PAST MASTERS 167

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

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1: The Time Lock

George Kibbe Turner

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ON that rainy night, some years ago, young Mr. Pettibone, as he was then, stood in the window of the second story law offices of Punderford and Maddox, staring out. It is quite a time to recall so keenly, as he still does, the tune he hummed, the suit he wore, and the coolness of the rain-streaked window glass upon his finger-tips. And yet not unnatural, either. For this was to be the night of his first law case. The matter of the dark young lady and the time lock.

It was nine o'clock, or thereabouts. Outside the recent rain was shining on the jet black pavement of Malcolm's Main Street. The fixed stare of vacant-eyed street lights fell upon the still more vacant-eyed windows of the damp, yellow brick blocks across the deserted street. He stared out as absently as they; a fair-haired, still-faced young man, slowly etching the figure of a duck with his forefinger on the cool, damp window-pane.

Dull deathly dull. Nothing doing in the deadly place. For him. Or ever would be.

"Hello. What's this?" he said, turning.

It was the telephone; an evident mistake. He let it ring.

"Punderford and Maddox," he said, deciding finally to stop it. The voice of a woman answered; a young woman's, it seemed. High, excited, and, he thought, frightened.

"Thank God!"

"At your service," said young Mr. Pettibone. Suddenly alert, brightening, listening closely.

"Is this a member of the firm speaking?— May I come down to see you? Now? On something of great importance. That must be taken care of now— to-night— at once," the clear, eager voice upon the telephone asked, with stammering haste.

"With pleasure, Madame."

"Wait, please. I shall be there at once."

HE sat, with still face, and studious care, marking upon the pad before him at the desk the effigy of a primitive duck, which so often had accompanied his more serious thinking since a child in primary school. And so he waited for the approaching client. Above him, as serious as himself, rose the steel engraving of Lincoln's Cabinet in session. Around him the worn and shiny dark furniture; the general respectability of the old-fashioned waiting-room of the most prosperous of New York suburbs' most prosperous and established law firms.

That so much needed new blood— like his own. A fact as yet unseen by anyone but himself. Canvassing carefully, once more, whether opportunity might not this very night be knocking finally for the young law clerk with the arrival of this untimely and excited seeker for advice. He rose with keen expectance at the sound of light feet upon the worn stairs of the old hall-way beyond the ground-glass door, suddenly and at once quite decided, as to taking the case.

The client was a dark young woman, black-haired, black-eyed, intense. A type which he feels sometimes, has now practically become extinct— with the change in the current styles of dress and manners and women. In a time when it is far worse form to own a genuine positive emotion than a sin. Her cheeks were red; her voice high and clear; her bright eyes fixed and worried. She was something vivid and alive in the world yet; frightened, but resisting still with every fibre that she had.

"Won't you sit down?"

"Thank you. You are the firm, are you not, who represent so many of the stockholders of the First National Bank?"

He watched her; the neat gloves and shoes she wore; the small dark hat, carefully and gallantly put on at just the angle that was right for his taste; romantic, but not sentimental.

"We are, oh yes," said Pettibone, still studying her with his customary aplomb.

"Yes. So father said, and so I came direct to you. To-night. In hopes ... in hopes our interests might be the same. In hopes that when the stockholders understood— that they might want— might help me save my father, and their bank, too."

"Yes?" he encouraged her.

"For I'm terribly afraid."

"Afraid?"

"I'm terribly afraid that if you don't my father may do something rash; even may be killing himself to-night."

"You can't mean that."

"To-night. When I get home. If you don't help me. Soon. Right away. For he's desperate. It was all I could do to get him to let me come here to see you."

"Won't you go on, please?"

The Cabinet of Lincoln and himself stared straight ahead, giving the client time to collect herself.

"It is a little hard," she said, "to tell a stranger."

Leaning forward, he laid his hand upon hers at the other side of the flat desk, pressing it confidentially.

"My dear young person," he told her, "I am not a stranger. I am an attorney—your attorney, if you wish to have me."

"I know— of course."

He still held her hand with his; her eyes with his eyes.

"And the first advice I must give you in our new relation is: Trust your attorney. Tell him everything... Quite frankly ... Or what's the use?"

"I know. Of course."

Releasing her hand, he sat back to hear her story; drawing more and more thoughtfully on his pad, as it developed; yet showing neither in his face nor voice the genuine surprise which struck him at hearing it. Nor afterward when he recapitulated it himself:

"You claim, I understand, that the First National Bank is to be robbed some time to-night by its president, Mr. Wilberforce Jones."

"I do."

"To cover up irregularities of his own in its operation."

"Yes."

"And you further claim that after doing this—as part of his scheme—he plans to charge to the bank examiner, to-morrow morning that your father, the bank's cashier, robbed the bank instead of him."

His client answered with her decisive nod; her eyes not once leaving his. Looking back as steadily, as he proceeded with his summary and her cross-examination.

"Now then, you know all this, you claim, positively, from the president's use of the time lock in the bank's vault. Interrupt me, if you will, please, if I do not get this right."

"I will."

"Your father, Mr. Newell, as I understand you, just before the closing of business this afternoon, hearing that the bank examiner was expected to be there the next morning, went into the office of Mr. Jones, the president of the bank, to expostulate with him for having replaced genuine bonds with forged ones of identical numbers, in the vaults of the bank, and warning him that at any time this might be discovered. Is that right?"

"Yes."

"They two were alone in the bank. No one but themselves heard the quarrel that developed, when Jones learned for the first time that his cashier, your father, the only other person but himself who had access to the vault, knew what Jones had done. Then suddenly, and unexpectedly, Jones charged that for some time he had been suspecting your father of having robbed the bank. And now the time had come to prove it with a show-down. Then telling your father to remain where he was, he went into the vault room, saying he

was putting the time lock on the safe setting it for nine o'clock to-morrow. At which time they two would open the safe to make good their conflicting statements in the presence of the bank examiner."

"That is right."

"But— instead of this— you claim that Jones, the president, did not actually put on the time lock at all. A fact which your father saw by means of a mirror in the president's office and Jones did this, you claim, with the idea of going to the safe to-night. And not only taking the forged bonds out to prove your father's charges wrong, but robbing the bank; and fixing the securities, so as to fit a theory of your father's having robbed the bank, which he will give the bank examiner in event of the three opening the safe together."

"After Jones—Mr. Jones has fixed the safe and put the time lock on afterward," said the client.

"Yes—and your father has no idea of what the charges, what this frame-up, are going to be."

"That's the worst of it, the most terrible part."

"I know— I understand," said the young attorney, taking the next step tactfully. "But is there anything, any hook, any weakness of your father's record in the bank, which Jones can use in confirming or establishing charges? You will excuse me. But I must know this. You must tell me freely as your attorney."

The client gazed back at him with her usual steadiness. "He can say plenty. That's the trouble. He can say my father drinks at times. That he has speculated, and lost money. His personal money; not the bank's. And once in 1929 he overdrew his personal account a thousand dollars or so— for about a day— covering a call for more margin from his broker."

"But that is all; the worst that can be said about your father?"

"Absolutely yes. Except that since that time he has personally been desperately poor and extended to keep going at all. And frightfully worried all the time for fear of what Jones may do to him."

"Framing him, with all the cards stacked exactly right."

"Yes. Exactly. Yes."

"And knowing that Jones' personal affairs will force him to do what he's going to do."

"Yes. Exactly. Now what should I do?"

Silence fell upon the dark furniture of the waiting room; the still-faced likenesses of Lincoln and Seward gazed far away, while young Mr. Pettibone worked carefully at the pad upon his desk; looked up at last, starting to give his first personal client his first advice.

"You are aware, of course, that your statement of facts is a very unusual one?"

"You do not doubt it then?" she came back quickly.

"I do not. No," said young Mr. Pettibone, looking up more slowly, but with a glance not less direct than hers. "But it is only fair, on the other hand, that I should ask you and your father to show us, and after us the world, his good faith and honesty in this matter. Are you willing to do this?"

"I am."

"Then there is simply one thing to do."

"What is that?"

"Your father— and yourself— must rob the bank of every security there. Before Jones does."

She was on her feet now, tense.

"If he does not do this— to prove his case, to have an actual showdown with Jones, before the stockholders or ourselves, if he does not show his good faith, by robbing and demonstrating what is in the bank, we shall not feel that we can take the case."

"But he will do it. He will rob the bank," she cried impulsively.

"I am glad of that," he said, rising.

"But what shall we do," she asked, puzzled, "after that; after we have robbed the bank?"

He gazed at her with his usual calm. He placed his hand upon her shoulder. "My dear Miss Newell," he said. "Frankly, it is your next move. We should not fancy— as counsel for the stockholders— to be your counsel also— if you are guilty. But the moment your father shows his honesty by robbing the safe and demonstrating the actual condition of its contents; why, then, we can undertake his case gladly."

"But what— after we have done this?" —she began, stammering.

"Yes?"

"What shall we do then?"

He pressed his hand upon her shoulder in a calm, professional manner.

"Simply trust your attorney to protect all interests— in a rather complicated case. Simply rob the bank, taking your first step. Trusting your attorney to notify you of the second in due time. Is that clear?"

"But I do not see yet."

"You will."

"Very well. I will."

"Good. Then hurry. Lose no time. Get there first."

He pressed his hand upon her shoulder once again. Saw her to the door. "Don't worry. It's going to be all right. Simply trust your attorney."

Going back, he gave more attention to his artistic pencil work. He had taken a chance, yes— upon an utter stranger's looks. And yet he was not sorry or alarmed. The prize was great: perhaps a double prize— well worth gambling for. Of all women that he had known to date, in none had he felt more confidence, more charm, more certainty in his personal judgment than in this first client. Looking down, he saw the new motif appear from his subconscious in his pencil work. Side by side with the primitive unconscious duck of childhood appeared the Spencerian free-hand dove. Far back in childhood his father had taught it to him, having learned it himself in a single term in business college. It had been a prized accomplishment of childhood writing notes; in his correspondence with the gentler sex in grammar school. Surviving still, as early habits will, in the subconscious.

He roused himself, having finished the outline of his first case, stretched out his hand, making his first move, the arrangement for the proper supervision of his bank robbery. If Punderford and Maddox had handled the case themselves, their course of action would, without doubt, have been different. He saw that clearly. But then they would not have approached it from so many angles.

So many hopes.

"Give me Malcolm 701." After a time he got his man.

"Listen, boy. Stop arguing. And get on your clothes. And come running. Each minute over ten you take getting here may cost you 5000 dollars."

Once more alone on the deserted main street Miss Anne Newell. turned on the switch, pushed down the grinding starter, startled the echoes from the brick-walled silence with the explosion of the noisy motor of the old-style family car. Herself more or less uneasy.

Robbing the largest bank in town of everything it contained, for the benefit of its stockholders, had seemed unusual even when advised by the lawyer for the stockholders in the dark, serious office with its old, conservative, steel engravings. Now out here in the dark alone it seemed really radical. Did this young attorney, this young-appearing partner in Punderford and Maddox know exactly the law in the case? He was very young. Yet he seemed smart, well-dressed, positive. Everything you would expect a lawyer to be. And he had nice eyes. She adjusted her hat and drove on.

The weather, bad enough before her trip to his office, had changed ; and not at all for the better. It had rained again quite heavily. Low, darkish clouds like tangled, matted hair passed threateningly across lighter openings in the higher clouds. The patent-leather pavements looked shinier and more sinister. She caught, with a sudden, unaccustomed jumping at the throat, the added

gleam of the rubber-coated policeman: the one guardian of the law upon his lonely beat.

"But we'll do it. We'll do just what he said," she told the darkness, turning now from Main into Prince Street from damp, glistening blocks, to dark, shiny, maple trees.

"It will be all right. All right, Father will understand," she told herself again —turning the corner into Elm Street— and went into a skid on her smooth, old tyres which landed her practically at her front walk.

The house was still dark; she stole into it.

"Father!"

"Yes."

So far, so good; he was there, waiting in the dark.

"What did he say about it, Anne?" His voice was just a little thick.

She told him, in the dark, a grey figure still and slouched in his chair.

"That's what he said, eh?"

"Yes. Is it all right?"

"Sure. I've been waiting for twenty-five years for a showdown with that old devil, Jones."

That was all she could get out of him. Whether it was judgment or hate behind the decision to go, she did not know. He had been drinking, too, since she left, but how much she could not tell.

"Come on. Let's go."

They started back, she driving, he sitting behind, silent, with his two suit-cases for the papers. It was already ten o'clock. Now that they were going through with it the one thing was to get there to the bank before Jones.

She drove down the slippery streets as fast as possible on her slippery tyres; slowed down carefully opposite the alley behind the bank.

"Everything all clear?"

She looked around. "Yes."

Her father moved quickly with his two suitcases back into the darkness of the alley and back door of the bank. She closed the car door softly and sat there watching, waiting.

THE section of Main Street ahead of the car was empty, soundless, as the bottom of the sea. Beside her, slightly back, the blackness of the alley showed blacker behind the dim whiteness of the bank. Sinister as all alleys are at night, even in the calmest, most respectable of New York suburbs. She turned sharply away at a sound in the soundlessness of the empty street— of slow, heavy, measured feet on the Main Street pavement. The single Main Street cop appeared through the wind-shield in his dark and shiny coat, like a seal in a

glass aquarium. She sat motionless. Saw him go. That he was not coming on to see her. Then suddenly she turned about, towards the alley.

It seemed to her now, back in the darkness, she had a sense of something there, moving. A clot of slightly thicker darkness. In the black hole of the alley; beyond the sharp-cut line where the light ended.

She moved at last from her listening. It was her father, coming out. She heard the turning of the knob and lock. The wait as he set down the bags. The closing of the door again.

"Just a minute,'' said the clot of shadow.

"What is this?" her father stammered. "Who are you?"

"Don't worry. Come along. I'll take the bags."

"You!" her father said. And came on in silence.

"Get in."

He put the suit cases in after her father. Got in himself.

"Drive over to the offices of Punderford and Maddox," said the shadow.

Mr. Wilberforce Jones, withdrawing his cold hand from his front door knob, stole back again through the dark hall and the unlighted library to answer the startlingly unexpected telephone call that had caught him, as he was leaving.

"Hello," he said, softly, "yes." And received the unexpected message from the still more unexpected source.

"This is Punderford and Maddox speaking."

"Yes," said Mr. Jones, deeply suspicious.

"Pettibone at the phone."

"Oh, yes, yes," said Mr. Jones, getting the voice now; that light-haired boy in Punderford and Maddox's. He had no use for him. "What can I do for you?"

"Would you care to step down to our office?"

"At this time of night?" exclaimed Mr. Jones.

"Or shall I give you the bad news over the wire?"

"The news! What news?" said Mr. Jones, his teeth clacked slightly, as they did when he got excited. They had never fitted him well.

"Your bank, sir, has just been robbed. If you will come here at once, we can put you on the trail of the robbers. Before notifying the police."

"But how— why?" said Mr. Jones.

"Hurry, please, Mr. Jones. There is no time to lose. Come to our office, unless you would rather meet us at police headquarters."

MR. JONES' teeth clacked again; the goose flesh rose upon his body. It was not alone the words, but the tone, that seemed some way suggestive.

"I'll be there. I'll come right over."

It was impossible; a shame, the whole thing. For a man of his age and standing in the community, to be first forced to rob his bank, in self defence, at this time of night. And suddenly without warning to be called up in the dark and told it was already robbed. Yet there it was. And perhaps all for the best. If it were really robbed. He would see.

He put his long, damp fingers on his hip to the old revolver he had put there earlier. In case of accident or interruption. Went softly out.

The bank was just as usual, he saw going by. The windows in Punderford and Maddox's were lighted. After a minute or so he went up.

"Glad you came so soon, Mr. Jones. Won't you sit down?" It was that Pettibone, the young lawyer. "Just a minute while I get the others."

Others! Mr. Jones sat down, somewhat slowly, feeling the unaccustomed hardness of the revolver in his rear pocket as he did so.

By and by this Pettibone reappeared from the office of Mr. Punderford, the senior partner, where he had gone. Another figure followed him; but not Mr. Punderford, as he had hoped.

"You know Mr. Sturgess?"

"Oh, yes, certainly," said Mr. Jones, smiling his set, false-toothed, elderly smile. It was young Sturgess, the representative of the Great Republic Guardian and Fidelity Company which wrote the bank's indemnity insurance for losses through theft.

"It was Mr. Sturgess who captured the robber red-handed." said the lawyer.

"Then you have him, the robber?" said Mr. Jones quickly.

"Just in there," he answered, nodding at the ground glass door into the second private office. "He has confessed," he said in a lower voice.

"Who— who is he?" asked Mr. Jones jerkily.

But he did not answer that at once. "He then confessed the taking of the securities, of every security in the bank."

"Every security?"

"And now he demands that we take them and him at once to the police department."

THE whole thing was unreasonable and unfair. He sat there, Wilberforce J. Jones, the president of the First National Bank, beneath the steel engraving of Lincoln's Cabinet in Punderford and Maddox's office— here at ten p.m. To hear stuff like this from this young law clerk; and feel the hardness of his pistol, that he himself had put there, growing more and more noticeable in his hip pocket.

"Or the bank examiner, if you prefer," said the young whippersnapper, more and more politely. "Claiming that he has robbed the bank in good faith

and merely wishes the chance now to demonstrate this to the stockholders and the bank examiner. Whatever that may mean to you!"

Mr. Jones did not respond, his faculties not coming back at once. The one sensation, that hard revolver in his hip pocket, dominating everything else more and more.

"Something about the time lock of the bank being left off by you to-night—which gave him his opportunity, whatever that means. So we sent for you to find out." He looked up with no visible expression, while Mr. Jones stood listening to a new voice strangely high and shrill; yet one he had often heard before.

"Bring him in. Let's see them both. Both the robber and the bonds."

"With pleasure."

It was a moment before Newell was in the glass doorway; he and the lawyer each bringing in a bag of bonds. And the idea came over Mr. Jones as to what he should do.

"What do you say? Shall I call him? The bank examiner at the hotel. To have the showdown?" the lawyer's voice was going on.

The pistol on Mr. Jones' hip grew suddenly light and disappeared. He found himself suddenly waving it. "No you don't. No you don't. Stand over there. Keep off from that telephone"; that strange voice that he knew so well was going on until he stopped it suddenly, and went on talking in his natural voice.

"Now, then, let's get this thing straightened out if we can."

"Why not?" This lawyer, this still-faced boy was answering and then turning toward the third glass door.

"Miss Newell."

"Yes."

"Is your door locked?"

"Yes."

"Get ready to call the police, when I say three."

Mr. Jones watched him steadily; down the level pistol barrel across his long white hand; a strange sight that he never thought that he would live to see.

"One... Are you ready, Mr. Jones, to stop your jesting?... For you know, Mr. Jones, this is foolishness."

"You'll see," said Mr. Jones, still stiffly holding out the gun before him.

"Two. Miss Newell, will you take hold of the receiver without removing it?"

"I have."

"What do you say, Mr. Jones? Must we do this thing, Mr. Jones? Must we really?"

"No." Mr. Jones still heard his voice responding. "No. You can't do this thing to me. Hand over those two suitcases to me. That is the property of the bank."

He could see him looking back up the revolver barrel, still arguing. "Why be foolish, Mr. Jones, why not make arrangements— inside the family here without calling in the police— the authorities. Why not simply sit back with Mr. Sturgess here to represent the indemnity company, and the firm of Punderford and Maddox the interests of the stockholders. Why go to gaol, unnecessarily, Mr. Jones? When a compromise can so easily be arranged."

The pistol wavered slightly at this point. Mr. Jones saw it do so.

"Punderford and Maddox, Punderford and Maddox! Since when were you Punderford and Maddox?" he said and laughed loudly.

His harsh amusement woke a slow smile from the young attorney at the desk. "You are quite right, Mr. Jones. Thanks for the suggestion."

"What are you doing now?" exclaimed Mr. Jones, his ancient pistol rising once more, as the lawyer, watching him, reached for the desk phone.

He waved his free hand reassuringly. "Calling up Mr. Maddox at his house, that's all. To fix that up for you: that little matter of the partnership."

As he said this he continued marking very carefully on the pad before him— turning his head critically from side to side, as if still uncertain of the effect. Watching carefully, over his shoulder Mr. Jones saw dimly what he thought it was: A broadly smiling duck, wearing a pronounced bang.

Joe Maddox, the slightly junior partner of Punderford and Maddox, came growling finally to the phone. Standing in his pyjamas in the dark, with his bare feet on the bare floor, he shook his grizzled forelock at the transmitter.

"Well, what is it?"

He was a man of violence; had made his living by violence for twenty-five years. He was the jury lawyer of the firm, the toughest jury lawyer in the county.

The bland young voice came back to him. "This is Punderford, Maddox and Pettibone," he thought he heard it say.

"This is what?" roared Joe Maddox, recognising it at once. He was a very profane man, when started.

It was that kid; that crazy, lightheaded Pettibone, getting gay on the partnership idea once more.

"Pardon me. My mistake. This is Punderford and Maddox. Pettibone speaking."

"Well, what is it? Is the county courthouse on fire?"

"No. But I've got the First National Bank here."

"Oh yeah?"

"You've often said you'd like to see what was going on inside there— as a stockholder yourself."

"Well, what of it?"

"Service," the young maniac was saying back. "Our motto. One word and it is done— we are holding the bank here for you. The president, and the cashier and all the assets; some $450,000 in securities in two black bags. And Mr. Jones himself here now guarding it and me with a big pistol, all waiting for you. And if you don't believe it, wait!"

Standing in the chilly dark, Mr. Maddox heard another voice; the voice of Jim Sturgess of the Great Republic Guardian and Fidelity Company. "You'll have to come down, Joe. The sooner the better."

He clapped back the telephone, dressed, started. What was going on? What would Jim Punderford, the senior partner, say to this new stunt. The old firm of Punderford and Maddox, the standard law firm of the county, wrecked for the whim, the sudden fancy of a mad boy. A conscious eccentric, an original who drew ducks upon a pad before making his eccentric answers; and the greatest kidder of all time. Yet doing nothing without a definite objective.

THEY were all waiting silently when he reached the office; the four men, and this good-looking, black-eyed girl. He knew her at the second look; it was Jim Newell's little girl with the black pigtails, grown up. Young Pettibone introduced her.

"Kindly meet my first client. The first business I brought into the firm."

Joe Maddox looked at him making his marks on the pad as he talked. Getting around to his purpose; to that partnership thought again no doubt.

"I took the liberty, in your absence, and Mr. Punderford's, to give her the advice which has brought us here to-night," he said, waving around easily with his pencil at the two black bags, which he claimed held $450,000 dollars at least; all the bank's securities.

"He told them— he advised these people here, to rob my bank," said old Jones, getting excited; trying to hurry the youngster.

He just sat there, drawing his ducks. "Telling them Punderford and Maddox advised it, too."

He looked up at last. "Pleasing you, Joe," he said. (Everybody called Maddox, Joe. He was the best and easiest-known court lawyer in the county.) "Giving you a look in at that old First National Bank Mystery. Showing devotion to God, country, and Punderford and Maddox."

They were in for it; there was nothing to do but go ahead after old man Jones; and slam the heart out of the old devil. Between Maddox and himself, and Sturgess and the others, they had him on the run; and a compromise

started. Well on the way to an arrangement— to let the old man out, and take over what assets he had; and keep the bank going.

IT was after that that young Pettibone started out for what he was after personally, lifting his head from his drawing.

"There is just one more small matter; another angle of the case, that I would like to secure your advice upon as an older attorney," he said, looking over to Joe Maddox very calmly.

"Ah-ha," said Maddox, looking back, watching it coming.

"About the professional ethics of this case and myself personally."

"I see."

"For I find myself on the horns of a dilemma."

"Oh you do, eh?" said old Joe Maddox, scowling at him under his long untidy forelock. "Well, let's get you off it. Which is it?"

"You see, as I viewed the case," said the young madman, looking up again. "As I viewed the case as brought here by our client—" (He waved his arm politely.) "There were different possibilities as to action. I could, of course, have advised my client to take the matter to the authorities at once. Perhaps locking up the safe with his own combination first, you see, which would very probably have entailed the closing of the bank."

"Ug," said Joe Maddox.

"What I did, of course, was to advise the robbing of the bank... in good faith. Under proper supervision," he said, waving now at Sturgess, the Indemnity man. "An advice, that very possibly the firm— either Mr Punderford or yourself, would not have given, if here. Correct me if I am wrong."

Mr. Maddox not answering. He went on with his plea.

"Which leaves us, as I see it, in this situation: If I, on the one hand, only advised my client to rob the bank for the good of the State— of the people at large— once having done this, my duty is to call in the authorities now, to prove the robbery to be in good faith, for the benefit of all, and indicating, of course, the whereabouts and the receivers of the stolen goods, which, of course, might be liable to cause comment; not only for me personally, but even for Punderford and Maddox— in whose offices the stuff would be found. You see my point?"

"Hum," said Mr. Maddox, still watching him, as he went back to his drawing, looked up again.

"Now! And here we come to the crux of the case," he said. They all watched him, especially the bright-eyed girl. "On the other hand, if I were a member of this firm, representing not only the interests of these clients here but also for the stock-holders, my duty— the whole ethics of the thing

change— from that moment on. I could scarcely go to the authorities; and wreck the interests of my clients by the closing of the bank. I could scarcely reveal the present situation of the securities of the bank here. To the authorities."

They still looked at him in silence as he raised his artistic pencil from his drawing.

"You get my meaning perhaps; a partnership, a partnership. What else would make such an excellent, a foolproof solution of the dilemma in which we both find ourselves?"

"Oh yeah," said Joe Maddox, his eye still on him.

"Correct me, if I am wrong."

"Starting when?"

"At eight to-morrow morning. Before banking hours."

"And subject to Old Man Punderford's O.K. in the morning." After all, he had done the job, the crazy nut had turned the trick.

"O.K. with me," he said, making more careful marks upon his pad, and then all at once raising it. "Listen, Joe, cast your eye on this. How's that for a masterpiece?"

"What is it? If you know."

"A duck."

"A duck," said Joe Maddox. "It looks to me more like a pigeon."

"You're right. It is!" said the young loon, as if surprised. "Now you speak of it. That's exactly what it is. A Spencerian dove. I used to make them for my girl, 'way back—" he started, and stopped, staring. They all did.

That girl; the black-eyed Newell child, that he had told to rob the bank was having hysterics all at once. Young Pettibone was by her side, holding her; talking to her as if there was nobody else there; kidding her back to normal.

"Relax." he said, "that's all. Put yourself in the hands of your attorney. Ease up."

After a while she raised her head up from his shoulder, laughing more naturally.

He put it back again— with a gentle pressure, but she refused to leave it.

"We'll have to go home now. My father and I."

"Taking your attorney with you. In case of any interference. And you can stay here, to watch over the $450,000 till I come back, pardner," he continued, gazing at Maddox very calmly.

Joe Maddox stood there with the rest, watching him pass out with his clients; holding the arm of the Newell girl; the one he afterwards married.

2: The Voice of Gunbar

E. W. Hornung

1866-1921

The Pall Mall Magazine Nov 1893

In: *Some Persons Unknown*, Scribners, NY, 1898

"H'SH! DID YOU hear a coo-ee?"

I shook my head in some surprise. My host seemed a good fellow; but hitherto he had proved an extremely poor companion, and for five minutes, I suppose, neither of us had said a word. My eyes had fallen from the new well, with its pump and white palings shining like ivory under the full moon, to our two shadows skewered through and through by those of the iron hurdles against which we were leaning. These hurdles enclosed and protected a Moreton Bay fig, which had been planted where the lid of the old well used to lie, so I had just been told; and I had said I wondered why one well should have been filled in and another sunk so very near the same place, and getting no answer I had gone on wondering for those five minutes. So if there had been any sound beyond the croaking of the crickets (which you get to notice about as much as the tick of a clock), I felt certain that I must have heard it too. I, however, was a very new chum, whereas Warburton of Gunbar was a ten-year bushman, whose ear might well be quicker than mine to catch the noises of the wilderness; and when I raised my eyes inquisitively there was a light in his that made me uneasy.

"Hear it now?" he said quietly, and with a smile, as a seaman points out sails invisible to the land-lubber. "I do— plainly."

"I don't," I candidly replied. "But if it's some poor devil lost in the mallee, you'll be turning out to look for him, and I'll lend you a hand."

His homestead, you see, was in the heart of the mallee, and on the edge of a ten-mile block which was one tangle of mallee and porcupine scrub from fence to fence. I shuddered to think of anyone being bushed in that stuff, for away down in Warburton's eyes there was a horror that had gone like a bullet to my nerves. I was therefore the more surprised at the dry laugh with which he answered:

"You'd better stop where you are."

I could not understand the man. He was not only the manager of Gunbar, but overseer and store-keeper as well, an unmarried man and a solitary. One's first impression of him was that his lonely life and depressing surroundings had sadly affected his whole nature. He had looked askance at me when I rode up to the place, making me fancy I had at last found the station where an uninvited guest was also unwelcome. After that preliminary scrutiny, however, his manner had warmed somewhat. He asked me several questions concerning

the old country from which we both came; and I remember liking him for putting on a black coat for supper, which struck me as a charming conceit in that benighted spot, and not a woman within twenty-five miles of us. His latest eccentricity pleased me less. Either he was chaffing me, and he had heard nothing (but his sombre manner made that incredible), or he was prepared to let a fellow-creature perish fearfully without an attempt at rescue. I was thankful when he explained himself.

"I know who it is, you see," he said presently, striking a match on the hurdle and re-lighting his pipe. "It's all right."

"But who is it?" said I; for that would not do for me.

"It's Mad Trevor," he returned gravely. "Come now!" he added, looking me in the face much as he had done before inviting me to dismount; "do you mean to say you have got as far as this and never heard the yarn of Mad Trevor of Gunbar?"

I made it clear that I knew nothing at all about it; and in the end he told me the story as we stood in the station yard, and lounged against those iron hurdles right under the great round moon.

"My lad, I was as young as you are when I came to this place; but that's very near ten years ago, and ten years take some time in the mallee scrub. Yes, I know I look older than that; but this country would age anybody, even if nothing happened to start your white hairs before their time. I'm going to tell you what did happen within my first two months on this station. Mad Trevor was manager then, and he and I were to run the show between us as soon as I knew my business. To learn it, I used to run up the horses at five o'clock in the morning, and run 'em out again last thing at night, for the drought had jolly nearly dried us up, and in the yard yonder we had to give every horse his nose-bag of chaff before turning him out. Well, between sparrow-chirp and bedtime I was either mustering or boundary-riding, or weighing out rations in the store, or taking them to the huts in the spring-cart, or making up the books, or sweeping out my store, or cleaning up the harness; but I never had ten minutes to myself, for old Trevor believed in making me work all the harder because I was only to get my tucker for it till I knew the ropes. And for my part I'm bound to say I thoroughly enjoyed the life in those days, as I daresay you do now. The rougher the job, the readier was I to tackle it. So I think the boss was getting to like me, and I know I liked him; but for all that, he was mad, as I soon found out from the men, who had christened him Mad Trevor.

"It appeared that he had come to Gunbar some three or four years before me, with his young wife and their baby girl, Mona, who was five years old when first I saw her— riding across this very yard on her father's shoulders. Ay, and I can see her now, with her yellow head of hair and her splendid little legs

and arms! She was forever on Mad Trevor's back, or in his arms, or on his knee, or at his side in the buggy, or even astride in front of him on the saddle-bow; and her father's face beaming over her shoulder, and his great beard tickling her cheeks, and he watching her all the time with the tenderest love that ever I saw in human eyes. For, you see, the wife had died here on Gunbar, and lay buried in the little cemetery we have behind the stock-yards; but she was going to live again in little Mona; and Trevor knew that, and was just waiting.

"But his trouble had driven him quite mad; for often I have been wakened when I'd just dropped off, by hearing him come down the verandah trailing his blanket after him; and away he was gone to camp all night on his wife's grave. The men used to hear him talking to her up there; it would have made your heart bleed for him, he was such a rough-and-ready customer with all of us but the child.

"Well, one day we were out on the run together, he and I in the buggy. It was to fix a new rope round the drum of the twelve-mile whim— at the far side of the mallee, that is— and I recollect he showed me how it was done that day so that I never needed showing again, and it was because I was quickish at picking up such things that he liked me. But a brute of a dust-storm came on just as we finished, and we had to wait at the whim-driver's hut till it was over; and that was the first time I ever heard him mention little Mona's name behind her back. For the whim-driver had a fine coloured print, from some Christmas number, stuck up over his bunk, and it was a treat to hear the poor boss beg it from him to bring home to the little one. It was as though the bare thought of the kid made a difference in the look of his eye and the tone of his voice; for he had been swearing at the rope and us in his best style; but he never swore once on the drive back, he only made me hold the rolled print in my hand the whole time; and I had to take tremendous care of it, and hand it over to him the moment we pulled up in the yard here, so that he might give it to little Mona first thing. But that was not to be: the child was lost. She had been missing since the time of the dust-storm, which was mid-day, and all hands but the cook who told us, and the nurse who was responsible and beside herself, were out searching for her already.

"The boss took the news without immediately getting down from the buggy, and with none of the bluster which he usually had ready for the least thing. But his face was all hair and freckles, and I recollect how the freckles stood out when he turned to speak to me; and to this day I can feel the pinch of his fingers on the fleshy part of my arm.

" 'Harry,' he says, in a kind of whisper, 'you must turn these two out, and then run up Blücher and Wellington; and you must drive that nurse girl away

from this, Harry— you must take her away this very night. For if my child is dead, I'll kill her too— by God, but I will!'

"But the nurse had seen us drive up, and as Mad Trevor crossed the yard heavily, like a dazed man, she ran out from the verandah and threw herself at his knees, sobbing her heart out. What he said to her first I couldn't catch: I only know that in another moment he was crying like a child himself. No wonder either, when the mallee is the worst kind of scrub to get lost in, and there had been enough dust to clean out deeper tracks than a child's, and when it was growing late in the afternoon, and the poor little thing out for hours already. But it was the most pitiful sight you ever saw— the servant girl in hysterics and the poor old boss steadying his voice to take the blame off her he'd said he'd kill. Ay, he was standing just in front of the verandah, within three yards of where we are now, and that rolled-up print was still in his hand.

"So no more was said about my carting the poor girl off that night; but Wellington and Blücher were run up all the same, and at sundown they were bowling the buggy away back to the twelve-mile with me in her. You see, the twelve-mile whim-driver was Gunbar George, our oldest hand, who knew every inch of the run, so the boss thought that George would lay hold of little Mona sooner than he could, if she was in the mallee. And that's where she was, we were all quite certain; and George was certain too, when I told him; and he told of a man he himself had once found in our mallee, stone-dead, with 'died from thirst' scratched in the grime on the bottom of his quart pot, and all within a mile of this very homestead.

"That wasn't a pretty story to leave behind with a new chum who was going to camp alone in a lonely hut for the first time of asking, and nothing to think about but the poor little bairn that was lost. I tell you, I shall remember that night as long as I live, and how I felt when I had seen the last of George and the buggy in the moonlight; for by that time it was night, and just such another as this, with the moon right overhead, as round as an orange, and not a cloud in the sky. Ah! we have plenty of nights like that in the back-blocks, and one full moon is as like the last as two peas, for want of clouds; and somehow they always seem to come before they're due; yet it's a weary while to look back upon, with that night at the end of all, like a gate after five miles of posts and wire. Say now— have you never heard him all this time?" He had paused, with his head bent and on one side.

I replied that I had heard nothing but his story; that what I wanted to hear was the end of it, and that Mad Trevor would keep. He smiled when I said that, and stood listening for another minute or more, with his eyes drawn back into his head.

"Ah, well!" he tossed up his head and went on, "it came to an end in time, like most nights; but the worst was before it began, when I could hear George cracking his whip whenever I stood still. So I stood still until I knew I should hear him no more, and then I blew up the fire for my tea, for I had a fair twist after all that driving. But Lord, you'll hear how your boots creak the first time you camp alone in a hut— especially if it's a good one with a floor to it like our twelve-mile! I tell you I took mine off, and then I put 'em on again, because my stocking-soles made just as much noise in their own way, and it was a creepier way. Then there are two or three rooms to the hut out there— it's a fine hut, our twelve-mile— and I had to poke my nose into them all before I could tackle my tea. And then I had to walk right round the hut in the moonlight, as if it had been a desert island. But it was lighter outside than in, for I had nothing but a slush-lamp— you know, a strip of moleskin in a tin of mutton fat— and I didn't understand the working of one in those days any better than I suppose you would now. Well, then, the whim-water at the twelve-mile is brackish, so I had to fill the billy at an open tank that was getting low; but there'd been a tantalising little shower of sixty points a day or two before that had made the water muddy; and I very well remember that the billy looked full of tea before I opened my hand to slip the tea in. Then the hut was swarming with bull-ants, and they came crawling up the sides of the billy and into the tea where I had set it to cool on the floor; and the light was so bad that I had to chance those ants, because you couldn't tell them from tea-leaves. Well, I could have enjoyed the experience, and thought of the fine letter home it would have made, if I hadn't been thinking all the time of that poor little thing in the mallee. I was just about as new a chum as you are now, and there was a kind of interest in turning my pouch inside out for the last pipeful of the cut-up tobacco I had brought up with me from Melbourne. It was one of the last fills of cut-up that ever I had until you handed me your pouch to-night, because when you once get used to the black cakes you'll find you'll stick to them. So there I sat and smoked my pipe on the doorstep, and kept looking at the moon, and thinking of the old people in the old country, and wishing they could see me just then. I daresay you think like that sometimes, but you'll find you get over that too. It was worse to think of that little mite in the mallee scrub, and how she had sat on my knee the night before; and how she would come into my store when I was doing the books, spill the flour about, and keep on asking questions. That's the store over there, at the other side of the new well, with the bell on top and the narrow verandah in front. I must show you little Mona's height on the centre post: I had to measure her every morning after once getting her to bed by telling her she only grew in her sleep.

"Well, thinking wouldn't do any good, and my last pipe of cut-up was soon done, for it was nothing but powder. I had brought a cake of the black stuff with me, but it was too strong for me in those days. So then I thought I had better turn in, though it was only ten o'clock; so I took my blanket and the slush-lamp to the little dark room at the back, and pulled off my coat and boots, and spread my blanket on George's bunk. And before I lay down— well, I thought I should like to put in a prayer for the poor little thing that was lost; and I reckon it was about the last time I was ever on my knees at that business, for you'll find these back-blocks don't make a man more religious than he need be. But it was a comfort to me that night; and, while I was kneeling, a little kitten of George's, that I'd never noticed when I first looked into the room, came out and went for my stocking-soles; and that was another comfort, I tell you! Mind you, I was twelve miles from a house, and five from the nearest fellow-creature, a boundary-rider on the next run. I had never been able to get that out of my head, so the kitten was a godsend, and though he would come on to the bed to tickle my toes, I wouldn't have been without him for all I was worth. I had a paper too— one of my home papers that I hadn't had time to read; and I stuck up the slush-lamp, and strained my eyes at the print until I couldn't keep them open any longer; and what with the kitten, that was purring very loud at my feet (but the louder he made it the homelier it sounded), I found myself tumbling off to sleep long before I had expected to, and in better heart too.

"I suppose I must have slept for some hours, for when I woke the moon was low and swollen, and hanging like a Chinese lantern in the very middle of my open doorway. But I never looked at my watch; I lay there staring at the setting moon, and listening for a repetition of the sound that had roused me. I had not long to wait, but yet long enough to make me wonder at the time whether I mightn't have heard it in my dreams only. And then it came again— the long-drawn wail, the piercing final cry of a coo-ee from one that had learnt to coo-ee before he could speak. As my feet touched the floor I heard another coo-ee; as I ran out into the moonshine there came a fourth; but the fifth was in my ear before I knew that they all came from the mallee scrub that spreads westward from here to within half a mile of the twelve-mile whim. Then I answered as well as I knew how; but the acquirement was a very recent one in my case; and besides, my wits were still in a tangle. For first I thought it was the child herself, until I realised, with a laugh at the absurdity of the idea, that she could neither walk so far nor coo-ee like that; and then I supposed it must be some chance traveller that had got bushed, like others before him, in that deadly mallee. But all the while I was answering his coo-ees as best I could, and running in my socks in the direction from which they seemed to come. And

long before I spied my man I made sure that it was Mad Trevor himself, for I knew no other with such lungs, and who else would have searched for a bairn of five so many weary miles from the spot where it had last been seen?

"But, as a matter of fact, he himself had no notion where he was, until he saw me standing in front of him in the low moonlight. Then he wanted to know what I meant by coming back from the twelve-mile; for, don't you see, he thought he had been coasting around the home-station all night— and that'll tell you about our mallee! When I set him right he just stood there, wringing his big hands like a woman; and it was worse to see than when he cried like a child before the little one's nurse.

"Of course I got him to come back with me to the hut; and he leant on my shoulder with his sixteen stone, and he just said, 'Well, Harry, I don't believe she's in the mallee at all. I've been coo-eeing for her the whole night, ever since you went; and George has been coo-eeing for her ever since he came; and all hands have been coo-eeing for her in the mallee all night long. And I don't believe she's there at all. I believe she's somewhere about the homestead all the time. We never looked there. What fools we all are. You shall make me a pannikin of tea, and I'll turn in and have a sleep, Harry; and we'll go back together when it's light; and we'll find her asleep in the chaff-house, I shouldn't wonder, if they haven't found her already; you bet we'll find her safe and sound in some hole or corner, the rogue! frightening her old dad out of all his wits.'

"And indeed, as he spoke, he gave a mad laugh even for him; and I shrank away from under his great hand, that would keep tightening on my shoulder; and left him to sit down in the hut while I went to the wood-heap, and then to the tank to rinse and refill the billy.

"But that notion of his about the homestead had been my notion too, in a kind of way; only I had kept it to myself because they were all so cock-sure it was the mallee, and they would know best. I was thinking it out, though, as I chopped the wood, and thinking it out as I rinsed the billy. Now, to do this where the water was clearest, I had to lean over from a bit of a staging, the tank being low, as I told you. But this time, through thinking so much more of Mona than of what I was doing, I lost my balance, and very nearly toppled in. And then I had to think no more, for in a flash I knew where little Mona was."

The instant he paused I saw him listening. He was standing in front of me now, but my back was still to the little fig-tree, and my hands had the hurdle tight. I neither spoke nor took my eyes off him till he went on.

"Yes, she was under the ground you're standing on," said Warburton, nodding his head as I started from the place; "she had fallen into the old well, and pulled down the lid in trying to save herself. I knew it at the moment I was

near toppling into the twelve-mile tank that wasn't one foot deep. It turned out to be so. But I was never surer of it than when I went back to the hut, spilling the water the whole way, I was in such a tremble. And the difficulty was to keep the knowledge— for knowledge it was— from the poor boss; it had cheered him so to think the child had never been near the mallee! Why, before daylight he dozed off quite comfortably on George's bunk in my blanket; and I sat and watched him, and listened to him snoring; and could have fetched the axe from the wood-heap and brained him where he lay, so that he might never know.

"And he took it so calmly after all! I do assure you, when we had buried her alongside her mother, he stood where we are now, and set all hands digging the new well and filling in the old, and swore at us like a healthy man when we didn't do this or that his way. It was he who designed those palings, and would have no more lids, but a pump; though there was neither woman nor child on the station to meet with accidents now, but only us men. And he was smoking his pipe when he planted this fig, for I was by at the time, and remember him telling me his wife had brought it from Moreton Bay in Queensland. I had seen it often in a pot, and now I had to say whether it was plumb; and with his pipe in his mouth and his head on one side he seemed as callous as you please. And for three weeks, to my certain knowledge, he slept every night in his room, and I would have thought nothing of sleeping there with him, he was bearing it so grandly. Then came the full moon and the bright nights again; and we heard him in the mallee, coo-eeing for the child that lay beside her mother—him that had buried them both!

"Well, he didn't come back next morning, so now all hands turned out to search for him. But we never found him all day, for he had crossed his tracks again and again; and all next night we heard him coo-eeing away for his dead child, but now his coo-ee was getting hoarse; and God knows why, but none of us could manage to set eyes on him. It was I who found him the day after. He was lying under a hop-bush, but the sun had shifted and was all over him. His lips were black, and I felt certain he was dead. But when I sung out he jumped clean to his feet, with his fists clenched and his red beard blowing in the hot wind, and his face and his eyes on fire. And if he had never been mad before, he was then.

"He opened his mouth, and I expected a roar, but I couldn't understand a word he said until he had half emptied my water-bag.

" 'What do you want with me?' he says at last; and of course I said I wanted him to come back to the station with me. So he says, 'You leave me alone— don't you meddle with me. I'm not coming back till I find my little 'un that's bushed in this mallee.' So then I saw there was nothing for it but firmness, and

I said he must come with me— as if it had been poor wee Mona herself. But he only laughed and swore, and went on warning me not to meddle with him. Well, I was just forced to. But sixteen stone takes a lot of weakening, and the last I saw of him alive was his great freckled fist coming at my head. I went down like a pithed bullock. And it was I who found him again the week after, when he must have been all but a week dead— but I had heard him coo-eeing every blessed night!"

He was listening again: whenever he paused, I caught him listening. I was still to understand it, and the deep-down scare in his eyes.

"Stop a bit!" said I. "Don't tell me he's dead if he's only mad, and you've got him in some hut somewhere. You say you can hear him coo-eeing— I see you can."

Warburton of Gunbar heaved the saddest sigh I have ever heard.

"I hear him always," he said quietly, "when the moon is at the full. I have done, all along, and it's close on ten years ago now. It's in the mallee I hear him, just as he heard little Mona; yet they all three lie together over yonder behind the stock-yards. H'sh, man, h'sh!" He was gripping at my arm, but I twisted away from him even as himself from Mad Trevor, because his listening eyes were more than enough for me. "There's his coo-ee again!" he cried, raising a hand that never quivered. "Mean to tell me you can't hear it now?"

3: The Valley of the Worm

Robert E. Howard

1906-1936

Weird Tales, February 1934

I WILL tell you of Niord and the Worm. You have heard the tale before in many guises wherein the hero was named Tyr, or Perseus, or Siegfried, or Beowulf, or Saint George. But it was Niord who met the loathly demoniac thing that crawled hideously up from hell, and from which meeting sprang the cycle of hero-tales that revolves down the ages until the very substance of the truth is lost and passes into the limbo of all forgotten legends. I know whereof I speak, for I was Niord.

As I lie here awaiting death, which creeps slowly upon me like a blind slug, my dreams are filled with glittering visions and the pageantry of glory. It is not of the drab, disease-racked life of James Allison I dream, but all the gleaming figures of the mighty pageantry that have passed before, and shall come after; for I have faintly glimpsed, not merely the shapes that trail out behind, but shapes that come after, as a man in a long parade glimpses, far ahead, the line of figures that precede him winding over a distant hill, etched shadow like against the sky. I am one and all the pageantry of shapes and guises and masks which have been, are, and shall be the visible manifestations of that illusive, intangible, but vitally existent spirit now promenading under the brief and temporary name of James Allison.

Each man on earth, each woman, is part and all of a similar caravan of shapes and beings. But they can not remember— their minds can not bridge the brief, awful gulfs of blackness which lie between those unstable shapes, and which the spirit, soul or ego, in spanning, shakes off its fleshy masks. I remember. Why I can remember is the strangest tale of all; but as I lie here with death's black wings slowly unfolding over me, all the dim folds of my previous lives are shaken out before my eyes, and I see myself in many forms and guises— braggart, swaggering, fearful, loving, foolish, all that men— have been or will be.

I have been Man in many lands and many conditions; yet— and here is another strange thing— my line of reincarnation runs straight down one unerring channel. I have never been any but a man of that restless race men once called Nordheimr and later Aryans, and today name by many names and designations. Their history is my history, from the first mewling wail of a hairless white ape cub in the wastes of the arctic, to the death-cry of the last

degenerate product of ultimate civilization, in some dim and unguessed future age.

My name has been Hialmar, Tyr, Bragi, Bran, Horsa, Eric, and John. I strode red-handed through the deserted streets of Rome behind the yellow-maned Brennus; I wandered through the violated plantations with Alaric and his Goths when the flame of burning villas lit the land like day and an empire was gasping its last under our sandalled feet; I waded sword in hand through the foaming surf from Hengist's galley to lay the foundations of England in blood and pillage; when Leif the Lucky sighted the broad white beaches of an unguessed world, I stood beside him in the bows of the dragonship, my golden beard blowing in the wind; and when Godfrey of Bouillon led his Crusaders over the walls of Jerusalem, I was among them in steel cap and brigandine.

But it is of none of these things I would speak. I would take you back with me into an age beside which that of Brennus and Rome is as yesterday. I would take you back through, not merely centuries and millenniums, but epochs and dim ages unguessed by the wildest philosopher. Oh far, far and far will you fare into the nighted Past before you win beyond the boundaries of my race, blue-eyed, yellow-haired, wanderers, slayers, lovers, mighty in rapine and wayfaring.

It is the adventure of Niord Worm's-bane of which I speak— the root-stem of a whole cycle of hero-tales which has not yet reached its end, the grisly underlying reality that lurks behind time-distorted myths of dragons, fiends and monsters.

Yet it is not alone with the mouth of Niord that I will speak. I am James Allison no less than I was Niord, and as I unfold the tale, I will interpret some of his thoughts and dreams and deeds from the mouth of the modern I, so that the saga of Niord shall not be a meaningless chaos to you. His blood is your blood, who are sons of Aryan; but wide misty gulfs of eons lie horrifically between, and the deeds and dreams of Niord seem as alien to your deeds and dreams as the primordial and lion-haunted forest seems alien to the white-walled city street.

It was a strange world in which Niord lived and loved and fought, so long ago that even my eon-spanning memory can not recognize landmarks. Since then the surface of the earth has changed, not once but a score of times; continents have risen and sunk, seas have changed their beds and rivers their courses, glaciers have waxed and waned, and the very stars and constellations have altered and shifted.

It was so long ago that the cradle-land of my race was still in Nordheim. But the epic drifts of my people had already begun, and blue-eyed, yellow-maned tribes flowed eastward and southward and westward, on century-long treks

that carried them around the world and left their bones and their traces in strange lands and wild waste places. On one of these drifts I grew from infancy to manhood. My knowledge of that northern homeland was dim memories, like half-remembered dreams, of blinding white snow plains and ice fields, of great fires roaring in the circle of hide tents, of yellow manes flying in great winds, and a sun setting in a lurid wallow of crimson clouds, blazing on trampled snow where still dark forms lay in pools that were redder than the sunset.

That last memory stands out clearer than the others. It was the field of Jotunheim, I was told in later years, whereon had just been fought that terrible battle which was the Armageddon of the Esirfolk, the subject of a cycle of hero-songs for long ages, and which still lives today in dim dreams of Ragnarok and Goetterdaemmerung. I looked on that battle as a mewling infant; so I must have lived about— but I will not name the age, for I would be called a madman, and historians and geologists alike would rise to refute me.

But my memories of Nordheim were few and dim, paled by memories of that long, long trek upon which I had spent my life. We had not kept to a straight course, but our trend had been for ever southward. Sometimes we had bided for a while in fertile upland valleys or rich river— traversed plains, but always we took up the trail again, and not always because of drouth or famine. Often we left countries teeming with game and wild grain to push into wastelands. On our trail we moved endlessly, driven only by our restless whim, yet blindly following a cosmic law, the workings of which we never guessed, any more than the wild geese guess in their flights around the world. So at last we came into the Country of the Worm.

I will take up the tale at the time when we came into jungle-clad hills reeking with rot and teeming with spawning life, where the tom-toms of a savage people pulsed incessantly through the hot breathless night. These people came forth to dispute our way— short, strongly built men, black-haired, painted, ferocious, but indisputably white men. We knew their breed of old. They were Picts, and of all alien races the fiercest. We had met their kind before in thick forests, and in upland valleys beside mountain lakes. But many moons had passed since those meetings.

I believe this particular tribe represented the easternmost drift of the race. They were the most primitive and ferocious of any I ever met. Already they were exhibiting hints of characteristics I have noted among black savages in jungle countries, though they had dwelt in these environs only a few generations. The abysmal jungle was engulfing them, was obliterating their pristine characteristics and shaping them in its own horrific mold. They were drifting into head-hunting, and cannibalism was but a step which I believe they

must have taken before they became extinct. These things are natural adjuncts to the jungle; the Picts did not learn them from the black people, for then there were no blacks among those hills. In later years they came up from the south, and the Picts first enslaved and then were absorbed by them. But with that my saga of Niord is not concerned.

We came into that brutish hill country, with its squalling abysms of savagery and black primitiveness. We were a whole tribe marching on foot, old men, wolfish with their long beards and gaunt limbs, giant warriors in their prime, naked children running along the line of march, women with tousled yellow locks carrying babies which never cried— unless it were to scream from pure rage. I do not remember our numbers, except, that there were some five hundred fighting-men— and by fighting-men I mean all males, from the child just strong enough to lift a bow, to the oldest of the old men. In that madly ferocious age all were fighters. Our women fought, when brought to bay, like tigresses, and I have seen a babe, not yet old enough to stammer articulate words, twist its head and sink its tiny teeth in the foot that stamped out its life.

Oh, we were fighters! Let me speak of Niord. I am proud of him, the more when I consider the paltry crippled body of James Allison, the unstable mask I now wear. Niord was tall, with great shoulders, lean hips and mighty limbs. His muscles were long and swelling, denoting endurance and speed as well as strength. He could run all day without tiring, and he possessed a co-ordination that made his movements a blur of blinding speed. If I told you his full strength, you would brand me a liar. But there is no man on earth today strong enough to bend the bow Niord handled with ease. The longest arrow-flight on record is that of a Turkish archer who sent a shaft 482 yards. There was not a stripling in my tribe who could not have bettered that flight.

As we entered the jungle country we heard the tom-toms booming across the mysterious valleys that slumbered between the brutish hills, and in a broad, open plateau we met our enemies. I do not believe these Picts knew us, even by legends, or they had never rushed so openly to the onset, though they outnumbered us. But there was no attempt at ambush. They swarmed out of the trees, dancing and singing their war-songs, yelling their barbarous threats. Our heads should hang in their idol-hut and our yellow-haired women should bear their sons. Ho! ho! ho! By Ymir, it was Niord who laughed then, not James Allison. Just so we of the Æsir laughed to hear their threats — deep thunderous laughter from broad and mighty chests. Our trail was laid in blood and embers through many lands. We were the slayers and ravishers, striding sword in hand across the world, and that these folk threatened us woke our rugged humor.

We went to meet them, naked but for our wolfhides, swinging our bronze swords, and our singing was like rolling thunder in the hills. They sent their arrows among us, and we gave back their fire. They could not match us in archery. Our arrows hissed in blinding clouds among them, dropping them like autumn leaves, until they howled and frothed like mad dogs and charged to hand-grips. And we, mad with the fighting joy, dropped our bows and ran to meet them, as a lover runs to his love.

