clouding the air.

"To save time, what don't I have to tell you?" asked Ike. "You heard a lot in court, of course."

"I heard enough, even from those liars, to settle this much in my mind: Jense didn't shoot Ansy. Somebody else took advantage of the gab threats and the general situation, and did the shooting. Who?"

"I'm only guessing, Hippo. But you're shrewder and can guess better. What do you say?"

"Calling no names, understand, and putting a lot of smoke around it"— Ben blew a big ring in front of his face— "Jode Krause."

"I'll step up and stand even-steven with you on li'bility— perviding walls have ears. Jode Krause has been my own guess." Angleworm was emphatic.

"Why did he do it?"

"First and foremost, out o' general cussedness of his nature, which is all grudge b'iled over hell-fire. Ansy and Jense, both of 'em, had whaled him for using his old stinger of a tongue on Julia. Standing on the side lines and watching sharp like I always do, I caught on as how Jode, the blasted old widderer fool, was trying to shine up to the girl. He knowed well enough that Jense would never let him marry her, even if she lost her mind complete and would take on the old whoopus. 'Sides, she was in love with Ansy and everybody was knowing to it. So, Jode's fool notion went to working and he saw a chance, as he looked at it, for more or less of a clean sweep. Hippo, Jode Krause has sure got- hellishness down fine. He has made a study of it. Gits his spice o' life that way. If I was wanting to keep you up all night I could tell you about the scandals, fambly bust-ups, and even killings, he has been back of."

"And getting away with no nicks in his skin?"

"He has been a fox monkeying with geese, Hippo. It's all well enough knowed but nothin' has been proved. Gawdamitey! With him a-hovering, we ain't really living up here. Were only standing 'round with both arms hooked over our heads but not expecting the arms will save us from being cracked a golsocker most any minute!"

"Anybody ever thought of shooting him?" queried Ben mildly.

"Plenty o' talk along that line, but never no doing. But when he went onto the stand to swear Jense into the noose, the thing seemed to be shaping up about to the queen's taste. So the boys made a bee of it, and swore Jerse off. Looked like Jense was the right and proper chap to do the job!"

"And would be fixed out with another perfect alibi, hey?"

"Waal, the boys have now had some practice and could do even a slicker job next time," averred Ike, grinning. "Here's Jense with every namable and square man's reason to do it, after the plaster laid on by Krause. But Jense went to work and turned himself into a dod-gummed fool after the' verdict. Didn't show a mite o' public sperit!"

"He showed sperit; but I wouldn't call it civic pride, from what I observed," drawled Ben.

"Waal, the boys are now putting it into him, whatever is the best name to call it. They're going at it tough and rough, but I guess it's all called for in his case."

"Why did the blame fool come back here? He knew what would happen. He said as much in my hearing."

"Once o' the mountains, allus o' the mountains! And his home is here, his work is here. He ain't the rover style. He may go crazy, but he won't go anywhere else."

"What are they doing to him?"

"Guess you'll have to do a little peeking and see for yourself. It wouldn't seem hardly sense and reason if I only set here and told it to you. It ain't what level-headed men of your kind would do. But it's the best the boys have been able to think up on short notice."

The old guide plucked his cap from the prong of a deer's head on the wall. He blew out the lamp and the two went forth into the night.

IKE LED THE WAY along bypaths until they were close to a well-lighted cottage. The windows of the front room were opened wide; the room was crowded with men, and plenty of air was needed. No curtains were drawn; the men of the settlement felt no call to hide their activities; espionage by outsiders was not apprehended.

Therefore, lurking in the darkness, away from the fan of light, the interloper was able to see and hear.

Jense Wayter was swathed with knotted ropes and was secured in a big chair.

Whispered Ike in his companion's ear: "They had a turrible tussle, ketching him foul and gitting the ropes on him. And he has been hollering something awful. But I guess they're gitting him consid'able soopled. Seems as if, anyway."

Wayter was rolling his head to and fro against the back of the chair, his purpled visage suggesting an apoplectic head of steam.

Men surrounded him, sitting on chairs or squatting cross-legged on the floor. They were all busy with the frippery tasks with which housewives occupy the time between the sterner duties of the home. Some were fussing at bungling work of knitting. Others were making a more horrible mess of fancy work which had been grabbed away from resentful wives whose civic pride was not up to having pretty things ruined for the sake of making a citizen realize his duty to the community.

All the unwelcome guests, speaking to the pinioned man, called him "Mis' Wayter," with emphasis of offensive politeness. They held in front of his face pieces of work and purred queries about purling or drop-stitching and divers other matters of purely feminine concern.

After a time a spokesman served the cause. "Jense, I'm asking you again! Are you ready to show you're a man and ready to do a man's honest work after a skunk has done his best to put your neck into the noose?"

" 'Honest work,' " quoted the prisoner, hoarse and savage. "A damn fine name you're plastering onto murder."

"Well, we've already argued it all out as how it ain't murder. It's saving this place from more damnation. A man here ought to be hung; but he never will be, because law ain't wuth a cuss in gitting at a slippery devil like he is. Hung he ought to be, I say again! Shooting him for what he tried to do is letting him off mighty easy. We ain't saying a thing about a killing we know he's guilty of; that killing done you a good turn, in a way, because cheap Ansy Ward would have been a husband to put a woman in hell."

"I swear to the Lord I won't bring blood on me!"

"In this case you wouldn't have a thing on your conscience," protested the spokesman. "The rest of us ain't got the same excuse as you have."

"No! I won't do it!" yelled Wayter.

"So you may be thinking to-night, Mis' Wayter, madam," said the provoker, returning to his sarcasm. "But when you've had a good sleep and pleasant dreams, and after another session with us over fancy work, I reckon you'll be seeing new light. Youre going to sleep in that chair, damn ye, Mis' Wayter, madam! Being such a feeble old lady, you're going to have your victuals brought and fed to you from a spoon. We ain't going to take the resks of another tussle, Mis' Wayter. So we'll be saying a fond good night and thanking the lady o' the house for a sociable evening. Much obleeged, too, for your idees on tatting and so forth."

Dreadful profanity constituted the sum of Wayter's speeding of his guests.

They left one man to guard and attend on the captive, promising to send a relief at midnight. "Swap receipts for pie and cake and keep Mis' Wayter interested," suggested the leader.

Following behind the guide, Ben made a quick get-away when he saw the meeting in process of breaking up.

"Ike," said the judge, "I didn't understand what Wayter meant when he told me he'd be put through hell to make him do a thing. But he didn't put it any too strong. They'll make a lunatic out of him, and then he'll break loose and do almost anything."

"Yeah! They're lotting on the sort o' temper Jense packs," admitted the old fellow placidly.

"Do you know of any way to stop this persecution?"

"I can't think of northin' sensible at present writing."

Ben smoked one more pipeful before turning in, Ike resumed work on the rod, winding the silk thread. There was no more talk between the two men.

Then Ben knocked the dottle out of his pipe, yawned vociferously, pulled off his collar and necktie and threw them on the floor, heaved coat and vest in another direction, and rolled into a bunk, with undérwear for night apparel. He did not open his valise.

Ike, warned by past association, pulled bits of cotton batting from a ragged quilt and stuffed his ears. This precaution dulled measurably the racket of Ben's snoring.

"He ain't been doing all that thinking without something sure to come from it," muttered Angleworm. "Well, we'll see what the morrer brings forth, as the pote says."

THE "MORRER" brought forth Big Ben out of his bunk before Ike had opened his eyes.

A tremendous clatter at the stove was the alarm.

Ike offered no comment or criticism on this activity of the guest; from past experience he knew how dead-set was Bachelor Ben Chadwick on doing for himself in getting up a meal.

The guide went out and chopped more wood, set the table, and stood around until breakfast was served.

There was no conversation. When Big Ben was busy over a stove he was always wholly absorbed. When he sat to eat he attended strictly to the business in hand and mouth.

Then, while Ike did the dishes, the guest idled and smoked with the air of one who had not a feather's weight of care or concern on his mind.

Angleworm recognized the symptoms in Ben Chadwick. "It means as how lightning is going to strike somewhere— somehow,"' mumbled Ike, cascading hot water from the teakettle on the heaped dishes.

However, as hour after hour passed, Ike became impatient. The anticipated storm seemed a long time a-gathering, For Ike it was not completely a consolation to reflect that the delayed lightning might be all the more effective because the charge was given plenty of time to accumulate.

Ben loafed and smoked. He did not talk.

Along toward noon he asked casually, "Are the menfolks drifting back from the choppings, Angleworm?"

Ike took a glance from the window. "Yep! Quite a bunch is gabbing in front o' the store, waiting for the dinner horns."

Ben put away his pipe and lifted himself out of the chair. He plodded to the wall and took down Ike's rifle.

"Magazine full?"

"Better come along. Not to help. Not to get mixed in. But something may happen and you don't want to miss it."

The two went out and walked slowly along the road toward the general store.

When they passed Jode Krause's house they saw him in the yard, chopping kindlings for his noontime cook fire.

He straightened and gaped at Judge Chadwick, finding no ready explanation of that gentleman's presence in the settlement.

"Howdy, Krause," called Ben cheerfully.

Jode "plocked" his ax into the chopping block and growled unamiable reply.

Pursued the judge: "Hope you are not laying it against me because Wayter went free after your testimony against him. But when a man is on the bench there's only about so much a presiding justice can do, holding strictly to the letter of the law."

"Law ain't much good in handling things, near's I can find out," snarled Krause.

"You and Jense Wayter seem to be agreed on that, no matter how far apart you are on other questions." The judge beamed amiably while he shifted the rifle to the other arm. It was as if he were putting emphasis on the weapon.

Jode goggled in puzzlement. "What's the idee, jedge? Ain't court still on?"

"Yes, but I'm taking a day off."

"Going hunting, hey?"

"That's it— I'm hunting." He walked on. Then he called over his shoulder, "By the way, Krause, I'm intending to say something about you down in front of the store. You may not want to miss it." It was deliberate and calculated challenge.

"I don't stand for no slurring from nobody," the other bawled.

"Ah-hah!" called the judge. "Slipping on all too sudden a coat that fits, aren't you? Isn't there anything good that can be said about you, Krause?"

He walked on.

"You're poking him with a pretty sharp stick, Hippo," observed Angleworm.

"With full intent and malice prepense," admitted the judge, grinning. "T suppose the law would call it that. But I want Jode Krause on hand and hot!"

As soon as Ben and Ike were well on their way, Krause trotted into his house. When he came out he was settling something on his hip, under the flap of his coat.

The men in front of the store surveyed the judge with apprehensiveness— revealed a sense of guilt; they were wondering how much he had learned about their perjury, how much he knew concerning their methods of "making a man" of Jense Wayter. A jurist descending on them with a rifle in the hook of his arm was, at any rate, a figure suggesting strange menace.

On his own part, Ben ran his eyes over them with the utmost benignancy.

"Howdy, folks! We can be more sociable to-day than we could be in the courtroom yesterday." Then he jumped them, with full enjoyment of the situation. "By the way, somebody run and cut Jense Wayter loose. This being a reunion, as you might say, we mustn't be stingy about letting everybody in. Oh, I know all about your handling of Jense!"

The individual who had been spokesman at Wayter's the previous evening now moved away from the group, going on the errand.

"Guess you've caught us foul, jedge," he confessed, abashed.

Ben shook his head, his broad face crinkly with smiles. He went to the store platform and paced to and fro, waiting for the arrival of Wayter, knowing well enough that the infuriated man would come rushing to headquarters.

Jode Krause merely slinked along the road, however, and took his stand apart from the others.

With ropes hanging to him in knots after he had been cut free, Jense came staggering to the scene on stiffened legs. He was working his arms to rid himself of the numbness. But his temper was full of vigor.

"Jedge Chadwick, jest as soon as I git some of my strength back I'm going to begin killing off this pack o'—"

Ben flung up his hand, then he patted the rifle, breaking in on the hoarse raving. "Jense, the instant you lay hand on any of these men, I'll bore one of your legs. I'm an awful good shot, as Ike, here, will testify— and it won't be the kind of alibi testimony that was given yesterday in court. A word to the wise! You get me, the whole of you, I reckon! I'm hoping and expecting you're all going to be nice boys here to-day. But if not " Slowly he raised his mammoth hand over his head and as slowly brought into a clinch the sturdy fingers. "You get me, don't you?"

All were silent except Jode Krause. He had brought a gun on his hip and in his heart his everlasting, acrid- grudge against all men— and at the moment the grudge was centered on this man who threatened to make talk.

He took a few steps forward and sneered, "I've seen some pernickety sights in my life, but the limit of all I've ever seen is a jedge a-swaggering around with a rifle, telling folks where they git off!"

"I agree with you, Krause. It would be queer if it were so. But I'm not a judge any longer. I've jacked the job. One reason for doing it is so I can stand here in this town of yours on my two feet as only a man with men. Hell is to pay here, and I'm going to uncover what it's all about."

He was silent for a moment, letting the statement soak in. He swung the rifle out of the hook of his arm and held it at his side in both hands, ready for instant use.

"On the way here, I called to Jode Krause in his yard and advised him to follow along. I told him I intended to say something about him: He is here and I'm going to say it to him!"

Krause set a hand on his hip and started to back away. "I ain't going to stay here and be houted!" he proclaimed fiercely.

"Take your hand away from your hip!" roared Big Ben. "Quick! Else I'll nail you in the leg."

The threatened man obeyed, cowed, dominated by that looming bulk on the platform, by that ready rifle, by the steel of eyes which matched the steel of the weapon.

"Now, Jode Krause, I'm telling you face to face, and before these men who know you, that you are and have been in this community a worse pest and plague than the smallpox crossed with the black death and the seven years' itch. You're a misbegotten hybrid, damned by the devil's mother and sired by an imp of hell. And I beg for the forgiveness of your real folks when I say it; but they wouldn't own you, if they were back on earth to know what you have been doing. You have lied to swear a man into the noose. I have got the goods on you, Krause. No matter how. I'm making it my own business and keeping my own secret. You'll now stand by to get yours— and get it plenty. Go home and wait. If you run away into the hills I'll call on these men and we'll comb the woods like combing a dog for fleas."

Krause went slowly away.

Shouted the god of the machine, making sure that the accused heard: "Go to your dinners, men. I'm not leaving town for a while. I'll be in Ike's cabin for the afternoon, writing out the facts about Jode Krause. They'll be handy in case anything happens to me."

The plotter came down from the platform, exhibiting complacency. According to his belief, he had compounded a compelling batch of bluff and provocation.

Ike, walking beside Ben, twisted queer, uncomprehending glances at his companion.

"Angleworm, you're wanting to tell me I'm playing a mighty queer game with Krause," the judge suggested. "But you needn't say so. I know it myself."

"You've scared him so blue he'll run away surer'n blazes."

"Oh, no! He won't run, Ike. Didn't you hear me announce I'd be writing out facts?"

"Of course I heerd you."

"Well, Jode Krause is of fool's caliber, that's all! He'll be figuring on a way to suppress both me and the facts. He can't see beyond that! Now, Angleworm, you get busy; but don't act as if you are busy. You simply loaf around from house to house and drop word to the men of this place, saying it's from me, that they're to walk away into the woods, all natural-like, after they eat dinner. Not in a bunch, but going as they usually do. Then they're to swing around under cover of the trees and post themselves out of sight but where they can keep sharp eyes on the back of your camp."

"My good, gracious gosh! You ain't aiming to let that hellion shoot at you, be ye!"

"Maybe!" admitted the judge placidly. "But you needn't make that any business of yours. Your business is to tell those men what I've said. Then you come to the camp, get your fishing rod, and go off toward the pond, making sure you pass Krause's house and let him see you."

"Hippo, you're too big a target!" mourned Ike.

"Target, eh? By thunder, Angleworm, you've given me a new and a clinching idea. I hadn't thought of something rather special."

Ben marched on, after admonishing his aid to attend to the job assigned.

When Ike returned to the camp to get his rod, Big Ben was out behind the cabin setting up a makeshift target.

"By the way, Angleworm," he called, "holler out good and loud in the village, making sure Krause hears you, telling one and all that none of the women and children are to be frightened if they hear shooting. But advise them to keep away from this camp. Tell 'em I'll be out having a little practice with your rifle."

"And all this ain't fooling, even if it looks like it, hey?" demanded the guide.

"No, it isn't fooling, no matter how it looks," returned Ben. "Now hustle your boots and leave me alone."

Ike moved leisurely enough when he left the settlement, after he had duly attracted the attention of Krause, who was glaring through the dingy pane of a window, and when he had delivered in Krause's hearing the admonition for the women and the children.

However, when the old chap had gained the covert of the woods, he legged it in good earnest, circling to post himself within sight of the rear of his camp.

He came upon others who were lurking according to orders. But he was not contented to remain on the ground. He climbed a spruce tree and peered from concealment, crouching behind the boughs,

At last he saw Jode Krause make a sortie, sneaking from the rear door of his cottage. He was carrying a rifle.

At about that time Big Ben came out of the camp and popped away at a target, emptying the magazine.

Then he trudged back into the cabin.

Krause hid himself and waited, as if to make sure that Chadwick had not gone in after more ammunition. But prolonged delay apparently satisfied Jode. He began his cautious stalking of the camp, using for covert the hollows of the rough ground, stealing from one clump of bushes to the other, as he advanced.

With coat and vest off, Ben appeared at an open window, holding a sheet of paper to the better light. Then he moved away with the air of one purposing to keep on with his writing job.

Stooping, Krause made a run of it to the corner of the camp. After a pause, holding close to the side of the building, he moved slowly toward the open window, doubling forward. Cautiously he raised himself on the sloping, double doors which covered the cellar rollway. From that vantage point he quickly swung up his rifle and cracked several shots into the camp.

And then something else happened.

The double doors were flung up and flapped open as if a dynamite blast had operated them. It was the eruption of the bulk of Benjamin Franklin Chadwick! That bulk filled the open space of the rollway.

The prodigious upheaval tossed Krause in air. He came floundering down on his back and then three hundred pounds lighted on him, squatting on him, rendering him as helpless as if he were pinned down by a steam roller.

And that was about all there was to it, except for tying him up securely after the men had come scampering from the woods.

"Angleworm, I used all the bedding you own, stuffing that up to proper size," stated Ben, directing their gaze by a flap of his big hand.

They massed at the window, looking in.

With broad back toward the window was a fairly good simulacrum of Ben Chadwick, sitting in a chair, elbows on the table, bent over in a posture of a man engaged in writing.

"Go in, boys, and make note of how many bullet holes are in the back of my coat," directed Big Ben. "And you saw the man who did the shooting. All

you've got to do is keep him as he is till I send up the sheriff. I'm starting for Frayne Center right now."

"Will there be enough ag'inst him to hang him?" inquired a citizen, while Ben was pulling on his coat after the inspection.

"All I can promise right now is that his address will be the State prison for some little time, boys. And after that, we'll see— we'll see!"

Then, with his familiar chuckle, he turned to Ike. "You'll find some holes in your bedding, Angleworm; but it needed ventilation, anyway. You don't air your place out enough." He straddled across the prostrate prisoner, whom they had laid in the yard. "So long, Krause! I'll see you in court."

Big Ben trudged away down the mountain swinging his little valise.

LESS THAN A WEEK later, Governor Chase came again to Ben's office building. The door was open. There was a new box in front of the threshold— a box labeled: "Clean-wash Soap."

To the caller, Ben was revealed through the doorway.

"H'lo, Ben!"

"H'lo, Sam! Step in!"

"Take notice, old spider: I'm straddling, this time. Short cut!"

"Yeah! A lot of fuss, fobbing, and foolishness can be saved by a short cut, Sam. Glad to see you taking up the idea."

The governor straddled, grunting with the effort, and entered. "It was considerable of a short cut you made upcountry in that Wayter case."

"Pretty short. You're right, Sam. Heard about it, eh?"

"I've made it my way to hear all the facts before coming into this office."

"I thought I might as well prove to you that I'm not good judicial timber. Hope the resignation has been acted on."

"It has been. Don't worry."

Big Ben's visage became a scroll which could be labeled: "Map of Supreme Content."

"However, I'm a little previous in saying it has been acted on," corrected his excellency. 'I'm really acting on it now."

From his pocket he pulled Ben's letter of resignation. He tore the sheet into bits and snowed the flakes over Ben's head and shoulders. "You blasted old hippopotamus, you know what that means, don't you?"

Ben pitched high his voice in protest. "But looka here, Sam, it isn't in me to be a proper kind of judge!"

"Confound you, you're the best pick for a judge I've made during my administration."

"It ain't so— by a dam-site. And you know it!"

"Well, Ben, in the interests of peace and perfect understanding, I'll compromise a mite. You're the best judge for"— he stressed the word— "for what you're up against im this neck o' woods. And don't I know the cussed critters exactly as well as you do! Just think of another sort of judge tackling the thing!"

"You're right, Sam!"

"I'll raise particular hell with you if you presume to tell the governor of this State he's wrong," declared his excellency.

———————

3: The Ghost Captain

Fred MacIsaac

1886-1940

The Popular Magazine, 7 Aug 1928

RALPH GORING got off the train from the nitrate fields, at Antofagasta in a state of mind. His clothes were covered with yellow dust, his nose was full of it— and his throat, his soul was. sick of the dreariness and nastiness of the sodium-and-potassium desert, and he was almost frantic with anxiety to. get out of the country to the civilization and luxury of Valparaiso. Although he was dying for a bath and a drink, he told the taximan to drive immediately to a steamship office, where he received the bad news that the next passenger liner south sailed in four days. He looked about. A town of yellow plaster-and-brick houses, of streets deep with yellow, irritating dust— a bustling, commercial, prosperous oven of a town, as dismal and distressing as the fields he had left so joyously. Four days in this hell.

At the hotel, which was a good enough hotel in its way, he succeeded in cleaning himself of the powder of the nitrate fields which was clinging to his body. And he absorbed two highballs in quick succession and got his throat clear; but his nose still itched annoyingly. He went down to lunch and found the place as hot as Hades because all windows were closed to keep out the flying yellow dust— and even that precaution was not entirely successful. It did not seem to him that he could endure this place for four days. The arrival of Peter Larkin, who traveled for a British house in Valparaiso and who was an old acquaintance, cheered him slightly.

"I hate Antofagasta," admitted Larkin. "It's the meanest port on my list, though the best from the standpoint of business. However, if you want to get away you don't have to wait for the mail boat. The *Captain Lynch* is sailing in the morning for Valparaiso via coast ports."

"What kind of a craft is she?" Goring asked eagerly.

"Terrible. A Chilean boat— dirty, bad-smelling, vermin-infested and only two thousand tons. Seven days to Valparaiso. The mail boat will be there as soon as the *Captain Lynch*."

"A funny name for a Chilean steamer," Goring commented.

Larkin laughed, "Lynch was captain of a Chilean warship in the war with Peru. As I remember it, he tackled two Peruvian ironclads with a wooden frigate, and when they had blown the bottom out of her, he boarded them with his crew and captured them. One of their great naval heroes. If it's any inducement, I'm going on her to Caldero. Her captain's an Englishman, so you can depend upon her navigation. Name of Brown."

"Get me aboard," Goring said recklessly. "If you can stand it, I can."

"Right-o."

Ralph Goring was an assignment man for a big American weekly, and his business in Antofagasta and the nitrate country was to supply the million readers of that publication with a vivid pen-picture of one of the world's greatest and least-known industries. At nine in the morning, accompanied by Larkin and followed by a small Indian boy staggering under the weight of his two big suit cases, he climbed the gangplank to the deck of the *Captain Lynch*.

The description of the vessel supplied him in advance by the salesman was utterly inadequate, he decided, as he looked about. The ship's hull was an expanse of rust, with here and there a few flakes of black paint. Her funnel was rusty and looked as though it might momentarily topple. Her deck house had once been white but was now blue with filth. Her deck was cluttered, her crew ragged; and the captain, who stood by the rail, was much the worse for drink.

"Good Lord!" Goring exclaimed. "Do you think she'll reach port?"

"Always has,' grinned Larkin. "Brown is a good seaman. He's drunk now, but he'll sober up at sea."

"You'd think an English skipper would make some effort to tidy his ship."

"Oh, he doesn't give a damn."

A half-naked steward's boy conducted them to their staterooms, two dirty cubby-holes which Goring inspected with disgust. They opened off a small, noisome cabin containing a dining table with six fixed chairs.

"We eat with the skipper," Larkin explained. "He's been on her ten years; and if the food hasn't killed him, it won't kill us."

If he had not been ashamed to let Larkin see his distaste for roughing it in this manner, Goring would have returned to the distasteful city of Antofagasta; but while he hesitated the lines were cast off and he was doomed to make the passage. He walked out on deck and came face to face with the captain, who nodded indifferently and passed. But Goring uttered a gasp of astonishment and dismay. He saw a man who ought to be about forty-five but looked ten years older, a man with silver hair and a fat red face mottled and pimpled and a nose which was as bright as a tomato. He wore a slovenly uniform of whites, open and advertising the fact that there was no shirt covering his paunch. He was at least thirty pounds overweight, and the very evident victim of drink— as different as possible from the man whom Goring recognized by the cold, pale-blue eyes.

The ship was already out in the harbor, a harbor alive with seals of a nonfur-bearing type. They were swimming in shoals away from the sharp bow of the slow-moving freighter. Goring resisted an impulse to jump overboard; but for the first time in an adventurous life he was afraid. He had recognized this man. If Captain Brown recognized him, something would happen to him.

He turned and went abruptly to his cabin. Larkin came out of his den and entered Goring's-cabin with him.

"How long before we get to Caldero?" he demanded.

"Twenty-four hours."

"I'm going ashore with you."

"But there's no decent hotel. It's an awful hole."

"I don't care. Meanwhile I'm seasick. I don't stir out of this cabin."

"Are you crazy? You can't live in this frightful closet. Bad enough to sleep here."

"Listen. I've got to keep out of the captain's way. If he recognises me he might kill me."

"You are crazy!"

"No. I'm responsible for what's happened to him; and he knows it. I'll tell you all about it when we get ashore. But I wouldn't blame him for murdering me; and he could get away with it, on this ship and on this coast. I'm in seclusion until it's time to get ashore."

"But you've paid your passage to Valparaiso."

"I don't care."

GORING spent a dreadful day, though he managed to open the tiny port. He could hear the conversation at meal hours— hear the loud, hearty voice of the skipper, who apparently liked Larkin and insisted upon his sharing a bottle of whisky with him. As the sea was smooth and even this old tub was as steady as a church, the captain joked loudly about the passenger who was seasick; but betrayed no desire to visit him.

Larkin looked in several times during the afternoon and evening to find Goring in his berth with his face turned to the wall.

"Call me when the boat is ready. At the last possible moment; then I'll make a run for it," he instructed.

About ten thirty next day the ship dropped anchor about a mile from Caldero, a cluster of dusty huts on a sandy shore. The Andes rose abruptly behind the village— monstrous piles of sunbaked dirt and rocks. Nowhere within the vision of those on the steamer could be seen a tree or a patch of green grass; yet Goring, looking through his porthole, blessed the sight of it.

"Boat ready," called Larkin.

Goring was also ready. The steward's boy carrying his luggage, he followed his friend out on deck toward the accommodation ladder and saw, to his dismay, the captain standing beside the opening in the rail to bid farewell to his passengers. Goring had to face him.

"Well, Larkin,' boomed the skipper, who seemed to be sober this morning, "see you soon again.

"Sorry, sir, you are ill," he said to Goring. "No doubt our agents will refund your passage money."

"Thanks, it doesn't matter," Goring mumbled.

The skipper regarded him curiously, some twinge of recollection twanging his rum-soaked mind.

"Seems to me Didn't I meet you somewhere?" he asked.

"Most likely: I'm a great traveler. Good-by, captain."

"Good-by," said the captain slowly.

Goring descended into the boat, and the boatman immediately pulled off. They had traveled fifty feet toward the shore when there was a shout from the ship. Captain Brown was leaning over the rail.

"Come back here!" he shouted. "I know you! Come back, you—" He finished with a string of curses in English and Spanish which were hair-raising.

The boatmen hesitated.

"Ten pesos to keep on rowing!" cried Goring. They were poor boatmen, not members of the crew, and this decided them. They bent to their oars.

"He's insane," said Larkin, who was looking back. "Goring, you were right to hide. He would have murdered you. What on earth did you do to him?"

"Wait till we get ashore," replied the correspondent.

In a café, half an hour later, he consented to explain to the curious salesman.

"Do you remember when the *Morovantha* went down?"

"Never forget it," said Larkin. "I had a brother on her."

"At the time, I was a water-front reporter in New York, working for the *Daily Sphere*. I consider that the greatest news story of all time. She was the biggest ship afloat and making her maiden voyage. Her passenger-list contained the cream of English and American society— big-business men, members of the nobility, railroad presidents, authors, musicians. Nearly two thousand passengers, and twelve hundred lost their lives; went down with the ship while the band played 'Nearer My God to Thee.'

"She struck an iceberg. The sea was smooth and the whole outfit could have been saved if there had been boats enough," said Larkin. "The women and children and a few male passengers and members of the crew were all that got off. Brown wasn't the captain; he went down with the ship. Do you mean to say he escaped?"

"No. He lost his life, all right. All the newspapers in America went insane that night, and stayed insane until the steamer with the rescued passengers docked in New York. From a newspaper standpoint the story was the greatest

that ever happened, because the interest was sustained five or six days. The *Montana*, which saved the passengers, sent by wireless the list of those rescued. But the wireless was in its infancy in those days—it was before the war you know— and amateurs kept cutting in so that the lists were all garbled. The steamship owners refused to permit any details of the disaster to go over the wireless. A score of steamers and tugs were sent out by the newspapers to meet the *Montana*; but she sailed right by them, refusing to permit anybody from them to come on board, and the story broke on the dock in New York."

"I remember all that. What has it got to do with this Captain Brown?"

WAIT. FROM STATEMENTS by passengers and members of the crew, it was evident that a big steamer was close to the *Morovantha*. She struck the iceberg at eleven at night, and an hour before they had passed within a few miles of this steamer, which was going the same way, only much more slowly. That meant that she must have been within ten or fifteen miles at the time of the disaster, and within sight of the distress rockets, and, of course, in hearing of the wireless. Had she come to the rescue of the big ship, she could have taken off the entire company; for the *Morovantha* floated three hours after she struck the berg.

My city editor called me in, the day after the survivors landed in New York, and called my attention to those statements.

"There is a big follow-up on this story," he said. "We have got to find the ship that failed to aid the *Morovantha* and show up the dirty coward who commands her. Investigate every vessel in port, and all that come in within a few days. We are wiring all American and British ports to do the same."

Now there was a steamer at Halifax, the *Colchester*, which had come in the day before the passengers of the *Morovantha* were landed, and a boat at Boston which arrived the day after. And two days later the Bullard Liner *Commorforth* arrived at her dock in New York. All these ships cleared themselves perfectly. I saw the captain of the *Commorforth* myself, a very agreeable fellow named Lossington. He was commodore of the fleet, and the Bullard line owned ten six- or seven-thousand-ton Atlantic freighters. They carried out grain and live cattle to England, and brought in manufactured goods. I sat in his cabin, and he gave me a drink.

"Bring in the log," he commanded his steward. And he opened it and showed me his position on the fatal night at eleven o'clock. The *Commorforth* was sixty-five miles from the spot where the *Morovantha* went down.

"About six o'clock that night," he told me, "we entered a field of ice which grew thicker as we proceeded. We had been running through fog for two days, and I had been on the bridge continuously; but this night it was clear. We saw

bergs all around us; and as we are not on any mail-boat schedule, I decided to take no chances. I stopped the ship until daylight. We carry only one wireless man, and he had been on duty for forty-eight hours continuously; so I told him to go to bed. The second officer was on watch from eight to midnight, the first officer from midnight to four a.m. I turned in myself. At six in the morning the wireless man got up and opened his key. He heard the ships talking about the loss of the *Morovantha* and immediately came rushing down and waked me. That's the way we learned what had happened.'

That disposed of the *Commorforth*. Even if she had received the wireless distress signals, she was a fourteen-knot ship and could not have reached the *Morovantha* in the three hours that she floated. Two other ships came in which might have been in the vicinity, but they all had clean bills of health, and reports from other cities and England were as decisive.

I decided that the phantom ship was just a phantom. People who are greatly excited will make things up, and there were survivors of the *Morovantha* who were not above telling sensational stories to get their pictures in the paper. Meanwhile a committee of the Senate in Washington was investigating the disaster, and our columns were full of the proceedings.

Going about my regular business, a couple of evenings later, into a saloon where they sold an unusually big schooner of beer for a nickel, I got talking with the barkeep, a good friend of mine.

"Say," he said, "why don't you show up this ship that saw the *Morovantha*?"

"Why don't I make a trip to the moon? There is no such ship."

"Yeh? There was a donkey engineer in here from the *Commorforth* last night that got full and began to cry in his cups. Next thing I know he was cursing out his skipper as a disgrace to the British merchant marine; and I started kidding him. 'Say,' he said, 'we could have saved everybody on board the *Morovantha* if the skipper wasn't a dirty coward.'

"Know his name?" I demanded eagerly.

"Jones— Peter Jones. Just a drunken dream, I bet."

"Oh, sure," I agreed. Other reporters might come in.

It was about eight o'clock at night, and I hot-footed it down to the dock.Docks at night, when no work is going on, are about the most fearsome places in the world. No lights, just a vast black warehouse and a pier where a false step would toss you overboard. "T was trying to build up a case against the Commorforth. But there was the log and the straightforward statement of the captain, against which a drunken remark of a member of the crew would count for nothing. If Lossington had falsified his log and browbeaten his officers into agreement, they had made themselves criminals by that act, and

their attitude to a newspaper man caught on their ship in an attempt to investigate their actions would be decidedly hostile. Even if they were innocent, they would resent my presence on the steamer at night, uninvited. It would be necessary for me to slip on board unnoticed.

I crept along the lip of the pier hidden by the shadow of the hull until I came to the gangway, and then I saw a seaman on guard leaning against the rail of the ship. This was unusual, for when a steamer is in her dock, her captain is content to depend upon the watchman at the entrance to the pier—whom, as it happened, I had passed with a nod, for I knew him well.

I retired into the shed, moved cautiously along until I had passed the midships section of the *Commorforth*, and then returned to the uncovered edge of the dock. The ship's deck was about ten feet above the pier, and she lay a couple of feet out from it. I looked dubiously at a two-inch hawser which passed from the pier to the deck of the steamer at the stern. It would carry me out over the slip which was choked with ice cakes, and I hadn't done rope climbing since I was a youngster in a gymnasium. Nowadays I would say that no story was big enough to take such a risk; but I was a kid reporter then, and my assignment was the most important: thing in the world. Taking off my gloves, encumbered by a heavy overcoat, I went up that swaying hawser, and overhand, leg over leg, until I crawled out on the deck.

I knew the crew of this steamer were berthed in a stern deck house and not quartered in the forecastle; and I descended from the stern deck to the main deck, pushed open a door marked "Crew," and entered boldly.

"I'm looking for a donkey engineer named Jones," I said to a seaman who blocked my passage through a narrow passageway.

"Jonesey," he yelled, "a gent out here to see ye."

A door opened and I got a glimpse of a cabin in which eight berths were jammed and in which half a dozen men were on the floor shooting dice. One of them scrambled up and came out.

" 'You was wantin' to see me, sir?' he asked doubtfully.

" 'Yes. Something important. Come outside on deck, if you don't mind.'

" 'Wait a minute till I slip me arms into me reefer,' he said. 'It's bitter without.'

In a jiffy he was following me out on the dark, bare deck. We sat ourselves down on a hatchway. Jones was an undersized cockney, ugly as sin, with a big mouth and small, ratlike eyes, unprepossessing and suspicious.

"I'm a reporter," I said bluntly. "You were shooting off your mouth in a saloon that this ship could have saved the people of the *Moravantha*."

He looked frightened. "I don't know nothin'," he said.

"You're a hell of a British seaman," I replied in apparent disgust. "Don't you want to punish the scoundrel that let twelve hundred people, mostly your own countrymen, be drowned?"

He snarled. "It ain't for the likes o' me to punish nobody."

"I don't believe you know anything, anyway," I sneered. "Just a blatherskite."

" 'Is that so? If I was to tell what I know—' He shut up.

" 'Why don't you?'

" 'I'd lose me job and never get another.'

"Listen. I want facts. I can pay for them. Your testimony is no good, and you won't appear in the thing. But, if I have anything to go on, I'll get the real story higher up. Here's twenty dollars.'

He took it.

"All right. I was sick to me stummick that night," he said, "and I had to have fresh air. I come up on deck 'bout ten o'clock. I was leanin' on the rail, thinkin' o nothin', when one of the watch comes by. 'Big one, ain't she?' says he, pointin'. I look; and five or six miles to south of us I see a long line o' lights— a big passenger steamer headin' the way we was but passin' us fast. I thinks no more about it, but holds me head, that was aching; and pretty soon I go down again. In half an hour, maybe, I come up for more air, my head fit to split. And a few points off the port bow I suddenly sees a rocket o' distress. 'Some one's in trouble,' says I.

"Presently I see another; and thinking they might not have noticed them from the bridge— though how they could help it I don't know— I sing out to the second: 'Did yer see them rockets, sir?' 'Aye,' he calls down. 'We seen em.'

"We was stopped because we was in ice. It was a clean night, and I seen the rockets bright as day. But it was none of my business, so I go down and turn in. Next mornin' comes the news the big ship was the *Morovantha*, and, of course, them was her rockets. I sneaks up to the second officer and spoke to him about it.

" 'You're crazy,' he says. 'We saw no rockets.'

" 'But I sung out to you; and you said you seen them.'

" 'I was humoring you,' he says. 'You open your face about this and there'll be one donkey engineer missing.' Well, I talk to the man that was at the wheel, and he saw them, and he said the second went down and woke the captain, and the captain said not to notice 'em."

By this time I was so excited I could hardly speak.

"Get off this ship and come with me," I said. "I'll see that you get five hundred dollars for your story if you give me an affidavit of what you have told me."

"A hundred pun!" he gasped. "Do yer mean it? And it's only bleedin' justice, at that."

"Meet me in an hour in Maguire's saloon," I instructed him.

Next I had to see the second officer. I had the advantage now of being on the ship, so that I could knock at his door without being questioned by seamen; they would naturally suppose I had a right on board, since I was there. If I could handle him, fine; but if he called the captain, warned him of the danger to both of them Well, a water-front reporter might make a misstep and fall off a dock on a dark night with nobody to blame. I took the chance.

I found the second officer sitting alone in his cabin, a clean-cut young Englishman with honest eyes and an expression of profound discouragement. There was a bottle on his table and a half-empty glass. It's a bad sign when a young seaman drinks alone. His name was Jackson.

"I'm a reporter for the *Sphere*, Mr. Jackson," I said abruptly, entering and closing the door after me, before he had time to demand my business. 'I'm here to give you a chance to do the decent thing. I know your part in this filthy job was done unwillingly."

"Damn your eyes!' he said angrily. "You get the hell out of here before I knock—"

"You've got twelve hundred lives on your soul!' I said sharply.

The fellow suddenly slumped. "What— what do you know?" he asked without any spirit.

"I know this ship was within twelve or fifteen miles of the *Morovantha* when she struck the iceberg. I know your captain falsified his position and forced you to sign the log. I know you saw the distress rockets. And I want to know why the devil you didn't behave like a man."

His mouth opened and closed like a fish. "Did the captain try to blame it on me?" he asked weakly.

"He'll blame it on you, all right, unless you beat him to it. Will you tell me the facts?"

"Yes," he said. "I'm damned glad to have a chance to tell them. Lossington is the guilty man. We officers have to obey orders. You understand that, don't you?"

"That won't keep you out of trouble for falsifying the log unless you beat him to the confession."

"All right," he sighed. "I was on watch from eight p.m. until midnight. About a quarter of ten we saw a big steamer, going west, pass some distance to the south. Half an hour later we stopped our engines because we were in field ice and might run into bergs. The skipper turned in. About eleven fifteen we saw distress rockets to the west, nearly dead ahead. We didn't suppose it was the

steamer— nothing happens to big liners— but I thought some fishing schooner might have hit a berg and was sinking. I went down and woke the captain. He figured it was a fishing schooner, just as I did; and he cursed like a streak. "Some blasted Yankee fisherman with all hands asleep hits a rock and I'm supposed to risk my ship. Morse to her."

" 'Why didn't you use the wireless, instead of using Morse lights?'

" 'The wireless operator was asleep,' Jackson answered, 'and I asked the skipper if I should wake him up. "Fishermen don't carry wireless," he said; "and if it's some blooming tramp freighter, there is no reason why we should take a chance in this ice of running down to her. If we don't wireless, he won't get our name."

"Wouldn't he get it from your Morse signals?"

The second officer grinned mirthlessly. "He couldn't see them at his distance. We'd put it down on the log we got no answer to our Morse signals, so we had done our duty. Well, I hated to be caught in a fix like this; but the skipper's word is law, and I could see his reasons. It was dangerous to travel in that ice, and if he hit a berg and lost his ship for the sake of some confounded fisherman that only wanted the Sunday newspapers, he couldn't explain to his owners."

"Didn't you know that couldn't be the reason for the rockets?"

"It isn't the first time that a ship has ignored signals of distress," said the second. "I admit I felt badly about it, but there was nothing I could do. I told the first officer when he came on at midnight to wake the captain if there were any more rockets; and I turned in. At six in the morning the whole ship was up, for the wireless man reported the loss of the *Morovantha*. An hour later the skipper called me into his cabin. He had thrown away the log sheet of the previous day and put in a fresh one.

" 'I want you to sign that,' he said. I looked at it; and it placed our position at eleven at sixty-five miles from the *Morovantha*. The first officer had already signed the page.

" 'In case there is any question, I want you both to sign this page,' he said. 'We're in a terrible situation, Jackson. It was the *Morovantha* whose rockets you saw and reported last night. If we had known, we could have saved her people. Now we have got to show we were so far away we couldn't have helped, or we'll all come in for censure.'

" 'I reported it,' I told him.

" 'I'll deny it,' he said. 'You sign this or I'll restore the old page and place all the blame on you. See if you'll get another berth anywhere on the four oceans.' I signed it.

" 'I asked you to wake the wireless man,' I told him.

" 'Of course I deny that, too. I couldn't risk my ship for some filthy sailing vessel. If I had known it was the *Morovantha*, it would have been different. I am as sorry as you for those who went down, but we've got to think of ourselves.'

"Well, I haven't slept since,"the second said. "I can see all those dead faces."

He began to blubber; and I felt sorry for him.

"You'll have to come ashore and make affidavit," I said. "They'll want you at the investigation."

"No," he retorted. "If I'm summoned, I'll tell the truth; but I can't go out and voluntarily report on my captain. You don't understand sea ethics. I'd never get another berth, no matter how good my motive was. Besides, I've signed the log."

I saw what to do with him. "All right," I said. "You'll be called before the committee, and then you can state facts."

I left him and walked boldly down the deck until I came to the gangway. A man was talking to the watchman. He turned, and I saw it was Captain Lossington. "Who in hell are you?" he demanded.

I faced him. "Hello, captain," I said. "I'm Goring, of the *Sphere*."

"A reporter! Why are you prowling on my ship at night? What do you want?"

"I came back to see if I could find any members of your crew who were related to the crew of the *Morovantha*."

"You damned sneaking news thief!" he yelled; and he swung for my jaw. He was a bigger man than I, but I always was a good boxer. He rushed me, after missing the first one, and I sidestepped and caught him on the side of the ear. He came in again, and landed one on my temple that dropped me. Then he started to cave in my ribs with the toe of his boot, but I rolled out of his way and was up again. I saw the watchman pull a marlinspike out of the rail and try to sneak up behind me; so I let out a yell and dove straight at the captain, taking a blow in the face to get him in the stomach. I heard him grunt. And just then the watchman swung with his iron club. I dropped to the deck and it whizzed over my head. I was up again, standing off the captain, who was like a wild man. I fancy they would have done me in; but a flash light suddenly played on us and a customs inspector was demanding:

"What's the row about?"

"One of my men trying to desert," said the captain quickly.

"Hello, Joe," I said.

The customs man was a friend of mine. He laughed in Lossington's face.

"This fellow is the reporter of the *Sphere*. Better go ashore with me, kid," he said.

Lossington had to see me walk off scot-free. His conduct would have convinced me of his guilt, if I hadn't the confession of two of his crew. Of course he had lost his head, for he was ignorant that the whole story was in my hands.

I made my way to the barroom, and waited an hour. Then Jones came in with his duffel bag under his arm,

"How did you get off the ship?'" I demanded.

"Slid down a hawser," he grinned. "The skipper is on the rampage and nobody is allowed ashore."

The saloon keeper was a justice of the peace. I wrote out the confession and got it sealed and signed, then called up my managing editor and told my story. He was a quick thinker.

"Great!" he said. "Don't lose that sailor. Bring him into the office with you and write the story as though it was all dope— no names of witnesses. Then take the train for Washington, get hold of Senator Munson, chairman of the committee of investigation, and have him summon the captain and second officer to the hearing—"

"LOSSINGTON is Brown," interrupted Larkin.

OBVIOUSLY. Well, all the other papers sneered at our story, while I took the limited to Washington. The poor donkey engineer was completely overcome with the luxury of the train and was afraid to accompany me into the dining car, but I assured him that nobody would pay any attention to him and he would be all right if he used the same knives and forks that I did. All went well during dinner until the waiter placed before each of us a gilt finger bowl upon the top of which floated a slice of lemon.

"I could have used this earlier. What's it for now?" he demanded.

I dipped my fingers into my bowl and wiped them with my napkin. His eyes widened. "You wash in lemonade?" he demanded.

"Certainly," I smiled.

He followed my example gingerly.

"There's many a night in the crew's quarters," he said, smacking his lips with anticipation, "when we sit around and spin yarns of what we've done and where we've been, and strange places we've seen, and strange adventures we've 'ad with women and wild men and sich. And some night, soon, we're all sittin' around, and after they've all told their tall stories of things that 'ave

'appened to 'em, then I'll speak up and tell 'em of the time I washed my 'ands in lemonade."

I had some trouble reaching the senator in Washington, because he was a very busy man. In truth, he was the worst possible chairman for such a committee, because he came from an inland State, had never made a sea voyage, and didn't know a winch from the galley stove. But he was a pleasant, honest old codger, trying to get at the bottom of a nasty mess.

I showed him the affidavit and he told me to bring the man to see him. When I returned to the Willard Hotel I found the seaman in his stocking feet. He said he didn't dare walk in his shoes on the wonderful carpet in the room.

He was tremendously impressed in meeting a United States senator, and he carefully repeated what he had stated in the affidavit. His evidence convinced Munson that he would have to summon the captain and second officer of the Commorforth, and the summonses were issued immediately.

Lossington arrived as bold as brass, for the story we had published had convinced him we had no real evidence. He gave out interviews that our statements were made out of whole cloth, just a sensation manufactured by a sensational newspaper. He was called to attend the afternoon session of the senate committee, and he talked big to reporters in the anteroom, while he waited to testify. He told them that I had tried to blackmail him and, upon his refusal, I had concocted this story.

Senator Munson called the second officer for testimony first, and to the astonishment of the committee and the audience, he repeated the story he had told me. The door to the anteroom was left carelessly open and Lossington heard all the evidence. You can imagine his feelings. However, he had a wonderful nerve.

Now, mind you, there wasn't a man on the committee who had any knowledge of the sea, and the attorney knew as little. I was seated behind Munson, at his request in case he wished to ask me any questions. Lossington made a good appearance when he came in and took the oath.

"Please give your version of the events of the night of January 18th," was Senator Munson's question.

"Well, sir," he began, "I had been forty-eight hours on the bridge, and then ran into ice. About nine thirty I gave orders to stop the ship for the night and turned in. My wireless operator was all worn out from coristant duty, and it was not our custom to keep him on at night except in case of emergency. About eleven o'clock at night, the second officer awakened me, just as he has said, and reported he had seen a single rocket. He asked me to wake the wireless operator, but I said any vessel which fired rockets was undoubtedly a sailing craft which had no radio, so I told him to use Morse lights. He got no

reply. At six next morning the radio man went on duty and immediately picked up the report that the *Morovantha* had gone down at eleven the night before. I realized then, of course, that it must have been she that sent up the rocket, but it was too late to be of service to her.

