PAST MASTERS 169

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PAST MASTERS 169

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

August 2024

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Frank Lovell Nelson, 1873-1947

The Cavalier, July 1911

BY A CURIOUS CHAIN of circumstances Gordon Hyde and I found ourselves in a little deserted cabin that seemed to cling upon the precipitous slope of one of the mountain ranges of eastern Tennessee. It was night, and a storm was raging without as only mountain storms can rage. The wind howled, the thunder rolled and crashed, and by the intermittent lightning flashes we could see the pines lashing and swaying before a hurricane that seemed to be struggling to uproot the very mountain itself and cast it bodily into the gorge below.

We had brought blankets and a portable stove for our cooking necessities; a roaring fire of resinous pine logs blazed in the mud-plastered fireplace of mountain boulders that took up all of one end of the cabin; so we were fairly comfortable. I had brought along a copy of my favorite Macaulay, and I was trying to read by the firelight, although the crash of thunder, reverberating in my ears like the roar of a thirteen-inch battery, and occasionally filling the atmosphere with the fumes of sulfur, tended to distract my attention from the printed page. Hyde sat in absorbed thought upon an upturned nail-keg, his immaculate suit of tan, his silk vest and his tan spats in almost ludicrous contrast to our sordid surroundings. His chin was in his hands, and his tensely drawn, aquiline features showed that his perfectly controlled mind was concentrated upon the tragic problem that had lured us so far from our familiar haunts in New York.

"I hope nothing happens to take us out to-night," I remarked, laying down my book. "Just listen to that wind!"

Before he could reply, a bolt struck so close that the sharp report made me jump, and even affected Hyde's iron nerves, for he looked up in a startled manner, while little blue balls of fire seemed to be playing about on the puncheon floor.

The reverberations finally died away, and then followed the stillness of death; suddenly broken by a woman's scream.

Hyde and I rushed to the door and, throwing it open, looked out. Black, impenetrable darkness met our eyes. The lightning had ceased, and the rain fell in torrents. The center of the storm had passed over the mountain. We waited for some clue to guide us. Then a distant lightning flash lighted the landscape, and Hyde's sharp eyes discerned something in the path leading up

to our cabin door. We ran out into the night, and, lying in the path, we found the form of a woman. We lifted her gently.

"Oh, father! Father!" she murmured, and then sank into unconsciousness.

Together, we silently bore her into the cabin. "She's not been struck. She's only fainted from fright," was Hyde's decision after a hasty examination.

He then set about reviving her, and as my clumsy fingers were useless in this work, I left it to his more experienced hands.

As I sat watching the strange scene, my mind went back over the events leading up to it.

Hyde and I, some months before, had retired from the Munro Detective Agency, with which I had been connected for some dozen or more years, and had joined forces on our own account as investigators of all criminal and business mysteries. The agency tried desperately hard to retain Hyde, but his active mind could not brook the dull routine of cases in the day's grist. Only those in which the mysterious or the bizarre were predominate interested him or drew out the fulness of his powers.

Work came to our hands; but we were not then so widely known that it did not give us a little thrill one day to receive a hurried call from one of the biggest insurance companies in the land.

We went to the offices of the company at once, and were shown into the private office of the superintendent of agencies, a brusk, businesslike little man, who knew his own mind, and who was eager to share this knowledge with others.

"You gentlemen have been highly recommended to me," he said briskly. "I want you to start to Tennessee to-night, and to find out for me why six perfectly good risks that we have had on our books less than three months have died off within two weeks."

"Have you no secret service of your own?" inquired Hyde wearily; and I knew that he saw only a prosaic case of insurance fraud.

"Naturally, I have exhausted my own resources before applying to you," answered Mr. Stephen Burt, the superintendent.

"Then give me an outline of the case, and I will tell you whether, in my opinion, we can help you," said Hyde.

"Certainly. To begin with, we write a special form of one thousand dollar policy for men beyond the ordinary age limit of fifty-five and up to seventy. It is expensive insurance, and very few such policies are written. Several months ago we were surprised to receive twelve applications from a county in eastern Tennessee in which we never before have written a dollar's worth of business. All but three of them were for the special form of policy I have described. I had some doubts about passing these risks, as I am informed that the people in

that part of the country are almost savages; but we are always anxious to break into new territory. And now they are dying off like flies at the rate of a thousand dollars a head. Of course, we have paid the losses without question, and we have made a quiet investigation without results. But a sort of sixth sense, upon which I have learned to depend, tells me that there is fraud. The company will spend many times the amount of the losses rather than be victimized. Therefore, I wish you to start for Tennessee at once, and to make a quiet, confidential investigation— first, to ascertain if fraud exists, and second, if it does, to bring the guilty parties to justice. If for no other reason than curiosity, the company wishes to learn why six perfectly good risks in the same county die within a few weeks of each other, of fright."

Hyde, who had begun to be intensely bored, looked up with interest.

"Fright, you say? Fright at what?"

"The reports of the local physician merely state, in the proper blank, 'Heart failure caused by fright'; but you may depend upon it we were not satisfied with this. One of our own investigators informs us that each risk was supposed to have been frightened to death at the sight of a tortoise-shell cat. In each instance, he says, the risk has been found dead in bed, the face horribly distorted with fear, and that when the door has been opened a large cat of the tortoise-shell variety has rushed out and escaped. There is quite a reign of terror in the community, I understand, and these events are looked upon as some sort of a visitation. This superstition is intensified by the fact that the people declare there are no cats of this variety in the county. As it is a wild mountain community, having little intercourse with the outside world and no newspapers, the affair has not become known, and we have been interested in keeping it quiet. Do you now think you can aid us?"

"Mr. Burt, we will start to-night," replied Hyde decisively.

"Good! Jason is the county-seat and post-office. It's off the railroad, I understand; but you can get a livery rig at Paint Rock. There's some sort of a hotel at Jason, and you'll find our Mr. Robertson there. He will give you every assistance in his paver."

"We shall be glad of his advice," said Hyde, as we prepared to withdraw, "but we probably will work independently of him."

At the end of a twenty-mile drive from the railroad we found the town of Jason, a little hamlet of about three hundred nestling at the foot of Knob Mountain. The hotel was a sorry affair; merely a one-story log structure of five rooms in line facing upon a rude porch. In one end room the lank mountaineer landlord and his sharpfeatured wife slept. The next room was the dining-room, the cooking being done in a lean-to kitchen at the rear, and the other three rooms were at the disposal of transients. Robertson, the insurance detective,

we found, occupied one of these, and two timber-buyers had usurped the other two.

Robertson we found to be an elderly man who had arrived at the garrulous stage of life a little before his time. In his broad feet, his slouching walk, and his bristling gray mustache, that gave his upper lip the appearance of a *chevaux-de-frise*, I read his history from patrolman to plain-clothes man— from fly-cop to private detective— as plainly as if it had been printed on his shirt-front. We were just in time for the midday meal, and after tasting the landlord's fare I for one was not sorry there were no accommodations for us, even though our habitation for the night still was an open question. After the meal we retired to Robertson's room to learn what, if anything, he knew of the case, although his antagonism was too evident to expect much assistance from him.

"The company can spend its money as it likes," he began sententiously. "It can pay me a salary to live at this bum hash-foundry, acquirin' nothin' but a bad case of indigestion, and, by the same token, it can send fancy detectives here by the dozen, an' I won't say a word. But it can't prove nothin' crooked in any one of these deaths. Just take a look at this list. Here, I'll read it," and he read the following list, with which Hyde and I already were but too familiar:

Tobe Watkins, aged 63, beneficiary, wife.
Captain Andrew Jackson Claypole, aged 65, beneficiary, wife.
Judge William Trimble, aged 68, beneficiary, sister.
Joe Bundy, aged 23, beneficiary, mother.
Polk Liggett, aged 65, beneficiary, wife.
Grundy H. Lane, aged 67, beneficiary, sister.

"There, I've investigated every one of them cases," he added, "and there ain't a single clue to hitch one of them to the other. They're none of them related, or I might think it was one of their here feuds. It's just coincidence, that's all. The company could lose that many risks in Hoboken and not bat an eyelid. Just because it's up here in the mountains, they think folks oughtn't never to die, I reckon. But that's nothin' to me so long as I get my bit every week."

"But how do you account for the cats?" I inquired, for Hyde seemed disposed to ignore the earnest but garrulous Robertson completely.

"Cats, bugdust! Do you know what killed these men? It was no more nor less than epidemic hallucination. That's what it was. First one, Ogden, goes out to a big family dinner, overeats, gets indigestion, has a nightmare and dreams a tiger-cat is after him, wakes up all tied into a knot, and yells, 'The cat! The cat!' Heart stops. Of course, the wife then sees the cat, too! Suggestion, you see? That starts all the rest of them. Why, one time during the war—"

But Hyde and I had the serious fact before us that we had no place to sleep for the night, and we did not wait to hear what happened during the war. We interviewed the landlord on the big question of a place to sleep.

"Ther' ain't nobuddy here puts up furriners but me," he said. "Judge Trimble would have tooken ye in ef he was livin', but ther' ain't nary tother house in these here parts whar they got more'n nuff room'n fer jest the fambly. Tell ye what I cain do. Ef ye don't mind campin' out, I've got a little log house 'bout half-way. up the mounting whar I used afore I come in town to keep this here hotel, thet ye cain hev an' welcome. I'll hitch up my mule an' tote yer things up thar, an' the ole woman'll lend ye the loan of a passel of kivers, an' I cain let ye hev what vittles ye want. Kinder lonesome up thar, I reckon, but better'n layin' out. Ain't nobuddy lives on that side o' the mounting 'ceppen Colonel Jim Shackelford, an' he ain't prime company. Never comes to town no more, Colonel Jim don't. Jest sends down that thar pretty gal of hissen, Sara Jane, an' she totes up what grub her an' her pa needs."

We accepted the offer of the cabin for want of a better; and the landlord went out to hitch up his mule.

"The cabin," said Hyde, "will at least offer an escape from the plague of loquacity which seems to have struck Jason."

Just as we were leaving the hotel for our five-mile drive in the landlord's rickety buckboard, one of the timber-buyers came forward with an offer of a portable stove.

"I know what it is to cook by an open fire," he said, "and this is an invention of my own that I always carry with me. You're welcome to the use of it while you are here."

Five days we had lived in the cabin when the storm broke over the mountain, and we were called to the door by the scream of a woman in the night. Had we made progress? I could not see it, although I did not know all that lay in the back of Hyde's brain. Twice we had made the trip together to the village, but we could learn nothing.

The mountaineers were apathetic.

"It is a judgment," they said, and they waited calmly for the mysterious death to strike another household.

We learned nothing from the doctor, who was a fine exemplification of Pope's warning against a little learning. He was a lank, elderly man, with a straggling wisp of beard under his chin, and he combined the duties of village druggist with a traffic in prescriptions of calomel, ipecac, quinin, and the few fluid extracts of herbs to which his knowledge was limited. His medical education consisted of a year's course in Louisville in the years when the bars to the profession were far from being pig-tight.

Dr. Bullwinkle admitted that he had made no autopsies, and tacitly confessed that he himself did not know the cause of either of the deaths.

"They just up an' died," he said, "and I writ 'fright' in the papers fer want of a better word. But I don't take no stock in this here cat story. Who seen 'em? Nobuddy but the wimmen folks. Wimmen folks is liable to get highstrikes and see 'most anything. You see, the wimmen folks 'round here in these mountings gits up airly and does ther chores. Take Tobe Watkins's woman, fer instance. She gits up to do the milkin' and git the breakfast, and she comes into the bedroom to wake old man Watkins fer breakfast, an' finds him layin' there dead as a door-nail. Natch'ally, she gits the highstrikes, an' 'lows as how she sees a tortoise-shell cat runnin' underneath her skirts and outen the room. Then, when Cap' Claypole ups an' dies, his ole woman 'lows as how she seen it, too; an' so on down th' line. That's all the stock I take in the cat story. Ef you was to ask me plain what I actually think killed 'em, I'd say it was cholrie. I ain't never saw a case, but I hearn my pappy tell about th' big cholrie times in 1857. But 'twouldn't do to hint that about these parts an' git everybody stirred up."

We were working over the same ground, and producing as little in the way of results as had Robertson before us.

Hyde walked out of the drug-store and across the street to the court-house, a low frame building, in front of which, at a public hitching-rack, a half-dozen horses and mules stood switching lazily at the flies. I waited a few moments to try to get some definite information out of the doctor-druggist, and failing, I followed Hyde to the court-house. There I found him pulling down record books and studying them.

"I am making a study of backwoods chirography," he said with an absent look. "See here, isn't this a remarkable piece of penmanship, dated in 1867, probably written with a quill pen."

I glanced at the caption, which read:

The State of Tennessee vs. Harrison Turner	Murder. A True Bill.

"T will be engaged here for some time," continued Hyde; "and perhaps you had better replenish our stock of provisions and meet me here in time to go home before dark. There seems to be nothing better to do, so I might as well be improving my mind from these musty records."

Hyde and I had fallen into the habit of working independently when on a case, leaving each other uninformed, unless requiring help.

"Theories are useless until they: are verified by demonstration," said Hyde; "and if we work independently, we are two heads. If we depend upon each other, we are not more than one and a half at best."

Consequently, I was not surprised when, toward evening, I called for Hyde, that he made no mention of the results of his afternoon's work, although I was sure it must have some bearing on the case in hand.

"We are going to have a storm," was his only remark, as he took one of my bundles from me and we set out on the five-mile hike up the mountain. Hyde's prophecy was correct, and the storm broke, as I have described, soon after we had eaten our frugal supper.

Such was my slight and fragmentary knowledge concerning "the horrors of Knob Mountain" when we found our cabin suddenly turned into a hospital for a beautiful, fainting girl. That she was beautiful did not require a second glance. Her dark hair had come down and fell in rippling waves over the pillow; her features were regular and fine; her skin was brown underneath the pallor of insensibility; her form was rounded and graceful, but betokened the strength and activity born of a free, untrammeled life. That the eyes concealed beneath the drooping lids were worthy of all these excellences, I had no doubt. She appeared to be about eighteen; but girls of the Tennessee mountains develop early, and she may have been younger.

"She has come out of her faint, and passed into a natural sleep without regaining consciousness. It is better so. Poor girl, she has had a terrible shock," said Hyde, as he left off chafing her wrists and bathing her forehead with something from his ever-ready medicine-chest. "There is nothing for us to do until she awakens. My God! I ought to have warned him, but I didn't think it would strike so soon, and in the midst of this terrible storm."

"Warned whom? What has struck? What do you mean?" I asked in a breath.

"The tortoise-shell cat. It has struck again, and Colonel Jim Shackelford is the victim. This is his daughter."

I had already surmised this, as the landlord at the hotel had told us that Shackelford and. his daughter were our only neighbors on the mountainside.

"I suspected it," continued Hyde, who was strangely agitated, and kept clenching his hands nervously while he sought to keep his voice down to avoid waking the sleeping girl. "I learned enough at the court-house this afternoon to put me on the right track. It was in my mind to keep on up the mountain and warn him, but the storm was right on us. This is the seventh. I wonder if he will get the other five?"

"But what on earth are you driving at? Remember, I know nothing of your afternoon's work," I questioned, driven desperate by Hyde's words.