By Ymir, it was a battle to madden and make drunken with the slaughter and the fury. The Picts were as ferocious as we, but ours was the superior physique, the keener wit, the more highly developed fighting-brain. We won because we were a superior race, but it was no easy victory. Corpses littered the blood-soaked earth; but at last they broke, and we cut them down as they ran, to the very edge of the trees. I tell of that fight in a few bald words. I can not paint the madness, the reek of sweat and blood, the panting, muscle-straining effort, the splintering of bones under mighty blows, the rending and hewing of quivering sentient flesh; above all the merciless abysmal savagery of the whole affair, in which there was neither rule nor order, each man fighting as he would or could. If I might do so, you would recoil in horror; even the modern I, cognizant of my close kinship with those times, stand aghast as I review that butchery. Mercy was yet unborn, save as some individual's whim, and rules of warfare were as yet undreamed of. It was an age in which each tribe and each human fought tooth and fang from birth to death, and neither gave nor expected mercy.

So we cut down the fleeing Picts, and our women came out on the field to brain the wounded enemies with stones, or cut their throats with copper knives. We did not torture. We were no more cruel than life demanded. The rule of life was ruthlessness, but there is more wanton cruelty today than ever we dreamed of. It was not wanton bloodthirstiness that made us butcher wounded and captive foes. It was because we knew our chances of survival increased with each enemy slain.

Yet there was occasionally a touch of individual mercy, and so it was in this fight. I had been occupied with a duel with an especially valiant enemy. His tousled thatch of black hair scarcely came above my chin, but he was a solid knot of steel-spring muscles, than which lightning scarcely moved faster. He had an iron sword and a hide-covered buckler. I had a knotty-headed bludgeon. That fight was one that glutted even my battle-lusting soul. I was bleeding from a score of flesh wounds before one of my terrible, lashing strokes smashed his shield like cardboard, and an instant later my bludgeon glanced from his unprotected head. Ymir! Even now I stop to laugh and marvel at the hardness of that Pict's skull. Men of that age were assuredly built on a

rugged plan! That blow should have spattered his brains like water. It did lay his scalp open horribly, dashing him senseless to the earth, where I let him lie, supposing him to be dead, as I joined in the slaughter of the fleeing warriors.

When I returned reeking with sweat and blood, my club horridly clotted with blood and brains, I noticed that my antagonist was regaining consciousness, and that a naked tousle-headed girl was preparing to give him the finishing touch with a stone she could scarcely lift. A vagrant whim caused me to check the blow. I had enjoyed the fight, and I admired the adamantine quality of his skull.

We made camp a short distance away, burned our dead on a great pyre, and after looting the corpses of the enemy, we dragged them across the plateau and cast them down in a valley to make a feast for the hyenas, jackals and vultures which were already gathering. We kept close watch that night, but we were not attacked, though far away through the jungle we could make out the red gleam of fires, and could faintly hear, when the wind veered, the throb of tom-toms and demoniac screams and yells— keenings for the slain or mere animal squallings of fury.

Nor did they attack us in the days that followed. We bandaged our captive's wounds and quickly learned his primitive tongue, which, however, was so different from ours that I can not conceive of the two languages having ever had a common source.

His name was Grom, and he was a great hunter and fighter, he boasted. He talked freely and held no grudge, grinning broadly and showing tusk-like teeth, his beady eyes glittering from under the tangled black mane that fell over his low forehead. His limbs were almost ape-like in their thickness.

He was vastly interested in his captors, though he could never understand why he had been spared; to the end it remained an inexplicable mystery to him. The Picts obeyed the law of survival even more rigidly than did the Æsir. They were the more practical, as shown by their more settled habits. They never roamed as far or as blindly as we. Yet in every line we were the superior race.

Grom, impressed by our intelligence and fighting qualities, volunteered to go into the hills and make peace for us with his people. It was immaterial to us, but we let him go. Slavery had not yet been dreamed of.

So Grom went back to his people, and we forgot about him, except that I went a trifle more cautiously about my hunting, expecting him to be lying in wait to put an arrow through my back. Then one day we heard a rattle of tom-toms, and Grom appeared at the edge of the jungle, his face split in his gorilla-grin, with the painted, skinclad, feather-bedecked chiefs of the clans. Our ferocity had awed them, and our sparing of Grom further impressed them.

They could not understand leniency; evidently we valued them too cheaply to bother about killing one when he was in our power.

So peace was made with much pow-wow, and sworn to with many strange oaths and rituals— we swore only by Y'mir, and an Æsir never broke that vow. But they swore by the elements, by the idol which sat in the fetish-hut where fires burned for ever and a withered crone slapped a leather-covered drum all night long, and by another being too terrible to be named.

Then we all sat around the fires and gnawed meat-bones, and drank a fiery concoction they brewed from wild grain, and the wonder is that the feast did not end in a general massacre; for that liquor had devils in it and made maggots writhe in our brains. But no harm came of our vast drunkenness, and thereafter we dwelt at peace with our barbarous neighbors. They taught us many things, and learned many more from us. But they taught us iron-workings; into which they had been forced by the lack of copper in those hills, and we quickly excelled them.

We went freely among their villages— mud-walled clusters of huts in hilltop clearings, overshadowed by giant trees— and we allowed them to come at will among our camps— straggling lines of hide tents on the plateau where the battle had been fought. Our young men cared not for their squat beady-eyed women, and our rangy clean-limbed girls with their tousled yellow heads were not drawn to the hairy-breasted savages. Familiarity over a period of years would have reduced the repulsion on either side, until the two races would have flowed together to form one hybrid people, but long before that time the Æsir rose and departed, vanishing into the mysterious hazes of the haunted south. But before that exodus there came to pass the horror of the Worm.

I hunted with Grom and he led me into brooding, uninhabited valleys and up into silence-haunted hills where no men had set foot before us. But there was one valley, off in the mazes of the southwest, into which he would not go. Stumps of shattered columns, relics of a forgotten civilization, stood among the trees on the valley floor. Grom showed them to me, as we stood on the cliffs that flanked the mysterious vale, but he would not go down into it, and he dissuaded me when I would have gone alone. He would not speak plainly of the danger that lurked there, but it was greater than that of serpent or tiger, or the trumpeting elephants which occasionally wandered up in devastating droves from the south.

Of all beasts, Grom told me in the gutturals of his tongue, the Picts feared only Satha, the great snake, and they shunned the jungle where he lived. But there was another thing they feared, and it was connected in some manner with the Valley of Broken Stones, as the Picts called the crumbling pillars. Long

ago, when his ancestors had first come into the country, they had dared that grim vale, and a whole clan of them had perished, suddenly, horribly, and unexplainably. At least Grom did not explain. The horror had come up out of the earth, somehow, and it was not good to talk of it, since it was believed that It might be summoned by speaking of It— whatever It was.

But Grom was ready to hunt with me anywhere else; for he was the greatest hunter among the Picts, and many and fearful were our adventures. Once I killed, with the iron sword I had forged with my own hands, that most terrible of all beasts— old saber-tooth, which men today call a tiger because he was more like a tiger than anything else. In reality he was almost as much like a bear in build, save for his unmistakably feline head. Saber-tooth was massive-limbed, with a low-hung, great, heavy body, and he vanished from the earth because he was too terrible a fighter, even for that grim age. As his muscles and ferocity grew, his brain dwindled until at last even the instinct of self-preservation vanished. Nature, who maintains her balance in such things, destroyed him because, had his super-fighting powers been allied with an intelligent brain, he would have destroyed all other forms of life on earth. He was a freak on the road of evolution — organic development gone mad and run to fangs and talons, to slaughter and destruction.

I killed saber-tooth in a battle that would make a saga in itself, and for months afterward I lay semi-delirious with ghastly wounds that made the toughest warriors shake their heads. The Picts said that never before had a man killed a saber-tooth single-handed. Yet I recovered, to the wonder of all.

While I lay at the doors of death there was a secession from the tribe. It was a peaceful secession, such as continually occurred and contributed greatly to the peopling of the world by yellow-haired tribes. Forty-five of the young men took themselves mates simultaneously and wandered off to found a clan of their own. There was no revolt; it was a racial custom which bore fruits in all the later ages, when tribes sprung from the same roots met, after centuries of separation, and cut one another's throats with joyous abandon. The tendency of the Aryan and the pre-Aryan was always toward disunity, clans splitting off the main stem, and scattering.

So these young men, led by one Bragi, my brother-in-arms, took their girls and venturing to the southwest, took up their abode in the Valley of Broken Stones. The Picts expostulated, hinting vaguely of a monstrous doom that haunted the vale, but the Æsir laughed. We had left our own demons and weirds in the icy wastes of the far blue north, and the devils of other races did not much impress us.

When my full strength was returned, and the grisly wounds were only scars, I girt on my weapons and strode over the plateau to visit Bragi's clan.

Grom did not accompany me. He had not been in the Æsir camp for several days. But I knew the way. I remembered well the valley, from the cliffs of which I had looked down and seen the lake at the upper end, the trees thickening into forest at the lower extremity. The sides of the valley were high sheer cliffs, and a steep broad ridge at either end, cut it off from the surrounding country. It was toward the lower or southwestern end that the valley-floor was dotted thickly with ruined columns, some towering high among the trees, some fallen into heaps of lichen-clad stones. What race reared them none knew. But Grom had hinted fearsomely of a hairy, apish monstrosity dancing loathsomely under the moon to a demoniac piping that induced horror and madness.

I crossed the plateau whereon our camp was pitched, descended the slope, traversed a shallow vegetation-choked valley, climbed another slope, and plunged into the hills. A half-day's leisurely travel brought me to the ridge on the other side of which lay the valley of the pillars. For many miles I had seen no sign of human life. The settlements of the Picts all lay many miles to the east. I topped the ridge and looked down into the dreaming valley with its still blue lake, its brooding cliffs and its broken columns jutting among the trees. I looked for smoke. I saw none, but I saw vultures wheeling in the sky over a cluster of tents on the lake shore.

I came down the ridge warily and approached the silent camp. In it I halted, frozen with horror. I was not easily moved. I had seen death in many forms, and had fled from or taken part in red massacres that spilled blood like water and heaped the earth with corpses. But here I was confronted with an organic devastation that staggered and appalled me. Of Bragi's embryonic clan, not one remained alive, and not one corpse was whole. Some of the hide tents still stood erect. Others were mashed down and flattened out, as if crushed by some monstrous weight, so that at first I wondered if a drove of elephants had stampeded across the camp. But no elephants ever wrought such destruction as I saw strewn on the bloody ground. The camp was a shambles, littered with bits of flesh and fragments of bodies— hands, feet, heads, pieces of human debris. Weapons lay about, some of them stained with a greenish slime like that which spurts from a crushed caterpillar.

No human foe could have committed this ghastly atrocity. I looked at the lake, wondering if nameless amphibian monsters had crawled from the calm waters whose deep blue told of unfathomed depths. Then I saw a print left by the destroyer. It was a track such as a titanic worm might leave, yards broad, winding back down the valley. The grass lay flat where it ran, and bushes and small trees had been crushed down into the earth, all horribly smeared with blood and greenish slime.

With berserk fury in my soul I drew my sword and started to follow it, when a call attracted me. I wheeled, to see a stocky form approaching me from the ridge. It was Grom the Pict, and when I think of the courage it must have taken for him to have overcome all the instincts planted in him by traditional teachings and personal experience, I realize the full depths of his friendship for me.

Squatting on the lake shore, spear in his hands, his black eyes ever roving fearfully down the brooding tree-waving reaches of the valley, Grom told me of the horror that had come upon Bragi's clan under the moon. But first he told me of it, as his sires had told the tale to him.

Long ago the Picts had drifted down from the northwest on a long, long trek, finally reaching these jungle-covered hills, where, because they were weary, and because the game and fruit were plentiful and there were no hostile tribes, they halted and built their mud-walled villages.

Some of them, a whole clan of that numerous tribe, took up their abode in the Valley of the Broken Stones. They found the columns and a great ruined temple back in the trees, and in that temple there was no shrine or altar, but the mouth of a shaft that vanished deep into the black earth, and in which there were no steps such as a human being would make and use. They built their village in the valley, and in the night, under the moon, horror came upon them and left only broken walls and bits of slime-smeared flesh.

In those days the Picts feared nothing. The warriors of the other clans gathered and sang their war-songs and danced their war-dances, and followed a broad track of blood and slime to the shaft-mouth in the temple. They howled defiance and hurled down boulders which were never heard to strike bottom. Then began a thin demoniac piping, and up from the well pranced a hideous anthropomorphic figure dancing to the weird strains of a pipe it held in its monstrous hands. The horror of its aspect froze the fierce Picts with amazement, and close behind it a vast white bulk heaved up from the subterranean darkness. Out of the shaft came a slavering mad nightmare which arrows pierced but could not check, which swords carved but could not slay. It fell slobbering upon the warriors, crushing them to crimson pulp, tearing them to bits as an octopus might tear small fishes, sucking their blood from their mangled limbs and devouring them even as they screamed and struggled. The survivors fled, pursued to the very ridge, up which, apparently, the monster could not propel its quaking mountainous bulk.

After that they did not dare the silent valley. But the dead came to their shamans and old men in dreams and told them strange and terrible secrets. They spoke of an ancient, ancient race of semihuman beings which once inhabited that valley and reared those columns for their own weird

inexplicable purposes. The white monster in the pits was their god, summoned up from the nighted abysses of mid-earth uncounted fathoms below the black mold, by sorcery unknown to the sons of men. The hairy anthropomorphic being was its servant, created to serve the god, a formless elemental spirit drawn up from below and cased in flesh, organic but beyond the understanding of humanity. The Old Ones had long vanished into the limbo from whence they crawled in the black dawn of the universe; but their bestial god and his inhuman slave lived on. Yet both were organic after a fashion, and could be wounded, though no human weapon had been found potent enough to slay them.

Bragi and his clan had dwelt for weeks in the valley before the horror struck. Only the night before, Grom, hunting above the cliffs, and by that token daring greatly, had been paralyzed by a high-pitched demon piping, and then by a mad clamor of human screaming. Stretched face down in the dirt, hiding his head in a tangle of grass, he had not dared to move, even when the shrieks died away in the slobbering, repulsive sounds of a hideous feast. When dawn broke he had crept shuddering to the cliffs to look down into the valley, and the sight of the devastation, even when seen from afar, had driven him in yammering flight far into the hills. But it had occurred to him, finally, that he should warn the rest of the tribe, and returning, on his way to the camp on the plateau, he had seen me entering the valley.

So spoke Grom, while I sat and brooded darkly, my chin on my mighty fist. I can not frame in modern words the clan-feeling that in those days was a living vital part of every man and woman. In a world where talon and fang were lifted on every hand, and the hands of all men raised against an individual, except those of his own clan, tribal instinct was more than the phrase it is today. It was as much a part of a man as was his heart or his right hand. This was necessary, for only thus banded together in unbreakable groups could mankind have survived in the terrible environments of the primitive world. So now the personal grief I felt for Bragi and the clean-limbed young men and laughing white-skinned girls was drowned in a deeper sea of grief and fury that was cosmic in its depth and intensity. I sat grimly, while the Pict squatted anxiously beside me, his gaze roving from me to the menacing deeps of the valley where the accursed columns loomed like broken teeth of cackling hags among the waving leafy reaches.

I, Niord, was not one to use my brain over-much. I lived in a physical world, and there were the old men of the tribe to do my thinking. But I was one of a race destined to become dominant mentally as well as physically, and I was no mere muscular animal. So as I sat there there came dimly and then clearly a thought to me that brought a short fierce laugh from my lips.

Rising, I bade Grom aid me, and we built a pyre on the lake shore of dried wood, the ridge-poles of the tents, and the broken shafts of spears. Then we collected the grisly fragments that had been parts of Bragi's band, and we laid them on the pile, and struck flint and steel to it.

The thick sad smoke crawled serpent-like into the sky, and turning to Grom, I made him guide me to the jungle where lurked that scaly horror, Satha, the great serpent. Grom gaped at me; not the greatest hunters among the Picts sought out the mighty crawling one. But my will was like a wind that swept him along my course, and at last he led the way. We left the valley by the upper end, crossing the ridge, skirting the tall cliffs, and plunged into the fastnesses of the south, which was peopled only by the grim denizens of the jungle. Deep into the jungle we went, until we came to a low-lying expanse, dank and dark beneath the great creeper-festooned trees, where our feet sank deep into the spongy silt, carpeted by rotting vegetation, and slimy moisture oozed up beneath their pressure. This, Grom told me, was the realm haunted by Satha, the great serpent.

Let me speak of Satha. There is nothing like him on earth today, nor has there been for countless ages. Like the meat-eating dinosaur, like old saber-tooth, he was too terrible to exist. Even then he was a survival of a grimmer age when life and its forms were cruder and more hideous. There were not many of his kind then, though they may have existed in great numbers in the reeking ooze of the vast jungle-tangled swamps still farther south. He was larger than any python of modern ages, and his fangs dripped with poison a thousand times more deadly than that of a king cobra.

He was never worshipped by the pure-blood Picts, though the blacks that came later deified him, and that adoration persisted in the hybrid race that sprang from the Negroes and their white conquerors. But to other peoples he was the nadir of evil horror, and tales of him became twisted into demonology; so in later ages Satha became the veritable devil of the white races, and the Stygians first worshipped, and then, when they became Egyptians, abhorred him under the name of Set, the Old Serpent, while to the Semites he became Leviathan and Satan. He was terrible enough to be a god, for he was a crawling death. I had seen a bull elephant fall dead in his tracks from Satha's bite. I had seen him, had glimpsed him writhing his horrific way through the dense jungle, had seen him take his prey, but I had never hunted him. He was too grim, even for the slayer of old saber-tooth.

But now I hunted him, plunging farther and farther into the hot, breathless reek of his jungle, even when friendship for me could not drive Grom farther. He urged me to paint my body and sing my death-song before I advanced farther, but I pushed on unheeding.

In a natural runway that wound between the shouldering trees, I set a trap. I found a large tree, soft and spongy of fiber, but thick-boled and heavy, and I hacked through its base close to the ground with my great sword, directing its fall so that, when it toppled, its top crashed into the branches of a smaller tree, leaving it leaning across the runway, one end resting on the earth, the other caught in the small tree. Then I cut away the branches on the under side, and cutting a slim tough sapling I trimmed it and stuck it upright like a prop-pole under the leaning tree. Then, cutting a way the tree which supported it, I left the great trunk poised precariously on the prop-pole, to which I fastened a long vine, as thick as my wrist.

Then I went alone through that primordial twilight jungle until an overpowering fetid odor assailed my nostrils, and from the rank vegetation in front of me, Satha reared up his hideous head, swaying lethally from side to side, while his forked tongue jetted in and out, and his great yellow terrible eyes burned icily on me with all the evil wisdom of the black elder world that was when man was not. I backed away, feeling no fear, only an icy sensation along my spine, and Satha came sinuously after me, his shining eighty-foot barrel rippling over the rotting vegetation in mesmeric silence. His wedge-shaped head was bigger than the head of the hugest stallion, his trunk was thicker than a man's body, and his scales shimmered with a thousand changing scintillations. I was to Satha as a mouse is to a king cobra, but I was fanged as no mouse ever was. Quick as I was, I knew I could not avoid the lightning stroke of that great triangular head; so I dared not let him come too close. Subtly I fled down the runway; and behind me the rush of the great supple body was like the sweep of wind through the grass.

He was not far behind me when I raced beneath the deadfall, and as the great shining length glided under the trap, I gripped the vine with both hands and jerked desperately. With a crash the great trunk fell across Satha's scaly back, some six feet back of his wedge-shaped head.

I had hoped to break his spine but I do not think it did, for the great body coiled and knotted, the mighty tail lashed and thrashed, mowing down the bushes as if with a giant flail. At the instant of the fall, the huge head had whipped about and struck the tree with a terrific impact, the mighty fangs shearing through bark and wood like scimitars. Now, as if aware he fought an inanimate foe, Satha turned on me, standing out of his reach. The scaly neck writhed and arched, the mighty jaws gaped, disclosing fangs a foot in length, from which dripped venom that might have burned through solid stone.

I believe, what of his stupendous strength, that Satha would have writhed from under the trunk, but for a broken branch that had been driven deep into his side, holding him like a barb. The sound of his hissing filled the jungle and

his eyes glared at me with such concentrated evil that I shook despite myself. Oh, he knew it was I who had trapped him! Now I came as close as I dared, and with a sudden powerful cast of my spear, transfixed his neck just below the gaping jaws, nailing him to the tree-trunk Then I dared greatly, for he was far from dead, and I knew he would in an instant tear the spear from the wood and be free to strike. But in that instant I ran in, and swinging my sword with all my great power, I hewed off his terrible head.

The heavings and contortions of Satha's prisoned form in life were naught to the convulsions of his headless length in death. I retreated, dragging the gigantic head after me with a crooked pole, and at a safe distance from the lashing, flying tail, I set to work. I worked with naked death then, and no man ever toiled more gingerly than did I. For I cut out the poison sacs at the base of the great fangs, and in the terrible venom I soaked the heads of eleven arrows, being careful that only the bronze points were in the liquid, which else had corroded away the wood of the tough shafts. While I was doing this, Grom, driven by comradeship and curiosity, came stealing nervously through the jungle, and his mouth gaped as he looked on the head of Satha.

For hours I steeped the arrowheads in the poison, until they were caked with a horrible green scum, and showed tiny flecks of corrosion where the venom had eaten into the solid bronze. He wrapped them carefully in broad, thick, rubber-like leaves, and then, though night had fallen and the hunting beasts were roaring on every hand, I went back through the jungled hills, Grom with me, until at dawn we came again to the high cliffs that loomed above the Valley of Broken Stones.

At the mouth of the valley I broke my spear, and I took all the unpoisoned shafts from my quiver, and snapped them. I painted my face and limbs as the Æsir painted themselves only when they went forth to certain doom, and I sang my death-song to the sun as it rose over the cliffs, my yellow mane blowing in the morning wind.

Then I went down into the valley, bow in hand. Grom could not drive himself to follow me. He lay on his belly in the dust and howled like a dying dog.

I passed the lake and the silent camp where the pyre-ashes still smoldered, and came under the thickening trees beyond. About me the columns loomed, mere shapeless heaps from the ravages of staggering eons. The trees grew more dense, and under their vast leafy branches the very light was dusky and evil. As in twilight shadow I saw the ruined temple, cyclopean walls staggering up from masses of decaying masonry and fallen blocks of stone. About six hundred yards in front of it a great column reared up in an open glade, eighty or ninety feet in height. It was so worn and pitted by weather and time that

any child of my tribe could have climbed it, and I marked it and changed my plan.

I came to the ruins and saw huge crumbling walls upholding a domed roof from which many stones had fallen, so that it seemed like the lichen-grown ribs of some mythical monster's skeleton arching above me. Titanic columns flanked the open doorway through which ten elephants could have stalked abreast. Once there might have been inscriptions and hieroglyphics on the pillars and walls, but they were long worn away. Around the great room, on the inner side, ran columns in better state of preservation. On each of these columns was a flat pedestal, and some dim instinctive memory vaguely resurrected a shadowy scene wherein black drums roared madly, and on these pedestals monstrous beings squatted loathsomely in inexplicable rituals rooted in the black dawn of the universe.

There was no altar— only the mouth of a great well-like shaft in the stone floor, with strange obscene carvings all about the rim. I tore great pieces of stone from the rotting floor and cast them down the shaft which slanted down into utter darkness. I heard them bound along the side, but I did not hear them strike bottom. I cast down stone after stone, each with a searing curse, and at last I heard a sound that was not the dwindling rumble of the falling stones. Up from the well floated a weird demon-piping that was a symphony of madness. Far down in the darkness I glimpsed the faint fearful glimmering of a vast white bulk.

I retreated slowly as the piping grew louder, falling back through the broad doorway. I heard a scratching, scrambling noise, and up from the shaft and out of the doorway between the colossal columns came a prancing incredible figure. It went erect like a man, but it was covered with fur, that was shaggiest where its face should have been. If it had ears, nose and a mouth I did not discover them. Only a pair of staring red eyes leered from the furry mask. Its misshapen hands held a strange set of pipes, on which it blew weirdly as it pranced toward me with many a grotesque caper and leap.

Behind it I heard a repulsive obscene noise as of a quaking unstable mass heaving up out of a well. Then I nocked an arrow, drew the cord and sent the shaft singing through the furry breast of the dancing monstrosity. It went down as though struck by a thunderbolt, but to my horror the piping continued, though the pipes had fallen from the malformed hands. Then I turned and ran fleetly to the column, up which I swarmed before I looked back. When I reached the pinnacle I looked, and because of the shock and surprise of what I saw, I almost fell from my dizzy perch.

Out of the temple the monstrous dweller in the darkness had come, and I, who had expected a horror yet cast in some terrestrial mold, looked on the

spawn of nightmare. From what subterranean hell it crawled in the long ago I know not, nor what black age it represented. But it was not a beast, as humanity knows beasts. I call it a worm for lack of a better term. There is no earthly language which has a name for it. I can only say that it looked somewhat more like a worm than it did an octopus, a serpent or a dinosaur.

It was white and pulpy, and drew its quaking bulk along the ground, worm-fashion. But it had wide flat tentacles, and fleshly feelers, and other adjuncts the use of which I am unable to explain. And it had a long proboscis which it curled and uncurled like an elephant's trunk. Its forty eyes, set in a horrific circle, were composed of thousands of facets of as many scintillant colors which changed and altered in never-ending transmutation. But through all interplay of hue and glint, they retained their evil intelligence— intelligence there was behind those flickering facets, not human nor yet bestial, but a night-born demoniac intelligence such as men in dreams vaguely sense throbbing titanically in the black gulfs outside our material universe. In size the monster was mountainous; its bulk would have dwarfed a mastodon.

But even as I shook with the cosmic horror of the thing, I drew a feathered shaft to my ear and arched it singing on its way. Grass and bushes were crushed flat as the monster came toward me like a moving mountain and shaft after shaft I sent with terrific force and deadly precision. I could not miss so huge a target. The arrows sank to the feathers or clear out of sight in the unstable bulk, each bearing enough poison to have stricken dead a bull elephant. Yet on it came; swiftly, appallingly, apparently heedless of both the shafts and the venom in which they were steeped. And all the time the hideous music played a maddening accompaniment, whining thinly from the pipes that lay untouched on the ground.

My confidence faded; even the poison of Satha was futile against this uncanny being. I drove my last shaft almost straight downward into the quaking white mountain, so close was the monster under my perch. Then suddenly its color altered. A wave of ghastly blue surged over it, and the vast hulk heaved in earthquake-like convulsions. With a terrible plunge it struck the lower part of the column, which crashed to falling shards of stone. But even with the impact, I leaped far out and fell through the empty air full upon the monster's back.

The spongy skin yielded and gave beneath my feet, and I drove my sword hilt-deep, dragging it through the pulpy flesh, ripping a horrible yard-long wound, from which oozed a green slime. Then a flip of a cable-like tentacle flicked me from the titan's back and spun me three hundred feet through the air to crash among a cluster of giant trees.

The impact must have splintered half the bones in my frame, for when I sought to grasp my sword again and crawl anew to the combat, I could not move hand or foot, could only writhe helplessly with my broken back. But I could see the monster and I knew that I had won, even in defeat. The mountainous bulk was heaving and billowing, the tentacles were lashing madly, the antennae writhing and knotting, and the nauseous whiteness had changed to a pale and grisly green. It turned ponderously and lurched back toward the temple, rolling like a crippled ship in a heavy swell. Trees crashed and splintered as it lumbered against them.

I wept with pure fury because I could not catch up my sword and rush in to die glutting my berserk madness in mighty strokes. But the worm-god was death-stricken and needed not my futile sword. The demon pipes on the ground kept up their infernal tune, and it was like the fiend's death-dirge. Then as the monster veered and floundered, I saw it catch up the corpse of its hairy slave. For an instant the apish form dangled in midair, gripped round by the trunk-like proboscis, then was dashed against the temple wall with a force that reduced the hairy body to a mere shapeless pulp. At that the pipes screamed out horribly, and fell silent for ever.

The titan staggered on the brink of the shaft; then another change came over it— a frightful transfiguration the nature of which I can not yet describe. Even now when I try to think of it clearly, I am only chaotically conscious of a blasphemous, unnatural transmutation of form and substance, shocking and indescribable. Then the strangely altered bulk tumbled into the shaft to roll down into the ultimate darkness from whence it came, and I knew that it was dead. And as it vanished into the well, with a rending, grinding groan the ruined walls quivered from dome to base. They bent inward and buckled with deafening reverberation, the columns splintered, and with a cataclysmic crash the dome itself came thundering down. For an instant the air seemed veiled with flying debris and stone-dust, through which the treetops lashed madly as in a storm or an earthquake convulsion. Then all was clear again and I stared, shaking the blood from my eyes. Where the temple had stood there lay only a colossal pile of shattered masonry and broken stones, and every column in the valley had fallen, to lie in crumbling shards.

In the silence that followed I heard Grom wailing a dirge over me. I bade him lay my sword in my hand, and he did so, and bent close to hear what I had to say, for I was passing swiftly.

"Let my tribe remember," I said, speaking slowly. "Let the tale be told from village to village, from camp to camp, from tribe to tribe, so that men may know that not man nor beast nor devil may prey in safety on the golden-haired people of Asgard. Let them build me a cairn where I lie and lay me therein with

my bow and sword at hand, to guard this valley for ever; so if the ghost of the god I slew comes up from below, my ghost will ever be ready to give it battle."

And while Grom howled and beat his hairy breast, death came to me in the Valley of the Worm.

4: Spurs

Tod Robbins

Clarence Aaron Robbins, 1888-1949
Munsey's Magazine, Feb 1923

This short story was the basis for the notorious Tod Browning movie "Freaks", 1932, starring Wallace Ford and Leila Hyams.

JACQUES COURBÉ was a romanticist. He measured only twenty-eight inches from the soles of his diminutive feet to the crown of his head; but there were times, as he rode into the arena on his gallant charger, St. Eustache, when he felt himself a doughty knight of old about to do battle for his lady.

What matter that St. Eustache was not a gallant charger except in his master's imagination— not even a pony, indeed, but a large dog of a nondescript breed, with the long snout and upstanding aura of a wolf? What matter that M. Courbé's entrance was invariably greeted with shouts of derisive laughter and bombardments of banana skins and orange peel? What matter that he had no lady, and that his daring deeds were severely curtailed to a mimicry of the bareback riders who preceded him? What mattered all these things to the tiny man who lived in dreams, and who resolutely closed his shoe-button eyes to the drab realities of life?

The dwarf had no friends among the other freaks in Copo's Circus. They considered him ill-tempered and egotistical, and he loathed them for their acceptance of things as they were. Imagination was the armour that protected him from the curious glances of a cruel, gaping world, from the stinging lash of ridicule, from the bombardments of banana skins and orange peel. Without it, he must have shriveled up and died. But those others? Ah, they had no armour except their own thick hides! The door that opened on the kingdom of imagination was closed and locked to them; and although they did not wish to open this door, although they did not miss what lay beyond it, they resented and mistrusted any one who possessed the key.

Now it came about, after many humiliating performances in the arena, made palatable only by dreams, that love entered the circus tent and beckoned commandingly to M. Jacques Corbe. In an instant the dwarf was engulfed in a sea of wild, tumultuous passion.

Mlle. Jeanne Marie was a daring bareback rider. It made M. Jacques Courbé's tiny heart stand still to see her that first night of her appearance in the arena, performing brilliantly on the broad back of her aged mare, Sappho. A tall, blonde woman of the amazon type, she had round eyes of baby blue which held no spark of her avaricious peasant's soul, carmine lips and cheeks,

large white teeth which flashed continually in a smile, and hands which, when doubled up, were nearly the size of the dwarf's head.

Her partner in the act was Simon Lafleur, the Romeo of the circus tent— a swarthy, hurculean young man with bold black eyes and hair that glistened with grease, like the back of Solon, the trained seal. From the first performance, M. Jacques Courbé loved Mlle. Jeanne Marie. All his tiny body was shaken with longing for her. Her buxom charms, so generously revealed in tights and spangles, made him flush and cast down his eyes. The familiarities allowed to Simon Lafleur, the bodily acrobatic contacts of the two performers, made the dwarf's blood boil. Mounted on St. Eustache, awaiting his turn at the entrance, he would grind his teeth in impotent rage to see Simon circling round and round the ring, standing proudly on the back of Sappho and holding Mlle. Jeanne Marie in an ecstatic embrace, while she kicked one shapely, bespangled leg skyward.

"Ah, the dog!" M. Jacques Courbé would mutter. "Some day I shall teach this hulking stable boy his place! *Ma foi*, I will clip his ears for him!" St. Eustache did not share his master's admiration for Mlle. Jeanne Marie. From the first he evinced his hearty detestation of her by low growls and a ferocious display of long, sharp fangs. It was little consolation for the dwarf to know that St. Eustache showed still more marked signs of rage when Simon Lafleur approached him. It pined M. Jacques Courbé to think that his gallant charger, his sole companion, his bedfellow, should not also love and admire the splendid giantess who each night risked life and limb before the awed populace. Often, when they were alone together, he would chide St. Eustache on his churlishness.

"Ah, you devil of a dog!" the dwarf would cry. "Why must you always growl and show your ugly teeth when the lovely Jeanne Marie condescends to notice you? Have you no feelings under your tough hide? Cur, she is an angel, and you snarl at her! Do you not remember how I found you, starving puppy in a Paris gutter? And now you must threaten the hand of my princess! So this is you gratitude, great hairy pig!"

M. Jacques Courbé had one living relative— not a dwarf, like himself, but a fine figure of a man, a prosperous farmer living just outside the town of Roubaix. The elder Courbé had never married; and so one day, when he was found dead from heart failure, his tiny nephew— for whom, it must be conversion— fell heir to a comfortable property. When the tidings were brought to him, the dwarf threw both arms about the shaggy neck of St. Eustache and cried out:

"Ah, now we can retire, marry and settle down, old friend! I am worth many times my weight in gold!"

That evening as Mlle. Jeanne Marie was changing her gaudy costume after the performance, a light tap sounded on the door.

"Enter!" she called, believing it to be Simon Lafleur, who had promised to take her that evening to the Sign of the Wild Boar for a glass of wine to wash the sawdust out of her throat. "Enter, *mon Cheri*!"

The door swung slowly open; and in stepped M. Jacques Courbé, very proud and upright, in the silks and laces of a courtier, with a tiny gold-hilted sword swinging at his hip. Up he came, his shoe-button eyes all a-glitter to see the more than partially revealed charms of his robust lady. Up he came to within a yard of where she sat; and down on one knee he went and pressed his lips to her red-slippered foot.

"Oh, most beautiful and daring lady," he cried, in a voice as shrill as a pin scratching on a window pane, "will you not take mercy on the unfortunate Jacques Courbé? He is hungry for your smiles, he is starving for you lips! All night long he tosses on his couch and dreams of Jeanne Marie!"

"What play acting is this, my brave little fellow?" she asked, bending down with the smile of an ogress. "Has Simon Lafleur sent you to tease me?"

"May the black plague have Simon!" the dwarf cried, his eyes seeming to flash blue sparks. "I am not play acting. It is only too true that I love you, mademoiselle; that I wish to make you my lady. And now that I have a fortune, not that—" He broke off suddenly, and his face resembled a withered apple, "What is this, mademoiselle?" he said, in the low, droning tone of a hornet about to sting. "Do you laugh at my love? I warn you, mademoiselle— do not laugh at Jacques Courbé!"

Mlle. Jeanne Marie's large, florid face had turned purple from suppressed merriment. Her lips twitched at the corners. It was all she could do not to burst out into a roar of laughter.

Why, this ridiculous little manikin was serious in his love-making! This pocket-sized edition of a courtier was proposing marriage to her! He, this splinter of a fellow, wished to make her his wife! Why, she could carry him about on her shoulder like a trained marmoset! What a joke this was— what a colossal, corset-creaking joke! Wait till she told Simon Lafleur! She could fairly see him throw back his sleek head, open his mouth to its widest dimensions, and shake with silent laughter. But she must not laugh— not now. First she must listen to everything the dwarf had to say; draw all the sweetness of this bonbon of humour before she crushed it under the heel of ridicule.

"I am not laughing," she managed to say. "You have taken me by surprise. I never thought, I never even guessed—"

"That is well, mademoiselle," the dwarf broke in. "I do not tolerate laughter. In the arena I am paid to make laughter; but these others pay to laugh at me. I always make people pay to laugh at me!"

"But do I understand you aright, M. Courbé? Are you proposing an honourable marriage?"

The dwarf rested his hand on his heart and bowed. "Yes, mademoiselle, and honourable, and the wherewithal to keep the wolf from the door. A week ago my uncle died and left me a large estate. We shall have a servant to wait on our wants, a horse and carriage, food and wine of the best, and leisure to amuse ourselves. And you? Why, you will be a fine lady! I will clothe that beautiful big body of yours with silks and laces! You will be as happy, mademoiselle, as a cherry tree in June!" The dark blood slowly receded from Mlle. Jeanne Marie's full cheeks, her lips no longer twitched at the corners, her eyes had narrowed slightly. She had been a bareback rider for years, and she was weary of it. The life of the circus tent had lost its tinsel. She loved the dashing Simon Lafleur; but she knew well enough that this Romeo in tights would never espouse a dowerless girl.

The dwarf's words had woven themselves into a rich mental tapestry. She saw herself a proud lady, ruling over a country estate, and later welcoming Simon Lafleur with all the luxuries that were so near his heart. Simon would be overjoyed to marry into a country estate. These pygmies were a puny lot. They died young! She would do nothing to hasten the end of Jacques Courbé. No, she would be kindness itself to the poor little fellow; but, on the other hand, she would not lose her beauty mourning for him.

"Nothing that you wish shall be withheld from you as long as you love me, mademoiselle," the dwarf continued. "Your answer?"

Mlle. Jeanne Marie bent forward, and with a single movement of her powerful arms, raised M. Jacques Courbé and placed him on her knee. For an ecstatic instant she held him thus, as if he were a large French doll, with his tiny sword cocked coquettishly out behind. Then she planted on his cheek a huge kiss that covered his entire face from chin to brow.

"I am yours!" she murmured, pressing him to her ample bosom.

"From the first I loved you, M. Jacques Courbé!"

THE WEDDING OF MLLE. JEANNE MARIE was celebrated in the town of Roubaix, where Copo's Circus had taken up its temporary quarters. Following the ceremony, a feast was served in one of the tents, which was attended by a whole galaxy of celebrities. The bridegroom, his dark little face flushed with happiness and wine, sat at the head of the board. His chin was just above the tablecloth, so that his head looked like a large orange that had rolled off the

fruit dish. Immediately beneath his dangling feet, St. Eustache, who had more than once evinced by deep growls his disapproval of the proceedings, now worried a bone with quick, sly glances from time to time at the plump legs of his new mistress. Papa Copo was on the dwarf's right, his large round face as red and benevolent as a harvest moon. Next to his sat Griffo, the giraffe boy, who was covered with spots and whose neck was so long that he looked down on all the rest, including M. Hercule Hippo the giant. The rest of the company included Mlle. Lupa, who had sharp white teeth of a incredible length and who growled when she tried to talk; the tiresome M. Jegongle, who insisted on juggling fruit, plates and knives, although the whole company was heartily sick of his tricks; Mme. Samson, with her trained boa constrictors coiled about her neck and peeping out timidly, one above each ear; Simon Lafleur, and a score of others. The bareback rider had laughed silently and almost continually ever since Jeanne Marie had told him of her engagenent. Now he sat next to her in his crimson tights. His black hair was brushed back from his forehead and so glistened with grease that it reflected the lights overhead, like a burnished helmet. From time to time, he tossed off a brimming goblet of burgundy, nudged the bride in the ribs with his elbow, and threw back his sleek head in another silent outburst of laughter.

"And you are sure you will not forget me, Simon?" she whispered. "It may be some time before I can get the little ape's money."

"Forget you, Jeanne?" he muttered. "By all the dancing devils in champagne, never! I will wait as patiently as Job till you have fed that mouse some poisoned cheese. But what will you do with him in the meantime, Jeanne? You must allow him some liberties. I grind my teeth to think of you in his arms!"

The bride smiled, and regarded her diminutive husband with an appraising glance. What an atom of a man! And yet life might linger in his bones for a long time to come. M. Jacques Courbé had allowed himself only one glass of wine, and yet he was far gone in intoxication. His tiny face was suffused with blood, and he stared at Simon Lafleur belligerently. Did he suspect the truth?

"Your husband is flushed with wine!" the bareback rider whispered.

"*Ma foi*, madame, later he may knock you about! Possibly he is a dangerous fellow in his cups. Should he maltreat you, Jeanne, do no forget that you have a protector in Simon Lafleur."

"You clown!" Jeanne Marie rolled her large eyes roguishly, and laid her hand for an instant on the bareback rider's knee. "Simon, I could crack his skull between my finger and thumb, like a hickory nut!" She paused to illustrate her example, and then added reflectively: "And, perhaps, I shall do that very thing, if he attempts any familiarities. Ugh! The little ape turns my stomach!"

By now the wedding guests were beginning to show the effects of their potations. This was especially marked in the case of M. Jacques Courbé's associates in the side-show.

Griffo, the giraffe boy, had closed his large brown eyes, and was swaying his small head languidly above the assembly, while a slightly supercilious expression drew his lips down at the corners. M. Hercule Hippo, swollen out by his libations to even more colossal proportions, was repeating over and over: "I tell you I am not like other men. When I walk, the earth trembles!" Mlle. Lupa, her hairy upper lip lifted above her long white teeth, was gnawing at a bone, growling unintelligible phrases to herself and shooting savage, suspicious glances at her companions. M. Jejongle's hands had grown unsteady, and as he insisted on juggling the knives and plates of each new course, broken bits of crockery littered the floor. Mme. Samson, uncoiling her necklace of baby boa constrictors, was feeding them lumps of sugar soaked in rum. M. Jacques Courbé had finished his second glass of wine, and was surveying the whispering Simon Lafleur through narrowed eyes. There can be no genial companionship among great egotists who have drunk too much. Each one of these human oddities thought that he or she was responsible for the crowds that daily gathered at Copo's Circus; so now, heated with the good Burgundy, they were not slow in asserting themselves. Their separate egos rattled angrily together, like so many pebbles in a bag . Here was gunpowder which needed only a spark.

"I am a big— a very big man!" M. Hercule Hippo said sleepily. "Women love me. The pretty little creatures leave their pygmy husbands, so that they may come and stare at Hercule Hippo of Copo's Circus. Ha, and when they return home, they laugh at other men always! 'You may kiss me again when you grow up,' they tell their sweethearts."

"Fat bullock, here is one woman who has no love for you!" cried Mlle. Lupa, glaring sidewise at the giant over her bone. "That great carcass of yours is only so much food gone to waste. You have cheated the butcher, my friend. Fool, women do not come to see you! As well might they stare at the cattle being let through the street. Ah, no, they come from far and near to see one of their own sex who is not a cat!"

"Quite right," cried Papa Copo in a conciliatory tone, smiling and rubbing his hands together. "Not a cat, mademoiselle, but a wolf. Ah, you have a sense of humor! How droll!"

"I have a sense of humor," Mlle. Lupa agreed, returning to her bone, "and also sharp teeth. Let the erring hand not stray too near!"

"You, M. Hippo and Mlle. Lupa, are both wrong," said a voice which seemed to come from the roof. "Surely it is none other than me whom the people come to stare at!"

All raised their eyes to the supercilious face of Griffo, the giraffe boy, which swayed slowly from side to side on its long, pipe stem neck. It was he who had spoken, although his eyes were still closed.

"Of all the colossal impudence!" cried the matronly Mme. Samson. "As if my little dears had nothing to say on the subject!" She picked up the two baby boa constrictors, which lay in drunken slumber on her lap, and shook them like whips at the wedding guests. "Papa Copo knows only too well that it is on ccount of these little charmers, Mark Antony and Cleopatra, that the side-show is so well-attended!"

The circus owner, thus directly appealed to, frowned in perplexity. He felt himself in a quandary. These freaks of his were difficult to handle. Why had he been fool enough to come to M. Jacques Courbé's wedding feast? Whatever he said would be used against him.

As Papa Copo hesitated, his round, red face wreathed in ingratiating smiles, the long deferred spark suddenly alighted in the powder. It all came about on account of the carelessness of M. Jejongle, who had become engrossed in the conversation and wished to put in a word for himself. Absent-mindedly juggling two heavy plates and a spoon, he said in a petulant tone:

"You all appear to forget me!"

Scarcely were the words out of his mouth, when one of the heavy plates descended with a crash on the thick skull of M. Hippo; and M. Jejongle was instantly remembered. Indeed he was more than remembered; for the giant, already irritated to the boiling point by Mlle. Lupa's insults, at the new affront struck out savagely past her and knocked the juggler head-over-heels under the table.

Mlle. Lupa, always quick-tempered and especially so when her attention was focused on a juicy chicken bone, evidently considered her dinner companion's conduct far from decorous, and promptly inserted her sharp teeth in the offending hand that had administered the blow. M. Hippo, squealing from rage and pain like a wounded elephant, bounded to this feet, overturning the table.

Pandemonium followed. Every freak's hands, teeth, feet, were turned against the others. Above the shouts, screams, growls, and hisses of the combat, Papa Copo's voice could be heard bellowing for peace.

"Ah, my children, my children! This is no way to behave! Calm yourselves, I pray you! Mlle. Lupa, remember that you are a lady as well as a wolf!"

There is no doubt that M. Jacques Courbé would have suffered most in this undignified fracas, had it not been for St. Eustache, who had stationed himself over his tiny master and who now drove off all would be assailants. As it was, Griffo, the unfortunate giraffe boy, was the most defenseless and therefore became the victim. His small, round head swayed back and forth to blows like a punching bag. He was bitten by Mlle. Lupa, buffeted by M. Hippo, kicked by M. Jejongle, clawed by Mme. Samson, and nearly strangled by both of the baby boa constrictors which had wound themselves about his neck like hangmen's nooses. Undoubtedly be would have fallen a victim to circumstances, had it not been for Simon Lafleur, the bride and half a dozen of her acrobatic friends, whom Papa Copo had implored to restore peace. Roaring with laughter, they sprang forward and tore the combatants apart.

M. Jacques Corbe was found sitting grimly under a fold of tablecloth. He held a broken bottle of wine in one hand. The dwarf was very drunk, and in a towering rage. As Simon Lafleur approached with one of his silent laughs, M. Jacques Courbé hurled the bottle at his bead. "Ah, the little wasp!" the bareback rider cried, picking up the dwarf by his waistband. "Here is your fine husband, Jeanne! Take him away before he does me some mischief. *Parbleu*, he is a bloodthirsty fellow in his cups!"

The bride approached, her blonde face crimson from wine and laughter. Now that she was safely married to a country estate, she took no more pains to conceal her true feelings.

"Oh, la, la!" she cried, seizing the struggling dwarf and holding him forcibly on her shoulder. "What a temper the little ape has! Well, we shall spank it out of him before long!"

"Let me down!" M. Jacques Courbé screamed in a paroxysm of fury. "You will regret this, madame! Let me down, I say!"

But the stalwart bride shook her head. "No, no, my little one!" she laughed. "You cannot escape your wife so easily! What, you would fly from my arms before the honeymoon!"

"Let me down!" he cried again. "Can't you see that they are laughing at me!"

"And why should they not laugh, my little ape? Let them laugh, if they will; but I will not put you down. No, I will carry you thus, perched on my shoulder, to the farm. It will set a precedent which brides of the future may find a certain difficulty in following!"

"But the farm is quite a distance from here, my Jeanne," said

Simon Lafleur. "You are strong as an ox, and he is only a marmoset; still I will wager a bottle of Burgundy that you set him down by the roadside."

"Done, Simon!" the bride cried, which a flash of her strong white teeth. "You shall lose your wager, for I swear that I could carry my little ape from one end of France to the other!"

M. Jacques Courbé no longer struggled. He now sat bolt upright on his brides broad shoulder. From the flaming peaks of blind passion, he had fallen into an abyss of cold fury. His love was dead, but some quite alien emotion was rearing an evil head from its ashes.

"Come!" cried the bride suddenly. "I am off. Do you and the others, Simon, follow to see me win my wager."

They all trooped out of the tent. A full moon rode the heavens and showed the road, lying as white and straight through the meadows as the parting in Simon Lafleur's black, oily hair. The bride, still holding the diminutive bridegroom on her shoulder, burst out into song as she strode forward. The wedding guests followed. Some walked none too steadily. Griffo, the giraffe boy, staggered pitifully on his long, thin legs. Papa Copo alone remained behind.

"What a strange world!" he muttered, standing in the tent door and following them with his round blue eyes. "Ah, there children of mine are difficult at times— very difficult!"

A YEAR HAD ROLLED BY since the marriage of Mlle. Jeanne Marie and M. Jacques Courbé. Copo's Circus had once more taken up its quarters in the town of Roubaix. For more than a week the country people for miles around had flocked to the side-show to get a peep at Griffo, the giraffe boy; M. Hercule Hippo, the giant; Mlle. Lupa, the wolf lady; Mme. Samson, with her baby boa constrictors; and M. Jejongle, the famous juggler. Each was still firmly convinced that he or she alone was responsible for the popularity of the circus.

Simon Lafleur sat in his lodgings at the Sign of the Wild Boar. He wore nothing but red tights. His powerful torso, stripped to the waist, glistened with oil. He was kneading his biceps tenderly with some strong-smelling fluid.

Suddenly there came the sound of heavy, laborious footsteps on the stairs. Simon Lafleur looked up. His rather gloomy expression lifted, giving place to the brilliant smile that had won for him the hearts of so many lady acrobats.

"Ah, this is Marcelle!" he told himself. "Or perhaps it is Rose, the English girl; or, yet again, little Francesca, although she walks more lightly. Well no matter— whoever it is, I will welcome her!"

By now, the lagging, heavy footfalls were in the hall; and, a moment later, they came to a halt outside the door. There was a timid knock.

Simon Lafleur's brilliant smile broadened. "Perhaps some new admirer that needs encouragement," he told himself. But aloud he said, "Enter, mademoiselle!"

The door swung slowly open and revealed the visitor. She was a tall, gaunt woman dressed like a peasant. The wind had blown her hair into her eyes. Now she raised a large, toil-worn hand, brushed it back across her forehead and looked long and attentively at the bareback rider.

"Do you not remember me?" she said at length.

Two lines of perplexity appeared above Simon Lafleur's Roman nose; he slowly shook his head. He, who had known so many women in his time, and now at a loss. Was it a fair question to ask a man who was no longer a boy and who had lived? Women change so in a brief time! Now this bag of bones might at one time have appeared desirable to him.

Parbleu! Fate was a conjurer! She waved her wand; and beautiful women were transformed into hogs, jewels into pebbles, silks and laces into hempen cords. The brave fellow, who danced to-night at the prince's ball, might to-morrow dance more lightly on the gallows tree. The thing was to live and die with a full belly. To digest all that one could— that was life!

"You do not remember me?" she said again.

Simon Lafleur once more shook his sleek, black head. "I have a poor memory for faces, madame," he said politely. "It is my misfortune, when there are such beautiful faces."

"Ah, but you should have remembered, Simon!" the woman cried, a sob rising in her throat. "We were very close together, you and I. Do you not remember Jeanne Marie?"

"Jeanne Marie!" the bareback rider cried. "Jeanne Marie, who married a marmoset and a country estate? Don't tell me. Madame, that you—"

He broke off and stared at her, open-mouthed. His sharp black eyes wandered from the wisps of wet, straggling hair down her gaunt person till they rested at last on her thick cowhide boots incrusted with layer on layer of mud from the countryside.

"It is impossible!" he said at last.

"It is indeed Jeanne Marie," the woman answered, "or what is left of her. Ah, Simon, what a life he has led me! I have been merely a beast of burden! There are no ignominities which he has not made me suffer!"

"To whom do you refer?" Simon Lafleur demanded. "Surely you cannot mean that pocket edition husband of yours— that dwarf, Jacques Courbé?"

"Ah, but I do, Simon! Alas, he has broken me!"

"He— that toothpick of a man?" the bareback rider cried, with one of his silent laughs. "Why, it is impossible! As you once said yourself, Jeanne, you could crack his skull between finger and thumb like a hickory nut!"

"So I thought once. Ah, but I did not know him then, Simon! Because he was small, I thought I could do with him as I liked. It seemed to me that I was marrying a manikin. 'I will play Punch and Judy with this little fellow,' I said to myself. Simon, you imagine my surprise when he began playing Punch and Judy with me!"

"But I do not understand, Jeanne. Surely at any time you could have slapped him into obedience!"

"Perhaps," she assented wearily, "had it not been for St. Eustache. From the first that wolf dog of his hated me. If I so much as answered his master back, he would show his teeth. Once, at the beginning when I raised my hand to cuff Jacques Corbe, he sprang at my throat and would have torn me limb from limb, had the dwarf not called him off. I was a strong woman, but even then I was no match for a wolf!"

"There was poison, was there not?" Simon Lafleur suggested.

"Ah, yes, I, too, thought of poison; but it was of no avail. St. Eustache would eat nothing that I gave him; and the dwarf forced me to taste first of all food that was placed before him and his dog. Unless I myself wished to die, there was no way of poisoning either of them."

"My poor girl!" the bareback rider said, pityingly. "I begin to understand; but sit down and tell me everything. This is a revelation to me, after seeing you stalking homeward so triumphantly with your bridegroom on you shoulder. You must begin at the beginning."

"It was just because I carried him thus on my shoulder that I have had to suffer so cruelly," she said, seating herself on the only other chair the room afforded. "He has never forgiven me the insult which he says I put upon him. Do you remember how I boasted that I could carry him from one end of France to the other?"

"I remember. Well, Jeanne?"

"Well, Simon, the little demon has figured out the exact distance in leagues. Each morning, rain or shine, we sally out of the house— he on my back, and the wolf dog at my heels— and I tramp along the dusty roads till my knees tremble beneath me from fatigue. If I so much as slacken my pace, if I falter, he goads me with cruel little golden spurs; while, at the same time, St. Eustache nips my ankles. When we return home, he strikes so many leagues of a score which he says is the number of leagues from one end of France to the other. Not half that distance has been covered, and I am no longer a strong woman, Simon. Look at these shoes!"

She held up one of her feet for his inspection. The sole of the cowhide boot had been worn through; Simon Lafleur caught a glimpse of bruised flesh caked with the mire of the highway.

"This is the third pair that I have had," she continued hoarsely.

"Now he tells me that the price of shoe leather is too high, that I shall have to finish my pilgrimage barefooted."

"But why do you put up with all this, Jeanne?" Simon Lafleur asked angrily. "You, who have a carriage and a servant, should not walk at all!"

"At first there was a carriage and a servant," she said, wiping the tears from her eyes with the back of her hand, "but they did not last a week. He sent the servant about his business and sold the carriage at a near-by fair. Now there is no one but me to wait on him and his dog."

"But the neighbours?" Simon Lafleur persisted. "Surely you could appeal to them?"

"We have no neighbours; the farm is quite isolated. I would have run away many months ago, if I could have escaped unnoticed; but they keep a continual watch on me. Once I tried, but I hadn't traveled more than a league before the wolf dog was snapping at my ankles. He drove me back to the farm, and the following day I was compelled to carry the little fiend until I fell from sheer exhaustion."

"But to-night you got away?"

"Yes," she said, and with a quick, frightened glance at the door. "To-night I slipped out while they were both sleeping, and came here to you. I know that you would protect me, Simon, because of what we have been to each other. Get Papa Copo to take me back in the circus, and I will work my fingers to the bone! Save me, Simon!"

Jeanne Marie could longer suppress her sobs. They rose in her throat, choking her, making her incapable of further speech.