"It was most unfortunate that our wireless man was off duty. I confess now to a violation of regulations due to the instinct of self-preservation. I knew we should be severely criticized, innocent as we were, if it came out that we lay within fifteen miles of the *Morovantha*, and I did change our position on the log after consultation with my officers— merely to escape undeserved odium, for we had answered the signals and it was not our fault she failed to reply to them. I confess the fault I did commit, but I want this committee to know that had I any evidence that any vessel, sailing craft or otherwise, was sinking near us, I would have risked my ship, started the engines, and gone to her aid. I have been a seaman for twenty-five years, and I know the duty of a seaman."

It was a manly, straightforward statement, and his manner was admirable. Senator Munson was stumped. I saw he was fishing around for questions and couldn't think of any; and I was in a funk lest he permit the man to get off with the confession of what seemed to these laymen to be a minor fault. A log book didn't mean much to them— nor what was written in it. They frequently made speeches and gave something entirely different to the Congressional Record.

I hastily scribbled two questions on a sheet of paper and handed them to the senator.

"Don't reverse these; ask them in order," I whispered.

He adjusted his glasses and read the questions.

"They seem of no moment," he said in a low tone.

"Ask them, for Heaven's sake!" I pleaded.

"Ahem!' said the senator. 'How far off was that vessel which sent up the rocket?"

"Oh, a good fifteen miles," said the captain boldly.

"Yes. Ahem!" He leaned toward me. "Er— what's this word? Oh,yes. Captain, how far can Morse signals be seen at sea?"

"Captain Lossington's red face turned a greenish white. His mouth opened and closed. He choked, he put his hand to his throat, he swayed back and forth in his chair, and then he toppled over on the floor in a dead faint— to the consternation of the roomful of people.

"My, my!" said Senator Munson. "Most unfortunate. I can't understand this. It seemed a most innocuous question. Young man, why should it cause him to faint?"

All eyes were on me. It was my moment.

"Because he would have had to tell you that they cannot be seen more than six or seven miles," I said slowly. "When he admitted that the vessel which sent up the rocket was at least fifteen miles away, he admitted that he had ordered his second officer to Morse to her because he knew that the ship in distress was so far away that his signals were invisible."

Everybody was talking at once.

"See?" exclaimed the attorney to the senator. "He did not want the sinking vessel to read his signals, because then he would have been compelled to go to her rescue. By doing what he did, he was able to put in his log that he had replied to the rockets and got no answer, and was therefore justified in doing nothing."

"But it wasn't in his log at all," protested the senator.

"Certainly not. Next day, when he found that the *Morovantha* had gone down, he could not admit being near enough to her to see a rocket without admitting his dereliction from duty. So he falsified his position."

Lossington had recovered and wanted to speak. But they refused to listen to him any longer, and the hearing went on to another phase of the matter of the sinking of the *Morovantha*. However, in the finding of the committee it was stated that the captain of the *Commorforth* was equally guilty with the captain of the *Morovantha* for the loss of twelve hundred lives.

This committee had no jurisdiction over a British vessel at sea and could not punish Lossington in any way; but the British government could, and was eager to do it. The British Board of Trade confirmed the decision of the American committee and canceled Lossington's master's certificate. Then the British government tried to catch him, to jail him on some charge or other; but Lossington faded away from view immediately after the session of the senate committee. He never went back to his ship.

"WHEW!" exclaimed Larkin.

"You can imagine my consternation," the reporter went on, "when I recognized him in that horrible rum-soaked skipper of the foulest old tub I ever saw in my life. From his standpoint, I was entirely responsible for his ruin. No layman understands the duty a reporter owes to his newspaper and the public, and Lossington undoubtedly believed I exposed him, after he had neatly covered everything up, from no other motive than pure malice.

"Had he recognized me on the high seas, he would have shot me out of hand, and claimed that I had mutinied; or he might have knifed me in the dark and tossed me overboard. You saw his rage when he realized who I was, as the boat was pulling away from the steamer. Had those boatmen obeyed his order

to return I'm not sure he wouldn't have murdered me right here in port. He was insane with fury."

They left the café and came into view of the harbor. Faintly across the water came the creaking of the steam winch lifting the anchor of the *Captain Lynch.* As they watched, the steamer began to move, and got under way to the southward. They watched her in silence until she was hull down.

"If this story gets out, he'll lose that ship," said Larkin.

Larkin shuddered. 'I'd hate to have his dreams."

"He's in hell now!" exclaimed Goring. "Just a ghost of a captain. A modern flying Dutchman, working out his damnation on the four oceans. Let him alone."

———————

4: The Final Word

Mark Hellinger

1903-1947

Daily Telegraph (Sydney) 21 Dec 1947

Mark Hellinger was a New York journalist, and a Hollywood movie producer. His best remembered movie is "The Naked City", later made into a successful TV series. His own voice is heard at the end of the movie, and at the end of every TV episode. "There are 8 million stories in the naked city. This has been one of them."

WALTER SCRUGGES was the smartest man in the world. There couldn't be much doubt about it, because he admitted it himself.

To him, all other humans were stupid fools. When he was scarcely out of his teens, he summed up his chances of becoming wealthy in a legitimate manner. He decided those chances were very slim, indeed, and he immediately devoted his brain to the task of committing the perfect crime. Anything short of perfection, of course, wouldn't suit him at all.

So, after awhile, he got himself a minor job with a chemical dye firm. And he began to plan the prettiest of all robberies.

The task wasn't as easy as Walter Scrugges had believed. He had such an unholy contempt, for his bosses that promotions came very slowly. And it took him ten long years to get into the cashier's cage as second assistant. He had fretted impatiently through the years, but he knew now that the big moment wasn't far away. As second assistant, he would handle cash. Once a week, he would handle heavy sums. Some week, it would turn out to be an unusually heavy sum. And that week he would disappear.

For a long time, he had muttered 'silly morons' at the world in general—and here, at last, he could say it with genuine conviction. For the world was puttinig him in a spot where he could grab a juicy stake and scram. Thus, very dutifully, he took the cash to the bank once a week. Very dutifully, too, he returned to the office. After ten weary years, Walter Scrugges could afford to wait just a little longer. He wanted the kitty to be good and fat, because everything else was in readiness for the perfect crime. Even the hideout.

One morning, suddenly, it happened. The cashier handed him the all-important bag. 'Careful with this bag today, Walter,' the cashier said. 'It has forty-one thousand in it.'

Walter smiled a little. He didn't speak, but his eyes said 'silly morons.' He walked out with the bag. And he didn't come back.

YES, MY friends, it was as easy as that. Walter just walked out, and he kept on walking. He took a cab to a false destination, double-tracked to the railroad

station, bought a ticket for a certain town— and then boarded an entirely different train without a ticket and paid the conductor. He got off at still another spot and proceeded by bus. Arriving in the town he had selected, he went immediately to the little bungalow he had rented some time before. And there he relaxed.

In the morning he donned his disguise. Said disguise was a moustache and goatee he had purchased a long time before? and It was a disguise he had worn whenever he had appeared in the small town.

Then Walter Scrugges, with a slight smile on his face, went out and bought the papers.

The story was there, all right. Big, too. The police, he read, were watching every exit from the city in the hope of catching him. This time he grinned.

'Silly morons,' he muttered... again and again. 'Silly morons!'

Until it died out, Walter followed the story very closely. He never left the bungalow without his moustache and goatee, and he lived quite happily. Whenever he wanted excitement, he counted his stolen money.

One afternoon, he walked into the small post office to get some magazines. There, hung on the wall, was a reward poster.

Walter Scrugges saw his clean-shaven face, and a $2,000 reward offer just beneath it. The poster gave an accurate description of him, and Walter almost guffawed as he studied the picture. It looked nothing like him now.

'Silly morons,' he said softly. 'Silly morons.' He stroked his phoney moustache and goatee tenderly, and walked out of the post office

Walter spent money slowly, for he was going to make his haul last a good many years. He bought groceries, and tobacco, and, now and then, a bottle of wine. But that was all. When women smiled at him, as they did occasionally in the village streets, he ducked as though he was veering away from an atomic bomb.

Everything, then, was perfection— until the fatal day. That was the day the two men walked into his bungalow and flashed their badges.

'Get ready, Scrugges,' they told him. 'You're coming with us.'

He glared at them and told them they were nuts. He said he wasn't Walter Scrugges. One of the men reached over swiftly and removed the false moustache and goatee.

Whereupon Walter shrugged— and confessed.

'You've got me,' he admitted. 'But I don't understand. My crime was perfect. How did you ever find me?'

The deputy sheriff grinned.

'It turned out to be easy,' he replied. 'Some dope in the Village, with nothing better to do, pencilled a moustache and goatee on your post office picture. Just some silly moron!'

_____

5: A Lesson in the Art

Anthony Hope

Anthony Hope Hawkins, 1863-1933
The Idler Sep 1894
Kyabram Free Press, 5 Nov 1895

More or less the inventor of the Ruritanian romance with such novels as "The Prisoner of Zanda" and "Rupert of Hentzau", Hope also wrote many short stories, now hard to find.

"OH, BUT you'll have to learn," said Mrs Maunce Duncan, making room for me beside her; "you couldn't employ your vacation better."

"Will you teach me, Mrs Duncan?" I asked.

"I believe you are learning," said she, with a glance. "You said that just in the right way— with right look too."

"I'm very young," said I, pathetically.

"H'm," observed Mrs Maurice Duncan.

"But if I watch people who know how to do it—"

"I'm sure you can't mean me?" she said, obviously assuming that I did.

"Seriously, you ought to do it very well," and she sighed gently. She was a woman of pleasing appearance.

"Why ought I do it very well?" I had the curiosity to ask.

"Oh, well, Mr Vansittart— but you don't want to be flattered, do you?"

"I am flattered."

"Are you? How?"

"By your sitting here with me."

"I don't believe you want any lessons at all," declared Mrs Duncan.

My eyes encountered Mrs Duncan's eyes. She nodded and smiled; I am not to this day quite sure that she did not blush. I averted my eyes and glanced across the room.

"Ah!" said I, "if I watch that girl talking to the tall man, I might learn.''

Mrs Duncan looked in the direction indicated. She smiled and shrugged her shoulders.

"I don't think you'll learn much there," she said.

"Oh, I don't know," said I. "Look, she's made room for him beside her."

"Well, I did that."

"So you did. Then it means nothing, of course?"

"Nothing at all, Mr Vansittart," she smiled.

"And they're talking to one another quite low."

"We're not speaking very loud."

"Well, we won't count that then. Oh, but look! He's buttoning her glove."

"That's nothing. You'd do that for me, wouldn't you?"

"Rather— if the button came undone, you know." Mrs Duncan smiled again.

"But what's he taken her fan for?" I asked, puzzled. "I don't see much point in that."

"There isn't any; it's stupid," said she, letting her own fan hang loosely in her fingers.

"Is it?" said I; and I tried it.

The man opposite opened and shut the fan; I followed his example. Mrs Duncan seemed to pay little attention to me; I threw Mrs Duncan's fan down carelessly.

"Take care; you'll break it," she said, almost sharply.

"Look?" I cried. "He's turned rightround, and he's staring at her like anything!" and I gazed across in a most interested manner.

"Well, it's sometimes thought polite to look at people when you talk to them."

"I think that's more than politeness," said I, turning to Mrs Duncan.

"Do you? Then it's different from your look, isn't it? You're looking away again!"

"Well, I want to see them."

Mrs Duncan took up her fan and beat it softly against the palm of her hand.

"He's looking this way, now," I cried; as the tall man suddenly turned towards us and smiled.

"Please don't mind them," said Mrs Duncan, laying the tip of two lingers on my

I felt pleased. The tall man turned round to the girl again. To speak it plainly, their heads almost met. Mrs Duncan leant forward to me.

"Are you very bored, talking to a poor old widow like me?" she said, but in so low a tone that I had to bend my head quite close to hers, to hear.

"I don't call you old," said I; suddenly realising that her complexion was very pretty. "You can't be any older than I

"Oh, you're very foolish, Mr Vansittart," and she laughed softly.

I glanced again across the room; nothing was to be seen but a black head and a fair one in close proximity. It was not interesting. I turned again to Mrs Duncan, who started the least bit in the world.

"How do you manage those little curls on your forehead?" I asked (I like to understand things.)

"Oh, it's quite easy. Do you think they're not real, Mr Vansittart?" .

"I don't know," said I, prudently.

"They're all my own. What an unbelieving boy you are! How can I satisfy you?"

I looked round the room. Supper was going on, and, save for the preoccupied couple opposite, we were alone.

"One could tell if one pulled one," I observed.

"Oh, could one?" laughed Mrs Duncan.

"A hard pull," said I, and I half advanced my hand.

Mrs Duncan looked round.. I didn't— I don't know why not.

"What would anyone think if they saw?" she asked.

"I don't care," said I.

"It's all very well for you—"

"But there's no one here— except those two— and they're not thinking of us," and I smiled most knowingly. '

"Aren't they?" she asked, with a little laugh. " Well, perhaps not, Mr Vansittart."

"They won't notice," I urged. Somehow, I wanted to do it.

"Well," she said, "we— we'll chance it— but be quick. ' No, not just now, wait till I say 'Now.' "

I held my hand in readiness. Mrs Duncan's eyes travelled round the room ; they rested, alert, for a moment on the couple opposite! swiftly they were back on mine, and she cried ."Now!" I pulled.

"Oh!" said Mrs Duncan, in a little shriek that was half a laugh.

The curl stood the ordeal. I looked round. Confusion! The tall man was glaring straight at us.

"How beastly unlucky!" I exclaimed to Mrs Duncan's fan— for her face was entirely hidden.

I got no answer, unless the gentlest mirthful gurgle were to count as one.

"Did it hurt ?" I asked.

"Not much," said Mrs. Duncan, displaying one eye round the side of her fan.

Suddenly there was a iripyempht opposite.<>»« friends rose ;• the man gave his arm they walked to the door.

"That's the way to the conservatory," I observed. "I say, he's looking awfully riled. She must have sat on him."

"Do you think so?" asked Mrs Duncan, looking up at me, and seeming much amused. "Suppose we go after them and look on again?"

"I'd just as soon stay here," said I.

"Would you? Oh,but, everybody will be here directly, Mr Vansittart!"

I nodded with understanding. "That's true," said I, offering my arm.

"I think you'll do, you know— some day," said Mrs. Duncan, as we went.

I thought that it was not bad— for a beginning. I daresay my look told my thought; for she laughed again.

"I'm much obliged for my lesson," said I, with a very significant glance.

"It was no trouble," she answered, with a demureness that hardly pretended to hide mischief.

"There they are," I whispered, as we reached the conservatory.

"Yes, there they are!"

The tall man and the girl were standing in the middle of the conservatory talking.

They did not appear now, so engrossed in one another; indeed, their conversation seemed intermittent. Mrs Duncan and I sat down.

"They're not amusing any longer," I observed.

"No," said Mrs Duncan, absently.

Then a strange thing happened. The tall man stepped swiftly across, and said to Mrs Duncan—

"Have you been to supper, Mrs Duncan?"

"Well, no," said she, with a smile of mockery.

"Then, perhaps, you'll permit me—?"

"It's so late now."

"Not too late?" said the tall man, with a touch of entreaty in his tone.

"Well— not quite, perhaps.''

She rose. "Good night, Mr Vansittart. I hope we shall meet again."

She gave me her hand. I said nothing. They were gone! The girl stood blank and alone. I stood opposite her. Then I heard from the door, in Mrs Duncan's voice—

"It was your own fault. Why did you talk to that child instead of me?"

There was a pause. Music began in the ball-room. The "child" looked desolate. Maybe I felt desolate. We had not been introduced, but—"

"May I have the pleasure of this with you?" I asked.

She started.

"Oh, yes, if you like," she said.

"Who was that fellow?" I asked.

"Mr Templeman. Mrs Duncan and he are— are great friends, you know."

"Great friends?"

"Yes; he's supposed to be going to marry her."

"And she?"

"Oh, she's ready enough," said the girl scornfully. Then she looked at me; and she smiled. She said nothing; she smiled. I wished myself a thousand miles away; and still she smiled.

"Why are you smiling?" I asked, in desperation.

"I saw it all the time," said she. "If you're going to dance, come along."
I did not ask her what she had seen. I suppose she meant— the lesson.

_____

6: The Last Act

Anthony Hope

Wagga Wagga Express, 19 Aug 1893

IT WAS a beautiful morning. A light breeze stirred the great tree, under which he sat, to soft whisperings, and the sun made its way through in glittering patches. Far off, down in the paddock, the children were at play, and their light laughter reached his ears now and again. But his eyes were fixed on the bedroom window, and his thoughts were away in a scene yet more lovely, by an Italian lake, in the absolute stillness of a sultry evening. He saw again the telegram she had just shown him, telling that Jack was kept in England for a week longer, and the sudden, uncontrollable glance with which he met the news. At the glance she had hastily turned away and run into the house, and he had seen her no more till the next day. Memory dragged him in pitiless detail through the week that followed, down to the very minute when they met Jack at the little station at Menaggio; it repeated to him with an almost present distinctness the sound of Jack's cheery greeting and the feel of his warm hand-grip ; it painted the look in her eyes as her husband kissed her. Poor old Jack saw nothing. Good heavens!

To them it seemed as plain as if the whole story had been written large as the 'Menaggio' on the station-wall. He heard the shuffle of a pair of loose slippers. Jack was coming down the steps to join him on the lawn, pausing on the way to fill and light his old cherry-wood pipe, and search for a match in the pocket of his tattered dressing-jacket. At the best of times Jack was no dandy: this morning he had not shaved; and all night he had not been to bed or changed his clothes; he looked aged, disconsolate, and desolate. He also heard the children laugh, and smiled for an instant before he sadly shook his head.

'Well?' said George.

'No better, poor girl,' answered Jack, sitting down by him, 'I hope you've been looked after all right, old fellow? I can't thank you properly for staying, but I can tell you I feel it. I should go mad if I hadn't someone to talk to.'

'Doctor been?'

'Yes.'

'What docs he say?'

'Nothing. Shakes his infernal head. She was delirious in the night, George.'

'What?'

'Yes, for two hours. I didn't stay, you know.'

'Ah!'

'The nurse wouldn't let me. As soon as she began, I was turned out. But I say, old fellow, just as I was going, I heard her mention your name,' and he

turned to his friend with a dreary kind of smile. 'She was always fond of you, poor dear; liked you best of all my friends by chalks. "George Morris— George," just like that she said it. I don't see why they should turn me out, do you?'

'Oh, I suppose she's better with the women. They understand such things. I expect they thought you'd—'

'Break down? Well, perhaps I should. It pretty well beats me. She's got no strength, you see; the fever exhausts her.'

The two men sat side by side for ten minutes or more without speaking again. Then Jack Clinton arose and drifted off towards the paddock to see the children. George sat on, his eyes wandering back to the bedroom window. Presently a woman came out of the house and began to pace up and down. It was the nurse, escaped for a breath of air. George watched her for a while, but she did not look towards him. He crossed the lawn, raised his hat to her and asked news of her patient.

'Mrs. Clinton's no better,' said the woman, curtly, not pausing in her walk. George lifted his eyebrows.

Up to to-day the nurse had been so friendly to him, glad to gossip and relieve her mind by an idle talk during her brief recreation, He knew the meaning of the change very well: the nurse had been there during those two hours of delirium. He thanked heaven that she had put Jack Clinton to the door. And he smiled at her; the disapprobation of this excellent woman, which she was at such commendable pains to show, was so absurdly light a penalty to put upon him.

'She was delirious, I hear,' he ventured.

'Yes,' answered the nurse, quickening her pace a little; but George kept by her side.

'Did she seem—'

'I'm not allowed to tell anyone anything about it, sir, as you must know.'

'Not anyone?' he asked.'

'Not anyone, sir.'

The more definite question in his look was answered by hers. The woman would not tell Jack; and she would think it her duty to prevent Jack hearing.

'Is she delirious now?' he asked, with a sudden fear of some indiscreet servant.' I shouldn't be here if she was.

Good morning, sir.' She evidently loathed his company, and took no pains to hide it. It no doubt seemed to her a horrible thing that he should be in the house— as it would be if anything happened to open Jack's eyes.

'A moment. Has she asked about me— when she was not delirious I mean?'

'She asked if you were still here.'

'And what did she say?'

'Nothing. She turned her face round to the wall.'

He was very hungry for more news of her, but the nurse would have none of him, and he went back to his seat under the tree. Nobody seemed to think that he would want to see her— except that woman perhaps now; and from her nothing was to be hoped.

Of course, nobody did. But wouldn't she herself ask? or daren't she? Or would she hate the sight of him? Since that week he had never really known whether she loved him or hated him more. She had been so terribly, I terribly ashamed, poor girl. He embodied such a degradation. And yet— he had told her that it altogether and himself that it a little, did away with the degradation— she had loved him with such a rush of love; and afterwards, in his visits, she had not been able to hide the tremulous, frightened joy of her greeting, or the emptiness of the day he went. He had not quite understood her feeling towards Jack since then. She had treated Jack with infinite tenderness; and the little airs and tyrannies and pettishness that had, perhaps, in the early days of marriage needed the excuse of her youth and beauty that poor Jack was so ready to make, vanished; her kindness to her husband was like what she showed to her little boy when once she hurt him by mistake. George was conscious that she had, with those wonderfully articulate eyes of hers, invited him to a conspiracy to make Jack as happy as he could be made ; and he had joined it. But now— now that she was ill— now that something he could not think of pushed itself into his thoughts and must be present in hers— what now did she feel about Jack? A sudden pang of jealousy shot through him. He could not bear that, even at the last, she should turn to Jack— shrink from him as the cause of her defilement, and render back her heart to Jack. A mad impulse seized him to rush to her room, bid that dragon of a nurse defiance, and stay by her till the only thing strong enough to part them wrenched her from his grasp. What did scandal, a household aghast, matter now? Not a bit. But then he could not face old Jack.

Suddenly the nurse came quickly out of the house again, and stood for a moment at the top of the steps, shading her eyes with her hand, and looking round the garden and the paddock. Away down in the paddock, Jake, hands in pockets, was slouching slowly towards the house. The woman saw him and beckoned energetically. George jumped up, and ran to her.

'What's the matter?' he cried.

'She's worse. She wants Mr. Clinton.'

'Worse. What, much? Do you mean—?'

'Yes, much worse. And she wants to speak to him.'

'What about woman?' he whispered hoarsely.'

'Ay, if you don't know, I don't,' she answered scornfully, her gaze still on the paddock, and her hand beckoning.

'My God!'

'You may well call on God,' said the woman. But he had not thought of God; his thoughts were on Jack who had seen the beckoning and started clumsily running.

'She mustn't do that,' he exclaimed, and he moved suddenly towards the door of the house. The woman caught him by the hand.

'Stop where you are. You shan't go near her. Do you want to yet between her and him again?'

'Is she going to tell him?'

'God knows. She's got something to tell him.'

Jack was coming through the gate, and running across the lawn to meet them. He pointed excitedly to the house; the nurse nodded, and Jack followed her, lifting his hands and letting them fall before him in a gesture of despair as he passed his friend. They went in. The door shut after them, absolute stillness, save for the songs of birds and the whisper of the leaves, fell again on the lawn. Even the children laughed no more; as George went back to his seat under the tree he saw them standing, one on either side of their maid, looking up at the house and then turning their faces up to hers in question. He must have sat nearly half an hour, motionless under the tree. He had enough to think of, God knew: but it seemed he could think of nothing. His mind was a prey of flitting images: now he saw her, now Jack; now, with rude intrusion, that woman crowded his brain. He hardly realised that she must be dying: for a moment he did, and the pang drove away his fear of what she would tell her husband. Then that came back, and he longed to be by her and whisper silence. And, more still, he longed to be able to take her hand once again, and comfort his love and tell her that she was a good woman, and pure, and true, and, for the last time, what she loved to hear, that she was very, very beautiful, and that he would never marry so long as she lived— never, on his honour as a gentleman.

It was what he had sworn to her the last night at Menaggio, when she lay on .the sofa in the little sitting-room and sobbed. At last someone pulled up the blind of the bedroom, opened the window, and pulled the blind down again. He guessed what it meant, and bowed his head to his hands. He forgot everything for a moment, except that the world was empty of her, and he wondered how the birds could sing.

More blinds were pulled down and he was dimly conscious of the little children being smuggled into the house by the back door. His mind seemed in two places: with half he saw all this; with the other half he was still at

Menaggio, pulling on the lake, or walking with her in the shade. He went through all the Menaggio days again, down to the very last— to the start for the station to meet Jack.

Jack! He sat up suddenly. He had forgotten Jack. Poor old Jack! He would like to shake him by the hand. Could he now? Jack came to the door, and looked dazedly about him, putting his hand up to his forehead. Then he felt in his pocket, but recollected the conventions, and left his old pipe where it was. He came down the steps, and began to walk up and down the lawn. He never looked towards George, who was looking now so intently towards him. George was in great fear— not altogether for himself; it would be hard for him to bear, but to Jack very terrible. Had she spoken? He could bear it no longer. He got up, and walked towards his friend. Jack's eyes were on the ground, and he did not notice his approach; he walked on aud sat down. George followed, and stood by him. Then Jack saw him, and held out his hand.

'My poor girl!' he muttered. George pressed his hand, but, that done, quickly let it fall, and stood silently by.

'She had something to say to me, George. So the nurse said, but she was very weak. She began something about having been a bad wife to me, and— and I broke down.' He had to stop for a minute. 'She tried to go on like that, but I wouldn't let her. I kissed her.'

It seemed very long to George before he spoke again.

'She tried— just at the end— to say something about you. She said your name and something about Menaggio; but I couldn't understand. She was distressed because she couldn't say it. I think she wanted to thank you for all your kindness there. She always liked you, George, old man— God bless you. And— and just at last, she whispered, "Forgive." My poor sweet darling, what had I to forgive?'

_____

7: The Run on the Bank— How it Was Stopped

Anthony Hope

Evening News (Sydney) 22 June 1895

LONG ago, as it seems now, there was a run on the Sandhill and District Bank. It had lasted the whole of one day, and had shown no signs of abating in the evening. If it lasted another day—

Old Mr. Bradshaw wiped his brow. It had come just at the most awkward time— just after the farmers had got their usual loans, just when securities were hard to realise. In fact, just at the moment when the bank, though in reality solvent, was emphatically not in a position to answer a long-continued demand for payment on the spot. Mr. Bradshaw groaned out all these distressing facts to his son Dick.

'We shall have to put the shutters up. One day's grace would save us, I believe. We could get the money then. But if they're at us again tomorrow morning we can't last two hours.'

Dick sympathised, but had nothing to suggest, except that it would not make matters worse if he carried out her engagement to go to the circus with the Flirtington girls.

'Oh, go to —— with the Flirtington girls!' groaned Mr. Bradshaw.

SO DICK WENT to the circus (the other expedition, as he said, would keep), and enjoyed the performance very much, especially the, lion taming, which was magnificent, and so impressed Dick that he deserted his companions, went behind the scenes, and insisted upon standing Signor Philippina several glasses.

'Is that big chap quite safe?' he asked, admiringly.

'I can do anythink with him,' said the signor, whose English was naturally defective. 'But with anyone helse e's a roarer, 'e is, and no mistake.'

After the performance Dick took the Flirtington girls home. Then, with a thoughtful look on his face, he went and had some talk with his father, and came away carefully placing a roll of notes in his breast pocket. Then he sought Signor Philippini's society once more.

And that's all that is really known about it— if, that is, we discard the obviously fanciful statement of Fanny Flirtington, that as she was gazing at the moon at 2 a.m. she saw a heavy waggon drawn by two horses, and driven by Signor Philippini, pass along the street in the direction of the bank.

However these things may be, this is what happened next morning:

When the first of the depositors arrived at 7 a.m., they found one of the windows of the bank smashed to pieces, and the shutter hanging loose. A cry

went up that there had been a robbery, and one or two men began to climb in. They did not get far before a fearful roar proceeded from the neighborhood of the counter. They looked at one another, and said it would be more regular to wait for the officials. The roars continued.

They sent for Mr. Bradshaw. Hardly had he arrived (accompanied by Dick, breathless and in shirt sleeves) before the back-most rows of the now considerable crowd became agitated with a new sensation. The news spread rapidly. Frantic men ran to and fro; several ladies fainted; the circus proprietor was sent for.

A lion had escaped from the menagerie, and was supposed to be at large through the town!

'Send for Philippini!' cried the proprietor.

They did so. Philippini had started early for a picnic in the country, and would not return till just before the performance in the evening. The proprietor was in despair.

'Where's the beast gone to?' he cried. A roar from the bank answered his question.

'Well, I'm blowed if he's not in the bank!' exclaimed the proprietor. It certainly appeared to be the fact that Atlas (that was the lion's name) had taken refuge in the bank, and was in full possession of the premises and assets. Under these circumstances there was, Mr. Bradshaw explained, a difficulty in resuming cash payments; but if his checks would be accepted— the crowd roared almost as loud as Atlas at such an idea. Something must be done.

They sent for the Mayor; he repudiated liability. They sent for the fire brigade and the lifeboat crew; neither would come. They got guns, and peppered the furniture. Atlas retired behind the fireproof safe, and roared worse than ever. Meanwhile, the precious hours were passing.

Mr. Bradshaw's money was also on its way from London. At last Dick took a noble resolution.

'I will go in at any cost,' he cried, and, in spite of Fanny Flirtington's tears, he scaled the window and disappeared from view. The crowd waited to hear Atlas scrunching; but he only roared.

When Dick was inside, he asked in a low voice: 'Is he chained?'

'Yes,' answered Signor Philippini from behind the safe. 'Is the Aunt Sally business over?' and he came out with a long pole in his hand. He used the pole to stir poor Atlas up when the roars became deficient in quantity and quality.

'The money ought to be here in three hours,' said Dick. 'Have you got the back door key?'

Philippini reassured him. Then Dick took a wild running leap at the window; Philippini stirred up Atlas, who roared lustily. Dick escaped with his life, and landed, a breathless heap, at the Mayor's feet.

The Mayor raised him, and said he would write to her Majesty, and suggest that Dick would be a proper recipient of the Albert Medal, and the Vicar (who had no money in the bank) indignantly asked the crowd if they could not trust a family which produced scions like that.

Several people cried 'Hear, hear!' and told Mr. Bradshaw that they never really meant to withdraw their deposits. Mr. Bradshaw thanked them, and looked at his watch.

At half-past three Philippini ran up; he also was breathless, and his shoes were dusty from walking in the country. At once he effected an entry, amid a scene of great excitement.

A moment later he appeared at the window, and cried in terror: 'I can't 'old 'im! I can't 'old 'iml 'E's mad! Look out for yourselves?' and he leaped from the. window.

The crowd fled in all directions, and two boys were all but run over by a cart which was being driven rapidly from the railway station to the bank.

'All right,' said Dick to the Signor; 'bring up the waggon.' And then, with great difficulty and consummate courage, the signor and Dick brought an iron cage up to the window, and drove Atlas in. The operation took more than an hour because they had to feed Atlas and drink a bottle of champagne themselves before they set about it,

So that it was about 6 o'clock before Atlas was 'out' and the money was in, and the Sandhill Bank opened its doors for business.

'We gained just the time we needed,' said Mr. Bradshaw. 'It was dirt cheap at £50!'

_____

8: Wings in the Night

Robert E. Howard

1906-1936

Weird Tales July 1932

1. The Horror on the Stake

SOLOMON KANE leaned on his strangely carved staff and gazed in scowling perplexity at the mystery which spread silently before him. Many a deserted village Kane had seen in the months that had passed since he turned his face east from the Slave Coast and lost himself in the mazes of jungle and river, but never one like this. It was not famine that had driven away the inhabitants, for yonder the wild rice still grew rank and unkempt in the untilled fields. There were no Arab slave-raiders in this nameless land— it must have been a tribal war that devastated the village, Kane decided, as he gazed somberly at the scattered bones and grinning skulls that littered the space among the rank weeds and grasses. These bones were shattered and splintered and Kane saw jackals and a hyena furtively slinking among the ruined huts. But why had the slayers left the spoils? There lay war spears, their shafts crumbling before the attacks of the white ants. There lay shields, moldering in the rains and sun. There lay the cooking-pots, and about the neck-bones of a shattered skeleton glistened a necklace of gaudily painted pebbles and shells— surely rare loot for any savage conqueror.

He gazed at the huts, wondering why the thatch roofs of so many were torn and rent, as if by taloned things seeking entrance. Then something made his cold eyes narrow in startled unbelief. Just outside the moldering mound that was once the village wall towered a gigantic baobab tree, branchless for sixty feet, its mighty bole too large to be gripped and scaled. Yet in the topmost branches dangled a skeleton, apparently impaled on a broken limb. The cold hand of mystery touched the shoulder of Solomon Kane. How came those pitiful remains in that tree? Had some monstrous ogre's inhuman hand flung them there?

Kane shrugged his broad shoulders and his hand unconsciously touched the black butts of his heavy pistols, the hilt of his long rapier, and the dirk in his belt. Kane felt no fear as an ordinary man would feel, confronted with the Unknown and Nameless. Years of wandering in strange lands and warring with strange creatures had melted away from brain, soul and body all that was not steel and whalebone. He was tall and spare, almost gaunt, built with the savage economy of the wolf. Broad-shouldered, long-armed, with nerves of ice

and thews of spring steel, he was no less the natural killer than the born swordsman.

The brambles and thorns of the jungle had dealt hardly with him; his garments hung in tatters, his featherless slouch hat was torn and his boots of Cordovan leather were scratched and worn. The sun had baked his chest and limbs to a deep bronze but his ascetically lean face was impervious to its rays. His complexion was still of that strange dark pallor which gave him an almost corpse-like appearance, belied only by his cold, light eyes.

And now Kane, sweeping the village once more with his searching gaze, pulled his belt into a more comfortable position, shifted to his left hand the cat-headed stave N'Longa had given him, and took up his way again.

To the west lay a strip of thin forest, sloping downward to a broad belt of savannas, a waving sea of grass waist-deep and deeper. Beyond that rose another narrow strip of woodlands, deepening rapidly into dense jungle. Out of that jungle Kane had fled like a hunted wolf with pointed-toothed men hot on his trail. Even now a vagrant breeze brought faintly the throb of a savage drum which whispered its obscene tale of hate and blood-hunger and belly-lust across miles of jungle and grassland.

The memory of his flight and narrow escape was vivid in Kane's mind, for only the day before had he realized too late that he was in cannibal country, and all that afternoon in the reeking stench of the thick jungle, he had crept and run and hidden and doubled and twisted on his track with the fierce hunters ever close behind him, until night fell and he gained and crossed the grasslands under cover of darkness. Now in the late morning he had seen nothing, heard nothing of his pursuers, yet he had no reason to believe that they had abandoned the chase. They had been close on his heels when he took to the savannas.

So Kane surveyed the land in front of him. To the east, curving from north to south ran a straggling range of hills, for the most part dry and barren, rising in the south to a jagged black skyline that reminded Kane of the black hills of Negari. Between him and these hills stretched a broad expanse of gently rolling country, thickly treed, but nowhere approaching the density of a jungle. Kane got the impression of a vast upland plateau, bounded by the curving hills to the east and by the savannas to the west.

Kane set out for the hills with his long, swinging, tireless stride. Surely somewhere behind him the black demons were stealing after him, and he had no desire to be driven to bay. A shot might send them flying in sudden terror, but on the other hand, so low they were in the scale of humanity, it might transmit no supernatural fear to their dull brains. And not even Solomon Kane,

whom Sir Francis Drake had called Devon's king of swords, could win in a pitched battle with a whole tribe.

The silent village with its burden of death and mystery faded out behind him. Utter silence reigned among these mysterious uplands where no birds sang and only a silent macaw flitted among the great trees. The only sounds were Kane's cat-like tread, and the whisper of the drum-haunted breeze.

And then Kane caught a glimpse among the trees that made his heart leap with a sudden, nameless horror, and a few moments later he stood before Horror itself, stark and grisly. In a wide clearing, on a rather bold incline stood a grim stake, and to this stake was bound a thing that had once been a black man. Kane had rowed, chained to the bench of a Turkish galley, and he had toiled in Barbary vineyards; he had battled red Indians in the New Lands and had languished in the dungeons of Spain's Inquisition. He knew much of the fiendishness of man's inhumanity, but now he shuddered and grew sick. Yet it was not so much the ghastliness of the mutilations, horrible as they were, that shook Kane's soul, but the knowledge that the wretch still lived.

For as he drew near, the gory head that lolled on the butchered breast lifted and tossed from side to side, spattering blood from the stumps of ears, while a bestial, rattling whimper drooled from the shredded lips.

Kane spoke to the ghastly thing and it screamed unbearably, writhing in incredible contortions, while its head jerked up and down with the jerking of mangled nerves, and the empty, gaping eye-sockets seemed striving to see from their emptiness. And moaning low and brain-shatteringly it huddled its outraged self against the stake where it was bound and lifted its head in a grisly attitude of listening, as if it expected something out of the skies.

"Listen," said Kane, in the dialect of the river-tribes. "Do not fear me— I will not harm you and nothing else shall harm you any more. I am going to loose you."

Even as he spoke Kane was bitterly aware of the emptiness of his words. But his voice had filtered dimly into the crumbling, agony-shot brain of the black man. From between splintered teeth fell words, faltering and uncertain, mixed and mingled with the slavering droolings of imbecility. He spoke a language akin to the dialects Kane had learned from friendly river-folk on his wanderings, and Kane gathered that he had been bound to the stake for a long time— many moons, he whimpered in the delirium of approaching death; and all this time, inhuman, evil things had worked their monstrous will upon him. These things he mentioned by name, but Kane could make nothing of it for he used an unfamiliar term that sounded like *akaana*. But these things had not bound him to the stake, for the torn wretch slavered the name of Goru, who was a priest and who had drawn a cord too tight about his legs— and Kane

wondered that the memory of this small pain should linger through the red mazes of agony that the dying man should whimper over it.

And to Kane's horror, the black spoke of his brother who had aided in the binding of him, and he wept with infantile sobs, and moisture formed in the empty sockets and made tears of blood. And he muttered of a spear broken long ago in some dim hunt, and while he muttered in his delirium, Kane gently cut his bonds and eased his broken body to the grass. But even at the Englishman's careful touch, the poor wretch writhed and howled like a dying dog, while blood started anew from a score of ghastly gashes, which, Kane noted, were more like the wounds made by fang and talon than by knife or spear. But at last it was done and the bloody, torn thing lay on the soft grass with Kane's old slouch hat beneath its death's-head, breathing in great, rattling gasps.

Kane poured water from his canteen between the mangled lips, and bending close, said: "Tell me more of these devils, for by the God of my people, this deed shall not go unavenged, though Satan himself bar my way."

It is doubtful if the dying man heard. But he heard something else. The macaw, with the curiosity of its breed, swept from a near-by grove and passed so close its great wings fanned Kane's hair. And at the sound of those wings, the butchered black man heaved upright and screamed in a voice that haunted Kane's dreams to the day of his death: "The wings! The wings! They come again! Ahhhh, mercy, *the wings*!"

And the blood burst in a torrent from his lips and so he died.

KANE ROSE and wiped the cold sweat from his forehead. The upland forest shimmered in the noonday heat. Silence lay over the land like an enchantment of dreams. Kane's brooding eyes ranged to the black, malevolent hills crouching in the distance and back to the far-away savannas. An ancient curse lay over that mysterious land and the shadow of it fell across the soul of Solomon Kane.

Tenderly he lifted the red ruin that had once pulsed with life and youth and vitality, and carried it to the edge of the glade, where arranging the cold limbs as best he might, and shuddering once again at the unnamable mutilations, he piled stones above it till even a prowling jackal would find it hard to get at the flesh below.

And he had scarcely finished when something jerked him back out of his somber broodings to a realization of his own position. A slight sound— or his own wolf-like instinct— made him whirl. On the other side of the glade he caught a movement among the tall grasses— the glimpse of a hideous black face, with an ivory ring in the flat nose, thick lips parted to reveal teeth whose

filed points were apparent even at that distance, beady eyes and a low slanting forehead topped by a mop of frizzly hair. Even as the face faded from view Kane leaped back into the shelter of the ring of trees which circled the glade, and ran like a deer-hound, flitting from tree to tree and expecting each moment to hear the exultant clamor of the braves and to see them break cover at his back.

But soon he decided that they were content to hunt him down as certain beasts track their prey, slowly and inevitably. He hastened through the upland forest, taking advantage of every bit of cover, and he saw no more of his pursuers; yet he *knew*, as a hunted wolf knows, that they hovered close behind him, waiting their moment to strike him down without risk to their own hides. Kane smiled bleakly and without mirth. If it was to be a test of endurance, he would see how savage thews compared with his own spring-steel resilience. Let night come and he might yet give them the slip. If not— Kane knew in his heart that the savage essence of the Anglo-Saxon which chafed at his flight, would make him soon turn at bay, though his pursuers outnumbered him a hundred to one.

The sun sank westward. Kane was hungry, for he had not eaten since early morning when he wolfed down the last of his dried meat. An occasional spring had given him water, and once he thought he glimpsed the roof of a large hut far away through the trees. But he gave it a wide berth. It was hard to believe that this silent plateau was inhabited, but if it were, the natives were doubtless as ferocious as those hunting him. Ahead of him the land grew rougher, with broken boulders and steep slopes as he neared the lower reaches of the brooding hills. And still no sight of his hunters except for faint glimpses caught by wary backward glances— a drifting shadow, the bending of the grass, the sudden straightening of a trodden twig, a rustle of leaves. Why should they be so cautious? Why did they not close in and have it over?

Night fell and Kane reached the first long slopes which led upward to the foot of the hills which now brooded black and menacing above him. They were his goal, where he hoped to shake off his persistent foes at last, yet a nameless aversion warned him away from them. They were pregnant with hidden evil, repellent as the coil of a great sleeping serpent, glimpsed in the tall grass.

DARKNESS FELL heavily. The stars winked redly in the thick heat of the tropic night. And Kane, halting for a moment in an unusually dense grove, beyond which the trees thinned out on the slopes, heard a stealthy movement that was not the night-wind— for no breath of air stirred the heavy leaves. And even as he turned, there was a rush in the dark, under the trees. A shadow that merged with the shadows flung itself on Kane with a bestial mouthing and a

rattle of iron, and the Englishman, parrying by the gleam of the stars on the weapon, felt his assailant duck into close quarters and meet him chest to chest. Lean wiry arms locked about him, pointed teeth gnashed at him as Kane returned the fierce grapple. His tattered shirt ripped beneath a jagged edge, and by blind chance Kane found and pinioned the hand that held the iron knife, and drew his own dirk, flesh crawling in anticipation of a spear in the back.

But even as the Englishman wondered why the others did not come to their comrade's aid, he threw all of his iron muscles into the single combat. Close-clinched they swayed and writhed in the darkness, each striving to drive his blade into the other's flesh, and as the superior strength of the white man began to assert itself, the cannibal howled like a rabid dog, tore and bit. A convulsive spin-wheel of effort pivoted them out into the starlit glade where Kane saw the ivory nose-ring and the pointed teeth that snapped beast-like at his throat. And simultaneously he forced back and down the hand that gripped his knife-wrist, and drove the dirk deep into the black ribs. The warrior screamed and the raw acrid scent of blood flooded the night air. And in that instant Kane was stunned by a sudden savage rush and beat of mighty wings that dashed him to earth, and the black man was torn from his grip and vanished with a scream of mortal agony. Kane leaped to his feet, shaken to his foundation. The dwindling scream of the wretched black sounded faintly *and from above him*.

Straining his eyes into the skies he thought he caught a glimpse of a shapeless and horrific Thing crossing the dim stars— in which the writhing limbs of a human mingled namelessly with great wings and a shadowy shape— but so quickly it was gone, he could not be sure.

And now he wondered if it were not all a nightmare. But groping in the grove he found the ju-ju stave with which he had parried the short stabbing spear which lay beside it. And here, if more proof was needed, was his long dirk, still stained with blood.

Wings! Wings in the night! The skeleton in the village of torn roofs— the mutilated black man whose wounds were not made with knife or spear and who died shrieking of wings. Surely those hills were the haunt of gigantic birds who made humanity their prey. Yet if birds, why had they not wholly devoured the black man on the stake? And Kane knew in his heart that no true bird ever cast such a shadow as he had seen flit across the stars.

He shrugged his shoulders, bewildered. The night was silent. Where were the rest of the cannibals who had followed him from their distant jungle? Had the fate of their comrade frightened them into flight? Kane looked to his pistols. Cannibals or no, he went not up into those dark hills that night.

Now he must sleep, if all the devils of the Elder World were on his track. A deep roaring to the westward warned him that beasts of prey were a-roam, and he walked rapidly down the rolling slopes until he came to a dense grove some distance from that in which he had fought the cannibal. He climbed high among the great branches until he found a thick crotch that would accommodate even his tall frame. The branches above would guard him from a sudden swoop of any winged thing, and if savages were lurking near, their clamber into the tree would warn him, for he slept lightly as a cat. As for serpents and leopards, they were chances he had taken a thousand times.

Solomon Kane slept and his dreams were vague, chaotic, haunted with a suggestion of pre-human evil and which at last merged into a vision vivid as a scene in waking life. Solomon dreamed he woke with a start, drawing a pistol— for so long had his life been that of the wolf, that reaching for a weapon was his natural reaction upon waking suddenly. And his dream was that a strange, shadowy thing had perched upon a great branch close by and gazed at him with greedy, luminous yellow eyes that seared into his brain. The dream-thing was tall and lean and strangely misshapen, so blended with the shadows that it seemed a shadow itself, tangible only in the narrow yellow eyes. And Kane dreamed he waited, spellbound, while uncertainty came into those eyes and then the creature walked out on the limb as a man would walk, raised great shadowy wings, sprang into space and vanished. Then Kane jerked upright, the mists of sleep fading.

In the dim starlight, under the arching Gothic-like branches, the tree was empty save for himself. Then it had been a dream, after all— yet it had been so vivid, so fraught with inhuman foulness— even now a faint scent like that exuded by birds of prey seemed to linger in the air. Kane strained his ears. He heard the sighing of the night-wind, the whisper of the leaves, the far-away roaring of a lion, but naught else. Again Solomon slept— while high above him a shadow wheeled against the stars, circling again and again as a vulture circles a dying wolf.

2. The Battle in the Sky

DAWN was spreading whitely over the eastern hills when Kane woke. The thought of his nightmare came to him and he wondered again at its vividness as he climbed down out of the tree. A near-by spring slaked his thirst and some fruit, rare in these highlands, eased his hunger.

Then he turned his face again to the hills. A finish fighter was Solomon Kane. Along that grim skyline dwelt some evil foe to the sons of men, and that

mere fact was as much a challenge to the Puritan as had ever been a glove thrown in his face by some hot-headed gallant of Devon.

Refreshed by his night's sleep, he set out with his long easy stride, passing the grove that had witnessed the battle in the night, and coming into the region where the trees thinned at the foot of the slopes. Up these slopes he went, halting for a moment to gaze back over the way he had come. Now that he was above the plateau, he could easily make out a village in the distance— a cluster of mud-and-bamboo huts with one unusually large hut a short distance from the rest on a sort of low knoll.

And while he gazed, with a sudden rush of grisly wings the terror was upon him! Kane whirled, galvanized. All signs had pointed to the theory of a winged thing that hunted by night. He had not expected attack in broad daylight— but here a bat-like monster was swooping at him out of the very eye of the rising sun. Kane saw a spread of mighty wings, from which glared a horribly human face; then he drew and fired with unerring aim and the monster veered wildly in midair and came whirling and tumbling out of the sky to crash at his feet.

Kane leaned forward, pistol smoking in his hand, and gazed wide-eyed. Surely this thing was a demon out of the black pits of hell, said the somber mind of the Puritan; yet a leaden ball had slain it. Kane shrugged his shoulders, baffled; he had never seen aught to approach this, though all his life had fallen in strange ways.

The thing was like a man, inhumanly tall and inhumanly thin; the head was long, narrow and hairless— the head of a predatory creature. The ears were small, close-set and queerly pointed. The eyes, set in death, were narrow, oblique and of a strange yellowish color. The nose was thin and hooked, like the beak of a bird of prey, the mouth a wide cruel gash, whose thin lips, writhed in a death snarl and flecked with foam, disclosed wolfish fangs.

The creature, which was naked and hairless, was not unlike a human being in other ways. The shoulders were broad and powerful, the neck long and lean. The arms were long and muscular, the thumb being set beside the fingers after the manner of the great apes. Fingers and thumbs were armed with heavy hooked talons. The chest was curiously misshapen, the breast-bone jutting out like the keel of a ship, the ribs curving back from it. The legs were long and wiry with huge, hand-like, prehensile feet, the great toe set opposite the rest like a man's thumb. The claws on the toes were merely long nails.

