PAST MASTERS 168

H. Bedford-Jones
Douglas Newton
Ethel Lina White
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and more

PAST MASTERS 168

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

22 July 2024

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1: The Fairy Pot

Ethel Lina White

1876-1944

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"SO this is a pothole," gasped Iris. She was sunken below sun-level in a vast cavern of rock, chill with damp and earthy odors. Only the dimmest light filtered through a small hole in the roof— from which trickled a shrunken waterfall. But although she was muddy, breathless and soaked to the skin, she felt the special thrill which accompanies achievement.

"Pothole?" repeated her companion scornfully. "What d'you mean? We're only in the daylight shaft. This is where the pothole begins. I'll show you."

The young engineer gripped her arm and they stumbled together across the slimed floor, following up the course of the streamlet from the fall, until it disappeared down a wide fissure in the rocks.

"At the bottom of that fall is an eternal pothole which is pitch dark," Courage explained. "It will lead you down to another, and so on, down and down, until the stream disappears down a crack too narrow to follow it— or until the ropes give out— or until any old thing happens."

"And you mean to tell me you go down horrible holes like that for pleasure?" asked Iris incredulously. "It seems to me a specially morbid and debased way of committing suicide."

Courage laughed.

"Potholing is a bug, like any other phobia," he said. "You have it—or you haven't."

He knew that it was hopeless to try to explain to her the magnetism in the sound of that chuckling water which was an elusive thread, leading down to hidden treasure. Here, in Pothole Land— the Cumberland dales— a vast region of subterranean wonderland had been already explored. Huge stalactite caverns, lakes, streams and more than two miles of connecting passages.

But there remained still the lure of finding some new entry down some insignificant hole which might drop down hundreds of feet in one sheer swoop. There was also the eternal hope of the pioneer— to be first to stumble on some new enchanted territory.

Even then, it might be lying under his feet— waiting for him to discover it. Voices called to him from the halls of darkness.

ALTHOUGH he was a keen Alpinist and rarely missed a holiday in Switzerland, the joys of mountain-climbing lacked this thrill of exploration. As he strained his eyes to look at Iris through the gloom, he longed to share his secret passion with her. He had known her for less than a fortnight, yet already she seemed so vital to his happiness, that his mind shied at the prospect of a future apart from her.

She had been tramping the Fells without a hat and her face was very brown, making a piquant contrast with her fair hair. Essentially a modern girl with a mechanical mind, she was employed at an aircraft factory and had the hard muscles and the unselfconscious camaraderie of one accustomed to work with men.

Lately Courage had wished that her blue eyes were not so friendly and impersonal.

"Don't you ever climb?" he asked.

"Definitely no," she replied. "I've no head for heights. Something goes funny inside me. I fly, of course, but that's different. My job is on the ground and I feel safer there... Let's get out of this tomb."

ALTHOUGH Courage remained below, to steady the rope ladder, she found its ascent both a tricky and humiliating performance. Whenever her shoe slipped on the narrow five-inch tread, she upset the precarious balance, and either swayed under the fall, or bruised herself against the rock.

It was a relief to get into the open air which was cooled by the spray from the Pharisee (Fairy) Fall. The great cascade foamed like a pillar of smoke down into the gorge, whose sides— emerald green with soaked ferns and vegetation— were hung with small trees, rowans, bird-cherries and birch. After plunging into a deep pool at its bottom, it rushed down into the valley in a small river.

In spite of its present volume, it had shrunk so far below its normal flow that it sealed no longer the mouth of the pothole. Courage explained the situation to Iris when he rejoined her.

"It's about eight years since it's been possible to get near the pothole," he said. "A chap called Riley discovered it, but he had to give up for lack of ropes."

The climb up the gorge was heavy going, which left no surplus breath for conversation, as they toiled out of the cool and shadowed radius of the spray. When they reached the path again, the sun beat down on them from a cloudless sky. The turf was scorched and the hills blurred by a thick blue soupy atmosphere, as though the heat had become visible.

"Today's going to be a real scorcher," panted Iris as she caught her heel in a crack in the baked earth. "Don't you wish it would rain?"

"I should say not." replied Courage. "I'm praying for this blessed drouth to last. It's the chance of a lifetime to explore the Pharisee Pot again. There's still rather too much overflow from the fall."

"Are you really going down that awful drop into the dark? You must be crazy."

"Call it 'potty.' Yes, it's all fixed. Riley— the chap who did it before, young Collier and myself."

"Young Collier? That precious youth? I don't believe it."

"Oh, he's got guts all right, In spite of his pretty face. I suppose as you're a native, you've a down on him because his old man is living in your Squire's ancestral hall."

"I'm not that sort of moldy snob. No, my grouch is this: When Granny rented her cottage from his father, the conveyance covered adequate water rights. Now we're dry as a bone, while he's built a swimming pool. It doesn't make sense. I believe he's poaching our spring."

"That's a dangerous charge," Courage reminded her. "Can you prove it?"

"How can I? Gran is helpless. If she tried to pump any of Collier's men, or approached the local surveyor, he'd get to hear of it and then he wouldn't renew her lease. It would break her up to leave her beloved hovel."

"Well, don't be hasty. Water is a very tricky thing. This drouth may have caused your spring to break out somewhere else. I'm an engineer, so I know something about it."

"And all I know is this. I've got to go to old Collier, cap in hand, to beg for some water. Gosh, what a prospect for any girl of spirit."

THEY parted at a hurdle-gate at the union of two tracks. One led up to the Hall— a fine Elizabethan mansion, now the property of Sir Henry Collier, late of the Baltic Pool. For the past fortnight, Courage had been a guest at this house, so naturally was prejudiced in favor of a genial and hospitable host.

The other path wound down to a whitewashed cottage, rented by Iris' grandmother— an active, independent lady of 62. It was only an accident to her leg which caused her to accept the services of her grandchild, who had given up her own holiday to look after her.

The sacrifice had proved to be not altogether loss, for she had met Courage, but the continuance of the drouth was gradually getting her down. It had lasted now for weeks. First, the flowers had to be sacrificed— a hopeful collection of buds. Then the daily bath was replaced by a piecemeal wash in a basin. After that, vegetables had to take their chance, when most of them lost out. Now it had become a problem how to ration the drinking water to include the fowls and dog.

With the end of her holiday in sight, Iris was worried about the future. It was only the thought of her grandmother's disability which forced her to turn out in the afternoon heat and eat humble-pie.

After the glare of the unprotected Fells, it was a relief to walk under the shade of the lime avenue which led up to the Hall. She noticed enviously the vivid green of the lawn in front of the house and the beautiful flower beds. On her way, she also passed the new swimming pool which was lined with turquoise tiles.

She told herself that it held sufficient water to preserve the cottage garden for the duration of the drouth. Her young lips were stern as she glanced contemptuously at two slim forms in bathing slips, stretched out on the grass. One was young Collier— a youth with a handsome slack face; the other was an exotic girl from London, whose skin was painted to get the same effect as the sunburnt Iris. There was no sign of Courage— a fact which disconcerted her, since she had counted on his moral support. Sir Henry Collier, however, was lounging on a deck-chair on the terrace.

He was a pleasant-faced, well-preserved man in the fifties, with wavy silver hair and a double chin. In his early struggling days he had been a thin acid young man, full of snap and drive, and although prosperity had mellowed him, there was still a glint in his eye which hinted of the original wire structure under his genial overweight.

He welcomed Iris with the cordiality of a host to an honored guest. Feeling slightly awkward, as though he had placed her in a false position, she refused his offers of varied refreshment.

"Really not, thank you," she persisted. "I only came to tell you that we've practically no water."

"No drinking water?" asked Sir Henry.

"Yes, we have that, but—"

"Then you must consider yourself lucky, when you think of the drouth."

"I know... But I have to walk a quarter of a mile to the village to get water for domestic purposes. Our garden is dying on us. Please, could you spare us a little of your surplus?"

"I don't know what you mean, If I had any surplus my tennis courts would not be ruined."

"But that swimming pool—"

"Oh, my dear young lady, don't look at me with such accusing eyes. I built that pool as a storage-tank, in case of fire. Indirectly, it benefits you, for we could run a pipe down to the cottage."

He stopped, as though waiting for the gratitude she could not force. She felt beaten down and incapable of making a further stand, as he went on talking.

"You can't blame me for the drouth. It was an act of God. It has dried up one of my best wells, but I am only too thankful for what is left. You must keep your chin up. I've always been on pleasant terms with your grandmother and I should be sorry to lose her for a more sporting tenant who would take the rough with the smooth. And don't forget it was I who put in the bathroom for her— not the old Squire."

"Yes, that was kind. There is no water in the pipes, but it looks very nice."

"And so do you— very fit and charming from all your extra exercise. I walked ten miles a day, to and from work, when I was young. Are you sure you won't have tea?"

"No, thank you." Her voice was bitter. "I only want water."

He took the request seriously and rang for a glass of iced water... Iris decided that it was impossible to impress such a man.

THAT evening, Courage met her as she was toiling up the path from the village. She wore breeches and looked both hot and limp, as she carried two slopping pails of water.

"Where were you this afternoon?" she asked reproachfully, as he took the buckets from her.

"Out on a private prowl," he told her. "How did you get on with Collier?"

"I didn't. I got out. All he did was to hint I couldn't take it. Well, I'm not sporting and I must have a smutty mind. For I still believe he has pinched our spring."

Courage frowned thoughtfully.

"Even if he has," he said, "litigation over water rights is the very mischief. If you prove your claim— and experts usually differ— Collier could hardly take it for a friendly gesture. Directly your grandmother's lease was up, she'd be outside on her ear. So how's it going to help you?"

"I know, but I'm bothered about the future. This will happen every drouth, and Gran can't carry water.

"Oh, buck up. Collier may have a change of heart. Any old way, this heat is bound to crack soon with thunder... That's why we are having a shot at the Pharisee Pot tomorrow."

"Tell me all about it. Do you go much deeper than that horrible black drop?"

"Deeper?" Courage laughed Jubilantly. "That's only the entrance hall, with 'Welcome' on the mat. When we're down that, we come to a filthy crawl over

the bed of a stream— which should be dry if it knows what's expected of it— along a passage which is nothing but a drain out to a main chamber. Then comes the clinking long drop which Riley couldn't tackle. I hope to be able to report its exact length and what's at the bottom of it tomorrow, Modom."

"Any— any danger?"

"Practically none. We're all experienced climbers. You've got to be very fit for pot-holing— and you've got to be slim or you'd stick. If you think of joining us, don't wear your crinoline. Of course, we've got to check up on ropes, food, lights, and so on. If they are O.K., we shall be O.K., too, except for—"

"Go on," she told him.

"Well, if a storm broke up in the hills, we might get our feet wet."

Iris said nothing. Her eyes were wide with terror as she pictured the sudden rush of floodwater down the valley, as she had seen it once before. She saw it thunder over the Pharisee Fall, rushing down the holes and cracks at its base— flooding underground passages— filling every chamber.

"What's the matter?" asked Courage.

"I'm afraid." Her voice was low and husky. "Don't go. For my sake."

He shook his head.

"You're putting me on the spot," he said. "I don't want you to be worried over me. I would rather make you happy. But honestly, you don't know what this chance is to a pot-holer. Besides, there is no risk. We shall phone up to the hills, to yet the weather report before we start."

"All right." Iris forced herself to speak in the voice familiar to all in the aircraft factory, where she claimed equality with men. "Good luck, mate—and get on with it."

IRIS was not the only person to sleep badly that night, for the heat was oppressive. She kept getting out of bed to watch from her window, in the hope of seeing a flicker of lightning, as herald of a thunderstorm.

Her prayers were not granted, for after a short sleep she awoke to another cloudless sky, from which all color was drained.

"Do you smell rain?" she asked, when she carried the morning tea in to her grandmother.

The small alert lady who was already knitting in bed, so as to waste no time, looked at her over steel-rimmed spectacles.

"You insolent child, I'm not a witch doctor," she protested. "Besides, any fool must know this heat will break in a storm. Probably tomorrow. I'm afraid it will skin the face off the garden, but it will get right down to the roots, thank God."

"Good. We want another dry day. Some boys are going down the Pharisee Pot-hole."

"That's fine news. Good lads."

No lack of sporting spirit there— but Iris failed to feel responsive to the local passion. Although every domestic task— complicated by lack of water— seemed drudgery, she tried to forget her apprehension in a drive of furious energy.

DIRECTLY after lunch, she changed into shorts, in order to fetch their daily ration of water. Just as she was about to start, she saw Sir Henry Collier sauntering down the hillside. He looked so aggressively cool and freshly-tubbed in his suit of tropical silk, that she felt she could not endure to walk to the village in his company.

She was loitering by the gate when be called out to her.

"The climbing party went off in fine spirits. They showed sense in not waiting. It's looking rather heavy up the pass. But no one can say our young men are deficient in grit."

Although his remark was not intended to be personal, Iris was stung to reprisal.

"You showed me your beautiful garden yesterday," she said sweetly. "Would you like to see what is left of ours? We have enough seeded nasturtiums to keep us in pickles all the winter."

As he was not the man to ignore a challenge, he followed her to the back of the cottage. They passed under a pergola, covered with withered roses and then Iris, who was leading, gave a cry.

"Do you see what I see? Water?"

Overflowing from a tank at the end of the garden, where the spring was piped, a great pool was spreading out over the baked earth which could not absorb it.

"You've left the tap on," said Sir Henry reproachfully.

"But the tank takes a whole day to fill. The water dribbles in, drop by drop... No. Something's happened to the spring."

At the implication of her words his face turned suddenly gray.

"Come and see," he said hoarsely.

He spoke to the air, for she had already rushed through the gate and was running up the hillside.

He followed her, bursting through clumps of burnt heather, whose tough roots noosed his feet and held him back, until he reached the spot where she stood.

At first, she was too breathless to speak, as she pointed to a streamlet which was half concealed by fronds of bracken.

"It's the normal flow," she panted. "There must be rain in the hills." The terror in her eyes leaped to his.

"Those lads," he gasped. "I'll ring up the Rescue club... But it will be too late."

"TOO late."

The words rang in Iris ears as she rushed madly up the pass, like one bereft of her senses.

The boulders on either side of the track blocked her view of the valley, but as she reached the gorge she became aware that she should have heard the roar of the little swollen river, dashing over its stony bed. Stopping for a moment to strain her ears, she caught— something— so faint that it was a vibration, rather than actual sound— as though a telephone were ringing in the last house of a long row.

It was thunder up in the hills.

Mercifully, it was very far away... Rushing round the bend, she was able, at last, to see the Pharisees Fall through its screen of trees. To her amazement, it was still pouring down in a steady white column, with no visible increase in volume.

She stood, scarcely able to credit the evidence to her eyes, while a wild hope flared up in her heart. Some miracle of Nature had intervened—a landslip or fall of boulders higher up— which had either dammed the flood, or diverted its course.

There was no time to lose in speculation. Reckless of danger, she plunged down the steep side of the gorge, snatching at such frail holds as ferns and wild strawberry runners, as she glissaded down muddy slopes and mossy rocks. Often she only saved herself from pitching headlong to the bottom of the gulf, by catching at the branches of a wild cherry or birch.

Her luck held, for her last jump was blind, so that she landed with a crash, amid the boulders of the stream. As she got up again, her first thought was for the torch which she had snatched from the hall table, in her rush through the cottage.

To her great relief, it was unbroken, to match her bones. Slipping it inside the neck of her pullover for safety, she scrambled over the exposed rocks until she reached the entrance to the pothole.

Without giving herself time to think, she gripped the rope ladder and began to lower herself with frantic haste— only to meet with disaster. In skipping rungs— to descend more quickly— she lost her footing and hung

suspended by her hands. As she swayed to and fro the motion accelerated and she spun giddily round, like a fly dangling at the end of a spider's thread.

She realized that she was missing the ballast provided by Courage, on her previous descent, when he had stood below to steady the ladder. Now, in her struggle to regain her footing, she kicked wildly against the rock, only to crash back under the fall. Fortunately, her palms were hard, to match her muscles, and she managed to lower herself until her toes scraped the insecure rungs again.

Lower and lower she dropped. The light drew dimmer— damp dungeon odors arose from the vault below— and she found herself on the rocky floor of the daylight chamber. Shuddering in anticipation of what was to come, she flashed on her torch and guided herself, by the trickle of water, across the dark shaft.

All she could see was a ghastly drop— like the shaft of a lift, enclosed by walls of dripping rock— and an insecure-looking rope-ladder dangling into the blackness.

At first, she lingered to shout, in the faint hope that the climbing party might be on its way up, but she only awoke a mutilated echo which was plainly out of practice. Time was racing on, while up in the hills the flood was piling itself up against its barrier, lapping higher every minute. Sooner or later, water must find its level.

She gripped the rope ladder with one hand and dropped backwards into the shaft. The strain on her arm was terrific, but it was momentary. The next instant she stuffed her precious torch into her pullover— releasing both hands for use.

At first, she felt the demoralizing swaying movement, growing gradually stronger with every lurch, like the swing of the pendulum. One moment, she banged against rock and the next, she hung under the spray of the fall. Then her feet found a hold on the ladder and the immediate crisis was past.

Afraid to hurry, lest she upset her balance, she crabbed downwards, rung by rung. As she did so, she began to lose her grip on reality. The darkness was so dense and muffling that it fulfilled the function of a drug, deadening her to the threat of vertigo. When, presently, her foot landed on rock again, she was only vaguely surprised that the decent had been accomplished so quickly.

She was about to step off the ladder when a warning signal was flashed from her brain. Still gripping the rope with one hand, she fumbled for her torch... Its light revealed a narrow shelf of cliff, on which she was perched while below was the darkness of the shaft.

Her heart leaped at the thought of the fate she had just escaped. Both palms and forehead were clammy as she continued her descent.

THE incident had shaken her nerve severely, but she had to go on. Down—down. Deeper—deeper. One, two... ten... twenty, until she lost count.

Once again she felt her foot bumping on a rough surface. This time, she had reached the bottom of the shaft in reality and was standing in a cave. Only a section was visible in the light of her torch, but she received a dim impression of stalactites, like bunches of candles or carrots. Then she followed the course of the stream which oozed down the slope and disappeared into the underground passage of which Courage had spoken.

"'The filthy crawl'," she quoted in a high unfamiliar voice. "Then comes the clinking long drop. Nobody knows how far down it. goes or what's at the bottom. That's the fun. At the end, we all break our necks, to make it a real success... But we've found another pot. Cheers—and mind your head."

She was able to crawl on her hands and knees along the bed of the underground stream for only a few yards. Very soon she was forced by the lowness of the roof to lie full length and drag herself along over the slimy trickle. She was scratched and bruised by grit, while the strain of her posture grew intolerable, but far worse than pain or exhaustion was the knowledge that she had to return the same way that she had come.

"Every terrible thing has to be done again." she thought. "I'm not even halfway. There's still the unfathomed drop to come."

In a way, her fear of the next ordeal was merciful, for it prevented her from accepting a suggestion so horrible that her mind instinctively rejected it, whenever it tried to drift into her brain.

It was the thought that even a slight fall of rock could seal her inside a living tomb.

She was gasping for breath and aching in every muscle when she crawled out of the passage. Her knees shook violently when she got up and her head began to swim. Flashing her light around, she got a confused impression of dripping disrupted cliff and riven rock, murmurous with echoes and the chuckles of imprisoned waters.

The streamlet led her inexorably to the lip of a cracked precipice, down which dangled a jaunty rope ladder.

As she looked at it, she felt another wave of faintness surge over her and knew that Nature had beaten her. If she attempted to climb down that ladder, her fingers would surely lose their grip and she would drop down into the gulf. To persevere was merely to commit suicide.

"I must make them hear," she thought desperately.

She put all her strength into her screams. Again and again... Then from the depths arose an answering shout.

"Oy! Oy!" It was Courage's voice. "What's up?"

"Flood!" she yelled. "Rain in the hills!"

She heard him shouting to the others, awakening a confusion of crosscurrent echoes. Then he called to her directly:

"Go back at once!"

In spite of the command, the knew that she must rest, to gain strength for the crawl along the drain. She was still crouched on the rocky floor when Courage came up the ladder, like a steeple-jack.

"Here, drink this," he said in a strangely stern voice.

She swallowed the brandy and then struggled to her feet. "I can start now," she said. As she followed him down the passage a thought passed through her mind.

"At this moment, I am here in this ghastly place. Where shall I be in an hour's time? And— how?"

AN hour later, she was curled up in a big chair in the cottage drawing-room, while her grandmother lay upon the couch. She felt tired but pleasantly relaxed after the rare luxury of a hot bath, even although the water which gushed from the tap was colored coffee-brown. A teapot was on the table and she smoked a cigarette as she watched the grand spectacle of a thunderstorm sweeping the Fells.

The clock ticked, her grandmother knitted, the ginger cat washed her face. In that scene of domestic comfort it was difficult to believe in her recent experience. It seemed incredible that she could have sustained such an ordeal and emerged with only cuts and bruises.

Already its memory was growing blurred, owing to her acute mental tension at the time— and parts of it were altogether forgotten. Looking back on her return journey, it seemed concentrated into a test of overstrained endurance and forced effort, when will, nerve and muscle were teamed in one frantic drive to cheat the enemy— Time.

They were racing the flood, so they could not stop to relax or rest. Once when they jammed in the terrible confinement of the underground passage, Courage cursed them impartially, but it was the very fury of his abuse which galvanized their limp muscles into new life.

They got out of the pothole only just in time. They could hear the distant roar of rushing water as they were climbing out of the daylight-shaft, and they had to scramble for their lives to reach the sides of the gorge.

As she was dragging herself up by the trees. Iris turned just in time to see the white pillar of the Pharisee Fall spread out suddenly in a broad brown fan as the flooded river foamed over its lip.

Afterwards there had been the comedy of their meeting with the Rescue Club, when she had been overwhelmed with congratulations. At the time she thought it was recognition of her feat, but learned later that it was only local jubilation over the discovery of a new pot.

"You can't satisfy some folks," said her grandmother, breaking the current of her thoughts. "Looks as if someone hadn't got wet enough for his liking."

Looking up as a fork of lightning veined the sky, Iris saw Courage coming through sheets of torrential rain. He looked excited and happy as he waved his hand. A minute later he burst into the room in front of the little maid who was trying to admit him.

"I've brought the doings," he said, crossing to the old lady's couch. "A new lease of the cottage for your lifetime, with adequate water provision and a special emergency clause, in case of drouth. It's rough, but it covers everything and it's signed and witnessed. It comes from Sir Henry Collier as a mark of appreciation for your granddaughter's heroism in saving his son's life."

Old Mrs. Holtby looked at the young man.

"I'll thank you later," she said. "First I want to hear the real story."

"Very well," he agreed. "The truth is this. I did a little private surveying yesterday afternoon, after which I engaged a young man to dig at a certain spot which seemed indicated. Result— I found that Collier had done the dirty on you. A stirrup-pipe had been inserted, which reduced the flow from your spring by one-half. The drouth did the rest of the mischief."

"I knew it," cried Iris.

"At the time I couldn't decide what to do," went on Courage. "As I explained to you, I couldn't see you would be better off if you fought a claim. So I told the young man to cover everything up and say nothing for the present. He was very hot over the business, so it is evident he decided to take the law into his own hands and remove the stirrup-pipe. That was the explanation of the increased flow from your spring."

"Does Sir Henry know everything?" asked Iris.

"Yes. I came out into the open. I also explained fully the providential nature of the incident... You see, we rang up that place in the hills and from what they have told us, the storm did not really break until Iris was well underground... If there had not been this false warning, nothing and no one could have saved us from being drowned."

He stopped and looked wistfully at Iris.

"Here's your prize," he said, giving her the lease.

Her face grew radiant.

"It's wonderful," she said. "Gran will love you for this."

Suddenly Courage saw his chance to propose in the presence of a friendly third party.

"I want her to love me— as a grandson," he said boldly.

Mrs. Holtby's eyes twinkled as she went on with her knitting.

"Iris," she said, "I'm doing very well. I've just had an offer. If you will cooperate with me, I am inclined to accept it."

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2: On the Trail of a Platinum Mine

H Bedford-Jones (as by "Culpeper Zandtt")

1887-1949

Blue Book Magazine, Jan 1924

"Deep-Water Men" series

WHEN the Australian cargo-boat *Wallacoomba* berthed at a pier in San Francisco harbor, two deck-hands who had shipped for the trip up from Balboa drew their pay and went ashore— seedy in appearance, with nothing but their small earnings between them and the beach. They had stowed themselves in the hold of a much larger boat in Sydney harbor, with the intention of spying upon her activities and locating an immensely rich platinum lode— ore from which the steamer had brought to Sydney for sale. But they had been discovered and transshipped, at sea, to a wool-boat which had cleared for London short-handed— her master guaranteeing that he'd work them on his craft as far as that port, at least. Having other views, however, Jones and Wohlberg had jumped overboard just off the Pacific entrance to the Canal, managed to swim ashore, picked up an odd job or two which fed them for a week, and then shipped north after reading a notice in the maritime news that the steamer *Wyanomah*, upon which they originally stowed themselves, had arrived at San Diego (when it was generally supposed that she was bound to some port several thousand miles from there), and would load for an Eastern voyage in San Francisco. Wohlberg, an island pearler and sometime pirate, was the more reckless of the two— the tougher fighter in any sort of a mix-up. But Jones, who had been a Broken Hill miner before going in for a course of engineering study, was the more far-sighted, had much the shrewder wits. It was he who decided upon their next move as they walked up toward Market Street.

"We've less than eighty dollars between us— aye. And we must eat— aye. But there'll be a man in this town who'll pay for what we can tell him— give us a share of the pickings if there are any— provided we've luck in getting to him. That be the diffic'lty! He's by way of being a swell— expensive offices, great house and estate in the country— clubs, society, all that. We'll never reach him as we look naw! So we'll just blow in the most of our tin on clothes, shaves, hair-trimming and visiting-cards. I'll do the passing upon everything, myselfi— because I've seen the time when I knew what was what. Are you on?"

A FEW hours later the pair stepped into one of the newer office-buildings on Market Street and were taken up to a luxuriously furnished suite of offices on the twelfth floor, from the windows of which there was an extensive view

of the Bay. Had any of their former shipmates seen them— or even the master himself— recognition would have been almost impossible. Two men of different breeding may each invest thirty dollars in clothes and haberdashery with amazingly opposite results, It isn't the cost of his clothes which stamps a man of the world with a compelling personality, but their selection, and the way in which they are worn. Aside from this instinctive knowledge, Jones and Wohlberg had rubbed against the sharp edges of life enough to give them poise— the impression of being at their ease in almost any combination of circumstances. For all of these reasons, the pair of speculators were presently admitted to a corner room of the suite, where Mr. Corbelston, an active man of fifty with heavy features and iron-gray hair, sat behind a large flat-topped desk. His whole appearance indicated power. The closeness with which his eyes were set together, and the grim lines of his mouth, spoke of power unscrupulously used. The man was in demand at clubs, social functions, in business circles— as a personage. On the whole, he was rather liked. But there was a reserve opinion that he could be something more than unpleasant if he had occasion to-go after anyone in earnest. Nobody knew whether he had one million or ten— but his credit was good for something over the one, at least, and the way he got it was of no consequence.

CORBELSTON was holding Jones' card in his hand— looking reflectively out of the window as they came in. With a nod, he indicated a couple of chairs near the end of his desk— not intimately so, but near enough for confidential talk.

"I remember you, Jones— perfectly. You did me a good turn over there in Australia — though I guess you didn't know how good. Well, I gave what you asked— we considered the incident closed. But I've thought more than once that if you ever turned up again, I'd hand you a check for a couple of thousand— just so you couldn't feel that I had a little too much the best of it— would be disposed to make another deal if things shaped up that way. I'll give you that check, now."

"Not on the old account, Mr. Corbelston! That was settled in full, at the time. I knew what you'd get out of it and was entirely satisfied— because I fancied it might get me an interview with you upon some occasion when, otherwise, I'd never get by your office people, or the butler in your house. I'm here, with Wohlberg, to sketch the facts of a certain situation as we know them— and see if you're interested."

"Shoot!"

"Two or three months ago a nine-thousand-ton cargo-boat came into a certain port— in ballast, judging by her freeboard— actually, with a part-cargo

of the richest platinum-bearing matrix-ore ever discovered. The charterer, who might or might not have been the mine-operator, didn't wish it reduced for owner's account. Would listen to no proposition but purchase of that ore outright as it lay in the hold. Finally sold it and cleaned up more than six hundred thousand dollars for what there was on board. The boat was then cleared for Brisbane in ballast— with some talk of running over to Auckland for balance of cargo. Instead of that, she turns up in one of your Pacific ports. The smelting comp'ny, of course, put men of their own on her track— cabled their agents in various ports. Wohlberg and I got aboard and stowed ourselves in her Number Two, but the master discovered us— we were transferred at sea to a wool-boat, London-bound. Jumped overboard at Balboa— shipped on the first boat coming this way— paid off on the pier, this morning. You see, that charterer refused to give any information whatever as to the location of the mine or who is operating it. Now— what's the natural inference— out in Eastern waters?"

"M-w-e-l-l— I'd say either the mine is so far from civilization that the present operator knows he can't hold it against an attack in force— or else he may have a landtitle to the ground which doesn't cover mining-rights of any description. In the last case, he's between two fires—risk of confiscation by the parties or the Government from whom he purchased, and the chance of being wiped out by some expedition with men enough to do it when there's no warship within call."

"In either case, that platinum mine— a few thousand tons from it selling for nearly three-quarters of a million— belongs to whoever can take and hold it. Eh?"

"Oh— tut-tut! That's robbery!"

"Take some proving to make it so— would it not?"

"H-m-m! Jones, I think one reason why you interest me is your habit of eliminating the nonessentials and getting down to bed facts! Well— suppose an expedition did locate and take possession of that mine? It would be the word of the wellequipped, well-manned operating company against a weak claimant, as far as the legal status went. But in getting possession, you might unfortunately kill the previous operator— possibly his whole force— eh? A very serious offense— not?"

"Oh, that's putting such a contingency in its worst light! Any comp'ny is permitted by law to protect its property against attack— protect the lives of its operating force! Of course, if a handful of soreheads choose to make trouble while we are peaceably operating our mine, and get shot while doing it, no court is going to blame us for acting in self-defense— particularly if none of the

other party is left alive to tell some cock-and-bull story about previous ownership. What?"

Corbelston threw back his head and laughed. He was just that cold-blooded, himself— though with a deceiving veneer which made him appear a gentleman. With no conscientious scruples to hold him back or trip him up, it is difficult to keep a person of that sort from accumulating what doesn't belong to him, even to the fullness thereof— and laughing at the helpless victims. As a rule, he's too smart to be caught actually outside the law— and if he is caught, he knows exactly what a hundred thousand or so will do by way of getting him loose again. He cast another appraising glance over the two men; then he asked:

"You haven't a sample of that ore with you, I suppose? It must have been almost impossible to hang on to it, with all you've been through!"'

"Worth giving some thought to, none the less! Without a sample, we'd have diffic'lty in gettin' anyone int'rested. I had this in a belt, under my shirt— fancy I've not lost a grain of it. You'll have it analyzed, of course— but return to me as much as possible of it."

"Hmph! I've a mineralogist of my own, as it happens— need him in various deals! You can bring your stuff along. when we go to. see him, presently— stand by and watch until he's through with his blowpipe testing. Is either of you a navigator?"

"Wohlberg holds a master's ticket for sail and a mate's for steam. I'm both a mechanical and a mining engineer."

"Then there's no need of letting in any of those shell-backs alongshore to split profits with us and blab when they're drunk! You two command the expedition— if your stuff tests out as you say. I'll give each of you a quarter-share in anything we get, and five thousand for immediate expenses. You haven't given me any workable details yet— description of ship, port, charterer, smelting company. But I expect you to do that when you get the ten thousand. Then I'll decide whether to stop there, or whether there's a gambling chance in really going after that stuff. Come along! We'll see the mineralogist first— then have dinner and block out some plan of action."

THREE days later Miss Avery was putting her cabin in order for a voyage. across the Pacific in the nine-thousand-ton cargo-boat *Wyanomah*— Joseph Allen, master— which had been loading flour and heavy-case goods for Manila. While she was arranging some of her recent purchases, Allen came in— bolting the door after him from mere force of habit.

"Going ashore again this afternoon, Claire?"

"Yes. I want to get a few more things before we leave. You'll clear tomorrow, will you?"

"Well— we'll have everything in before breakfast—there's no reason why we shouldn't, though Cap'n Jennings has been nosing around California Street to see if he can pick up anything we should guard against, and it might be to our advantage if we waited a day longer. Of course he has no idea who is really chartering his boat— back of you; and he doesn't give a darn— says your word and your father's were always as good as your bond. But he knows all about the stuff we took down to Sydney— knows we'll run more cargoes of it if we get the chance, and would like nothing better than to come along as passenger and watch us play the game. I was almost tempted to invite him—but the Rajah might object, and he can help us more by staying here in Frisco and being honestly ignorant of what we're doing. What do you think, Claire? Is anyone after us right now— or have we bluffed everybody with our regular ship's business since we cleared from Sydney?"

"That depends a whole lot upon how much gossip there was around Darling Harbor when we left. That president of the smelting company is a pretty hardoiled. proposition— there isn't a doubt that he cabled his agents in more than one port to keep track of us, but they'd hesitate about going very far without plainer orders than he'd give by cable. And I don't think those stowaways had any conuection with him—"

"In spite of the fact that they got aboard of us from one of the company's ore-barges?"

"They could easily have gotten themselves taken on as extra shovelers— and Manners is too smart to attempt anything as likely to point suspicion directly at him when we found them, which we were almost certain to do. He wants more of that ore— it paid him a frightful profit!"

"Then there was knowledge gomg about Sydney as to what sort of stuff we brought there!"

"Enough to put those two men aboard of us, anyhow— but they might have stumbled upon it accidentally, and had good reason to keep their mouths shut. They're in London by now— can't get here before we leave—"

"It would seem not— unless they got loose, somewhere along the Canal."

"I've been thinking of that. We'll overhaul the boat pretty thoroughly when we're past the Farralones. If we don't find anybody except our own crew aboard, I don't see how they can interfere with us much— short of catching us at the Island by sheer accident."

"You can't be sure of anything in this sort of game— except that our unknown adversary is working just as much in the dark as we are— but is not going to sleep on the job. Well— I'll clear her by noon. You'll be aboard either

tonight or soon after breakfast, I suppose? Cap'n Jennings says he's coming down to get better acquainted with you before we pull out— the old boy seems to have fallen for you pretty hard— says it took man-size nerve to put through that deal in Sydney."

WITH all their caution and forethought, it had not occurred to either of them that anybody could have an object in molesting one or the other in a port where their business of securing cargo for their boat at more or less profitable freights was so perfectly obvious. The *Wyanomah* was loading a full cargo of bona-fide merchandise, and there wasn't an extra displacement-ton in which she could have carried anything else if her charterer had wished to. So Miss Avery took a jitney up to Market Street and made purchases in a couple of stores where she was known by name— then went to see an acquaintance in one of the office-buildings, remaining for over an hour.

When she came out upon the sidewalk, a neatly uniformed chauffeur stepped across from an expensive car at the curb, touched his cap, asked if she were not "Miss Avery'"— and handed her a note in a stylish envelope, explaining that he had traced her to the last shop in which she had made a purchase and that one of the clerks had pointed her out to him just as she entered the office-building. He had waited, there, for her to come out again.

The man and the car had every appearance of quiet respectability. After glancing over them a second time, she opened the envelope and read the note. The paper was rich and creamy, with the name of a country estate engraved at the top.

My dear Miss Avery:

Very much to my regret, my chauffeur was unfortunate enough to run down Captain Joseph Allen of the Steamer Wyanomah at a crossing, when he was coming up from his pier. He was unconscious when we picked him up— but, stopping for a docter on the way, we took him out to my home a few miles south of the city, and he was able to speak by the time we reached there. After examining him, the doctor thinks a fractured leg and bruises about the body are the worst of his injuries— hopes to have him out again within a month, if nothing else develops.

But his recovery will be retarded if he has anything to worry about—and he began asking, at once, that you be sent for, as there are a number of matters: which you must handle in his absence. As I understand it, his ship was to leave tomorrow and he seems anxious to have her go even if he has to rejoin her later in some other port. I'm not familiar with the shipping business, but I suppose there are expenses which run up against a ship if she remains in port after her cargo is in, ready to leave. The doctor used an anesthetic while setting the leg, and I'm sending my chauffeur at once to see if he can't trace you and bring you out here by the time Captain Allen is able to talk again.

Respectfully, James Harping Copley, II

On the face of it, there was nothing suspicious about the note. The name seemed vaguely familiar to her as that of a rich society man, about thirty-five, who lived in one of the show-places of the suburbs and whose grandfather had been a "Forty-niner" from Boston. But just to make sure of this, she went back into the lobby of the office-building and looked him up in the suburban telephone-book. Name and address appeared to correspond, perfectly. Then— just for assurance which seemed really needless— she called up the *Wyanomah* and got Harry Bradford, the mate, on the wire. He said the shipmaster had gone up the pier within ten minutes after she left— intending to dine at one of the clubs after attending to some business on Market Street. This tallied with the statements in the note— there would have been ample time for the accident, the taking him out to Copely's house, and the chauffeur's return to search for her. It was even likely that Allen might have given the names of two shops in which she was known and might be found— inasmuch as she had told him just where she was going.

All this, of course, takes much longer in the telling than it did at the time. Looking at the note from any angle, it seemed perfectly straight— and if Joe Allen were really hurt too badly to clear his ship, next day, he might have decided it would be the safer course, everything considered, for her to sail without him. In that case, he would need a confidential interview with her at once. Probably it was less than ten minutes from the time she read the note to the moment she stepped into the car and was driven swiftly off down the Monterey road.

THERE was apparently nothing to prevent Claire Avery's stopping the car anywhere along the road and getting out, had she decided to do so. The windows were open— other cars passing. It seemed farther than her estimate of the distance, and soon became too dark to distinguish houses back from the road, but eventually, they swung in between handsome gate-pillars with lamps on them, drove for several minutes through a thick growth of evergreens, and came to the porte-cochére of a spacious bungalow, which didn't seem to be as well lighted as it would have been with guests about the place. Saying he supposed she would like to go up to see the Captain at once, the chauffeur removed his cap and led the way up a broad flight of redwood stairs, along a spacious hall, and threw open the door of a room lighted by a single incandescent with a green shade.

Before Miss Avery could fairly make out the different objects in it, the door was quietly closed behind her— and locked. Unquestionably, securely, locked! There were in the room a neat white-enameled bed, davenport, chairs, books on a table, roses in a bowl, a bath adjoining— and steel grilles at every

window, of beautiful design, highly decorative, but hard enough to resist any file or any human strength.

Miss Avery sat down, removed her hat, picked up a book. Eventually, there would be food, in all probability— and an explanation. Meanwhile— the only satisfaction she got out of the situation was that her instinct had been right. She was securely trapped, for the present.

In half an hour the door was unlocked to admit a big Chinaman who would have scared most women speechless. Some accident of birth had twisted his features until they were those of a demon rather than a normal human being. His eyes were deep-set, coal-black and piercing— but taken by themselves, gave a somewhat better impression than the face. The man was. clean enough— his clothes neat for their type. Yet the whole effect was one which would have given the average woman a feeling of helpless terror— and Miss Avery decided at first glance that the man had been selected to wait upon her, purposely, with such an idea in view. As he was laying out a tempting meal upon a table near one of the windows, she studied him closely— then, with a smile, ventured a few words in the Cantonese dialect. (A woman who manages the business of her father's schooner, among the Pacific islands, picks up a good bit of the Samoan-Hawaiian dialects and runs across the limit of grotesque hideousness in human features. When her trading sends her up and down the China Sea, she acquires a smattering of Mandarin and Cantonese, as easily— becomes accustomed to even more nerve-jarring sights.)

For a second or two, the big Chink's face was Orientally impassive; then the more expressive eyes glanced over her speculatively. When it was evident that she had his close attention, the girl suddenly flung out one hand at arm's length in a peculiar gesture— the fingers crooked in a certain position.

Now, a Chinaman rarely gets pale. Instead of that, the flesh of his face sometimes appears to get pasty—as if one might dent it deeply with the end of a finger. Presumably the man was thoroughly coldblooded— a machine to commit any sort of atrocity which might be ordered— had been a hatchet-man, and worse— or else he wouldn't be where he was in the circumstances. But like most of his race, he was intensely superstitious; '"devils" were living, destructive forces to him; and this white woman not only knew his own country but apparently moved in the most powerful devil-society. Loyalty to his wages and salt were all very well in the case of soft, weak females with throats to be cut— but nothing had been said to him about a "devil-woman." That was a different matter altogether. For the sake of his ancestors and his own bodily safety, he was entirely at the disposal of such a person.

OF course the plotters in the background had figured that she would react to the Chink's terrorizing appearance in the usual feminine way and be in a receptive condition when one of them finally appeared to interview her— instead of which, she had written a coded note to Captain Allen and intrusted it to the Chinaman, apparently without a doubt that it would be forwarded as she had ordered. And this calm assurance that he dare not disobey her, clinched the young woman's status in Ling Fo's mind. The ordinary white-faced girl would have feared him— screamed at his approach. But this handsome "devil-woman" had given her orders with the air of one who knows they cannot be disobeyed under penalty of disaster to one's body and torment to one's ancestors—then calmly turned her back upon him. All things considered, he feared the mails were too slow, and managed to send the note by a fellowCantonese within an hour. Miss Avery knew it was a chance, of course— but took it with a good deal of confidence that her nete would reach Joe Allen and induce him to sail without her— which was about the last thing the gang expected him to do. Later in the evening a man whose strong features seemed vaguely familiar came in and sat down to chat with her as if she were a guest in his house instead of a prisoner. He was courteous— not in the least dictatorial— said that his own wishes in regard to dealing with her had been overruled by rougher business associates who had determined to purchase a halfinterest in the platinum mine whose owner she was known to represent. He explained that they were prepared to give her satisfactory guarantees that they would pay as high as a million for a half-interest if, upon examination by their engineers, the matrixlode proved as rich as the sample which they had seen would indicate— but that they must know the location of the mine and examine it for themselves. In order clearly to bring out what she was up against, Claire pretended to more fear and nervousness than she came anywhere near feeling.

"Of course you know, Mr. Copely— if that's your name—"

"It isn't. We're using his house while it is supposed to be closed, during his absence in Europe. The two caretakers were induced to make a little extra money on the side. I'm 'Smith'— if you like."

"You're something a good deal more than Smith, if I know anything about physiognomy! Some day, I'll place you— and see if a man can really get away with this sort of thing! However, getting back to the main question: you know as well as I do that I merely acted as shipping-agent for the owner of that ore— selling it as ordered. And that closed the transaction as far as I and my steamer were concerned. We left Singapore in ballast and made a quick run to Sydney— showing that there was but one way in which that ore could be put aboard of us— from junks— at sea."

"Just where did they put it aboard of you, Miss Avery?"

"Somewhere between Singapore and Sydney. Figure it out for yourself!"

"Smith" threw up one hand in a gesture of annoyance. "Miss Avery," he said, "you fail entirely to realize the position you are in! I'm doing my best to get you out of this without bodily harm and with a minimum of detention. But the crowd who are back of this affair are as coldblooded as an octopus! They mean to get what you know— or—"

"Yes? Or— what?"

"Well— the mildest thing they talk of doing is sending you out to an isolated bungalow the other side of the foothills with Ling Fo— alone!"

An expression of horror came into th girl's face. She was an excellent actress, at a pinch. "Oh, not that, Mr. Smith! Have mercy! Not that!"

"If you persist in defying them, I'm powerless! Were I seriously to interfere, they'd accuse me of intending to betray them— my life wouldn't be worth ten cents! And— frankly— I've too many weighty interests at stake to attempt anything quite so heroic for a woman who is simply obstinate and has it in her own hands to walk out of this house about her own business within an hour!"

"You're willing to have my life on your hands rather than make an effort to save me? That's the sort of a man you are, is it? Of course I'd kill myself at the first opportunity after reaching that bungalow!"

"M-well— that's putting me in perhaps a worse light than I really deserve, Miss Avery! It is barely possible that we may be able to work upon Captain Allen's fears for you sufficiently to get the information from him. I think he'll give it rather than have you subjected to any such treatment. He'll know by noon that something has happened to you— and he wont leave port until you're found."

"I think you overrate my importance to him or his shippers. He must run his ship according to his business agreements for his cargo— some of which is perishable."

"Smith" laughed— overconfidently, as he was afterward obliged to admit. At the time, he would have gambled any reasonable amount of money that Joe Allen would no more leave San Francisco knowing that she was in the hands of unscrupulous scoundrels than she would have sailed without him in a similar position. Had it not been for the note which she smuggled out by Ling Fo, Smith would have won his bet— because his knowledge of human nature and conviction as to a strong liking between the two were not at fault. It was simply that both were playing a game far bigger than their own personal interests, and were risking something at every step.

ALLEN had come down the pier to his ship about six bells— finding, at the gangplank, a well-dressed Cantonese who spoke fairly good English, waiting for him with Claire's note. Once assured that he was Captain Allen, himself, the Chinaman disappeared before he had read it through. It took but a couple of minutes for Allen to grasp the fact of her abduction— and sprint up the pier in record time. But the messenger was nowhere in sight. The watchman said he had crossed the street a few seconds before— which was all the satisfaction the shipmaster got. As well try to locate one particular flea on a big dog! After he had reread the note in his own cabin to Harry Bradford and Tom Harvey, they were all three inclined to disregard it and quietly set the whole police-force at work. But gradually they came around to the belief that the girl was right and stood a good chance of outwitting the gang of pirates— even securing much valuable information if they did as she requested. The note was in a cipher which Claire and the Captain had worked out to be quickly read without a key and yet completely baffle a casual reader who would suppose it much more complicated than it actually was. Translated, it read:

Dear Joe:

They "got me" through a fake note stating that you had been run over by a car and wanted to see me at once. I tested it— two ways— seemed perfectly straight. Of course they're using pretty nasty threats to force information out of me.

Just by luck, they tried to scare me with a frightful-looking Chink who has more anxiety about what I may do to his ancestors than keeping his job. Barring accidents, if I lose my nerve, he'll obey my orders at every turn— which is something.

They expect you to hold up the ship and search for me. If you do, they are likely to get you, also, or force your hand with threats concerning me. If you clear as intended, I'm fairly sure it will disarrange their plans a whole lot, because they're not expecting you to do anything of the sort and wont have any boat of their own ready to chase you on the jump. So, if you pass the Farralones before they're in sight. they wont get a glimpse of you all the way across. They'll calculate your time into Manila pretty closely— probably arrange to get there four or five days later— before you can load and be off again after discharging.

My impression is that if you let the newspapers get hold of my abduction— make quite a story of it without any apparent explanation— it will make other parties who may be on our track think that you'll never dream of looking for any business out of the usual run until I'm found. You can make Manila at least three days quicker than anyone supposes— set down in the log that you were making a test-run with picked coal under exceptionably favorable conditions. Cap'n Jennings can be fixing a part-cargo in the right direction while you're at sea—so that you can be out of Manila before this crowd reaches there. Catch the idea?

Never mind about me. I'll probably find out a lot before they get through with me— and unless a streak of unexpected bad luck happens along, I think I can get loose when it begins to look as though I'd better. If I get a chance, will communicate by radio.

Claire.

THE mate and the engineer were inclined to minimize the danger which Miss Avery might be running in the hands of her captors. The fact that she had succeeded in getting her note through to the Captain and appeared to have been treated well up to that time indicated, as they thought, that whoever had abducted her would have too wholesome a respect for criminal punishment to do her bodily harm. On the other hand, her being in their power seemed to offer a better chance to run another cargo of the ore than they had really expected to get for some months— from the fact that her captors would never think of the Captain's risking it on his own responsibility, without her. But Allen knew the seriousness of the game better than they did.

"It probably does give us some chance of running another cargo after we leave Manila— provided those cowards who have Miss Avery happen to represent a combination of the only parties who are making a serious effort to run us down and discover the location of that mine! But we can't safely assume anything of the sort! That Sydney smelting company want to keep a ' good thing for themselves sufficiently to use every effort toward preventing any knowledge of the ore from leaking out. They're equally certain, however, to have one or more agents of their own shadowing us even if the men have no idea of just why they are doing it.

"Now, suppose that some one else with access to their plant happened to get hold of a sample and tested it— knowing the source from which the company got it? That would make at least two different parties on our trail. The company's own agents: might be cautioned against getting caught in anything really outside the law— though I think both Manners and Sladen have nerve enough to take a chance for what they know there is in this proposition. But the possible outsiders wouldn't be influenced by any scruples at all. If they know the amount paid for that partcargo of ore— and they undoubtedly would if they know anything at all about the stuff— they wont even stop at murder! They'll have no more mercy on Claire Avery than they would on a cat which had something of value to them inside of her! In spite of her letter, I'm going to stay here until I run those brutes down and get her out of their clutches!"

"I think you're wrong and she's right, Cap'n! First place, she's sized up the proposition just about as I do— you'll be a darned sight more likely to wind up in their clutches, yourself, than you will to locate and get her out of them. Perhaps you'd be lucky enough or smart enough not to—but say they do get you? That puts the two of you in the gang's hands— and we'll suppose this lot to be the more determined, unscrupulous one. Now, imagine yourself securely bound to something solid watching them do things to her right before your eyes? See? If it were a case of you alone, blabbing, you'd tell 'em to go to hell

and cut the liver out of you. But if you saw 'em trying it on her,— and couldn't do a thing,— you'd weaken inside of a minute! Any of us would!

"Suppose, on the other hand, you clear the boat as she wishes and let Cap'n Jennings do the chasing of those brutes while we are on our way? He likes her a lot— he'll see red when he hears about this— and he's got a lot of influence both with the city government and the Federal. administration. He might even get a detail of doughboys from Presidio to work on the quiet while the city police are tracing her in their own way. If the Wyanomah unexpectedly gets away to sea before they can follow her with some faster boat, it'll make 'em damn careful what they do to Miss Avery! If they maltreated her uselessly when the key to the whole proposition was chasing after us, they not only wouldn't gain anything by it, but there'd be a good deal less mercy shown them if, or when, they are caught. Seems to me the safest thing for Miss Claire is to do exactly as she says!"

EVENTUALLY, Allen came around to their belief— though he felt sick all through at the idea of leaving Claire in such a position. They were at breakfast next morning when a note was put aboard by some messenger who got away before there seemed any reason for detaining him. This communication was expressed in courteous terms by a person of education, but its grim purport was none the less clear. Miss Avery was being "detained" by certain "interests" who were determined to purchase a half-interest in the mine whose owner she represented. She was in a place secure enough to make any search for her useless, and would be treated with consideration if she gave them the location of the mine within a reasonable time. If, unfortunately, she remained foolishly obstinate, the "interests" would be regrettably obliged to use pressure. In the circumstances, Captain Allen must use his own judgment, based upon his knowledge of her, as to whether it might be advisable for him to remain a week or more in port— or whether, if there seemed to be nothing gained by waiting, he should clear at once as intended.

The shipmaster's immediate reaction to this note was both as the writer had anticipated— and very much otherwise. Allen was seen motoring furiously to the offices of the Jennings Shipping & Navigation Company— then, with Captain Jennings, to call upon the Police Commissioner. After that, by cable-car and on foot, he cleared his ship at the Customhouse in his usual businesslike way— and the *Wyanomah* was actually steaming out through the Golden Gate before the "interests" were convinced that he had really done so.

AT two o'clock, there was a hurried council-of-war in the corner room of Corbelston's office-suite between the financier, Jones, Wohlberg and two

other men who had been taken into the game as competent executives. Corbelston had seen too many propositions of all sorts—been through too many risky adventures— to get much excited over a serious reverse when one happened to disarrange his plans. His voice was quiet— he seemed to be enjoying his cigar; but if he had lost one trick, he meant to take the next one. He wasn't playing for marbles, either.

"After we'd finished breakfast this morning, out at the Copely place, I'd about decided to pull out and quit. I don't pretend to know so very much about women— but I'm pretty well satisfied that we'll get nothing from that girl. And she has a perfect horror of Ling Fo, too! Makes her faint even to look at him, if I'm any judge of expression and nervous reaction. Of course, we can try going the limit with her— but if we do, and get nothing, we're not only where we started, as far as she is concerned, but we're up against conviction for murder if the police run us down. She'll kill herself! And her friends wont let up until they get us! The only thing which made me hesitate was the chance that we might get Captain Allen, too, while he was searching the city for her. It never occurred to me that he would actually sail and leave her in any such position, here— not one man in ten thousand would have done it! And I figured that by working upon the fears of each for the other we might get somewhere.

"Well— Allen's clearing his ship and getting to sea, in the circumstances, puts another face upon the matter altogether. So far, I've been interested in this game of Jones' and Wohlberg's as a gamble with some chance of potting half a million if we were lucky— perhaps a bit more. And the thing began to look as though our chances were poor unless we got in deeper and took more serious risks than it was really worth. But now— I'm plumb interested! I'm going to sit in this game to win! If that girl will actually risk being alone with Ling Fo in a mountain shack rather than tell us what she knows,— and this shipmaster, Allen, will risk leaving her in our hands with all which that implies, the game is far bigger than any of us have dreamed! It's not a matter of half a million, but of twenty— thirty— fifty millions! Unless it's absolutely necessary, with reasonable prospect of her weakening, I wont stand for doing that girl any real harm. I've too much to lose, personally, by getting implicated in anything of the sort— otherwise, of course, she or what happens to her are of no interest to me."

"But— hell! What can we do, now, if she doesn't come across? Allen and his ship are out of sight by this time— at sea!"

"Well—they can be followed. If we get busy at once, we can clear the *Llangow City* and be outside Point Lobos by sunset. According to Cap'n Wohlberg's estimate of the *Wyanomah*'s engines, our boat should have the

edge on her by a good four knots— overhaul her in forty-eight hours if she sticks to a straight course for Manila—"

"Aye— but suppose Allen doesn't? He'll save time and coal by a 'great circle' course— making his southing off Japan— difference of close upon two days in the run!"

"We don't really care much, either way. They'll post the Wyanomah on the blackboard at the Maritime Exchange as being due in Manila on a certain date— knowing better than we do how long she ought to take at sea. We may fairly assume, I think, that the platinum mine is not upon any of the Pacific islands—inasmuch as that boat picked up the ore somewhere between Singapore and Sydney. She hasn't a single ton of space for it until after she discharges at Manila. So all we have to do is to make Manila about the same time or possibly a day ahead of her. Even if she beats us a couple of days, she wont be discharged and loaded again."

"Didn't you say you could have chartered an eight-hundred-ton seagoing yacht for a little less than you got the *Llangow City*, Mr. Corbelston? Why wouldn't she have been a better craft for the sort of chasing and cruising we're likely to do?"

"Cost more to run her—attract too much attention wherever we went— too easy to spot, and start gossip in different ports. On the other hand, a modern tramp like the *Llangow City*, under U. S. registry, getting no business at the freights she has to charge, might easily pass through the hands of six or eight different owners— be put under European registry again— be sent from one was presumably another passenger, like herself— yet in a few moments she sensed the air of command which indicated him as the man in supreme authority. From his manner she judged that he was fully aware of the risk to all of them if they ill-treated her— that it was his intention to be as courteous as circumstances permitted. Again, the impression crossed her mind that he was really a person of social prominence— well-known in California. The difficulty would be to prove such a man's identity with this gentlemanly pirate who was certainly breaking the laws in her case and presumably in others.