"Calm yourself, Jeanne," Simon Lafleur told her soothingly. "I will do what I can for you. I shall discuss the matter with Papa Copo to-morrow. Of course, you are no longer the woman that you were a year ago. You have aged since then, but perhaps our good Papa Cope could find you something to do.

He broke off and eyed her intently. She had [sat up] in the chair; her face, even under its coat of grime, ha[d turned] a sickly white. "What troubles you, Jeanne?" he asked a trifle breathlessly.

"Hush!" she said, with a finger to her lips. "Listen!"

Simon Lafleur could hear nothing but the tapping of the rain on the roof and the sighing of the wind through the tree. An unusual silence seemed to pervade the Sign of the Wild Boar.

"Now don't you hear it?" she cried with an in articulate gasp. "Simon, it is in the house— it is on the stairs!"

At last the bareback rider's less sensitive ears caught the sound his companion had heard a full minute before. It was a steady pit-pat, pit-pat, on the stairs, hard to dissociate from the drop of the rain from the eaves; but each instant it came nearer, grew more distinct.

"Oh, save me, Simon; save me!" Jeanne Marie cried, throwing herself at his feet and clasping him about his knees. "Save me! It is St. Eustache!"

"Nonsense, woman!" the bareback rider said angrily, but nevertheless he rose. "There are other dogs in the world. On the second landing, there is a blind fellow who owns a dog Perhaps that is what you hear."

"No, no— it is St. Eustache's step! My God, if you had lived with him a year, you would know it, too! Close the door and lock it!"

"That I will not," Simon Lafleur said contemptuously. "Do you think I am frightened so easily? If it is the wolf dog, so much the worse for him. He will not be the first cur I have choked to death with these two hands!"

Pit-pat, pit-pat—it was on the second landing. Pit-pat, pit-pat— now it was in the corridor, and coming fast. Pit-pat— all at once it stopped.

There was a moment's breathless silence, and then into the room trotted St . Eustache. M. Jacques sat astride the dog's broad back, as he had so often done in the circus ring. He held a tiny drawn sword; his shoe-button eyes seemed to reflect its steely glitter.

The dwarf brought the dog to a halt in the middle of the room, and took in, at a single glance, the prostrate figure of Jeanne Marie. St. Eustache, too, seemed to take silent note of it. The stiff hair on his back rose up, he showed his long white fangs hungrily, and his eyes glowed like two live coals.

"So I find you thus, madame!" M. Jacques Courbé said at last. "It is fortunate that I have a charger here who can scent out my enemies as well as hunt them down in the open. Without him, I might have had some difficulty in discovering you. Well, the little game is up. I find you with your lover!"

"Simon Lafleur is not my lover!" she sobbed. "I have not seen him once since I married you until to-night! I swear it!"

"Once is enough," the dwarf said grimly. "The imprudent stable boy must be chastised!"

"Oh, spare him!" Jeanne Marie implored. "Do not harm him, I beg of you! It is not his fault that I came! I—"

But at this point Simon Lafleur drowned her out in a roar of laughter.

"Ha, ha!" he roared, putting his hands on his hips. "You would chastise me, eh? *Nom d'un chien*! Don't try your circus tricks on me! Why, hop-o'-my-thumb, you who ride on a dog's back like a flea, out of this room before I

squash you. Begone, melt, fade away!" He paused, expanded his barrel-like chest, puffed out his cheeks, and blew a great breath at the dwarf. "Blow away, insect," he bellowed, "lest I put my heel on you!"

M. Jacques Corbe was unmoved by this torrent of abuse. He sat very upright on St. Eustache's back, his tiny sword resting on his tiny shoulder.

"Are you done?" he said at last, when the bareback rider had run dry of invectives. "Very well, monsieur! Prepare to receive cavalry!" He paused for an instant, then added in a high clear voice: "Get him, St. Eustache!"

The dog crouched, and at almost the same moment, sprang at Simon Lafleur. The bareback rider had no time to avoid him and his tiny rider. Almost instantaneously the three of them had come to death grips. It was a gory business.

Simon Lafleur, strong man as he was, was bowled over by the dog's unexpected leap. St. Eustache's clashing jaws closed on his right arm and crushed it to the bone. A moment later the dwarf, still clinging to his dog's back, thrust the point of his tiny sword into the body of the prostrate bareback rider.

Simon Lafleur struggled valiantly, but to no purpose. Now he felt the fetid breath of the dog fanning his neck, and the wasp-like sting of the dwarf's blade, which this time found a mortal spot. A convulsive tremor shook him and he rolled over on his back. The circus Romeo was dead.

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5: Spindleby's Dilemma

Anonymous

Kangaroo Island Courier, 1 June 1918

'TO BE or not to be? that is the question. Whether shall I marry the sweetest and dearest little girl on earth, without a shilling to her name, or shall I fall into the arms of & charming little widow on the shady side of forty, with sixteen stones weight and fifty thousand pounds sterling to her credit?'

Jack Spindleby stood with his hands thrust deep in his trousers pockets. I laughed at his seriousness.

'Why, Jack, old man, you are a gay Lothario! You speak as if the women were ail at your feet, scrambling for the honour of becoming the one and only Mrs Spindleby!'

'Not exactly that, but it's quite true I've got to make the choice somehow. There's little Gracie Lovell, at home— we're not engaged, you know, but I'm awfully food of her and we're the best of friends and all that, but the has hardly money enough to buy her trousseau, and I— well, you know I can't save much.'

'Yet many a chap manages to save enough to get married upon on four pounds a week,' I ventured.

'On the other hand,' Jack continued, 'there's this little widow, Vi Golding. Ever since we've been down here she's been making a dead set on me, and I've only got to say the word to make her happy and myself rich for life.'

Harry Benton had remained silent till now. He chimed in with a remark made in all seriousness.

'Jack, my boy, the charm of that little Brixton girl will wear off soon after the honeymoon is over, but the fifty thousand will last a good few years with care.'

Harry Benton was always a cynic, and I disagree with many of his views, and hasten to say so.

'Take my advice, Jack, and don't marry for money. If you love the other girl, take her, and pull yourself together to save and buy a decent home for her.'

We three were spending a month together at Lowestoft. Spindleby was employed in an office in the City and lived at Brixton, while Benton was solicitor at Newcastle, and I had worked up a fair medical practice at Liverpool. Jack would not deride hastily. From the first a portrait of Grace Lovell had stood on his dressing table, and now one of Mrs Golding appeared on the other side— just to make a pair, he explained.

But fate— and the widow— laid a neat trap for young Spindleby.

I was fishing from the pier-head that afternoon, and Benton sat nearby, reading a novel. Spindleby and the widow ware walking up and down the pier oblivions to all else except their own society. I landed a dab, and at I pulled it in I most have given a little shout of pleased surprise, for Spindleby stopped and came towards me. I remember my first thought was that the fish must weigh seven or right pounds, though subsequent examination reduced it to one pound exactly,

'What is it?' cried Jack, leaning over the side as I drew in my line.

'I can see it! I can—?'

Mrs Golding had leaned over also, and in her enthusiasm had leaned too far, for her words ended in a little cry of terror as she overbalanced and went head-first into the sea.

Then it was that Jack's love for her was put to the test, but it did not fail. In an instant he had pulled off his boots and thrown his jacket on the seat. In another he was standing on wooden rail, with his hands above his head, ready to dive.

In he went, and, being a strong swimmer he reached she terrified woman as she came to the surface.

'Trust yourself to me,' he spluttered as he caught her by the arm. She gurgled something which I did not hear, and flung both her arms around his neck, closing her eyes as though fainting.

Jack gently disengaged himself from her grasp and, taking her by the shoulders, swam backwards towards the pier steps, where a group of people had already gathered to receive him. There was a little cheer as he dragged her to safety and led her up the steps. Then as the two walked back along the pier Mrs Golding clung to Jack tenaciously, and talked freely, though somewhat incoherently.

'Oh, I shall never, never repay you, Mr Spindleby! You have saved my life, and henceforth I can never do enough to repay you for your bravery.'

Harry Benton and I were walking just behind and we exchanged smiles.

'I'll back Jack for the Fortune Stakes,' he whispered. 'He'll have to marry that fifty thousand now.'

And as our holiday drew to a close it became clear that his prophecy was not a wild one. If Jack had not yet decided, Mrs Golding had, and the way she showed her intentions left no room for doubt in any of our minds.

'I cannot say that I feel sure of myself,' said Jack, in confidence. 'But I'm very much afraid poor little Gracie will have to find another husband. And after all Vi is a dear little woman, one of the best I've ever met. I shall marry her for her own sake, and you fellows needn't think it's her money I'm after.'

'Never let it be said, old chap,' replied Benton, heartily. 'I wish you joy, and in any case you've earned your good fortune, for she might have drowned but for you.'

And when we finally returned to our respective homes Jack had made arrangements to correspond with Mrs Golding, and had promised to meet her in town.

SOME of us are poor correspondents and I must admit that when about six months had passed I had neither written to my old friend nor heard from him.

Then came a surprise. Jack wrote a brief note inviting me to his wedding on the following Thursday morning. It meant travelling by night and reaching London in the early morning but one friends do not get married every day, and the least I could do was to write and accept the invitation He had said nothing as to his intended bride, but in my own mind I had no doubt as to her identity. Mrs Golding had meant business.

After a series of unexpected and provoking delays I arrived at the house to find that the interested parties had already gone to the church.

Harrying after them I found the ceremony had commenced, and Spindleby was already fumbling in his waistcoat pocket for the ring. The bride's face I could not see— in fact she appeared, from where I sat, as a mass of dainty, gauze-like finery, with just a shred of jet-black hair showing where her head-gear had become slightly disarranged. That shred of hair aroused my wonder. In figure the woman was slim and short of stature— far too slim for the widow, I imagined, even supposing that she had taken a long course of treatment for corpulency . No, it could not be Mrs Golding. On the other hand I knew that Grace Lovell had rich auburn hair— the most beautiful hair in the kingdom, according to Jack.

Not till the ceremony was over did I eaten a glimpse of the bride's face, and then I knew she was neither the one nor the other, but a girl of about one and twenty. In the vestry I heard that her name had been Minnie Rolfe.

Jack greeted me as cordially as ever and hastened to introduce me to his wife. My congratulations were equally sincere, though I was still wondering, and a little later I had the chance of a few words with my old chum.

'You've done me this time old man! What has become of the little widow? And what about Grace? I've never even heard of this young lady.'

Jack laughed in his usual merry way as he replied.

'Of course you don't know, for I haven't seen you lately. I had almost forgotten about those two. It was awfully funny the way they dropped out of it. Let's take a turn around the garden and I'll tell you the yarn.

'I really did mean to have one of those two,' he went on, ' but I couldn't screw up my courage to decide definitely and tell the other I didn't want her. So for some time I kept on with both, till fate played me a very shabby trick. I was walking out arm-in-arm with Vi— the widow, you know— and suddenly we ran right against Gracie. I might have survived that, but unfortunately I quite lost my head, and made a fool of myself.'

'Not for the first time,' I laughed.

'True. But anyway I had to introduce them, and yet wanted to keep up the— er— game, you know. And is my flurry I introduced Mrs Golding as my mother's sister, and said that Gracie was a distant cousin. That did it! In a minute I knew that I had made a fearful mistake, but it was too late.

'So I should think.'

'Yes, the little widow flared up at once and turned on me.

' "Your mother's sister, am I? What's your little game Mr Spindleby? Is that an insult ? If it is I'll let you know I'm not as old as some people think!" Then she turned to Gracie and went on, "I don't know if you are really his cousin, miss, but I'll let you know that Mr Spindleby is engaged to me, and we are to be married shortly."

'Then it was Gracie's turn. She looked horrified and then turned pale.

' "Married?" says she. "Why, Jack is practically engaged to me. We are not cousins, we've been friends along while."

'Women are queer creatures, you know and terribly unreasonable, and as soon as they had exchanged a few remarks they both turned on me, and I tell you I had to go through it. Finally the widow said I had best think no more of her, and stick to my cousin, for she had done with me. And Gracie became sarcastic and told me she thought my mother's sister would be a better match for me than herself, for I wanted a mother to look after me and teach me manners. That was three months ago and I've never set eyes on either of them since.'

'And what about this young lady, Minnie? How does she come into it?

'Oh, Minnie! She's a gem! I met her about that time, and it was really a case of love at first sight. We took to each other at once, and— you wait till you know her better, old chum, she's a perfect treasure. She's much the finest girl I've ever met, in many ways, and I reckon I'm a lucky man to win her.'

'Is she rich?' I inquired, remembering his doubts as to his ability to support a wife.

'Rich? Why, man, she hasn't a stiver to her name! But what does that matter? Hang it all, it's hard lines if a man can't work to keep his wife, especially when she's the dearest and best little woman on earth.'

And to do Jack Spindleby justice, though ten years have gone by since then he still holds strenuously to that opinion.

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6: Men Are Such Fools

E. Phillips Oppenheim

1866-1946

Ainslee's, Sep 1908

THEY leaned over the white paling of the enclosure and gazed moodily after the retreating players.

"I can't think why I came to this beastly place!" he muttered.

"Nor I!" the girl answered indifferently.

"I shall leave to-morrow," he declared.

"The best train is in the afternoon," she reminded him. "You would have plenty of time to pack."

"She must have remembered it perfectly well," he continued, following out his own train of thought. "I saw her coming down to breakfast, and she said that she might be a few minutes late. Here am I on the spot to the moment, and there she is at the second hole, playing with that fellow Cunningham!"

The girl who had been standing by his side shrugged her shoulders as she turned away.

"Why don't you go in and see the colonel?" she suggested. "He'll find you a match."

He opened his mouth to say things, but remembered in time that the girl was within ear-shot. As she strolled up to the first tee he watched her critically. She really was not bad looking. Her figure was excellent, and although her features were undistinguished, and her small oval face was pale, her eyes were good, and her deep brown hair was a pleasant color. Of course, by the side of Stella Manners she was insignificant, so far as looks went, at any rate, but she at least presented a possibility.

"I suppose you wouldn't care to have a round with me?" he suggested, strolling after her.

She turned round and faced him, with a humorous twinkle in her eyes.

"How good-natured of you!" she exclaimed. "I should be delighted, if you are quite sure that it won't bore you."

"Not in the least," he assured her. "Let me see, my handicap is ten. What shall I give you? Half a stroke?"

"I don't think that I must be quite so greedy," she answered. "Let us try a round level."

He raised his eyebrows. He had never seen her play.

"Just as you like," he assented, a little stiffly. "I thought that it would make the game more interesting if I gave you some strokes."

She smiled, and drove off. At the turn he was two down. He lost the match three down.

"I'm awfully sorry I offered you those strokes," he said, laughing, as they walked up to the pavilion. "You might have told me that you were a scratch player."

"You never asked me my handicap," she reminded him. "Besides, these links are all in my favor. On a long course I shouldn't have a chance against you."

Stella came out of the enclosure to meet them.

"You were late this morning, Mr. Lugard," she remarked.

"I was here punctually at the time we arranged," he answered stiffly.

"Really! Then my watch must have gained in the night," she declared carelessly. "So sorry! I suppose you two wouldn't care to play a foursome against Captain Cunningham and myself this afternoon, would you?"

Lugard was on the point of refusing, when an evil thought struck him.

"I should be delighted." he said, "if Miss Leycester would play."

Miss Leycester agreed, after a moment's hesitation.

"We aren't very much good, you know," Lugard remarked modestly, "at least I'm not."

"We can give you strokes," Stella declared magnanimously. "Captain Cunningham is playing a wonderful game!"

THE foursome should have taught him wisdom, but it didn't. The lady of his ill-advised adoration, accustomed to supremacy, was outdriven and outplayed by the quiet little brown girl whom no one knew anything about. Stella almost lost her temper, and she made several remarks which were calmly ignored by her opponent. Lugard was idiot enough to admire her high-heeled shoes and silk stockings, and to find Miss Leycester's flat thick boots unbecoming: to prefer her elaborate dressmaker's golfing costume, with its "lady's-maid's" rustle, to the faultless tailor-made outfit of his own partner. Yet even he was a little netted at her curt refusal to play a bye when she and Captain Cunningham had lost the match at the thirteenth hole, and he had spirit enough to refuse her invitation to walk home by the cliffs, and to remain and finish the round with Miss Leycester. When they had holed out on the last green and were on their way to the pavilion, she turned toward him.

"You admire Miss Manners very much, don't you?" she asked quietly.

"She is very pretty— and graceful," he answered. "I think every one admires her, don't they?"

She shrugged her shoulders. There was a gleam of humor in her dark bright eyes as she looked at him.

"I suppose," she remarked, "that you consider yourself desperately in love with her. I wouldn't be, if I were you!"

"Why not?" he asked.

"You are very young," she answered, "too young even to imagine yourself in love with any one. Don't be annoyed with me. Lookers-on see so much, you know— and I am always a looker-on!"

THAT evening a surprise was in store for the guests at the hotel where they were all staying. Miss Leycester and her aunt, who had dined every night in their own sitting-room, came down to the table d'hôte. The aunt, who had spent most of her time in her own room, and of whom no one yet had obtained more than a casual glimpse, was tall, and of aristocratic appearance. She wore a handsome black lace dress, with some wonderful old-fashioned jewelry— her appearance as she walked slowly down the room, leaning on a gold-mounted stick, and followed by her maid carrying a cushion, was quite impressive. But the quiet little brown girl! She wore a muslin gown, quite fresh and new, whose superiority over the ordinary evening dress of the hotel sojourners, even Lugard unhesitatingly accepted; and a cluster of pink roses at her bosom which no local flower-seller had ever provided. She smiled charmingly at Lugard, who was so dumbfounded that he had scarcely presence of mind enough to rise and bow. Either of intent or otherwise, she ignored the table where Miss Manners and her friends were sitting. Stella colored slowly, and ate with little appetite. For the first time she recognized a rival.

Miss Leycester was sitting in the hall when Lugard came out, and beckoned to him just as Stella was advancing with a smile.

"I want to introduce you to my aunt, Mr. Lugard." she said. "She used to know your father quite well, when he was vicar of Downminster."

Lugard looked a little perplexed.

"I thought that I knew most of my father's parishioners," he remarked.

Mrs. Templeman raised her eyeglasses and nodded.

"I remember you quite well, Mr. Lugard," she said. "You used to shoot rabbits in the park when you were quite a boy. Lord Downminster was my brother, you know, and I used to stay there a good deal." Lugard smiled.

"Of course!" he exclaimed. "You once gave me a rook rifle on my birthday, and Lord Downminster took it away the next day because I shot a cat!"

Mrs. Templeman turned to her niece.

"The colonel is coming in to have coffee with us, Elisabeth," she said. "If Mr. Lugard would make a fourth, we could have a rubber of bridge."

Miss Leycester looked up at him with a smile.

"Perhaps you have made some other arrangement, Mr. Lugard?"

"Not at all," he assured her. "I shall be delighted."

Stella looked distinctly annoyed as she saw Lugard follow the two ladies up to their sitting-room. She was not used to losing admirers, and she had never seriously regarded this quiet reserved girl as a possible rival. In her own mind she made plans for the morrow.

The Honorable Mrs. Templeman paused on the first landing and looked downward through her gold eye-glasses. Lugard had gone back again to order their coffee.

"Rather a scratch lot of people, Betty," she said. "The boy seems nice. What made you talk to him?"

Her niece smiled thoughtfully.

"He is making rather a fool of himself with that fair, showy-looking girl, Stella somebody or other," she said. "I don't know why I should interfere really, but the girl annoys me. She is so hopelessly obvious. I hope it won't bore you to have him come up."

"I never allow any one to bore me," her aunt answered placidly. "Besides, he makes a fourth for bridge!"

FOR three days Lugard wavered. Stella treated him with greatly increased consideration, she changed her frocks continually, and she was always ready to talk nonsense. Miss Leycester, on the other hand, although she was always bright and companionable, made no special effort to attract him, and seemed rather inclined to let him go his own way. The absolute simplicity of her dress and manners, and her perfect naturalness, appealed to him at times with their due significance, but he was unfortunately at that unholy age when the more obvious arts of the girl who has graduated in the profession of making herself agreeable to his sex are more likely to prevail. Gradually he became Stella's constant companion. One night after dinner, as they left the hotel together for a walk on the sea-front, and Stella from underneath her lace scarf had thrown an almost insolent glance at Miss Leycester sitting alone, Mrs. Templeman noticed them.

"So you couldn't teach your young man wisdom, Betty," she remarked.

Elisabeth answered lightly enough, but there was an undercurrent of regret in her tone, and her eyes, still fixed upon the door, were a little wistful.

"He is very young," she said. "The girl, too, is after all beautiful in her way. You really think of leaving this week, aunt?"

Mrs. Templeman nodded.

"The place is beginning to bore me," she said. "We will go to Scotland and stay with Bobby for a week or so."

THEY left the next day, and Stella carefully arranged a golf-match with Lugard

for the time of their departure. From her place in the railway-train, Elisabeth looked out over the links and watched them playing. They were a very good-looking couple, and Lugard appeared to be completely absorbed by his companion. He did not even glance toward the train as it passed. Elisabeth leaned back in her corner. She was a very matter-of-fact young person, but there was a queer little pain at her heart just then, and she was never quite sure whether the mist was on the window-pane or in her eyes.

LUGARD, unable to stop the frenzied rush, did what seemed to him to be the next best thing— he escaped from it. The idea of being borne to safety in the center of a howling mob of men and women, suddenly transformed into the likeness of beasts, revolted him. He opened the door of one of the deserted boxes and stepped inside.

Below, in the stalls and pit, something of the same sort of scene was being enacted: from behind the lowered curtain came, every now and then, little vicious-looking puffs of smoke. Gazing around the house, he became suddenly aware that the box next to his was occupied. A woman's hand was resting upon the ledge. He leaned over, and recognized her at once.

"Miss Leycester!" he gasped.

She was a little pale, but there was in her face some trace of the same scorn, mingled with disgust, which had made him escape from the maddened path which led to safety. When she saw him, however, her whole expression changed. The smile which broke across her face was illumining, and it seemed to him that she had grown beautiful.

"How odd!" she exclaimed. "You, too, are waiting— until this is over. Do come in and sit with me."

He swung himself into her box and seated himself opposite to her. She was apparently in the same place which she had occupied all the evening. Her program and opera-glasses were on the ledge in front of her.

"This is like you," he said quietly. "I could never have imagined you— down there!"

He pointed to the screaming crowd below, and her eyes followed his gesture.

"I'm playing my old role," she said softly, "a looker-on always!"

He rose suddenly to his feet. His cheeks were blanched, his eyes were fastened upon one figure. A woman, tall and fair, was making frantic efforts to push her way from the center of the stalls. Her shrieks filled the air, her dress was half torn from her shoulders; she struck madly at every one within reach: the initial desire for personal safety at all costs burned in her terror-stricken, staring eyes. They saw her push off her feet and climb upon the body of an

older woman, to gain a few inches of ground. Miss Leycester said nothing, but she looked away with a little shudder.

"God in Heaven!" he muttered. "I left England because of that woman. I might, yes, I might have married her!"

She opened her fan and commenced to fan herself.

"Don't let us look any more," she said. "It makes one feel— so ashamed. Is the fire gaining ground, do you think?"

He wiped the sweat from his forehead. He, too, was brave, but it was hard to match her coolness.

"I fancy so," he answered. "But the pity of it! There was time for every one to escape. There is now."

"Nothing can be done, I suppose?" she asked.

He shook his head.

"I climbed on the stage, and stayed there shouting till my throat ached," he answered.

She nodded.

"I saw you! It was no good! It is like an epidemic, this madness. How fortunate to be here! Tell me, how long have you been back in England?"

"Three weeks," he answered.

"And it is just three years since we were down at Sheringham," she remarked.

Their door came crashing in, and a man lay groaning across the threshold. Outside, the stream was thicker than ever. Men and women stumbled over and kicked the prostrate body. Lugard helped him to his feet, and without a word of thanks he reeled once more like a drunken man into the throng.

"Let me lift you into the other box." Lugard said. "The door is still fast there."

She nodded. He went first, and she leaned over, trusting herself fearlessly to his arms. For a moment he forgot to release her. They stood there in the dimly-lit box, and he felt her heart beat madly against his. A sudden wave of emotion swept over him. He forgot the horrors by which they were surrounded. Some part of the passion which was vibrating in another key throughout the doomed building, seemed to be throbbing now in these few feet of darkened air around them. He held her face, pale no longer, up to his, and kissed her unresisting lips.

"Don't!" she murmured weakly. "Oh, what an idiot I am!"

He laughed cheerfully.

"Not nearly such an idiot as I have been," he answered.

"Escape," he remarked, a few minutes later, "has now become a necessity. Wait!"

He opened the door carefully. The passage was empty. A fireman with a hydrant was sending a stream of water toward the blistering wall. He looked at them in surprise.

"Is the staircase still standing?" Lugard asked.

"The extra exit is," the man answered. "It has never been used," he added grimly. "Straight through here, sir!"

Lugard threw his coat over his shoulders.

"Come!" he said, and they walked out into the night.

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7: Pug-Face's Daughter

Gilbert Frankau

1884-1952

The London Magazine, Feb 1922

Australian Women's Weekly, 11 June 1938

ONE cannot honestly blame "Pug-face" Peters. That old man (his nick-name fits his bluff, clean-shaven, wrinkled countenance to a "t"; and the paunchy body and squat limbs hardly detract from the illusion) loved his cloth mills at least as much as— some will say more than— he loved his one daughter and only child, Milly. Therefore, when Milly insisted on marrying Harold Wentworth...

But that would be anticipating the tale.

Peters' mills employ a thousand hands. They weave— all Yorkshire admits that much— the best cloth In the West Riding. And their chimney— it cost Pug-face twelve hundred pounds to re-point the bricks in 1919— dominates the town very much in the same way that Pug-face domineers over the Town Council.

Pug-face, watching the twilight glow of that chimney as he waited for his homeward tram, was thinking about those twelve hundred pounds, gloating over the fact that he, who had started life with "nowt," should be able to spend such an amount on mere repairs.

"And there'll be no excess profits duty to pay, neither," he gloated.

Yet Pug-face was neither a mean man nor unpatriotic. He wasn't even a profiteer What he had made, he had made honestly and spent lavishly-whether on his dead wife's Jewellery, his daughter's education, or the town "What's the sense in making t'brass if you don't spent t'brass?" he used to say. And when it came to spending "t'brass" on his mills, Pug-face could be more than lavish.

You can't wonder at that. Peters' mills, to their owner, are more than a mere business— they are a creation, his own private and particular emulation of God. He knows every man Jack and every girl Jill of his thousand employees; he knows every trick and turn of the thousand processes that go to the manufacturing of his product. Wool (which he spins himself), worsted (which he buys from his cronies), carding machinery, "mules," "wuzzers," dyes, dynamos, "helds," and "maces," there isn't a single strand of raw material, a single gadget of wood or steel, a single operation of finger or machinery that "the old man" isn't wise to, and Infernally wise.

He can work the old wooden handlooms that are still used, in a quaint gallery of their own, for the weaving of patterns; he can take man or boy's place in the "warping" rooms; he can handle the clacking miracles, whose "picking sticks" shoot their shuttle a hundred times a minute through the

"shed" of the moving "warp;" he can Judge "indigo" by naked eye to the minutest coloration of a three-year-old sample; he can "burl" the finished cloth better than the oldest woman who gossips under the sky-light of the top floor; and he can even, at a pinch, act as his own commercial traveller.

But on this particular evening— his customary gloat about the chimney having come to an end— Pug-face's mind deserted his mills for his Milly. Milly, and Milly's husband, expected a decision; he would have to give that decision over his after-dinner cigar.

"Confound 'em both!" muttered Pug-face, as the lights of his tram came switch-backing down the dale. Usually he enjoyed the ride home— the conductor's respectful greeting, the glimpses of the town through the windows. But to-night enjoyment failed him.

"The lass is as obstinate as her own father," he growled, "and her man's a fool!"

The car decanted him at the foot of his own drive; clanged away. For a moment he hesitated. Why not go to the club? Why not postpone "the row"? But lack of moral courage had never been one of the old man's fallings, and he strode on, hands in his overcoat pockets, muffler round his neck, bowler tilted at the back of his head, up his own drive, between his own laurel bushes into his own house.

A pert maidservant (there were seven at Holmfield) informed him that "Captain and Mrs. Wentworth" were out in the motor, but would be back in time for dinner. He heard the car arrive, tooting its klaxon, while he was dressing

Wealthy manufacturers of the West Riding— despite the asseverations of "local color" novelists— no longer take "high teas" in the kitchen. Nothing about the dining-room at Holmfield could have been cavilled at by a Mayfair hostess. On the contrary, many a humble denizen of Half Moon Street or Berkeley Hill would have opened her eyes at the winking table-silver, the Waterford glass, the deft service, and the general luxury of Pug-face's establishment.

While as for Pug-face's turtle soup, fried sole, and grouse-pie— to say nothing of Pug-face's 1912 Pommery and '68 port— not a clubman in London but would have sold his hopes of immortality for a smell of them. So at least thought Harold Wentworth (some time captain of Yeomanry) as he picked a fat Havana from the box his father-in-law passed across the coffee-cups, and glanced anxiously at his "missus."

They made a quaint trio— the old man in his bulging shirt-front; the old man's daughter, tall, dark, a trifle large of hand and foot, with Pug-face's own desperately resolute black eyes, her mother's dimpled chin, and a full, red, jolly

mouth, which came from neither parent; and the well-groomed blond youth, with the clipped moustache, the "soda-water-bottle" blue eyes, the high cheekbones, and the intellectual forehead.

"Best leave us, lass," said Pug-face.

"You'll quarrel if I do," protested the girl, and the resolution in her look belied the smile of her mouth. "Besides, I'm just as interested in your decision as Harold is!" She shifted her chair nearer to her husband, so that the old man faced the pair of them. "Talk away, Daddy," she smiled.

Peters took a preliminary puff at his cigar, and began.

"Harold," he said, "I'd be the last to deny that a man has a right to choose his own career. But he can't expect another man, even his own father-in-law, to find the brass for it. When you married my lass 'twas an understood thing that you'd come into my mills. No. I'll admit you made no promise. You've been straight with me. That much I'll grant you both. You wanted time to think it over, and I've give you time. Last night you said you'd made up your mind. You wouldn't come into my mills."

He paused, and Wentworth, filling up the pause, admitted: "That's right, sir."

"And you told me that you wanted to go in for politics!" The old man sniffed. "Politicians in this country need an income. Who's to provide yours? Your father-in-law?"

"That's the idea, Daddy," interjected Wentworth's wife. "We could manage quite well on a couple of thousand a year for a start."

"I've no doubt you could, lass. I started on five shillings a week." Pug-face's voice had begun to rasp. "But you'll have no couple of thousand a year from me— not for politics. Politicians cost me quite enough already. I'll keep no M.P.'s of my own." He turned to his son-in-law. "You come into the mills, Harold. Plenty of time for the political game when you've learned how to make a living."

"I'm sorry, sir." Wentworth's jaw set. "I only wish I could make you understand. To me, politics aren't a game; they're a duty the leisured classes owe to their country."

"You talk like a parson," retorted his father-in-law. "This country isn't run by politicians. It's run by business men. I keep a thousand people in employ. I keep 'em happy. I work. You only want to idle at my expense."

"You needn't be rude, Daddy." Millicent's black eyes hardened; Into her voice, too, crept the family rasp.

"I'm telling you both the truth," said her father. "Truth's always a bit rude-to the young."

"Then you'll do nothing to help us, daddy?"

"I'll do everything in the world, if ye go my way. My way's the mills. If ye don't"— Pug-face laughed, as a man sure of his ground— "ye can look after yourselves."

Milly had fallen very silent. The hands on her lap were clenched; her teeth bit on her under lip. All the hardness of the West Riding shone in her eyes. She said to her-self, "Daddy's a beast! A mean beast! I don't want Harold in the mills. I want him in the House. I'll have what I want!"

She said to her father:

"You think we can't look after ourselves?"

Her father answered, laughing:

"That's self-evident, lass. If ye could look after yourselves ye wouldn't ask me for a couple o' thousand a year."

There ensued an interval of utter silence, during which it seemed to Wentworth as though the issue were out of his hands. Then the woman said:

"One day you'll be sorry about this, Daddy."

She swept out of the dining-room, taking her husband with her, and Pug-face watched them go, his bluff countenance crinkled to a sardonic smile.

"She's the very spit of her father," smiled Pug-face. "Pity she wasn't a boy."

But next evening, when he returned home to find neither daughter nor son-in-law— only the little note which ended: "We're going to show you that we can look after ourselves," the owner of Peters' Mills did not smile. On the contrary, he cursed his daughter for a "pig-headed lass," and his son-in-law for "a man who didn't know which side his bread was buttered."

SOME six weeks later the "pig-headed lass" sat alone over her tea in the lounge of Banister's Hotel, London. The "tea"— thin bread-and-butter and a cake or so— cost half a crown. The bill for the week would be thirty pounds. Chin cupped in Arm hand, Millicent Wentworth ruminated on these and other problems.

The whole position, of course, was ludicrous. To begin with, she never ought to have coaxed Harold into running away from the town. Secondly, she ought never to have suggested Banister's. Thirdly, she ought to nave taken her pearls out of the safe before they started. One could "look after oneself" for quite a time on the proceeds of a three-thousand pound pearl necklace. Meanwhile, she would have to pawn her furs before they could pay their bill, unless she told the hotel to send the bill to her father. "And I'd die rather than do that," she thought.

She said as much to her husband when he Joined her— his hands in his trousers pockets, a wry smile on his lips.

"If I had any gumption, Harry," she said. "I'd find some way to beat him. We've only been bluffing so far, and bluff Isn't any use against Daddy's money."

"If I'd had any gumption," he retorted, "I'd have found a job." He lit a cigarette and smiled philosophically. "Nothing for it but the mills, I'm afraid.

"Milly," he continued, "London's no place for an untrained man with extravagant habits. Even if I had a job we couldn't have lived on it. Your father's right— politics, without an income, are a wash-out!"

THEY went, both very thoughtful, to their room, began dressing for dinner; and it was while dressing— to be precise, at the exact moment when Harry had fumbled the last hook of her gown into Its ultimate eye— that Millicent remarked:

"Don't Socialists say that people should be kept by the State?"

"More or less," answered Wentworth, kissing her neck.

"And what do you think?"

"I think"— the kiss had put him a little off his guard— "that people have got to look after themselves."

"Then," decided his wife, "hadn't we better do it?"

"How?" They faced each other in front of the gleaming mirror.

"Oh, anyhow!" She stretched out a hand to him. "Harry, I'm Yorkshire. And I'd hate to think Daddy had got the better of me. Let's beat him, even if— even if"— she hesitated perceptibly— "we both of us have to go to work."

"Both of us!" Wentworth was only twenty-four, and a Southerner. His mouth fell open at the very suggestion.

"And why not?" Pug-face's daughter laughed. "My mother was a working woman. And her mother before her."

"Yes; but I say—" began her husband. Milly stifled protest with a full-lipped kiss; led him, still protesting, dinnerward.

Pug-face Peters sat solitary in his dining-room over a fat cigar and a glass of '68 port. The cigar wouldn't burn and the port had lost its savor.

Most things had lost their savor for Pug-face since Milly and her husband disappeared. To begin with, Holmfield wasn't running smoothly; three of the seven maidservants had given notice, and the cook appeared daily on the verge of mutiny. Then the mills were short of work. And lastly, folk had begun to gossip.

Folk suspected a family row. Folk wanted to know the whereabouts of Pug-face's daughter. And Pug-face couldn't tell them the whereabouts of his daughter— because Pug-face didn't know.

He didn't know! That was the maddening feature of the whole business. The "lass" and her "man" had vanished— literally vanished from the face of London. Even "t'brass "— and he'd spent brass enough personally and through inquiry agents—had failed to trace them after they had left Banister's.

Pouring himself a second glass of the port which had lost its savor, the old man decided on yet another trip to London.

Some four months after Milly's disappearance from Holmfield, Nathaniel Jobson— of "Jobson's Cutprice Clothing Stores"— returned to his elaborate villa-residence at Streatham in a state of pleasurable excitement. An unpleasant person was Nathaniel Jobson; loud of voice, fat, and red of face— briefly, as noisome a representative of the newly-rich as you could hope never to encounter.

To-night, however. Nathaniel's excitement made him almost jovial. Stepping out of his new car, he flung a couple of half-crowns to his new chauffeur, and said gruffly:

"Know anything about waiting at table?"

The chauffeur pocketed the half-crowns before replying:

"Very little, I'm afraid, sir."

"Now, look here, me lad"— Nathaniel's Joviality eased off a point or two— "don't let's have any nonsense. I told the two of you when I engaged you, that you'd be expected to turn your hands to anything. I've got one of the biggest bugs from the North of England dining with me to-night, and he's got to be impressed. Impressed! Do you follow me? Bit of swank so to speak."

"And you want me to impress him?" asked the young man in the new motor-livery.

"That's the ticket! Now, Just you listen to me."

Nathaniel gave his orders, watched the car drive off round the shrubbery, fumbled for the latch-key let himself into the ornate hall, and shouted:

"Harvey!"

Harvey Jobson, a supercilious youth with a cigarette hanging from the corner of his loose-lipped mouth lounged out from the smoking-room and murmured:

"Hullo, father!"

"Did you get my telephone message?"

"Yes, Martha gave it to me."

"Where is Martha?"

"Getting dinner ready."

"Getting dinner ready! What the devil d'ye mean?"

"Cook's gone," said the supercilious youth. "Someone had to cook the dinner!"

For the fraction of a second his father stood paralysed; then he exploded.

"GONE! How dare she go? I'm entitled to a month's notice. I'll have the law on that woman" (he didn't actually say "woman"), "if it costs me every penny I possess. Why the devil didn't you telephone me?"

"She only went half an hour ago," put in Harvey. "There wasn't time."

"And how the devil is Martha goin' to wait at table and cook the dinner?"

"Hanged if I know," said the supercilious youth, and added, under his breath, "or care."

Pug-face Peters, driving Streatham-wards in the car which had accompanied him to London, cursed himself heartily for having accepted Jobson's invitation.

"Profiteering brute!" growled Pug-face. "Bad enough having to sell him cloth. No need to eat his food."

Still, the mills would be glad of Jobson's contract— even though it was for "wools" and not for "worsteds." Jobson't Cut-price Clothing Stores— with their five hundred branches and their three-guinea ready-to-wear suits—could take a lot of "the stoof" in the course of the twelve months; and it was better to run at no profit than close down. If only the fellow hadn't insisted on inviting him to dinner!

It took Pug-face's North-country chauffeur a goodish detour to find Pinewood Lodge, so that by the time his car purred up to the front door Jobson, what with the apprehension of his guest's not arriving at all, and the fear lest the hurriedly improvised arrangements for his guest's reception should go awry, was in a state of excitement which, far from being pleasurable, bordered on hysteria. The first arrangement, therefore (that the camouflaged chauffeur should open the front door) went by the board; and Nathaniel himself, in full evening dress, rushed out.

"Come in, Mr. Peters-come in!" shouted Nathaniel. "It's a pleasure to see you with us. Even though you do find us in the midst of a domestic upheaval."

"Domestic upheaval?" thought Pug-face, shuffling out of his fur coat. "His daughter can't have bolted, too."

But Jobson's next words dissipated the illusion.

"Our staff," prevaricated Jobson, "has suddenly deserted us. Would you believe it, Mr. Peters— cook, kitchen-maid, and two of the house-maids. All gone. Without notice. Scandalous, isn't it?"

"Scandalous!" agreed the guest, wondering about how bad the dinner was going to be.

"However," went on his host, "luckily we've still enough of them to manage a bit of food for an honored guest." And he led the way into an over-furnished drawing-room, where Harvey— more supercilious than ever in his Jobson Cut-price smoking jacket— was keeping guard over a tray of cocktail ingredients.

Pug-face was introduced to Harvey, accepted a badly-mixed gin and bitters, refused a cigarette, and did his best to make conversation.

"Got any family, Mr. Peters?" asked his host.

"Yes. I've a daughter."

"Lucky man! I wish I had a girl. Sons"— Jobson senior glanced meaningly at Jobson junior— "are an expensive luxury. Not that I grudge the expense, mark you. I don't expect my son to work as I've had to."

"That so?" murmured the old man. Conversation languished. Jobson, obviously ill at ease, began to fidget on his chair, excused himself, went out. Peters, listening with half an ear to the lofty remarks of Jobson, jun., heard a furious whisper beyond the door. "Hang it, how much longer are you going to be?" and a voice— a voice which seemed somehow familiar— replying: "I was just coming to tell you it was ready."

Nathaniel— a trifle flushed from his encounter— reappeared, flung open the door, and announced that the meal waited.

Crossing the ornate hall, Pug-face was aware of a female figure— a figure somehow familiar— vanishing through a baize-covered door. But before the impression could fully register he found himself In the overlit dining-room, found himself gazing across a table, heavy with silver and flowers, into the utterly impassive countenance of-his son in-law.

"We'll begin with sherry, Parsons," said Nathaniel Jobson.

The soup-that much Pug-face could realise-had been on the table when they sat down. He even made an effort to partake of the soup. But Harold Wentworth's quiet "Sherry, sir?" and the sight of Harold Wentworth's aristocratic hand on the decanter upset his father-in-law to such an extent that the mouthful almost choked him.

He sat before the soup, watching it chill, hypnotised by it, hypnotised by the glimmer of the light in his sherry glass.

Harold Wentworth— Captain Harold Wentworth— his own son-in-law— butler at Jobson's! Pug-face tried to tell himself that the thing was impossible, that he must be the victim of hallucination.

"Parsons," said Jobson's voice, "clear away the soup."

"Parsons" couldn't be Wentworth, couldn't be the man who'd married his Milly. "Parsons" must be Wentworth's double.

PARSONS" began to remove the soup plates. Pug-face, doing his best to make conversation, could see that Jobson senior was fidgety. Jobson senior had pressed an electric table bell. Jobson senior was watching the dining-room door. Pug-face, too, watched the door.

"Confound that girl!" muttered Jobson, and again pressed his bell.

Then the door opened, and Pug-face, already sick with apprehension, looked straight into the black eyes of his missing daughter.

Milly wore the cap and apron of domestic servitude. Milly's firm hands (white no longer) carried on the most elaborate of silver dishes— a vast fish. But her firm hands shook; her face was flushed from the oven. She could feel fish and dish a-tremble. Her brain spun. "It's daddy," she thought. "Daddy I They made me cook the dinner for him. They made me bring it in. Why didn't Harold tell me it was daddy?"

Whereupon, simultaneously, she heard Jobson's voice, "Be careful with it, Martha," felt herself stagger, stumble forward; saw dish and fish shoot from his hands to carpet; caught a staccato "Clumsy fool!" from Jobson— and fainted.

But Milly's faint only lasted a second. A voice— rasped to fury— burst the black of her unconsciousness as flame bursts a child's balloon.

"What the devil d'ye mean by it, sir?" rasped the voice, daddy's voice. "Call my daughter a clumsy fool, would you? Make her cook your darned dinner, would you? Make my son-in-law your bally butler, would you? Spoilt the fish, has she? Curse you and your fish, sir! Curse 'em, I say!"

Pug-face was on his feet-black eyes blazing. One podgy hand pounded on the table, the other itched to seize Jobson's throat. Harvey— superciliousness abandoned— had taken refuge under the table. Wentworth was assisting his wife to rise.

"You can hardly blame Mr. Jobson," said Harold Wentworth. "He had no idea who we were when he engaged us."

"Jobson be sugared!" barked Pug-face. "And you, too! You're a fine sort of husband for any man's lass! Go and get your hats, both of you. And have my car round to the front door in five minutes Get a move on, now!"

The pair fled, and Pug-face, with a curt: "Ye'll get no stoof out of me— not if ye pay cash twice!" to the quivering Jobson, followed them.

Five minutes later an amazed North-country chauffeur headed the car for Banister's.

"AND now," grunted the owner of Peters' mills from the recesses of the limousine, "I'll thank the pair of you for an explanation."

"Well, sir," began Wentworth. But his wife— opera cloak, last un-pawned relic of riches, hiding her domestic attire— took the words from his mouth.

"I can't see that any explanation is needed from us," began Pug-face's daughter. "You dared us to look after ourselves— and we've done it. We'd be doing it still if you hadn't frightened me, daddy."

"Frightened you!" Something in the girl's voice— a note of hysteria which came to him like a dim echo out of the past before she had been born— gentled Pug-face's grunt to solicitude.

"Tell us how ye came to make such a fool of yourself," he grunted.

Wentworth, watching his wife, saw tears dim her black eyes as she answered:

"We took the only job we could get— domestic service. There's an awful shortage of servants in London, daddy. So the Jobsons engaged us without references. We'd have been all right if cook hadn't left."

Pug-face's mottled hand stole to his daughter's.

"For how long would ye have been all right, lass?" he whispered.

"What do you mean, Daddy?" There is no resentment in Milly's question.

" 'Tisn't like my lass to be frightened!"

"N-o."

"Nor to faint, neither!"

"No, daddy."

And quite suddenly Wentworth— looking back on the past weeks— knew why it had been hopeless to try to dissuade his wife from her adventure; why instinct had urged him that she must have her own way, be allowed— whatever the cost— to beat Daddy.

For only out of resolute women, such women as you will find in the West Riding of Yorkshire, are bred those resolute men who made the old, and will make the new, England; and to thwart the mother-in-season is to thwart the child-to-be.

That, at least, is Wentworth's theory. Pug-face's, enunciated some five months after the dinner at Jobson's, as he sat with a well-fed specialist over a bottle of '68 port in the dining-room at Holmfield, ran differently.

"I shan't pop off for another quarter of a century," said Pug-face. "By that time the grandson'll be fit for the mills. Harold's as weak as they make 'em but my brass'll put him in as member for the town, and my lass'll see he doesn't make too much of a fool of himself once he gets to Parliament."

To which the specialist, who had a pretty wit, replied, "And even if he does, Mr. Peters, he'll do less harm at Westminster than he would up here."

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8: Trophy for Two

Warwick Deeping

1877-1950

Australian Women's Weekly, 25 June 1938

REDMAYNE was bored.

He was not bored because it was raining, and the sea the color of lead. The inwardness of his ennui was more subtle and delicate; it transcended a mere mood; it shaded towards the twilight of lost illusions.

For five years he had been farming in Rhodesia, and a lonely sort of life such as this is apt to breed illusions. Out there he would turn on the gramophone at night and grow quite sentimental, even as in the war he had sometimes grown sentimental about women and dogs and children.

"Oh, to be in England now that April's there!"

He had landed in England in April, a dolorous, gusty April, with the spring in cold storage and the Nymph's nose looking blue. Ye gods, and that London hotel, an hotel that considered itself so exclusive that it even scorned gas stoves in the bedrooms, and made the discovering of a bathroom a sort of adventure in no man's land! A week in that hotel feeling liverish! He had escaped into the country to visit a girl who had assisted in the preservation of an illusion. He could afford to marry now, but when he had seen Norah Cairns he had lost all appetite for marriage. He had found her shrill and energetic; blue-eyed and pragmatical, and somehow suggesting those formidable women who have made England great and virtuous. He had sojourned for three days at a country pub, living on much cold meat and boiled potatoes, and fruit salad, and finding Norah as indigestible as the food. He had had to make some sort of mumbling apology.

"Good to see old friends."

And suddenly he had packed his suitcase and fled. The situation was like an English April, the product of poetic licence. There was no licence about Norah. But if she had expected him to ask her to marry him—! Oh, well, you had to allow that five years might make a devil of a difference.

Redmayne had spent three weeks with his people, and then experimented for a second time with London theatres, cinemas, an occasional night-club, lonely loafings about old familiar streets. A flashy gentleman had tried to work the confidence trick on him and been baulked. Then suddenly May had produced a week of sunshine and a suggestion of lilac-time.

Someone or something had spoken to him of Sussex, and the downlands and the sea.

He had remembered a little place that had delighted him as a lad. Pannage. Queer name. Pannage! It had reminded him of a shingle bank, a strip of sandy

turf, an old cliff, a row of coastguards' white cottages. He had taken the train to St. Martin's and put up at the Queen's Hotel. He had made inquiries about Pannage at a local house-agent's.

They had offered to let him a furnished bungalow at Pannage, and in one of those moments of hope and resignation he had accepted the suggestion.

"All right, I'll take it."

HE was not afraid of picnicking at Pannage. He could cook. He would prefer to be alone in the Sussex of a memory. He could loaf and walk and bathe. The plunge off the steep shingle bank at Pannage had been epic. Just the gulls, the sea, the sky. and the wind in the grasses.

But when a motor-bus had deposited Redmayne and his luggage at the new and transfigured Pannage he had regretted his impetuosity. He should have distrusted that motor-bus. It had unloaded him outside a flaring tin teahouse, that was also a grocer's shop and a post office, and which led the procession of shacks and bungalows and old army huts that mottled the spit of land between the old cliff and the sea. The first human beings whom Redmayne had met in the new Pannage had been two wm young things parading in brilliant pyjamas, and a fat man wearing dirty grey flannel shorts and a shirt that was rather too small for him.

He had accosted the fat man.

"Excuse me, can you tell me where Eglantine is? It's a bungalow."

The fat man had been matey.

"Straight ahead, old chap. Right at the end of the village. Stands a bit by itself."

Redmayne had thanked him and fled from the friendliness of those naked and knobbly knees.

The name of Eglantine chapleted the owner's inverted sense of humor. The bungalow belonged to a rather celebrated person. Mr. Stephen Branker the novelist. Mr. Branker had left Pannage less than a month ago and had put Eglantine in the hands of all the local agents. Nor was there any honeysuckle growing over the little white box of a bungalow with its roof like a red lid. Mr. Branker had purchased Eglantine for the purpose of "copy"; he had been engaged upon a novel in which a little world of the Pannage type was portrayed, and a week or so before the publication of the novel Mr. Branker had abandoned Pannage. It was as well.

Redmayne knew nothing of these affairs. This wet day was his fifth day in Ramshackle-by-the-sea. He had tramped five miles up the long ridge to Westling, and tramped back again. He was wet and depressed. This untidy conglomeration of hutments that was the new Pannage made the very name

seem apposite. It reminded him of that curious old phrase in *Domesday Book*—"Pannage for Hogs."

He arrived at Mr. Branker's bungalow. Like a darned fool he had rented the place for two months. He unbuttoned his sodden mackintosh and felt in his trouser pocket for the key.

A fire would have been acceptable, and Eglantine, being a summer residence, provided you with nothing but a rather smelly oil-stove.

Redmayne opened the door and saw something lying on the cheap mat, a grey envelope. Obviously it had been pushed through the letter flap. He bent down and picked it up. There was no name and no address.

He opened the envelope and extracted a sheet of paper, and when he unfolded the sheet he found just two words in a hand that looked like a woman's:

"*You beast*!"

There was such an element of acid unexpectedness in those two words that he found them stimulating. Yes, like a good honest slap when you were feeling temperamental and self-centred. "You beast!" But could he take the credit to himself? Surely the accusation had been flung at some predecessor? He had been guilty of no flagrances to which Pannage could take exception. In fact, so far is his own observation served him. Pannage would take a deal of shocking.

Well, who was the beast? His eminent landlord. Mr. Stephen Branker? And who had penned those words? He stuffed the sheet of paper into his pocket, and, being a man whom life had taught to use both his wits and his senses, he went out and examined the sandy track that was Pannage's main thoroughfare. It disappeared eastwards in a wilderness of grass and gorse, but in front of Eglantine it was still a road, and Redmayne did discover something of interest: the marks of motor tyres in the wet sand. The tyres were fitted with a particular non-skid tread that had left a criss-cross impression. It appeared to him that a car had stopped outside the bungalow and then had been driven on. He traced the wheel marks to the grass, and there they disappeared. It was a one-way track, and he stood and wondered.

For if the car had travelled eastwards it would arrive at nothing but the cliff end.

Eglantine was the last bungalow along the beach; nor could he see any sign of a car among the knolls of gorse.

Well, it was as mysterious as that very candid communication:

"*You beast*!"

He returned to the bungalow and began to think about supper.

HE was hungry, and with a hunger that scorned boiled eggs and lettuce and Dutch cheese. He wanted something hot and savory, and at a butcher's in Westling he had bought a pound of sausages and carried them home in his mackintosh pocket. Yes, hot sausages and a Welsh rarebit, and a bottle of beer; gross provender, but comforting, with the grey dusk merging into the grey of the sea. He hung up his mackintosh and pulped hat, and betaking himself to the small kitchen at the back of the bungalow he lit the lamp, and removing his coat got busy on that evening meal. He was rather proud of himself as a chef, and he had lit the oil-stove, greased his frying-pan, and placed the sausages in it, when he heard a car stop outside the bungalow. He stood listening, the frying-pan poised over the oil stove.

Someone knocked. He was more Interested in the frying of those sausages than In the unknown visitor at his front door. He decided to ignore the summons.

The knock was repeated and with more emphasis, and resigning himself to the interruption, he put the frying-pan down on the kitchen table and walked Into the narrow passage. It was almost dark here, and as he reached for the handle of the door it occurred to him that there might be some relation between that mysterious message and the person on his doorstep.

There was. For when he opened the door he saw the dim figure of a girl there, and before he had even begun to ask her what she wanted the attack was launched.

"So— you are here, you beast? I waited and came back to make sure."

Obviously there was some misunderstanding, and obviously she was the person who had pushed that grey envelope through the letter-box.

He said: "I'm sorry. I'm afraid you have made a mistake."

She had realised it, too, before he had finished speaking, for though it was dark In the passage and she had been unable to see his face distinctly his voice betrayed him.

"I say, I'm awfully sorry."

He got the Impression of her as being suddenly deflated. Her fierceness had subsided into a feeling of humiliating foolishness, and suddenly he was sorry for her.

"I thought you were Mr. Branker."

"No, my name's Redmayne. I have rented the place from him for two months."

"I didn't know."

"Of course not. It's quite all right

She had retreated to the gate. The rain had stopped, and he saw the dark outline of a small car with its hood up beyond the white fence. It was lighting-

up time, but she had not turned on the lamps. He came out and stood on the doorstep in his shirt-sleeves. He felt that he would like to see her face, but it was too dark, and her mood was for escape.

"I'm so sorry. Did you find that— that letter?"

"Yes."

"Please tear it up."

She got herself out of the gate, and walked down to the car.

"Anything I can do?"

"Oh, no, nothing, thank you."

She scrambled into the car, switched on the lights, pressed the self-starter, and without another word to him drove away. He was able to read the registration plate at the back of the car, and he made a mental note of the letters and numbers. He went inside and wrote them down.

THE frying-pan and its sausages awaited him, and holding the frying-pan over the stove he wondered how Mr. Branker had contrived to enrage that strange young woman. He had never read any of Mr. Branker's novels. He knew nothing about the fellow, save that the bungalow was a somewhat messy habitation.

But he was tempted to trace that car. He had liked the girl's voice, and her passion, and the dark intensity of her attack. Pannage possessed a garage, and he strolled along to it next morning, and having looked as a possible purchaser at a second-hand car, he asked the proprietor a question.

"Oh, by the way, do you happen to know the name of the owner of a car with a number-plate XX703?"

The proprietor eyed him with slight suspicion.

"Blue two-seater with black hood?"

"I believe so."

The man hesitated, and Redmayne smiled at him.