But the most curious feature of this curious creature was on its back. A pair of great wings, shaped much like the wings of a moth but with a bony frame and of leathery substance, grew from its shoulders, beginning at a point just back and above where the arms joined the shoulders, and extending half-way

to the narrow hips. These wings, Kane reckoned, would measure some eighteen feet from tip to tip.

He laid hold on the creature, involuntarily shuddering at the slick, hard leather-like feel of the skin, and half lifted it. The weight was little more than half as much as it would have been in a man the same height— some six and a half feet. Evidently the bones were of a peculiar bird-like structure and the flesh consisted almost entirely of stringy muscles.

Kane stepped back, surveying the thing again. Then his dream had been no dream after all— that foul thing or another like it had in grisly reality lighted in the tree beside him— a whir of mighty wings! A sudden rush through the sky! Even as Kane whirled he realized he had committed the jungle-farer's unpardonable crime— he had allowed his astonishment and curiosity to throw him off guard. Already a winged fiend was at his throat and there was no time to draw and fire his other pistol. Kane saw, in a maze of thrashing wings, a devilish, semi-human face— he felt those wings battering at him— he felt cruel talons sink deep into his breast; then he was dragged off his feet and felt empty space beneath him.

The winged man had wrapped his limbs about the Englishman's legs, and the talons he had driven into Kane's breast muscles held like fanged vises. The wolf-like fangs drove at Kane's throat but the Puritan gripped the bony throat and thrust back the grisly head, while with his right hand he strove to draw his dirk. The bird-man was mounting slowly and a fleeting glance showed Kane that they were already high above the trees. The Englishman did not hope to survive this battle in the sky, for even if he slew his foe, he would be dashed to death in the fall. But with the innate ferocity of the fighting Anglo-Saxon he set himself grimly to take his captor with him.

Holding those keen fangs at bay, Kane managed to draw his dirk and he plunged it deep into the body of the monster. The bat-man veered wildly and a rasping, raucous screech burst from his half-throttled throat. He floundered wildly, beating frantically with his great wings, bowing his back and twisting his head fiercely in a vain effort to free it and sink home his deadly fangs. He sank the talons of one hand agonizingly deeper and deeper into Kane's breast muscles, while with the other he tore at his foe's head and body. But the Englishman, gashed and bleeding, with the silent and tenacious savagery of a bulldog sank his fingers deeper into the lean neck and drove his dirk home again and again, while far below awed eyes watched the fiendish battle that was raging at that dizzy height.

They had drifted out over the plateau, and the fast-weakening wings of the bat-man barely supported their weight. They were sinking earthward swiftly, but Kane, blinded with blood and battle-fury, knew nothing of this. With a

great piece of his scalp hanging loose, his chest and shoulders cut and ripped, the world had become a blind, red thing in which he was aware of but one sensation— the bulldog urge to kill his foe. Now the feeble and spasmodic beating of the dying monster's wings held them hovering for an instant above a thick grove of gigantic trees, while Kane felt the grip of claws and twining limbs grow weaker and the slashing of the talons become a futile flailing.

With a last burst of power he drove the reddened dirk straight through the breast-bone and felt a convulsive tremor run through the creature's frame. The great wings fell limp— and victor and vanquished dropped headlong and plummet-like earthward.

Through a red wave Kane saw the waving branches rushing up to meet them— he felt them flail his face and tear at his clothing, as still locked in that death-clinch he rushed downward through leaves which eluded his vainly grasping hand; then his head crashed against a great limb and an endless abyss of blackness engulfed him.

3. The People in the Shadow

THROUGH colossal, black basaltic corridors of night, Solomon Kane fled for a thousand years. Gigantic winged demons, horrific in the utter darkness, swept over him with a rush of great bat-like pinions and in the blackness he fought with them as a cornered rat fights a vampire-bat, while fleshless jaws drooled fearful blasphemies and horrid secrets in his ears, and the skulls of men rolled under his groping feet.

Solomon Kane came back suddenly from the land of delirium and his first sight of sanity was that of a fat, kindly black face bending over him. Kane saw he was in a roomy, clean and well-ventilated hut, while from a cooking-pot bubbling outside wafted savory scents. Kane realized he was ravenously hungry. And he was strangely weak, and the hand he lifted to his bandaged head shook and its bronze was dimmed.

The fat man and another, a tall, gaunt, grim-faced warrior, bent over him, and the fat man said: "He is awake, Kuroba, and of sound mind." The gaunt man nodded and called something which was answered from without.

"What is this place?" asked Kane, in a language he had learned, akin to the dialect the black had used. "How long have I lain here?"

"This is the last village of Bogonda." The fat black pressed him back with hands gentle as a woman's. "We found you lying beneath the trees on the slopes, badly wounded and senseless. You have raved in delirium for many days. Now eat."

A lithe young warrior entered with a wooden bowl full of steaming food and Kane ate ravenously.

"He is like a leopard, Kuroba," said the fat man admiringly. "Not one in a thousand would have lived with his wounds."

"Aye," returned the other. "And he slew the akaana that rent him, Goru."

Kane struggled to his elbows. "Goru?" he cried fiercely. "The priest who binds men to stakes for devils to eat?"

And he strove to rise so that he could strangle the fat man, but his weakness swept over him like a wave, the hut swam dizzily to his eyes and he sank back panting, where he soon fell into a sound, natural sleep.

Later he awoke and found a slim young girl, named Nayela, watching him. She fed him, and feeling much stronger, Kane asked questions which she answered shyly but intelligently. This was Bogonda, ruled by Kuroba the chief and Goru the priest. None in Bogonda had ever seen or heard of a white man before. She counted the days Kane had lain helpless, and he was amazed. But such a battle as he had been through was enough to kill an ordinary man. He wondered that no bones had been broken, but the girl said the branches had broken his fall and he had landed on the body of the akaana. He asked for Goru, and the fat priest came to him, bringing Kane's weapons.

"Some we found with you where you lay," said Goru, "some by the body of the akaana you slew with the weapon which speaks in fire and smoke. You must be a god— yet the gods bleed not and you have just all but died. Who are you?"

"I am no god," Kane answered, "but a man like yourself, albeit my skin be white. I come from a far land amid the sea, which land, mind ye, is the fairest and noblest of all lands. My name is Solomon Kane and I am a landless wanderer. From the lips of a dying man I first heard your name. Yet your face seemeth kindly."

A shadow crossed the eyes of the shaman and he hung his head.

"Rest and grow strong, oh man, or god or whatever you be," said he, "and in time you will learn of the ancient curse that rests upon this ancient land."

And in the days that followed, while Kane recovered and grew strong with the wild beast vitality that was his, Goru and Kuroba sat and spoke to him at length, telling him many curious things.

Their tribe was not aboriginal here, but had come upon the plateau a hundred and fifty years before, giving it the name of their former home. They had once been a powerful tribe in Old Bogonda, on a great river far to the south. But tribal wars broke their power, and at last before a concerted uprising, the whole tribe gave way, and Goru repeated legends of that great

flight of a thousand miles through jungle and swampland harried at every step by cruel foes.

At last, hacking their way through a country of ferocious cannibals, they found themselves safe from man's attack— but prisoners in a trap from which neither they nor their descendants could ever escape. They were in the horror-country of Akaana, and Goru said his ancestors came to understand the jeering laughter of the man-eaters who had hounded them to the very borders of the plateau.

The Bogondi found a fertile country with good water and plenty of game. There were numbers of goats and a species of wild pig that throve here in great abundance. At first the black people ate these pigs, but later they spared them for a very good reason. The grasslands between plateau and jungle swarmed with antelopes, buffaloes and the like, and there were many lions. Lions also roamed the plateau, but Bogonda meant "Lion-slayer" in their tongue and it was not many moons before the remnants of the great cats took to the lower levels. But it was not lions they had to fear, as Goru's ancestors soon learned.

Finding that the cannibals would not come past the savannas, they rested from their long trek and built two villages— Upper and Lower Bogonda. Kane was in Upper Bogonda; he had seen the ruins of the lower village. But soon they found that they had strayed into a country of nightmares with dripping fangs and talons. They heard the beat of mighty wings at night, and saw horrific shadows cross the stars and loom against the moon. Children began to disappear and at last a young hunter strayed off into the hills, where night overtook him. And in the gray light of dawn a mangled, half-devoured corpse fell from the skies into the village street and a whisper of ogreish laughter from high above froze the horrified onlookers. Then a little later the full horror of their position burst upon the Bogondi.

At first the winged men were afraid of the black people. They hid themselves and ventured from their caverns only at night. Then they grew bolder. In the full daylight, a warrior shot one with an arrow, but the fiends had learned they could slay a human and its death scream brought a score of the devils dropping from the skies, who tore the slayer to pieces in full sight of the tribe.

The Bogondi then prepared to leave that devil's country and a hundred warriors went up into the hills to find a pass. They found steep walls, up which a man must climb laboriously, and they found the cliffs honeycombed with caves where the winged men dwelt.

Then was fought the first pitched battle between men and bat-men and it resulted in a crushing victory for the monsters. The bows and spears of the

black people proved futile before the swoops of the taloned fiends, and of all that hundred that went up into the hills, not one survived; for the akaanas hunted down those that fled and dragged down the last one within bowshot of the upper village.

Then it was that the Bogondi, seeing they could not hope to win through the hills, sought to fight their way out again the way they had come. But a great horde of cannibals met them in the grasslands and in a great battle that lasted nearly all day, hurled them back, broken and defeated. And Goru said while the battle raged, the skies were thronged with hideous shapes, circling above and laughing their fearful mirth to see men die wholesale.

So the survivors of those two battles, licking their wounds, bowed to the inevitable with the fatalistic philosophy of the black man. Some fifteen hundred men, women and children remained, and they built their huts, tilled the soil and lived stolidly in the shadow of the nightmare.

In those days there were many of the bird-people, and they might have wiped out the Bogondi utterly, had they wished. No one warrior could cope with an akaana, for he was stronger than a human, he struck as a hawk strikes, and if he missed, his wings carried him out of reach of a counter-blow. Here Kane interrupted to ask why the blacks did not make war on the demons with arrows. But Goru answered that it took a quick and accurate archer to strike an akaana in midair at all and so tough were their hides that unless the arrow struck squarely it would not penetrate. Kane knew that the blacks were very indifferent bowmen and that they pointed their shafts with chipped stone, bone or hammered iron almost as soft as copper; he thought of Poitiers and Agincourt and wished grimly for a file of stout English archers— or a rank of musketeers.

But Goru said the akaanas did not seem to wish to destroy the Bogondi utterly. Their chief food consisted of the little pigs which then swarmed the plateau, and young goats. Sometimes they went out on the savannas for antelope, but they distrusted the open country and feared the lions. Nor did they haunt the jungles beyond, for the trees grew too close for the spread of their wings. They kept to the hills and the plateau— and what lay beyond those hills none in Bogonda knew.

The akaanas allowed the black folk to inhabit the plateau much as men allow wild animals to thrive, or stock lakes with fish— for their own pleasure. The bat-people, said Goru, had a strange and grisly sense of humor which was tickled by the sufferings of a howling human. Those grim hills had echoed to cries that turned men's hearts to ice.

But for many years, Goru said, once the Bogondi learned not to resist their masters, the akaanas were content to snatch up a baby from time to time, or

devour a young girl strayed from the village or a youth whom night caught outside the walls. The bat-folk distrusted the village; they circled high above it but did not venture within. There the Bogondi were safe until late years.

Goru said that the akaanas were fast dying out; once there had been hope that the remnants of his race would outlast them— in which event, he said fatalistically, the cannibals would undoubtedly come up from the jungle and put the survivors in the cooking-pots. Now he doubted if there were more than a hundred and fifty akaanas altogether. Kane asked him why did not the warriors then sally forth on a great hunt and destroy the devils utterly, and Goru smiled a bitter smile and repeated his remarks about the prowess of the bat-people in battle. Moreover, said he, the whole tribe of Bogonda numbered only about four hundred souls now, and the bat-people were their only protection against the cannibals to the west.

Goru said the tribe had thinned more in the past thirty years than in all the years previous. As the numbers of the akaanas dwindled, their hellish savagery increased. They seized more and more of the Bogondi to torture and devour in their grim black caves high up in the hills, and Goru spoke of sudden raids on hunting-parties and toilers in the plantain fields and of the nights made ghastly by horrible screams and gibberings from the dark hills, and blood-freezing laughter that was half human; of dismembered limbs and gory grinning heads flung from the skies to fall in the shuddering village, and of grisly feasts among the stars.

Then came drouth, Goru said, and a great famine. Many of the springs dried up and the crops of rice and yams and plantains failed. The gnus, deer and buffaloes which had formed the main part of Bogonda's meat diet withdrew to the jungle in quest of water, and the lions, their hunger overcoming their fear of man, ranged into the uplands. Many of the tribe died and the rest were driven by hunger to eat the pigs which were the natural prey of the bat-people. This angered the akaanas and thinned the pigs. Famine, Bogondi and the lions destroyed all the goats and half the pigs.

At last the famine was past, but the damage was done. Of all the great droves which once swarmed the plateau, only a remnant was left and these were wary and hard to catch. The Bogondi had eaten the pigs, so the akaanas ate the Bogondi. Life became a hell for the black people, and the lower village, numbering now only some hundred and fifty souls, rose in revolt. Driven to frenzy by repeated outrages, they turned on their masters. An akaana lighting in the very streets to steal a child was set on and shot to death with arrows. And the people of Lower Bogonda drew into their huts and waited for their doom.

And in the night, said Goru, it came. The akaanas had overcome their distrust of the huts. The full flock of them swarmed down from the hills, and Upper Bogonda awoke to hear the fearful cataclysm of screams and blasphemies that marked the end of the other village. All night Goru's people had lain sweating in terror, not daring to move, harkening to the howling and gibbering that rent the night; at last these sounds ceased, Goru said, wiping the cold sweat from his brow, but sounds of grisly and obscene feasting still haunted the night with demon's mockery.

In the early dawn Goru's people saw the hell-flock winging back to their hills, like demons flying back to hell through the dawn, and they flew slowly and heavily, like gorged vultures. Later the people dared to steal down to the accursed village, and what they found there sent them shrieking away; and to that day, Goru said, no man passed within three bow-shots of that silent horror. And Kane nodded in understanding, his cold eyes more somber than ever.

FOR MANY DAYS after that, Goru said, the people waited in quaking fear, and finally in desperation of fear, which breeds unspeakable cruelty, the tribe cast lots and the loser was bound to a stake between the two villages, in hopes the akaanas would recognize this as a token of submission so that the people of Bogonda might escape the fate of their kinsmen. This custom, said Goru, had been borrowed from the cannibals who in old times worshipped the akaanas and offered a human sacrifice at each moon. But chance had shown them that the akaana could be killed, so they ceased to worship him— at least that was Goru's deduction, and he explained at much length that no mortal thing is worthy of real adoration, however evil or powerful it may be.

His own ancestors had made occasional sacrifices to placate the winged devils, but until lately it had not been a regular custom. Now it was necessary; the akaanas expected it, and each moon they chose from their waning numbers a strong young man or a girl whom they bound to the stake. Kane watched Goru's face closely as he spoke of his sorrow for this unspeakable necessity, and the Englishman realized the priest was sincere. Kane shuddered at the thought of a tribe of human beings thus passing slowly but surely into the maws of a race of monsters.

Kane spoke of the wretch he had seen, and Goru nodded, pain in his soft eyes. For a day and a night he had been hanging there, while the akaanas glutted their vile torture-lust on his quivering, agonized flesh. Thus far the sacrifices had kept doom from the village. The remaining pigs furnished sustenance for the dwindling akaanas, together with an occasional baby

snatched up, and they were content to have their nameless sport with the single victim each moon.

A thought came to Kane.

"The cannibals never come up into the plateau?"

Goru shook his head; safe in their jungle, they never raided past the savannas.

"But they hunted me to the very foot of the hills."

Again Goru shook his head. There was only one cannibal; they had found his footprints. Evidently a single warrior, bolder than the rest, had allowed his passion for the chase to overcome his fear of the grisly plateau and had paid the penalty. Kane's teeth came together with a vicious snap which ordinarily took the place of profanity with him. He was stung by the thought of fleeing so long from a single enemy. No wonder that enemy had followed so cautiously, waiting until dark to attack. But, asked Kane, why had the akaana seized the black man instead of himself— and why had he not been attacked by the bat-man who alighted in his tree that night?

The cannibal was bleeding, Goru answered; the scent called the bat-fiend to attack, for they scented raw blood as far as vultures. And they were very wary. They had never seen a man like Kane, who showed no fear. Surely they had decided to spy on him, take him off guard before they struck.

Who were these creatures? Kane asked. Goru shrugged his shoulders. They were there when his ancestors came, who had never heard of them before they saw them. There was no intercourse with the cannibals, so they could learn nothing from them. The akaanas lived in caves, naked like beasts; they knew nothing of fire and ate only fresh raw meat. But they had a language of a sort and acknowledged a king among them. Many died in the great famine when the stronger ate the weaker. They were vanishing swiftly; of late years no females or young had been observed among them. When these males died at last, there would be no more akaanas; but Bogonda, observed Goru, was doomed already, unless— he looked strangely and wistfully at Kane. But the Puritan was deep in thought.

Among the swarm of native legends he had heard on his wanderings, one now stood out. Long, long ago, an old, old ju-ju man had told him, winged devils came flying out of the north and passed over his country, vanishing in the maze of the jungle-haunted south. And the ju-ju man related an old, old legend concerning these creatures— that once they had abode in myriad numbers far on a great lake of bitter water many moons to the north, and ages and ages ago a chieftain and his warriors fought them with bows and arrows and slew many, driving the rest into the south. The name of the chief was

N'Yasunna and he owned a great war canoe with many oars driving it swiftly through the bitter water.

And now a cold wind blew suddenly on Solomon Kane, as if from a Door opened suddenly on Outer gulfs of Time and Space. For now he realized the truth of that garbled myth, and the truth of an older, grimmer legend. For what was the great bitter lake but the Mediterranean Ocean and who was the chief N'Yasunna but the hero Jason, who conquered the harpies and drove them— not alone into the Strophades Isles but into Africa as well? The old pagan tale was true then, Kane thought dizzily, shrinking aghast from the strange realm of grisly possibilities this opened up. For if this myth of the harpies were a reality, what of the other legends— the Hydra, the centaurs, the chimera, Medusa, Pan and the satyrs? All those myths of antiquity— behind them did there lie and lurk nightmare realities with slavering fangs and talons steeped in shuddersome evil? Africa, the Dark Continent, land of shadows and horror, of bewitchment and sorcery, into which all evil things had been banished before the growing light of the western world!

Kane came out of his reveries with a start. Goru was tugging gently and timidly at his sleeve.

"Save us from the akaanas!" said Goru. "If you be not a god, there is the power of a god in you! You bear in your hand the mighty ju-ju stave which has in times gone by been the scepter of fallen empires and the staff of mighty priests. And you have weapons which speak death in fire and smoke— for our young men watched and saw you slay two akaanas. We will make you king— god— what you will! More than a moon has passed since you came into Bogonda and the time for the sacrifice is gone by, but the bloody stake stands bare. The akaanas shun the village where you lie; they steal no more babes from us. We have thrown off their yoke because our trust is in you!"

Kane clasped his temples with his hands. "You know not what you ask!" he cried. "God knoweth it is in my deepest heart to rid the land of this evil, but I am no god. With my pistols I can slay a few of the fiends, but I have but a little powder left. Had I great store of powder and ball, and the musket I shattered in the vampire-haunted Hills of the Dead, then indeed would there be a rare hunting. But even if I slew all these fiends, what of the cannibals?"

"They too will fear you!" cried old Kuroba, while the girl Nayela and the lad, Loga, who was to have been the next sacrifice, gazed at him with their souls in their eyes. Kane dropped his chin on his fist and sighed.

"Yet will I stay here in Bogonda all the rest of my life if ye think I be protection to the people."

So Solomon Kane stayed at the village of Bogonda of the Shadow. The people were a kindly folk, whose natural sprightliness and fun-loving spirits

were subdued and saddened by long dwelling in the Shadow. But now they had taken new heart by the white man's coming and it wrenched Kane's heart to note the pathetic trust they placed in him. Now they sang in the plantain fields and danced about the fires, and gazed at him with adoring faith in their eyes. But Kane, cursing his own helplessness, knew how futile would be his fancied protection if the winged fiends swept suddenly out of the skies.

But he stayed in Bogonda. In his dreams the gulls wheeled above the cliffs of old Devon carved in the clean, blue, wind-whipped skies, and in the day the call of the unknown lands beyond Bogonda clawed at his heart with fierce yearning. But he abode in Bogonda and racked his brains for a plan. He sat and gazed for hours at the ju-ju stave, hoping in desperation that black magic would aid him, where the white man's mind failed. But N'Longa's ancient gift gave him no aid. Once he had summoned the Slave Coast shaman to him across leagues of intervening space— but it was only when confronted with supernatural manifestations that N'Longa could come to him, and these harpies were not supernatural.

The germ of an idea began to grow at the back of Kane's mind, but he discarded it. It had to do with a great trap— and how could the akaanas be trapped? The roaring of lions played a grim accompaniment to his brooding meditations. As man dwindled on the plateau, the hunting beasts who feared only the spears of the hunters were beginning to gather. Kane laughed bitterly. It was not lions, that might be hunted down and slain singly, that he had to deal with.

At some little distance from the village stood the great hut of Goru, once a council hall. This hut was full of many strange fetishes, which Goru said with a helpless wave of his fat hands, were strong magic against evil spirits but scant protection against winged hellions of gristle and bone and flesh.

4. The Madness of Solomon

KANE WOKE suddenly from a dreamless sleep. A hideous medley of screams burst horrific in his ears. Outside his hut, people were dying in the night, horribly, as cattle die in the shambles. He had slept, as always, with his weapons buckled on him. Now he bounded to the door, and something fell mouthing and slavering at his feet to grasp his knees in a convulsive grip and gibber incoherent pleas. In the faint light of a smoldering fire near by, Kane in horror recognized the face of the youth Loga, now frightfully torn and drenched in blood, already freezing into a death mask. The night was full of fearful sounds, inhuman howlings mingled with the whisper of mighty wings, the tearing of thatch and a ghastly demon-laughter. Kane freed himself from

the locked dead arms and sprang to the dying fire. He could make out only a confused and vague maze of fleeing forms, and darting shapes, the shift and blur of dark wings against the stars.

He snatched up a brand and thrust it against the thatch of his hut— and as the flame leaped up and showed him the scene he stood frozen and aghast. Red, howling doom had fallen on Bogonda. Winged monsters raced screaming through her streets, wheeled above the heads of the fleeing people, or tore apart the hut thatches to get at the gibbering victims within.

With a choked cry the Englishman woke from his trance of horror, drew and fired at a darting flame-eyed shadow which fell at his feet with a shattered skull. And Kane gave tongue to one deep, fierce roar and bounded into the mêlée, all the berserk fury of his heathen Saxon ancestors bursting into terrible being.

Dazed and bewildered by the sudden attack, cowed by long years of submission, the Bogondi were incapable of combined resistance and for the most part died like sheep. Some, maddened by desperation, fought back, but their arrows went wild or glanced from the tough wings while the devilish agility of the creatures made spear-thrust and ax-stroke uncertain. Leaping from the ground they avoided the blows of their victims and sweeping down upon their shoulders dashed them to earth, where fang and talon did their crimson work.

Kane saw old Kuroba, gaunt and blood-stained, at bay against a hut wall with his foot on the neck of a monster who had not been quick enough. The grim-faced old chief wielded a two-handed ax in great sweeping blows that for the moment held back the screeching onset of half a dozen of the devils. Kane was leaping to his aid when a low, pitiful whimper checked him. The girl Nayela writhed weakly, prone in the bloody dust, while on her back a vulture-like thing crouched and tore. Her dulling eyes sought the face of the Englishman in anguished appeal. Kane ripped out a bitter oath and fired point-blank. The winged devil pitched backward with an abhorrent screeching and a wild flutter of dying wings and Kane bent to the dying girl, who whimpered and kissed his hands with uncertain lips as he cradled her head in his arms. Her eyes set.

Kane laid the body gently down, looking for Kuroba. He saw only a huddled cluster of grisly shapes that sucked and tore at something between them. And Kane went mad. With a scream that cut through the inferno he bounded up, slaying even as he rose. Even in the act of lunging up from bent knee he drew and thrust, transfixing a vulture-like throat. Then whipping out his rapier as the thing floundered and twitched in its death struggles, the raging Puritan charged forward seeking new victims.

On all sides of him the people of Bogonda were dying hideously. They fought futilely or they fled and the demons coursed them down as a hawk courses a hare. They ran into the huts and the fiends rent the thatch or burst the door, and what took place in those huts was mercifully hidden from Kane's eyes. And to the frantic white man's horror-distorted brain it seemed that he alone was responsible. The black folk had trusted him to save them. They had withheld the sacrifice and defied their grim masters and now they were paying the horrible penalty and he was unable to save them. In the agony-dimmed eyes turned toward him Kane quaffed the black dregs of the bitter cup. It was not anger or the vindictiveness of fear. It was hurt and a stunned reproach. He was their god and he had failed them.

Now he ravened through the massacre and the fiends avoided him, turning to the easy black victims. But Kane was not to be denied. In a red haze that was not of the burning hut, he saw a culminating horror; a harpy gripped a writhing naked thing that had been a woman and the wolfish fangs gorged deep. As Kane sprang, thrusting, the bat-man dropped his yammering, mowing prey and soared aloft. But Kane dropped his rapier and with the bound of a blood-mad panther caught the demon's throat and locked his iron legs about its lower body.

Again he found himself battling in midair, but this time only above the roofs of the huts. Terror had entered the cold brain of the harpy. He did not fight to hold and slay; he wished only to be rid of this silent, clinging thing that stabbed so savagely for his life. He floundered wildly, screaming abhorrently and thrashing with his wings, then as Kane's dirk bit deeper, dipped suddenly sidewise and fell headlong.

The thatch of a hut broke their fall, and Kane and the dying harpy crashed through to land on a writhing mass on the hut floor. In the lurid flickering of the burning hut outside, that vaguely lighted the hut into which he had fallen, Kane saw a deed of brain-shaking horror being enacted— red dripping fangs in a yawning gash of a mouth, and a crimson travesty of a human form that still writhed with agonized life. Then in the maze of madness that held him, his steel fingers closed on the fiend's throat in a grip that no tearing of talons or hammering of wings could loosen, until he felt the horrid life flow out from under his fingers and the bony neck hung broken.

And still outside the red madness of slaughter continued. Kane bounded up, his hand closing blindly on the haft of some weapon, and as he leaped from the hut a harpy soared from under his very feet. It was an ax that Kane had snatched up, and he dealt a stroke that spattered the demon's brains like water. He sprang forward, stumbling over bodies and parts of bodies, blood

streaming from a dozen wounds, and then halted baffled and screaming with rage.

The bat-people were taking to the air. No longer would they face this white-skinned madman who in his insanity was more terrible than they. But they went not alone into the upper regions. In their lustful talons they bore writhing, screaming forms, and Kane, raging to and fro with his dripping ax, found himself alone in a corpse-choked village.

He threw back his head to shriek his hate at the fiends above him and he felt warm, thick drops fall into his face, while the shadowy skies were filled with screams of agony and the laughter of monsters. And Kane's last vestige of reason snapped as the sounds of that ghastly feast in the skies filled the night and the blood that rained from the stars fell into his face. He gibbered to and fro, screaming chaotic blasphemies.

And was he not a symbol of Man, staggering among the tooth-marked bones and severed grinning heads of humans, brandishing a futile ax, and screaming incoherent hate at the grisly, winged shapes of Night that make him their prey, chuckling in demoniac triumph above him and dripping into his mad eyes the pitiful blood of their human victims?

5. The White-skinned Conqueror

A SHUDDERING, white-faced dawn crept over the black hills to shiver above the red shambles that had been the village of Bogonda. The huts stood intact, except for the one which had sunk to smoldering coals, but the thatches of many were torn. Dismembered bones, half or wholly stripped of flesh, lay in the streets, and some were splintered as though they had been dropped from a great height.

It was a realm of the dead where was but one sign of life. Solomon Kane leaned on his blood-clotted ax and gazed upon the scene with dull, mad eyes. He was grimed and clotted with half-dried blood from long gashes on chest, face and shoulders, but he paid no heed to his hurts.

The people of Bogonda had not died alone. Seventeen harpies lay among the bones. Six of these Kane had slain. The rest had fallen before the frantic dying desperation of the black people. But it was poor toll to take in return. Of the four hundred odd people of Upper Bogonda, not one had lived to see the dawn. And the harpies were gone— back to their caves in the black hills, gorged to repletion.

With slow, mechanical steps Kane went about gathering up his weapons. He found his sword, dirk, pistols and the ju-ju stave. He left the main village and went up the slope to the great hut of Goru. And there he halted, stung by

a new horror. The ghastly humor of the harpies had prompted a delicious jest. Above the hut door stared the severed head of Goru. The fat cheeks were shrunken, the lips lolled in an aspect of horrified idiocy, and the eyes stared like a hurt child. And in those dead eyes Kane saw wonder and reproach.

Kane looked at the shambles that had been Bogonda, and he looked at the death mask of Goru. And he lifted his clenched fists above his head, and with glaring eyes raised and writhing lips flecked with froth, he cursed the sky and the earth and the spheres above and below. He cursed the cold stars, the blazing sun, the mocking moon and the whisper of the wind. He cursed all fates and destinies, all that he had loved or hated, the silent cities beneath the seas, the past ages and the future eons. In one soul-shaking burst of blasphemy he cursed the gods and devils who make mankind their sport, and he cursed Man who lives blindly on and blindly offers his back to the iron-hoofed feet of his gods.

Then as breath failed he halted, panting. From the lower reaches sounded the deep roaring of a lion and into the eyes of Solomon Kane came a crafty gleam. He stood long, as one frozen, and out of his madness grew a desperate plan. And he silently recanted his blasphemy, for if the brazen-hoofed gods made Man for their sport and plaything, they also gave him a brain that holds craft and cruelty greater than any other living thing.

"There you shall bide," said Solomon Kane to the head of Goru. "The sun will wither you and the cold dews of night will shrivel you. But I will keep the kites from you and your eyes shall see the fall of your slayers. Aye, I could not save the people of Bogonda, but by the God of my race, I can avenge them. Man is the sport and sustenance of titanic beings of Night and Horror whose giant wings hover ever above him. But even evil things may come to an end—and watch ye, Goru."

In the days that followed Kane labored mightily, beginning with the first gray light of dawn and toiling on past sunset, into the white moonlight till he fell and slept the sleep of utter exhaustion. He snatched food as he worked and he gave his wounds absolutely no heed, scarcely being aware that they healed of themselves. He went down into the lower levels and cut bamboo, great stacks of long, tough stalks. He cut thick branches of trees, and tough vines to serve as ropes. And with this material he reinforced the walls and roof of Goru's hut. He set the bamboos deep in the earth, hard against the wall, and interwove and twined them, binding them fast with the vines that were pliant and tough as cords. The long branches he made fast along the thatch, binding them close together. When he had finished, an elephant could scarcely have burst through the walls.

The lions had come into the plateau in great quantities and the herds of little pigs dwindled fast. Those the lions spared, Kane slew, and tossed to the jackals. This racked Kane's heart, for he was a kindly man and this wholesale slaughter, even of pigs who would fall prey to hunting beasts anyhow, grieved him. But it was part of his plan of vengeance and he steeled his heart.

The days stretched into weeks. Kane toiled by day and by night, and between his stints he talked to the shriveled, mummied head of Goru, whose eyes, strangely enough, did not change in the blaze of the sun or the haunt of the moon, but retained their life-like expression. When the memory of those lunacy-haunted days had become only a vague nightmare, Kane wondered if, as it had seemed to him, Goru's dried lips had moved in answer, speaking strange and mysterious things.

Kane saw the akaanas wheeling against the sky at a distance, but they did not come near, even when he slept in the great hut, pistols at hand. They feared his power to deal death with smoke and thunder. At first he noted that they flew sluggishly, gorged with the flesh they had eaten on that red night, and the bodies they had borne to their caves. But as the weeks passed they appeared leaner and leaner and ranged far afield in search of food. And Kane laughed, deeply and madly. This plan of his would never have worked before, but now there were no humans to fill the bellies of the harpy-folk. And there were no more pigs. In all the plateau there were no creatures for the bat-people to eat. Why they did not range east of the hills, Kane thought he knew. That must be a region of thick jungle like the country to the west. He saw them fly into the grassland for antelopes and he saw the lions take toll of them. After all, the akaanas were weak beings among the hunters, strong enough only to slay pigs and deer— and humans.

At last they began to soar close to him at night and he saw their greedy eyes glaring at him through the gloom. He judged the time was ripe. Huge buffaloes, too big and ferocious for the bat-people to slay, had strayed up into the plateau to ravage the deserted fields of the dead black people. Kane cut one of these out of the herd and drove him, with shouts and volleys of stones, to the hut of Goru. It was a tedious, dangerous task, and time and again Kane barely escaped the surly bull's sudden charges, but persevered and at last shot the beast before the hut.

A strong west wind was blowing and Kane flung handfuls of blood into the air for the scent to waft to the harpies in the hills. He cut the bull to pieces and carried its quarters into the hut, then managed to drag the huge trunk itself inside. Then he retired into the thick trees near by and waited.

He had not long to wait. The morning air filled suddenly with the beat of many wings and a hideous flock alighted before the hut of Goru. All of the

beasts— or men— seemed to be there, and Kane gazed in wonder at the tall, strange creatures, so like to humanity and yet so unlike— the veritable demons of priestly legend. They folded their wings like cloaks about them as they walked upright and they talked to one another in a strident crackling voice that had nothing of the human in it. No, these things were not men, Kane decided. They were the materialization of some ghastly jest of Nature— some travesty of the world's infancy when Creation was an experiment. Perhaps they were the offspring of a forbidden and obscene mating of man and beast; more likely they were a freakish offshoot on the branch of evolution— for Kane had long ago dimly sensed a truth in the heretical theories of the ancient philosophers, that Man is but a higher beast. And if Nature made many strange beasts in the past ages, why should she not have experimented with monstrous forms of mankind? Surely Man as Kane knew him was not the first of his breed to walk the earth, nor yet to be the last.

Now the harpies hesitated, with their natural distrust for a building, and some soared to the roof and tore at the thatch. But Kane had builded well. They returned to earth and at last, driven beyond endurance by the smell of raw blood and the sight of the flesh within, one of them ventured inside. In an instant all were crowded into the great hut, tearing ravenously at the meat, and when the last one was within, Kane reached out a hand and jerked a long vine which tripped the catch that held the door he had built. It fell with a crash and the bar he had fashioned dropped into place. That door would hold against the charge of a wild bull.

Kane came from his covert and scanned the sky. Some hundred and forty harpies had entered the hut. He saw no more winging through the skies, and believed it safe to suppose he had the whole flock trapped. Then with a cruel, brooding smile, Kane struck flint and steel to a pile of dead leaves next the wall. Within sounded an uneasy mumbling as the creatures realized that they were prisoners. A thin wisp of smoke curled upward and a flicker of red followed it; the whole heap burst into flame and the dry bamboo caught.

A few moments later the whole side of the wall was ablaze. The fiends inside scented the smoke and grew restless. Kane heard them cackling wildly and clawing at the walls. He grinned savagely, bleakly and without mirth. Now a veer of the wind drove the flames around the wall and up over the thatch— with a roar the whole hut caught and leaped into flame. From within sounded a fearful pandemonium. Kane heard bodies crash against the walls, which shook to the impact but held. The horrid screams were music to his soul, and brandishing his arms, he answered them with screams of fearful, soul-shaking laughter. The cataclysm of horror rose unbearably, paling the tumult of the flames. Then it dwindled to a medley of strangled gibbering and gasps as the

flames ate in and the smoke thickened. An intolerable scent of burning flesh pervaded the atmosphere, and had there been room in Kane's brain for aught else than insane triumph, he would have shuddered to realize that the scent was of that nauseating and indescribable odor that only human flesh emits when burning.

From the thick cloud of smoke Kane saw a mewing, gibbering thing emerge through the shredding roof and flap slowly and agonizingly upward on fearfully burned wings. Calmly he aimed and fired, and the scorched and blinded thing tumbled back into the flaming mass just as the walls crashed in. To Kane it seemed that Goru's crumbling face, vanishing in the smoke, split suddenly in a wide grin and a sudden shout of exultant human laughter mingled eerily in the roar of the flames. But the smoke and an insane brain plays queer tricks.

KANE STOOD with the ju-ju stave in one hand and the smoking pistol in the other, above the smoldering ruins that hid forever from the sight of man the last of those terrible, semi-human monsters whom another white-skinned hero had banished from Europe in an unknown age. Kane stood, an unconscious statue of triumph— the ancient empires fall, the dark-skinned peoples fade and even the demons of antiquity gasp their last, but over all stands the Aryan barbarian, white-skinned, cold-eyed, dominant, the supreme fighting man of the earth, whether he be clad in wolf-hide and horned helmet, or boots and doublet— whether he bear in his hand battle-ax or rapier— whether he be called Dorian, Saxon or Englishman— whether his name be Jason, Hengist or Solomon Kane.

Kane stood and the smoke curled upward into the morning sky, the roaring of foraging lions shook the plateau, and slowly, like light breaking through mists, sanity returned to him.

"The light of God's morning enters even into dark and lonesome lands," said Solomon Kane somberly. "Evil rules in the waste lands of the earth, but even evil may come to an end. Dawn follows midnight and even in this lost land the shadows shrink. Strange are Thy ways, oh God of my people, and who am I to question Thy wisdom? My feet have fallen in evil ways but Thou hast brought me forth scatheless and hast made me a scourge for the Powers of Evil. Over the souls of men spread the condor wings of colossal monsters and all manner of evil things prey upon the heart and soul and body of Man. Yet it may be in some far day the shadows shall fade and the Prince of Darkness be chained forever in his hell. And till then mankind can but stand up stoutly to the monsters in his own heart and without, and with the aid of God he may yet triumph."

And Solomon Kane looked up into the silent hills and felt the silent call of the hills and the unguessed distances beyond; and Solomon Kane shifted his belt, took his staff firmly in his hand and turned his face eastward.

_____

9: The Decree of Duke Deodonato

Anthony Hope

The English Illustrated Magazine March 1895

"IT IS A MOST anxious thing— to be an absolute ruler," said Duke Deodonato, "but I have made up my mind. The Doctor has convinced me (here Dr. Fusbius, Ph.D., bowed very low) that marriage is the best, noblest, wholesomest, and happiest of human conditions."

"Your Highness will remember—" began the President of the Council.

"My lord, I have made up my mind," said Duke Deodonato.

Thus speaking, the Duke took a large sheet of foolscap paper, and wrote rapidly for a moment or two.

"There," he said, pushing the paper over to the President, "is the decree."

"The decree, sir?"

"I think three weeks afford ample space," said Duke Deodonato.

"Three weeks, sir?"

"For every man over twenty-one years of age in this Duchy to find himself a wife."

"Your Highness," observed Dr. Fusbius with deference, "will consider that between an abstract proposition and a practical measure—"

"There is to the logical mind no stopping-place," interrupted Duke Deodonato.

"But, sir," cried the President, "imagine the consternation which this—!"

"Let it be gazetted to-night," said Duke Deodonato.

"I would venture," said the President, "to remind your Highness that you are yourself a bachelor."

"Laws," said Duke Deodonato, "do not bind the Crown unless the Crown is expressly mentioned."

"True, sir; but I humbly conceive that it would be *pessimi exempli*—"

"You are right; I will marry myself," said Duke Deodonato.

"But, sir, three weeks! The hand of a princess cannot be requested and granted in—"

"Then find me somebody else," said Deodonato; "and pray leave me. I would be alone;" and Duke Deodonato waved his hand to the door.

Outside the door the President said to the Doctor,

"I could wish, sir, that you had not convinced his Highness."

"My lord," rejoined the Doctor, "truth is my only preoccupation."

"Sir," said the President, "are you married?"

"My lord," answered the Doctor, "I am not."

"I thought not," said the President, as he folded up the decree, and put it in his pocket.

It is useless to deny that Duke Deodonato's decree caused considerable disturbance in the Duchy. In the first place, the Crown lawyers raised a puzzle of law. Did the word 'man' as used in the decree, include 'woman'?

The President shook his head, and referred the question to his Highness.

"It seems immaterial," observed the Duke. "If a man marries, a woman marries."

"*Ex vi terminorum*," assented the Doctor.

"But, sir," said the President, "there are more women than men in the Duchy."

Duke Deodonato threw down his pen. "This is very provoking," said he. "Why was it allowed? I'm sure it happened before I came to the throne."

The Doctor was about to point out that it could hardly have been guarded against, when the President (who was a better courtier) anticipated him.

"We did not foresee that your Highness, in your Highness's wisdom, would issue this decree," he said humbly.

"True," said Duke Deodonato, who was a just man.

"Would your Highness vouchsafe any explanation—?"

"What are the Judges for?" asked Duke Deodonato. "There is the law— let them interpret it."

Whereupon the Judges held that a 'man' was not a 'woman' and that although every man must marry, no woman need.

"It will make no difference," said the President.

"None at all," said Dr. Fusbius.

Nor, perhaps, would it, seeing that women are ever kind, and in no way by nature averse from marriage, had it not become known that Duke Deodonato himself intended to choose a wife from the ladies of his own dominions, and to choose her (according to the advice of Dr. Fusbius, who, in truth, saw little whither his counsel would in the end carry the Duke) without regard to such adventitious matters as rank or wealth, and purely for her beauty, talent, and virtue. Which resolve being proclaimed, straightway all the ladies of the Duchy, of whatsoever station, calling, age, appearance, wit, or character, conceiving each of them that she, and no other, should become the Duchess, sturdily refused all offers of marriage (although they were many of them as desperately enamored as virtuous ladies may be), and did nought else than walk, drive, ride, and display their charms in the park before the windows of the ducal palace. And thus it fell out that when a week had gone by, no man had obeyed Duke Deodonato's decree, and they were, from sheer want of

brides, like to fall into contempt of the law and under the high displeasure of the Duke.

Upon this the President and Dr. Fusbius sought audience of his Highness, and humbly laid before him the unforeseen obstacle which had occurred.

"Woman is ever ambitious," said Dr. Fusbius.

"Nay," corrected the President, "they have seen his Highness's person as his Highness has ridden through the city."

Duke Deodonato threw down his pen.

"This is very tiresome," said he, knitting his brows. "My lord, I would be further advised on this matter. Return at the same hour to-morrow."

The next day Duke Deodonato's forehead had regained its customary smoothness, and his manner was tranquil and assured.

"Our pleasure is," said he to the President, "that, albeit no woman shall be compelled to marry if so be that she be not invited thereunto; yet, if bidden, she shall in no wise refuse, but straightway espouse that man who first after the date of these presents shall solicit her hand."

The President bowed in admiration.

"It is, if I may humbly say so, a practical and wise solution, sir," he said.

"I apprehend that it will remedy the mischief," said Duke Deodonato, not ill-pleased.

And doubtless it would have had an effect as altogether satisfactory, excellent, beneficial, salutary, and universal as the wisdom of Duke Deodonato had anticipated from it, had it not fallen out that, on the promulgation of the decree, all the aforesaid ladies of the Duchy, of whatsoever station, calling, age, appearance, wit, or character, straightway, and so swiftly that no man had time wherein to pay his court to them, fled to and shut and bottled and barricaded themselves in houses, castles, cupboards, cellars, stables, lofts, churches, chapels, chests, and every other kind of receptacle whatsoever, and there remained beyond reach of any man, be he whom he would, lest haply one, coming, should ask their hand in marriage, and thus they should lose all prospect of wedding the Duke.

When Duke Deodonato was apprised of this lamentable action on the part of the ladies of the Duchy, he frowned and laid down his pen.

"This is very annoying," said he. "There appears to be a disposition to thwart Our endeavors for the public good."

"It is gross contumacy," said Dr. Fusbius.

"Yet," remarked the President, "inspired by a natural, if ill-disciplined, admiration for his Highness's person."

"The decree is now a fortnight old," observed Duke Deodonato. "Leave me, I will consider further of this matter."

Now even as his Highness spoke a mighty uproar arose under the palace windows, and Duke Deodonato, looking out of the window (which, be it remembered, but for the guidance of Heaven he might not have done), beheld a maiden of wonderful charms struggling in the clutches of two halberdiers of the guard, who were haling her off to prison.

"Bring hither that damsel," said Deodonato.

Presently the damsel, still held by the soldiers, entered the room. Her robe was dishevelled and rent, her golden hair hung loose on her shoulders, and her eyes were full of tears.

"At whose suit is she arrested?" asked Deodonato.

"At the suit of the most learned Dr. Fusbius, may it please your Highness."

"Sir," said Dr. Fusbius, "it is true. This lady, grossly contemning your Highness's decree, has refused my hand in marriage."

"Is it true, damsel?" asked Duke Deodonato.

"Hear me, your Highness!" answered she "I left my dwelling but an instant, for we were in sore straits for—"

"Bread?" asked Deodonato, a touch of sympathy in his voice.

"May it please your Highness, no— pins wherewith to fasten our hair. And, as I ran to the merchant's, this aged man—"

"I am but turned of fifty," interrupted Fusbius.

"And have not yet learnt silence?" asked Deodonato severely. "Damsel, proceed!"

"Caught me by my gown as I ran and—"

"I proposed marriage to her," said Fusbius.

"Nay, if you proposed marriage, she shall marry you," said Deodonato. "By the crown of my fathers, she shall marry you. But what said he, damsel?"

"May it please your Highness, he said that I had the prettiest face in all the Duchy, and that he would have no wife but me; and thereupon he kissed me; and I would have none of him, and I struck him and escaped."

"Send for the Judges," said Duke Deodonato. "And meanwhile keep this damsel and let no man propose marriage to her until Our pleasure be known."

Now when the Judges were come, and the maiden was brought in and set over against them on the right hand, and the learned Doctor took his stand on the left, Deodonato prayed the Judges that they would perpend carefully and anxiously of the question— using all lore, research, wisdom, discretion, and justice— whether Dr. Fusbius had proposed marriage unto the maiden or no.

"Thus shalt Our mind be informed, and We shall deal profitably with this matter," concluded Duke Deodonato.

Upon which arose great debate. For there was one part of the learned men which leant upon the letter and found no invitation to marriage in the words of Dr. Fusbius; while another part would have it that in all things the spirit and mind of the utterer must be regarded, and that it sorted not with the years, virtues, learning, and position of the said most learned Doctor to suppose that he had spoken such words and sealed the same with a kiss, save under the firm impression, thought, and conviction that he was offering his hand in marriage; which said impression, thought, and conviction were fully and reasonably declared and evident in his actions, manner, bearing, air, and conduct.

"This is very perplexing," said Duke Deodonato, and he knit his brows; for as he gazed upon the beauty of the damsel, it seemed to him a thing unnatural, undesirable, unpalatable, unpleasant, and unendurable, that she should wed Dr. Fusbius. Yet if such were the law— Duke Deodonato sighed, and he glanced at the damsel: and it chanced that the damsel glanced at Duke Deodonato, and, seeing that he was a proper man and comely, and that his eye spoke his admiration of her, she blushed; and her cheek that had gone white when those of the Judges who favored the learned Doctor were speaking, went red as a rose again, and she strove to order her hair and to conceal the rent that was in her robe. And Duke Deodonato sighed again.

"My Lord," he said to the President, "we have heard these wise and erudite men; and, forasmuch as the matter is difficult, they are divided among themselves, and the staff whereon we leant is broken. Speak, therefore, your mind."

Then the President of the Council looked earnestly at Duke Deodonato, but the Duke veiled his face with his hand.

"Answer truly," said he, "without fear or favor; so shall you fulfil
Our pleasure."

And the President, looking round upon the company, said:

"It is, Your Highness, by all reasonable, honest, just, proper, and honorable intendment, as good, sound, full, and explicit an offer of marriage as hath ever been had in this Duchy."

"So be it," said Duke Deodonato; and Dr. Fusbius smiled in triumph, while the maiden grew pale again.