"Oh, yes, Foster; it is time I told you what I have learned. If we had only kept on to Shackelford's to-night, we should have known it all. Now, there is nothing to do but to wait. Well, to review the case, some two months ago twelve men in this county in which an insurance policy never before had been written, applied to have their lives insured. What does this suggest to you? That these twelve men had reason to fear something. Within three months after the policies are written, six of the twelve are dead. Each one is found dead in bed, alone. Three of the six are married men, and in these three cases death seems to have occurred between the time when the wife got up to do her morning work and the time she went to call her husband to breakfast. The houses in which these deaths occurred are widely separated, two being in the town and the other four at various points through the mountains.

"Reserving for the present the story of the tortoise-shell cats, the number twelve suggested to my mind a jury. Robertson had been unable to draw a logical connection between any of these victims. I was satisfied that Robertson had not gone back far enough. Here is what I learned from the court records. In 1867, Harrison Turner was convicted of murder and executed. There were no court stenographers in those days, and even the indictment is not on file; so there is nothing to show any of the facts relating to this murder, not even the name of the murdered man; and I did not think it wise to inquire about the court-house, for if we are on the right track, we must not flush the game.

"But just look over the names of the jury in the case and see what you think. Here they are: Colonel Jim Shackelford was foreman, and the other members were Tobias Watkins, Andrew Jackson Claypole, William Trimble, Joseph Bundy, Polk Liggett, Grundy Lane, John H. Manlove, Alexander MacBean, Isaac Ferguson, Thomas Culbertson, and Ball Whiting. The tortoise-shell cat has got six of them. It added a seventh to-night— Colonel Jim Shackelford. You see why I say I wonder if it will get the other five."

"But," I objected, studying the list of the six deaths which I held in my hand, "there is a flaw here. Joe Bundy's age is given as twenty-three. How could he have sat on a jury in 1867?"

"I looked up the birth records. This is a son of the juryman. It must be a terrible revenge, if revenge it is, that pursues to the second generation. But Miss Shackelford is waking up. Not a word till we get her story."

The girl waked up, and looked wildly around the room. For a moment she did not seem to be able to collect her faculties, and then she remembered and fell into a passionate flood of weeping.

"Oh, father, father!" she moaned, as she swayed back and forth on the bed holding her hands before her eyes as if to shut out a 'horrible memory. I knew by her use of the word "father," instead of the colloquial "pappy," that she must have had an education superior to the mountains.

Hyde gave her a draft he had prepared from his medicine-case. It seemed to calm her instantly.

"We will help you, Miss Shackelford; perhaps we can save him," he said. "No, no! It's too late! He's dead! I know he's dead! It was horrible— horrible!"

"Tell us about it, if you have the strength. Remember, justice is still to be considered. Captain Foster and I have our duty to the law. You must help us. Your father may at least be avenged."

Hyde had struck the chord that is latent in the breast of every mountaineer, no matter what the sex or education. Her eyes lighted up, and they were beautiful eyes, the eyes of a tigress bereft of her young.

"I was wakened in the night," she began steadily. "It was a scream like the scream of a cat. I thought it was the storm, the wind howling through the pines, and then I heard it again. It was in the house. I was afraid, and I lay still and waited. Father and I lived all alone, and have since my mammy died when I was a baby, except the four years that he sent me to Knoxville to school. There was no one to call. Then I thought I heard a footfall outside the house, and I thought it was father up, for if it had been anybody else, Coon, our hound, would have barked. I lay still a while and heard nothing, and all at once I heard an awful scream from father's room.

"I got up and slipped on this dress. I was afraid to open his door. I thought of all the dreadful things that have been happening on the mountain. I went to the outside door of the cabin and called Coon. He did not come. Then I went to father's window. The rain was pouring, but the lightning made it as light as day. I looked in. Oh—"

Again she pressed her hands against her eyes, while her body trembled like a leaf in the wind. After a little while she became calm again.

"I looked in," she continued, "and there lay father on his bed. I knew he was dead, for there was the most horrible look of agony on his face. And sitting on his breast was an immense, big tortoise-shell cat. I could see its eyes like balls of fire when the lightning flashed.

"I turned and ran as fast as I could, and as I ran down the path I stumbled over something. I stooped and felt it. It was the body of Coon. It was dead, but still warm. How I got here I don't know. The last I remember is a terrible flash of lightning. Then I awoke here. Oh, my poor father, my poor father!"

"The door to your father's room— was it still locked when you left?" asked Hyde.

"Yes; I did not open it."

" And the window?"

"The window was nailed at the bottom, but open at the top. And when I looked through, I pushed up the upper sash. I was afraid the cat would jump out on me, and then it flashed across my mind that the cat must have something to do with his death, and that it must be imprisoned there."

"Oh, you clever girl!" exclaimed Hyde. "Look, Foster! It's getting light outside. The rain has stopped. We must get quick action. Take both your guns, and hurry on ahead to the Shackelford cabin. I will follow as fast as Miss Shackelford can travel, for we must not leave her here alone. It is important that the cabin be watched. Do not go near, but take your stand where you can see Shackelford's window. Which side of the house is his room on, Miss Shackelford?"

"The east."

"Then watch that window, and if you see any one approaching it, shoot. Don't give him time to get within twenty feet of you. Just shoot. And as you value your life, don't go near the window."

Obeying Hyde's instructions without knowing their import, I ran up the slippery, winding mountain-path until I came to a clearing almost at the summit of the mountain. The Shackelford cabin was of that ambitious style of backwoods architecture known as "two decks and a passage"— that is, two full-sized one-room cabins connected by a covered passageway that served as a dining-room in the summer. Shackelford, I had learned, slept in the east of these cabins, and I judged his daughter occupied the west one. What a lonely, sordid existence, I thought, for a beautiful and educated girl. It was broad day when I reached the clearing.

The only evidence of the tragedy of the night before was the body of a hound lying in the path that led from the edge of the clearing to the passageway. I took up my stand behind a tree at the edge of the clearing, and waited. Once I thought I heard a stealthy step behind me and the crackling of the underbrush; but, although I strained my eyes to pierce the thicket, I saw nothing.

After about an hour, Hyde came toiling up the path with Miss Shackelford on his arm. In one hand he carried a peculiar object, the nature of which I could not make out until he came up, when I observed that it was a bee helmet. He made no comment, but, motioning to me to follow, he led the girl directly to the house. With great delicacy he urged the girl to go to her own room, close the door, and lie down, while we went about our task.

"But I am brave, Mr. Hyde," she objected. "I am not afraid."

"I do not want to involve you in a risk of which I do not even know the full nature," answered Hyde; "but I know you will be perfectly safe in your room. First, have you a covered market-basket?"

The girl hurried to get the article, which was hanging from one of the beams of the passageway. Then, upon Hyde's insistence, she went into her room and closed the door. Hyde's first care was to make an examination of Shackelford's window.

"I did not want you to approach it," he said, "if it were not entirely closed. Also, I wished to leave the tracks, if there are any, absolutely undisturbed."

From a distance we saw that the window was, as the girl had said, tightly closed. The soft ground was ideal for retaining tracks, and, moreover, right in front of the window was a flower-bed of geraniums and verbenas, with sufficient open space between the plants to make our quest a simple one. In the midst of one of these open spaces we found the two little tracks of the girl's slippered feet, showing where she had stood to peep into the window by the light of the lightning flashes.

Completely surrounding these tracks were two of the strangest tracks that ever marred an old-fashioned Southern garden. They were huge, shapeless, uncouth, startling. Fully fifteen inches in length and as many broad, the outer rim marked by the prints of claws that had dug deep into the soft earth. The flowers that came within the circumference of this remarkable spoor were pressed into a shapeless mass. The tracks were there when the girl looked into the window, for the print of both her slippers were clearly defined within one of the circles.

Hyde studied these strange marks with a startled air. He got down on his knees and examined them closely. Then he stepped back and examined the blue grass turf. Here it was more difficult to distinguish traces, for the rain of the night was the first for several weeks, and the dry earth had soaked it up rapidly. But his trained eye discerned enough to tell him something of the history of the night.

"Here, Foster," he said, pointing to the marks on the turf, "is where the creature came up. Here is where it stepped back. Notice that the back of the track, the heel, if I may call it such, is deeper than the claws. Foster, what do you say made these tracks?"

I had been puzzling my brain to answer this question. An elephant? A camel? A bear? I dismissed all these suggestions offhand. I had seen the track of all three, and they were unlike these. At last it flashed across my mind. The dinosaur in the American Museum of Natural History; in the flesh, he would make just such a track as this.

"It looks to me like a dinosaur's track," I said hesitatingly. "And pray, Foster," said Hyde, with a smile, "what is a dinosaur doing roaming the mountains of eastern Tennessee. Your theory is untenable."

"Then, what is it?"

"Well, to tell the truth, you are not so very far off. The tracks of this animal have puzzled some of the shrewdest scientists, and caused them to wonder if specimens of the dinosaur may not have survived. It is the track of the cayman, or giant crocodile of the river Guayas, in Ecuador."

"And what is the giant crocodile of the Guayas doing in Tennessee?" I retorted. For answer, Hyde did a most incomprehensible thing. He stepped into the flower-bed, at one side of the tracks, and went through the motions of lowering a window, and then of throwing something. Then he stepped back and carefully examined, first, his own tracks and then those of the crocodile.

"I will venture' to say, Foster," he said, when this examination was completed, "that this crocodile did not weigh more than one hundred and sixty pounds. But we have to deal with a cat now, and the crocodile can wait."

All this time we had been so absorbed in the strange tracks that the ghastly scene inside the room and the terrible animal we were to face had been forgotten for the moment. We both looked through the window, and saw the thin, spare form of an elderly man lying on the bed. His limbs were drawn, and the face was distorted, as if a horrible vision suddenly had congealed there. At first glance he could see nothing of the cat, but closer scrutiny disclosed it sitting on a walnut chest of drawers, its eyes blazing fiendishly.

Hyde stepped back from the window and proceeded to draw on a pair of heavy gloves. Then he picked up the bee helmet and put it over his head. Rigged out in this peculiar costume, he turned to me and said:

"Stand here and watch the thing, Foster. When you see the door open a little way, if it has not moved, whistle. I don't want it to escape while I am going in."

I saw the door open, gave Hyde the signal, and he dashed in and quickly shut the door. I noted that he had in one hand the covered basket. Then ensued a strange battle between the man and the cat. The creature seemed determined not to be captured, and it gave Hyde a desperate fight, dashing at him with teeth and claws, and screaming like a whole back-fence cantata. But at last he succeeded in grasping it by the skin of the neck, and, holding it at arm's length, he thrust it, writhing and squirming, into the basket. When it was safely fastened in he took off the bee helmet and his gloves, and wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

"There," said Hyde, as he came out with the basket— "we now have the key to the lair of the giant crocodile."

He then motioned me to enter. I did so, and together we made a careful examination of the body of Shackelford. To my eyes, there was not a sign to show the probable cause of death. One thing only struck me as queer, and that was that the rigidity of the muscles seemed abnormal. Every muscle was drawn as tight as a bowstring, and as hard as iron. I looked at Hyde questioningly, and he pointed out to me a thin red line on one of the hands. It was so slight that it might have been overlooked by the most careful medical examiner.

"There is where death entered," said Hyde, "and a terrible death it was. Do you know, Foster, I have in preparation a book on the thousands of methods by which the thread of life may be snapped. I have heard of some strange ones. There is the death-dealing boot of the Yaquis; the seed of the Indian crab-apple held under the finger-nail by the Hindus; the needle stiletto of the Apaches of Paris; the ring of the Borgias, and the glass poignard of the Camorra of Sicily; but I shall have to list as the strangest of all the one clawed cat of East Tennessee. But come, Foster, we have a big job before us. Death may strike again to-night, and there is no time for explanations. I saw a horse in the stable, and I suppose there is some sort of a buck-board. I want you to hitch up and take the girl to town. She can't stay here. Then pick up Robertson and meet me at the cabin. He will be all we want in on it, and he is a nervy man. And, Foster, this is the most important of all. Bring with you a hound; a good one. Now, hurry. It must be noon already, and there's no time to lose. I'll jog along to the cabin with this little pet. I've a little work to do there while you are in town."

"But what about Shackelford?" I objected. "It doesn't seem right to leave him here this way."

"We can't do him any good. You can tell the landlord to notify the coroner."

Miss Shackelford demurred about going to the village with me, and insisted that she would remain with the body of her father, but Hyde would not consent.

"I would not answer for your life until nightfall," he told her.

I fulfilled Hyde's directions, left the girl at the hotel, dragged Robertson away from the perusal of a week-old newspaper, and left with him before the landlord had a chance to spread the news of the night's tragedy. The hound was an easy commission. Every family in the mountains owned five or six, and we secured one for the modest sum of fifty cents, promising to turn him loose when we were through with him.

When we reached the cabin, Hyde, we found, had rigged up a small chemical laboratory out of his medicine-chest, and was busy with test-tubes.

The basket stood at one side, and on the other was a paper cracker-box full of holes.

"Here, Robertson," he said, "I want to show you how epidemic hallucination works."

He dipped a surgeon's needle into one of the test-tubes, and, opening the crackerbox, he took out a field mouse. Holding the little animal between his left finger and thumb, he carefully scratched its nose with the needle. Instantly it stiffened in death.

"And now perhaps you will also believe in the tortoise-shell cat," and Hyde opened the basket and took out the twisting, clawing animal. "She's harmless now, but you will notice that she has only one claw on the right paw and none on the left. All the others have been carefully cut off. Does this still look like a suggestion to you?"

"Hum! Just about the liveliest suggestion I've seen in a coon's age," said Robertson, scratching his head in amazement. "Poison, of course; but what do you make it out to be?"

"Curare."

"Come again, now that you've found the way?" queried Robertson bromidically.

"Yes," continued Hyde reflectively. "It must be curare, although I cannot be certain without further tests. It is the most terrible poison known to man, and is used by the Indians of Brazil, Ecuador, and Bolivia to poison their arrow-tips. An animal merely scratched with it falls dead on the instant, and, strange to say, its edible qualities are unimpaired. It acts by instant paralysis of the nerve centers. It never has been satisfactorily analyzed, although Boehm, a German chemist, has isolated an alkaloid which he named curarin. No white man knows how curare is made, but it is supposed to be concocted from the serum of decayed livers mixed with the venom of the fer-de-lance and the echus, the two most deadly reptiles of South America."

"But where does the cat come in?" asked Robertson.

"Whoever is at the bottom of this devilish work has made the cat, or cats — for probably there are several of them—the instruments for administering the poison. As you see, this cat has been deprived of all but one claw. That was to avoid a typical cat's scratch, and to make the slight abrasion of the skin practically unnoticeable. Then the poison has been made into a paste and spread upon the hollow inside of the claw. The cat, rendered violent either by continued bad treatment or by the nature of its diet, was then thrust through the window of the victim. As soon as the door was opened it dashed out. We succeeded in capturing this one because Miss Shackelford did not open the door to her father's room, but looked in through the window. I scraped enough

of the poison out of the claw of this cat to make the solution contained in these two test tubes, and I venture to say there is concentrated death enough there to kill the whole village of Jason. I shall attempt to make a perfect analysis of it in my New York laboratory."

While Hyde was running on with his lecture, his eyes shining with the pride in his own cleverness that I have always held to be this sole weakness of character, I was thinking that we were losing time, and that we had a deal better be after the author of the crime than bothering with the chemistry of it. So I interrupted: "I am more interested, Hyde, in running down your giant crocodile of the Guayas. If you know so much, perhaps you can tell us where to find him."

"No, I cannot; but we may safely leave that to the cat. Did you bring the hound?"

"He's tied in the wagon."

"Then all we have to do is to turn this animal loose and put the hound on his trail. That should lead us to the lair of the crocodile."