"No, nothing secret. It stopped outside my bungalow the other day, and someone left a letter that was not meant for me."

The proprietor knew the car and its owner. She had bought petrol and sundries from him on several occasions.

"The name's Miss Langdale. Lives up at Windmill Hill."

"And where exactly is Windmill Hill?"

"About five miles or so. Turn off the Westling road at High Oak Corner."

"Is there a windmill?"

"No. Used to be. Little old farm-house close to a clump of pines. It's a chicken farm."

"A chicken farm? Thanks."

The weather continued to be unsettled, and Pannage's sun-bathing was fitful, and a matter of opportunism. Redmayne buzzed into St. Martin's that same afternoon. He was in need of tobacco and some literature, and at the circulating library a young lady kept a few special volumes for special patrons on a shelf under her desk.

"I've got Stephen Branker's latest. Only just out."

Redmayne smiled at her and at the coincidence.

"By George, have you? I'll take it."

"Yes, it's just a little— fresh."

"Sea breezes and salt spray and all that?"

The girl simpered.

"Well, not quite. Please don't think it's quite— my style of a book, but it's a Branker."

It was. Redmayne sat down with the book after supper, and he remained with it until he had turned the last page, not because he was enthralled by Mr. Branker's exposition of life, but because the book explained certain happenings. Its title was *Cocktails for Two*. Mr. Branker indulged in that sort of text. The novel described the life of a place such as Pannage, and it did not describe it too kindly. It portrayed an artist who lived in a bungalow and a girl who kept a chicken farm, and the intimate experiences of the artist and the girl. It was witty and wanton and whimsical, and its portraiture of Pannage and its people was palpably realistic. Redmayne could recognise the fat fellow in shorts who had directed him on his arrival. And, of course, the girl of the chicken farm!

Redmayne's neutral comment was: "What a darned cad!"

HE did not know his Branker, nor had he any conception of Mr. Branker's infinite complacency. On several occasions he had transmuted his personal and private adventures into copy. He had both kissed and told, and sometimes he had told when he had failed to consummate the kissing. His conceit was such that he believed that the world was rather flattered when it found itself painted by Branker, but he made a habit of disappearing discreetly before the portrait was hung, just as he had disappeared from Pannage.

When he had finished it, Redmayne heaved the book into a corner. He quite understood why that angry young woman had addressed Mr. Branker as "You beast."

Next day he walked up the Westling road to High Oak corner. The day was hot and sultry, with a thunderstorm threatening, but he had brought no mackintosh with him. He turned off at High Oak. He went down a hill and up a hill, and on the brow of the hill he sighted a clump of Scotch firs. A bit farther

on he saw a little old red-brick Sussex farmhouse set back from the lane. Just outside the gate a two-seater car stood waiting, and its number-plate bore those mystic symbols XX703.

Redmayne hesitated. A black cloud canopy was spreading ominously above the hill. There might be some significance in that cloud.

He waited, and In a little while he saw the girl emerge from the white door of the house and come down towards the gate. She was slim and dark and sunburnt. Her movements had a pleasant freedom. She carried her head as though she and the world were not on speaking terms.

She did not see Redmayne until she had reached the gate. She came to a sudden pause. Her very black eyebrows seemed to draw together. Her right hand rested on the top rail of the gate.

Redmayne stood up. Her obvious displeasure at seeing him there embarrassed him, but he had no intention of being Ignored.

He was wearing no hat, so he raised his hand in a salute.

"I hope you don't mind my sitting here?"

She recognised his voice. She flung the gate open and walked through it to the car.

"Oh, Mr. Branker's tenant— I think."

"Yes."

She gave him a devastating glance over her shoulder.

"And do you write books?"

His reply was a creature of impulse.

"Heaven forbid! I Just do things." She had opened the door of the car, but the candor and the emphasis of his retort made her pause.

"Oh, well— that's a mercy. Friend of Mr. Branker's?"

"Never seen the chap."

"Is that so? But I suppose—"

"Well, you see, I don't know much about literature. I'm home on a holiday. I farm in Rhodesia."

"Rhodesia?"

"Yes."

And then three or four heavy raindrops pattered upon the hood of the car, and she looked up at the black sky.

"It's going to rain like—"

"Yes, apparently so."

She glanced at his unprotected figure.

"You are an ass. Why didn't you bring—?"

He smiled at her.

"Oh, I don't mind a soak. But Tm keeping you."

She looked at him for a moment intently.

"Yes, you are. I was going down to St. Martin's to shop. I could drop you at the top of Pannage Hill. I won't come into the loathsome place."

He said : "I shouldn't. It's awfully decent of you. I'll say yes and thank you."

THE thunderstorm broke over them before she had driven half a mile, and when they came to the hill above Pannage the rain was behaving like stage rain. She pulled up, and they looked at each other, and he reached for the door handle. They had exchanged about six words during the drive.

"Thanks most awfully."

He was preparing to get out into that deluge, but she reprieved him

"Wait a moment. It can't last."

"But I'm wasting your time."

Her face had a sudden fierceness. "Oh, that's not worth worrying about, I'm selling up the farm before the autumn."

It seemed to him that her fierceness concealed a wound. He wanted to ask her— But how could he ask her? He remained at her side in the car.

"That's rather a pity, isn't it?"

She gave a little shrug. She looked through the wet windscreen at the conglomeration of architectural improvisations that was Pannage.

"Hideous, isn't it?" He nodded.

"I knew it when there was nothing but shingle and the coastguard cottages."

"How lovely."

"It was. You just tumbled off the shingle. Another chap and I had a tent just where that prawn in aspic bungalow stands."

She smiled faintly.

She said: "Have you noticed any shortage of eggs in Pannage? No. I used to supply the place with eggs. I supplied your predecessor. You ought to read that last book of his."

He glanced at her, hesitated, and was bold.

"I have read it."

He was aware of her as a kind of young and rigid presence.

"Like it?"

"I thought it an utterly rotten egg."

For some seconds there was silence. She appeared to be willing herself to say something.

"Supposed to be topical, you know. Local color, and all that. As a matter of fact, when you allow a man to be a bit of a pal you don't expect—"

She faltered, and he prompted her.

"Rotten eggs."

"Exactly."

The rain was slackening, and again his movements suggested that he was about to get out of her car.

"Rather a foul sort of fellow. I have a feeling that the bungalow I occupy ought to be fumigated. Yes, it's holding up now. You ought to be moving on."

He got out, and she made no at-tempt to detain him. She supposed that he might believe some of Mr. Branker's story, and most certainly she was not going to explain or deny anything. But he stood looking at her, with one hand on the door.

"I say, don't think it awful cheek, but would you mind if I came up once or twice to— to buy eggs?"

For a moment she looked as though she was tempted to slap his face, but something in his eyes appeased her.

"Rather a long way, isn't it?"

"Oh, just a stroll. I'm long in the leg. I'd be most awfully grateful."

"For the eggs?"

"Yes, of course, for the eggs."

She laughed, but her laughter had an edge of bitterness.

"Well— I suppose you're not after copy. But I'm pretty hard, you know, now. All right, but you had better bring a mackintosh."

He put out a hand.

"That's perfectly splendid of you." She accepted his hand and said rather breathlessly: "You're getting beastly wet. You had better buzz off. Cheerio-o."

He stepped back, smiled and saluted her.

"Cheerio-o."

BEFORE he had known her a week he had heard the whole of her story, nor was it necessary for her to explain that Mr. Branker and his book had made life at Windmill Hill seem rather impossible. Of course she knew all about the new candor and the new nakedness or naturalness and all that, but a man like Branker seemed to possess the mind of an unlicked lout. Yes, of course, he was clever; he could give his loutishness a polish, make it appear witty and furiously modern, but the essential lout in Mr. Branker was limited by its very loutishness. He appeared to think that all women were raw meat from the same shop. The meat varied a little in quality, that was all. Woman and her sex were just a universal burnt offering and bloody sacrifice to the crude realist in Mr. Branker.

She said: "Of course, if you like, you can believe that I behaved like the girl in the book—"

"I don't believe it."

She looked him straight in the eyes.

"Sure?"

"Absolutely."

"Well, as a matter of fact I didn't. As a matter of fact, when he began to get greasily sentimental, I couldn't stand him at any price. In fact— Oh, well, he had his revenge. He has made me look a nauseating fool before all the people I know. He knew I couldn't go for him and show him up. He knew that much about me."

They were sitting on the grass in her garden, and Redmayne, who was smoking a pipe, laid it aside on the grass.

"You know, there is one thing that I am going to do before I go back to Rhodesia. I'm going to kick that man."

She gave a little laugh. "Is it worth it?"

"Every time."

He disappeared, and Pannage realised that Mr. Branker's bungalow had lost its tenant. He had been given a description of Mr. Branker. He put up at a London hotel, and the first book he consulted was a copy of *Who's Who*. He found that Mr. Branker's home address was Hampstead: "No. 3, Regency Terrace." He went to Hampstead, and, calling at No. 3, inquired for the novelist. Mr. Branker was served by a married couple and the man interviewed Redmayne. He said that Mr. Branker was out, but he was expected home for dinner.

"What name, sir?"

"Never mind. I'll call again."

He hung about Regency Terrace for two days before his opportunity arrived. He had become sure of Mr. Branker's person, and he had seen In Mr. Branker a type that it would be extremely pleasurable to kick.'

REDMAYNE discovered that every evening about nine Mr. Branker took a little walk. He exercised himself upon the Heath, and upon the pre-destined evening Redmayne followed him. He was hoping that Mr. Branker's constitutional would carry him into some more or less secluded spot where his penance could be performed in private. It did so. In the spreading twilight Redmayne found himself in a kind of little glade with the prey before him.

He overtook the novelist.

"Excuse me, Mr. Branker, I think?"

Mr. Branker swung round, am his blue eyes stared. When ac costed by strangers he expected to be asked for an autograph or sympathetic loan.

"Yes. What can I do for you? Redmayne's very white teeth showed.

"Oh— I'd like you to join me in cocktails for two."

The assault was so unexpected that the sacred act was performed upon Mr. Branker without his putting up any sort of serious and fleshly protest. He was a big man but obviously he had no stomach for such barbarism. Hit hard and true between the eyes, he blinked an staggered. His hat fell off. He did manage to exclaim: "What the devil? Are you mad? Disgraceful!"

He was caught by the collar, twirled and given a push, and Redmayne, measuring his distance nicely, performed that pleasant act. He repeated it twice.

"Tails for two, you cad!"

He left Mr. Branker sitting on the grass and looking shocked and pensive. He collected Mr. Branker's hat and walked off with it as a trophy. Mr. Branker did not follow him. Obviously there was no copy to be collected from so humiliating and disgusting an Incident.

Redmayne took a morning train to St. Martin's and a motor-bus to Pannage, and about tea-time he appeared at Windmill Hill. He found Joan Langdale collecting eggs from her chicken houses. He had brought a brown paper parcel with him. Through its untidy wrappings bulged a grey felt hat.

"Here's the scalp. Would you like it?" he said.

She glanced darkly at the grey object. She knew that particular hat.

"No, burn lt. But— Dick— "

"Yes, I performed the sacred act. I enjoyed it."

"Oh, my dear, but supposing—" He laughed.

"Not much kudos to be got out of being kicked. Do you think he will advertise it, pass it on to his publicity agent? Not likely."

She did not object to the arm that enfolded her.

"Look here, Jo, do you really mean to give up the farm?"

"Yes. I simply couldn't-"

"Oh, well, there's an alternative. Care to consider it?"

"I might."

"Come out to Rhodesia and farm with me. It's not a bad life, and there are no literary gents in Rhodesia. At least, I haven't struck one."

She said: "I'll come."

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9: Always in my Heart

Oscar Graeve

1884-1939

Australian Women's Weekly, 30 July 1938

MOST of the girls Letty met at the club where she lived and elsewhere said they wouldn't work for a woman for anything, how did she ever stand it and wasn't a woman as a boss much more difficult than a man? But Letty Marshall said she didn't mind. And she didn't; she really liked Juliet Grey. Of course Miss Grey had her peculiarities, but then, who hasn't?

When Miss Grey first engaged Letty as her secretary and general assistant, she said, "I want someone who is quiet and attends to business and isn't always thinking of men and parties. Also, someone who is used to nice things and has some background."

Inwardly Letty smiled at that, but she didn't think it advisable to let Miss Grey see the smile. All Letty had left was background. For generations and generations the Marshalls and the Lancasters wert the two families that had furnished the main background of the little old town where backgrounds, some-how, seemed just a little more important than anywhere else. But that was all past now.

And Letty Marshall did not tell Juliet Grey any of this. All she said was, "I am quiet, Miss Grey; perhaps a little too quiet, not— not aggressive enough!"

Miss Grey laughed. "I'll provide all the aggressiveness we need," she said, and then asked sharply: "What about men?"

Letty flushed painfully. And she thought of her home again and of Bob Lancaster who had let her go without a word. Well, anyway, without the sort of word she had expected. He had driven her to the train and given her a box of chocolates to eat on the Journey. But not one word of regret that she was going, not one word of pain at the parting. Even though they'd been brought up next door to each other in the two huge old houses, even though they'd gone through all sorts of ups and downs together. For the Lancaster family, like the Marshall family, had fallen upon barren days

"I— I don't think I'm the type that attracts men, Miss Grey," Letty finally admitted, her cheeks still crimson.

"Nonsense!" said Miss Grey. "You're very pretty in a Quaker girl way."

It was from that moment Letty began to like Miss Grey. "As to the business part," she said boldly, "if you'll give me the chance I shall certainly attend to it."

Miss Grey was entirely won over by now. "You're a quaint child," she said. "I think we'll enjoy working together."

And they did. Letty liked the shop-Miss Grey was an interior decorator And she took a quiet but intense interest in the business and its customers.

Everything would have been fine if it had not been for Mr. Pendexter. Letty could not help feeling sorry for Mr. Pendexter. And she realised— oh, decidedly!— that Mr Pendexter was none of her business. On the contrary, and most decidedly, he was Juliet Grey's business.

Juliet Grey and Miles Pendexter were engaged and they had been engaged. Letty understood, for years That was the trouble. Miss Grey was, or she thought she was, too busy to get married .

"And it's all wrong," thought Letty. "She has no right to keep that nice man dangling. And, besides, they're both getting old!" For Miss Grey must be quite thirty-five and Miles Pendexter at least forty, although he didn't look it. "Soon she'll look older than he does," Letty reflected, "and where will she be then?"

One reason Miss Grey often looked a little haggard was that she was indeed too busy. She worked too hard. In the morning she'd look quite nice and fresh with her delicate milk-white complexion and her pale daffodil hair. But by nightfall she'd look a wreck, her face grey with fatigue, her hair tousled. And she was always dashing here and there, not in town only, but on business out of town. To do a new millionaire's new mansion or someone's summer cottage. That, too, was hard on Miles Pendexter. "He's just at the age when he longs for companionship." Letty, who was twenty-one, decided "I know just how he feels."

She had sense enough, however, not to confess her feelings to anyone, and certainly not to Mr. Pendexter, although her feeling may have shown— oh ever so slightly!— whenever she looked at Mr. Pendexter those times he came into the office calling for Miss Grey to take her to luncheon or to dinner He was on the Stock Exchange, Miss Grey had told her, but he seemed to have plenty of time to do whatever he pleased. Perhaps people on the Stock Exchange did. Letty didn't know.

He called Letty "Sparrow".

"Hello, Sparrow," he'd say, looking very smart and quite young in his brown suit, polished shoes, and chamois gloves. "Where's Miss Grey?"

"She told me to tell you she'd be back any minute, Mr. Pendexter. She had to go out about some material."

"I know you wouldn't keep your young man waiting, Sparrow. Not every time as Julie does me."

"I might if I had a young man," said Letty demurely and blushed. For, with a slight pang, she thought of Bob Lancaster.

So that's how it went and that's how it might have gone on indefinitely if Juliet Grey had not received a telegram. For the evening of the day she received the telegram she had an engagement to have dinner with Miles Pendexter and go to the theatre with him. It was rather a special occasion

because he'd obtained very good seats for the newest musical hit, and very good seats for that were difficult to obtain.

Miss Grey opened the telegram and ran her fingers through her daffodil hair, which was already little dishevelled. "It says come at once," she exclaimed. "Letty you'll I have to look after things. I'll have to go home and pack—"

"But you're having dinner with I Mr. Pendexter to-night!" Letty reminded her.

"I can t help that," Juliet Grey said impatiently. "This is a tremendously important one: it means doing a whole chateau— think! A real French chateau, even If it is in Devonshire."

"I don't think Mr Pendexter will like it," said Letty, with effrontry. "You know he's got tickets for—"

"I know it! I know it!" Juliet cried. "If it were anything else but this, Letty! This order will give the biggest autumn season we've ever had." She was silent a moment and then she bubbled with sudden laughter. "I know. You go with Miles to-night."

"Me!"

"Yes, you! You be my understudy. Be at my flat to-night when he calls. I was going home first to dress. And you can wear any of my clothes you like, you quaint child, even my ermine wrap. We're about the same size. And how surprised Miles will be!"

"He will be surprised," said Letty. "Surprised and furious."

Well, thought Letty later, it wasn't as if she hadn't warned her.

And Mr. Pendexter was Indeed surprised but he wasn't as furious as might have been expected. Or else he was very polite about it to Letty.

Miss Grey's maid let him in and when he advanced into the room, looking very slim and fit in his dinner jacket, he found Letty and not Juliet awaiting him.

"Oh, hello, Sparrow. How nice you look! Where's Juliet? Still dressing?" he said.

"Juliet's gone away."

"Gone away!"

"Yes. This afternoon."

"But she was going to dinner and the theatre with me—"

"Yes, I know. Oh, I don't know how to explain." And then to her chagrin Letty sat down on the couch and began to cry.

Miles Pendexter looked at her In astonishment and then sat down on the couch beside her, put his arm round her and patted her shoulder. "Whatever is the matter with you, Sparrow?" he asked.

"Well, she told me to-to take her place," Letty sobbed. "And I-I know I can't do that."

Miles Pendexter withdrew his arm and looked grim. "Yes, perhaps you can," he said sombrely. "Anyway, we'll see if you can."

Juliet Grey was gone three weeks. It was a trying three weeks for Letty. Miles Pendexter asked her to dinner again, for lunch twice; three times he asked her to drive out of town with him and dine and dance somewhere. Letty refused three of the invitations, accepted three. And what could be fairer than that? But she really didn't know what to do.

But one thing she did do. She put aside her injured feelings and wrote Bob Lancaster a long letter and said she'd enjoyed his chocolates very much and that London was lovely and she was having a fine time, but that she missed her home and she also tried to convey subtly that she missed Bob Lancaster even more. But all she had in Bob's reply was a stilted note saying that the river had overflowed and that there were two feet of water in the High Street. Letty felt as if her own hopes where Bob was concerned were under two feet of water after that. But, anyway, Mr. Pendexter and his invitations were still left to her.

ONE NIGHT when there was a moon awash in a sky tremulous with clouds, Letty and Mr. Pendexter drove out to a little inn which he said was ideal for a night like this. And so it was. Too ideal! The inn had once been a mill and was built over a dam. Beneath it the waters of a little river tumbled into the embrace of an arm of the sea. And the moonlight shimmered on the waters—they could see it from the balcony where they sat— and the air was soft and enticing and from an inner room came the lilt of an old waltz most insidiously hushed.

"Oh, dear," thought Letty. "Never shall I be an understudy in love again. I don't think I feel just as a mere understudy should feel."

Perhaps Mr. Pendexter wasn't feeling just as he should either. For he leaned across to her and his warm brown eyes gazed into hers as he said: "Sparrow, why are you so aloof? I-I haven't offended you in any way, have I?"

"No, Mr. Pendexter," she said. "Oh, no!"

"Why 'Mr. Pendexter'? I've asked you to call me Miles."

"I know, Mr. Pendexter, but—"

"But what?" he persisted with a smile.

"Well, If I call you Miles I'd feel I was admitting I like you better than I should."

"What of that?" he asked harshly. "She practically threw us into each other's arms."

"Not into each other's arms, quite," Letty protested.

"We might as well be in each other's arms for all she cares. Why, I— I don't think Julie cares two pins for me. Do you think she acts as if she did?"

"She's so busy— "

"Busy! Would you treat a man as she has me if you really cared for him?"

"No, but—"

"There's no but about it. You've shown me, Letty, how sweet and kind a girl can be, and what a good companion. It's you that I'm really fond of now. Why can't we be married?"

"For goodness sake!" said Letty. "I think we'd better go."

BUT how could she help it if she felt sleepy on the long drive home? How could she help it if her head fell against Mr. Pendexter's shoulder and stayed there?

He had to awaken her when they drew up before the girls' club where she lived.

He shook her gently, but there was something tense In his manner. "We'll have dinner to-morrow night, Letty," he said, and he didn't invite her this time, he commanded her: "Meet me at the little French place in Soho at seven. We'll settle this one way or another."

That command, somehow, aroused Letty. Tired as she was, she wrote another note to Bob Lancaster that night. All it said was: "Dear Bob: Don't you care at all? I've got to know. At once. Letty."

The next morning, however, some-thing happened. Something terrifying. Juliet Grey was descending upon them. Letty received her telegram at the shop. Miles received a telegram, too. He telephoned Letty about it.

"She's arriving at midday, Letty," he said. "She's asked me to meet her at the station."

"Yes, I got a telegram, too," said Letty.

"I'll meet her," said Miles. "I'll take her to lunch. I'll tell her."

"Tell her what?" Letty faltered.

"Tell her about us. And I'm seeing you to-night, Letty. Don't forget. Don't weaken."

"Oh, dear!" said Letty. She didn't mean it as a term of endearment, either.

All the rest of the morning, all through the lunch hour and into the early afternoon, Letty sat there with her heart ticking like a clock

At half-past two Juliet Grey entered the shop and came straight to the desk where Letty sat. Her face was grey and lined. Her hair fell in strings. Her suit was rumpled.

"I want to talk to you," she said to Letty. "Come into my office."

In the office they stood facing each other.

"What a fool I was!" Juliet cried at last. "I thought you were a nice, quaint child! And I discover that you're a snake in the grass and not at all quaint!"

"Miss Grey, let me explain—"

"EXPLAIN! What can you explain? You've stolen Miles from me. He says he wants to many you. How can you explain that?"

"But I tried so hard—"

"You tried so hard! You're a scheming, underhand, vicious little hussy without background or breeding."

Something snapped in Letty. This was enough. She was no longer meek. She was flaming.

"Now you listen to me, Juliet Grey," she said, her hands clenched. "If anybody's been an idiot you have. I didn't try to take Miles from you. You threw us together. You left him lonely and unhappy. You've been selfish and stupid. You've sacrificed him to this silly business of yours. You've made him feel you don't give two hoots for him."

That startled Juliet. "But I— I love him," she said.

"You don't show that you do. He is— or was— devoted to you. He did love you. He still does, I think."

"He doesn't," Juliet said. "He told me so."

And suddenly she was sobbing and suddenly Letty's arms were round her and there were those two strange creatures wrapped in each other's arms with Letty trying to comfort Juliet. "He does still love you," Letty insisted. "He told me that if he thought you cared at all for him he'd still care for you... That's practically what he told me."

Juliet's lace was ravaged with her tears. "But he told me he was having dinner with you. He told me he was going to ask you to marry him."

"He was. But he isn't now. I don't want him."

"You don't want him?" Juliet demanded indignantly.

"No, I don't!" said Letty positively. "I thought for a moment I did. He's nice. But I don't want him. I want someone else. I always have. Listen to me, Julie! You made the mistake of making me your understudy once. Now you be my understudy. You go to dinner with Miles to-night. Meet him at the little French place in Soho at seven o'clock. You're the one he really wants."

Juliet looked a little hopeful. "Do you think so?" she said hesitatingly.

"I know it! But let me tell you this, too. Go to a hairdresser's first. Wear your best dress. Look your best. At present you look simply terrible."

For the first time since she had entered the shop Juliet managed a smile. "You are a quaint child," she said

Letty didn't go to the shop the next morning. After all that had happened she didn't think Juliet would want her back at the shop again. What's more, she didn't care. Because, at last, Bob Lancaster had written her an answer to her last brief note, a letter that was completely satisfying. It was an incoherent letter, but that didn't matter, either. It was filled with choppy sentences like these: "I thought you wanted to get away. I thought you were bored with this place and with me. How was I to know you cared? I didn't want to say anything when I had nothing to offer you. I was broke. I have a job now. A good Job. Come back, Letty. Come back!" Yes, a very satisfying letter.

At eleven the telephone rang in Letty's room where she was sitting polishing her nails and looking very happy indeed. It was Juliet.

"Why aren't you here?"

"I didn't think you'd want me. Julie, after—"

"Of course I want you, stupid. Everything"— Juliet's voice broke— "everything is wonderful, Letty. Everything, except that you're not here."

"I'll come on one condition," said the new, no longer meek, Letty.

"What's that?"

"I'll come and stay while you're away."

"Away?"

"Away on your honeymoon. I'll come if you get married to Miles at once and go away with him for two weeks or so."

"But, Letty—"

"Those are my terms, Julie," Letty said firmly.

"But, Letty, I'll still want you here after we've come back."

"No," said Letty, "not me."

"Why not?"

"I'm going away myself when you get back," Letty announced. "I'm going home."

"Home?"

"Yes, I thought it before. I know it now," said this new and very wise Letty. "You can't— you simply cannot— keep a nice man dangling."

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10: Thimblerig

Henry Herbert Knibbs

1874-1945

Popular Magazine, 20 June 1927

"IF things don't break right the next flutter, it's me for the soft plank and the singsong." Thimblerig was talking to himself.

He liked to talk to himself, because he drew a kind of melancholy solace from sympathizing with his own trials and troubles. Soft plank and singsong meant a hard bed in a rescue mission and a sad face. And Thimblerig simply couldn't assume a sanctimonious air. "Holy howlers" always made him grin. He couldn't spell "hypocrisy," but he knew it when he saw it. He would have made more of a success in his calling, which was chiefly at back doors, if he had been able to subdue his grin. When a man is hungry, and says he is hungry, and grins happily, it takes a broad-gauge philanthropist to overlook the grin and produce the handout.

Not so many hours past, Thimblerig had been presented with an overcoat and a derby hat. His means of obtaining them had been simple enough. While sweeping a saloon floor that morning he had picked up a round, brass check with a number on it. The number happening to be 221. He put the check in his pocket. When he left the saloon he had two nickels. As he walked down the street, he jingled the two nickels and the brass check, which felt like a quarter. At noon he drank a glass of beer and ate all the free lunch he dared commandeer. About six that evening he drank another glass of beer and ate more free lunch. Then he set out for the residential district.

Thimblerig was possessed of a strange and apparently incomprehensible. desire to enact a new scene in an old setting. People were weary of the usual plaint of the hobo. And Thimblerig was weary of it. He would try something different. Hunger, desperation, the chill of approaching winter, and indifference to the absurdity of his. appeal, combined to distort his sense of humor into something decidedly grotesque. He would present his brass check and demand his hat and overcoat in the grand manner, quite as though he were about to depart from a banquet at the Ritz. He expected to get thrown down hard. And yet, some one might fall for his act; might be so startled by the ridiculousness of his request for a hat and overcoat, that they would produce these essentials as a sort of secondhand donation to originality. Was it not one of the legends of the "Brotherhood" that "Gentleman Harry," pinched as a vagabond, had braced the cop for a quarter— a small loan from one gentleman to another— and the cop had so admired Gentleman Harry's sheer nerve that he had come across with a half dollar? And when the cop, to maintain his prestige, had told Gentleman Harry to beat it and not show up around there

again, or he would have to take him in, Gentleman Harry had politely declined to beat it, but had told the cop that now he was no vagrant, as he had money in his pocket. You never could tell just which way the bones would flop. Of course, it all depended on the way you did it. The itinerant brotherhood still tell with gusto how "Punch," the professor, and Gentleman Harry turned that half dollar into an orgy.

Thimblerig licked his thin lips. He was cold, hungry, and, above all, thirsty. Desperation rode him with a relentless heel. He kept the brass check warm in his hand. The brass check, at least, was real. The streets were twilight avenues of unreality. The folk upon the streets were phantoms. Thimblerig had. hypnotized himself into believing that his brass check was a fetish as potent as bright gold.

He tried several back doors. But there are none so arrogant and haughty as menials when approached by their physically shabbier brethren. However, somebody would fall for his patter, sooner or later. The eighth back door yielded the actual presence of the master of the house, who happexed to be an undertaker, or, if you feel that way about it, a mortician. This undertaker enjoyed a joke. Secretly he was facetious; never, of course, during office hours. Only a professional funny man can afford to be facetious during office hours.

THE undertaker answered Thimblerig's knock, for his wife was afraid to go to the back door after dark. After dark meant nothing to the undertaker. And his attitude and manner at once told Thimblerig what he was. Thimblerig was disconcerted, but he grinned. To his amazement, the undertaker grinned. It was dark, and no one would see him indulging in such an unpardonable luxury. Thimblerig didn't count. How could he? He wasn't dead, and most obviously he didn't have any well-to-do relatives.

"What can I do for you?" queried the undertaker.

"Nothing in your line, thanks," replied Thimblerig. He struck an attitude— a haughty, hurry-up-my-car-is-waiting attitude. He presented the brass check with the careless gesture of a wealthy man at the check-room door. "My hat and coat, please. They are together."

"Oh, are they?" said the undertaker sweetly. He took the check and glanced at the number in the dim light of a lone anemic bulb above his head. "Two twenty-one?" he asked thoughtfully.

"Yep. And it's two to one you'll lose your job if you don't get a move on. Get my things, or I'll have to speak to the management."

"That will not be necessary. I am the management. Just wait here a minute," advised the other.

"While you call a cop? life! Not on your life! Gimme my check!"

"Do you want that hat and coat?" asked the undertaker brusquely. He could be brusque, at a pinch. His wife knew it.

"Sure I want a benny and a lid. But I was only—"

"Don't spoil the act!" said the undertaker, who had once been an unsuccessful tragedian.

"Well, hurry! I'm freezin' to death," said Thimblerig, taking his cue.

'Perhaps I ought to wait, then," said the undertaker. "But, no—it wouldn't pay." Softly he vanished, and softly he returned with a fawn-colored, knee-length overcoat, long out of style and garnished with large, pale mother-of-pearl buttons. In the dim light the buttons looked like silver dollars.

Thimblerig inspected the coat.

"Where's me hat?" he queried.

"Here," said the undertaker, producing a derby that looked blacker than it was. "But if you hadn't reminded me you wouldn't have got it. This hat and coat once belonged to a cab driver, now defunct. He was English— once."

"Well, the stuff is all right," declared Thimblerig. 'But the service is rotten." He donned the coat and hat with the swift ease of his kind and tossed his old hat into the garbage can.

"Haven't you forgotten something?" queried the undertaker, rubbing his thumb and forefinger together, as though trying to coax a tip from a reluctant pocket.

"Yes, me gloves. But I can't wait. I never play the same number twice."

"Well, call around next fall," said the undertaker. "Here is my card. Glad I met you. Sometimes I wish I could play the old one-nights again and hoof it when the box office blew up. But I can't. My business keeps me here, day and night."

"You are up against a stiff proposition, most of the time, ain't you?" And again Thimblerig grinned.

"Vulgarian!" thundered the undertaker, who hadn't thundered for years. He was actually enjoying himself.

"And what kind of a vegetable is that?" asked Thimblerig.

"Take 'em and welcome!" said the undertaker. "So long! Good luck!"

Thimblerig doffed his hat and bowed.

"Go to hell!" he said, grinning.

The undertaker seemed pleased. He nodded and closed the back door softly.

For a moment Thimblerig felt lonesome. He hadn't had to talk to himself to be understood. Never had he had any use for undertakers. But this one had been a good sport. Bet he had a fat wife who belonged to the Daughters of Everything— and then some. But business is business. And Thimblerig's

business was to find a place to sleep. He would have to live up to the pearl-buttoned benny and the dip lid. But they weren't quite as much of an asset as might at first seem. They made him look too prosperous. Who would fork over a quarter to a man sporting a box coat and black derby, when the wearer declared that he was hungry and didn't have the price of a flop? "Not so many, sister. Not so many!"

It was about then that Thimblerig made his "flutter." There were not too many people on the street. The five-thirty workers had thinned out; they had gone to their homes, or their boarding houses, or familiar downtown eating places. A few, temporarily affluent, sought the long counter and the brass foot rail, whereon to rest their tired feet, one at a time, and tease their weary souls with false hopes at five cents per hope— a high one with a short kick; for ten cents they got a short one with a longer kick. Such days come not again.

Thimblerig's first flutter was a short and sorry flight. The man was buttoning up his overcoat, as he came out. The swing doors had not ceased waving good-by to him before Thimblerig discovered that his pearl buttons blinded the eyes of charity. He had asked for assistance, the price of a sandwich and a bed. The man had stared pointedly at the large pearl buttons and passed on. Thimblerig veered off and crossed the street to change his luck. His next flutter met with no better success. This time his anticipated benefactor was sorry, but he was broke himself. It may have been true. Thimblerig knew that kind. Again he approached a swing-door devotee. This one was mellow. In fact, he was so mellow that all men looked alike to him. They were his brothers. Solemnly he listened to Thimblerig's plaint. He thought that Thimblerig was offering to buy him a sandwich and put him to bed. And solemnly he thanked Thimblerig; but, an honest old sport, he didn't want a sandwich— might upset his stomach— and it was too early to go to bed. Affectionately he suggested that they forget all about it and sing. Thimblerig declined the invitation and, leading the potential singer over to the nearest lamppost, he left him there for better or for worse,

"If things don't break right the next flutter—" Thimblerig decided to change his tactics. Thrice he had softpedaled in a minor strain. The next time he would pull out all the stops and tear off a couple of bars of "The Wedding March." He would pick a live one and tell him a live story. Two long, city blocks, and he saw the live one coming— brisk, portly, full-jowled, and in patent-leather shoes. Thimblerig headed straight for him, raised his hat, as they all but collided, seized the proverbial, psychological second by its metaphorical ears, and grinned. He lowered his voice a full octave below the mendicant's wistful note.

"I'm a bum. I'm broke. I stole this overcoat off a Pike Street dummy. I ain't hungry, and I don't want the price of a flop. If you was to give me a quarter, I

would canter into the first bar I saw and take a high dive into a bucket of suds. Suit yourself."

The gentleman thus accosted, did not smile. Neither did he frown. He fished a quarter from his pocket. "Canter!" he said. And Thimblerig cantered.

"There is a tide in the affairs of men, which, taken at the flood," leads to the hoosegow. Thimblerig knew it. Consequently he always let his left hand know what his right hand was doing. He preferred beer as a lubricant for the main bearings of adversity. As a matter of caution, rather than of principle, he indulged moderately. Beer was meat and . drink and solace. And it lasted longer when one was privateering round a free lunch counter. When Thimblerig's ears began to buzz he ceased taking on cargo, tast off, and steamed for the open sea. If she rolled a bit, let her roll. Always he remained captain of his feet.

But those days come not again. And possibly Thimblerig wouldn't welcome some of them back, if they could return. As for the beer, Thimblerig says a wickercovered jug of "*vino tinto*," in the shade of a California sycamore, beyond which a band of amiable sheep graze in the sunshine, isn't so bad. By contrast, perhaps, with that memorable evening of the overcoat,

His quarter went into the till, and back came four nickels and a tall glass of light beer, clear amber, topped with a creamy foam that mushroomed in ephemeral bubbles— bubbles which winked at him jovially. He grinned and drank slowly. The cool, smooth draft satisfied his thirst. It did more. It lifted him from the mud bank of mere existence to the tide mark of pleasant anticipation. That he anticipated nothing specific, made it all the more interesting. Another long one, and his spirit would be fairly afloat upon the wide harbor of imagination. It would not matter what his surroundings were— boozing ken, dark street, wide, blazing thoroughfare, or a dank bedroom in a loft. He would be dreaming, awake— outward bound, adventuring, unaware of the careless elbows of humanity, of faces— blearing, bright, or stolid— unaware of his own lean, graceless figure, his destitution and the hopelessnesss of his quest. Hope was a flighty, impertinent hussy, who had so often led Thimblerig a wild chase, which resulted in nothing but breathlessness, that he had decided to remain a lone bachelor of Fortune and save his breath.

With the third long one, Thimblerig entered the realm of the fourth dimension. He was above the obvious. Not that the saloon was a vale of enchantment and the bartender a demigod. The saloon was a second-rate drinking place, and the bartender a Hibernian, with a thick neck and heavy black eyebrows. Nor were the patrons fauns, although among them was the inevitable satyr. Thimblerig's surroundings were as plain to him as images in an

untarnished mirror. Faces, voices, gestures and attitudes, he saw. Yet they meant nothing to him. He had withdrawn into himself. He was alone— neither elated nor depressed— simply alone and happy.

The journey from self-consciousness to sublime indifference had cost fifteen cents.

Indifferent he was to all that was going on about him. But not indifferent to Thimblerig, his friend and comfortable companion. 'Not on your bright future, sister! Not on your bright future!" Pretty soon Thimblerig would mooch out and do a slow glide down the avenue. And, around some corner off the avenue, there would be the dim entrance to a stairway, and above the entrance a triangular, illuminated sign reading: "Rooms: 25, 15 and 10 cents." An amateur paid his twenty-five and got a ten-cent room. A professional paid fifteen or ten and got the same kind of room.

Some one pushed a nickel into the slot of the player piano, which spewed out a jangling tune of the streets. Conversations became louder. The sound of the player piano finally ceased in a saccharine trickle of notes, ending in what might be justly termed the spinal chord. Thimblerig heard the tune, knew the tune, but felt nothing. The spurious melody awakened in him neither hate nor affection. Not even the breath of a memory answered. Had a regimental band entered the place and whanged and thundered, Thimblerig would have but stared at it nonchalantly. An ambulance gong might have stirred him, but that would have been different. Or a voice. Voices got under a fellow's hide, sometimes. Sometimes a voice could reach in and pull you off your perch and make you listen. Depended upon the quality of the voice. Some voices just rocked you to sleep. Other voices awakened the old, primitive lust for battle. And there were others which made you feel creepy inside and want to turn and run.

The man next to Thimblerig had set out to get drunk— blind drunk, if possible. He had arrived at the garrulous stage, and, his erstwhile companion having moved away, he turned to Thimblerig for audience. And he talked. He had a grudge against the city administration. He had been wronged. But the crooks in the city hall would hear something drop! He knew 'em, every unmentionable one of 'em. And he named a few, but the names he used, while possibly of biblical! origin, were carelessly chosen. Thimblerig heard every word the plaintiff said, yet the words bounced off Thimblerig's consciousness, like pebbles off a drum. They made a sound and caromed into space. Yet he seemed to be listening. The man with a grudge called for a drink and invited Thimblerig to join him. Thimblerig came to, with a start. "No, thanks," he said. "I don't want to get drunk." And, in spite of the other's lowering face, he grinned. It was a friendly, an apologetic grin.

"You mean I'm drunk?" bellowed the man, with a grudge. Thimblerig showed fear. He tried to speak and grinned again. A fist crashed against his chin. He staggered and clutched at the rail of the bar. He saw the white-shirted arm of the bartender swing up and come down, saw the blackjack descending in a vicious arc, and heard a dull, soft sound. The bartender had heard Thimblerig's assailant, and the bartender had friends in the city hall. It was up to him to' prevent a row in the saloon. He had done more than that. He had put a few extra pounds of personal animus into the blow. The man on the floor was dead.

"Call a cop!" "No, ring for the ambulance!" "Who hit him, anyway? Gee, but he went down quick! Did you see him smash the guy with the sporty overcoat?" "Sure! Poked him in the face. Well, he got what was comin' to him." "Did you see Jerry reach for him with a billy?" "No, you damn fool. It was the thin guy that done it. Wasn't it, Jerry? Jerry just reached over to pull 'em apart and make 'em quit. Ain't that right, Jerry?" "Sure! It was the thin guy with the light overcoat. Looked like a bad actor. That guy, over there. Hell! He was there a minute ago."

THIMBLERIG had vanished. Jerry called them all up and set out bottles and glasses. It was on the house. He took one himself. The wagon came, with burly, blue-clad men who weren't the least bit excited. Yet their eyes were alive. With a clang and a rush, the man with a grudge was hurried to the emergency hospital. He was dead, but it would look better for Jerry's place if he died in the wagon. Jerry had friends in the city hall.

Thimblerig didn't have friends in the city hall or anywhere else. And: there had to be a goat. The central station telephoned the district police stations to gather in a guy about thirty or thirtyfive years old, in a light-colored box coat with pearl buttons. A thin guy, about five feet six or seven. Light hair and blue eyes. Weighed about one hundred and thirty pounds. No marks of identification on hands and face. Wasn't lame or crippled.

Jerry had given a fairly accurate description of the scapegoat. He would be a fool not to hang it onto the bum, who was a stranger and didn't belong in the ward. But Jerry hadn't reckoned on the satyr, who was not a stranger and belonged in that ward. Unlike the bemused denizens of the saloon, the satyr had seen clearly every detail of the quarrel. He had no friends in the city hall. But his friends wanted to get into the city hall, being of the opposite party. He had influence enough to make it hot for Jerry, or make him come across with the "kale." He didn't care whether Jerry 'came across or traveled the other way.

And Thimblerig didn't know which way to travel after slipping out of the side door, when the man with a grudge went down in a motionless heap. Yet Thimblerig traveled at top speed. To the right, down the side street, and then to the left, down a street paralleling the avenue. Then again to the right down another side street, and again to the left. High brick walls and unlighted windows loomed on either side. Warehouses, wholesale houses. He slowed to a nervous walk. His chest hurt. He jumped, as he saw a faint, moving reflection of himself in a big window. But, no, he wasn't wearing a cap. He was afraid to look again. He kept on. The wide, dark mouth of the entrance to the building was just ahead, on his right. He thought he had better slip in there and get rid of that light overcoat. He would have to keep the derby until he could find some other kind of a hat. Wouldn't do to mooch around bareheaded. Thimblerig turned into the dark entrance. He imagined he saw something crouching far back among the shadows. His hands shook, as he tried to unbutton his overcoat. He knew there wasn't anything in there but shadows. He was feeling spooky, rattled, and no wonder! He slipped one arm out and paused. He had seen something move. He choked back a scream, as a light flashed in his face. His back grew cold. Well, they had got him!

"What's the big idea?" The voice came from behind the flash light.

"Why, I was just— why, nothin'. I just stepped in here to—"

The man behind the flash light stepped up close. "Well, I'm night watchman here, see? Just climb back into that coat and beat it."

"Sure! I didn't know anybody was here."

Thimblerig fumbled his arm into the sleeve. The flash light snapped off. He could scarcely see. Crimson disks, like fugitive suns, wheeled and vanished before his eyes. "Hold on a minute," said the night watchman. "Are you in a hurry?"

Thimblerig was, but he didn't want to say so. "You said to mooch along."

"That's all right. Listen: I got to meet a guy up to Jerry's. I won't be long. But I ain't supposed to leave here. Got to punch the clock. And the cop'll be bumpin' his stick along here in a couple of minutes. And he'll be tryin' the door and mebby stoppin' to chin, if I ain't inside. If he sees me inside, he'll give me the high sign and mooch along. Want to make a couple of bucks easy?"

Thimblerig wanted to get away. But he didn't know how even to start. A night watchman was something like a cop— had a badge and could pinch a guy for trespassin'.

"How do you mean?" Thimblerig asked.

"Easy! Just slip out of that benny and dicer and put on me cap and take me fiash and me keys and step inside. You can be in sight without him seein' you too close. Work the flash once in a while, like you was on the job, punchin' the

clock. He'll think everything's O. K. and won't be reportin' me as off the job. I'll be back here before he makes his second trip. Are you on?"

Thimblerig was about to decline, when he heard, far away the faint, shrill call of a policeman's whistle. "Come out of it!" said the night watchman. "Listen! I want to get a couple of drinks. I was kiddin' about meetin' a guy. Here's a couple of bucks, and here's me flash and the keys. Don't lose them keys. And, say, when you step inside, slip out of that benny. Here, take me cap and gimme that lid."

Reluctantly Thimblerig handed over his derby and took the night watchman's cap. "Get that coat off!" said the night watchman, "or you'll give me away." Thimblerig hesitated, then stripped off the overcoat. 'You can wear it, if you like. I won't need it when I'm inside."

THE night watchman seemed a bit surprised. He laughed. "Great idea!" And he put on the coat. Stooping, he picked up something— something which Thimblerig thought looked like a small satchel. Perhaps he was going to get some bottled beer. From down the street came the click of footsteps. The night watchman turned and walked briskly away. Thimblerig, whose eyes had grown accustomed to the darkness of the entrance way, stepped to the door, tried it, and walked into the building. He flicked the flash light on and off. There was a partitioned hallway, and in the partition were round-topped windows, like bookkeepers' or cashiers' windows. The first floor was occupied by the office force. The main office faced the street. Thimblerig, fearing to be seen and fearing still more that, if not seen, the cop might step in and investigate, stole into the main office and shot his flash light at the wall. It centered on a round clock, which said eleven. He heard the deep tones of a bell tolling the hour. He turned and peered toward the street. Then, remembering that the night watchman had said the cop usually tried the door, he darted out to the hallway and released the catch 6f the spring lock, a second or two before a burly figure loomed up, and Thimblerig heard the door rattle. He backed away and turned into the main office. He could discern a blurred figure standing a few feet back from the front window. Thimblerig waved a greeting and, turning, shot the flash light on the clock. The figure waved reply and nodded. The gesture and the nod seemed to say: "Sure! Eleven and right on the dot."

It was a place of business, an office. It smelled like an office. Yet it was a ghostly environment, strange and filled with strange shadows. That shadow over there in the corner looked like a man standing and waiting. The flash light showed it to be a water cooler, a longish, round body on thin iron legs.

Thimblerig wished that the watchman would return. Only five minutes past eleven. Thimblerig couldn't stand still, and he didn't want to sit down, although he was tired and shaky. So he prowled the length of the hall leading toward the back of the building. Occasionally he turned his flash light on that he might see where he was going and feel less afraid of the shadows. All the doors along the hall were closed— glass doors with gold lettering on them. There was one exception— the door farthest from the main office. This door stood open. Thimblerig turned his light on the floor of this room. He saw some scattered papers, a thin, canvas-covered book. But people didn't leave their letters and books scattered on the floor. He raised the flash light, and it shone on an open safe. Near the base of the safe he saw a man's shoe, the sole toward him. Slowly the golden disk of light crept on, up. Now it shone on the sprawled body of a man, his arm bent under him, his eyes half open and glassy. Horrified, Thimblerig could not cry out, nor move, nor scarcely breathe until he had perversely experienced the extreme horror. The little hole in the man's forehead looked like a tiny, black wafer, with a thread running from it. Before Thimblerig could turn and dash for the front door, he knew what had happened. And he knew who had killed the night watchman and taken his flash light and keys. Yes, a man as cool as that yegg had been, since he framed it to get away and leave an innocent man vainly waiting for him to return— yes that yegg would kill, and kill quick. And he was a tough one to dare to work it alone.

Thimblerig dropped the flash light and keys and ran down the hall to the door. Horror and dread had not dulled his senses, but had sharpened them. He turned the knob of the spring lock, closed the door softly, and stepped to the opening of the entrance way. No one in sight, up or down the street. Keeping close to the shadow of the wall, he slunk along to the first cross street, turned, and followed it toward the north. Somewhere down there was the river and dark places where a fellow could hide and kind of think things over. He didn't know what todo. But he did know that if the police got him he would be sent down, perhaps for murder. And he hadn't even touched the man who had hit him. He didn't fear the police so much as he feared humanity. He was a down-and-out, and down-and-outs always got it in the neck. Yes, the stray dog always got the can. Queer, how people would kick a stray dog just to see him run. And then the stray dog, battered and hungry and sore and scared to death, would slink into some hole and hide, and maybe wonder what he had done to make folks hate him.

THE streets weren't so well lighted in this district. Once in a while the window of a cheap store, run by one of them wops. Wops were always eating or buying something to eat, or scrapping about the price of the stuff. But they

weren't so bad. They just left a fellow alone if he minded his own business. But Americans, now, they wouldn't let a fellow mind his own business. They were always starting something. Thimblerig tried to walk like an honest man, but he knew he looked guilty. But guilty of what? That was it! What had he done?

Down the block he saw the twin lights of a police station. He wanted to turn back. But to turn back meant to travel toward that street of grim brick walls and dark entrance ways. He would have to keep on, take a brace, and strut past the police station, just like anybody. He was within a few steps of the twin lights when he heard horses behind him, coming down the street at a brisk trot. The sharp clang of a gong sent shivers up and down his back. The wagon! And the people! Up from dim basement stairways, out of dark hallways, from swiftly opened doors came figures in shirt sleeves, in shawls, in hastily donned overcoats. Windows were thrust up and heads appeared.

Was the wagon fetching somebody who got somebody, or who had been done for? Was it the first act or the last act of the continuous performance? The horse swung to the curb. Thimblerig was in the midst of a silent group. Out of the wagon stepped a cop, then two more, with a handcuffed man between them, The man had on a derby hat and a short, light overcoat, with big pearl buttons. The cops yanked him along, across the sidewalk and up the steps. No one seemed to know what had happened. Some one in the group round Thimblerig asked one of the policemen, but he did not reply. Thimbletig knew what had happened. The yegg who had shot the night watchman had been caught. He had said he was going over to Jerry's place to get a drink. Of course he hadn't gone there. But he had gone in that direction, and the cops had been on the lookout for a light overcoat with big pearl buttons. Maybe they had arrested him for killing the man in the saloon. Maybe they didn't know about the night watchman.

"Wonder what he done?" said a voice at Thimblerig's elbow. The question was not addressed to Thimblerig. It was merely curiosity expressed in words. Then Thimblerig— the Thimblerig who often grinned so inopportunely and sometimes spoke in spite of himself— answered the question.

"He killed the night watchman at No. 221 Beaver Street and cracked the safe."

"Did, eh? Who is he?"

Thimblerig might have given some answer or other. He didn't have a chance. An officer told the driver of the wagon to wait a minute. Several policemen came from the station hurriedly. They clattered down the steps and climbed into the wagon. Thimblerig heard one of the officers say: "No. 221 Beaver— Sweeney's beat." As the group turned to watch the wagon, Thimblerig moved on. He wondered how the police had learned of the murder

and robbery so soon. He was pretty sure that the yegg hadn't told of it yet. There hadn't been time to give him the third. Thimblerig didn't know that when he had dropped the flash light in the,back office, it had fallen so that its weight rested on the on-and-off button and threw a long ray of light across the floor of the hall. Sweeney, the patrolman, returning on his beat, had glanced toward the front office, half expecting to see the night watchman making his rounds. Instead, he had noticed a peculiar light along the floor of the hallway. He stood for a while looking through the front window. He knew that the safe was in the office from which the light came. There was something wrong. The light was shooting along the floor, too low to seem right. Sweeney drew his gun and tapped smartly on the window. If the wrong man was in there he'd show up, make a 'break for the-open. But there was no response to his tapping. He tried the main door. It was locked. He shook the door. The watchman ought to hear that and show up. Finally, Sweeney hastened down to his box and rang up the station. He wasn't going to break into those offices just because there was a funny light on the floor. Let some one else do the breaking in and get the laugh if things were O. K. The brick buildings gave way to grimy cottages, miles of them. The street was unlighted, save for the spluttering arc lights at the end of each block. Thimblerig could smell river mist. Pretty soon he would be far away enough from saloons and patrol wagons and cops to be safe, for a little while. He was hungry, thirsty and tired. Occasionally his knees wabbled. He would have to sit down and rest as soon as he came to the river. And he began to feel chilled. He hadn't noticed the cold before. The cottages were at last petering out. In their stead stood a row of two-story buildings, small groceries, a drug store, a hardware shop. Above the stores were what the landlords called apartments. At the end of the street, where the bridge rose in a low arc above the murky river, was a corner saloon. Thimblerig walked past it once and glanced in. A tough joint. He turned and came back.

THEN he took a brace and strutted his stuff— marched up to the bar and called for a schooner. The beer was not amber colored, but 'reddish brown, and it left a kind of sticky taste, and sweetish, but it was beer. And it pulled Thimblerig up a notch. He had a nickel left. Another long one would put him on his feet, and he could mooch along the river and maybe find a place to flop. Two men came in— river toughs, wearing sweaters and overalls and caps. They were neither young nor old. Their Radics had the vigor of youth, but their faces were weathered and seared and lined. They drank cheap whisky and talked together at the end of the bar. Thimblerig took the second long one and drank slowly. He felt better. In a little while he wouldn't feel the river chill, nor any

weariness. Then he could walk and walk and talk to the Thimblerig that never failed him after the second long one. Maybe that other Thimblerig would tell him what to do. He would have to do something. He couldn't stick around town and run the chance of being picked up any minute. He put the heavy glass down on the bar, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, and started for the door. Now he was all right. That which had so recently terrified him was fading away. He was going on a journey, and, as he traveled, he would visit with himself and perhaps find a bright road that would lead him to that vague place he had always wanted to find. As he opened the door, he: could smell the river mist, but he didn't feel it. He was going on a journey.

"Jerusalem the Golden, with peace and plenty blest." He had heard that hymn, in a singsong joint. Maybe there was something to hymns, after all. "With peace and plenty blest." That would be a dandy place to live, where there was peace all the time. Just peace would be enough. Never mind the plenty. He would be willing to go without one "meal a day, if he could have peace. He was getting tired of being kicked around and chased and scared. Well, guess he'd start out. He buttoned up his thin coat and pulled down his cap.

"Just a minute, you!" The voice broke into his waking dream and shattered it to bits. He knew that tone, and there was something about the plain-clothes man that advertised him for what he was. He flipped back the lapel of his overcoat, 'displaying a badge.

"But I ain't done nothin'," said Thimblerig.

"That's all right. But you told a fella that lives near the station that somebody killed the night watchman at No. 221 Beaver Street, and you told him before the wagon got there, and we found it out. What you got to say?"

"Nothin'," said Thimblerig, and he thrust out his thin wrist. They had got him, at last. But he didn't care. They would torture him, give him the third, and maybe beat him up to make him say that he had killed a man. Or maybe they would try to hang both murders onto him. Queer— the handcuff didn't feel cold. It just felt warm and firm. And he wasn't afraid of the plain-clothes man. So long as he was handcuffed to the plain-clothes man, nobody else would get him. Not so you would notice! "Jerusalem the Golden, with peace and plenty blest." Maybe there was something in those hymns, if you happened to live in "Jerusalem the Golden." But if you were just a bum and didn't live anywhere—

"Full of hop," muttered the plainclothes man. "But when the hop dies out, and he don't get any more, he'll talk."

Thimblerig heard, but he didn't care. He had given up hope. He was through. But not quite through. Deep in his heart he could still sing to himself, "Jerusalem the Golden." He would hang onto that, and they could kill him, but

he would hang onto it. And not so long ago he had scorned singsongs and their hymns. But this wasn't their hymn. It was his. "Jerusalem the Golden" was his, and he would live there some day.

They had walked a block east and had taken a street car. It was a night car and traveled rapidly. When they got off the car they walked a block west, turned a corner, and there were the twin lights of the police station. But Thimblerig didn't care. Nothing mattered now. And they weren't going to 'bother him right away. They took his name, asked him a few questions, and led him to a cell. They thought that the ecstasy in his thin, shining face was the result of hop. He'd look different in the morning.