FROM her stateroom she once or twice caught the snapping of a radio-spark which seemed to be just overhead in the master's cabin abaft the wheelhouse. She knew that Corbelston had appropriated this for himself and thought it likely that there would not be space enough up there for the more bulky parts of the outfit— either a large storage-battery or a small automatic dynamo, controlled from above. In such a case, these would be, possibly, in a storeroom adjoining hers. So, at first opportunity, she had Ling Fo get her a

small electric torch and a pair of pliers. The serviceable automatic which she had been wearing concealed in her clothes, of course, hadn't been discovered.

Feeling practically certain that Corbelston— the supposed Smith— wouldn't go into this storeroom unless looking for trouble in his outfit, or have Jones overhaul it unless necessary, she managed to pick the lock and slip in there during the nightwatch, unobserved, to make a thorough examination. As she had thought likely, there were a number of the smaller parts in duplicate. "Spares"— in the way of wire, switches, extra batteries, keys, head-frames with ear-receivers, spark-coils, condensers, and so forth. The connections from the master's cabin were led down through a couple of three-inch iron tubes— there was even a manhole plate in the deck which permitted access to the storeroom and its various parts of the outfit in case of mutiny or other trouble aboagd. As nearly as she could judge, this manhole cover was under the chart-desk on the side opposite Corbelston's berth, and she found that by standing on top of the dynamo, she could manage to push it up at any time she wished. Hauling herself up through it was a more difficult matter— but it was possible.

AT a time when "Smith" was playing cards with the other men in the mess saloon within thirty feet of her, she took the chance of going into the storeroom, bolting the door, putting a wooden box on top of the dynamo and actually getting up into the cabin above. Drawing the blinds so that no reflection from her torch could be seen from the bridge, she examined the wires leading up to the antenne and found a place where a branch-loop could be spliced in on them without being discovered unless a careful search were made. Then letting herself down into the storeroom again, she sawed an opening in the bulkhead through which she crawled into the space under the berth in her own stateroom.

As Ling Fo had charge of its cleaning and bed-making, the steamer-trunk containing an outfit of clothing hastily purchased for her offered all the concealment necessary when shoved under her berth. On the other side, an empty wooden box was placed against the hole. She was now in position to make her next moves with more leisure and less chance of being caught at them— as every signal over the aérials passed through her branch-loop and she could cut-in with her switch at any time, having access to the storeroom without the risk of going in from the gangway.

Having handled a battery-set for her father on the old trading-schooner, she was a competent amateur electrician and had kept up with recent developments of the regenerative telephone-sets. So that with anything as comparatively simple as a spark and code outfit, she had little difficulty in rigging up a pony transmitting buzzer and key— from a spark-coil and two cells

of battery— which was weak enough to sound as though it were coming from distance when Corbelston had the receivers over his ears in the cabin above. An experienced operator might have detected something about the strength of the signals which would have started him investigating, but to Corbelston there seemed to be nothing at all out of the way with them when she cut in and asked him to relay a message to some other steamer, that night.

THE other men hadn't considered that there would be anything more they could do on the voyage across the Pacific than get to Manila about the time the *Wyanomah* did and start the real chase from there. But Corbelston was now in theport to another in ballast for delivery— be chartered on short time or for a single voyage— pick up a little business here and there during these changes of ownership— and attract no attention whatever to the six or eight men who happen to be aboard in addition to her crew. Also— she'll carry that ore when we get it! I went over all this before chartering her.

"Well— I'll leave word in my offices that I've been suddenly called to the East— then get aboard the tramp from some launch on the side away from the pier, before the last coal-barge hauls away. Meanwhile, Cap'n Wohlberg will clear her, and Gurney will either get some guarantee from the girl that she'll go aboard without making any disturbance— face pretty well covered— or else drug her and come down in an ambulance with a 'sick woman.' Don't do that, however, unless you have to. It's too risky, with the police combing the city for her! My impression is that she'll go with ts willingly— particularly when she knows we've cleared for Manila and are proceeding there, direct. I foresaw the possibility of having to bring her along and have had men fitting up a stateroom on the hurricane-deck, just under the wheelhouse. Also, I've signed on a well-recommended steward and stewardess. We'll take a gang of fifteen or twenty husky scrappers from 'longshore, with us— and a couple of machine-guns, just in case we locate that mine within the next few months. But we'll berth them aft under the turtle-deck— away from the crew, and where they'll have no business in the 'midship-'house' at all. With that outfit, we can go most anywhere and do pretty nearly anything. Now— if you've got the layout thoroughly in mind, let's go! Get busy!"

DURING the twenty-four hours Claire Avery had been materially strengthening her influence over Ling Fo in a way that was entirely psychological and which she artistically worked for all it was worth. The big demoniac Chinaman had been given to understand by Corbelston— as the supposed "Copely"— and his companions, that they had a young woman in their power from whom they meant to get certain information in one way or

another— no matter how far they had to go with her. His natural inference, based upon Oriental methods in such cases, was that they were dealing with a female already frightened out of her senses and that either they would turn her over to him as a plaything or order her throat cut to get rid of her after getting the information they wanted. When she laughed at him— looking into those fathomless eyes, which were not so bad as his face, without the least evidence of fear— and proved herself the possessor of knowledge supposedly given only to those upon intimate terms with both gods and devils, he was convinced that a mistake had been made, somewhere. So he closely watched her bearing with the supposed "Copely-Smith" and Gurney, who was brought in to attempt a little '"third degree."

Had she weakened with either of them, he would have begun to distrust the extent of her power for evil or good in his own case. But she appeared to be laughing at them also— answering their questions and accusations with a simple innocence which the Chinaman saw, with a quiet grin of his own, was simply playing with them, fencing, telling nothing they wanted to know. So, being apparently in their power to kill or abuse in any way they chose, if she actually was so little afraid of them as to smilingly defy the worst they could do, it was manifestly probable that she could have some willing devil strike them dead with black magic at any moment she wished to do so. And thinking of certain stuff in little teakwood boxes concealed in secret pockets of his quilted jacket, Ling Fo rather hoped for selection as that "willing devil," himself, upon occasion. He was entirely at her service— it could be quite easily done, and no great "bobbery" about it if the bodies were properly made away with.

When it appeared that she had nothing of this sort in mind for the present, Ling Fo's respect increased, if anything. She would use the fools for purposes of her own, it seemed— when they supposed her in their power? 'The artistic finesse of this appealed to him. All in her own good time? Decidedly, this was admirable! In the serving of such a one, there was much to be learned. When he found that they were to make a journey, at sea in the general direction of his own country and that the woman was to accompany them, quite willingly, the oblique mind of him grinned while his face remained impassive. This was getting to be more and more a joke which none but the Oriental brain could thoroughly appreciate. It was conveyed to him in simple but forcible language that the woman would be more or less in his charge— that he was to look after, anticipate her wants, tempt her appetite with his choicest cooking— but that, under risk of sudden death, he was to see that no harm came to her from anyone. This, mind you, from the very employers who at first pretended

indifference as to whether her throat was cut or anything else that might happen to her. Hmph! They had been as putty in her hands!

WHEN he first heard of the eighteen roughnecks who were to be quartered aft upon the same boat, it presented another aspect of the affair. Handling three or four men with brains enough to consider their own safety was a different proposition from controlling a dozen and a half beachcombers who were likely to be fairly primed with hard liquor and oblivious to personal danger for that reason. But if, for example, Ling were to constitute himself assistant steward, as would be the natural selection aboard the tramp, it would be among his duties to carry meals aft from the galley to this bunch of driftwood under the turtle-deck. And if the woman considered it advisable to so order it, any time, he would provide himself with more little teakwood boxes of different sorts to be used in connection with the food— the contents of some producing wholesale oblivion for many hours, while others made the effect unanimous and permanent. All things considered, Ling Fo went aboard that afternoon with no misgivings either for himself or his "devil-woman"— who seemed equally satisfied with the course matters were taking. And as they rounded Point Lobos, the evening papers were out with big headlines concerning a handsome girl, well-known in shipping circles as the charterer and supercargo of a nine-thousandton steamer, who had been mysteriously abducted for no apparent reason— who was being diligently searched for both by the city police and army-details from Presidio. It was rumored that international complications might be mixed up in the case.

Corbelston's private secretary had been told that he could be reached by radio— and paid over a hundred dollars to have the gist of the news broadcasted. The operator on the *Llangow City*— Corbelston himself, happened to be the only man aboard who could adjust a regenerative set and use "Continental"— picked this up as it came, noticing with surprise and much satisfaction that no hint of their real game had been even suggested in relation to the girl's abduction. So far, it seemed, the efforts of the various conflicting "interests" to locate the mysterious mine had been leak-proof.

IN the mess-saloon, that evening, Miss Avery saw Jones and Wohlberg for the first time since her abduction. As they had not been on the deck of the Wyanomah for over five minutes before getting into the boat which transferred them to the wool-steamer, and had presented a pretty tough appearance after their thirty-six hours in the hold, they didn't suppose she would recognize them. For a few minutes, she didn't— couldn't place them in spite of the something familiar in their faces. Then Wohlberg scowled in a

peculiar way and it instantly recalled the look on his face after Allen had knocked him down. She smiled in frank good humor— and renewed the acquaintance.

"I've been unable to guess why I was abducted and what all this was about, but of course, if you two are in it, that explains a lot— though why you should bear any ill-will toward me, I don't know! How did you manage to get off that wool-boat? We understood her master to say he was shorthanded and would be glad to work you as far as London, anyway."

Wohlberg scowled in a peculiar way and it— merely glowered at her across the table, but Jones had gotten more of his rough edges polished off, and for that reason was perhaps the more dangerous of the two, because it enabled him to keep his real intentions entirely under cover. Corbelston game to win and was using his head. He had a confidential agent in most of the Oriental ports with whom he used a private code for more particular communications. So he began, on the second day out, to advise his Manila man that he wanted confidential information concerning all cargo offering there for Australian or Oriental ports— and received messages two or three times each day upon this subject. Half way across, he was amazed to hear that the Wyanomah was expected within forty-eight hours— having made a test-run with picked coal over the northern or "great circle" course— and that a part-cargo of hemp and tobacco for Brisbane had been fixed for her by the Jennings agents, there. If this information had any basis of truth, Corbelston knew that he must have been misled upon some of Jones' or Wohlberg's data— and put it squarely up to them.

"Didn't one or both of you tell me the *Wyanomah* couldn't do better than fourteen— usually logged around thirteen?"

"Aye, sir. Down to her Plimsoll, she'll not do thirteen!"

"Well you're crazy in the head, I reckon! She'll be in Manila within forty-eight hours— been making a test-run with picked coal— northern course. And she's got a part-cargo fixed for Brisbane!"

"Did you get that by radio? Well—it's a lie! It's not in her to do it in the time! I listened to her engines through that bulkhead for two days an' they were shovin' her— we could tell by the way she was buckin' into them head-seas. Countin' the revolutions— knowin' the size an' pitch of her screw— it's not diffic'lt to figure her average speed! Turn up 'Lloyd's Register'— you'll find her rated twelve-and-a half!"

"H-m-m— you've pretty good reasons for your belief— but I've a hunch that you're wrong, all the same. That boat must have a good four knots in reserve! Anyhow— say the report is correct? What would you suggest?"

"If the report is right— which it just can't be— Allen'll be loaded an' outa Manila at least a day before we get there. Going to Brisbane, his course is down through Gilolo Passage and Torres Straits— if he goes direct. By changin' our course right now, we could prob'ly reach Gilolo a bit ahead of him. Got any agents in those waters that'd be likely to hear of his being spoken?"

"One at Gilolo— one at Zamboanga— and the one in Manila."

"The Manila one might pick up rumors at the Maritime Exchange. Tell him to let you know the minute any other craft speaks or sees the *Wyanomah*! He's got agents of his own who can watch for her!"

Corbelston did this at once, and changed his course to make the Gilolo Passage. Claire Avery did some concentrated thinking. She first ordered Ling Fo to put something in the pseudo "Smith's" cocktails which would keep him dead to the world until the next morning at least— and when the Chink brought word that the man couldn't keep his eyes open ten minutes longer, she crept up through the manhole into his room— examined him carefully to see if he were really unconscious— bolted the door and sat down at the radio-outfit to send out her code-call for the *Wyanomah*. In half an hour, she got an acknowledgment from Allen himself, who instantly recognized her sending. She gave him the main points of Corbelston's plans, so that Allen might easily avoid being spoken at sea.

FIVE days later, she talked to Corbelston in the room above, with her pony set— saying the *Wyanomah* had been sighted and spoken off Sandakan, North Borneo, apparently bound Macassar way— but botched the signature so that he couldn't tell which of his agents supposedly talked with him. He changed his course for Borneo, but got no other report of anyone sighting his quarry— went 1500 miles out of his way on a fool's errand while Allen was safely taking aboard another lot of ore at the mysterious mine on Lajoe Koera— loafed around Torres Straits for a week—then read in the maritime reports that the steamer *Wyanomah*, Allen, master, was discharging at Brisbane and proceeding from there with a part-cargo for the big smelting and refining company in Sydney. When he got back aboard the *Llangow City* with his news, he found that Miss Avery had somehow managed to get ashore at Thursday Island during the night and knew that she would go to the British Resident with the story of her abduction as soon as she could see him. Corbelston didn't even wait to get his anchor up— cut the cable and steamed off down the Straits at the best gait the deceptive-looking tramp had in reserve.

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3: The Man Who Missed The 'Bus

Stella Benson

1892–1933

1928 as a limited edition chap book

MR. ROBINSON'S temper was quite sore by the time he reached St. Pierre. The two irritations that most surely found the weak places in his nervous defences were noise and light in his eyes. And, as he told Monsieur Dupont, the proprietor of Les Trois Moineaux at St. Pierre, "If there is one thing, monsieur, that is offensive— essentially offensive— that is to say, a danger in itself— I mean to say noise doesn't have to have a meaning... What I mean is, monsieur, that noise—" "*Numero trente*," said Monsieur Dupont to the chasseur. Mr. Robinson always had to explain things very thoroughly in order to make people really appreciate the force of what he had to say— and even then it was a hard task to get them to acknowledge receipt, so to speak, of his message. But he was a humble man, and he accounted for the atmosphere of unanswered and unfinished remarks in which he lived by admitting that his words were unfortunately always inadequate to convey to a fellow-mortal the intense interest to be found in the curiosities of behaviour and sensation. His mind was overstocked with bye-products of the business of life. He felt that every moment disclosed a new thing worth thinking of among the phenomena that his senses presented to him. Other people, he saw, let these phenomenal moments slip by unanalysed, but if he had had the words and the courage, he felt, he could have awakened those of his fellow-creatures whom he met from their trance of shallow living. As it was, the relation of his explorations and wonderings sounded, even to his own ears, flat as the telling at breakfast of an ecstatic dream. What he had meant to say about noise, for instance, had been that noise was *in itself* terrifying and horrible— not as a warning of danger, but as a physical assault. Vulgar people treat noise only as a language that *means* something, he would have said, but really noise could not be translated, any more than rape could be translated. There was no such thing as an ugly harmless noise. The noise of an express train approaching and shrieking through a quiet station— the noise of heavy rain sweeping towards one through a forest— the noise of loud, concerted laughter at an unheard joke— all benevolent noises if translated into concrete terms, were *in themselves* calamities. All this Mr. Robinson would have thought worth saying to Monsieur Dupont— worth continuing to say until Monsieur Dupont should have confessed to an understanding of his meaning— but, as usual, the words collapsed as soon as they left Mr. Robinson's lips.

Monsieur Dupont stood in the doorway of Les Trois Moineaux with his back to the light. Mr. Robinson could see the shape of his head set on stooping

shoulders, with a little frail fluff of hair beaming round a baldness. He could see the rather crumpled ears with outleaning lobes bulging sharply against the light. But between ear and ear, between bald brow and breast, he could see nothing but a black blank against the glare. Mr. Robinson had extremely acute sight— perhaps too acute, as he often wanted to tell people, since this was perhaps why the light in his eyes affected him so painfully. "If my sight were less acute," he would have said, "I should not mind a glare so much— I mean to say, my eyes are so extremely receptive that they receive too much, or, in other words, the same cause that makes my eyes so very sensitive is ..." But nobody ever leaned forward and said, "I understand you perfectly, Mr. Robinson, and what you say is most interesting. Your sight includes so much that it cannot exclude excessive light, and this very naturally irritates your nerves, though the same peculiarity accounts for your intense powers of observation." Nobody ever said anything like that, but then, people are so self-engrossed. Mr. Robinson was not self-engrossed— he was simply extravagantly interested in *things,* not people. For instance, he looked round now— as the chasseur sought in the shadows for his suitcase— and saw the terrace striped by long beams of light— broad flat beams that were strung like yellow sheets from every window and door in the hotel to the trees, tall urns and tables of the terrace. A murmur of voices enlivened the air, but there were no human creatures in any beam— only blocked dark figures in the shadows— and, in every patch of light, a sleeping dog or cat or two. Dogs and cats lay extended or curled comfortably on the warm, uneven pavingstones, and Mr. Robinson's perfect sight absorbed the shape of every brown, tortoiseshell or black marking on their bodies, as a geographer might accept the continents on a new unheard-of globe. "It's just like geography— the markings on animals," Mr. Robinson had once said to an American who couldn't get away. "What I mean to say is that the markings on a dog or rabbit have just as much sense as the markings on this world of ours— or, in other words, the archipelagoes of spots on this pointer puppy are just as importantly isolated from one another as they could be in any Adriatic sea— " But the American had only replied, "Why, no, Mr. Robinson, not half so important; I am taking my wife— with the aid of the American Express Co.— to visit the Greek islands this summer, and we shall be sick on the sea and robbed on the land; whereas nobody but a flea ever visits the spots on that puppy, and the flea don't know and don't care a damn what colour he bites into." Showing that nobody except Mr. Robinson ever really studied things impersonally.

Mr. Robinson, a very ingenious-minded and sensitive man with plenty of money, was always seeking new places to go to, where he might be a success— or rather, where his unaccountable failures elsewhere might not be

known. St. Pierre, he thought, was an excellent venture, although the approach to it had been so trying. As soon as he had heard of it— through reading a short, thoughtless sketch by a popular novelist in the *Daily Call*— he had felt hopeful about it. A little Provençal walled town on a hill, looking out over vineyards to the blue Mediterranean— a perfect little hotel, clean and with a wonderful cook— frequented by an interesting few....

"By the time I get downstairs," thought Mr. Robinson, as he carefully laid his trousers under the mattress in his room and donned another pair, "the lights will be lit on the terrace, and I shall be able to see my future friends. I must tell someone about that curious broken reflection in the river Rhone...." He went downstairs and out on to the terrace where the tinkle of glasses and plates made him feel hungry. He could hear, as he stood in the doorway looking out, one man's voice making a series of jokes in quick succession, each excited pause in his voice being filled by a gust and scrape of general laughter— like waves breaking on a beach with a clatter and then recoiling with a thin, hopeful, lonely sound. "Probably all his jokes are personalities," thought Mr. Robinson, "and therefore not essentially funny. No doubt they are slightly pornographic, at that. When will people learn how interesting and exciting *things* are...."

A waiter behind him drew out a chair from a table in one of the squares of light thrown from a window. Mr. Robinson, after sitting down abstractedly, was just going to call the waiter back to tell him that his eyes were ultra-sensitive to light, and that he could see nothing in that glare, when a large dog, with the bleached, patched, innocent face of a circus-clown, came and laid its head on his knee. Mr. Robinson could never bear to disappoint an animal. He attributed to animals all the hot and cold variations of feeling that he himself habitually experienced, identifying the complacent fur of the brute with his own thin human skin. So that when the waiter, coming quietly behind him, put the wine list into his hand, Mr. Robinson merely said, "Thank you, garçon, but I never touch alcohol in any form— or, for the matter of that, tobacco either. In my opinion— " — and did not call the rapidly escaping waiter back to ask him to move his table. The dog's chin was now so comfortably pressed against his knee, and the dog's paw hooked in a pathetically prehensile way about his ankle.

Mr. Robinson made the best of his position in the dazzle and tried to look about him. The Trois Moineaux was built just outside the encircling wall of the tightly corseted little town of St. Pierre, and, since St. Pierre clung to the apex of a conical hill, it followed that the inn terrace jutted boldly out over a steep, stepped fall of vineyards overhanging the plain. The plain was very dim now, overlaid by starlit darkness, yet at the edge of the terrace there was a sense of

view, and all the occupied tables stood in a row against the low wall, diluting the food and drink they bore with starlight and space. The men and women sitting at these tables all had their faces to the world and their backs to Mr. Robinson. He could not see a single human face. He had come down too late to secure one of the outlooking tables, and his place was imprisoned in a web of light under an olive tree. In the middle of the table peaches and green grapes were heaped on a one-legged dish. And on the edge of the dish a caterpillar waved five-sixths of its length drearily in the air, unable to believe that its world could really end at this abrupt slippery rim. Mr. Robinson, shading his eyes from the light, could see every detail of the caterpillar's figure, and it seemed to him worth many minutes of absorbed attention. Its colour was a pale greenish fawn, and it had two dark bumps on its brow by way of eyes. "How unbearably difficult and lonely its life would seem to us," thought Mr. Robinson, leaning intensely over it. "How frightful if by mistake the merest spark of self-consciousness should get into an insect's body— (an accidental short-circuit in the life current, perhaps)— and it should know itself absolutely alone— appallingly free— " He put his finger in the range of its persistent wavings, and watched it crawl with a looping haste down his fingernail, accepting without question a quite fortuitous salvation from its dilemma. He laid his finger against a leaf, and the caterpillar disembarked briskly after its journey across alien elements. When it was gone, Mr. Robinson looked about him, dazed. "My goodness," he thought, "that caterpillar's face was the only one I have seen to-night."

The noise of chatter and laughter went up like a kind of smoke from the flickering creatures at the tables near the edge of the terrace. At each table the heads and shoulders of men and women leaned together— were sucked together like flames in a common upward draught. "My dear, she looked like a.... Oh, well, if you want to.... he's the kind of man who.... *No,* my dear, not in my *bedroom*.... A rattling good yarn.... Stop me if I've told you this one before...." One man, standing up a little unsteadily, facing the table nearest to Mr. Robinson, made a speech: "...the last time... delightful company... fair sex... happiest hours of my life... mustn't waste your time... us mere men... as the Irishman said to the Scotsman when... happiest moments of all my life... one minute and I shall be done... always remember the happiest days of all my... well, I mustn't keep you... I heard a little story the other day...." And all the time his audience leaned together round their table, embarrassed, looking away over the dark plain or murmuring together with bent heads. The only woman whose face Mr. Robinson might have seen was shielding her face with her hands and shaking with silent laughter. The speaker was wavering on his feet, very much as the caterpillar had wavered on its tail, and his wide

gestures, clawing the air in search of the attention of his friends, suggested to Mr. Robinson the caterpillar's wild gropings for foothold where no foothold was. "Yes," thought Mr. Robinson, "the caterpillar was *my* host. No other face is turned to me."

However, as he thought this, a man came from a further table and stood quite close, under the olive tree, between Mr. Robinson and the lighted doorway, looking down on him. The man stretched out his hand to the tree and leaned upon it. A freak of light caught the broad, short hand, walnut-knuckled and brown, crooked over the bough. Mr. Robinson could not see the man's face at all, but he felt that the visit was friendly. To conciliate this sympathetic stranger, he would even have talked about the weather, or made a joke about pretty girls or beer, but he could not think of anything of that kind to say to a man whose hand, grasping an olive bough, was all that could be known of him. All that Mr. Robinson could do for the moment was to wonder what could have sent the man here. "It could not have been," thought Mr. Robinson humbly, "that he was attracted by my face, because nobody ever is." And then he began thinking how one man's loss is nearly always another man's gain, if considered broadly enough. For one to be forsaken, really, means that another has a new friend. "This young man," thought Mr. Robinson, gazing at the black outline of the stranger's head, "has probably come here blindly, because of some sudden hurt, some stab, some insult, inflicted by his friends at that table over there— probably by a woman. Perhaps he thinks he has a broken heart (for he has young shoulders)— nothing short of a wound that temporarily robbed him of his social balance could make him do so strange a thing as suddenly to leave his friends and come here to stand silent by me in the shade. Yet if he only could— as some day, I am convinced, we all shall— know that the sum remains the same— that some other lover is the happier for this loss of his— and that if he had gained a smile from her, the pain he now feels would simply have been shifted to another heart— not dispelled.... We only have to think impersonally enough, and even death— well, we are all either nearly dead or just born, more or less, and the balance of birth and death never appreciably alters. Personal thinking is the curse of existence. Why are we all crushed under the weight of this strangling ME— this snake in our garden...?" So he said to the young man, "Isn't it a curious thing, looking round at young people and old people, that it doesn't really matter if they are born or dead— I mean to say, it's all the same whatever happens, if you follow me, and so many people mind when they needn't, if people would only realise—" At this moment there was a burst of clapping from the far table, and the young man bounded from Mr. Robinson's side back to his friends, shouting, "Good

egg— have you thought of a word already? Animal, vegetable or mineral— and remember to speak up because I'm rather hard of hearing...."

Mr. Robinson suddenly felt like Herbert Robinson, personally affronted. The sum of happiness (which of course remained unaltered by his set-back) for a moment did not matter in the least. He pushed back his chair and walked away, leaving his cheese uneaten and the clownfaced dog without support. He went to his bedroom and sat down opposite his mirror, facing the reflection of his outward ME. There sat the figure in the mirror, smooth, plump, pale, with small pouched eyes and thick, straight, wet-looking hair. "What is this?" asked Mr. Robinson, studying the reflection of his disappointed face— the only human face he had seen that evening. "Look at me— I *am* alive— I am indeed very acutely alive— more alive, perhaps, than all these men and women half-blind— half-dead in their limitations of greed and sex.... It is true I have no personal claim on life; I am a virgin and I have no friends— yet I live intensely— and there are— there *are*— *there are* other forms of life than personal life. The eagle and the artichoke are equally alive— and perhaps my way of life is nearer to the eagle's than the artichoke's. And must I be alone— must I live behind cold shoulders because I see *out* instead of *in*— the most vivid form of life conceivable, if only it could be lived perfectly?"

He tried to see himself in the mirror, as was his habit, as a mere pliable pillar of life, a turret of flesh with a prisoner called *life* inside it. He stared himself out of countenance, trying, as it were, to dissolve his poor body by understanding it— poor white, sweating, rubbery thing that was called Herbert Robinson and had no friends. But to-night the prisoner called *life* clung to his prison— to-night his body tingled with egotism— to-night the oblivion that he called wisdom would not come, and he could not become conscious, as he longed to, of the live sky above the roof, the long winds streaming about the valleys, the billions of contented, wary or terrified creatures moving about the living dust, weeds and waters of the world. He remained just Herbert Robinson, who had not seen any human face while in the midst of his fellow-men.

He began to feel an immediate craving— an almost revengeful lust— to be alone, far from men, books, mirrors and lights watching, all his life long, the bodiless, mindless movements of animals— ecstatic living things possessing no ME. "I should scarcely know I was alive, then, and perhaps never even notice when I died...." He decided he would go away next day, and give no group again the chance to excommunicate him.

He remembered that he had seen a notice at the door of the hotel, giving the rare times at which an omnibus left and arrived at St. Pierre. "I will leave by the early 'bus, before anyone is awake to turn his back on me."

He could not sleep, but lay uneasily on his bed reading the advertisements in a magazine he had brought with him. Advertisements always comforted him a good deal, because advertisers really, he thought, took a broad view; they wrote of— and to— their fellow-men cynically and subtly, taking advantage of the vulgar passion for personal address, and yet treating humanity as an intricate mass— an instrument to be played upon. This seemed the ideal stand-point, to Mr. Robinson, and yet he was insulted by the isolation such an ideal involved.

He dressed himself early, replaced in his suitcase the few clothes he had taken out, put some notes in an envelope addressed to Monsieur Dupont, and leaned out of the window to watch for the 'bus. St. Pierre, a sheaf of white and pink plaster houses, was woven together on a hill, like a haycock. The town, though compact and crowned by a sharp white belltower, seemed to have melted a little, like a thick candle; the centuries and the sun had softened its fortress outlines. The other hills, untopped by towns, seemed much more definitely constructed; they were austerely built of yellow and green blocks of vineyard, cemented by the dusky green of olive trees. Gleaming white, fluffy clouds peeped over the hills— "like kittens," thought Mr. Robinson, who had a fancy for trying to make cosmic comparisons between the small and the big. On the terrace of the inn, half-a-dozen dogs sprawled in the early sun. Over the valley a hawk balanced and swung in the air, so hungry after its night's fast that it swooped rashly and at random several times, and was caught up irritably into the air again after each dash, as though dangling on a plucked thread. Mr. Robinson leaned long on his sill looking at it, until his elbows felt sore from his weight, and he began to wonder where the 'bus was that was going to take him away to loneliness. He went down to the terrace, carrying his suitcase, and stood in the archway. There was no sound of a coming 'bus— no sound at all, in fact, except a splashing and a flapping and a murmuring to the left and right of him. A forward step or two showed him that there were two long washing troughs, one on each side of the archway, each trough shaded by a stone gallery and further enclosed in a sort of trellis of leaning kneading women. Mr. Robinson noticed uneasily that he could not see one woman's face; all were so deeply bent and absorbed. After a moment, however, a woman's voice from the row behind him asked him if he was waiting for the 'bus. He turned to reply, hoping to break the spell by finding an ingenuous rustic face lifted to look at him. But all the faces were bent once more, and it was another woman behind him again who told him that the 'bus had left ten minutes before. Once more the speaker bent over her work before Mr. Robinson had time to turn and see her face. "What a curious protracted accident," he thought, and had time to curse his strange isolation before he realised the irritation of being

unable to leave St. Pierre for another half-dozen hours. He flung his suitcase into the hall of the inn, and walked off up a path that led through the vineyards. As if the whole affair had been prearranged, all the dogs on the terrace rose up and followed him, yawning and stretching surreptitiously, like workers reluctantly leaving their homes at the sound of a factory whistle.

Mr. Robinson, true to his habit, concentrated his attention on— or rather diffused it to embrace— the colours about him. The leaves of the vines especially held his eye; they wore the same frosty bloom that grapes themselves often wear— a sky-blue dew on the green leaf. Two magpies, with a bottle-green sheen on their wings, gave their police-rattle cry as he came near and then flew off, flaunting their long tails clumsily. A hundred feet higher, where the ground became too steep even for vines, Mr. Robinson found a grove of gnarled old olive trees, edging a thick wood of Spanish chestnuts. Here he sat down and looked between the tree-trunks and over the distorted shadows at the uneven yellow land and the thin blade of matt blue sea stabbing the furthest hills. The dogs stood round him, expecting him to rise in a minute and lead them on again. Seeing that he still sat where he was, they wagged their tails tolerantly but invitingly. Finally they resigned themselves to the inevitable and began philosophically walking about the grove, sniffing gently at various points in search of a makeshift stationary amusement. Mr. Robinson watched them with a growing sense of comfort. "Here," he thought, "are the good, undeliberate beasts again; I knew they would save me. They don't shut themselves away from life in their little individualities, or account uniquely for their lusts on the silly ground of personality. Their bodies aren't prisons— they're just dormitories...." He delighted in watching the dogs busily engrossed in being alive without self-consciousness. After all, he thought, he did not really depend on men. (For he had been doubting his prized detachment most painfully.)

One of the dogs discovered a mousehole, and, after thrusting his nose violently into it to verify the immediacy of the smell, began digging, but not very cleverly, because he was too large a dog for such petty sports. The other dogs hurried to the spot and, having verified the smell for themselves, stood restively round the first discoverer, wearing the irritable look we all wear when watching someone else bungle over something we feel (erroneously) that we could do very much better ourselves. Finally, they pushed the original dog aside, and all began trying to dig in the same spot, but finding this impossible, they tapped different veins of the same lode-smell. Soon a space of some ten feet square was filled with a perfect tornado of flying dust, clods, grass and piston-like forepaws. Hindlegs remained rooted while forelegs did all the work, but whenever the accumulation of earth to the rear of each dog became

inconveniently deep, hindlegs, with a few impatient, strong strokes, would dash the heap away to some distance— even as far as Mr. Robinson's boots. Quite suddenly, all the dogs, with one impulse, admitted themselves beaten; they concluded without rancour that the area was unmistakeably mouseless. They signified their contempt for the place in the usual canine manner, and walked away, sniffing, panting, sniffing again for some new excitement. Mr. Robinson, who had been, for the duration of the affair, a dog in spirit, expecting at every second that a horrified mouse would emerge from this cyclone of attack, imitated his leaders and quietened down with an insouciance equal to theirs. But he had escaped from the menace of humanity; he was eased— he was sleepy....

He slept for a great many hours, and when he awoke the sun was slanting down at the same angle as the hill, throwing immense shadows across the vineyards. The dogs had gone home. And there, on the space of flattened earth between two spreading tree-roots, was a mouse and its family. Mr. Robinson, all mouse now, with no memory of his canine past, lay quite still on his side. The mother mouse moved in spasms, stopping to quiver her nose over invisible interests in the dust. Her brood were like little curled feathers, specks of down blown about by a fitful wind. There seemed to be only one license to move shared by this whole mouse family; when mother stopped, one infant mouse would puff forward, and as soon as its impulse expired, another thistledown brother would glide erratically an inch or two. In this leisurely way the family moved across the space of earth and into the grass, appearing again and again between the green blades. Mr. Robinson lay still, sycophantically reverent.

Between two blades of grass the senior mouse came out on to a little plateau, about eighteen inches away from Mr. Robinson's unwinking eyes. At that range Mr. Robinson could see its face as clearly as one sees the face of a wife over a breakfast table. It was a dignified but greedy face; its eyes, in so far as they had any expression at all, expressed a cold heart; its attraction lay in its texture, a delicious velvet— and *that* the mouse would never allow a human finger, however friendly, to enjoy. It would have guarded its person as a classical virgin guarded her honour. As soon as Mr. Robinson saw the mouse's remote expression, he felt as a lost sailor on a sinking ship might feel, who throws his last rope— and no saving hands grasp it.

He heard the sound of human footsteps behind him. There was a tiny explosion of flight beside him— and the mouse family was not there. Through the little grove marched a line of men in single file, going home from their work in the vineyards over the hill. Mr. Robinson sat up, and noticed, with a cold heart, that all the men wore the rush hats of the country pulled down against the low last light of the sun, and that not one face was visible.

Mr. Robinson sat for some time with his face in his hands. He felt his eyes with his finger, and the shape of his nose and cheekbone; he bit his finger with his strong teeth. Here was a face— the only human face in the world. Suddenly craving for the sight of that friend behind the mirror, he got up and walked back to the Trois Moineaux. He found himself very hungry, having starved all day, but his isolation gave him a so much deeper sense of lack than did his empty stomach that, although dinner was in progress among the bands of light and shade on the terrace, his first act was to run to his room and stand before the mirror. There was a mistiness in the mirror. He rubbed it with his hand. The mistiness persisted— a compact haze of blankness that exactly covered the reflection of his face. He moved to a different angle— he moved the mirror— he saw clearly the reflection of the room, of his tweed-clad figure, of his tie, of his suitcase in the middle of the floor— but his face remained erased, like an unsatisfactory charcoal sketch. Filled with an extraordinary fear, he stood facing the mirror for some minutes, feeling with tremulous fingers for his eyes, his lips, his forehead. There seemed to him to be the same sensation of haze in his sense of touch as in his eyesight— a nervelessness— a feeling of nauseating contact with a dead thing. It was like touching with an unsuspecting hand one's own limb numbed by cold or by an accident of position.

Mr. Robinson walked downstairs, dazed, out on to the terrace. As before, the shadowed tables looking out over the edge of the terrace were already surrounded by laughing, chattering parties. Mr. Robinson took his seat, as before, under the olive tree. "Bring me a bottle of... Sauterne," he said to the waiter (for he remembered that his late unmarried sister used to sustain upon this wine a reputation for wit in the boarding-house in which she had lived). "And, waiter, isn't there a table free looking out at the view? I can't see anything here." It was not the view he craved, of course, but only a point of vantage from which to see the faces of his mysterious, noisy neighbours. His need for seeing faces was more immediate than ever, now that his one friend had failed him. "There will be tables free there in a moment," said the waiter. "They are all going to dance soon. They're only waiting for the moon." And the waiter nodded his shadowed face towards a distant hill, behind which— looking at this moment like a great far red fire— the moon was coming up. "Look, the moon, the moon, the moon, look..." everyone on the terrace was saying. And a few moments later, the moon, now completely round, but cut in half by a neat bar of cloud, took flight lightly from the top of the hill.

There was a scraping of chairs, the scraping of a gramophone, and half-a-dozen couples of young men and women began dancing between the tall Italian urns and the olive trees on the terrace. Mr. Robinson poured himself

out a large tumbler of Sauterne. "Waiter, I don't want a table at the edge now— I want one near the dancers— I want to see their faces."

"There are no tables free in the centre of the terrace now. Several are vacant at the edge."

"I can see a table there, near the dancers, with only two chairs occupied. Surely I could sit with them."

"That table is taken by a large party, but most of them are dancing. They will come back there in a moment."

Mr. Robinson, disregarding the waiter, and clutching his tumbler in one hand and his bottle in the other, strode to the table he had chosen. "I'm *too* lonely— I *must* sit here."

"So lonely, po-oo-or man," said the woman at the table, a stout, middle-aged woman with high shoulders and a high bosom, clad in saxe-blue sequins. She turned her face towards him in the pink light of the moon. Mr. Robinson, though desperate, was not surprised. Her face was the same blank— the same terrible disc of nothingness that he had seen in his mirror. Mr. Robinson looked at her companion in dreadful certainty. A twin blank faced him.

"Sh— lonely, eh?" came a thick young voice out of nothingness. "Well, m'lad, you'll be damn sight lonelier yet in minute 'f y' come buttn' in on— "

"Ow, Ronnie," expostulated his frightful friend— but at that moment the gramophone fell silent, and the dancers came back to their table. Mr. Robinson scanned the spaces that should have been their faces one by one; they were like discs of dazzle seen after unwisely meeting the eye of the sun.

"This old feller sayzzz-lonely— pinched your chair, Belle."

"Never mind, duckie," said Belle, and threw herself across Mr. Robinson's knee. "Plenty of room for little me."

The white emptiness of her face that was no face blocked out Mr. Robinson's view of the world.

"Oh, my God!" she cried, jumping up suddenly. "I know why he's lonely— why— the man's not alive. Look at his face!"

"I am— I am— I am!— " shouted Mr. Robinson in terror. "I'll show you I am...." He lurched after her and dragged her among the dancers as the music began again. He shut his eyes. He could hear her wild animal shrieks of laughter, and feel her thin struggling body under his hands.

MR. ROBINSON sat, quite still but racked by confusion, excitement and disgust, beside the road on the wall of the vineyard, watching the last stars slip down into the haze that enhaloed the hills. The moon had gone long ago. All Mr. Robinson's heart was set on catching the 'bus this morning; to him the dawn that was even now imperceptibly replacing the starlight was only a

herald of the 'bus and of escape. He had no thoughts and no plans, beyond catching the 'bus. He knew that he was cold— but flight would warm him; that he was hungry and thirsty— but flight would nourish him; that he was exhausted and broken-hearted— but flight would ease and comfort him.

A white glow crowned a hill, behind which the sky had long been pearly, and in a minute an unbearably bright ray shot from the hill into Mr. Robinson's eyes. The dazzling domed brow of the sun rose between a tree and a crag, and a lily-white light rushed into the valley.

The 'bus, crackling and crunching, waddled round the bend. Mr. Robinson hailed it with a distraught cry and gesture.

"*Enfin.... très peu de place, m'sieu— n'y a qu'un tout p'tit coin par ici*...."

Mr. Robinson had no need now to look at the face of the driver, or at the rows of senseless sunlit ghosts that filled the 'bus. He knew his curse by now. He climbed into the narrow place indicated beside the driver. The 'bus lurched on down the narrow, winding road that overhung the steep vineyards of the valley. Far below— so far below that one could not see the movement of the water— a yellow stream enmeshed its rocks in a net of plaited strands.

Mr. Robinson sat beside the driver, not looking at that phantom, faceless face— so insulting to the comfortable sun— but looking only at the road that was leading him to escape. How far to flee he did not know, but all the hope there was, he felt, lay beyond the furthest turn of the road. After one spellbound look at the sun-blinded face of St. Pierre, hunched on its hivelike hill, he looked forward only at the winding, perilous road.

And his acute eyes saw, in the middle of the way, half-a-dozen specks of live fur, blowing about a shallow rut.... The 'bus' heavy approach had already caused a certain panic in the mouse family. One atom blew one way, one another; there was a sort of little muddled maze of running mice in the road.

Mr. Robinson's heart seemed to burst. Before he was aware, he had sprung to his feet and seized the wheel of the 'bus from the driver. He had about twenty seconds in which to watch the mice scuttering into the grass— to watch the low, loose wall of the outer edge of the road crumble beneath the plunging weight of the 'bus. He saw, leaning crazily towards him, the face— the *face*— rolling eyes, tight grinning lips— of the driver, looking down at death. There, far down, was the yellow net of the river, spread to catch them all.

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4: The Banshee's Warning

Anonymous

London Society, Christmas Annual 1876

How oft has the banshee cried!
How oft has death untied
Bright links that glory wove,
Sweet bonds entwined by love!
—Thomas Moore

ONE DULL DECEMBER evening, arriving in London from Portsmouth, I took the shortest way towards the West-End, in which quarter of the town an aunt and sister of mine resided. I intended spending Christmas with them at the house of a friend in Lincolnshire, which I generally did when I happened to be in England at this time; so that I hoped not only to have the pleasure of seeing them shortly, but also that of their company down. As I passed through the different streets on my route, I noted the various preparations for the approaching Christmas; but they failed to awaken in me those pleasurable sensations which they usually arouse: in their stead was a sickening presentiment of coming evil, though in what form or from what quarter it would come I felt alike ignorant.

It is said that coming events cast their shadows before , and I knew that a shadow was upon me then, as dark and drear as the sky above me, and do what I would I could not shake it off.

This presentiment will not appear so unreasonable when I explain a little, to do which it will be necessary to mention a few particulars respecting myself and family.

I was the youngest son of an Irish family formerly living in the north-west of Ireland. There were five of us, all speaking brogues as thick as the fog that lost mother Maloney in the bog.

When Norah and I were still very young, my three brothers went abroad one after another, consequently we were the only children left to my father to make anything like a home for him.

Our mother had been dead some time, and the care of us had devolved upon an old woman who had been in the family for years, and who was as fond of us as if we had been her own.

It is well known that the peasantry of the west of Ireland retain more of the customs and superstitions of the early Irish than that of the other portions of the island; this may result from their having had less intercourse with their English neighbours.

It was among these people and still wilder surroundings that our childhood was passed, listening to and becoming familiar with the wild legends current among them, which we believed in as firmly as we did the earth we trod, or the air we breathed.

But it was from our old nurse that we first heard of the 'good people,' as the fairies are called in Ireland; and in the long winter evenings, when the snow lay thick outside, Norah and I would sit in the glow of the turf-fire while she told us weird stories of the Pookah and the Banshee, till we fancied we heard the mournful cry of the last, mingling with the moaning of the wind as it swept over the bleak hills that lay in the rear of our house.

The belief in the Banshee is now so generally known that I presume any explanations I might offer here with regard to it would only prove unnecessary. The first time I ever heard it was late one dreary winter's night. I was waiting for my father, who had been away since early morning. A s I sat listening intently, imagining often I distinguished his horse's hoofs coming over the frozen ground, my brain filled with strange fancies, and a vague fear benumbing my senses, the stillness, which had seemed to grow more awful each moment, was suddenly broken by the mournful cry— which once heard is never to be forgotten— the dreaded voice of the Banshee.

My father never came home that night; but he was discovered next morning at some little distance from the house quite dead; and his horse, which it is supposed had stumbled and thrown him, standing by him whinnying.

After this sad event our home of course was quite broken up. Norah went to live with a rich aunt in London, while, through the interest of some of my father's friends, a berth was obtained for me on board the *Daphne*. At the time my story opens I no longer sported the middy's short jacket, but was happy in the dignity conferred by a tailcoat and odd epaulette when worn in the Queen's service.

Remembering well my father's death and the strange warning that preceded it, my very blood was chilled when I heard the Banshee for the second time one dark night as we stood up the Channel.

What did the mystic voice portend? I only knew that as surely as the shadow proclaims the presence of an object from which it derives its being, so surely was it the forerunner of some evil; what, I could not know yet, though come I felt it must, and that all I could do would neither prevent nor defer it.

My mind given over to reflection of a most gloomy character, I arrived at my aunt's house, but only to learn from the housekeeper that Miss Norah and Miss O'Hara had gone down to Lincolnshire the week before, and that young Mr. Leyton had come up for the express purpose of escorting them thither. I

bore my disappointment with as good a grace as possible; and as there was nothing for it but to wait till the morrow and take the early coach, I sat down in front of a fire which my coming had given life to, and read some letters which I found awaiting me, while tea was being prepared for me.

The letters were from my aunt and friend respectively, and were both to the effect that Fergus O 'Hara— my respected self— would transport himself to Leyton Hall at the first possible opportunity ; which I of course fully intended to do.

Harry Leyton and I were old and fast friends, though we saw each other rarely, and this friendship, which was no common one, his engagement to Norah tended to strengthen; and I did hope that in the future another tie might be added which would cement it still more closely.

I first made his acquaintance through my aunt, at whose house he used to be a frequent visitor. He was a handsome young fellow, had studied for the Bar, and was then making some little name.

I felt rather solitary partaking of my meal alone; the room which to another's eyes would have no doubt appeared cheerful enough seemed desolate to me, myself the only tenant, where I had expected to see Norah's pretty person and my dear old aunt. My meal over, I thought an early retreat to bed the best means o f disposing o f the remainder of a miserable evening, and o f securing a good night's rest, as I should be forced to rise early to be in time for the coach.

I arrived at Leyton Hall early in the evening o f the following day.

'Well, old fellow,' said Harry, bursting into the apartment which I bad been shown into, and which was to be mine during my stay, 'I'm glad you're come at last. Here,' giving a look round, 'let me take your traps into my room till that fire looks a little brighter;' and suiting the action to the word he seized upon as many articles as he could conveniently transport there, in spite of my remonstrances.

I was not long in making my toilette, when we went to the drawing-room together. The scene which met my eyes was indeed a happy one, and well worthy of the season which had occasioned it, and speedily banished the dark fears which had oppressed me during the past few days.

The guests were as numerous as they appeared happy. Norah and my aunt were delighted to see me, and Sir Henry and Lady Leyton gave me as warm a welcome as I could have desired. All this time there was a young lady, with red flowers in her hair, who was unaware, or pretended to be so, of my presence, till Harry apprising her of it, she rose from the piano, at which she had been playing, to greet me. The vivid blush that dyed her fair face at sight of me, and

the pretty look o f surprise that accompanied it, made her appear more charming and bewitching than I had ever before seen her.

She resumed her seat at the instrument, and took up the verse of a ballad which my approach had interrupted. When it was finished I selected some old favourites of mine, and requested her to sing them, which she did; thus listening, and talking in the pauses of the songs, I passed one o f the happiest hours it is ever permitted a mortal to enjoy.

The next morning at breakfast a ball was planned for the same evening; and as the time for the proper decoration of the large dining-hall in which it was principally to take place was rather short, all hands were pressed into the service.

There is no season like Christmas for making people sociable. All seemed to enter heart and soul into the spirit of the thing, and showed the greatest interest in what was going forward. Even the two Miss Mills, a couple of unusually crabbed spinsters, who rarely relaxed from their grim frigidity, became quite genial under its influence, much to the astonishment of everybody; which so affected a short, puffy old gentleman, a neighbour of theirs, who was nailing up holly hard by them, that he either made a joke or paid a compliment to the younger of the ladies in question. I am inclined to think it was the latter, for the elder Miss Mills seemed slightly resentful to her sister for some little time afterwards.

Well, at last, after a great deal of laughing and talking and directing, a great deal of hammering and noise, the immense piles of green which the servants had been constantly bringing in were transferred from the floor to the dark panelled walls, where the pictures looked out from their annual frames of scarlet and green. There was not an available spot where holly could be put that we did not put it— swords were wreathed with it, helmets were crowned with it; and the fire, blazing and crackling on the hearth, glinted on the ancient breastplates and head-pieces through the friendly branches of the holly and mistletoe.

When I entered the ballroom in the evening, it really presented a most pleasing and splendid appearance, and we were w ell repaid for the labours of the morning. The wax tapers, which were plentifully distributed throughout the apartment, shed a brilliant though soft light over the happy scene. The gaiety around me was so contagious that I grew infected with it, and, casting care and dark thoughts to the winds, I entered on the pleasures of the evening with full determination to enjoy them. I had just ended a careful survey of the company, to discover if Harry's sister were yet present, when I espied her in the doorway, a vision of loveliness to remember. She was attired in a soft

creamytinted material, with crimson flowers in her hair— the flowers in her hair were always red, the colour, I suppose, became her best.

From the centre of the oak ceiling a huge bough of mistletoe depended, which was the cause of much fun and amusement. No sooner did any unwary maiden wander beneath it than some cavalier, instantly taking advantage of the occasion thus offered, claimed the legal kiss, when would ensue struggles of resistance, either assumed or real, which called forth such shouts of laughter as made the old room ring again.

Alice I could have kissed several times, but I lacked both courage and inclination to do so. Alice's manner had been very cold towards me during the few minutes that I was allowed to enjoy her society; for directly the dancing commenced I saw little of her. I was no proficient in the Terpsichorean art myself.

I was the more surprised and gratified, then, when she came over to me and said, with a very sweet, smile, 'Don't you dance, Fergus?'

'No,' I replied, wishing with all my heart I could give a different answer— 'or at least,' I hastened to add, 'very indifferently.'

'Which means that you are afraid of being laughed at, did you make the attempt,' she returned mischievously.

'Not at all; but though I do not object to making myself food for mirth on an especial occasion like the present, I should greatly regret having rendered a lady such.'

'O, if that is your scruple lay it aside for once; and as I fear a laugh as little as you do, accept my guidance through the next quadrille. You must— every one is dancing to-night.'

Though she laughed as she said this, the real kindness intended was unmistakable. What could I do but yield? So when the next dance was forming we rose; and with the knowledge I had unconsciously gained from watching others, and the whispered directions and signs she favoured me with, I acquitted myself very creditably.

Once during the evening I found myself quite alone with Alice, when I put a question to her which I had had it in my heart to ask so long; and the answer she made me gave me the right to kiss her without being under the mistletoe.

It was late when I reached my room that night; but feeling no desire to sleep I opened my window, and, leaning out, smoked a cigar.

The room I occupied was in the left wing of the house, its one window looking on to a broad terrace from which a handsome flight of steps led down to the beech avenue. The snow, which had fallen heavily all day, had nearly ceased; only a few stray feathery flakes slowly descended on the white carpet beneath, while in the air that strange stillness reigned which a snowstorm

always produces. I stood watching the patches of light thrown from the windows along the terrace disappear one by one, till, my second cigar being finished, I went to bed. I had been to sleep about two hours, as far as I could judge, when I awoke suddenly with the conviction that some one had pronounced my name. I listened: all was silent. I spoke aloud: there was no answer; and by the imperfect light I could see that there was no one in the room.

I was just about to lay my head on the pillow again, persuading myself that I had been the victim of my own imagination, when close beside me arose a low wailing cry; it was so mournful, so weird, that I had not an instant's doubt as to its identity.

'The Banshee!' I cried, starting from the bed, all my old horror returned and intensified; but the words had scarcely left my lips ere a shadow passed the window. I sprang towards it, the sound dying away as I did so. At first I could see nothing unusual outside to attract my attention; but after a keen survey, I discerned a tall shadowy form moving in a direction opposite to the house. I put my hand over my eyes : was I mad or dreaming? I knew I was neither.

When I looked again it had reached the avenue, where, though farther off, I could distinguish it more clearly, the dark tree-trunks offering a belter background than the snow. It continued to flit among the tree shadows for some time, when it seemed to vanish altogether.

My first impulse, though I did not act upon it, was to rush out into the air, and penetrate, if I could, the mystery that enshrouded me. I waited long in the hope that the spectre might return; but this hope I was forced to abandon, when the gray light of a winter's morning began to steal into my chamber; I seemed to have lost all conception of time. Then I threw myself on the bed dressed as I was, and, thoroughly exhausted, fell into a dreamless sleep.

It was late when I awoke. The day wore slowly, even tediously on, in my anxiety for the night to arrive; for then I had determined to wait on or near the spot where I had lost sight of the figure on the preceding night.

I spoke to no one of the dread forebodings I was a prey to, not even Norah; for she I knew held the same beliefs as myself, and I was unwilling to cause her any uneasiness; but I tried, though fruitlessly, to learn whether she had received any warning of the evils which I felt the future held for one or both of us.

It was the greatest possible relief to me when the daylight began to give out, and night to spread its dark curtain over the sky. The state of suspense I was in was unendurable; even Alice' s dear voice, as she sang my favourite airs, seemed to have lost something of its charm— for the time at least— and her smile the magic power to cheer me. But I never left her so reluctantly, or with

such a heavy heart, as when we parted for the night; for the long hours were before me in which, something whispered, I should be an actor in some terrible drama.

Once in my room, I sat over the fire till it boasted but a few dull embers, my brain busily engaged with the events o f the past night. By my watch it wanted a quarter to one, when I arose, wrapped a boat-cloak round me, and taking a pistol which I had placed in readiness, and opening the window as quietly as possible, dropped out on to the terrace, where the snow lay so thick that my footsteps were rendered almost inaudible. I soon reached the spot which I intended making my post of observation, and, screening myself from view among the trees, I waited the issue of events. There was a moon, though not a bright one. The wind, which moaned in the distance, swept by in cold biting blasts, shaking the leafless branches overhead, and causing me to shudder involuntarily and draw my cloak close about me for warmth.

I remained in this position for some time, and had almost given up the idea of again seeing the phantom, when, on looking towards the hall, I became conscious of its dim form stealing along the terrace. With a terrible anxiety I watched its stealthy progress, trying to descry its features— if features it had— till the fixedness of my gaze made the space before me black, and forced me to rest my aching sight.

When I watched it again, it had passed all the windows on one side of the terrace, with the exception of one, which was mine; a second or two, and it had reached it; it stopped, and disappeared within.

The chill of horror which crept over me at this circumstance I could not describe; it seemed to numb my brain and deprive me of the power to act. But not for long. Soon the hot blood came surging through my veins, till I felt like one in a fever. I left my place of concealment, hurried along the avenue, up the steps, along the terrace, dreading yet longing for the moment that would reveal to me the unbidden occupant of my apartment, I found my window open, as I had left it; my first quick glance inside discovered nothing. With my pistol ready I was preparing to enter, when a sudden clutch was laid upon me— something confronted me, and I fired full at it. A low groan, horribly human, followed the report. I sprang into the window; beneath it, close against the wall, crouched or huddled an object. I stooped hastily to examine it, and saw what made me faint and sick with fear and remorse— Harry's face, white and still.