"Well, I want to take a squint at his feet when we find him," said Robertson, to whom I had told the story of the strange tracks on our trip from the village.

It was a desperate undertaking that we planned. Surely a demon of such devilish craft and resourcefulness would not allow himself to be taken without exhausting his ingenuity for evil. But I do not think either of us gave the danger more than a passing thought in the intense interest of the chase.

We took the basket to the door and opened it. The cat dashed out, and was off through the timber like a yellow streak. Holding back the dog, which Hyde had taken the precaution to muzzle, so that his baying would not prove a warning, we waited until the animal had such a start that we were satisfied it would not be captured before reaching the lair of its terrible master. And then the chase began.

It led us through tangled underbrush, around the flank of the mountain, the hound tugging in leash. Mile after mile we trudged with set teeth, keeping silent that we might husband breath. On the other side of the mountain the trail led down into the valley, and then up the course of a mountain stream that dashed along through a cañon of the Yellowstone in miniature. Up this little cañon the hound led us until the sun began to sink low in the west, and I for one began to fear that the quarry might not be run down before nightfall.

But at last we found ourselves in a wild, forbidding "cave country" similar to that peculiar formation in southern Ohio. We had passed the mouths of several of these caverns when the dog turned and, struggling at his leash, tried to dash into one of them. Then another scent must have caught his sensitive

nostrils, for he slunk back and crouched toward us with his tail between his legs.

"He's there!" whispered Hyde. He was there, perhaps; but how to get him out was another question. I for one did not relish a dash into that forbidding hole, and I saw Robertson shake his head in a puzzled way.

"I'm going in, fellows," declared Hyde.

We tried to dissuade him, to rouse in him fear of an unknown death in a terrible form, that might come through the prick of a dart from a blow gun, the scratch of an angry cat, or by any number of means; but he was determined. With sinking hearts we watched him disappear into the gloom, crouching, an automatic pistol in his palm. We waited what seemed an interminable length of time. The shadows were deepening in the valley. The hound had lost its restless terror, and lay quiet at our feet.

"Robertson," I suddenly exclaimed, "you and I are a couple of chicken-hearts, beside that young chap. I'm afraid something has happened to him. I'm going after him."

"Push ahead. I'm right at your heels," he said.

Stooping to avoid knocking our brains out on the dripping roof, we followed the tortuous cavern for about fifty feet. Then, rounding a sharp turn, we came upon a strange scene, lighted by a flickering fire, the curling smoke of which found egress through some aperture in the roof of the cave. Lying on a pile of ragged blankets was a man, gaunt, cadaverous, his beard matted, his grizzled hair long and tangled as a mop, his nose thin and beaklike, his eyes deep set under shaggy brows and flashing in the red firelight. Seated beside him, tailor fashion, was Gordon Hyde, his eyes glued to the old man's face, his ears drinking in his words.

Silently Hyde motioned us to places at the fireside, and the old man went on with his tale, which, apparently, he was just beginning.

"You-uns cain't onderstand what it is," he said, taking in Robertson and me with his eyes; "but when a man's floundered round in the jungles of Africy an' Brazil fer over twenty year, fightin' with all sorts of pizen snakes an' ferocious animals, and bloody-minded blacks an' Indians, an' then he thinks there ain't none on 'em as bad as them he left go free back hum, and then the sun sort of gits into his haid; well, it don't take much more after that fer him to come back and sort a set things right ag'in, like I swore to my pore pappy I would do. 'Git 'em, Schuyler, ef it takes you forty year. Remember, boy, what the Scripters says, "An eye fer an eye, an' a tooth fer a tooth, even unto the third an' fourth gineration of them that hate me." Them was his very words.

"But to git it all in order so's you-uns'll understand. Heh, I ain't talked to white men fer so long, it tangles me all up. It all goes back to before the war.

My pappy was secesh. Come up here from Virginy. He was the richest man in these parts. When the war broke out, these here mountings was all fer the Union. They made it mighty oncomfortable fer pappy, specially Judge Trimble an' Colonel Jim Shackelford, who run things pretty ginerally about these parts. An' one night they come to our house with a rope, an' told pappy they'd give him jest five hours to jine the company they was gittin' up fer the Lincoln army er he'd swing from the limb of the big sycamore in the co'te-house yard. Then they left pappy to make up his mind.

"Pappy seen there wer'n't nothin' else to do, so he kissed me an' mammy good-by an' lit out fer to jine the secesh army. I was eight year old then, an' I never seen him again till the war was over. Mammy took sick an' died about the third year. Now I know it wer'n't anything but grievin' fer pappy, an' the way everybody, even the womins folks, deviled her. They took me an' bound me out to ole Judge Trimble, an' he used to lam the daylights out of me jest fer the fun of it till I got to hate the whole yearth.

"When the war was over pappy come home. He was a captain, and had been right in all the fightin', an' be'n surrendered along with the rest of Lee's army. When he hearn how mammy'd died, an' how I'd be'n lammed about, an' how his house had ketched afire one night, mysterious-like, an burnt, he never said nothin', but I seen 'im git white about the gills, an' seen his fists clench till they showed all white under the brown.

"He'd orta took me an' left, but he says no; that he's a goin' to stick it out right thar, an' show 'em that what Abe Lincoln said was true; that it was all a free country, an' the war over.

"But they wouldn't leave off pesterin' im. Pappy knowed a heap about Jedge Trimble an' Colonel Jim Shackelford, and the'r ways with the county money, an' they wasn't the kind that'd stand up to a fair fight, er even unsling a gun an' shoot a man down in hot-blood. Ef they'd only done that, I could 'a' forgive 'em. But they laid out to git rid of him, hook er crook, an' so they put it up on him that he'd killed a wuthless, no-account nigger, an' then they all gets drawed on the jury so's they could hang him. They never give pappy no chanct. They jest hung 'im like a dawg fer an ornery nigger that wouldn't've fetched two hundred dollars, pappy said, in Virginy. An', men, I seen 'em-do it.

"I was fourteen about, then. I ain't so old as you'd think; not more'n fifty. It's the sun an' the jungle an' that pictur' that's made these here white hairs.

"I left Jason with the pictur' in my mind. I jogged nigh plumb all over the world with it thar. Finally I took up with a German animal-ketcher fer circuses an' the like, and most of the time since I've be'n in Africy er South America, allus tryin' to run away from that pictur'. Many a night, lyin' out in the jungles, pappy's come to me and said, 'Git 'em, Schuyler, ef it takes you forty year.'

"An' then, one day the sun sorta got into my haid, an' I couldn't git the pictur' outen my mind. It never give me no peace after that, an' every day pappy would come an' say, ' Schuy, the forty year is mighty nigh up. Git 'em, Schuy, even unto the third an' fourth gineration.'

"But I never went about it in no ordinary way. I'd learnt too much from savages ever to use white man's ways. Fust, I sent 'em all warnin', full an' fair, an' money to git the'r lives insured, so as the'r famblies wouldn't suffer. Then I come up here to this place I'd knowed as a boy to let my jury set on 'em. Thar's my jury," and he waved a gaunt arm toward a cage in a corner of the cavern in which seven tortoise-shell cats lay blinking at the firelight.

"Thar ain't but seven on my jury now; thar was twelve when I left Belem at the mouth of the Amazon, but five on 'em died on the trip to Newerleans.

"Thar' ain't no appeal from the verdict of my jury, an' here's the verdict," and he reached out from where he lay and took from a shelf a half-pint whisky-flask.

"Indian arrer-head pizen," he continued. "I reckon ef I hadn't ketched this here fever the night I visited the sentence of the court on Colonel Jim Shackelford, me an' the jury an' the curare would have got all twelve of 'em, 'even unto the third and fourth ginerations, the third and fourth ginerations.' "

He stopped speaking and lay clasping the bottle before his breast like a crucifix, while his fierce eyes took on an expression of crazed ecstasy. Hyde, Robertson, and myself sat like statues carved in stone. Then suddenly, before either of us could put out a hand to stay him, his right hand swept across his bare chest, leaving four red scratches, while his right emptied the contents of the bottle over the bleeding wounds. Instantly the light went out of the staring eyes, and we were looking at a corpse.

It was several minutes before either of us spoke.

Then Hyde said: "It's better so. A mind crazed by years of solitude and sun and the early memory of a great tragedy; that is man's most merciful judgment. Let us believe that the mercy of God will not be less. This cavern is all the grave he needs, so let us leave him alone with his pets, which it will not be safe to turn loose on the world"; and, drawing his automatic, Hyde went up to the cage and put a merciful end to the seven tortoise-shell cats.

"Now," he said, when the reverberations of the fusillade had died away, "let us go."

"But the tracks," said Robertson, pointing to the bare feet upon the sorry bed. "He never made 'em."

"I forgot you hadn't seen them," said Hyde. "You know, I had quite a talk with him before you came. I'll show you the crocodile," and going to a dark corner he dragged out the most peculiar pair of boots I ever expect to see.

"I'm going to keep these as a souvenir of the horrors of Knob Mountain. They are evidently of South American Indian workmanship, and made from the feet, claws and all, of the giant cayman of the Guayas."

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2: The Valley of Never-Come-Back

Beatrice Grimshaw

1870-1953

The Irish-born novelist, journalist and traveller lived in Port Moresby for twenty seven years from around 1906, when the southern half of modern-day Papua New Guinea was "British Papua." In 1936, she left the island and retired to New South Wales. She was a prolific novelist.

EVEN in bright Sydney, the light seemed a little pale— to Meredith, new landed. It was a sunny day; out in the street, the rays played with you, lightly, pleasantly; indoors, they slipped through narrow windows, and peered, unsure of themselves, among the massed, dusk furniture. Where Meredith had come from, sun-rays bit you to the marrow; they flung themselves in fierce battalions through wide doorways never closed; they burned the scant white mats, and sallowed the basket chairs. A curious, gentle world, this of the cities, in spite of hooting traffic and humanity boiling up like ant-hills; a world of blues and greys and cream colours, nothing emphasized. When you lay in your extraordinarily wide bed in the hotel, of nights, with four choking walls about you, your waist missed the hard bulge of the navy-pattern Colt that had been your bed-fellow for so long; you found yourself snapped into sudden wakefulness, twenty times a night, by footsteps that passed your door. Impossible to realize, just at once, that they didn't mean, didn't threaten, anything.

Up north, far north towards the Line, in Papua, the world was coloured like a parrot's plumes; the seas were flaming blue and furious green. There were no hordes of white folk— a few scores in the settlements; out in the ranges, where Meredith had lived, no one— except the natives, on whose account one slept with that blued-steel companion. They were the people of the unknown; Meredith lived on the edge of it. In Papua, it is the natives of the unknown country whom you must distrust, because— heartily and fiercely, down to the bottom of their hearts, and to the point of the long killing-dagger of human bone— they distrust you.

Years— years— how many, since he had trodden pavements or seen the hurried stranger crowds go by? In Papua you knew everyone. In Papua you walked not too fast, and carefully, always; you were so used to the rough tracks, the rock-strewn river-beds, and in any case there was never anything to hurry for. He knew it of old, this process— painful, almost— of speeding up body and mind to the time of the wide-awake places. It was bound to last some days. By Saturday or Sunday next he would be feeling different; his environment would have closed round him, flowed over his head; he would be

a chip in the current, swept easily along, instead of the little struggling thing that now beat about on the surface. By Sunday next ....

A woman passed him in the lounge of the hotel, almost brushing his knee with her skirts. They were very short skirts; the legs beneath them, frankly displayed, according to the mode of the day, were silk-clad and beautifully shaped. She seemed to be all silk, a little ruffly, like a flower. She smelled of fresh violets; there was a great bunch of them at her waist the colour of her dress, and the colour of her eyes. Meredith did not get beyond the eyes for a minute. Then he noticed that the hair waving under the little purple hat was deep black. She had a fur thrown loosely about her neck.

It all attracted Meredith, by its strangeness— its unlikeness to anything in his life of late. Not for many years had he seen women who wore dark silken things, and framed their faces in the intriguing dusk of furs. It gave a fascinating newness to the woman of the violet clothes and eyes. He watched her as she moved across the lounge, and seated herself in a window where she could look out and watch the street. A shut window; what horror. It would take him a long time— longer than next Sunday— to get used to shut windows.

The woman— she seemed to be young; under thirty, at all events— loosened her fur with dark-gloved hands (how small a woman's hands looked in dark gloves! he'd forgotten that) and leaned forward. She seemed to be waiting for someone. Imagine any man keeping her waiting.

"I would like to punch his head for him," thought Meredith. Then he saw her draw back, and quickly open her handbag. He did not know why she looked so earnestly inside it; why she drew her handkerchief across her lips as she did so— but a certain self-possessed hurry in her actions told him that the man was coming now.

He watched the door; it would be interesting to see ....

What? there was Packer coming in; good old Packer of the Civil Service; didn't know he was away from Kurukuru Station, down on leave. He'd like a yarn with him by and by, but just now it would be more interesting to see what sort of lucky man it was who....

Jove! It was Packer himself. He was going up to her. She had risen, and they were about to go out together. Would Packer see him? The lounge was so dark— everything in Sydney was dark; dark and choking and stuffy. If they looked at the mirror by the door, they were bound to see him. Yes, Packer had seen; he was coming back. Good old Packer; how smart he was; never seen him look such a dandy. Packer was a well-bred man; squatter family; looked it to-day, though he didn't look like anything much but a beachcomber or a pirate when you met him at Kurukuru, at the back of all beyond. Going to introduce? He was.

"Hallo, Meredith ! Well, but I am glad to see you; I never thought.... This is Mr. Meredith, Mrs. May; he's one of the maddest chaps in Papua, but you'd stand him all right if you knew him; he has his points. I say, how does it happen you aren't dead?"

"Did you want me to be?" asked Meredith. He had risen and was standing with his back towards the light, facing the "Violet Lady" as he had already named her in his mind. He was not very tall, not very broad, not very marked as to feature, and you could not, in any case, see him clearly against the window. His clothes, through long sojourning in trunks, were creased, and smelt of mothballs more than enough. He was not an impressive figure, but the Violet Lady looked twice at him.

"I thought you were bound to be dead," was Packer's reply. He turned to his companion. "This man," he said, "is the only man who's ever come back alive from a valley right away in the interior that's all sort of queer stories about it. Nobody knows anything much, because nobody's been able to tell. They call it the 'Valley of Never-Come-Back.' "

The Violet Lady gave him a third look— a long one, this time. Meredith returned it with interest. Like most pioneers, he was a trifle innocent where women were concerned, but more than a trifle determined to make his way with them. The bushman, like the sailor, has to take his opportunities while they are ripe. In that long third look Meredith had read an opportunity, and his hand was already out to pluck and hold.

"I'll tell you about it," he vouchsafed, "if you would like to hear." Packer stared at him. Meredith was close-mouthed even among the silent men of the Papuan bush country. He had never volunteered to tell anybody anything before— not so much as a comment about the weather could you screw out of Meredith, when the keep-it-close fit was on him— and it generally was. Packer could not but think he was joking with the Violet Lady.

Madeline May— to give her her full, true, though theatrical-sounding name— was not so foolish as to think anything of the sort. She guessed at once that there was an interesting secret— and what so attractive as locked doors? But the afternoon's amusement was in peril, and Packer must not be offended. Madeline had hopes of Packer. The late Mr. May had been dead long enough to allow of his widow's slipping, a little prematurely, into the picturesque stage when one half-mourns, but he had hardly left enough behind him to pay for the purples and the lilacs that expressed her bisected grief. She was getting very anxious, being neither so young nor so pretty as Meredith, innocent bushman that he was, had judged her, and having by no means enough money to go gunning among the big game that she, naturally, coveted.