But when the gray morning came, and he was taken into a room with four others, and lined up in front of the captain and the plain-clothes man and an officer, Thimblerig's face was radiant, and occasionally he grinned. Then, a man stepped into the room from a side door. Thimblerig stared. It was the undertaker, the friend who had given him the box coat with the big pearl buttons, and the derby hat. Thimblerig didn't know that the man next to him in line was the yegg. In fact, Thimblerig paid no attention to his fellows. His gaze was fixed on the undertaker's fleshy, sallow face. The desk man came in and laid a light-colored, short overcoat and a derby hat on the desk. The captain turned to the undertaker.

"Mr. Smiley, you say you gave this coat and hat to a tramp, about six o'clock last night. You have identified the hat and coat. Now tell me if the man you gave them to is in this room."

Thimblerig was trying to hang onto "Jerusalem the Golden." He hummed it, way down in his heart, but it was hard work trying to remember the tune and the words. Mr. Smiley, suave, cool, quite at ease, stood with his hands in his trouser pockets looking at the five men lined up in front of the desk.

"Step down, and look 'em over," said the captain.

Mr. Smiley stepped down and walked along in front of the line. He had taken his right hand from his pocket, and, as he moved along, he toyed with a coin nonchalantly. He paused for a second in front of each man. When he came to Thimblerig he seemed to pause a little longer. In fact, he paused long enough for Thimblerig to notice that it wasn't a coin the undertaker was toying with, but a brass check. Mr. Smiley moved to the next man, then stepped back to the desk. And, catching his eye, Thimblerig grinned, not consciously, but through habit. "The man I gave the hat and coat to isn't here," said Mr. Smiley. "I talked with him quite a while, and I would know him again, anywhere."

The succeeding silence was interrupted by the arrival of a brisk person, clothed smartly like a well-to-do business man. This person laid something on

the desk, and his forefinger moved about, as the captain bent his head, listening. Finally the captain looked up.

"Got you this time, 'Rusty.' Got six or seven of your finger prints from the safe door. That lets the rest of you guys out," declared the captain.

The man next to Thimblerig licked his lips. A policeman stepped up to him and shoved him along toward the corridor of cells. The others in the line stood stupidly watching the captain. They were too scared to move until they were told to clear out. Thimblerig was the last to leave. And strangely enough, he didn't feel elated, now that he was free. He didn't care. He would just hunt up some kind of a job and get a stake and then beat it out of town. Go where? It didn't matter.

As he slouched along the street, a man passed him, walking swiftly. Thimblerig recognized him as Mr. Smiley, the undertaker. But why had Mr. Smiley stopped and laid something on the fire hydrant and then walked off, as though in a great hurry? Thimblerig wanted to speak to Mr. Smiley— to thank him. But that wouldn't do. Might get Mr. Smiley into trouble, if a cop should happen to see them. Thimblerig glanced at the fire hydrant, as he came opposite it. Mr. Smiley had laid a silver dollar on top of the hydrant. Thimblerig veered over and pocketed the dollar. Up the block the undertaker was just turning the corner, and, as he turned, he waved a white hand— a gesture that said: "So long! Good luck!" Mr. Smiley's gestures were always adequate. He had once been an unsuccessful tragedian.

Mr. Smiley had also had so much to do with both the living and the dead, that he knew a criminal when he saw one. And he knew that Thimblerig was not even a potential criminal; also, that Thimblerig was an easy mark when crooks happened to be hunting for goats.

THAT night Thimblerig walked into the rescue mission, the detested singsong. He had been shaved and had had his hair cut, and he sported a pair of shoes, secondhand, but new to him. When the time came for the actual hymn, and the horse-faced guy who led the "holy howlers" asked if there was any one present who wished to choose a hymn, Thimblerig spoke up promptly. " 'Jerusalem the Golden!' And tell the guy at the melodeon to tromp on it!"

Thimblerig sang. He had a thin, clear voice, a natural ear for melody, and he loved tunes. But, heretofore, he had never paid much attention to the words of a song. He was startled when he discovered that the one hymn which he had made his own, did not read, "With peace and plenty blest," but read, "With milk and honey blest." Yes, the book said that. But he would not sing it that way. His Jerusalem was blessed with peace and plenty, and that settled it.

He tarried in the mission only long enough to gather unto himself an overcoat— a dark-colored overcoat, by choice, and some decent clothing and a small stake. These he accumulated by working at odd jobs— cleaning windows, distributing hand bills, even carrying in coal, a round basketful at a time, in places where the domestic topography precluded the use of a chute. After work Thimblerig never failed to stop in at a certain' West Side saloon and get a long one— sometimes two. Then he went directly to the mission, as a paroled prisoner returns. He wasn't in love with the mission, but it was safe. Them spring came, and the urge to travel. Somewhere he would discover a golden land, blessed with peace and plenty. Once or twice he had thought of calling on Mr. Smiley, the undertaker, But Mr. Smiley read the newspapers, and the newspapers had told all about the row in Jerry's place, and how Jerry had been arrested, but had been let go because of insufficient evidence. And the papers also printed a lot about Rusty, the yegg, his trial and his sentence to a life term in the pen. Mr. Smiley read the papers, and he would know that the guy he gave the overcoat to wasn't a crook. So Thimblerig didn't visit Mr. Smiley, although he often thought of him as a real guy who wouldn't kick a stray dog, even if he was asked to.

Finally, Thimblerig heard a still, small voice tell him to take up his bed and walk. He did so literally. He had graduated from bum to hobo. That was one step in the right direction. He took many thousand more, and all toward the West. His journey to California would make a story in itself— a three-thousand mile story of hardships and dangers, of wind and sun and rain, of camp fires and chance companions, of one long and terrifying tramp across a barren land, where a guy traveled at night and tried to make it to a town or station along the railroad, where he could get some shade and water, and sleep in the daytime. Then came a day when Thimblerig looked down from the plateau of the desert upon a land literally flowing with milk and honey, to say nothing of almonds and oranges, only they don't flow. He loafed down the Cajon Pass and camped along the arroyo above San Bernardino. By degrees, pleasant degrees, he reached the coast, and stood upon a peak and discovered the Pacific, just as all tourists from the East do. It was great, but it wasn't just the spot he was looking for. So he rambled up the coast, crossed a range of hills, and sauntered down into a valley, and then he knew that he had arrived — that "Jerusalem the Golden" was a song come true.

"This is it! But how many know I been lookin' for this place, and how many care? It's kind of up to us"— Thimblerig spoke editorially— "to drop the couplin' pin into a link that is hooked onto one of these here farmers or fruit growers, or mebby a sheep-herder who owns a great flock in a weary land. That hoss-faced guy at the mission was always talkin' about tendin' sheep, and

lyin' still by green pastures, and such. And that kind of a job ought to give a fella time to think. And he was always sayin', 'Think before you act.' But how many fellas ever set down on one of them sneakin' little cactus dinguses in the dark and did any thinkin' before they acted?" Thimblerig was talking to himself, and, in one pointed instance, from experience: "Not so many, sister! Not so many!

"There she is, flowin' with milk and honey and oranges and alfalfa and walnuts and grapefruit and some lemons. And here I am, lookin' down on her, same as Moses, only I got one foot in the door, and somebody's got to listen. Sign back there said, 'Oaji, three miles.' I never saw one. But, after tribulatin' three or four thousand miles to get here, I'm goin' to take a look."

IT is to whistle or sing, when the warm sun shines on the Oaji Valley, when one is footloose and feels as gay as a road runner catching grasshoppers in an alfalfa patch. However, if your lips are cracked and chapped from weary desert travel, it is just as well to hum. Thimblerig hummed, as he went. A long one would go pretty good. Yet there was a glory in the morning that lifted him above mere physical thirst. His eye was alert for a green pasture and still waters. He found the next best thing, an irrigating ditch. This was before the advent of carbon monoxide. And beside the irrigating ditch, in the shade of a fatherly cottonwood, he uncorded his blankets, washed, shaved, took a semicircle of aluminum comb from his inner hatband, and combed his scanty hair. He even went so far as to rub the dust from his shoes with a wad of newspaper. He drank of the cool, clear water. A rancher came along the road on foot, a shovel over his shoulder. 'Say, mister," called Thimblerig, "what place is this?"

"O-hi."

Thimblerig seemed puzzled. "I mean—right here."

"O-hi."

Evidently the rancher was smart-cracking. He didn't seem any too friendly, though. Thimblerig grinned. "Thanks. But, honest, how high is O-hi?"

"Think you're funny, don't you?"

"Sure! Don't you?"

"I think a hobo is about as low as a man can get," replied the rancher.

"Nope, my friend. There's something lower than that— and that's a man with a job tryin' to throw dirt on a man that is lookin' for one."

"You lookin' for work, honest?"

"Yep. Honest work."

"Well, I can give you a job."

Thimblerig's thin face glowed with anticipation. He regretted having lost his temper. But the rancher had started the kidding.

"Well, I'll be awful glad to get work," said Thimblerig. "I like this place."

"All right. Take this shovel and bury yourself."

Thimblerig's mouth twitched, and his face grew white. But no angel with a flaming sword or lopsided old shovel was going to chase him out of The Promised Land. Swinging his bed roll across his back, Thimblerig strutted haughtily down the road, nobly conscious of having refrained from retorting with a play upon words regarding interments which has became a classic among hobos and others. No, not The Promised Land, but The Garden of Eden, was what he had meant. But he was hot and kind of forgot his lines.

The dairy farm was as immaculate and neat and sanitary as an operating room in a hospital— that is, before the battle. There were very few discontented cows in the great, glossy-backed herd. In fact, they were the most contented cows in the world. Just to see them in the stanchions, lazily rolling their cuds from side to side, as they chewed thoughtfully, convinced one that the billboards sometimes told the truth. They were thoroughly contented and gave calm milk— several grades of it, all from the same cow. But that didn't happen until the milk had been manhandled at the distributing plant. And that is what puzzled Thimblerig when he hired out as a dairymaid. He had had visions of pails of foaming milk and pans from which the rancher's wife skimmed the cream and served some of it to the help, with their coffee and flapjacks.

Thimblerig was puzzled. True, he saw cows and calves. But he scarcely ever saw any milk. You see, it was like this. When the cows were in the stanchions, fellas in striped overalls went along puttin' things like football masks on the udders of the cows. The masks had a lot of funny little rubber tubes that came together in one long hose. And then a guy turned on the electricity, and them there dinguses went to work and milked the cows, just like humans. It was disillusioning. It wasn't a bit pastoral. And once a cow doctor came along and gave all the cows a shot in the arm, but maybe that was to keep them contented.

Thimblerig didn't know. His job was to drive a team, pulling a wagon laden with filled milk cans to the station. It was impressed upon him that he must never miss the train. And he was faithful to his trust. He wore a striped-denim uniform, with white letters across the back of the jacket. He was somebody. The trainmen chaffed him and called him "Joe." He liked that. Sounded like they thought he was a real guy.

Meals were served in a clean, airy, pleasant dining room— good meals, with plenty of vegetables. The sleeping quarters were also clean and orderly.

And there were shower baths and even a plunge. The men were paid promptly, the first of each month. Rowdyism was discouraged, and profanity was not tolerated beyond a reasonable working limit. Smoking was not allowed in any of the buildings except the reading room. The dairy was organized efficiency, from its northern boundary to the south line. Thimblerig worked faithfully, and thought he also was contented. Yet, somehow, there was something lacking.

ABOUT the time the wild oats were heading, and poppies bloomed in the remote, uncultivated valleys, the something which Thimblerig had missed, appeared. First, a cloud of dust— a sign and a portent. Out of the cloud emerged a band of sheep, with dogs trailing on either wing of the band; following the sheep, came a pack burro. Behind the pack burro strode a lean, little, dried-up Mexican, with a stick in his hand, Thimblerig gazed upon an ideal. He was a bit disappointed in the stick. It wasn't what sacred literature had described as a shepherd's crook: The Mexican used it to punch the slow end of the pack burro. The Mexican was old— very old, *señor*! *Muy viejo*. But every year, after the rains, he went up into the hills with his sheep. One got into the way of it, after thirty or forty years.

Thimblerig, driving to the station in the afternoon to get some empties, had pulled kis team to one side to let the sheep pass. The band surged against the opposite fence and slowly strung out, as the dogs dodged here and there, knowing their work and doing it with zest. The old sheepman paused to thank Thimman's third, "*Gracias, señor*!" Thimblerig actually blushed. That was all right! Glad to do it. After the old man's third, "*Gracias, señor*!' Thimblerig thought it was about time to introduce himself. You never could tell. The old man might give him a job some day. "My name's Joe. Work up at the dairy. Do you handle all them sheep alone?"

"Alone, me? *Si*. An' the dog, he work pretty good."

"Well, so long. I always did like sheep."

The old Mexican punched his pack burro and followed the cloud of dust. Thimblerig automatically kept an eye on his own driving, but his mind was submerged in dusty clouds of thought. To ramble along in the sunshine with that old gentleman— Grassy Señor, he said his name was— would be just about the last word. And to camp where there were trees and water and grass— sit by a fire, at night, and smoke and chin about everything! And one good thing, sheep wouldn't hook you or kick or bite you, like a cow or a horse would, sometimes. And it would be educational, learnin' to talk Spanish.

Thimblerig collected the empties and drove back to the dairy. The following day he told his foreman he thought he would quit, the first of the month.

Thimblerig almost wept with gratitude when the foreman told him he would have some kind of a job for him whenever he wanted to come back.

Thimblerig drew part of his pay and had the balance credited to him on the company books. A job and money when he came back! 'Jerusalem the Golden, with peace and plenty blest." The sheepman had been on his way four days. That was nothing. It wouldn't be hard to trail him, for he would have to travel slowly. Two days after setting out, Thimblerig overtook the sheep, in evening camp, along the foothills. The dogs ran out from the fire, snarling. They returned frolicking around Thimblerig, as though they had expected him and were giving him a welcome.

The old man noticed this. His dogs, they knew! And old José's little black eyes, like sparks of fire on leather, burned shrewdly upon the visitor. Why had he come? What did he want? But let the visitor speak. There was all the time in the world. And, after some goat's meat and frijoles and black coffee, Thimblerig spoke— and spoke with "the tongues of men and of angels."

Old José listened and gathered from Thimblerig's outburst that he wanted to help him with the sheep. As for pay, that didn't matter. The queer gringo wanted to learn all about sheep. *Por Dios*! But there was nothing to learn. Sheep were sheep. Fortunately, just about then Thimblerig coughed. The frijoles had been pretty hot— seasoned beyond a mere gringo's powers of appreciation. Old José's eyes brightened. He nodded. Now he understood. The queer one was sick in the chest. He wished to live outdoors and grow strong.

"You got the sick in the chest?" queried old José.

Thimblerig had never felt better in his life. But something told him not to say no. "I got a cough," he said, as a sort of compromise.

"You cook?" And José gestured toward the Dutch oven.

"You bet your life! Nothin' fancy, but I can shake a mean skillet."

"*Bueno*. You stay here." And that was all.

Thimblerig stayed— stayed until fall drove the sheep from the higher country into the lowlands, through which they drifted Jazily toward the valley and home. And when they arrived at old José's home, Thimblerig discovered that the old man lived alone, without kin of any kind. He had homesteaded a few acres, built an adobe, and had grown alfalfa, a few vegetables, and enjoyed the fruit from trees he had planted many years ago— figs and olives and apricots. José was getting feeble, and Thimblerig did most of the work that winter. Toward spring, old José was taken sick one night, and he died before Thimblerig could get a doctor.

They had been friends, the best kind of friends, because neither talked much. A word or a gesture from either, and the other understood. Thimblerig drew his money from the dairy and paid for the old man's funeral. Then one

day, as he sat in the adobe, smoking and wondering what would become of José's place and the sheep, a man in a broad, black Stetson and rather severe black clothing, drove up in a light buggy and talked with Thimblerig. It developed, much to Thimblerig's surprise, that old José had left his place, his sheep, and something less than two hundred dollars to his friend and partner in business, Joe Smiley. But there was a hitch. How could Thimblerig prove that he was the man mentioned in the will?

"Ask the folks at the dairy," said Thimblerig.

"Oh, that's different," said the county official. "I didn't know but what you were some hobo that just happened to come along and roost here."

"Well, I might have been, at that," said Thimblerig. "But you ask the foreman at the dairy how Joe Smiley stands with him."

"That's all right," declared the official.

"You better come to town when you get time. There's some papers to sign."

The official departed. Thimblerig went into the adobe and sat on the edge of the bed. His eyes filled with tears. The two dogs lay on the floor, their muzzles on their paws, watching him. Thimblerig clasped his knee, and rocked back and forth gently. He was humming, "Jerusalem the Golden." There were some regular guys in the world, after all. Mr. Smiley, the undertaker, and old José, the Mexican sheepman. Sometimes one of them hymns did come true, but you wanted to be sure and pick the right hymn, at the start. And a fella just had to tie to something, or he'd get dizzy and fall off the edge, or get tromped in the rush, or busted in the jaw, or somethin'. Thimblerig brushed his hand across his face. He grinned. The dogs thumped the floor with their tails.

"You been waitin' for the old man, but he ain't comin' back," said Thimblerig. "I'm the boss now. You'll have to kind of get used to me. And, listen! Pretty soon we'll be moochin' up the valley with the sheep again. His name was José, which means Joe. And I'm Joe." Thimblerig tapped his chest with his thumb. "Joe, savvy?"

Thimblerig raised his eyes and stared at the wall. He seemed to see a little, dried-up figure in overalls and coarse boots and a sombrero, the figure of old José. And Thimblerig heard a voice:

"*Gracias, señor*! I know you be good to my dogs and my sheep. So it is that I give them to you."

The figure melted into the wall. And Thimblerig was staring at the old man's faded black coat and hat, on the peg where he had last hung them.

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11: Abraham is Seated

William J. Elliott

1886-c. 1947

Australian Women's Weekly 8 Oct 1938

DAY in, day out— week after week, month after month, and year after year— he has stood there— a colossal, dark figure, gazing immovably upon one of the busiest and most picturesque corners of the civilised world, and upon its almost daily scenes of pomp and pageantry.

Beneath the unwinking stare of his grave eyes many events have taken place— gaily grand weddings; solemnly grand funerals; dignified scenes of great national import; hectic scenes of riot and violence— and all the time he has stood there, amid his little patch of gay green grass, before his great chair, with the Eagle of Liberty embossed upon it. In a sense a shabby and incongruous figure, with his ill-fitting frock coat and badly-hanging trousers, and with that expression of slightly aggressive austerity upon his rugged face. Looking at him, one feels that he must be con-stantly saying to himself: "Vanity, vanity— all is vanity!"

Kings and Governments, War and Peace, and the futile, scurrying crowds of business and pleasuretcekers come and go, but still the statue of Abraham Lincoln, apostle oí Liberty and Democracy, stands there, wrapped in his mantle of eternal silence, and gazes austerely out upon the panorama of Royal Westminster...

Beyond the fact that they are both Americans, it would seem dif-ficult to imagine any possible connection between the dead Abraham Lincoln and the very much alive Mr. Sol B. Yanker (to quote his own impressive signature). One feels, somehow, that had these two sons of a great nation ever met they would not have really liked each other.

Mr. Sol B. Yanker is very far from being a Democrat or an Apostle of Liberty. He is an exploiteer and a profiteer. A Captain of Industry— other people's industry. In a lower and less certain strata of society he would be called a "con-man." But he calls himself, and is accepted by others as, a "financier." He is, needless to mention, the possessor of much wealth— and also of a rather greedy wife and an extremely beautiful and charming daughter.

Mr. Yanker is of course, extremely clever at his business. But outside that he ls something of a nit-wit— and, like many such, he is an inveterate second hand humorist. By which I mean that he never makes an original joke, but, having heard one that tickles his often rather coarse fancy, he is apt to re-peat it ad nauseam on every possible and impossible occasion, until a music-hall turn, the radio, or a public-house humorist supplies him with another. I have

enlarged to some extent upon this habit of his, because but for it there would have been no occasion to write this story.

One afternoon, boxed up in a Jubilee-week traffic Jam, right opposite Westminster Abbey, he heard a new joke. Next to his opulent-looking car in the jam stood a lorry, and the driver of it, jerking his thumb in the direction of the adjacent statue of Abraham Lincoln, remarked to his mate:

"Blimey, don't get impatient! Look at that old cock there, been standing 'ere for donkey's years, 'e 'as!"

And his mate retorted:

"Bloomin' near time 'e sat down, then— 'e must be blinkin' tired by now!"

That struck Mr. Yanker as being a really good Joke. He chuckled over it, and made a mental note to work it off at the first available opportunity. And this, as it happened (and with astonishing results) came to him the following norning.

It was Mr. Yanker's habit to drive to his offices In Lothbury in one of his high-powered cars, and sometimes his wife and his beautiful daughter accompanied him, the daughter afterwards driving her mother home to Eaton Square, or wherever else they decided to go.

On this occasion they once more were forced to pull up right opposite the statue, and Mrs. Yanker took advantage of the pause in drivingconcentration to ask once more a recently oft-reiterated question:

"What about that trip to the States, Solly? When are you going to take me?"

Mr. Yanker immediately seized upon the heaven-sent opportunity, and, with a broad grin and a Jerk of an over-corpulent cigar in the direc-tion of the statue, said:

"When old Abe there squats down In his chair, m'dear! You won't have long to wait— I reckon the old timer's pretty tired by now!"

Mrs. Yanker muttered something unprintable, the jam broke, and the car forged ahead. Miss Enid Angela Sadie Yanker, sitting in the back seat, had overheard her parent's little joke. She did not smile at it, but, sub-consciously, she must have made a note of it, as the future proved.

Miss Enid A. S. Yanker, being a young lady of great beauty, charm and vivacity, possessed a large and heterogeneous collection of admirers, none of whom found her to justify her initials. Among these was one Robert (or Bobbie) Ffoliot. He appeared, on the face of it, to be by no means a favorite in the great race for the Enid Stakes (1,000,000 sovs.). The fact that he was rather too much of a colt of a noble stable made him unfancled by Sol B., and Enid herself, while rather fond of him personally, had certain objections to him which will appear shortly. Nevertheless, Bobble Ffoliot was a dark horse.

The day following that upon which Sol. B. first fired off his new Joke, Enid was due to appear as a guest at a Kentish house-party, and Bobbie, by sheer persistency, had managed to get her permission to drive her to London Bridge station in his little sports-car. Needless to mention, he did not take the nearest route.

At Hyde Park corner he commenced to bother his fair passenger with his usual importunities, to which she listened with an air of resigned boredom. As they approached Victoria Station she said:

"Say, Bobbie, listen! And just get this, will you? This is about the one hundred and forty-sixth time I've said it, and I'm just as definite now as I was the first time! I-will-not-marry-you!"

"And why not?" asked Bobbie, with an air of polite detachment, which somehow annoyed her. It annoyed her, in fact, so much that she was goaded into speaking the truth.

"For once I'll tell you! I'll spill all the beans. I'll give you the complete and ultimate low-down. Now, listen. You are handsome, you are charming, you are nice and kind. You are, In fact, all that an English gentleman ought to be. In fact, I'm not at all sure that I'm not in love with you more than a bit. I—"

"Ii you'll pardon me," Bobble Interpolated, gently, "your reasons for, so to speak, turning me down as a husband don't seem to me to be entirely adequate!"

"Wait a minute. You are all those things, but you don't do anything! So far as the available records go, you never have done anything. For what my gift of prophecy is worth, you never will do anything. You are just a useless idler— a parasite cumbering the face of the world. And I will only marry a man who does things— or who, at any rate, has done something. That's the only sort I've any use for, in my young life."

They were tooling gently down Victoria Street.

"I see, so you want me to do something!" said Bobbie, thoughtfully. "Like-like your pater, eh?"

"Nonsense!" with marked decision. "Pop doesn't do things— he does people. Besides, I don't especially want you to make money— goodness knows there ls plenty of the stuff about on our side. I Just want you to do something that matters— something big— something daring— something unusual— something that no one else has done! That's all!"

"Is it?" sighed Bobbie. "I see!" Then, with a sudden air of determination: "All right— that's settled. Now, there's only one more thing to arrange, beautiful."

"And that ls?"

"When, O belovedest? When will you marry me?"

Enid's subconscious mind worked suddenly. She gave him one glance, with pronounced disbelief and lack of faith marring slightly the azure glory of her eyes— and then she pointed ahead, half-left, with a slender, white, charmingly manicured finger.

"When that old man sits himself down," she said, somewhat dis-respectfully. And added, echoing her father's humor: "You'll not have to wait long— he must be mighty tired by now!"

"I'm sure he must be!" Bobbie agreed, with a quick glance at Lincoln. He said little more between that point and London Bridge Station, but there was a queer gleam in his eyes when he said good-bye to his lady-love through the window of the first-class, reserved compartment. Little could be said, because Enid's maid was there, but just for a moment she looked into his eyes with sadness nestling in the heaven of her own, and whispered:

"Poor old Bobbie!"

And "Poor old Bobbie be darned!" muttered that ungrateful gentleman, as he strode towards the barrier with the air of one who has important business in hand!

In the small hours of the following morning a solitary figure might have been seen with its back to the Abbey of Westminster, and its face turned attentively towards the statue of the Apostle of Liberty— which it was eyeing with no great favor. Presently it spoke, addressing the statue in the tone of a lion-tamer addressing a doubtful member of his class.

"Sit down, will you? D'you hear me, darn you— sit down...! Oh, you won't, won't you? Very well, then...!"

THE figure gave one quick and comprehensive glance around, and then, taking a tape-measure from its pocket, it proceeded to cautiously climb the railings by the base of the statue!

The race for the Enid Stakes (1¼ million sovs— Sol had brought off another coup) was getting very hot. The Duke led by two theatres and a night-club, but his Lordship was a warm second. Then came the Field, and well in the ruck was Ffoliot, the Dark Horse.

At an almost obscenely early hour one morning Bobbie rang Enid up. His usually slightly bored voice was vibrant with excitement.

"Listen, O Queen of my Heart," he breathed. "An event— an astounding event of international importance— has occurred, and it is absolutely essential that I should see you this morning! As early as possible!"

"Are you fooling, or do you really mean that, Bobbie?" Enid inquired. His tone rather impressed her.

"As you would say, O Fairy of the Stars-and-Stripes, I sure do!" was the answer.

"Very well, then. Let me see... I am going to the office with father -I'll call for you at your club about eleven, then!"

"Oh!" came Bobbie's rather thoughtful voice. "You're going to the office, are you?"

"Sure! Why?" Bobbie's tone puzzled her.

"Oh, nothing! See you at eleven, then! S'long!" And Bobbie rang off.

A little later the big car rolled swiftly but with befitting dignity down Victoria Street. It was just opposite the Abbey when Mrs. Yanker suddenly gave vent to a strangled scream. Then:

"Say, Solly!" she gasped. "Just train your lamps on that goldarned stattoo!"

Mr. Yanker, a trifle startled, turned his eyes in the direction of the replica of their national hero. Then he emitted a sort of huffling snort, and, without putting his hand out, crammed all the four-wheel brakes on. A delivery van crashed heartily into their rear, but neither that nor the picturesque flow of language that followed it could tear Sol's goggling eyes from that statue.

For Abraham Lincoln was, undoubtedly and indubitably, sitting down!

His expression was the same; the ill-fitting frock coat and the badlyhanging trousers were the same. Only the pose was altered, in that instead of standing in front of the great chair with the embossed eagle he was now sitting in it. But not lolling at his ease, or languidly lounging, for the austerity of his expression was confirmed by the stiff, upright, disapproving pose he had adopted in, at last, taking his seat.

And the three people in the car were all staring at it as though hypnotised. Sol himself was gasping like a dyspeptic codfish; Mrs. Sol looked like one who, having backed a rank outsider, has just heard that it was first past the post; Enid's expression was enigmatic, but the wonderful blue of her eyes looked rather like the Southern skies just when the sun is peeping up from behind the horizon.

"Now, then!" ejaculated the commonplace voice of the trafficpoliceman, as he fished out his note-book. "What's all this about, eh?"

And Sol managed to gasp, in a dry, throaty croak:

"The statue— look at the statue! It's— sitting down!"

The constable took a quick glance over his shoulder:

"Of course it is!" he snapped. "What did you expect it to be doing -playing darts?"

Then a suspicious look came Into hts cold eye. He put his face close to Sol's and sniffed, like a blood-hound on the trail.

"B-b-ut it was standing up just now— yesterday morning, that is!" gasped Sol.

"Oh, was lt!" said the constable, grimly. "Well, I can't smell nothing, but it's either drink, dope, or bate in the belfry. You'd better come along of me, slr-the Court's sitting, so it won't take long!"

The constable took charge of the dazed Sol, and Enid took charge of the car.

At Westminster Police Court the magistrate was very unsympathetic.

"You say you were startled by the fact that the statue of Lincoln was sitting down! Well, I see nothing startling in that! It always has been sitting down!"

"Standing up, your Worship!" interpolated the clerk, in a stage whisper.

"Oh," said the magistrate. "Well, it comes to the same thing, so far as this case is concerned." Interrogatively, to a police sergeant: "You say the doctor four d' no trace of al-cohol?"

"None, sir! But he said the prisoner was in a dazed condition, and not fit to drive a car!"

"Very well, we'll give him the benefit of the doubt! Pay fifty pounds, ten guineas costs, and the doctor's fee!"

The result of all this was that Enid was very late for her appoint-ment, but Bobbie waited patiently. As soon as they were alone, he announced:

"I have to inform your Serene and Beautiful Highness that to-day your friend, Mr. Lincoln, has accepted an invitation to be seated!"

"You're telling me...!" said Miss Yanker. "Have you any notion how it happened, Bobbie?" She looked at him with considerable suspicion, which he bore with equanimity.

"I have!" he answered, cheerfully. "In the parlance of the best criminal circles— I done it!"

"You mean that you and you alone made that statue sit down?"

"I mean just that! That is to say, I am solely responsible-with the aid of certain paid henchmen of mine, who, however, did no executive work-for the change in the gentleman's attitude!"

"Prove it!" snapped Enid.

"With pleasure. I will tell you now that, to-morrow morning, the statue will be standing again. If that is not sufficient proof, if you care to be outside the Abbey at two-thirty sharp to-morrow morning, you will actually see the— ah— transportation, so to speak! Now, tell me— have I done anything— something daring; unusual; something that no one else has ever done— or have I not?"

And there was certainly no cloud in the blue of her eyes as she looked into his own ardent ones, and said:

"Bobbie! If you are certain you can prove it— you can get busy on procuring a special licence right away I"

"Good egg!" said Bobbie.

I am not a statistician. I cannot compute, even roughly, how many thousand people pass the Lincoln statue each day. But it must be very many thousands, and it is amazing to relate that, out of all those thousands, only a few noticed the difference in the position of the late President of the United States. Which was, perhaps, just as well, since those few indulged in many and bitter quarrels with friends and acquaintances who were perfectly certain that the statue had always been sitting. As most of them said: "If not, what the deuce is the chair there for?"

Late in the evening a descriptive reporter on London's liveliest daily heard the rumor. He dashed down to have a look at the statue, man-aged to get a picture postcard of it, showing it in an undoubtedly erect pose, and straightway wrote a three-column, front-page spread, with splash headline:

"AMAZING MYSTERY OP LONDON STATUE— WHAT MADE LINCOLN SIT DOWN?"

If he had had the nous to take a flashlight photograph of lt, he wouldn't have got the sack!

At two-thirty that morning Enid stood in the shadow of the Abbey and watched a lorry approach along the deserted street. It had upon

it a small but very powerful crane, and a large object swathed in canvas.

The lorry pulled up before the sitting statue, and a number of men alighted. They were all wearing peaked caps, and had overalls over their uniforms. In very large white letters on the side of the lorry was painted: "The Royal Society for the Preservation of Statues." There was a sort of foreman in charge, wearing a bowler hat. In this individual Enid, not without a thrill, recognised none other than Bobbie Ffoliot.

Under his directions the men got to work. The crane got busy and lifted the sitting President out of his chair and placed him in the lorry. Then the standing figure of the President, having been unswathed from its canvas wrappings, was lifted from the lorry and replaced in its original position. A passing policeman, on his beat, paused for a moment and remarked:

"Blimey! You made a quick Job o' that, didn't you?"

"Not 'arf !" answered Bobble, lighting a cigarette.

The policeman called a cheerful good-night and passed on his way. A few minutes later the lorry drove off also. And last of all Enid made her way somewhat thoughtfully home.

The following morning Mr. Sol. B. Yanker, always a man of his word, placed the reservations for the best suite on the newest transatlantic liner in his wife's lap. About the same time his daughter, inheriting at least one good trait from her father, placed the rest of her life in the hands of Mr. Robert Ffoliot. A little later, over a simple weddingbreakfast taken *a deux*, he told her the story.

"FOR one who worships me as you do, O most Beautiful of Brides," he commenced, "you know but little of me! For instance, you never knew until now that I spent some years of my youth In learning to sculpt. I was a good sculptor— up to a point. That is to say, I could imitate, but could never create. So I gave it up. But when you made your funny little stipulation about the jolly old President... well... I took up sculpting once more!

"The first act of the drama took place In Westminster Police Court, when a young man, who gave the slightly improbable name of Robert Smith, was charged with being drunk and disorderly. It seems that the police found him measuring the statue of Lincoln with a tape measure. He explained that he was a tailor's assistant, and had decided that the President wanted a new suit. But when they asked him why he also measured up the chair, he couldn't answer. So they fined him ten bob, and sent him away. He was, of course, your new but devoted husband!

"The rest you will guess. When the sculpting was finished, I hired a lorry with a crane attached. I had a not quite truthful legend painted on its sides, and I engaged a team of hefty unemployed gentlemen, whom I rigged up in second-hand uniforms which, I gather, had once belonged to the Stoke Pendleton Silver Prize Band. With slight alteration the letters did nicely for the initials of the Society for the Preservation of Statues!

"Then we got busy, late at night, and removed the original statue, substituting the sitting one. A constable came butting in, but was, of course, completely deceived by the uniforms, and we explained that we were temporarily removing it for renovation! He stood and watched us for a while, wished us luck, and then retired In good order So did we!

"That concludes the second act, and the third, I believe, you actually witnessed yourself. Anyway, the important point ls that I have fulfilled all your requirements. The statue of President Lincoln duly sat down, and I have actually done something— something big— something daring— something unusual— something that no one else has done! And you have kept your pretty little word, so we're all square! Excepl that, seeing as how we're married respectable like, I think I might have a kiss!"

He got it— and then Enid said:

"Now, immediately after the honeymoon, we're going to take the finest studio in London! I shall give dinners to important people in the art world, and you must get busy on a lot more sculpting...!"

"Shades of Lincoln!" groaned Bobbie. "I knew there must be a catch in it, somewhere...!"

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12: Loaded Dice

Rafael Sabatini

1875-1950

Ainslee's Magazine Nov 1901

WHERE IS THE MAN who deems himself loyal that can ponder with heart unmoved upon the indignities whereunto my liege and master, the Second Charles, was subjected during that year of his mock-kingship in Scotland? A king in name, surrounded by the outward pomp of kings, but beset by spies, and less a king than the meanest knave of the Kirk Commission that ruled and made a vassal of him.

How it befel that when in their purgation— as they called it they banished from his court the noble Hamilton, Lauderdale, Callender and all those others whom they dubbed malignants, they should have left me beside him doth pass my understanding. For verily— to use another of their words— besides the malignancy, which quality those irreverent dogs assigned to the loyal party to which I had the honor to belong, they might in me have noted a malignancy of another sort— and one which I was never at any pains to dissemble— a deep-seated malignancy towards themselves and all that concerned their infernal covenant.

Did the King play at cards on a Sabbath he was visited by a parcel of sour-faced ministers, who preached to him through their noses touching the observance of the Lord's Day, while did they but hear of his having chucked a maid under the chin, they thundered denunciations upon his reprobate head and poured forth threats of exchanging his throne for a cutty stool.

It is, therefore, matter for scant wonder that when on that September evening the Marquess of Argyle came to Perth Castle, his ill-favored countenance monstrous sober and dejected, to acquaint His Majesty with the Scotch disaster at Dunbar, instead of the outburst of grief which he had looked for:

"Oddsfish!" quoth Charles, with a hard laugh. "I protest I am glad of it!"

"Sire!" cried in reproach the dismayed M'Callum More.

"Well, what now?" the King demanded, coldly, while his fiery black eyes flashed such a glance upon the covenanting marquess that he fell abashed and recalled, mayhap, some lingering memory of the respect he owed his King.

For a moment Charles stood surveying him, then turning on his heel and signing to Buckingham to attend him, he passed into the adjoining chamber, where, I afterwards learned, he fell on his knees, and, for all that Cromwell was

his father's murderer and his own implacable enemy, he rendered thanks unto God for the Scotch destruction.

A dead silence followed the King's departure. My Lord Wilmot exchanged smiles with Sir Edward Walker; Cleveland and Wentworth looked at each other significantly, whilst the Marquis de Villaneuffe, who stood beside me, put his lips to my ear to whisper:

"Observe milord Argyle's countenance."

And truly the scowl the marquess wore was an ominous sight. Sir John Gillespie approached him at that moment and they spoke together in low tones. Presently they were joined by Mr. Wood, of the Kirk Commission, who had also heard His Majesty's rash words, and as I gazed upon the three in conversation a feeling that was near akin to dread took possession of me— 'twas, perchance, a premonition of that which was to follow, of a harvest whose seeds I make no doubt were sown in that consultation.

A gayly dressed young man approached me, and hailed me in words more attuned to my tastes and calling.

"Will you throw a main at hazard, Mr. Faversham?"

I looked into the lad's face— a smooth, girlish face it was, set in a frame of golden love locks— and for a second I hesitated. He was not rich, and in two nights he had lost a thousand crowns to me. The thing was, methought, well nigh dishonest, but he spoke of the révanche I owed him, and to that I could but answer that I was his servant.

And so we got to table, and for an hour my Lord Goring and I played at hazard, fortune favoring me, who scorned her for once. 'Tis ever thus with fortune— a shameless jade that hath most smiles for him who flouts her.

At the end of an hour Lord Goring proposed that we should change the game to passage, and this we did, yet the blind goddess was no kinder to him.

One by one, those who stood about took their departure, and presently we had the chamber to ourselves, save for Sir John Gillespie, who came to stand behind Lord Goring's chair and watch the play.

The poor boy sat with a white face, his lips compressed and his eyes a-burning, striving to win as men strive against death, and damning every throw. As midnight struck he at last pushed back his chair.

"I'll play no more to-night, an' it please you, Mr. Faversham," said he in a voice which his breeding vainly strove to render indifferent.

"Mr. Faversham is truly a formidable opponent," quoth Sir John. "He hath learned much in France."

There was that in the voice of this covenanting creature and kinsman of Argyle that I misliked, yet left unheeded. I rose, and expressing polite regrets at

his lordship's persistent ill luck, I pocketed a hundred crowns. Five times that paltry sum it might have been had I so willed it.

I had hoped that Gillespie's remark touching the much that I had learned in France might have proved an admonition to my Lord Goring, and led him to play thereafter with some opponent whose skill was on a level with his own. Not so, however; the boy was blind to the fact that I was his master, and attributed his losses to luck alone.

In this fashion things continued for a week, until in the end naught was talked of but Lord Goring's losses and Lionel Faversham's winnings. Men gathered round the table to watch our play— Sir John Gillespie ever in the foremost rank— and my luck grew at length to be a proverb.

One day, at last, His Majesty drew me aside with a smile that had some thing serious in it.

"Lal," quoth he, laying his hand upon my shoulder, "had I half your luck I should be King of England now. But if you love me, Lal, you'll play no more— leastways, not at the castle. You know my position; you know the crassness of this Kirk Commission. We shall have them denouncing my court from the pulpit as a gaming house, and assigning to that cause the loss of the battle of Dunbar."

"My liege," I exclaimed, "forgive me—"

"Nay, nay," he laughed. "'Tis I who crave forgiveness for inconveniencing you with such a request— but there is the Kirk Commission." And His Majesty added something under his breath; perchance, it was a prayer.

I was glad of so stout an excuse when next Lord Goring approached me with his daily invitation. But Sir John Gillespie was at hand to propose that, if we were anxious to pursue our amusement, there was the hostelry of the Rose in the High Street.

I might have asked this Presbyterian hound what interest of his it was that made him urge us to follow a pursuit at war with his religion. But my position, as you may see, was grown somewhat delicate, and it would ill become me to evince reluctance to play with my Lord Goring.

And so it befel that two nights thereafter we were installed Goring and I— in a cheerful room on the first floor of the hostelry of the Rose. With us came his grace of Buckingham and a party of gentlemen who sat down to lansquenet in the adjoining room, and besides these there was the unavoidable Sir John.

He played not at lansquenet, but stood at Goring's elbow— like Satan, methought, watching a tempted victim. Truth to tell, I had conceived the notion that Sir John was plotting something against either Goring or myself, and I had a monstrous inclination that night to pick a quarrel with him. I had thereafter cause to repent that I obeyed not that prompting.

The mischief chanced upon the following night. Again Buckingham and his friends were in the adjoining chamber, the door of which stood open, so that from where we sat we could see them by the mere raising of our eyes. Sir John lolled in a chair beside us watching Lord Goring lose, and wearing a sardonic grin upon his lean, saturnine countenance.

The hour waxed late; the candles were burning low, and my wits grew dull with the vapors of the sack I had drunk; but for that circumstance mayhap I had coped better with that which followed.

Of a sudden, Goring flung the box down with an oath, and sprang to his feet so violent and clumsily as to overset his chair, which fell with a crash behind him. Through the open door I saw Buckingham turn his head, and I heard his laugh and his words:

"'Tis but Faversham's luck, gentlemen."

'Twas the first time Goring had been betrayed into so unseemly a display of temper, and it surprised me all the more considering that his losses that night did not amount to fifty crowns, while at other times he had risen with a smile from a table at which he had payed me hundreds.

"In the future, Master Faversham, you may play with the devil," said he.

Now, in my cups I am the sweetest-tempered fellow living, and but for the bottles of sack that I had emptied I should have been sorely put to it to have slit his lordship's nose for those words. As it was I did but laugh, and then before I had recovered— for sack maketh a man's laugh long-drawn— Sir John stood up, and:

"Will you throw a main at passage with me, Mr. Faversham?" said he. "I am curious to break a lance with this wondrous luck of yours."

"My lord here proposes I should play the devil," I answered, with a hiccough. "Well, I take it the devil is much the same as a Presbyterian, so come on, Sir John."

He darted a venomous glance at me, and drew up his chair. It never occurred to me how strange a thing it was that this pillar of the sober, virtuous Kirk should play at passage, and for that thoughtlessness again I blame the sack.

Goring set his elbows on the table, and with his chin in his hands he watched us.

Sir John gathered the dice into the box, and handed it to me. I threw; he threw; I threw again, I passed, and won the five gold caroluses he had staked. We began again, and ended in like fashion.

"Come now, Sir John," I cried, "confess 'tis more diverting than a sermon. It thrills you more, doth it not, Sir Jack? Aye, rat me, it—"

I checked myself suddenly, and gazed in fascination at his forefinger and thumb, 'twixt which he was balancing one of the dice that I had just thrown. For a second he held it steady; then slowly, but surely and fatally it turned. My first thought was that the sack had made me dizzy and a prey to illusions; but Goring's words, hissed into my ear, told me otherwise.

"You blackguard!" he said, and what with the wine and my bewilderment I had not the wit to strike him down, but sat, with mouth agape, staring at Gillespie. At length the Scotchman spoke.

"So! we have discovered the secret of your good fortune, Master Faversham," and with a gesture of ineffable disgust, he flung the loaded cube onto the board. At that I found my voice.

"The secret, Sir John!" I cried struggling to rise. But he pushed me back into my chair.

"Hush, sir," he answered, "or those others will hear you. I do not seek your disgrace."

"Disgrace!" I echoed. "Damn me, Sir Jack— Sir Jack Presbyter you shall answer to me—"

"Be silent," he commanded, so sharply that despite myself I obeyed him. "Attend to me, sir. I shall answer to you for nothing. My sword is for men of honor— not for discovered cheats, men who play with loaded dice. Nay, keep your hands still! If you so much as draw an inch of your sword, I'll call my Lord Buckingham and those other gentleman, and show them these dice. Lord Goring can bear witness to the service they have been put to."

I sat back in my chair, and the sweat came out upon my brow while my wine-clogged brain strove vainly to unriddle me this desperate situation.

"Lord Goring," quoth Sir John, pointing to a side table, "will you favor me with that inkhorn and pen?"

His lordship brought him the things, whereupon having found a strip of paper, Sir John set himself to write, while I watched him like one in dream.

"What is it you do?" I asked at length, and in answer he set before me the paper, whereon I read, with some difficulty and no little horror, the following:

I, Lionel Faversham, do hereby confess and declare that on the evening of the tenth of September, of the year of our Lord 1650, while playing at hazard and passage with my Lord Goring and Sir John Gillespie, at the hostelry of the Rose in the High Street, Perth, did with the nefarious intent to plunder the said gentlemen, make use of loaded dice, at which foul practice I was discovered by Sir John Gillespie in the presence of my Lord Goring. In witness whereof I do hereunto set my hand.

"Sign," commanded Sir John, in answer to my glance of inquiry; and he offered me the pen.

"Sign!" I echoed, aghast. "Are you mad, Sir John?"

"Sign!" he repeated.

Ah, 'tis easy to say now what I should have done. I should have upset the table and kicked Sir John downstairs. But so befuddled was I 'twixt sack and the dread of public dishonor that I did neither of these things.

"Sir John," I protested, "I swear 'tis a lie— a vile, monstrous lie. If the dice be clogged indeed, then we have both used them so; how they came here I know not. But we have both used them, I say."

He laughed harshly and pointed to the pile of gold at my elbow sixty or seventy crowns, there may have been.

"Yet you alone contrived to win," he sneered. "You, who in the past week have won thousands from Lord Goring. Come, Master Faversham, sign."

"Not I," I answered, stubbornly.

Sir John stood up.

"I fear, Mr. Faversham, you do not realize the gravity of your position. Unless you forthwith sign that paper, I shall be compelled to call hither his grace of Buckingham, and those with him, and make this matter public. There lie the dice, there the money you have won, and here my Lord Goring, a witness. Perchance, you can picture what must follow."

I could indeed! And I grew cold at the contemplation of it. In my imagination I beheld myself already disgraced, dismissed from court, and— worse than all— dishonored for life.

"If I sign," I inquired, huskily, "what use will you make of it?" "None, given that you comply with my demands, and that they have also Lord Goring's approval."

"They are?"

"That you never again touch either dice box or cards, and that you return to Lord Goring the moneys you have won from him during the past week. On such conditions I am content to keep the matter secret. Are you agreed, my lord?"

His lordship nodded.

"But, gentlemen," I protested, "I swear by honor—"

"The honor of a man who uses loaded dice," sneered Gillespie. "Have done, sir, and sign."

In despair, I snatched up the pen, and set my name to that bond of infamy. No sooner was it done than, quickly, as though fearing I might repent of it, Gillespie seized the paper and signed to Lord Goring to collect the crowns that I had won from him as honestly as ever crowns were won at play.

I AWAKENED next morning with a dull, aching head, sorely harassed moreover by that which had befallen at the Rose. At first I was beset by rage that I had allowed myself to sign so damnable a document. But anon, when I gave more sober thought to it, I realized indeed that no alternative had been left me. My character itself was one that could not have borne so heinous a charge. I was known— among other attributes— for a desperate gamester, and one indeed who well-nigh lived upon his wits at play. For saving the pittance which His Majesty allowed me, I was as penniless a fortune hunter as any of his followers— the Parliament having stripped my father of his last acre of land. Further, my fortune at play— wedded to my skill— had of late bordered upon the miraculous, all of which would give vraisemblance to Gillespie's accusation.

I had taken a morning draught of muscadine and eggs when some one tapped at my chamber door, and Giles— my body servant admitted Sir John Gillespie. I sent Giles on an errand that was like to keep him absent for an hour or so, then turned to my visitor.

"Are we alone?" asked Gillespie.

"Quite," I answered.

"Mr. Faversham," said he. "You no doubt are harassed by the recollection of the paper you signed last night?"

"Need you ask, sir?"

"And were the opportunity afforded you of regaining possession of that scrap of paper, you would eagerly avail yourself of it, eh?"

"Again, need you ask?"

"Well, Mr. Faversham, I am come to bargain with you. There is something that you can obtain for me, and in exchange for that something you shall have your document."

"Name it," I cried, eagerly. "What is this something?"

"The King," he answered, coolly.

"The King?" I echoed. "I don't understand."

"The King. Charles Stuart. Let me explain, Mr. Faversham. You were present some nights ago when this misguided young malignant protested that he was glad the Scotch were destroyed at Dunbar. Well, sir, those words have rankled; not with me alone, but with other eminent members of the state. On the same night a letter from Charles Stuart to the Duke of Hamilton was intercepted, wherein there were such things as no covenanter could suffer even from a king. 'Tis to him, this accursed prince, to his debaucheries and those of the blasphemous libertines about him that we assign our destruction. 'Tis his godless, malignant ways that have drawn the wrath of the Lord upon our heads."

"Forbear, Sir John!" I thundered, unable to brook more of this. "You are a traitor."

"Better to be a traitor to an evil King of earth than a traitor to the King of Heaven," answered the fanatic, rising. "Hear me out, Mr. Faversham. We are resolved— I and some other humble instruments of the Lord— to rid Scotland of this impious prince. The sectary Cromwell clamors for him; on his head, then, be the boy's blood. To Cromwell we shall deliver him. But the majority in Kirk and the Parliament, I grieve to say, are averse to this, and so strategy is needed. The Lord hath set a weapon in my hand; that fool of a lordling whose money you have won was in despair at his losses and his debts. Cromwell offers no less than three thousand pounds for the worthless person of Charles Stuart; with, those three thousand pounds I have bribed Lord Goring. I paid him that sum of money yesterday, in advance, for his help to fuddle you with sack, and to bear witness that you had played with the loaded dice which I, myself, set upon the table."

"'Slife!" I cried, beside myself with rage. "Call you such lying, deceitful knavery consistent with your religion— you instrument of the Lord!"

Sir John smiled coldly.

"The end justified the means."

"And, by God, the end shall justify me for slitting your throat!" I sprang toward my sword as I spoke, but ere I could reach it Sir John had leveled a pistol at me.

"Sit down, you fool," he snarled, "or I'll blow your brains about the chamber."

I resumed my seat. What alternative had I?

"Now, sir," he proceeded, "I duped you because I have need of you. You are intimate with Charles Stuart. More than once have you been his companion upon some escapade of infamy; his mentor upon some debauched enterprise. You must be so again to-morrow night. Lure him from the castle— I care not upon what plea or pretext. But see that by ten o'clock you have him at the corner of the High Street and Maiden Lane."

Loud and long and derisively did I laugh when he had done.

"Out of my sight, you cur, you son of a race of curs!" I cried at last. "You do well to hold a pistol in front of you while you come upon this Judas errand."

He rose calm and unruffled.

"I am going," he said, coolly, "to lay the paper you signed last night before the King. Thereafter I shall lay it before the Kirk Commission, together with certain knowledge that I have of your late connection with James Graham, Earl of Montrose. Ah! you change color, eh? By Heaven, 'tis not without cause, for methinks I have conjured up for you an unpleasant picture— first dishonor,

then the hangman. I have you in the hollow of my hand, Mr. Faversham. If I but tighten my grip I crush you, and tighten my grip I will unless you obey me."

Of what avail to detail further this painful scene of a man thus tortured by fears— not of death alone, but of dishonor? I still resisted, but more and more feebly, until in the end— shame on me that I must write it!— I agreed to do his bidding.

I was to bring the King in a chair. In the High Street at the corner of Maiden Lane, Sir John would meet me, and after assuring himself that 'twas indeed the King whom I had brought he would hand me the paper.

"For the rest," quoth he, "you will yourself see the futility of playing me any tricks. Warn the King, or denounce me to the Parliament, and I have but to produce this document to prove that you sought by a lie to destroy a man who holds such a piece of evidence against you. And see that you come alone, for I shall take precautions, and if in any way you play me false you yourself will be the only sufferer."

"What of Goring?" I inquired.

"He has no knowledge of what is afoot. The fool was desperate with his losses, but even should he repent him of what befel last night, he dare say nothing for his own sake. Good-day to you, Mr. Faversham; see that you do not fail me."

And so it came to pass that during the day I found myself at the King's side, and I proposed to afford him right merry entertainment if on the following night he would go with me to the Watergate. His Majesty, ever ready for a frolic that would relieve the dullness of his Scotch kingship, assented eagerly. And thus the thing was done, and I was left a prey to the tortures of my conscience for the foul work whereon I was embarked.

On the following day Charles, who was in the best of humors, mentioned it in open court that he and I were bent that night upon an adventure to the Watergate. Sir John Gillespie, who was present, approached me a moment later to whisper in my ear:

"You have chosen wisely, Mr. Faversham," whereunto I returned no answer.

Goring was not there; indeed, I had not seen him since the affair at the Rose. But towards seven o'clock that evening while I sat in my chamber a prey to misery untold, he suddenly burst in upon me. He was pale, his eyes bloodshot, and his looks disordered. He closed the door and coming forward he drew from beneath his cloak two leathern bags that looked monstrous heavy, and which, as he set them down upon the table, gave forth the chink of gold.

Deeply marveling, yet saying naught, I watched him.

"Mr. Faversham," he began, speaking hoarsely and with averted eyes, "I am come to very humbly make what reparation is in my power. There are in these bags some three thousand pounds that I received from John Gillespie to aid him dupe you the night before last at the Rose. For duped you were, Mr. Faversham— the cogged dice came out of Gillespie's pocket. The money, sir, is more yours than mine; at least, I will have none of it; dispose of it as you think fit. Your pardon, Mr. Faversham, I dare not crave. My offense is too hideous. But should you demand satisfaction I shall be happy to render it."

I sat in my chair and eyed the broken fool. Calmly and coldly I eyed him. Oddslife! Here was something the cunning Sir John had not reckoned with.

"Are you prepared, my lord," I inquired, sternly, at length, "to come with me to the King and make a full confession?"

He shrank back, turning a shade paler.

"No, no!" he cried. "I dare not. It means disgrace and dishonor."

"Doth the paper in Ruthven's possession mean less to me?" I demanded, coldly. "You spoke of rendering me satisfaction."

"The satisfaction of arms, I meant," he explained, timidly.

"Think you 'twill avail my honor aught to kill you?" I asked, with a contemptuous laugh. Matters, it seemed, were not mended after all. Then in a flash there came to me, I know not whence, an inspiration.

"How came you hither?" I inquired, abruptly.

"How? By the south gallery."

"Did you meet no one?"

"None but the guard at the castle gate. Why do you ask?"

"Why? Because I would not have it known," I cried, facing him with arms akimbo, "that I have been closeted with a man charged with high treason, and for whose arrest there is a warrant."

"My God! What do you mean?" he gasped, in pitiful affright.

"Mean, you fool? That next time you link yourself with a knave of Gillespie's kidney and enter with him upon a villainous enterprise, you first ascertain what be the real business that is afoot. Pah! my lord, you have set a noose about your handsome neck."