IT WAS New year's eve, when the oak dining-hall, and the guests assembled there, were looking their brightest and gayest, while Harry, with his

arm still in a sling, was being made much of by the company in general, and Norah and myself in particular.

Some days had elapsed since I had mistaken poor Harry, in a fit of somnambulism, for a genuine ghost— when by a mad act I narrowly escaped depriving him of his life and myself of all future happiness. Why he had unconsciously taken the same course on the two successive occasions was fully explained by what he afterwards told me.

A certain Sir Eustace Leyton, an ancestor of Harry's, who owned the Hall in the time of the Parliamentary wars, being at one particular period forced to leave it somewhat scantily garrisoned, caused a great part of the household silver to be placed in a chest, and buried in a spot known only to himself and a select few. There were rumours afloat to the effect that this silver had remained buried ever since; which rumours, Harry, having the curious chance to come across an old document seeming to refer, though indefinitely, to the place where the treasure was deposited, had begun to give some little credence to, though they were generally accounted as among the many improbable stories connected with the old mansion.

It was just upon twelve when we threw open the window to hear the bells ring out the old year and usher in the new— the New Year that might have been so dark, yet which promised so much happiness for some of us. Standing by Alice, I looked out on the moonlight scene. Our window commanded the long double-line of beeches; and as I watched the weird shadows their branches cast on the frost-bound ground beneath as the wind swayed them, a certain night was brought so vividly to my mind that I could almost fancy the Banshee's warning voice still filling my ears.

I have lived many happy years since that time, and I have never once heard it. I can't help hoping that I never shall.

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5: The Creeping Shadow

R. Pardepp

Morris Price Williams, 1842-1900
Belgravia, Oct 1896

Extracts from the Diary of the late Rev. J. Burcot, M.A.]

I AM sitting in my study in what is, I think, the very prettiest rectory in this country-side. My attitude towards my clerical neighbours' grounds and houses is certainly not Ahab's towards Naboth's vineyard. Yet, somehow, the feeling I have does not seem quite an innocent one. And, if it be not pride (I am certainly not a man conceited in my possessions), I wonder why it is not innocent. But there! it makes my head ache to try and think it out. And now I call to mind having noticed in myself of late a strange inability to follow up the simplest chain of argument; a dulness of the intellect akin to that dimness of vision which heralds the failing of the sight. And I fear my sight is going, for I now and then see a shadow whose presence cannot be accounted for by a corresponding substance. And what is this but dimness of the vision? It is but a trivial thing. But it strangely saddens me, as though it carried with it some deeper meaning; and I numbly wonder what that is!

Dated three months later.

Sitting here at my study table, I am looking out of my French window on the most charming garden man ever worked in, and you cannot taste the true sweetness of a garden unless you work in it with heart and soul. Every rose that nods at me in a friendly way I budded myself with my own hands.

WHAT IS THAT gleaming white among the bushes? Ah! I see now. It is Mabel in her white dress! Sweet Mabel! Little did I think, when my old chum Garton asked me to be his baby's godfather, that the child would one day come and live here to be the light of my life! I trust I have made her orphanhood a lighter burden than it might have been. How exquisitely lovely the girl is, with the sunlight kissing her brown tresses! She catches sight of me and her charming face lights up and here she comes—!

But no! I must not let the madcap in, or good-bye to all work. So I wave her away.

GOD HELP ME! I have just seen the shadow again ! It was lurking near the moss-rose tree at the corner of the path as Mabel passed, a few minutes ago, with a pretty pout on her lips at being refused admittance, and a playful shake of her bit of a fist at me. Could the thing have been lying in wait for her behind

the bushes? It may have been my fancy, but it seemed to me to outline dimly the shape of a crouching man. I cannot now hide from myself the conviction that the awful thing is growing more distinct each time I see it. At first it was a mere suggestion of a shadow rather than an actual shade; something like the very faint shadow cast by a sickly sun— a mere blur. And the crowning horror of it is that it appears to have some mysterious affinity with Mabel, for it is never visible unless she be somewhere near! May God shield the poor child from harm!

WHAT drivelling nonsense is this that I have been writing? It is unutterably absurd that a grotesque fancy should so prey on a healthy man. What would my sister Martha say ? Why, I have never (till now) known what nerves are! An old University oarsman and cricketer, I should be above this morbid nonsense. Here goes for a ten-mile walk over the cliffs by the sea-side! That is the broom to brush away these cobwebs of the brain. And I'll see a doctor to-morrow. *

Dated the following day.

I'VE SEEN old Crake. How the dear old doctor laughed when I told him of my ailment.

"Shadow of your grandmother!" he scoffed. "Why, man alive, any fool could tell 'twas indigestion! Come now! When d'ye go to roost? What d'ye eat? How many pipes a day do you smoke?"

And he was quite triumphant over my confession of latish hours and a hearty appetite for meals and tobacco. I am feeling better already, and am following the doctor's rules implicitly.

Dated a mouth later.

AH, ME! My secret trouble has returned in an aggravated form, and I am powerless to battle with it. Very gradually, but very surely, the mysterious shadow, which has drained the sunshine out of my life, is growing into substance. Even now it is, as the book of *Exodus* has it, "a darkness that may be felt" — so distinct are its outlines, and, I had almost said, its features. And I do not know that the word would be out of place; for now and again there surely flashes upon me out of its dusky lineaments the glance of a malevolent eye, and yesterday the gleam of teeth shone for a moment where its cruel lips were curling into a mocking sneer at some innocent remark of Mabel's. Aye, it is ever Mabel! I never see the phantom save close to her. Horrible! Most horrible! Yet the child is, as yet, thank Heaven, unconscious of the dread something flitting near her which causes her guardian such agony. I strive with all my might to hide the emotion it excites, for the girl's sake. And I hope and

think that no human being— not even Martha— knows my strange trial. Like Jacob, I wrestle on a mountain-top of utter loneliness; not, like him, with a good angel to gain a blessing, but with a bad one to avert a curse. And as Jacob's dear ones peacefully rested in the valley, unwitting of his dire struggle, so, please God, my sister and my ward are now, at dead of night, sleeping a sweet and dreamless sleep, while I am agonising in the cruel grip of this nameless fear!

THE THRICE ACCURSED shade is beginning to use threatening gestures! Yesterday from behind Mabel's chair, it shook a clenched hand at me, and the words I was uttering froze on my lips. I forget what I was saying. I forget everything now, save this horror which I would give the world—

What was that I heard just now? Thank God for one thing. Never yet have I seen the grim presence hovering near Mabel in church. There only have I rest. But is not this additional proof that it is an evil spirit from the bottomless pit luring my darling to some awful—? Again that sound! Would to Heaven that the shadow were substance! Then would I grapple with it to the death for Mabel's sake!

Statement of Silas Chipp, gardener to the late Rev. J. Durcot and Parish Clerk of Barbax.

HE WOR allers a good measter to me, wor the Rector. A fine hup-standing gennleman as hever I seed, six foot in 'is stockin's, stronger nor Tim Blacksmith and with a pair o' shoulders like Farmer Bates'! And, afore his trouble, a jolly 'carty man with a larf as wor better nor doctor's stuff to a sadly pusson! But yer knowed 'im yerself? Jess so.

When did I tek notiss of hanythink differ?

Why, 'twor on the Monday— no, Toosday, after Stillbro' Fair. That day he walked back and fore in the garden a-mutterin' to 'isself and makin' no more account o' me, has wor a-workin' 'ard by, nor if I wor a stone himage, and 'im so sot on his flowers and wegetables and sich! Thinks I, "There's bound to be summit wrang vvi' Measter."

Well, some fortnight arter, Rector, 'e cum to me one fine mornin' for to pick a place for the sailary and brokilo, and more like wot 'e use ter be nor I'd sin 'im for some time sunce. "Silas, my man," sez 'e, quoite cheery loike, "now for a loikely spot for them brokilo," sez 'e, "for we beant a-goin' to let nobody else take the cake for brokilo this year, not if we can 'elp it."

Jess then I heerd a click o' the garden gate and incums Miss a-singin' loike a thrush, and a sweeter young lass nor Miss Mabel yer couldn't see nowheers, and loike a darter to Rector and Miss Burcot for all she be no kin o' they, not

wotever. Measter 'e hup and looks at 'er as she cum 'long the path, and in a jiffy yer mout a-knocked me down wi' a spray of fennel, that skeered wor I. For he wor a-peerin' o'er Miss's shoulder at summat ahint 'er, 'is eyes 'most a-startin' hout of 'is 'ead and 'is face loike the dead!

I wor that creepy that I tuk but one look, and nowt in loife could I see but a wheel-barrer, not my own self I couldn't. But Rector 'e mout 'a sin the Devil 'isself!

Howsumdever, when Miss cum hup 'e whips round and teks her by the harm so as she couldn't see 'is face, and I heerd 'em a-talking* together on their way back to the 'ouse.

But Measter 'e forgot all about them brokilo.

Nothin' hout o' the common, not has I can call to mind, 'appened after this up to a Froiday night in June.

'Twor our choir practiss. Measter, in coorse, wor there and the choir, hall save Bertie Cobb, who wor that sadly 'long o' heating green gooseberries as 'e'd 'ad to boide in bed. Bertie 'e be a reglar limb 'e be, but hour best treble, moind yer, hall the same.

I'd lit the candles in the chansull and a couple agin the wall, down in the church (wich 'e be a dark 'un, 'e be), for Miss, who use ter slip in and listen to the moosic.

Well, practiss was nigh hover when Fred Timms 'e lends I a dig i' the ribs and sez 'e in my hear at the end of a werse: "Wot's cum to Rector?" sez 'e.

Wi' that I turns and Mrs. Babbs, the horganist (she'd heerd some choir boys a-w'isperin'), she turns, and we hall turns, and looks hat Rector. He wor astandin' nigh the haltar-rail, a-facin' to'rds the west winder, wi' that same gruesome look on him as I'd sin afore— only wuss— ten toimes wuss. It guv hus hall the cold shivers, it did! For 'e wor a-seein' summat, has none hon hus could see, somewheers close agin Miss Mabel.

Miss, she wor a-stoopin' down 'er 'ead to look hat 'er book, or mebbe drowsin' a bit, and small blame to 'er, for Chant 31 'e be a powerful soothin' 'un ; and we wor glad she didn't 'appen to look hour way.

Measter, 'e looked has hif 'e'd sin his death, no less; 'is face loike the chalk, 'is lower jaw dropped, and 'is eyes— well, we dursn't look hat 'em and that's the fac'! Has for hus, we didn't stir nor speak no more nor if we wor friz. Leastways we couldn't.

Bymeby Rector 'e cums to 'isself a bit and sez 'e, hin a strange, holler-loike woice: "That'll do. Good night, hall! Chipp, tek this to Miss Carton."

And wi' that 'e scrubbles summat on a leaf of 'is pocket-book and sez 'e, "Don't wait," sez 'e, "I'll put hout the lights meself."

I took the note to Miss, and out she whips by the big door. And, thinks I, "Sure has heggs, Measter he've bin and haxed 'er to do summat in th' 'ouse to get 'er hout o' the way."

Well, when I'd locked t' big door ahint me, I can tell yer I felt strongly sot on it to skedaddle loike the rest on 'em, for I'd heerd 'em, when they got outside chansull door, makin' tracks for 'ome loike rabbuts. And my 'air had stood on hend whoile Miss wor a-readin' the note, for fear I mout 'a chanced to see summat hin that wetry spot. But I couldn't aboide to leave Rector by 'isself hin that lonesome place a-seein' wisions. So I steals round and sees the loight through the chansull winders a-gittin' weaker as 'e wor a-doutin' the candles, wun by wun. When mebbe wun hor two were left I waited and waited: "Wot's hup?" thinks I, "hev' 'e bin and fainted away or wot?"

So, werry gingerly, I hopens chansull door and pushes my 'ead past curtain and peeps roight hin. There wor Measter a-kneelin' hon the haltar step and asobbin' quietly to 'isself. Hit med my 'eart sore to see 'im, hit did! Nowand agen he wor a-muttcrin' summat, a prayer 'tis loike, but I couldn't roightly 'ear. So I cums haway and waits houtside, and arter a bit hout 'e cums and locks the door hall roight, and I hup and sez, same has hif nothing 'adn't 'appened:

" 'Tis a foine night, sir, and I'm thinkin' we'd best get in that 'ere medder-'ay to-morrer."

He wor glad to see me, leastwise I thowt so, and sez e, quoite chirpy:

"Ye're roight, Silas," sez 'e. "Tell Farmer Bates cz 'ow we should be glad hof a lend o' the waggin, hif so be has 'e beant a-husin' on hut 'isself."

And I walks 'long hof 'im has far as Rector's door, 'im and me together, a-talkin' jess loike hold toimes, 'cept that I heerd none o' that ere jolly larf of 'isn.

No ! nor never will no more, poor soul !

Last entry in the Diary of the late Rev. J. Burcot: almost illegible.
Friday night, June 13.

EVEN consecrated walls cannot keep out the accursed thing. I saw it to-night behind Mabel in church. It stole nearer and nearer her, till at length it thrust out its dusky arms towards her, like a great black spider about to clutch its prey.

TWO YEARS LATER.

Scene: Dr. Crake's sanctum.
Time, ir p m.
Dramatis personae:
Dr. Crake and his new partner, Mr. Jebson

"SO," said the rosy-cheeked, white-headed doctor, filling his favourite pipe with a deliberation born of the consciousness that the next ring at the surgery-bell would be a matter for the junior partner's attention, "so, Jebson, you were like a boy in pursuit of a soapy-tailed pig. Just as you thought you had caught old Telfort and were in for a yarn— the yarn, in fact— you found him slipping away from you!"

"Yes, just like the boy, what I want is a firm grasp of the whole tale," said Jebson, whose cigar was in full glow. "And the whole tale you shall have," chuckled the doctor, who had a way of genially annexing other people's jokes in the sincere belief that they were his own, "but first let me light up."

"Poor dear Jack Burcot!"

The doctor's rollicking voice had become tender and cooing as the note of a turtle-dove, and, as he blew meditative clouds into the air, he watched them drawing off into thin wisps with a far-off gaze. Now Jebson, himself a man of few words, could sympathise with and respect an eloquent hiatus. So he sat still as a mouse, till the doctor was ready to proceed. At length a belated fly lit upon the senior partner's bald pate and created a diversion.

"Where was I? I had known Burcot from his cradle. He was worth knowing. Physically, he was quite the handsomest and finest man I have ever seen; a grand athlete, a 'Varsity blue—"

"I know," said Jebson reverentially, "made big scores for the Gentlemen v. Players and rowed two years running for Oxford."

"As a friend," the doctor went on, "he was peerless! For instance, his old schoolfellow, Garton, Rector of Pikewich, having lost his wife (it was a case of cancer), and all his property by the breaking of Cobton's bank, died, leaving a little girl who happened to have Burcot for her godfather. And a fairy godfather he was! He did all that a father could have done, and amply provided for her into the bargain. And he was not without his reward. Mabel Garton grew up into the sweetest and loveliest girl in the county, and was as the apple of his eye. Even Burcot's only sister (who is the grimmest spinster I know), was, in her stiff way, oddly fond of Mabel.

"Well, Burcot had been ten years rector of this family living, beloved by his parishioners, with ample means, and apparently superb health, in short, as happy as a mortal could be, when one day he consulted me, in a half-joking, shamefaced way, about an appearance like a shadow which vexed him.

"Of course I knew there was insanity in the family; but I had always regarded poor Jack as a splendid illustration of '*mens sana in corpore sano*.'

"I pooh-poohed, and called it indigestion, and so on, but at the end of the interview it was clear to me that the family curse had lit upon him. So it proved. He grew morbid and hippish, and finally his brain gave way. A curate

was put in charge of the parish, and competent keepers were placed in the Rectory to look after poor Burcot. His sister stuck by him, and as a matter of fact there was no risk in her doing so, as his malady had taken the form of extreme despondency without the smallest tendency to violence."

Jebson shook his head.

"You can never tell," said he, "what turn a case of mental weakness may take."

The old doctor was pugnaciously argumentative, and felt all the temptation of a favourable opening, but the swing of his story was upon him, so after a wistful pause, he went on :

"His ward too would have stuck by Burcot through all. But I sent her away on the ground that her presence, much as he loved her, was, in some way or other, a source of agitation to him. The reason why was found on examination of her guardian's papers."

Here the doctor, noting that Jebson had changed his attitude, and that every line of his face and body was shaping itself to the keenest attention, inhaled the full fragrance of the incense so dear to the teller of a story.

"It was this. To Burcot's mind there was some sinister association of the shadow he had mentioned to me with Mabel Garton. He fancied, in fact, that it dogged the girl's steps."

"Tell me one thing, Crake. Was it ever surmised that Burcot had any warmer feeling for the girl than the paternal kind of affection you have described ? "

"I never heard the smallest hint of it. Not only was Burcot at that time fifty and the girl nineteen, but there never had been in the man a trace of a weakness such as that." (Dr. Crake was a bachelor.)

"It was a matter of comment." Jebson waved his cigar in token of waiving the point. "Mabel was packed off, ostensibly on a short visit to a cousin of the Burcots in another county— a Mrs. Tanwick, who was a widow and well-to-do. Here an admirer turned up in the person of a young baronet, whom Mrs. Tanwick— an indefatigable match-maker— considered an eminently eligible candidate for Mabel's hand. I met him once, and must admit that he had remarkable personal advantages. He was as dark as a Spaniard, and his black eyes were strikingly brilliant and piercing. They had the singular quality of seeming to arrest and take hold of one's attention in so vivid a way that it was like the grasp of a hand. There was something weird and uncanny about it, and it reminded one of the Ancient Mariner. For the rest, he was a tall and athletic man of distinguished presence. But— there was an indefinable something— some subtle note which jarred." Jebson's cigar had gone out.

"What did the young lady think of him?"

"Why, it was difficult to tell! The man clearly exercised a strong influence over her. But it was, some thought, more like the fascination of a bird by a snake than anything else. His personality seemed to dominate her in spite of herself. At last matters drifted into an engagement. The poor child certainly did not loo as other maidens do in like case. She was wretchedly pale and distraught, and her wan little face began to wear a frightened and hunted look. One day Sir Dudley Sake—"

"Ah!" said Jebson. "I felt that name was coming."

The doctor paused and took his turn at listening. "Why, Crake, he was a fellow-student of mine in hospital before I went to sea, and we youngsters all regarded him, and with reason, as a dangerous reptile. He used to say that he was studying anatomy and medicine, not for a living, nor for healing's sake, but to arm himself for vengeance on his enemies. He had travelled much, and went in for charms, incantations and spiritualism. He was a cynic, and sneered at everything good and pure. This is not a handsome foot—" (thrusting out a huge boot), "but I am glad to remember that it once administered a sound kicking to Sir Dudley Sake for his rudeness to a certain young lady among the hospital nurses."

This was a long speech for Jebson, He was slightly flushed, perhaps with the unwonted exercise. His bolt being shot, he subsided into his chair with a muttered apology for his emotion.

"Go on, doctor, do."

"Well, one day, the baronet took it into his head to make an expedition all by himself into this parish of Barbax. Possibly he wished to learn something of Mabel's old surroundings. Heaven knows! Now, Jebson, you have been here long enough to know that part of the sea coast where the precipitous Pincost rocks tower over the bay. As you are aware, paths for the convenience of visitors wind among the cliffs.

"Now Burcot happened to be out for a walk with one of his keepers on the Pincost path, which, as it was winter time, was the most secluded in the parish, when a stranger came into sight at a turn of the path, walking briskly to meet them, some two hundred yards off. As the man drew nearer, Burcot started violently and showed signs of the strongest agitation. According to the keeper's account he cried 'It's the shadow come to life!' The man, seeing that some crisis was at hand, tried to detain his patient and guide him homewards, but Burcot dashed him to the ground and rushed madly towards the approaching figure. The keeper was, for the moment, stunned by the fall, but soon picked himself up and gave chase, arriving, however, only just in time to sec the end of the encounter.

"They were in a death-struggle on the very verge of the cliff. The stranger was a powerful man, and was fighting for his life. But Burcot's malady had given him superhuman strength, and the awful wrestling-match was not long in doubt. In spite of his frantic struggles Burcot pushed the man over the edge, and both fell, gripping one another in a deadly clutch, forty feet before they reached the water, which was, at that point and tide, full twenty feet deep.

"When the bodies were found, knit together in a grim embrace, that of the stranger was identified as Sir Dudley Sake's."

There was a long pause. Then the doctor soliloquised aloud:

"Yes! This man was the shadow creeping over Mabel Garton's life. But the question is how Burcot, who had never seen him before, came to connect him with his ghastly visions!"

"That," said Jebson, who was his dry self again, "was the merest coincidence."

"But, my dear fellow," cried the doctor, hastily mounting his hobby of argument, "consider the circumstances—"

There was a ring at the surgery door.

"Mrs. Boobyer took bad," reported the doctor's man.

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6: Adriatic Interlude

Douglas Newton

Wilfrid Bernard M. Newton, 1884-1951
The Wireless Weekly, 13 June 1942

TWO feelings attacked Bob Scarron, of *The Tribune*, as the heavy door thudded behind him. One: that this room, with its thick, soundproof walls, was a beast of a trap for a man whose life was in danger. Two: he was the man with his life in danger.

It was the room of a house built into the very wall of the city. Its own walls, floor, and ceiling were of rough, bare stone. At the far end a broad window looked on to the Adriatic, a plumb fifty feet beneath. It was a vision of Homer's own wine-dark sea shining in the hot sun, but its convenience for getting rid of dead bodies was ever more apparent.

There were five men in the room, all big Cravat-Muslims, hawk-handsome, and plainly selected for muscular use, especially the largest, whose back was significantly against the door, and whose hand held a pistol. All wore lounge suits and fezzes and carried a death sentence in their still eyes.

The girl had stripped off the Turkish shawl with its black, lattice-like veil, which she had used to entice him here. Her dark bright eyes, the glowing brown fire of her face under raven-wing hair, made her the very muse of vengeance. She was not a Muslim, but one of the Cravat-Slovenes who were leading the attempt to overthrow the Dictatorship of their country. Her face was also familiar, and almost at once Scarron knew why. She was Peter Alessan's sister.

He ought to have been pleased at that. He had only followed her here because she had spoken Alessan's name. He was worried about the atrocity story he had collected from Alessan and sent to his paper— something seemed to have gone wrong with it.

He'd not had a word about it from his London office, while the Cravat-Slovene Government had taken no action. But he wasn't pleased—she hadn't brought him here to explain, only for vengeance. Her brother had been arrested because of his message to his paper. It seemed too absurd for real life, but it was a fact. He, Bob Scarron, was being tried as Peter Alessan's betrayer— tried, that is, though he had already been sentenced. That was the way with these fierce-blooded Balkan people; death was their code even for an accidental wrong.

True, the girl, brought up most of her life in England, was trying to make it seem an act of justice. She had even selected these English-speaking Muslims for her court, so that he could not complain of being judged unheard, but that did not alter her determination to kill him.

PETER ALESSAN was her brother, the leader of their cause and the only genius in it; his arrest was a tragedy both personal and political. The bright eyes of hate she fixed on Scarron made it plain what it meant to her, she was a fury who would not be satisfied until his body went out through the window.

All the same, Scarron could not quite take her seriously. He couldn't believe the charge— a newspaper story causing the arrest and death of any man, especially his story. He was no cub reporter fumbling his job, but a newsman of international reputation. It was an attack on his pride even to suggest that he made such slips.

He told her all this, trying not to smile at her, for he liked her. The Muslims called her Katharine, she was better than good looking, and even her anger could not hide her charm.

She only blazed cold enmity and told him again that there wasn't a doubt that his message had betrayed her brother: "The police expected it, too," she said. "You have been playing into their hands all the time."

"Have some sense," he said. "I'm on a holiday. Why should they suspect a mere tripper?"

"You brought a letter from the Committee of Freedom in Switzerland to Korovic here. They knew it. They have known all about you since before you landed."

He was taken aback by that, yet managed to shrug: "You mean they followed when Korovic took me to Alessan's hiding place? I'm scarcely to blame for that. Korovic—"

"No! We are not so careless," her fury was knife-edged. "You were not followed. It was the wire you sent to your paper that told them where Peter was hidden."

SHE was a charming kid, but he was growing angry at her Lord High Justice manner.

He told her with hardening patience: "I did not wire the message. I telephoned it to my paper's London office. I did it from the room in my hotel — I did not want anybody to read or overhear it, you understand. I 'phoned in English because they don't understand English at the Telephone Exchange here. I had even to speak German to get them to make the connection with London."

"They were fooling you," she said with a calm certainty that galled him. "Of course they understand English. They took down every word of your message."

"Rot!" he snapped. "See here, baby, they simply couldn't have let. That message go through— if they understood. It was too ugly, was bound to rouse the world against them, yet they didn't ever cut me off."

He spoke With assurance, but his uneasiness had come back. There was something queer about that message. The world did not seem to be aroused; also, though he had expected trouble for himself, arrest or at least deportation, nothing had happened. Not even a local policeman looking back at him. It worried him.

Even if his message had slipped through because he spoke English, the Cravat-Slovene Legation must have wired from England by now and stirred things up. She read the puzzlement in his face.

"I told you they were only playing with you. They only let you send that message so that they could find Peter through it. It was never meant to appear."

"Don't be silly," he jerked. "They couldn't stop it once it reached London."

"They stopped it," she said, relentlessly. "We know. We have a man in the Post Office. Half an hour after you telephoned they wired London, using your name, telling them to hold your message until you confirmed it. A little later the Cravat-Slovene Government broadcast to the whole world the capture of the celebrated brigand, Peter Alessan, a notorious assassin, who has been spreading atrocity stories to cover up his own foul murders...."

Bob Scarron stared at her, swearing softly. So that was why his message had fallen dead. London would naturally feel that the fake wire meant that he had discovered these atrocity stories to be false; they would naturally "kill" his telephone report.

Clever work. The police had been playing with him all the time, as this girl said, just using him as a cat's-paw to find Peter Alessan for them— but—

"No. They may have been playing monkey with me, but they did not get his hiding place from my message."

"We know they did."

"How? Did your spy in the Post Office tell you how?" Scarron jeered.

"Not actual details, but he knows it was so."

"No," Scarron rapped. "I know my job, I didn't write a word to give Alessan away, only the atrocity stuff he himself supplied, and, hang it, he himself urged me to use that. He wanted to open the eyes of the world to what was going on here."

"Quite true," the big Muslim by the door said unexpectedly. "He felt it would force the world to intervene."

"There you are. I was doing him a service, not harm."

"You got Peter arrested. You could do no worse harm than that," she said, implacably.

Between her obstinacy and his rising anger at the way the police had tried to use him, Scarron was getting ragged.

"Rot! I'm telling you I know my own game. I'm too old a hand to give things away. That message was straight atrocities without frills or description...."

"Description!" She was on that in a flash. "You described the house he was hiding in!"

"Not the house, baby, just the garden. So unique! I gave a full pen-portrait of every blade of grass under the pomegranate trees..."

She interrupted him with a cry:

"There it is. The pomegranate trees— the police could not miss that "

Scarron felt as though someone had hit him unexpectedly in the wind. He had liked that pomegranate tree touch, it gave the authentic Adriatic atmosphere without being specific.

"What's special about those pomegranates?" he scowled.

"They're the only pomegranates in Sabbiona."

He gaped, startled, then: "Stuff! I've seen them all down the coast— everywhere."

"Not in Sabbiona," Katharine Alessan's voice was that of a prosecuting attorney driving home conviction. "Only in that one garden. The Turkish pasha who built that house was so proud of his pomegranates that he forbade anyone else in the city to grow them. Everyone knows that. No wonder the police knew exactly where to find Peter."

"Help— what a break. What a fool I was. If Alessan had only told me— but we were both too full of those atrocities. Cuss, it is just that kind of fool slip that gives things away,"'

"And sends men to death," the big Muslim by the door said, but his tone wasn't so stern. Odd how the little human slip had humanised them— all except the girl, that is.

She could not forget her brother.

"But will they kill him?" Scarron asked anxiously. He'd liked Alessan.

"It is only a matter of time," Katharine said. "He is to be taken to the Island of Vlis in four days. Prisoners who go to Vlis do not return alive."

"A penal settlement?" Scarron asked.

"And a lethal chamber," the big Muslim told him. "There are mines on Vlis, and guards who know how to use them to destroy men body and soul."

"Peter will not live six months," the girl cried passionately. "He has not the stamina to survive."

"No— not from the look of him," Scarron mused. He was full of pity for the poor, frail idealist, only that was nothing beside his anger at his own slip or his growing rage against the police for tricking him.

"And you sent him to this death," the girl cried.

"Yes, that'll need squaring up," he frowned.

"We mean to square it up," she reminded him, harshly.

"I mean, me," he mused. "I'm not standing dumb under a thing like that, naturally."

"You— what do you think you can do?"

''How do I know at a moment's notice? he shrugged. "But there'll be some way." He turned on the Muslims. "You big boys ought to have some ideas among you?''

"They are here to do justice to the betrayer of my brother" she cried, fiercely.

"Forget it," Scarron frowned "Here, one of you tell me just how things stand. Where's Alessan?"

The big mail by the door began to tell him that Alessan was in the citadel behind the town, but the girl burst in:—

"Ismael Spata, this man is here to be punished. It is our law vengeance for betrayal..."

She had leapt to her feet at the mere hint of their being ready to listen to Scarron. She was not merely a sister demanding blood requital as her tradition required, she was speaking with the imperious authority of a leader... only Scarron thought of her as a woman who would interrupt. He walked across, caught her slim, upper arms in his strong hands, and forced her back on to the divan.

"Be quiet, baby," he growled. "Our big brother is talking, and I want to get him straight. Cut the gallery play till we're through."

THE girl stared up at him, startled, confounded, her face a queer daze of beauty. Then her eyes blazed.

"You— you," she cried, striving to free her arms to strike him. "I'm ordering them to kill you, you fool

"I know— only this is serious," he said, patiently. "If we're to get your brother out of this jam..."

"But— but—"

"It's all said— you want to yarn about executions and things. Pigeon-hole it, sister. Death and burial can wait, but we've got to move sharp if we're to do anything real for your brother."

He turned to the men, his attitude saying that now he'd got of that distraction they would all be sensible, and seeing that the Muslims were ready to listen to him, she screamed:—

"He's fooling you. Don't you see? This talk of saving my brother is only a trick to escape punishment. He cares nothing for Peter or our cause."

"Right," Scarron faced her angrily. "Who said I did? But he'll benefit. I'm going to get him out—"

"Lies," she flamed. "Trickery—"

"Lady," Bob Scarron said, with bitter weariness. "Your brother may not mean much and your cause rather less, but if you think I'm letting a bunch of dirty dicks in uniform pull this stuff on me, Bob Scarron, you've got life all wrong. I'm showing them I'm nobody's sucker, and that means getting your brother away...

"Trickery," she cried. "I demand vengeance." She was on her feet like a cat. There was a knife in the hand that swept up from her skirts as she ran at Scarron.

Scarron took it away from her.

It was as casual as that. As her hand stabbed at his throat his own took it. "You sit down and stay put," he said, and shoved her hard on to the divan. "Stay quiet, do you hear? You waste too much time..." With the same indifferent movement with which he turned back to the Muslims, he tossed her knife out of the window.

She sat back spellbound, numbed by his unconcern. Hate, astonishment, and something like fear shone from her eyes.

They considered how they might rescue Peter Alessan.

The citadel, Scarron was told, was proof against anything but a trebly-signed permit or a siege gun— no hope there. In four days Alessan would be taken by road across the Sabbiona peninsula to the port of Kregs and there put on the steamer to Vlis.

He would do the journey in an lorry with an armored car escort— not much hope about that. Once on the ship no hope at all. They all agreed on that; the sea intimidated them.

SCARRON found these Muslims irritatingly pathetic. They could talk. They had the endless eloquence of conspirators, but when it came to action were merely fantastic. They suggested absurdities— a plan for bombing and rushing the citadel. A regular army manoeuvre for ambushing Alessan's escort as it travelled over the empty karst hills.

"Prisoner of Zenda stuff," Scarron called it, and they grew a little huffy under his constant veto. Even the girl recovered Poise enough to sneer, "Always objections! He rescue Peter— pah!"

Scarron asked abruptly: "What about the sea? How do they take him to Vlis?"

Again they were so unanimously against the sea, so certain that neither rescue nor their own escape effected on its coverless tract of water that Scarron had to snap again: "How do they get prisoners to Vlis—I mean, by war-ship, or what?"

It appeared there was only one way. The prisoners were always carried by the ordinary passenger steamers plying up and down the coast. Five or six soldiers under a sergeant would go with Peter Alessan. He would be taken below to an ordinary second-class cabin and confined there until the steamer reached Vlis two days later.

THERE were never any special precautions since the Cravat-Slovene authorities also seemed to regard the sea as an impossible place for rescue. Scarron said evenly:—

"That's our chance, then," and as they all cried "Impossible" again snapped: "Listen—" and told them his idea.

They didn't really like it. The biggest Muslim, Ismael Spata. thought there might be something in it, but then he'd been born a fisherman. The others, hill fighters and shooters from behind rocks, were against it on principle, and now took their turn in raising objections.

The girl's attitude alone was odd. Eager as she was to belittle Scarron, it was soon plain that she was mortified to find his suggestion the only practical one. In the end, when the Muslims did put forward what seemed an insuperable difficulty, it was she who said, obviously against her will:—

"No, that will be easy. Stjepan Busti is at Kregs, and his motor-boat is faster even than the Government's destroyer."

"You're sure of that?" Scarron asked.

"Stjepan uses it to smuggle our printing— and other things from abroad," she told him, sullenly.

"Great, and Stjepan, being a smuggler, is also the very man we want," Scarron cried. "That settles it— do you agree?"

The Muslims, who took their lead entirely from Katharine Alessan, looked at her.

"Yes, it is the soundest plan," she said, reluctantly, "if we can trust this man."

"Get yourself another knife and come with me."

Her color deepened. She said sombrely: "I will. Ismael Spata and I will go with you."

There was no trouble about Scarron's leaving. He took the ordinary public motor-bus across the Sabbiona peninsula to the port of Kregs the next day. Even there he had no difficulty in securing a cabin to Trieste, though it was on the very steamer that would call at Vlis with Peter Alessan. The authorities indeed seemed quite anxious for him to go.

He told Katharine Alessan this after a fezzed urchin had picked him up at the rendezvous arranged, and led him by devious ways to where she waited at Stjepan Busti's.

"You've served their ends," she said, acridly, "they're glad to be rid of you— your next slip might hurt instead of help them."

"You're too sweet to me," he grinned. "So, they think they've spiked my guns, eh? That'll mean a bigger jolt for them when I produce your brother to confirm my story."

"Your story," she blazed. "Don't you ever think of anybody else?"

"You know, I'm almost willing to try, if you'll teach me," he said, and laughed as she grew queerly pale under his admiring eyes.

Ismael Spata was there with Stjepan Busti; a short, teak-built old-ster in the world's most ragged Turkish breeches and a blood-topped Bosnian cap.

A doer rather than a talker, Stjepan. His dour face split into a broken-toothed grin as he listened to Scarron's plan; without fuss he produced maps and steamer sailing times, and with the fewest possible words began to reduce the scheme to chart terms that would give it the greatest chances of success.

Scarron went back to his hotel sure that he could rely absolutely on Stjepan and Spata, but he wondered more than he liked about Katharine.

They went on board the steamer separately. Katharine, again disguised as a Muslim woman, wore a colored veiled shawl that Scarron could recognise among many. She was to act as go-between for any information Spata could collect on board.

It was well they arranged it thus, for Scarron found that the police had set a man to watch him through the voyage; a small, unobtrusive tripper, who always drifted into view wherever Scarron lingered.

Scarron was to get in touch with Katharine on the after-deck at 6 o'clock, but because of the shadower he dared not approach her even when he located her by the rail. Still, suspicion is a quality that the wise know how to employ, and having patrolled the deck in a way that suggested he was testing it for spies, he adopted the air of having found none, and sat himself down for a sun-bath by the winch on the forward-deck.

THERE, but not too secretly, he wrote a note, and this he shoved under a pile of chain by the winch before leaving that part of the deck. He glanced back once, just long enough to make sure that his shadower had slid from cover to get that note. While the man was occupied with it, Scarron walked quickly to where Katharine stood and, looking out to sea, said in English:—

"I'm watched. My cabin is No. 27 C Deck. I can hold my shadower for ten minutes; go there now."

He strolled back to let the shadower pick him up again. The fellow looked extraordinarily puzzled. Scarron did not wonder at it. He had written in that note: "Snow as white was fleece its lamb little a had Mary."

The man, who could undoubtedly read English, would be certain that was a cipher message. Scarron let the man follow him about like Mary's lamb until he was sure Katharine was safe in his cabin, then he drifted below. The shadower followed him with a casual boldness along the cabin alleyway, but he did not see Katharine, who was crouching behind the door.

Scarron locked the door and pulled her down on to the bunk; she resisted with a spitfire fury, until he made her realise it was caution, not flirtation, indicating that the bulkheads were so thin that any passengers in the next cabins might overhear them.

When she realised it, she was so angry with herself that she stripped off the shawl with its black lattice-like veil, to show that it made no difference to her how close their faces had to be in order to whisper. Scarron smiled, and perhaps his lips went closer than needful to the warm and golden cheek as he whispered in her ear. Yet, for a time, it made no difference. She had important news to communicate.

Spata had reported to her that her brother was in the second class Cabin No. 126. He had two soldiers with him day and night. There were four soldiers and a sergeant in the next cabin. Both cabins were near the exits of the alleyway that led on to the lower aft deck.

Spata had been very thorough. He had even been able to measure the exact distance between the cabin doors and the hand-rail on the other side of the alleyway, as Scarron had asked.

Scarron told her about his shadows, and how easy it had been to fool the man so far. He said he felt he had nothing to fear from this fellow so long as he kept his wits alert. Katharine cried softly, catching at his coat; "You will be very careful, it is so dangerous..."

For a moment they swayed very close together as they sat on the bunk, and he saw something in her eyes that wasn't hate— a strange, soft light that took his breath away. Abruptly he realised how cut off and alone and at his mercy she was, and said hoarsely:—

"Have you your knife with you? Bring it out, quick— l feel like kissing you...."

HER face flamed and stiffened. She drew back as his hand went to her shoulders... "To say that,'' she half sobbed, and struck him across the mouth.

"Fine!" he said, edgily, standing up. "Now we can go on being enemies, with no silliness to spoil the rescue of your brother— and my scoop."

He moved towards the door, said:

"I'm going on deck. That police slob will follow me. Give me two minutes to get him clear before you leave."

She did not answer, did not move, did not lift her head, and he went back and close, whispering urgently: "Do you hear? Give me two minutes " he stopped. She was staring at the ground, crying silently.

"Katharine!" he cried, softly.

"Go," she breathed. "Go quickly. I can't hate you enough any more."

It was the queer, dead grey before summer dawn, and the steamer was passing amid the islands. He could see the harsh land, like a grey and shrouded ghost, slipping by about half a mile away. He picked up the little headland village of Sterke that was his warning point, then the channel between the Island of Nun and Zrinjii opened out with the stunted pharos winking on the latter. It was time to act.

He lifted from his bunk the length of stout rope he had looped and tied to Ismael Spata's measurements and went aft along the alley-ways.

The ship had the strange silence of the sea at night, a sort of living deadness; eerie movement with no visible life.

Katharine was already in the second-class alley. She had dressed herself as a Turkish boy, baggy breeches, legs as bare and brown as honey, a loose shirt. She pointed to a door as he came up. It was the cabin of the sergeant and his four soldiers.

Scarron looped his rope round the handrail clamped to the far wall of the alley, then secured the handle of that door to it. Spata's measurements had been so good there'd be no opening that door until the handle came off.

Katharine was already at the other cabin door, Peter's, opening it gently. One soldier was standing with fixed bayonet looking out of the porthole, but very much on guard.

As Katharine entered the cabin he swept around, and in an instant she was forced back against the bulkhead, the point of the man's bayonet at her bosom. He began to shout for his sergeant.

IT was a nasty moment. Scarron could do nothing. One word from him might mean the bayonet driving forward into the girl. Peter had awakened and recognised his sister, but he could not get at the man, and dared not speak for fear of causing her death. Meanwhile, the soldier's companion tumbling out of his bunk, and the sergeant in the next cabin was roused. They heard shouts, the rattle of the handle, thuds on the door.

Scarron sweated fear, heard the other soldier shout, "Bayonet the boy, you fool," and prepared to charge in. There came a heavy explosion from forward in the ship, followed by an outbreak of panicky shouting. Ismael Spata had done his bit; he had exploded a smoke bomb somewhere up in the bows. The noise and the shouts startled the two soldiers, the man with the bayonet at Katharine's breast half-turned, dropping the point. "What is it?" he cried.

Scarron appeared at the door, shouting: "Quick! The ship's bombed and sinking .... Quick, get on deck."

The man, full of his race's fear of the sea, swung anxiously towards Scarron, his gun coming right away from the girl. Scarron took the risk and leapt at him. The bayonet came up, but only far enough to gash the newspaperman's hip, and by that time his fist had connected. The man went back and down, and Scarron was on to the other soldier. He shouted to Katharine to get Peter out, and was engulfed.

The man had half on the bunk in a sprawling sort of hold he simply could not break. He was preparing to resign himself when the cabin water flask came down on the soldier's head, and, as the man went limp, Katharine's hands caught Scarron's body and hauled him free. Scarron was glad to see that the sergeant's door, though splintered, was still holding as he sprinted for the after-deck.

Peter Alessan was there, standing by the rail as he had been instructed. Ismael Spata had doubled aft and joined him. A motor-boat that had been, apparently, passing the ship suddenly took a sweeping curve towards her, a beautiful manoeuvre.

As the motor-boat swept round, men on the bridge-deck of the steamer guessed what she was up to; there were shouts, the drumming of feet to the side, even a shot fired at the motor-boat.

Scarron saw that Peter Alessan had caught up a lifebelt, and he nodded to Spata. "Over!" he said.

Spata leapt on to the rail, pulling Peter after him. He and Spata jumped for water as one. The curve of Stjepan Busti's motor-boat would reach them in a couple of minutes.

It was all a matter of minutes, no time to lose.

Scarron turned to the girl. "Our turn. Up you go."

"No," she said. "You jump. I'll follow."

"Still independent," he began, then he caught her eyes. "You little idiot," he shouted. "You can't swim."

"No," she said thickly. "But I shall be all right... a woman... Go quickly. It will be too late...."

It was, in fact, almost too late. Men had reached the rail of the deck above them, were shouting at them. They heard a crash, and a bellow from the sergeant told them he and his men were free.

"Go, Bob, my dear," she wailed. He caught her up in his arms.

"You plucky kid," he said. "You'd sacrifice yourself for the man you hate?"

"Not hate," she cried softly. "I've long ago— not hated you, Bob."

Her glowing face was close to his. For a moment he was near kissing her There was an explosion and the scream of a bullet by his ear. With a quick heave he got both of them to the rail and over the side.

But as the water closed over them, and they sank and sank— he did kiss her. He didn't quite know what would happen when they came to the surface, and while they had time in hand he didn't see the use of wasting it.

He felt her arms tighten a little that was all, and then they broke water. But not to death. Stjepan Busti had already swung his boat cleverly to screen them from the shooting on the ship.

With a smuggler's skill the craft came on to them, scarcely checking speed. Strong hands grabbed and pulled them inboard. Then they were off to pick up Peter and Ismael Spata.

They were shooting into the channel between the islands of Nun and Zrinjii by the time the steamer came about. Stjepan Busti kissed his hand to it; there was nothing to catch them now.

As the islands cut them off from sight of the steamer Peter Alessan said: "That nightmare is finished... I owe you a lot, Mr. Scarron. You've not only saved me from imprisonment, but you saved my sister's life "

"Had to," Scarron laughed. "You see, she meant to kill me."

"Kill you?" Peter was astonished. "Good Heavens why?"

Katharine and Scarron stared at each other. It seemed so amazing that he was the man she had hated and meant to kill. She turned to her brother, but Scarron saved her explaining.

"It doesn't matter— she's commuted it to a life sentence, anyhow," he laughed.... "Stjepan, can you get me ashore before nightfall? I've got to catch the early editions to scoop."

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7: The Six Know-Alls

Douglas Newton

The Wireless Weekly, 17 May 1941

LAVER went boldly ahead through glooms that half hid what seemed a museum cross-section of the marine junk of all ages. Penroy, who accompanied him, found the going uneasy after the brassy sunlight of the streets.

Penroy was just beginning to wonder whether Laver was fooling him, for he couldn't see how a seedy joint like this could be the gathering ground of everyone that amounted to anything among the old China Coasters, when they stepped round an angle of a passage, and were in a room so bright and handsome that he had to blink.

It was a gem of Chinese beauty— lacquer of the most subtle blending, mother-o'- pearl and incised brass. Electric light in a lovely tasselied lamp was the only concession to modernity— apart from the men.

As Laver had said, there were six of them, the Big Noises, the lead-leading representatives of wealth, power and position in the white community, but what meant more to Penroy, the Know-alls of the port. They greeted Laver warmly, and Penroy with a cautious affability, since he was Laver's friend.

As he sat among them Penroy wondered whether he could get the reactions he hoped out of such men. There was a hard-case wariness about them all. Even the vast, perspiring and good-humored Tyler, who sat across from him, had a shrewd glint in his eye for all the indulgence that accumulated wealth put into his constant chuckles.

Adlam, the small, cheerful old man on his right, with a face like a sunny apple, had a friendly, almost appealing, innocence in his bright blue eye but Penroy already knew that he had made his fortune by a cold, almost ruthless, trading along a semi-pirate coast.

Drapps, on his left, looked easier. He had a dark, lazy and almost purring affabilitv, but from the snap of the Chinese he flung at the "boy," Penroy felt that there was more panther than pussy-cat in his purr.

The other three really looked tough. Narland at the head of the table, huge and square and hewn-teak, had the air of a man who had smashed his way to fortune and position. De Jong, thin, taut and keen, was as wicked as a rapier that was always kept sharp and deadly.

Litlington, chunky, blond and dreamy-seeming, actually carried the scars of his violent past on face and neck.

As the drinks mellowed them and they became more and more friendly, Penroy grew more sure he could get what he wanted. Their very importance

and status in the community would see to that. When Laver was forced to leave them, Penroy decided not to feel his way with them, but to treat them frankly as the men of the world they were and say his say straight out.

He did it candidly. He let them know he was a police officer who had only just landed in the port, and he told them why. He told them how the big pearl that Roding, the millionaire, had bought by wireless through his agent in Parlandang had been stolen: how T Roding, in his fury had demanded its recovery at all costs; how he, Penroy, an expert in such jobs, had been assigned to the case, and how he had traced it to the port.

"An' why tell your secret to us, Mr. Policeman?" asked Narland.

"Well, gentleman, I was rather hoping you'd help being in the position you are."

"Catch your thief for you?" De Jong almost sneered.

"Not exactly I'll catch him, all right," Penroy said evenly. "That's only a matter of time. But you, with your special knowledge, might help quicken things up, make me more sure of recovering the pearl. That's the really important thing. Roding doesn't want to lose that on any account. In fact, he wants it more than he wants the thief. That's why I turn to you gentlemen . .

"Even about that I'm wondering

why?" Litlington murmured.

Penroy explained why he sought them out.

"I know," he said, "that the crook headed here, landing two days ahead of me from the inter-island steamer. I also know his method. He doesn't use a fence in the ordinary sense, he knows these seas too well. He trades privately, probably through rich Chinese mandarins who are not above buying stolen jewels if they think they're safe."

"Yeh," Adlam nodded boyishly. "That's the custom, and they generally are safe."

"Won't be so in this case," Penroy told him sharply. "I've a line that will take me to my man and the buyer— and it's going to mean a real stretch of jail for that buyer, let me tell you, if I get him."

"Don't seem much in my line," Drapps said, swilling off his drink and rising. "Coming my way, Tyler?"

"I'm sure that gentlemen like you, knowing the port as you do, could give me a lead— I only need a hint,"

Penroy said.

"Might try Fu-Ah, head of the Light-Fingered Tong," De Jong said, rising, as did the others.

"Yes, that's the best line," agreed Tyler. "I don't see any other."

"Not a thing," said Drapps, and began to snap at the "boy" in Chinese to bring the reckoning.

The whip-lash of the tone brought the Chinese running, but made him so agitated that he stumbled over the matting at the door and, as he fell, banged his hand against the switch so that the light went out. For half a minute there was black confusion, Adlam by Penroy's side stepping back violently and jostling him against someone who stood behind him, who, in turn, seemed to shove him into a whole bunch of bodies But it was only a momentary confusion.

Narland bellowed in Chinese, the lights went up again, and they were all blinking and grinning at each other, no one the worse for the hubbub.

They settled up, the "boy" leaving Penroy, as the inconspicuous stranger, to the last. Their partings were casual and unaffected. As Penroy paid, the "boy" muttered:

"You no like your dlink? No finish?"

Penroy felt he might at least have that out of his failure, and drank. As he drank, something rapped against his teeth.

He held it in his mouth until the "boy" had gone,"then ejected it into his hand. As he had expected, it was a pearl. A rare and marvellous pearl that had been hidden in his glass by the dark color of the drink.

He grinned. His bluff had won as he had hoped it would... He had effectively scared the guilty party into yielding up the pearl as he had felt sure he could. He had saved himself what would have been, in spite of his boasts, an impossible hunt.

Reaching into his side pocket for the wash-leather bag in which to put the pearl, he wondered whether it had been De Jong, as he had suspected, or one of the other five who had slipped the pearl into his drink in the dark. But he stopped wondering as his fingers encountered three strange objects in his pocket. He pulled them out; they were three rare and marvellous pearls. He stared at them astonished for a moment. Then instinct led him to plunge his hand into his other side pocket. He brought out two round objects from that and burst out laughing.

He had come here to frighten a wealthy receiver of stolen goods into disgorging one pearl— and had got back six.

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8: Miss Cameron's Art Sale.

Charlotte Rosalys Jones

fl 1890s

In: *The Hypnotic Experiment of Dr. Reeves*, 1894

Apart from the slim volume of short stories from which this story comes, I can find out nothing about the author.

KATHERINE CAMERON was spending her third winter in Paris. The first year she had led a quiet, uneventful student's life. The second season she launched out a little into society as represented by the English and American colonies, and now she was spoken of as that "clever and rich Miss Cameron," whom the English-speaking residents remembered to have seen at various *musicales* the year before.

On her return from America, with the reputation of added wealth, she found herself invited everywhere. Everyone wondered that she did not marry, for she was a young woman whom men admired apart from her money and accomplishments. But although she went out a great deal, and was usually surrounded by a little court of struggling tenors and impecunious titles, she seemed unmoved by all the attention she received, and apparently was not even greatly amused.

The truth was, Katherine Cameron, being a clever girl, had seen through the artificiality of it all, and still could not bear to give up the illusion she had cherished all her life, that she should find her *real* sphere in the society she would meet in Paris; it might be among her own country people, but they would be broadened by travel and study until all desirable and agreeable qualities would be blended into a harmonious whole.

When she decided to pass the winter with her aunt, Mrs. Montgomery, it was with the sweet hope that she should be able to realise her dreams of a little "Salon"— a revival of that delightful French institution and formulated on the same lines, but having American cleverness and adaptability added to it. It seemed feasible. Mrs. Montgomery had lived in Paris for years, and she knew all the resident society people, the rest of the "floating population" were usually provided with letters of introduction to her. Her "Tuesdays At Home" were delightful functions. Katherine Cameron had great respect for her aunt's discrimination, which often seemed prophetic, and caused uninitiated people to wonder *how* Mrs. Montgomery happened to have "taken up" some artist or singer who afterwards became famous.

Still Katherine was not entirely satisfied. Men liked her, but thought her cold; at any rate, she never fulfilled any promise of a flirtation that her agreeable manners might suggest. Women said she was ambitious, that she

would only marry some distinguished foreigner, and yet Miss Cameron, who sometimes used forcible expressions, had been heard to say, "She would marry a 'Hottentot' if she loved him." She was honestly trying to get some good out of her surroundings, and was perfectly willing to fall in love, or to gratify her intellectual tastes, just as it might happen. Up to this time, however, she had been distinctly heart-whole, and aside from an occasional charming man or woman whom she met in society, or the interesting art students whom she knew (and liked best of all), it seemed to her clear and practical mind that there was a great deal of "padding," as she expressed it.

She resented, as a patriotic American woman of culture and refinement, that the so-called "exclusive" circles in the American quarter accepted some of the families who would not occupy conspicuous positions in their own free and enlightened country. She could not help comparing certain wealthy young society women with a clever but poor friend of hers, whose artistic talent had been recognized by her own warm-hearted Southern townspeople, who had contributed a sufficient sum to send Miss Paterson abroad, confident that her brush would one day repay them. The two young women had met at the studio of a common friend, and Miss Cameron, who professed to know nothing of art, had asked such intelligent questions of the young student that Miss Paterson, with a woman's quick intuition, had surmised that her fashionable countrywoman had a more artistic nature than she admitted. A friendship was begun, and Katherine Cameron became the *confidante* and admirer of the rising young artist.

Just now she has returned from a musicale at the hotel of one of the famous teachers, and she is describing it to Miss Paterson, who has come in for a chat and a quiet cup of tea.

"It makes me so indignant," she is saying, "when I think what an impression we must make on intelligent French people. Why this afternoon, at Madame de la Harpe's, it was simply one medley of disputing mothers and jealous pupils. Madame herself is so distinctly a lady, that when two irate mothers appealed to her as to which of their daughters should sing *first*, she shrugged her shoulders in true French fashion and said, 'They will both sing many times; they will sing so well that it will be doubtless required'— a diplomatic answer! She knew her audience, and felt that a programme of twenty-three numbers could not admit of many encores in one afternoon. I noticed she did not deviate from the original plan. Then that vulgar Mrs. Booth, from somewhere out west, who has the gorgeous apartment, and the family of extremely pretty daughters, asked me if I would join their French class. 'We have an actor, M. de Valle, to teach us,' she said, 'he is just splendid— so handsome and so polite; only he will make us *congregate* verbs.' To my horror, Mr. Vincent, of the

English Embassy, who is so coldly critical of everything American, overheard her, and I saw him trying to suppress a smile, which made me indignant, so I impulsively replied, 'I shall be charmed, Mrs. Booth— so kind of you to ask me.' And now I shall have to extricate myself from that situation, for, although I have a certain appreciation of the ludicrous, I cannot sacrifice one night of every week, even to show Mr. Vincent that I despise his criticism."

"But I have rather thought Mr. Vincent one of your admirers," Miss Paterson returns.

"Admirer? He sees in me a young person who will not be apt to make any very ridiculous blunders, and as he *has* to appear occasionally, being in the diplomatic service, he talks to me as a sort of compromise between the tourist element and his own fixed aristocracy. I *love* to shock him. Why, to-day, he said, in that deliberate tone he employs when he wishes to be particularly patronizing, 'I suppose you go in for all sorts of things, Miss Cameron. I hear you are artistic, and know the Latin Quarter better than this side of the river. When do you get it all in?' I told him to behold a young person positively unique in Paris— one who was actively pursuing *nothing*. And then he actually remarked that 'in an age where all the young women were running mad with *fads* it was refreshing to find one so confessedly idle.' He aggravates me so that I always lose my head, and get the worst of the argument. But here I am talking away, and forgetting that I am to hear all about you and your plans."