Packer had, perhaps, exaggerated the importance of a Papuan Resident Magistrate's position. Madeline had, maybe, been taken in; maybe not— one thinks perhaps not. But it was getting to a point where she had to re-marry, as promptly as possible, or else....

Mrs. May, widow, did not want to "else." There are good women who are capable of darkening their hair and eyelashes, with things out of bottles that are of course not really dyes; who are not above lip-paints; who contrive to look like sirens, or the more modern " vamp," and are not terribly offended if taken for the thing they look like— once in a way. Mrs. May was quite good. She was as selfish as a cat, as greedy as a fowl; she talked scandal like a hospital sister; was not above small, safe acts of dishonesty, and she had never in her thirty-odd years of life done a disinterested kindness to any human being. But she was good.

She wanted to marry again, and Packer, it seemed, wanted— or would want, with a little more encouragement— to marry her. She knew several women who were married to Papuan Government officials. They had an excellent time. After six months in the country, they had contrived to get their doctors to order them "South," and they still contrived to get their doctors to keep them there. The husbands stayed away in Papua, where they could not be a nuisance to anyone, and paid for everything. The wives stopped on in pleasant Sydney, and enjoyed themselves. Oh, it was a fine life ! and one could, if one wanted, discover quite a little society of Papuan wives— ordered relentlessly "South " and thriving on it— to foregather with. She had always envied Mrs. Noone and Mrs. Blank-Dasher and the rest, of Papua; always wanted to join that happy band of do-nothings. This was her chance. Yes, she would go out with Packer— but she would cast her nets for the other man, later. She'd heard of queer things happening in that country— men who found oil-fields, others who discovered forests of sandalwood, and made thousands in a month.

The quality of the smile that she gave Meredith— unaccompanied by words; Madeline May knew the values of silence— sent him to his stuffy room in a trance of delight. One could not stand the lounge after that. One had to be alone, and dream....

There is no knowing how things might have gone, had Mrs. May's fishing been unsuccessful that afternoon. But it chanced that she landed her fish; and, as was natural, an immediate re-valuation took place. Packer, R.M., swimming free, and Packer landed and gasping at her feet, were two very different things. At once he went up in price; he represented, in a world that is hard and uncertain, security and ease; he was (to change the comparison) the barn-door fowl in the hand, better worth having than a flock of birds of paradise in the

bush. Mrs. May put out of her head at once the thought of trying to keep both men. She knew the danger of that as thoroughly as a silk-legged widow of thirty-and-too-much was likely to know it.

But, none the less, she wanted Meredith's secret. A little kindness might not come amiss.

It followed that she managed to get him alone, on pretext of wanting to see Sydney from the roof of the hotel. Mrs. May knew— who better?— that the empty corridors of hotels are lined by walls that have ears. She carried Meredith off to the top, therefore, and, surrounded by belching chimney-pots and a view of the harbour, badly smeared, she spread her nets in view of this easily captured bird.

Afterwards she told Packer, with a tiny little laugh, that " he fell for it right away." Mrs. May was one of the many Australians who think it "cute" to use American slang; being under the irremovable impression that Vanderbilts and Astors converse in the language of the Bowery.

"Believe me," she said, "I got him to tell me all about it. I couldn't have slept a wink if I hadn't. I always say that I'm a born detective. How do you think your little Maddie pulls the sleuth stuff?"

Packer, not quite sure what she meant, replied at a venture: "I'm sure anything you pulled would come without much pulling," and, getting off slippery ground, asked her what she had heard? He didn't believe old Meredith would tell anybody all about anything— not if it was an angel from Heaven or his own (Packer's own) little Maddie.

Madeline, suddenly practical, dropped her airs and Americanisms for a minute. This was business. This was the thing that mattered most in life— money.

They had gone to the gardens for quiet. Australia's most famous, if not most lovely, view lay painted before them on the hanging canvas of the blue Pacific. Red roofs, green gardens, fairy inlets and bays, all as the advertisements depicted it— and the gardens, with their steps and statues, and the beautiful neat flowers, and delightful clipped trees, and the tidy, clean walks that wound about, leading to lovely kiosks where you could have tea.

"I do like the gardens," burst out Maddie, in an irrepressible aside. " Little old Sydney and its gardens for me, every time... What were you saying, dear? Oh— about your friend. Well, then I must be an angel, for he told me...."

Packer was so deeply interested that he forgot the apparently inevitable compliment. "For heaven's sake what was it?" he demanded, stopping before her in the midst of the asphalt walk, his head and shoulders blocking out half Sydney Harbour. "It's been a sort of legend for years— the valley, away in the interior, that men were supposed never to come back from. And there's been

two or three who didn't— apart from natives, who hardly count. Was he there? What did he find?"

"He says," answered Mrs. May succinctly, "that he did get there, and that he found gold."

"Gold? Gold? Are you sure?" Packer breathed deeply.

Madeline May looked at him. Fond as she was of money, she was very far from understanding the nature of the gold-lust, a passion not wholly ignoble, as it is known to men of the outback. Packer had actually turned white, or as nearly white as his tan would let him. He was panting as if he had just run up a hill.

"Gold! Where? How much?" he demanded, clutching her arm in his excitement. A policeman, rocking slowly along the path, slowed down still more to cast a professional glance at him. He let go her arm. " I beg your pardon," he said, " but— you don't know what it means!"

"My dear man," said Madeline, rubbing her arm, which was not hurt at all, " I know as much about gold as anyone else. Perhaps I want it a bit more than you. He said it was gold— alluvial gold (didn't I remember well?) and lots of it, in the bed of a river."

"Well? "

"Well! What more do you want? Don't you know where the river is?"

"I can make a guess— but that's not what I mean. Did he just say that, and stop? Didn't he tell you anything about how on earth he ever got there, or how he came back? You know they call it the 'Valley of Never-Come-Back'— at least, that's what the native name means, translated. Why, Meredith has no business to be alive at all, if half the things they said about the place were true!"

Madeline May looked a little disturbed. It seemed that she must have had succumbed, in her own way, to the gold madness that was now shaking Packer down to the bottom of his soul. It had not taken her in just the same fashion, but she had certainly allowed the main point of the discussion to slip. She had for- gotten that she wanted to know Meredith's secret; he had, it appeared, drawn the red herring of the gold across her path, rather cleverly.

"And I thought I had him in my hand," she muttered to herself, twisting and crushing the ends of her gossamer veil in her hand. She felt humiliated. Didn't she know her job of a pretty woman better than that?

"What do you think? " Packer asked with anxiety. "What did he say? "

"Oh, just what I told you. No, he did not say why or how he'd come back. I suppose he thought it was enough that he was back."

"You don't think so, and I don't. There's something behind." Packer stared fiercely at the eternal stone boxers squaring up to each other on either side of the path. One would have thought he wished to challenge them.

Meredith was his friend— yes, but not his "mate." There is a difference, among Australasians. Packer was a man with no very lofty sense of honour; he had as much as most men, neither more nor less. It was not against his code to find out, by any means available, what his friend had chosen to conceal. That there was something grave, he did not doubt for a moment. The very fact that Meredith had told Mrs. May so much as he had, proved— to Packer, who knew him— that the secret, the real secret, remained behind.

Now that he came to think of it, the information wasn't very new. For years there had been rumours of gold in the unknown valley. It was not the reputation of its dangers that had kept men from attempting the journey. The white man of Papua is notoriously a dare-devil. No, it was a more prosaic reason— that of expense. It costs money, much money, to get into the interior of the " Unknown Land."You may traverse half Africa— you may make yourself a nickel-plate reputation as one of the hundred and ten undistinguished "African explorers" with less than the money needed for a three months' prospecting trip of a few score miles in the unexplored parts of New Guinea. Unless, of course, you are the Government— but the Government has other fish to fry.

The "Valley of Never-Come-Back " was situated in one of the great blanks that lie upon the Papuan map, among the half-traced, huge, torrential rivers of the West. Years gone by a Chinaman was supposed to have reached it, and got away alive; but he was never able to tell anything about it, because, when he went down to the inhabited places again, the first white man who met him found that he had lost his reason. At best, he could not speak more than the merest smattering of pidgin English. But in spite of that, and in spite of the fact that he never said a sensible word while they were taking him down in the schooner to Queensland, and putting him safely away in an asylum, something got out. There was a whisper of gold. There was a whisper of something else— nobody knew what. But it was something terrible.

It was to be expected that some of the Papuan gold-digging crowd— perhaps the hardest, pluckiest crowd in all the South Sea world— would take up the challenge that Nature, and luckless Ah Wing, had thrown down. Two contrived to raise the money (no one knew where the Chinaman had got his) to recruit the necessary carriers, to get away, with stores, arms and ammunition for six months, into the unknown.

For six months nobody took alarm. For eight months, Port Moresby waited. Then down the coast drifted the inevitable native rumour that is, in New

Guinea, the Mother Carey's Chicken to disaster. It was said that the men and their carriers were lost.

No one believed it at first. The rumour grew. The Government sent out a patrol officer, and police. The patrol officer could not find out where the miners had gone, because the natives of the district were hostile, and shot at him on sight, instead of waiting to answer questions. He did his best, searched villages, picked up more rumours; and came back. So did not Hart and Willoughby; nor yet the carriers whom they had taken with them. And the silence of the Papuan bush closed over their fate.

An Australian, fond of adventure, and possessed of money to burn, came up to Papua to burn a little of it looking for the gold, for Hart and Willoughby, and, incidentally, for adventure. Whether he found Hart and Willoughby, or the valley, or the gold, is not to this day known. It is probable that he found adventure; certain that he found the greatest adventure of all.

There were one or two others; but no one was quite certain whether they had been looking for the valley, or merely prospecting, in an ordinary way; since it became unfashionable at that date, to say that one was going to look for the place. One ran the risk of being called absurd and uncivil names.

But the legend held, as the legend of somebody's secret island down at the East End holds to-day; as the tale of the diamonds on the Aikora is bruited about, once in a way; comes to nothing, and dies down again. The valley had become one of Papua's strange tales.

Instead of which, Meredith went out and found it, or said he did. Packer, when he reflected on these things, was moved to forget the presence of his lady-love, and to say, with an Army-in-Flanders word or two, bitten short in his moustache, that he'd cut the heart out of Meredith, but he'd get it somehow.

Madeline was practical. She had had to be.

"That's nonsense," she said crisply. " What you've got to do is to find out why he's come down to Sydney anyhow. He must have business here. If he's really found the gold, he wouldn't leave it without some big reason."

"Oh, he wants to finance some sort of syndicate," answered Packer absently. "There's nothing in that. They all do."

The shadows were growing blue in Sydney Gardens; the women picnicking on the grass with their children felt the lowering temperature and began to cluck and fuss over their brood like hens, gathering the little ones together and driving them towards home. Men, loafing and smoking on the seats, sat up and looked about them; pipes were put in pockets, newspapers folded away. It was nearly time to close. Down on the walk below the two stone boxers, eyeing each other, seemed to wait with heads down and hands guarding for the moment when the gates should be shut, and the wandering people gone.

Madeline, sensitive, suddenly, to the rise of the tides of night, to the whisper that they bring with them of the shortness of our day, the certainty of the dark that comes after and comes soon— Madeline, a little over-wrought and inwardly troubled lest she might not have indeed played her great game wisely, caught at the arm of the man she had chosen, beginning to cry, gasped out, into Packer's entirely sympathetic ears:

"I can't bear to be poor. It's wicked for him to keep it to himself. I'll die if I don't find out."

Meredith had come down by the *Morinda*. It followed that, being in a hurry, he was to go back by the *Marsina*, since the *Morinda* had already sailed on her return journey to the Mysterious Land. There are only the two steamers, and it is well understood in Papua that business trips take the traveller to Sydney by one and bring him back by the next— unless, indeed, he is in such a hurry that ten days, at the end of a two thousand mile run, is time enough for him.

This last was what Meredith had intended. If it had not been for the little Violet Lady. But because of her dark feathery hair, and her silken ankles, and the pitiful charming, little-widow way she had with her, he had somehow discovered that his sales and his purchases would keep him twenty days in Sydney, instead of only ten. So he let the *Morinda* sail and took his passage by the boat that was to follow.

In the matter of the Violet Lady, he thought that Packer "butted in" more than enough— Packer, indeed, seemed to think he owned her; it was as much as a man could do to get a quiet talk with her, on the hotel roof-garden, or in the lounge. But when he hinted at Packer's attentions, Mrs. May only looked down at the tip of her small shoe and sighed, with a little smile at the back of the sigh. And Meredith, of course, understood that Packer was making himself a nuisance, but that she was too kind to tell him so.

Eleven days after the arrival of his ship in Sydney— one day after the sailing back again of the *Morinda*— he missed Madeline May. He missed— though with less regret— Packer as well. He could not understand it. The hotel people only knew that they had both gone away that morning and left no address. Their rooms were given up, their luggage fetched. Meredith, who had been practically certain that Madeline was going to accept him to-morrow or the day after, felt as one feels who, walking in the dark up a long flight of stairs, puts down his foot, disconcertingly, in the air instead of on a last, non-existent step. When this happens there is a jar: Meredith was badly jarred. He could not imagine— he would not imagine....

Until a chambermaid, who knew a good fellow when she saw one, and who had— one will suppose— a heart of her own (though Meredith could not have

told you whether she had even a head, or two legs), came and told him, playing with her bunch of keys the while, and not looking at him directly, that she thought the lady and gentleman who had left that morning were going to be married.

She was a "picture fan"; she had an inflamed sense of dramatic values, and expected Meredith to "register"— she didn't quite know what— the well-known emotion, whatever it may be, that is simply and naturally expressed by staggering back, with a stiff neck and a jutting chin, and a hand suddenly slapped to a forehead. She would not have been surprised if he had seized her passionately by the arm and shouted: " Girl— do you lie to me?" She knew! Bless you, she had seen it all along

But Meredith, being a man from " outback," just Booked at her and asked, in an even voice, "Anyone tell you?"

"No!" giggled Myrtle of the keys. "I put two and two together meself. But it's gospel true. Why, when they come back from goin' out in a taxi, and she went to her room to tidy her hair and get her suit-case, there was rice on the floor! Rice! Besides— I knew it, anyhow."

There was no change on Meredith's face; no paling of the bronze-burned skin. He did not break off the conversation and hurry away, one arm thrown over his eyes. Instead, he remarked to Myrtle: " You're a pretty girl, Myrtle; no wonder you know so much about weddings. When's your own coming off, eh?"

A man must pinch a girl's arm, by all the rules of the game, when he makes such an enquiry.

"Go on! " giggled Myrtle, and immediately ran away, so that he could not have followed her advice even if he had been desirous of doing so.

Having thus "saved his face" Meredith turned into his room, bolted the door, sat down on a chair, and looked steadily at his boots for fifteen minutes. At the end of that time he got up, said "Damn her!" and went down to the lift and out.

It was in his mind more or less all day that he had cut the Violet Lady completely out of his existence, and also had forgotten her completely. At intervals he told himself that she was nothing to him; she would never touch his life again.

IN THE meantime, the *Morinda*, running steadily north, carried in one of her deck cabins Mr. and Mrs. Lancelot Packer, who had taken train and Just managed to pick up the ship at Brisbane.

On the boat deck, right aft, is the place for a quiet talk— for a talk that must not be overheard. It is true that nobody on the Morinda would have tried to eavesdrop on a newly-married couple, obviously fond of one another. But

there was that between Mr. and Mrs. Lance Packer that had naught to do with dears and darlings.