"And," pursued the President, "it binds, controls, and rules every man, woman, and child in these Your Highness's dominions, and hath the force of law over all."

"So be it," said Deodonato again.

"Saving," added the President, "Your Highness only."

There was a movement among the company.

"For," pursued the President, "by the ancient laws, customs, manners, and observances of the Duchy, no decree or law shall in any way whatsoever impair, alter, lessen, or derogate from the high rights, powers, and prerogatives of Your Highness, whom may Heaven long preserve. Although, therefore, it be, by and pursuant to Your Highness's decree, the sure right of every man in this Duchy to be accepted in marriage of any damsel whom he shall invite thereunto, yet is this right in all respects subject to and controlled by the natural, legal, inalienable, unalterable, and sovereign prerogative of Your Highness to marry what damsel so ever it shall be Your pleasure to bid share your throne. Hence I, in obedience to Your Highness's commands, pronounce and declare that this damsel is lawfully and irrevocably bound and affianced to the learned Dr. Fusbius, unless and until it shall please Your Highness yourself to demand her hand in marriage. May what I have spoken please Your Highness." And the President sat down.

Duke Deodonato sat awhile in thought, and there was silence in the hall. Then he spoke:

"Let all withdraw, saving the damsel only."

And they one and all withdrew, and Duke Deodonato was left alone with the damsel.

Then he arose and gazed long on the damsel; but the damsel would not look on Duke Deodonato.

"How are you called, lady?" asked Duke Deodonato.

"I am called Dulcissima," said she.

"Well named!" said Deodonato softly, and he went to the damsel, and he laid his hand, full gently, on her robe, and he said, "Dulcissima, you have the prettiest face in all the Duchy, and I will have no wife but you;" and Duke Deodonato kissed the damsel.

The damsel forbore to strike Duke Deodonato, as she had struck Dr. Fusbius. Again her cheek went red, and again pale, and she said, "I wed no man on compulsion."

"Madam, I am Your Sovereign," said Duke Deodonato; and his eyes were on the damsel.

"If you were an Archangel— !" cried the damsel.

"Our House is not wont to be scorned of ladies," said Deodonato. "Am I crooked, or baseborn, or a fool?"

"This day in your Duchy women are slaves, and men their masters by your will," said she.

"It is the order of nature," said Deodonato.

"It is not my pleasure," said the damsel.

Then Deodonato laid his hand on his silver bell, for he was very angry.

"Fusbius waits without," said he.

"I will wed him and kill him," cried Dulcissima.

Deodonato gazed on her.

"You had no chance of using the pins," said he, "and the rent in your gown is very sore."

And upon this the eyes of the damsel lost their fire and sought the floor; and she plucked at her girdle, and would not look on Deodonato. And they said outside, "It is very still in the Hall of the Duke."

Then said Deodonato,

"Dulcissima, what would you?"

"That you repeal your decrees," said she.

Deodonato's brow grew dark; he did not love to go back.

"What I have decreed, I have decreed," said he.

"And what I have resolved, I have resolved," said she.

Deodonato drew near to her.

"And if I repeal the decrees?" said he.

"You will do well," said she.

"And you will wed—?"

"Whom I will," said she.

Deodonato turned to the window, and for a space he looked out; and the damsel smoothed her hair and drew her robe, where it was whole, across the rent; and she looked on Deodonato as he stood, and her bosom rose and fell. And she prayed a prayer that no man heard or, if he heard, might be so base as to tell. But she saw the dark locks of Deodonato's hair and his form, straight as an arrow and tall as a six-foot wand, in the window. And again, outside, they said, "It is strangely still in the Hall of the Duke."

Then Deodonato turned, and he pressed with his hand on the silver bell, and straightway the Hall was filled with the Councillors, the Judges, and the halberdiers, attentive to hear the will of Deodonato and the fate of the damsel. And the small eyes of Fusbius glowed and the calm eyes of the President smiled.

"My Cousins, Gentlemen, and my faithful Guard," said Deodonato, "Time, which is Heaven's mighty Instrument, brings counsel. Say! what the Duke has done, shall any man undo?"

Then cried they all, save one, "No man!"

And the President said, "Saving the Duke."

"The decrees which I made," said Deodonato, "I unmake. Henceforth let men and maidens in my Duchy marry or not marry as they will, and God give them joy of it."

And all, save Fusbius, cried "Amen." But Fusbius cried, "Your Highness, it is demonstrated beyond cavil, ay, to the satisfaction of your Highness—"

"This is very tedious," said Deodonato. "Let him speak no more."

And again he drew near to Dulcissima, and there, before them all, he fell on his knee. And a murmur ran through the hall.

"Madam," said Deodonato, "if you love me, wed me. And, if you love me not, depart in peace and in honor; and I, Deodonato, will live my life alone."

Then the damsel trembled, and barely did Deodonato catch her words:

"There are many men here," said she.

"It is not given to Princes," said Deodonato, "to be alone. Nevertheless, if you will, leave me alone."

And the damsel bent low, so that the breath of her mouth stirred the hair on Deodonato's head, and he shivered as he knelt.

"My Prince and my King!" said she.

And Deodonato shot to his feet, and before them all he kissed her, and, turning, spoke:

"As I have wooed, let every man in this Duchy woo. As I have won, let every man that is worthy win. For, unless he so woo, and unless he so win, vain is his wooing and vain is his winning, and a fig for his wedding, say I, Deodonato! I, that was Deodonato, and now am— Deodonato and Dulcissima."

And a great cheer rang out in the Hall, and Fusbius fled to the door; and they tore his gown as he went and cursed him for a knave. But the President raised his voice aloud and cried—"May Heaven preserve your Highnesses— and here's a blessing on all windows!"

And that is the reason why you will find (if you travel there, as I trust you may, for nowhere are the ladies fairer or the men so gallant) more windows in the Duchy of Deodonato than anywhere in the wide world besides. For the more windows, the wider the view; and the wider the view, the more pretty damsels do you see; and the more pretty damsels you see, the more jocund a thing is life-and that is what the men of the Duchy love— and not least Duke Deodonato, whom, with his bride Dulcissima, may Heaven long preserve!

———————

10: The Willowdale Mystery

R. Austin Freeman

1862-1943

The Novel Magazine, Aug 1910

1. The Spinsters' Guest

THE LINGERING SUMMER twilight was fast merging into night as a solitary cyclist, whose evening-dress suit was thinly disguised by an overcoat, rode slowly along a pleasant country road. From time to time he had been overtaken and passed by a carriage, a car or a closed cab from the adjacent town, and from the festive garb of the occupants he had made shrewd guesses at their destination. His own objective was a large house, standing in somewhat extensive grounds just off the road, and the peculiar circumstances that surrounded his visit to it caused him to ride more and more slowly as he approached his goal.

Willowdale— such was the name of the house— was, to-night, witnessing a temporary revival of its past glories. For many months it had been empty and a notice-board by the gate-keeper's lodge had silently announced its forlorn state; but, to-night, its rooms, their bare walls clothed in flags and draperies, their floors waxed or carpeted, would once more echo the sound of music and cheerful voices and vibrate to the tread of many feet. For on this night the spinsters of Raynesford were giving a dance; and chief amongst the spinsters was Miss Halliwell, the owner of Willowdale.

It was a great occasion. The house was large and imposing; the spinsters were many and their purses were long. The guests were numerous and distinguished, and included no less a person than Mrs. Jehu B. Chater. This was the crowning triumph of the function, for the beautiful American widow was the lion (or should we say lioness?) of the season. Her wealth was, if not beyond the dreams of avarice, at least beyond the powers of common British arithmetic, and her diamonds were, at once, the glory and the terror of her hostesses.

All these attractions notwithstanding, the cyclist approached the vicinity of Willowdale with a slowness almost hinting at reluctance; and when, at length, a curve of the road brought the gates into view, he dismounted and halted irresolutely. He was about to do a rather risky thing, and, though by no means a man of weak nerve, he hesitated to make the plunge.

The fact is, he had not been invited.

Why, then, was he going? And how was he to gain admittance? To which questions the answer involves a painful explanation.

Augustus Bailey lived by his wits. That is the common phrase, and a stupid phrase it is. For do we not all live by our wits, if we have any? And does it need any specially brilliant wits to be a common rogue? However, such as his wits were, Augustus Bailey lived by them, and he had not hitherto made a fortune.

The present venture arose out of a conversation overheard at a restaurant table and an invitation-card carelessly laid down and adroitly covered with the menu. Augustus had accepted the invitation that he had not received (on a sheet of Hotel Cecil notepaper that he had among his collection of stationery) in the name of Geoffrey Harrington-Baillie; and the question that exercised his mind at the moment was, would he or would he not be spotted? He had trusted to the number of guests and the probable inexperience of the hostesses. He knew that the cards need not be shown, though there was the awkward ceremony of announcement.

But perhaps it wouldn't get as far as that. Probably not, if his acceptance had been detected as emanating from an uninvited stranger.

He walked slowly towards the gates with growing discomfort. Added to his nervousness as to the present were certain twinges of reminiscence. He had once held a commission in a line regiment— not for long, indeed; his "wits" had been too much for his brother officers— but there had been a time when he would have come to such a gathering as this an invited guest. Now, a common thief, he was sneaking in under a false name, with a fair prospect of being ignominiously thrown out by the servants.

As he stood hesitating, the sound of hoofs on the road was followed by the aggressive bellow of a motor-horn. The modest twinkle of carriage lamps appeared round the curve and then the glare of acetylene headlights. A man came out of the lodge and drew open the gates; and Mr. Bailey, taking his courage in both hands, boldly trundled his machine up the drive.

Half-way up— it was quite a steep incline— the car whizzed by; a large Napier filled with a bevy of young men who economised space by sitting on the backs of the seats and on one another's knees. Bailey looked at them and decided that this was his chance, and, pushing forward, he saw his bicycle safely bestowed in the empty coach-house and then hurried on to the cloak-room. The young men had arrived there before him, and, as he entered, were gaily peeling off their overcoats and flinging them down on a table. Bailey followed their example, and, in his eagerness to enter the reception-room with the crowd, let his attention wander from the business of the moment, and, as he pocketed the ticket and hurried away, he failed to notice that the bewildered attendant had put his hat with another man's coat and affixed his duplicate to them both.

"Major Podbury, Captain Barker-Jones, Captain Sparker, Mr. Watson, Mr. Goldsmith, Mr. Smart, *Mr. Harrington-Baillie*!"

As Augustus swaggered up the room, hugging the party of officers and quaking inwardly, he was conscious that his hostesses glanced from one man to another with more than common interest.

But at that moment the footman's voice rang out, sonorous and clear—

"Mrs. Chater, Colonel Crumpler!" and, as all eyes were turned towards the new arrivals, Augustus made his bow and passed into the throng. His little game of bluff had "come off," after all.

He withdrew modestly into the more crowded portion of the room, and there took up a position where he would be shielded from the gaze of his hostesses. Presently, he reflected, they would forget him, if they had really thought about him at all, and then he would see what could be done in the way of business. He was still rather shaky, and wondered how soon it would be decent to steady his nerves with a "refresher." Meanwhile he kept a sharp look-out over the shoulders of neighbouring guests, until a movement in the crowd of guests disclosed Mrs. Chater shaking hands with the presiding spinster. Then Augustus got a most uncommon surprise.

He knew her at the first glance. He had a good memory for faces, and Mrs. Chater's face was one to remember. Well did he recall the frank and lovely American girl with whom he had danced at the regimental ball years ago. That was in the old days when he was a subaltern, and before that little affair of the pricked court-cards that brought his military career to an end. They had taken a mutual liking, he remembered, that sweet-faced Yankee maid and he; had danced many dances and had sat out others, to talk mystical nonsense which, in their innocence, they had believed to be philosophy. He had never seen her since. She had come into his life and gone out of it again, and he had forgotten her name, if he had ever known it. But here she was, middle-aged now, it was true, but still beautiful and a great personage withal. And, ye gods! what diamonds! And here was he, too, a common rogue, lurking in the crowd that he might, perchance, snatch a pendant or "pinch" a loose brooch.

Perhaps she might recognise him. Why not? He had recognised her. But that would never do. And thus reflecting, Mr. Bailey slipped out to stroll on the lawn and smoke a cigarette. Another man, somewhat older than himself, was pacing to and fro thoughtfully, glancing from time to time through the open windows into the brilliantly-lighted rooms. When they had passed once or twice, the stranger halted and addressed him.

"This is the best place on a night like this," he remarked; "it's getting hot inside already. But perhaps you're keen on dancing."

"Not so keen as I used to be," replied Bailey; and then, observing the hungry look that the other man was bestowing on his cigarette, he produced his case and offered it.

"Thanks awfully!" exclaimed the stranger, pouncing with avidity on the open case. "Good Samaritan, by Jove. Left my case in my overcoat. Hadn't the cheek to ask, though I was starving for a smoke." He inhaled luxuriously, and, blowing out a cloud of smoke, resumed: "These chits seem to be running the show pretty well, hm? Wouldn't take it for an empty house to look at it, would you?"

"I have hardly seen it," said Bailey; "only just come, you know."

"We'll have a look round, if you like," said the genial stranger, "when we've finished our smoke, that is. Have a drink too; may cool us a bit. Know many people here?"

"Not a soul," replied Bailey. "My hostess doesn't seem to have turned up."

"Well, that's easily remedied," said the stranger. "My daughter's one of the spinsters— Granby, my name; when we've had a drink, I'll make her find you a partner— that is, if you care for the light fantastic."

"I should like a dance or two," said Bailey, "though I'm getting a bit past it now, I suppose. Still, it doesn't do to chuck up the sponge prematurely."

"Certainly not," Granby agreed jovially; "a man's as young as he feels. Well, come and have a drink and then we'll hunt up my little girl." The two men flung away the stumps of their cigarettes and headed for the refreshments.

The spinsters' champagne was light, but it was well enough if taken in sufficient quantity; a point to which Augustus— and Granby too— paid judicious attention; and when he had supplemented the wine with a few sandwiches, Mr. Bailey felt in notably better spirits. For, to tell the truth, his diet, of late, had been somewhat meagre. Miss Granby, when found, proved to be a blonde and guileless "flapper" of some seventeen summers, childishly eager to play her part of hostess with due dignity; and presently Bailey found himself gyrating through the eddying crowd in company with a comely matron of thirty or thereabouts.

The sensations that this novel experience aroused rather took him by surprise. For years past he had been living a precarious life of mean and sordid shifts that oscillated between mere shabby trickery and downright crime; now conducting a paltry swindle just inside the pale of the law, and now, when hard pressed, descending to actual theft; consorting with shady characters, swindlers and knaves and scurvy rogues like himself; gambling, borrowing, cadging and, if need be, stealing, and always slinking abroad with an apprehensive eye upon "the man in blue."

And now, amidst the half-forgotten surroundings, once so familiar; the gaily-decorated rooms, the rhythmic music, the twinkle of jewels, the murmur of gliding feet and the rustle of costly gowns, the moving vision of honest gentlemen and fair ladies; the shameful years seemed to drop away, and leave him to take up the thread of his life where it had snapped so disastrously. After all, these were his own people. The seedy knaves in whose steps he had walked of late were but aliens met by the way.

He surrendered his partner, in due course, with regret— which was mutual— to an inarticulate subaltern, and was meditating another pilgrimage to the refreshment-room, when he felt a light touch upon his arm. He turned swiftly. A touch on the arm meant more to him than to some men. But it was no wooden-faced plain-clothes man that he confronted; it was only a lady. In short, it was Mrs. Chater, smiling nervously and a little abashed by her own boldness.

"I expect you've forgotten me," she began apologetically, but Augustus interrupted her with an eager disclaimer.

"Of course I haven't," he said; "though I have forgotten your name, but I remember that Portsmouth dance as well as if it were yesterday; at least one incident in it— the only one that was worth remembering. I've often hoped that I might meet you again, and now, at last, it has happened."

"It's nice of you to remember," she rejoined. "I've often and often thought of that evening and all the wonderful things that we talked about. You were a nice boy then; I wonder what you are like now. Dear, dear, what a long time ago it is!"

"Yes," Augustus agreed gravely, "it *is* a long time. I know it by myself; but when I look at you, it seems as if it could only have been last season."

"Oh, fie!" she exclaimed. "You are not simple as you used to be. You didn't flatter then; but perhaps there wasn't the need." She spoke with gentle reproach, but her pretty face flushed with pleasure nevertheless, and there was a certain wistfulness in the tone of her concluding sentence.

"I wasn't flattering," Augustus replied, quite sincerely; "I knew you directly you entered the room and marvelled that Time had been so gentle with you. He hasn't been as kind to me."

"No. You have got a few grey hairs, I see, but after all, what are grey hairs to a man? Just the badges of rank, like the crown on your collar or the lace on your cuffs, to mark the steps of your promotion— for I guess you'll be a colonel by now."

"No," Augustus answered quickly, with a faint flush. "I left the army some years ago."

"My! what a pity!" exclaimed Mrs. Chater. "You must tell me all about it— but not now. My partner will be looking for me. We will sit out a dance and have a real gossip. But I've forgotten your name— never could recall it, in fact, though that didn't prevent me from remembering you; but, as our dear W. S. remarks, 'What's in a name?'"

"Ah, indeed," said Mr. Harrington-Baillie; and apropos of that sentiment, he added: "mine is Rowland— Captain Rowland. You may remember it now."

Mrs. Chater did not, however, and said so. "Will number six do?" she asked, opening her programme; and, when Augustus had assented, she entered his provisional name, remarking complacently: "We'll sit out and have a right-down good talk, and you shall tell me all about yourself and if you still think the same about free-will and personal responsibility. You had very lofty ideals, I remember, in those days, and I hope you have still. But one's ideals get rubbed down rather faint in the friction of life. Don't you think so?"

"Yes, I am afraid you're right," Augustus assented gloomily. "The wear and tear of life soon fetches the gilt off the gingerbread. Middle age is apt to find us a bit patchy, not to say naked."

"Oh, don't be pessimistic," said Mrs. Chater; "that is the attitude of the disappointed idealist, and I am sure you have no reason, really, to be disappointed in yourself. But I must run away now. Think over all the things you have to tell me, and don't forget that it is number six." With a bright smile and a friendly nod she sailed away, a vision of glittering splendour, compared with which Solomon in all his glory was a mere matter of commonplace bullion.

The interview, evidently friendly and familiar, between the unknown guest and the famous American widow had by no means passed unnoticed; and in other circumstances, Bailey might have endeavoured to profit by the reflected glory that enveloped him. But he was not in search of notoriety; and the same evasive instinct that had led him to sink Mr. Harrington-Baillie in Captain Rowland, now advised him to withdraw his dual personality from the vulgar gaze. He had come here on very definite business. For the hundredth time he was "stony-broke," and it was the hope of picking up some "unconsidered trifles" that had brought him. But, somehow, the atmosphere of the place had proved unfavourable. Either opportunities were lacking or he failed to seize them. In any case, the game pocket that formed an unconventional feature of his dress-coat was still empty, and it looked as if a pleasant evening and a good supper were all that he was likely to get. Nevertheless, be his conduct never so blameless, the fact remained that he was an uninvited guest, liable at any moment to be ejected as an impostor, and his recognition by the widow had not rendered this possibility any the more remote.

He strayed out on to the lawn, whence the grounds fell away on all sides. But there were other guests there, cooling themselves after the last dance, and the light from the rooms streamed through the windows, illuminating their figures, and among them, that of the too-companionable Granby. Augustus quickly drew away from the lighted area, and, chancing upon a narrow path, strolled away along it in the direction of a copse or shrubbery that he saw ahead. Presently he came to an ivy-covered arch, lighted by one or two fairy lamps, and, passing through this, he entered a winding path, bordered by trees and shrubs and but faintly lighted by an occasional coloured lamp suspended from a branch.

Already he was quite clear of the crowd; indeed, the deserted condition of the pleasant retreat rather surprised him, until he reflected that to couples desiring seclusion there were whole ranges of untenanted rooms and galleries available in the empty house.

The path sloped gently downwards for some distance; then came a long flight of rustic steps and, at the bottom, a seat between two trees. In front of the seat the path extended in a straight line, forming a narrow terrace; on the right the ground sloped up steeply towards the lawn; on the left it fell away still more steeply towards the encompassing wall of the grounds; and on both sides it was covered with trees and shrubs.

Bailey sat down on the seat to think over the account of himself that he should present to Mrs. Chater. It was a comfortable seat, built into the trunk of an elm, which formed one end and part of the back. He leaned against the tree, and, taking out his silver case, selected a cigarette. But it remained unlighted between his fingers as he sat and meditated upon his unsatisfactory past and the melancholy tale of what might have been. Fresh from the atmosphere of refined opulence that pervaded the dancing-rooms, the throng of well-groomed men and dainty women, his mind travelled back to his sordid little flat in Bermondsey, encompassed by poverty and squalor, jostled by lofty factories, grimy with the smoke of the river and the reek from the great chimneys. It was a hideous contrast. Verily the way of the transgressor was not strewn with flowers.

At that point in his meditations he caught the sound of voices and footsteps on the path above and rose to walk on along the path. He did not wish to be seen wandering alone in the shrubbery. But now a woman's laugh sounded from somewhere down the path. There were people approaching that way too. He put the cigarette back in the case and stepped round behind the seat, intending to retreat in that direction, but here the path ended, and beyond was nothing but a rugged slope down to the wall thickly covered with bushes. And while he was hesitating, the sound of feet descending the steps

and the rustle of a woman's dress left him to choose between staying where he was or coming out to confront the new-comers. He chose the former, drawing up close behind the tree to wait until they should have passed on.

But they were not going to pass on. One of them— a woman— sat down on the seat, and then a familiar voice smote on his ear.

"I guess I'll rest here quietly for a while; this tooth of mine is aching terribly; and, see here, I want you to go and fetch me something. Take this ticket to the cloak-room and tell the woman to give you my little velvet bag. You'll find in it a bottle of chloroform and a packet of cotton-wool."

"But I can't leave you here all alone, Mrs. Chater," her partner expostulated.

"I'm not hankering for society just now," said Mrs. Chater. "I want that chloroform. Just you hustle off and fetch it, like a good boy. Here's the ticket."

The young officer's footsteps retreated rapidly, and the voices of the couple advancing along the path grew louder. Bailey, cursing the chance that had placed him in his ridiculous and uncomfortable position, heard them approach and pass on up the steps; and then all was silent, save for an occasional moan from Mrs. Chater and the measured creaking of the seat as she rocked uneasily to and fro. But the young man was uncommonly prompt in the discharge of his mission, and in a very few minutes Bailey heard him approaching at a run along the path above and then bounding down the steps.

"Now I call that real good of you," said the widow gratefully. "You must have run like the wind. Cut the string of the packet and then leave me to wrestle with this tooth."

"But I can't leave you here all— — "

"Yes, you can," interrupted Mrs. Chater. "There won't be anyone about— the next dance is a waltz. Besides, you must go and find your partner."

"Well, if you'd really rather be alone," the subaltern began; but Mrs. Chater interrupted him.

"Of course I would, when I'm fixing up my teeth. Now go along, and a thousand thanks for your kindness."

With mumbled protestations the young officer slowly retired, and Bailey heard his reluctant feet ascending the steps. Then a deep silence fell on the place in which the rustle of paper and the squeak of a withdrawn cork seemed loud and palpable. Bailey had turned with his face towards the tree, against which he leaned with his lips parted scarcely daring to breathe. He cursed himself again and again for having thus entrapped himself for no tangible reason, and longed to get away. But there was no escape now without betraying himself. He must wait for the woman to go.

Suddenly, beyond the edge of the tree, a hand appeared holding an open packet of cotton-wool. It laid the wool down on the seat, and, pinching off a fragment, rolled it into a tiny ball. The fingers of the hand were encircled by rings, its wrist enclosed by a broad bracelet; and from rings and bracelet the light of the solitary fairy-lamp, that hung from a branch of the tree, was reflected in prismatic sparks. The hand was withdrawn and Bailey stared dreamily at the square pad of cotton-wool. Then the hand came again into view. This time it held a small phial which it laid softly on the seat, setting the cork beside it. And again the light flashed in many-coloured scintillations from the encrusting gems.

Bailey's knees began to tremble, and a chilly moisture broke out upon his forehead.

The hand drew back, but, as it vanished, Bailey moved his head silently until his face emerged from behind the tree. The woman was leaning back, her head resting against the trunk only a few inches away from his face. The great stones of the tiara flashed in his very eyes. Over her shoulder, he could even see the gorgeous pendant, rising and falling on her bosom with ever-changing fires; and both her raised hands were a mass of glitter and sparkle, only the deeper and richer for the subdued light.

His heart throbbed with palpable blows that drummed aloud in his ears. The sweat trickled clammily down his face, and he clenched his teeth to keep them from chattering. An agony of horror— of deadly fear— was creeping over him— a terror of the dreadful impulse that was stealing away his reason and his will.

The silence was profound. The woman's soft breathing, the creak of her bodice, were plainly— grossly— audible; and he checked his own breath until he seemed on the verge of suffocation.

Of a sudden through the night air was borne faintly the dreamy music of a waltz. The dance had begun. The distant sound but deepened the sense of solitude in this deserted spot.

Bailey listened intently. He yearned to escape from the invisible force that seemed to be clutching at his wrists, and dragging him forward inexorably to his doom.

He gazed down at the woman with a horrid fascination. He struggled to draw back out of sight— and struggled in vain.

Then, at last, with a horrible, stealthy deliberation, a clammy, shaking hand crept forward towards the seat. Without a sound it grasped the wool, and noiselessly, slowly drew back. Again it stole forth. The fingers twined snakily around the phial, lifted it from the seat and carried it back into the shadow.

After a few seconds it reappeared and softly replaced the bottle— now half empty. There was a brief pause. The measured cadences of the waltz stole softly through the quiet night and seemed to keep time with the woman's breathing. Other sound there was none. The place was wrapped in the silence of the grave.

Suddenly, from his hiding-place, Bailey leaned forward over the back of the seat. The pad of cotton-wool was in his hand.

The woman was now leaning back as if dozing, and her hands rested in her lap. There was a swift movement. The pad was pressed against her face and her head dragged back against the chest of the invisible assailant. A smothered gasp burst from her hidden lips as her hands flew up to clutch at the murderous arm; and then came a frightful struggle, made even more frightful by the gay and costly trappings of the writhing victim. And still there was hardly a sound; only muffled gasps, the rustle of silk, the creaking of the seat, the clink of the falling bottle and, afar off, with dreadful irony, the dreamy murmur of the waltz.

The struggle was but brief. Quite suddenly the jewelled hands dropped, the head lay resistless on the crumpled shirt-front, and the body, now limp and inert, began to slip forward off the seat. Bailey, still grasping the passive head, climbed over the back of the seat and, as the woman slid gently to the ground, he drew away the pad and stooped over her. The struggle was over now; the mad fury of the moment was passing swiftly into the chill of mortal fear.

He stared with incredulous horror into the swollen face, but now so comely, the sightless eyes that but a little while since had smiled into his with such kindly recognition.

He had done this! He, the sneaking wastrel, discarded of all the world, to whom this sweet woman had held out the hand of friendship. She had cherished his memory, when to all others he was sunk deep under the waters of oblivion. And he had killed her— for to his ear no breath of life seemed to issue from those purple lips.

A sudden hideous compunction for this irrevocable thing that he had done surged through him, and he stood up clutching at his damp hair with a hoarse cry that was like the cry of the damned.

The jewels passed straightway out of his consciousness. Everything was forgotten now but the horror of this unspeakable thing that he had done. Remorse incurable and haunting fear were all that were left to him.

The sound of voices far away along the path aroused him, and the vague horror that possessed him materialised into abject, bodily fear. He lifted the limp body to the edge of the path and let it slip down the steep declivity among the bushes. A soft, shuddering sigh came from the parted lips as the

body turned over, and he paused a moment to listen. But there was no other sound of life. Doubtless that sigh was only the result of the passive movement.

Again he stood for an instant as one in a dream, gazing at the huddled shape half hidden by the bushes, before he climbed back to the path; and even then he looked back once more, but now she was hidden from sight. And, as the voices drew nearer, he turned, and, with stealthy swiftness, ran up the rustic steps.

As he came out on the edge of the lawn the music ceased, and, almost immediately, a stream of people issued from the house. Shaken as he was, Bailey yet had wits enough left to know that his clothes and hair were disordered and that his appearance must be wild. Accordingly he avoided the dancers, and, keeping to the margin of the lawn, made his way to the cloak-room by the least frequented route. If he had dared, he would have called in at the refreshment-room, for he was deadly faint and his limbs shook as he walked. But a haunting fear pursued him and, indeed, grew from moment to moment. He found himself already listening for the rumour of the inevitable discovery.

He staggered into the cloak-room, and, flinging his ticket down on the table, dragged out his watch. The attendant looked at him curiously and, pausing with the ticket in his hand, asked sympathetically: "Not feeling very well, sir?"

"No," said Bailey. "So beastly hot in there."

"You ought to have a glass of champagne, sir, before you start," said the man.

"No time," replied Bailey, holding out a shaky hand for his coat. "Shall lose my train if I'm not sharp."

At this hint the attendant reached down the coat and hat, holding up the former for its owner to slip his arms into the sleeves. But Bailey snatched it from him, and, flinging it over his arm, put on his hat and hurried away to the coach-house. Here, again, the attendant stared at him in astonishment; which was not lessened when Bailey, declining his offer to help him on with his coat, bundled the latter under his arm, clicked the lever of the "variable" on to the ninety gear, sprang on to the machine and whirled away down the steep drive, a grotesque vision of flying coat-tails.

"You haven't lit your lamp, sir," roared the attendant; but Bailey's ears were deaf to all save the clamour of the expected pursuit.

Fortunately the drive entered the road obliquely, or Bailey must have been flung into the opposite hedge. As it was, the machine, rushing down the slope, flew out into the road with terrific velocity; nor did its speed diminish then, for its rider, impelled by mortal terror, trod the pedals with the fury of a madman.

And still, as the machine whizzed along the dark and silent road, his ears were strained to catch the clatter of hoofs or the throb of a motor from behind.

He knew the country well— in fact, as a precaution, he had cycled over the district only the day before; and he was ready, at any suspicious sound, to slip down any of the lanes or byways, secure of finding his way. But still he sped on, and still no sound from the rear came to tell him of the dread discovery.

When he had ridden about three miles, he came to the foot of a steep hill. Here he had to dismount and push his machine up the incline, which he did at such speed that he arrived at the top quite breathless. Before mounting again he determined to put on his coat, for his appearance was calculated to attract attention, if nothing more. It was only half-past eleven, and presently he would pass through the streets of a small town. Also he would light his lamp. It would be fatal to be stopped by a patrol or rural constable.

Having lit his lamp and hastily put on his coat he once more listened intently, looking back over the country that was darkly visible from the summit of the hill. No moving lights were to be seen, no ringing hoofs or throbbing engines to be heard, and, turning to mount, he instinctively felt in his overcoat pocket for his gloves.

A pair of gloves came out in his hand, but he was instantly conscious that they were not his. A silk muffler was there also; a white one. But his muffler was black.

With a sudden shock of terror he thrust his hand into the ticket-pocket, where he had put his latch-key. There was no key there; only an amber cigar-holder, which he had never seen before. He stood for a few moments in utter consternation. He had taken the wrong coat. Then he had left his own coat behind. A cold sweat of fear broke out afresh on his face as he realised this. His Yale latch-key was in its pocket; not that that mattered very much. He had a duplicate at home, and, as to getting in, well, he knew his own outside door and his tool-bag contained one or two trifles not usually found in cyclists' tool-bags. The question was whether that coat contained anything that could disclose his identity. And then suddenly he remembered, with a gasp of relief, that he had carefully turned the pockets out before starting, with this very idea.

No; once let him attain the sanctuary of his grimy little flat, wedged in as it was between the great factories by the river-side, and he would be safe: safe from everything but the horror of himself, and the haunting vision of a jewelled figure huddled up in a glittering, silken heap beneath the bushes.

With a last look round he mounted his machine, and, driving it over the brow of the hill, swept away into the darkness.

2. *Munera Pulveris*

(Related by Christopher Jervis, M.D.)

IT IS ONE OF the drawbacks of medicine as a profession that one is never rid of one's responsibilities. The merchant, the lawyer, the civil servant, each at the appointed time locks up his desk, puts on his hat and goes forth a free man with an interval of uninterrupted leisure before him. Not so the doctor. Whether at work or at play, awake or asleep, he is the servant of humanity, at the instant disposal of friend or stranger alike whose need may make the necessary claim.

When I agreed to accompany my wife to the spinsters' dance at Raynesford, I imagined that, for that evening, at least, I was definitely off duty; and in that belief I continued until the conclusion of the eighth dance. To be quite truthful, I was not sorry when the delusion was shattered. My last partner was a young lady of a slanginess of speech that verged on the inarticulate. Now it is not easy to exchange ideas in "pidgin" English; and the conversation of a person to whom all things are either "ripping" or "rotten" is apt to lack subtlety. In fact, I was frankly bored; and, reflecting on the utility of the humble sandwich as an aid to conversation, I was about to entice my partner to the refreshment-room when I felt someone pluck at my sleeve. I turned quickly and looked into the anxious and rather frightened face of my wife.

"Miss Halliwell is looking for you," she said. "A lady has been taken ill. Will you come and see what is the matter?" She took my arm and, when I had made my apologies to my partner, she hurried me on to the lawn.

"It's a mysterious affair," my wife continued. "The sick lady is a Mrs. Chater, a very wealthy American widow. Edith Halliwell and Major Podbury found her lying in the shrubbery all alone and unable to give any account of herself. Poor Edith is dreadfully upset. She doesn't know what to think."

"What do you mean?" I began; but at this moment Miss Halliwell, who was waiting by an ivy-covered rustic arch, espied us and ran forward.

"Oh, do hurry, please, Dr. Jervis," she exclaimed; "such a shocking thing has happened. Has Juliet told you?" Without waiting for an answer, she darted through the arch and preceded us along a narrow path at the curious, flat-footed, shambling trot common to most adult women. Presently we descended a flight of rustic steps which brought us to a seat, from whence extended a straight path cut like a miniature terrace on a steep slope, with a high bank rising to the right and a declivity falling away to the left. Down in the hollow, his head and shoulders appearing above the bushes, was a man holding in his hand a fairy-lamp that he had apparently taken down from a

tree. I climbed down to him, and, as I came round the bushes, I perceived a richly-dressed woman lying huddled on the ground. She was not completely insensible, for she moved slightly at my approach, muttering a few words in thick, indistinct accents. I took the lamp from the man, whom I assumed to be Major Podbury, and, as he delivered it to me with a significant glance and a faint lift of the eyebrows, I understood Miss Halliwell's agitation. Indeed, for one horrible moment I thought that she was right— that the prostrate woman was intoxicated. But when I approached nearer, the flickering light of the lamp made visible a square reddened patch on her face, like the impression of a mustard plaster, covering the nose and mouth; and then I scented mischief of a more serious kind.

"We had better carry her up to the seat," I said, handing the lamp to Miss Halliwell. "Then we can consider moving her to the house." The major and I lifted the helpless woman and, having climbed cautiously up to the path, laid her on the seat.

"What is it, Dr. Jervis?" Miss Halliwell whispered.

"I can't say at the moment," I replied; "but it's not what you feared."

"Thank God for that!" was her fervent rejoinder. "It would have been a shocking scandal."

I took the dim little lamp and once more bent over the half-conscious woman.

Her appearance puzzled me not a little. She looked like a person recovering from an anaesthetic, but the square red patch on her face, recalling, as it did, the Burke murders, rather suggested suffocation. As I was thus reflecting, the light of the lamp fell on a white object lying on the ground behind the seat, and holding the lamp forward, I saw that it was a square pad of cotton-wool. The coincidence of its shape and size with that of the red patch on the woman's face instantly struck me, and I stooped down to pick it up; and then I saw, lying under the seat, a small bottle. This also I picked up and held in the lamplight. It was a one-ounce phial, quite empty, and was labelled "Methylated Chloroform." Here seemed to be a complete explanation of the thick utterance and drunken aspect; but it was an explanation that required, in its turn, to be explained. Obviously no robbery had been committed, for the woman literally glittered with diamonds. Equally obviously she had not administered the chloroform to herself.

There was nothing for it but to carry her indoors and await her further recovery, so, with the major's help, we conveyed her through the shrubbery and kitchen garden to a side door, and deposited her on a sofa in a half-furnished room.

Here, under the influence of water dabbed on her face and the plentiful use of smelling-salts, she quickly revived, and was soon able to give an intelligible account of herself.

The chloroform and cotton-wool were her own. She had used them for an aching tooth; and she was sitting alone on the seat with the bottle and the wool beside her when the incomprehensible thing had happened. Without a moment's warning a hand had come from behind her and pressed the pad of wool over her nose and mouth. The wool was saturated with chloroform, and she had lost consciousness almost immediately.

"You didn't see the person, then?" I asked.

"No, but I know he was in evening dress, because I felt my head against his shirt-front."

"Then," said I, "he is either here still or he has been to the cloak-room. He couldn't have left the place without an overcoat."

"No, by Jove!" exclaimed the major; "that's true. I'll go and make inquiries." He strode away all agog, and I, having satisfied myself that Mrs. Chater could be left safely, followed him almost immediately.

I made my way straight to the cloak-room, and here I found the major and one or two of his brother officers putting on their coats in a flutter of gleeful excitement.

"He's gone," said Podbury, struggling frantically into his overcoat; "went off nearly an hour ago on a bicycle. Seemed in a deuce of a stew, the attendant says, and no wonder. We're goin' after him in our car. Care to join the hunt?"

"No, thanks. I must stay with the patient. But how do you know you're after the right man?"

"Isn't any other. Only one Johnnie's left. Besides— here, confound it! you've given me the wrong coat!"

He tore off the garment and handed it back to the attendant, who regarded it with an expression of dismay.

"Are you sure, sir?" he asked.

"Perfectly," said the major. "Come, hurry up, my man."

"I'm afraid, sir," said the attendant, "that the gentleman who has gone has taken your coat. They were on the same peg, I know. I am very sorry, sir."

The major was speechless with wrath. What the devil was the good of being sorry? and how the deuce was he to get his coat back?

"But," I interposed, "if the stranger has got your coat, then this coat must be his."

"I know," said Podbury; "but I don't want his beastly coat."

"No," I replied, "but it may be useful for identification."

This appeared to afford the bereaved officer little consolation, but as the car was now ready, he bustled away, and I, having directed the man to put the coat away in a safe place, went back to my patient.

Mrs. Chater was by now fairly recovered, and had developed a highly vindictive interest in her late assailant. She even went so far as to regret that he had not taken at least some of her diamonds, so that robbery might have been added to the charge of attempted murder, and expressed the earnest hope that the officers would not be foolishly gentle in their treatment of him when they caught him.

"By the way, Dr. Jervis," said Miss Halliwell, "I think I ought to mention a rather curious thing that happened in connection with this dance. We received an acceptance from a Mr. Harrington-Baillie, who wrote from the Hotel Cecil. Now I am certain that no such name was proposed by any of the spinsters."

"But didn't you ask them?" I inquired.

"Well, the fact is," she replied, "that one of them, Miss Waters, had to go abroad suddenly, and we had not got her address; and as it was possible that she might have invited him, I did not like to move in the matter. I am very sorry I didn't now. We may have let in a regular criminal— though why he should have wanted to murder Mrs. Chater I cannot imagine."

It was certainly a mysterious affair, and the mystery was in no wise dispelled by the return of the search party an hour later. It seemed that the bicycle had been tracked for a couple of miles towards London, but then, at the cross-roads, the tracks had become hopelessly mixed with the impressions of other machines, and the officers, after cruising about vaguely for a while, had given up the hunt and returned.

"You see, Mrs. Chater," Major Podbury explained apologetically, "the fellow must have had a good hour's start, and, with a high-geared machine, that would have brought him pretty close to London."

"Do you mean to tell me," exclaimed Mrs. Chater, regarding the major with hardly concealed contempt, "that that villain has got off scot-free?"

"Looks rather like it," replied Podbury, "but if I were you I should get the man's description from the attendants who saw him and go up to Scotland Yard to-morrow. They may know the Johnnie there, and they may even recognise the coat if you take it with you."

"That doesn't seem very likely," said Mrs. Chater, and it certainly did not; but since no better plan could be suggested the lady decided to adopt it; and I supposed that I had heard the last of the matter.

In this, however, I was mistaken. On the following day, just before noon, as I was drowsily considering the points in a brief dealing with a question of survivorship while Thorndyke drafted his weekly lecture, a smart rat-tat at the

door of our chambers announced a visitor. I rose wearily— I had had only four hours' sleep— and opened the door, whereupon there sailed into the room no less a person than Mrs. Chater followed by Superintendent Miller, with a grin on his face and a brown-paper parcel under his arm.

The lady was not in the best of tempers, though wonderfully lively and alert considering the severe shock that she had suffered so recently, and her disapproval of Miller was frankly obvious.

"Dr. Jervis has probably told you about the attempt to murder me last night," she said, when I had introduced her to my colleague. "Well, now, will you believe it? I have been to the police, I have given them a description of the murderous villain, and I have even shown them the very coat that he wore, and they tell me that nothing can be done. That, in short, this scoundrel must be allowed to go his way free and unmolested."

"You will observe, doctor," said Miller, "that this lady has given us a description that would apply to fifty per cent. of the middle-class men of the United Kingdom, and has shown us a coat without a single identifying mark of any kind on it, and expects us to lay our hands on the owner without a solitary clue to guide us. Now we are not sorcerers at the Yard; we're only policemen. So I have taken the liberty of referring Mrs. Chater to you." He grinned maliciously and laid the parcel on the table.

"And what do you want me to do?" Thorndyke asked.

"Why, sir," said Miller, "there is a coat. In the pockets were a pair of gloves, a muffler, a box of matches, a tram-ticket and a Yale key. Mrs. Chater would like to know whose coat it is." He untied the parcel, with his eye cocked at our rather disconcerted client, and Thorndyke watched him with a faint smile.

"This is very kind of you, Miller," said he, "but I think a clairvoyant would be more to your purpose."

The superintendent instantly dropped his facetious manner.

"Seriously, sir," he said, "I should be glad if you would take a look at the coat. We have absolutely nothing to go on, and yet we don't want to give up the case. I have gone through it most thoroughly and can't find any clue to guide us. Now I know that nothing escapes you, and perhaps you might notice something that I have overlooked; something that would give us a hint where to start on our inquiry. Couldn't you turn the microscope on it, for instance?" he added, with a deprecating smile.

Thorndyke reflected, with an inquisitive eye on the coat. I saw that the problem was not without its attractions to him; and when the lady seconded Miller's request with persuasive eagerness, the inevitable consequence followed.

"Very well," he said. "Leave the coat with me for an hour or so and I will look it over. I am afraid there is not the remotest chance of our learning anything from it, but even so, the examination will have done no harm. Come back at two o'clock; I shall be ready to report my failure by then."

He bowed our visitors out and, returning to the table, looked down with a quizzical smile on the coat and the large official envelope containing the articles from the pockets.

"And what does my learned brother suggest?" he asked, looking up at me.

"I should look at the tram-ticket first," I replied, "and then— well, Miller's suggestion wasn't such a bad one; to explore the surface with the microscope."

"I think we will take the latter measure first," said he. "The tram-ticket might create a misleading bias. A man may take a tram anywhere, whereas the indoor dust on a man's coat appertains mostly to a definite locality."

"Yes," I replied; "but the information that it yields is excessively vague."

"That is true," he agreed, taking up the coat and envelope to carry them to the laboratory, "and yet, you know, Jervis, as I have often pointed out, the evidential value of dust is apt to be under-estimated. The naked-eye appearances— which are the normal appearances— are misleading. Gather the dust, say, from a table-top, and what have you? A fine powder of a characterless grey, just like any other dust from any other table-top. But, under the microscope, this grey powder is resolved into recognisable fragments of definite substances, which fragments may often be traced with certainty to the masses from which they have been detached. But you know all this as well as I do."

"I quite appreciate the value of dust as evidence in certain circumstances," I replied, "but surely the information that could be gathered from dust on the coat of an unknown man must be too general to be of any use in tracing the owner."

"I am afraid you are right," said Thorndyke, laying the coat on the laboratory bench; "but we shall soon see, if Polton will let us have his patent dust-extractor."

The little apparatus to which my colleague referred was the invention of our ingenious laboratory assistant, and resembled in principle the "vacuum cleaners" used for restoring carpets. It had, however, one special feature: the receiver was made to admit a microscope-slide, and on this the dust-laden air was delivered from a jet.

The "extractor" having been clamped to the bench by its proud inventor, and a wetted slide introduced into the receiver, Thorndyke applied the nozzle of the instrument to the collar of the coat while Polton worked the pump. The slide was then removed and, another having been substituted, the nozzle was

applied to the right sleeve near the shoulder, and the exhauster again worked by Polton. By repeating this process, half-a-dozen slides were obtained charged with dust from different parts of the garment, and then, setting up our respective microscopes, we proceeded to examine the samples.

A very brief inspection showed me that this dust contained matter not usually met with— at any rate, in appreciable quantities. There were, of course, the usual fragments of wool, cotton and other fibres derived from clothing and furniture, particles of straw, husk, hair, various mineral particles and, in fact, the ordinary constituents of dust from clothing. But, in addition to these, and in much greater quantity, were a number of other bodies, mostly of vegetable origin and presenting well-defined characters and considerable variety, and especially abundant were various starch granules.

I glanced at Thorndyke and observed he was already busy with a pencil and a slip of paper, apparently making a list of the objects visible in the field of the microscope. I hastened to follow his example, and for a time we worked on in silence. At length my colleague leaned back in his chair and read over his list.

"This is a highly interesting collection, Jervis," he remarked. "What do you find on your slides out of the ordinary?"

"I have quite a little museum here," I replied, referring to my list. "There is, of course, chalk from the road at Raynesford. In addition to this I find various starches, principally wheat and rice, especially rice, fragments of the cortices of several seeds, several different stone-cells, some yellow masses that look like turmeric, black pepper resin-cells, one 'port wine' pimento cell, and one or two particles of graphite."

"Graphite!" exclaimed Thorndyke. "I have found no graphite, but I have found traces of cocoa— spiral vessels and starch grains— and of hops— one fragment of leaf and several lupulin glands. May I see the graphite?"

I passed him the slide and he examined it with keen interest. "Yes," he said, "this is undoubtedly graphite, and no less than six particles of it. We had better go over the coat systematically. You see the importance of this?"

"I see that this is evidently factory dust and that it may fix a locality, but I don't see that it will carry us any farther."

"Don't forget that we have a touchstone," said he; and, as I raised my eyebrows inquiringly, he added, "the Yale latch-key. If we can narrow the locality down sufficiently, Miller can make a tour of the front doors."

"But can we?" I asked incredulously. "I doubt it."

"We can try," answered Thorndyke. "Evidently some of these substances are distributed over the entire coat, inside and out, while others, such as the graphite, are present only on certain parts. We must locate those parts exactly and then consider what this special distribution means." He rapidly sketched

out on a sheet of paper a rough diagram of the coat, marking each part with a distinctive letter, and then, taking a number of labelled slides, he wrote a single letter on each. The samples of dust taken on the slides could thus be easily referred to the exact spots whence they had been obtained.

Once more we set to work with the microscope, making now and again an addition to our lists of discoveries, and, at the end of nearly an hour's strenuous search, every slide had been examined and the lists compared.

"The net result of the examination," said Thorndyke, "is this. The entire coat, inside and out, is evenly powdered with the following substances: Rice-starch in abundance, wheat-starch in less abundance, and smaller quantities of the starches of ginger, pimento and cinnamon; bast fibre of cinnamon, various seed cortices, stone-cells of pimento, cinnamon, cassia and black pepper, with other fragments of similar origin, such as resin-cells and ginger pigment— not turmeric. In addition there are, on the right shoulder and sleeve, traces of cocoa and hops, and on the back below the shoulders a few fragments of graphite. Those are the data; and now, what are the inferences? Remember this is not mere surface dust, but the accumulation of months, beaten into the cloth by repeated brushing— dust that nothing but a vacuum apparatus could extract."

"Evidently," I said, "the particles that are all over the coat represent dust that is floating in the air of the place where the coat habitually hangs. The graphite has obviously been picked up from a seat, and the cocoa and hops from some factories that the man passes frequently, though I don't see why they are on the right side only."