Miss Cameron soon proved that she could listen as well as talk, for she was most attentive while Miss Paterson told her about a letter which she had received that day, and which had disturbed her not a little. In the midst of their displeasure both girls saw the ludicrous side of it, for it was nothing less than a letter from Miss Paterson's townspeople *forbidding* her marriage to the penniless young sculptor with whom she had fallen in love.

"What impertinence!" Miss Cameron remarks; "talk about the tyranny of European courts! Here you are, an orphan, without a relative in the world to restrain you, and these people fancy they *own* you, and can control your liberty just because they have furnished you with funds which they ought to know will be returned to them."

"But there *is* a moral obligation," Miss Paterson replied. "I shall send them back every penny of their money as soon as possible, and I shall always feel a debt of gratitude which no pecuniary remuneration can cover."

"Little saint!" Miss Cameron exclaims, but she respects her brave little countrywoman all the more, because she is so visibly distressed at the situation.

"Let us go over the facts," adds Miss Cameron. "Here they are briefly: A number of your townspeople, seeing in you evidences of talent, raised a sum

of money and sent you to Paris two years ago. Two of these people selected your masters (fortunately they made no mistake there); you have worked faithfully and conscientiously, and have accomplished more than most art students do in twice the time. This year two of your studies have been in the Salon, one of them was bought by a Frenchman of critical taste; and you have a number of charming saleable studies, besides your large picture of the garden-party intended for next year's Salon, in which festive scene your humble servant poses as the hostess serving tea to a group of *fin-de-siècle* society people. You are sure to make a hit with that, so many of the figures are actual portraits, and Paris dotes on personalities. It is conceded that merit no longer wins, but to be 'received' one must be a friend of some member of the jury, or paint the people whose vanity moves them to pull some wire, so that they may gaze down from the Salon walls upon an inquisitive and envious public."

"And in this case can I count on *you* or some of your admirers to pull the wires, Katherine?" Miss Paterson mischievously asks.

"Yes; that picture shall hang 'on the line,' even if I have to lobby for it; but you know all the artists think it splendidly treated," said Miss Cameron.

"I hoped it would be received this year, but, do you know, I have been considering all day whether I had better not sell it now, and send back as much money as I can raise immediately; for I intend to marry Edgar McDowald, with the benediction of my patrons if possible— without it if necessary," emphatically declares Miss Paterson.

"And I shall aid and abet you, especially if you intend to show them that 'love laughs at locksmiths'— and creditors. But, seriously, why not have an art sale? I am off to a musicale at that extraordinary Mrs. Smyth's (formerly spelt with an i), who begins every Monday morning sending letters, followed during the week by three-cornered notes marked '*pressée*,' in which she 'begges' her dear friend, whoever it may be, to run in Saturday afternoon, and casually remarks that some 'celebrated musicien' will perform. The joke is they usually do, and we all find ourselves there once or twice a season. To-night the American Minister has promised to be present, and I shall profit by the occasion to invite everyone to your studio next week to see some charming studies which will be for sale."

Miss Paterson knew Miss Cameron's influence, and felt that she was quite safe in letting her friend have her way; so after talking over the details they separated.

That evening Miss Cameron succeeded in quietly scattering the information through the crowded rooms that a very charming friend of hers, the Miss Paterson, who occasionally received with her, would have a little private art sale the following week. Among the attentive listeners was Mr. Vincent, who

casually asked if Miss Paterson had finished her Salon picture which she had described to him.

"She has," Miss Cameron replied, and suddenly added, "And you know, Mr. Vincent, I cannot offer my friend money, nor would she sell me so important a picture as her large one, for she would think I did it to help her; now, I want to ask you, as the person she would think of as being the last one connected with me (here Mr. Vincent smiled a rather melancholy but affirmative smile), to buy two of her studies for me in some other name. I can easily dispose of them as presents, and she will never be the wiser."

"Miss Cameron's wishes are my commands. I will call on Miss Paterson before Wednesday, and on the day when the exhibition takes place, you can be sure that at least two pictures will be marked 'Sold.'"

"That will give a business-like air to the whole arrangement, Mr. Vincent, and suggest to any possible buyers that other equally attractive studies are for sale. This must be a profound secret. Do you promise?"

"Certainly," Mr. Vincent replied, and Miss Cameron knew she could trust him.

"He is really very likeable, when one sees him alone," Miss Cameron soliloquizes; and then she reflects that it is decidedly her fault that she does not see Mr. Vincent more frequently in his best light; she remembers various occasions when she has made their duet a trio by addressing some third person, thus preventing a possible *tête-à-tête*.

The afternoon selected by Miss Paterson arrived, and as Miss Cameron alighted from her coupé in the humble street where art and poor students hold sway, she remarked with pleasure a goodly line of private carriages, and knew that her scheme had succeeded, and that Miss Paterson was the fashion— at least of the hour. The question was, Would they buy her pictures? And then she added to herself, "They must be sold, even if I have to find other agents, and buy them all in." But the loyal girl might have spared herself any anxiety. As she entered the room, which was artistically draped and hung with numerous strongly-executed sketches, she saw the magic word "Sold," not only on several of the small studies, but conspicuously placed at the base of the largest canvas, Miss Paterson's salon picture, in which Miss Cameron is the central and principal figure.

"Isn't it too delightful, dear?" Miss Paterson whispers to her. "An Englishman, a friend of Mr. Vincent's, came here with him yesterday, saw my canvas, liked it, asked my price, and actually took it. Mr. Vincent also bought two other studies, and several have gone to-day. Edgar has lost no time. He has disappeared now to cable to my esteemed benefactors, '*Marriage will take place; cheque for full amount on way*.' Extravagant of us, I know, and of course

it's extremely '*previous*,' but we really see our way clear to happiness, and I shall always feel *you* did it all."

As Miss Cameron shook hands with Mr. Vincent that day she told him that he had been instrumental in making two deserving people happy.

"It was so thoughtful to bring your friend here, who bought the large picture," she says. And then she adds, "Did I ever see him?"

"I think you have seen him," Mr. Vincent replies. Something in his manner betrays him, and Miss Cameron, guessing the truth, impulsively says:

"You bought it yourself, Mr. Vincent."

"Hush!" he softly whispers, with his finger on his lips. "We are fellow-conspirators, and cannot betray each other."

Next year, when a great American city gave Edgar McDowald the order for a State monument, the beauty of his designs having distanced all competitors, Parisians remarked that Mrs. Montgomery's discrimination, as regarded celebrities, seemed to have fallen upon her niece.

Mr. and Mrs. McDowald delight in telling of their romantic courtship, and how Miss Cameron's scheme of an art sale brought about their marriage; but Miss Cameron always affirms that its success was not due to her, but to Mr. Vincent's tact in exhibiting that expensive canvas to his friend.

Miss Cameron, being a worldly-wise young woman, tries to feel that Mr. Vincent's motives were wholly generous and disinterested; but if what rumour says is true, Mr. Vincent would do more than that for the charming central figure in Mrs. McDowald's Salon picture, which now looks down from a good position in the library of his own English home, and which never hung "on the line" after all.

9: A Present of His Past

Florence Ostern

fl 1925-35

Australian Women's Weekly, 25 May 1935

The Novel Magazine, May 1934

Otherwise unknown author who published tewnty or so romantic short stories, mostly in The Novel Nagazine

NANCY told them about it at dinner, then held her breath and waited for the deluge. It came all right. The family hadn't been so upset since the time she wanted to be a ventriloquist.

"When we gave you that trip with your aunt," Mr. Porcher re-minded his daughter, "you promised to be more considerate, Nancy. And here, your first day home—"

"But think of becoming a famous reporter like Vic Beaver!" Nancy's short, brown curls bristled eloquently. "Besides, what's wrong with newspaper work?"

"What was wrong with ventriloquism?" Mrs. Porcher wanly salted her celery for the third time. "Or archery? Or pumping stomachs? Every month something equally impossible. When I was nineteen—"

"Nancy's too flighty to get a job selling papers, let alone reporting on one." Hutch, her brother, spoke with all the sagacity of his sixteen years. "Anyhow, we can always pay the damage suit," he continued grandly, "like we did when she pumped the stomach of Miss De Jong's cat."

"I wish it had been yours," Nancy mumbled with feeling.

"My advice," Hutch condescended, "is to ensnare some man. You're prettier than most, and flightier than any, and that's the sort we men marry "

"Speaking of men"— Nancy buttered a roll dreamily— "coming home on the train this morning, I met a per-fect-ly—"

"Dar-ling man," Hutch squeaked.

Mrs. Porcher dropped her tragic air. "I wish you wouldn't pick up with strangers. Who was he, dear? Somebody— eligible?"

Nancy giggled. "I didn't get his name. But he read mine off the tag on my bag. About twenty-seven. Tall, fair, with the smoothest tan—"

"But his eyelashes?" Hutch pre-tended breathlessness. "Did they curl?"

Nancy ignored her brother. "He's somebody important, mother. I saw his picture in one of the film magazines. Taken with May de Hay and her two pet leopards. Not that lt matters. I lost him in a luggage scramble at the station. And, anyway, darling, marriage and a career would never mix."

The family looked at each other. They had known Nancy to mix even stranger things.

She appeared, in her new sailor hat, next morning just as her father was leaving for the office. "I'm driving down with you, dad. I happen to be one of those early birds who's worm conscious."

"Pembroke, be firm with her!" Mrs. Porcher moaned, but Nancy was already in the car.

"Why don't you give up this nonsensical idea?" Mr. Porcher was still pleading, as the car crept through traffic.

"Look!" In her excitement. Nancy pointed. "There he is!"

"There who is?"

"The man I met on the train. Isn't he pulse-raising? Oh— he doesn't see me!" Nancy's face fell as a lean figure in tweeds disappeared into a building. "But he's all alone. I mean," she explained to her dazed father, "there's no designing female with him." Nancy opened her compact and gave one final dab at her nose. "Stop here, dad," she requested. "*The Courier* is across the street."

THE EDITOR neither rose nor removed the foul-smelling cigar from his mouth when Nancy finally reached him.

"What can I do for you?" he barked. "I'm interested in a position." She was one hundred per cent, confident. "And I'm willing to accept any sort of assignment. At least," she amended, "anything that doesn't require a visit to the mortuary or viewing messy accidents. Things like that depress me terrifically."

"Oh, things like that depress you terrifically, Miss— er—"

"Porcher. Nancy Porcher."

"Old Pembroke Porcher's girl?" His expression altered at her nod. "What made you decide to honor our humble paper?"

"Any paper that Vic Beaver works for must be good," Nancy said. "And one should always aim for the best, shouldn't one?"

She could see that the editor and the inky individual standing near were impressed, for they exchanged glances openly.

"Tell you what I'll do, Miss Porcher," the editor drawled after a moment's thought, "I'll give you a chance at something no other reporter in this town is able to get. Even Vic Beaver says it's hopeless. But I believe you don't know the meaning of that word. Ever hear of John Norse?"

Nancy felt nothing could be gained by confessing ignorance, so she nodded brightly.

"Well— Norse is back in town," the editor continued, "and it's rumored that he didn't, return alone. You see? Married or something, though we can't

learn anything definite. Just the same there was a cable from our foreign correspondent some time ago, and Norse is refusing to see the press."

Nancy waited, wide-eyed.

"Norse is staying at the Parkview," the editor mentioned, "but it's useless to go up there. Of course, a clever girl like you will think of something original. Care to go after the story?"

"I'll get it," Nancy promised, ment-ally snapping her fingers under the editor's nose as she had seen it done in "The Big Scoop," "or there isn't one."

She congratulated herself on the exit line. Her assurance grew by leaps and bounds. So Norse wouldn't give Vic Beaver an interview! Well, she was sure a gentleman would never refuse to see a lady. In high hopes, Nancy entered the Parkview Hotel.

WITH as much self-possession as if she were a veteran reporter, she walked over to the desk. But before sending up her name she peeped cautiously over one shoulder, just in case any of her mother's prudish friends happened to be abroad. Thank heaven, not a soul was near! Unless you counted the nosey-looking man with the goatee.

"Mr. Norse says to come up— 418," the clerk yawned.

Outside 418, Nancy knocked confi-dently. The door fairly sprang back.

"Good morn—"

Her brand new notebook and pencil clattered to the floor. Standing there was the man of the train.

"I wondered if it could possibly be you!" he was marvelling, as he re-covered her things. "Nancy Porcher isn't a name I found easy to forget."

And Shakespeare had wanted to know what was in a name!

"So you did recognize me on the train yesterday." He was as pleased as Punch. "I didn't realise delightful young ladies were interested in big game."

It was then that Nancy caught sight of the leopard skins on the floor, the what-not skins on the sofa, and the pith helmet lying on the table.

"Oh, you're a big game hunter," she murmured lamely. She kept warning herself not to be led astray by a few dead leopards and the light in a man's eyes. "Now, Mr. Norse—"

"After we got in," he grinned at her, "I hung round the station so long looking for you the good ladies from the Traveller's Aid were beginning to worry about me."

Nancy sternly reminded herself why she was here. Wasn't he the owner of a questionable past or, worse, a questionable present?

"I'm a reporter on the *Courier*"— she took pains to be exceedingly formal— "and I came toget your story for my paper."

If she said she had come to burn the leopard skins John Norse couldn't have been more in-dignant.

"Then all you want is copy?"

It was harrowing to see him turn hostile before her very eyes. But she couldn't allow a personal rebuff to stand in the way of her duty to the press. With a professional air she opened her notebook.

"Mr. Norse, my paper would like your whole story. Slowly, if you please, as I am not a shorthand writer."

"I'm afraid you'll have to excuse me."

"But, at least," she persisted, speak-ing once for the Courier and twice for herself, "you might tell my paper if you are married."

"There will be no inter—" The clipped tones of John Norse were inter-rupted by the slamming of a door.

Nancy blinked. A riotous something, which at first glance baffled the eye, was charging towards her. Its face was disguised by layers of chocolate cake and it had that over-stuffed appearance so popular in furniture a few seasons ago. Still, with one's percep-tions sharpened by newspaper work, it was fairly easy to classify it as a little boy of about six, obviously stalking big game.

Nancy drew back. She wouldn't have felt squeamish about a trusty popgun, or even a waterpistol, but there was something about a revolver in the hands of a small child that did not inspire confidence.

"Stop it, Chetwood! Stop it!" John Norse commanded, at the same time assuring the shrinking Nancy that the weapon was not loaded. "Chetwood, do you hear me?"

"Ouch!" A squeal escaped Nancy as the big game hunt ended in a violent and unexpected poke in the stomach.

"Down, you ole gee-raff! Down!" The tiny hunter was jabbing the revolver savagely against her midriff.

"Chetwood," John Norse petitioned helplessly, "be nice!"

Chetwood, turning his attention to the man, set up a howl that threatened the eardrums.

"I wanna kill somefing," he wailed disconsolately. "I wanna see you kill somefing. Like you did down dere in th' jungle." No immediate attempt being made to oblige, Chetwood gave himself up to black despair. "I wanna see you kill somefing," he sobbed brokenly.

"All love and tenderness, isn't he?" Nancy murmured.

"Why are you waiting?" John Norse demanded rudely. Then, to the screaming child: "Come. Chetwood! Come, old fellow!"

Nancy's lip curled. "The child certainly has your charming manner." It was a neat insult. She banged the door after her.

In the lift, Nancy held her head high to keep the tears from spilling over. Flirting with her like that, when the whole time he was the father of a blood-thirsty offspring! How she was going to enjoy digging up his odious story and plastering it over every front page in the country!

Nancy approached the hotel revolving door at the same time as the nosey little man with the goatee. He stared at her so curiously, she decided she had better pull herself together. If she didn't she would never get that story. A cup of coffee might soothe her.

The man with the goatee sat next to her in the cafe. Of course, it was silly to think he was following her. Nevertheless—

Nancy came out and paused before a window of a freckle remover. She would give him a chance to walk on. The man stopped too. Nancy shot him a quick glance. He had no freckles.

Her heart pounded in her throat. The sight of the traffic policeman at the corner was comforting. She crossed back and forth with him, wondering what to do. The policeman, unfor-tunately, had little poise. After five trips with Nancy he began signalling pedestrians and traffic to move together. An appalling mix-up followed, and she succeeded in losing the disturbing goatee.

NANCY spent a glum evening, and appeared at breakfast crushed. She hadn't even enough spirit to protest at Hutch's division of the morning paper; the fashion page to Mr. Porcher and the advertising section to herself. Her listless eyes wandered over the boring "Situations Vacant" column. Suddenly she emitted a delirious whoop:

Wanted: Nursemaid to small child. Must be excellent disciplinarian. Call Parkview. Room 418.

John Norse's suite! Um-mm. How about pretending to go after the posi-tion, as a ruse to secure another inter-view? The editor had said she would think of something original!

Hutch had promised to take her car down to Larkin's to be washed, so Nancy caught a bus at the corner. What a jam! Not enough space to flutter an eyelash, and the man beside her trying to turn a newspaper. Nancy squirmed pointedly. The man moved. As he did, her "tch tch" died away into something that sounded like a death-rattle. Though she could scarcely believe her eyes, behind that paper she had glimpsed the little man with the goatee.

He had probably been waiting out-side her house since yesterday. It was uncanny being followed like that. He must be a lunatic! Or perhaps he was following the wrong person. Still, one would dislike being murdered by mis-

take. Though if he ever came within murdering distance, Nancy vowed, hopping off the bus, she would call a policeman.

A middle-aged man, with a har-assed air, admitted her to 418.

"I'm Mr. Norse's secretary. Mr. Norse is out. Did you come about the position?"

Nancy was disappointed, but not defeated. She was inside the Norse suite again, and nothing short of the collapse of the building was going to get her out.

"FRANKLY, the little lad doesn't take to everybody," the secretary was confiding wearily. "I might say little Chetwood is anti-social. The nurse he's had was a splendid woman, but of late she seemed to develop a sad antipathy for the young."

Nancy waited breathlessly. He might just as well decide she would do, because she wasn't moving one inch until she saw her man. She was dying to inquire if John Norse were a widower, but nothing in the secretary's voice encouraged the question.

The secretary proceeded with the interview, raising his voice to be heard above the smashing of glassware in the adjoining room. Finally, he said: "Let me call little Chetwood and see what he thinks."

Chetwood appeared, drenched from head to foot in orange juice, a broken cut-glass pitcher dangling from one hand.

"A slight accident," the secretary informed Nancy.

She fixed Chetwood with a cold, fishy eye. Behind him he unsuccessfully concealed a hammer, which shattered the "accident theory" somewhat.

Chetwood returned Nancy's look, and signalled instant recognition.

"Ole gee-raff," he muttered, letting the hammer fly.

Nancy ducked barely in time.

"There— you see!" the secretary smirked. "Little Chetwood has taken to you already."

Nancy wondered how Chetwood would react should ever he take an intense dislike to her.

"Suppose we give it a day's trial, anyway," the secretary suggested.

Nancy was elated. John Norse would

have to come home eventually, and she would be waiting for him, if she sur-vived. Her gaze wandered towards the desk, where stood a stunning picture of John Norse and a dead tiger. She regarded it wistfully. Yes, it was worth the risk.

"I'm extremely busy," the secretary put in hurriedly. "Do you mind assuming your duties immediately?"

Nancy suspected that her main duty consisted in protecting life and limb from the gruesome designs of little Chetwood.

"Come, dear, give Nancy the hammer," she cooed in honeyed tones.

HE gave it to her on both big toes. And not until he had ransacked her purse, confiscating the penknife she was having initialled for her father, did Chetwood consent to relinquish the hammer.

"Chetwood," Nancy inquired, once more an inspired reporter, "have you a mother?"

Chetwood busily whittled away at the hotel furniture. "Sure, ain't choo?" he asked, surprised.

Of course. Nancy reflected bitterly, John Norse would have a wife. "Is she pretty, Chetwood?" It was like biting down on a sore tooth. She simply couldn't help it.

Chetwood paused in the absorbing business of peeling wallpaper. "Prettier 'n you, old gee-raff."

This last observation did nothing towards cementing a friendship. Neither did the walk scheduled for the afternoon.

"I wanna go t' th' Zoo," Chetwood shouted. "I wanna kill a ole gee-raff. I been t' th' Zoo lottsa times."

The Zoo! A fine chance she'd have of getting copy there! Nancy explained coldly that the Zoo was full of curious odors and, therefore, quite out of the question. But she didn't convince Chetwood. He threw himself upon the floor and kicked. When he saw kick-ing inadequately met the situation he sank some teeth into one of Nancy's ankles. Her cry of pain brought the secretary.

"Here, my little lad!" With callous disregard for her safety, the secretary restored Chetwood's beloved hammer. "And here, my little lad!" He added two bananas and a piece of sponge cake.

NANCY agreed with, herself that it was humiliating walking through the lobby accompanied by a hammer, two bananas and a piece of sponge cake. She tried, by a studied air of detachment, to give the impres-sion that little Chetwood was not with her. But Chetwood puffed along, close to her side, eating bananas and roar-ing that this was not the direction to the Zoo.

What could one expect, Nancy asked herself contemptuously, of anything belonging to John Norse?

"Chetwood, if you don't stop rubbing bananas in your hair—" the rest was lost in a gasp. Gooseflesh broke out all over her, and she felt a little sick. Directly behind them was the man with the goatee!

Nancy's brain functioned wildly. She wasn't nervous for herself, but there was Chetwood! Her blood ran hot and cold. Grabbing one of his sticky hands, she dashed into the nearest shop. It was Dorette's Beauty Salon, a place not likely to be invaded by a goatee.

It would sound silly to tell the girl at the desk that she had come in to escape a sinister shadow. Especially as the man had given no reason for calling the police.

"A wave, please," Nancy quavered.

The hairdresser said the booths were too small to accommodate an extra person. So Nancy deposited Chetwood on a chair in the reception room. "Now, don't move from here until I come back. Promise, Chetwood?"

"Huh-huh," Chetwood replied, open-ing his penknife in a very workman-like manner.

"Know who that child in there looks like?" the hairdresser remarked, and before Nancy could guess: "The youngster of May de Hay. I gave her a wave last time she was here."

Nancy started. Of course! May de Hay and John Norse! Hadn't she seen their picture together in a film magazine. How stupid of her!

"Who's May de Hay married to now?" Nancy sounded anxious in spite of herself.

The hairdresser shrugged. "You have to take memory courses before you can recite the husbands of May de Hay. I read in one of the cinema magazines that if she marries again within the next two years Filmart is going to break her contract."

So that was it! May de Hay married to John Norse and keeping it from her public! What a story. Nancy thought dolefully. Well, her loss was the Courier's gain. Even if they made her city editor for this, she gulped, it was too big a price to pay for any scoop.

Nancy felt that she sat under the drying machine an age, mentally writ-ing headlines and hating John Norse. Actually, she hadn't passed the drip-ping stage before she sang out: "Come. Chetwood, we're ready!"

She received no answer. Chetwood's dynamic presence no longer graced the reception room.

NANCY searched the booths apprehensively. When it became apparent that Chetwood was nowhere in the shop she grew alarmed. Wasn't his mother one of the higher-salaried film queens? And who was that man with the goatee? Perhaps a former husband of May de Hay who hadn't been fond of the anti-social Chetwood.

Nancy didn't stop to pay her bill. She ran up and down the street, peering into doorways, calling: "Chetwood!" People stared curiously, but what did it matter?

From a call-box she phoned the police. Had an unattractive boy of about six, with a hammer, penknife, and a possible pair of marcel waving irons, been brought in, dead or alive? The police had no record of him.

Now, what to do! Perhaps Chetwood had trotted home by himself. She rang the hotel. In a perfect agony of suspense she waited for the secre-tary's voice.

"Hallo? Nancy Porcher speaking—"

"Nancy?"

That funny little feeling in the pit of her stomach at the sound of John Norse's voice!

"How about a peace pact?" he was asking. "I can talk now with a fair degree of quiet. Chetwood's out with his nurse."

Out with his nurse! Nancy stifled a cry of despair. Things were getting worse every minute.

"I've decided to make you a present of my past," he was saying. "Still interested, Miss Reporter?"

Two fat tears chased one another down Nancy's cheek. Here was John Norse, willing and eager to give her that scoop, and she couldn't face him. She couldn't face anybody again until she found Chetwood. But where would she find him? It came to her in a flash.

"Meet me at the Zoo," she burst out wildly. "Near the giraffes." At least she could make one last effort before handing herself over to the police.

"What makes you think I care for my big game caged?" John Norse was laughing. "But, of course, you're jok-ing, Nancy."

If Chetwood were at the Zoo there was no time to lose.

"Near the giraffes," Nancy repeated hysterically as she rang off.

She dashed over to Larkin's. "My car in a hurry," she gasped to an astonished attendant.

TWENTY - FIVE min- utes later she parked at the zoo entrance. As she did so she noticed a shabby taxi stopping a few feet away and the man with the goatee emerging. After a moment of terror her first thought was to reach Chetwood before he did! She rushed inside the deserted Zoo, her heart sinking with each step. Chetwood was not visible. She braced herself to wait for John Norse.

Where was Chetwood? And why didn't John Norse come? Did he really think she had been joking? Joking when close by in the bushes a man with a

goatee crouched and waited. She looked again. Yes, he was still waiting. Nancy shuddered. It would be terrible if anything happened to her before she returned Chetwood.

"So here you are!" John Norse touched her elbow, and Nancy almost fainted. "You distinctly said 'near the giraffes,' and I've been waiting for you over there."

Nancy sent a hurried glance at the animal caged behind her.

"That," John Norse pointed out, "is our friend the ostrich."

So it was! In her agitation she had been standing before the wrong cage.

"Is the Zoo your idea of a romantic rendezvous?" His smile was teasing.

For answer, she clutched his arm convulsively; her eyes wide with horror.

"Nancy, what is it?"

Speechless, she pointed. That man with the goatee! Sneaking into the dickey seat of her car. Without further ado, she sprinted for it, two leaps ahead of the wind. She slammed down the dickey seat and was behind the wheel in a split second. She was con-vinced she had the clue to Chetwood's disappearance.

"I say— Nancy— wait a minute—" John Norse was calling, but she was already far down the road.

She knew she was taking an insane chance by not driving immediately to the police station. But other reporters would be there. John Norse would hate that. She must get Chetwood back to him without any publicity.

Nancy rushed blindly through red signals. Newspaper people always took chances. Didn't Vic Beaver once hang from a ten-story building just to see May de Hay do her hip exercises? And she would do more than hang to get Chetwood back. Only she had to take her prisoner somewhere. Not knowing what else to do, she took him home.

It was dusk when Nancy parked her car in the garage. Her first impulse was to open the dickey and brain the villain as he huddled there. But it would be hard to learn little Chetwood's whereabouts from a corpse. She mustn't be hasty.

Her eyes narrowed as she looked round. The only possible weapon was a monkey-wrench, lying in a pool of grease upon the floor. Weren't people in the cinema always pretending monkey-wrenches were pistols? There must be something in it.

Grimly, Nancy lifted the dickey-seat. If only John Norse knew what she was suffering for him and his! The imple-ment in her hand gleamed wickedly in the murky light of the garage.

"Do you know where Chetwood is? Is he safe?" she hissed. "Speak, or I shoot."

A startled face bobbed into view. "S-sure. Y-yes."

Nancy breathed freely once more. That was all she wanted to know. At the point of the monkey-wrench, she forced the brute to open his mouth.

"Wait—let me—" But Nancy cut off his protest by masterfully gagging him with polishing rags which she had found lying upon the garage floor. She even managed to secure the gag with her belt.

The man put up quite a struggle just the same. In fact, it took all Nancy's strength to shove him back into the dickey seat. Breathing hard, she banged it down and turned the key.

She lost no time in phoning the editor. She advised him to come in-stantly and bring Vic Beaver, as well as a couple of good camera men. She had the story of the century!

Nancy reviewed it, as she sat on the running-board to wait. May de Hay and John Norse were married! In the dickey seat was locked the kidnapper of May de Hay's child. Yes, she had certainly made good as a reporter.

THE garage door swung open abruptly. The editor's hat was on back-to-front, and his eyeshade still hung round his neck.

"That story of yours had better be good," he growled.

Nancy tried to conceal her triumph, but she couldn't help murmuring: "Single-handed with a monkeywrench," as she opened the rumble and pointed to her captive.

The editor took one look and uttered a strangled cry. Nancy's eyes popped.

Could it be that she had brought in that notorious kidnapper all the papers were talking about!

"Vic Beaver!" the editor spluttered. "What in the name of heaven—"

Nancy was aghast. Surely this creature couldn't be the famous Vic Beaver! She waited, too confused to speak, while the editor removed the dirty rags from the mouth of his star reporter.

"This," Vic Beaver began hoarsely, climbing out of the rumble with an air of injured dignity and addressing the editor, "was your idea. Didn't you say: 'Follow her. She is Pembroke Porcher's girl, and it ought to be a story.' "

The editor grunted.

"Since yesterday," Vic Beaver continued, "I've made a bloodhound look like a Pomeranian. And what did I find out? She has been playing nurse to the youngster of May de Hay. But that's not the front page stuff. De Hay is honeymooning again. That's why Norse wouldn't talk. De Hay made him promise for fear something might leak out."

"But her contract?" the editor broke in.

"De Hay's quitting the screen. Told me so when I brought her child back to the hotel. So when I followed Norse to the Zoo—"

"Then Chetwood is safe?" Nancy's voice trembled with relief.

"Not due to your expert care," Vic Beaver snapped. "Ten minutes after you left me outside that beauty shop I found the child trying to take up the pavement with a penknife. It took me an hour to bring him back. He didn't miss one building, either. Practically carved his way home."

"We haven't anything to complain about," the editor remarked genially; "we'll be the first paper to print news of the de Hay retirement. Whom did she marry this time?"

"She re-married Chetwood's father!" Nancy and the two men turned. Standing at the garage door was John Norse.

"Who's this?" the editor demanded.

"Norse." Vic Beaver enlightened his chief, "May de Hay's brother."

"May de Hay's brother!" Nancy looked radiantly at John Norse. Then she turned on the editor: "What did you mean telling me John Norse was married?"

"I THOUGHT so," the editor confessed sheepishly. "My cable read: 'Norse marries in Johannesburg.' But I ran across the mailed confirmation this afternoon, and it should have been: 'Norse tarries in Johannesburg.' "

"You newspaper people!" John Norse's words included them all, but Nancy saw he was gorgeously unaware of anybody but her.

The editor gave Vic Beaver a shove. "We'll never get the next edition through here," he reminded him.

When the garage door closed behind the two men, John Norse came over to Nancy.

"Oh, John," she sighed ruefully, "I'm afraid it's too late for that present of your past."

He put one arm about her waist and tilted her face towards his.

"Then what about a present of my future?" he wanted to know.

———————————

10: Maid of Niu-Niu

Beatrice Grimshaw

1870-1953

Australian Women's Weekly, 8 June 1935

Born in County Antrim, Ireland, the prolific author became a journalist in London, and in 1903 was assigned to write a series of travelogues on the remote South Pacific islands, later settling in New Guinea on a plantation with her brother. By the 1920s she had become a best-selling novelist and also wrote numerous short stories. She retired from New Guinea to New South Wales, continuing her writing

JAMES COOPER had left the island of Niu-Niu in the year of King Edward's coronation. Now it was thirty years after, and he was coming back again, at the end of a South Sea tour with his son, Harry, who had been to the Varsity and knew everything. Cooper had been to no University save that of Life. Mate on an island schooner, he might have stayed in the islands, lived and worked with companions who were (he would have told you) twice the men their successors were; tough, careless, pull-the-devil-by-the-tail sort of fellows. There lived no more such, now.

He had not stayed. He had gone into steam; married, rather unexpectedly, an owner's daughter; gone out of steam and into a shipping office, pushed always by Gladys and her people, kept, by them, with his nose to the desk and his eyes well blinkered. He had helped to build up a big ship-broking business, carried it on ably; retired, after Gladys' death. Successful man, James Cooper. Made good; done well. Yes.

And here, off the remote unprofitable island of Niu-Niu, where ships seldom came, where nothing, he supposed, could have altered since he sailed away in nineteen one, he found himself wishing that he had never gone at all; never stepped into the waiting whaleboat that clear night of stars, unclasped a girl's soft hands from about his arm, kissed her and kissed her and turned away to sea.

LILY GREENLEES was her name; a mission girl prettier than most mission women and quite as good. If she hadn't been so good he might not have remembered her, gone on wanting her for thirty years. He had wanted her badly, then, but he didn't wish to marry at one-and-twenty, and there was nothing but marriage to be thought of where she was concerned.

So, he had left her; left the lily on its stem and, like a thousand other sailor men, had sailed away.

To what? Sea first; shipbroking, marriage. The E. C. district. Villa in Putney; Gladys and Gladys' parties. Life that somehow wasn't exactly life, just an excellent imitation.

Even his son, Harry, who had been such a jolly little chap in the nursery— Harry, more or less, escaped him. Cooper, in spite of Gladys, had re-mained rough and tough. He could hardly understand this fine gentleman whom he had sired; this Harry, who knew so much that he didn't, was so kind and patient and uncomprehending with his bear of a father, who had agreed without murmur to go on a world tour with Cooper, and "see a bit of things in general," as the elder man phrased it, before settling down to London and marriage. He was engaged to a "swell," a girl with a courtesy title, that deeply impressed and unspeakably worried Cooper, even as the aspect of the Honorable Elizabeth Lockhart, slim and boyish and shingled, worried him; not his idea at all of the sort of girl a man ought to want for a wife... She was like all the rest of it; she wasn't real— quite.

Well, here was Niu-Niu that he had longed to see again, and was seeing; Niu-Niu, that couldn't have changed a bit, whatever else had changed. The high, lone island, nine hundred miles from anywhere; the tall coconuts that plumed the top of it; the boat-landing, blasted in sheer coral rock. Some-where out in the living green of the lagoon a log canoe and a native in it, fishing. Ah! Nineteen hundred, and the stars bright in the water, and the young, young schooner mate without a care in the world.

"You going ashore?" asked Harry, cigarette in mouth. He seemed a fine figure, standing there by the ship's rail, inches taller than his tough, shell-backed father, fair-haired like Gladys, like her regular of feature; well trained and exercised as any racehorse; fit and complete and somehow miles away.

"Of course we're going," Cooper answered. Did the lad think he had paid through the nose for this side trip not to take advantage of it? Other places had been disappointing; other islands tourist haunted, civilised out of all recognition. Niu-Niu would be different; there, things never changed.

"We'll trot along up to the Mission," he said, cheerfully. "Have a look round, and send for our suitcases later. Stop maybe till the *Donald Cameron* calls; she's due on her annual trip in a few weeks, I understand."

"Yes, sir," Harry dutifully agreed. "I suppose this is one of the local celebrities?"

A small, dried up old man, who had come out to pilot the ship, seemed to be listening to the conversation with intelligent interest. "I, Orao," he in-troduced himself. "I talk Engliss." He stared very hard at Harry.

"Bring our baggage by and by, if we don't come back," Cooper directed. "We're going ashore." And to the purser, "Likely we'll put up at the Mission for a while."

The purser nodded. "Old man says we may have to get away in a hurry," he warned. This trip was a novelty, and not an agreeable one, to the trading steamer.

HARRY, following his father up the steep stairway that led to the top of the island, watched him with increasing wonder. What an evergreen the Dad was! He never seemed to tire, he always wanted to see everything. He was breasting the steep climb, now, like a two-year-old. Harry remembered a girl in Samoa, a pretty one, who had run after the Dad, thrown a wreath of flowers around his neck, and called him— "Big man, big chief!" She was ready to throw herself after the flowers, Harry thought, but the Dad had said something to her in island Maori that had sent her skipping away.

As for Jim Cooper, on the top of Niu-Niu, treading once more the enchanted ways of youth, after thirty years, he had, for the moment, forgotten Harry's existence. Yes, it was all the same. Here were the enormous palms, naked-white, swinging their crests up eighty feet in the blue. Here

was the coral roadway, with the thatched coral-concrete cottages along one side, and the high plain of sea on the other. And the beach-lilies, Lily's name-flower, heavy, sweet and pale, trailing among the flat-palmed castor-oil plants and the wine-colored coleus leaves. And the—

HE stopped, staring down the roadway. "Jeez!" he said.

"My sacred aunt!" ejaculated Harry. Along the road, in the full sun, was approaching a procession that Harry mentally described as something like the Bacchic rout in "Endymion," and that Cooper, seeing, classified as a "proper old Ratcliff Highway sort of spree." In any part of the world it would have been an amazing sight, but here!

Thirty years ago, this big isolated island with the bad approach had been famed for its almost blatant type of Christianity. The Niu-Niu people were among the greatest triumphs of Pacific Mission work. In one generation they had turned from savagery to a strict brand of Methodism. The women wore long Mother Hubbard frocks, the men confronted the blazing sun in heavy dungarees. Pious they were, even to excess; they new few pleasures save Sunday-school picnics, few entertainments save the singing of hymns. Under the hand of a famous and masterful missionary they had become the shining light of the South Sea world. They may have been happy; certainly they were very good.

Cooper, young and pleasure-loving, had sometimes found the mission rule oppressive. But he had never seriously questioned its rightness, and he hadn't supposed it could ever come to an end, any more than the long trade winds of the south-east season, the bluster-ing gales of the north-west. Always, in after years, he had pictured Niu-Niu and the coral-stone church, the coralconcrete mission house, standing for ever in these lonely seas unchanged.

Well, there was the church—gutted, turned into a sort of savage palace, all one big room, with a dais at the end, and carved ceremonial chairs— and there was the mission house, empty, with the sea wind blowing through its eyeglass windows, and the forest vines creeping over it. And here, here, coming down the roadway, were the children of the old pious folk of his day; with a few of the old folk themselves coming after.

First came a crowd of young men, respectably but not excessively dressed in a bunch of leaves apiece. They carried old-time clubs in their hands, lovely clubs set with sawfish teeth and swordfish beaks; they danced, and whirled the clubs round their heads, and sang. After them came drummers beating drums that, like the clubs, had been museum antiques in Cooper's day. Girls with food baskets followed, doing a kind of shuffle, and shaking their short grass skirts. They had beautiful figures, carefully oiled to bring up all the highlights; their gold-bronze bodies, naked to the waist, flashed back the sun as they went. Boys came behind, carrying woody roots for the brewing of kava drink; some of them bore huge bowls of orange beer, and some had bamboos corked with a twist of palmleaf and full of new palm wine.... In Niu-Niu of old days a man who brewed or tasted drink had six months' work upon the roads handed out to him as punishment. Cooper re-membered that.

LAST came a band of grey old men, their faces smeared with ash. It seemed that they, and the women, were mourning somebody, for every now and then they broke forth into a howling lament, which ended with a dancing step or two, and then began again. Obviously they took note of the newcomers, but the dance and the singing held them; they passed by without pause.

"Jeez!" said Cooper again, watching the rout go by. "They'd 've told you, thirty years ago, that you was— were— dreamin', if you'd have prophesied the like of this happening."

Harry, who looked suddenly brighter (for, really, this was interesting, was something like), replied: "No great mystery about it, sir." He stared hard at the retreating forms of the girls. "One hears that the war, and the general decline in religious feeling that followed it, hit the missions pretty hard. Lots of them have closed down. This must have been a costly place to run, so far from anywhere. I'd imagine it may have gone back quite a long while ago."

Cooper said dreamily, "The old chaps used to say— those who remembered fighting days— that if the Lord was to think maybe that He wanted the good missionaries somewhere else, and was to take 'm away, there'd be all the old doin's again in two shakes of a lizard's tail. You see, they remembered the days, before I came when it was noth-ing but fighting and feasting and the king was a real king, and they had 'taupos'— sort of sacred maids, like them in Samoa; and they fair wor-shipped them, too, I heard tell. I never saw one myself, they were gone before I came, but—"

HE stopped, speechless, and pointed with one rugged hand to the last, the very last, figure in the long procession. A girl, walking sedately by herself. A girl dressed like the others in swinging grass skirts, but robed as well in a tabard and train of creamy tappa cloth. She wore a white shell round her neck. Her hair fell down her back a long way; it was yellow hair, and her skin, though kissed by the sun to a golden color, was clearly the skin of a white woman.

"Son," said Cooper, swearing a long sea oath, "if that's not Lily Greenlees it's the devil!"

Harry said, looking appreciatively at the girl as she passed by, eyes fixed ahead (but she seemed to see him and Cooper, all the same), "Who is Lily Greenlees?"

"She was a mission lassie," answered Cooper. "Thirty years ago. And none the better— nor the worse— for me." He sighed, and Harry wondered, irreverently, which part of the Dad's sentence was answerable for the sigh....

But Cooper, volunteering nothing further, followed the procession, in silence, to the door of the great hall that once had been a church. The people were massing themselves inside the building now, joining their voices together in a fierce, wailing song. "It'll be the old king they're crying for," Cooper said. "The purser told me he'd died some days ago. I reckon he's buried, and they're having the funeral spree."

"That would be it," agreed Harry. But he was not listening closely; his eyes, deserting the crowd of armed young men and dancing, shuffling girls, had strayed to the far end of the hall, whither the elders, slowly pacing, now led the girl in the tappa robe.

"Look, Dad!" he said. "Look— they're putting her into that big carved chair!"

"She's a taupo, by that frock of hers," answered Cooper. "A sacred sort of virgin. They almost used to worship 'm, in old times, I've heard say." He, too, stared hard at the girl, who was sitting easily on the throne-like chair. Her knees were crossed, one bare foot swinging— a beautiful foot, bronzed on the

instep, white beneath the toes. Her thigh, where the tappa tunic fell aside, showed flower-pale, contrasting vividly with the sun-bronze of face and arms.

YES, she was white; white as tall Harry, staring his heart out at her; white as Harry's stocky, sturdy father with the sea-blue eyes, and the red stain of the sea on his cheeks.

And, certainly, she was Lily Greenlees or the devil— yet, how could it be, after all these years?

Cooper had never been one to balk his fences. He left Harry, standing there at gaze, and marched alone right up to the carved chair. To the gold-and-white girl who sat on it, he said curtly— "I'm James Cooper; who in God's name are you?"

"I am Lily," she answered, fixing him hard, with the eyes of a stranger — Lily's very eyes, that didn't know him.

"Not Lily Greenlees," he said, with growing certainty, as he saw, at close quarters, the flawless beauty, the untouched, unworn youth of her. Miracles were past....

"Lily Greenlees was my mother. She died a great many years ago. When the Mission left, she stayed here because she had married my father."

"And who was your father?" he asked, uncomfortably, conscious of a certain cold hostility in her manner.

She did not immediately reply. The shuffling and dancing had ceased; the singers were silent. The hall full of people hardly seemed to breathe, watching the pair. Now and then the heads of the old men turned from Lily to the tall form of Harry Cooper; to Lily, back again.

"William Johnston," answered Lily, at last.

"The trader? Is he alive?"

"He is dead last year."

"And left you— alone— among the—"

"Among my friends," she answered proudly. "They have made me their Maid. They will make me their Queen."

She spoke with a certain clipped accent, but her English was good.

Johnston, Trooper thought, must have educated the girl. Lord, how like Lily she was! save for the flash of savagery, or something like it, that shot out now and then from her deep-lidded eyes, showed in her full, cruelly scarlet mouth. Not in her blood, that, not in her upbringing. Where? Cooper couldn't say. Harry the highly educated might have given the word he wanted— "environment."

If he had more to ask, Lily did not give him time. "Why did you leave my mother, break her heart?" she demanded. "I have had no mother, because of

you." That was pretty thick, Cooper thought; why, she had married the trader chap.... well, maybe she had to live; well, maybe, like the little girl in the book by Stevenson, "she couldn't make out to live," after all. Anyhow, she hadn't.

He answered, meekly, "Because I wanted to go and make my fortune."

"Did you make it?"

"Yes."

"Did you marry someone?"

"Yes. That's my son."

She threw a swift glance at Harry. About him, the young warriors were beginning to gather, to mass themselves as if by accident. Harry didn't notice; he was looking at her.

"So you have got all you wanted," the girl said, a little more swiftly. "So you have been very happy!"

"By God, no!" burst out Cooper. He knew now that he hadn't. That he had left the happiness that was meant for him, the life he should have had, behind him the night he kissed Lily Greenlees and sailed and sailed away. Gladys and her people had held him fast; Harry was keeping him now, holding him half-awake, half-asleep, in the long dream that had been his life.

The girl was softening; she glanced at him almost kindly, but now, there was something strange in her glance— excitement? Fear?

"They were never bad folk," he reminded himself. "They wouldn't do you in." But he turned from Lily; stared about the hall.

The young men had surrounded Harry. They were edging himself away from Lily. Something was going to happen....

Lily said, suddenly, "You should not have come back," slipped out of her carved chair, and melted into the crowd of girls, vanishing he didn't know where.

Frightened she was, yet laughing, too— grinning, you might almost have called it, if she hadn't been so pretty.

What did it mean?

The answer to that came immediately, with a blaring blast from the steamer. One long call, three short. She was going! And right on the sound, as if it had been the signal for which they were waiting, the young men, armed, closed about Cooper and his son, sweeping them together, and barring their way. At the same instant all the doors were closed.

"Shanghaied, by God!" cried Cooper.

IT was late in the afternoon. Long since the steamer must have seen the last of Niu-Niu, glad to be clear of the reefs and shoals of that notorious island. Westering through lemon-green leaves of palm, the sun shone low upon the

white walls of the cottage assigned by the old men's council to Cooper and his son. They had been escorted there as soon as the steamer was safe out of signalling distance. The old man Orao had made things quite clear; and if he was feeble, if he resembled a Japanese bronze monkey more than anything else, his following of a hundred youths armed with clubs and spears gave weight to his orders.

These were that the white men should keep to their cottage, and to the roadway immediately before it, and that they should refrain from putting up signals for ships. Food would be given them; beds had been provided. They would be well treated, and if they made no trouble of any kind Cooper would be allowed to leave by the *Donald Cameron* trading boat when she called in a few weeks' time.

"What about me?" demanded Harry, fairly smoking with wrath. He had disregarded his father's advice to "take things quiet: you can't fight a hundred to one," and had, in consequence, been somewhat knocked about on the way. The youths had refrained from touching his face, but his ribs were sore with the pokes of spear-butts and the smacks of wooden club-heads; and on some of the noses of Orao's young men there were marks of a good British fist.

If Orao heard the question he did not answer it. Instead, he beckoned Cooper with one withered finger, and half in broken English, half in island Maori, began to make a speech.

AS he spoke he turned from one white man to the other, pointing his remarks with further pokes of the finger, now on Cooper's arm, now against Harry's chest. That Harry glared at him, only restrained from violence by the Councillor's feebleness and age, did not seem to trouble Orao in the least.

The king, he said, was just dead. An old, old man, too old to govern well of recent years. Johnston the trader had largely taken his place, and after Johnston's death the Council. The Council, Orao suggested, had done very well; but it was necessary to have a permanent head. Niu-Niu never, in the memory of man, had been without its King— or Queen.

"Or Queen," he repeated, shoving his finger-end into Harry's shirt. "Like Makea Takau of the Cook Islands, or Saloti of Tonga. Queens were very well. Better than Kings in some ways," Orao explained. 'Tn others, they were— troublesome."

He went on to explain further. The girl Lily was their Maid. True, she was not of island blood, but in everything else she was a real Niu-Niu girl. To see her dance! To see her swim the breakers! To see her spear fish, and kill sharks! not afraid to dive under, give the swift fatal stab! Oh, she was Island at heart.

They had made her Maid of Niu Niu, given her the Maid's dress, the Maid's chaperons and hangers-on. Al-most a goddess she was, after the fashion of the Islands.

But in the Islands— as Cooper doubt-less knew— a Maid was not always a maid. It was the custom, when she grew rather old, as Lily was growing— Lily was twenty-two— to have her married. With marriage her power, almost divine, left her. No longer was she sacred, a thing to be worshipped. Another maid took her place, and she stepped down.

Now Lily had been very troublesome about this. She would not marry. They, brought her all the finest young men of the island— and Cooper could judge how fine they were; just look at them!— and told her she could have her choice of any one; of any two or three, if she liked. But the girl was obstinate; went so far as to say that she'd throw herself over the cliffs if they persisted. Then they said, thinking that she did not wish to lose her glory, that they would make her Queen; it was quite in the order of things for a Maid to take that place, after she married. Of course, an unmarried sovereign was a thing unheard of. Still she held out. Then the wisest of the old men— of whom he, Orao, was one— had consulted together, and they had come and told her that they would find her a white man. She said, "A white man broke my mother's heart; I am Niu-Niu in everything but color; I will not marry a white man any more than a brown man. I will not marry at all." But she blushed and looked sidewise when she said it, so the old men, who were very wise— especially himself, Orao— made magic to cause a ship to come.

And behold, a ship did come, and as soon as they saw Harry—

At this point Harry broke in, violently, addressing his father:—

"Damn it all, does the old monkey think I'm going to be married to any girl by force? Or to any girl anyhow, except Elizabeth?"

Cooper said, "Hold your horses, son. A lot of things may happen before the Donald Cameron comes."

"Only one thing's going to happen that I know of, and that is that I'm going back to Elizabeth. She and I are going to stand up in St. Margaret's in exactly four months' time, if I have to knock off Orao's head and blow up the island to do it."

"T-t, t-t!" said Cooper pacifically. "Take things easy. You've got me with you, and I know the Islands. There's ways," he said. And he added (inconsequently, as it seemed), "A lot better than it used to be, Niu-Niu is. Ah a grand place! I'd never 'a left it if—" He broke off short.

Harry, staring indignantly at Orao, at the youths, at the little white cot-tage before which they stood the cottage that, it seemed, was to be his prison— Harry didn't listen. He was not in the habit of listening to James Cooper. It was

quite enough to be kind to your father without that. And after all, it was the Dad, with his absurd and romantic fancies— romance at fifty!— who had let him in for all this. But Orao was going on; he must listen. Pity the Dad had to translate most of it. He would have liked to listen and answer, unhelped.

ORAO, it seemed had not much more to say. The white men were to keep within bounds, and all would be well. If stray ships came— though that was not likely— and if, or when, the *Donald Cameron* called the doors would be shut upon the two, and guards put outside. Unless, of course, the Maid gave orders otherwise. And she would only give such orders— advised by her council— after the title of Maid was hers no longer; after she had been wedded, by all the island ceremonies, to Harry.

For years no white man like Harry, young and handsome and unwedded, had been seen in lonely Niu-Niu. It might be years before such a one was seen again. The council, in the person of Orao, gave it as its opinion that Harry might as well consent at once, to save trouble. There would be no opposition from the girl; she knew better. And he, Orao, couldn't imagine a young man with blood in his body— an unmarried young man, too—doing anything at all but accept his luck, and sing over it. Or words to that effect.

"Tell him," said Harry, rather white about the lips, "that I'm as good as married. To— to the finest girl in the world. A very great chief's daughter. A— a girl I love. Tell him—" He paused, swallowed, and abruptly ended— "Tell him to go to blazes!"

James Cooper, in the island Maori that came back so easily to his tongue, explained that the young chief wished to thank Orao and the council, and above all, the Maid, for their kind offer, but regretted that he did not see his way to consent.

Orao, with a good deal of dignity for one so small and naked, bowed his head, collected his young men, and disappeared.

And the two white men, seeing nothing else for it, went into the cottage.

Lily was sitting on the coral pathway, outside the cottage door. She sat cross-legged, "taupo" fashion, with her limbs folded as a man folds his arms, a pose impossible to most Europeans. She had a fan in her hand, and fanned herself with it, gracefully, while she made conversation, discoursing exactly like a society woman paying a call.

BEHIND her, six old women, sleepily chewing betel nut, kept guard, as they were bound to keep guard over the sacred person of the Maid, day and night, until her wedding.

In the past ten days she had called three times, each time taking her place outside the cottage, and talking pleasantly, non-committally, about the weather, and the fishing, and the prospect of the island crop of yams. It seemed that, in the politest manner, she was showing off the goods to a possible buyer. No importunity, no sales pressure; simply a shop-window display. Neither Harry nor his father could help admiring her perfect command of a somewhat difficult situation. It was impossible to guess, from her manner, what she herself might feel.

As for the two men, they enjoyed her company, uneasily in the one case, wholeheartedly in the other. Cooper found himself, more than once, wishing that Elizabeth, "that two yards of "pump-water" (for so he described her much admired slight figure), had been drowned before she came along and captured Harry— and Harry's prospective fortune. This was the sort of daughter-in-law he'd have liked; this creature of white and tan and burning gold, with the cool, self-contained way of speech, and the hot flash that, now and then, showed up so intriguingly in her blue-green, brilliant eyes.

"Cripes, Harry!'' he said, when for the third time Lily came pacing down the road, before her women— "Cripes, that's a girl that is a girl. She's pepper, she's ginger, for all her hair is gold."

Harry looked hard at her, and for a minute kept silence. Then he said, with something of an effort, "All one to me if she's garlic and onions, and if her hair's brass or pewter, or anything you like. She's— she's not a patch on Elizabeth.''

"Son," said Cooper suddenly (they had talked much during those days of semi-imprisonment, but, manlike, shirked certain vital issues), "Son, do you want the Honorable Elizabeth or not?"

Harry forbore to wince at the use of the title. "Dad," he said, "if I were in my right senses, I do. But— who does keep his senses in the islands? There's something gets hold of you, makes you wonder what all the rest of it's about, anyhow, why people can't just live instead of scratching about for money, doing things they don't

want to all the time. I think like that sometimes, and then I look at— her—"

Lily was within hearing now, and perforce he ceased. His mind was a battleground. He could almost see Elizabeth—Elizabeth, cool as a prim-rose, shiny-pale as the last snows of spring; tall, distinguished, calm, with something in her character that met and matched with the conventional spirit of his own; Elizabeth, who'd run his house, himself, his children, exactly as houses, husbands and child-ren ought to be run. Elizabeth, of whom one was sure....

And Lily, now offered to him as a sweet is offered to a child. Lily, with the tang of savagery in her burning loveliness; daring as any of Orao's wild young

men. Lily, incalculable, wonderful, a consecrated Maid, a Queen. Whom to love would be the maddest adventure a man could con-ceive. His— if he chose.

Something in Harry that was all of

his father cried out "Yes!" Something, cooler and harder, inherited from Gladys, bade him hold back. He was almost visibly trembling when the girl, who had taken her seat as usual, and as usual began to talk, turned and addressed herself directly to him. Had she seen his emotion? Did she, per-haps, misinterpret it? He did not know, could not guess just how Lily regarded him— and that was half her charm.

What was she saying now? What was the meaning of the impish light that glittered in her eyes? She was rising to her feet. She was going. And before she went she looked straight at James and Harry and said, with a graceful bow, "I invite you to my party!"

"What party? When?" asked Cooper.

"The day before the *Donald Cameron* comes; that will be in four more days. The party," she said, "for the wedding." And on that she went, with the six old women scuttling, crab-wise, behind her.

Cooper swore a strange sea oath. "The cutty!" he ended. "The cutty! So she'd take an unwilling husband, soon as not. I told you there was ginger in Lily."

Fires seemed to be dancing before the eyes of Harry Cooper. "Dad," he said in a voice not like his own, "what can I do? What can a fellow do against a hundred men?"