Sitting on a sail-covered locker, looking down on the second-class deck, where the pigs and the poultry, and the people who are "broke," journey all together, the Packers talked. They had found out by now that they were an amazingly congenial pair, and Mrs. Lance had lost all regret for Meredith's possibly wider prospects. Something within her told her that he would have been fussy and faddy; probably the sort of man who would want you to keep all your little pie-crust promises as if they really mattered; who would make great eyes at you if you told a harmless fib. "Gee! but that highbrow stuff does give me the willy-willies," she confided to her mate, in a burst of Americanese that was not quite so accurate as she fancied it.

"That's right," agreed Packer, on general principles. He was never quite sure what Maddie meant when she began to talk like a "best seller," though he liked it on the whole.

Maddie reflected for a minute, looking out, without seeing anything, at the prospect of the Glass House Mountains, away off on the golden coast of Queensland. The sum of her reflections was that it was a bit of a handicap to a woman to be good— Good with a capital letter— as she was. Perhaps another kind, a trifle worse, would have been more successful with Meredith. Of course, she had had him on a string; she knew that— but though she could have made him marry her by holding up a finger, she could not, with all the fingers of both hands, and the length of her tongue to boot, get him to tell her any more than he had told about the mysterious valley. He had assured her, laughing (and Maddie liked the look of blue eyes wrinkled up with laughter in a hard brown face) that there wasn't anything to tell. Pressed, morally and physically, he had first tried to kiss her, and then, when she wouldn't let him— because she was good, one must remember that— he had, still laughing, overwhelmed her with a flood of mining technicalities. He wouldn't even let drop a word about his business in Sydney. It came upon little Maddie, just then, that the men of the wilderness were neither so soft nor so simple as they— quite unjustifiably — made you think.

She had, in order to punish him, deliberately left him under the impression that she "meant something"— to use her own term— and had then taken delight in going off without a word. There was reason for the hurry beyond Madeline's desire to land her fish safely. Packer had, at the last minute, decided to catch up the *Morinda* via Brisbane, and get to Papua ahead of Meredith who had definitely abandoned his passage by the steamer.

"One can easily find his carriers, and get to the place somehow," he said. "I don't know what the deuce he's up to in Sydney, and I don't care. Gold's gold. Are you sure it was nuggets, Mad?"

For Madeline, greatly daring, had contrived to stalk the explorer once, for half a morning; had seen him go into a bank, and open the mouth of a little canvas sack, before the interested eyes of an official; had, disappointedly, watched him retire to some inner fastness with his sack— but not till she had caught the rough shining of golden lumps and grains inside it. After, she had chanced on a distant view of him, going into a George Street shop. She did not dare to follow him there; it was too open— but she had taken note of the position of the shop, and, later on, had gone in to try and find out what she could. It was— of all things— a rubber goods shop, an immense place, dealing in everything rubber from fire-engine fittings down to elastic bands for letters. Maddie, with what she felt to be great presence of mind, had asked the clerk who came forward if the tall gentleman who just left had ordered his raincoat to be sent home for him or not, and if he had left any message about a coat for her. The clerk, regretfully, couldn't answer; he hadn't served the gentleman. The assistant manager— would the lady kindly ask him?

The assistant manager was of another kidney. He eyed Madeline up and down, and said that the customer she referred to had not purchased any coat, or left any message. "Not a coat?" twittered Madeline, very sweetly. " But what did he—" This was to have been the key of the situation; the assistant was to have mentioned, of course, what Meredith did buy. Instead, he only asked her, rather curtly, if he could serve her with anything. She bought a bathing cap that she did not want, and went out, her nails clenched tight inside her gloves. Brute!

Packer, her Packer, soothed her blistered vanity. He was eager to know what she had to tell; he made her repeat it more than once. "Nuggets," he said to himself, lovingly. And— "Partridge's shop"— couldn't have been rubber coats or boots, he never wears them. Sluicing tackle? Couldn't have been that, either, for a place chock full of rivers. Rubber canoe? No— bottom would be ripped out of her in two shakes; all those western rivers are full of snags." He could not make it out. "Went to the bank first with his gold," he said. "Big order, evidently; he had to get the cash. He must have wanted something expensive. What the devil— oh, what the devil, Maddie, could it have been?"

"I wish we knew," said little Mrs. Packer, uneasily. "I feel sure it's important. Are you going to make a try as soon as you land? "

"Rather. My leave isn't up yet; I have another two months, but I'll go back to work at once, and start a long patrol inland. The place isn't in my division, but I don't know who's likely to tell, once I'm ten days back of the coast. You

see, if I make a patrol of it, I shan't have to pay carriers, and I can take my armed police with me; it won't cost me anything at all."

"Would the Government let you?"

"The Government," said Packer calmly, "won't be asked. The Government will get a nice little report of a patrol, if I don't pull the thing off, and nobody will be any the worse. If I do pull it off I shall be fired for using Government police and carriers on my own business, and I shan't care a little hang."

"I do think you're clever," fluted Madeline. "I am glad I married you." She felt this was indeed the kind of man to stand between the world and a poor little widow; she could not call herself a widow now; curious— she rather missed the pathetic name; it had done such good service. Well, Lance was the kind of man to take care of her, anyhow.

"What do you suppose," demanded Packer, ramming down the tobacco in his pipe with a leisurely finger, "was the exact size of the nuggets that you saw? "

THREE WEEKS afterwards, Mrs. Lancelot, left alone on the station, was finding, in the immense, silent mornings, in the empty afternoons, when the sea thrashed unceasingly upon the beach, and the palms were never done with their lonely, idle thrumming upon the iron roof of her house, full time to realize just what was this life of a Papuan magistrate's wife, into which she had so joyfully flung herself. There could be for her no easy lazy life in a Sydney flat, among the other "semi-detached" wives— Packer, with post-marital frankness, had told her he was head over ears in debt to "B.P's.," and could hardly afford her tucker in New Guinea. There was, for the same reason, no chance of spending the long months of his absence in a Port Moresby hotel. Her new husband, hardened by years of risk and deprivation, laughed at her fears of the country and the natives, her almost tearful dismay over tinned train-oil butter, tinned milk, tinned meats that were variously and beautifully labelled but that tasted, every one, when you came to eat them, exactly like stewed string. He told her she would be lucky if she saw a salad this time three years hence, and that if she couldn't eat yam she had better try tato, for English potatoes were fivepence a pound in "Port," and his salary wouldn't run to it. He was very fond of her, very kind in his own way; he mortgaged the last of his credit to supply her with groceries during his absence, and cut down his own stuff to do it. He left his second-best police-sergeant with her, and a dozen constables, all with large furry heads, all dressed in braided blue serge jumpers and tunics, like Victorian ladies going in to bathe. He told her what to do if anyone came along the coast looking for him; he explained to her that the mission was only

fourteen miles away, and that she could run over there any time she liked in the whaleboat; besides, there were plantations farther along, not two days off.

Oh, she'd be all right; people got used to being a bit lonely in Papua. And he kissed her, and kissed her again, and tramped away, waving his hand, at the head of his train of carriers and armed police. And Madeline Packer saw them all wind off into a crack in the great forest, like ants creeping into a wall, and there was nothing left but silence, and the sea, and the wind blowing under the thatch.

Then began for her the sadness of the white wife left alone; the crying in corners; the lethargy that would not let her rise and dress of a morning, but kept her lying till high noon, staring under her mosquito net at the sun-rays slowly painting the bedroom wall; the meals that she could not trouble to order, or to eat when the houseboy brought them, badly cooked and served; the senseless, useless journeying, many times a day, to the top of the little ridge near the station, whence she could command the coast on both sides, and see if anyone was coming. There never was anyone. Nor did she take the whaleboat, as Packer had cheerfully assumed she would, and go to look for company. Town bred, timid, she looked with horror upon the restless seas that fronted the station bungalow; she trembled at the very thought of going out among those mad white horses, sinking and soaring helplessly in a world of beaten foam. It was only the ordinary, steady south-east sea, which no resident of Papua fears, though every traveller from the westward curses its inconvenience with a heart and a half. But to wretched Maddie, it was all the terror of all the seas of the world, pressing on one lonely little heart.

After long waiting came fear; after fear, despair. And at the end, a messenger. He came to the house in the evening, sundown, so that she had not any warning of his arrival. The natives saw him and raised a cry, but she did not understand what they were saying, and when the tall, thin figure clad in khaki suddenly appeared in the light of the lamps before her, she dropped the book she had been trying to read, and screamed as if she had seen a spirit. It was only a moment till she was on her feet; her arms were out, her lips ready to cry, "Lance, Lance!" before they melted into his....

The figure spoke; it came nearer, into the full light.

"Mrs. Packer—" it began. Madeline's arms dropped down. She stood where she had risen from her chair, staring. The man was Meredith.

PACKER found the first part of his journey easy enough.

He wanted a score or two of carriers; he got them without difficulty, because he sent his police to fetch them— an act entirely illegal, since he was

not on Government business, but the district had only four white men in it, and none of them was within fifty miles of him, so who was going to tell?

Thinking one might as well be hung for a sheep as for a lamb, in case one did get found out, Packer stole his sheep by ordering the police to find and catch Meredith's carriers, while they were on the job, and to bring them in irons, if they would not come without. Five terrified inland natives, heavily ironed, limped in with the rest of the carriers. They confessed to having carried for the white man; they did not know it was wrong; they wanted to know what the Chief meant to do about it. If he thought of killing them, they begged to point out that they were in very poor condition, and not worth the eating of such a nobleman. Wild eyes glaring from black-painted circles, betel-stained teeth clicking with fear, they stood in front of him, begging clemency.

Packer told them royally that he did not want to eat them, did not even want to kill them at present. Whether he would kill them or not later on depended on themselves. He wanted them to lead him to the place where the white man had found the gold.

At this the natives raised a howl, and began stamping and leaping in their irons, They did not know where the white man had found gold. They did not know what gold was. They had never heard of the Valley of Never-Come-Back, and anyone that went to it was sure to die, and they had not been there, and they would not go again. No, they did not understand what the white man was saying through his interpreter. They did not understand anything. They wanted to go home.

"You think they know? " asked Packer of his black sergeant, a Kiwai who feared nothing on earth or sea.

The sergeant spat on the ground, to show his disgust.

"Sir, they are black swine," he said. "They too much fright."

"What's the matter with the place, anyway? " asked Packer.

The sergeant flung a few questions at the leanest, wildest, most miserable of the captured men, and replied, saluting:

"Sir, they say too much very bad devil stop along that place."

Packer swore disgustedly.

"You and your devils," he said. "Devils, devils! To hear any of you talk, you'd think there were as many devils as mosquitoes in New Guinea. You'd think the air was thick with them. Everything's devil with you, from whooping cough to earthquakes. Can't you get anything more out of him?"

"No, sir. This bushman very dam ignoran' fellow. This bushman too much fright. I think he see some devil along bush what bite him. I not savvy him talk very well."

"Can't make anything out of that," mused Packer to himself. "All their blooming devils bite, or strangle, or poke people's eyes out. Just have to cany on, sergeant."

"Yessir."

"Bring them along with us, and take their irons off when we're an hour or two out. See they don't get away."

"Yessir."

WEEKS— many weeks— later, all that was left of Packer's expedition trailed slowly, painfully into camp, through the rain of a mountain night. It was cold; they had been climbing for many days, and the steamy warmth of the plains was far behind. All day they had been struggling through the moss-stifled forests of the high main range, where trees are veiled and furred in moss, all clammy-wet, and fallen logs are wrapped in shrouds of emerald, and a man walks, not on solid ground, but on a treacherous, rotting carpet of mosses big as ferns, that may at any moment give way, and drop him neck-deep into a chaos of moss and mud. Lovely beyond description are these moss forests; hateful beyond telling.

Spiritless, the carriers laid down their loads, and trailed tired limbs in search of logs to split for the fire. There were not many of them left, even as there was not much left for many or few to carry. Once again the man-eating tribes of the mountains had come down on the white man who threatened their homes, and had attacked Packer and his camp in the dark. They found him better prepared than others had been— Packer, who knew by now that he was certain to be dismissed with disgrace on his return, was minded to get as much use out of the armed police as he could, while he had them; and he had ordered them to fire without scruple. Two or three carriers and four police were killed in the first rush of the cannibals, but after that bullets and bayonets told against spears and stone clubs, and the mountain men retired, and left free passage to the white man and his train.

Packer, who had risked his life as freely as anyone, did not trouble himself about the losses. He thought he could explain when he got down to the coast, at least so far as would keep him out of serious trouble— dismissal, of course, being now sure— and, in any case, it was a much-wanted relief to the stores. They were, for days after, not so short of provisions.

But on this wet, black night, far in the unknown country, when they camped on the spine of a ridge among wind-beaten trees that looked down upon a gulf of stars, food was short again; warmth was short; safety, comfort, assurance of any kind, absent. Packer was almost certain that this great ridge, on the tip of which he had camped, must be very near the valley from which

no man came back. Everything proved it— the distance, the lie of the country, the strange absence for days past of any signs of native life; most of all, the increasing terror of the carriers, who had to be watched all night by himself and the police in turn, lest they should steal what was left of the provisions, run away, and condemn the whole party to certain death. And still, he could get no hint out of them as to what the dangers might be that lay ahead. He knew by now that his interpreter did not really know the language of Meredith's carriers, as he had professed he did. Nobody knew their language. No one could tell what they said or thought about anything, though it appeared— from the likeness of one solitary word to a similar word in the coast language— that the chief subject of their conversation, night and day, was devils.

The rain had ceased after supper, and the stars showed clearly; above the mighty gulf that lay below, Packer, enjoying the comfort of his pipe, leaned against a tree and talked to the Kiwai. It was not discipline, but discipline might be hanged; he'd have little use for it in future, however things might go.

"Morning time," he said, "we go down."

"Yessir. Morning time, go down. I very glad we finish this go up."

"What you think we find along this place?"

"Me no savvy, sir. Me take you orders."

Packer, drawing at his pipe, watched the immovable, Jewish-nosed profile against the sky; the broad, drilled shoulders. "The man's braver than I am," he thought. "If I were he, I wouldn't face it. He believes in all these devils just as much as the carriers do. I wonder what they are, anyhow? The sooner we find out the better. This is a queer place— fertile as you like, but not a sign of a native tribe within ten days, big mountains draining on these lower ones till they're sunk in moss and stuff, and not a drop of water but what you dig for, though it rains fit to drown you half the afternoon. Wonder what a geologist would make of it all."

The Kiwai, rolling a banana leaf cigarette, bent his bushy head to get a light. He seemed very quiet, very well contented with his world. He had to obey orders. Once in a way he scratched himself, and fidgeted. The carriers, underneath their rude bush shelters, could be heard scratching too, and whimpering like dogs.

"Scrub itch," thought Packer, rubbing his hand, which burned and tingled. "But I didn't think there was any here. Besides, it ought to be under one's clothes. If we were at a lower altitude I'd almost think— Gad it is though; it's mosquitoes. Well, you never can account for the little devils." He slapped his neck, viciously. The Kiwai shuffled his bare legs.

"Plenty muskeet, sir," he ventured.

"Better sling your net," said Packer. " Thought we'd done with them a week ago."

The Kiwai, smoking his banana leaf cigarette, seemed to consider things in general. Presently he took the cigarette out of his mouth and thriftily extinguished it against a log for future use.

"I no like, sir," was the sum of his thoughts.

"What don't you like? "

But the sergeant-interpreter seemed to have lost his tongue.

"Well, sergeant," laughed Packer, "I never thought to see you afraid of anything."