"That is a question of time," said Thorndyke, "and incidentally throws some light on our friend's habits. Going from home, he passes the factories on his right; returning home, he passes them on his left, but they have then stopped work. However, the first group of substances is the more important as they indicate the locality of his dwelling— for he is clearly not a workman or factory employee. Now rice-starch, wheat-starch and a group of substances collectively designated 'spices' suggest a rice-mill, a flour-mill and a spice factory. Polton, may I trouble you for the Post Office Directory?"

He turned over the leaves of the "Trades" section and resumed: "I see there are four rice-mills in London, of which the largest is Carbutt's at Dockhead. Let us look at the spice-factors." He again turned over the leaves and read down the list of names. "There are six spice-grinders in London," said he. "One of them, Thomas Williams & Co., is at Dockhead. None of the others is near any rice-mill. The next question is as to the flour-mill. Let us see. Here are the names of several flour millers, but none of them is near either a rice-

mill or a spice-grinder, with one exception: Seth Taylor's, St. Saviour's Flour Mills, Dockhead."

"This is really becoming interesting," said I.

"It has become interesting," Thorndyke retorted. "You observe that at Dockhead we find the peculiar combination of factories necessary to produce the composite dust in which this coat has hung; and the directory shows us that this particular combination exists nowhere else in London. Then the graphite, the cocoa and the hops tend to confirm the other suggestions. They all appertain to industries of the locality. The trams which pass Dockhead, also, to my knowledge, pass at no great distance from the black-lead works of Pearce Duff & Co. in Rouel Road, and will probably collect a few particles of black-lead on the seats in certain states of the wind. I see, too, that there is a cocoa factory— Payne's— in Goat Street, Horsleydown, which lies to the right of the tram line going west, and I have noticed several hop warehouses on the right side of Southwark Street, going west. But these are mere suggestions; the really important data are the rice and flour mills and the spice-grinders, which seem to point unmistakably to Dockhead."

"Are there any private houses at Dockhead?" I asked.

"We must look up the 'Street' list," he replied. "The Yale latch-key rather suggests a flat, and a flat with a single occupant, and the probable habits of our absent friend offer a similar suggestion." He ran his eye down the list and presently turned to me with his finger on the page.

"If the facts that we have elicited— the singular series of agreements with the required conditions— are only a string of coincidences, here is another. On the south side of Dockhead, actually next door to the spice-grinders and opposite to Carbutt's rice-mills, is a block of workmen's flats, Hanover Buildings. They fulfil the conditions exactly. A coat hung in a room in those flats, with the windows open (as they would probably be at this time of year), would be exposed to air containing a composite dust of precisely the character of that which we have found. Of course, the same conditions obtain in other dwellings in this part of Dockhead, but the probability is in favour of the buildings. And that is all that we can say. It is no certainty. There may be some radical fallacy in our reasoning. But, on the face of it, the chances are a thousand to one that the door that that key will open is in some part of Dockhead, and most probably in Hanover Buildings. We must leave the verification to Miller."

"Wouldn't it be as well to look at the tram-ticket?" I asked.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed. "I had forgotten the ticket. Yes, by all means." He opened the envelope and, turning its contents out on the bench, picked up the

dingy slip of paper. After a glance at it he handed it to me. It was punched for the journey from Tooley Street to Dockhead.

"Another coincidence," he remarked; "and, by yet another, I think I hear Miller knocking at our door."

It was the superintendent, and, as we let him into the room, the hum of a motor-car entering from Tudor Street announced the arrival of Mrs. Chater. We waited for her at the open door, and, as she entered, she held out her hands impulsively.

"Say, now, Dr. Thorndyke," she exclaimed, "have you got something to tell us?"

"I have a suggestion to make," replied Thorndyke. "I think that if the superintendent will take this key to Hanover Buildings, Dockhead, Bermondsey, he may possibly find a door that it will fit."

"The deuce!" exclaimed Miller. "I beg your pardon, madam; but I thought I had gone through that coat pretty completely. What was it that I had overlooked, sir? Was there a letter hidden in it, after all?"

"You overlooked the dust on it, Miller; that is all," said Thorndyke.

"Dust!" exclaimed the detective, staring round-eyed at my colleague. Then he chuckled softly. "Well," said he, "as I said before, I'm not a sorcerer; I'm only a policeman." He picked up the key and asked: "Are you coming to see the end of it, sir?"

"Of course he is coming," said Mrs. Chater, "and Dr. Jervis too, to identify the man. Now that we have got the villain we must leave him no loophole for escape."

Thorndyke smiled dryly. "We will come if you wish it, Mrs. Chater," he said, "but you mustn't look upon our quest as a certainty. We may have made an entire miscalculation, and I am, in fact, rather curious to see if the result works out correctly. But even if we run the man to earth, I don't see that you have much evidence against him. The most that you can prove is that he was at the house and that he left hurriedly."

Mrs. Chater regarded my colleague for a moment in scornful silence, and then, gathering up her skirts, stalked out of the room. If there is one thing that the average woman detests more than another, it is an entirely reasonable man.

The big car whirled us rapidly over Blackfriars Bridge into the region of the Borough, whence we presently turned down Tooley Street towards Bermondsey.

As soon as Dockhead came into view, the detective, Thorndyke and I alighted and proceeded on foot, leaving our client, who was now closely veiled, to follow at a little distance in the car. Opposite the head of St. Saviour's Dock,

Thorndyke halted and, looking over the wall, drew my attention to the snowy powder that had lodged on every projection on the backs of the tall buildings and on the decks of the barges that were loading with the flour and ground rice. Then, crossing the road, he pointed to the wooden lantern above the roof of the spice works, the louvres of which were covered with greyish-buff dust.

"Thus," he moralised, "does commerce subserve the ends of justice— at least, we hope it does," he added quickly, as Miller disappeared into the semi-basement of the buildings.

We met the detective returning from his quest as we entered the building.

"No go there," was his report. "We'll try the next floor."

This was the ground-floor or it might be considered the first floor. At any rate, it yielded nothing of interest, and, after a glance at the doors that opened on the landing, he strode briskly up the stone stairs. The next floor was equally unrewarding, for our eager inspection disclosed nothing but the gaping keyholes associated with the common type of night-latch.

"What name was you wanting?" inquired a dusty knight of industry who emerged from one of the flats.

"Muggs," replied Miller, with admirable promptness.

"Don't know 'im," said the workman. "I expect it's farther up."

Farther up we accordingly went, but still from each door the artless grin of the invariable keyhole saluted us with depressing monotony. I began to grow uneasy, and when the fourth floor had been explored with no better result, my anxiety became acute. A mare's nest may be an interesting curiosity, but it brings no kudos to its discoverer.

"I suppose you haven't made any mistake, sir?" said Miller, stopping to wipe his brow.

"It's quite likely that I have," replied Thorndyke, with unmoved composure. "I only proposed this search as a tentative proceeding, you know."

The superintendent grunted. He was accustomed— as was I too, for that matter— to regard Thorndyke's "tentative suggestions" as equal to another man's certainties.

"It will be an awful suck-in for Mrs. Chater if we don't find him after all," he growled as we climbed up the last flight. "She's counted her chickens to a feather." He paused at the head of the stairs and stood for a few moments looking round the landing. Suddenly he turned eagerly, and, laying his hand on Thorndyke's arm, pointed to a door in the farthest corner.

"Yale lock!" he whispered impressively.

We followed him silently as he stole on tip-toe across the landing, and watched him as he stood for an instant with the key in his hand looking gloatingly at the brass disc. We saw him softly apply the nose of the fluted key-

blade to the crooked slit in the cylinder, and, as we watched, it slid in noiselessly up to the shoulder. The detective looked round with a grin of triumph, and, silently withdrawing the key, stepped back to us.

"You've run him to earth, sir," he whispered, "but I don't think Mr. Fox is at home. He can't have got back yet."

"Why not?" asked Thorndyke.

Miller waved his hand towards the door. "Nothing has been disturbed," he replied. "There's not a mark on the paint. Now he hadn't got the key, and you can't pick a Yale lock. He'd have had to break in, and he hasn't broken in."

Thorndyke stepped up to the door and softly pushed in the flap of the letter-slit, through which he looked into the flat.

"There's no letter-box," said he. "My dear Miller, I would undertake to open that door in five minutes with a foot of wire and a bit of resined string."

Miller shook his head and grinned once more. "I am glad you're not on the lay, sir; you'd be one too many for us. Shall we signal to the lady?"

I went out on to the gallery and looked down at the waiting car. Mrs. Chater was staring intently up at the building, and the little crowd that the car had collected stared alternately at the lady and at the object of her regard. I wiped my face with my handkerchief— the signal agreed upon— and she instantly sprang out of the car, and in an incredibly short time she appeared on the landing, purple and gasping, but with the fire of battle flashing from her eyes.

"We've found his flat, madam," said Miller, "and we're going to enter. You're not intending to offer any violence, I hope," he added, noting with some uneasiness the lady's ferocious expression.

"Of course I'm not," replied Mrs. Chater. "In the States ladies don't have to avenge insults themselves. If you were American men you'd hang the ruffian from his own bedpost."

"We're not American men, madam," said the superintendent stiffly. "We are law-abiding Englishmen, and, moreover, we are all officers of the law. These gentlemen are barristers and I am a police officer."

With this preliminary caution, he once more inserted the key, and as he turned it and pushed the door open, we all followed him into the sitting-room.

"I told you so, sir," said Miller, softly shutting the door; "he hasn't come back yet."

Apparently he was right. At any rate, there was no one in the flat, and we proceeded unopposed on our tour of inspection. It was a miserable spectacle, and, as we wandered from one squalid room to another, a feeling of pity for the starving wretch into whose lair we were intruding stole over me and began almost to mitigate the hideousness of his crime. On all sides poverty— utter,

grinding poverty— stared us in the face. It looked at us hollow-eyed in the wretched sitting-room, with its bare floor, its solitary chair and tiny deal table; its unfurnished walls and windows destitute of blind or curtain. A piece of Dutch cheese-rind on the table, scraped to the thinness of paper, whispered of starvation; and famine lurked in the gaping cupboard, in the empty bread-tin, in the tea-caddy with its pinch of dust at the bottom, in the jam-jar, wiped clean, as a few crumbs testified, with a crust of bread. There was not enough food in the place to furnish a meal for a healthy mouse.

The bedroom told the same tale, but with a curious variation. A miserable truckle-bed with a straw mattress and a cheap jute rug for bed-clothes, an orange-case, stood on end, for a dressing-table, and another, bearing a tin washing-bowl, formed the wretched furniture. But the suit that hung from a couple of nails was well-cut and even fashionable, though shabby; and another suit lay on the floor, neatly folded and covered with a newspaper; and, most incongruous of all, a silver cigarette-case reposed on the dressing-table.

"Why on earth does this fellow starve," I exclaimed, "when he has a silver case to pawn?"

"Wouldn't do," said Miller. "A man doesn't pawn the implements of his trade."

Mrs. Chater, who had been staring about her with the mute amazement of a wealthy woman confronted, for the first time, with abject poverty, turned suddenly to the superintendent. "This can't be the man!" she exclaimed. "You have made some mistake. This poor creature could never have made his way into a house like Willowdale."

Thorndyke lifted the newspaper. Beneath it was a dress suit with the shirt, collar and tie all carefully smoothed out and folded. Thorndyke unfolded the shirt and pointed to the curiously crumpled front. Suddenly he brought it close to his eye and then, from the sham diamond stud, he drew a single hair— a woman's hair.

"That is rather significant," said he, holding it up between his finger and thumb; and Mrs. Chater evidently thought so too, for the pity and compunction suddenly faded from her face, and once more her eyes flashed with vindictive fire.

"I wish he would come," she exclaimed viciously. "Prison won't be much hardship to him after this, but I want to see him in the dock all the same."

"No," the detective agreed, "it won't hurt him much to swap this for Portland. Listen!"

A key was being inserted into the outer door, and as we all stood like statues, a man entered and closed the door after him. He passed the door of the bedroom without seeing us, and with the dragging steps of a weary,

dispirited man. Almost immediately we heard him go to the kitchen and draw water into some vessel. Then he went back to the sitting-room.

"Come along," said Miller, stepping silently towards the door. We followed closely, and as he threw the door open, we looked in over his shoulder.

The man had seated himself at the table, on which now lay a hunk of household bread resting on the paper in which he had brought it, and a tumbler of water. He half rose as the door opened, and as if petrified remained staring at Miller with a dreadful expression of terror upon his livid face.

At this moment I felt a hand on my arm, and Mrs. Chater brusquely pushed past me into the room. But at the threshold she stopped short; and a singular change crept over the man's ghastly face, a change so remarkable that I looked involuntarily from him to our client. She had turned, in a moment, deadly pale, and her face had frozen into an expression of incredulous horror.

The dramatic silence was broken by the matter-of-fact voice of the detective.

"I am a police officer," said he, "and I arrest you for— — "

A peal of hysterical laughter from Mrs. Chater interrupted him, and he looked at her in astonishment. "Stop, stop!" she cried in a shaky voice. "I guess we've made a ridiculous mistake. This isn't the man. This gentleman is Captain Rowland, an old friend of mine."

"I'm sorry he's a friend of yours," said Miller, "because I shall have to ask you to appear against him."

"You can ask what you please," replied Mrs. Chater. "I tell you he's not the man."

The superintendent rubbed his nose and looked hungrily at his quarry. "Do I understand, madam," he asked stiffly, "that you refuse to prosecute?"

"Prosecute!" she exclaimed. "Prosecute my friends for offences that I know they have not committed? Certainly I refuse."

The superintendent looked at Thorndyke, but my colleague's countenance had congealed into a state of absolute immobility and was as devoid of expression as the face of a Dutch clock.

"Very well," said Miller, looking sourly at his watch. "Then we have had our trouble for nothing. I wish you good afternoon, madam."

"I am sorry I troubled you, now," said Mrs. Chater.

"I am sorry you did," was the curt reply; and the superintendent, flinging the key on the table, stalked out of the room.

As the outer door slammed the man sat down with an air of bewilderment; and then, suddenly flinging his arms on the table, he dropped his head on them and burst into a passion of sobbing.

It was very embarrassing. With one accord Thorndyke and I turned to go, but Mrs. Chater motioned us to stay. Stepping over to the man, she touched him lightly on the arm.

"Why did you do it?" she asked in a tone of gentle reproach.

The man sat up and flung out one arm in an eloquent gesture that comprehended the miserable room and the yawning cupboard.

"It was the temptation of a moment," he said. "I was penniless, and those accursed diamonds were thrust in my face; they were mine for the taking. I was mad, I suppose."

"But why didn't you take them?" she said. "Why didn't you?"

"I don't know. The madness passed; and then— when I saw you lying there— — Oh, God! Why don't you give me up to the police?" He laid his head down and sobbed afresh.

Mrs. Chater bent over him with tears standing in her pretty grey eyes. "But tell me," she said, "why didn't you take the diamonds? You could if you'd liked, I suppose?"

"What good were they to me?" he demanded passionately. "What did anything matter to me? I thought you were dead."

"Well, I'm not, you see," she said, with a rather tearful smile; "I'm just as well as an old woman like me can expect to be. And I want your address, so that I can write and give you some good advice."

The man sat up and produced a shabby card-case from his pocket, and, as he took out a number of cards and spread them out like the "hand" of a whist player, I caught a twinkle in Thorndyke's eye.

"My name is Augustus Bailey," said the man. He selected the appropriate card, and, having scribbled his address on it with a stump of lead pencil, relapsed into his former position.

"Thank you," said Mrs. Chater, lingering for a moment by the table. "Now we'll go. Good-bye, Mr. Bailey. I shall write to-morrow, and you must attend seriously to the advice of an old friend."

I held open the door for her to pass out and looked back before I turned to follow. Bailey still sat sobbing quietly, with his head resting on his arms; and a little pile of gold stood on the corner of the table.

"I expect, doctor," said Mrs. Chater, as Thorndyke handed her into the car, "you've written me down a sentimental fool."

Thorndyke looked at her with an unwonted softening of his rather severe face and answered quietly, "It is written: Blessed are the Merciful."

11: The Brownie of the Black Haggs

James Hogg

1770-1835

Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine Oct 1828

WHEN the Sprots were Lairds of Wheelhope, which is now a long time ago, there was one of the ladies who was very badly spoken of in the country. People did not just openly assert that Lady Wheelhope (for every landward laird's wife was then styled Lady) was a witch, but every one had an aversion even at hearing her named; and when by chance she happened to be mentioned, old men would shake their heads and say, "Ah! let us alane o' her! The less ye meddle wi' her the better." Old wives would give over spinning, and, as a pretence for hearing what might be said about her, poke in the fire with the tongs, cocking up their ears all the while; and then, after some meaning coughs, hems, and haws, would haply say, "Hech-wow, sirs! An a' be true that's said!" or something equally wise and decisive.

In short, Lady Wheelhope was accounted a very bad woman. She was an inexorable tyrant in her family, quarrelled with her servants, often cursing them, striking them, and turning them away; especially if they were religious, for she could not endure people of that character, but charged them with every thing bad. Whenever she found out that any of the servant men of the Laird's establishment were religious, she gave them up to the military, and got them shot; and several girls that were regular in their devotions, she was supposed to have got rid of by poison. She was certainly a wicked woman, else many good people were mistaken in her character; and the poor persecuted Covenanters were obliged to unite in their prayers against her.

As for the Laird, he was a big, dun-faced, pluffy body, that cared neither for good nor evil, and did not well know the one from the other. He laughed at his lady's tantrums and barley-hoods; and the greater the rage that she got into, the Laird thought it the better sport. One day, when two maid-servants came running to him, in great agitation, and told him that his lady had felled one of their companions, the Laird laughed heartily, and said he did not doubt it.

"Why, sir, how can you laugh?" said they. "The poor girl is killed."

"Very likely, very likely," said the Laird. "Well, it will teach her to take care who she angers again."

"And, sir, your lady will be hanged."

"Very likely; well, it will teach her how to strike so rashly again— Ha, ha, ha! Will it not, Jessy?"

But when this same Jessy died suddenly one morning, the Laird was greatly confounded, and seemed dimly to comprehend that there had been unfair play going. There was little doubt that she was taken off by poison; but whether the

Lady did it through jealousy or not, was never divulged; but it greatly bamboozled and astonished the poor Laird, for his nerves failed him, and his whole frame became paralytic. He seems to have been exactly in the same state of mind with a colley that I once had. He was extremely fond of the gun as long as I did not kill any thing with it, (there being no game laws in Ettrick Forest in those days,) and he got a grand chase after the hares when I missed them. But there was one day that I chanced for a marvel to shoot one dead, a few paces before his nose. I'll never forget the astonishment that the poor beast manifested. He stared one while at the gun, and another while at the dead hare, and seemed to be drawing the conclusion, that if the case stood thus, there was no creature sure of its life. Finally, he took his tail between his legs, and ran away home, and never would face a gun all his life again.

So was it precisely with Laird Sprot of Wheelhope. As long as his lady's wrath produced only noise and uproar among the servants, he thought it fine sport; but when he saw what he believed the dreadful effects of it, he became like a barrel organ out of tune, and could only discourse one note, which he did to every one he met. "I wish she mayna hae gotten something she had been the waur of." This note he repeated early and late, night and day, sleeping and waking, alone and in company, from the moment that Jessy died till she was buried; and on going to the churchyard as chief mourner, he whispered it to her relatives by the way. When they came to the grave, he took his stand at the head, nor would he give place to the girl's father; but there he stood, like a huge post, as though he neither saw nor heard; and when he had lowered her head into the grave, and dropped the cord, he slowly lifted his hat with one hand, wiped his dim eyes with the back of the other, and said, in a deep tremulous tone, "Poor lassie! I wish she didna get something she had been the waur of."

This death made a great noise among the common people; but there was little protection for the life of the subject in those days; and provided a man or woman was a real Anti-Covenanter, they might kill a good many without being quarrelled for it. So there was no one to take cognizance of the circumstances relating to the death of poor Jessy.

After this, the Lady walked softly for the space of two or three years. She saw that she had rendered herself odious, and had entirely lost her husband's countenance, which she liked worst of all. But the evil propensity could not be overcome; and a poor boy, whom the Laird, out of sheer compassion, had taken into his service, being found dead one morning, the country people could no longer be restrained; so they went in a body to the Sheriff, and insisted on an investigation. It was proved that she detested the boy, had often threatened him, and had given him brose and butter the afternoon before he

died; but notwithstanding of all this, the cause was ultimately dismissed, and the pursuers fined.

No one can tell to what height of wickedness she might now have proceeded, had not a check of a very singular kind been laid upon her. Among the servants that came home at the next term, was one who called himself Merodach; and a strange person he was. He had the form of a boy, but the features of one a hundred years old, save that his eyes had a brilliancy and restlessness, which were very extraordinary, bearing a strong resemblance to the eyes of a well-known species of monkey. He was froward and perverse, and disregarded the pleasure or displeasure of any person; but he performed his work well, and with apparent ease. From the moment he entered the house, the Lady conceived a mortal antipathy against him, and besought the Laird to turn him away. But the Laird would not consent; he never turned away any servant, and moreover he had hired this fellow for a trivial wage, and he neither wanted activity nor perseverance. The natural consequence of this refusal was, that the Lady instantly set herself to embitter Merodach's life as much as possible, in order to get early quit of a domestic every way so disagreeable. Her hatred of him was not like a common antipathy entertained by one human being against another,— she hated him as one might hate a toad or an adder; and his occupation of jotteryman (as the Laird termed his servant of all work) keeping him always about her hand, it must have proved highly annoying.

She scolded him, she raged at him; but he only mocked her wrath, and giggled and laughed at her, with the most provoking derision. She tried to fell him again and again, but never, with all her address, could she hit him; and never did she make a blow at him, that she did not repent it. She was heavy and unwieldy, and he as quick in his motions as a monkey; besides, he generally contrived that she should be in such an ungovernable rage, that when she flew at him, she hardly knew what she was doing. At one time she guided her blow towards him, and he at the same instant avoided it with such dexterity, that she knocked down the chief hind, or foresman; and then Merodach giggled so heartily, that, lifting the kitchen poker, she threw it at him with a full design of knocking out his brains; but the missile only broke every article of crockery on the kitchen dresser.

She then hasted to the Laird, crying bitterly, and telling him she would not suffer that wretch Merodach, as she called him, to stay another night in the family.

"Why, then, put him away, and trouble me no more about him," said the Laird.

"Put him away!" exclaimed she; "I have already ordered him away a hundred times, and charged him never to let me see his horrible face again; but he only grins, and answers with some intolerable piece of impertinence."

The pertinacity of the fellow amused the Laird; his dim eyes turned upwards into his head with delight; he then looked two ways at once, turned round his back, and laughed till the tears ran down his dun cheeks; but he could only articulate, "You're fitted now."

The Lady's agony of rage still increasing from this derision, she upbraided the Laird bitterly, and said he was not worthy the name of man, if he did not turn away that pestilence, after the way he had abused her.

"Why, Shusy, my dear, what has he done to you?"

"What done to me! has he not caused me to knock down John Thomson? and I do not know if ever he will come to life again!"

"Have you felled your favourite John Thomson?" said the Laird, laughing more heartily than before; "you might have done a worse deed than that."

"And has he not broke every plate and dish on the whole dresser?" continued the Lady; "and for all this devastation, he only mocks at my displeasure,— absolutely mocks me,— and if you do not have him turned away, and hanged or shot for his deeds, you are not worthy the name of man."

"O alack! What a devastation among the cheena metal!" said the Laird; and calling on Merodach, he said, "Tell me, thou evil Merodach of Babylon, how thou dared'st knock down thy Lady's favourite servant, John Thomson?"

"Not I, your honour. It was my Lady herself, who got into such a furious rage at me, that she mistook her man, and felled Mr Thomson; and the good man's skull is fractured."

"That was very odd," said the Laird, chuckling; "I do not comprehend it. But then, what set you on smashing all my Lady's delft and cheena ware?— That was a most infamous and provoking action."

"It was she herself, your honour. Sorry would I be to break one dish belonging to the house. I take all the house servants to witness, that my Lady smashed all the dishes with a poker; and now lays the blame on me!"

The Laird turned his dim eyes on his lady, who was crying with vexation and rage, and seemed meditating another personal attack on the culprit, which he did not at all appear to shun, but rather to court. She, however, vented her wrath in threatenings of the most deep and desperate revenge, the creature all the while assuring her that she would be foiled, and that in all her encounters and contests with him, she would uniformly come to the worst; he was resolved to do his duty, and there before his master he defied her.

The Laird thought more than he considered it prudent to reveal; he had little doubt that his wife would find some means of wreaking her vengeance on

the object of her displeasure; and he shuddered when he recollected one who had taken "something that she had been the waur of."

In a word, the Lady of Wheelhope's inveterate malignity against this one object, was like the rod of Moses, that swallowed up the rest of the serpents. All her wicked and evil propensities seemed to be superseded, if not utterly absorbed by it. The rest of the family now lived in comparative peace and quietness; for early and late her malevolence was venting itself against the jotteryman, and against him alone. It was a delirium of hatred and vengeance, on which the whole bent and bias of her inclination was set. She could not stay from the creature's presence, or, in the intervals when absent from him, she spent her breath in curses and execrations; and then, not able to rest, she ran again to seek him, her eyes gleaming with the anticipated delights of vengeance, while, ever and anon, all the ridicule and the harm redounded on herself.

Was it not strange that she could not get quit of this sole annoyance of her life? One would have thought she easily might. But by this time there was nothing farther from her wishes; she wanted vengeance, full, adequate, and delicious vengeance, on her audacious opponent. But he was a strange and terrible creature, and the means of retaliation constantly came, as it were, to his hand.

Bread and sweet milk was the only fare that Merodach cared for, and having bargained for that, he would not want it, though he often got it with a curse and with ill will. The Lady having, upon one occasion, intentionally kept back his wonted allowance for some days, on the Sabbath morning following, she set him down a bowl of rich sweet milk, well drugged with a deadly poison; and then she lingered in a little anteroom to watch the success of her grand plot, and prevent any other creature from tasting of the potion. Merodach came in, and the house-maid said to him, "There is your breakfast, creature."

"Oho! my Lady has been liberal this morning," said he; "but I am beforehand with her.— Here, little Missie, you seem very hungry to-day— take you my breakfast." And with that he set the beverage down to the Lady's little favourite spaniel. It so happened that the Lady's only son came at that instant into the anteroom seeking her, and teasing his mamma about something, which withdrew her attention from the hall-table for a space. When she looked again, and saw Missie lapping up the sweet milk, she burst from her hiding-place like a fury, screaming as if her head had been on fire, kicked the remainder of its contents against the wall, and lifting Missie in her bosom, retreated hastily, crying all the way.

"Ha, ha, ha— I have you now!" cried Merodach, as she vanished from the hall.

Poor Missie died immediately, and very privately; indeed, she would have died and been buried, and never one have seen her, save her mistress, had not Merodach, by a luck that never failed him, looked over the wall of the flower garden, just as his lady was laying her favourite in a grave of her own digging. She, not perceiving her tormentor, plied on at her task, apostrophizing the insensate little carcass,— "Ah! poor dear little creature, thou hast had a hard fortune, and hast drank of the bitter potion that was not intended for thee; but he shall drink it three times double for thy sake!"

"Is that little Missie?" said the eldrich voice of the jotteryman, close at the Lady's ear. She uttered a loud scream, and sunk down on the bank. "Alack for poor Missie!" continued the creature in a tone of mockery, "my heart is sorry for Missie. What has befallen her— whose breakfast cup did she drink?"

"Hence with thee, fiend!" cried the Lady; "what right hast thou to intrude on thy mistress's privacy? Thy turn is coming yet; or may the nature of woman change within me!"

"It is changed already," said the creature, grinning with delight; "I have thee now, I have thee now! And were it not to show my superiority over thee, which I do every hour, I should soon see thee strapped like a mad cat, or a worrying bratch. What wilt thou try next?"

"I will cut thy throat, and if I die for it, will rejoice in the deed; a deed of charity to all that dwell on the face of the earth."

"I have warned thee before, dame, and I now warn thee again, that all thy mischief meditated against me will fall double on thine own head."

"I want none of your warning, fiendish cur. Hence with your elvish face, and take care of yourself."

It would be too disgusting and horrible to relate or read all the incidents that fell out between this unaccountable couple. Their enmity against each other had no end, and no mitigation; and scarcely a single day passed over on which the Lady's acts of malevolent ingenuity did not terminate fatally for some favourite thing of her own. Scarcely was there a thing, animate or inanimate, on which she set a value, left to her, that was not destroyed; and yet scarcely one hour or minute could she remain absent from her tormentor, and all the while, it seems, solely for the purpose of tormenting him. While all the rest of the establishment enjoyed peace and quietness from the fury of their termagant dame, matters still grew worse and worse between the fascinated pair. The Lady haunted the menial, in the same manner as the raven haunts the eagle,— for a perpetual quarrel, though the former knows that in every encounter she is to come off the loser. Noises were heard on the stairs by night, and it was whispered among the servants, that the Lady had been seeking Merodach's chamber, on some horrible intent. Several of them would

have sworn that they had seen her passing and repassing on the stair after midnight, when all was quiet; but then it was likewise well known, that Merodach slept with well-fastened doors, and a companion in another bed in the same room, whose bed, too, was nearest the door. Nobody cared much what became of the jotteryman, for he was an unsocial and disagreeable person; but some one told him what they had seen, and hinted a suspicion of the Lady's intent. But the creature only bit his upper lip, winked with his eyes, and said, "She had better let that alone; she will be the first to rue that."

Not long after this, to the horror of the family and the whole country side, the Laird's only son was found murdered in his bed one morning, under circumstances that manifested the most fiendish cruelty and inveteracy on the part of his destroyer. As soon as the atrocious act was divulged, the Lady fell into convulsions, and lost her reason; and happy had it been for her had she never recovered the use of it, for there was blood upon her hand, which she took no care to conceal, and there was little doubt that it was the blood of her own innocent and beloved boy, the sole heir and hope of the family.

This blow deprived the Laird of all power of action; but the Lady had a brother, a man of the law, who came and instantly proceeded to an investigation of this unaccountable murder. Before the Sheriff arrived, the housekeeper took the Lady's brother aside, and told him he had better not go on with the scrutiny, for she was sure the crime would be brought home to her unfortunate mistress; and after examining into several corroborative circumstances, and viewing the state of the raving maniac, with the blood on her hand and arm, he made the investigation a very short one, declaring the domestics all exculpated.

The Laird attended his boy's funeral, and laid his head in the grave, but appeared exactly like a man walking in a trance, an automaton, without feelings or sensations, oftentimes gazing at the funeral procession, as on something he could not comprehend. And when the death-bell of the parish church fell a-tolling, as the corpse approached the kirk-stile, he cast a dim eye up towards the belfry, and said hastily, "What, what's that? Och ay, we're just in time, just in time." And often was he hammering over the name of "Evil Merodach, King of Babylon," to himself. He seemed to have some far-fetched conception that his unaccountable jotteryman was in some way connected with the death of his only son, and other lesser calamities, although the evidence in favour of Merodach's innocence was as usual quite decisive.

This grievous mistake of Lady Wheelhope can only be accounted for, by supposing her in a state of derangement, or rather under some evil influence, over which she had no control; and to a person in such a state, the mistake was not so very unnatural. The mansion-house of Wheelhope was old and

irregular. The stair had four acute turns, and four landing-places, all the same. In the uppermost chamber slept the two domestics,— Merodach in the bed farthest in, and in the chamber immediately below that, which was exactly similar, slept the Young Laird and his tutor, the former in the bed farthest in; and thus, in the turmoil of her wild and raging passions, her own hand made herself childless.

Merodach was expelled the family forthwith, but refused to accept of his wages, which the man of law pressed upon him, for fear of farther mischief; but he went away in apparent sullenness and discontent, no one knowing whither.

When his dismissal was announced to the Lady, who was watched day and night in her chamber, the news had such an effect on her, that her whole frame seemed electrified; the horrors of remorse vanished, and another passion, which I neither can comprehend nor define, took the sole possession of her distempered spirit. "He must not go!— He shall not go!" she exclaimed. "No, no, no— he shall not— he shall not— he shall not!" and then she instantly set herself about making ready to follow him, uttering all the while the most diabolical expressions, indicative of anticipated vengeance.— "Oh, could I but snap his nerves one by one, and birl among his vitals! Could I but slice his heart off piecemeal in small messes, and see his blood lopper, and bubble, and spin away in purple slays; and then to see him grin, and grin, and grin, and grin! Oh— oh— oh— How beautiful and grand a sight it would be to see him grin, and grin, and grin!" And in such a style would she run on for hours together.

She thought of nothing, she spake of nothing, but the discarded jotteryman, whom most people now began to regard as a creature that was "not canny." They had seen him eat, and drink, and work, like other people; still he had that about him that was not like other men. He was a boy in form, and an antediluvian in feature. Some thought he was a mongrel, between a Jew and an ape; some a wizard, some a kelpie, or a fairy, but most of all, that he was really and truly a Brownie. What he was I do not know, and therefore will not pretend to say; but be that as it may, in spite of locks and keys, watching and waking, the Lady of Wheelhope soon made her escape, and eloped after him. The attendants, indeed, would have made oath that she was carried away by some invisible hand, for it was impossible, they said, that she could have escaped on foot like other people; and this edition of the story took in the country; but sensible people viewed the matter in another light.

As for instance, when Wattie Blythe, the Laird's old shepherd, came in from the hill one morning, his wife Bessie thus accosted him.— "His presence be about us, Wattie Blythe! have ye heard what has happened at the ha'? Things are aye turning waur and waur there, and it looks like as if Providence had

gi'en up our Laird's house to destruction. This grand estate maun now gang frae the Sprots; for it has finished them."

"Na, na, Bessie, it isna the estate that has finished the Sprots, but the Sprots that hae finished the estate, and themsells into the boot. They hae been a wicked and degenerate race, and aye the langer the waur, till they hae reached the utmost bounds o' earthly wickedness; and it's time the deil were looking after his ain."

"Ah, Wattie Blythe, ye never said a truer say. And that's just the very point where your story ends, and mine begins; for hasna the deil, or the fairies, or the brownies, ta'en away our Leddy bodily! and the haill country is running and riding in search o' her; and there is twenty hunder merks offered to the first that can find her, and bring her safe back. They hae ta'en her away, skin and bane, body and soul, and a', Wattie!"

"Hech-wow! but that is awsome! And where is it thought they have ta'en her to, Bessie?"

"O, they hae some guess at that frae her ain hints afore. It is thought they hae carried her after that Satan of a creature, wha wrought sae muckle wae about the house. It is for him they are a' looking, for they ken weel, that where they get the tane they will get the tither."

"Whew! Is that the gate o't, Bessie? Why, then, the awfu' story is nouther mair nor less than this, that the Leddy has made a 'lopement, as they ca't, and run away after a blackguard jotteryman. Hech-wow! wae's me for human frailty! But that's just the gate! When aince the deil gets in the point o' his finger, he will soon have in his haill hand. Ay, he wants but a hair to make a tether of, ony day! I hae seen her a braw sonsy lass; but even then I feared she was devoted to destruction, for she aye mockit at religion, Bessie, and that's no a good mark of a young body. And she made a' its servants her enemies; and think you these good men's prayers were a' to blaw away i' the wind, and be nae mair regarded? Na, na, Bessie, my woman, take ye this mark baith o' our ain bairns and ither folk's— If ever ye see a young body that disregards the Sabbath, and makes a mock at the ordinances o' religion, ye will never see that body come to muckle good.— A braw hand our Leddy has made o' her gibes and jeers at religion, and her mockeries o' the poor persecuted hill-folk!— sunk down by degrees into the very dregs o' sin and misery! run away after a scullion!"

"Fy, fy, Wattie, how can ye say sae? It was weel kenn'd that she hatit him wi' a perfect and mortal hatred, and tried to make away wi' him mae ways nor ane."

"Aha, Bessie; but nipping and scarting is Scots folk's wooing; and though it is but right that we suspend our judgments, there will naebody persuade me if

she be found alang wi' the creature, but that she has run away after him in the natural way, on her twa shanks, without help either frae fairy or brownie."

"I'll never believe sic a thing of ony woman born, let be a leddy weel up in years."

"Od help ye, Bessie! ye dinna ken the stretch o' corrupt nature. The best o' us, when left to oursells, are nae better than strayed sheep, that will never find the way back to their ain pastures; and of a' things made o' mortal flesh, a wicked woman is the warst."

"Alack-a-day! we get the blame o' muckle that we little deserve. But, Wattie, keep ye a geyan sharp look-out about the cleuchs and the caves o' our hope; for the Leddy kens them a' geyan weel; and gin the twenty hunder merks wad come our way, it might gang a waur gate. It wad tocher a' our bonny lasses."

"Ay, weel I wat, Bessie, that's nae lee. And now, when ye bring me amind o't, I'm sair mista'en if I didna hear a creature up in the Brockholes this morning, skirling as if something war cutting its throat. It gars a' the hairs stand on my head when I think it may hae been our Leddy, and the droich of a creature murdering her. I took it for a battle of wulcats, and wished they might pu' out ane anither's thrapples; but when I think on it again, they war unco like some o' our Leddy's unearthly screams."

"His presence be about us, Wattie! Haste ye— pit on your bonnet—tak' your staff in your hand, and gang and see what it is."

"Shame fa' me, if I daur gang, Bessie."

"Hout, Wattie, trust in the Lord."

"Aweel, sae I do. But ane's no to throw himsell ower a linn, and trust that the Lord will kep him in a blanket. And it's nae muckle safer for an auld stiff man like me to gang away out to a wild remote place, where there is ae body murdering another.— What is that I hear, Bessie? Haud the lang tongue o' you, and rin to the door, and see what noise that is."

Bessie ran to the door, but soon returned, with her mouth wide open, and her eyes set in her head.

"It is them, Wattie! it is them! His presence be about us! What will we do?"

"Them? whaten them?"

"Why, that blackguard creature, coming here, leading our Leddy by the hair o' the head, and yerking her wi' a stick. I am terrified out o' my wits. What will we do?"

"We'll see what they say," said Wattie, manifestly in as great terror as his wife; and by a natural impulse, or as a last resource, he opened the Bible, not knowing what he did, and then hurried on his spectacles; but before he got two leaves turned over, the two entered,— a frightful-looking couple indeed.

Merodach, with his old withered face, and ferret eyes, leading the Lady of Wheelhope by the long hair, which was mixed with grey, and whose face was all bloated with wounds and bruises, and having stripes of blood on her garments.

"How's this!— How's this, sirs?" said Wattie Blythe.

"Close that book, and I will tell you, goodman," said Merodach.

"I can hear what you hae to say wi' the beuk open, sir," said Wattie, turning over the leaves, pretending to look for some particular passage, but apparently not knowing what he was doing. "It is a shamefu' business this; but some will hae to answer for't. My Leddy, I am unco grieved to see you in sic a plight. Ye hae surely been dooms sair left to yoursell."

The Lady shook her head, uttered a feeble hollow laugh, and fixed her eyes on Merodach. But such a look! It almost frightened the simple aged couple out of their senses. It was not a look of love nor of hatred exclusively; neither was it of desire or disgust, but it was a combination of them all. It was such a look as one fiend would cast on another, in whose everlasting destruction he rejoiced. Wattie was glad to take his eyes from such countenances, and look into the Bible, that firm foundation of all his hopes and all his joy.

"I request that you will shut that book, sir," said the horrible creature; "or if you do not, I will shut it for you with a vengeance;" and with that he seized it, and flung it against the wall. Bessie uttered a scream, and Wattie was quite paralysed; and although he seemed disposed to run after his best friend, as he called it, the hellish looks of the Brownie interposed, and glued him to his seat.

"Hear what I have to say first," said the creature, "and then pore your fill on that precious book of yours. One concern at a time is enough. I came to do you a service. Here, take this cursed, wretched woman, whom you style your Lady, and deliver her up to the lawful authorities, to be restored to her husband and her place in society. She has followed one that hates her, and never said one kind word to her in his life; and though I have beat her like a dog, still she clings to me, and will not depart, so enchanted is she with the laudable purpose of cutting my throat. Tell your master and her brother, that I am not to be burdened with their maniac. I have scourged— I have spurned and kicked her, afflicting her night and day, and yet from my side she will not depart. Take her. Claim the reward in full, and your fortune is made; and so farewell!"

The creature went away, and the moment his back was turned, the Lady fell a-screaming and struggling, like one in an agony, and, in spite of all the old couple's exertions, she forced herself out of their hands, and ran after the retreating Merodach. When he saw better would not be, he turned upon her, and, by one blow with his stick, struck her down; and, not content with that,

continued to maltreat her in such a manner, as to all appearance would have killed twenty ordinary persons. The poor devoted dame could do nothing, but now and then utter a squeak like a half-worried cat, and writhe and grovel on the sward, till Wattie and his wife came up, and withheld her tormentor from further violence. He then bound her hands behind her back with a strong cord, and delivered her once more to the charge of the old couple, who contrived to hold her by that means, and take her home.

Wattie was ashamed to take her into the hall, but led her into one of the out-houses, whither he brought her brother to receive her. The man of the law was manifestly vexed at her reappearance, and scrupled not to testify his dissatisfaction; for when Wattie told him how the wretch had abused his sister, and that, had it not been for Bessie's interference and his own, the Lady would have been killed outright, he said, "Why, Walter, it is a great pity that he did not kill her outright. What good can her life now do to her, or of what value is her life to any creature living? After one has lived to disgrace all connected with them, the sooner they are taken off the better."

The man, however, paid old Walter down his two thousand merks, a great fortune for one like him in those days; and not to dwell longer on this unnatural story, I shall only add, very shortly, that the Lady of Wheelhope soon made her escape once more, and flew, as if drawn by an irresistible charm, to her tormentor. Her friends looked no more after her; and the last time she was seen alive, it was following the uncouth creature up the water of Daur, weary, wounded, and lame, while he was all the way beating her, as a piece of excellent amusement. A few days after that, her body was found among some wild haggs, in a place called Crook-burn, by a party of the persecuted Covenanters that were in hiding there, some of the very men whom she had exerted herself to destroy, and who had been driven, like David of old, to pray for a curse and earthly punishment upon her. They buried her like a dog at the Yetts of Keppel, and rolled three huge stones upon her grave, which are lying there to this day. When they found her corpse, it was mangled and wounded in a most shocking manner, the fiendish creature having manifestly tormented her to death. He was never more seen or heard of in this kingdom, though all that country-side was kept in terror for him many years afterwards; and to this day, they will tell you of The Brownie of the Black Haggs, which title he seems to have acquired after his disappearance.

This story was told to me by an old man named Adam Halliday, whose great-grandfather, Thomas Halliday, was one of those that found the body and buried it. It is many years since I heard it; but, however ridiculous it may appear, I remember it made a dreadful impression on my young mind. I never heard any story like it, save one of an old fox-hound that pursued a fox through

the Grampians for a fortnight, and when at last discovered by the Duke of Athole's people, neither of them could run, but the hound was still continuing to walk after the fox, and when the latter lay down, the other lay down beside him, and looked at him steadily all the while, though unable to do him the least harm. The passion of inveterate malice seems to have influenced these two exactly alike. But, upon the whole, I scarcely believe the tale can be true.

12: The Well of Pen-Morfa

Elizabeth Gaskell

1810-1865

Household Words, 16, 23 Nov 1850; uncredited.

OF A HUNDRED travellers who spend a night at Tre-Madoc, in North Wales, there is not one, perhaps, who goes to the neighbouring village of Pen-Morfa. The new town, built by Mr Maddocks, Shelley's friend, has taken away all the importance of the ancient village— formerly, as its name imports, 'the head of the marsh;' that marsh which Mr Maddocks drained and dyked, and reclaimed from the Traeth Mawr, till Pen-Morfa, against the walls of whose cottages the winter tides lashed in former days, has come to stand, high and dry, three miles from the sea, on a disused road to Caernarvon. I do not think there has been a new cottage built in Pen-Morfa this hundred years, and many an old one has dates in some obscure corner which tell of the fifteenth century. The joists of timber, where they meet overhead, are blackened with the smoke of centuries. There is one large room, round which the beds are built like cupboards, with wooden doors to open and shut, somewhat in the old Scotch fashion, I imagine; and below the bed (at least in one instance I can testify that this was the case, and I was told it was not uncommon) is a great wide wooden drawer, which contained the oat-cake, baked for some months' consumption by the family. They call the promontory of Llyn (the point at the end of Caernarvonshire), Welsh Wales. I think they might call Pen-Morfa a Welsh Welsh village; it is so national in its ways, and buildings, and inhabitants, and so different from the towns and hamlets into which the English throng in summer. How these said inhabitants of Pen-Morfa ever are distinguished by their names, I, uninitiated, cannot tell. I only know for a fact, that in a family there with which I am acquainted, the eldest son's name is John Jones, because his father's was John Thomas; that the second son is called David Williams, because his grandfather was William Wynn; and that the girls are called indiscriminately by the names of Thomas and Jones. I have heard some of the Welsh chuckle over the way in which they have baffled the barristers at Caernarvon assizes, denying the name under which they had been subpoenaed to give evidence, if they were unwilling witnesses. I could tell you of a great deal which is peculiar and wild in these true Welsh people, who are what I suppose we English were a century ago; but I must hasten on to my tale.

I have received great, true, beautiful kindness from one of the members of the family of whom I just now spoke as living at Pen-Morfa; and when I found that they wished me to drink tea with them, I gladly did so, though my friend was the only one in the house who could speak English at all fluently. After tea, I went with them to see some of their friends; and it was then I saw the

interiors of the houses of which I have spoken. It was an autumn evening: we left mellow sunset-light in the open air when we entered the houses, in which all seemed dark, save in the ruddy sphere of the firelight, for the windows were very' small, and deep-set in the thick walls. Here were an old couple, who welcomed me in Welsh; and brought forth milk and oat-cake with patriarchal hospitality. Sons and daughters had married away from them; they lived alone; he was blind, or nearly so; and they sat one on each side of the fire, so old and so still (till we went in and broke the silence) that they seemed to be listening for death. At another house lived a woman stern and severe-looking. She was busy hiving a swarm of bees, alone and unassisted. I do not think my companion would have chosen to speak to her; but seeing her out in her hill-side garden, she made some inquiry in Welsh, which was answered in the most mournful tone I ever heard in my life; a voice of which the freshness and 'timbre' had been choked up by tears long years ago. I asked who she was. I dare say the story is common enough; but the sight of the woman and her few words had impressed me. She had been the beauty of Pen-Morfa; had been in service; had been taken to London by the family whom she served; had come down, in a year or so, back to Pen-Morfa, her beauty gone into that sad, wild, despairing look which I saw; and she about to become a mother. Her father had died during her absence, and left her a very little money; and after her child was born, she took the little cottages where I saw her, and made a scanty living by the produce of her bees. She associated with no one. One event had made her savage and distrustful to her kind. She kept so much aloof that it was some time before it became known that her child was deformed, and had lost the use of its lower limbs. Poor thing! When I saw the mother, it had been for fifteen years bedridden. But go past when you would, in the night, you saw a light burning; it was often that of the watching mother, solitary and friendless, soothing the moaning child; or you might hear her crooning some old Welsh air, in hopes to still the pain with the loud monotonous music. Her sorrow was so dignified, and her mute endurance and her patient love won her such respect, that the neighbours would fain have been friends; but she kept alone and solitary. This a most true story. I hope that woman and her child are dead now, and their souls above.

Another story which I heard of these old primitive dwellings I mean to tell at somewhat greater length:—

There are rocks high above Pen-Morfa; they are the same that hang over Tre-Madoc, but near Pen-Morfa they sweep away, and are lost in the plain. Everywhere they are beautiful. The great, sharp ledges, which would otherwise look hard and cold, are adorned with the brightest-coloured moss, and the golden lichen. Close to, you see the scarlet leaves of the crane's-bill, and the

tufts of purple heather, which fill up every cleft and cranny; but, in the distance, you see only the general effect of infinite richness of colour, broken, here and there, by great masses of ivy. At the foot of these rocks come a rich, verdant meadow or two; and then you are at Pen-Morfa. The village well is sharp down under the rocks. There are one or two large sloping pieces of stone in that last field, on the road leading to the well, which are always slippery; slippery in the summer's heat, almost as much as in the frost of winter, when some little glassy stream that runs over them is turned into a thin sheet of ice. Many, many years back— a lifetime ago— there lived in Pen-Morfa a widow and her daughter. Very little is required in those out-of-the-way Welsh villages. The wants of the people are very simple. Shelter, fire, a little oat-cake and buttermilk, and garden produce; perhaps some pork and bacon from the pig in winter; clothing, which is principally of home manufacture, and of the most enduring kind: these take very little money to purchase, especially in a district into which the large capitalists have not yet come, to buy up two or three acres of the peasants; and nearly every man about Pen-Morfa owned, at the time of which I speak, his dwelling and some land beside.