"Depends," Cooper told him, "on what the fellow wants to do. Son, you shall have what you want, whatever—" He broke off and corrected himself— "whichever it is."

Harry did not answer.

"They done me out of it," said Cooper darkly. Not to Gladys' son could he tell how he had been jockeyed, into marrying Gladys, held to her apron-strings for half his life. It was his own fault; it had all followed, logically, from that night on which he had deserted Lily's mother, and left the island world.

"No one," he went on, "is going to do you out of what you want— if you know," he smiled hastily, "what it is."

There was silence, for so long as it might take three waves to tumble, creaming, on the coral beach below. Then Harry, with an effort, jerked out the one word— "Elizabeth!" Cooper said nothing in reply; he waited. Harry went on, collecting himself— "They're taking my honor from me, if they don't let me go. They're making me feel a swine."

Briskly Cooper spoke.

"We can't let you feel like a swine, son. Leave it to me."

Harry said. "The days of miracles are past," and turned away to the cottage. Cooper could not see his face.

IN the days that followed no miracle seemed imminent; nothing was done. The Dad went off walking by himself now and then; oc-casionally vanished for some few hours after dark, eluding the guards with an ingenuity that would have been quite beyond Harry. Harry wondered, occasionally, whether it was possible that, in the sudden outflare of youth that comes to most men at fifty, the Dad mightn't have gone chasing after native girls. They were attractive enough, heaven knew. As for himself, haunted as he was by the double images of Lily and Elizabeth, super-imposed like a twice-exposed negative, he had no thought to spare for any of the handsome young hussies who from time to time passed his door, laughing and looking. They did not look so much or so often as they had done at first. Anxiety and strain were beginning to tell upon Harry; his face was pale, his shoulders stooped. He was not now the splendid youth who had landed so light-heartedly on Niu-Niu only a few weeks back.

As for James Cooper, worry had left no mark on him. You might have taken him for a model ready to stand for the jolly sea-god Neptune beside a somewhat weary, over-travelled Mercury. To use Cooper's own expression, Harry seemed a bit under the weather, while he himself was, and intended to remain, as fit as a flea....

The visits of Lily had ceased. Once or twice, moodily lounging by the cottage door, Harry Cooper thought to have seen her white trailing robes flash through the neighboring groves of banana and palm; but that one couldn't be sure of; it might have been a party of girls carrying flowers. Miracle or no miracle, the wedding preparations went on. Dances were being practised, pigs and fowls collected for the killing, breadfruit baked, prawns, pigeons, oysters, turtle steaks prepared.

THERE was no count of kumaras, yarns and taro, or mangoes, oranges, custard apples, pineapples, "wi" apples, coconuts. Days before the wedding the feast would begin, continuing for days after. There'd be dancing and dancing, feasting and dancing, and dancing and drinking and dancing again. Kava and pine-apple and orange beer would run free for all, and there would be, for the chiefs, strong ti root, and palm wine as well. The nights were moonlight. Day and night, until it wore itself and everyone else to an end, the festival would go on. After that the whole island, tired, would rest, as only in the islands one could rest, for idle days and days. There'd be no dragon called "business" waiting, claws outstretched at the end of the fun; no desks and ledgers over which tired heads would have to bend; no deathtraps set in

roaring streets, for hands a little unsure of the steering wheel, eyes not swift to follow flashing signals.

Instead, there would be the cool, undisturbed twilight of the coral houses, with the sea wind blowing through; the day sleep that restored; the singing of the reef that soothed and healed.

Savage? Yes— as London and New York are savage, too. Surely, if Nature needs an outbreak now and then; if enough is not indeed a feast, and too much sometimes good, as certain we men say— then, the way of Niu-Niu's the best.

COOPER and Harry, outside it all, watched the preparations. It was pleasant enough in the coral cottage, up on the top of the cliff, if one had one's mind free; if quite untouched by trouble one could have seen the processions of dancers and food-gatherers go by; with he... at ease, watched the splendid pageant of the tides, the dawn, the blossoming and fruiting of Niu-Niu's eternal summer. To see, and delight in, the picture of a perfect star painted a shadow about the foot of every palm-tree at high noon; to listen to the mourning sound of the casuarina tree, like the sad, sleepy voices of sea-shells; to mark, each day, the mar... of the Aaron's rods of emerald trans-formed, among the bananas, into flaunting banners of huge leaf— this would have delighted the sensitive soul of Harry, if only he had felt free to look and wonder.

As it was he could feel, like a flood tide flowing in the charm of the islands softly invading his mind. Life here was simple as spring water, and as sweet. In England, "the world was so full of a number of things," im-portant and unimportant, that a man, if not as happy, was at all events as busy as kings— English kings, w... understood! A man, it seemed, was too busy with the mere mechanics of living simply to live.

Sometimes one wondered— almost— what all these complications really and truly were for. Hadn't one at Niu-Niu, at the stretching of a hand, everything for which men toiled and toiled, in the grey countries, till they themselves were grey?

So he would think; then, suddenly the picture of London would unroll itself before his eyes. London grey and cold, stinging, stimulating. London, and the sight of it, the thick-piled houses, the pavements, thronged and glassy-wet. The smell of it, tar and petrol and a million meals of food. The streets— Bond Street, where Elizabeth went shopping; Elizabeth coming down that narrow, haughty thorough-fare, her small hat swept aside over her grey eyes, her waist, so long, so neat, clipped in a furred coat. Elizabeth who was competence, capability, charm. Who was sure of everything in the world. Who knew for a certain that England was life, and that the South Seas— if anyone

ever spared thought to that wild place— we... death-in-life: only Elizabeth, who was even now buying her wedding clothes in Bond Street, and in vain.

For the Dad, after all, had doner nothing; the miracle hadn't take place. Questioned, he merely advised Harry, as before, to hold his horses and to keep his hair on. Once he had declared, in a burst of confidence, that what you didn't know wouldn't do you any harm, nor yet anyone else. Harry paid small attention. The Dad, in his opinion, loved cheap mysteries. And nothing could alter the hard facts, they stood.

Now at last the feast began in a its fury; the island went dancing, drumming, eating, drinking and kiss-ing mad; the great hall was decorated, the old men, too old for dancing and kissing, were gathering together to watch the rest. A small but formid-able group they made, a handful of human dust and ashes, even such as would suffice to represent, in the end, all the flame and the splendor of then island's burning youth, to-day.

LILY, among her tirewomen, was decking herself for the wedding. That misnamed handful of audacity and mischief, that spice blossom, that freaked hot ginger flower, was giving trouble to the old ladies whose task was so nearly done. She had slapped several of them severely; she had refused to wear most of the robes they brought her, and thrown away the wreaths they made for her hair, capriciously demanding others. She had made faces at them when they hung the taupo's white shell about her neck on a new light string, and had fidgeted till they could hardly comb her amazing yellow hair and set the comb in it, ready for her lover to raise the long locks and secure them on the top of her head. Only the maidens wore their hair loose; the upraising of the hair, the snatching and throwing away of the white shell, and the drinking of a ceremonial cup of kava, half by the bridegroom and half by the bride, constituted a NiuNiu marriage ceremony.

To quiet her, the old women began their eternal gossip; gossip was their joy, their chief excitement. "The young chief looks pale," they said. "He is terribly in love with you, so terribly that he is nearly ill of it." And they added remarks such as can be found, by the curious, in the earlier scenes of "Romeo and Juliet."

Lily tossed her head, giggled, and seemed to have some private joke of her own.

"He will be a good husband for the Queen," they said. "He won't anger the old men. Young men are beautiful, old men are wise. His time for wisdom has not come."

Lily looked at herself in a hand glass. "I am very beautiful," she observed. "I am beautiful enough for two."

"Yes, yes," they said uncomprehend-ingly, and combed away at the spark-ling hair. Lily was anxious, they could see, upset almost. Well, it was enough to upset any girl, to have a bridegroom given her, who didn't know whether he wanted her or not (for that the old women, who were wise, well knew). But Lily would handle him. She was a little devil. He would know his master, before long, and she'd like that.

Did the old women, who were so wise, for this once make a mistake? Did they forget the fact that all women, at heart, are alike? It seems they did; for no one, not the oldest and ugliest, and thereby the wisest of the lot, seems to have known, or guessed, at what was coming.

The wedding was not up to time; there had been a question of pigs, a perplexity about turtles, that had thrown back the ceremony for days, brought it, as things happened, right on to the time of the arrival of the Donald Cameron. In fact, she was signalled that very morning. But the council, with Orao at their head, re-mained unperturbed. A hundred armed young men could keep the white men away from the ship people as long as might be necessary. And, after all, it would be handy to have the boat there on the spot, to take away Cooper Senior, prevent his making trouble. He knew too much about the islands; he was too strong in character; he'd have a finger in everybody's pie, if they didn't get him away. The Island wed-ding, for island folk, was irrevocable. Once the bridegroom had cast away the shell, raised the bride's tresses of hair and drunk the kava cup, he was hers and she was his, for as long as their lives might last. And Orao had planned— later on— to have a white man's wedding as well, down at Suva or Nukualofa. Just to drive the last nail safely home.

Now, the festivity was nearing its crown and climax; the feast was spread ready; the bucks and belles were gathered in the great hall. Frizzed they were, and painted, decked with beads and shells, with necklaces of scarlet berries, with striped grass crinolettes and loin-cloths of painted tappa. They were plump and shining, they had eaten nobly, and meant to eat again. They giggled, pinched, and slapped one an-other, and kicked with bare brown toes. A wedding was fun...

The bridegroom! the white man who was to marry their white Queen! Here he came, slowly walking with his father. The girls looked knowingly at James Cooper, and whispered to one another. That day, he seemed ageless; his fifty years were neither here nor there; he held himself as nobly as any of the young bucks whose heads had never bent to the desk and pen. There wasn't a strand of grey in his black hair; his neck, in the loose collar, showed thick and sturdy as a threeyear-old bull's. Gaily he was dressed, coatless, silk-shirted, with crimson cummerbund and white trousers and a gardenia in his breast

pocket. You might have taken him for the bride-groom if there had been no Harrywalking beside. Harry, very tall and slim and pale, in white tailored suit and perfect boots. Harry, anxious-looking, uncertain, and wondering what on earth the Dad had meant by telling him, ten minutes ago, to keep up his pecker; he'd get him through all right.

All right? When he saw Lily come into the hall, a dream in snowy tappa cloth and flower crown, floods of sparkling hair adrift down her back, a light of mischief, excitement. Heaven knew what, in her blue-green eyes, he wondered what was all right, and what, at the bottom of his soul, he really wanted. The Donald Cameron had whistled, down below, a quarter of an hour ago. If by some miracle the way was opened, if he could go this minute—what then?

THERE was to be no miracle, it seemed. Lily was slowly pacing with the dignity of a Maid, the majesty of a Queen, up to the dais where he and James Cooper stood. The old men and the warriors waited below. On a table stood the carved coconut cup of kava. Let him remem-ber what Orao had said. ... He had to lift that mass of hair, twist it and fasten it on the top of Lily's head with Lily's own pearlshell comb. He had to break the string that held the white shell, and throw the shell on the floor. He had to take the cup, drink half of it at a draught (he hoped to heaven it wouldn't make him sick) and hand the rest to Lily. If he didn't do all this there would be the father and mother of a row, and the Dad would never be allowed to go back home, whatever happened to him. And the Donald Cameron, the trading steamer bound for Sydney town, had whistled down below. She'd go without her passenger— unless he did his job at once, with-out fumbling. After all, one must stand by one's father, even if he had got one into the mess.

Lily was between the two; so close that one could scent the perfume of her delightful hair, see the dilated pupils of her deep-sea-colored eyes. She was clearly very much excited. And she was looking— by Gad!— not at him, but at James Cooper.

Harry, half dreaming, stretched forth an uncertain hand towards her hair. She kicked him away. Instantly Cooper's hands were in her hair, had twisted it, swept it up and fastened it; had snapped the cord of the shell and flung it down. Quicker than a man might tell, Cooper had seized the kava cup, tossed half of it down his throat, and given the cup to Lily, who almost choked upon it as she gulped the rest.

ORAO, who had seemed, for the moment, petrified with astonishment, now sprang forward screaming, a shrill old man's scream. But the girls, unconsciously, barred his way. Shrieking with laughter, they had flung

themselves in one solid mass upon the shell, and fought one another for its possession. There were auguries to be gleaned from that shell; strange secrets to be read from the manner of its fall.... And he had seen no hesitancy in Lily's drinking her share of the kava.

And Orao, in one bitter moment, saw himself defeated. It was too late. Cooper, the sailor, the strong man, had married the Maid. Cooper would lead her, to-night, to the flower-decked bridal room. No undeveloped youth, easy to influence, would sit on the Prince Consort's throne of Niu-Niu. The island and the Maid would know a master.

"Here," said Cooper, giving Harry an enormous dig in the ribs, "wake up and scoot, son, scoot! Kiss your step-mother and be off, before any of these jokers with the spears quit laughing." (For the young men, aware now of the enormous jest that had been played, were roaring like jackasses.) "You can reckon on an islander for just five minutes at a time and no longer. Your hand, boy— don't forget your old Dad— be off!"

There were tears in his eyes as he grasped the white hand of Harry, and crushed it in his own brown paw. A son was a son Even if—maybe by and by—

HARRY recovering his wits, smacked down a hurried, stepsonly kiss on the cheek of Lily (not thus had he thought to kiss her!) and, edging through the crowd almost unnoticed, fled. Down the coral road-way, where the wind swept up from the anchorage below, where, now, the angry whistle of the Donald Cameron demanded, for the second time, attention, he went hotfoot. One couldn't think of refusing the Dad's fine sacrifice, so cleverly managed as it had been; so ably as that young puss, Lily, had played her part! How Lily and his father could have planned it was beyond his imagination.

Sacrifice? Was it anything of the kind? Was it not, for James Cooper, something quite other; a coming home, at last, to the life that he had missed and wanted— all the time? Harry, little accustomed to think of James Cooper save as a mere background to his own hopes and plans, accepted the idea with amazement. Yes, the Dad had never been really happy. He'd always had a sort of hunger in his eyes. As if he were looking at something that he wanted, a long, long, long way off...

And with that came the recollection of Elizabeth, a long way off, whom— Harry was quite sure about it now— he wanted.

The Niu-Niu lilies, heavy-headed, swept past his face as he went down the stairs. He thought he would remember the scent of them always.

———————————

11: The Keys of Bluebeard

Beatrice Grimshaw

The Home, (Sydney) 1 June 1940

BIRDS had been known to dash themselves against the tall cliffs of Takau, wildly, inexplicably, falling to their death. There were native tales about ghosts that haunted the island and did a mischief, sometimes, to unwary men.

Yet it was beautiful; loveliest, perhaps, of the twin islands, set in the blue Pacific, that belonged to Leo Gamble. Tinomana, across the strait, was lower and more accessible than Takau; it was feathered with tall palms, planted with fruit trees; it had a bungalow, and a boat-jetty, running down the wide white shore. Takau, tall and steep, broke off short above the sea in precipices masked by uncleared bush; its coral beaches were narrow as the sides of a saucer too small for the cup; on the summit stood, open to all winds, a shack that was weatherproof and little more.

There were no other islands near to these. The port of entry for the Laka group, Meitaki, could just be seen on the horizon, serrated, pale and purple, like a hyacinth flower afloat. From Meitaki, you travelled to Leo's islands by occasional launch, and your stores and your mails and your visitors— if any— went by the same route.

On the day that Leo and Cecily came to Tinomana— Cecily drugged with happiness, chloroformed by sun and sea-airs, so that she no longer felt the sting of the Puritan conscience that had tormented her all along the cold New Zealand coasts and up from Australia: Leo Gamble, dark, inscrutable, calm as he had always been calm, even in those moments of fierce danger that had been common in his explorer's career they stood together on the top of the island, looking towards the illimitable sea-line that lay before them, clear as the rim of a lens, or as the ring that Leo held in his hand, and showed to Cecily.

"Two rings of eternity," he said to her, and set the gold ring on her hand. He had kept it for this hour.

"What is the inscription?" she said, looking at it closely. It was an Egyptian scarab ring, of great age and value.

"Translated," he said, "it's this— 'I found thee, I keep thee, The gods give thee to me forever .' "

Cecily drew a long breath of delight. It was not the moment to remember— but she could not help remembering— George Grant, her husband, away down in Dunwoodie, at the cold Antarctic end of New Zealand. George, twenty years older than herself, a solicitor with no interests beyond his practice, had been "sensible about the engagement ring. It was a standard pattern half hoop of very small diamonds, like —except as to size— every ring that every girl in

Dunwoodie had ever been given. He had said, as he put it on her hand: "Now don't go dropping it down the wash basin, or losing it along the beach, for you won't get another..."

That ring was at the bottom of the Antarctic Ocean, where Leo Gamble, adventurer, explorer and famous man, had thrown it, with her wedding ring, the night they ran away to the steamer.

It had been a whirlwind courtship: Leo, coming back from the Antarctic, had met the little yellow-haired wife of his solicitor at a dinner given in honour of the exploring party; had been told by interested friends that Grant kept her shut up in a box, and wouldn't even let her go to the pictures, because he was jealous of everything and everybody: jealous even of Gary Cooper and Clark Gable; had felt, the moment he saw her, that she was too good for such a fool.... Leo Gamble, lover of many women, knew, if Grant did not, that no woman, married or single, can be cheated forever of the one thing that matters more to her than anything on earth— her dream.

On that dream has Hollywood been founded; have the innumerable picture palaces been built; have the colossal fortunes of producing firms been made, and the names and faces of dream lovers, dream projections of unsatisfactory selves, gone flying round the world.

Leo knew well how the screen slaked the thirsts of frustrated people; how pictures took the place of opium and hashish, with unsatisfied wives; and here was an unsatisfied wife, pretty as the frail pink Arctic poppies in her garden, without so much as the shadow of an Adolphe Menjou "to content herself withal." She told him, moreover, in the first of their stolen talks, that George wouldn't even let her read anything he hadn't censored, and that she had been enjoying so much, the life of Sir Richard Burton, the lover of beautiful Isabel, the great explorer, "with the brow of a god and the jaw of a devil," when George took the book away and sent it back to the library. Also that he had gone about whistling the day T. E. Lawrence died, because Cecily had seen the Arab pictures of Lawrence, and liked them, so that, of course, she cried a little over the news.

Leo, who was considered to be, and considered himself, not unlike the Burton and Lawrence type, saw his chance, and seized it, with the dash and determination that had already carried him through the adventures, amatory and geographical, of thirty stormy years. This golden Cecily, with her New Zealand clove-pink bloom, and the wasted, defeated youth of her, like the spilled scent of the clove-pink, crying out, "Take me, take!" was clearly meant for him.

The day they came to Tinomana, he said to her, after he had put the priceless scarab on her hand, and kissed it, This is our home, for as long as you

like, but, remember, that other island, Takau, isn't for you. You must never go on to it, for any reason or any excuse."

"Why, my Lord Bluebeard?" she asked him, and he said,

"No matter. Call me Bluebeard if you like—"

"You're dark enough." she said, looking again at the dusky, deep-set eyes, the black-dotted jaw of a devil, that likened him, in the opinion of many, to his nineteenth-century prototype, Richard Burton.

"Call me anything; call Takau Bluebeard's chamber, if you choose, but let the keys alone." His eye wandered to the native canoe that lay on the low beach of Tinomana.

Cecily would have given him, on demand, her head upon a charger, if such a gift had been anatomically possible. "I promise," she said.

It had been hard to keep the promise, when she saw that Bluebeard was in the habit of visiting his own secret chamber, almost daily; that he picked up things on the beach, brought them back, wrapped in bagging, and stored them carefully underneath the living room floor. For a good while he had tested her patience, her obedience, by saying nothing at all about this treasure trove, whatever it might be.

But one day, when she had come upon him unexpectedly, as he was storing away a bag of some yellow-brown substance that spilled out and fell upon the floor, he had said, cocking a mischievous eye at her— "What is it, Madam B?"

Cecily sniffed fastidiously. "It's ugly, she said, "and it smells like— like something toasted— toast gone a little bad and spread with baddish butter. If you ask me."

"That," said Leo, "is ambergris."

"What! the thing they make the perfumes of?

"The thing that's used in perfumery. Yes. Less of it in the world every year, as the big whales are killed off. Nobody knows much about the big sperm whales that and how and why they produce ambergris— it's really a disease— but I've picked up some information most people haven't got; worked out for myself their routes. Between two of the Solomons is one, east coast of New Caledonia is another, *and* that last is a sick whales bay. Nobody knows why, but they get lots of ambergris, and being French and practical, say mighty little about it. Well, this is another. Between these islands, at certain times of the year, you II see the flukes and the black backs of them coming up as they go through. And when they're sick they come. Must be so, because it s a real mine of ambergris; that s why I took up the islands. The currents seem to land it mostly on Takau. But here's the catch." (He was stowing away treasure as he spoke; rough lumps the size of a fist, worth as much as a motor car; lumps as

big as a man's head, worth a fine town house.) I couldn't keep it, if anyone found out. Law of flotsam and jetsam. Thrown up on the beach or floating about— anyone's. He put by the last of the greasy, burnt-smelling stuff, and clamped down the movable floorboards over it.

"So that's the Bluebeard secret?" Cecily demanded, eagerly.

She did not care much about the treasure-trove, but very much about being in Leo's confidence.

Leo didn't answer her at first, and then, as he walked out on to the verandah, sending his keen-sighted glance up and down the quiet seas— a thing he always did, when he had finished working in the cache— he said: "What I told you about Takau still holds— Madam Bluebeard."

It's nothing that matters, she thought. The dear likes his little secrets. Men must have toys, and secrets are Leo's.... But she was astonished at his keenness, his almost greediness, over this treasure-trove of the seas. She hadn't thought him so very fond of money.

Gamble was not fonder of it than, perhaps, you or I. But neither you nor I, maybe, has ever had the special reason for wanting money, money in large heaps, that Leo Gamble had— after he stole away the wife of George Grant, solicitor. After he realised that Cecily's Puritan conscience might be scotched, but could not, altogether, be killed. After he guessed that she couldn't be kept, for always, unless Grant divorced her— which was the last thing a man of Grant's type was likely to do.

Money was the only chance. Money that would buy them both a position in some sort of society, after the islands of the blest had palled, as even blest islands do. If you have money enough, you can get away with murder, Leo thought. Or without money— sometimes.... He passed his hand across his cat-moustache. and smiled. Only the earth's waste places knew what Leo Gamble had got away with, in the buried years.

Beside him, clove-pink Cecily stood, like a coloured angel off a birthday cake, wishing from her heart that she could sufficiently thank Heaven for the priceless gift of Leo's love. But she did not, honestly, suppose that she could. It would be too like a pickpocket going down on his knees to render thanks for a good day among the rings and watches....

Every day, when Leo had paddled himself across from the Bluebeard island, and put away his catch, little or large, he had been wont to cast a glance here and there, a mechanical look, like that of a coastguard sweeping the bare horizon with his glass. This day, being occupied with his own thoughts, he hardly knew that he was looking; did not know that, for once, he had missed the object of that daily search— until Cecily, seizing his arm, cried out: "Leo, there's someone coming!"

In a moment they knew who it was.

Even though the launch, a black pin point stuck in a black pencil, took an hour or more to creep across the satin of the still Pacific, near enough for those two on the island to see what it carried-even though they could only tell, at first, that there was a native engineer on board, and two white men— Leo and Cecily knew, from the instant the launch sighted, that Cecily s husband

was on board.

Cecily held on to Leo's arm with a drowning grip. "You won't let him take me away?" she said, breathless and trembling. He could feel the chill of her fingers through his cotton sleeve.

Leo was not pitiful, but he was struck with sudden pity now for this Iceland poppy of a girl, shaken by the winds of cruel chance (strange how one always likened her to a flower!) He felt himself, beside her, stark, strong as one of the giant kauri pines of her own country.

With his warm hands he pressed her chilly fingers.

"You shall always have what you like, and do what you like— except one thing." he said to her. "If that's Grant— and I think it is— you needn't see or speak to him.

"Oh, if I needn't!"

"You shan't. Go into the bungalow and stop there. He and I will meet each other on Takau."

Cecily had given over being afraid of Takau by this time. Whatever its ghostly, deathly history might be (and it was hard to believe dark legends, when you looked at that unmysterious shape, covered with flowers and bushes, and open to all the winds of heaven) it was plain that Leo wasn't troubled by it. The prohibition that kept herself away didn't matter: Leo was a bit of a tyrant; had to have something, she supposed, about which to be tyrannical. I like tyrants, she thought, with the warm blood rushing to her cheeks.... She wasn't thinking of Takau Island now, but of the men upon it. What were they talking about, shut up in the tin bungalow, among the weeds and flowers that crowned Takau?

After what seemed to be a long while, with the sun beginning to sink in a brazen sea, and the man-of-war birds whistling as they flew overhead towards home, one of the men came out. Cecily's heart stopped beating... but no, it wasn't George. George was fat and tall; this was the other, this thin, smallish fellow, walking with Leo.

They took the canoe and began paddling back to Tinomana. On the top of the island, as the sun went down, Cecily could see a black, massive figure standing outside the doorway of the hut. That would be George. George, it seemed, was going to stay the night on the other island: Leo must have had

some trouble to persuade or bully him into it, but it had been done. There was bedding and furniture on Takau, and food as well: Leo had always kept the hut prepared, in case of stormy weather detaining him overnight.

Very black the motionless figure looked against the geranium sunset. The wind was getting up; it cried among the cliffs of Takau; it wailed like the ghosts that were said to haunt the island. Shivers went over Cecily. She turned away from the evening and the sea. The bungalow was bright, with lit lamps and a table whitely covered. Cecily thought of the little poem by Mallock that Leo loved; the verses ending— . . .

Hold me fast by your true hand,
Turn away from the changed sea,
Daylight forsakes the forlorn land,
Never forsake me.

Maybe I'm "fey," she thought. I feel as if there was something coming. But I don't think— no, I don't think, whatever happened— I would. Here was Leo now, gay and unconcerned as ever; no one would think he had been holding what Cecily knew must have been an extremely stormy interview with her husband. He was introducing the other man; someone called Winder, who didn't need to be introduced; Cecily remembered him, a friend of George's. He has brought him along for a witness, she thought. He's on George's side. I wish they had left him over on Takau. Nevertheless, she was civil to Winder, even when the little attorney's clerk told her right out that Grant had come to bring her home again, and wouldn't be satisfied with anything less.

"Your husband doesn't believe in divorce," Winder said, fixing her with grey, disapproving eyes, that seemed to Cecily to embody and express the opinions of far-away Dunwoodie upon her conduct. The worst of it was that she agreed with Dunwoodie; she knew she was bad, as bad, no doubt, as the woman in *The Scarlet Letter*; she ought to wear a red cloth initial upon the breast of her linen frock, like wicked Hester in the story— if justice were done.

She could see herself, some day— but not too soon; like St. Augustine, she could have petitioned Heaven— "not yet!"— leaving Leo, spending the rest of her life in regrets and penitence.

(If Leo would let her.)...

But she couldn't see herself going back to Grant and to Dunwoodie. The tall black island across the strait took on a sinister aspect as she thought of that. She had never liked the place; she hated it now; it was slimed all over with Grant.

After dinner, they played a stupid game of dummy bridge, and Winder smoked the good cigars that Leo gave him, and they all went early to bed. In

the middle of the night. Cecily waked, alone in her room. Leo was sharing the room of the attorney's clerk; she could not hear him breathing, but the snores of the clerk sounded loudly. What had she heard? Not those snores only. There was something else; it might have been the cry of a seabird, or it might have been a shriek.

Maybe there were ghosts on Takau after all. George would not care; he'd tackle a ghost just as he'd go for a witness in court. George could take care of himself. And when the launch went back to the port of entry to-morrow she wouldn't be in it. Leo would see to that.

George— could— take— care of himself— on that thought, strangely repeated, she went to sleep.

Leo said, next morning: "You've been crying." They were out on the verandah, in the freshness of the early day. It was autumn on Tinomana and Takau; autumn marked only, in those tropic latitudes, by a little more gold in the gilded sunshine, a dreaming mist upon the seas of lupin blue. Pineapples were bearing for the second time that year; bananas bowed themselves towards earth, weighed down by the richness of their fruit; male pawpaws dangled streamers of lacy flowers beside the sturdy female trees, that bore big clusters of green and yellow melons. There were no fruit trees on Takau which had not been cultivated: only the tangle of tropic bush, brightened with stray flowers and berries, that spread itself gaily under the early sun.

Cecily said: "I've not,— or only a little. I— I can't help it."

"I suppose it's because that dog-in-the-manger wouldn t give you your freedom."

"Is it sure he won't?" They had used different tenses of the same verb: but Cecily saw nothing in that.

Leo said, shifting the cigarette between his lips: "Yes." Then, after a moment's silence: "Do you mean to let that matter?"

She could only answer: "It must!"

"Money," said Leo. "will carry off most things, in most places."

"I don't care about money," she told him. "You do— but you said you couldn't be sure of keeping— what you had— to yourself."

Leo did not reply for another long minute. The cigarette was done; he threw it down.

I can be sure, he said.

She looked at him, her breath coming quickly with the desire of finding out at last what the real secret of Takau might be. She knew that it was held, like a kernel, in the shell of that last sentence. But the shell remained shut. Winder joined them, and immediately recommenced his arguments of the previous night. Why didn't Leo leave him over on Takau with George, thought Cecily. It

was surely inconsiderate to let me be troubled by him, when it could so easily have been arranged; this man is like a fly, one can't shake him off or stop him buzzing.

To all that he said she opposed her unconquerable resolution. She would not go back to Grant. She would not see him, or speak to him.

"Then what, if I may ask, are your— plans?" the little man inquired. His tone was chilly, superior. Just the tone of the people in Dunwoodie, Cecily thought, just the way they would speak to me— if they spoke at all—

But it was hard to answer, with Winder staring at her, waiting, and Leo, her lover, still more narrowly watching her. It seemed that she had a vital decision to make, there in the garden of Paradise that belonged to Leo and to her, above the quiet sea that had never, until now, carried trouble to them from the world of struggling men. She had to declare immediately what she was going to do. These were men, hostile in the hearts of them to women, even though one of them loved her. Men were like that when they came to sit in judgment....

Her throat was dry; she had to swallow once or twice before she could speak. But she knew, now, what she was going to say.

"I— I— I'm going away," she said. She hadn't known it, ten minutes before. She knew now. Leo would give her money, and she would make him release her, and she would go and break her heart somewhere, alone. She couldn't, couldn't go on being the— the— (no, not that word) of a man. Even Leo. The answer was something that she had not expected. Leo laughed. In a satisfied way. as if something pleased him. And he told her: "I knew you'd say that," and right before little Winder, he stooped down (he had a long way to stoop)— and kissed her. Then he walked away, whistling.

Winder said, with unexpected kindness: "If you really won't go back to Grant, Mrs. Grant, I think you're doing the next best thing. May I inform him that you and Mr. Gamble have decided to part?"

"You can tell him," Cecily said with some spirit, "that I have decided."

It seemed as if Winder were about to speak; he looked questioningly at Leo, who was calmly walking up and down on the stretch of ground that overlooked the ghostly island, and taking no notice of anyone. But whatever he was going to say remained unspoken. He merely bowed to Cecily and took his way down to the beach, where the canoe lay waiting.

"I can't work this craft of yours," he called to Leo, "I shall have to trouble you."

"Grant knows how to paddle, I believe," Leo called in answer.

"I— it's odd, but he doesn't seem to have got up yet; can't see him anywhere.

"Well, I'll take you over."Leo came down to the shore.

Cecily watched them crossing the strait; saw them land, and make their way up to the hut.

Silence Fell on Tinomana; the little wild bees buzzed like flies among the lacy flowers of the pawpaws; over the top of the island gulls went crying. One didn't mind the gulls; they didn't frighten you as they went cruising about after fishy prey in the straits; but Cecily remembered the little land birds once and again seen upon Takau, how they had alarmed her, going crazy, as it seemed, flying madly about and dashing themselves to death against the cliffs. Their small fluffy bodies had lain upon the stones below, suddenly still and by and by the tide had swept them away; some of them, even, had been cast on their own island of Tinomana.

More than ever she hated to see Leo go over to Takau that morning. There was no logic in it; simply, she felt so.

To keep herself from thinking— above all, from thinking about that decision of hers, that lay cold in her warm heart like a snake coiled up in a dove's nest— she set to work getting things ready for Leo's dinner. Curry she would make; there was no fresh meat, and tinned stuff wanted dressing. Salt meat, she knew, was kept upon Takau, maybe he'd bring a bit back with him; they didn't use it as a rule, in that thirsty climate.

Meantime, she got to work upon her curry, gathering fresh herbs to flavour it, and not forgetting the red peppers that Leo loved; he had learned to like strong spices in his Eastern travels. The peppers were nearly done, but she found a bush of good ones right down on the beach, finest and biggest she had seen. You didn t put them into the curry, you squeezed their juice through a cloth. She didn't mind the trouble, though for herself she preferred the plainest food. Men must be humoured. No sound, as yet, had come from the other island, and she could not see Leo or Winder. They must have gone down to the beach, she thought, and that was odd, for the beach was the last place where Leo desired to see strangers.

Lunch was finished, cooked, set ready to warm up when wanted, and still there was no sign of the men. Cecily was growing uneasy. Like Malbrouk's wife, she went up to the top of the island, looked out to see where Leo and Winder had gone.... There, there, at last! They were coming slowly round the corner of the cliffs; they must have walked the whole way round Takau. What could have kept them, and what was it they were carrying?

She asked herself, but she knew. It was George Grant.

A long way off, across the empty sea, a pencil streak of black began to show. The launch was on its way. So quiet was the place that you could hear,

miles off, the faint put-put of the engine. Who was going back again by that launch, and who would never go?

She ran to the beach. No Bluebeard's chamber terrors would have kept her from Takau if the canoe had been there for her use. But it was on the opposite shore, and she had to wait until, slowly, loaded with a burden that was almost too much for the small craft, the canoe, paddled by Leo Gamble, with Winder as passenger, came to land. Across the outrigger they had laid the body of Grant. Just as he looked when she left him in Dunwoodie he looked now, the fair, reddish face that she hated, the thick lips, the light hair fringing the half bald, round head. But the eyes were closed, and she was sure in that moment that they would never open upon her again.

"Go up to the house,' Leo told her.

"What is it? " she asked him, before she

went. She was shaking all over; her voice sounded strange in her ears; but Leo was perfectly calm.

"Grant has fallen; killed himself, it seems," he answered.

Winder cut in: "We found him at the bottom of the cliffs. He appears to have gone wandering in the night and fallen over. Winder seemed to be disturbed and puzzled. "It was a fine night,"he said. "Moonlight, too. I— l can't understand. I— l— But of course, no suspicion can possibly attach—"

"What does he mean?" Cecily asked,staring.

"I should suppose what he says, Cecily, you heard me."

Obedience had become part of her nature. She left the two, and went to her own room. George was dead. No one could do anything for him. And she was free. She fell upon her bed.

Late in the afternoon she woke from a sleep of exhaustion. The house was very still. A long way off the put-put of the launch sounded faintly across the sea, as she had heard it in the morning. Then it had been approaching, now it was dying away. She did not need to ask who, and what, had gone away with it.

Leo came into the room; he looked strangely, she thought, pale and feverish.

Was he going to be ill, out here on lonely Tinomana? The worst fear that can grip at the lonely settler's heart, the terror that is the price of pioneering, held her in its clutches.

"Are you all right?" she asked. It was not what she had expected to say to him in this, the first moment of their freedom; this day that made it possible for her to become at last an "honest woman."

Leo passed a hand over his eyes. "I think so," he said. Then; "You've had no lunch."

"I didn't want any. I'll make a cup of tea."

"Give me some when you do. I believe I've got a touch of that confounded Egyptian malaria." He went into the sitting room and lay down on the couch.

There was a flagstaff on the island. Cecily looked at Leo once, twice, with her heart beating in her temples, and her fingers turning cold. Then she went to the top of Tinomana and ran the flag up, half-mast high. They mightn't see it from Meitaki, and then again, they might, if anyone was looking at the island through a glass. She could only hope.

When she came back to the sitting-room he was flinging himself about like a mad beast, falling against the furniture, striking his head upon the walls. Just as the little land-birds had done, against the cruel cliffs of Takau, when the evil spirit of that island had seized upon them, and driven them to their death, as the devils in Holy Writ seized the swine and sent them rushing violently down a steep place into the sea. Into the sea! One thought only held Cecily in that moment. George had gone rushing out from the hut upon Takau, like the birds, like the swine, and flung himself over the cliffs. She knew it now. If she could not prevent him, Leo would do the same. The devils of Takau had hold of him.

He seemed to be blind. He did not see her come in. He went on flinging himself about, crying strange and dreadful things. Cecily darted to the door, locked it, and put the key down the front of her dress. Then she backed behind the sofa, and stood there staring. Was he possessed. Was he mad?

The fit went over. He had groped, sightlessly, to the door; had fought with the handle, and found it locked. Just for a moment she feared he might use his terrible strength to break the door; but suddenly the madness seemed to pass, and he sank down upon a chair.

"Cecily," he said, in a voice not unlike his own.

"Dear," she answered him, coming forth fearlessly, and laying her hand in his. "What is it? Are you ill?"

He said: "What was in the food you gave me?"

He's still out of his senses, she thought. "Nothing, love," she answered. "Just curry."

"Was there fruit in the curry?"

"No. Only peppers."

"What peppers? Bring them." ill

She saw that he must be humoured. She went down to the beach and picked some of the peppers, the large long ones, that she had squeezed for lunch. "They're very hard," she cold him, returning. "Maybe not quite ripe; but they were all I could get."

He took the fruit in his hands and felt it. She heard him give a groan. "Are you feeling ill?" she asked, anxiously. He did not answer but presently he said:

"You've always obeyed me. Break off that bush and throw it into the sea. Go now."

Again she did his bidding, and came back.

"Was it bad? Was there anything wrong?" she asked, almost unable

Leo drew himself erect, and spoke the bravest words of all his life.

"Nothing," he said. "I'm just a little— ill. Give me your hand back to the house."

He stumbled; she helped him into the bedroom, and led him (for he could not find his way) to the bed. He lay down upon it, and turned his face towards the wall.

Disturbed, she left him there, and went out, once more like Malbrouk's wife, to look forth and see if anyone was coming. A long way off the launch from Meitaki could be seen, beginning to cross. It would be there in an hour, she thought, and it would— she hoped— bring help.

When the launch appeared, there were two men in it. Winder and another man, whom she recognised as the doctor from the port of entry.

"Anything wrong?" the doctor asked briskly.

"It's my —my husband," Cecily said, faltering a little over the word.

"He's got an attack of some sort of fever— I don't understand it— he went crazy for about a minute, and he doesn't seem to see very well—"

The doctor exchanged a significant glance with Winder.

"Two in one day," he said. "Lucky my last job was in Queensland. You might take me to the patient."

They walked together up the hill, and the doctor kept glancing sharply about him as they went. He seemed to be on the lookout for something that he did not find.

Leo would not let her come into the room. He spoke to the doctor by himself; she heard their voices murmuring, but could not guess at what they said. Winder stood in the outer room, whistling uneasily, and did not look at her.

By and by the doctor came out. "You can go in now," he said.

Leo was sitting on the side of the bed. "You'd better know," he said. "I'm blind."

She felt as if she had been struck on the heart. "It isn't true!"

"It is true. There's a—" he hesitated, "a fever on Takau, and I got it. I shall never see again. You'd better pack up and go back to New Zealand. You don't want to be a blind man's dog the rest of your life."

She was kneeling beside him, her arms round him. "But I do, I do. I'll be your dog— your wife— anything. I'll send for the missionary to marry us to-morrow."

"You would do that?"

"A hundred times, yes."

He was going to speak, but Winder had come into the room, noisily. Cecily thought she heard him more and more; always he seemed to be in the way always meddling. He said now, in his clipped, pompous manner: "I think this lady ought to know the real state of affairs before she binds herself to do anything of the sort. She isn't free."

Cecily said: "What!"

"Perhaps she was not informed that Mr. George Grant is recovering."

"She would have been informed in a minute," Leo said coolly.

Mr. Winder looked at him as if he did not believe him. Cecily said: "Was my—was Mr. Grant badly hurt?"

Pretty badly, Winder answered, "and there seems to be an injury to his eyes."

"Will he be—" She could not finish.

Winder said: "Doctor says no one can tell that."

And now," said Leo, "you can damned well go."

Winder hesitated, turned and left the room.

Outside the doctor stood with him on the crest of the island and looked across at Takau. "A clear case, from what Grant was able to tell me he said. "The finger-cherry of North Queensland; classified by the Government as a noxious weed; probably brought over to Takau by some accident— Queensland's the next land— but what the devil set Grant to eating it?"

"He said there was nothing but salt meat in the hut, and hardly any water. He saw the finger-cherries at the door of the hut, and he was thirsty.

"And of course he ate some; they're tempting things, curse them! Look a bit like peppers, but taste very well. In Queensland I've had a whole family of children brought in to me, blind as bats, and most of them for life; it gets the optic nerve. Birds, too; the fruit-eaters peck at them, and go mad and blind and fall into the sea; and I daresay that'show some of the seeds have been carried to these islands, where people know nothing about them I'll see to having them rooted out of Takau. I wonder Gamble didn t do it; he can't have known. Poor chap, he'll suffer enough for his carelessness."

"I wonder, too," said Winder. "About quite a lot of things... Do you think Grant'll get back his sight?"

Quite possible; I judge he didn't have near as much of the poison as the other fellow. Gamble might never see that pretty girl again "

"Do you mean that she'll return to her husband?"

"I do not mean anything of the kind. But with women— one never knows. Anyhow, if Grant does get better, and if he's a soul anywhere in that big carcase of his, he'll let her go."

Winder said; "He might. What are Gamble's chances of recovery?"

"One can only say— perhaps."

In the bedroom, Cecily sat beside her lover.

"What about it?" he asked her, holding on to her hand. She did not pretend to misunderstand him. "I'm going to stay," she said. "I know I'm wicked, but I don't care— now— how wicked I am."

Leo laughed. He could actually laugh!—as he put his arms about her. "There'll be a pair of us, then," he said.

She was never to know what he meant.

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12: A Story of the Sigatoka

J. S. Griffiths
fl 1910s
The Bulletin, 1 Jan 1914

Sigatoka is a major river on the main island of Fiji, and the name of the major town on the river. I can find out nothing about this author.

ROBERT SYMON, aged 21, was steeped in the passionate poetry of Robert Louis Stevenson's visions of Samoa, and soaked in Louis Becke's tales of Island Life, when he, together with his new luggage, was landed on the Suva wharf, and saw crowding around him the dusky faces of Fiji.

There were rather too many white people on the wharf and in the streets to fit in with Symon's preconceived idea of the place; but when he said something of the kind to Horrocks (who had been told off to meet the new cadet and see him settled), that guide assured him that there were "beastly few really nice people to know in the beastly hole."

Symon was taken to a little hot box of a bedroom at a second-class boarding-house on the hill, still holding fast to his belief that the Pacific Islands in general and Fiji in particular, were an earthly paradise. And he freely forgave Paradise its abominably cooked food, and its swarms of mosquitoes, and a rather fierce bout of the only fever in Suva— influenza.

A greater trial than all these things together to Symon was the mental attitude of his fellow cadets to the natives. Of course, the "niggers" had to be looked after; but they were a dreadful nuisance, though not bad workers, provided you booted 'em now and then. "Sweated heathens" Horrocks called them.

To Symon they were patient and proud, with a gentle humility, and he discerned a wealth of unspeakable poetry in tlieir sad, dark eyes. He felt certain that, as soon as he could speak their language, he would have ready access to the romantic world of which he had read. So nearly all the days were spent in earnest study of the Fijian languages (there was very little work for him at the offices); also, many nights when he could not sleep for the intolerable heat, found him poring over his books.

Then Biggles, S.M., wrote up from the Sigatoka that the work was far more than he could manage, and they must send him down a clerk. Spagle-Hunt was almost engaged for the fourth time within the year, and, of course, did not want to leave town and his romance. Horrocks was first favorite in a tennis tournament just begun, and couldn't possibly be spared. When the Chief tentatively put the case before Symon that youth volunteered eagerly to go and do his best. The only launch service stopped short at Navua, 20 miles down

the coast, and passengers had to walk the other 40 miles along bush tracks, to avoid which Symon chose to go the whole way in a native cutter.

Rotting copra and stale coconut oil are not specially pleasant perfumes, and Tongan Charlie's cutter, in which Symon voyaged, reeked of both. The wind, however, was fair, and when Symon's stomach refused to be fed with cold boiled taro and tinned salmon, he lay limply on the deck and dreamt beautiful things about "holding up an outpost of Empire," and "bearing the white man's burden." The stars were so near, and so friendly, and he felt so like flying that more than once he reached out and gripped the gunwale to make sure that he was awake.

Charlie negotiated the narrow channel in the reef and took his cutter up the river opposite the Magistrate's house with the easy confidence of the best pilot in Fiji. Then he helped Symon and his boxes ashore by means of the two planks on stilts which did duty as a wharf.

It was Sunday afternoon, and some naked Fijian children were bobbing up and down in the river; but no other human beings were in sight. Had not Biggles, S.M., expected him? Possibly, though, he was busy with church matters. Anyway, the house was in sight behind a waving fringe of nokonolco trees, so, taking up his smallest bag, the cadet walked briskly up the grassy path to the comfortable-looking bungalow. Not a breath of the breeze which had wafted them so speedily along the ocean road outside the reef touched even the tops of the mango trees along the river, and some frangipanni bushes beside the gate made the heavy air oppressive with a pungent sweetness. Young Symon put his bag down in the cool shadow of the verandah and rapped at the open door.

An Indian servant in spotless white, whose bare feet made no sound on the polished floor, answered the summons, and, to the visitor's great relief, answered his halting Fijian in easy English.

"Verry sorry, but the Sahib is asleep, and the Memsahib is also asleep. Will the Sahib rest in a chair? And have a whisky-soda? And view with reading the papers?"

Symon accepted the chair, the whisky and soda, and "viewed with reading" some very old papers and magazines for a long hour before Mrs. Biggles appeared in a fresh white gown which made her unwieldy figure look— even to the boy's uncritical eyes— almost deformed with fat. Her small black eves twinkled in an expanse of pale yellow puffy face, and her hair was carried up into an exaggerated pompadour. The fat fingers were loaded with rings, and there were various other signs that the vanity of beauty remained where all other trace of it had fled. The "mixed blood" showed in her appearance and in her speech.

"I am ver' sorry, but my husban ees not well. He will be out by-un-bye. He deed not expec' you so soon this day."

"No," said Symon, "we had a fair wind."

"We are ver' sorry that we have not room in thees house for you to sleep; but the house ees ver' small, an' you will have the more comfort en quiet in the bure. The chil'ren will not then disturb you, no?"

Symon hastened to assure her that any arrangement would suit him, and inquired how he would get his boxes up from the river.

Ahmedkhan, of the noiseless feet, was called and addressed by Mrs. Biggles in fluent Fijian, and very shortly afterward Symon sat on the side of a generous magi-magi bed, in the twilight coolness of a grass house, watching the dancing shadows of the mango leaves outside the low-set door, and trying to realise that for some months to come it was to be his home.

At dinner that night he met Biggles, S.M., and in a very few days learned that this important representative of British authority was seldom sober in the morning, generally drunk in the afternoon, and always at night. All the work at the Magistracy which it was possible for Biggles to get Symon to do, Symon did. Registrations, report-making, and the interpretation of native regulations alike were left to his discretion.

Mrs. Biggles at first adopted the foster-mother attitude, and looked closely after his comfort. Symon was properly grateful. Then he became aware of a change in Mrs. B.'s attitude towards him. Thenceforward he spent a lot of time planning how to keep out of her way.

Days were long, for the work did not keep him fully occupied, and the warm, sweet nights were longer. His mastery of the Fijian language was advancing rapidly, and it was good practice to go down to the native town near by and chat with the villagers. Then, too, the old Buli of Serua kept very decent cigars and whisky, and he had recently taken unto himself a young wife who, by comparison with Mrs. Biggles, seemed the very embodiment of physical perfection. Her slender, round limbs, amply displayed by her scanty native dress, moved with the silken softness of a cat, while her dark eyes alternately slumbered or flared in the way that is common to the coquettes of every race. Symon grew to know and love Loata's every little trick. And he would watch her with furtive longing as, with hibiscus blossom held in her strong, white teeth, she took the surf in strong, clean strokes with the other women. For Loata was the best swimmer in a village where even the babies can swim.

It was more than possible that it was the furiously jealous Mrs. Biggies who first prompted the Buli of Serua to be suspicious of the frequent absences of Loata, who, all her life, had been as free to roam about the reef or beaches as the very *belo* of her native land. But for long the spying came to naught, for

Loata was, a favorite, and "Popi" (Robert) had succeeded in making himself very popular with all the younger people.

But Luck is a fickle goddess, and in the first tender pink of a pearl dawning, the Buli himself seized Loata by the wrist as she slipped, heavy-eyed, from the door of Symon's bure.

Though startled, the girl made no cry, and three hours later Symon went up to the Magistracy whistling merrily and all unconscious of the news which there awaited him. Biggles met him on the verandah, half sober and wholly scandalised; and the righteous Mrs. Biggies, being herself "a respectable married woman," shrilly prompted her husband to further utterance whenever he paused.

"It is so very bad for the honor of the Service and all that sort of thing, you know," ended Biggles.

"An' we took you in an' were ver' kind to you, and this ees your gratitude," from Mrs. Biggles.

"I am sure the Governor will blame me when the Buli tells him all," cried Biggles, almost weeping.

Symon was utterly bewildered. "Will you kindly tell me what you are talking about?"

"He knows! He ees brazen like one— like one"— but the lady could think of no adequate comparison.

Biggles put on his most pompous magisterial air. "The Buli of Serua has been here and reported that he caught Loata coming out of your house before daylight this morning, and in spite of all I could say left in his cutter more than an hour ago to report the matter to his Excellency the Governor."

Symon blanched. "And Loata?"

"He has taken Loata with him."

Afterward they said that they thought the boy was about to faint; but he did not. The color came back to his lips after a moment, and he turned on his heel and walked smartly back to his bure.

Had he been an "old hand," or even the average practical young man, much could have been done in the way of smooth lying to save the situation. An early appearance in Suva, or even a properly-worded epistle, might have altered everything; but being a romantic youth weighted with a literary sense of chivalry, he attempted no explanation to the sodden Biggles, but early and late watched for any glimpse of flapping sail, while the day lasted, and when the light failed, listened for the "Sail-ho!" with which Fijians hail the appearance of an approaching boat.

IN SUVA the Buli of Serua was received coldly. The Governor rebuked his jealous ravings, and made him understand, finally, that while he would certainly recall Symon, he could not punish the woman. He was informed, officially, that the accusation would have to be proven, and that the proper place to prove it was in a magistrate's court. Unofficially, he was given to understand, in unmistakable terms, that it would be more pleasant for all hands if nothing more was said about the matter.

NEVER was there a more beautiful morning than that on which the cutter *Tui Serua* sailed like a white swan through the passage, and round the Sigatoka River bend to her anchorage near the village of Serua. But there was no shout of welcome nor any jovous gi-eetings from the villagers as they gathered slowly on the river bank. Perhaps a sort of telepathic knowledge held them silent. The anchor was lowered and the sails furled, and, even when the Buli stepped ashore, not an exclamation was heard, as he stalked through the crowd unquestioned.

But speedily from house to house, like flame on dry prairie grass, there ran the news that Loata was drowned. She had fallen overboard, so the story ran, and though her body had been recovered and brought to Serua, she was dead.

It was like Biggles the Beast to insist upon Symon being present at the official inquiry. And what did it matter that the slender body was all seared and torn around the waist where the Manila rope had ploughed deep, as, too exhausted to swim, Loata had been dragged in the wake of the *Tui Serua* to glut the vengeance of the Buli?

The verdict, founded upon the testimony of eye-witnesses, was "Accidentally drowned."

SYMON made a fearful mess of the job and of the office, in which he was inconsiderate enough to do it. The bullet even ploughed a hole in the court-house wall nearly as big as that in his own head. But the doctor's certificate read : "Acute dysentery." Which was less painful to his people in England than the brutal truth.

13: The Rejuvenation of Bellamy Grist

Edgar Jepson

1863-1938

Los Angeles Herald 5 July 1908

THE operation was over, and it had been successful; Bellamy Grist's new heart was beating steadily. I went to the window called down to the reporters "Success!" and watched them dash into the temporary telegraph office on the other side of the road, to send the glad tidings to the anxious, waiting cities of the country that a new lease of life had been granted to America's noblest son, and the golden stream of his poetry would still flow. Then I breathed long and deeply and came back to the operating tables. My work was done; Glaisher and Tobin were putting the final touches to it; and I had leisure to look from the massive face of Bellamy Grist, pillowed in its leonine mane of snow-white hair, to the black, chinless, browless face of Moko the big chimpanzee whose heart now beat in the poet's body.

As I looked, to my surprise the chimpanzee's ears twitched. He should have been dead an hour. In dismay I looked for Bellamy Grist's heart, the heart which was to be embalmed and deposited in the Pantheon, where should rest the relics of America's great dead. The very movement to build the Pantheon had been set on foot by Bellamy Grist's admirers, who could not endure that his splendid heart should lack a proper resting place; and now that idiot O'Driscoll, with his senseless love of practical joking, had replaced Moko's heart with it. What a fool I had been, brilliant surgeon as he was, to let him take part in the operation! He had, with Bekker's help taken out Moko's heart for me, and while I was absorbed in fixing it in Bellamy Grist, had put the poet's heart in its place.

"O'Driscoll, Where's Bellamy Grist's heart?" I said sharply.

He turned from the window from which he was watching with Bekker the struggle of the reporters, and said, "Sure, it's in Moko. Exchange Is no robbery, Hickman, me boy. And I'm thinking, too, that it's enjoying the new rich blood that it's pumping."

"But, confound you, what about the Pantheon?" I cried.

"It can go there later when the monkey dies, if It's built so soon. Science needed the converse of the operation," he said seriously enough.

That was true; and to the interests of science everything must give way: "Very well," I said firmly. "In that case you will take charge of Moko."

"I'll do that," he said.

Glaisher came across the room and shook my hand, saying, "Hickman R. Shafer, I congratulate you! In the name of American surgery I congratulate you. It was magnificent!"

"Congratulate Chicago, rather," I said. "My masters, Guthrie and Carrell, invented the operation. I'm only their pupil."

"You did it twenty minutes quicker than either Guthrie or Carrell. I've seen them," said O'Driscoll.

"That's so," said Tobin; and he and Bekker also shook hands with me and congratulated me.

I made another examination of Bellamy Grist; and we moved him into his bedroom. Then I went down stairs to my wife, Bellamy Grist's daughter. Her face lighted up at the sight of me, and she stepped hastily forward, kissed me on the brow, and said In a choked voice, "Oh, Hickman, my glorious Hickman, you have given me back a father! But more— oh, far more— you have given back to the greatest of the nations its noblest son!"

"That's so, little girl. If all goes well," I said.

"It will! I feel it will! And oh, how doubly blessed am I to be the daughter of a genius and the wife of a genius! You will be world-famous!"