"I no 'fraid, sir. I take you orders."

"Well, you said you were afraid."

"No, sir. Me say, I no like."

"Damn you, what don't you like?"

The Kiwai got up from his place, saluted, and walked silently away.

"That puts the top on it," said Packer, biting at the end of his pipe.

He sat a little longer by himself on the rim of the ridge, looking down at nothing at all, in the dark, and listening to the low singing of some river that ran away, unseen, a long way down.

"The place is getting on my nerves," he thought. He was familial with the effects of the lonely mountain country on civilized man and his over-strung nervous system. "By and by," thought Packer, " I'll be seeing things that aren't there, and hearing— Jove! what was that? Have I begun already?"

He listened, sitting very still, and keeping his breath close held. Very, very far away, thin in the distance, there seemed to be a sound of— music? Not actual music, but surely musical notes— long-drawn, continuous, high and low curiously mingled.

Packer did not think he had heard anything like it before, but he could not be sure. He had a kind of half-formed, puzzling fancy that there was something unpleasant connected with the sound— its associations, if it had any, in his sub-conscious mind, were not agreeable. But he did not know at all what it was. He sat a long time listening to it. It never varied. He noticed, as he watched, that the various creatures of the night were coming out, as they came, nightly, when the camp had settled down to quiet; a wallaby hopped through the forest; a python, somewhere near, drew yards of scaly coils through dead leaves and fallen branches with a sound like tissue paper softly folded; birds of the dark rose silently and planed above his head. He saw that they all took flight backwards up the range; not one of them launched itself into the sweep of sky and stars that overhung the valley.

Turning into his tent, with its mosquito net slung on poles, and its rough camp bed unfolded, Packer was haunted, till he fell asleep, by the odd, uncharacteristic phrase of the Kiwai sergeant— "Sir, I no like..."

When morning came, unexpected difficulties came with it. The carriers mutinied, desperately, and with a determination that nothing could shake. From the first look-down into the valley at dawn they seemed to know where they were, and it was plain that they were struck with panic by the knowledge. Packer, an eye at his telescope, examined the valley, so far as its sloping mountain walls allowed. He could see nothing to excite fear. The sides were irregular and steep, perhaps a couple of thousand feet in depth; the valley seemed to be bag-shaped at one end, without exit, and to follow, at the other, the ordinary winding course of a mountain gorge. There was plenty of vegetation to be seen, so there could not be any poisonous gases about; that was a solution that had occurred to him. But now it must be given up, as also must the idea of some exceptionally plucky and dangerous inland tribe. Clearly, no native lived within many days of the Valley of Never-Come-Back.

It was not the business of a morning to go down into that valley and explore it; probably not the business of a week. Packer wanted his provisions, his tents; he wanted boys to clear the thick bush for him, and more boys, if he met with signs of gold, to work with pick and shovel. But it seemed that he was to have none of these things. The carriers, one and all, refused with violence. Some of them flung themselves face downwards on the ground, weeping and howling; some screamed insults at him in their native tongue; one or two even seized their clearing knives and made as if they would attack him. At this, the six police came forward and flung up their rifles, shouting as loudly as the carriers. Neither understood the other, but the unarmed men backed down.

Packer saw that he could not, by any means short of murder, force his carriers into the valley, and at that he shrank. He thought he had only to give the word for his police to fall upon them, kill one or two, and drive the others on.... But one wasn't a murderer, if one wasn't quite a saint, and anyhow— was one really sure of the police themselves?

The answer to this was swift in coming. It appeared that one was not. Hanging together, muttering and looking over their shoulders, with dark sullen eyes, and blubber lips stuck out, the six police, after reducing the carriers to quiet, began to show that they had a little affair of their own to consider, and that they were by no means anxious to attempt the valley. Packer ordered, bullied, to no result. One man only stuck by him, the Kiwai sergeant.

"I no like," he repeated stolidly, again and again; and afterwards, " I take you order, sir."It seemed as if he had forgotten every phrase of pidgin English

save those two, that represented, in few and stumbling words, his fear and loyalty.

"By God ! sergeant, you're a good-plucked one," swore Packer. "If I get the gold, you shall have enough of it to buy you a whaleboat of your own." He knew that, to a native from Kiwai, the possession of a whale-boat represented the very sum and crown of human ambition.

"I no like," repeated the Kiwai, like a minute gun going off. Then, suddenly, as they began to descend the slope together, the five remaining police keeping guard over the carriers, "Forty feet, sir? "

"Yes," said Packer, understanding. "A forty-foot boat, with two masts, and sails, and oars, and real brass rowlocks."

The Kiwai let out a wild chuckle, and then became strangely grave. It seemed that he was reckoning up his chances of securing the forty-foot whaleboat with two masts, and that he found them small.

Cursing the carriers as he went. Packer resolved to see what he could of the valley in a day, and return to the camp at night-time.

"It's all bunkum about anything being wrong with the place," he thought. "Those tribes we passed through are enough to account for it. I suppose they ambushed everyone who came along.... Except Meredith."

He found it necessary to assure himself of this again and again as he made his slow, difficult way down the precipices humming in and guarding the mysterious valley. The Kiwai was almost yellow with fear; his lips, in spite of the moist heat, seemed cracked and dry, and he kept licking them continually. Every now and then he stopped to look about him, hanging on to a branch with one hand, and peering anxiously down into the valley that still seemed so far below. Packer, who kept a good look-out on his own account, could not disguise from himself that there was something queer about the place. No birds, for one thing— he had not seen one, since he started, and there ought to have been many, flying startled up from the valley as the sergeant and he crashed noisily downward. And, when they stopped to rest for a minute, he could almost have sworn he heard that curious, musical sound, like, and yet not like, something that he thought he ought to know, and did not.

Of a sudden the Kiwai let out a barking cry.

"Woof!" he shouted, and with one frantic hand began pointing into the valley at a small clear space of gravel a long way below.

Packer looked, but could see nothing till he took the telescope. He gave one glance and dropped it again. He thought— though he could not be sure— that there were bones, white and bare, shining in the sun among the boulders and gravel of what seemed to be an ancient river bed.

"Just as likely as not it's nothing," he thought. "And whether it is or not, I'm going, so why worry?.. I believe they were too small to be men's bones. Probably pigs'."

They went down and down. The air, that had been cool on the mountain top, now grew oppressively wet and warm; sweat streamed in runnels down the Kiwai's dark legs; Packer's shirt stuck to his back. "There must be a deuced sight of water somewhere here, though there isn't a river apparently," he thought. "I suppose all that frightful moss-hag country drains right down into it. Lord ! isn't it hot? But I never heard of the heat killing anyone in Papua yet. Or the mosquitoes— though heaven knows they're bad enough." The Kiwai and himself, for the last half hour, had been ceaselessly beating themselves with green boughs, trying to find some relief from the swarms of fierce mosquitoes that attacked them. They were not large mosquitoes, they were the small, black mosquito, soft, easily caught and crushed, and, when crushed, smelling of fleas; that is the worst, most persistent, and most irritating of all the many mosquitoes that torment black men and white in Papua.

And now the real nature of the noise that had been puzzling him so long became plain at last to Packer. It was the war-cry of mosquitoes, billions and trillions strong— mosquitoes in such numbers as he had never dreamed of. They clung to his eyelids in bunches, they clustered in his nostrils, they hung like hanks of black beads upon the lobes of his ears, his lips were swelled up as if he had been fighting. His arms and neck felt as if they were bathed in fire. He struck and struck, drove them away, and felt them settle again instantly in larger swarms. If it was ill with him it was still worse with the Kiwai, whose bare legs and feet were showing angry red through the brown skin, and whose dark jumper attracted the little tormentors in thousands.

Packer swore fiercely at them and went determinedly on. It seemed as if he were going down into a solid mass of mosquitoes, packed like herrings at shoal time. His blood was full of the venom, and he felt the wild feverishness that is brought on by these wholesale poisonings mounting and mounting in his mind. He could have killed, in that moment; could have slashed a man to pieces with an axe, and enjoyed it.

But instead of a solid, tangible enemy, on level ground, there were the myriad tiny, winged devils filling the air; there was the precipice slope of the valley; there was, not so very far away, the bottom of the valley where he had seen the white bones shining in the sun where he was now certain the famous gold must lie....

Packer, like most old inhabitants of Papua, was something of a prospector. He had looked for gold before now, and if he had not found it he had learned a good deal about the places where it was likely to be found. And the rocks

down which he was climbing, the formation of the ranges, the look of the old dried river bed, the shape and run of the whole valley spelt, to the practised hunter, Gold!

"A jeweller's shop it'll be," he panted, beating wildly with his green branch at the mosquitoes. A jeweller's shop, in the mining talk of Papua, means a small, easily worked find of very high value. Jewellers' shops do not make big fields, but they enrich the men who find them.

"Throw a stone down, sergeant. I want to judge how deep it is," he ordered. The Kiwai obediently picked up a lump of stone, and poised it. In the instant, while he was judging his distance, Packer let out a shout, and seized his arm.

"Give it to me," he cried. The Kiwai gave the stone, and Packer, holding it up to the sunlight, for a moment forgot even to chase away the terrible mosquitoes. The native, stamping and beating, watched him.

"Gold!" said Packer, solemnly. "Colours all through. Sergeant, do you hear? This one is gold— good gold My word, I find one proper big lot down there. Lord, Lord!" he went on to himself. "If that's what it's like on the sides of this valley, the bottom must be stiff with it. Damn the mosquitoes, they're killing me!" He beat about with his branch.

"Yessir," said the Kiwai suddenly. "He killem altogether man."

"Oh, rats!" answered Packer, coughing, and spitting up a mouthful of mosquitoes. It seemed to him as if he were breathing mosquitoes now. The yelling hum was beyond anything he had ever imagined; since they were as bad as this in the daytime, he could well understand how a man might hear the terrible chorus at its worst— if worse could be— from the top of the range at night. Devils— devils— the natives were right.

"I'm losing my head," he thought. "Damn it, the brutes turn one's blood into pure poison." He felt on fire all over— like this must the martyrs have felt when they were being burned to death.

Death!

The thought halted him in his tracks. He stopped, and his mouth fell open. Into it a million mosquitoes dashed. Packer choked and spat them out; he did not dare to curse; he kept his lips tight shut when he could breathe again. His eyes were swelling so that the lids began to come down over the pupils. He'd be blind presently; so would the Kiwai, and then— then they would lose their way, and then—

He remembered, with singular accuracy, that one short glimpse of the white bones in the valley. He had never really thought they were the bones of pigs.

"You go back, sergeant— go back while you can," he gasped, with his fingers across his mouth.

"You going back, sir?"

Packer shook his head. He wasn't done yet.

"I stop along you, sir," choked the Kiwai, spitting mosquitoes. His great black and white eyes were all bloodshot, his face was swelling out of shape. He stamped and danced ceaselessly on his bare, swollen legs.

Packer had no breath to say what he thought. He went on down. It became impossible to think, for a moment, of anything but the torment of the mosquitoes. Behind closed lips, he found himself muttering half-crazed ejaculations, " God, this is awful. Can't stand it. Going through fire— live fire. This is awful. This is how they... Awful, this is awful!"...

He felt he was getting near breaking strain— and at the same moment he saw, through half-closed eyes, that the bed of the valley was at hand. He stumbled and fell over a root; the Kiwai caught him by the slack of his trousers, and saved him from falling the rest of the distance. Packer stayed where he was for a moment, half crouched on the ground. There was a momentary release from the torture, as he buried his face in a mass of fern. He pulled the fern out by the roots; as he rose, it might be useful for beating off the brutes....

His thoughts stopped short, as a clock stops when suddenly jarred. The fern was in his hand; its long roots trailed downwards in the air, and as they hung, gold— thick gold dust, pure and sparkling— dropped from them.

Packer gave a yell, stopped to choke, shouted again, and motioned to the Kiwai. The latter turned his bloodshot eyes on the fern, and then pointed down to the ground. Where his feet, and Packer's, had disturbed the soil in the scramble of the fall, pale sparkles answered to the sunlight. The ground was full of gold.

"If it's like this here, what's the creek like?... Awful, my God!... this is torment— I can't— I— There'll be all the gold that ever.... Yes, I will, I will, if it kills me. This is killing.... Gold— heaps of it."...

For the second time his feet gave way under him; he could only see out of one eye now, and things were getting blurred. He fell again, and this time the Kiwai was not quick enough. Packer struck, turned over, and landed in the bed of the dry creek.

He thought he must have been stunned for a moment. When he opened the one eye that still remained fit for use, there was nothing to be seen above him but a black cloud of mosquitoes, swarming and settling down. The screaming of the terrible horde was like the sound of steam whistles. He tried to get up, and found one leg was useless.

"That's the finish," he thought to himself. "The dead finish." Merciful insensibility seemed to float down upon him; through it he could vaguely hear the footsteps of the Kiwai, running— running hard and stumblingly down the bed of the creek.

"Left me," was Packer's last thought, before the world went out.

HE AWOKE to indescribable agony; every inch of his body felt as if it had been skinned with a blunt knife. He could not see, but his eyes were not suffering like the rest of him; something cool was touching them, deliciously. His ears were terribly swollen; it was hard to be sure if one heard anything— but there seemed to be people talking. Packer wondered if he was dead...

He found he could open one eye.

It showed him the walls of a small room, semi-transparent walls, through which you could see sky and trees. Two people were near him; one of them was a white man, who was bathing his eyes, and the other was—

Surely he was dead after all, and this was a devil— an old-fashioned devil, of the kind you saw in pictures when you were a child. The devil was big and shapeless; it had an immense head, with huge glaring eyes; it had not got hoofs, but its feet were formless and clubbed. Packer murmured something, he did not know what. The white man bent down over him, and looked at him.

"You're all right now," he said. There was something odd in his voice. Packer, through the mist that obstinately clung about his mind, said to himself dully that the man was telling lies about something, but he did not know what. The man was holding whisky to his mouth; it burned and hurt; he wanted to push it away, but his hands would not come up when he ordered them to do so. A little of it went down his protesting throat. The mist cleared somewhat after that, and he knew— for a moment— that Meredith had somehow got there— wherever "there" was— from Sydney, and was standing close over him, staring in his face.... Years afterwards it seemed, there was the touch of a hand feeling his wrist; another, at his side. With an enormous effort, he opened his one eye, and saw, "as in a glass darkly," the Kiwai feeling his heart, and Meredith beside him, on his knees, praying....

THE PIONEER of Papua has many hard things to do and to face, but Meredith thought he had never had a harder task set him by fate than that of breaking to Mrs. Packer the news that her man, like other women's men, was not coming back to her; that the cruel, unknown lands had taken him, as they had taken so many before. He made it as short as he could; he told her quickly, without the cruelty of "preparing," and steeled himself to endure her first wild distress, her snatching at unbelief, her slow despair when unbelief gave way.

He left her with the native women for an hour or two, and came back when the worst of her sudden grief had spent itself, to answer the questions that he knew she would ask him.