Eleanor Gwynn inherited the cottage (by the roadside, on the left hand as you go from Tre-Madoc to Pen-Morfa) in which she and her husband had lived all their married life, and a small garden sloping southwards, in which her bees lingered before winging their way to the more distant heather. She took rank among her neighbours as the possessor of a moderate independence— not rich, and not poor. But the young men of Pen-Morfa thought her very rich in the possession of a most lovely daughter. Most of us know how very pretty Welsh women are; but, from all accounts Nest Gwynn (Nest, or Nesta, is the Welsh for Agnes) was more regularly beautiful than any one for miles round. The Welsh are still fond of triads, and 'as beautiful as a summer's morning at sunrise, as a white seagull on the green sea wave, and as Nest Gwynn,' is yet a saying in that district. Nest knew she was beautiful, and delighted in it. Her mother sometimes checked her in her happy pride, and sometimes reminded her that beauty was a great gift of God (for the Welsh are a very pious people); but when she began her little homily, Nest came dancing to her, and knelt down before her, and put her face up to be kissed, and so, with a sweet interruption, she stopped her mother's lips. Her high spirits made some few shake their heads, and some called her a flirt and a coquette; for she could not help trying to please all, both old and young, both men and women. A very little from Nest sufficed for this; a sweet, glittering smile, a word of kindness, a merry glance, or a little sympathy; all these pleased and attracted: she was like the fairy-gifted child, and dropped inestimable gifts. But some, who had interpreted her smiles and kind words rather as their wishes led them, than as

they were really warranted, found that the beautiful, beaming Nest could be decided and saucy enough; and so they revenged themselves by calling her a flirt. Her mother heard it, and sighed; but Nest only laughed.

It was her work to fetch water for the day's use from the well I told you about. Old people say it was the prettiest sight in the world to see her come stepping lightly and gingerly over the stones with the pail of water balanced on her head; she was too adroit to need to steady it with her hand. They say, now that they can afford to be charitable and speak the truth, that in all her changes to other people, there never was a better daughter to a widowed mother than Nest. There is a picturesque old farmhouse under Moel Gwynn, on the road from Tre-Madoc to Criccaeth, called by some Welsh name which I now forget; but its meaning in English is 'The End of Time;' a strange, boding, ominous name. Perhaps, the builder meant his work to endure till the end of time. I do not know; but there the old house stands, and will stand for many a year. When Nest was young, it belonged to one Edward Williams; his mother was dead, and people said he was on the look-out for a wife. They told Nest so, but she tossed her head and reddened, and said she thought he might look long before he got one; so it was not strange that one morning when she went to the well, one autumn morning when the dew lay heavy on the grass, and the thrushes were busy among the mountain-ash berries, Edward Williams happened to be there, on his way to the coursing match near, and somehow his greyhounds threw her pail of water over in their romping play, and she was very long in filling it again; and when she came home she threw her arms round her mother's neck, and, in a passion of joyous tears, told her that Edward Williams, of 'The End of Time,' had asked her to marry him, and that she had said 'Yes.'

Eleanor Gwynn shed her tears too; but they fell quietly when she was alone. She was thankful Nest had found a protector— one suitable in age and apparent character, and above her in fortune; but she knew she should miss her sweet daughter in a thousand household ways; miss her in the evenings by the fireside; miss her when at night she wakened up with a start from a dream of her youth, and saw her fair face lying calm in the moonlight, pillowed by her side. Then she forgot her dream, and blessed her child, and slept again. But who could be so selfish as to be sad when Nest was so supremely happy; she danced and sang more than ever; and then sat silent, and smiled to herself: if spoken to, she started and came back to the present with a scarlet blush, which told what she had been thinking of.

That was a sunny, happy, enchanted autumn. But the winter was nigh at hand; and with it came sorrow. One fine frosty morning, Nest went out with her lover— she to the well, he to some farming business, which was to be

transacted at the little inn of Pen-Morfa. He was late for his appointment; so he left her at the entrance of the village, and hastened to the inn; and she, in her best cloak and new hat (put on against her mother's advice; but they were a recent purchase, and very becoming), went through the Dol Mawr, radiant with love and happiness. One who lived until lately, met her going down towards the well that morning, and said 'he turned round to look' after her— she seemed unusually lovely. He wondered at the time at her wearing her Sunday clothes; for the pretty, hooded blue-cloth cloak is kept among the Welsh women as a church and market garment, and not commonly used, even on the coldest days of winter, for such household errands as fetching water from the well. However, as he said, 'It was not possible to look in her face, and "fault" anything she wore.' Down the sloping stones the girl went blithely with her pail. She filled it at the well; and then she took off her hat, tied the strings together, and slung it over her arm. She lifted the heavy pail and balanced it on her head. But, alas! in going up the smooth, slippery, treacherous rock, the encumbrance of her cloak— it might be such a trifle as her slung hat— something, at any rate, took away her evenness of poise; the freshet had frozen on the slanting stone, and was one coat of ice; poor Nest fell, and put out her hip. No more flushing rosy colour on that sweet face; no more look of beaming innocent happiness; instead, there was deadly pallor, and filmy eyes, over which dark shades seemed to chase each other as the shoots of agony grew more and more intense. She screamed once or twice; but the exertion (involuntary, and forced out of her by excessive pain) overcame her, and she fainted. A child, coming an hour or two afterwards, on the same errand, saw her lying there, ice-glued to the stone, and thought she was dead. It flew crying back.

'Nest Gwynn is dead! Nest Gwynn is dead!' and, crazy with fear, it did not stop until it had hid its head in its mother's lap. The village was alarmed, and all who were able went in haste towards the well. Poor Nest had often thought she was dying in that dreary hour; had taken fainting for death, and struggled against it; and prayed that God would keep her alive till she could see her lover's face once more; and when she did see it, white with terror, bending over her, she gave a feeble smile, and let herself faint away into unconsciousness.

Many a month she lay on her bed unable to move. Sometimes she was delirious, sometimes worn-out into the deepest depression. Through all, her mother watched her with tenderest care. The neighbours would come and offer help. They would bring presents of country dainties; and I do not suppose that there was a better dinner than ordinary cooked in any household in Pen-Morfa parish, but a portion of it was sent to Eleanor Gwynn, if not for her sick

daughter, to try and tempt her herself to eat and' be strengthened; for to no one would she delegate the duty of watching over her child. Edward Williams was for a long time most assiduous in his inquiries and attentions; but by-and-by (ah! you see the dark fate of poor Nest now), he slackened, so little at first that Eleanor blamed herself for her jealousy on her daughter's behalf, and chid her suspicious heart. But as spring ripened into summer, and Nest was still bedridden, Edward's coolness was visible to more than the poor mother. The neighbours would have spoken to her about it, but she shrunk from the subject as if they were probing a wound. 'At any rate,' thought she, 'Nest shall be strong before she is told about it. I will tell lies— I shall be forgiven— but I must save my child; and when she is stronger, perhaps I may be able to comfort her. Oh! I wish she would not speak to him so tenderly and trustfully, when she is delirious. I could curse him when she does.' And then Nest would call for her mother, and Eleanor would go and invent some strange story about the summonses Edward had had to Caernarvon assizes, or to Harlech cattle market. But at last she was driven to her wits' end; it was three weeks since he had even stopped at the door to inquire, and Eleanor, mad with anxiety about her child, who was silently pining off to death for want of tidings of her lover, put on her cloak, when she had lulled her daughter to sleep one fine June evening, and set off to 'The End of Time.' The great plain which stretches out like an amphitheatre, in the half-circle of hills formed by the ranges of Moel Gwynn and the Tre-Madoc Rocks, was all golden-green in the mellow light of sunset. To Eleanor it might have been black with winter frost— she never noticed outward things till she reached 'The End of Time;' and there, in the little farm-yard, she was brought to a sense of her present hour and errand by seeing Edward. He was examining some hay, newly stacked; the air was scented by its fragrance, and by the lingering sweetness of the breath of the cows. When Edward turned round at the footstep and saw Eleanor, he coloured and looked confused; however, he came forward to meet her in a cordial manner enough.

'It's a fine evening,' said he. 'How is Nest? But, indeed, your being here is a sign she is better. Won't you come in and sit down?' He spoke hurriedly, as if affecting a welcome which he did not feel.

'Thank you. I'll just take this milking-stool and sit down here. The open air is like balm, after being shut up so long.'

'It is a long time,' he replied, 'more than five months.'

Mrs Gwynn was trembling at heart. She felt an anger which she did not wish to show; for, if by any manifestations of temper or resentment she lessened or broke the waning thread of attachment which bound him to her daughter, she felt she should never forgive herself. She kept inwardly saying,

'Patience, patience! he may be true, and love her yet;' but her indignant convictions gave her words the lie.

'It's a long time, Edward Williams, since you've been near us to ask after Nest,' said she. 'She may be better, or she may be worse, for aught you know.' She looked up at him reproachfully, but spoke in a gentle, quiet tone.

'I— you see the hay has been a long piece of work. The weather has been fractious— and a master's eye is needed. Besides,' said he, as if he had found the reason for which he sought to account for his absence, 'I have heard of her from Rowland Jones. I was at the surgery for some horse-medicine— he told me about her:' and a shade came over his face, as he remembered what the doctor had said. Did he think that shade would escape the mother's eye?

'You saw Rowland Jones! Oh, man-alive, tell me what he said of my girl! He'll say nothing to me, but just hems and haws the more I pray him. But you will tell me. You must tell me.' She stood up and spoke in a tone of command, which his feeling of independence, weakened just then by an accusing conscience, did not enable him to resist. He strove to evade the question, however.

'It was an unlucky day that ever she went to the well!'

'Tell me what the doctor said of my child,' repeated Mrs Gwynn. 'Will she live, or will she die?' He did not dare to disobey the imperious tone in which this question was put.

'Oh, she will live, don't be afraid. The doctor said she would live.' He did not mean to lay any peculiar emphasis on the word 'live,' but somehow he did, and she, whose every nerve vibrated with anxiety, caught the word.

'She will live!' repeated she. 'But there is something behind. Tell me, for I will know. If you won't say, I'll go to Rowland Jones to-night, and make him tell me what he has said to you.'

There had passed something in this conversation between himself and the doctor, which Edward did not wish to have known; and Mrs Gwynn's threat had the desired effect. But he looked vexed and irritated.

'You have such impatient ways with you, Mrs Gwynn,' he remonstrated.

'I am a mother asking news of my sick child,' said she. 'Go on. What did he say? She'll live— ' as if giving the clue.

'She'll live, he has no doubt of that. But he thinks— now don't clench your hands so— I can't tell you if you look in that way; you are enough to frighten a man.'

'I'm not speaking,' said she, in a low, husky tone. 'Never mind my looks: she'll live— '

'But she'll be a cripple for life. There! you would have it out,' said he, sulkily.

'A cripple for life,' repeated she, slowly. 'And I'm one-and-twenty years older than she is!' She sighed heavily.

'And, as we're about it, I'll just tell you what is in my mind,' said he, hurried and confused. 'I've a deal of cattle; and the farm makes heavy work, as much as an able healthy woman can do. So you see— ' He stopped, wishing her to understand his meaning without words. But she would not. She fixed her dark eyes on him, as if reading his soul, till he flinched under her gaze.

'Well,' said she, at length, 'say on. Remember, I've a deal of work in me yet, and what strength is mine is my daughter's.'

'You're very good. But, altogether, you must be aware, Nest will never be the same as she was.'

'And you've not yet sworn in the face of God to take, her for better, for worse; and, as she is worse'— she looked in his face, caught her breath, and went on— 'as she is worse, why, you cast her off, not being church-tied to her. Though her body may be crippled, her poor heart is the same— alas!— and full of love for you. Edward, you don't mean to break it off because of our sorrows. You're only trying me, I know,' said she, as if begging him to assure her that her fears were false. 'But, you see, I'm a foolish woman— a poor, foolish woman— and ready to take fright at a few words.' She smiled up in his face; but it was a forced, doubting smile, and his face still retained its sullen, dogged aspect.

'Nay, Mrs Gwynn,' said he, 'you spoke truth at first. Your own good sense told you Nest would never be fit to be any man's wife— unless, indeed, she could catch Mr Griffiths of Tynwntyrybwlch; he might keep her a carriage, maybe.' Edward really did not mean to be unfeeling; but he was obtuse, and wished to carry off his 'embarrassment by a kind of friendly joke, which he had no idea would sting the poor mother as it did. He was startled at her manner.

'Put it in words like a man. Whatever you mean by my child, say it for yourself, and don't speak as if my good sense had told me anything. I stand here, doubting my own thoughts, cursing my own fears. Don't be a coward. I ask you whether you and Nest are troth-plight?'

'I am not a coward. Since you ask me, I answer, Nest and I were troth-plight; but we are not. I cannot— no one would expect me to wed a cripple. It's your own doing I've told you now; I had made up my mind, but I should have waited a bit before telling you.'

'Very well,' said she, and she turned to go away; but her wrath burst the flood-gates, and swept away discretion and forethought. She moved, and stood in the gateway. Her lips parted, but no sound came; with an hysterical motion, she threw her arms suddenly up to heaven, as if bringing down lightning towards the grey old house to which she pointed as they fell, and then she spoke—

'The widow's child is unfriended. As surely as the Saviour brought the son of a widow from death to life, for her tears and cries, so surely will God and His angels watch over my Nest, and avenge her cruel wrongs.' She turned away weeping, and wringing her hands.

Edward went in-doors; he had no more desire to reckon his stores; he sat by the fire, looking gloomily at the red ashes. He might have been there half an hour or more, when some one knocked at the door. He would not speak. He wanted no one's company. Another knock, sharp and loud. He did not speak. Then the visitor opened the door, and, to his surprise— almost to his affright— Eleanor Gwynn came in.

'I knew you were here. I knew you could not go out into the clear, holy night as if nothing had happened. Oh! did I curse you? If I did, I beg you to forgive me; and I will try and ask the Almighty to bless you, if you will but have a little mercy— a very little. It will kill my Nest if she knows the truth now— she is so very weak. Why, she cannot feed herself, she is so low and feeble. You would not wish to kill her, I think, Edward!' She looked at him, as if expecting an answer; but he did not speak. She went down on her knees on the flags by him.

'You will give me a little time, Edward, to get her strong, won't you, now? I ask it on my bended knees! Perhaps, if I promise never to curse you again, you will come sometimes to see her, till she is well enough to know how all is over, and her heart's hopes crushed. Only say you'll come for a month or so, as if you still loved her— the poor cripple, forlorn of the world. I'll get her strong, and not tax you long.' Her tears fell too fast for her to go on.

'Get up, Mrs Gwynn,' Edward said. 'Don't kneel to me. I have no objection to come and see Nest, now and then, so that all is clear between you and me. Poor thing! I'm sorry, as it happens, she's so taken up with the thought of me.'

'It was likely, was not it? and you to have been her husband before this time, if— oh, miserable me! to let my child go and dim her bright life! But you'll forgive me, and come sometimes, just for a little quarter of an hour, once or twice a week. Perhaps she'll be asleep sometimes when you call, and then, you know, you need not come in. If she were not so ill, I'd never ask you.'

So low and humble was the poor widow brought, through her exceeding love for her daughter.

ii

NEST REVIVED during the warm summer weather. Edward came to see her, and stayed the allotted quarter of an hour; but he dared not look her in the face. She was, indeed, a cripple: one leg was much shorter than the other, and

she halted on a crutch. Her face, formerly so brilliant in colour, was wan and pale with suffering; the bright roses were gone, never to return. Her large eyes were sunk deep down in their hollow, cavernous sockets; but the light was in them still, when Edward came. Her mother dreaded her returning strength— dreaded, yet desired it; for the heavy burden of her secret was most oppressive at times, and she thought Edward was beginning to weary of his enforced attentions. One October evening she told her the truth. She even compelled her rebellious heart to take the cold, reasoning side of the question; and she told her child that her disabled frame was a disqualification for ever becoming a farmer's wife. She spoke hardly, because her inner agony and sympathy was such, she dared not trust herself to express the feelings that were rending her. But Nest turned away from cold reason; she revolted from her mother; she revolted from the world. She bound her sorrow tight up in her breast, to corrode and fester there.

Night after night, her mother heard her cries and moans— more pitiful, by far, than those wrung from her by bodily pain a year before; and night after night, if her mother spoke to soothe, she proudly denied the existence of any pain but what was physical, and consequent upon her accident.

'If she would but open her sore heart to me— to me, her mother,' Eleanor wailed forth in prayer to God, 'I would be content. Once it was enough to have my Nest all my own. Then came love, and I knew it would never be as before; and then I thought the grief I felt, when Edward spoke to me, was as sharp a sorrow as could be; but this present grief, O Lord, my God, is worst of all; and Thou only, Thou, canst help!'

When Nest grew as strong as she was ever likely to be on earth, she was anxious to have as much labour as she could bear. She would not allow her mother to spare her anything. Hard work— bodily fatigue— she seemed to crave. She was glad when she was stunned by exhaustion into a dull insensibility of feeling. She was almost fierce when her mother, in those first months of convalescence, performed the household tasks which had formerly been hers; but she shrank from going out of doors. Her mother thought that she was unwilling to expose her changed appearance to the neighbours' remarks, but Nest was not afraid of that; she was afraid of their pity, as being one deserted and cast off. If Eleanor gave way before her daughter's imperiousness, and sat by while Nest 'tore' about her work with the vehemence of a bitter heart, Eleanor could have cried, but she durst not; tears, or any mark of commiseration, irritated the crippled girl so much, she even drew away from caresses. Everything was to go on as it had been before she had known Edward; and so it did, outwardly; but they trod carefully, as if the ground on which they moved was hollow— deceptive. There was no more

careless ease, every word was guarded, and every action planned. It was a dreary life to both. Once, Eleanor brought in a little baby, a neighbour's child, to try and tempt Nest out of herself, by her old love of children. Nest's pale face flushed as she saw the innocent child in her mother's arms; and, for a moment, she made as if she would have taken it; but then she turned away, and hid her face behind her apron, and murmured, 'I shall never have a child to lie in my breast, and call me mother!' In a minute she arose, with compressed and tightened lips, and went about her household work, without her noticing the cooing baby again, till Mrs Gwynn, heart-sick at the failure of her little plan, took it back to its parents.

One day the news ran through Pen-Morfa that Edward Williams was about to be married. Eleanor had long expected this intelligence. It came upon her like no new thing, but it was the filling-up of her cup of woe. She could not tell Nest. She sat listlessly in the house, and dreaded that each neighbour who came in would speak about the village news. At last some one did. Nest looked round from her employment, and talked of the event with a kind of cheerful curiosity as to the particulars, which made her informant go away, and tell others that Nest had quite left off caring for Edward Williams. But when the door was shut, and Eleanor and she were left alone, Nest came and stood before her weeping mother like a stern accuser.

'Mother, why did not you let me die? Why did you keep me alive for this?' Eleanor could not speak, but she put her arms out towards her girl. Nest turned away, and Eleanor cried aloud in her soreness of spirit. Nest came again.

'Mother, I was wrong. You did your best. I don't know how it is I am so hard and cold. I wish I had died when I was a girl, and had a feeling heart.'

'Don't speak so, my child. God has afflicted you sore, and your hardness of heart is but for a time. Wait a little. Don't reproach yourself, my poor Nest. I understand your ways. I don't mind them, love. The feeling heart will come back to you in time. Anyways, don't think you're grieving me; because, love, that may sting you when I'm gone; and I'm not grieved, my darling. Most times, we're very cheerful, I think.'

After this, mother and child were drawn more together. But Eleanor had received her death from, these sorrowful, hurrying events. She did not conceal the truth from herself, nor did she pray to live, as some months ago she had done, for her child's sake; she had found out that she had no power to console the poor wounded heart. It seemed to her as if her prayers had been of no avail; and then she blamed herself for this thought.

There are many Methodist preachers in this part of Wales. There was a certain old man, named David Hughes, who was held in peculiar reverence

because he had known the great John Wesley. He had been captain of a Caernarvon slate-vessel; he had traded in the Mediterranean, and had seen strange sights. In those early days (to use his own expression) he had lived without God in the world; but he went to mock John Wesley, and was converted by the white-haired patriarch, and remained to pray. Afterwards he became one of the earnest, self-denying, much-abused band of itinerant preachers who went forth under Wesley's direction, to spread abroad a more earnest and practical spirit of religion. His rambles and travels were of use to him. They extended his knowledge of the circumstances in which men are sometimes placed, and enlarged his sympathy with the tried and tempted. His sympathy, combined with the thoughtful experience of fourscore years, made him cognizant of many of the strange secrets of humanity; and when younger preachers upbraided the hard hearts they met with, and despaired of the sinners, he 'suffered long, and was kind.'

When Eleanor Gwynn lay low on her death-bed, David Hughes came to Pen-Morfa. He knew her history, and sought her out. To him she imparted the feelings I have described.

'I have lost my faith, David. The tempter has come, and I have yielded. I doubt if my prayers have been heard. Day and night have I prayed that I might comfort my child in her great sorrow; but God has not heard me. She has turned away from me, and refused my poor love. I wish to die now; but I have lost my faith, and have no more pleasure in the thought of going to God. What must I do, David?'

She hung upon his answer; and it was long in coming.

'I am weary of earth,' said she, mournfully, 'and can I find rest in death even, leaving my child desolate and broken-hearted?'

'Eleanor,' said David, 'where you go, all things will be made clear; and you will learn to thank God for the end of what now seems grievous and heavy to be borne. Do you think your agony has been greater than the awful agony in the Garden— or your prayers more earnest than that which He prayed in that hour when the great drops of blood ran down his face like sweat? We know that God heard Him, although no answer came to Him through the dread silence of that night. God's times are not our times. I have lived eighty and one years, and never yet have I known an earnest prayer fall to the ground unheeded. In an unknown way, and when no one looked for it, maybe, the answer came; a fuller, more satisfying answer than heart could conceive of, although it might be different to what was expected. Sister, you are going where in His light you will see light; you will learn there that in very faithfulness he has afflicted you!'

'Go on— you strengthen me,' said she.

After David Hughes left that day, Eleanor was calm as one already dead, and past mortal strife. Nest was awed by the change. No more passionate weeping— no more sorrow in the voice; though it was low and weak, it sounded with a sweet composure. Her last look was a smile; her last word a blessing.

Nest, tearless, streaked the poor worn body. She laid a plate with salt upon it on the breast, and lighted candles for the head and feet. It was an old Welsh custom; but when David Hughes came in, the sight carried him back to the time when he had seen the chapels in some old Catholic cathedral. Nest sat gazing on the dead with dry, hot eyes.

'She is dead,' said David, solemnly; 'she died in Christ. Let us bless God, my child. He giveth and He taketh away.'

'She is dead,' said Nest, 'my mother is dead. No one loves me now.

She spoke as if she were thinking aloud, for she did not look at David, or ask him to be seated.

'No one loves you now? No human creature, you mean. You are not yet fit to be spoken to concerning God's infinite love. I, like you, will speak of love for human creatures. I tell you if no one loves you, it is time for you to begin to love.' He spoke almost severely (if David Hughes ever did); for, to tell the truth, he was repelled by her hard rejection of her mother's tenderness, about which the neighbours had told him.

'Begin to love!' said she, her eyes flashing. 'Have I not loved? Old man, you are dim, and worn-out. You do not remember what love is.' She spoke with a scornful kind of pitying endurance. 'I will tell you how I have loved by telling you the change it has wrought in me. I was once the beautiful Nest Gwynn; I am now a cripple, a poor, wan-faced cripple, old before my time. That is a change, at least people think so.' She paused and then spoke lower. 'I tell you, David Hughes, that outward change is as nothing compared to the change in my nature caused by the love I have felt— and have had rejected. I was gentle once, and if you spoke a tender word, my heart came towards you as natural as a little child goes to its mammy. I never spoke roughly, even to the dumb creatures, for I had a kind feeling for all. Of late (since I loved, old man), I have been cruel in my thoughts to every one. I have turned away from tenderness with bitter indifference. Listen!' she spoke in a hoarse whisper. 'I will own it. I have spoken hardly to her,' pointing towards the corpse,— 'her who was ever patient, and full of love for me. She did not know,' she muttered, 'she is gone to the grave without knowing how I loved her— I had such strange, mad, stubborn pride in me.'

'Come back, mother! Come back,' said she, crying wildly to the still, solemn corpse; 'come back as a spirit or a ghost— only come back, that I may tell you how I have loved you.'

But the dead never come back.

The passionate adjuration ended in tears— the first she had shed. When they ceased, or were absorbed into long quivering sobs, David knelt down. Nest did not kneel, but bowed her head. He prayed, while his own tears fell fast. He rose up. They were both calm.

'Nest,' said he, 'your love has been the love of youth— passionate, wild, natural to youth. Henceforward, you must love like Christ, without thought of self, or wish for return. You must take the sick and the weary to your heart, and love them. That love will lift you up above the storms of the world into God's own peace. The very vehemence of your nature proves that you are capable of this. I do not pity you. You do not require pity. You are powerful enough to trample down your own sorrows into a blessing for others; and to others you will be a blessing. I see it before you, I see in it the answer to your mother's prayer.'

The old man's dim eyes glittered as if they saw a vision; the fire-light sprang up, and glinted on his long white hair. Nest was awed as if she saw a prophet, and a prophet he was to her.

When next David Hughes came to Pen-Morfa, he asked about Nest Gwynn, with a hovering doubt as to the answer. The inn-folk told him she was living still in the cottage, which was now her own.

'But would you believe it, David,' said Mrs Thomas, 'she has gone and taken Mary Williams to live with her? You remember Mary Williams, I'm sure.'

No! David Hughes remembered no Mary Williams at Pen-Morfa.

'You must have seen her, for I know you've called at John Griffiths', where the parish boarded her?'

'You don't mean the half-witted woman— the poor crazy creature?'

'But I do!' said Mrs Thomas.

'I have seen her sure enough, but I never thought of learning her name. And Nest Gwynn has taken her to live with her.'

'Yes! I thought I should surprise you. She might have had many a decent girl for companion. My own niece, her that is an orphan, would have gone, and been thankful. Besides, Mary Williams is a regular savage at times: John Griffiths says there were days when he used to beat her till she howled again, and yet she would not do as he told her. Nay, once, he says, if he had not seen her eyes glare like a wild beast, from under the shadow of the table where she had taken shelter, and got pretty quickly out of her way, she would have flown

upon him, and throttled him. He gave Nest fair warning of what she must expect, and he thinks some day she will be found murdered.'

David Hughes thought a while. 'How came Nest to take her to live with her?' asked he.

'Well! Folk say John Griffiths did not give her enough to eat. Half-wits, they tell me, take more to feed them than others, and Eleanor Gwynn had given her oat-cake, and porridge a time or two, and most likely spoken kindly to her (you know Eleanor spoke kind to all), so some months ago, when John Griffiths had been beating her, and keeping her without food to try and tame her, she ran away, and came to Nest's cottage in the dead of night, all shivering and starved, for she did not know Eleanor was dead, and thought to meet with kindness from her, I've no doubt; and Nest remembered how her mother used to feed and comfort the poor idiot, and made her some gruel, and wrapped her up by the fire. And, in the morning, when John Griffiths came in search of Mary, he found her with Nest, and Mary wailed so piteously at the sight of him, that Nest went to the parish officers, and offered to take her to board with her for the same money they gave to him. John says he was right glad to be off his bargain.'

David Hughes knew there was a kind of remorse which sought relief in the performance of the most difficult and repugnant tasks. He thought he could understand how, in her bitter repentance for her conduct towards her mother, Nest had taken in the first helpless creature that came seeking shelter in her name. It was not what he would have chosen, but he knew it was God that had sent the poor wandering idiot there.

He went to see Nest the next morning. As he drew near the cottage— it was summer time, and the doors and windows were all open— he heard an angry passionate kind of sound that was scarcely human. That sound prevented his approach from being heard; and, standing at the threshold, he saw poor Mary Williams pacing backwards and forwards in some wild mood. Nest, cripple as she was, was walking with her, speaking low soothing words, till the pace was slackened, and time and breathing was given to put her arm around the crazy woman's neck, and soothe her by this tender caress into the quiet luxury of tears— tears which give the hot brain relief. Then David Hughes came in. His first words, as he took off his hat, standing on the lintel, were— 'The peace of God be upon this house.' Neither he nor Nest recurred to the past, though solemn recollections filled their minds. Before he went, all three knelt and prayed; for, as Nest told him, some mysterious influence of peace came over the poor half-wit's mind, when she heard the holy words of prayer; and often when she felt a paroxysm coming on, she would kneel and repeat a homily rapidly over, as if it were a charm to scare away the Demon in

possession; sometimes, indeed, the control over herself requisite for this effort was enough to dispel the fluttering burst. When David rose up to go, he drew Nest to the door.

'You are not afraid, my child?' asked he.

'No,' she replied. 'She is often very good and quiet. When she is not, I can bear it.'

'I shall see your face on earth no more,' said he. 'God bless you!' He went on his way. Not many weeks after, David Hughes was borne to his grave.

The doors of Nest's heart were opened— opened wide by the love she grew to feel for crazy Mary, so helpless, so friendless, so dependent upon her. Mary loved her back again, as a dumb animal loves its blind master. It was happiness enough to be near her. In general, she was only too glad to do what she was bidden by Nest. But there were times when Mary was overpowered by the glooms and fancies of her poor disordered brain. Fearful times! No one knew how fearful. On those days, Nest warned the little children who loved to come and play around her, that they must not visit the house. The signal was a piece of white linen hung out of a side window. On those days, the sorrowful and sick waited in vain for the sound of Nest's lame approach. But what she had to endure was only known to God, for she never complained. If she had given up the charge of Mary, or if the neighbours had risen, out of love and care for her life, to compel such a step, she knew what hard curses and blows, what starvation and misery, would await the poor creature.

She told of Mary's docility, and her affection, and her innocent, little sayings; but she never told the details of the occasional days of wild disorder, and driving insanity.

Nest grew old before her time, in consequence of her accident. She knew that she was as old at fifty as many are at seventy. She knew it partly by the vividness with which the remembrance of the days of her youth came back to her mind, while the events of yesterday were dim and forgotten. She dreamt of her girlhood and youth. In sleep, she was once more the beautiful Nest Gwynn, the admired of all beholders, the light-hearted girl, beloved by her mother. Little circumstances connected with those early days, forgotten since the very time when they occurred, came back to her mind, in her waking hours. She had a scar on the palm of her left hand, occasioned by the fall of a branch of a tree, when she was a child. It had not pained her since the first two days after the accident; but now it began to hurt her slightly; and clear in her ears was the crackling sound of the treacherous, rending wood; distinct before her rose the presence of her mother, tenderly binding up the wound. With these remembrances came a longing desire to see the beautiful, fatal well once more before her death. She had never gone so far since the day when, by her

fall there, she lost love and hope, and her bright glad youth. She yearned to look upon its waters once again. This desire waxed as her life waned. She told it to poor crazy Mary.

'Mary!' said she, 'I want to go to the Rock Well. If you will help me, I can manage it. There used to be many a stone in the Dol Mawr on which I could sit and rest. We will go to-morrow morning before folks are astir.'

Mary answered briskly, 'Up, up! To the Rock Well. Mary will go. Mary will go.' All day long she kept muttering to herself, 'Mary will go.'

Nest had the happiest dream that night. Her mother stood beside her— not in the flesh, but in the bright glory of a blessed spirit. And Nest was no longer young— neither was she old— 'they reckon not by days, nor years, where she was gone to dwell;' and her mother stretched out her arms to her with a calm, glad look of welcome. She awoke; the woodlark was singing in the near copse— the little birds were astir, and rustling in their leafy nests. Nest arose, and called Mary. The two set out through the quiet lane. They went along slowly and silently. With many a pause they crossed the broad Dol Mawr, and carefully descended the sloping stones, on which no trace remained of the hundreds of feet that had passed over them since Nest was last there. The clear water sparkled and quivered in the early sunlight, the shadows of the birch-leaves were stirred on the ground; the ferns— Nest could have believed that they were the very same ferns which she had seen thirty years before— hung wet and dripping where the water overflowed— a thrush chanted matins from a hollybush near— and the running stream made a low, soft, sweet accompaniment. All was the same. Nature was as fresh and young as ever. It might have been yesterday that Edward Williams had overtaken her, and told her his love— the thought of his words— his handsome looks— (he was a gray, hard-featured man by this time), and then she recalled the fatal wintry morning when joy and youth had fled; and as she remembered that faintness of pain, a new, a real faintness— no echo of the memory— came over her. She leant her back against a rock, without a moan or sigh, and died! She found immortality by the well-side, instead of her fragile, perishing youth. She was so calm and placid that Mary (who had been dipping her fingers in the well, to see the waters drop off in the gleaming sunlight), thought she was asleep, and for some time continued her amusement in silence. At last, she turned, and said,—

'Mary is tired. Mary wants to go home.' Nest did not speak, though the idiot repeated her plaintive words. She stood and looked till a strange terror came over her— a terror too mysterious to be borne.

'Mistress, wake! Mistress, wake!' she said, wildly, shaking the form.

But Nest did not awake. And the first person who came to the well that morning found crazy Mary sitting, awestruck, by the poor dead Nest. They had to get the poor creature away by force, before they could remove the body.

Mary is in Tre-Madoc workhouse. They treat her pretty kindly, and, in general, she is good and tractable. Occasionally, the old paroxysms come on; and, for a time, she is unmanageable. But some one thought of speaking to her about Nest. She stood arrested at the name; and, since then, it is astonishing to see what efforts she makes to curb her insanity; and when the dread time is past, she creeps up to the matron, and says, 'Mary has tried to be good. Will God let her go to Nest now?'

13: A Letter From The Queen

Sinclair Lewis

1885-1951

Cosmopolitan Dec 1929

DOCTOR SELIG was an adventurer. He did not look it, certainly. He was an amiable young bachelor with thin hair. He was instructor in history and economics in Erasmus College, and he had to sit on a foolish little platform and try to coax son e fifty young men and women, who were interested only in cuddling and four-door sedans, to become hysterical about the law of diminishing returns.

But at night, in his decorous boarding house, he sometimes smoked a pipe, which was viewed as obscene in the religious shades of Erasmus, and he was boldly writing a book which was to make him famous.

Of course everyone is writing a book. But Selig's was different. It was profound. How good it was can be seen from the fact that with only three quarters of it done, it already had fifteen hundred footnotes such lively comments as "*Vid* J.A.S.H.S. VIII, 234 *et seq*:" A real book, nothing flippant or commercialized.

It was called *The Influence of American Diplomacy on the Internal Policies of Paneuropa*.

"Paneuropa," Selig felt, was a nice and scholarly way of saying ''Europe."

It would really have been an interesting book if Doctor Selig had not believed that all literature is excellent in proportion as it is hard to read. He had touched a world romantic and little known. Hidden in old documents, like discovering in a desert an oasis where girls laugh and fountains chatter and the market place is noisy, he found the story of Franklin, who in his mousy fur cap was the Don Juan of Paris, of Adams fighting the British Government to prevent their recognizing the Confederacy, of Benjamin Thompson, the Massachusetts Yankee who in 1791 was chief counselor of Bavaria, with the title of Count Rumford.

Selig was moved by these men who made the young America more admired than she is today. And he was moved and, in a most unscholarly way, he became a little angry as he reviewed the story of Senator Ryder.

He knew, of course, that Lafayette Ryder had prevented war between England and America in the first reign of Grover Cleveland; he knew that Ryder had been Secretary of State, and Ambassador to France, courted by Paris for his wisdom, his manners, his wit; that as Senator he had fathered (and mothered and wet-nursed) the Ryder-Hanklin Bill, which had saved our wheat markets; and that his two books, Possibilities of Disarmament and The Anglo-American Empire, were not merely glib propaganda for peace, but such

inspired documents as would have prevented the Boer War, the Spanish-American War, the Great War, if there had been in his Victorian world a dozen men with minds like his. This Selig knew, but he could not remember when Ryder had died.

Then he discovered with aghast astonishment that Senator Ryder was not dead, but still alive at ninety-two, forgotten by the country he had helped to build.

Yes, Selig felt bitterly, we honor our great men in America— sometimes for as much as two months after the particular act of greatness that tickles us. But this is a democracy. We mustn't let anyone suppose that because we have given him an (undesired) parade up Broadway and a (furiously resented) soaking of publicity on March first, he may expect to be taken seriously on May second.

The Admiral Dewey whom the press for a week labeled as a combination of Nelson, Napoleon, and Chevalier Bayard, they later nagged to his grave. If a dramatist has a success one season, then may the gods help him, because for the rest of his life everyone will attend his plays only in the hope that he will fail.

But sometimes the great glad-hearted hordes of boosters do not drag down the idol in the hope of finding clay feet, but just forget him with the vast, contemptuous, heavy indifference of a hundred and twenty million people.

So felt Doctor Selig, angrily, and he planned for the end of his book a passionate resurrection of Senator Ryder. He had a shy hope that his book would appear before the Senator's death, to make him happy.

Reading the Senator's speeches, studying his pictures in magazine files, he felt that he knew him intimately. He could see, as though the Senator were in the room, that tall ease, the contrast of long thin nose, gay eyes, and vast globular brow that made Ryder seem a combination of Puritan, clown, and benevolent scholar.

Selig longed to write to him and ask— oh, a thousand things that only he could explain; the proposals of Lionel Sackville-West regarding Colombia; what Queen Victoria really had said in that famous but unpublished letter to President Harrison about the Newfoundland fisheries. Why couldn't he write to him?

No! The man was ninety-two, and Selig had too much reverence to disturb him, along with a wholesome suspidon that his letter would be kicked out by the man who had once told Gladstone to go to the devil.

So forgotten was the Senator that Selig could not, at first, find where he lived. *Who's Who* gave no address. Selig's superior, Professor Munk, who was believed to know everything in the world except the whereabouts of his last-

season's straw hat, bleated, ''My dear chap, Ryder is dwelling in some cemetery! He passed beyond, if I remember, in 1901."

The mild Doctor Selig almost did homicide upon a venerable midwestern historian.

At last, in a bulletin issued by the Anti-Prohibition League, Selig found among the list of directors: "Lafayette Ryder (form. LF.S.Sen., Sec'y State), West Wickley, Vermont." Though the Senator's residence could make no difference to him, that night Selig was so excited that he smoked an extra pipe of tobacco.

He was planning his coming summer vacation, during which he hoped to finish his book. The presence of the Senator drew him toward Vermont, and in an educational magazine he found the advertisement: "Sky Peaks, near Wickley, Vt., woodland nook with peace and a library— congenial and intellectual company and writers— tennis, handball, riding— nightly Sing round Old-time Bonfire— fur. bung, low rates."

That was what he wanted: a nook and a library and lots of low rates, along with nearness to his idol. He booked a fur. bung, for the summer, and he carried his suitcase to the station on the beautiful day when the young fiends who through the year had tormented him with unanswerable questions streaked off to all parts of the world and for three tremendous months permitted him to be a private human being.

WHEN he reached Vermont, Selig found Sky Peaks an old farm, redecorated in a distressingly tea-roomy fashion. His single bungalow, formerly an honest corncrib, was now painted robin's-egg blue with yellow trimmings and christened "Shelley.'" But the camp was on an upland, and air sweet from hay field and spruce grove healed his lungs, spotted with classroom dust.

At his first dinner at Sky Peaks, he demanded of the host, one Mr. Iddle, "Doesn't Senator Ryder live somewhere near here?"

"Oh, yes, up on the mountain, about four miles south."

"Hope I catch a glimpse of him some day."

"I'll run you over to see him any time you'd like."

"Oh, I couldn't do that! Couldn't intrude!"

"Nonsense! Of course he's old, but he takes quite an interest in the countryside. Fact, I bought this place from him and Don't forget the Sing tonight."

At eight that evening Iddle came to drag Selig from the security of his corncrib just as he was getting the relations of the Locarno Pact and the Versailles Treaty beautifully coordinated.

It was that kind of Sing. “The Long, Long Trail,” and “All God’s Chillun Got Shoes.” (God’s Chillun also possessed coats, pants, vests, flivvers, and watermelons, interminably.) Beside Selig at the campfire sat a young woman with eyes, a nose, a sweater, and an athletic skirt, none of them very good or particularly bad. He would not have noticed her, but she picked on him:

“They tell me you’re in Erasmus, Doctor Selig.”

“Um.”

“Real attention to character. And after all, what benefit is there in developing the intellect if the character isn’t developed to keep pace with it? You see, I’m in educational work myself— oh, of course nothing like being on a college faculty, but I teach history in the Lincoln High School at Schenectady— my name is Selma Swanson. We must have some good talks about teaching history, mustn’t we!”

"Um!” said Selig, and escaped, though it was not till he was safely in his corncrib that he said aloud, ‘'We must *not*!”

For three months he was not going to be a teacher, or heed the horrors of character-building. He was going to be a great scholar. Even Senator Ryder might be excited to know how powerful an intellect was soothing itself to sleep in a corncrib four miles away!

He was grinding hard next afternoon when his host, Iddle, stormed in with: “Eve got to run in to Wickley Center. Go right near old Ryder’s. Come on. I’ll introduce you to him.”

“Oh, no, honestly!”

“Don’t be silly: I imagine he’s lonely. Come on!”

Before Selig could make up his mind to get out of Iddle’s tempestuous flivver and walk back, they were driving up a mountain road and past marble gateposts into an estate. Through a damp grove of birches and maples they came out on meadows dominated by an old brick house with a huge porch facing the checkered valley. They stopped with a dash at the porch, and on it Selig saw an old man sunk in a canvas deck chair and covered with a shawl. In the shadow the light seemed to concentrate on his bald head, like a sphere of polished vellum, and on long bloodless hands lying as in death on shawl-draped knees. In his eyes there was no life nor desire for it.

Iddle leaped out, bellowing, “Afternoon, Senator! Lovely day, isn’t it.? I’ve brought a man to call on you. This is Mr. Selig of— uh— one of our colleges. I’ll be back in an hour.”

He seized Selig’s arm— he was abominably strong— and almost pulled him out of the car. Selig’s mind was one wretched puddle of confusion. Before he could dredge any definite thought out of it, Iddle had rattled away, and Selig

stood below the porch, hypnotized by the stare of Senator Ryder — too old for hate or anger, but not too old for slow contempt.

Not one word Ryder said.

Selig cried, like a schoolboy unjustly accused:

“Honestly, Senator, the last thing I wanted to do was to intrude on you. I thought Iddle would just introduce us and take me away. I suppose he meant well. And perhaps subconsciously I did want to intrude! I know your *Possibilities of Disarmament and Anglo-American Empire* so well ”

The Senator stirred like an antediluvian owl awakening at twilight. His eyes came to life. One expected him to croak, like a cynical old bird, but his still voice was fastidious :

“I didn’t suppose anyone had looked into my books since 1910.” Painful yet gracious was the gesture with which he waved Selig to a chair. “You are a teacher?”

“Instructor in a small Ohio college. Economics and history. I’m writing a monograph on our diplomacy, and naturally there are so many things that only you could explain!”

“Because I’m so old?”

“No! Because you’ve had so much knowledge and courage— perhaps they’re the same thing! Every day, literally, in working on my book I’ve wished I could consult you. For instance lell me, sir, didn’t Secretary of State Olney really want war with England over Venezuela? Wasn’t he trying to be a tin hero?”

“No!” The old man threw off his shawl. It was somehow a little shocking to find him not in an ancient robe laced with gold, but in a crisp linen summer suit with a smart bow tie. He sat up, alert, his voice harsher. “No! He was a patriot. Sturdy. Honest. Willing to be conciliatory but not flinching. Miss Tullyl”

At the Senator’s cry, out of the wide fanlighted door of the house slid a trained nurse. Her uniform was so starched that it almost clattered, but she was a peony sort of young woman, the sort who would insist on brightly mothering any male, of any age, whether or not he desired to be mothered. She glared at the intruding Selig; she shook her linger at Senator Ryder, and simpered:

“Now I do hope you aren’t tiring yourself, else I shall have to be ever so stern and make you go to bed. The doctor said—"

“Damn the doctor! Tell Mrs. Tinkham to bring me down the file of letters from Richard Olney, Washington, for 1895— 0-l-n-e-y— and hustle it!”

Miss Tully gone, the Senator growled, “Got no more use for a nurse than a cat for two tails! It’s that muttonheaded doctor, the old fool! He’s seventy-five years old, and he hasn’t had a thought since 1888. Doctors!’’

He delivered an address on the art of medicine with such vigorous blasphemy that Selig shrank in horrified admiration. And the Senator didn't abate the blazing crimson of his oration at the entrance of his secretary, Mrs. Tinkham, a small, narrow, bleached, virginal widow.

Selig expected her to leap off the porch and commit suicide in terror. She didn't. She waited, she yawned gently, she handed the Senator a manila envelope, and gently she vanished.

The Senator grinned. "She'll pray at me tonight! She daren't while you're here. There! I feel better. Good cussing is a therapeutic agent that has been forgotten in these degenerate days. I could teach you more about cussing than about diplomacy — to which cussing is a most valuable aid. Now here is a letter that Secretary Olney wrote me about the significance of his correspondence with England."

It was a page of history. Selig handled it with more rt*'^erence than he had given to any material object in his lift .

He exclaimed, "Oh, yes, you used— of course I've never seen the rest of this letter, and I can't tell you, sir, how excited I am to see it. But didn't you use this first paragraph— it must be about on page 276 of your *Anglo-American Empire*?"

"I believe I did. It's not my favorite reading!"

"You know, of course, that it was reprinted from your book in the *Journal of the American Society of Historical Sources* last year?"

"Was it?" The old man seemed vastly pleased. He beamed at Selig as at a young but tested friend. He chuckled, "Well, I suppose I appreciate now how King Tut felt when they remembered him and dug him up.... Miss Fully! Hey! Miss Tully, will you be so good as to tell Martens to bring us whisky and soda, with two glasses? Eh? Now you look here, young woman; we'll fight out the whole question of my senile viciousness after our guest has gone. Two glasses, I said!... Now about Secretary Olney. The fact of the case was..."

Two hours later, Senator Ryder was still talking and in that two hours he had given Selig such unrecorded information as the researcher could not have found in two years of study.

Selig had for two hours walked with presidents and ambassadors; he had the dinner conversation of foreign ministers, conversations so private, so world-affecting, that they never had been set down, even in letters. The Senator had revealed his friendship with King Edward, and the predictions about the future World War the King had made over a glass of mineral water.

The mild college instructor, who till this afternoon had never spoken to anyone more important than the president of a prairie college, was exalted

with a feeling that he had become the confidant of kings and field marshals, of Anatole France and Lord Haldane, of Sarah Bernhardt and George Meredith.

He had always known but till now he had never understood that in private these great personages were plain human beings, like Doctor Wilbur Selig of Erasmus. It made him feel close to King Edward to hear (though the Senator may have exaggerated) that the King could not pronounce his own name without a German accent; it made him feel a man of the world to learn the details of a certain not very elevating party at which an English duke and a German prince and a Portuguese king, accompanied by questionable ladles, had in bibulous intimacy sung to Senator Ryder's leadership the lyric, "How Dry I Am."

During that two hours, there had been ten minutes when lie had been entirely off in a Conan Doyle spirit world. His notion of prodigious alcoholic dissipation was a bottle of home-brewed beer once a month. He had tried to mix himself a light whisky and soda— he noted, with some anxiety about the proper drinking-manners in diplomatic society, that he took approximately one third as much whisky as the Senator.

But while the old man rolled his drink in his mouth and shook his bald head rapturously and showed no effect, Selig was suddenly lifted six million miles above the earth, through pink-gray clouds shot with lightning, and at that altitude he floated dizzily while below him the Senator discoursed on the relations of Cuban sugar to Colorado beets.

And once Iddle blatted into sight, in his dirty flivver, suggested taking him away, and was blessedly dismissed by the Senator's curt, "Doctor Selig is staying here for dinner. I'll send him back in my car."

Dinner... Selig, though he rarely read fiction, had read in some novel about "candle-flames, stilled in the twilight and reflected in the long stretch of waxed mahogany as in a clouded mirror— candles and roses and old silver." He had read, too, about stag horns and heraldic shields and tlie swords of old warriors.