"Mr. Faversham," he wailed, "I beseech you to explain."

And explain I did, but with many reservations and modifications that rendered my meaning at times obscure, how the money that Gillespie had paid him was from Cromwell for the person of the King. I showed him how he had made himself a party to a betrayal that fortunately was discovered, and for which Gillespie lay already under arrest. So full of terror did I strike him with the picture I drew of the disgrace and ignominious death that awaited him,

that in the end he groveled before me, clasped my knees, and besought me to save him by bearing witness to the truth.

"And thereby bring suspicion upon myself, and risk my own neck?" I sneered. "Not I. But attend to me, Lord Goring, I can smuggle you out of the castle and out of Perth if I so choose, and this much I— who am convinced of your innocence of treason— am willing to do."

"Oh, thanks! A thousand thanks, my preserver, my— "

"Get up, you fool," I broke in harshly. "Come, let me look at you. Yes, you will do. Your figure is much of the King's height, and you may thank Heaven also that your shape is similar to his, for to-night you will have to impersonate the King."

I explained my meaning fully, and to all that I proposed he eagerly concurred, for truly he deemed himself a drowning man, and the business I suggested was his straw.

Bidding him on no account quit my chamber, I left him to go in quest of Giles. To my ready-witted servant I made known my wants, and the outcome of it was that by nine o'clock we had tricked out his lordship in a suit of black with gold lace borrowed from His Majesty's wardrobe. His golden locks we concealed 'neath a ponderous black wig that was the very counterpart of His Majesty's hair; his creamy white skin we stained with walnut juice to the gypsy tint of the King's complexion. With a burnt cork Giles drew him a pair of long black eyebrows, so that in the end he looked not at all like Lord Goring and sufficiently like Charles Stuart to play by night the part I assigned to him. And when we had given him a cloak, and he had flung it across his shoulders so that it masked his chin and mouth, his resemblance to the King was wondrous true.

Moreover, his lordship was an able mimic, and entering into the spirit of the business, he assumed before us such characteristic attitudes of Charles that he must needs be lynx-eyed who could see through the deception, particularly when considered that 'twould but be seen in the fitful light of torch or lanthorn.

It wanted a quarter to ten when we quitted my room, and going by the south gallery we made our way— Goring and I— to the King's apartments. His Majesty being, as I had conjectured, still at supper, the antechamber was empty and but dimly lighted. But I had scarcely pushed my companion into the embrasure of a window when the sound of steps and voices announced the King's approach.

I sprang forward as he entered.

"So you are here, Lal?" he exclaimed. "I was marveling at your absence from the table."

"Sire," I whispered hurriedly, "I beseech you bid your attendants wait without, and permit me to close the door."

He looked up in surprise, but there was that in my voice that impelled him to grant my request.

"Why, what folly is this, Lal?" said he when the door was shut.

"Sire, I pray you ask me no questions now. There is to be no entertainment to-night at the Watergate. But if your Majesty will enter your chamber, and see no one until my return, I promise you a narrative of ample entertainment."

Naturally, he was inquisitive, but I urged him so, and spoke so fearfully of a matter where lives were involved that in the end he consented to do my will, and I held his chamber door for him.

"Now, my lord," I whispered, drawing Goring from his hiding place. "Play the King, and you are saved."

We crossed the antechamber; then as I held wide the door, and those without bowed low before him, I was astounded to hear what was for all the world the King's voice issue from the folds of his cloak.

"Oddsfish, Lal, 'tis a mad conceit!" He inclined his head to the throng of unsuspecting courtiers and strode on before me.

In the courtyard, before entering his chair, he must needs sniff the air, and for the benefit of those assembled.

"Oddsfish, Lal," he cried in the voice of Charles, "the air is chill." Then to the bearers who stood waiting, "Step on apace, my good fellows," quoth he.

Chancing to turn as the chair was lifted, I beheld Gillespie watching us from the gate, and I was glad that Goring had spoken.

It was a bright, moonlight night, and the chair swung rapidly along. I stalked beside it down the High Street, Sir John following, some fifty yards behind. As we reached the corner of Maiden Lane, half a dozen men emerged from the by-street and stood there while we passed, then started to follow. I fell behind, and a moment later Ruthven was beside me.

"You have done wisely, Mr. Faversham," he sneered. "There is your paper. You had best see to the saving of your own neck."

With that piece of advice he left me, and for some moments I watched the little procession as it moved toward the Watergate. I glanced at the paper, and by the light of the moon I could make out that it was the document I had signed at the Rose. Then I turned and ran every foot of the way back to the castle.

I entertained His Majesty that evening with a narrative of what had taken place, with, however, certain slight alterations that I held necessary, and whose purport it is not difficult to guess.

Nor is it difficult to imagine what befel when Sir John Gillespie discovered what manner of king it was he was bearing to Cromwell. A warrant was issued next day for his arrest. But he was not seen again in Perth; nor was my Lord Goring.

13: Xélucha

M. P. Shiel

Matthew Phipps Shiel, 1865-1947
In: *Shapes in the Fire*, 1896

"He goeth after her...and knoweth not..."
—From a diary

THREE days ago! by heaven, it seems an age. But I am shaken— my reason is debauched. A while since, I fell into a momentary coma precisely resembling an attack of *petit mal*. "Tombs, and worms, and epitaphs"— that is my dream. At my age, with my physique, to walk staggery, like a man stricken! But all that will pass: I must collect myself— my reason is debauched. Three days ago! it seems an age! I sat on the floor before an old *cista* full of letters. I lighted upon a packet of Cosmo's. Why, I had forgotten them! they are turning sere! Truly, I can no more call myself a young man. I sat reading, listlessly, rapt back by memory. To muse is to be lost! of that evil habit I must wring the neck, or look to perish. Once more I threaded the mazy sphere-harmony of the minuet, reeled in the waltz, long pomps of candelabra, the noonday of the bacchanal, about me.

Cosmo was the very tsar and maharajah of the Sybarites! the Priap of the *détraqués*! In every unexpected alcove of the Roman Villa was a couch, raised high, with necessary foot-stool, flanked and canopied with mirrors of clarified gold. Consumption fastened upon him; reclining at last at table, he could, till warmed, scarce lift the wine! his eyes were like two fat glow-worms, coiled together! they seemed haloed with vaporous emanations of phosphorus! Desperate, one could see, was the secret struggle with the Devourer. But to the end the princely smile persisted calm; to the end— to the last day— he continued among that comic crew unchallenged choragus of all the rites, I will not say of Paphos, but of Chemos! and Baal-Peor! Warmed, he did not refuse the revel, the dance, the darkened chamber. It was utterly black, rayless; approached by a secret passage; in shape circular; the air hot, haunted always by odours of balms, bdellium, hints of dulcimer and flute; and radiated round with a hundred thick-strewn ottomans of Morocco.

Here Lucy Hill stabbed to the heart Caccofogo, mistaking the scar of his back for the scar of Soriac. In a bath of malachite the Princess Egla, waking late one morning, found Cosmo lying stiffly dead, the water covering him wholly.

"But in God's name, Mérimée!" (so he wrote), "to think of Xélucha dead! Xélucha! Can a moon-beam, then, perish of suppurations? Can the rainbow be eaten by worms? Ha! ha! ha! laugh with me, my friend: *'elle dérangera l'Enfer'*! She will introduce the pas de tarantule into Tophet! Xélucha, the feminine

Xélucha recalling the splendid harlots of history! Weep with me— *manat rara meas lacrima per genas*! expert as Thargelia; cultured as Aspatia; purple as Semiramis. She comprehended the human tabernacle, my friend, its secret springs and tempers, more intimately than any savant of Salamanca who breathes. Tarare— but Xélucha is not dead!

Vitality is not mortal; you cannot wrap flame in a shroud. Xélucha! where then is she? Translated, perhaps— rapt to a constellation like the daughter of Leda. She journeyed to Hindostan, accompanied by the train and appurtenance of a Begum, threatening descent upon the Emperor of Tartary. I spoke of the desolation of the West; she kissed me, and promised return.

Mentioned you, too, Mérimée— 'her Conqueror'— 'Mérimée, Destroyer of Woman.' A breath from the conservatory rioted among the ambery whiffs of her forelocks, sending it singly a-wave over that thulite tint you know. Costumed cap-à-pie, she had, my friend, the dainty little completeness of a daisy mirrored bright in the eye of the browsing ox. A simile of Milton had for years, she said, inflamed the lust of her Eye: 'The barren plains of Sericana, where Chineses drive with sails and wind their cany wagons light.' I, and the Sabæans, she assured me, wrongly considered Flame the whole of being; the other half of things being Aristotle's quintessential light. In the Ourania Hierarchia and the Faust-book you meet a completeness: burning Seraph, Cherûb full of eyes. Xélucha combined them. She would reconquer the Orient for Dionysius, and return. I heard of her blazing at Delhi; drawn in a chariot by lions. Then this rumour— probably false. Indeed, it comes from a source somewhat turgid. Like Odin, Arthur, and the rest, Xélucha— will reappear.

Soon subsequently, Cosmo lay down in his balneum of malachite, and slept, having drawn over him the water as a coverlet. I, in England, heard little of Xélucha: first that she was alive, then dead, then alighted at old Tadmor in the Wilderness, Palmyra now. Nor did I greatly care, Xélucha having long since turned to apples of Sodom in my mouth. Till I sat by the cista of letters and re-read Cosmo, she had for some years passed from my active memories.

The habit is now confirmed in me of spending the greater part of the day in sleep, while by night I wander far and wide through the city under the sedative influence of a tincture which has become necessary to my life. Such an existence of shadow is not without charm; nor, I think, could many minds be steadily subjected to its conditions without elevation, deepened awe. To travel alone with the Primordial cannot but be solemn. The moon is of the hue of the glow-worm; and Night of the sepulchre. Nux bore not less Thanatos than Hupuos, and the bitter tears of Isis redundulate to a flood. At three, if a cab rolls by, the sound has the augustness of thunder. Once, at two, near a corner, I came upon a priest, seated, dead, leering, his legs bent. One arm, supported

on a knee, pointed with rigid accusing forefinger obliquely upward. By exact observation, I found that he indicated Betelgeux, the star "a" which shoulders the wet sword of Orion. He was hideously swollen, having perished of dropsy. Thus in all Supremes is a grotesquerie; and one of the sons of Night is— Buffo.

In a London square deserted, I should imagine, even in the day, I was aware of the metallic, silvery-clinking approach of little shoes. It was three in a heavy morning of winter, a day after my rediscovery of Cosmo. I had stood by the railing, regarding the clouds sail as under the sea-legged pilotage of a moon wrapped in cloaks of inclemency. Turning, I saw a little lady, very gloriously dressed. She had walked straight to me. Her head was bare, and crisped with the amber stream which rolled lax to a globe, kneaded thick with jewels, at her nape. In the redundance of her décolleté development, she resembled Parvati, mound-hipped love-goddess of the luscious fancy of the Brahmin.

She addressed to me the question:

"What are you doing there, darling?"

Her loveliness stirred me, and Night is bon camarade. I replied:

"Sunning myself by means of the moon."

"All that is borrowed lustre," she returned, "you have got it from old Drummond's Flowers of Sion."

Looking back, I cannot remember that this reply astonished me, though it should— of course— -have done so. I said:

"On my soul, no; but you?"

"You might guess whence I come!"

"You are dazzling. You come from Paz."

"Oh, farther than that, my son! Say a subscription ball in Soho."

"Yes?...and alone? in the cold? on foot...?"

"Why, I am old, and a philosopher. I can pick you out riding Andromeda yonder from the ridden Ram. They are in error, M'sieur, who suppose an atmosphere on the broad side of the moon. I have reason to believe that on Mars dwells a race whose lids are transparent like glass; so that the eyes are visible during sleep; and every varying dream moves imaged forth to the beholder in tiny panorama on the limpid iris. You cannot imagine me a mere fille! To be escorted is to admit yourself a woman, and that is improper in Nowhere. Young Eos drives an équipage à quatre, but Artemis 'walks' alone. Get out of my borrowed light in the name of Diogenes! I am going home."

"Near Piccadilly."

"But a cab?"

"No cabs for me, thank you. The distance is a mere nothing. Come."

We walked forward. My companion at once put an interval between us, quoting from the Spanish Curate that the open is an enemy to love. The

Talmudists, she twice insisted, rightly held the hand the sacredest part of the person, and at that point also contact was for the moment interdict. Her walk was extremely rapid. I followed. Not a cat was anywhere visible. We reached at length the door of a mansion in St. James's. There was no light. It seemed tenantless, the windows all uncurtained, pasted across, some of them, with the words, To Let. My companion, however, flitted up the steps, and, beckoning, passed inward. I, following, slammed the door, and was in darkness. I heard her ascend, and presently a region of glimmer above revealed a stairway of marble, curving broadly up. On the floor where I stood was no carpet, nor furniture: the dust was very thick. I had begun to mount when, to my surprise, she stood by my side, returned; and whispered:

"To the very top, darling."

She soared nimbly up, anticipating me. Higher, I could no longer doubt that the house was empty but for us. All was a vacuum full of dust and echoes. But at the top, light streamed from a door, and I entered a good-sized oval saloon, at about the centre of the house. I was completely dazzled by the sudden resplendence of the apartment. In the midst was a spread table, square, opulent with gold plate, fruit dishes; three ponderous chandeliers of electric light above; and I noticed also (what was very bizarre) one little candlestick of common tin containing an old soiled curve of tallow, on the table. The impression of the whole chamber was one of gorgeousness not less than Assyrian. An ivory couch at the far end was made sun-like by a head-piece of chalcedony forming a sea for the sport of emerald ichthyotauri. Copper hangings, panelled with mirrors in iasperated crystal, corresponded with a dome of flame and copper; yet this latter, I now remember, produced upon my glance an impression of actual grime. My companion reclined on a small Sigma couch, raised high to the table-level in the Semitic manner, visible to her saffron slippers of satin. She pointed me a seat opposite. The incongruity of its presence in the middle of this arrogance of pomp so tickled me, that no power could have kept me from a smile: it was a grimy chair, mean, all wood, nor was I long in discovering one leg somewhat shorter than its fellows.

She indicated wine in a black glass bottle, and a tumbler, but herself made no pretence of drinking or eating. She lay on hip and elbow, petite, resplendent, and looked gravely upward. I, however, drank.

"You are tired," I said, "one sees that."

"It is precious little than you see!" she returned, dreamy, hardly glancing.

"How! your mood is changed, then? You are morose."

"You never, I think, saw a Norse passage-grave?"

"And abrupt."

"Never?"

"A passage-grave? No."

"It is worth a journey! They are circular or oblong chambers of stone, covered by great earthmounds, with a 'passage' of slabs connecting them with the outer air. All round the chamber the dead sit with head resting upon the bent knees, and consult together in silence."

"Drink wine with me, and be less Tartarean."

"You certainly seem to be a fool," she replied with perfect sardonic iciness. "Is it not, then, highly romantic? They belong, you know, to the Neolithic age. As the teeth fall, one by one, from the lipless mouths— they are caught by the lap. When the lap thins— they roll to the floor of stone. Thereafter, every tooth that drops all round the chamber sharply breaks the silence."

"Ha! ha! ha!"

"Yes. It is like a century-slow, circularly-successive dripping of slime in some cavern of the far subterrene."

"Ha! ha! This wine seems heady! They express themselves in a dialect largely dental."

"The Ape, on the other hand, in a language wholly guttural."

A town-clock tolled four. Our talk was holed with silences, and heavy-paced. The wine's yeasty exhalation reached my brain. I saw her through mist, dilating large, uncertain, shrinking again to dainty compactness. But amorousness had died within me.

"Do you know," she asked, "what has been discovered in one of the Danish Kjökkenmöddings by a little boy? It was ghastly. The skeleton of a huge fish with human—"

"You are most unhappy."

"Be silent."

"You are full of care."

"I think you a great fool."

"You are racked with misery."

"You are a child. You have not even an instinct of the meaning of the word."

"How! Am I not a man? I, too, miserable, careful?"

"You are not, really, anything— until you can create."

"Create what?"

"Matter."

"That is foppish. Matter cannot he created, nor destroyed."

"Truly, then, you must be a creature of unusually weak intellect. I see that now. Matter does not exist, then, there is no such thing, really— it is an appearance, a spectrum— every writer not imbecile from Plato to Fichte has, voluntary or involuntary, proved that for good. To create it is to produce an

impression of its reality upon the senses of others; to destroy it is to wipe a wet rag across a scribbled slate."

"Perhaps. I do not care. Since no one can do it."

"No one? You are mere embryo—"

"Who then?"

"Anyone, whose power of Will is equivalent to the gravitating force of a star of the First Magnitude."

"Ha! ha! ha! By heaven, you choose to be facetious. Are there then wills of such equivalence?"

"There have been three, the founders of religions. There was a fourth: a cobbler of Herculaneum, whose mere volition induced the cataclysm of Vesuvius in '79 in direct opposition to the gravity of Sirius. There are more fames than you have ever sung, you know."

"The greater number of disembodied spirits, too, I feel certain— "

"By heaven, I cannot but think you full of sorrow! Poor wight! come, drink with me. The wine is thick and boon. Is it not Setian? It makes you sway and swell before me, I swear, like a purple cloud of evening— "

"But you are mere clayey ponderance!— I did not know that!— you are no companion! your little interest revolves round the lowest centres."

"Come— forget your agonies— "

"What, think you, is the portion of the buried body first sought by the worm?"

"The eyes! the eyes!"

"You are hideously wrong— you are so utterly at sea— "

"My God!"

She had bent forward with such rage of contradiction as to approach me closely. A loose gown of amber silk, wide-sleeved, had replaced her ball attire, though at what opportunity I could not guess; wondering, I noticed it as she now placed her palms far forth upon the table. A sudden wafture as of spice and orange-flowers, mingled with the abhorrent faint odour of mortality over-ready for the tomb, greeted my sense. A chill crept upon my flesh.

"You are so hopelessly at fault— "

"For God's sake— "

"You are so miserably deluded! Not the eyes at all!"

"Then, in heaven's name, what?"

Five tolled from a clock.

"The Uvula! the soft drop of mucous flesh, you know, suspended from the palate above the glottis. They eat through the face-cloth and cheek, or crawl by the lips through a broken tooth, filling the mouth. They make straight for it. It is the deliciæ of the vault."

At her horror of interest I grew sick, at her odour, and her words. Some unspeakable sense of insignificance, of debility, held me dumb.

"You say I am full of sorrows. You say I am racked with woe; that I gnash with anguish. Well, you are a mere child in intellect. You use words without realization of meaning like those minds in what Leibnitz calls 'symbolical consciousness.' But suppose it were so—"

"It is so."

"You know nothing."

"I see you twist and grind. Your eyes are very pale. I thought they were hazel. They are of the faint bluishness of phosphorus shimmerings seen in darkness."

"That proves nothing."

"But the 'white' of the sclerotic is dyed to yellow. And you look inward. Why do you look so palely inward, so woe-worn, upon your soul? Why can you speak of nothing but the sepulchre, and its rottenness? Your eyes seem to me wan with centuries of vigil, with mysteries and millenniums of pain."

"Pain! but you know so little of it! you are wind and words! of its philosophy and rationale nothing!"

"Who knows?"

"I will give you a hint. It is the sub-consciousness in conscious creatures of Eternity, and of eternal loss. The least prick of a pin not Pæan and Æsculapius and the powers of heaven and hell can utterly heal. Of an everlasting loss of pristine wholeness the conscious body is sub-conscious, and 'pain' is its sigh at the tragedy. So with all pain— greater, the greater the loss. The hugest of losses is, of course, the loss of Time. If you lose that, any of it, you plunge at once into the transcendentalisms, the infinitudes, of Loss; if you lose all of it—"

"But you so wildly exaggerate! Ha! ha! You rant, I tell you, of commonplaces with the woe—"

"Hell is where a clear, untrammelled Spirit is sub-conscious of lost Time; where it boils and writhes with envy of the living world; hating it for ever, and all the sons of Life!"

"But curb yourself! Drink— I implore— I implore— for God's sake— but once—"

"To hasten to the snare— that is woe! to drive your ship upon the lighthouse rock— that is Marah! To wake, and feel it irrevocably true that you went after her— and the dead were there— and her guests were in the depths of hell— and you did not know it!— though you might have.

Look out upon the houses of the city this dawning day: not one, I tell you, but in it haunts some soul— walking up and down the old theatre of its little Day— goading imagination by a thousand childish tricks, *vraisemblances*—

elaborately duping itself into the momentary fantasy that it still lives, that the chance of life is not for ever and for ever lost— yet riving all the time with under-memories of the wasted Summer, the lapsed brief light between the two eternal glooms— riving I say and shriek to you!— riving, Mérimée, you destroying fiend— She had sprung— tall now, she seemed to me— between couch and table.

"Mérimée!" I screamed, "—my name, harlot, in your maniac mouth! By God, woman, you terrify me to death!"

I too sprang, the hairs of my head catching stiff horror from my fancies.

"Your name? Can you imagine me ignorant of your name, or anything concerning you? Mérimée! Why, did you not sit yesterday and read of me in a letter of Cosmo's?"

"Ah-h...," hysteria bursting high in sob and laughter from my arid lips— "Ah! ha! ha!"

"Xélucha! My memory grows palsied and grey, Xélucha! pity me— my walk is in the very valley of shadow!— senile and sere!— observe my hair, Xélucha, its grizzled growth— trepidant, Xélucha, clouded— I am not the man you knew, Xélucha, in the palaces— of Cosmo! You are Xélucha!"

"You rave, poor worm!" she cried, her face contorted by a species of malicious contempt.

"Xélucha died of cholera ten years ago at Antioch. I wiped the froth from her lips. Her nose underwent a green decay before burial. So far sunken into the brain was the left eye—"

"You are— you are Xélucha!" I shrieked; "voices now of thunder howl it within my consciousness— and by the holy God, Xélucha, though you blight me with the breath of the hell you are, I shall clasp you, living or damned— "

I rushed toward her. The word "Madman!" hissed as by the tongues of ten thousand serpents through the chamber, I heard; a belch of pestilent corruption puffed poisonous upon the putrid air; for a moment to my wildered eyes there seemed to rear itself, swelling high to the roof, a formless tower of ragged cloud, and before my projected arms had closed upon the very emptiness of insanity, I was tossed by the operation of some Behemoth potency far-circling backward to the utmost circumference of the oval, where, my head colliding, I fell, shocked, into insensibility.

When the sun was low toward night, I lay awake, and listlessly observed the grimy roof, and the sordid chair, and the candlestick of tin, and the bottle of which I had drunk. The table was small, filthy, of common deal, uncovered. All bore the appearance of having stood there for years. But for them, the room was void, the vision of luxury thinned to air. Sudden memory flashed

upon me. I scrambled to my feet, and plunged and tottered, bawling, through the twilight into the street.

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14: The Story of Richard Lavender

Roderic Quinn

1867-1949

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Australian poet and author

I WAS doing duty in the office of the Inspector-General when Inspector Jackson from the —— western district sought an audience.

Soon the Chief's gong sounded, summoning me.

"Lavender,"he said, "I gave you some correspondence dealing with the Lacy Gang, two days since. What did you do with it ? "

I pointed to a shelf. "It is there, sir," I said, and made a movement to reach it down, but he stayed me.

"Put this with it," he said, lifting up a photograph which he had been scrutinising. "It is a picture of Dan Lacy, the leader of the gang which has been playing such ducks and drakes with Mr. Jackson's reputation."

He turned a stern look on the Inspector and a smiling one on me, and then his eyes fell on the photograph again, and from the photograph rose to my face, and once again they fell on the photograph, and the smile died on his lips, and he said, "Good Heavens, how curious!"

Presently he addressed Jackson. "About how old is Lacy?"

"Thirty."

"Lavender's age," he commented.

The Chief mused. "It is a coincidence," he said, "and ought to prove of service. Coincidences are not sent for nothing. This remarkable likeness, if properly operated, might prove the gang's undoing."

After a moment's reflection he looked up at me.

"Lavender," he said, "if you succeed in bringing about the downfall of this gang, I will make you a sergeant."

My opportunity had come at last, and I said, "Thank you, sir, I shall succeed."

IT WAS a long way from Sydney to the scene of the Lacy exploits, but the trip gave me time to learn something about the notorious bushranger and his associates. Mr. Jackson talked to me of them and of their doings at somewhat tedious length.

When I got to my new headquarters I just idled about the town for the first few days, seeking information, and getting it. I had disguised myself with blonde whiskers, matching my hair, and no one remarked on my likeness to Dan Lacy. I discovered that the gang held the district in a state of terror.

Lacy and his men were speedy riders and reckless fellows, and they came and went with a rattle of hoofs and a hurry of words, and no one within a hundred miles of them felt secure by night or day. I learnt that they had more than one rendezvous. One of these places was known as the "Hut," but it was no more a hut than it was a clipper ship, being a limestone cave in the hills. And one evening, as I sat talking to the woman in whose house I stayed, I heard startling news— Dan Lacy was in love! I do not know why I should have attached such instant importance to the information, but it seemed to me that Lacy's love affair was to help me.

The next day I saw the woman— a slight girl in a riding-habit. My hostess beckoned me to the window, and pointed her out as she sat her horse at the far side of the street, talking to the local bank manager. She had fair hair with a shade of brown in it, and her profile was delicately cut. Once she turned my way, and I noticed that her eyes were long and blue. Her horse (a chestnut) was full of fight and fire, reefing at the reins and pawing the ground fretfully; but she sat him with ease, and held him with a masterly, firm hand. As she said good-bye to the bank manager she blushed prettily.

Afterwards, I praised my landlady for her cooking, which means that I took the high road to her good graces, and she spent a full two hours talking to me. Having told me much concerning herself and her past, which did not interest me, she came round to discuss the subject which lay close to my heart.

"He met her in a coach two years ago," she said, "and let the coach go its way for her sake. Wasn't that nice? She was coming from town, where her mother had died, to stay with her uncle at the 'Girth and Surcingle.' Maybe you've heard of the 'Girth and Surcingle'— a public house at the foot of Dingo Hill, ten miles out or thereabouts? People say that Kitty Bell is a good girl, but they don't speak well of her uncle. He knows how many beans make five, and who butters his bread, and since you seem to be a trusty man who can keep a confidence, I may as well tell you that there's those that say when the Lacy gang makes a haul old Tom Bell doesn't need to ask for his share. He generally finds it lying around pretty handy."

I SPENT a full fortnight, before making a move, idling about the place— drinking in bars, attending race meetings in many of the centres round about, and dancing at house parties. I learnt on one occasion that Dan Lacy generally rode a big brown horse, with a white star on his forehead; and shortly after I seized an opportunity, which offered, to become possessed of an animal of that description. I did not take delivery at once, but said I would send for the horse when I wanted him. At the end of the fortnight I heard something more, and I decided to move. From two different quarters news came of the gang. In

one place they had robbed a coach. In the second a station had been held up by them. But in each case Dan Lacy was an absentee. I knew that in all previous exploits he had led the gang, and that he took a kind of joy in exhibiting himself conspicuously as their leader. I sat down and did some hard thinking, and my thinking convinced me that Dan Lacy must be either sick or gone on a far venture. Afterwards I discovered that the latter conclusion was the correct one, and that he had ridden a hundred miles to buy a trinket for the girl he loved.

As a result of my planning, Constable Brown left town one morning, and early in the afternoon of the same day I strolled across some paddocks out into the country. At the end of a mile's walk I came to the comer of an out-paddock, where Brown waited for me. He was sitting in a saddle, holding a second horse—the animal I had purchased—by the bridle, and I mounted and rode off, Brown following. I skirted the road, which led to the "Girth and Surcingle," for some miles, not venturing on to it till I was well free of settlement. Then we put our horses to the canter, and as wn rode side by side I made Brown aware of the part he was to play.

All day leaden clouds had been marching up from the North, and lay heaped layer upon layer above us. At intervals a quick thread of lightning shot through the piled masses, and now and again thunder muttered. The long-deferred monsoonal rains were about to fall.

The first drops came when we had been riding an hour, and so heavy was the onset of the storm that in five minutes we were wet to the skin. Our spirits rose, however, when through a thinning among the trees, we saw the "Girth and Surcingle," with its roof ofironbark shingles. We rode across a creek that wound along at a hundred yards distance from the public-house, and on the further side, putting myself well in view r of the place, I reined up, while Brown rode on. I watched him till he had covered every inch of the space which intervened between my halting-place and the "Girth and Surcingle." There he dismounted and entered the bar. I waited, disturbed by anxiety, and wondering what sort of a fist he would make of his part.

He had a simple story to tell and a simple question to ask. I had instructed him to explain to Bill that I, Dan Lacy, was afraid to enter his place, as I feared a police ambush, and that I waited there in the open with an eye on the country-side. He was to ask the whereabouts of the gang, and haying got the information, to leave hurriedly, as though imminent danger threatened.

He was longer in the place than I had anticipated, and nervousness overcame me, making my fingers twitch at the reins; but the nervousness gave way to suspense when Bell appeared at the door, followed by Brown. I waved my hand to the publican, and he waved his to me in return, looking steadily at

me the while ; then, as though satisfied, he turned to Brown and said something, and Brown, without another instant's pause, hurried to his horse, mounted, and came towards me. I wheeled my own horse and rode off, but, even as I turned away, I noticed that a girl, dressed in blue, had come round the side of the house, and was looking towards me. I knew the slight willowy figure and the clear-cut profile of Kitty Bell, even though the space between us was filled with grey rain. I lifted my hat to her, and she returned my salute with a grave nod of the head. That was all, and I found myself thinking that, if she were in love, surely she would not content herself with a nod only. A moment afterwards Brown galloped up to me.

"At the 'Hut'!" he said.

AT THE corner of the paddock, where Brown and I had met earlier in the afternoon, I dismissed him with a message to Inspector Jackson, and I told him that whatever was to be done must be done instantly and with the greatest possible secrecy.

The rain fell and time passed, and, soaked to the skin, I stamped my feet or paced to and fro, eaten with impatience. I could well understand, as I waited, the mood of the Emperor Charles of Spain when he,

In great boots of Spanish leather,
Cursed the Frenchman, cursed the weather.

I suppose all the sounds of the bush, the crying and the calling of night birds, went on as usual around me, but I had no ears for them : all my hearing was strained to catch the fall of the horses' hoofs coming up out of the dark. At last I heard them, and presently four troopers, with Jackson at their head, showed themselves out of the night, and drew up beside me.

"Wilkins knows the track to the 'Hut,' " said Jackson. "He says it is not difficult going."

An hour's riding brought us to rough country —hill and hollow, and in every hollow we crossed was a creek that the steady, streaming rain had filled with the noise and motion of sudden waters. The troopers were armed with carbines, slung across their shoulders, in addition to the revolvers which they wore in their belts. They were a smart body of men, lightly built and capital riders.

We might have taken the outlaws with-out firing a shot if it had not been for the clumsiness of Inspector Jackson.

We crept up the hill, leaving our horses by a creek-side at the bottom, and had reached the flat table of cleared land in front of the cave, when, suddenly, Jackson stumbled, inadvertently pulled the trigger of his carbine, and so

announced that we had arrived. I dropped to the ground as an answering gun sounded, and wriggled on my stomach to a log, feeling a trifle unnerved. The troopers had all taken cover behind rocks and stumps and logs, and presently Jackson called out to the men in the cave, them that we were police, and ordering them to surrender in the Queen's name. There came back a voice shouting defiance. Thereupon Jackson parleyed no longer, but gave the order to fire, and our guns roared out. From where I lay I saw chips of rock fly from the sides of the cave's mouth, and a great echo went rolling through the hills. When it died away, from three holes in the rocks— one on either side the entrance and one above it— red tongues of flames shot, and the choked explosions of the outlaws' guns made a dull noise in the night. We fired again, and again the outlaws returned our fire, and for more than an hour an aimless, fruitless, exchange of bullets went on.

Then, as I lay on the wet ground, tired and disappointed, an idea suddenly sparkled in the gloom like a star through clouds, and I could have laughed for very joy— it promised to solve the difficulty so simply. Moving stealthily, I made my way to Jackson, and in a whisper acquainted him with my plan. He demurred at first, objecting that Lacy might have returned, and that if such were the case I should be little better than a dead man.

Presently, I overcame his scruples, and he praised me for my cleverness and courage, and trusted to God that no harm would befall me.

I crawled through the under-scrub from one to the other of the troopers, making them aware of my plan, and to the last man I handed my revolver, and in return he handcuffed me, and I whistled to Jackson. Jackson thereupon hailed the outlaws and spoke to them.

"Look here, you fellows," he said, "you've got to give in, and the sooner you follow your leader's example the better."

There was a laugh that died away suddenly, and a moment's silence, and then one of the outlaws asked in concerned tones :

"What's that you say about our leader?"

"I say he's a sensible man," shouted Jackson. " We got him down at Bell's— he gave in without firing a shot."

"It's a lie," growled back the cave.

"Very well," said Jackson, " I've given you a chance —it's the last you'll get."

The moment was intense, and we waited for the outlaw's reply. Then one of the men spoke again.

"Is that a fact about Dan Lacy?"

The Inspector laughed.

"So much a fact, my man, that we've even got him here alongside of us now."

There was another interval of loaded silence, and then the same voice sounded from the cave.

"What's good enough for him, is good enough for us. If he tells us to chuck the game, we'll chuck it and come along to you, quiet as lambs."

"Right!" returned Jackson.

I came up through the bush with a quick, desperate stride, and advanced a few feet in the open. There Jackson ordered me to halt. The light of the .fire was on my face, and looking towards the cave, I raised my manacled hands as though the situation had left me a broken man. In the cave I heard the men groaning. I did not speak, pretending that my heart was too full for words, and, Jackson calling me in the nick of time,

I stumbled back to him.

"Well," said Jackson, crying out again ; " are you satisfied now ? "

"Don't fire," came the reply, "we're coming." And presently they issued from the cave, drawing on their coats, and slouched into the open.

The rest was easy work, but I did not wait to see it.

WILKINS HAD directed me to follow the creek till I reached the road. Afterwards, an hour's fast travelling would bring me to the " Girth and Surcingle." I felt that, even if I failed to find Lacy there, I would see Kitty Bell, and (who knows?) be permitted, perhaps, a quiet word or two with her. But once or twice, in a hush between the gusts of a great wind that had come up, I fancied that I heard the sound of galloping hoofs. Suddenly, on rounding a clump of trees, a light in the near distance warned me that I was approaching the "Girth and Surcingle."

It wanted about an hour to dawn, and at such a time the light looked suspicious. Five minutes afterwards I hitched my horse to a sapling and moved steathily towards the house. I went slowly, not wishing to make any noise, but suddenly I heard a woman's voice, heavy with terror, and I threw discretion to the winds and started to run. As I approached the house the cry resolved itself into the words— "Not here, Dan Lacy— no murder here, for God's sake." I heard that voice all the way to the house raised in tones that palpitated with fear and anxiety.

"'Twas you he told, and only you," she said, "you sat on your horse out there by the creek and you sent a man to find out where the gang was, and you waved your hand to him, and you raised your hat to me— and it's a pretence you're making, so that you may kill him— and that's all, Dan Lacy."

Her voice, with its rich contralto tones of fear, put a madness in my veins, and I thrust myself through an open door into the middle of the trouble. I had

drawn my revolver from my shirt, and as I entered the room I levelled it at Lacy's forehead.

Afterwards I remembered the grouping in that room, and many times since the details of the picture have come back to me. Dan Lacy, pale, and with wet hair, stood above Bell, the publican, holding him by the collar of the shirt so that his knuckles pressed the publican's windpipe and made his face blue with strangulation. The girl hung on to Lacy's disengaged arm, despair and appeal in her eyes and attitude. It was evident from her attire that Lacy's appearance was unexpected, as she wore only a loose wrapper, which fell back on her shoulders, disclosing more than her throat's whiteness.

I stood at the door unnoticed till I said— "Surrender!"

More in surprise than in obedience to my command, Lacy released Bell, regarding me with wonder. The girl drew back clutching at her wrapper so as to hide her throat, and she too wondered at me.

"Who the Devil are you?" said Lacy.

"An officer of the police," I answered, "come to take you."

"Indeed," said he quietly, "I thought you might be my own mother's son, but I'm not so sure that you're going to take me, all the same."

"I took your mates," I answered.

"I know it; I was there and saw the curs surrender."

"It was the only thing they could have done," I said.

"No," he replied, " they could have died like men."

"I'm waiting for you," I said.

"I'll be a weight to carry," he answered.

"You mean—" I said.

"That I'm going out of here dead, or not at all," he replied.

He had his hand on the back of a chair, and I saw his fingers tighten on it. I knew that he was desperate and would use anything that came handy as a weapon.

He gave a side look at the girl.

"I'm sorry for to-night's business and the way I made you feel," he said to her. "The fellow over there (indicating me) is so like me that I can understand how yesterday's affair occurred. I've got a trinket here. I had to ride a mile or two to get it, but I bought it honestly. Perhaps you won't mind wearing it, Kitty?"

He released the chair, undid a pouch attached to his belt, and drew from it a leather casket. He held it towards the girl, but she shrank away from it.

"It's by way of a parting gift," he said appealingly, and I suppose she pitied him, for she took it.

"And now," said he to me, his eye flashing, "I'm not going out of this room alive."

"My arm," I said, "is getting tired, and I never allow any man to play the fool with me."

"Look here!" he replied. "Anyway, things seem to be at a dead finish with me. My gang's taken, and I don't appear to matter much to anybody. If I allow you to take me I'll hang, and hanging's not the kind of end I care for. Since I chucked things aside and took to the bush I haven't been over-happy, but one thing I swore, and that was that I'd never go to gaol. I swore that the night I got even with black Dawson, the trooper— everyone knows that story— Kitty knows it.... She was my favorite sister."

"I've got my duty to do," I said. "I give you while I count ten to hoist your hands— while our friend Bell claps these on you." I threw a pair of handcuffs on the table. I began to count, but he interrupted me, smiling.

"When you've finished your counting," he said, "I'm afraid you'll have to make a mess of Kitty's room."

Then suddenly a great gust of wind, rushing through the house, slammed the door on me and threw me forward, and when I recovered an erect position he had me covered with his revolver.

"I could have shot you," he said, "but it wouldn't do any good, seeing that I'm at the dead finish, any way. I'm going down fighting, however, and since this is to be a duel, why not have it out fair and square in the open?"

I said nothing, and again he repeated a phrase he had used earlier.

"There's no occasion to make a mess of Kitty's room."

Day had broken, and I recognised that if I could hold him in parley for a while longer, Jackson with his men would come along and make an end of the affair. But when he looked into my eyes and said— "Afraid?" I turned, and, "When you're ready!" I answered.

The rain still fell, and the land was full of early light. We took our places at twenty-five paces from each other, and Bell, a handkerchief in his hand, stood to one side of us. I heard a kookaburra laughing.... I saw the handkerchief fall.... and I fired. A sudden pain stung my right arm, but I did not pay much heed to it. I was watching Lacy, and wondering why his chin had dropped upon his chest. When his knees gave way, and he fell gently over, I did not wonder any more, and then the green bush, shrouded in grey rain, began to circle round me, and I sank down wounded and very tired.

15: Jim's Latest Experience

Ernest Favenc

1845-1908

Evening News (Sydney), 21 May 1898

Favenc's character "Jim" has had a number humorous encounters with unusual ghosts

SINCE Jim Parks wrote to me about his experiences with the spiders, whom he succeeded in finally banishing, I had not heard from him until the other day, when he wrote and told me that he had an entirely new experience to relate to me, if I could find time to run up and see him.

As Jim is always good company, I gladly accepted the invitation, and was cordially welcomed by him and his wife.

THIS LAST experience of mine, (*said he, when yarning time came*) regularly floored me for a while. I was going to write to you at the time, just to hunt up some more of those old books about witches and such like; but I didn't like to confess myself beat, and went a lone hand, and pulled through. I read all that Mr. Stead had to say on the subject in his books about real ghost stories, and the Borderland, and so en, and found not a word there bearing on my troubles. Look here! if Stead had only applied to me, I would have pitched him a far better lot of yarns than he has published, wouldn't I now?

'I'm sure of it, Jim.'

I was haunted for a long time before I could exactly locate what was wrong, and then I suddenly found out that there was a conspiracy against me, a conspiracy of ghosts.

You see, they'd got narked at my poking fun at them, and telling everybody that the best way to floor a ghost was to make game of it, so they determined to give me a lesson. And they did, too, for a time. I'll say that for them though, that they never troubled the wife. She's not used to the ways of ghosts .like I am. Fortunately, she went away on a visit to her eldest married sister, who had just had twins, so I was able to tackle the ghosts alone.

The trouble commenced with a Scotchman, a Highlander, who pretended that he could only talk Gaelic, and consequently could not answer when he was spoken to. I got rid of him quickly by treating him as though I did not see him— walking through him, and generally ignoring him. He was a foolish sort of ghost to send to frighten me, and I wonder, by what occurred afterwards, that they were so green as to do it.

The real trouble commenced the day after the Scotchman disappeared. I had been out at work since daylight, and had come in to breakfast, when one

of the men who were fencing came running in to tell me that Dick Trumbles, my neighbor, had just cut his throat— would I come over, and do what I could?

Dick was a good fellow, but had been rather down-hearted lately on account of a girl having chucked him over. The man said that a messenger had run over to tell him, and hurried back again; so I put on my hat, and went at once. The first man I saw was Trumbles, harnessing one of his horses.

Like an idiot I did not drop to the trick at once, and blurted out, 'Why, Dick, they just sent over for me, because you'd cut your throat?'

Dick looked at me, and seeing that I was pretty flustered with running, he said, 'Uh! Jim; got 'em again; bad this time, too.'

I got mad, and asked him what he meant by rousing a hungry man from his breakfast with his stale old jokes. So we had some hot words about it, and presently he walked over with me, and interviewed the fencers. They said that certainly a man had come running up to them with the message. I guessed the truth at once, and made it right with Dick, and went in to my breakfast again. As I sat down I heard a *he*! *he*! kind of laugh from somewhere.

I confess I didn't like it, for I could see no end of worry sticking out, and for a while they certainly did give me fits. One time the police and a whole lot of men armed to the teeth came rushing up, and I was nearly shot down like a dingo because a man had come up and reported that Jim Parks had gone raving mad, and was murdering all hands on his selection.

It undoubtedly was mean, the way they went about it, for they would not appear to me so that I could get a chance at them, but always to somebody else; and they did it so well, too, that nobody would believe it was ghosts doing it all the while. I began to get into bad odor. People said I was a confounded nuisance, and suggested that I should give some other locality a turn.

Just then I was thinking of writing to you to send me some more books up, when I hit upon an idea which, made me prefer to tackle it myself. I wrote to the wife and told her not to hurry back; then I laid myself out to worry the ghosts in return.

Of course, it looked a pretty hard contract, for I had to catch, one first, and while they could always locate me, I could not locate them. However, I waited and watched, and at last succeeded in getting speech with. one. As ghosts are always fond of a yarn with, human beings, he was ready to talk after a few words.

I asked him what they meant by plaguing me, to which he answered that I knew, too much about ghosts, and was bringing them rapidly into contempt. Very soon nobody would care a snap about ghosts, and where would their business be then? Was it fair on my part to take, so to speak, the bread out of their mouths?

Having once got him into an argument, I was safe.

'Now look at the matter plainly, from a common-sense point of view,' I said. 'Did a ghost ever do any good to anybody? What's the sense in acting the giddy scarecrow and frightening women and children. You can't frighten me, and you know it, and I'll find a man besides that the whole boiling of you wouldn't frighten.'

The ghost laughed scornfully.

'Why, I could, .and a ghost who can materialise himself into shapes that would make you die screaming with fright.'

'Bring him along,' I said. 'If he frightens me or my friend I'll give in, and have no truck with ghosts any more. If we're not scared, you just clear' out, and leave me alone for the future.'

'I can't decide myself,' he replied. 'You see, there's been a committee of ghosts appointed in, this matter. We're going to bust Jim Parks— that's you. It's called the Jim Parks Abolishment Society. It's a strong branch of the Society for the Suppression of Sceptics. I'll lay the matter before the committee, and faring you their report.'

The ghost, who was a highly respectable old gentleman to look at, was about disappearing, when I stopped him.

'Can't you fellows materialise yourselves solid,' I asked, 'so that you could catch hold of anything?'

'Some in the higher planes can. This ghost of whom I am speaking can do so.'

'All right, it's an offer, pay or play.'

The ghost departed, and I sent into the township for a young fellow I knew well. He was a doctor looking out for a place to start a practice ; but just then doing nothing. He was death on ghosts and all that kind of work, understood hypnotism, and had studied the phenomena of spiritual manifestations, as lie called it. He came out at once, and was delighted at the show I promised him. We were sitting at dinner when I heard a voice in the verandah call out, 'Jim Parks!'

'That's the ghost,' I said. Then sung out, 'Come in; there's no one here but my friend.'

The ghost stepped inside. Then a strange thing happened. The doctor got up all white and shaky, staring at the figure as though he had turned loony all of a sudden. Here's a breakdown, I thought. If he's frightened of a quiet, gentlemanly ghost like this, what will happen when he sees the one promised us. But I was wrong; it was not funk, only astonishment.

'Why, dad,' he said, and then I knew that it was the ghost of his father who stood there.

'Well, Robert, my boy,' replied the spectre. 'How are you; and how are you and Lucy getting along?'

'Lucy and I are not married, and I'm looking round to build up- a practice somewhere.'

'Good gracious!' said the ghost. 'Why aren't you married, and why did you not keep my practice on?'

'Well,' said Robert; 'the practice was sold to pay off that old debt to Solomons—'

'To do what!' interrupted the old ghost. 'Why, Solomons was paid off before I died, and I made sure that you would have got along comfortably with my practice— it wanted a younger man; and you would have married Lucy and settled down.'

'We could find no receipt, and Solomons swore that the debt was not settled, and he could not wait any longer for his money.'

'The scoundrel!' said the ghost, now in a towering rage. 'The swindler, robber, thief! I'll give Solomons a turn! Fifty per cent I've paid him. Not find the receipt; why, I put the receipt in, in— now, where did I put that receipt?'

We waited in silence, but the ghost was evidently astray.

'Did you get my prescription for "Bunce's Miraculous Moist Powders?" ' he asked.

'No; I looked for that everywhere.'

'Very strange, very strange! Won't I give that Solomons fits!'

Somehow, I felt sorry for Solomons. Old Dr. Bunce, or his shade, puzzled his brains in vain. At last his son said, 'I have an idea. Would you mind allowing me to hypnotise you?'

'On no account,' said the old gentleman, testily. 'You know my rooted objection to all that humbug.'

'But this is a matter of the greatest importance. Perhaps it will set me up on my legs, and enable me to marry Lucy. Do let me try.'

The old man was moved.

'You can't hypnotise a ghost,' he protested.

'Let me try, at any rate.'

To cut it short, he consented, and Robert went to work. He started the old ghost looking steadfastly at a saucer full of tea, and begged him to concentrate his thoughts on the missing receipt. We waited in perfect silence. Presently Robert made some passes, and told his father to look up.

The ghost raised his face. His eyes were open, but set fixedly. Evidently he saw nothing.

'When Solomons gave you the receipt for the money where did you go?' asked Robert.

There was no answer.

'You are not dead,' went on the son— 'you are alive, and coming away from Solomons' with the receipt in your pocket.'

'Yes,' said the ghost.

'Where do you go?'

'I go home and straight up to my consulting room and lock the receipt up in my cash box.'

'Go on. Perhaps you took it out again.'

'I do take it and the other papers out again— my lease and other things. I look at the date of the lease; then I put them back again.'

'You are sure you put them all back again?'

'I think so, but I am not sure.'

Robert was at fault. 'We have searched everywhere. The cash box was locked, with the lease and other papers in it, but no receipt.'

'I remember nothing more but that.'

'Ask him about the prescription?' I whispered. 'What did you do with the prescription of "Bunce's miraculous moist powders?" '

'I wrote it out on a piece of paper, and put it in the leaves of my *Nomenclature*.'

That was all that could be obtained. Further questioning could elucidate nothing fresh— no clue of any sort. Robert made some upward passes and restored the ghost of his parent to consciousness.

'You didn't succeed, then,' he said.

'Yes, I did. Look at the clock. You've been in a hypnotic trance for over fifteen minutes.'

'Did you find out anything?'

'You took the receipt home and locked it up in your cash box.'

'So I did; I remember now. Well, go on.'

'It was not in the cash box when you died. You took the papers out once to look at the date of your lease, but, to the best of your belief, put them all back again.'

The old man seemed very perplexed.

'How did Solomons know the receipt was lost?' 'He got it out of me in an unguarded moment.'

'I'll get at him in an unguarded moment. Did I tell you anything about the "moist powders?" '

'Yes; you put the prescription in amongst the leaves of your *Nomenclature*.'

'So I did, so I did. I remember it all now. How weak my memory must have got just before I died. Have you got the book still?'

'Yes; but I have never opened it, as I have my own *Nomen*.'

'Anyway, I'll commence on Solomons. I'll frighten the soul out of him.'

He was starting off to put Solomons through a preliminary canter, when I detained him.

'You have not delivered the committee's message,' I reminded him.

'No, no; I forgot. They accept your challenge, and will meet you here at 12 o'clock to-night.'

'How about this top-sawyer ghost? Can I make him angry?'

'Yes, but don't; he could hurt you.'

The old fellow vanished, but suddenly reappeared.

'It's against rules to give advice, but Robert, you hypnotise him if you can.'

Then he went out for good.

We made ourselves comfortable against midnight, and passed the time in conversation.

Dr. Bunce always enjoyed my conversation, like you do. (Jim never gave anybody else a chance to speak, when he was, what he called, conversing.) Young Bunce was in good spirits. He said, anyhow, if Solomons was not frightened out of the money, he would make a good thing out of the moist powders, which was a real good medicine.

Midnight struck, or at least it would have done so, hut my clock doesn't strike. Nothing happened for awhile.

Suddenly Bunce shivered, and said it was cold. I pushed the whisky bottle over to him, and then saw that the door was slowly opening. I confess I felt more frightened when we were watching that door slowly, slowly, opening than at anything we saw afterwards, and Bob says the same. What was coming in so silently?

A hand appeared— a huge hand, of a dull white corpse color; a hand big enough for a giant of immense size. It came in the room, and the arm also— a white, ghastly, bloodless arm. To watch it, and think what creature must own such an arm that was so gradually creeping towards us, was the most awful thing.

Presently it began to search about, as though seeking something— as though striving to clutch its prey with those terrible looking fingers. It hovered over the table, and every second we expected it to lay hold of us.

Suddenly Bunce broke the spell of fear.

'Don't take our whisky,' he said, in a choky kind of voice. That saved us. I mustered up a very artificial laugh. The arm was suddenly withdrawn, and the door closed angrily with a bang.

'That part of the show is over,' I remarked with relief; and I may tell you that it was a near go with both of us.

Then the door opened again, and a ghastly figure entered— a mutilated human form. The nose and ears had been cut off, the eyes gouged from the sockets, the mouth cut into a hideous slit, and landless, bleeding stumps were extended towards us.

As the thing advanced, a sound of agonised sobbing accompanied it, seemed to hover around it, and fill the room with the moanings of a being under torture. Horrible as this appearance was, it did not affect either of us as did that cruel searching hand. It wandered round the room, waving its stumps, and moving its horrible face this way and that. Then, coming close to Bunce, it put its face down, and a soft woman's voice of great sweetness seemed to come from the gaping mouth:

'Kiss me, my lost love.'

This spoilt the whole show, arid both of us burst into a loud laugh!— the effect was too absurd. In an instant the thing vanished, and the door slammed. 'I think they'll fail now,' said Robert. 'D — n it; look out!'

He started up, for a snake, a death-adder, was wriggling about on the table.

'It's that Tomfool ghost,' I said. 'Let it alone.'

We did so, and it wriggled away.

Then darkness fell on us. We could see the lamp like a speck of fire, but it gave no light. I struck a match, but it was just the same. Cold, slimy hands pawed over our faces; they circled round our throats, as if threatening to strangle us; and the room was full of a rustling sound, as though it was filled with gliding forms. It was very disagreeable, but we constrained ourselves to sit still, and presently the light shot up again, and the room was empty.

Bunce reached out to the bottle, but it was instantly snatched away.

'Put that back,' he said, 'that's an old trick I'd be ashamed of.'

The bottle was returned, but when he went to lift it it seemed rooted to the table.

'That's only fit for a side show,' I remarked, and the bottle was free, and we helped ourselves. For two or three hours or more they tried it on in all manner of ways, but as they did not succeed at first they lost their chance, and the performance only got amusing.

'I'm tired of this,' I said at last. 'It's our turn now. Where's that boss ghost who frightens cats and babies?'

'I'm here,' said a voice in my ear that made me jump.

'Well, just appear; show yourself, man — don't hide.'

'How shall I appear?'

'As a good strong man,' I said.

Immediately there stood by the table a brawny looking fellow, dressed in bush fashion.

'Are you the ghost who can materialise himself solid?' I asked.

'Smell that,' he returned, thrusting a brawny fist against my nose.

'You'll do,' I remarked. 'Now, strong as you are, you can't stare at this tumbler for five minutes and then look my friend in the face.'

The ghost sneered; then fixed his eyes on the tumbler and stared at it. At the end of five minutes Bunce made some passes over him, and then told him to look up. It was all right; we had him safely hypnotised. We had our plans arranged also.

'You know what ringbarking is?' said Bunce.

'Yes,' answered the mesmerised ghost.

'Then, as soon as it is daylight you can go and begin, and don't leave off until you're allowed to.'

It was just beginning to dawn when that materialised ghost started ringbarking, and it was dusk in the evening when Bunce removed the influence, and a sadder, wiser ghost returned to spirit land. We told the men that it was a bet that he could keep ringbarking all day without knocking off, and to their surprise he did it. There were many spectators during the time he was employed, and if the ghosts were listening they must have been edified by the critical remarks passed. What surprised everybody was the disappearance of such a master ringbarker; but, as you may believe, he was never seen in this district again.

I drove Bunce into town again, and he started off for Sydney and Lucy, his books being packed up there. A week afterwards I got a letter from him. This is it:

Dear Jim,

I owe you a lot for that ghost racket. What do you think— my old father had written out the prescription for the 'miraculous moist powders' on the back of the receipt which he must have left lying on the desk when he opened the cashbox to look at the date of the lease.

I went to Solomons, and found him ill and penitent, and only too willing to make restitution. He did not enter into details as to what had occurred, but from what he let drop I fancy dad kept his word, and Solomons has been having a really bad time lately.

Lucy and I are to be married very soon, and then we'll come up and see you. As I said, I owe you something, and, by George, I'll pay it! When the 'miraculous moist powders' are ready for the market you shall be the first man I will doctor with them.

'I don't know what the moist powders are good for,' said Jim, as he finished the letter; 'but I'll be hanged if he will.'

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16: The Ghost-Extinguisher

Gelett Burgess

1866-1951

Cosmopolitan, April, 1905

MY ATTENTION was first called to the possibility of manufacturing a practicable ghost-extinguisher by a real-estate agent in San Francisco.

"There's one thing, " he said, "that affects city property here in a curious way. You know we have a good many murders, and, as a consequence, certain houses attain a very sensational and undesirable reputation. These houses it is almost impossible to let; you can scarcely get a decent family to occupy them rent-free. Then we have a great many places said to be haunted. These were dead timber on my hands until I happened to notice that the Japanese have no objections to spooks. Now, whenever I have such a building to rent, I let it to Japs at a nominal figure, and after they've taken the curse off, I raise the rent, the Japs move out, the place is renovated, and in the market again."