Packer, he told her, had found the valley, even as he, Meredith, had found it. From what the Kiwai said, it seemed clear that Packer had been caught exactly as other men had been; that the amazing richness of the gold on the sides of the valley, and the certainty of finding wealth beyond all dreams in the river-bed below, had lured him down and down, till he was beyond going back. Even if he had not met with the fall that flung him senseless on the river-bed, and left him unprotected for hours to the full attack of the mosquitoes while the Kiwai was going down the creek, he would not, in all probability, have been able to climb up the sides of the valley again. No one ever had done so, Meredith thought. As for himself, what had saved him on his first trip had been the self-restraint that had checked him, at the very first finding of gold, and had sent him up the range again, with gold in sight below him everywhere... only just in time. He had come back again from Sydney with a couple of rubber diving dresses, the kind that carries its own air supply, contained in a knapsack. He had brought a Thursday Island diver with him, and the two of them had prospected the bed of the creek, with a mosquito-proof house to change, sleep, and feed in. Yes, it was amazingly rich; but he needn't bother her with technical details. Yes, they knew what they were going to do; they were going to use poison gas on a large scale; nothing else would be of any use— you couldn't drain that country. No, of course, he had not gone by the same route as Packer; there was a much better one, which he had found coming back from his first trip. Enmity? How could she ask? Poor chap, he only wished Packer had got what he wanted; he would never have grudged him a share of it, if only he had come to him as man to man, and asked him what he had found— but that was all past. The carriers and police had joined his party; they all got back together. As for the Kiwai, undoubtedly he had done his best to save his master's life, by running down the creek on the bare chance of meeting natives, or finding a short way out. He could have got up the cliff again, in all probability, having a thicker skin than the white man; but he had not tried, he had stayed below and taken the hundredth chance. Reward him?

Certainly. Packer had promised him a whaleboat, and he, Meredith, would see that the sergeant got it.

"A— a whaleboat!" sobbed the widow— widow once more— behind her soaked handkerchief. "Do they?— what are they—?"

"About a hundred pounds," answered Meredith.

Mrs. Packer seemed to meditate. She was quietening down now; she had had time to think that this man before her had been very much in love with

her; that he was undisputed possessor of the biggest gold find ever made in New Guinea. And poor Lance after all....

She slipped her fingers through her hair, tidying it surreptitiously. She looked at Meredith, under long, wet eyelashes. And Meredith, to whom the death of Packer was a story of three weeks old, looked back at her, and felt a little ashamed of himself for the warmth of the sudden thrill that went through him. He broke into talk again, to hide it.

"I'll order the best boat that can be got in Sydney," he said, " and have it sent up by the next *Morinda*."

Mrs. Packer, a new handkerchief in her hand, wiped her eyes delicately, and cried a very little more. Then she looked up at Meredith. Her eyelashes were very long.

"Isn't that a lot of money to spend?" she said simply. "Surely a dinghy would do?"

As long as Madeline Packer remains upon this mortal world, she will never understand why it was that Meredith, who was once so terribly in love with her, never, after she was widowed, asked her to marry him.

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3: Recluses

Raymond S. Spears

1876-1950

Argosy, 29 Sep 1928

A THOUSAND generations of breeding ugliness out of Black Forest wolves to make them tractable sheep guardians could not fail to eradicate some of the wolf instincts from the nature of these age-long leaders of rapine. Features, appearance, physique remained the same, but by breeding in the docile and friendly dog types while breeding out the lupine frames of mind came down at last to Queen, who belonged at the Cougar Den Club.

Queen was a tall, narrow, smiling dog, that gave returns in friendly interest to the sportsmen who had organized the Cougar Den away out on the edge of things. There they went to revert for a few days or weeks to the killing of wild beasts enduring the privations of a land where only the trails of animals led through the gaps.

Queen stretched with long dignity before the fireplace. She ate at her own bowl, never deigning to come to the table to beg a bite from the humans. She strolled around the camp, corral, and along the banks of Skipping Creek with her head and tail low, catching game to show that a thousand generations of domestic habits had not cost her any of the wolf skill of her wild ancestry back in the nomadic days of humanity.

She also knew where the trout had their spawning beds of sand. Wading in the shoals she would plunge her open jaws into the water and bring up great flopping fish, some of which she ate. Others she carried nonchalantly into the camp kitchen for the sportsmen, making them envy her for the capture of such monsters, their own fish-rod luck bringing no like rewards.

Queen would go to a near-by knoll and sit on her haunches, surveying the surrounding country. She kept her nose horizontal, however, and no coyote howl ever tempted her to point her jaws up, howling in answer. It remained for a dog wolf, a gray roamer of perhaps her own age, to come by at last; and between suns she vanished from the sportsmen's camp. The men knew she had eloped with the wolf. They found the tracks where they romped away together up the dry sand bed of Thirsty Creek.

The wolf was a traveler when he took Queen with him. And she had the gray hide and the magnificent carriage, the swagger and the gait, the silhouette and the voice of a wolf; a thousand humans wise to police or German sheep or Belgian wagon dogs might see her and yet not notice that she was dog instead of wolf.

Of her wild range no one could make even a plausible guess. Whenever in this or that desert terrain, along timber belts, in the lakes or streams regions

word was heard of a pair of wandering wolves who played as they ran, and spent their time chasing jackrabbits, hunting squirrels, turning porcupines over to bite them in the bellies, and other familiar pursuits, the sportsmen were glad that Queen had survived the poison bait, the traps, and the farreaching rifles of hunters eager to slay the savage pair, though they were much more interesting alive than dead.

But when it began to be said that Queen and her mate, who was called President, to fit him in name for so fine a companion, had a superior intelligence, and were too good for trappers and hunters to slay, champion killers of "varmints" made a dead set to stretch the hides of President or Queen just to show how much smarter they were than even a run-wild dog.

The two never occupied the same den twice in succession until Queen went into retirement, to issue presently with a litter of wolf pups. She lived one spring in the Linkum Hills, another in the Goggle timber belt, and a third up at the head of Diamond waters.

She did her duty by the pups. She raised them till they were racing around. Then, with President, she trained the youngsters to hunt game for themselves, taught them according to their ability to learn, and then, when the pups were able to care for themselves, catching cottontails and eating grasshoppers, chewing grass, berries, and nuts for their health and hunger, she would slip away with her mate to run again, untrammeled by matronly cares, during the autumn and winter, through courtship affairs of February and March, again to go into retirement in late spring.

Inklings of her travels and habits were obtained when from time to time she passed through the Cougar Den country.

She had ways of letting the sportsmen at the camp know that she had come there. She was wild and savage, now, and slunk away from men whenever she came upon them. Rifle bullets spraying around her and President as they ran or slipped away, had taught her to shun humanity.

At the same time she still could not quite forego the memories of the sportsman camp ranch, and she would come down among the two or three dogs who had taken—but not filled— her own place in the camp and its traditions. She could nose the dogs without jeopardy, and she would leave a fish on the porch or lug in a big antelope jackrabbit, just for old-times' sake, and the dogs left her tribute of friendship alone, as though she had warned them of the consequences if they didn't.

Summer and autumn in that country was beautiful. She would come with President, who hung back in the junipers, probably anxious and angry that she took such chances around a human cabin. She was clever, however, and the pair steered clear of all camps, ranches, trappers' cabins, and places where

men traveled. When they crossed a wagon road they would jump twenty-five feet or so, and high in trajectory. They had no use for humans, and the coming of hunters or fugitives from justice in their temporary locale would see them hurtling for some other place as far away as possible from mankind.

THE man who had brought Queen from the kennels when a few months old was Roland Danvers. Danvers was a manufacturer of brass and copper implements, making a large income and a fine name for the excellence of his products. He overdid his job, however, and a day came when the doctors told him he had nerve, lung, and muscular ailments, and he must retire into some far, high place to regret his industry and bemoan the meagerness of his sins.

Danvers had always been so proud of his strength. He had been tireless in his mountain climbings. He had braved the precipices and conquered the fastnesses. Now, when he went to the Cougar Den, scene of his wildcraft triumphs, he had to hobble around and stop for breath.

He caught the sidelong glances of pity, and heard the false note of assurance and delight that he looked so well. His friends knew that he was done for, so he had himself built a cabin away back up in the timber belt, and as he was not wholly helpless, he ordered his guides down to the main camp, and warned them that if they came to him oftener than once a week he would shoot them.

There, in his cabin, he sat for hours in the sunshine, and learned to watch and know the wild life around him, instead of shooting the big game and ignoring the small.

He asked his old friends not to shoot anything in this particular valley, and so the deer and bears came around his cabin, feeding on his middens and licking salt. At night he heard the coyotes howl, and by day he learned the languages of ravens, grouse, and other birds.

A long autumn passed. The people wanted him to come down to the main camp, but he refused. Instead, he ordered up enough supplies to last him all winter, when deep, loose snow might keep the guides from coming in to him as often as they ought to, looking after his safety.

Elk and deer went by him on their way into the winter feeding country. Mountain sheep came down into his valley. Blizzards shut him in. Instead of being alone for a week, he was alone for a month at a time. He set out a prodigal feast there every day for the birds. Although most of the big animals had gone away, mountain sheep came to feed at stacks of hay he had had harvested for them on the meadow spreading wide at his feet, lifting into gorgeous granite ranges across the way.

Weak, lonely and yet hopeful, Danvers studied the passers-by through powerful binoculars as well as close at hand. He had never known rest when youth or man, having begun work on leaving the grammar grades, and had carried on steadily. Now that time seemed more precious than ever to him, he relaxed and enjoyed the passing hours as never before. He forgot his ailments. He lived watching the creatures which fed on his bounty. Even a cougar came strolling by his silent figure, stopped to look him in the eyes and then slipped on his way.

There was a scoundrel who lived away up beyond where Danvers had had his retreat built. His real name was unknown to any one. He was suspected of being a fugitive from justice. That he was bad was obvious when one saw the greenish hue of his sullen eyes, watched the twisting of his lips, and noticed how quickly his hand went to his big revolver at a strange sound or at the fall of a shadow on the ground within his view.

At his door had been laid cattle stealing, a murder on the other side of the mountains, and robberies. Now and again a Carcajou detective made the circuit of the settlements and ranches which encircled the Tehawus country, and the man back in the mountains knew about that, attaching to it the significance it deserved.

The detectives knew him, but the region's population did not know. He went by the name of Skyline Pete, because he was seen so often silhouetted against the horizon along the crests of the bare Alpine heights above the timber stand.

The rumor went around that Roland Danvers had in his peeled log cabin unusual luxuries and supplies of the most tasty kinds. This was near the truth, for the doctors had prescribed for him a great many luxuries to assuage his physical condition. He had a fortune from which he could scarcely spend the income.

His cabin was finely furnished, but he would have been glad to exchange all that he had for the robust health and easy habits of mind of most of those who dwelt far away and in humbler surroundings than his mountain retreat, where at times despair could not fail to mingle its voice with his most determined resolutions. Never before had his courage been so sorely tried.

Drawn into an unnatural shape by his illness, he daily worked against the strains, exercising, reading in the great literature that inspires heroes and records the transition of human despair into supreme confidence, generally he was content. Though winter was upon him, he refused to obey the portents of the migration of the wild life from the high ranges down into the lower belts.

"No," he shook his head, "leave me here alone. I've enough to eat, more than three pounds a day for the length of the winter season, and a ton of grain

and a cord of dried meats to hang out for my wild neighbors. There's plenty of fuel in the woodshed, and lots of oil for my lamps. No! If man can't help me it may be I'll find here in these mountains the faith of mind that 'lll overcome my physical ailments."

"We prob'ly cain't git to come up more'n once or twicet this winter, if the snow's loose!" the club superintendent warned him.

"Don't worry about me, boys," he replied. "It doesn't matter what happens. If I go back down now, I'm retreating. I want to stay here and fight it out."

With forebodings they left him, and well they might dislike to leave a man alone like that in such a remote fastness. Danvers was a good fellow. When he had been a stalwart, like his camp mates, he had been one of the kindliest men in the world. Now he was even finer and gentler.

They left him firearms and ammunition. They made sure of every detail, from fire extinguishers to matches, and from venison jerky to long rows of canned fruit. His own solicitude was that he should have plenty of grain and dried meats, great sticks of beef and mutton kidney fats to be hung out for his bird friends, who like himself would rather enjoy the great mountains, despite the cold, than go down to milder climes.

When two of the guides fought their way into the cabin to spend Christmas with the self-exiled man, they found him about the same. He was putting records through his phonograph when they came up to the cabin in the evening. The timber above the cabin was splitting with the terrific frost, the ground shaking as the solid granite shrank to the shriveling touch. But within, a red fire blazed cheerily in the sitting room, a heating stove insuring 'the cabin the ample warmth of comfort. At their hail from without the man threw wide the door.

"Why, boys, you've come?" he exclaimed.

"Sure thing— Merry Christmas!" they laughed, and unloaded bundles of mail, magazines and remembrances which had been sent to him by his friends.

"Thank you, boys!" he said, brokenly, stirred by the affection which was willing to undertake that tremendous trip through the hard going when every step of the snowshoes on the loose fluff let them down nearly two feet in it.

The visitors remained four days. Danvers visibly cheered up under their presence. He was not sorry to have them leave, but from every word that had come to him he knew that his friends were pulling for him. They wanted him to swing up instead of slide down. 'They couldn't afford to lose him. At the same time they knew he was the captain of his own destiny, and that he must find himself there alone or not at all.

New Year's, January and February were magnificent phenomena in that land. Storms swept the mountains and added snow on the deeps already

inundated. There were days so cold that the birds could not face it, and the watcher saw a raven, flying along, suddenly collapse and fall into the snow, frozen to death on the wing.

Wiser birds buried themselves in the loose snow, waiting for the freeze to moderate, and when they came out at last they swarmed in flocks around the great chunks of suet and lean meat which hung in Danvers's trees and scratched and ate the grain till their crops stuck out like pouters. All of them, when stuffed, came with shining eyes to cock their heads to right or left, staring at the muffled human who attended them in their wants.

He even set out dishes of warm water at which they drank damatically. Now and then a foolish young one plunged in to take a bath, requiring thawing operations quickly.

SKYLINE PETE, improvident and a thief, came prowling into the winter hermit's valley. He had failed to lay in enough food to see him through the winter, and, hungry as a bear, emerging from its hibernating, Skyline Pete took advantage of hard snow and bare streaks to sneak out of his own fastnesses into the domain of Roland Danvers.

He arrived near the cabin after dusk. He circled around it, peering through the windows into the fire-lit comfort of the sitting room, where the recluse sat listening to the music of his records, of which he had brought so many that perhaps some had never yet been played. The skulker went, catlike, to the porch to look in. Ravenous, he broke off a chunk of jerky, careless whether it was beef or horse, gnawing it, jealous and envious of the birds, who there had all they needed.

Skyline Pete knew well enough that just one word of his own hungry predicament would give him a back load of supplies, and another lot when he should return. Sportsmen were like that, prodigal in their liberality. He knew that Danvers was one of the best fellows in the world. He hated him for the contrast with his own surly and brutal instincts.

There was loot of firearms, of money, probably, and of innumerable trinkets and valuables. He even saw sparkling on the man's hand the beautiful stone which marked Danvers's allegiance to his wife and sweetheart, now gone.

The visitor turned raider. He slipped to the door and softly tried it. Of course, no one locked a camp in that remote place! Skyline Pete quietly opened the hewn plank barrier and walked in on his toes, feline in his invasion. The cool draft rolling through the room gave the man who had spent the winter there his first warning of the intrusion.

Roland Danvers straightened from the rack of records to look. He saw the whiskery, long-haired scoundrel, who was patched about with furs and hides, the accumulated results of repugnance to cold water, visible to his looks. Skyline Pete had picked up a club of firewood as he came along the porch from looking at the window. Under his grizzly brows his eyes glowed green in their sunken pits. Perhaps he was demented or a reversion to the cave man era of intelligence and habits. In any event murder was his intention, unmistakably.