Now, actually, the Senator's dining room had neither stag horn nor heraldic shield nor sword, and if there were still candle-flames, there was no mahogany to reflect them, but instead a silver stretch of damask. It was a long room, simple, with old portraits against white panels. Yet Selig felt that he was transported into all the romance he had ever read.

The dinner was country-like. By now, Selig expected peacocks' tongues and caviar; he got steak and cantaloupe and corn pudding. But there were four glasses at each plate, and along with water, which was the familiar drink at Erasmus, he had, and timidly, tasted sherry. Burgundy, and champagne.

If Wilbur Selig of Iowa and Erasmus had known anything, it was that champagne was peculiarly wicked, associated with light ladies, lewd talk, and

losses at roulette invariably terminating in suicide. Yet it was just as he was nibbling at his very first glass of champagne that Senator Ryder began to talk of his delight in the rise of Anglo-Catholicism.

No. It was none of it real.

If he was exhilarated that he had been kept for dinner, he was ecstatic when the Senator said, “Would you care to come for dinner again day after tomorrow? Good. Fll send Martens for you at seven-thirty. Don’t dress.”

In a dream phantasmagoria he started home, driven by Martens, the Senator’s chaufFeur-butler, with unnumbered things that had puzzled him in writing his book made clear.

When he arrived at the Sky Peaks camp, the guests were still sitting about the dull campfire.

"My!” said Miss Selma Swanson, teacher of history. “Mr. Iddle says you’ve spent the whole evening with Senator Ryder. Mr. Iddle says he’s a grand person— used to be a great politician.”

“Oh, he was kind enough to help me about some confused problems,” murmured Selig.

But as he went to bed— in a reformed corncrib— he exulted, “I bet I could become quite a good friend of the Senator! Wouldn’t that be wonderful!”

LAFAYETTE RYDER, when his visitor— a man named Selig or Selim— was gone, sat at the long dining table with a cigarette and a distressingly empty cognac glass. He was meditating, “Nice eager young chap. Provincial. But mannerly. I wonder if there really are a few people who know that Lafe Ryder once existed ?”

He rang, and the crisply coy Miss Tully, the nurse, waltzed into the dining room, bubbling, “So we’re all ready to go to bed now, Senator!”

“We are not! I didn’t ring for you; I rang for Martens."

“He’s driving your guest.”

“Humph! Send in cook. I want some more brandy.”

“Oh, now. Daddy Ryder! You aren’t going to be naughty, are you?”

“I am! And who the deuce ever told you to call me ‘Daddy’? Daddy!”

“You did. Last year.”

“I don’t— this year. Bring me the brandy bottle.”

“If I do, will you go to bed then?”

“I will not!”

“ But the doctor—”

“The doctor is a misbegotten hound with a face like a fish. And other things. I feel cheerful tonight. I shall sit up late. Till All Hours.”

They compromised on eleven-thirty instead of All Hours, and one glass of brandy instead of the bottle. But, vexed at having thus compromised— as so often, in ninety-odd years, he had been vexed at having compromised with Empires— the Senator was (said Miss Tully) very naughty in his bath.

“I swear,” said Miss Tully afterward, to Mrs. Tinkham, the secretary, “if he didn’t pay so well. I’d leave that horrid old man tomorrow. Just because he was a politician or something, once, to think he can sass a trained nurse!”

“You would not," said Mrs. Tinkham. “But he is naughty.”

And they did not know that, supposedly safe in his four-poster bed, the old man was lying awake, smoking a cigarette and reflecting:

“The gods have always been much better to me than I have deserved. Just when I thought I was submerged in a flood of women and doctors, along comes a man for companion, a young man who seems to be a potential scholar, and who might preserve for the world what I tried to do. Oh, stop pitying yourself, Lafe Ryder!... I wish I could sleep.”

Senator Ryder reflected, the next morning, that he had probably counted too much on young Selig. But when Selig came again for dinner, the Senator was gratified to see how quickly he was already fitting into a house probably more elaborate than any he had known. And quite easily he told of what the Senator accounted his uncivilized farm boyhood, his life in a state university.

“So much the better that he is naive, not one of these third-secretary cubs who think they’re cosmopolitan because they went to Groton,” considered the Senator. “I must do something for him.”

Again he lay awake that night, and suddenly he had what seemed to him an inspired idea.

“I’ll give young Selig a lift. All this money and no one but hang-jawed relatives to give it to! Give him a year of freedom. Pay him— he probably earns twenty-five hundred a year; pay him five thousand and expenses to arrange my files. If he makes good. I’d let him publish my papers after I pass out. The letters from John Hay, from Blaine, from Choate! No set of unpublished documents like it in America! It would the boy!”

Mrs. Tinkham would object. Be jealous. She might quit. Splendid ! Lafe, you arrant old coward, you’ve been trying to get rid of that woman without hurting her feelings for three years! At that, she’ll probably marry you on your dying bed!”

He chuckled, a wicked, low, delighted sound, the old man alone in darkness.

“Yes, and if he shows the quality I think he has, leave him a little money to carry on with while he edits the letters. Leave him— let’s see.”

It was supposed among Senator Ryder's lip-licking relatives and necessitous hangers-on that he had left of the Ryder fortune perhaps two hundred thousand dollars. Only his broker and he knew that he had by secret investment increased it to a million, these ten years of dark, invalid life.

He lay planning a new will. The present one left half his fortune to his university, a quarter to the town of Wickley or a community center, the rest to nephews and nieces, with ten thousand each for the Tully, the Tinkham, Martens, and the much-badgered doctor, with a grave proviso that the doctor should never again dictate to any patient how much he should smoke.

Now to Doctor Selig, asleep and not even dream-warned in his absurd corncrib, was presented the sum of twenty-five thousand dollars, the blessings of an old man, and a store of historical documents which could not be priced in coin.

In the morning, with a headache, and very strong with Miss Tully about the taste of the aspirin — he suggested that she had dipped it in arsenic — the Senator reduced Selig to five thousand, but that night it went back to twenty-five.

How pleased the young man would be.

DOCTOR WILBUR SELIG, on the first night when he had unexpectedly been bidden to stay for dinner with Senator Ryder, was as stirred as by— What would most stir Doctor Wilbur Selig? A great play? A raise in salary? An Erasmus football victory?

At the second dinner, with the house and the hero less novel to him, he was calmly happy, and zealous about getting information. The third dinner, a week after, was agreeable enough, but he paid rather more attention to the squab in casserole than to the Senator's revelations about the Baring panic, and he was a little annoyed that the Senator insisted (so selfishly) on his staying till midnight, instead of going home to bed at a reasonable hour like ten— with, perhaps, before retiring, a few minutes of chat with that awfully nice bright girl, Miss Selma Swanson.

And through that third dinner he found himself reluctantly critical of the Senator's morals. Hang it, here was a man of good family, who had had a chance to see all that was noblest and best in the world, and why did he feel he had to use such bad language, why did he drink so much? Selig wasn^t (he proudly reminded himself) the least bit narrow-minded. But an old man like this ought to be thinking of making his peace; ought to be ashamed of cursing like a stableboy.

He reproved himself next morning, "He's been mighty nice to me. He's a good old coot— at heart. And of course a great statesman."

But he snapped back to irritation when he had a telephone call from Martens, the chauffeur: “Senator Ryder would like you to come over for tea this afternoon. He has something to show you.”

“All right, I’ll be over.”

Selig was curt about it, and he raged, “Now, by thunder, of all the thoughtless, selfish old codgers! As if I didn’t have anything to do but dance attendance on him and amuse him 1 And here I’d planned to finish a chapter this afternoon! ’Course he does give me some inside information, but still — as if I needed all the tittle-tattle of embassies for my book! Got all the stuff I need now. And how am I to get over there? The selfish old hound never thinks of that! Does he suppose I can afford a car to go over? I’ll have to walk! Got half a mind not to go!”

The sulkiness with which he came to tea softened when the Senator began to talk about the Queen Victoria letter.

Historians knew that during the presidency of Benjamin Harrison, when there was hostility between America and Britain over the seizure by both sides of fishing boats. Queen Victoria had written in her own hand to President Harrison. It was believed that she deplored her royal inability to appeal directly to Parliament, and suggested his first taking the difficulty up with Congress. But precisely what was in this unofficial letter, apparently no one knew.

This afternoon Senator Ryder said placidly, "I happen to have the original of the letter in my possession.”

"*What?*"

‘'Perhaps some day I’ll give you a glimpse of it. I think I have the right to let you quote it.”

Selig was electrified. It would be a sensation — he would be a sensation! He could see his book, and himself, on the front pages. But the Senator passed on to a trivial, quite improper anecdote about a certain Brazilian ambassador and a Washington milliner, and Selig was irritable again. Darn it, it was indecent for a man of over ninety to think of such things! And why the deuce was he so skittish and secretive about his old letter? If he was going to show it, why not do it?

So perhaps Doctor Selig of Erasmus was not quite so gracious as a Doctor Selig of Erasmus should have been when, at parting, the od man drew from under his shawl a worn blue-gray pamphlet, and piped:

“I’m going to give you this, if you’d like it. There’s only six copies left in the world, I believe. It’s the third one of my books— privately printed and not ordinarily listed with the others. It has, I imagine, a few things in it the historians don’t know; the real story of the Paris commune.”

“Oh, thanks,” Selig said brusquely and, to himself, in the Senator’s car, he pointed out that it showed what an egotistic old codger Ryder was to suppose that just because he’d written something, it must be a blooming treasure!

He glanced into the book. It seemed to have information. But he wasn’t stirred, for it was out of line with what he had decided were the subjects of value to Doctor Selig and, therefore, of general interest.

After tea, now, it was too late for work before dinner, and he had Ryder’s chauffeur set him down at Tredwelfs General Store, which had become for members of the Sky Peaks camp a combination of department store, post office and cafe, where they drank wild toasts in lemon pop.

Miss Selma Swanson was there, and Selig laughingly treated her to chewing gum. Attaboy Peanut Candy Rolls, and seven fishhooks. They had such a lively time discussing that funny Miss Elkington up at the camp.

When he started off, with Miss Swanson, he left the Senator’s book behind him in the store. He did not miss it till he had gone to bed.

Two days afterward, the Senator’s chauffeur again telephoned an invitation to tea for that afternoon, but this time Selig snapped, ‘‘Sorry! Tell the Senator I unfortunately shan’t be able to come!”

“Just a moment, please,” said the chauffeur. “The Senator wishes to know if you care to come to dinner tomorrow evening— eight— he’ll send for you.”

“Well Yes, tell him I’ll be glad to come.”

After all, dinner here at Sky Peaks was pretty bad, and he’d get away early in the evening.

He rejoiced in having his afternoon free for work. But the confounded insistence of the Senator had so bothered him that he banged a book on his table and strolled outside.

THE MEMBERS of the camp were playing One Old Cat, with Selma Swanson, very jolly in knickerbockers, as cheer leader. They yelped at Selig to join them and, after a stately refusal or two, he did. He had a good time. Afterward he pretended to wrestle with Miss Swanson — she had the supplest waist and, seen close up, the moistest eyes. So he was glad that he had not wasted his afternoon listening to that old bore.

The next afternoon, at six, a splendid chapter done, he went off for a climb up Mount Poverty with Miss Swanson, the late sun was so rich on pasture, pine clumps, and distant meadows, and Miss Swanson was so lively in tweed skirt and brogues— but the stockings were silk— that he regretted having promised to be at the Senator's at eight.

“But of course I always keep my promises," he reflected proudly.

They sat on a flat rock perched above the valley, and he observed in rather a classroom tone, “How remarkable that light is— the way it picks out that farmhouse roof, and then the shadow of those maples on the grass. Did you ever realize that it's less the shape of things than the light that gives a landscape beauty?"

“No, I don't think I ever did. That's so. It's the light! My, how observant you are!"

“Oh, no, I’m not. I’m afraid I’m just a bookworm."

“Oh, you are not! Of course you're tremendously scholarly— my, I've learned so much about study from you— but then, you’re so active— you were just a circus playing One Old Cat yesterday. I do admire an all-round man."

At seven-thirty, holding her firm hand, he was saying, “But really, there’s so much that I lack that— But you do think I'm right about it's being so much manlier not to drink like that old man? By the way, we must start back."

At a quarter to eight, after he had kissed her and apologized and kissed her, he remarked, “Still, he can wait a while— won't make any difference."

At eight: “Golly, it's so late! Had no idea. Well, I better not go at all now. I'll just phone him this evening and say I got balled up on the date. Look! Let's go down to the lake and dine on the wharf at the boathouse, just you and I."

“Oh, that would be grand!” said Miss Selma Swanson.

LAFAYETTE RYDER sat on the porch that, along with his dining room and bedroom, had become his entire world, and waited for the kind young friend who was giving back to him the world he had once known. His lawyer was coming from New York in three days, and there was the matter of the codicil to his will. But— the Senator stirred impatiently— this money matter was grubby; he had for Selig something rarer than money— a gift for a scholar.

He looked at it and smiled. It was a double sheet of thick bond, with ‘‘Windsor Castle’’ engraved at the top. Above this address was written in a thin hand: “To my friend L. Ryder, to use if he ever sees lit. Benj. Harrison.”

The letter began, “To His Excellency, the President,” and it was signed, “Victoria R.” In a few lines between inscription and signature there was a new history of the great Victoria and of the Nineteenth Century.... Dynamite does not come in large packages.

The old man tucked the letter into a pocket down beneath the rosy shawl that reached up to his gray face.

Miss Tully rustled out, to beg, “Daddy, you won't take more than one cocktail tonight. The doctor says it's so bad for you!”

“Heh! Maybe I will and maybe I won’t! What time is it?”

“A quarter to eight.”

“Doctor Selig will be here at eight. If Martens doesn’t have the cocktails out on the porch three minutes after he gets back. I’ll skin him. And you needn’t go looking for the cigarettes in my room, either! I've hidden them in a brand new place, and I'll probably sit up and smoke till dawn. Fact; doubt if I shall go to bed at all. Doubt if I’ll take my bath.”

He chuckled as Miss Tully wailed, “You’re so naughty!”

THE SENATOR need not have asked the time. He had groped down under the shawl and looked at his watch every five minutes since seven. He inwardly glared at himself for his foolishness in anticipating his young friend, but— all the old ones were gone.

That was the devilishness of living so many years. Gone, so long. People wrote idiotic letters to him, still, begging for his autograph, for money, but who save this fine young Selig had come to him.... So long now!

At eight, he stirred, not this time like a drowsy old owl, but like an eagle, its lean head thrusting forth from its pile of hunched feathers, ready to soar. He listened for the car.

At ten minutes past, he swore, competently. Confound that Martens!

At twenty past, the car swept up the driveway. Out of it stepped only Martens, touching his cap, murmuring, “Very sorry, sir. Mr. Selig was not at the camp."

“Then why the devil didn’t you wait?”

“I did, sir, as long as I dared.”

“Poor fellow! He may have been lost on the mountain. We must start a search!”

“Very sorry, sir, but if I may say so, as I was driving back past the foot of the Mount Poverty trail, I saw Mr. Selig with a young woman, sir, and they were talking and laughing and going away from the camp, sir. I'm afraid—"

“Very well. That will do.”

“I’ll serve dinner at once, sir. Do you wish your cocktail out here?”

“I won’t have one. Send Miss Tully.”

When the nurse had fluttered to him, she cried out with alarm. Senator Ryder was sunk down into his shawl. She bent over him to hear his whisper:

“If it doesn’t keep you from your dinner, my dear, I think I’d like to be helped up to bed. I don’t care for anything to eat. I feel tired.”

While she was anxiously stripping the shawl from him, he looked long, as one seeing it for the last time, at the darkening valley. But as she helped him up, he suddenly became active. He snatched from his pocket a stiff double

sheet of paper and tore it into fragments which he fiercely scattered over the porch with one sweep of his long arm.

Then he collapsed over her shoulder.

_____

14: The Lady Of The Pillar-Box

Barry Pain

1864-1928

The Windsor Magazine, Aug 1910

TRAVELLING ONE DAY on a Tube railway, I happened to find myself seated opposite to a well-dressed lady of middle age. Her expression was one of timidity and benevolence, and I judged her to be of low mental calibre. The nose was Roman, the forehead receded, and the chin was lamentable. The eyes showed nervousness.

In one hand this lady held a small box wrapped in paper. On one side of the box were the words "DEATH TO ALL," printed in black capitals. I noticed that she was wearing one black shoe and one of bronze green.

These points interested me. I had intended to travel as far as Edgware Road, but when the lady got out at Baker Street, I followed her. On reaching the lift, she increased my interest and my perplexity.

She said plaintively to the lift-man who took her ticket: "Do you still refuse?"

The man looked slightly sheepish. "Yessum," he said. "I shouldn't know what to do with 'em."

"I suppose it hasn't been found?" she said, after a pause.

"Not that I know of," said the man. "But it wouldn't be— that kind of thing never is. Afraid you had your journey for nothing, too."

"Yes," said the lady wearily, "the tree turned out to be a sycamore."

The man smiled and said "Good morning " as he swung the gates open. The lady was too cryptic to be lost sight of, and I followed her down the street.

She went straight to the nearest pillar-box and dropped into it the small box which she was carrying. Then she went off as fast as she could walk. Now, I had observed that box carefully. It bore no stamp and no address— no inscription of any kind except that mysterious "DEATH TO ALL."

Women are universally suspicious of those who ask favours of them. But many of them submit readily to dictation, and it had struck me that this lady was of the number. If I had besought her, with many apologies, to give me the solution of the problem, and spare me nights of sleepless puzzling, she would probably have threatened to appeal to the policeman. So I took the other line.

I overtook her and tapped her on the shoulder. "This kind of thing cannot be allowed," I said sharply.

She was obviously much flustered and confused. "Oh, what do you mean, sir?" she said.

"You know very well what I mean. I have had you under observation for some time— in the train and in the lift."

"Yes— oh, yes. I remember. I didn't know I was doing anything actually wrong."

"Absolutely illegal. I'm afraid I must do my duty."

"Oh, please don't!" she said. "I can explain everything if you'll listen. If you took me to a police-station, you'd only find you'd made a mistake. And the publicity of it would kill me; I've been fighting against publicity all my life."

I saw, of course, that she had mistaken me for a detective acting in the interests of the Post Office. I had thought she might make that mistake. It would have broken my tailor's heart, but for the moment I did not correct it.

"Very well," I said. "We'll step aside into the park. But I must have the whole truth, and the explanation must be satisfactory to me."

"I'm sure you will find it so. And I'm very much obliged to you. I will tell you the whole thing from beginning to end."

As we crossed the grass to the chairs under the trees, she said: "I've only done it twice before, and I didn't know there was any real harm in it, but I'll never, never do it again."

As I was not quite sure what she was talking about, I said that I hoped she wouldn't. We sat down, and I lit a cigarette. She was clearly relieved that I was dealing so leniently with her.

"Now, then, madam," I said. "From the beginning, please."

"I'm a widow," she said. "I do not know whether the name will suggest anything to you, but I am Mrs. Sumple."

I had seen the name frequently in shops and in advertisements. "Yes," I said, "it does suggest something to me; it suggests a disinfectant."

"I expected it," she said, with a sigh. "Sumple's Liquid Safety is but too well known. My poor husband invented it."

"Surely," I said, "the more it is known, the better, from a commercial point of view, it must be for you, then."

"That, unfortunately, is not so. When I married Arbuthnot Sumple, he held an honourable salaried post as analyst to an important manufacturing firm— Shadwell and Joy, the soapmakers. The disinfectant was invented by him in his leisure time, and it was he, I regret to say, who thought of the name for it. But he had no means other than his salary, and was in consequence unable to place the thing on the market. Somebody had to be found who, for a small share in the profits, would provide the money for manufacturing the disinfectant and for advertising it and pushing it with the trade. So naturally I thought of Mr. Magwhit."

"Magwhit," I observed, "is a name known and respected in the lesser financial world. But why was it specially natural that you should select him?"

"Simply and solely because he married my cousin Clara. She was a Miss Bone before marriage, and, of course, everybody says that she has a very charming manner. That may be, but she is not always sincere and she can also be very unpleasant. Well, I said to poor dear Arbuthnot: 'There is only one thing to be done— we must get at Percy Magwhit through Clara.' I am sorry to say that my husband took my advice. Arbuthnot was not a business man; Magwhit was. You can imagine the result."

"I can, Mrs. Sumple. The financier swallowed the inventor. That generally happens."

"Precisely. Sumple's Liquid Safety did not do very well the first six months, and not much better the next six. Arbuthnot was weak and got discouraged. Mr. Magwhit made him an offer, and he accepted it. He sold all his rights in Sumple's Liquid Safety for an annuity— four hundred a year for his life and mine. And at the time I really thought Mr. Magwhit was treating him generously. That was only four years ago. Yet last year Mr. Magwhit made no less than thirty thousand pounds out of the disinfectant, and this year, as Clara admits, he will make still more."

"It seems hard," I said.

"It is very hard, sir. My income from my husband's salary vanished, of course, at his death, and he was not insured. I have only the four hundred a year, and I have all the odium from the disinfectant. The Magwhits have thirty thousand a year from it, and no odium at all. I shall never get used to the horrible publicity of the thing. My name stares at me from a hoarding, and it is a shock. A newspaper advertisement tells me to be sure it is Sumple's, and I shudder. I go into a chemist's shop, and some young man enters and demands Sumple in the eighteenpenny size, and I blush to the roots of my hair. My name serves as a mudguard to protect the Magwhits. I doubt if any of the smart people that Clara entertains in Hill Street or at Tufmore know that; the Magwhits have ever dabbled in disinfectants at all."

"Well," I said, "if you don't like it, it is a very simple matter to change your name."

"Never!" she said, and the jet trimming on her frontage trembled with emotion. "That is a piece of treachery to Arbuthnot's memory that I can never commit. I would sooner suffer as I do. The Magwhits might change the name of the disinfectant, but when I suggest it, they smile and change the subject."

"That is quite likely. But, Mrs. Sumple, you promised me an explanation of certain curious facts that I have observed. What bearing has all this on—"

"Everything can be traced to it, as you will see, and you asked me to begin at the beginning. I have this reduced income of four hundred a year. Fortunately, I have no children and nobody dependent on me. Even as it is, I

have the greatest difficulty in keeping up the very modest style to which I am accustomed, without getting into debt. My little flat in Upper Gloucester Place is expensive. I think it a fairly good address myself, though Clara lets me see that she considers it contemptible, and pretended, when I took it, that she did not know where it was."

"One moment. You have not quarrelled with Mrs. Magwhit, then? You are still on good terms with her?"

"We are quite intimate, yet we dislike one another. That may surprise you."

"On the contrary, it is one of the commonest combinations."

"We played together as children, and have known each other all our lives. So, though I considered her husband cheated mine, I have not dropped her. To be candid, I have always had hopes that he might, in consequence of the great prosperity of the disinfectant, suggest something in the way of a bonus. I have already given hints in that direction. As Clara always, until her marriage, had to help in the housework in the morning, it was perfectly absurd of her to pretend that she had never heard of Upper Gloucester Place. But she can be kind when she likes. She has occasionally asked me to receptions in Hill Street, and although I never know anybody there, and cannot afford the dress expenditure and the cab fares, I should be sorry to miss them. She has frequently invited me to luncheon, when only she and the governess have been present. And she did once ask me down to Tufmore. I had to be postponed, as my room was wanted for Lady Rochester's maid; but that I quite understood, and no doubt at some other time—"

"Pardon me, Mrs. Sumple, but is this really explanatory?"

"In a way it is. It shows that I have expensive friends, and that explains why I have had to look about me for methods of making money. I had thought about home-made pickles, but people in the other flats would have objected to the smell of vinegar. And Clara refused to push them with her friends, and said that nobody but the servants ever eat pickles. I am earning a commission for recommending Gimlong Tea, or, at any rate, I shall be as soon as I get some orders. I wrote a testimonial for the Bestwear Boot and Shoe Company in Orchard Street the other day, but there was no agreement, and all I received was one complimentary pair of— walking shoes. And then I turned my attention to silkworms."

"Silkworms?"

"Yes, I'll tell you how it happened. My charwoman brought them to me in a little box. She said her son had got them from another boy, and he would sell them for sixpence. She had been told that the silk they made fetched fabulous prices. Naturally, I bought them. There were a hundred and eight of them

originally, and it seemed a good bargain. Where I was wrong was in not inquiring about their food."

"You had trouble about it?"

"I did. I tried them with lettuce, which rabbits and almost all animals like. Nineteen of them died that night. Despair drove me to experiment with bread-crumbs, and fifty-three more of the poor creatures perished in the next twenty-four hours. This morning the charwoman came again, and said that I ought to feed them on mulberry leaves. Now, I have no mulberry tree in my flat, and so I thought the best thing I could do was to cut my loss and give the silkworms to one of the lift-men at Baker Street Station. He was a man who had been most civil and obliging, and I had always wanted to make him some little present. I went from Baker Street Station. I was wearing, only for the second time, the complimentary shoes that the Bestwear Company had sent me. There was the lift just on the point of starting, and the particular lift-man I wanted was in it. I made a rush for it, and I suppose I caught the heel of one of my shoes in something. At any rate, the heel came clean off and went spinning across the floor of the booking-office. I did not wait to pick it up, or I should have missed the lift. But I told the lift-man about it, and asked him, if anybody found the heel, to have it reserved for me. I then offered him the silkworms, but he said he did not understand their habits and couldn't take them. I was explaining to him my difficulty, when suddenly something which Clara once said to me flashed across my mind. 'Wait,' I said; 'I know a lady who has a mulberry tree. I will take the silkworms to her.' Do you see?"

"I am beginning to see."

"The hats in the shops were most extraordinary. There was one at Pigwell's which it is no exaggeration to say—"

"Pardon," I said, "you can leave out the part about the hats. If I surmise correctly, you went on to Mrs. Magwhit's, in Hill Street."

"I did. I had to. Silkworms apart, it was quite imperative. The strain on my ankles! You, perhaps, do not know what it is to walk with a high heel on one shoe and none at all on the other. It gives one a curious gait, which is remarked and quite misunderstood by boys in the street, and it is painful as well. Uncertain though I was of the way Clara would take it, I felt I must borrow a pair of shoes from her. Otherwise, I should have been driven to take a cab, and that is an expense which I always try to avoid. I found Clara at home— you can imagine her, perhaps."

"Not in the least."

"No? Then I must tell you. She has a beautiful and graceful figure— I will say that for her— and she dresses like an Egyptian serpent and is rather languid. As a matter of fact, she is quite keen in matters of business. She writes

all the advertisements of Sumple's Liquid Safety, and had proofs of some new handbills on the table in her boudoir when I went in. Her manner this morning was what might be called medium. I have known her to be more affectionate, and I have known her to be nastier. She said that of course I could have a pair of her shoes if I could get into them— her foot is a half-size larger than mine, and she is sensitive about it— but she couldn't think why I bought rotten shoes that dropped to pieces in the street. She showed me the new hand-bills. There was a blank space where there was to be a picture, and underneath was printed 'Sumple's Liquid Safety is Death to all Disease Germs.' So I said I had something to show her, too— something that she might like to buy from me— and I handed her the box of silkworms. She opened it, screamed, and lost her temper. She said it was disgusting of me to bring a box of dead maggots and mess into her house. What was I thinking of? Had I gone mad? Well, I did my best to appease her. I told her I was sorry, but they were not maggots; they were silkworms— pretty, playful little things— and some of them were still alive. However, I would take them away as soon as I got my shoes on. She seemed pacified, and said I could have one of the handbills to wrap the box in."

"I see," I said. "You wrapped the box in the handbill. That accounts for the legend on the box. But what about your shoes? They are of different colours."

"Really, you notice everything!"

"Everything which is unusual and nothing which is not."

"Well, I will tell you. All Clara's shoes are bronze green and so are all her stockings, and they have to match exactly; it is one of her fads and affectations. As I was putting on the right-hand shoe, I told Clara that the real reason why I had brought the silkworms to her was because I remembered her saying that there was a mulberry tree on the front lawn at Tufmore, and this would have made it quite easy for her to feed them. Clara sighed and said I had got the most unaccountable delusions. The tree was a sycamore, and she had never told me that it was anything else, if she had ever mentioned it at all, which she did not believe. Of course, that may have been so. All I can say is that, if it was not Clara who said she had a mulberry tree, then it must have been somebody else. However, to change the subject, I asked her what she was going to have for the picture on the new handbill. 'Oh,' she said, 'I don't know. Some funny old face, I think. We might have the widow of the inventor!' Well, that was enough for me. There are things which I permit and things which I do not permit. Clara had passed the limit. I simply got up and walked out. She told me not to be a fool and take offence at a joke, but, as I said to her, there are jokes and jokes. When I got into the street, I remembered that I had changed only one of my shoes, but I would not go back. And now, sir, I have told you everything fully and frankly."

"Pardon me, Mrs. Sumple. I understand now why you are wearing odd shoes. Your curious conversation with the lift-man is also explained— by the way, I am sorry that you did not get the heel of your shoe back— but why did you post the silkworms?"

"Well, sir, I had to get rid of them, and what else was I to do? There was nowhere else to put them. If I had dropped them in the street, somebody would have picked them up and brought them back to me, and very likely a reward would have been expected. Seeing all I have gone through, I am sure, sir, you must admit that I have been sufficiently punished."

"But I think you said that on two previous occasions you have used a pillar-box in the same reprehensible way— in fact, as a dust-bin?"

"Yes, but it will never happen again. In one case I had bought something from the fishmonger and was taking it home myself. I had practically told him that it must be fresh, and I never dealt with him again. In the other case it was— well, it was a mistake of my dentist's. I wished to get rid of it, and I was anxious from delicate motives that it should not be traced to me. I could not burn it, but I could and did post it. Of course, I did not know that the Post Office employed detectives to watch the pillar-boxes."

"Nor did I."

"But you are a detective yourself? You said so."

"There, Mrs. Sumple, you are mistaken. I said that I had had you under observation for some time, and it was true. I pointed out that you could not be allowed to throw refuse into pillar-boxes, nor can you. I did say that I must do my duty, and England expects every man to do as much, but I never said I was a detective, and I never should say it. Why, it's illegal!"

"Then, if you are not a detective, what are you?"

"Merely," I said, "an old gentleman who employs an ample leisure in the satisfaction of an inquiring and curious disposition. Thank you very much indeed, Mrs. Sumple, and good morning."

I left her still searching for words to express her feelings. But she quickly recovered herself and came panting after me.

"Gimlong Tea," she said breathlessly. "Splendid tea. Under the circumstances, I think you must give me an order."

———————

15: Capturing a Convict

Richard Marsh

Richard Bernard Heldmann, 1857-1915

The Strand Magazine, Aug 1893

"CONVICT'S escaped!"

"Oh? when?"

"Last night. Didn't you hear the guns?"

I had not heard them. I don't think Ted had heard them, either. We had not gone to bed with the intention of lying awake to listen to guns

We sat down to breakfast, Ted and I, thinking rather of the food in front of us than of the unfortunate or fortunate individual who, according to our landlord, had quitted Princetown Prison, in the small hours of the morning, without first going through the form of obtaining his host's permission. But the landlord was full of the subject. He went on talking while we went on eating.

"They'll catch him, safe enough. I've been here a few years, and I've seen a few of 'em escape, I tell you. But I've never known one that wasn't brought back yet. You see, there's five pounds to anyone who gives the screws the office— they call the warders 'screws,' them chaps up here. So pretty near everyone's hand's against them. And then Princetown isn't like Millbank. You can't drop over the wall and find a pal waiting for you round the corner. It's when they're out that their troubles begin. They don't know their way about Dartmoor any more than they know their way about the moon."

Mr. Pethick paused to take in a little breath. So Ted asked a question: "Have you heard who it is has got away?"

Mr. Pethick winked.

"They keep that dark just at first, you know. They like to lay their hands upon him before anybody gets to know who it is has tried to slip his collar. But I was told it was a 'lifer'— a chap who, if he'd got his rights, would have been hung. I shouldn't be surprised if he made a bit of a fight for it before he lets them lay their hands on him."

Ted Lane and I were staying at a certain little inn within two miles of Princetown Prison, which is not unknown to brethren of the rod and the line, and of the palette and the brush. It stands just at the junction of the tiny stream which they call the River Cowsick with the River Dart; in the heart of a country which, at least in summer, is as beautiful as it is wild. We had gone there ostensibly to sketch, but we had done a little fishing, and to tell the truth, I don't think that we had done much of either.

I was a lazy man in those days. I don't know that I am much more hard-working now.

But that particular day we had planned a ten-mile walk over the moor— ten miles out and ten miles home— to Erme Head. And if we felt in the mood, and not too lazy, and that sort of thing, we had vague intentions of pushing on to Red Lake, about a mile farther on.

It was good walking weather, a clear sky overhead, and just breeze enough to keep one cool; and I need scarcely observe that we did not allow the fact of a man having escaped from the convict establishment at the top of the hill to make any alteration in our plans.

The man, however, seemed to be running in Mr. Pethick's mind. There is not much to talk about at Two Bridges except the weather, and an escape from Princetown is undoubtedly an event.

"You are sure to meet him," our landlord remarked, as we set out. I will only hint that if I had only been as sure of this as our host professed to be, at least one of those pedestrians would have stayed at home. I am not at all sure that the stay-at-homes would not have extended to two. I am not a thief-catcher. I had no desire to earn five pounds by what Mr. Pethick had termed "giving the 'screws' the 'office.'" As for the members of the criminal classes, I have always felt that the less I have to do with them, the better I am pleased. I do not know how it is with other men. It has always been that way with me. And I am sure— on that point there cannot be the slightest possible doubt!— that if I had anticipated having an interview, in the remotest and most secluded fastnesses of wild Dartmoor, with a gentleman who would have been hung "if he had had his rights," I, for one, should have postponed that little excursion *sine die*. Indeed, I should not have minded if it had never come off at all.

Ted Lane, however, gave me the impression that he was not of my way of thinking. I am persuaded that if you had listened to the remarks which he made as we went along— casual remarks, as it were— you would have supposed, as I supposed at the time, that nothing would have given him greater pleasure than to capture, or recapture, all the inmates of Princetown Prison single-handed. Nor do I deny that I might have dropped a hint, a distant hint, that under certain circumstances I should do, or endeavour to do, my duty to my Queen and to my country. But when Ted Lane declares, as he since has declared, that I said that I should be only too glad, five pounds or no five pounds, to have a chance of taking the bloodstained villain by the throat, and "scrunching the life right out of him!" he libels me. I hope and I believe, in fact I know, that I would "scrunch the life" out of no man, whether convict or, so to speak, layman.

We had gone five,miles, it may be; perhaps a little more, because we had passed For Tor. We were not talking about convicts— nothing of the kind. We

were in the middle of a discussion about the Whistlerian theories of art, when I turned round, the better to get a light to my pipe. As I turned I saw, or thought I saw, someone or something drop down behind a hillock some two hundred yards away. But as I continued to look steadily in that direction and saw nothing and no one, I concluded that I was mistaken, and that some chance object had deceived my eye. Having lit my pipe, I rejoined Lane, who had gone on and was a few yards ahead.

We resumed the thread of our discussion; but as we argued I could not rid myself of the impression that, after all, I might not have been mistaken, and that someone had dropped down behind the hillock. To make quite sure, I glanced backwards, over my shoulder. As I did so I gave an exclamation.

"What's the matter?" inquired Ted.

I had stood still and turned. He also stood still and turned.

"It's very queer," I said, "but I could have sworn that I saw somebody peeping over the top of that hillock."

"Which hillock?"

"That one— with the patch of gorse at the side."

Ted looked in the direction in which I pointed.

"There's nothing there." It was true that there was nothing there just then; but if there had not been something there a moment before, then I had been the victim of an optical delusion, and of an optical delusion of a curious kind. But for some reason, on which I need not dwell, I did not altogether relish the idea of there being someone in that wild place who, while he was anxious to look at us, was even more anxious that we should not look at him. So I did not think it worth while to insist that I could scarcely have been twice deceived, in broad daylight, in such a very singular manner.

Ted went on talking in his light-hearted way.

"You were dreaming, my dear fellow." He recommenced his forward march. "In Whistler's portrait of his mother—"

My thoughts were not with Whistler's portrait of his mother. They were behind my back. As Ted went prosing on, I gave another glance over my shoulder. What I saw— well! I do not wish to use exaggerated language, so I will not say that it made my blood run cold, but I do affirm that it did not increase my sense of comfort. I saw that a man was following us, as it seemed to me, upon his hands and knees. He must have been well on the alert, because directly I looked round he dropped down, so that he lay concealed among the ferns and grasses. But I had seen him, though he might not think it. Upon that point I had no doubt

I was at a loss as to what was the best course to pursue. I am aware that it may seem obvious enough on paper. I can only state that I did not find it quite

so obvious in fact. I am not a fighting man, and what is more, I never have been. I do not know that that is anything to be ashamed of, though, to listen to some people, and to some ostensibly respectable people, you would think that it was. There is nothing I object to so much as a row; and, in fact, although I may be an artist, I am a peace-loving and peace-abiding citizen. And I defy even a cross-examining barrister to prove that I am otherwise.

After a few moments of what I will call inward meditation, I gathered myself together, moistened my lips, and said, "Ted!"

"Yes?" He looked at me. I suppose he saw that there was something in my face. "What's up?"

"Keep cool, old man."

"Keep cool! What do you mean?" I caught his arm.

"Don't turn. Perhaps it would be as well not to let him think we see him."

"See him? See whom?"

"Keep cool. Don't get excited, Ted." I dropped my voice to what I have seen described as a "lurid" whisper. "The gentleman who escaped from Princetown last night is just behind. He's following us."

I used the word "gentleman" advisedly; because, although, of course, I knew that he could not hear what we were saying, still I did not wish him even to *think* that we were using towards him the language of discourtesy.

I had not imagined that my observation would have had the effect it did have upon Ted Lane. He pulled up short.

"Don't stop," I said. "Don't let him think we've noticed him."

Ted went on again, as it seemed to me, a little hurriedly.

"You're sure it's the man?"

"Quite sure."

"Where is he?"

"I don't know where he is now. When I just looked back he was rather more, perhaps, than fifty yards behind us."

"Fifty yards? That all? Why is he following us?"

"I'm sure I don't know why he's following us. I say, Ted, I wish you wouldn't walk so fast. I can scarcely keep up with you."

"I'm not walking fast." I did not see how he could walk much faster, unless he ran. But I said nothing. I did my best to keep at his side.

After we had walked a dozen or twenty yards at the rate of about seven miles an hour, Ted gasped out:

"What sort of man is he?"

"I didn't see. I only just had a peep at him."

"Look where he is!"

"Then don't go tearing off like that."

I caught him by the arm, to make sure that he did not walk on and leave me behind. I glanced behind. As I did so I uttered an exclamation. What I saw was enough to make any man exclaim. A truculent-looking scoundrel, apparently about eight feet high, attired in the hideous costume of a convict, was striding after us as if he were in possession of the seven league boots, and was wearing them just then.

My exclamation caused Ted to look behind him. When he saw that murderous-looking monster bearing down upon us in a manner which inevitably suggested a bloodthirsty pirate bearing down upon an inoffensive trading craft, Ted tore his arm out of my grasp, and, without giving me the slightest hint of what his intentions were, made off as fast as his legs would carry him. When that convict saw that Ted had taken to his heels, he took to his, and, of course, when he took to his heels, I also took to mine.

"Stop!" I cried to Ted. "Don't run away from the man."

I protest that I shouted this with the full force of my lungs, although— in this way is history told— Ted denies that I did so to this hour.

I had no idea that Ted Lane could run so fast. He simply flew over the ground. All I did was to try to catch him, and, I need scarcely observe, I had to strain every nerve if I wished to have a chance of doing that. As for that convict, no sooner had the procession started, than that audacious villain gave utterance to an ear-piercing yell, which must have been audible all the way to Princetown. When that sound fell upon Ted Lane's ear, he stood, if possible, still less upon the order of his going even than before. He tore off the light knapsack which held his sketchbook, his palette, and his lunch, and cast it to the winds. When he let his knapsack go, of course, I let mine go too. But, merely on that account, it is absurd to suppose that I was running away from the man behind. I repeat that my sole desire was to catch Ted Lane, who was in front. And how could I expect to be able to catch him if I was more heavily weighted than he was?

That convict, instead of pausing as he might have been expected to do, to see what the knapsacks contained, came on, if anything, faster than before. He moved so much faster than I did that I already seemed to feel his outstretched hand upon my collar, which is a sufficient refutation of the ridiculous suggestion that, in the *true* sense of the words, I was running away from him.

So, as it was plainly a case of at once or never, I increased my already almost super-human efforts to catch Ted Lane. I gained upon him, perceptibly, inch by inch— though seldom was a man more winged by fear than he was then. I almost had him. In another second we should have been side by side, when my foot caught against some obstacle on the uneven turf, and I fell head-foremost to the ground.

What is the most natural thing for a man to do when he finds that he is falling? To try to save himself by catching hold of something. No matter what— anything that is within his reach. That is what I did. And therefore I say that, under the circumstances, Ted Lane's simulated indignation is simply nonsense.

When I felt myself going, I did the most natural thing in the world— I made a snatch at something. I suppose it is not my fault if Ted Lane's leg was the only thing there was to snatch. I presume that even Ted Lane himself will not venture to suggest that I put his leg where it was. Nor, when I touched his leg, if he chose to go sprawling forward on to his face, was that any affair of mine. Anyhow, he did go forward. And there we both of us lay.

"So I've got you!"

This observation was made in a tone of voice which induced me, after a short interval for reflection, to look round. The speaker was the gentleman— but why should I write "gentleman"? I will write it plainly. The speaker was the unmitigated ruffian who had escaped from Princetown Gaol.

I sat up, feeling a little out of sorts. In my sanguine way, I imagined that the time had not yet passed for peaceful overtures. So I spoke to the fellow as I would have spoken to an ordinary Christian.

"Good-day! Warm weather for walking."

"I'll make it warmer for you before I've done."

That was what the crime-stained wretch replied. Yet, such was the extent and fullness of my Christian charity, still I did not wish him to look upon us as his natural enemies.

"You need not be afraid of us, my dear sir," I remarked, in that friendly and affable way I have. "We have a fellow feeling for a fellow creature in distress, and rather than re-consign you to the dungeons which you appear to have so recently quitted—"

"Afraid of you!" he yelled. He gave a whoop which would have done credit to a Red Indian on the warpath. He also bounded about four feet from the ground.

"I am Jim Slim, the Camden Town murderer. I have slain nine people with this right hand— seven women, three men, and a boy." His arithmetic reminded me of a dining-room waiter's, but that is what he said. "And why should I not add you to the number of the slain?"

This inquiry was such a peculiar one, even proceeding from an escaped convict in the middle of Dartmoor, that I was induced to look more carefully at the speaker. He was quite worth looking at, from the point of view of the people who derive satisfaction from gazing at the ladies and gentlemen in the "Room of Horrors."

A more horrible and malignant-looking scoundrel I never saw. I am not prepared to state what were his exact measurements in inches, but he was certainly head and shoulders taller than I am. I should say, if we had been placed rear to rear, that the top of my head would have reached somewhere about the middle of his back. And, what is more, he was *more* than broad in proportion.

But he was not only a dreadful object as regards his physical configuration, but, if the thing was possible, his attire lent to his appearance an added charm. He was, of course, clad in convict's clothing, but, although one does not expect that clothing to be "cut" in Savile Row, one certainly does expect to see about it some sort of a fit. For instance, one does not expect to see a man of, say, seven foot in a suit of clothes which would not be large enough for a man of three foot six. The hideous miscreant in front of us had been crammed into garments which had apparently been intended for his infant brother. I don't know, but I had always supposed that they provided even convicts with boots or shoes. This individual had neither. He had on a pair of stockings, the whole of which was scarcely large enough to contain his feet. His knickerbockers stopped short about ten inches above his knees. They looked more like curtailed bathing drawers, of novel design and pattern, than any other garment I ever saw. He had apparently cut them open at the back to induce them to meet in front, and the result was singular. He had cut his jacket open at the seams to enable him to get into it. Between the bottom of that garment and the top of his knickerbockers was a vacant space of about two feet. This was scantily covered by the ragged remnants of a parti-coloured shirt. No waistcoat was visible to the naked eye. As for hat or cap, perhaps the gentleman had come away so hastily that he had forgotten to bring that with him.

I felt that if that is the costume in which a grateful country attires her criminals, honesty may be the better policy, after all.

While Ted and I regarded the guilt-smirched scoundrel with eyes of wonder and admiration, he plunged his hand into the bosom of what, I presume, was intended for his shirt. When that hand reappeared it held what I have seen described as a "shooting-iron." A revolver was flashed in our faces. It only needed that to make the situation perfect.

"What shall I do with you?" he demanded, in a manner which, so far as I was concerned, required no reply whatever. Ted, however, seemed to think otherwise.

"I haven't brought much money with me; but so far as half a sovereign is concerned—"

"Half-sovereign me no half-sovereign!"

Ted ducked. He appeared to be under the impression— which, I am bound to own, I shared— that that ideal candidate for Falstaff's ragged regiment was about to "take a shot" at him. Our new acquaintance, however, restrained his zeal.

"My dear sir," cried Ted, "don't fire! I assure you that my sympathy is yours. I have always been conscious that a gentleman in your position may be, if all were known, a better man—"

"Sympathy me no sympathy!" (Another duck from Ted.) "What I want," yelled the stranger, as if he were addressing a meeting in Hyde Park, "is clothes!"

I felt that this was true; indeed, we both of us felt that this was true. But none the less, we were not prepared for what immediately followed.

"Take off your coat!"

Ted chose to take the request as being addressed to him.

"I am afraid you will find my coat too small for you."

"The two of you take off your coats. I will sew them both together."

The proposition did not commend itself to me as being of a practicable kind, nor as one which was likely to lead to a satisfactory result. I did not see how he proposed to provide himself with a well-fitting garment even when the two coats were sewn together. However, as Ted took off his coat, of course I took off mine. I had always regarded that man as my friend, and I was not going to desert him then. I have some consideration for the claims of friendship, whatever other men may have.

But the stranger was not content when he had got our coats.

"Take off your waistcoats," was his next demand.

Here Ted made a stand; not such a stand as I should have made— still, he made a stand.

"You really must excuse me, my dear sir, but if you wouldn't mind—"

"Strip!" roared the stranger.

And— well, I may say, in fact, I do say it, without the slightest hesitation, that if Ted had not stripped first, I should not have stripped: I should have remonstrated with that ruthless ruffian. I should have pointed out to him that there are circumstances which an escaped convict ought to consider even in the centre of Dartmoor. I should have done this in a manner which would have commended itself to his sense of what was right and what was wrong. But, as I have already pointed out, I am not a man to desert a friend, especially in the hour of his need. So, when Ted stripped, I stood to him, shoulder to shoulder, and I stripped too.

There was one thing— the weather was tolerably warm, and the spot was a secluded one, ten miles from anywhere, so that there was nothing to shock the proprieties. Otherwise, if I know myself, I should certainly have refrained.

I must confess, though, that I did not understand why he would not allow us to keep our socks. Even if he had sewn the two pairs together he would not have been able to get into them. And as for our shoes, the idea of his ever being able to wear them was simply ridiculous. But no, he would not even allow us to keep a pocket-handkerchief. He would only allow us to keep our hats. And that was absurd. A man cannot do much in the way of outdoor exercise if he only has a hat on. The thing would make the absence of the rest of his apparel more marked than ever.

"Take six steps to the left," observed the stranger.

We took six steps to the left; or, rather, Ted took six steps to the left, and, of course, I followed him. I never *would* desert a friend.

When we had taken six steps to the left, the stranger tucked my clothes under one arm, and Ted's clothes under the other. He turned away. He disappeared among the heather, down a winding path which led, with a sharp descent, to some lower ground upon the right.

I will not attempt to describe the feelings with which we watched him disappear. We waited for him to reappear. But we waited in vain. We saw nothing more of him, or of our clothes. We spent the greater part of that day, in the heart of Dartmoor, with "nodings on" except our hats. And what is even a Lincoln and Bennett when you have no other garments with which to keep that article in countenance?

16: The Pillow

Ethel Lina White

1876-1944

Pearson's, June 1925
The Saturday Journal, Adelaide, 3 Oct 1925

LITTLE Ginger lay in bed, crippled with muscular rheumatism. She was racked with pain whenever she stirred a finger. She was entirely dependent upon the grudged services of her step-mother, Jitta. And she hated Jitta. But she kept on smiling. For inside her pillow was £380. Jitta was 10 years older than Ginger. She was an ice-cold brunette, with snapping black almond eyes and thin scarlet lips. All she cared for was money.