"Yes, Editha; I guess American surgery will go up one," I said.

She blinked; and I thought that, as often, it was at the idiomatic phrase; but then she sighed and said, "If only it had not been a monkey's heart in my splendid father."

I have always recognized that she is the high-souled, ethereal daughter of a poet, and I said soothingly, "Well, it was a choice of evils. And after all a heart is only a muscle; It's not like a brain; it can't do him any harm."

"No, no; of course not. Still I can't help feeling it. If only it could have been the heart of some brave, simple young Westerner!" she said, clasping her hands.

"No young Westerner applied," I said. "And if one had the law might have kicked up a fuss. But I must get back to your father."

I kissed her and went upstairs; I was thankful that she had not spoken of her father's old heart. I wanted time to think over breaking the truth about it to her.

FOR SOME DAYS she was busy with the sacks of congratulatory letters and telegrams brought to the house by the postal wagons, and cutting out and pasting into large volumes the eulogiums of the Press on Bellamy Grist and myself. O'Driscoll smuggled Moko away as soon as he could be moved; and she was not even aware that the chimpanzee was alive. O'Driscoll had bidden me good-bye and taken a few steps toward the depot when he turned and said "Suppose the heart is the seat of the emotions after all, Hickman, me boy?"

"Not on your life." I said.

Bellamy Grist made a wonderful recovery. The powerful heart of Moko drove the blood in full flood through his veins, and every other organ took on a new lease of life. The years seemed to fall off him; and I had the satisfaction of having given to my country probably a score more years of her noblest son's activity. The Press took the closest warmest interest in his recovery; and his first egg, and even more, his first steak, received an extraordinary meed of recognition.

His recovery was helped considerably by his excellent spirits; he was frequently the prey of fits of child-like glee. At first this startled us, since, as every one knows, before the operation, a great seriousness had been the keynotes of Bellamy Grist's character no less than of his work. I soon grew used to it; but Editha did not She found it hard to adjust herself to this change in her father, since his intense seriousness had been the quality in him she cherished most. One day, indeed, after he had playfully tweaked off his nurse's cap, she came up to me in tears and said, "I have always known, of course, that my father has a wide humanity; but these manifestations of its humorous side, coming so late in life, jar upon me as undignified after his strenuous past. Tell me, Hickman, do you— do you think they are preliminary symptoms of his second childhood?"

I assured her that I had never known an old man less senile than her father.

In other ways, too, he showed this change to youth. His favourite reading had been our serious monthly and quarterly reviews; now he would not look at them himself, nor let Editha read them to him. His taste was all for light literature of the humorous kind, or for records of tropical travel.

I came in one evening towards the end of his convalescence to find that one of our brightest publishers, Richard P. Blick, had been down to see him about his next volume of poems. I was somewhat vexed, for my father-in-law had always been somewhat ineffectual in money matters, and had always made poor bargains with his publishers. It was not likely that he had made a better one on a sick bed. I went upstairs to him, and when I made sure that the visit had not tired him, I said, "So Blick has been down to see you about your next book."

With a grin, which, on anyone else's face I should have called mischievous, he drew a check out of his writing case and handed it to me: It was for fifty thousand dollars!

"Blick talked of fifteen thousand," said Bellamy Grist, and— could I believe my eyes?— he winked. Yes; Bellamy Grist winked!

A few days later he was about again, and we became fully alive to the changes in him. The renewal of his youth, it was indeed almost a renewal of his boyishness, was amazing— sometimes it was very trying. He had been of a

distinctly sedentary habit before the operation, spending nearly the whole day in his study. Now he was full of a boyish restlessness, wandering continually from room to room, and spending hours roaming about the woods. Before, he had always been of a grave seriousness; now, he was vivacious; he would even sometimes josh Editha. He began to show a distressing fondness for practical jokes. I observed other changes, too, in his tastes. Before, he had been passionately partial to pie; indeed, I had always believed that pie was chiefly to blame for the failure of his heart; now, he preferred fruit and salads and sweets. In the matter of sweets he was voracious. He seemed to grow more boyish every day.

We were not the only people to notice the changes in him, or indeed, to find them trying. I observed that his admirers, who came by scores to listen to his glorious words, no longer came from their interviews with uplifted, transfigured faces; they looked puzzled and glum. The neighbours, too, before so proud of his dwelling in their midst, now that they sometimes suffered from his practical jokes, began to look at him uneasily. His old friends, America's greatest thinkers and litterateurs, after a while ceased to congratulate us on the wonderful renewal of hi B youth.

These changes in his character were not accompanied by any diminution in his intellectual force; I thought myself that his intellect had grown, if anything, keener and more discerning. He was not working at his new volume with the old steady industry— I have known him write six hundred lines of poetry in an afternoon— he worked at it fitfully.

He had lost interest, too, in the biography, once his pride, which Editha was writing of him. Curiously enough I liked him far more than I had in his serious days, in spite of my being a serious, scientific man myself; we were now much closer friends. I did not, indeed, see so much of him as I had done, for I was often away from home performing the heart-transference operation in every part of the country. Indeed, my services were so much in demand that there was a run on the greater Simians, the price of them had risen sixty per cent, and Rogers, the purveyor to menageries, was forced to fit out two large expeditions to Africa to supply my patients. Our leading financiers, society women, actors, politicians, and divines were getting me to replace their hearts worn out by our strenuous American life.

Thus I was prevented from observing continuously the youthful changes in my father-in-law; and it was nearly five months after the operation that I became seriously uneasy about them. Then a possibility at once so astounding and uncomfortable that I dismissed it at once as an idle fancy, flashed upon me. I was working in my study and Bellamy Grist was walking up and down it with the boyish restlessness now habitual to him. I raised my eyes from my

notes and observed that he wore a very absent-minded air, and his lips were moving as if he were engaged in composition. Suddenly as I looked, without any change in his musing face, plainly without any conscious effort of will, he leapt up sideways, caught the curtain rod with his right hand, and came bang down on the floor, bringing the snapped rod and the curtain on the top of him; and I had had a flashing, fleeting, but vivid impression of a leaping monkey. Even as he picked himself up, with a very sheepish air, and rubbed his knees, I thrust the fancy from me and assured myself that it was only his wonderful boyishness.

The impression kept recurring; but I thrust it away and refused to let it annoy me. Two days later it was strengthened indeed. I was strolling through the woods with him when he made another of those sudden leaps, caught the lower branch of a tree, swung, gave himself a curious jerk, and dropped in an oddly foolish ways on his hands and knees. He looked round with an air of strange surprise, rose, shook his leonine mane of snow-white hair on one side, looked behind him curiously, and said, "I thought I'd got a tail. Dodgast it, Hickman! Why haven't we tails?"

I gasped. Then he laughed a forced laugh and pretended he had been joking. I accepted the pretence; but when I reached home I locked myself in my study and faced the situation. There was no doubt that Bellamy Grist had acquired along with the heart, something of Moko's disposition; with him nothing could be done; but how did I stand to my patients still awaiting the operation? At first it seemed to me that I ought to warn all of them of these new results of it. I took the list of name) and dates out of the drawer, to write them; and it pulled me up short. There were two famous divines, a great but honest lawyer, a professor of Harvard, and a leading actor, about whom there could be no doubt; they were servants of the American people, doing good work; they must be told and choose for themselves. On the other hand there were two Wall Street operators, the head of a great, well-water trust, throe leading politicians, and five leaders of society in New York and Chicago. It was plain that the characters of these could not but benefit by the admixture of some natural monkey; and I resolved In their case to preserve a beneficial silence and operate.

For the next few weeks I watched Bellamy Grist closely, and now that my mind was on the right tack, I saw many more signs of the influence of Moko. I came to the conclusion that the influence was merely in his sentiments and emotions; his brain power was as strong as ever. He finished his volume of poems and despatched it to his editor. Editha was hurt, and I think deeply hurt, though she was too high-souled to complain, by the fact that he had not shown her a single poem in it. Before she had been his constant confidante

and advisor in matters poetical, and had always striven, for, like Homer, he sometimes nodded, to keep him at his highest level of grave seriousness.

A few days later I suffered another shock. I was walking in our little town with him when a mulatto woman passed us. He gripped my arm and cried, "Good heavens. Hickman! What a beautiful creature! What features!"

It was the Simian type that appealed; and my blood ran cold. I turned and fairly dragged him along homewards.

We had just reached home one day after another walk, and were entering the house, when the sound of hurried footsteps made me pause and turn my head. A dapper little man with a very pale face, carrying a package under his arm. was opening the garden gate.

"Hello, here's Blick," said Bellamy Grist; and I caught a ring of discomfort in his tone.

The publisher skipped up to us in the hall and without a word or greeting cried, "Mr. Grist! What does this mean? What does this mean?"

"What does what mean?" said Bellamy.

"This book— this dreadful book!" cried the publisher.

"What's the matter with the book?" said Bellamy Grist cheerfully; and he opened the door of his study and we all went in.

"The matter! The matter!" cried Blick, slamming the package down on the table and beginning to strip off the wrappings. "We bought a volume of serious poetry from you; and this is humorous! It must be humorous! All our readers think it's humorous!"

"Well, if this doesn't beat the Dutch!" said Bellamy Grist. "It's nothing of the kind."

Blick turned over the leaves of the MS. quickly, and cried, "But— but this 'Ode to a Ripe Banana!' And— this poem, 'The Joy of Nuts!' And— and— this one, 'Up a Tree!' And this one— where is it?— here— 'Freedom'— all about freedom from the— from insects!"

"Well, what's the matter with them? They're all right!" said Bellamy Grist tartly.

"But we didn't want this kind of thing! We wanted poetry— serious poetry— the— the noble sort of stuff the American market expects from you."

Bellamy Grist grinned at him, an angry grin that bared his teeth, and said in a rising voice, "Ah, if you'd only told me so, I'd have told you I wasn't writing any more of that trash. Why, I can't read my previous volumes!" He snatched one out of the shelf and banged it down beside the MS.

"They're all about nothing at all. But this is all right; this is the real thing. I've always said that poetry should be the expression of genuine emotion; and this new volume is the expression of genuine emotion. Take this 'Ode to a Ripe

Banana' and compare it with my 'Ode to a President.' A president is not like that, and nobody ever felt about him like that. But a ripe banana is like this; and I feel about It just like this— every healthy human being must. Besides a ripe banana is a beautiful thing, and a proper subject for poetry; a president Is not a beautiful thing and a proper subject for poetry. And this 'Freedom' again— have you ever in the summer been troubled by a flea?"

"What!" screamed Blick above Bellamy Grist's thunderous roar. "Are you seriously defending this dreadful poetry? Have you no care for your splendid reputation— for— for the great success you have had in the American market?"

"Oh, they're all right," said Bellamy Grist.

"They're not all right! And we won't publish this book! It won't sell! You must refund the fifty thousand dollars! We'll bring an action against you to recover It!" howled Blick.

"You make me tired," said Bellamy Grist scornfully. "Go and look at our agreement. I'll bring an action against you if you don't publish it."

The wretched Blick wiped the sweat from his clammy brow, and walked up and down, muttering; then he said bitterly, "Well, we've been done by America's noblest—"

"Say that, and I'll kick you out of the house!" roared Bellamy Grist, advancing on him briskly.

Blick curled up: "No, no, Mr. Grist! I— I— may be wrong! Perhaps I'm not a Judge of poetry. It's a new break for the firm. Perhaps you're right. After all there's the vegetarians— they're fond of reading." And he snatched up the MS., backed out of the door and slammed it in the wrathful poet's face.

"It's a new break for me, too," said Bellamy Grist.

I did not dare tell Editha of the character of the new volume any more than I had dared tell her of the effect of Mokos heart on her father's nature. I watched him more closely, trying to observe if that effect was increasing; I fancied that in the matter of a love of mischief it was. Some of his pranks were outrageous, and I found that he was on the best of terms with all the bad boys of the neighbourhood. I believed, indeed, that he was the instigator of their bolder fights.

Then came the domestic climax. One morning at breakfast Editha said. "Surely the embalmers are very long fixing up father's heart. They've had it five months."

"The embalmers haven't got it. They can't have it till Moko dies," I said in as matter of fact a tone as I could assume.

"What do you mean?" gasped Editha.

"Well, O'Driscoll replaced Moko's heart by your father's. He felt that science needed the converse of the operation."

"But— but— my father's heart— the splendid heart of Bellamy Grist— this Is desecration!" cried Editha.

"Worn out poet's hearts are no great shakes," said Bellamy with a chuckle. Then he added, "I'm thinking. Editha, that that biography you're writing for me should branch off at the operation and continue with Moko."

Week by week his boyishness grew more trying. It seemed as if he spent all his time, except when he was writing poetry, plotting or executing wild pranks. We were relieved, though we were very anxious about how he should behave, when the Society of American Litterateurs invited him to help entertain a great French writer, with a view to confronting their guest with the serious, earnest American spirit in its most perfect expression, and he left us for a fortnight.

I watched the papers anxiously; but plainly he was restraining his mischievous spirit, for the event passed off without a scandal. At the end of a fortnight he came back with the astounding intelligence that he was off to Paris. The old Bellamy Grist had always proclaimed that the true American poet must never weaken his grip on the American spirit by enervating contact with effete Europe. This recantation was a great shock to Editha, and I expect to most of his admirers.

After he had gone we were both happier. It was a rest for us. Then he wrote that he was going to settle down In Paris for a year or two, and asked me to manage his money and remit his income. I agreed thankfully.

But always there loomed ominously ahead the publication of his book of which I had never dared to speak to Editha. I was out when her advance copy of it came, and when I returned I found her in tears. I tried to comfort her; but it was no use; she said sobbing that her father had destroyed forever his splendid success. For the next two days she went about the house mourning. Then came the day of the book's publication and the appearance of the reviews. When I came to breakfast I found her sitting in the midst of a heap of newspapers and magazines. To my surprise she was flushed and smiling and there were tears In her eyes.

"How could I have been so foolish?" she cried. "I missed the true inwardness of my father's book utterly. The *High Thinker* says that it shows a poetic insight into the cosmic soul unsurpassed in literature. The *Cultured American* says that he is the greatest allegorist the world has ever known. Of course there are scoffers"— she frowned— "but they are only superficial and blind— souls in whom the mystic meaning of the universe awakens no response. My father's renewal of youth has trebled his great success. He is in truth to-day America's 'noblest soul.' "

I was a little dazed to hear that the cultured were filling themselves up cheerfully with the sentiments of Moko took me aback.

Editha tore herself away from the tributes to her father's genius, and we began breakfast. She opened some of her letters; and then I was startled by a sudden cry from her. Her face was full of horror and dismay, and she said, "My father is married! Bellamy Grist has married a French woman! He has married that!!" and she tossed a photograph across the table to me.

I have never seen a lady of a more Simian type.

14: The Sculptor of Modena

Sylvanus Cobb, Jr.

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1

The Sculptor and his Model

WITHIN a stone's throw of the great Cathedral of Modena, there was an artist's studio. It was on the second floor of a large building, and its two windows were flanked by wide balconies. Within the studio, which was divided into two apartments, appeared all the appurtenances of the sculptor. In the outer apartment, which contained the implements, for modeling and numerous plaster busts, and figures in clay, and which was also used for a sort of waiting-room, sat an elderly lady engaged in looking over a portfolio of drawings. She was dressed in a very rich garb, and had the air of one much used to the upper ranks of life; but for all that she was only a serving-woman. She had a look of shrewdness about her, and ever and anon she would turn her eyes toward the screen that covered the arched doorway to the inner apartment, as if she would listen to what was going on there. Once or twice a half-mocking smile broke over her features, and when that smile passed away, she would shake her head and pat her foot, like one who has thoughts too complicated for utterance.

Within the studio there was a different group Near the centre of the room stood a marble statue of the Virgin. The rough work was all done— the drapery thrown into its required folds— the head and hands formed— the bosom worked down to its due proportions, and the face partly finished. By its side stood Zanello, the sculptor. He was a young man— perhaps thirty years of age— and he possessed a wild, dreamy beauty that was startling at the first sight. He was of medium height, and rather slender of frame, but he lacked not in a muscle, nor in anything that marks the true physical man. His features were of the most faultless symmetry, but very pale. His eyes were large and black, containing a world of power and electric light, and his brow was broad and high. His hair was black, and hung in long, flowing curls over his shoulders.

Near by the sculptor, upon a low ottoman, sat a girl— a girl who had seen some twenty summers. She was a beautiful creature, for it was her very beauty that had called her there. Her beauty was of that quiet, modest cast, with none of that voluptuousness which appears to the outer senses, but made up of spirit that looks only to the soul for appreciation. At the present moment her eyes were drooping, and the long silken lashes were traced upon the white cheeks. She was Marianna Torello, a distant relative, and a protégé of the Duke

of Modena. She was acknowledged the queen of beauty in the city, and most people who knew her declared that her equal was not to be found in the whole dukedom. She was of noble birth, but an orphan.

The Duke Antonio had engaged Zanello to make him a statue of the Virgin, and the whim had seized him to have the face copied from the lovely features of Marianna; nor was the whim very wild, either, for it were hard for an artist to create a countenance better adapted to express the soul of the Christian Mother. The duke entertained no fears in thus trusting his protégé at the artist's studio, but as a guard against scandal, he always sent her in company with Dorina, one of his wife's trusty serving- women. Once, Julian Pazzi, an acknowledged suitor for Marianna's hand, who was count, and a favorite of the duke, expressed a dislike to having the maiden go to the studio of the handsome artist, but the duke only laughed at him, and assured him that Marianna's heart was not open to such danger. But we shall see how the count looked upon it,

"Come, signor," said Marianna, in a very low tone, as she raised her eyes tremblingly to the artist's face, "you are slow with your work. The duke will not grant you many more sittings from me."

Zanello raised his chisel to the marble face, but he did not set about his work. He looked upon the living face he was to copy, and again his arm dropped to his side.

"Signora," he said, in a tone as deep and rich as the breathing of an organ, "'tis a hopeless task. Go, tell the noble duke that I cannot do his bidding."

"Cannot!"

"That was my word. I would if I could, but I cannot."

"But Antonio will be angry."

"Then so be it."

"And you cannot finish the statue?"

"I said not so. If he will send me another face, or leave me to fashion one from my own creation, I will do the work, but I cannot put your face upon my marble."

Again Marianna's eyes drooped to the floor, and she turned strangely pale. She trembled, too. till her dark ringlets shook as though the wind were playing with them.

"Then you will not want me to come here again," she said, without raising her eyes.

The sculptor started. A wild commotion moved his features for a moment, but when he spoke he was calm again.

"No— there is no need that you should come here more. I cannot do the work for which you are sent."

"I fear the duke will be very angry," said the maiden, slowly raising her eyes.

"Then let him be so," said Zanello, speaking more slowly, and in a very low, calm tone. "I will tell the truth to you, but you need not tell it to him. I would rather brave his anger than to have my own heart crushed and broken. He ought not to have sent you here."

"I am sure he meant no harm, signor; nor can I see where there is any."

"Cannot you understand me? I will speak more plainly, then. Instead of transferring your face to this senseless marble, I have allowed it to become imaged in my own soul. I dare not see you smile again."

The sculptor ceased speaking, and sank into a chair. At the end of a few moments he cast his eyes again upon his lovely companion, but he found that her head was bowed.

"Signora," he continued, with a strange sadness in his tone, "long years ago I laid my mother in the cold grave, and then I was without a friend in the world. Since then I have been a solitary child of fortune, seeking no love, and returning none. I have loved my art, and I had thought my heart could learn to love nothing more on earth; but I have been mistaken. You came to me like a spirit from Heaven. I saw you smile, heard you speak, and read the pure thoughts that dwelt in your soul. Already I love you with a passion that must henceforth leave its touch of pain upon my heart; but I dare not venture further. Go back to the duke, and tell him that I will finish the work without a model. I hope I need not ask your pardon for thus telling the truth."

Zanello drew a screen over the statue, and then turned toward the outer studio. He had moved but a few steps, however, ere he heard his name pronounced. He stopped and turned, and Marianna was looking full upon him. She was pale, and tears glistened in her eyes, but she did not tremble.

"Zanello," she said, "I, too, lost my mother long years ago, and since then I have seen little to love in the gaudy throng that has surrounded me. Few have known the feelings of my orphaned heart. Perhaps the duke ought not to have sent me here ; but it cannot be helped now. I have come— and— and you must not drive me away."

Marianna's eyes drooped again as she ceased speaking, and now she began to tremble. Zanello was not a man to resist the intoxicating flood that came pouring upon him. This drop had made his cup overrun, and without a word he clasped the maiden to his bosom. She looked up and smiled through her tears, and then laid her head upon his shoulder.

At this moment the lovers heard a movement in the outer room, and soon afterward Dorina looked in,

"Come, signora, it is time we should go," she said.

"I will be with you in a moment."

Marianna was quickly prepared, and having wiped all the tears away from her face, she turned toward the door, but before she reached it she stopped,

"I shall come again," she said.

"Yes— I will go on with the work," replied the artist.

2

The Duel.

IT WAS toward the middle of the afternoon when Zanello was left alone. The emotions that had come to his soul were too powerful for calm thought. He did not think of Marianna's noble blood, nor of the barrier that the laws placed between them. He only knew that she loved him— that she had reclined on his bosom, and that she had received his avowal of love with a happy smile. If there was a tangible form to any of his thoughts, it was the thought of another land, where there was no stern duke to interpose between him and his love, and where he could fashion him a home beneath the sunshine of peace and safety. And so for an hour he lived in the realm of his own wild dreams, sometimes sitting by the statue, and sometimes walking up and down his studio.

At length the sculptor prepared himself for a walk in the open air. He had put on his cap, and hung his light rapier to his girdle, and was upon the point of going out, when he suddenly stopped in front of the statue. He gazed upon the marble face, the features of which were just beginning to spring into life, and a new idea burst upon him. His dark eyes glowed with a deeper fire, his pale face was lighted up with a glow of new enthusiasm, and his whole frame seemed set to the strange thought that had come upon him. For a while he forgot the love- light that had found its way into his soul, for Genius was overleaping everything that belonged not to its legitimate train.

The face of Marianna Torello had passed away from that marble, and another had taken its place. Up from his own soul the sculptor had drawn a form that was to live in the white stone. Perhaps he feared that he could not copy the features of the maiden he loved, but be that as it may, the outer form had come unbidden to him, and he was resolved to use it.

Having dwelt for a long time in the thought that had so strangely come to him, Zanello started up from his deep study and prepared once more to go out. He locked the door of his studio, and having gained the street, he turned his steps toward the Secchia. He had passed on through several squares when his attention was attracted by a party of young noblemen, who were coming

toward him. He noticed that Count Pazzi was among the number, and also that their attention was directed toward himself. He would have crossed over and avoided them, but Pazzi interrupted him.

"Look ye, signor sculptor," exclaimed the count, "it appears to me that you kept Marianna Torello a long time in your studio today. By San Marco, this will not do. I shall accompany her the next time myself."

"Very well," returned Zanello; and he would have passed on, for he saw that the young man was heated with wine. But the count was not yet done and would not permit him to pass.

"I was at the ducal palace when the lady returned, not an hour since, and she had surely been in tears. Now what caused them?" he asked, in an angry tone.

"I know not the object of your question," returned Zanello; "nor do I choose to make a street talk of one like Marianna Torello. Let me pass on."

"Not yet, for by my soul you shall answer me first."

"I shall answer you no questions here upon that subject, sir count. If you respect the lady you will not make her name a byword for your companions."

"Now by the Parent of us all," cried Pazzi, drawing his sword and changing color, "you shall answer for this."

"For what?" asked Zanello, apparently unmoved.

"For your insolence, vile dog."

The sculptor was keen enough to see that the count was desperately jealous. He was aware of the young nobleman's fiery temper, and now that the heat of the wine -cup was added to it, there could be little hope of pacification.

"Sir count, I beg of you that you will respect yourself enough to avoid a street brawl, I would go quietly on my way."

"Out upon thee, dog. Draw, or I'll spit thee as I would a goose."

"Beware, or you may rush too far. Put up your sword."

"Oh, what a coward ! Take that for your insolence."

As the count spoke, he struck the sculptor a blow across the cheek with the flat of his blade, and at that the other noblemen set up a loud, derisive laugh. Zanello drew his rapier and stood upon his guard, but he did not offer to strike.

"At him," cried one of the party, at the same time slapping the count upon the shoulder, to incite him.

"Ay," added another. "He's drawn. Point the dog!"

"One moment, gentlemen," said Zanello, with a strange calmness in his tone, "This broil is none of my seeking, and even now I would go on my way in peace. Let me pass, gentlemen."

"Not until you are punished," hissed the count.

Pazzi made a lunge at the sculptor as he spake, but it was safely parried, and from that instant Zanello appeared a different man. A livid spot came upon either cheek, his eyes burned with a steady, deep light, and his muscles were set like iron.

"Beware, sir count," he uttered, as he parried the fourth stroke. "I cannot stand upon the defensive much longer."

But Pazzi heeded not the warning. He was too much blinded with passion to see that under the present circumstances the sculptor was his superior in every respect, and he continued to strike out with an utter recklessness, seeming bent only on the desire of taking the life of his antagonist.

"Signors," said Zanello, turning to the count's companions, but at the same time guarding against the blows that were furiously aimed at him, " will you not remove your friend and put a stop to this disgraceful scene? for see— the people are even now collecting."

But the young men were too much excited to do any such thing, and they only clapped their hands and urged Pazzi on.

Zanello had borne all that he could. At length he received a prick upon the shoulder, and his forbearance was gone. He advanced a step, threw off a blow that was aimed at his neck, and on the next instant his rapier had passed through the count's body. He withdrew his weapon, and after a few wild thrusts, Julian Pazzi sank upon the pavement. His friends were sobered in an instant, and they gathered about the fallen man and lifted him up ; but he was dead!

"You had better flee while there is yet opportunity, signor."

Zanello turned and saw an old man standing by his side.

" God knows that I could not help it," he uttered, as he thrust his weapon back into its sheath.

"That is plain enough to me," said the old man, "for I saw it all. But you know the laws of Modena. Death is the inevitable punishment for such a crime as this. You have slain a Modenese nobleman, and for a plebeian, that is death under any circumstances. Flee while there is yet time."

Zanello did hurry away from the spot, but he went toward his own studio. When he reached his room he began to walk nervously to and fro. His mind was the seat of strange emotions; but at length he stopped before the statue, and having thrown off the screen, he became lost in contemplating the dreamy ideal that had moved him an hour ago.

3

Condemned.

ON THE morning following the death of the Count Pazzi, Marianna Torello had prepared to go to the sculptor's studio, but before she set off, she received a summons to attend the duke. Antonio Guida, Duke of Modena, was a stern iron-willed man and about forty years of age. He ruled in the duchy with the most rigid adherence to the laws, and if he had any kind impulses, they never manifested themselves in connection with his dispensing of justice.

"Did you send for me?" asked Marianna, as she approached the duke.

Yes, my sweet child. You need not go to the sculptor's studio, to-day."

"Shall I go to-morrow?"

"No. You need go there no more."

"No more!" faintly echoed the maiden, changing color.

"No, Marianna. I have bad news for you. Shall I break it to you now?"

"Yes," tremblingly murmured the fair girl.

"You may as well hear it now as at any time. Your lover is dead."

"Dead!" repeated Marianna, with a quick cry. "Zanello dead!"

"Zanello?" uttered the duke, starting as though he had been stung. "It is the Count Pazzi who is dead."

A quick look of relief shot across the girl's features, but it was not quick enough to escape the eye of the duke. He had long been used to reading people's thoughts from their faces, and it was no difficult task for him now to read the whole of his fair ward's secret. Marianna knew that she had betrayed herself, for she hung down her head and trembled violently.

"Marianna," at length resumed the duke, "you have exposed to me a thing I could not otherwise have believed. But it has come in season to save you. I will not blame you, for perhaps I am myself to blame. I ought not to have sent you there. But you will go there no more. Zanello is in prison. It was he who killed the count."

Marianna gazed for a moment up into the face of her guardian, and then she sank back. She would nave fallen to the floor, but the duke sprang forward and caught her. She was insensible. She had passed from the pain that had seized her heart, for the shock had bereft her of all power. An attendant was summoned, and the form of the poor girl was borne away.

An hour later, and the sculptor stood before the ducal throne. He was in chains, and strongly guarded. The duke looked upon him sternly, but the artist did not shrink or even tremble.

"Zanello," said the duke, "you are charged with having slain the Count Julian Pazzi."

"He did fall at my hands, my lord; but I only defended myself," calmly replied the sculptor. "He taunted me most bitterly, and drew upon me without any provocation."

"And yet you killed him?"

"Yes, my lord."

"You know your fate, then?"

"I know the laws, my lord."

"And that they are rigid?"

"Yes."

"Then I have but to pronounce sentence. You must assuredly die."

"It is hard, my lord duke. Had I not resisted, the count would have killed me. I resisted, and now the law kills me."

"You should have escaped."

"But I am only a man."

The duke was struck by this last answer— not only by the words, but by the strange tone in which they were spoken. But he could not help the artist, for there were two laws either of which- would condemn him. One was, that in all street conflicts resulting in death, the survivor should suffer; and the other, that any plebeian who should cause the death of a patrician should pay the penalty with his life. From the former law the duke often made exceptions, but never from the latter, for even had he been inclined so to do, he would not have dared to meet the indignation of the nobility, which would have been sure to follow it.

"Your doom is fixed, signor. You will go back to you prison, and from thence to the scaffold. I hope God may have mercy on your soul."

The guard would have led the prisoner away, but he hesitated.

"My lord duke," he said, "I know there is no use in asking for my life, but yet I have a boon to beg. I would not die until I have finished the task I have already so nearly completed."

"You allude to the statue of the Virgin," said the duke, while a cloud came over his face.

"Yes."

"And do you think you will have the Signora Marianna for a model?"

Zanello changed color, for he knew by the duke's look and tone that he had discovered the secret of his heart, but he quickly threw off the perturbation.

"Nay, most noble signor, I cannot copy those features if I would. I have the ideal in my own mind, and I must give it life before I die. It shall be yours, and all it shall cost you will be the respite I need. Grant me this boon. In a week I can do it."

"But you cannot go back to your studio to finish it."

"I can have a room in the prison, and my implements may be carried thither."

The duke considered a few moments, and in the end he resolved to grant the sculptor's request. He wanted the statue, for he had set his heart upon it.

"Well," he at length said, "I will give you eight days. Will that be sufficient?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Then do your work;. and at the expiration of that time you die. I can do nothing more for you."

Antonio waved his hand as he spoke, and the sculptor was led from the hall. After he had gone, the duke sought the apartment of his ward, but he found her weeping so bitterly, that he could not find it in his heart to trouble her. He could only regret that he had ever thought of sending her to the sculptor's studio.

4

The Prison Visitor.

WITHIN A CLOSE apartment in the strong prison of Modena, the sculptor was at work. The window from which the light came was sufficiently large, but it was securely protected with stout iron bars. There was no need, however, of all this precaution, for nothing could have tempted Zanello from his work. He had finished the drapery, and the last touches had been put to the hands and breast. The face alone was now the theme of the artist's study. No one, to have seen him, would have dreamed that he was under the dread sentence of death. His every thought was upon the creation that was growing beneath his hands, and his dark eyes burned with the fire of genius alone. They betrayed no fear, ho cowering dullness.

At times he would hesitate in his work, and commence pacing the narrow room. Then he would sink down upon his stool and bury his brow in his hands. But 'twas not his death doom that busied him— 'twas the ideal he sought— the features he would breathe upon his marble, and when he had called them to mind he would spring to his work again.

Thus he had worked for several days. The face of the marble Virgin had begun to assume the garb of life, and the artist was more enthusiastic than ever. It was late in the afternoon, and Zanello was improving the last rays of light that was to be his for that day, when suddenly he was aroused by the turning of a key in the lock of his door. He did not like this, for he had been promised that no one should interrupt him except at stated times. The door was slowly opened, and the form of a monk appeared. " The visitor carefully reclosed the door.

"How now, monk," uttered the sculptor, somewhat petulantly;"have you come to shrive me?"

Without answering this question, the unbidden presence threw back the cowl, and Zanello started on seeing the beautiful features of Marianna Torello.

"Sh!" uttered the maiden, holding up her white finger. "There may be danger at hand, so speak not too loudly."

" Blessed angel," murmured Zanello, moving forward and taking her hand, and pressing it to his lips. " Has the duke let you come to

"The duke would not have sent me in this guise," interrupted Marianna. "No, no— I have stolen my way here, and I have come to set you free."

"But surely the duke will not pardon me."

"No. You must escape. This garb will disguise you. The key of your door I will leave with you, and a trusty servant will be at the outer gate to let you forth. I have braved much to accomplish this, but at length I have succeeded. O Zanello, you may yet be saved."

The sculptor sat down upon his stool, and buried his face in his hands. For a long while he sat thus, and then he arose and gazed upon the growing features of the Virgin.

"Marianna," he said at length, in a tone of sad sound, "I cannot go now. I must finish this work first. I must see it done."

"But that will be too late," urged the maiden. "If you love life, save it now."

" Ah, signora, life is not so sweet to me as it was once. You would not flee with me. "

"Would you ask me to?"

"No, no. God forbid that I should see you in danger."

"Then flee now, and when you find a safe home, I will come to you."

"O God, what sweetness of bliss do you whisper now into mine ear. You will come to me, and be ever with me, to bless and love me?

"Yes, yes," whispered the maiden, bowing her head upon the bosom of her lover. "Only flee now, and when you are safe, I will come to you."

The young sculptor struggled hard with the spirit that was thus called up within him. But at length his face grew calm, and he drew the maiden more closely to his bosom.

"Marianna," he said, "three nights in succession have I dreamed a strange dream. I thought I was upon the scaffold, and the executioner was ready to do his bloody work. Suddenly there came an angelic presence and stayed the axe, and I was free. I kneeled down to thank my preserver, and I thought 'twas my own marble Virgin that received my thanks. Thrice has that dream come. O, I must finish my work. I must see that marble as it appeared to me in my dream, and then I will flee."

"Alas, that may be too late. Let me be your preserver."

"Do not tempt me. I would rather die than give you pain, and I would rather die than live to see my work unfinished. I will hurry with it, Marianna— I will strain every nerve. If you can come to me in three days, I will have it done. The duke will yet wait five days for me. Come to me then, and I will flee. If you love me, let me do my work before I go."

"If I did not love you I should not be here," returned the maiden, struggling to keep back the tears that welled up from the fount of her deep feelings. "But I will try to be here in three days from now. Will you promise to flee then?"

"Yes, Marianna, I will promise you that."

"Then God save you till that time. I think I can come then."

For a few moments longer those two bosoms beat together, and then Marianna Torello drew the dark cowl up over her head, and glided away from the prison-room.

5

The Magic of the Marble Virgin.

With the sculptor, the hours of day-light passed almost unheeded by. He worked upon his statue with unceasing diligence, and on the morning from the third day from the visit of Marianna, it was all done save a few finishing strokes that were needed to give it the full blush of life. The hours passed on, and the marble features began to throw off the last vestiges of coldness and assume warm tints of thought and soul. Zanello's dinner was brought to him, but he did not touch it. The afternoon was passed half away, and the ideal had become real. The sculptor stepped back from his work, and with arms folded across his breast, he gazed upon it. A while he stood thus, and then he sank back upon his stool and wept.

An hour later, and the artist was startled by hearing heavy footsteps in the corridor outside his door. With a quick movement he drew the green screen over the statue. Hardly had he done this, when the door was opened, and the duke entered alone. Zanello was not prepared for this, but yet he met the noble signor calmly.

"Well, Zanello, I have come to see how you progressed with your work. You have given o'er the task for to-day, it seems."

"Yes, my lord. The light is failing me, and I am weary."

"But I will see how much you have accomplished,"

Not now, my lord. Come here at this hour to-morrow, and you shall see it."

"Yes, and I must see it now, too. Be not too jealous of your art, Zanello, for you will not live long to profit by it. Remove the screen and let me see how looks our marble Virgin."

"Not now, my lord duke," persisted the sculptor, with considerable agitation. "Grant me until to-morrow. To-morrow at this hour you may see it, for then it shall be yours. It is mine now."

But the duke was not to be put off thus. He had come to see the statue, and he was not a man to be balked of his purpose.

"You must excuse me," he said, as he moved toward the statue.

Under other circumstances Zanello would have pushed the intruder back, but he dared not do it now. He only put forth his hand with a convulsive movement as he saw the duke pull the screen from the statue.

At this moment the door of the room was again opened, and the lady Marianna, disguised as before, entered. She closed the door carefully after her, and then for the first time she saw the duke.

"Aha! whom have we here?" uttered Antonio.

Zanello was upon the point of assuring the duke that it was only a monk who had come to shrive him. but the maiden exposed herself before he could speak. The sight of her stern guardian operated .so powerfully upon her that she uttered a quick cry, and she trembled so violently that the cowl fell back from her face.

"Marianna!" uttered the duke, as he recognized the beautiful features of his ward. "Zanello, what means this? You have been deceiving me. This, then, is the secret of the respite you asked. Now, by my soul, you shall die this very night!"

This startled the maiden back to her senses. She sprang forward, and kneeling at the feet of the duke, she clasped her hands together.

"No, no, my good lord," she cried, "O, he is not to blame for this. It is I— I who have done it all. Pardon, pardon, for Zanello !"

The duke was for a few moments silent. Dark clouds sweep across his face, and wild emotions raged in his bosom. He loved the gentle girl who knelt at his feet, and he was more grieved than angry now that he found the sculptor likely to be innocent of the meeting.

"Marianna," he at length said, "why are you here?"

"I came to liberate Zanello."

"You love him, then."

"Yes."

The duke turned away, and as he did so his eyes for the first time fell upon the marble features he had uncovered. He started back as he saw them, and for the time the sculptor seemed forgotten. It was a face of marvelous beauty that dwelt there upon that marble statue and the beauty was as strange as it was marvelous. It was a maternal beauty— a soft, shining, heavenly countenance— full of soul and holy love. The hands were clasped upon the

swelling bosom, and the eyes were turned toward Heaven. The duke gazed and gazed, and he placed his hands upon his brow and then gazed again. All signs of conflict were gone from his face, and in the stead thereof there was a radiant light breaking over his features. His own hands were slowly folded upon his bosom, even as were the marble hands upon which he gazed, and his eyes gradually turned heavenward. At length he turned toward the sculptor.

"Zanello," he said, in a hushed whisper, " your work is finished."

"Yes, my lord," returned the artist, strangely puzzled by the duke's manner.

Even Marianna had for the moment forgotten the startling scene that had just passed.

"Where is your model for that face?" asked Antonio in the same low whisper.

"In my own heart, most noble duke."

"But how came it there ? "

"I have carried it there from earliest childhood. Pardon me, my lord, for 'twas no sacrilege to put those features upon the Virgin Mother. A more holy countenance never shone on earth than the one I have imagined there."

"But who— who wore that countenance?"

"It was my mother ! "

The duke of Modena sank down upon the sculptor's stool, and though he gazed still upon the statue, yet it was evident that his thoughts were far away.

"Zanello," he said, after a long silence, "tell me more of this. Tell me what you know of that mother, for I, too, remember a face like that."

The sculptor was startled, for as he now gazed upon the duke's countenance a strange sensation came over him.

"My lord duke,'' he said, "I have but a very simple tale to tell. The first that I remember of life was in Dalmatia. In a quiet cot upon the banks of the Cherca I lived all alone with my mother. She came from some place in Italy to escape religious persecution. My father was killed. I was her youngest child, and with me, then an infant, she fled. One other child, a boy of twelve years, she left behind, for he was at Rome with an uncle, and she had to go without him. When I was fifteen years old my mother died. I saw her buried, and then I came to Italy to study. My mother had advised me not to come hither, but I knew not why I should fear."

"And your mother's name ? "

"I only knew that it was Lucretia. She would never tell me more, for she said my name would only be a curse to me."

"Alas, poor Lucretia!" murmured the duke, as he bowed his head. "In one short month after she fled, the proscription was taken from her house, and she

was searched for in vain. Zanello, your father did die— he suffered under the ban of proscription, but his memory has been cleared from all stain."

"And you knew my mother?" said the sculptor, tremblingly.

"Ay, Zanello, for she was my mother, too. In my own prison have I found my brother!"

The duke stepped forward as he spoke, and placed his arms about the sculptor's neck. Zanello would not have made the first demonstration, but now that he found that his brother loved him, he gave his heart up to the emotions that had found a place in his soul. No doubt existed of the reality of what he had heard, for it all came in heaven-tones upon his ears.

Marianna realized the whole in a moment, and as she leaned up against the window-casing for support, her small white hands were clasped in hopeful prayer.

"O, how well do I remember those sainted features," murmured the duke, as he gazed again upon the marble face, but with his hand still upon his brother's shoulder. "I can see my mother, as I left her on the morning of my departure for Rome. I kissed her when she blessed me, and how I kissed my infant brother that lay upon her bosom. I never saw her again, and when I grew up my heart grew cold and severe. But it's warmer now, for I am not alone on earth. Our father, Zanello, was the lawful duke of Modena, and when I came of age I followed to the office. Come, come, this prison is no place for you."

"And can you save me ? "

" Save you? Yes, The law cannot harm you now, for you are one of the noblest patricians in Modena. By my faith, that marble Virgin has a wondrous magic in it. It has saved your life, given you a noble station, and bestowed upon me a dearly loved brother."

"And has it done nothing for me whispered Marianna, moving to the duke's side and laying her hand beseechingly upon his shoulder.

"For you, Marianna?"

"Ay, my good lord. You should not keep all the charm of the magic Virgin to yourself."

The maiden hung down her head as she ceased speaking, and Antonio felt a warm tear fall upon his hand.

"Ah, my sweet ward," uttered the duke, with a light smile, " I fear that your wickedness will triumph after all. You have trampled upon my authority— sought to throw off my protection— attempted to set my prison-house at naught, now you would have me be kind to you. I have a great notion to put you away from me. Zanello, will you take her?"

The duke pushed the maiden toward his brother as he said this, and from the smile that dwelt upon his countenance the lovers knew that there was no more barrier to their love. The sculptor caught Marianna to his bosom, and when she looked up through her happy tears, she murmured:

"Ah, Zanello, your dream was true, after all."

There was wonder and excitement in Modena when it was known that the youngest son of the dead duke was returned to the home of his birth, and hundreds who came to gaze upon the marble Virgin remembered well the loved features of the long lost duchess. Zanello found friends on all hands, and even the relations of Julian Pazzi came to him and forgave him, for they knew that their kinsman had been all to blame.

There was a marriage ceremony in the ducal palace, and when it was concluded, the duke kissed the blushing bride, and then turning to Zanello, he said:

"Now, signor sculptor, you have a truant in your own keeping, and I advise you not to suffer her to show her face to any other artist for a model. There's witchery in the business."

"It's a marvelous pleasing witchery, at all events," returned Zanello, as he drew his beautiful bride more closely to his side, and looked lovingly into her radiant face.

Marianna only smiled in reply. She was to happy to speak.

The marble Virgin is still in Modena. It stands by itself in the chapel of the ducal palace, and the old Benedictine who attends there loves to point it out to visitors, and relate the strange circumstances connected with its history.

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15: The Night of Power

Richard Dehan

(Clotilde Graves, 1863-1932)

In: *The Cost of Wings and other Stories*, 1914

In Two Parts

i

THE Doctor, stepping softly forth from the sick-room, paused for a brief confidential parley with the print-gowned, white-capped hospital nurse, who had followed him. That functionary, gliding from his side, evanished, with the falling of a curtain-sheet soaked in disinfectant and the closing of a door, into the Blue-Beard chamber beyond, leaving the man of medicine free to pursue his portly way downstairs.

At the bottom of the second flight one of the hotel servants stopped him with a respectful murmur and a salver with a card upon it; and the Doctor, reading the name thereon by the help of a pair of gold-rimmed glasses, inclined his neatly-shaved, gray-blue chin toward the mourning diamond discreetly twinkling amid the billows of black satin that rolled into the bosom of his capacious waistcoat, saying:

"The wife of my patient upstairs? Certainly; I will see the lady at once. Which way?"

His responsible, square-toed, patent-leather boots had not much farther to carry him. The lady and her maid were waiting in a sitting-room upon the next landing. Under the fashionable physician's heavy yellow eyelids— livery eyelids, if one might dare to hint so— lay the faculty of keen observation. He noticed, in the moment of recovery from a justly-celebrated bow, that the maid was in tears, and the mistress was not.

He presupposed that he had the pleasure of addressing Mrs. Rosval. Mrs. Rosval answered that he had. Then the maid uttered a sob like the popping of a soda-water cork, and Mrs. Rosval said:

"Matilda, be quiet!"

She was a woman of supple figure and of medium height. She appeared to be elegantly dressed, though no one garment that she wore asserted itself as having been expensive. The eyes that looked at the Doctor through her thick black veil struck him as being unnaturally brilliant. This fact, together with the composure of her voice and manner, confirmed him in the belief that the woman was in a highly-strung condition of emotional excitement. He was mentally evolving a little prescription— with bromide in it, to be taken every three hours— when she lifted her hands and unpinned the veil. Then the

Doctor looked in the face of a woman who was as perfectly calm, cool, and composed as he was himself. Even more so because the revelation rather surprised him.

She addressed him in clear, quiet tones:

"A telegraphic message was delivered to me this morning—"

"At Mirkwood Park, near Bradford," the Doctor unconsciously quoted aloud from the card he still held between his plump white thumb and forefinger.

"It purported to come from the proprietor of this hotel. It said that Mr.— that my husband was dangerously ill— that my presence was urgently needed." Mrs. Rosval's lips— delicately chiseled lips, but totally devoid of color— shaped themselves into something that might have been a smile. And as the maid, who nursed a dressing-bag in the background, at this juncture emitted a sniff, the mistress glanced again over her shoulder, and said, with a slight accent of weariness or contempt, or both together: "Really, Matilda, there is no need for that!"

The irrefragable Doctor had gauged the shallow depths of the woman's nature by this time. She was merely a polished and singularly adamantine specimen of the unfeeling wife. He allowed a tinge of rebuke to color the tone of his explanation.

"The proprietor acted upon my— ah— advice. The condition of my patient may be truthfully described as— er— dangerous. The illness is— in fact— typhoid fever. And your husband has it in a bad form. There are complications which—"

The Doctor stopped short. For Mrs. Rosval was not listening. She was crumpling a piece of pinkish paper into a ball— probably the telegram to which she had alluded— and pondering. Then she leveled those strangely brilliant, narrow-lidded eyes of hers point-blank at the Doctor, and asked: "Am I to understand that Mr. Rosval has nothing to do with— my being sent for?"

The Doctor conveyed the information that Mr. Rosval had not prompted the step. Mr. Rosval had been— since the third day following on the— ah— development of the illness— ringing the changes between delirium and—ah— coma. For— as the Doctor had already said— there were complications—

Mrs. Rosval neatly stopped the ball, for the second time.

"How did you know, if *he* did not tell you, that there was a Mrs. Rosval? How did you get at my address?"

The Doctor, swelling with the indignity of being supposed to have got at anybody's address, explained that the proprietor of the hotel, having some faint inkling that Mr. Rosval belonged to the class of landed gentleman, had looked up the name in *Burke*.

The sharp suspicion faded out of Mrs. Rosval's eyes as she listened. It was a perfectly credible, perfectly simple explanation. She tossed the crumpled telegram into the fire— which devoured it at a gulp— and began to pull off her gloves. That was her way of intimating that she accepted the situation. Then she rang the bell. The decorous waiter appeared, and she gave the man a quiet order, handing him some loose silver and a slip of paper, upon which she had penciled a few words.

"A cab is waiting at the door. Pay the driver and send him away. A person who is— not quite a gentleman— is waiting in the vestibule. Say to him that Mrs. Rosval is satisfied, and there is no need to wait. Give him that paper at the same moment, or he will not believe you!" As the waiter vanished she turned to the Doctor with the faintest flicker of a smile upon her sensitive pale lips. "I thought it wisest to keep the cab, in case I required to leave this place hurriedly," said Mrs. Rosval. "The man waiting downstairs is a detective from a well-known Agency. I judged it best to enlist his services—he would have proved useful supposing this business of the telegram to have been a Trap."

The Doctor spread his large white hands, danglingly, like a seal's flappers.

"A trap?" he repeated, helplessly. "My dear madam! You suspected that some designing person or persons unknown might— possibly use your husband's name, invent a story of his illness as a ruse to— entrap you?"

"I suspected," returned Mrs. Rosval, "no unknown person. The inventor of the ruse would have been my husband. We separated some years ago by mutual consent. At least, I refused to live with him any longer, and he— knowing what grounds I had for the refusal— was obliged to submit. But he resented my action in the matter." Mrs. Rosval raised her delicate dark eyebrows with weary disdain, and imparted to her shoulders a mute eloquence of contempt which is not the prerogative of an English-bred woman. "And he has, more than once, had recourse to what, for want of a better word, I call Traps. That is all. Matilda," she addressed the tearful maid, "dry your eyes and tell the people downstairs that I engage this suite of rooms. Two bedrooms, a bathroom, and sitting-room at ten guineas a week, I think they said? Horribly expensive, but it cannot be helped. And now, Doctor"— she turned again to the Doctor— "when do you wish me to see your patient? At once? It shall be at once if you say so! I am completely in your hands!"

The Doctor, a little staggered by the deftness of his patient's wife in transferring the onus of the situation from her shoulders to his own, absolutely prohibited any suggestion of her entering the sick-room until refreshed and rested. Mrs. Rosval acquiesced, with a repetition of that compromising statement about being completely in his hands— and the Doctor took his

leave, promising to return later that evening. She gave him her cool fingers, and they parted. He had no sooner reached the door than she called him back.

"I only wanted to ask— Of course, you have a library. Does the catalogue of your library include a file of the *Daily Telegraph*?" It did, the Doctor admitted. File in question extending some twelve years back.

"Three will do," said Mrs. Rosval, warming one slender arched foot upon the fender. "Next time you are in want of a little light reading, look in the Law Intelligence, Divorce Division, month of February, 1899, where you will find a case: 'Ffrench *v.* Ffrench; Rosval cited.' The details will explain a good deal that may appear puzzling to you with regard to the strained relations between Mr. Rosval and myself. Though doctors never allow themselves to be puzzled, do they? *Au revoir!*"

ii

THE DOCTOR had had an unusually busy day of it. But he curtailed his after-dinner nap in order to glance through the Law Intelligence records of the month of February, 1899. There was much in the case to which Mrs. Rosval had referred that went far toward justifying the "strained relations" she had hinted at. And it is the duty of the medical profession to rally at the war-cry of the outraged Proprieties. But, when alone and unobserved, doctors have many points in common with mere men. And as this Doctor stepped into his brougham he said, "Women are very hard! In all human probability the man was innocent." He said again, "Women are hard!" as he creaked up the hotel staircase.

He found her in the sick-room. She had changed her dress for something that gave out no assertive silken rustle in answer to her movements, something that draped the charming contour of her figure— she had a charming figure— with soft, quiet folds, like the wings of a dun hawkmoth. That fell composure still walled her in as with ramparts of steel. She held the bed-curtain back as the Doctor stooped over the livid, discolored face upon the pillow. She took a linen cloth from the nurse, and deftly, lightly wiped away the froth and mucus that had gathered about the cracked and bleeding lips. But the hand that rendered these offices was as steady as though it had been carved out of white marble.

Disturbed from his lethargy by the invasion of candlelight upon his haggard eyelids and the Doctor's bass murmur in his ear, the sick man began to talk a little. For the most part it was mere gabble, but some sentences were plain. He moaned piteously for a barber, because he was unshaven. Rosval had always been foolishly vain of his personal appearance. And he damned the one glass

of bad water, to the imbibition of which he attributed his disease, promising, if he got well, never to drink any more. To do him credit, he had never been addicted to that particular form of liquid refreshment. The Doctor inferred as much from his diagnosis— and from the faint sarcastic quiver of Mrs. Rosval's white lips. Then the tongue of the man ceased wagging— but the burning head began to thresh to and fro upon the pillow, and the claw-like hands to scratch at the bed-clothes in a fresh access of the maddening enteric irritation. Alleviating measures proved as effective as alleviating measures generally do prove; the head went on rolling, and the crooked talons continued to tear. All at once they were quiet. Mrs. Rosval had laid her hand upon the clammy forehead— about as tenderly, to all appearance, as she would have laid it upon the back of a chair. And the man was still. She placed the other hand beside the first— the drawn lines about the nostrils relaxed, the clenched teeth parted, the breast rose and fell with the indrawing and outgoing of a sigh of relief. And the man slept. So soundly that she moved from him presently, without disturbing him, and passed into the room adjoining, where the Doctor and the nurse were holding a whispered confabulation.

There would be no need to send in another professional attendant, the nurse said, now that the patient's wife had arrived. She possessed a remarkable ability for nursing, and extraordinary self-command. She shrank from nothing— not even the most repugnant duties of the sick-chamber. The nurse had met in her time with ladies who took things coolly; but this lady really surprised her.

The Doctor was in the act of shaking his head— not from side to side, but up and down— a gesture which expressed indulgent tolerance of the nurse's surprise while it repudiated the notion of his entertaining any on his own account— when he jumped. For a calm, quiet voice at his elbow said:

"You told me that Mr. Rosval was dangerously ill. Is he dying?"

The nurse had vanished into the carbolic-laden atmosphere of the Chamber of Horrors.

"My dear madam, your husband is in the Hands—" So the Doctor was beginning, when the obvious inappropriateness of the stereotyped formula stopped him short. Then he admitted that the condition of the man in the other room was very precarious. That he could not, when not in *articulo mortis*, be said to be dying— but that, toward the small hours of the morning, he might attain to a pitch of prostration closely allied to that condition. And that nothing could be done for him but to give him milk and medicine regularly, and— The Doctor would have ended "and trust in Providence," but for obvious reasons he thought better of it. Then he went away, feeling quite

certain in his own mind that Mrs. Rosval would be a widow before twenty-four hours were over.

That lady, meanwhile, returning to the sick-room, had persuaded the fagged nurse to go and lie down. She understood how to do all that was necessary, she whispered, and would call the attendant if any change occurred. Then she sat down at the foot of the bed, and prepared to keep her vigil with unshaken fortitude. The sleeping woman in the next room breathed heavily, the sounds of rolling wheels and jarring voices grew less and less— then all fell quiet. About three hours before the dawn the sleeper awakened. The hollow eyes no longer turned on her with the blind, glassy stare of delirium. There was reason in Rosval's look, and memory.

He seemed to beckon, and she came near. She had to stoop to catch the moaning whisper that asked: "How— did you— come here?"

She answered steadily, "They sent for me."

"They'd not have— if *I* had known!" Rosval gasped.

"If I annoy you," said Mrs. Rosval, with icy tolerance, "I can go!" She turned, meaning to call the nurse; but a claw-like hand went weakly out and caught at her skirts. The grasp was no stronger than that of a newborn child, but, just for that it *was* so feeble, it held her.

"You'll not go! Three years— you've treated me— like a leper! Never would— listen to what I'd got to say. But now ... I— tell you, she— sat on— my knee and— kissed me! Before I knew it— and then— the husband came in! A plant, by Gad!"

Mrs. Rosval said, "You must not talk. The Doctor says you are not to talk," and busied herself with the bottles and glasses that occupied a little stand near the bedside.