The subject interested me, for I am not only a scientist, but a speculative philosopher as well. The investigation of those phenomena that lie upon the threshold of the great unknown has always been my favorite field of research. I believed, even then, that the Oriental mind, working along different lines than those which we pursue, has attained knowledge that we know little of. Thinking, therefore, that these Japs might have some secret inherited from their misty past, I examined into the matter.

I shall not trouble you with a narration of the incidents which led up to my acquaintance with Hoku Yamanochi. Suffice it to say that I found in him a friend who was willing to share with me his whole lore of quasi-science. I call it this advisedly, for science, as we Occidentals use the term, has to do only with the laws of matter and sensation; our scientific men, in fact, recognize the existence of nothing else. The Buddhistic philosophy, however, goes further.

According to its theories, the soul is sevenfold, consisting of different shells or envelopes— something like an onion— which are shed as life passes from the material to the spiritual state. The first, or lowest, of these is the corporeal body, which, after death, decays and perishes. Next comes the vital principle, which, departing from the body, dissipates itself like an odor, and is lost. Less gross than this is the astral body, which, although immaterial, yet lies near to the consistency of matter. This astral shape, released from the body at death, remains for a while in its earthly environment, still preserving more or less definitely the imprint of the form which it inhabited.

It is this relic of a past material personality, this outworn shell, that appears, when galvanized into an appearance of life, partly materialized, as a ghost. It is not the soul that returns, for the soul, which is immortal, is

composed of the four higher spiritual essences that surround the ego, and are carried on into the next life. These astral bodies, therefore, fail to terrify the Buddhists, who know them only as shadows, with no real volition. The Japs, in point of fact, have learned how to exterminate them.

There is a certain powder, Hoku informed me, which, when burnt in their presence, transforms them from the rarefied, or semi-spiritual, condition to the state of matter. The ghost, so to speak, is precipitated into and becomes a material shape which can easily be disposed of. In this state it is confined and allowed to disintegrate slowly where it can cause no further annoyance.

This long-winded explanation piqued my curiosity, which was not to be satisfied until I had seen the Japanese method applied. It was not long before I had an opportunity. A particularly revolting murder having been committed in San Francisco, my friend Hoku Yamanochi applied for the house, and, after the police had finished their examination, he was permitted to occupy it for a half-year at the ridiculous price of three dollars a month. He invited me to share his quarters, which were large and luxuriously furnished.

For a week, nothing abnormal occurred. Then, one night, I was awakened by terrifying groans followed by a blood-curdling shriek which seemed to emerge from a large closet in my room, the scene of the late atrocity. I confess that I had all the covers pulled over my head and was shivering with horror when my Japanese friend entered, wearing a pair of flowered-silk pajamas. Hearing his voice, I peeped forth, to see him smiling reassuringly.

"You some kind of very foolish fellow, " he said. "I show you how to fix him!"

He took from his pocket three conical red pastils, placed them upon a saucer and lighted them. Then, holding the fuming dish in one outstretched hand, he walked to the closed door and opened it. The shrieks burst out afresh, and, as I recalled the appalling details of the scene which had occurred in this very room only five weeks ago, I shuddered at his temerity. But he was quite calm.

Soon, I saw the wraith-like form of the recent victim dart from the closet. She crawled under my bed and ran about the room, endeavoring to escape, but was pursued by Hoku, who waved his smoking plate with indefatigable patience and dexterity.

At last he had her cornered, and the specter was caught behind a curtain of odorous fumes. Slowly the figure grew more distinct, assuming the consistency of a heavy vapor, shrinking somewhat in the operation, Hoku now hurriedly turned to me.

"You hully up, bling me one pair bellows pletty quick!" he commanded.

I ran into his room and brought the bellows from his fireplace. These he pressed flat, and then carefully inserting one toe of the ghost into the nozzle and opening the handles steadily, he sucked in a portion of the unfortunate woman's anatomy, and dexterously squirted the vapor into a large jar, which had been placed in the room for the purpose. Two more operations were necessary to withdraw the phantom completely from the comer and empty it into the jar. At last the transfer was effected and the receptacle securely stoppered and sealed.

"In former yore-time," Hoku explained to me, "old pliests sucked ghost with mouth and spit him to inside of vase with acculacy. Modem-time method more better for stomach and epiglottis."

"How long will this ghost keep?" I inquired.

"Oh, about four, five hundled years, maybe," was his reply. "Ghost now change from spilit to matter, and comes under legality of matter as usual science."

"What are you going to do with her?" I asked.

"Send him to Buddhist temple in Japan. Old pliest use him for high celemony, " was the answer.

My next desire was to obtain some of Hoku Yamanochi's ghost-powder and analyze it. For a while it defied my attempts, but, after many months of patient research, I discovered that it could be produced, in all its essential qualities, by means of a fusion of formaldehyde and hypophenyltrybrompropionic add in an electrified vacuum. With this product I began a series of interesting experiments.

As it became necessary for me to discover the habitat of ghosts in considerable numbers, I joined the American Society for Psychical Research, thus securing desirable information in regard to haunted houses. These I visited persistently, until my powder was perfected and had been proved efficacious for the capture of any ordinary housebroken phantom. For a while I contented myself with the mere sterilization of these specters, but, as I became surer of success, I began to attempt the transfer of ghosts to receptacles wherein they could be transported and studied at my leisure, classified and preserved for future reference.

Hoku's bellows I soon discarded in favor of a large-sized bicycle-pump, and eventually I had constructed one of my own, of a pattern which enabled me to inhale an entire ghost at a single stroke. With this powerful instrument I was able to compress even an adult life-sized ghost into a two quart bottle, in the neck of which a sensitive valve (patented) prevented the specter from emerging during process.

My invention was not yet, however, quite satisfactory. While I had no trouble in securing ghosts of recent creation— spirits, that is, who were yet of almost the consistency of matter— on several of my trips abroad in search of material I found in old manor houses or ruined castles many specters so ancient that they had become highly rarefied and tenuous, being at times scarcely visible to the naked eye. Such elusive spirits are able to pass through walls and elude pursuit with ease. It became necessary for me to obtain some instrument by which their capture could be conveniently effected.

The ordinary fire-extinguisher of commerce gave me the hint as to how the problem could be solved. One of these portable hand-instruments I filled with the proper chemicals. When inverted, the ingredients were commingled in vacuo and a vast volume of gas was liberated. This was collected in the reservoir provided with a rubber tube having a nozzle at the end. The whole apparatus being strapped upon my back, I was enabled to direct a stream of powerful precipitating gas in any desired direction, the flow being under control through the agency of a small stopcock. By means of this ghost-extinguisher I was enabled to pursue my experiments as far as I desired.

So far my investigations had been purely scientific, but before long the commercial value of my discovery began to interest me. The ruinous effects of spectral visitations upon real estate induced me to realize some pecuniary reward from my ghost-extinguisher, and I began to advertise my business. By degrees, I became known as an expert in my original line, and my professional services were sought with as much confidence as those of a veterinary surgeon. I manufactured the Gerrish Ghost-Extinguisher in several sizes, and put it on the market, following this venture with the introduction of my justly celebrated Gerrish Ghost-Grenades. These hand-implements were made to be kept in racks conveniently distributed in country houses for cases of sudden emergency. A single grenade, hurled at any spectral form, would, in breaking, liberate enough formaldybrom to coagulate the most perverse spirit, and the resulting vapor could easily be removed from the room by a housemaid with a common broom.

This branch of my business, however, never proved profitable, for the appearance of ghosts, especially in the United States, is seldom anticipated. Had it been possible for me to invent a preventive as well as a remedy, I might now be a millionaire; but there are limits even to modem science.

Having exhausted the field at home, I visited England in the hope of securing customers among the country families there. To my surprise, I discovered that the possession of a family specter was considered as a permanent improvement to the property, and my offers of service in ridding

houses of ghostly tenants awakened the liveliest resentment. As a layer of ghosts I was much lower in the social scale than a layer of carpets.

Disappointed and discouraged, I returned home to make a further study of the opportunities of my invention. I had, it seemed, exhausted the possibilities of the use of unwelcome phantoms. Could I not, I thought, derive a revenue from the traffic in desirable specters? I decided to renew my investigations.

The nebulous spirits preserved in my laboratory, which I had graded and classified, were, you will remember, in a state of suspended animation. They were, virtually, embalmed apparitions, their inevitable decay delayed, rather than prevented. The assorted ghosts that I had now preserved in hermetically sealed tins were thus in a state of unstable equilibrium. The tins once opened and the vapor allowed to dissipate, the original astral body would in time be reconstructed and the warmed-over specter would continue its previous career. But this process, when naturally performed, took years. The interval was quite too long for the phantom to be handled in any commercial way. My problem was, therefore, to produce from my tinned Essence of Ghost a specter that was capable of immediately going into business and that could haunt a house while you wait.

It was not until radium was discovered that I approached the solution of my great problem, and even then months of indefatigable labor were necessary before the process was perfected. It has now been well demonstrated that the emanations of radiant energy sent forth by this surprising element defy our former scientific conceptions of the constitution of matter. It was for me to prove that the vibratory activity of radium (whose amplitudes and intensity are undoubtedly four-dimensional) effects a sort of allotropic modification in the particles of that imponderable ether which seems to lie halfway between matter and pure spirit. This is as far as I need to go in my explanation, for a full discussion involves the use of quaternions and the method of least squares. It will be sufficient for the layman to know that my preserved phantoms, rendered radio-active, would, upon contact with the air, resume their spectral shape.

The possible extension of my business now was enormous, limited only by the difficulty in collecting the necessary stock. It was by this time almost as difficult to get ghosts as it was to get radium. Finding that a part of my stock had spoiled, I was now possessed of only a few dozen cans of apparitions, many of these being of inferior quality. I immediately set about replenishing my raw material. It was not enough for me to pick up a ghost here and there, as one might get old mahogany; I determined to procure my phantoms in wholesale lots.

Accident favored my design. In an old volume of *Blackwood's Magazine* I happened, one day, to come across an interesting article upon the battle of Waterloo. It mentioned, incidentally, a legend to the effect that every year, upon the anniversary of the celebrated victory, spectral squadrons had been seen by the peasants charging battalions of ghostly grenadiers. Here was my opportunity.

I made elaborate preparations for the capture of this job lot of phantoms upon the next anniversary of the fight. Hard by the fatal ditch which engulfed Napoleon's cavalry I stationed a corps of able assistants provided with rapid-fire extinguishers ready to enfilade the famous sunken road. I stationed myself with a No. 4 model magazine hose, with a four-inch nozzle, directly in the path which I knew would be taken by the advancing squadron.

It was a fine, clear night, lighted, at first, by a slice of new moon; but later, dark, except for the pale illumination of the stars. I have seen many ghosts in my time— ghosts in garden and garret, at noon, at dusk, at dawn, phantoms fanciful, and specters sad and spectacular— but never have I seen such an impressive sight as this nocturnal charge of cuirassiers, galloping in goblin glory to their time-honored doom. Prom afar the French reserves presented the appearance of a nebulous mass, like a low-lying cloud or fog-bank, faintly luminous, shot with fluorescent gleams. As the squadron drew nearer in its desperate charge, the separate forms of the troopers shaped themselves, and the galloping guardsmen grew ghastly with supernatural splendor.

Although I knew them to be immaterial and without mass or weight, I was terrified at their approach, fearing to be swept under the hoofs of the nightmares they rode. Like one in a dream, I started to run, but in another instant they were upon me, and I turned on my stream of formaldybrom. Then I was overwhelmed in a cloud-burst of wild warlike wraiths.

The column swept past me, over the bank, plunging to its historic fate. The cut was piled full of frenzied, scrambling specters, as rank after rank swept down into the horrid gut. At last the ditch swarmed full of writhing forms and the carnage was dire.

My assistants with the extinguishers stood firm, and although almost unnerved by the sight, they summoned their courage, and directed simultaneous streams of formaldybrom into the struggling mass of fantoms. As soon as my mind returned, I busied myself with the huge tanks I had prepared for use as receivers. These were fitted with a mechanism similar to that employed in portable forges, by which the heavy vapor was sucked off. Luckily the night was calm, and I was enabled to fill a dozen cylinders with the precipitated ghosts. The segregation of individual forms was, of course, impossible, so that men and horses were mingled in a horrible mixture of

fricasseed spirits. I intended subsequently to empty the soup into a large reservoir and allow the separate specters to reform according to the laws of spiritual cohesion.

Circumstances, however, prevented my ever accomplishing this result. I returned home, to find awaiting me an order so large and important that I had no time in which to operate upon my cylinders of cavalry.

My patron was the proprietor of a new sanatorium for nervous invalids, located near some medicinal springs in the Catskills. His building was unfortunately located, having been built upon the site of a once-famous summer hotel, which, while filled with guests, had burnt to the ground, scores of lives having been lost. Just before the patients were to be installed in the new structure, it was found that the place was haunted by the victims of the conflagration to a degree that rendered it inconvenient as a health resort. My professional services were requested, therefore, to render the building a fitting abode for convalescents. I wrote to the proprietor, fixing my charge at five thousand dollars. As my usual rate was one hundred dollars per ghost, and over a hundred lives were lost at the fire, I considered this price reasonable, and my offer was accepted.

The sanatorium job was finished in a week. I secured one hundred and two superior spectral specimens, and upon my return to the laboratory, put them up in heavily embossed tins with attractive labels in colors.

My delight at the outcome of this business was, however, soon transformed to anger and indignation. The proprietor of the health resort, having found that the specters from his place had been sold, claimed a rebate upon the contract price equal to the value of the modified ghosts transferred to my possession. This, of course, I could not allow. I wrote, demanding immediate payment according to our agreement, and this was peremptorily refused. The manager's letter was insulting in the extreme. The Pied Piper of Hamelin was not worse treated than I felt myself to be; so, like the piper, I determined to have my revenge.

I got out the twelve tanks of Waterloo ghosthash from the storerooms, and treated them with radium for two days. These I shipped to the Catskills billed as hydrogen gas. Then, accompanied by two trustworthy assistants, I went to the sanatorium and preferred my demand for payment in person. I was ejected with contumely. Before my hasty exit, however, I had the satisfaction of noticing that the building was filled with patients. Languid ladies were seated in wicker chairs upon the piazzas, and frail anemic girls filled the corridors. It was a hospital of nervous wrecks whom the slightest disturbance would throw into a panic. I suppressed all my finer feelings of mercy and kindness and smiled grimly as I walked back to the village.

That night was black and lowering, fitting weather for the pandemonium I was about to turn loose. At ten o'clock, I loaded a wagon with the tanks of compressed cohorts, and, muffled in heavy overcoats, we drove to the sanatorium. All was silent as we approached ; all was dark. The wagon concealed in a grove of pines, we took out the tanks one by one, and placed them beneath the ground floor windows. The sashes were easily forced open, and raised enough to enable us to insert the rubber tubes connected with the iron reservoirs. At midnight everything was ready.

I gave the word, and my assistants ran from tank o tank, opening the stopcocks. With a hiss as of escaping steam the huge vessels emptied themselves, vomiting forth clouds of vapor, which, upon contact with the air, coagulated into strange shapes as the white of an egg does when dropped into boiling water. The rooms became instantly filled with dismembered shades of men and horses seeking wildly to unite themselves with their proper parts.

Legs ran down the corridors, seeking their respective trunks, arms writhed wildly reaching for missing bodies, heads rolled hither and yon in search of native necks. Horses' tails and hoofs whisked and hurried in quest of equine ownership until, reorganized, the spectral steeds galloped about to find their riders.

Had it been possible, I would have stopped this riot of wraiths long ere this, for it was more awful than I had anticipated, but it was already too late. Cowering in the garden, I began to hear the screams of awakened and distracted patients. In another moment, the front door of the hotel was burst open, and a mob of hysterical women in expensive nightgowns rushed out upon the lawn, and huddled in shrieking groups.

I fled into the night.

I fled, but Napoleon's men fled with me. Compelled by I know not what fatal astral attraction, perhaps the subtle affinity of the creature for the creator, the spectral shells, moved by some mysterious mechanics of spiritual being, pursued me with fatuous fury. I sought refuge, first in my laboratory, but, even as I approached, a lurid glare foretold me of its destruction. As I drew nearer, the whole ghost-factory was seen to be in flames ; every moment crackling reports were heard, as the overheated tins of phantasmagoria exploded and threw their supernatural contents upon the night. These liberated ghosts joined the army of Napoleon's outraged warriors, and turned upon me. There was not enough formaldybrom in all the world to quench their fierce energy. There was no place in all the world safe for me from their visitation. No ghost-extinguisher was powerful enough to lay the host of spirits that haunted me henceforth, and I had neither time nor money left with which to construct new Gatling quick-firing tanks.

It is little comfort to me to know that one hundred nervous invalids were completely restored to health by means of the terrific shock which I administered.

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17: Just like Little Dogs

Dylan Thomas

1914-1953

Wales, Oct 1939

STANDING ALONE under a railway arch out of the wind, I was looking at the miles of sands, long and dirty in the early dark, with only a few boys on the edge of the sea and one or two hurrying couples with their mackintoshes blown around them like balloons, when two young men joined me, it seemed out of nowhere, and struck matches for their cigarettes and illuminated their faces under bright-checked caps.

One had a pleasant face; his eyebrows slanted comically towards his temples, his eyes were warm, brown, deep, and guileless, and his mouth was full and weak. The other man had a boxer's nose and a weighted chin ginger with bristles.

We watched the boys returning from the oily sea; they shouted under the echoing arch, then their voices faded. Soon there was not a couple in sight; the lovers had disappeared among the sandhills and were lying down there with the broken tins and bottles of the summer passed, old paper blowing by them, and nobody with any sense was about. The strangers, huddled against the wall, their hands deep in their pockets, their cigarettes sparkling, stared, I thought, at the thickening of the dark over the empty sands, but their eyes may have been closed. A train raced over us, and the arch shook. Over the shore, behind the vanishing train, smoke clouds flew together, rags of wings and hollow bodies of great birds black as tunnels, and broke up lazily; cinders fell through a sieve in the air, and the sparks were put out by the wet dark before they reached the sand. The night before, little quick scarecrows had bent and picked at the track-line and a solitary dignified scavenger wandered three miles by the edge with a crumpled coal sack and a park-keeper's steel-tipped stick. Now they were tucked up in sacks, asleep in a siding, their heads in bins, their beards in straw, in coal-trucks thinking of fires, or lying beyond pickings on Jack Stiff's slab near the pub in the Fishguard Alley, where the methylated-spirit drinkers danced into the policemen's arms and women like lumps of clothes in a pool waited, in doorways and holes in the soaking wall, for vampires or firemen. Night was properly down on us now. The wind changed. Thin rain began. The sands themselves went out. We stood in the scooped, windy room of the arch, listening to the noises from the muffled town, a goods train shunting, a siren in the docks, the hoarse trams in the streets far behind, one bark of a dog, unplaceable sounds, iron being beaten, the distant creaking of wood, doors slamming where there were no houses, an engine coughing like a sheep on a hill.

The two young men were statues smoking, tough-capped and collarless watchers and witnesses carved out of the stone of the blowing room where they stood at my side with nowhere to go, nothing to do, and all the raining, almost winter, night before them. I cupped a match to let them see my face in a dramatic shadow, my eyes mysteriously sunk, perhaps, in a startling white face, my young looks savage in the sudden flicker of light, to make them wonder who I was as I puffed my last butt and puzzled about them. Why was the soft-faced young man, with his tame devil's eyebrows, standing like a stone figure with a glow-worm in it? He should have a nice girl to bully him gently and take him to cry in the pictures, or kids to bounce in a kitchen in Rodney Street. There was no sense in standing silent for hours under a railway arch on a hell of a night at the end of a bad summer when girls were waiting, ready to be hot and friendly, in chip shops and shop doorways and Rabbiotti's all-night café, when the public bar of the 'Bay View' at the corner had a fire and skittles and a swarthy, sensuous girl with different coloured eyes, when the billiard saloons were open, except the one in High Street you couldn't go into without a collar and tie, when the closed parks had empty, covered bandstands and the railings were easy to climb.

A church clock somewhere struck a lot, faintly from the night on the right, but I didn't count.

The other young man, less than two feet from me, should be shouting with the boys, boasting in lanes, propping counters, prancing and clouting in the Mannesmann Hall, or whispering around a bucket in a ring corner. Why was he humped here with a moody man and myself, listening to our breathing, to the sea, the wind scattering sand through the archway, a chained dog and a foghorn and the rumble of trams a dozen streets away, watching a match strike, a boy's fresh face spying in a shadow, the lighthouse beams, the movement of a hand to a fag, when the sprawling town in a drizzle, the pubs and the clubs and the coffee-shops, the prowlers' streets, the arches near the promenade, were full of friends and enemies? He could be playing nap by a candle in a shed in a wood-yard.

Families sat down to supper in rows of short houses, the wireless sets were on, the daughters' young men sat in the front rooms. In neighbouring houses they read the news off the table-cloth, and the potatoes from dinner were fried up. Cards were played in the front rooms of houses on the hills. In the houses on tops of the hills families were entertaining friends, and the blinds of the front rooms were not quite drawn. I heard the sea in a cold bit of the cheery night.

One of the strangers said suddenly, in a high, clear voice: 'What are we all doing then?'

'Standing under a bloody arch,' said the other one.

'And it's cold,' I said.

'It isn't very cosy,' said the high voice of the young man with the pleasant face, now invisible. 'I've been in better hotels than this.'

'What about that night in the Majestic?' said the other voice.

There was a long silence.

'Do you often stand here?' said the pleasant man. His voice might never have broken.

'No, this is the first time here,' I said. 'Sometimes I stand in the Brynmill arch.'

'Ever tried the old pier?'

'It's no good in the rain, is it?'

'Underneath the pier, I mean, in the girders.'

'No, I haven't been there.'

'Tom spends every Sunday under the pier,' the pug-faced young man said bitterly. 'I got to take him his dinner in a piece of paper.'

'There's another train coming,' I said. It tore over us, the arch bellowed, the wheels screamed through our heads, we were deafened and spark-blinded and crushed under the fiery weight and we rose again, like battered black men, in the grave of the arch. No noise at all from the swallowed town. The trams had rattled themselves dumb. A pressure of the hidden sea rubbed away the smudge of the docks. Only three young men were alive.

One said: 'It's a sad life, without a home.'

'Haven't you got a home then?' I said.

'Oh, yes, I've got a home all right.'

'I got one, too.'

'And I live near Cwmdonkin Park,' I said.

'That's another place Tom sits in in the dark. He says he listens to the owls.'

'I knew a chap once who lived in the country, near Bridgend,' said Tom, 'and they had a munition works there in the War and it spoiled all the birds. The chap I know says you can always tell a cuckoo from Bridgend, it goes: "Cuckbloodyoo! cuckbloodyoo!"'

'Cuckbloodyoo!' echoed the arch.

'Why are you standing under the arch then?' asked Tom. 'It's warm at home. You can draw the curtains and sit by the fire, snug as a bug. Gracie's on the wireless to-night. No shananacking in the old moonlight.'

'I don't want to be home, I don't want to sit by the fire. I've got nothing to do when I'm in and I don't want to go to bed. I like standing about like this with nothing to do, in the dark all by myself,' I said.

And I did, too. I was a lonely night-walker and a steady stander-at-corners. I liked to walk through the wet town after midnight, when the streets were deserted and the window lights out, alone and alive on the glistening tram-lines in dead and empty High Street under the moon, gigantically sad in the damp streets by ghostly Ebenezer Chapel. And I never felt more a part of the remote and overpressing world, or more full of love and arrogance and pity and humility, not for myself alone, but for the living earth I suffered on and for the unfeeling systems in the upper air, Mars and Venus and Brazell and Skully, men in China and St Thomas, scorning girls and ready girls, soldiers and bullies and policemen and sharp, suspicious buyers of second-hand books, bad, ragged women who'd pretend against the museum wall for a cup of tea, and perfect, unapproachable women out of the fashion magazines, seven feet high, sailing slowly in their flat, glazed creations through steel and glass and velvet. I leant against the wall of a derelict house in the residential areas or wandered in the empty rooms, stood terrified on the stairs or gazing through the smashed windows at the sea or at nothing, and the lights going out one by one in the avenues. Or I mooched in a half-built house, with the sky stuck in the roof and cats on the ladders and a wind shaking through the bare bones of the bedrooms.

'And you can talk,' I said. 'Why aren't you at home?'

'I don't want to be home,' said Tom.

'I'm not particular,' said his friend.

When a match flared, their heads rocked and spread on the wall, and shapes of winged bulls and buckets grew bigger and smaller. Tom began to tell a story. I thought of a new stranger walking on the sands past the arch and hearing all of a sudden that high voice out of a hole.

I missed the beginning of the story as I thought of the man on the sands listening in a panic or dodging, like a footballer, in and out among the jumping dark towards the lights behind the railway line, and remembered Tom's voice in the middle of a sentence.

'...went up to them and said it was a lovely night. It wasn't a lovely night at all. The sands were empty. We asked them what their names were and they asked us what ours were. We were walking along by this time. Walter here was telling them about the glee party in the "Melba" and what went on in the ladies' cloakroom. You had to drag the tenors away like ferrets.'

'What were their names?' I asked.

'Doris and Norma,' Walter said.

'So we walked along the sands towards the dunes,' Tom said, 'and Walter was with Doris and I was with Norma. Norma worked in the steam laundry. We hadn't been walking and talking for more than a few minutes when, by God, I

knew I was head over heels in love with the girl, and she wasn't the pretty one, either.'

He described her. I saw her clearly. Her plump, kind face, jolly brown eyes, warm wide mouth, thick bobbed hair, rough body, bottle legs, broad bum, grew from a few words right out of Tom's story, and I saw her ambling solidly along the sands in a spotted frock in a showering autumn evening with fancy gloves on her hard hands, a gold bangle, with a voile handkerchief tucked in it, round her wrist, and a navy-blue handbag with letters and outing snaps, a compact, a bus ticket, and a shilling.

'Doris was the pretty one,' said Tom, 'smart and touched up and sharp as a knife. I was twenty-six years old and I'd never been in love, and there I was, gawking at Norma in the middle of Tawe sands, too frightened to put my finger on her gloves. Walter had his arm round Doris then.'

They sheltered behind a dune. The night dropped down on them quickly. Walter was a caution with Doris, hugging and larking, and Tom sat close to Norma, brave enough to hold her hand in its cold glove and tell her all his secrets. He told her his age and his job. He liked staying in in the evenings with a good book. Norma liked dances. He liked dances, too. Norma and Doris were sisters. 'I'd never have thought that,' Tom said, 'you're beautiful, I love you.'

Now the story-telling night in the arch gave place to the loving night in the dunes. The arch was as high as the sky. The faint town noises died. I lay like a pimp in a bush by Tom's side and squinted through to see him round his hands on Norma's breast. 'Don't you dare!' Walter and Doris lay quietly near them. You could have heard a safety-pin fall.

'And the curious thing was,' said Tom, 'that after a time we all sat up on the sand and smiled at each other. And then we all moved softly about on the sand in the dark, without saying a word. And Doris was lying with me, and Norma was with Walter.'

'But why did you change over, if you loved her?' I asked.

'I never understood why,' said Tom. 'I think about it every night.'

'That was in October,' Walter said.

And Tom continued: 'We didn't see much of the girls until July. I couldn't face Norma. Then they brought two paternity orders against us, and Mr Lewis, the magistrate, was eighty years old, and stone deaf, too. He put a little trumpet by his ear and Norma and Doris gave evidence. Then we gave evidence, and he couldn't decide whose was which. And at the end he shook his head back and fore and pointed his trumpet and said: "Just like little dogs!"'

All at once I remembered how cold it was. I rubbed my numb hands together. Fancy standing all night in the cold. Fancy listening, I thought, to a

long, unsatisfactory story in the frost-bite night in a polar arch. 'What happened then?' I asked.

Walter answered. 'I married Norma,' he said 'and Tom married Doris. We had to do the right thing by them, didn't we? That's why Tom won't go home. He never goes home till the early morning. I've got to keep him company. He's my brother.'

It would take me ten minutes to run home. I put up my coat collar and pulled my cap down.

'And the curious thing is,' said Tom, 'that I love Norma and Walter doesn't love Norma or Doris. We've two nice little boys. I call mine Norman.'

We all shook hands.

'See you again,' said Walter.

'I'm always hanging about,' said Tom.

'Abyssinia!'

I walked out of the arch, crossed Trafalgar Terrace, and pelted up the steep streets.

18: Mrs. Amworth

E. F. Benson

1867-1940

Hutchinson's Magazine, June 1922

THE VILLAGE of Maxley, where, last summer and autumn, these strange events took place, lies on a heathery and pine-clad upland of Sussex. In all England you could not find a sweeter and saner situation. Should the wind blow from the south, it comes laden with the spices of the sea; to the east high downs protect it from the inclemencies of March; and from the west and north the breezes which reach it travel over miles of aromatic forest and heather. The village itself is insignificant enough in point of population, but rich in amenities and beauty. Half-way down the single street, with its broad road and spacious areas of grass on each side, stands the little Norman Church and the antique graveyard long disused: for the rest there are a dozen small, sedate Georgian houses, red-bricked and long-windowed, each with a square of flower-garden in front, and an ampler strip behind; a score of shops, and a couple of score of thatched cottages belonging to labourers on neighbouring estates, complete the entire cluster of its peaceful habitations. The general peace, however, is sadly broken on Saturdays and Sundays, for we lie on one of the main roads between London and Brighton and our quiet street becomes a race-course for flying motor-cars and bicycles. A notice just outside the village begging them to go slowly only seems to encourage them to accelerate their speed, for the road lies open and straight, and there is really no reason why they should do otherwise. By way of protest, therefore, the ladies of Maxley cover their noses and mouths with their handkerchiefs as they see a motor-car approaching, though, as the street is asphalted, they need not really take these precautions against dust. But late on Sunday night the horde of scorchers has passed, and we settle down again to five days of cheerful and leisurely seclusion. Railway strikes which agitate the country so much leave us undisturbed because most of the inhabitants of Maxley never leave it at all.

I am the fortunate possessor of one of these small Georgian houses, and consider myself no less fortunate in having so interesting and stimulating a neighbour as Francis Urcombe, who, the most confirmed of Maxleyites, has not slept away from his house, which stands just opposite to mine in the village street, for nearly two years, at which date, though still in middle life, he resigned his Physiological Professorship at Cambridge University and devoted himself to the study of those occult and curious phenomena which seem equally to concern the physical and the psychical sides of human nature. Indeed his retirement was not unconnected with his passion for the strange uncharted places that lie on the confines and borders of science, the existence

of which is so stoutly denied by the more materialistic minds, for he advocated that all medical students should be obliged to pass some sort of examination in mesmerism, and that one of the tripos papers should be designed to test their knowledge in such subjects as appearances at time of death, haunted houses, vampirism, automatic writing, and possession.

"Of course they wouldn't listen to me," ran his account of the matter, "for there is nothing that these seats of learning are so frightened of as knowledge, and the road to knowledge lies in the study of things like these. The functions of the human frame are, broadly speaking, known. They are a country, anyhow, that has been charted and mapped out. But outside that lie huge tracts of undiscovered country, which certainly exist, and the real pioneers of knowledge are those who, at the cost of being derided as credulous and superstitious, want to push on into those misty and probably perilous places. I felt that I could be of more use by setting out without compass or knapsack into the mists than by sitting in a cage like a canary and chirping about what was known. Besides, teaching is very bad for a man who knows himself only to be a learner: you only need to be a self-conceited ass to teach."

Here, then, in Francis Urcombe, was a delightful neighbour to one who, like myself, has an uneasy and burning curiosity about what he called the "misty and perilous places"; and this last spring we had a further and most welcome addition to our pleasant little community, in the person of Mrs. Amworth, widow of an Indian civil servant. Her husband had been a judge in the North-West Provinces, and after his death at Peshawar she came back to England, and after a year in London found herself starving for the ampler air and sunshine of the country to take the place of the fogs and griminess of town. She had, too, a special reason for settling in Maxley, since her ancestors up till a hundred years ago had long been native to the place, and in the old church-yard, now disused, are many grave-stones bearing her maiden name of Chaston. Big and energetic, her vigorous and genial personality speedily woke Maxley up to a higher degree of sociality than it had ever known. Most of us were bachelors or spinsters or elderly folk not much inclined to exert ourselves in the expense and effort of hospitality, and hitherto the gaiety of a small tea-party, with bridge afterwards and goloshes (when it was wet) to trip home in again for a solitary dinner, was about the climax of our festivities. But Mrs. Amworth showed us a more gregarious way, and set an example of luncheon-parties and little dinners, which we began to follow. On other nights when no such hospitality was on foot, a lone man like myself found it pleasant to know that a call on the telephone to Mrs. Amworth's house not a hundred yards off, and an inquiry as to whether I might come over after dinner for a game of piquet before bed-time, would probably evoke a response of welcome. There

she would be, with a comrade-like eagerness for companionship, and there was a glass of port and a cup of coffee and a cigarette and a game of piquet. She played the piano, too, in a free and exuberant manner, and had a charming voice and sang to her own accompaniment; and as the days grew long and the light lingered late, we played our game in her garden, which in the course of a few months she had turned from being a nursery for slugs and snails into a glowing patch of luxuriant blossoming. She was always cheery and jolly; she was interested in everything, and in music, in gardening, in games of all sorts was a competent performer. Everybody (with one exception) liked her, everybody felt her to bring with her the tonic of a sunny day. That one exception was Francis Urcombe; he, though he confessed he did not like her, acknowledged that he was vastly interested in her. This always seemed strange to me, for pleasant and jovial as she was, I could see nothing in her that could call forth conjecture or intrigued surmise, so healthy and unmysterious a figure did she present. But of the genuineness of Urcombe's interest there could be no doubt; one could see him watching and scrutinising her. In matter of age, she frankly volunteered the information that she was forty-five; but her briskness, her activity, her unravaged skin, her coal-black hair, made it difficult to believe that she was not adopting an unusual device, and adding ten years on to her age instead of subtracting them.

Often, also, as our quite unsentimental friendship ripened, Mrs. Amworth would ring me up and propose her advent. If I was busy writing, I was to give her, so we definitely bargained, a frank negative, and in answer I could hear her jolly laugh and her wishes for a successful evening of work. Sometimes, before her proposal arrived, Urcombe would already have stepped across from his house opposite for a smoke and a chat, and he, hearing who my intending visitor was, always urged me to beg her to come. She and I should play our piquet, said he, and he would look on, if we did not object, and learn something of the game. But I doubt whether he paid much attention to it, for nothing could be clearer than that, under that penthouse of forehead and thick eyebrows, his attention was fixed not on the cards, but on one of the players. But he seemed to enjoy an hour spent thus, and often, until one particular evening in July, he would watch her with the air of a man who has some deep problem in front of him. She, enthusiastically keen about our game, seemed not to notice his scrutiny. Then came that evening, when, as I see in the light of subsequent events, began the first twitching of the veil that hid the secret horror from my eyes. I did not know it then, though I noticed that thereafter, if she rang up to propose coming round, she always asked not only if I was at leisure, but whether Mr. Urcombe was with me. If so, she said, she would not spoil the chat of two old bachelors, and laughingly wished me good night.

Urcombe, on this occasion, had been with me for some half-hour before Mrs. Amworth's appearance, and had been talking to me about the mediæval beliefs concerning vampirism, one of those borderland subjects which he declared had not been sufficiently studied before it had been consigned by the medical profession to the dust-heap of exploded superstitions. There he sat, grim and eager, tracing, with that pellucid clearness which had made him in his Cambridge days so admirable a lecturer, the history of those mysterious visitations. In them all there were the same general features: one of those ghoulish spirits took up its abode in a living man or woman, conferring supernatural powers of bat-like flight and glutting itself with nocturnal blood-feasts. When its host died it continued to dwell in the corpse, which remained undecayed. By day it rested, by night it left the grave and went on its awful errands. No European country in the Middle Ages seemed to have escaped them; earlier yet, parallels were to be found, in Roman and Greek and in Jewish history.

"It's a large order to set all that evidence aside as being moonshine," he said. "Hundreds of totally independent witnesses in many ages have testified to the occurrence of these phenomena, and there's no explanation known to me which covers all the facts. And if you feel inclined to say 'Why, then, if these are facts, do we not come across them now?' there are two answers I can make you. One is that there were diseases known in the Middle Ages, such as the black death, which were certainly existent then and which have become extinct since, but for that reason we do not assert that such diseases never existed. Just as the black death visited England and decimated the population of Norfolk, so here in this very district about three hundred years ago there was certainly an outbreak of vampirism, and Maxley was the centre of it. My second answer is even more convincing, for I tell you that vampirism is by no means extinct now. An outbreak of it certainly occurred in India a year or two ago."

At that moment I heard my knocker plied in the cheerful and peremptory manner in which Mrs. Amworth is accustomed to announce her arrival, and I went to the door to open it.

"Come in at once," I said, "and save me from having my blood curdled. Mr. Urcombe has been trying to alarm me."

Instantly her vital, voluminous presence seemed to fill the room.

"Ah, but how lovely!" she said. "I delight in having my blood curdled. Go on with your ghost-story, Mr. Urcombe. I adore ghost-stories."

I saw that, as his habit was, he was intently observing her.

"It wasn't a ghost-story exactly," said he. "I was only telling our host how vampirism was not extinct yet. I was saying that there was an outbreak of it in India only a few years ago."

There was a more than perceptible pause, and I saw that, if Urcombe was observing her, she on her side was observing him with fixed eye and parted mouth. Then her jolly laugh invaded that rather tense silence.

"Oh, what a shame!" she said. "You're not going to curdle my blood at all. Where did you pick up such a tale, Mr. Urcombe? I have lived for years in India and never heard a rumour of such a thing. Some story-teller in the bazaars must have invented it: they are famous at that."

I could see that Urcombe was on the point of saying something further, but checked himself.

"Ah! very likely that was it," he said.

But something had disturbed our usual peaceful sociability that night, and something had damped Mrs. Amworth's usual high spirits. She had no gusto for her piquet, and left after a couple of games. Urcombe had been silent too, indeed he hardly spoke again till she departed.

"That was unfortunate," he said, "for the outbreak of— of a very mysterious disease, let us call it, took place at Peshawar, where she and her husband were. And—"

"Well?" I asked.

"He was one of the victims of it," said he. "Naturally I had quite forgotten that when I spoke."

The summer was unreasonably hot and rainless, and Maxley suffered much from drought, and also from a plague of big black night-flying gnats, the bite of which was very irritating and virulent. They came sailing in of an evening, settling on one's skin so quietly that one perceived nothing till the sharp stab announced that one had been bitten. They did not bite the hands or face, but chose always the neck and throat for their feeding-ground, and most of us, as the poison spread, assumed a temporary goitre. Then about the middle of August appeared the first of those mysterious cases of illness which our local doctor attributed to the long-continued heat coupled with the bite of these venomous insects. The patient was a boy of sixteen or seventeen, the son of Mrs. Amworth's gardener, and the symptoms were an anæmic pallor and a languid prostration, accompanied by great drowsiness and an abnormal appetite. He had, too, on his throat two small punctures where, so Dr. Ross conjectured, one of these great gnats had bitten him. But the odd thing was that there was no swelling or inflammation round the place where he had been bitten. The heat at this time had begun to abate, but the cooler weather failed

to restore him, and the boy, in spite of the quantity of good food which he so ravenously swallowed, wasted away to a skin-clad skeleton.

I met Dr. Ross in the street one afternoon about this time, and in answer to my inquiries about his patient he said that he was afraid the boy was dying. The case, he confessed, completely puzzled him: some obscure form of pernicious anæmia was all he could suggest. But he wondered whether Mr. Urcombe would consent to see the boy, on the chance of his being able to throw some new light on the case, and since Urcombe was dining with me that night, I proposed to Dr. Ross to join us. He could not do this, but said he would look in later. When he came, Urcombe at once consented to put his skill at the other's disposal, and together they went off at once. Being thus shorn of my sociable evening, I telephoned to Mrs. Amworth to know if I might inflict myself on her for an hour. Her answer was a welcoming affirmative, and between piquet and music the hour lengthened itself into two. She spoke of the boy who was lying so desperately and mysteriously ill, and told me that she had often been to see him, taking him nourishing and delicate food. But to-day— and her kind eyes moistened as she spoke— she was afraid she had paid her last visit. Knowing the antipathy between her and Urcombe, I did not tell her that he had been called into consultation; and when I returned home she accompanied me to my door, for the sake of a breath of night air, and in order to borrow a magazine which contained an article on gardening which she wished to read.

"Ah, this delicious night air," she said, luxuriously sniffing in the coolness. "Night air and gardening are the great tonics. There is nothing so stimulating as bare contact with rich mother earth. You are never so fresh as when you have been grubbing in the soil— black hands, black nails, and boots covered with mud." She gave her great jovial laugh.

"I'm a glutton for air and earth," she said. "Positively I look forward to death, for then I shall be buried and have the kind earth all round me. No leaden caskets for me— I have given explicit directions. But what shall I do about air? Well, I suppose one can't have everything. The magazine? A thousand thanks, I will faithfully return it. Good night: garden and keep your windows open, and you won't have anæmia."

"I always sleep with my windows open," said I.

I went straight up to my bedroom, of which one of the windows looks out over the street, and as I undressed I thought I heard voices talking outside not far away. But I paid no particular attention, put out my lights, and falling asleep plunged into the depths of a most horrible dream, distortedly suggested no doubt, by my last words with Mrs. Amworth. I dreamed that I woke, and found that both my bedroom windows were shut. Half-suffocating I dreamed that I

sprang out of bed, and went across to open them. The blind over the first was drawn down, and pulling it up I saw, with the indescribable horror of incipient nightmare, Mrs. Amworth's face suspended close to the pane in the darkness outside, nodding and smiling at me. Pulling down the blind again to keep that terror out, I rushed to the second window on the other side of the room, and there again was Mrs. Amworth's face. Then the panic came upon me in full blast; here was I suffocating in the airless room, and whichever window I opened Mrs. Amworth's face would float in, like those noiseless black gnats that bit before one was aware. The nightmare rose to screaming point, and with strangled yells I awoke to find my room cool and quiet with both windows open and blinds up and a half-moon high in its course, casting an oblong of tranquil light on the floor. But even when I was awake the horror persisted, and I lay tossing and turning. I must have slept long before the nightmare seized me, for now it was nearly day, and soon in the east the drowsy eyelids of morning began to lift.

I was scarcely downstairs next morning— for after the dawn I slept late— when Urcombe rang up to know if he might see me immediately. He came in, grim and preoccupied, and I noticed that he was pulling on a pipe that was not even filled.

"I want your help," he said, "and so I must tell you first of all what happened last night. I went round with the little doctor to see his patient, and found him just alive, but scarcely more. I instantly diagnosed in my own mind what this anæmia, unaccountable by any other explanation, meant. The boy is the prey of a vampire."

He put his empty pipe on the breakfast-table, by which I had just sat down, and folded his arms, looking at me steadily from under his overhanging brows.

"Now about last night," he said. "I insisted that he should be moved from his father's cottage into my house. As we were carrying him on a stretcher, whom should we meet but Mrs. Amworth? She expressed shocked surprise that we were moving him. Now why do you think she did that?"

With a start of horror, as I remembered my dream that night before, I felt an idea come into my mind so preposterous and unthinkable that I instantly turned it out again.

"I haven't the smallest idea," I said.

"Then listen, while I tell you about what happened later. I put out all light in the room where the boy lay, and watched. One window was a little open, for I had forgotten to close it, and about midnight I heard something outside, trying apparently to push it farther open. I guessed who it was— yes, it was full twenty feet from the ground— and I peeped round the corner of the blind. Just outside was the face of Mrs. Amworth and her hand was on the frame of the

window. Very softly I crept close, and then banged the window down, and I think I just caught the tip of one of her fingers."

"But it's impossible," I cried. "How could she be floating in the air like that? And what had she come for? Don't tell me such—"

Once more, with closer grip, the remembrance of my nightmare seized me.

"I am telling you what I saw," said he. "And all night long, until it was nearly day, she was fluttering outside, like some terrible bat, trying to gain admittance. Now put together various things I have told you."

He began checking them off on his fingers.

"Number one," he said: "there was an outbreak of disease similar to that which this boy is suffering from at Peshawar, and her husband died of it. Number two: Mrs. Amworth protested against my moving the boy to my house. Number three: she, or the demon that inhabits her body, a creature powerful and deadly, tries to gain admittance. And add this, too: in mediæval times there was an epidemic of vampirism here at Maxley. The vampire, so the accounts run, was found to be Elizabeth Chaston... I see you remember Mrs. Amworth's maiden name. Finally, the boy is stronger this morning. He would certainly not have been alive if he had been visited again. And what do you make of it?"

There was a long silence, during which I found this incredible horror assuming the hues of reality.

"I have something to add," I said, "which may or may not bear on it. You say that the— the spectre went away shortly before dawn."

"Yes."

I told him of my dream, and he smiled grimly.

"Yes, you did well to awake," he said. "That warning came from your subconscious self, which never wholly slumbers, and cried out to you of deadly danger. For two reasons, then, you must help me: one to save others, the second to save yourself."

"What do you want me to do?" I asked.

"I want you first of all to help me in watching this boy, and ensuring that she does not come near him. Eventually I want you to help me in tracking the thing down, in exposing and destroying it. It is not human: it is an incarnate fiend. What steps we shall have to take I don't yet know."

It was now eleven of the forenoon, and presently I went across to his house for a twelve-hour vigil while he slept, to come on duty again that night, so that for the next twenty-four hours either Urcombe or myself was always in the room where the boy, now getting stronger every hour, was lying. The day following was Saturday and a morning of brilliant, pellucid weather, and already when I went across to his house to resume my duty the stream of

motors down to Brighton had begun. Simultaneously I saw Urcombe with a cheerful face, which boded good news of his patient, coming out of his house, and Mrs. Amworth, with a gesture of salutation to me and a basket in her hand, walking up the broad strip of grass which bordered the road. There we all three met. I noticed (and saw that Urcombe noticed it too) that one finger of her left hand was bandaged.

"Good morning to you both," said she. "And I hear your patient is doing well, Mr. Urcombe. I have come to bring him a bowl of jelly, and to sit with him for an hour. He and I are great friends. I am overjoyed at his recovery."

Urcombe paused a moment, as if making up his mind, and then shot out a pointing finger at her.

"I forbid that," he said. "You shall not sit with him or see him. And you know the reason as well as I do."

I have never seen so horrible a change pass over a human face as that which now blanched hers to the colour of a grey mist. She put up her hand as if to shield herself from that pointing finger, which drew the sign of the cross in the air, and shrank back cowering on to the road. There was a wild hoot from a horn, a grinding of brakes, a shout— too late— from a passing car, and one long scream suddenly cut short. Her body rebounded from the roadway after the first wheel had gone over it, and the second followed. It lay there, quivering and twitching, and was still.

She was buried three days afterwards in the cemetery outside Maxley, in accordance with the wishes she had told me that she had devised about her interment, and the shock which her sudden and awful death had caused to the little community began by degrees to pass off. To two people only, Urcombe and myself, the horror of it was mitigated from the first by the nature of the relief that her death brought; but, naturally enough, we kept our own counsel, and no hint of what greater horror had been thus averted was ever let slip. But, oddly enough, so it seemed to me, he was still not satisfied about something in connection with her, and would give no answer to my questions on the subject. Then as the days of a tranquil mellow September and the October that followed began to drop away like the leaves of the yellowing trees, his uneasiness relaxed. But before the entry of November the seeming tranquillity broke into hurricane.

I had been dining one night at the far end of the village, and about eleven o'clock was walking home again. The moon was of an unusual brilliance, rendering all that it shone on as distinct as in some etching. I had just come opposite the house which Mrs. Amworth had occupied, where there was a board up telling that it was to let, when I heard the click of her front gate, and next moment I saw, with a sudden chill and quaking of my very spirit, that she

stood there. Her profile, vividly illuminated, was turned to me, and I could not be mistaken in my identification of her. She appeared not to see me (indeed the shadow of the yew hedge in front of her garden enveloped me in its blackness) and she went swiftly across the road, and entered the gate of the house directly opposite. There I lost sight of her completely.

My breath was coming in short pants as if I had been running— and now indeed I ran, with fearful backward glances, along the hundred yards that separated me from my house and Urcombe's. It was to his that my flying steps took me, and next minute I was within.

"What have you come to tell me?" he asked. "Or shall I guess?"

"You can't guess," said I.

"No; it's no guess. She has come back and you have seen her. Tell me about it."

I gave him my story.

"That's Major Pearsall's house," he said. "Come back with me there at once."

"But what can we do?" I asked.

"I've no idea. That's what we have got to find out."

A minute later, we were opposite the house. When I had passed it before, it was all dark; now lights gleamed from a couple of windows upstairs. Even as we faced it, the front door opened, and next moment Major Pearsall emerged from the gate. He saw us and stopped.

"I'm on my way to Dr. Ross," he said quickly. "My wife has been taken suddenly ill. She had been in bed an hour when I came upstairs, and I found her white as a ghost and utterly exhausted. She had been to sleep, it seemed— but you will excuse me."

"One moment, Major," said Urcombe. "Was there any mark on her throat?"

"How did you guess that?" said he. "There was: one of those beastly gnats must have bitten her twice there. She was streaming with blood."

"And there's someone with her?" asked Urcombe.

"Yes, I roused her maid."

He went off, and Urcombe turned to me. "I know now what we have to do," he said. "Change your clothes, and I'll join you at your house."

"What is it?" I asked.

"I'll tell you on our way. We're going to the cemetery."

HE CARRIED a pick, a shovel, and a screwdriver when he rejoined me, and wore round his shoulders a long coil of rope. As we walked, he gave me the outlines of the ghastly hour that lay before us.

"What I have to tell you," he said, "will seem to you now too fantastic for credence, but before dawn we shall see whether it outstrips reality. By a most fortunate happening, you saw the spectre, the astral body, whatever you choose to call it, of Mrs. Amworth, going on its grisly business, and therefore, beyond doubt, the vampire spirit which abode in her during life animates her again in death. That is not exceptional— indeed, all these weeks since her death I have been expecting it. If I am right, we shall find her body undecayed and untouched by corruption."

"But she has been dead nearly two months," said I.

"If she had been dead two years it would still be so, if the vampire has possession of her. So remember: whatever you see done, it will be done not to her, who in the natural course would now be feeding the grasses above her grave, but to a spirit of untold evil and malignancy, which gives a phantom life to her body."

"But what shall I see done?" said I.

"I will tell you. We know that now, at this moment, the vampire clad in her mortal semblance is out; dining out. But it must get back before dawn, and it will pass into the material form that lies in her grave. We must wait for that, and then with your help I shall dig up her body. If I am right, you will look on her as she was in life, with the full vigour of the dreadful nutriment she has received pulsing in her veins. And then, when dawn has come, and the vampire cannot leave the lair of her body, I shall strike her with this"— and he pointed to his pick— "through the heart, and she, who comes to life again only with the animation the fiend gives her, she and her hellish partner will be dead indeed. Then we must bury her again, delivered at last."

We had come to the cemetery, and in the brightness of the moonshine there was no difficulty in identifying her grave. It lay some twenty yards from the small chapel, in the porch of which, obscured by shadow, we concealed ourselves. From there we had a clear and open sight of the grave, and now we must wait till its infernal visitor returned home. The night was warm and windless, yet even if a freezing wind had been raging I think I should have felt nothing of it, so intense was my preoccupation as to what the night and dawn would bring. There was a bell in the turret of the chapel, that struck the quarters of the hour, and it amazed me to find how swiftly the chimes succeeded one another.

The moon had long set, but a twilight of stars shone in a clear sky, when five o'clock of the morning sounded from the turret. A few minutes more passed, and then I felt Urcombe's hand softly nudging me; and looking out in the direction of his pointing finger, I saw that the form of a woman, tall and large in build, was approaching from the right. Noiselessly, with a motion more

of gliding and floating than walking, she moved across the cemetery to the grave which was the centre of our observation. She moved round it as if to be certain of its identity, and for a moment stood directly facing us. In the greyness to which now my eyes had grown accustomed, I could easily see her face, and recognise its features.

She drew her hand across her mouth as if wiping it, and broke into a chuckle of such laughter as made my hair stir on my head. Then she leaped on to the grave, holding her hands high above her head, and inch by inch disappeared into the earth. Urcombe's hand was laid on my arm, in an injunction to keep still, but now he removed it.

"Come," he said.

With pick and shovel and rope we went to the grave. The earth was light and sandy, and soon after six struck we had delved down to the coffin lid. With his pick he loosened the earth round it, and, adjusting the rope through the handles by which it had been lowered, we tried to raise it. This was a long and laborious business, and the light had begun to herald day in the east before we had it out, and lying by the side of the grave. With his screwdriver he loosed the fastenings of the lid, and slid it aside, and standing there we looked on the face of Mrs. Amworth. The eyes, once closed in death, were open, the cheeks were flushed with colour, the red, full-lipped mouth seemed to smile.

"One blow and it is all over," he said. "You need not look."

Even as he spoke he took up the pick again, and, laying the point of it on her left breast, measured his distance. And though I knew what was coming I could not look away....

He grasped the pick in both hands, raised it an inch or two for the taking of his aim, and then with full force brought it down on her breast. A fountain of blood, though she had been dead so long, spouted high in the air, falling with the thud of a heavy splash over the shroud, and simultaneously from those red lips came one long, appalling cry, swelling up like some hooting siren, and dying away again. With that, instantaneous as a lightning flash, came the touch of corruption on her face, the colour of it faded to ash, the plump cheeks fell in, the mouth dropped.

"Thank God, that's over," said he, and without pause slipped the coffin lid back into its place.

Day was coming fast now, and, working like men possessed, we lowered the coffin into its place again, and shovelled the earth over it.... The birds were busy with their earliest pipings as we went back to Maxley.

19: Soames v. Farshaw

Barry Pain

1864-1928

The Windsor Magazine June 1901

"Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes."
—I am afraid of the Danaans and those bearing gifts
[*Often rendered as "Beware of Greeks bearing gifts—T.W., Ed.*]

HOW Mr. S. Bywater Soames was a young man who wanted money without working for it, by the simple process of knowing something, may possibly be remembered. It may also be remembered how he triumphed over the Anglo-Foreign Hotels Syndicate, and milked them of the sum of six thousand pounds, in the matter of Soames's lease of his chambers in Doddington Street.

About a year after that event Soames was lunching by himself at the Continental, when a tall old gentleman, of somewhat military appearance, touched him on the shoulder.

"Mr. Soames, I think. I wonder if you remember me."

"Certainly. Mr. Farshaw, of the Anglo-Foreign Hotels Syndicate. Won't you sit down?"

"Thanks. It will be far pleasanter than lunching alone. We were opponents once, but I'm glad to see that you bear no malice. After all, why should you? You got six thousand for what was not worth six hundred in the open market."

"But I was not dealing in the open market. So far as I remember, the offer you made to me was twenty-five pounds."

"True. Twenty-five and a few little extras. You looked so young. You still do; happy man! Of course, in business one has to try to buy as cheaply as possible. Indeed, as a director, acting on behalf of others, it was my duty to do so. I think we may call it quits there. I'm afraid Chive was rude to you, but I was not responsible for that drunken brute; we threw him out soon afterwards. Still, I'm sorry."