She had made a precious bad speculation in her marriage to Dan Scudamore. He was the son of a gentleman-farmer, but the family was going downhill. Since Jitta had spent his modest patrimony, Dan had been selling goods on commission. Like his daughter, he was a Rufus. He was a big man, with a red, clean-shaven face and jovial blue eyes. His was the type which went with prosperity—sporting clothes, dogs, and money to 'jingle.'

He put up a brave bluff at the confidence which spells success in business. But while he fixed customers with magnetic blue eyes, they held apology. He told broad stories to men, but his loud laughter could not hide the tremor of his lips. He had reached the stage when he had to goad himself to make his daily round of humiliation and failure. He had to force his way into houses where he was not welcome, and pester people to buy goods which they did not need.

Dan was a gentleman, and he hated making a nuisance of himself. When he made a sale, he felt that it was the result of pity.

And he hated pity.

He got none from his wife— Jitta. She had him well to heel. She lashed him with her tongue. Worse than all, she had taught him to despise himself.

For this last, Ginger hated her.

Yet, although Ginger had the fiery temper which accompanies red hair, she dared not quarrel. While she lay there Jitta had the whip hand.

Jitta resented the extra work of her illness. She did the minimum for the invalid. Thrice daily, she slammed down a tray by her bedside. It was left to Dan to wash Ginger's face and make her bed. Still, that was to the good, for it enabled them to preserve the secret of the pillow. It was only the knowledge of that £380 which kept Dan going in his little hell of life with Jitta. It was the key to release.

Formerly, it had been, placed on deposit But Dan's nerve crashed upon the failure of a certain bank, popular with small investors. He withdrew the whole,

in twenty-pound notes, and the bulky envelope, was sewn up in Ginger's pillow.

The hoard was the slow growth of years— the salvage of Dan's War Gratuity, and Ginger's savings.

Before her illness, Ginger— who had taken the first job which offered—had been a waitress at a celebrated London restaurant. Quick as a needle to adapt herself to town surroundings, within a month, she had covered her freckles with powder and used a discreet lipstick. She was smart as paint, from every live red hair to the silk stockings which twinkled under her knee-short skirt. She soon became popular with the clientele of the restaurant, for she nipped round and executed an order while another girl was writing it down. For every sixpence the other waitresses took up. Ginger picked up a shilling. They all went into the pillow.

For six weeks now, Ginger had lain in her lumpy bed, suffering the torments of inactivity and baffled rage. She was denied even the solace of privacy, for Jitta kept the overflow of her wardrobe in her room. She dared not rebel. Jitta had ways of getting even with, her. She had known what it was to lie parched for hours, while Jitta gossiped at the gate. And Jitta never gossiped with women.

Ginger gritted her teeth, like some small trapped creature, as the door was kicked open and Jitta entered her room. Taking no notice of Ginger, she walked to the window and stood there, polishing her nails upon a dirty pad. Although it was early in the morning, she was dressed in a short tight skirt of large plaid: her orange silk jumper left her big arms bare to the shoulder. Round her neck was a string of enormous imitation pearls.

Ginger knew that downstairs the dirty, dishes were still unstacked, so that Dan would have to wash his own plate when be returned. A film of dust covered the carpet. Under the bed, the fluff was piling up in drifts. Ginger began to boil.

"When I get about again," she said, addressing the air, "I'll soon have the place shipshape and Bristol fashion."

Jitta regarded her with callous eyes.

In her London days Ginger had rather resembled a pretty little red fox. Now— with her tangle of matted hair— she looked more like a lost sandy kitten, with an unwashed face.

Jitta ran her fingers over her over shingled head, which gleamed like black lacquer.

"Best begin on yourself," she remarked scornfully. "Sly! You do look a sketch."

"I can't help it," gulped Ginger. "Lying here, not able to do a stroke for myself."

"Got others to do it for you, haven't you?"

As she spoke Jitta banged open a drawer and shook a new nightdress from its crease. It was sleeveless and made of lemon crêpe de chine.

Ginger watched while Jitta packed it inside a suitcase, to which a luggage tag was already tied. Her sharp eyes read the name of a celebrated Brighton hotel. Her grey-green eyes grew bigger. She knew that Jitta was indifferent to scandal, but she had never before gone openly away for a weekend. Yet whatever she did, Ginger knew that Dan would take it like a lamb, lying down. There lay the sting. Yet safer so. She always remembered their bull terrier who had bitten the postman.

Dan explained the attack to the board, "He's mild as milk and he stood this man's tormenting, day after day— week in, week out— till he reached a point when he couldn't stand any more."

The Bench— doggy men all— had spared the bull terrier's life. But Ginger never forgot. She knew the time would come when Dan's patience, too, would break. That day he would see red. He hated Jitta, but he did not know it. Ginger knew. And this fear was always in her mind.

Jitta snapped the suitcase and slouched into her own room. She returned with armfuls of clothing of all kinds— suits; frocks, jumpers— which she flung on the bed.

A sudden flicker of mad hope shot through Ginger.

She crushed it resolutely. Such a wonderful thing could not happen. It was too good to be true.

At last she could restrain her curiosity no longer.

'Whatever are you up to now, Jitta?

"Selling my old rags."

"Are you expecting Mrs. Pomeroy?"

Jitta deigned no reply. She rubbed her nails to higher polish. Presently she went downstairs and Ginger heard the owning of the front door.

The wardrobe dealer's big laugh floated up the stairs. When, she entered the bedroom with Jitta she brought with her a sense of warmth and life. She was a handsome, portly matron of 50, with a rose-red colour and fine dark eyes. She wore a long seal coat and carried two enormous Japanese handbags. She spoke to Ginger with real kindliness.

"My! Ginger in bed! What's the matter?"

"Screws," said Jitta indifferently.

"You don't say so!"

Mrs. Pomeroy clicked her sympathy. "Dear, dear! When my old man gets lumbago I iron his back. Have you tried that?"

Jitta laughed scornfully. "No fear! Me? I'd like to know why she didn't go to a hospital in London, instead of coming here to be nursed. You'd think this family came from Aberdeen."

"Now, my dear, that's not the way to talk," purred Mrs. Pomeroy. She betrayed no sighs of professional interest, although Jitta was adding to the piles on the bed. Presently she dumped down a final bundle, and stood, her hands on her hips.

"That's the lot. Make a bid, Mrs. Pom."

Ginger's eyes, grew bigger as the flame of hope shot up again. Something vital was in the wind. Mrs. Pomeroy did not glance at the array of finery. She strolled nonchalantly across to the door and fingered a near fur coat which was slung on a hanger.

"I'll give you a pound for that coat," she said.

Ginger's face flamed. "It's mine. Jitta sold it to me for four pounds."

"In instalments," snapped Jitta. "'Tisnt yours till the last is paid."

"Well, before you sell it you'll, have to give me back the two pounds I've paid you, won't she, Mrs. Pom?"

Mrs. Pomeroy, however, had made her gesture. She turned her back on the coat, with a shrug, and allowed herself to become aware of the clothing on the bed. She took up a skirt and held it up to the light. Ginger noticed how all the geniality had drained from her face. Her eyes glittered like black glass as she disparaged one article after another.

"They're not the fashion. People want a lot for their money, these days, ready-mades being so cheap. The trade's not what it was. No one'll buy an out-of-date cut."

"My lord!" Jitta exploded. "They're the latest." She picked up a vivid checked silk frock. "I got this from Paris— well, never mind how!"

Mrs. Pomeroy threw her a curious glance. She adopted a swift change of tactics.

"Well, now I look at it, I can see it for myself. There's a bit of sauce. Heal style— all of them— and in good condition. But, tell you the truth, I'm overstocked as it is. The Hall's gone into mourning and I took away all their colours yesterday. But I could offer you a good price for underclothing."

"Righto!"

A spot of colour burned in Ginger's face as Jitta opened the lower drawers of the wardrobe and feverishly raked out their contents. "Plenty here. But, I warn you, no lump sum. Every blessed thing is to be sold separate, even if it's only odd pence."

Mrs. Pomeroy grimaced as Jitta produced a slip of paper and pencil. Both women knew that the threepences and sixpences would add up to a higher total than any direct offer.

"You seem to be having a wholesale clearout," she remarked. "You'll want another trousseau to make up. Are you thinking of a second honeymoon?"

Jitta did not respond to her wink. She looked at her under insolent lids.

"I'll tell you one thing. Nothing under a fiver's any good to me. Will you give two shillings for this?"

"Funny, eh? Give you fivepence."

Ginger did not hear her wrangling. Her heart was singing with joy. Like one who had dwelt long in a cellar, she saw the door open to a vista of light.

There was no longer any doubt that Jitta was selling all she possessed. It could mean only one thing. She was going away for good.

Everyone had predicted that the Scudamore marriage would end that way, but Ginger had credited Jitta with too much selfish prudence to burn her boats. She knew that Dan would never take proceedings against her. She had trained him too well. Poor bluff, beaten Dan kept flying the banner of his wife's loyalty as though to salve the pride he had once possessed.

He admitted— speaking with Jitta's voice— that since he was not man enough to provide a smart woman with more than a bare living, he could not grudge her the amusements which other men were able to offer her. It was natural for women to want small presents and visits to the cinema.

But, while he affected to see nothing, Ginger had seen his eyes, blaze like fire between his sandy lashes; she had noticed the involuntary, clenching of his fists.

To-day, her fear would be laid to rest for ever. The end really was in sight. When things had seemed at their blackest the worst had turned to the best.

Ginger turned unwarily on to her back. In the rapture, she scarcely felt the torture of her racked muscles. She did not worry about the ethics or morality; to her, Jitta was merely about to do openly what she had done in secret. And the prisoners would be free.

They had often talked, in secret, of the day when they would sail into the sun and begin the new life of freedom. For that end they had saved, even though the goal was obscured. They had planned to join Ginger's lover in California. He was already working his small prune plantation.

Dan often talked wistfully of a man's life in the open, with aching muscles and plenty of sweat. Ginger, too, had her private, dream of running a restaurant, with home-made fare and black-and-orange checked tablecloths. She suddenly gurgled as she looked at Jitta's tense face. There was rich

humour in the situation; while Jitta was scraping together the halfpence, Ginger was lying upon a small fortune.

While she was helpless, it was any one's— for the taking.

"What's Ginger smiling about?" asked Mrs. Pomeroy. It seemed to Ginger that she towered above her bed, like a steamer over a small boat when boarded from the open sea.

"I'm thinking of my boy in California. Summer there? It's nice to think of the sun."

"To be sure. This house always stinks of blue mould."

The mill house was certainly damp, it was responsible for Ginger's rheumatism, but the rent was low. It lay below the level of the road and was built beside the stream which flowed between towering banks. Fallen leaves lay around it in sodden piles and the gorge was choked with the thin blue smoke of mist. Altogether, an ideal place wherein to think of the sun.

"It's not fit for pigs to live in," declared Jitta wrathfully. "But he won't move."

She never referred to Dan by his name.

"If your good man could afford a better house," said Mrs. Pomeroy soothingly, "I am sure be would. But you can't blink facts. The Scudamores have always been noted for their bad luck."

The words fell with a chill on Ginger's heart. It was true. The family was on the down-grade. Nothing good ever came their way. They dreamed— but to wake. She tried to shake off her depression, by picturing Dan's homecoming that evening. She imagined the dawn of incredulous joy in his eyes. They would search the paper for the first sailing; Ginger intended to go on that ship, even if she had to be carried on board. Together, they would open the pillow and recount their hoard.

But it was no good. She had grown vaguely uneasy whenever she thought of the pillow. It seemed like courting bad luck.

Her eyes persisted in following, Mrs. Pomeroy. There was no doubt that she was a terrific personality. She commanded the situation, in spite of Jitta's dominant nature.

She shook her head at every appeal to examine Jitta's discarded wardrobe. "I wouldn't give the thing house room. But I could do with old boots and shoes— or gentlemen's clothes."

Ginger read her expression when Jitta retuned from her room burdened with her entire stock of footgear. If she wanted confirmation of her own suspicion, it was plainly written on Mrs Pomeroy's face as she looked at Jitta. It bore grudged envy for one who had the courage to quit dull domesticity for

lurid adventure, blended with the contempt of the respectable matron towards the woman who throws her cap over the windmill.

"Heels run-over. Soles thin as brown paper."

While she haggled over the shoes, she kept throwing appraising glances towards the piles on the bed. They were not lost on Ginger. Jitta had shown her cards. She was obviously desperate for money to buy new finery for her venture. It was Mrs. Pomeroy's cue to ask for anything else that was saleable, so that, at the end, she could obtain the lot for a song.

While she bought the shoes for starvation prices, her wandering eyes made Ginger feel uneasy. This woman was ruthless where her pocket was concerned. Jitta, too, was reckless, and would not care how she despoiled the nest she was leaving for ever. And Ginger could not raise a finger in her defence.

She realized her own helplessness when the women began to laugh at Dan's suit. In striking contrast to Jitta's stock, he had but one to spare—a sporting affair, of shepherd's plaid. It was ancient to the last degree, but poor, shabby Dan always invested his clothes with his own air of breeding. Pockets may be empty, but an unbroken line of yeoman ancestry will tell.

The empty suit looked grotesque and moth-eaten as dangled in Mrs. Pomeroy's clutch.

"About fit for a scarecrow," she sniggered. "A man with a smart wife didn't ought to let himself run to seed."

"I give you my word," broke in Jitta passionately, "that there've been times when that I've pretended not to see him in the street, I've been so ashamed."

Ginger writhed as she listened: her hot blood boiled. Had she been able to rise, she would have flown at them like a little tiger-cat.

"And you fancy a swell dresser, eh?" Mrs. Pomeroy the smiled archly. "Well, there's as good fish, you know. Between you an me and the bed-post, is it true that stripes are the fashion, this season?"

"That so?" Jitta bright yawned ostentatiously in her face.

Ginger swallowed her rage. Temper could do Dan no good, and it only weakened her. In addition, it had given her a terrifying insight into the fury of elemental passion.

But that old fear was stilled. Before Dan came home, Jitta would have gone away with Tiger Morgan— the manager of the local cinema. Ginger had recognised the allusion to his taste in suitings. Her elation, however, had now entirety left her. She felt vaguely worried and apprehensive. Mrs. Pomeroy seemed no longer a genial, well-preserved woman, but a harpy, with avid claws outstretched to by pounce on all and she fancied.

As she watched her, Ginger fell a prey to a terrible fear. They would sell her pillow.

She tried to shake off the morbid fancy. Even the family ill-luck had its limits, she could not conceive a cruelty which had raised them to the heights, only to dash them down in ruin.

She began to pray fervently that the wardrobe woman would leave the house. Her petition was not granted. Mrs. Pomeroy had not bought sufficient to half fill one of her hampers.

Jitta— biting her lip over the low total on her paper— walked desperately towards the bed.

"Have a heart, Mrs. Pom. I tell you, I simply haven't a bean. I never get anything from him. Come on. I'll take a lump sum."

"Right."

Mrs. Pomeroy laughed.

"Ten bob for the lot."

"Ten? Well— I'm— They'd fetch more for rags."

"Try! The rag-and-bone man will be round next week."

Jitta could not wait for him. Mrs. Pomeroy knew that. She smiled, although the fruit had not fallen when she shook the tree.

"I've a party coming to-night," she observed, "that's going to be married— and not too soon, either. Now, what have you got to spare in the household line? Any old carpets?"

Ginger held her breath as Jitta shook her head. It was like the children's game of "hunt the thimble," where the seeker is guided by cries of "hot" and "cold."

"Rugs? Curtains? Tablecloths?" Mrs Pomeroy was still cold. "Counterpanes? Eiderdowns?"

She was growing warm. Warmer.

"Dear me! No old sheets or blankets?"

Ginger could hardly breathe. It was but one step away from her treasure. She waited for the connecting thought which would bridge the gap.

"I'll see what sheets we have," said Jitta. "Making me work, aren't you?"

There was no spare linen at the Mill House. Mrs. Pomeroy turned down the corners of her mouth at the few ragged sheets.

"I can't make you an offer for this tripe. It's past turning sides to middle."

"More shame to him. He's never restocked since we were married," cried Jitta vehemently. "And Ginger's never sent home so much as a duster from the White Sales for all the money she makes."

"Ginger?" Mrs. Pomeroy's ears were pricked. "She can't, earn much."

"Oh, no," Jitta laughed scornfully. "She only takes pounds a week in tips. A girl who works in the same shop told me."

Ginger's face began to burn. She had no idea that Jitta knew of her earnings.

"Look at her blushing," said Mrs Pomeroy. "You mark my words, Ginger's got a stocking."

Ginger felt a real terror as the two women stared at her. As she lay there, a little palpitating heap of nerves, the blow fell.

Mrs. Pomeroy kicked aside the sheets.

"Got any pillows to spare?"

All the colour drained away from Ginger's face.

Jitta admired the polish of her nails.

"M'm. Yes. He always sleeps with two."

The throb of Ginger's heart was the a great engine. It raced and pulsed while Dan's pillow was fetched and examined. Her secret was still safe. But Mrs. Pomeroy was getting nearer every second. She was hot— burning— she was on fire. The pillow was brought in. She scratched her eyebrows in thought.

"Got another to make the pair?"

"Yes. How's this?"

Jitta jerked the pillow from under Ginger's head. Ginger felt the sweat, break out on her pale face. Carelessly Mrs. Pomeroy let £380 slip through her itching palms.

"No. Two small. I want a couple of squares for a baby's cot, but it's too big for that." She jerked her thumb in the direction of Jitta's pile. "I'll give you a pound for that lot." Jitta passed her hands over her polished shingle with a desperate movement.

"Thirty," she cried.

"Twenty-five."

"All right. But it's blood money."

Mrs. Pomeroy packed her hampers swiftly and dexterously.

"I'll take only the one and send a boy for the other this afternoon," she said, straightening herself.

"Don't do that!" said Jitta quickly. "There'll be no one here all day, for Ginger can't move. I'm going your way as far as the Red Lion. I'll take the other hamper and drop it there."

Mrs. Pomeroy opened her purse and took out three notes.

"Here you are. Three pound. But there's an odd fourpence owing to-night. I must have something for it.... This will do. I can use the feathers."

She picked up Ginger's pillow. Ginger choked back her scream. She knew that her only hope lay in silence. If she could only keep cool and not arouse suspicion, Dan would be able to get back the pillow from Mrs. Pomeroy that same evening. It was torture to lie still while Jitta dressed herself for her final

departure. At last she came back to the room. Without a farewell glance at Ginger, she took up one of the hampers by its strap. Mrs. Pomeroy stopped her.

"No. Leave me that one. It's got the small pillow. It's just struck me that I've a party coming at four, about the baby's cot. There'll just be time to rip open the pillow and fill a couple of small squares."

"No! No!" Ginger's lips moved soundlessly. She tried to rise, but the room turned black. She fell back in a faint. Neither woman noticed her. Both had paused by the door, on which was the fur coat.

There was a rapid interchange of glances.

"Two pounds," breathed Mrs. Pomeroy. As Jitta nodded, she whisked the coat from its hanger.

"Best not let it be seen," whispered Jitta. "People know I sold it to her."

"Trust me. I'll sell it outside the neighbourhood."

Mrs. Pomeroy plumped noiselessly to her knees, and unstrapped a hamper. "Something'll have to come out. Here! I'll leave you this, for luck."

She dumped one of her bargains on the floor, and stuffed the fur coat in its place.

"There! So long, Ginger." Her farewell was cheery. But she did not glance at the silent figure on the bed.

Ginger heard the slam of the gate as she recovered consciousness. She felt empty, as though something had eaten away her heart.

Then— she remembered. Slowly she opened her eyes.

A ray of winter sun fell across the floor. It lit upon the object which had been discarded by Mrs. Pomeroy.

It was her pillow.

_____

17: Rejuvenation

Arthur Gask

1869-1951

The Chronicle (Adelaide) 3 Sep 1942

MATHEW PONTING BROWN lived a very humdrum life, and no one could have called it a happy one. At forty he was an old man with an habitual worried expression upon his face. He was short and slight of figure, his hair was greying, and he actually sported whiskers. As long as anyone had known him it was said he had always worn the same suit. That was not, however, true, for he bought a new one every four or five years. Still, as each new suit was the exact copy of the one before it in style, cut and color, it can easily be understood how the legend of the eternal durability of his clothes arose.

He was a bachelor, living in lodgings in an unpretentious street in North Adelaide, and his way of life was the same from one year's end to another. A ledger clerk at Boomer and Hunt's, he had been with the firm since he was seventeen, and was considered steady and trustworthy. Of very limited intelligence, however, he had never risen from a very subordinate position. By his fellow clerks and the employees of the firm, generally, he was called "Doormat," and he never seemed to resent the implied contempt in the nickname.

He had no vices and no hobby. He didn't drink, he didn't smoke, he never went to races, and he had never been known to address any member of the other sex by her Christian name. Every Sunday, morning and evening, he attended a little church of some queer sect in a little bye-lane near Ovingham, but he never was seen to open his mouth there, and his interest in the affairs of the church appeared to end when he had come out of its doors. So, with no relations or friends, his surroundings were as lonely as possibly could be, and he slunk through life a very ghost of a man, interested in no one and with no one interested in him.

With his habits very simple, he was not troubled with any form of ill-health until well into his fortieth year. Then he began to suffer from what for a long while he thought was only indigestion. He did not take much notice of it at first but, the discomfort in the pit of his stomach continuing and getting no better, he suddenly started worrying that, perhaps, some dreadful disease might be setting in. Reading his morning paper from end to end, as he did every day, from its advertisement columns he had acquired a most comprehensive knowledge of the many ills which many quack doctors were anxious to treat, and so was mentally ripe for the suggestion of almost any kind of affliction.

Getting thoroughly frightened at last, he decided to see a doctor, but, knowing none, he could not make up his mind which particular one to choose.

Then, remembering the advertisement of a Chinaman which had often caught his eye, after a lot of thinking, he came to the conclusion he could not do better than go to him.

The Chinaman was a Wei Hung Ling, who lived in a little bye-street off King William road. To Mathew's simple mind it seemed he must be a man of great knowledge, ministering, as he was able, according to his advertisements, to almost all the ailments human nature was prone to.

He described himself as a natural healer, specialising in eyes, nose, throat, heart, lungs, and other less romantic parts of the human body. Apart from this extensive repertoire, the Chinaman was also a psychologist, a hypnotist, and a vocational adviser. His advertisement, moreover, suggested he might be consulted about the stars. Altogether Mathew thought he would be quite safe in consulting him, and, accordingly, one afternoon, upon leaving Boomer and Hunt's, he made his way to the Chinaman's place of practice.

Now, whatever may have been the attainments of this Wei Hung Ling in the healing art, he was certainly a pretty shrewd judge of human nature, for directly he clapped eyes on the nervous, shrinking Mathew Brown, he saw possibilities of good profit. If rightly handled, the little chap was just the very kind to be kept hanging about for years.

Swallowing hard in his nervousness, Mathew described his symptoms, and, asking many questions about his occupation and mode of life, short of exactly finding out what his salary was a week, the Chinaman was speedily in possession of nearly all there was to learn about his new patient. Then he made him partly undress, and having prodded his stomach very hard and listened to its rumblings through a stethoscope, he tut-tutted very gravely many times. Finally he gave his verdict.

It was a good thing he had come to him, he told Mathew solemnly, for he had come only just in time. The pain and discomfort he had suffered from were far more than an ordinary indigestion. They were the first stage of a very serious trouble. Still, with patience and extended treatment, he was most hopeful everything would come all right in the end.

Mathew must have X-ray treatment, the galvanic battery and massage, as well as medicines. He must come to be treated three times a week. As to fees, Ling couldn't say how much it would cost, but with such treatments it was, of course, customary to pay something on account. Mathew was thoroughly frightened, and with no demur parted with five one pound notes on account. The treatment was started at once with a dose of the battery, which made him feel rather faint and sick. Indeed, he looked so white and shaky, that the Chinaman produced a good-sized tumbler full of port and insisted upon his drinking it. Never having taken alcohol before, Mathew responded at once to

the heavy wine, and, except for rather wobbly legs, expressed himself as feeling much better. Finally, Ling bowed him out with a little box of evil-looking pills and the strict injunction he was to return in two days' time.

Mathew walked slowly down King William road towards the stop, where he would pick up a North Adelaide tram. He had to walk slowly, because not only could he not trust his legs over-much, but also there was a blurred mist before his eyes. However, he soon reached the stop, and was crossing over to the safety zone when everything seemed to go black and he felt faint again. It was only for a few seconds, and then he felt all right. His tram arriving, he mounted the step and sank gratefully into a seat. Really, he told himself, that Chinaman's medicine had been very strong. He had no idea it was just ordinary port wine he had been given.

That night, according to instructions, he took two pills and two more the next morning. He felt astonished with the effect they had on him. It was not only that they took away the pain in his stomach, but they gave him also such a feeling of well-being. He felt he was treading upon air and was so light-hearted, too. Passing out through the garden of the house where he lodged, he plucked one of his landlady's prize rosebuds, strangely enough not caring whether she saw him or not. He knew she would be very angry if she did, as she was showing a bouquet of roses at a local flower show the following week.

Arriving early at the office, he almost ran into one of the other clerks, pretty little Dolly Thompson, in the passage. They were the first to arrive. "Now then, Doormat, dear," she called out gaily, "where are you going? But how nice you smell! Who on earth gave you that dinky little rose?"

"I acquired it by conquest, pretty one," replied Mathew grandly, and it seemed to him it was some other person speaking. "In other words, I stole it from my landlady's garden."

"You wicked man," exclaimed the girl disgustedly, "give it to me at once," and then, when he had smilingly handed it over and she was busy arranging it in her dress, he bent over and gave her a resounding kiss as near to her mouth as he could get.

"You little beast, Doormat!" she exclaimed, pushing him away indignantly. "How dare you do that? Why, I'm almost inclined to scratch your eyes out, you wretch!"

"No, my dear, you're not," he retorted firmly. "And you'll say nothing about it either, and then I'll buy you a box of chocolates."

"A shilling one?" she queried scornfully.

"No, a five shilling one." And again it seemed to him someone else was speaking, as he added importantly, "Don't tell anyone, but I've come in for a lot of money. My old aunt died last week and left me a few hundred."

"Really?" asked the girl with her eyes opened very wide. "Then buy yourself some new clothes at once, and get your hair cut, too. It's the way you dress and those awful whiskers you've got that make you look such an old corpse." She pretended to look coy. "Why, I've let men much older than you take me out, when they dressed properly and looked decent."

Mathew had his hair cut that very day, and at the same time was measured for a suit of clothes by one of the best tailors in Adelaide. He had plenty of money, for he had saved more than £400.

When on the evening of the following day he kept his appointment with the Chinaman, and told him delightedly how much better he felt. "My indigestion is all gone, and I feel quite different all round." He laughed. "Why, I even see now when a girl's good-looking or not, and I haven't noticed that for years. Those pills of yours must be very strong."

Wei Hung Ling nodded. "Yes, they are restoring your vital energy and that's what I meant them to do." He smiled a cunning smile. "But it is not only the pills which are making you feel so much better." He fixed Mathew intently with his eyes and added very solemnly, "You didn't know, did you, that I had hypnotised you! Well, I had, and I had willed you should become young again." He spoke as one with great authority. "You do as I tell you and in six months I will have taken twenty years off your life."

Mathew was thrilled and, at the Chinaman's suggestion, so that there should be no slipping back, paid down a further two pounds for pills of an even stronger nature.

And in the months which followed, although he was being well and consistently milked by Wei Hung Ling, he never for one moment regretted having gone to him. His whole life was altered in a most extraordinary degree. He had become sharp and quick, where before he had been dull and slow, and, indeed, was now so capable in everything he undertook, that he soon found he was being given responsible duties, with his salary being raised accordingly.

After working hours, too, everything was different. He took Dolly Thompson out quite a lot, and both his kisses and his presents were now accepted as a matter of course. Indeed, the office was expecting that an engagement would be announced any day. Mathew, however, was taking his time there. Appetite had grown with eating and, although very taken with the charms of the fascinating little Dolly, he had several other little flirtations in hand at the same time. He had moved to a good-class guest home and a lively young widow there was beginning to regard him as her private property. Also, he was sweet on a girl in a lawyer's office. Her name was Penelope and she had a good eye for the main chance.

And not only was Mathew prospering in his work and his love affairs, but he was also most fortunate in other ways. Attending the local race meetings and knowing nothing whatsoever about horses, time after time he made quite useful sums of money by backing certain animals, either because he liked their names, or else because the numbers on their saddle-cloths coincided with those which he had cause to remember for some particular reason, quite unconnected with racing.

One afternoon, for instance, he had a pound on a horse because its number was 20 and he had suddenly remembered the Chinaman had said he would take that number of years off his life. The horse won and paid £185/10s. in the totalisator.

Splashing his money about as he now did, everyone seemed to want to be friendly with him and, going out quite a lot, he was always meeting people, anxious to share in his good fortune. Strangely enough, however, he had developed a great shrewdness of character and always managed to avoid the pitfalls which were being set for him. He flattered himself he could pick out the go-getters from the honest ones every time.

Instead of the little packet of measly sandwiches and the glass of milk which in the days gone by consisted of his lunch, he now made a substantial meal at a good-class café, and sitting always at the same table, got to know a young fellow who generally came to sit opposite to him.

Just nodding casually at each other, at first, it was some weeks before they began to talk of themselves, and then Mathew learnt his new acquaintance was a clerk in a lawyer's office, was twenty-six years of age, and half engaged to a very pretty girl, but had very poor prospects of being able to get married. He was always hoping, however, that one day some great happening would avalanche into his life, and everything would be quite different. He was a great believer in Fate.

"We can't help ourselves," he said. "We're running in a groove, and everything we say or do has been arranged years and years before we were born, to fit in with the lives of other people."

"Then why was it fated," smiled Mathew, "that I should come and sit down at your table."

"Don't know," replied the young fellow. He smiled, "Perhaps it was to teach me not to take so much salt. It was you who told me about it first, and I've learnt since then it makes your arteries grow hard as you get old." He nodded. "So, perhaps, just from this chance meeting with you, I may live ten or fifteen years longer than I should have done if it hadn't happened."

Mathew nodded back, feeling quite a thrill at the important part he might be playing in this boy's destiny.

One lunch-time the boy arrived looking very preoccupied, and after a long silence said earnestly:— "Look here, Mr. Brown, do you ever speculate? Do you ever take a risk?"

Mathew laughed. "I'm middle-aged with a bit of dough, and if I take a girl to the pictures and squeeze her hand in the dark, why, it's always on the cards that she'll be thinking I ought to mean business and start to sue me for breach of promise the next morning." He seemed very amused. "Yes, I'm accustomed to take risks."

The young man laughed back. "I didn't mean in that way. I meant do you ever speculate in stocks and shares?"

Mathew shook his head. "Don't know enough about them." He was anxious. "But what makes you ask?"

"Because," said the young man solemnly, "I'm pretty certain I've got some information about a certain gold-mine which may send the shares up from the few pence they are now to as many shillings, or, perhaps, even pounds. Oh, yes, I know a bit about gold shares. My Dad lost all his money in them and that's why we're so deuced poor today."

Mathew expressed his interest, and having promised the young man profound secrecy, the latter went on. "Listen, last month the Silver Moon people took over another gold mining property, a badly worked mine which so far has done no good, and everyone was very curious why they did it, for they are known as a very shrewd lot. Their shares now stand at seven pence."

"Seven pence!" exclaimed Mathew. "Surely that's not much for a share in a gold mine."

"Often too much," smiled the young man. He went on. "Now here comes the funny business. Next door to us lives a chap called Entwhistle, a retired mining engineer. He's really given up active work now, but sometimes he's still consulted because he's supposed to know more about gold mining than any man in Australia. People don't go to him often, because he charges a deuced big fee. Well, yesterday, he received a telegram, and, because that storm we had has flattened all the telephone posts in our road, the wire was delivered by hand, with the boy, as usual, waiting to know if there was any answer."

The young man spoke very solemnly. "Well, here Fate steps in. I was in our garden when Entwhistle came out of his front door to give the boy the reply to the telegram and as the old man is very deaf he shouted what the words were, 'Halliday, Silver Moon, Kalgoorlie,' he bawled, 'Accept terms—coming by plane tomorrow, Entwhistle.'"

"Then what does it all mean?" frowned Mathew.

"That they think they've struck it rich," was the instant reply, "and they want Entwhistle to assure them it's worth while going to the expense of putting

down new machinery." He nodded, "And I'll bet they paid him a huge sum. He's always vowed he'd never set foot in a plane under five hundred guineas."

"And what do you think'll happen?" asked Mathew.

"The shares'll go up at once the moment it leaks out that Entwhistle's been called in. I shouldn't wonder if they don't go up tuppence or threepence this afternoon."

A short silence followed and then Mathew said with decision. "Look here, my boy, I'll go in with you. We'll buy a thousand shares each, at once, straight-away within the hour."

The young fellow got very red. "Can't do it, sir," he said. "I've no spare cash."

"Well, I'll lend it to you," nodded Mathew. "No, that's all right. It'll be a little excitement for us whatever happens. Now how do you set about getting these shares."

So it ended in the two hurriedly making their way to a stockbroker the young man knew. But the stockbroker was out and to fill in the few minutes before he returned, they went into a hotel and had some drinks. Under the influence of two sloe gins, Mathew took a most rosy view of everything and it ended in him buying two thousand shares for himself and one for his friend. They cost him, with commission, a little over £100.

Nothing happened for three days, and then the boy came rushing excitedly into the café at lunch time to give the startling information that not an hour previously Silver Moons had jumped from eightpence to two shillings.

"It's leaked out that Entwhistle was over there," he whispered hoarsely, "and some say he's given them a marvellous report."

And exactly what report the mining expert had given Mathew never knew. All that interested him was that he found himself being carried violently forward in the crest of a tremendous boom in Silver Moons. The shares soared and soared, from two shillings to five, from five shillings to a pound and then up, up, up until seventy odd shillings was reached. Then, upon the advice of his friend, Mathew sold out, finding himself in the possession of more than £7,000.

Keeping the whole matter to himself for a couple of weeks, he at last went to the heads of the firm and told them what had happened. They were aghast, but, their first surprise over, regarded him with great respect.

"Well, well, Mr. Brown," said old Boomer, "you do astonish us. Certainly, of late, you've given us good reason for surprise in many directions, but we didn't think you had as much go in you as this." He frowned. "And now, of course, I suppose you will be leaving us. You will want to——"

"No, no," broke in Mr. Hunt with a significant look at his partner, "decide nothing precipitately, Mr. Brown." He coughed. "Don't say anything for a few

days, and we may have a suggestion to make to you." He smiled. "You know we are both older than we used to be, and don't want to go on working for ever."

In the meantime, Mathew's love affairs were becoming rather involved, and it seemed he was in the way of getting himself into trouble. He was inclined to think something of his good fortune must somehow have leaked out, as all his lady loves were most actively pushing their claims. He was practically engaged to Dolly Thompson on the quiet; he had been taking the little widow out and buying her expensive presents, and he spent as much time as he could with Penelope of the lawyer's office, when he could safely get away from the other two.

Strangely enough, his deceit did not worry him in the least. Indeed, he never gave it a thought, taking all his love adventures as the natural result of the rejuvenation Wei Hung Ling had promised him. He was free of the Chinaman now, and that did not trouble him either. A month back he had seen in the newspapers that the premises off King William road had been raided, and Ling committed for trial for trafficking in forbidden drugs.

Late one night Mathew took counsel of himself in his bedroom. Things had become very awkward, and a crisis was certainly approaching. That afternoon the partners had announced to their other employees that they were taking him into partnership, and Dolly had at once triumphantly broadcast their engagement. Yet, the previous evening after sitting with the widow on the parklands, and overcome by her caresses and the fragrance of the particular scent she had been using, he had asked her to marry him. Also, that very morning he had lunched with Penelope at a fashionable hotel, and snatched a passionate kiss from her in a secluded corner of the lounge when no one else was by. He had arranged, too, to spend the following Sunday with her at her home.

He looked into the mirror and thoughtfully regarded the image reflected there. He saw a distinguished, handsome man who did not look a day older than 30; a man with a strong, clever face, and calm, confident eyes.

"What a change from what I was six months ago!'' he nodded. "Yes, it's exactly six months to day, on May 2nd, since I first visited old Ling, and what a lot has happened in that time!" He went on. "Sure, you ought to go a long way, Mathew, for nothing now is beyond your grasp. A partner in an important business firm, you must get on the city council. Then it will be only another step to becoming the lord mayor. After that—who knows? You may be Sir Mathew very soon.

He undressed himself and quickly got into bed. "I must get a good sleep now. I have a busy day tomorrow. Dolly, Penelope and Susan, how shall I

manage them all?" but, his head touching the pillow, his thoughts trailed away into nothingness and .... he was asleep.

ONE OF the house surgeons of the Adelaide Hospital was showing two interested elderly ladies over the new wing of the building. As they entered a small ward, some nurses were putting a screen round one of the beds.

"A patient just died?" whispered one of the ladies sympathetically.

The house surgeon nodded. "We expected it. A bad accident case! He hadn't a chance when they brought him in."

"How long ago, since it happened?"

The house surgeon considered. "Three days last Tuesday evening, May 2nd, he was knocked down by a motor lorry in King William road while waiting for a tram. His injuries were shocking. Fractured base of the skull, five ribs broken and a compound fracture of the thigh. But it was probably mostly his own fault, as he reeked of port wine when he was picked up."

"Was he a young man?"

"No, about forty, so his firm told us. He was a clerk in a soft-goods warehouse and, apparently, without any relations or friends, as not a soul's been to see him since he was brought in."

"Oh, what a dreadful death."

The house surgeon smiled. "The accident was dreadful, but the dying wasn't. He's been chock full of morphia and, judging by his talk, has had a lovely time. He won huge sums at the races and made a fortune in a gold-mine. Also, he became the head partner of his soft-goods firm. As for love affairs, why he had sweethearts all over the place, Penelope, Dorothy, Susan, and it seemed he was going to marry all of them."

"How shocking," murmured the other lady. "He must have been a thoroughly bad man!"

The house surgeon shook his head. "No, I don't think so. He was only just an ordinary man and in his dreams he let himself go." He laughed. "His name was Mathew, but he was certainly no saint."

_____

18: John Bartine's Watch

Ambrose Bierce

1842-1914

San Francisco Examiner 22 Jan 1893

Startling Mystery Stories 1967/68, Winter

"THE EXACT TIME? Good God! my friend, why do you insist? One would think— but what does it matter; it is easily bedtime— isn't that near enough? But, here, if you must set your watch, take mine and see for yourself."

With that he detached his watch— a tremendously heavy, old-fashioned one— from the chain, and handed it to me; then turned away, and walked across the room to a shelf of books, began an examination of their backs. His agitation and evident distress surprised me; they appeared reasonless. Having set my watch by his, I stepped over to where he stood, and said, "Thank you."

As he took his timepiece and reattached it to the guard I observed that his hands were unsteady. With a tact upon which I greatly prided myself, I sauntered carelessly to the sideboard and took some brandy and water; then, begging his pardon for my thoughtlessness, asked him to have some and went back to my seat by the fire, leaving him to help himself, as was our custom. He did so and presently joined me at the hearth, as tranquil as ever.

This odd little incident occurred in my apartment, where John Bartine was passing an evening. We had dined together at the club, had come home in a cab and— in short, everything had been done in the most prosaic way; and why John Bartine should break in upon the natural established order of things to make himself spectacular with a display of emotion, apparently forhis own entertainment, I could nowise understand. The more I thought of it, while his brilliant conversational gifts were commending themselves to my inattention, the more curious I grew, and of course had no difficulty in persuading myself that my curiosity usually assumes to evade resentment. So I ruined one of the finest sentences of his disregarded monologue by cutting it short without ceremony.

"John Bartine," I said, "you must try to forgive me if I am wrong, but with the light that I have at present I cannot concede your right to go all to pieces when asked the time o' night. I cannot admit that it is proper to experience a mysterious reluctance to look your own watch in the face and to cherish in my presence, without explanation, painful emotions which are denied to me, and which are none of my business."

To this ridiculous speech Bartine made no immediate reply, but sat looking gravely into the fire. Fearing that I had offended I was about to apologize and

beg him to think no more about the matter, when looking me clamly in the eyes he said:

"My dear fellow, the levity of your manner does not at all disguise the hideous impudence of your demand; but happily I had already decided to tell you what you wish to know, and no manifestation of your unworthiness to hear it shall alter my decision. Be good enough to give me your attention and you shall hear all about the matter.

"This watch," he said, "had been in my family for three generations before it fell to me. Its original owner, for whom it was made, was my great-grandfather, Bramwell Olcott Bartine, a wealthy planter of Colonial Virginia, and as stanch a Tory as ever lay awake nights contriving new kinds of maledictions for the head of Mr. Washington, and new methods of aiding and abetting good King George. One day this worthy gentleman had the deep misfortune to perform for his cause a service of capital importance which was not recognized as legitimate by those who suffered its disadvantages. It does not matter what it was, but among its minor consequences was my excellent ancestor's arrest one night in his own house by a party of Mr. Washington's rebels. He was permitted to say farewell to his weeping family, and was then marched away into the darkness which swallowed him up forever. Not the slenderest clew to his fate was found. After the war the most diligent inquiry and the offer of large rewards failed to turn up any of his captors or any fact concerning his disappearance. He had disappeared, and that was all."

SOMETHING IN Bartine's manner that was not in his words — I hardly knew what it was — prompted me to ask:

"What is your view of the matter— of the justice of it?"

"My view of it," he flamed out, bringing his clenched hand- down upon the table as if he had been in a public house dicing with blackguards—"my view of it is that it was a characteristically dastardly assassination by that damned traitor, Washington, and his ragamuffin rebels!"

For some minutes nothing was said: Bartine was recovering his temper, and I waited. Then I said:

"Was that all?"

"No— there was something else. A few weeks after my great-grandfather's arrest his watch was found lying on the porch at the front door of his dwelling. It was wrapped in a sheet of letter paper bearing the name of Rupert Bartine, his only son, my grandfather. I am wearing that watch."

Bartine paused. His usually restless black eyes were staring fixedly into the grate, a point of red light in each, reflected from the glowing coals. He seemed to have forgotten me. A sudden threshing of the branches of a tree outside

one of the windows, and almost at the same instant a rattle of rain against the glass, recalled him to a sense of his surroundings. A storm had risen, heralded by a single gust of wind, and in a few moments the steady plash of the water on the pavement was distinctly heard. I hardly know why I relate this incident; it seemed somehow to have a certain significance and relevancy which I am unable now to discern. It at least added an element of seriousness, almost solemnity. Bartine resumed:

"I have a singular feeling toward this watch— a kind of affection for it; I like to have it about me, though partly from its weight, and partly for a reason I shall now explain, I seldom carry it. The reason is this: Every evening when I have it with me I feel an unaccountable desire to open and consult it, even if I can think of no reason for wishing to know the time. But if I yield to it, the moment my eyes rest upon the dial I am filled with a mysterious apprehension— a sense of imminent calamity. And this is the more insupportable the nearer it is to eleven o'clock— by this watch, no matter what the actual hour may be. After the hands have registered eleven the desire to look is gone; I am entirely indifferent. Then I can consult the thing as often as I like, with no more emotion than you feel in looking at your own. Naturally I have trained myself not to look at that watch in the evening before eleven; nothing could induce me. Your insistence this evening upset me a trifle. I felt very much as I suppose an opium-eater might feel if his yearning for his special and particular kind of hell were re-enforced by opportunity and advice.

"Now that is my story, and I have told it in the interest of your trumpery science; but if on any evening hereafter you observe me wearing this damnable watch, and you have the thoughtfulness to ask me the hour, I shall beg leave to put you to the inconvenience of being knocked down."

HIS HUMOR did not amuse me. I could see that in relating his delusion he was again somewhat disturbed. His concluding smile was positively ghastly, and his eyes had resumed something more than their old restlessness; they shifted hither and thither about the room with apparent aimlessness and I fancied had taken on a wild expression, such as is sometimes observed in cases of dementia. Perhaps this was my own imagination, but at any rate I was now persuaded that my friend was afflicted with a singular and interesting monomania. Without, I trust, any abatement of my affectionate solicitude for him as a friend, I began to regard him as a patient, rich in possibilities of profitable study. Why not ? Had he not described his delusion in the interest of science ? Ah, poor fellow, he was doing more for science than he knew: not only his story but himself was in evidence. I should cure him if I could, of

course, but first I should make a little experiment in psychology — nay, the experiment itself might be a step in his restoration.

"That is very frank and friendly of you, Bartine," I said cordially, "and I'm rather proud of your confidence. It is all very odd, certainly. Do you mind showing me the watch?"

He detached it from his waistcoat, chain and all, and passed it to me without a word. The case was of gold, very thick and strong, and singularly engraved. After closely examining the dial and observing that it was nearly twelve o'clock, I opened it at the back and was interested to observe an inner case of ivory, upon which was painted a miniature portrait in that exquisite and delicate manner which was in vogue during the eighteenth century.

"Why, bless my soul!" I exclaimed, feeling a sharp artistic delight— "how under the sun did you get that done ? I thought miniature painting on ivory was a lost art."

"That," he replied, gravely smiling, "is not I; it is my excellent great-grandfather, the late Bramwell Olcott Bartine, Esquire, of Virginia. He was younger then than later— about my age, in fact. It is said to resemble me; do you think so?"

"Resemble you? I should say so! Barring the costume, which I supposed you to have assumed out of compliment to the art— or for vraisemblance, so to say — and the no mustache, that portrait is you in every feature, line, and expression."

No more was said at that time. Bartine took a book from the table and began reading. I heard outside the incessant plash of the rain in the street. There were occasional hurried footfalls on the sidewalks; and once a slower, heavier tread seemed to cease at my door— a policeman, I thought, seeking shelter in the doorway. The boughs of the trees tapped significantly on the window panes, as if asking for admittance. I remember it all through these years and years of a wiser, graver life.

Seeing myself unobserved, I took the old-fashioned key that dangled from the chain and quickly turned back the hands of the watch a full hour; then, closing the case, I handed Bartine his property and saw him replace it on his person.

"I think you said," I began, with assumed carelessness, "that after eleven the sight of the dial no longer affects you. As it is now nearly twelve" — looking at my own timepiece— "perhaps, if you don't resent my pursuit of proof, you will look at it now."

He smiled good-humoredly, pulled out the watch again, opened it, and instandy sprang to his feet with a cry that Heaven has not had the mercy to permit me to forget ! His eyes, their blackness strikingly intensified by the

pallor of his face, were fixed upon the watch, which he clutched in both hands. For some time he remained in that attitude without uttering another sound; then, in a voice that I should not have recognized as his, he said:

"Damn you! it is two minutes to eleven!"

I was not unprepared for some such outbreak, and without rising repleid, calmly enough:

"I beg your pardon; I must have misread your watch in setting my own by it."

He shut the case with a sharp snap and put the watch in his pocket. He looked at me and made an attempt to smile, but his lower lip quivered and he seemed unable to close his mouth. His hands, also, were shaking, and he thrust them, clenched, into the pockets of his sack-coat. The courageous spirit was manifestly endeavoring to subdue the coward body. The effort was too great; he began to sway from side to side, as front vertigo, and before I could spring from my chair to support him his knees gave way and he pitched awkwardly forward and fell upon his face. I sprang to assist him to rise; but when John Bartlne rises we shall all rise.

The post-mortem examination disclosed nothing; every organ was normal and sound. But when the body had been prepared for burial a faint dark circle was seen to have developed around the neck; at least I was so assured by several persons who said they saw it, but of my own knowledge, I cannot say if that was true.

Nor can I set limitations to the law of heredity. I do not know that in the spiritual world a sentiment or emotion may not survive the heart that held it, and seek expression in a kindred life, ages removed. Surely, if I were to guess at the fate of B ram well Olcott Bartine, I should guess that he was hanged at eleven o'clock in the evening, and that he had been allowed several hours in which to prepare for the change.

As to John Bartine, my friend, my patient for five minutes, and— Heaven forgive me!— my victim for eternity, there is no more to say. He is buried, and his watch with him— I saw to that. May God rest his soul in Paradise, and the soul of his Virginian ancestor, if, indeed, they are two souls.