Rosval condemned the Doctor. Mrs. Rosval measured out his medicine, raised his head with professional skill, and offered him the glass. He clenched his teeth, and defied her with gaunt eyes across the brim.

"No! No milk— no doctor's stuff. I've been going to the devil— for three years past," proclaimed the sinner, feebly. "Why not go— at once— and have done with it?" Then he fell back heavily on the pillow.

Mrs. Rosval summoned the nurse. The nurse could do nothing. For the moribund was obdurate, and every fresh manifestation of obduracy drove not one, but half a gross of nails into his coffin. That casket was fast progressing toward completion, when Mrs. Rosval conceived a desperate idea. The execution of it cost her a severe struggle. Stooping down, she whispered to the sinking man:

"Jack!"

His faded eyes rolled in their sunken sockets until they rested on her. He said with difficulty:

"Well?"

"What will make you take it?"

Something like a gleam of cunning came into the face. The answer came:

"Kiss me!"

She battled with herself for a moment silently, and then, bending closer, touched his forehead with her lips.

"That isn't all! You must say: '*I forgive you!*'"

"I can't!"

"All— right, then!"

Silence ensued. The angles of the features were growing pinched and sharp; a bluish shade was creeping about the mouth. She cast a glance of scorn at her own reflection, caught in a mirror that hung against the opposite wall, and said the words:

"I forgive you! Isn't that enough?"

"Not quite. '*I love you— and—*' "

The voice was getting very faint.

"I love you— dear— and—"

"And '*I take you back!*' "

"I take you back." Her iron fortitude was broken. She said it with a sob, and gathered the weak head to her bosom, being the kind of woman who does not do things by halves.

A MONTH LATER the Doctor received a check. It was a handsome check, enclosed with the thanks and compliments of Mr. and Mrs. Rosval, on leaving London.

"Carried him off with her into the country," said the Doctor, tapping his teeth with a paper-knife as he closed the volume of the *Daily Telegraph* which contained the case "Ffrench *v.* Ffrench; Rosval cited." "In other words, taken him back. And in all human probability the man was guilty. Women are very weak!"

16: The Laughing Thing

G. G. Pendarves

Gladys Gordon Trenery, 1885-1938
Weird Tales, May 1929

"VERY WELL, Mr. Drewe! I'll sign the agreement, though no one but you would drive such a devil's bargain."

The speaker's tall, emaciated body vibrated with indignation, and his strange light eyes blazed like incandescent lamps. There was something of the brooding menace of the gray sea in the latter, and a note in his voice reminded me of the sullen mutter of the wind before a storm. A little shiver of apprehension ran through me as I turned from him to my brother-in-law, Jason Drewe.

Nothing could have been more utterly and infuriatingly complacent than the latter, who was leaning back in the most comfortable chair my office afforded, with an expensive cigar in his mouth, his big frame clad in the smartest of light tweeds, and an orchid in his buttonhole. Jason was an extremely wealthy man, young enough to enjoy his money, and with a son to inherit his millions one day.

The loss of Mavis, his wife, had been more of an annoyance than a grief to him; he felt that she had died merely to make things awkward for him— in fact, he added her death to the many grievances he treasured up against her. I knew that if there is such a thing as a broken heart; he broke my sister's, and I hated him for it. I would have cut off all intercourse with him, only that I had promised Mavis to keep an eye on the boy, and counteract his father's influence as far as possible.

Jason knew nothing of this; he believed I hung on to him for the sake of his wealth and twitted me with it quite openly, in spite of the fact that I was never indebted to him for a single dime, and would have cleaned the streets, or sold "hot dogs" rather than owe him a penny.

It seemed absurd to pity him, especially at this moment of his triumph, when he had succeeded in getting the land he wanted at the price he wanted, and was sitting there before me as pink and pleased as a prize baby after its bottle.

Eldred Werne, whom Jason had just cornered so successfully, was the one whom most people would have pitied. But I had only admiration for anyone as determined and strong of soul as Werne. Poor and desperately ill though he was, he was not an object for pity.

As junior partner in the firm of Baxter and Baxter, real estate agents, I was present to witness the signatures and conclude the deal between Werne and

Jason; and I wished a thousand times that Baxter and Baxter had never had this affair entrusted to them. It was a sordid, despicable business altogether.

"I'll sign," repeated Werne, drawing his chair closer to my desk, and taking up the parchments in his thin, blue-veined hands. "The land shall be yours at your own price— for the present!"

Anger and instant suspicion showed in Jason's small, heavy lidded eyes. "What the devil do you mean?" he said. "If you sign these papers the land is mine, and there's no power on earth can make me pay more for it than the sum set down there in black and white."

"I wasn't thinking of money." Werne's voice was strangely quiet and yet so full of menace that again I felt every nerve in my body thrill to it. "I am sure you will never pay more in money."

"You're right— dead right, Werne," Jason's resonant voice echoed through the room.

"And yet— I think you will pay more in the end. Yes, in the end you will pay more, Mr. Drewe."

Jason turned to me blustering and furious. "Aren't these deeds water-tight? What does he mean ? If there is any flaw in these agreements I'll stamp you and your fool firm out of existence!"

Before I could reply, Werne began to laugh. He sat there and laughed long and dreadfully, the bright color staining his thin cheeks, his gray eyes brilliant and malicious. He laughed until the cough seized him, and he leant back at last utterly exhausted, an ominous stain on the handkerchief he pressed to his lips.

"Let me relieve your natural anxiety, Mr. Drewe," he said at last, his hoarse voice still shaken with mirth. "You will pay more, but not in money! Not in any material sense at all."

"What in the name of common sense do you mean?" growled Jason.

"There is nothing common at all in the sense of which I speak. It is very uncommon indeed! I refer to payments which have no connection with money— nothing which can be reckoned in dollars and cents."

Jason looked uncertain whether to call police protection or medical aid, and he watched Werne narrowly as the latter signed the documents. When the signatures were completed, Eldred Werne got to his feet and stood looking down at Jason— a long, strange, deep look, as if he meant to learn the other's every feature off by heart. Behind Werne's eyes once more a sudden terrifying flame of laughter danced— flickered— and was gone!

"You don't fear any payment that will not reduce your bank account, then?"

"What other payment is there?" asked Jason in genuine surprise.

"You're wonderful!" said Werne. "So complete a product of your age and kind. So logical and limited and— excuse me — so thoroughly stupid!"

Jason's fresh-colored face turned a deep purple. "If you were not a sick man—" he began.

"And one, moreover, whom you have thoroughly and satisfactorily fleeced," interpolated Werne.

"I should resent your remarks," continued Jason pompously. "As it is, I see no use in prolonging this conversation."

"Stay!" cried Werne, as Jason put on his fur coat and prepared to depart. "It's only fair to warn you that if I die out there in Denver City, I shall come back again! I shall be in a better position then, without this wretched body of mine. I shall come back— to make you pay— a more satisfactory price for my Tareytown acres."

Jason stared, standing in the doorway with one plump well-manicured hand on the door-knob, looking like a great shaggy ox in his fur coat, and with that air of stupid bewilderment on his broad face.

"Wha-a-a-at?" he stammered. Then, as the other's meaning slowly dawned on him, he leaned up against the door and showed every tooth in his head in a perfect bellow of mirth.

"Are you threatening to haunt me?" he choked, the veins on his forehead swelling dangerously. "Well, my good fellow, if it gives you any comfort to imagine that, don't let me discourage your little idea. You'll be welcome at Tareytown any old time! The Tareytown specter, eh? It'll give quite an air to the place! What kind of payment will you want— moonshine, eh?" Jason almost burst with the humor of this remark. "Moonshine and ghosts! Seems the right sort of mixture!"

With a last fatuous chuckle, Jason opened the door; and, through the window, I saw him get into his new coupé and drive off, his face still creased in enjoyment of his last sally.

"The descent of man," murmured Werne, half to himself. "There's no doubt that Jason Drewe has descended a considerable way from the apes! The fool— the blind, besotted fool!"

ii

IT WAS a perfect day in the late autumn of that same year, when, for the first time, I saw the Tareytown estate.

I dismissed my taxi at the huge stone gateway, and walked slowly up through the woods. After the hectic rush and noise of New York, the golden

stillness around me was deeply satisfying; and I thought of poor Eldred Werne, who would never know the beauty and healing peace of this place again.

I had seen the notice of his death in Denver City, only a month after he had signed away his rights to these lovely Tareytown woods, and I had thought very often since of the lonely bitterness which must have clouded his last days.

Glimpses of the blue, shining Hudson shone between the trees, and beyond, the flaming russet of the Palisades. On all sides the country stretched out to dim, misty horizons for which Werne's dying eyes must have longed in his exile.

Then, quite suddenly, a chill passed over me. I became aware of the ominous and unusual stillness of the brooding woods. Neither bird nor squirrel darted to and fro among the leaves and branches— not even a fly buzzed about in the hazy sunshine.

I looked around in gathering apprehension. What was it that began to oppress me more and more ? Why did the tall trees seem to be listening?— why did I have the impulse to look over my shoulder?— why did my heart thump and my hands chill suddenly?

With a great effort I restrained myself from breaking into a run, as I continued upward toward the house.

The path doubled back on itself across and across the shoulder of the hill on which the house, Red Gables, was built; and it was fully ten minutes before I arrived breathless in sight of its red roof and high old-fashioned chimney-stack.

In a corner of its wide porch, I caught a glimpse of a boy's figure and let out a loud halloo, glad of an excuse to break the queer, unnatural silence. There was an answering hail, and my nephew, Tony, came running down the path to meet me.

"Hello, Uncle John! I was waiting for you! Did you walk up through the woods—alone?"

The boy's voice held an awed note, which was emphasized by the look of fear in his dark eyes. He was only eight years old, and exactly like his mother. Thank heaven, there was no trace of Jason's complacent materialism in his son... mind and body, Tony was an utterly different type.

I loved the boy, and a real friendship had developed between us, despite the disparity of our years. He was curiously sensitive and mature for his age, and it was a great thing for a bachelor like myself to have a child make a little tin god of me, as Tony did.

"And why not walk alone through the woods?" I demanded, looking down at him as he rubbed his head against my arm like some friendly colt.

"I wouldn't," he replied simply.

"Why not, old man? There aren't any wolves or bears or even Indians left here, are there?"

"Don't laugh, Uncle." The boy's voice sank to a whisper. "There isn't time to tell you now, but there's something in those woods. Something you can't see—that—that is waiting!"

I stared at the boy, and once again the cold chill I had experienced during my walk up to the house crept over me.

"Look here, Tony," I began. "You mustn't get—"

"There is—there is, I tell you!" He was passionately in earnest. "Something that laughs—something that is waiting!"

"Laughs— waiting!" I echoed feebly.

"You'll hear it yourself," he answered. "Then you'll know. Father won't let me speak about it to him, and says if I'd play games instead of reading books, I'd only hear and see half what I do now."

"About as much as he hears and sees," I murmured to myself.

"I am sure Father hears it too, only he won't say so," continued Tony. "But I've noticed one thing— he won't let anyone knock at the doors. The servants even go into his study without knocking, and he was always so— so—"

"Exactly!" I said dryly; "I understand."

The small hand in mine gave a little warning pressure, and I saw Jason Drewe's big frame and massive head loom up in the comparative dimness of the interior, as Tony and I reached the entrance door of Red Gables.

"Well, John!" boomed my host, as he rose from the depths of a vast chair and came forward, cigar in hand. "Made your fortune yet?"

It was the form of greeting he invariably gave me; for he was that irritating type of man who uses a limited number of favorite witticisms and sticks to them persistently, in season and out of season.

Today, however, his complacent heartiness was obviously an effort to him, and I was quite startled by the change in his appearance. He seemed conscious of it himself, but there was a certain bravado in the sunken eyes he turned on me, which defied me to remark on his ill looks.

I was certainly shocked to notice how much thinner he was, how gray his skin, and how hunted and restless were his eyes, as he kept glancing from side to side with a quick upward jerk of his big head, as though he were listening for some expected and unwelcome summons. He motioned me to a chair and poured out drinks with a fumbling sort of touch, which further indicated the change in him since I last saw him in the office of Baxter and Baxter.

Tony curled up at my side on the arm of my easy-chair, as quiet as a dormouse, taking no part in the conversation, but his precocious intelligence enabled him to follow the drift of it; that I could swear to. He annoyed his

father, this silent observant child, and in the middle of a discussion Jason turned irritably to the boy.

"Why don't you go off and amuse yourself out of doors like any other boy of your age? You sit round the house like a little lap-dog and waste your time with books— always mooning about like someone in a dream! Just like your mother—just like her," he finished in an exasperated mutter.

When we were alone, Jason turned to me with a frown. "More like a girl than a boy!" he commented bitterly. "About as much pep as a soft drink! What's the use of building up a business and making a future for him, when he'll let it all slip through his fingers later on?"

He went on talking rather loudly and quickly on the subject, with no help at all from me, and it struck me he was talking in order to defeat his own clamorous unpleasant thoughts; working himself up into a pretense of anger to make the blood run more hot and swift in his veins.

As far as he was able, within the limited scope of his primitive nature, Jason loved the boy, and every hope and ambition he cherished was centered round Tony, and Tony's future.

I just let him run on. and speculated with increasing bewilderment on the cause of my brother-in-law's obvious uneasiness of soul. It must be something tremendous to have shaken his colossal egotism, I argued to myself, and moreover it was something he was desperately anxious to hide— some unacknowledged fear which had pricked and wounded him deep beneath his tough skin.

"I'm not satisfied with that school of his— not at all satisfied! " he went on. "I ask you now, what's the use of filling a kid's head with all that imaginary stuff when he's got to live in a world of Jews and politicians and grafters? How's he going to grind his own when his darned school has exchanged it for a silver butter knife? How's he going—"

He broke off with a queer strangled groan as a sudden clamorous knocking sounded—a loud tattoo like the sound of war-drums through the quiet house. The big sunshiny room darkened suddenly and a puff of wind from an open window at my side breathed an icy chill on my cheek.

The horror I had recently experienced in the woods swept over me again, and I saw Jason's face set in a mask of fear and loathing. Silence held us bound for a perceptible moment, and in the quiet a loud, echoing laugh rang out.

It sounded as though someone were standing just outside the house, and I had a vivid mental image of a figure convulsed and rocking with mirth. But this figure of my imagination did not move me to laughter myself, although as a rule nothing is more contagious than laughter— but not this— not this hateful mirth!

I dashed to the window and looked out; then, making for the door in blind haste, I stumbled out on the porch and ran round the house in a queer frenzy of desire to learn who —or what— had stood there laughing... laughing... laughing.

I only caught a glimpse of frightened faces in the servants' quarters at the back of the house as I dashed past, and saw windows and doors being hastily slammed.

When I got back to the living room again Jason was gone, and I sat down breathless, and shaken to the very soul. I had stumbled on to the secret— or part of it— with a vengeance; and I sat with my unlit pipe in my mouth for the better part of an hour, until the first overwhelming horror of the episode had faded a little.

Jason came in just as I was thinking of going up to my room to change for dinner, and any idea I might have entertained of asking him for explanations was foiled by the extraordinary change in him.

He was his old self again. Large, pink, and prosperous, he breezed into the room and stood with his hands in his pockets, grinning down at me from his massive six feet odd. If there was something defiant in the gleam of his blue eye, if his voice was harsh and his grin a trifle too wide, it needed someone who knew him as well as I did to detect it. I never liked or admired him as much as I did at that moment; and the determination came to me, to stand by him in this trouble of his, to stay and fight it out. and give what help I could to him and the boy.

I am not a superstitious man, nor counted credulous by my friends or enemies. But here was something inexplicably evil which brooded over the lonely woods of Tareytown like some dark-winged genie.

I went slowly and thoughtfully up to my room, my mind heavy with doubt and perplexity, and as the night wore on and darkness closed in about the house, so did my mind grow darker and more fearful.

iii

"WELL, SOAMES! Rather a change from your roof-garden in New York— eh? How do you like it here ?"

The old gardener folded his gnarled hands one over the other on the handle of his spade, and shook his head slowly from side to side.

"It was an unlucky day for the master when he came to Tareytown, sir— an unlucky day!"

"How's that? Won't your plants grow for you?"

"You know, sir! I see by your face that you know already!"

"I must confess there's something a bit depressing about the place," I answered. "It's just the time of year, no doubt. There's always something melancholy about the fall."

"There's nothing wrong about the time of year," said the old man. He leaned forward and his voice sank to a whisper. "Haven't you heard it yet?"

I gave an involuntary start, and he pursed up his mouth and nodded.

"Aye, I see you have!" He came closer and peered up at me, his brown face with its faded blue eyes a network of anxious wrinkles. "Sir, if you can help the master, for God's sake do it! He's a rare hard one, I know, but I've served him for thirty-five years, and I don't want to see no harm come to him. He won't own up that he hears anything amiss, nor go away from this accursed place with the boy, before any harm comes to either of them. He's that angry because he don't understand— won't understand there's something more flesh and blood can hurt us sometimes!"

The old man's words came out in a flood, the result of long-suppressed anxiety, and I marveled that a man of Jason Drewe's type should command such solicitude from anyone.

"I'm all in the dark, Soames," I said slowly. "Who is it that knocks— that laughs?"

The gardener's eyes grew very somber. "No mortal man—no mortal man, sir."

"Why, Soames, you're as superstitious as they make them," I said, trying to make light of his words.

"See here, sir," he said, pulling me by the sleeve into the deeper shade of the shrubbery behind us. "I'll tell you what I've never spoken a word of yet. I'll tell you what I overheard one night when this—this thing first came here. I was pottering about late one evening, tying up bits of creeper against the wall outside the master's study. I heard the knock— loud and long as if the emperor of the world was a-knocking at the door, and I looks up to see who was there. The door was only three or four feet from where I was standing with bass and scissors in my hand. And there was no one at all on the steps nor anywhere near the house. While I was a-staring and wondering I heard the laugh! My blood went cold, and I just stood there shaking like a poplar tree in a wind. And since then, night after night, that knock and that laugh comes as regular as the sun sets!"

I stared at my companion in incredulous horror.

"And one time," he continued, "I heard the master call out. Terrible loud and fierce his voice was: 'Have you come for your moonshine, Eldred Werne— take it!' And with that, a bottle of whisky comes hurtling through the window and fell almost at my feet. I felt a wind blow across my face same as if it blew

right off an iceberg; and as I stood there afraid to move hand or foot, I heard the laugh way down among the trees, getting fainter and fainter just as if someone was walking away down the path— and laughing and laughing to himself all the time!"

I listened aghast to the old man, and a vivid picture arose in my mind of Eldred Werne as I last saw him in life— the tall, emaciated figure, the arresting face with its beautifully chiseled features, and above all the strange gray eyes as they had dwelt in that last deep look on Jason, the burning mocking fire which lit them and the fathomless contempt of the strong mouth."

"You will pay— you will pay!"

The words rang in my ears as if Werne were standing at my side speaking them at that very moment. I sat down abruptly on a fallen tree, and lit a cigarette with unsteady fingers.

"Now look here, Soames," I said at last. "We mustn't let this thing get us seared out of all common sense and reason. I admit it's a beastly unpleasant business, but I can't— I won't believe yet that there is no natural explanation of these things. Someone who owes him a grudge may be putting one over on Mr. Drewe. It may be a deliberate plot to annoy and frighten him. There was a— er— well, a misunderstanding between your master and Mr. Werne over the purchase of this Tareytown estate, and Mr. Werne was quite capable of planning a neat little revenge to square his account a little. He was a very sick man, remember— and sick men are apt to be vindictive and unreasonable."

"I guessed as something had happened between the two," murmured Soames, "but I didn't rightly know what it was."

"You and I will watch the house from now on," I said. "We'll arrange to be outside, one or other or both of us, directly after sunset. And if—if we see nothing, if we find no one there—"

"Aye—you won't, sir!"

"Then I shall do my best to persuade Mr. Drewe to leave this place and return to the city."

"And that you'll never do. He'll never give in and go away, not if it means his death. The master is terrible obstinate, and he fair blazed up when I kind of suggested he wasn't looking just himself, and that maybe Tareytown didn't agree with him.'

And remembering Jason's defiant eyes and the bluff he put up last evening for my benefit, I was inclined to agree with Soames.

"I'll do what I can," I said, getting up and brushing off twigs and leaves.

"I'm thankful to know you're here, sir. There was no one I dared say a word to until you came. The servants are in mortal terror, and never a week passes

without one or more of them leaving. Soon we won't be able to get anyone to stay a night in the place!"

"If your master could be persuaded to send the boy away for the rest of his vacation—"

"He won't do that," was the lugubrious reply. " That would be sort of owning up that there was something here he was afraid of! He'll never admit that— never!"

iv

OUR FIRST vigil took place that night. The boy was safe indoors— he never went over the threshold of the house after dusk fell, I noticed. Jason had established himself with his favorite drink, a stack of newspapers, and a box of cigars, in his library. I left him looking as immovable as the Rock of Gibraltar— and as gray!

Soames and I planted ourselves in strategic positions on either side of the porch, where we could see both the big entrance door, and the whole of the front porch which ran in front of the library, dining-room, and sun-parlor. A pale moon sailed serenely overhead, and I felt a passionate longing to be as far away from this evil-haunted little piece of earth as was the moon itself.

Revolt which was almost nausea seized me, as I looked around at the shadowy woods, and felt the unnamable creeping horror which waited there. Slow minutes passed.

The shadows grew denser, and the silence so profounder, that the falling leaves rattled like metal things on the dry ground, and the creak of the great trees made my heart thump furiously against my ribs. I could see Soames' small tense figure bent forward in a listening attitude, his face turned toward the entrance door. He looked like a terrier-dog straining eagerly on a leash.

My eyes roved restlessly to and fro, and fell at last on the long, uncut grass which grew about the tree trunks.

Quite suddenly I saw the reeds and grasses bend and quiver as if before a strong wind. In a long thin line they bent— a line advancing rapidly from the blackness of the trees out toward the open— toward the house— toward the entrance porch, with its broad steps gleaming silver in the moonlight.

My hand flew to my throat to stifle the cry that rose as I saw that sinister trail being blazed before my eyes. It advanced to the extreme edge of the tall grasses in a direct line with the entrance-door.

A moment of unendurable suspense— an agony of terrified expectant waiting!

Then it came— loud— thunderous— awful as the stroke of doom!

The knocker had been removed from the door, and on the bare wood itself beat that devil's tattoo. I was paralyzed with the shock and thunder of it, and only when I saw Soames stumbling forward, and heard his hoarse cry, did I move— stiff and uncertainly as a man might move after a long illness.

We clutched each other like two terrified children when we arrived at the foot of the steps, and I felt Soames's body shaking against my own.

Then, abruptly, the infernal racket ceased; and in the momentary silence which ensued, a laugh broke out that sent our trembling hands over our ears, but we could not shut out the sound of that demoniac laughter.

Uncontrolled and triumphant it rang out again and again, and the vision of someone rocking with mirth rose as before in my imagination. But nothing was there on the porch in the moonlight! The whole porch was visible in the clear white light. No one, no thing, could have escaped our staring, straining eyes. There was no one there, and yet almost within touch of our out-stretched hands some invisible, intangible Thing stood laughing— laughing— laughing....

v

AFTER THAT night the horror fell more and more darkly. Soames, who was out all day working in the gardens and shrubberies, noticed increasingly sinister signs that our invisible enemy was marshaling his forces, and closing in on the last stages of the siege.

More and more frequently the old man would see the grasses bending and swaying around him in loops and circles, as though the laughing Thing moved to and fro in the mazes of some infernal dance.

Often Soames felt the chill of the Thing's passing, and noted the shriveled, blighted foliage which marked its trail.

The woods grew darker with every passing day, despite the thinning of the leaves. The autumn mists which lay so white and cloudlike in the valleys of the surrounding country, drifted in among the trees on the Tareytown estate like gray, choking smoke, dank and rotten with the breath of decay, shutting out the sunlit earth beyond, and the clear skies above, rolling up around the house with infinite menace and gloom.

Louder and more clamorous grew the nightly summons, and the laughter which followed echoed and re-echoed about the house throughout the night, sounding at our very windows, then growing faint and ominous from the depths of the brooding woods.

vi

AT LAST, the boy's terror precipitated a crisis. Jason, who had brought this cursed thing upon himself, it seemed, refused to acknowledge that he had been wrong, to make any amends which lay within his power, or even to move from the place which Eldred Werne had loved so passionately in the flesh, and haunted so persistently in die spirit.

Jason's courage, though I admired it in one way, was not of the highest order. I mean that his conduct was guided by no reason, but only by blind impulse. I tackled him more than once about Tony, and only succeeded in rousing furious opposition.

"What the devil are you driving at?'' he roared at me.

"This is my house, isn't it? These are my woods and my lands. I paid for them according to my bond. No one is going to drive me out—no one, d'you hear?—neither man nor devil!"

"But Tony!" I protested. "You ought to consider him. He hears the servants talking. He hears whatever it is that comes knocking at your door, Jason—you know best what it is! The boy is almost beside himself with fear. Can't you see he is desperate? He doesn't eat or sleep properly. D'you want to kill him as you did his mother?" I added bitterly, remembrance of my sister's lonely, unhappy life with Jason goading me to speech. But Jason was always impervious to anything he wished to ignore, and he brushed aside my last words and returned to Tony.

"The boy has got to learn— he's got to learn, I say! If this house is good enough for me, then it's good enough for him, too. Tony'll stay here with me to the end of his vacation. If I give in about this thing, it will be the thin end of the wedge. He'll expect me to indulge every girl's fad and fancy he has— and the Lord knows he's full of them! Here I stay, and here he stays, and that's all about it. Why on earth do you stay yourself, feeling as you do?" he added roughly. "If you're afraid, I'll excuse you the rest of your visit."

I didn't trouble to deny the fact that I was afraid, and went off cursing myself for interfering, and probably making Tony's relations with his father even more difficult.

vii

THAT EVENING Jason seemed absolutely possessed. Whether he had been drinking heavily, or whether his endurance had reached the breaking point suddenly in the long, silent combat of wills with his invisible enemy, or whether the blind gray figure of Fate had written the last chapter, and he had no choice but to obey, I do not know.

Everything that happened that last fatal night seemed obscured and fogged with the waves of terror and desolation that swept over the house and the surrounding woods. From early morning the attack on us strengthened perceptibly. Every hour I felt we were fighting a losing battle, and I had no comfort for Soames when he sought me out, and led me off to the potting-sheds after a pretense of breakfasting.

Tony had remained in bed, to his father's unbounded disgust. The boy had spent a sleepless night and I had given him a bromide and persuaded him to stay in his room to rest.

"Making a mollycoddle of him!" growled Jason, his eyes light and dangerous as a wild boar's above his flabby, sallow cheeks. He put down his cup with a rattle on the saucer, and scraping his chair noisily on the polished flooring, he rose and strode heavily out of the room, and I heard the stairs creak under his weight as he went up to the boy. Throughout the day, his evil mood grew on him, and Tony could do nothing right.

"Mark my words, sir," Soames had said to me as we stood in the potting-sheds that morning. "I've a feeling we've about come to the end! That Laughing Devil will knock for the last time tonight— for the last time! Mark my words!"

And as the day wore on I felt more and more assured that Soames was right.

Every hour the sense of imminent and immense danger grew heavier, and every hour Tony grew more and more nervous and Jason more brutally obstinate; for the sight of the boy's terror goaded his father into senseless anger.

The sun set that night in a bank of heavy dull cloud, which spread and darkened until thick impenetrable dusk closed about us. With the coming of twilight we waited in fearful anticipation of our usual visitation; but dusk deepened to night and no summons sounded at the door, no mocking horror of laughter was heard at all. Yet this silence brought no feeling of reprieve. Rather our expectancy grew more and more tense, and Tony sat by the fire with cold shaking hands thrust deep into his pockets, and tried to prevent his father noticing the ague of fear which shook his thin little body.

Jason did not send him to bed at his usual time— we all sat there waiting— just waiting! The big logs smoldered dully and reluctantly on the hearthstone. Jason's face was a gray mask; his thick lips sneered; his eyes gleamed between their puffy lids. He was like a cornered animal of some primeval age— a great inert mass of flesh slumped down in his big chair by the dying fire.

Nine— ten— eleven! The torturing hours crept on and still we sat there like people under a spell, just waiting —waiting! With the deep midnight chime of

the clock in the library, the spell was broken with a hideous clamor that made Tony leap up with the shriek of a wild thing caught in a trap.

Jason got to his feet in one surprising movement, and stood with feet apart and lowered head, as if about to do battle. I sat clutching the arms of my chair, held by a blind terror that was like steel chains about me.

It was the Laughing Thing at last!

Long and furiously the knock resounded, sinking to a low mutter and rising to a crescendo of blows that threatened to batter down the heavy door. And over and above the thunderous blows rose the high mocking laughter— triumphant, cruel, satisfied laughter!

I blame myself— I shall always blame myself for what happened then. I might have held the boy back— guarded him more closely when he was too frenzied with fear to guard himself. But I did not dream what he was about until it was too late! When he ran from the shelter of my arms, I thought he meant to seek an¬ other refuge! But no— the boy was crazed beyond all reason and control, and ran desperately to the very horror which had driven him mad.

I heard his quick, light steps along the hall, and I thought he was making for the staircase, not the door—my God, not the door! There was the quick rattle of a heavy chain, the groan of a bolt withdrawn— then a long, wailing shriek of terror! With one accord Jason and I dashed out into the hall— Soames came rushing from the kitchen-quarters— and there stood the door flung wide, and from the porch without came a long exultant peal of laughter.

We flung ourselves forward and out into the night. In the distance among the trees we heard the dying echoes of that infernal laughter— then nothing more.

viii

UNTIL DAWN we searched the woods of Tareytown, and as the first gray glimmer of light broke in the east we found him.

Have you ever seen anyone dead of a sudden violent poison— such as prussic acid— with teeth showing in a terrible grin— the muscles of the face stiffened in inhuman laughter? It is the most dreadful of all masks which death can fix on human lineaments.

So we found Tony! His eyes— awful contrast to his grinning mouth— mirrored a terror too profound for any words to convey. Eyes which had looked on the unnamable— the unthinkable; spawn of that outermost darkness which no human sight may endure.

That night was the end of my youth and happiness. Jason packed up and went for a prolonged tour of Europe with his fears and his memories, and I have never seen him since.

For myself, I live, and will always live, on the Tareytown estate, where perhaps Tony's spirit may wander lost and lonely, still possessed by that evil which caught him in its net.

I must remain at Red Gables, and perhaps here or hereafter I may atone for the selfish fear which made me fail Tony in that desperate crisis. Somewhere— somehow, beyond the curtain of this life, I may meet the Thing which laughed— the evil, bitter Thing which once was Eldred Werne— the Thing which may still possess the boy and hold him earthbound and accurst. I failed Tony once, but I will not do so a second time. I will offer my own soul to set him free— and perhaps the high gods will hear me and accept the sacrifice.

———————————

17: The Mystery of Miss Carew

Mary E. Penn

fl 1876-1897

The Argosy (UK) Sep 1895

British Author of numerous short stories which appeared between 1876 and 1897

"JACK, is it your intention to many Mrs. Winthrop?"

"If she will do me the honour to accept me— it is." This point-blank inquiry and decisive reply were exchanged between myself, Wilfrid Madeley, and my friend, Jack Davenant, one autumn evening five years ago, as we stood on the terrace of the hotel at Bürgenstock, near Lucerne.

"Bürgenstock," as perhaps some of my readers are aware, is a lofty wooded promontory, which juts out abruptly on the east side of the lake of Lucerne. A funicular railway shoots up almost perpendicularly from the shore to the summit of the cliff, which is crowned by a big white hotel, where my friend and I had been spending our autumn holiday. We were both barristers, but I was perforce a hard worker, while Davenant merely "coquetted with the law," having independent means.

"Is there any just cause or impediment why I should *not* marry Mrs. Winthrop?" he demanded, turning his handsome bronzed face towards me.

"No 'cause' whatever; she is an excellent match in every sense of the word, and you are a lucky man if you win her. But there may be an 'impediment.' Her sister, Miss Carew, has evidently made up her mind, for reasons best known to herself, that Mrs. Winthrop shall not marry again if she can prevent it."

"But fortunately she can't prevent it," he interrupted. "If Stella— Mrs. Winthrop— loves me, as I hope and believe she does, it is not likely she will give me up at the bidding of that interfering old maid."

"She would be very foolish to do so. But she seems to be in the habit of yielding to her sister, and even to be a little afraid of her, which surprises me, for Miss Carew does not give one the impression of being a particularly strong-willed or strong-minded person."

"Not strong-minded certainly," he acquiesced. "In fact it has occurred to me more than once that she is a little bit," he touched his forehead significantly, "and perhaps that is the reason Mrs. Winthrop gives way to her, not to irritate her by opposition. Haven't you noticed her nervous restless manner, and the scared sort of look she has, as if she had once seen a ghost and had never got over it?"

I laughed.

"She is sane enough to make herself uncommonly disagreeable sometimes," I remarked; "but to do her justice, she seems devoted to her sister, though in a jealous sort of way that must be rather trying."

"Trying? Stella must be an angel to endure it!" he exclaimed. "Poor darling, her life has not been a very bright one hitherto. Married at eighteen to a man old enough to be her father, who kept her shut up like a nun, and now, tormented by the tyranny and surveillance of a jealous old-maid sister! But if she will trust herself to me, the future shall atone for the past," he added, more to himself than to me, and returned to his contemplation of the view.

At a giddy depth below us lay the "Lake of the Four Cantons," calm as a mirror in the evening stillness, while to right and left, like twin sentinels, rose the majestic forms of the Righi and Mount Pilatus. The sun had set long ago, but the golden glow still lingered, and all the air seemed luminous.

Dinner was over, and the Bürgenstock guests, among whom Germans predominated, were trooping out on to the terrace to drink coffee and enjoy the cool evening air. Trim waitresses bustled about, the hotel band began to play, and presently an electric lamp was strung up to a pole above our heads, illuminating the terrace *a giorno*.

"Here they are at last!" Jack exclaimed, after many expectant glances over his shoulder, and he went forward to meet two ladies who had just emerged from the house.

Except in figure and complexion, both being fair, and both tall and slender, the sisters were as great a contrast as could well be imagined. Mrs. Winthrop was a fragile, girlish-looking woman of three or four-and-twenty, with soft appealing blue eyes, and arched brows, which gave her face a look of innocent surprise. It was a face which, if not actually beautiful, was singularly attractive; none the less so, perhaps, for the suggestion of weakness in the pretty curved lips and dimpled chin. Miss Carew was at least ten years her sister's senior, and looked even older than her age, thanks to her worn features and pallid complexion. Her manner was nervous and abrupt, and her eyes— fine brown eyes, which redeemed her face from plainness— had at times, as Jack had remarked, a curiously startled look, as if the shadow of some great fear had passed over her.

"How late you are!" was my friend's greeting. "Dinner was over half-an-hour ago." He placed a chair for the young widow as he spoke, leaving me to perform the same office for her sister.

"It took me exactly half-an-hour to convince Edith that it was not too cold to sit out of doors," she answered, laughing; "and having been 'convinced against her will,' she is naturally 'of the same opinion still.' "

"The air is chilly," Miss Carew asserted, as she drew round her shoulders a voluminous grey woollen shawl.

"You would be more sheltered at the other end of the terrace," Jack suggested with *empressement*. "Madeley, why don't you move Miss Carew's chair over there?"

"Thank you, I will stay where I am," she rejoined drily, as she subsided into her seat, and produced the complicated piece of knitting without which she was seldom seen.

Mrs. Winthrop laughed again, that pretty ringing little laugh of hers which was almost too frequent.

"Edith will freeze rather than desert the post of duty," she said. "'*J'y suis, j'y reste*' is her motto."

"But may I ask why she considers it her duty to mount guard over you so persistently?" Davenant inquired, lowering his voice. "I thought a widow could dispense with a chaperon."

"So one would think," she answered with a little shrug, "but to Edith I am still a girl, to be watched and guarded. It is rather irritating sometimes, but she is so good, so devoted, that I cannot complain. I know that she loves me dearly."

He looked at her adoringly.

"If it is a merit to love you," he began, "then I—"

She interrupted him with a tap of her fan.

"Hush! this is too public a place for sentiment. How full the terrace is to-night, and how loud those Germans talk!" she added, glancing over her shoulder at a particularly noisy group near us, the central figure of which was a stout black-eyed lady with strongly-marked Jewish features, who was attired with more splendour than the occasion seemed to warrant.

"Those dulcet tones are not German," I remarked; "it is Mrs. Solomans, the stock-broker's wife."

The young widow changed her position to have a better view of the Jewess.

"Her diamonds are splendid," she said softly after a pause.

Miss Carew, who had apparently been absorbed in counting stitches, looked up quickly.

"Shocking bad form to wear them at a table-d'hôte," she remarked, in her abrupt way.

"And not very safe," Davenant added, lowering his voice; "there is a thief in the house. The manager tells me that within the last fortnight several guests have missed small articles of jewellery. But the curious part of the matter is," he continued, "that the things have since been returned to their owners as

mysteriously as they were taken. There is something rather uncanny about it—things vanishing and reappearing as if by some invisible agency."

"You make me quite nervous," Mrs. Winthrop declared, half laughing, half serious. "I hope— Are you going, Edith?" she broke off, as Miss Carew began to roll up her knitting.

"Yes, I am cold," the latter replied, with a shiver. "You had better come indoors too; it is getting late."

The young widow hesitated, but meeting her lover's pleading gaze, she answered with unusual decision:

"Not yet; I will join you presently."

Her sister seemed about to speak again, but changed her mind, and walked away in silence.

Soon afterwards I also discreetly vanished, leaving Davenant to make the most of his opportunity. An hour later, looking from my window, I saw the lovers still tête-à-tête, apparently unconscious of the fact that Miss Carew, grim and inscrutable as one of the Fates, was watching them from the steps of the verandah.

ii

"WELL, Jack, am I to congratulate you?" I asked my friend the following day, as we were smoking after lunch in a shady nook of the shrubbery.

"Congratulate me on what?" he demanded moodily.

"On having won the fair widow, for I suppose you came to an understanding last night? Surely she has not refused you!" I added, noticing his gloomy expression.

"She neither refused nor accepted me," he answered, discontentedly. "I could not get her to give me a definite answer. She acknowledged that she cared for me, but talked mysteriously of an obstacle between us, and when I asked her what it was, began to cry. Of course the 'obstacle' is Miss Carew—confound her!" he concluded, flicking the ash from his cigar.

"Cheer up; it'll all come right!" I told him consolingly. "Rather than you should be disappointed, I'll marry the 'obstacle' myself."

"Thanks, old boy, that would indeed be a proof of friendship," he rejoined laughing, as he rose and stretched himself. "How intolerably hot it is! I'm going to get an iced 'soda.' *Au revoir!*" and he strolled away.

The heat was indeed overpowering, and seemed to increase rather than diminish as the sultry afternoon wore on. Lightly clad as I was, my clothes oppressed me. My very ring— a sapphire, in a massive old-fashioned setting—

was an inconvenience. I took it off, and placing it on the rustic table before me, resumed the novel which I had been reading before Davenant joined me.

But the book was dull, and I was drowsy. The distant voices of the indefatigable lawn-tennis players, and the muffled plaint of the much-enduring piano, which reached me through an open window, mingled together in a confused and soothing murmur. I fell into a doze, and from that into a sound sleep. I must have slept some time, for when I woke it was getting dusk.

Before my waking senses fully returned, I had a hazy idea that someone or something had been near me in the arbour; I even fancied that I had caught sight of a woman's figure in the act of leaving it, but when I roused myself and looked round, no one was visible. A glance at my watch showed me that it was time to dress for dinner, and I was moving away, when I remembered my ring, and turned to take it from the table.

To my surprise and dismay it was no longer there.

I looked under the bench, among the bushes, and in every nook and corner of the place— in vain. The mysterious thief had paid me a visit while I slept, and the ring was gone!

I felt that I had only my own carelessness to thank for the loss, but it was none the less vexatious, for the ring was a valuable one. I could only hope that it would eventually be returned, as other missing articles had been.

At dinner I related my adventure, drawing forth a chorus of excited questions and exclamations from everyone within hearing.

"You think it was a woman?" Davenant asked, when he could make himself heard.

"I am convinced of it. I caught sight of her figure as she left the arbour, and if I had awakened a few seconds earlier, I should have surprised her in *flagrante delicto*."

I happened to glance, as I spoke, at Miss Carew, who was sitting opposite, and met a look which startled me. If ever a face told a guilty fear, hers did at that moment. The look passed as quickly as a breath from a mirror, but it had been there, and it suggested to my mind a suspicion which I dismissed the next moment as extravagant and absurd. How was it possible to suppose that a wealthy and well-bred woman would condescend to petty pilfering!

Still, that look haunted me.

A sort of chill seemed to have fallen upon us; Mrs. Winthrop looked pale and disturbed, and I hastened to change the subject. The sisters left the table before dessert, and to Jack's disappointment, did not appear after dinner.

Later in the evening I had occasion to go upstairs to fetch my cigar-case. I was approaching my bedroom door when it suddenly opened, and to my astonishment, Miss Carew emerged from the apartment.

She stopped short on seeing me, and for a moment we stood face to face, looking at each other in silence.

Then, as if taking a sudden resolution, she said, with a sort of desperate composure: "I have returned your ring, Mr. Madeley."

"My ring!" I echoed. "Then," the words escaped me involuntarily, "then it *was* you who took it!"

She inclined her head without speaking, standing before me like a criminal awaiting sentence. I gazed at her in perplexity. She could not be in her right mind, I told myself, yet there were no signs of insanity about her at this moment. Her face was simply a blank page which told nothing.

"My dear Miss Carew," I said, forcing a smile, "what induced you to do such a thing? Was it meant as a joke?"

"You can think so if you like," she muttered, without raising her eyes.

Her manner provoked me.

"I should advise you to give up such 'jokes' in future," I said drily; "they are rather a dangerous form of pleasantry, and might get you into difficulties."

"Shall you— do you intend to denounce me?" she asked, huskily.

"If anything of the sort occurs again, I shall be compelled to do so," I returned; "but in the meantime I shall keep silence for your sister's sake."

She raised her eyes to my face with a strange look; a look that seemed full of meaning, though I had not the clue to it.

"Thank you," she said, quietly, and before I could speak again, she walked past me down the corridor.

iii

THREE days passed uneventfully, and brought us to Thursday evening, when the weekly *soiree dansante* took place. It was held in the large dining-hall of the hotel, which made a capital ball-room.

Not being a dancing man, I seldom attended these affairs, and was inclined to grumble when deprived of my natural rest by the noise of revelry in which I did not share.

At about ten o'clock I looked in, on my way upstairs, and found the ball in full swing. Davenant and Mrs. Winthrop whirled passed me to the strains of the "Endymion Valse." They both looked radiantly happy, but it struck me that there was something feverish in the young widow's gaiety. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes unnaturally bright, and her laugh had a half-hysterical ring. She seemed as the Scotch say, "fey." Near the curtained doorway where I stood, a row of "wall-flowers" and chaperons were seated, among whom were Miss Carew and Mrs. Solomans. The latter, as usual was absurdly over-dressed,

with half the contents of a jeweller's show-case displayed on her neck and arms.

As Davenant and his partner walked past at the conclusion of the valse, I saw him laughingly direct her attention to the Jewess. The young widow looked at her carelessly, glancing over her shoulder as they passed on. Miss Carew also was watching her stout neighbour with a curious intent look, as if she were appraising the value of every jewel she wore.

Presently I retired to my room, but not to sleep; I felt wakeful and restless.

Before midnight the music ceased, there was a sound of footsteps and voices in the corridor as the guests dispersed to their different rooms, and I heard Davenant enter his, which adjoined my own. Then by degrees, silence settled down upon the sleeping house— silence utter and complete.

Feeling that if I went to bed, I should not sleep this sultry night, I took a chair out on to the broad stone balcony, on which all the rooms of the first-floor front opened. The suite occupied by Mrs. Winthrop and her sister were to the left, over the entrance, while my right-hand neighbour was Mrs. Solomans, whose sonorous snoring reached me distinctly through her open window.

It was a magical night. All the circle of the heavens glittered with stars, the lake and mountains lying in a tranced stillness beneath. To look up at that shining host in the thrilling silence of a night like this made one feel lonely and insignificant, giving one a sense of the immeasurable space which lies above and around this puny world of ours, the vast spheres of existence apart from our little life, and never to be explored by us.

I rose at last, and retreated to my room, to shut myself in from the wide vague night and the haunting presence of the stars. I had hardly quitted the balcony, when my ear caught the sound of a light footfall approaching along it from the left. As I drew back into the shadow of the room, a woman's figure glided past— a tall slender figure— with a grey woollen shawl thrown over the head and shoulders. She walked swiftly but stealthily past my window, her long light wrapper trailing after her, and disappeared in the direction of Mrs. Solomans' apartment.

"So," I thought, "in spite of my warning, Miss Carew is at her old tricks again!"

What was to be done? Should I follow and prevent her from carrying out her purpose, or would it be better to wait till she emerged, and— While I still hesitated, there came from the next room a sound of something dropped on the parquet floor.

The Jewess's rhythmical breathing ceased all at once. There was a smothered exclamation, then a loud startled cry, which rang through the silence.

I lingered no longer, but obeying an impulse of irresistible curiosity, hurried down the balcony and looked in through the open French window.

The electric light had been turned on, and showed me Mrs. Solomans in a graceful *deshabille*, just as she had sprung out of bed, clutching the wrist of the intruder, who stood as if petrified, her head bent low, and her shawl half covering her face. At the same moment Davenant's voice sounded behind me.

"What's the matter? what has happened?" he exclaimed, looking over my shoulder. "Hallo, Mrs. Solomans, have you caught the thief?"

"Yes, I have caught the thief," she answered, in a curious tone, glancing towards him. The muffled figure made a sudden movement as if to escape, but Davenant placed himself in the way.

"No, no, madame or mademoiselle," he said, with ironical politeness, "you must not leave us till we have seen your face," and before she could prevent him, he drew the shawl away.

After one glance at the features which were revealed, he fell back with a gasp of astonishment.

"Good heavens— Stella!"

It was indeed Mrs. Winthrop who stood there, white and trembling, her face vacant with fear.

"Stella?" he repeated after a moment; "why are you here?"

"Is it necessary to ask that question?" Mrs. Solomans exclaimed, with an angry laugh. "Look! she has my necklet-case in her hand at this moment!" She pointed to it with a fat forefinger. "Luckily she dropped something and woke me, or—"

She was interrupted by the appearance of Miss Carew, who put us aside without ceremony and entered the room. She was very pale, but looked neither surprised nor alarmed. There was a composed dignity about her which I had never noticed before.

"Is my sister here?" she asked quietly, addressing Mrs. Solomans. "She has been walking in her sleep."

"Edith, I am here. Take me away, oh, take me away, and hide me," the young widow cried, in a tone of anguish, rushing to her, and hiding her face on her shoulder.

The elder woman folded her arms round the trembling figure with a look of protecting tenderness which transfigured her face.

"Yes, darling, come," she said soothingly.

"I am sorry you have been disturbed," she added with a smile, addressing Mrs. Solomans, who stood transfixed. "Good-night."

Drawing her sister's arm through her own, she led the way along the balcony to the sitting-room they occupied, and turning at the door, beckoned to Davenant and myself to enter.

Mrs. Winthrop threw herself on a couch and buried her face in her hands, sobbing hysterically.

In a moment her lover was on his knees at her side.

"Stella, my darling," he began, taking her hand; "do not distress yourself. You have had a bad dream; try to forget it—"

She started at his touch, and raised herself, confronting him with a face so changed, so wild and haggard, that the words died upon his lips.

"Do not speak to me— do not touch me," she breathed, shrinking from him. "I am not worthy of your love. I am— what that woman called me just now"—her voice sank to a horrified whisper— "a thief!"

He drew back involuntarily, gazing at her in speechless astonishment. "What are you saying?" he exclaimed; "you were not conscious of what you were doing. You were asleep—"

She shook her head.

"I was not asleep—though it seems now like a dream. Edith will tell you that." She broke off with a cry of pain, putting both hands to her temples. "My head— my head," she moaned, and with a long shuddering sigh, fell back insensible.

Davenant rose slowly, his face white to the lips.

"Is she raving, or is this horrible thing true?" he asked hoarsely turning to Miss Carew.

She did not answer him until she had laid her sister's nerveless figure upon the couch, and arranged the cushions under her head. Then she turned to him with a face almost as white as his own.

"It is true," she said quietly; "but—"

She held up her hand as he was about to speak. "You must pity, not condemn, her. She is no more to be blamed for this unhappy mania than if it were a physical ailment."

"Mania?" he repeated quickly; "ah, I understand."

"Yes; a mania she has had since childhood. The temptation comes upon her as a sudden overmastering impulse. She acts automatically, as if under the pressure of a will stronger than her own, and retains no recollection of her action. There are intervals during which the malady seems dormant, and then again it attacks her— as it has since we came here."

He drew a deep breath and was silent a moment.

"Miss Carew, you should have told me this before," were his next words.

"You have a right to reproach me," she acknowledged; "but I hoped to find a means of separating you from her without revealing this miserable secret, which it has been the purpose of my life to conceal. But now that you know it," she continued, "you understand how impossible it is that she can be your wife, and in mercy to her you will go away, and never seek to see her again."

"But she is young: she may be cured," I suggested.

"Never! Mr. Winthrop had that hope when he married her— for of course we had warned him; but all his love and care were in vain. No— death only can remove the blight which rests upon her mind."

Davenant turned and looked at the inanimate figure on the couch, so pathetic in its helplessness. "How can I leave her? I love her— I love her!" he cried passionately.

"If you love her, do not torture her. Go before she wakes, and spare her the pain of saying Good-bye."

He stood for a moment irresolute, then stooped and kissed again and again the closed eyes and sweet cold lips, and muttering some inarticulate words of farewell, turned and hurried from the room.

THE next day we left Bürgenstock, and my friend never saw Mrs. Winthrop again. Little more than a year afterwards the tidings reached him of her death, and even he, who had loved her, could not but feel that she was mercifully taken.

———————

18: The Lone Corvette

Gilbert Parker

Sir Horatio Gilbert Parker, 1862-1932
The Westminster Gazette, 1893

"And God shall turn upon them violently, and toss them like a ball into a large country."—ISAIH.

"POOR TED, poor Ted! I'd give my commission to see him once again."

"I believe you would, Debney."

"I knew him to the last button of his nature, and any one who knew him well could never think hardly of him. There were five of us brothers, and we all worshipped him. He could run rings round us in everything, at school, with sports, in the business of life, in love."

Debney's voice fell with the last few words, and there was a sorrowful sort of smile on his face. His look was fastened on the Farilone Islands, which lay like a black, half-closed eyelid across the disc of the huge yellow sun, as it sank in the sky straight out from the Golden Gate. The long wash of the Pacific was in their ears at their left, behind them was the Presidio, from which they had come after a visit to the officers, and before them was the warm, inviting distance of waters, which lead, as all men know, to the Lotos Isles.

Debney sighed and shook his head. "He was, by nature, the ablest man I ever knew. Everything in the world interested him."

"There lay the trouble, perhaps."

"Nowhere else. All his will was with the wholesome thing, but his brain, his imagination were always hunting. He was the true adventurer at the start. That was it, Mostyn."

"He found the forbidden thing more interesting than— the other?"

"Quite so. Unless a thing was really interesting, stood out, as it were, he had no use for it— nor for man nor woman."

"Lady Folingsby, for instance."

"Do you know, Mostyn, that even to-day, whenever she meets me, I can see one question in her eyes: 'Where is he?' Always, always that. He found life and people so interesting that he couldn't help but be interesting himself. Whatever he was, I never knew a woman speak ill of him.... Once a year there comes to me a letter from an artist girl in Paris, written in language that gets into my eyes. There is always the one refrain: 'He will return some day. Say to him that I do not forget.'"

"Whatever his faults, he was too big to be anything but kind to a woman, was Ted."

"I remember the day when his resignation was so promptly accepted by the Admiralty. He walked up to the Admiral— Farquhar it was, on the *Bolingbroke*— and said: 'Admiral, if I'd been in your place I'd have done the same. I ought to resign, and I have. Yet if I had to do it over again, I'd be the same. I don't repent. I'm out of the Navy now, and it doesn't make any difference what I say, so I'll have my preachment out. If I were Admiral Farquhar, and you were Edward Debney, ex-commander, I'd say: "Debney, you're a damned good fellow and a damned bad officer."'

"The Admiral liked Edward, in spite of all, better than any man in the Squadron, for Ted's brains were worth those of any half-dozen officers he had. He simply choked, and then, before the whole ship, dropped both hands on his shoulders, and said: 'Debney, you're a damned good fellow and a damned bad officer, and I wish to God you were a damned bad fellow and a damned good officer— for then there were no need to part.' At that they parted. But as Edward was leaving, the Admiral came forward again, and said: 'Where are you going, Debney?' 'I'm going nowhere, sir,' Ted answered. 'I'm being tossed into strange waters— a lone corvette of no squadron.' He stopped, smiled, and then said— it was so like him, for, with all his wildness, he had the tastes of a student: 'You remember that passage in Isaiah, sir, "And God shall turn upon them violently, and toss them like a ball into a large country"?'

"There wasn't a man but had a kind thought for him as he left, and there was rain in the eyes of more than one A.B. Well, from that day he disappeared, and no one has seen him since. God knows where he is; but I was thinking, as I looked out there to the setting sun, that his wild spirit would naturally turn to the South, for civilised places had no charm for him."

"I never knew quite why he had to leave the Navy."

"He opened fire on a French frigate off Tahiti which was boring holes in an opium smuggler."

Mostyn laughed. "Of course; and how like Ted it was— an instinct to side with the weakest."

"Yes, coupled with the fact that the Frenchman's act was mere brutality, and had not sufficient motive or justification. So Ted pitched into him."

"Did the smuggler fly the British flag?"

"No, the American; and it was only the intervention of the United States which prevented serious international trouble. Out of the affair came Ted a shipwreck."

"Have you never got on his track?"

"Once I thought I had at Singapore, but nothing came of it. No doubt he changed his name. He never asked for, never got, the legacy my poor father left him."

"What was it made you think you had come across him at Singapore?"

"Oh, certain significant things."

"What was he doing?"

Debney looked at his old friend for a moment debatingly, then said quietly: "Slave-dealing, and doing it successfully, under the noses of men-of-war of all nations."

"But you decided it was not he after all?"

"I doubted. If Ted came to that, he would do it in a very big way. It would appeal to him on some grand scale, with real danger and, say, a few scores of thousands of pounds at stake— not unless."

Mostyn lit a cigar, and, thrusting his hands into his pockets, regarded the scene before him with genial meditation— the creamy wash of the sea at their feet, the surface of the water like corrugated silver stretching to the farther sky, with that long lane of golden light crossing it to the sun, Alcatras, Angel Island, Saucilito, the rocky fortresses, and the men-of-war in the harbour, on one of which flew the British ensign— the *Cormorant*, commanded by Debney.

"Poor Ted!" said Mostyn at last; "he might have been anything."

"Let us get back to the *Cormorant*," responded Debney sadly. "And see, old chap, when you get back to England, I wish you'd visit my mother for me, for I shall not see her for another year, and she's always anxious— always since Ted left."