"That's all right," said Soames languidly. "Syndicate doing pretty well?"

"Not more than fairly well, I'm afraid. But I have nothing to do with it now. It was splendid business once, but there's a lot of competition nowadays; any new idea's copied at once. When you've had the cream you come down to the milk. I thought it best to leave before we were right on to it. I sold out. I thought I saw better ways of using my little savings. Then, again, in business you must not be too particular what company you keep; but Chive was a bit too strong for my taste, and the man who followed him was not much better. Then there was old Mandelbaum— remember him?"

"I shall never forget him."

"Oh, he was typical; he was chronic; he was too hot! I'd had as much as I could stand. And what has been your latest coup Mr. Soames, if one may ask?"

"I've done nothing. I've been resting. I require a good deal of rest; I'm easily tired. For the last few months I've been abroad. I came back to attend a sale of Stuart relics. But I think, perhaps, I ought to be making some more money now. Perhaps you have some opportunities to offer me?" he said, with a smile.

"Well," said Mr. Farshaw, "after I'd left the Syndicate I had a few deals in house property. I made some successes, and I made some disappointments. There wasn't much in it, anyway. Then I went into the jungle— West Africans, you know. That's been much better, and we're not at the end of it yet. There are opportunities for a man with a little capital, if you like."

"Ah!" said Soames, "I don't know anything about mines and that sort of thing."

"Let me tell you, then. Let me just give you a few instances."

Mr. Farshaw began on his instances. He reeled off big figures with conviction, and pronounced many names with ease and familiarity that would have baffled Soames completely. He exhibited the pitfalls of the market and gave the simplest possible rules for avoiding them. He became descriptive. After hearing him one might have thought it idle and slovenly to take more than three weeks over making a large fortune. His candid blue eyes gleamed as he attempted to paint some— only some— of the miraculous possibilities that were awaiting the investor. And he was not ungenerous, for in some of the things that held out the brightest hopes Mr. Farshaw was quite prepared to sell his own personal holding— to give Soames a start.

When he had quite finished, Soames, who had appeared interested, said, with a sigh, that he did not go in for that kind of thing. He might, perhaps, see if there were anything that would suit him in the way of house property.

Mr. Farshaw did not look perfectly satisfied, but he remained as obliging as ever. "Well," he said, "since you ask me for opportunities, I can tell you of something in that direction, too. It doesn't represent the big thing that can be done by judicious investment in West Africans. It's simply a good and certain profit for a man who can afford to put a little capital by for a few years. It's on a very small scale, but, so far as it goes, it's very particularly all right. I found it myself and fully intended to tackle it myself. But at that time I was already nibbling at the West African business, and I'm not a rich man, and cannot afford to lock up any capital. It's simply a question of buying a narrow, triangular strip of road frontage to sell to the owner of a larger property behind it."

"Why can't the present owner of the larger property buy the strip for himself?"

"He can, but he won't. He doesn't care about making money. He's a scholar and a collector, and so on. He's also a recluse, and it wouldn't be far wrong to say that he's a little cracked, as well. But he's an old man and a bit of an invalid. He can't last long. And the next owner, whoever he may be, will want that long strip of road frontage. You can buy it now for £750, and you will be able to sell it then for £1,500. It stands to reason. Why—"

"Pardon me," said Soames. "You don't own any of this property, or any in the neighbourhood?"

"Not one solitary inch."

"Why do you give me this chance? Why do you show such remarkable generosity to me, of all people?"

Mr. Farshaw watched Soames keenly and for one moment seemed to be reflecting on his answer. He was always more ready for a subtle than a simple question. "At present," he said, "I have given you nothing. You would not know where to go to find this property. You have no names or addresses. I could not afford to give, and I am sure you would not care to take a present from me so valuable as this information is. I will sell you it on fair business terms."

"I see. What are they?"

"We adjourn, say, to the smoking-room. I give you all the necessary details and answer your questions as far as I can. You go down to the place and look into it for yourself. If you buy the strip, you call on me on the day of the purchase and hand me three twenty-fives— that is, ten per cent. on the price you pay— as my commission. If you decide it is not good enough, you pay me nothing, but you agree to keep the information to yourself, so that I may have a chance of selling it elsewhere."

"Very well," said Soames. "I agree to that. You shall put it in writing and I will sign."

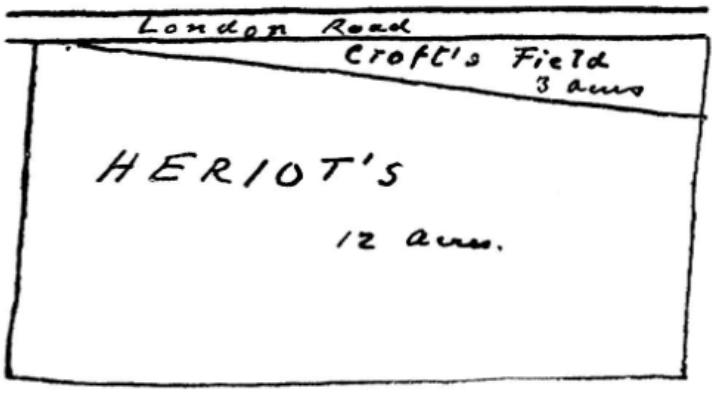
"It would perhaps be more regular," said Mr. Farshaw, as he rose from the table. In the smoking-room, Soames reclined in the most comfortable chair he could find, his habitual air of weariness being, if anything, more marked than usual. Mr. Farshaw wrote a few lines on a sheet of notepaper, drew a rough plan beneath them, and handed it to Soames.

"That'll do, I should think," said Mr. Farshaw.

"Thanks," said Soames, as he examined the paper. On it was written—

"In the event of my purchasing any part of the property referred to in the plan below, and situated in the parish of Salsay Bois, Bucks, I agree to pay to James Edward Farshaw the sum of seventy-five pounds in cash, in consideration of information supplied by him. And in the event of my not purchasing, I agree to make no further use of that information whatever."

To that was appended this rough plan:—



And underneath was a space for the signature.

"It wouldn't satisfy the lawyers," said Mr. Farshaw; "at least, I suppose not. I'm no lawyer myself, but the meaning is perfectly clear, and it is a memorandum that would be binding on gentlemen."

"Certainly," said Soames, in an absent-minded way, as he examined the plan carelessly. "I think I see," he went on. "The part marked 'Croft's field' is the part I have got to buy, and it is to the future owner of Heriot's that I have got to sell. By the way, what is the name of the present owner?"

"His name's Gilfrew."

"And he won't buy Croft's field. Yet he must see that it would add immensely to the value of his property."

"He sees that all right; but the lunatic doesn't care. 'Why should I buy it?' he said to me. 'I've been here twenty years without having that field, and I've never felt the want of it. I bought this place to live in, and not as a speculation, and I hate alterations.' And you can't shake him."

"But this James Gilfrew—"

"How do you know his name's James?"

"I happen to have a book or two that he wrote. I had heard that he lived as a recluse in the country. It must be the same man. If he won't buy Croft's field, could he be induced to sell Heriot's?"

"No, he won't do anything— not one single blessed thing. I tried that, too. There's a very good demand for small residences there just now, and there's next to no land to be had. If he would have sold Heriot's, you may be quite sure that I should have bought it. As it was, I was on the verge of buying Croft's field and waiting for my profit; but— well, I've explained all that."

"Why doesn't Croft keep his land himself, and sell it to the next owner of Heriot's?"

"Because Croft, like a good many farmers nowadays, is in want of ready money. He has an idea that the land will be worth something one of these days, and thinks he is asking a pretty stiff price for it. But he has not quite

realised that it puts from fifty to a hundred pounds an acre on to the value of the twelve acres behind it."

"When you gave up the idea of buying, why didn't Croft go about and find another purchaser?"

"Croft's not the kind of man that goes about and finds things. Besides, he is by no means sure that I have given the thing up. He has written to me twice about it within the last fortnight, and I've put him off."

Soames looked at the plan again. "You don't mind me asking all these questions?" he said.

"On the contrary, I particularly want you to ask them. If you buy this land, you must do it on your own responsibility and judgement. I give you the information, but it must be understood that I do not advise. Now, what else can I tell you?"

"You have not marked the position of the house at Heriot's."

"No, I've not put in any details. The position is very curious, and much what one might have expected from that idiot Gilfrew. He has put the house as far away as possible from the road. Doesn't like to hear or see his own species, I suppose. You go through three fields before you get to the gardens, and his house is at the end of the gardens, with its back to the road."

"And the land round Heriot's?"

"All farmland. Some of it's Croft's; some of it's Belman's; and some belongs to another chap whose name I've forgotten. You'll find out all about that easily enough when you go down there."

"Thanks," said Soames. "I think that's all. I'll just sign that document for you." He rose and went in his turn to the writing-table. Then he gave the signed paper to Mr. Farshaw and sank back in his chair with the air of one who has completed a hard day's work. Shortly afterwards Mr. Farshaw left to keep an appointment in the City. For a time Soames still remained in his place. His eyes were closed, and it might have been thought that he was asleep. But he was not; he was merely trying, unsuccessfully, to think out a puzzle.

A trap was being laid for him— of that he had never since the beginning of his conversation with Farshaw had the slightest doubt. He was perfectly well aware that Farshaw hated him and wanted to get even with him. He knew it as well as if Farshaw himself had told him so. But he did not quite see what Mr. Farshaw was to make out of it. He was convinced that the £75 commission had simply been an afterthought to provide a reason for making the offer. And he did not see in the least where the trap lay. It was clearly not in the figures, since these could so easily be checked. Indeed, all Farshaw's statements could easily be checked, and he had nothing to gain by lying in that way. The trap, if

there were a trap, would consist, not in what Farshaw had said, but in what he had left out. And that was as far as Soames could get for the present.

On the following morning he called on Croft's agents. They talked like agents and were of no sort of use to Soames. Then he caught a train to the nearest station to Salsay Bois, and succeeded in interviewing Croft. He was a somnolent and unsatisfactory old farmer. Croft was vague on most points. He said that there had been a Mr. Farshaw, but he didn't seem to be going on with it. He didn't answer letters, this Farshaw. The field was a splendid investment, and Croft declared that it was only a series of bad years that forced him to part with it. Soames had much the same feeling that he had had with Farshaw, the feeling that something was being kept back. Soames succeeded in obtaining an option to purchase for a fortnight. Croft was very reluctant here. At last he said, "Well, if at the end of the time you haven't bought, I shall expect something." That was arranged, and so far Soames was content; but he had not yet found out where the trap lay.

He found it out next morning when he called on Mr. James Gilfrew, armed with a letter of introduction and three important manuscripts relating to Charles I., of which one was spurious. The manuscripts alone would have constituted sufficient introduction, but Soames liked to do things in their proper order. He remained to luncheon with the eccentric old recluse; by four o'clock in the afternoon, when he left, he had a very fair idea of the trap, and of how to put Mr. James Farshaw into it. Soames, as he travelled back to town, looked the very picture of a man who was at peace with the world.

For a man who tired easily Soames got a good deal done in the course of the next day. He called on Croft's agents in London and arranged to purchase Croft's field for considerably less than the sum that had originally been asked. He could and did produce a fair reason why the reduction should be made. They said dejectedly that they would write to their client, and had no doubt that he would be ready under the circumstances to meet Mr. Soames's views. Then he rushed off to Salsay Bois and had an interview with a much more prosperous farmer, of the name of Belman, who owned the land to the south of Heriot's. When that was over he returned to London in time to see two solicitors. The next day he rested, and the day following, being Sunday, he rested some more. And on Monday he paid another visit to Mr. Gilfrew, with a document or two in his pocket.

When he was walking back to the station he met something which was not exactly a common object of the country roadside, but nevertheless occasioned him no surprise. It was Mr. Farshaw, suitably dressed in country clothes and walking fast. He saluted Soames with his usual genial smile.

"Come down to look at the place? That's right. I mustn't stop. I'm down here on business."

"I'm afraid," said Soames wearily, "that you're a little too late for it."

Farshaw's smile vanished. He looked at Soames with suspicion. "How do you know? What do you mean?"

"If you were not going to Heriot's, I don't mean anything. If you were, I give you my word that you will save yourself time and trouble by walking back to the station with me. You are too late to do anything. Even if Gilfrew would see you, which I very much doubt, Heriot's is no longer at his disposal. I'm perfectly willing to tell you the whole story. It would interest me. But I shall expect you to be as candid with me as I am going to be with you."

"I was half afraid of this," said Farshaw. "Very well. Go on. Let's have it."

"When you gave me that opportunity to invest some money profitably in property here, you forgot one point. I refer to the new road to be made through Belman's land, skirting the south side of Heriot's."

"Croft never told you that. He only suspected it himself."

"Croft was a monument of discretion, and told me nothing. The new road will be a short cut, the other road makes a big loop just there; it will also be a better road, because the old one is flooded regularly whenever there is a heavy rain. Consequently, when Heriot's gets a frontage all along the south side, the frontage on the north, where Croft's field is, must necessarily be of comparatively no importance. In fact, the bottom drops out of the investment that you suggested to me. If I had given £750 for Croft's field, I should never have seen my money back again. I think you knew all that, and that you tried to put me in the cart, and I think I know why. And I don't think you were influenced by the commission that you were to make."

"That's all right," said Farshaw genially, and not in the least perturbed. "The game's up, and I may as well put my cards on the table. You knocked the syndicate of which I was a director for six thousand pounds. It is true that the loss fell on the syndicate, and not on me personally. It is also true that if my advice had been taken you would have got only half that sum. But the fact remained— I am fairly old, and I have always thought that I knew my way about, and I, in company with two other men of experience, had been knocked out of time by a youngster. I did not like it. I wanted to get more or less even with you. You are quite right in supposing that I was not playing for the commission. I had to make my offer to you seem more plausible, and that's why I spoke of the commission. All I really wanted was to put you in the cart, as you say. I knew Croft and Croft's agents would tell you nothing. I doubt if they knew that the road would be made so soon; it's been talked of for a long time. I knew that Gilfrew had said to me some time before that the next person who

came and bothered him about the property would be turned out at once, and I think he meant it; also I am pretty sure he did not know about the new road. Belman did, because it practically rested with him whether the road would be made or not. But why should you think of going to him? For that matter, why should you suspect that a new road was likely to be made at all?"

"It's all very simple. I wasn't satisfied with Croft. Next day I called on Gilfrew with an excuse connected with the work in which he is interested. I got on very well with him. Shortly before I left, I was admiring his place, and he began at once to tell his sorrows. He had heard the news from Belman, and he was in despair about it. 'Of course,' he said, 'I can't stop here now. Their road will run within thirty yards of my windows. And it was only the other day that I missed a chance to sell!' That was a clear invitation to me. I took advantage of it. I offered to buy if the new road were made. He accepted. I saw Belman about the road next day, and now all is settled."

"Got Croft's field, too?"

"Got the whole block right through from road to road. Of course, I didn't pay Croft anything like the price he asked when he thought I didn't know anything about the new road."

"It's my own fault," said Farshaw. "I ought to have seen it sooner. It flashed across my mind this morning that the new road would make a great change in that lunatic Gilfrew's ideas, and that I might have another chance to buy. Oh, I ought to have seen it before! But I was thinking so much about the new road, and the chance of getting you over Croft's field, that I never saw my own line to take. Of course, as soon as I did think of it I started off at once; and now it's too late, and I've been beaten once again."

They had reached the railway-station.

"Look here," Farshaw continued. "If you like, I will give you the sum you have paid for Heriot's and Croft's field, and another thousand pounds into the bargain."

"It sounds a good offer," said Soames, "but I've got fifteen acres very cheap, and I think I can make more by cutting it up. In fact, I'm seeing some building people about it when I get back. They may be willing to work with me or to buy from me. By the way, I have your little commission here."

"Oh, thanks! Perhaps you wouldn't mind sending it to the office?"

"Certainly. Here's our train. Going smoking?"

"Thanks," said Farshaw grimly. "I think I'll travel in a compartment by myself. We go through a long tunnel, and I've got a very good knife in my pocket. I think I might be tempted."

20: Caught at the Wicket

Horace Bleackley

1868-1931

The Windsor Magazine, June 1901

"NOW, genteelmen, I vill give you one toast," cried De Musset, balancing himself on the edge of the billiard table, and flourishing his glass above his closely cropped hair. "Ze health of ze charming Mees Peggy!"

"I'm with you, friend," said Hiram P. Block, tossing off the contents of his tumbler. "The gal's a daisy."

Being hopelessly in love myself with my cousin Peggy, this public exhibition of sentiment did not please me, and I began to wonder more than ever why my uncle Owen had invited such founders as De Musset and Block to stay with him. No doubt to an unprejudiced person the two individuals would have appeared respectable types of the French and American citizen; but my condition of mind was hypercritical. It was past midnight; we were smoking in the bilUard-room; the family— namely, my uncle Owen and pretty cousin Peggy— had retired; and I was acting as deputy host.

"You two men seem fairly smitten," drawled Montford, caressing his slender moustache with a satirical smile on his sallow face. " If there is to be *un affaire d'honneur* , De Musset, myself and Cousin Jack here will be delighted to assist."

This remark, like most things spoken by Montford, seemed to me in questionable taste; but I was a jealous young cub, and he appeared a dangerous rival.

"Ah— no, ve vill not fight; your England ees no place for *chevalerie*— it ees all shop! Besides, *avec des fleurets*, I am— vat you call it?— champe-on! *Mon ami* Block, he vill have no chance."

"I guess, boy, your waistcoat covers twice as much ground as mine. Hev you seen me shoot ever? I ain't likely to miss a barrel at twenty paces— blindfold, you bet. You'd leak a bit, I reckon, if you stood up against me."

The artful Montford glanced from the tall Yankee to the plump little Frenchman with a patronising smile.

"Your talents are remarkable, no doubt," he observed. "Here, unfortunately, they are quite useless. The most necessary accomplishment in this house, as you know, is cricket. Isn't it, Jack?" and he turned to me with a wicked twinkle in his eye.

Montford was perfectly correct. My uncle, Owen Trelawney, though a splendid old fellow in other respects, was as mad as a hatter on one subject. His whole soul was wrapped up in cricket, and dear little Peggy, owing to her unfortunate bringing up, shared his enthusiasm. It was a condition of mind with which I had then no sympathy. Other species of mania I could understand and condone. There are scores of men who can think, talk, and dream of nothing but

horse-racing; others are equally mad in respect to shooting, yachting, or hunting. These people, it seemed to me, get some fun for their money, and in comparison cricket was commonplace and cheap.

It was in consequence of his ability as a cricketer that Montford had been chosen by my uncle as his steward, which was an additional reason why I should hate the game.

"You must understand, my friends," continued Montford, smiling upon our foreign guests, "that our host, Mr. Trelawney, requires neither blue blood to ennoble his race nor money to enrich it. The son-in-law that would most please him— providing, of course, that he was a gentleman— would be the excellent cricketer. I'm right. Jack, am I not?"

"Ah, you English are all mad. Ze cricket, vat ees it?" cried De Musset, executing some graceful *leger de main* with the billiard balls. "It ees no-zing— it ees *très facile* for ze man vith— vat you call it?— vith ze eye. I have ze eye! Ze eye of billiards, and ze eye of cricket— him ees all ze same! I practise, I improve— I heet, I slog! You have seen me. Monsieur Jack, ees it not so?"

"You're coming on. You'd make the fortune of any circus," I retorted rudely, but I had been a spectator while the creature went through its exhibitions at the nets during the past week; and the fact that the active Frenchman had mastered the elements of batting as quickly as a clever monkey learns a new trick had much annoyed me.

"Cricket is characteristic of the English race," said Hiram Block, in accents not unlike an untuned banjo. " It's slow— and it's heavy. There's little variety, and no vi-vacity about it. I reckon the fellows that play it are only about half awake. There's only one game in creation, sir, and that's baseball. Its su-periority to your sport is evident. Here I come, a stranger to your game, and none of you can take my pitches."

Of course, it was the hope of pleasing pretty Peggy and her father that had caused the two foreigners to take such an interest in cricket.

"Nonsense, Block! you can bowl duffers like De Musset and poor old Jack," retorted Montford contemptuously, in answer to the American's boast, "but your toffee would be no good against a decent batsman."

"Anyway, friend, I hit your stick this afternoon," twanged Block, crossing his legs upon a table and blowing a disdainful cloud of smoke. "I come on each day I try my hand at throwing. None of you'll be able to touch me in a bit."

THE FOLLOWING MORNING at half-past nine we had all assembled on the charming cricket-ground in front of the Castle, upon which my uncle Owen lavished his thousands, and practice at the nets was in full progress. The mellow tints of autumn weere glowing in copse and covert, and most rational men had laid aside bat and ball to devote their attention to grouse and partridge. Not so my uncle Trelawney, He still insisted upon his cricket, and though teams were

more difficult to raise, since so many men were engaged on the moors or amidst the turnips, the inevitable programme of two matches a week was strictly observed. The excitable little man was bustling about in a wide-brimmed felt hat and a sash and blazer which Joseph's brethren might have envied.

"Our two colts shape well, eh, Jack?" he exclaimed, drawing his arm through mine and leading me to the back of the nets. "Just watch Block's delivery. By Jove! I swear that ball curved six inches in the air! I wouldn't have believed that a man could pick up the trick in a week."

"But he's a first-class baseball player in his own country," I protested, feeling a twinge of jealousy.

"Yes, of course, but he's quite new to our game," said Mr. Trelawney. "Jove! if he'll stick to it, he'll prove a heaven-born bowler. Great Heavens! he's pilled Stoggins! That ball must have had some top work on it— it didn't rise three inches."

"Pitched in that there 'ole, sir," explained the burly professional whose stumps had just been scattered by Hiram T. Block, straddling forward and beating a spot upon the turf with his bat very viciously. "These furrin gents slur about all hover the wicket, sir. They will do it! "

"Oh, papa, come and look! " cried a sweet voice from the back of the next net. "Monsieur de Musset has got Ranji's leg glide."

Peggy was bending forward in great excitement, leaning upon her parasol, the point of which rested between her tiny white shoes. The snowy flannel skirt draped itself in natural folds around her graceful figure. A wonderful Leghorn hat with flowing plumes and blue ribbons was perched upon her fair hair, and its broad brim cast delightful shadows over her glowing cheeks. Her blue eyes, with long, dark lashes, flashed with enthusiasm as they were raised for a moment as we approached.

"The fellow's a perfect acrobat," exclaimed Uncle Owen, gazing with astonishment upon the fat little Frenchman. De Musset, who was arrayed in tight pique trousers, patent leather boots, pink shirt, and Tyrolese hat, was performing at the wickets, and Montford was bowling to him. Skipping nimbly forward with his bat as a pivot, as if he were practising pole-jumping, he had just snicked a fast length ball to leg from off his middle stump.

"Ha, ha, Mees Peggy! I have found him— ze genteel tap!" cried the Frenchman, waving his bat in the air. "I heet— I slog!"

"It looks odd without its stick, doesn't it? " I remarked unkindly, jerking my thumb in M. de Musset's direction.

"Poor man! he does his best," replied Peggy, who had always a kind word for everyone. "I wish you would show as much interest in the game, Jack. I think you might, as you know how fond I am of it."

"Jack, you're the disappointment of my life, and you glory in the fact," said my uncle severely, commencing his oft-repeated lecture. "You got your Trials' cap and

you were in the football fifteen for three years. Why didn't you get your cricket Blue? Through sheer idleness and pure cussedness, sir, and because you thought it would annoy me! "

And having once more unburdened his feelings at my expense, the old fellow stalked away indignantly.

It was a most unjust accusation, for though I disliked the game, no man could have striven harder to become a cricketer than I had done in order to please my uncle (and Peggy too, of course); but Nature, and Fate also, perhaps, had been against me.

"You might try to play sometimes. Jack. You know how difficult it is for papa to raise his teams at this time of the year," said Peggy, with a glance of gentle reproach. "It would please him so much."

"My dear little girl, I am playing to-day! The Roxborough Masters are short, and your father has given me to them as a substitute."

Peggy burst into ripples of laughter.

"How generous of papa!" said she, with a mischievous smile. "You've scarcely practised for years."

"Oh, haven't I? Just come a stroll round the ground, and I'll tell you a secret."

Peggy's pretty face glowed with interest and she followed me obediently. The Satanic Montford had been watching us with his usual cynical smile; but I noticed a slight frown steal across his brow as we walked off together, and his next ball to the excitable De Musset seemed rather a vicious one.

Peggy and I sauntered into the old-world garden and strolled along the shady paths, with their tall box hedges, where the bright September sunlight was tempered by the ample foliage on all sides. Since my last visit to Trelawney Castle I fancied that there was a change in the bright little Peggy, for brief moments of gloom seemed to come upon her such as I had never detected before, and I determined to discover the reason.

"Well, Jack, what is this secret of yours?" she demanded, when there was no longer a chance of our conversation being overheard.

"I am about to astonish Uncle Owen!" I cried dramatically. "I have become a really good cricketer! "

"Nonsense, Jack; I saw you bat at the nets yesterday. You've no more idea of it than a schoolgirl."

"You're right, my dear; I am no batsman."

"Well, you can't bowl a bit, so what good are you, you silly old thing?"

"I am no bowler. But all the same, Peggy, I have been coached for some weeks by one of the most famous Surrey pros., and he tells me, and I am vain enough to believe him, that if I persevere, any county will be glad of my services."

"Jack, you're too stupid for anything. I've no patience "

"Wait and see, dear. I've a surprise in store for you. Now, why do you think I've wasted all this time— I mean, why have I devoted so much attention to cricket— since I last saw you?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. As people get older they grow wiser, I suppose."

"Ah! Well, let me put a question to you. Let us presume that a man aspired to become your father's son-in-law—"

Peggy blushed and started.

"If this man had no cricket in his soul— if he were a rank duffer, in fact— don't you think he would encounter much opposition from my uncle Owen? "

Peggy's face drooped towards her bosom, and she did not answer.

"I think we may assume that, however rich, well born, or eligible the aspirant might be, that Uncle Owen would not regard him with perfect approval if he were a dunce at cricket."

This was perhaps a slight exaggeration, but Peggy did not contradict me. My selfpossession, a little too apparent, maybe, astonished me, for I had expected to be very nervous. It was a week since my arrival at Trelawney Castle, after an absence of three months; and finding that two more rivals had appeared, in the persons of Hiram P. Block and De Musset, and that the detestable Montford was more formidable than ever, I determined to learn my fate without delay.

"At last, my dear Peggy, I am confident that my ability as a cricketer will satisfy Uncle Owen," I continued, bending over her. "It was to please him that I persevered."

Then, in simple words, I told her how I loved her. To my surprise she burst into tears and continued to sob as if her poor little heart would break. Hard by there was a rustic summer-house, so I led her to a seat within and tried to console her.

"Peggy, darling, what is the matter? Can't you love me?" I cried tremulously.

She raised her rosy, tear-stained face to mine in great distress.

"Oh, yes, Jack, I do love you!" she sobbed. "But I have been so foolish, and I am so miserable. You won't be angry with me, will you?"

"Angry, my pet? Of course not. Tell me what makes you so unhappy."

"It's about— Mr. Montford—"

"I guessed as much. I'll wring the scoundrel's neck! "

"I'm much more to blame than he is. I've given him the Trelawney ring!"

"What! the family opal? Then you're— you're engaged to him! "

I rose to my feet with a stamp of anger, and poor Peggy commenced to sob once more. The ring had been an heirloom in the family for several generations, and it had been the custom for the eldest son of the house to present it to his *fiancée* upon their betrothal. As Peggy was the only child, the opal was in her gift.

"Oh, Jack, I must have been mad. But you were always so merry and callous; you never showed your love, and I thought you didn't care for me. Mr. Montford was so nice, and seemed so fond of me, that I really thought I liked him. He pressed me so hard that at last I promised to be engaged to him."

"And I suppose he asked you for the ring? "

"Not exactly; but he hinted that it was the usual family custom—"

"Have you written him any letter?"

"Oh, no; as he lives at the cottage there was no need."

"Of course, it's plain he wanted the ring in evidence of your engagement."

"Oh, please don't talk about that. I soon found out I didn't like him one bit. I told him so last week; and now he refuses to release me."

And she nestled in my arms and burst into another flood of tears.

"As he is a good cricketer, I suppose my uncle will approve of him."

"Don't be so silly. Jack. Poor papa is not as foolish as you try to make out. He wouldn't be so cruel as to force upon me a man I disliked. It's the horrid scandal I'm thinking about, for Mr. Montford threatens that he will tell everything unless I go with him to papa and announce our engagement."

There was a step upon the gravel-path, a shadow crossed the door of the summerhouse, and the hateful Montford himself stood before us. Peggy started from my arms and I rose to confront the intruder.

"I am interrupting an interesting *tête-à-tête*, I fear," Montford began, trying to speak calmly. His face was very pale and there was a look of jealous fury in his eyes.

"There is wisdom in the old proverb, for we were just talking about you," I retorted, declaring war at once. "Moreover, I am glad you have come, as I require an explanation."

"And so do I," he answered, keeping his temper most admirably. "In the first place, let me inform you that Miss Trelawney and I are engaged."

"And, on behalf of Miss Trelawney, I wish to tell you that this engagement must end."

"If the lady wishes it, she must have changed indeed," he answered with a sneer. "But I cannot beheve that this is the case, although I ato sure you have been trying your best to turn her against me."

"Oh, Mr. Montford, you know what I have told you is true," said poor Peggy, in piteous tones.

"Mr. Trelawney, your employer, will hardly approve of your conduct when he knows that you have been trying to force his daughter to continue an engagement which is distasteful to her."

"A generous taunt, indeed," Montford exclaimed, with a fine show of dignity. "A veiled threat that I may lose my employment! Fortunately, I have

just secured an appointment under my cousin. Lord Esmond, and I shall leave here very soon. But let us come to an understanding. Miss Trelawney." He turned to Peggy with a melodramatic bow. "Am I to believe that you give me my dismissal? "

"I think you've had your answer already," I replied savagely.

"Very well. Then as an honourable man I shall be obliged to fully explain my conduct to Mr. Trelawney," he answered, with a sardonic smile. " Secondly, in justice to myself, in order to prove that the lady really did return my affection, I shall wear publicly the ring she gave me, for a week, before I hand it back again to her."

And holding out his hand he displayed the opal with its circlet of diamonds sparkling upon his finger. Here was my chance to save Peggy from further humiliation. I was a much bigger man than he, and my blood was up.

"You abominable rascal! " I cried, fixing one hand upon his collar, and gripping his wrist with the other. "I'll have that ring before I let you go, if I have to choke you for it."

He kicked and swore, but I soon laid him on the ground, while Peggy kept imploring me to release him. In another instant I should have secured the coveted ring, when we heard voices coming in the direction of the summer-house.

"Oh, here is papa, with Mr. Block and Monsieur de Musset! " exclaimed Peggy, in great distress. "Oh, Jack, do let him go."

Almost involuntarily my fingers unclasped themselves, and Montford staggered to his feet just as the new-comers turned the corner of the tall hedge and came down the path towards us.

"Gentlemen, I assure you both," Mr. Trelawney was saying, "that you have natural genius for the game. Considering neither of you played cricket till a week ago, your present form is marvellous."

"Wal, I bet you'll see me whet up in a bit when I feel my feet," said Block.

"*Mais oui*, you shall see. I will be a champe-on— I will perform before ze lords in your Regent's Park!" cried De Musset.

Montford stepped forward hurriedly to join the three gentlemen, and Peggy and I followed him. For the present all chance of recovering the ring was at an end.

"I will take care that he gives it up, my pet, you'll see," I whispered encouragingly.

"Oh, he'll show it to everyone, out of spite, and papa will be so angry. It will make such a scandal."

"Come along, my friends," exclaimed Mr. Trelawney; "we've just time for a glass of ale and some bread and cheese before those Roxborough fellows arrive. Match begins at eleven prompt."

"I teekle ze old man. He lov me like a son," De Musset whispered to me in confidence. "Ze fair Mees Peggy she also admire my play. I— vat you call it?— I— come on! "

THE ROXBOROUGH Masters, good cricketers all, were an extremely nice set of men, and were captained by my former college friend, George Slade, the old Oxford wicket-keeper, who was extremely amused when he was told that I was to play for his team.

"George, old man, I want you to do me a favour," I said to him, as he was going to the nets for a few before the match commenced. "Let me keep sticks for you."

"That's a new line for you, eh. Jack?" he answered, with a laugh. "But you're just the build for the job. I'll hand over the gloves with pleasure if you think you can stop 'em! "

In a few words I explained my qualifications, and Slade assured me that I was a good Samaritan, that his hands were all knocked to pieces, and that he would be delighted to have a rest. Still, I believe that it was curiosity more than anything else that induced him to grant my request.

The Trelawney eleven won the toss. Uncle Owen stared in bewilderment when he saw me step from the pavilion, be-gloved and padded for my new duties.

"Jack, my lad, it's not safe— you'll get killed! " he cried sarcastically. "You may scale as heavy as Mordecai, but—" A Babel of tongues that suddenly arose behind his back interrupted his flow of wit.

"My good fellows, I really cannot put you in first," Montford was declaring very emphatically. "We can't afford to throw away—"

"In my country, I guess we give strangers the chance of a show, anyhow," Hiram P. Block snarled angrily.

"It ees imposs-eeble for me to vait," screamed De Musset, with a burst of hysteria. "I am inspire. I lose my eye eef I vait. I vill go to ze wicket. I heet— I slog. Monsieur Trelawney, I eemplore you to command this young man that I shall go to ze sticks! "

Messrs. Block and De Musset gained their point, for while Slade was disposing his fielders they came marching out together in the company of the umpires, who delivered them safely into our hands. Unfortunately they did not entertain us for long. Block was bowled by the first delivery of the match, and this having been magnanimously regarded as "a trial," he was promptly bowled

again by the next; while De Musset, stepping across his wickets to perform his favourite stroke, received the ball upon the buckle of his leather belt, and had to be carried back to the pavilion, where he decided to remain. When Montford had taken his place, the fielders had a hard time, for he was an excellent bat, and in company with Stoggins punished the bowling severely. He seemed none the worse for the shaking I had given him, but the glances with which he favoured me occasionally were murderous.

"Do you intend to keep the ring?" I demanded, *sotto voce*,^ seizing the opportunity between the overs when no one was very near us.

"Certainly, until I have displayed it in public."

"Why not show it now, so that I shall have a chance of thrashing you immediately afterwards? "

"I bide my time."

"Look here, Montford, I'll have that ring, if I have to search you publicly to find it."

"Will you be such a fool as to give Miss Peggy away before all the crowd?"

"Yes, I'll run the risk," I retorted, my passion rising.

"I fancied you might," he muttered, with a look of triumph. "But you'll gain nothing. The ring is safely hidden until I require it."

My position was one of great perplexity, and I could not make up my mind what course to adopt. The next over I had the satisfaction of securing Montford's dismissal by a catch rather wide on the leg side, which was greeted by a shout of applause from my uncle Owen in the pavilion.

A wicket-keeper, like a poet, must be born to the trade, and my capabilities had hitherto remained unsuspected, merely because neither myself nor anybody else had thought of putting them to the test. A hint given half in jest by a professional coach resulted in the discovery of my hidden talents, and constant practice had made me almost an adept.

"Eh, Mister Jack, your stumping fair caps everything," remarked the burly Stoggins, who had come in after the fall of the first wicket, with a genial grin. " That there catch o' yours would have made old Sherwin feel too big for his britches. It's a proud surprise, sir, to see you snap 'em up the way you do."

"I wish you'd touch one, Billy, to keep my hand in," I replied.

"Lor' bless you, no, sir," answered the big professional. "I've got to make fifty-sevin to-day, sir; this being the last match, that'll leave me top of the averages, and I shall win the Squire's fifty-quid prize."

As Stoggins must have made over forty already, and was "going strong," it seemed to me highly probable that he would gain the reward which was bestowed annually by my munificent uncle. But presently a rising ball struck

him sharply on the knuckles. His bat dropped to the ground, he flung off his glove and danced frantically about, wringing his hand. I hastened to him.

"Not cut the skin, I hope?"

"No, sir; I'll be all right in a minute."

He stuck out his injured hand, regarding it dubiously, and to my amazement I beheld upon his little finger the missing Trelawney opal.

"Where did you get that ring, Stoggins?" I demanded sternly.

"Mr. Montford give it to me to keep for him, sir," the wounded professional replied innocently.

"That ring belongs to me, not to Mr. Montford," I said, deeply excited by the sudden discovery. "You must give it to me."

"Lor', sir, I daren't. Mr. Montford told me particular I wasn't to even show it to no one. I was to have kept it in its case till he axed me for it; but it were too big a lump in my britches pocket, so I left the case in my waistcoat and put the ring on my finger under my glove, for fear of leaving it."

"Come, hand it over to me at once."

"It ain't for the likes o' me to say what's the rights o' the case between two gentlemen," replied the professional, looking very perplexed. "That must be for you and Mr. Montford to settle, sir. But my duty is to give it back to the one that give it to me. That's only fair and right, sir, ain't it? "

"Stoggins," I whispered earnestly, "I'll promise you a fiver "

The hulking professional checked my attempt at bribery with a reproachful shake of the head as he slowly put on his glove again and took up his bat. While I was wondering whether I should try to compel him by physical force to restore the ring, Stoggins was back again at the crease and play had commenced. The pain of his wound could not have impaired his powers, for he smote both the next two deliveries to the boundary, and a burst of applause showed that he had "made his fifty." The next ball got up sharply from the pitch, and coming back a little passed six inches over the off-bail into my hands. There had been no click, the bowler did not appeal, but Stoggins stood straddle-legged and immovable, and as I looked down the pitch my eye caught that of old Mark Antony, the umpire. The ball had grazed the batsman's glove! Just as I was about to appeal, the luncheon-bell rag and the players began to stroll away.

Then suddenly a crafty notion came into my head, and without troubling whether I was acting in a shabby manner, or as to the morality of doing evil to achieve good, I determined to carry out the idea.

"Hullo, Stoggins! " I cried, as he was commencing to walk from the wickets, "that was a nasty rap for you."

"What was, sir? " he asked, looking as innocent as a baby.

"I thought I should soon get you," I answered, with a grim smile.

"Lor', sir, I was a foot hoff that last one," he returned, grinning sheepishly. "Besides which, sir, it's too late for an appeal."

"Nonsense," I replied, though I was not quite certain of the law on such a point. "Let's go and ask old Mark Antony."

The big professional looked very glum.

"Don't you think as I might have the benefit of the doubt, sir? It's a matter of fifty quid to me! "

"You know, Stoggins, if I appeal to the umpire after lunch, before you've had another ball, you can be given out right enough."

"It'll be beastly hard lines, sir; I've only got sevin more to be top of them averages."

"Old Mark Antony doesn't often make a mistake. I could tell he saw that was a catch."

"Let's not mention it, sir," pleaded Stoggins, with an imploring wink.

"Very well, I'll make a bargain," I replied briskly. "Hand me over that ring, and I'll promise not to appeal to Mark."

I blush to confess my iniquity, but Peggy's peace of mind was at stake. The match was merely a friendly one; and I was really glad to give the professional a chance of earning his talent money.

Stoggins appeared very shocked at the proposal, for most people are fond of assuming a virtue.

"Don't be 'ard on me, sir. I give Mr. Montford my word, honour bright—"

"Never mind him. I'll make it all right— it's only a joke! I shall tell him, of course, that I stole it, and he won't blame you."

He still looked very dubious.

"I don't relish the doing of it, sir."

"Oh, very well; then I shall appeal to Mark directly you get back to the sticks."

"I'll agree, sir. I must get my fifty-sevin. But let me give Mr. Montford back the case, sir. Then he'll find out for himself that the ring's gone, sir. It won't be so bad as telling him myself. He has such a way of using his tongue! "

"Yes, yes, that's right enough."

"And when he gets to know, I'll tell him you must have stolen it out of my waistcoat."

"Oh, tell him what the deuce you like— only hand over the ring."

In another moment the coveted possession was safely in my pocket.

"Jack, my boy, I am surprised and delighted!" cried Uncle Owen, when we met outside the luncheon-tent a few minutes later. "But why have you been hiding your talents under a bushel all this time?"

"I only discovered them myself a few weeks ago," I replied, laughing.

"You couldn't expect an ordinary cricket ball to get past one of his size," said Slade rudely. "He is just built for the part. We ought to have found it out years ago."

Peggy was looking proud and happy, although an anxious expression stole occasionally over her pretty face.

"It's all right," I whispered; "I've got it."

"The ring?" she murmured tremulously.

"*My* ring," I answered. "I shall buy yours as soon as I get near a decent shop."

"Ah, Monsieur Jack, ze speed of ze cricket ball ees ter-reeble," exclaimed De Musset. "It gif me *un mal d'estomac* veree bad; but I haf dronk much Cognac, and now I am— vat you call it?— ol right."

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21: A Ghost Train

W. L. Alden

1837-1908

The Idler, Nov 1895

"DO YOU mean to tell me," I asked the station master, "that you really believe that a train has a ghost, and that ghostly trains run over actual railways at night?"

"If you were a railroad man," replied my friend, "you'd see the foolishness of asking such a question. Do I believe in ghost trains? You might as well ask me if I believed in Pullman cars. Why, man! every railroad man knows that ghost trains are liable to be met with almost any night. I don't say that they are common, but I do say that there are lots of men who have seen 'em, and have just as much reason for believing in 'em as they have for, believing in any regular train."

"Have you yourself ever seen a ghost train?" I asked.

The station master chewed his cigar for a moment in silence, and then said: "Seeing as it's you that asks me, I'll tell you something that I haven't told any man for more than ten years, unless he happened to be an experienced railroad man. You see, I got tired of having people doubt my word, and insinuate that I was a lunatic, or had been drinking too much whiskey. You'll perhaps think the same, but what I'm going to tell you is a cold fact, and there ain't a bit of lying, or poetry, or political argufying, or any of those sort of imaginative things about it.

"You know the road from here to Tiberius Center? It's pretty near a straight line, but when I first came into these parts, the trains used to run from here to Tiberius Center by a mighty roundabout way. The line, as it was originally laid out, ran in a sort of semicircle, taking in half a dozen small towns lying north-west of this place. After a while the company surveyed the new line, and bored the big tunnel through the Blue Eagle mountain. The old line wasn't entirely abandoned until about two years ago, but after the tunnel was finished, there was only one passenger train each way daily on the old line, and a freight train three times a week.

"I had a brother who lived up at Manlius, a town on the old line, about seventy miles from here. That is to say, Manlius was his post office address, but he lived in a house that was three miles from the station, and there wasn't any town of Manlius, except the station house, and a little shanty that was used as a post office. I was a kind of general assistant at this hyer station where we are now, and there not being very much work on hand, I got two days' leave, and took the train up to see my brother. It was just about a year after the new line had been opened, and as the company meant to abandon the old

line, they hadn't put any repairs on it worth speaking of, and it was about the roughest road you ever traveled over.

"I was a little scared myself, though, as a rule, I never trouble myself about railroad accidents, knowing that they're bound to come, and you can't help yourself. There had been a terrible bad accident on that very road just before the expresses quit running over it. A train, with a Pullman car full of passengers, went off the track just as she had struck the bridge over the Muskahoot river, and as the bridge was over sixty feet high, and the river was over twenty feet deep, nobody ever saw hide or hair of that train, or of anybody connected with it, from that day to this.

"Well, I got up to my brother's along about eight or mebbe half-past eight o'clock in the evening, and found him gone away, and the house locked up. I hammered on the doors and tried the windows till I had settled that there wasn't any one at home, and that I couldn't break in, and then I meandered back to the station, calculating to pass the night in the wood-shed, and take the train back to Jericho the next day. It had been snowing hard, and there was near a foot of snow on a level, let alone the big drifts that were here and there. I was pretty well fagged out when I got to the station, which, of course, was shut up for the night, and if it hadn't been that I had a quart flask of whiskey in my pocket, I should have come near freezing to death.

"I went into the wood-shed, and got round behind the wood, where the wind couldn't reach me, and after cussin' my brother for a spell, on account of his having gone off and shut up his house, I made my preparations for taking a nap. Just then I heard the rumble of a train. This naturally astonished me, knowing as I did exactly what trains were running on that road, and that there wasn't any sort of train due at that station for the next fifteen hours. However, the train kept coming nearer and nearer, and pretty soon I heard the grinding of the brakes, and understood that the train was coming to a stop. I didn't lose any time in getting out of that wood-shed, and going for that train. I could see it standing close to the water-butt, about fifty yards down the road, and knew, of course, that the engineer was taking in water. When I reached her I saw that the train consisted only of a baggage car and a Pullman sleeper. I swung myself up on the rear platform of the sleeper, and pushed the door open with a good deal of trouble, for the woodwork seemed to have swelled, and there wasn't anybody to help me from the inside of the car.

"When I got inside I looked around for the passengers, but there wasn't a single one. Neither was there any sign of the nigger porter, who ought to have been there to ask me for my ticket, and to pretend that I was making him a lot of trouble by asking for a bed. You know the ways of nigger porters, and how they always make you feel that if you don't give them a pretty big tip, you are a

good deal worse than a slave driver. The car was lit up after a fashion by a single oil lamp, and all the berths looked as if the passengers had just jumped out of them, and the porter hadn't been round to make up the beds. I couldn't think what had become of the passengers, seeing as they couldn't have gone into the baggage car, and it didn't seem probable that a whole car full could have distributed themselves at way stations. However, that wasn't any affair of mine. I opened both doors of the car to let a little air blow through, for it was as musty as a bar-room when you open it the first time in the morning; and then I picked out a good berth, and calculated to turn in for the night. I soon found that those berths weren't fit for any Christian to sleep in, for the bed-clothes were as damp as if they had been left out in a rain-storm. Where the water had come from that had soaked them I couldn't imagine, for it hadn't rained any for a week, and it stood to reason that the snow couldn't have drifted into the car, shut up as tight as it was. Then it puzzled me to imagine why the porter hadn't taken the wet clothes away, and what had become of the nigger anyhow. The whole business was enough to throw a man off his balance, and I gave up thinking about it, and, going into the wash-room, I sat down in the wash-basin, which was the only dry seat in the car, and, leaning up against the corner, tried to get a nap.

"By this time the train had left the station several miles behind, and was running at a rate that I knew would have been risky on any road, let alone as rough a road as the one we were on. At first I didn't mind this, the running of the train not being my business, but pretty soon I found that I could not keep in my seat without holding on with both hands. I've been in cars that have done some pretty tall running, and over some mighty rough roads, but I never before or since knew a car to jump, and roll, and shake herself generally as that car did. I began to think that the engineer was either drunk or crazy, and that the passengers had got so scared that they had all left the train. To tell the truth, I would have been glad to have left the train myself, but I never was fond of jumping, and if there is any man who says that he likes to jump from a train that is doing forty or fifty miles an hour, why I just don't believe him.

"All of a sudden I thought of the bell-cord, and I decided that I would pull it and stop the train. Then if any conductor appeared I would tell him who I was, and inform him that if he didn't make his engineer run the train in a decent way, I would take good care that the Division Superintendent should know all about the thing. So I got hold of the bell-cord and gave it a fairish sort of pull—not the very hardest sort of a pull, you understand, but just a moderate pull. The cord broke in my hand as easy as if it had been a piece of thread, and all chance of stopping the train that way disappeared. I looked at the bell-cord and saw that it was as rotten as a politician's conscience, so I just broke off a

piece of it, about two or three yards long, and put it in my pocket, intending to show it to the Division Superintendent as a specimen of the way in which the Pullman car conductors attended to their business.

"All the time the train was rushing ahead at a speed that would have been counted worth noticing even on the New York Central. When she struck a curve— and there were lots of them— she just left the track entirely, and swung round that curve with her wheels in the air. And when she did strike the track again you can bet that things shook. Of course I don't mean that the train actually did leave the track, but that was the way it would have seemed to you if you had been aboard that car. I went to the forward door to see if there was any chance of getting into or over the baggage car and so reaching the engineer, but it would have taken a monkey in first-rate training to have climbed over that baggage car without breaking his neck at the rate at which we were running. I went back into the sleeper again, and, holding on to a berth, tried to light up a cigar, but somehow the match didn't seem to take much interest in the thing. I felt confident that in a few minutes more the car would leave the track and go to everlasting smash, and I remember feeling thankful that I had gone over my accounts just before leaving Jericho, and that nobody could fail to understand them. Just then I thought of the brake. If I should go out on the platform and put the brake on, the engineer would feel the drag on the car and would stop the train, unless he was stark mad. At any rate, the thing was worth trying.

"I got out on the platform, hanging on for all I was worth to the hand rail, until I got hold of the brake wheel. It was as rusty as if it had been soaking in water for a week, but I didn't mind that. I jammed that brake down good and hard, but the brake-chain snapped almost as easy as the bell-cord, and there was an end of that plan for stopping the train. Of course, I knew that a brake-chain sometimes snaps, and you can't prevent it, but it was curious that both the bell-cord and the brake-chain on that car should have been good for nothing.

"Well, I got back into the car again, and I took a middling good drink of the whiskey, and it sort of warmed up my courage. I never was a drinking man even in my young days, for I despise a drunkard, especially if he is a railroad man. But I hadn't had above six or seven drinks that day, and I knew that another moderate one wouldn't do me any harm. I was beginning to feel a little better, when I remembered that I had never heard the whistle of the locomotive since we had started from Manlius station. That showed me that the engineer wasn't either drunk or mad, for in either case he would have blown his whistle about two-thirds of the time; there being nothing that a crazy man or a drunken engineer finds as soothing as a steam whistle. I

couldn't explain our flying around curves and over level crossings without sounding the whistle, except on the theory that the engineer had dropped dead in his cab. But then there would have been the fireman. Both of the men couldn't very well have died at the same minute, and if there was anything the matter with the engineer, the fireman would naturally either have stopped the train and tried to get help, or he would have run it very cautiously, that not being his usual business, and would have been very particular about whistling at the proper places. Not hearing the whistle was, on the whole, more astonishing to me than finding a Pullman car without a passenger, or without a nigger porter; and with the bed-clothes soaked with water, and the bell cord almost too rotten to bear its own weight.

"There wasn't a thing to be seen through the car windows, for they were thick with dirt. So, wanting to get some idea of the locality that we had got to, I went out on the rear platform again, and getting down on the lower step I leaned out to have a look all around. Just then we started around another curve, and what with my fingers being a little numb, and what with the swaying of the car, I lost my hold, and was shot off that train like a mail-bag that is chucked on to our platform when the Pacific express goes booming by.

"Luckily I fell into a snow-bank and wasn't seriously hurt. However, the shock stunned me for a while, and when I came to, and found that I had no bones broken, and that my skull was all right, I picked myself up and started to wank down the track till I should come to a house. After walking, as I should judge, about half a mile, I came to East Fabiusville, where there is a little tavern, and mighty glad I was to see it. I knocked the landlord up and got a bed, and it was noon the next day before I woke up.

"There wasn't any train to Jericho until after three o'clock, so not having anything to do, I looked up the landlord, and found he was an old acquaintance of mine, by the name of Hank Simmons. When I told him that I had come to Fabiusville by a night train, he sort of smiled, and I could see he didn't believe me. 'I don't say that the train stopped here,' I said, 'for the last I saw of it was a mile or so up the road, where I fell off the rear platform into a snow-bank. But all the same, I did come most of the way from Manlius last night in a Pullman sleeper.'

" 'Then you must have come on what the boys call the ghost train,' says Hank.

" 'What train's that?' says I.

" 'Why, it's the ghost of the train that went off the bridge on the Muskahoot river. The boys do say that every once in a while there is a train made up of a locomotive, a baggage-car, and a Pullman sleeper that comes down the road a hustlin', and goes off the Muskahoot bridge into the river. I

never saw no such train myself, but there's lots of folks living along this road that have seen it, and you'd have hard work to convince 'em that it isn't the ghost of the wrecked train. Come to think of it, that there train was wrecked just a year ago last night, and it's probable that her ghost was out for an airing, as you might say.'

"Well, when I came to think the thing over, I came to the conclusion that Hank was right, and that the Pullman with the wet bedclothes, and the rotten bell-cord, was nothing, more or less, than the ghost of a car. However, I didn't say much more to Hank about it at the time, for the less a man talks about seeing ghosts the better it is for him, if he wants to be considered a reliable man. But as soon as I got back to Jericho I went to see the Division Superintendent and told him the whole story.

" 'See here,' he said, when I had got through, 'I suppose I ought to report you, but considering that you were not on duty last night, and that you're not a drinking man as a general thing, I shan't say anything about it. But if you'll take my advice, you'll not tell that ridiculous story to anybody else.'

" 'Then you think I was drunk and dreamed the whole thing, do you?' I asked.

" 'I don't think so,' says he, 'I'm sure of it, I've just been over the division reports, and no such train as you describe has been seen at any station. Besides, I know where every Pullman car in the company's service is just at this identical time, and it's impossible that a Pullman should have been on the Manlius branch last night. No train of any kind went over that branch between eight o'clock last night, and seven o'clock this morning.'

" 'Then I wish you'd explain how I traveled from Manlius station to East Fabiusville last night between nine and twelve. I can prove by the conductor of the up train that he let me off at Manlius after eight o'clock last night, and I can prove by the landlord of the Fabiusville Tavern that I put up at his house just before twelve o'clock. A man, whether he is drunk or sober, can't travel seventy miles in three hours, unless he does it on a railroad train.'

"The Superintendent was a mighty smart man, but this conundrum of mine was more than he could answer. So he only smiled, in an aggravating sort of way, and said, 'You'd better take my advice and keep quiet. You know how down the Directors are on any man that drinks too much whiskey. If you go about talking of this adventure of yours the chances are you'll lose your place.'

"Just then I happened to think of the piece of bell-cord that I had taken from the car. I put my hand in my pocket, and there it was, sure enough. I held it up, and said to the Superintendent: 'There's a piece of the rotten bell-cord that I told you about. Perhaps you'll say I dreamed six feet of cord into my pocket.'

"The Superintendent took it, and I could see that he was some considerable staggered. 'You say you got this out of the Pullman sleeper that you dreamed about?' he asked.

" 'That's just exactly and precisely the identical place where I got that cord aforesaid,' says I, as solemn as if I was on my oath.

" 'Well!' says he, 'I take back what I said about you're having been drunk. That there cord hasn't been in use in any car on this road for more than a year. The last car that had a cord like that was the one that went into the Muskahoot river. That's a cotton cord, and we don't use anything but hemp nowadays.'

" 'Then you think that I was on a ghost train after all,' says I.

" 'I think,' says he, 'that the less you say about it the better— that is, if you care to follow my advice. If you keep on talking about it you'll have half the trainmen on the division watching for ghosts and neglecting their regular duties.'

"Of course, I promised to do as the Superintendent said, and I never mentioned the ghost train until this particular Superintendent had skipped to Canada with over a hundred thousand dollars. He was a most amazing smart man, and if I had gone against his wishes, I wouldn't have stayed in the company's service very long. However, when I did begin to tell the story, nobody believed me, except now and then an old train hand who had seen ghost trains himself, and knew all about 'em. I've told you the story as straight as a die, and you can take it or leave it just as you choose. As Horace says, 'There's more things in heaven and the other place than any philosopher ever dared to dream about.' "

End