Mostyn grasped the other's hand, and said: "It's the second thing I'll do on landing, my boy."

Then they talked of other things, but as they turned at the Presidio for a last look at the Golden Gate, Mostyn said musingly: "I wonder how many millions' worth of smuggled opium have come in that open door?"

Debney shrugged a shoulder. "Try Nob Hill, Fifth Avenue, and the Champs Elysees. What does a poor man-o'-war's-man know of such things?"

An hour later they were aboard the *Cormorant* dining with a number of men asked to come and say good-bye to Mostyn, who was starting for England the second day following, after a pleasant cruise with Debney.

Meanwhile, from far beyond that yellow lane of light running out from Golden Gate, there came a vessel, sailing straight for harbour. She was an old-fashioned cruiser, carrying guns, and when she passed another vessel she hoisted the British flag. She looked like a half-obsolete corvette, spruced up, made modern by every possible device, and all her appointments were shapely and in order. She was clearly a British man-of-war, as shown in her trim-dressed sailors, her good handful of marines; but her second and third lieutenants seemed little like Englishmen. There was gun-drill and cutlass-drill every day, and, what was also singular, there was boat-drill twice a day, so that

the crew of this man-of-war, as they saw Golden Gate ahead of them, were perhaps more expert at boat-drill than any that sailed. They could lower and raise a boat with a wonderful expertness in a bad sea, and they rowed with clock-like precision and machine-like force.

Their general discipline did credit to the British Navy. But they were not given to understand that by their Commander, Captain Shewell, who had an eye like a spot of steel and a tongue like aloes or honey as the mood was on him. It was clear that he took his position seriously, for he was as rigid and exact in etiquette as an admiral of the old school, and his eye was as keen for his officers as for his men; and that might have seemed strange too, if one had seen him two years before commanding a schooner with a roving commission in the South Seas. Then he was more genial of eye and less professional of face. Here he could never be mistaken for anything else than the commander of a man-of-war— it was in his legs, in the shoulder he set to the wind, in the tone of his orders, in his austere urbanity to his officers. Yet there was something else in his eye, in his face, which all this professionalism could not hide, even when he was most professional— some elusive, subterranean force or purpose.

This was most noticeable when he was shut away from the others in his cabin. Then his whole body seemed to change. The eye became softer, and yet full of a sort of genial devilry, the body had a careless alertness and elasticity, the whole man had the athletic grace of a wild animal, and his face had a hearty sort of humour, which the slightly-lifting lip, in its insolent disdain, could not greatly modify. He certainly seemed well pleased with himself, and more than once, as he sat alone, he laughed outright, and once he said aloud, as his fingers ran up and down a schedule— not a man-o'-war's schedule— laughing softly:

"Poor old Farquhar, if he could see me now!" Then, to himself: "Well, as I told him, I was violently tossed like a ball into the large country; and I've had a lot of adventure and sport. But here's something more the biggest game ever played between nations by a private person— with fifty thousand pounds as the end thereof, if all goes well with my lone corvette."

The next evening, just before dusk, after having idled about out of sight of the signal station nearly all day, Captain Shewell entered Golden Gate with the *Hornet*— of no squadron. But the officers at the signal station did not know that, and simply telegraphed to the harbour, in reply to the signals from the corvette, that a British man-of-war was coming. She came leisurely up the bay, with Captain Shewell on the bridge. He gave a low whistle as he saw the *Cormorant* in the distance. He knew the harbour well, and saw that the *Cormorant* had gone to a new anchorage, not the same as British men-of-war

took formerly. He drew away to the old anchorage— he need not be supposed to know that a change was expected; besides—and this was important to Captain Shewell— the old anchorage was near the docks; and it was clear, save for one little life-boat and a schooner which was making out as he came up.

As the *Hornet* came to anchor the *Cormorant* saluted her, and she replied instantly. Customs officers who were watching the craft from the shore or from their boats put down their marine glasses contentedly when they saw and heard the salutes. But two went out to the *Hornet*, were received graciously by Captain Shewell, who, over a glass of wine in his cabin- appropriately hung with pictures of Nelson and Collingwood— said that he was proceeding to Alaska to rescue a crew shipwrecked which had taken refuge on a barren island, and that he was leaving the next day as soon as he could get some coal; though he feared it would be difficult coaling up that night. He did not need a great deal, he said— which was, indeed, the case— but he did need some, and for the *Hornet*'s safety he must have it. After this, with cheerful compliments, and the perfunctory declaration on his part that there was nothing dutiable on board, the officers left him, greatly pleased with his courtesy, saluted by the sailors standing at the gangway as they left the ship's side. The officers did not notice that one of these sailors winked an eye at another, and that both then grinned, and were promptly ordered aft by the second lieutenant.

As soon as it was very dark two or three boats pushed out from the *Hornet*, and rowed swiftly to shore, passing a Customs boat as they went, which was saluted by the officers in command. After this, boats kept passing backward and forward for a long time between the *Hornet* and the shore, which was natural, seeing that a first night in port is a sort of holiday for officers and men. If these sailors had been watched closely, however, it would have been seen that they visited but few saloons on shore, and drank little, and then evidently as a blind. Close watching would also have discovered the fact that there were a few people on shore who were glad to see the safe arrival of the *Hornet*, and who, about one o'clock in the morning, almost fell on the neck of Captain Shewell as they bade him good bye. Then, for the rest of the night, coal was carried out to the *Hornet* in boats and barges.

By daybreak her coal was aboard, then came cleaning up, and preparations to depart. Captain Shewell's eye was now much on the *Cormorant*. He had escaped one danger, he had landed half a million dollars' worth of opium in the night, under the very nose of the law, and while Customs boats were patrolling the bay; there was another danger— the inquisitiveness of the *Cormorant*. It was etiquette for him to call upon the captain of the *Cormorant*, and he ought to have done so the evening before, but he had not dared to run the risk, nor

could he venture this morning. And yet if the *Cormorant* discovered that the *Hornet* was not a British man-of-war, but a bold and splendid imposture, made possible by a daring ex-officer of the British Navy, she might open fire, and he could make but a sorry fight, for he was equipped for show rather than for deadly action. He had got this ex-British man-of-war two years before, purchased in Brazil by two adventurous spirits in San Francisco, had selected his crew carefully, many of them deserters from the British Navy, drilled them, and at last made this bold venture under the teeth of a fortress, and at the mouth of a warship's guns.

Just as he was lifting anchor to get away, he saw a boat shoot out from the side of the *Cormorant*. Captain Debney, indignant at the lack of etiquette, and a little suspicious also now— for there was no *Hornet* in the Pacific Squadron, though there was a *Hornet*, he knew, in the China Squadron— was coming to visit the discourteous commander.

He was received with the usual formalities, and was greeted at once by Captain Shewell. As the eyes of the two men met both started, but Captain Debney was most shaken. He turned white, and put out his hand to the bulwark to steady himself. But Captain Shewell held the hand that had been put out; shook it, pressed it. He tried to urge Captain Debney forward, but the other drew back to the gangway.

"Pull yourself together, Dick, or there'll be a mess," said Shewell softly.

"My God, how could you do it?" replied his brother aghast.

Meanwhile the anchor had been raised, and the *Hornet* was moving towards the harbour mouth. "You have ruined us both," said Richard Debney.

"Neither, Dick! I'll save your bacon." He made a sign, the gangway was closed, he gave the word for full steam ahead, and the *Hornet* began to race through the water before Captain Debney guessed his purpose.

"What do you mean to do?" he asked sternly, as he saw his own gig falling astern.

"To make it hard for you to blow me to pieces. You've got to do it, of course, if you can, but I must get a start."

"How far do you intend carrying me?"

"To the Farilones, perhaps."

Richard Debney's face had a sick look. "Take me to your cabin," he whispered.

What was said behind the closed door no man in this world knows, and it is well not to listen too closely to those who part, knowing that they will never meet again. They had been children in the one mother's arms; there was nothing in common between them now except that ancient love.

Nearing the Farilones, Captain Debney was put off in an open boat. Standing there alone, he was once more a naval officer, and he called out sternly: "Sir, I hope to sink you and your smuggling craft within four-and-twenty hours!"

Captain Shewell spoke no word, but saluted deliberately, and watched his brother's boat recede, till it was a speck upon the sea, as it moved towards Golden Gate.

"Good old Dick!" he said at last, as he turned away toward the bridge. "And he'll do it, if he can!"

But he never did, for as the *Cormorant* cleared the harbour that evening there came an accident to her machinery, and with two days' start the *Hornet* was on her way to be sold again to a South American Republic.

And Edward Debney, once her captain? What does it matter?

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19: An Instrument of the Gods

Lincoln Colcord

1883-1947

The American Magazine, Apr & May 1921

US newspaperman, songwriter, translator and author, mostly of sea stories

"YOU THINK the Chinese are prosaic," said Nichols from the darkness of his corner. "I've listened to you closely. You fellows have been discussing only superficialities. At heart, you and the Oriental are the same. The Chinese are romantic, I tell you; they are heroic. Yes, really. Let me tell you a tale."

Suddenly he laughed. "You won't be convinced. But strip my friend Lee Fu Chang naked, forget about that long silken coat of his; dress him in a cowboy's suit and locate him on the Western plains, and the game he played with Captain Wilbur won't seem so inappropriate. You merely won't expect a mandarin Chinaman to play it. You'll feel that China is too civilized for what he did.

"Some of you fellows must remember the notorious case of Captain Wilbur and the *Speedwell*; but I'll briefly refresh your memories: He was a well-known shipmaster of the palmy days, and his vessel was one of the finest clippers ever launched on the shores of New England. But she was growing old; and Wilbur had suffered serious financial reverses, though the fact wasn't generally known.

"To make a long story short, he put the *Speedwell* ashore in Ombay Pass, on a voyage from Singapore to New York, and abandoned her as she lay. Within a month after sailing, he was back again in Singapore with his ship's company in three long boats and a tale of a lost vessel. No hint of scandal was raised against the affair. The insurance companies stood the gaff, the business was closed up without a hitch, and the name of the *Speedwell* passed simultaneously from the *Maritime Register* and from the books of her owners in America.

"Wilbur went immediately to Batavia, and there hired a schooner and crew with the proceeds of his personal holdings in the vessel. He sailed for Ombay Pass; after a period of magnificent sailorizing and superhuman effort he floated the ship and patched her so that she would stay afloat. When he appeared off Batavia roadstead with the *Speedwell* under topgallant-sails, it was the sensation of the port; and when it transpired what he intended to do with her, the news flew like wildfire about the China Sea. For he proposed to hold the ship as salvage; and nothing, apparently, could be done about it. He found men willing to advance him credit, bought off his Lascar crew, took the

Speedwell to Hong Kong and put her in dry dock, and soon was ready for business with a fine ship of his own.

"I was off on a trading voyage while these events were taking place. I heard them first from Lee Fu Chang.

" 'An extraordinary incident!' exclaimed Lee Fu in conclusion. 'I am deeply interested. It is a crowning stroke that he has not seen fit to change the name of the vessel. All is as it was before, when the well-known and reputable Captain Wilbur commanded his fine ship, the *Speedwell*, on voyages to the East.'

" 'Does the crowd have anything to do with him?' I asked.

" 'None of his old associates speak in passing. He goes about like a man afflicted with a pestilence. Apparently, he is not disturbed by this treatment. He makes no protest, offers no excuse, takes no notice; in the face of outrageous insult he maintains an air of dignity and reserve, like a man conscious of inner rectitude.'

" 'Did you talk with him, Lee Fu?'

" 'Oh, yes. In fact, I cultivated his acquaintance. It relieved, as it were, the daily monotony of virtue. Do not think that he is a simple man. His heart in this matter is unfathomable, and well worth sounding.'

" 'By Jove, I believe you liked him!'

" 'No, not that.' Lee Fu folded his hands within the long sleeves of his embroidered coat and laid them across his stomach in a characteristic attitude of meditation. 'No, quite the opposite. I abhorred him. He feels no remorse; he goes his way in peace from the betrayal of a sacred trust. He is an arch-criminal.'

" 'Aren't you laying it on a little thick?' I laughed.

"Lee Fu smiled quietly, giving me a glance that was a mere flicker of the eyelids. 'Captain, let me tell you, murder is brave and honorable compared to this. Consider what he did: Trained to the sea and ships, after a lifetime of service to his traditions, he suddenly forsakes them utterly. It is blasphemy which he has committed; blasphemy against the gods who guide and sustain us, and without whose aid we cannot live. So I abhor him— and am fascinated. If you will believe me, Captain, I have not in all my talk with him received a single flash of illumination; no, not one! There is no clue to his design. He speaks of his ship as others do; he is a big, red-faced man with frank glances and open speech. I swear to you, his heart is untroubled. And that is horrible.'

"I was a little amused at my friend's moral fervor. 'Perhaps he's innocent,' I said.

" 'You forget that he holds the vessel,' Lee Fu reminded me. 'To one of your race, if no blood flows, then it is not so bad. But bear in mind that a strong man

within your circle has murdered the spirit— and wait until the actual blood flows.'

" 'What do you mean. Lee Fu?'

" 'I mean that Captain Wilbur will bear watching. In the meantime, do not fail to study him when opportunity offers. Thus we learn of heaven and hell.'

"A few years went by, while the case of Captain Wilbur and the *Speedwell* was in its initial stages of being forgotten. Nothing succeeds like success; the man was growing rich, and there were many to whom the possession of a fine vessel covered a multitude of sins. Some of his old friends were willing after a while to let bygones be bygones. Little by little, one began to see him again on the quarter-deck of an evening, among the fleet captains. When, in time, it became unwise to start the story against him for fear of misconstruction of the motive, it was evident that he'd won his nefarious match against society

"I'd met him a number of times during this interval. Indeed, he compelled attention. That perfect urbanity, that air of unfailing dignity and confidence, that aura of a commanding personality, of an able shipmaster among his brethren, of a man whose position in the world was secure beyond peradventure; these could spring only from a quiet conscience or from a heart perfectly attuned to villainy. So unconscious was his poise that one often doubted the evidence of memory, and found one's self going back over the record, only to fetch up point-blank against the incontestable fact that he had stolen his ship and had betrayed his profession.

" 'It is a triumph, a feat of character!' Lee Fu used to say, as we compared notes on the case from time to time. 'I think that he has not been guilty of a single minor error. His correctness is diabolical. It presages disaster, like too much fair weather in the typhoon season. Mark my word, Captain, when the major error comes it will be a great tragedy.'

" 'Must there be an error?' I asked, falling into the mood of Lee Fu's exaggerated concern. 'He has carried it off so far with the greatest ease.'

" 'Yes, with the greatest ease,' Lee Fu repeated thoughtfully. 'Yet I wonder if he has been properly put to the test. See how the world protects him! But he is not invulnerable. Life will yet challenge him— it must be. Can a man escape the gods? I wonder. That is why I concern myself with him— to know his destiny.'

"'You admit, then, that he may be merely a stupid fool?' I chaffed.

"'Not stupid,' said Lee Fu. 'Yet, on the other hand, not superior to life. Such faultless power of will is in itself no mean share of ability. He is, as you might say, self-centered—most accurately self-centered. But the challenge of the gods displaces the center of all. He will be like a top that is done spinning. A little breath may topple him. Wait and see.'

"Voyage followed voyage; and one time, when I had come in from Bangkok and was on my way to Lee Fu's office I passed Captain Wilbur on the opposite side of Queen's Road. It flashed across my mind that I hadn't observed the *Speedwell* in harbor.

" 'The fact is, the successful Captain Wilbur has retired from active service on the sea,' Lee Fu explained with a quizzical smile, when I put the question. 'He is now a ship owner alone, and has favored Hong Kong above all other ports as the seat of his retirement. He resides in a fine house on Graham Terrace, and has chairmen in white livery edged with crimson. Captain Nichols, you should steal a ship.'

" 'Who goes in the *Speedwell*?'

" 'An old friend of ours, one Captain Turner,' said Lee Fu slowly, without looking in my direction.

" 'Not Will Turner?'

" 'The same.'

"I pursed up my mouth in a silent whistle. Will Turner in the *Speedwell*' Poor old chap, he must have lost another ship. Hard luck seemed to pursue him, gave him no rest on land or sea. A capable sailor and an honest man, yet life had afforded him nothing but a succession of black eyes and heavy falls. Death and sorrow, too; he had buried a wife and child, swept off by cholera, in the Bay of Bengal. Turner and I had landed together in the China Sea; I knew his heart, his history, some of his secrets, and liked him tremendously for the man he was.

"Watching Lee Fu in silence, I thought of the relationship between Will Turner and this extraordinary Chinaman. I won't go into the story, but there were overwhelming reasons why they should think well of each other; why Lee Fu should respect and honor Turner, and why Turner should hold Lee Fu as his best friend.

" 'I did not know of the plan until he had accepted,' Lee Fu was saying. 'I did everything in my power to dissuade him.'

" 'Didn't Wilbur do the right thing?'

" 'Oh, yes. But it is unthinkable, Captain, that he should command the *Speedwell*. The jealous gods have not yet shown their hand.'

" 'Nonsense, Lee Fu!' I exclaimed, a little irritated. 'Since the thing is done, hadn't we better try to be practical?'

" 'Exactly,' said Lee Fu. 'Let us be practical. Captain, is it impossible for the Caucasian to reason from cause to effect? There seems to be no logic in your design; which explains many curious facts of history. I have merely insisted that a man who would do one thing would do another, and that, sooner or later, life would present to him another thing to do.'

" 'But I've known too many men to escape what you call destiny,' I argued peevishly.

" 'Have you?' inquired Lee Fu.

"That year I went into the Malay Archipelago for an extended cruise, was gone seven months among the islands, and reached Hong Kong just ahead of a bad blow. Typhoon signals were flying from the Peak as I came in; the sky to the eastward had lowered and darkened like a shutter, and the breeze had begun to whip in vicious gusts across the harbor. I carried important communications for Lee Fu, so went ashore at once. The outer office was full of gathering gloom, although it was still early afternoon. Sing Toy immediately took in my name; and soon I was ushered into the familiar room, where my friend sat beside a shaded lamp, facing a teakwood desk inlaid with ivory, and invariably bare, save for a priceless Ming vase and an ornament of old green bronze.

" 'I am glad to see you, Captain,' he said dispassionately. 'Sit down. I have bad news.'

" 'Yes?' I queried, more than a little alarmed.

"Folding his hands across his stomach and slightly bowing his head, he gazed at me with a level upturned glance that, without betraying expression, carried by its very immobility a hint of deep emotion. 'It is as I told you,' he said at last. 'Now, perhaps, you will believe.'

" 'For heaven's sake, what are you talking about?' I demanded.

" 'We had another typhoon this season, a very early one. It was this typhoon into whose face our late friend Captain Turner took his ship, the *Speedwell*, sailing from Hong Kong for New York some four months ago. Three days after sailing, he met the typhoon and was blown upon a lee shore two hundred miles along the China coast. In this predicament, he cut away his masts and came to anchor. But his ship would not float, and accordingly sunk at the anchors.'

" 'Sunk at her anchors!' I exclaimed. 'How could that be? A tight ship never did such a thing.'

" 'Nevertheless, she sunk in the midst of the gale, and all on board perished. Afterwards the news was reported from shore, and the hull was discovered in ten fathoms of water. There has been talk of trying to save the ship; and Captain Wilbur himself, in a diver's suit, has inspected the wreck. Surely, he should know if it is possible to salve her! He says no, and it is reported that the insurance companies are in agreement with him.' Lee Fu's voice dropped to a rasping tone. 'The lives, of course, he cannot save.'

"I sat for some moments gazing at the green bronze dragon on the desk, stunned by what I had heard. Turner gone? Even between us, who had seen

each other seldom in late years, there had been a bond. Weren't we known as the two Eastern wanderers?

" 'That is not all,' said Lee Fu suddenly. 'What more?' I asked.

" 'Listen, Captain, and pay close attention. Some weeks after the loss of the *Speedwell*, it came to my ears that a man had a tale worth hearing. He was brought; he proved to be a common coolie who had been employed in the loading of the *Speedwell*. This coolie had been gambling during the dinner hour, and had lost the small sum that he should have taken home as the result of several days' labor. Likewise, he feared his wife, and particularly her mother, who was a shrew. In a moment of desperation, as the lighter was preparing to leave for the night, he escaped and secreted himself in the hold of the vessel.

" 'He had long been asleep that night when he was suddenly awakened by a sound on the ladder leading from the upper deck. It was a sound of careful steps, mingled with a faint metallic rattling. A moment later a foot descended on the floor of the between-decks, and lantern was cautiously lighted. The coolie retreated quickly into the lower hold, and from his post among the bales of merchandise was able to see all that went on.'

"Again Lee Fu paused, as if lingering over the scene. 'It seems that this late and secret comer into the hold of the *Speedwell* was none other than her owner, Captain Wilbur,' he slowly resumed. 'The coolie knew him by face, and had seen him come on board that afternoon. Afterwards, through my inquiries, I learned that Captain Turner had spent that night on shore. It was Captain Wilbur's custom, it seems, frequently to sleep on board his ship when she lay in port. Have you ever been in the lower hold of the *Speedwell*, Captain Nichols?'

" 'No, I haven't.'

" 'But you recall her famous ports?'

" 'Yes, indeed.' The incident at once came back to me in detail. The *Speedwell* once had carried a cargo of ironwood from Singapore for a temple up the Yangtse-kiang. In order to load the immense timbers, she had been obliged to cut bow ports of extraordinary size, fifty inches in depth, they were, and nearly seven feet in width, according to my recollection.

" 'It has been my privilege,' said Lee Fu, 'to examine carefully the forepeak of this vessel. I had chartered her one time, and felt alarmed for her safety until I had seen the interior fastenings of these great windows that looked out into the deep sea. But my alarm was groundless. There was a most ingenious device for strengthening the bows where they had been weakened by the cutting of the ports. Four or five timbers had, of course, been severed; but these were reproduced on the port itself, and the whole was fashioned like a massive door. It lifted upward on immense wrought-iron hinges; when it was

lowered in place gigantic bars of iron, fitted into brackets on the adjoining timbers, stretched across its face to hold it against the impact of the waves. Thus the port, when tightly caulked from without, became again an integral part of the hull; I was told that there had never keen a trace of leakage from her bows. And, most remarkable of all, I was told, when it became necessary to open these ports for use, the task could easily be accomplished by two or three men and a stout watch-tackle. This I am now prepared to believe.

" 'But, to resume the account of the coolie,' Lee Fu went on with exasperating deliberation. 'This is what he saw: Our friend Captain Wilbur descended into the lower hold and forward to the forepeak, where there was little cargo. There he worked with great effort for several hours. He had equipped himself with a short crowbar, and carried a light tackle wrapped beneath his coat. The tackle he loosened and hung to a hook above the middle of the port; it was merely for the purpose of lowering the iron crossbars so that they would make no noise. Had one fallen—'

" 'Good God, Lee Fu, what are you trying to tell me?'

" 'Merely an incident of the night. So, with the crowbar, Captain Wilbur pried loose the iron braces, slinging them in his tackle and dropping them softly one by one into the ship's bottom. It was a heavy task; the coolie said that sweat poured from the big man like rain. Last of all he covered the bars with dunnage, and rolled against the bow several bulky bales of matting to conceal the work. Captain, when the *Speedwell* sailed from Hong Kong in command of our honored friend, one of her great bow ports below the water hung on its hinges without internal fastenings, and held in place only by the tightness of the caulking. The first heavy weather—'

" 'Can this be possible?' I said through clenched teeth.

" 'Oh, yes, so easily possible that it happened,' answered Lee Fu.

" 'But why should he do such a thing? Had he anything against Turner?'

" 'Captain, you do not understand. He merely was tired of the vessel; and freights are becoming very poor. He wanted his insurance. He had no thought of disaster so he now assures himself; what he had in mind was for the ship to sink discreetly in pleasant weather. Yet he was willing enough to run the chance of wholesale murder.'

"I got up and began pacing the floor; the damnable affair had made me sick at heart, and a little sick at the stomach.

" 'Thus the gods have struck,' said Lee Fu behind me, in that changeless voice that for a moment seemed to concentrate the echo of the ages. 'There is blood at last, Captain— twenty-seven lives, and among them one dear to us— enough even to convince one of your race that a crime has been committed.

But I was mistaken in much that I foresaw. The criminal, it seems, is destined not to suffer. He has escaped the gods.'

" 'Can't you bring him to a reckoning? Isn't there some way—'

"Lee Fu shook his head. 'No, Captain, he is amply protected. What could I accomplish in your courts with this fantastic tale, and for witnesses a coolie and a sampan man?'

"I continued to pace the floor, thinking dark thoughts. There was a way, of course, between man and man; but such things are no longer done in the heart of civilization, except in sudden passion or jealousy.

"Pacing rapidly, and oblivious to everything but the four walls of the room, I nearly ran into Sing Toy coming in with a message from the outer office. He whispered a word in Lee Fu's ear.

" 'Ah!' exclaimed Lee Fu sharply. I started, whirled around. His voice had lost the level, passive tone; it had taken on the timbre of action.

" 'Send him in,' he said in Chinese to Sing Toy.

" 'Who is it?' I asked breathlessly.

" 'The man we have been speaking of.'

"'Wilbur? What the devil does he want?'

"'Nothing,' answered Lee Fu, speaking swiftly. 'He merely came to make a call. So he thinks; but I think otherwise. Beware of word or glance. This chanced by arrangement. We are on the threshold of the gods.'

"Lee Fu remained standing as Captain Wilbur entered the room. His hurried admonition still rang in my ears: 'Keep silence— beware of word or glance!' But I couldn't have spoken intelligibly just then. To beware of glances was a different matter. I stood as if rooted to the floor, gazing point-blank at Wilbur with a stare that must have made him wonder as to my sanity.

"'Good afternoon, Captain Wilbur,' said Lee Fu blandly. 'I think you are acquainted with Captain Nichols, of the bark *Omega*?'

" 'Oh, how-do, Nichols,' said Wilbur, advancing down the room. 'I've missed you around town for a good while. Glad you're back. I suppose you had the usual assortment of adventures?'

"I drew back to escape shaking his hand.

" 'No,' I answered, 'nothing like the adventure that awaited me here.'

"He settled himself in a chair, directly in range of the light, smiled, and lifted his eyebrows. 'So? Well, I can believe you. This office, you know, is the heart of all adventure.' He bowed toward Lee Fu, who had resumed his seat.

" 'You honor me, Captain,' replied the Chinaman. 'Yet it is only life which may be called the heart of adventure— life, with its amazing secrets that one by one transpire into the day, and with its enormous burden of evil that weighs us down like slaves.'

"Wilbur laughed. 'Yes, that's it, no doubt. Good, too, Lee Fu, plenty of good. Don't be pessimistic. But I suppose you're right, in a way; the evil always does manage to be more romantic.'

" 'Much more romantic,' said Lee Fu. 'And the secrets are more romantic still. Consider, for instance, the case of a dark secret, which by chance has already become known. How infinitely romantic! Though the man feels secure, yet inevitably it will be disclosed. When, and how? Such a case would be well worth watching— as the great writer had in mind when he wrote, "Murder will out."'

"The winged words made no impression on their mark. Wilbur met Lee Fu's glance frankly, innocently, with interest. By Jove, he was wonderful! The damned rascal hadn't a nerve in his body.

"I examined him closely. Above a trimmed brown beard his cheeks showed the ruddy color of health and energy; his eyes were steady; his mouth was strong and clean; a head of fine gray hair surmounted a high forehead; the whole aspect of his countenance was pleasing and dignified. Sitting at ease, dressed neatly in blue serge, with an arm thrown over the chair back and one ankle resting on the other knee, he presented a fine figure.

"He gave a hearty laugh. 'For the Lord's sake, come out of the gloom!' he cried. 'I drop in for a chat, and find a couple of blue devils up to their ears in the sins of humanity. Nichols over there has hardly opened his mouth.'

" 'It is the mood of the approaching storm,' interposed Lee Fu quietly.

"A fiercer squall than the last shook the building; it passed in a moment as if dropping us in mid-air. Wilbur was the first to speak. 'Yes, it's going to be a hummer, isn't it? A bad night to be on the water, gentlemen. I wouldn't care to be threshing around outside, now, as poor old Turner was such a short while ago.'

"I could have struck him across the mouth for his callousness.

"Lee Fu's voice fell like oil on a breaking sea. 'All signs point to another severe typhoon. It happened, Captain, that we were discussing the loss of the "Speedwell" when you came in.'

" 'Too bad— too bad,' said Wilbur slowly, with a shake of the head. 'You were away, Nichols, weren't you? It was a bad week here, I can tell you, after the news came in. I shall never forget it. Well, we take our chances.'

" 'Some of us do, and some of us don't,' I snapped.

" 'That's just the way I feel about it,' he said simply. 'It came home hard to me.' My jaw fairly dropped as I listened. Was it possible that he liked to talk about the affair?

" 'We were wondering,' observed Lee Fu, 'why it was that the *Speedwell* did not remain afloat. What is your opinion, Captain Wilbur?'

" 'It isn't a matter of opinion,' Wilbur answered. 'Haven't I seen you since the inspection? Why, the starboard bow port is stove in. I've always been afraid of those big bow ports. When I heard the peculiar circumstances, I knew in my heart what had happened.'

" 'Did you?' inquired Lee Fu, with a slight hardening of the voice. 'Captain, have you collected your insurance?'

"Wilbur frowned and glanced up sharply, very properly offended. The next moment he had decided to pass it off as an instance of alien manners. 'I've just cleaned up today,' he replied brusquely. 'Had my last settlement with Lloyd's this morning— and did a silly thing, if you'll believe me. They had a package of large denomination bank notes, crisp, wonderful looking fellows; I took a sudden fancy and asked for my money in this form. To tell the truth, I've got it on me now; must get to the bank, too, before it closes.'

"'What is the amount of the bank notes which you have in your possession?' asked Lee Fu in a level tone that carried its own insult.

"Wilbur showed his astonishment. 'Amount? Well, if you want all the details, I've got about forty thousand dollars in my pocket.'

"Lee Fu turned and shot at me a blank stare full of meaning; it might have been a look of caution, or a glance of triumph. I knew that I was expected to understand something, to glimpse some pregnant purpose; but for the life of me I couldn't catch on.

" 'I, also, knew in my heart what had happened,' said Lee Fu slowly, staring at Wilbur with a steady gaze. As he looked, he reached out with his right hand and opened the top drawer of the desk. Suddenly he stood up. The hand held a revolver, pointed at Wilbur's breast.

" 'If you move from your chair, Captain, I will shoot you dead, and your end will never be known,' he said rapidly. 'It is time we came to an understanding for the day wanes.'

"Wilbur uncrossed his legs, leaned forward, and looked at Lee Fu narrowly. 'What's the joke?' he asked.

" 'A joke that will be clear as time goes on— like one you played with bow ports on my friend. Captain, we are going on a journey. Will you join us, Captain Nichols, or will you remain on shore?'

"The question was perfunctory; Lee Fu knew well enough that my decision was in his hands. I stood up—for until now I had been chained to my chair by the amazing turn of the moment.

" 'Bow ports?' Wilbur was saying. 'Put that gun down! What in hell do you mean?' He started to rise.

" 'Sit down!' commanded Lee Fu. 'I mean that I will shoot. This is not play.' Wilbur sank back, angry and confused.

" 'Are you crazy, Lee Fu?' he demanded. 'What's the meaning of this, Nichols? Do you intend to rob me? Have both of you gone mad?'

" 'Is it possible that you do not comprehend that I share your secret?' asked Lee Fu sternly. 'You were observed, Captain, that night in the forepeak of the *Speedwell*; and those details, also, are known to me. It is needless to dissemble.'

" 'That night in the forepeak?— Lee Fu, for God's sake, what are you talking about?'

" 'Ah!' exclaimed Lee Fu with evident satisfaction. 'You are worthy of the occasion, Captain. That is well. It will be most interesting.'

"He slapped his left palm sharply on the desk; Sing Toy appeared at the door as if by a mechanical arrangement. 'Bring oilskin coats and hats for three,' Lee Fu commanded. 'Also, send in haste to my cruising sampan, with orders to prepare for an immediate trip. Have water and food provided for a week. We come within the half hour and sail without delay.'

" 'Master!' protested Sing Toy. 'Master, the typhoon!'

" 'I know, fool,' answered Lee Fu. 'I am neither deaf nor blind. Have I not ordered oilskin coats? Do as I have said.'

"He sat down, resting the gun on the corner of the desk, and resumed the bland tone of conversation. 'I am sorry, gentlemen, that the rain has already come; but there is water also below, as Captain Wilbur should be aware. Yes, it was destined from the first to be a wet journey. Yet it will still be possible to breathe; and not so bad as solid water on all sides, where, after a grim struggle, one lies at rest, neither caring nor remembering— Captain Wilbur, listen to me. We go from this office to my sampan, which lies moored at the bulkhead not far away. During the walk, you will precede us. I will hold my revolver in my hand—and I am an excellent shot. If you attempt to escape, or to communicate with any passer-by, you will immediately be dead. Do not think that I would fear[Pg 96] the consequences; we will pass through Chinese streets, where action of mine would not be questioned.'

" 'Damn you!' Wilbur burst out. 'What silly nonsense are you up to? Nichols, will you permit this? Where are you going to take me?'

" 'Never mind,' replied Lee Fu. 'As for Captain Nichols, he, also, is at my mercy. Ah, here are the raincoats. Put one on, Captain Wilbur; you will need it sorely before your return. Now we must hurry. I would be clear of the harbor before darkness entirely falls.'

"Issuing from the doorway, the gale caught us with a swirl that carried us around the corner and down a side street. 'To the right!' Lee Fu shouted. Wilbur, lurching ahead, obeyed sullenly. We came about and made for the

water front through the fringe of the Chinese quarter, the most remarkable trio, perhaps, that had ever threaded those familiar thoroughfares.

"Overhead, the sky had settled low on the slope of the Peak. We floundered on, enveloped in a gray gloom like that of an eclipse. When we reached the water front the face of the bay had undergone a sinister change, its yellow-green waters lashed into sickly foam and shrouded by an unnatural gleaming darkness. A distant moaning sound ran through the upper air, vague yet distinctly audible. The center of the typhoon was headed in our direction.

"As we staggered along the quay, my thoughts worked rapidly. I saw the plan now, and recognized the dangerous nature of the undertaking on which we'd embarked. It was to be a game of bluff, in which we would have to risk our lives if the other held his ground.

"I edged toward Lee Fu. 'Will you go on the water?' I asked in his ear.

"He nodded, keeping his eyes fixed on Wilbur ahead.

" 'But it can't be done,' I told him. 'A boat won't live.'

" 'There is always a definite alternative,' he replied abruptly.

" 'Yes— that we sink.'

" 'Exactly.'

"All at once, in a flash of enlightenment, the greatness of the occasion came to me. By Jove! He had taken the matter in his own hands; he had stepped in when the gods had failed. But he had observed the divine proprieties; had seen that if he presumed to act for the gods he must throw his own life, as well, into the balance. He must run every risk. It was for them, after all, to make the final choice. He was only forcing action on the gods.

"I gazed at him in wonder. He advanced stiffly against the storm, walking like an automaton. Beneath the close pulled rim of a black sou'wester his smooth oval countenance looked ridiculously vacant, like the face of a placid moon. He was the only calm object on earth, sea or sky; against the lashing rain, the dancing boats, the scudding clouds, the hurried shadows of appearing and vanishing men, he stood out plainly, a different essence, a higher spirit, the embodiment of mind and will.

"And how was it with Wilbur, off there in the lead? He, too, walked stiffly, wrapped in thought. Once he turned, as if to come back and speak to us; then whirled with a violent movement of decision and plunged on into the rain. He knew, now, what it was all about, if not what to expect. He knew that his crime had been discovered. Yet he had made no break; in no particular had he given himself away. What had he decided? What had he been about to say? Would he confess, when he faced death on the water; or would he be confident enough to believe that he could beat the game?

"Observing his broad back, his commanding figure, that looked thoroughly at home in its oilskin coat and leaning against the storm, it came to me that he would put up a desperate defense before he succumbed. He, too, was a strong man, and no part of a coward; he, too, in a different way, was a superior being, the embodiment of mind and will.

"Then, for a moment, my own spirit went slump with the realization of what lay before us, and a great weakness overcame me. I edged again toward Lee Fu.

" 'My God, what if the man really is innocent?' I cried. 'He hasn't turned a hair.'

"Lee Fu gave me a flash of the moon face beneath the sou'wester, 'Have no fear, my friend,' he reassured me. 'I am completely satisfied, in regions where the soul dwells.'

"When we reached the sampan, lying under a weather shore beneath the bulkhead, we found a scene of consternation. Lee Fu's orders had arrived, and had been executed; yet the men couldn't believe that he actually meant to sail. Gathered in a panic-stricken group on the fore deck of the sampan, they chattered like a flock of magpies; as they caught sight of us, they swarmed across the bulkhead and fell at Lee Fu's feet, begging for mercy.

" 'Up, dogs!' he cried. 'There is no danger. I shall steer, and it is necessary that we go. If any would remain, let them depart now, with no tale to tell. Let those who stay prepare at once for sea.'

"I found Wilbur beside me. 'What's this madness, Nichols?' he demanded for the third and last time.

" 'I know no more about it than you do,' I answered shortly. 'He has told his crew to prepare for sea. If he goes, we all go.'

"A moment later we stood on the quarter-deck of the cruising sampan. Lee Fu took his station at the great tiller. The wind lulled, as the trough of a squall passed over; he gave a few sharp orders. Moorings were cast off, a pinch of sail was lifted forward. The big craft found her freedom with a lurch and a stagger; then pulled herself together and left the land with a steady rush, skimming dead before the wind across the smooth upper reach of the harbor and quickly losing herself in the murk and spray that hung off Kowloon Point. Lee Fu somehow managed to avoid the fleet at anchor off Wanchi; straight down the length of the bay he struck, and in an incredibly short time we had left the harbor behind and were whirling through the narrow gut of Lymoon Pass before a terrific squall, bound for the open sea.

"I watched Captain Wilbur. He stood carelessly at the rail during our race down the harbor, scanning the boat and the water with an air of confidence and unconcern. A sneer curled his lip; he had made up his mind to see the

nonsense through. The sailor in him had quickly recognized that the craft would stand the weather in smooth water; he probably expected any minute that Lee Fu would call it quits and put into some sheltered cove.

"But when we shot through Lymoon Pass, I saw him turn and scrutinize the Chinaman closely. Darkness was falling behind the murk, the real night now; and ahead of us lay a widening reach among the islands that opened abruptly on the main body of the China Sea. We were rapidly leaving the protection of Victoria Island. Soon we would be unable to see our way. Ten miles outside a high sea was running. And with every blast of wind that held in the same quarter, the center of the typhoon was bearing down on us with unerring aim.

"These things were as patent to Wilbur as to any of us. In fact, his knowledge was his undoing; had he been less of a sailor, or had he been entirely ignorant of sea matters, he could have resigned himself to the situation on the assumption that Lee Fu never would put himself in actual danger. Perhaps Lee Fu had foreseen this when he chose the sea as the medium of justice; perhaps he had glimpsed the profound and subtle truth that Wilbur couldn't properly be broken save in his native environment. He knew the sea, had trifled with it; then let him face the sea.

"The time came, just before we lost the loom of the land, when Wilbur could stand it no longer; as a sailor, used to responsibility and command, he had to speak his mind.

"He dropped aft beside Lee Fu, and put his hand to his mouth. 'You're running to your death!' he shouted. 'You've already lost Pootoy. If you can't haul up and make the lee of the Lema Islands—'

" 'I intend to pass nowhere near them,' answered Lee Fu, keeping his eyes on the yawning bow of the sampan.

" 'There's nothing to the eastward— no shelter.'

" 'Of that I am aware.'

" 'Do you know what that means?' Wilbur pointed above the stern rail into the face of the storm.

" 'I think we will get the center, Captain, by tomorrow noon.'

"Wilbur made a move as if to grasp the tiller. 'Haul up, you fool!'

"A stray gleam in the gathering darkness caught the barrel of the revolver, as Lee Fu steered for a moment with one hand.

" 'Beware, Captain! You are the fool; would you broach us to, and end it now? One thing alone will send me to seek the last shelter; and for that thing I think you are not ready.'

" 'What?'

" 'To say that you sunk the *Speedwell*.'

"Wilbur gathered his strength as if to strike; his face was distorted with passion.

" 'You lie, you yellow hound!'

" 'Exactly— Captain, be careful— come no nearer! Also, leave me alone. If you value your life, you will keep silence and stay a little forward. Go, quickly! Here I could shoot you with the greatest impunity.'"

Nichols paused. "Maybe some of you fellows haven't seen Lee Fu's cruising sampan," he remarked. "In reality, she's more of a junk than a sampan, a sizable craft of over a hundred tons, and the best product of the Chinese shipyard. Lee Fu had her built for trips along the coast, and many of his own ideas, born of an expert knowledge of ships of every nationality entered into her construction. The result is distinctly a Chinese creation, a craft that seems to reflect his personality, that responds to his touch and works with him. She's higher in the bows than an ordinary junk, and lower in the stern; a broad, shallow hull that needs a centerboard on the wind. Of course she's completely decked over for heavy weather. In charge of any of us, perhaps, she would be unmanageable; but in his hands, I can assure you, she's a sea boat of remarkable attainments.

"I had seen him handle her under difficult conditions, but never in such a pass as this. How he did it was inconceivable to me. The last I saw of him that night he had called two men to help him at the tiller; and, so far, he had kept the craft before the wind.

"For many hours I was surrounded by pitch blackness and the storm. I clung to a single stanchion, hardly changing my position during the night, drenched by rain and spray, seeing nothing, hearing no word. The gale roared above us with that peculiar tearing sound that accompanies the body of a typhoon; a sound suggestive of unearthly anger and violence, as if elemental forces were ripping up the envelope of the universe. The wind gained steadily in volume; it picked up the sea in steep ridges of solid water that flung us like a chip from crest to crest, or caught us, burst above us and swallowed us whole, as if we had suddenly sunk in a deep well. Every moment I expected would be our last. Yet, as time wore on, I felt through the sampan's frantic floundering a hand of guidance, a touch of mastery. Lee Fu steered, and she was still in his control. A night to turn the hair gray, to shatter the mind.

"But we came through, and saw the dawn. A pale watery light little by little crept into the east, disclosing a scene of terror beyond description. The face of the sea was livid with flying yellow foam; the torn sky hung closely over it like the fringe of a mighty waterfall. In the midst of this churning cauldron our little craft seemed momently on the point of disappearing, engulfed by the wrath of the elements.

"In the lull of the storm my glance encountered Wilbur; for a long while I'd forgotten him entirely. He hung to the rail a little farther forward, gazing across the maelstrom with a fixed, exhausted expression. His face was haggard; the strain of the night had marked him with a ruthless hand. As I watched him, his eye turned slowly in my direction; he gave me an anxious look, then crawled along the rail to a place by my side.

"'Nichols, we're lost!' I heard him cry in my ear. The voice was almost plaintive; it suddenly made me angry, revived a few sparks of my own courage.

" 'What of it?' I cried harshly. 'Turner was lost.'

" 'You believe that, too?'

"I looked at him point-blank; his eyes shifted; he couldn't face me now. 'Yes, I do,' I told him. 'Why don't you own up, before—?'

"He moved away hastily, as if offended to the heart. But the strong man had gone, the air of perfect confidence had disappeared; he was shattered and spent—but not yet broken. Pride is more tenacious than courage; and men with hearts of water will continue to function through self-esteem.

"Looking above his head, where the sky and the sea met in a blanket of flying spume, I caught sight for an instant of something that resembled the vague form of a headland. Watching closely, I soon saw it again—unmistakably the shadow of land to port, well forward, of the beam. Land! That meant that the wind had shifted to the southward, that we were being blown against the shore.

"I worked my way cautiously aft, where Lee Fu stood like a man of iron at the tiller, lashed to the heavy cross-rail that must have been constructed for such occasions. He saw me coming, leaned toward me.

" 'Land!' I shouted, pointing on the port bow.

"He nodded vigorously, to show me that he'd already seen it. 'Recognize—' The rest of the answer was blown away by the wind.

"By pantomime, I called his attention to the shift of the storm. Again he nodded— then ducked his head in Wilbur's direction, and shouted something that I couldn't quite follow. 'Change our tactics— we must change our tactics— ' was what I understood him to say.

"He beckoned me to come closer; grasping the cross-rail, I swung down beside him.

" 'I know our position,' he cried in my ear. 'Have no alarm, my friend. There are two large islands, and a third, small like a button. Watch closely the button, while I steer. When it touches the high headland, give me the news instantly.'

"He had hauled the junk a trifle to port, and with every opportunity was edging toward the land. The tall headland that I'd first sighted grew plainer

with every moment; soon I made out the island like a button and saw it closing rapidly on the land behind.

" 'Now!' I shouted to Lee Fu, when the two had touched.

"He swung the sampan a couple of points to starboard, discovering close beneath our bows the tip of another reef that stretched toward the land diagonally across the path of the wind. In a moment we were almost abreast this point of reef; a hundred yards away, its spray lashed our decks as the low-lying black rocks caught the broken wash of the storm. Another swing of the great tiller, and we had hauled up in the lee of the reef— in quiet water at last, but with the gale still screaming overhead like a defeated demon.

"It was like nothing but a return from hell. The wind held us in a solid blast; but to feel the deck grow quiet, to be able to speak, to hear—and then, to see the land close aboard. By Jove, we were saved!

"A voice spoke gruffly beside us. 'By God, I hope you're satisfied!' We turned to see Wilbur at the head of the cross-rail. A twitching face belied the nonchalance that he'd attempted to throw into the words.

" 'I don't know how we lived!' he snarled. 'What in the name of God made you try it? Nothing but luck—and now the typhoon's leaving us. We can wait here till the blow dies down.'

" 'Is that all, Captain, that you have to say?' inquired Lee Fu, his attention riveted on the course.

"Wilbur clutched the rail as if he would tear it from its fastenings. 'A damned sight more, you blackguard; but I'll save it for the authorities!'

" 'You feel no thanks for your escape— and there is nothing on your mind?'

" 'Nothing but sleep— why should there be? Let's wind up this farce and get to anchor somewhere; I'm fagged out.'

" 'No, we are going on,' said Lee Fu calmly, making no move to come into the wind. 'No time for rest, Captain; the journey is not done.'

" 'Going on?' He turned fiercely, and for a moment he and Lee Fu gazed deep into each other's eyes in a grapple that gave no quarter.

" 'Yes, Captain!' cried Lee Fu sharply. 'We have not yet reached the spot where the *Speedwell* met her doom. Now go! I cannot waste time in talk.'

"Since this experience, I've many times examined the charts of the region," Nichols went on. "But they don't begin to show it all. Beyond the middle island stretched a larger island, distant some five miles from the other; and between them lay the most intricate, extraordinary and terrible nest of reefs ever devised by the mind of the Maker and the hand of geologic change.

"The outlying fringe of reefs that had broken first approach ended at the middle island; beyond that to windward lay clear water, and the nest of reefs that I've mentioned received the full force of the wind and sea. Five miles of

water stretched in mad confusion, a solid whiteness of spouting foam that seemed to hold a hideous illumination. Beyond the point of the middle island the long wind-swept rollers burst in tall columns of spray that shut off the view like a curtain as we drew near, where the rocks began in an unbroken wall.

"It was directly against this wall that Lee Fu was driving the sampan. The first lift of the outside swell had already caught us. I held my breath, as moment by moment we cut down the margin of safety. No use to interfere; perhaps he knew what he was doing; perhaps he actually had gone mad under the terrific strain. As he steered, he seemed to be watching intently for landmarks. Was it possible that he still knew his bearings, that there was a way through?

"Wilbur, at Lee Fu's command, had left us without a word. He stood at the rail, supporting himself by main strength, facing the frightful line of the approaching reefs; and on his back was written the desperate struggle he was having. It bent and twisted, sagging with sudden irresolution, writhing with stubborn obduracy, straightening and shaking itself at times in a wave of firmness and confidence, only to quail once more before the sight that met his eyes. He couldn't believe that Lee Fu would hold the course. 'Only another moment!' he kept crying to himself. 'Hold on a little longer!' Yet his will had been sapped by the long hours of the night and the terror of the dawn; and courage, which with him had rested only on the sands of ostentation, had crumbled long ago.

"I turned away, overcome by a sickening sensation; I couldn't look longer. Lee Fu waited tensely, peering ahead and to windward with lightning glances. A wave caught us, flung us forward. Suddenly I heard him cry out at my side in exultation as he bore down on the tiller. The cry was echoed from forward by a loud scream that shot like an arrow through the thunder. Wilbur had sunk beside the rail. The sampan fell off, carried high on the wave.

"Then, in a moment like the coming of death, we plunged into the reef. I have no knowledge of what took place— and there are no words to tell the story. Solid water swamped us; the thunder of the surf stopped the mind. But we didn't touch, there was a way through, we had crossed the outer margin of the reef. We ran the terrible gauntlet of the reef, surrounded on every hand by towering breakers, lost in the appalling roar of the elements. Without warning, we were flung between a pair of jagged ledges and launched bodily on the surface of a concealed lagoon.

"A low rocky island lay in the center of the nest of reefs, with a stretch of open water to leeward of it, all completely hidden from view until that moment. The open water ran for perhaps a couple of miles; beyond it the surf

began again in another unbroken line. It would take us ten minutes to cross the lagoon.

" 'Bring Captain Wilbur,' said Lee Fu.

"I crept forward, where Wilbur lay beside the rail, his arm around a stanchion. He was moaning to himself as if he'd been injured. I kicked him roughly; he lifted an ashen face.

" 'Come aft— you're wanted,' I cried.

"He followed like a dog. Lee Fu, at the tiller, beckoned us to stand beside him; I pulled Wilbur up by the slack of his coat, and pinned him against the cross-rail.

" 'This is the end,' said Lee Fu, speaking in loud jerks, as he steered across the lagoon. 'There is no way out, except by the way we came. That way is closed. Here we can find shelter until the storm passes, if you will speak. If not, we shall go on. By this time. Captain, you know me to be a man of my word.'

" 'You yellow devil!'

" 'Beyond these reefs, Captain, lies the wreck of your ship the *Speedwell*. There my friend met death at your hands. You have had full time to consider. Will you join him, or return to Hong Kong? A word will save you. And remember that the moments are passing very swiftly.'

"With a last flicker of obstinate pride, Wilbur pulled himself together and whirled on us. 'It's a damnable lie!'

" 'Very well, Captain. Go forward once more, and reserve your final explanation for the gods.'

"The flicker of pride persisted; Wilbur staggered off, holding by the rail. I waited beside Lee Fu. Thus we stood, watching the approach of the lagoon's leeward margin. Had Lee Fu spoken truthfully; was there no way out? I couldn't be certain; all I knew was that the wall of spouting surf was at our bows, that the jaws of death seemed opening again.

"Suddenly Wilbur's head snapped back; he flung up his arms in a gesture of finality, shaking clenched fists into the sky. He was at the point of surrender. The torture had reached his vitals. He floundered aft.

" 'What is it I must say?' he cried hoarsely, in a voice that by its very abasement had taken on a certain dignity.

" 'Say that you sunk the *Speedwell*.'

"His face was shocking; a strong man breaking isn't a pleasant object. In a flash I realized how awful had been this struggle of the wills. He came to the decision as we watched, lost his last grip.

" 'Of course I did it! You knew it all along! I had no intention— You madman! For God's sake, haul up, before you're in the breakers!'

" 'Show me your insurance money.'

"Wilbur dug frantically in an inside pocket, produced a packet of bank notes, held them in a hand that trembled violently as the gale fluttered the crisp leaves.

"' Throw them overboard.'

"For the fraction of a second he hesitated; then all resolution went out in his eyes like a dying flame. He extended his arm and loosed the notes; they were gone down the wind before our eyes could follow them.

"In the same instant Lee Fu flung down the great tiller. The sampan came into the wind with a shock that threw us to the deck. Close under our lee quarter lay the breakers, less than a couple of hundred yards away. Lee Fu made frantic signals forward, where the crew were watching us in utter terror. I felt the centerboard drop; a patch of sail rose on the main. The boat answered, gathered headway, drove forward—

"Wilbur lay as he had fallen and made no move.

"Two nights later, under a clear starry sky, we slipped through Lymoon Pass on the tail of the land breeze. It fell flat calm before we reached Wanchi; the long sweeps were shipped, and the chattering crew, who'd never expected to see Hong Kong again, fell to work willingly. At length we rounded to against the bulkhead and settled into our berth, as if back from a late pleasure trip down the bay.

"A little forward, Wilbur rose to his feet. He hadn't spoken or touched food since that tragic hour under the reefs two nights before. Without a glance in our direction, he made for the side and stepped ashore. There was a bright light behind him; his form stood out plainly. It had lost the lines of vigor and alertness; it was the figure of a different and older man.

"A moment later he had lurched away, vanishing in the darkness of a side street. Three days later, we heard that he had taken the boat for Singapore. He hasn't been seen or heard of since that day.

"When he had gone, that night at the bulkhead, Lee Fu reached out a hand to help me to my feet. 'Thank you, Captain,' he said. 'For my part, it has been supremely interesting. For your part, I hope that you have been repaid?'

" 'It's enough to be alive, just now,' I answered. 'I want a chart, Lee Fu. I want to see what you did. How you did it is quite beyond my comprehension.'

" 'Oh, that? It was not much. The gods were always with us, as you must have observed. And I know that place pretty well.'

" 'Evidently. Did the *Speedwell* fetch up among those reefs, or to leeward of them?'

" 'The *Speedwell*? Captain, you did not believe my little pleasantry! We were nowhere near the wreck of the "Speedwell," as Captain Wilbur should have known had he retained his mind.'

"I smiled feebly. 'I didn't know it. Tell me another thing, Lee Fu. Were you bluffing, there at the last, or wasn't there really a hole through the reef?'

" 'So far as I am aware, Captain, there was no passage,' answered my imperturbable friend. 'I believe we were heading for the rocks when we came into the wind.'

" 'Would you have piled us up?'

" 'That is merely a hypothetical question. I knew that I would not be forced to do it. I was only afraid that, in the final anguish, Captain Wilbur would lose his sense of seamanship, and so would wait too long. That, I confess, would have been unfortunate. Otherwise, there was no doubt or especial danger.'

" 'I'm glad to know it!' I exclaimed, with a shudder of recollection. 'It wasn't apparent at the time.'

" 'No, perhaps not; time was very swift. In fact, he did wait too long. He was more willful than I had anticipated.'

"I gazed across the harbor, reviewing the experience. 'What did you have in mind,' I asked, 'before the typhoon shifted? Did you expect to catch the center?'

" 'I had no plan; it is dangerous to plan. There was a task to be begun; the determination of its direction and result lay with the gods. It was plain that I had been called upon to act; but beyond that I neither saw nor cared to see.'

"I could believe him only because I'd witnessed his incredible calm. He waved a hand toward the city. 'Come, my friend, let us sleep,' he said. 'We have earned our rest. Learn from this never to plan, and always to beware of overconfidence. It is by straining to look into the future that men exhaust themselves for present duty; and it is by making their little plans that men bring down the wrath of the gods. We are their instruments, molding in faith and humility our various destinies. Perhaps you thought me unfeeling, but I was only happy. There constantly were too many propitious signs.' "