Roland Danvers straightened up, his brows lifting with surprise. His soul had been tried by his long vigil alone in that high back land. There had been times when he had bent weakly in dejection before the fireplace on gloomy nights, but courage had never failed him. Weak or strong, he was no quitter. He took a step toward the scamp with such a serene and blue-eyed contempt that Skyline Pete flinched, hesitated and took a slight step backward.

The intruder was a much heavier man than his intended victiin. He was armed with a club, revolvers, and a knife in his belt. He had every advantage, it seemed, over the slender gentleman who stood with such a feeling of expectant exultation as. he had not felt in twenty years, as though youth itself had returned to bless him with its stalwart joy in the beginning of some great feat.

Angered that he had betrayed his own cowardice, the raider surged forward with a savage, incoherent growl, shrill and high in its timbre, raising his club to beat down the smaller man with famine-inspired blows. Side-stepping, Danvers slipped from under, and the knot struck a dent in the flooring.

Danvers leaped in, driving home a fist blow. Its strength surprised him. Ag had not known he was that nearly fit.

His physique cleared with his mind. He was largely himself again. He had scant chance against that antagonist, but he took it cheerfully, as though any possibility, however slight, was all he asked.

Much quicker than Skyline Pete, he must, if he would win, keep clear of the club, duck out of the fellow's bearlike arms, and stay on his feet. If caught and seized, he did not forget the guns and knife whose butts jutted cut of the bearskin hair at the fellow's waist. Cool against increasing and baffled rage, Danvers had some advantage of which he took the full measure.

Mere cornered defense increased to lively hope for a while, but the ursine quickness and the cat-like bounds of the assailant were soon apparent. Time and again Danvers just slipped clear, and one blow grazed his shoulder, numbing it.

Courage hardly availed in that kind of a contest with the odds so much against him. Cornered, Danvers found himself trying to duck under, but he was thwarted. The next instant they were in a clinch and the chortling exultation of

the savage man as he wrapped himself around his victim was accompanied by Danvers' gasping cry— still brave but despairing.

With a glance toward the open door, Danvers gave fleeting thought to the chance of a miracle, and one happened on the instant. He saw a great, fanged, wolf-like creature coming in absolute, instantaneous answer to his shout. The beast was fluffed of fur and white-fanged, light on its paws, with lowered head and tail.

With two short, puppyish springs, as if in play, the animal nipped in, snapping a chunk out of the ham of Skyline Pete. Leaping in again, as the man shrank away screaming at that unexpected anguish, the beast tore open the white flesh of Skyline Pete's upper arm, which had been bared in the struggle.

And then the rescuer tore in and slashed with faster and more fancy bites and wrenches. Skyline Pete struggled clear of Danvers, trying to seize the wolfish assailant. Then he reached to snatch his revolvers which he seemed to have forgotten or felt he didn't need in the fight with the man.

Danvers flung himself and balked his attempt to use the firearms. Then Danvers caught up the club from the floor and with a terrific blow smashed the invader's big hand, while the animal charged in, tearing open the calf of a leg.

Skyline Pete surged toward the doorway. He was tripped by a grab in the heel. He managed to get outdoors and go tumbling and rolling headlong, end over end, down the steep slope in front of the cabin. The rescuer stood in the open, breathing swiftly with tongue out, smiling.

"Queen!" Roland Danvers shouted as the voice of the whipped man died away in the distance, cursing and wrathful in fear and agony.

"Queen! It's you, Queen!"

She turned with her eyes shining to look at the man who had brought her into this lofty sky-land. She licked in her long tongue, and walked with dignity to him as he dropped on his knees to wrap her in his arms, glad and grateful beyond words.

It seemed to him as though in just these few minutes of terrific struggle his weakness and his hopelessnes of ever recovering had both departed. He had fought a good fight, and then a friendliness and a companionship out of the old days had brought him succor in the moment of his great need.

"Queen!" he exclaimed. " Good old girl! What can I do for you!"

As if for answer she strolled along the front veranda and lifting her voice, yelped and uttered a long-drawn howl.

From yonder there came an answer in kind, and presently the answering was farther away.

"Tell him to come in, Queen!" the man urged. "Bring him in, old girl! He's welcome!"

But the wolf mate would not accept that invitation. He lay out in the ridges and back in the timber, that night and in the weeks that followed. Queen took her place by hearth and in the kitchen. She was there when the guides broke through into the big country to the cabin, fearful for what they might find, and delighted when they were welcomed by a man in whose eyes were the full recovery and exuberance of well-being, mind and body.

Toward these other men Queen lifted her nose and lips, and they respected her feelings of aloofness— instantly. Yet presently she let the hair lie down along her back and curtained her fangs again, reassured by the voice and explanation Danvers gave her. She did not know or love them.

Roland Danvers would have gone down to the main camp, but the dog drew back from making the journey even when the way was clear and the avalanches of the spring melt had stopped coiling and growling in smoking devastation down the mountain steeps.

She would not leave the remote cabin, and so Danvers stayed with her. She let him play with her pups when they presently came. She romped with them herself before the cabin, like a wolf bitch before her den, watchful, wild and happy. They grew apace and if she let them feed on the dishes which Danvers prepared for them with fond efforts and varied recipes, she would also go away alone and bring back a jack-rabbit or marmot or other wild meat for them to gum with their funny mouthings and their squeaking little yelps.

Later she took the pups for short runs with her, and then Danvers would see her mate, always wild and keeping his distance, go to join and run with them, the plump youngsters bobbing along, while with lithe, swift leaps the parents set the pace. And after a time Danvers would hear them circling back, their voices shrill in eager hunting cries, lifting in the wind like wandering wraiths.

A morning came when the family pack did not return. A day or two later Queen came running by, flirting her tail, yelping and on the romp, looking over her shoulder at the man who stood leaning against a post on the veranda. He knew by her refusal to come within a hundred yards that she had gone wolf again.

She was on her way over her long range, jubilant, happy, and wild, not sorry that a thousand generations of civilization had urged her to show gratitude nor regretting that she had turned a man's cabin into her spring wolf-den; but now she would be joining her mate for the jeopardies and the delights of feral freedom on her way! And Danvers with joy headed into his own world to resume his old life.

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4: The Galley Slave

J.H.M. Abbott

1874-1953

The Bulletin, 28 Mar 1928

Prolific author of non-fiction, novels and short stories, as well as a journalist. His fiction is mostly historical, set in the days of colonial New South Wales

"BUT, my dear man," remarked the Parson, "you have not a great deal to complain of. It is notorious that the crew of the Commandant's barge are infinitely better off than any others of us— how shall I put it?— citizens of constraint. You certainly must bend your back and strain upon your oar when occasion demands. I know that the labor of pulling up-stream against the tide is heavy and hard, but you don't do it every day. You have good quarters. Your rations are regular. You get your tot of spirits and your allowance of tobacco when you are on voyage. And. you have never been through the mill, as I have. You have not worked with the lime-burners, you have had no experience of the mines, or on the breakwater— you have never bullocked on the cedar logs. Look at me— Master of Arts of Cambridge, formerly priest in Holy Orders, highly cultured gentleman, once a fellow of John's, once chaplain to a bishop— once, even, in a fair way to becoming a bishop myself. And what do I do in the scheme of things that rules this charming settlement of Newcastle, or King's Town, or the Coal River— or whatever may be its proper title? What is my honorable employment in this sphere of coerced usefulness? Why, dammit, grave-digging! And I look upon myself as lucky to be so employed. I have been in an iron-gang, I have been flogged half a score of times. And you have never once stretched yourself at the triangle. Bless my soul, my young friend, you are a pessimist."

Peter Septimus Crawshaw, a tall old man in patched but very clean convict clothing which even his present task had hardly soiled, with the face of a saint,. the past reputation of a satyr and the record of a "pebble" of the worst description, both in Sydney and in Van Diemen's Land, smiled benignly down upon the younger man. That person lay on the grass beside the open grave in the churchyard on the hill at Newcastle, staring disconsolately out over the lovely prospect of sun-burnished waters, yellow sands of the long beach that stretches to Port Stephens, silvery winding reaches of the river, miles of mangrove and dark forest, and the distant blue mountains to the northward and north-west.

No one ever looked less of a villain than this venerable sexton leaning upon the long handle of his shovel and cutting a fill of black twist for his stumpy clay pipe; yet there was hardly a prisoner in the settlement at the mouth of the

Hunter who had a fouler record. Twice he had cheated the hangman, for five-and-twenty years his character had been notorious as that of a man whom normal sinners loathe, despise and fear— that sort of character which all penal systems, of all times and places, seem to breed like the sores of scurvy. A brilliantly-clever man, horribly perverted and delighting in the corruption of others, his sins were of a sort that may hardly even be hinted at. Old age— he was seventy-three— had taken his active vices from him, but he remained a burnt-out volcano of a sort of badness beside which mere homicidal mania is a clean, wholesome and manly sport.

And yet there was no man in all the colony who had more charm of manner than this unspeakably disreputable old convict who had made Latin verses, trouble and infamy wherever he had been. Until new officials recognised him for what he was they nearly always took him for what he seemed to be— with his clean-cut, handsome features, fine eyes and gentle manner. But when they learned his record they generally found some position for Peter Septimus in which he would come in contact as little as possible with his fellow prisoners.

The young man sighed as he scrambled to his feet. "No," he said gloomily, "I've never been flogged, and I suppose the billet I'm in's not a bad one, as they go here. But I oughtn't to be here at all. Damme, I was wrongly convicted. I no more did what I was sent here for than— than you did. And here I am, a warrant officer of the Royal Navy, compelled to do the task of a— of a d—d galley-slave."

Very musically and gently the old man laughed.

"Oh, innocent— of course. We all are. *Cela va sans dire*! But why did they send you here? What is your qualification for this colony of the elect at the Coal River? How were you supposed to earn the privileges of this select community?"

"Forging the Captain's name— and I swear I never did it. But that don't matter, I've told you you're wanted down at the boat-shed. And you'd better shake a leg. Jimmy sent me for you. And he's down there himself. Come along. Put on your jacket, and hurry up. You know Jimmy better than I do. It won't do either of us any good if he's kept waiting.

"No, it certainly won't. That eminent disciplinarian Major James Morissett of the 'Buffs' is, as you say, not a person to be treated lightly." He picked up his jacket, and slipped it on. "Well, I'm ready— and I have a clear conscience. There is nothing against me. Perhaps I may indulge a hope that this summons portends promotion. The Commandant may have noted my zeal and assiduity as a First Gravedigger, and have decided that I am worthy of something better. He may, indeed, wish to reward faithful, if humble, service by advancement.

The young man laughed grimly. "He does intend to promote you, Parson. I heard him say so."

"Indeed! And may I ask what my future sphere of usefulness is to be? Do you happen to have heard that also?"

"Yes,"

"What is it, pray?"

"He is going to make you acting-hangman."

The old man smiled. "Well, well— I had no idea that such an honor was in store for me! Good. And the occasion?"

"There are two to be hanged at Wallis Plains to-morrow, and Billy the Ram's broken his leg. You're to go up in the barge with us this evening on the turn of the tide. We'll he there in the morning. I hope you like it! Billy's job, I mean."

"Like it, my dear boy— l could kiss you for bringing me the news. Indeed I could."

Whistling cheerfully, and always smiling, the venerable and picturesque old man followed the other down the hillside and across the town to the river, where the Commandant's barge lay ready manned beside the jetty of the King's Wharf.

A CURIOUS CRAFT was this big boat in which Major Morissett was wont, by means of its ample waterways, to visit the hinterland of the territory he ruled so firmly.

Settlement on the Hunter was well established in 1825. Newcastle was developing from a convict camp into a town. Already the Australian Agricultural Company was established at Port Stephens. Wallis Plains, where West Maitland was coming into being, was beginning to rival the Hawkesbury as a farming district. The main river, the Williams, and the Paterson ran into magnificent cedar forests that were as good as those in Illawarra. The Upper Hunter, pioneered by Howe and Loder, and the others from the Windsor side, five years before, was being taken up as cattle-stations. The van of the scattered army of colonisation that first settled in these rich lands had almost reached the Liverpool Ranges, and was nearly ready to cross over on to the plains of the North-West. But active government hardly extended as yet further westward than Wallis Plains. The Commandant could still visit the most important centres of his administration in his State galley.

The barge was a long and broad-beamed craft, with capacity for from six to eight oars, room for an armed guard of soldiers and a capacious cabin for the accommodation of the Commandant in the stern. Forward, in the bows, was fixed up a set of triangles. It was Major Morissett's custom, taking the

flagellator with him, to hold courts along the river-bank upon assigned servants who might be presented by their masters for trial upon complaints of idleness, theft, insubordination or insolence, and to administer justice, or injustice, on the spot where the trial was held. Once a month at least this useful pilgrimage was made into the interior, and was a welcome relief in the monotony of existence for those who were settled along the three rivers. That is, to those who did not have to go into the bows of the barge with their shirts off.

The broad waters shone like mother of pearl as the big boat glided across their glassy surface towards the sunset, the six long oars rising and falling regularly and rhythmically to the slow time given them by the coxswain standing by the tiller on the little deck aft of the cabin. Beside him, gazing forward over the latter's roof, the tall and burly figure of Major Morissett dominated the little company of voyagers. In the well before the cabin the red coats of a corporal and three soldiers, flamingly vivid in the level rays of a pink-and-orange sunset, made a splash of color against the dark cedar panelling of the little house. The venerable ex-clergyman sat near them— but not too near.

And there were two others, handcuffed and leg-ironed.

Tugging at the bow oar on the starboard side sat the young man who had been sent to summon the sexton to this variation of his work of disposing of the dead, his gloomy gaze concentrated upon the bending bodies of his fellow-rowers as they swung back and forward in pairs upon the wooden seats stretching from gunwale to gunwale. He had no eyes for the beauties of the evening and the glories of the sunset reflecting themselves upon the still surface of the river. The long beaches of grey mud below the mangroves, just beginning to be slowly eaten up by the turning tide, fitted his mood of sullen discontent better than the wealth of light and color which seemed to have fascinated even the grim Commandant himself. The two pale men in irons— they were the two who were to die at Wallis Plains upon the morrow —were hardly so sorry for themselves as was prisoner Isaac Penfold, bowman of the Commandant's barge at Newcastle and lately gunner of H.M.S. *Bermuda* in the Channel Fleet. Actually, to him, their impending fate seemed preferable to his own.

Major Morissett's stern grey eyes wandered over the length of the barge, scanning each toiling oarsman in turn, and when they rested on the group in the well before the cabin he frowned slightly and bent forward over the cabin's roof.

"Corporal Tuft!" he barked, with the parade-ground rasp in his voice.

The corporal started to his feet, straightening his crossbelts as he rose, and turned to face the Commandant, standing rigidly to attention and saluting when he replied.

"Sir."

"Send that d—d hangman for'ard immediately. D'ye think its decent to have him sitting there with those two? Let him go into the bows."

"Very good, sir," replied the corporal, turning to Peter Septimus. "Get to h— out o' this, you old beast. Go an' sit be y'self, up be th' whippin' post. Move lively, now. What th' devil d'ye mean a-shovin' in amongst decent people?"

The old man scrambled forward, smiling pleasantly, and sat down in the bottom of the boat, his hack propped against one of the legs of the triangles, so that he was immediately behind Isaac Penfold.

As dusk settled down over the quiet reaches, and the stars came out in the dark indigo vault of sky, spreading like the roof of a tent from wall to wall of dark forest that stood up dimly visible upon either low-lying bank of the river, a light shone out of the Commandant's cabin, and crew and soldiers and prisoners became aware that the great man was at supper. Not until they halted for an hour or so, at midnight, were the rowers to satisfy their hunger, though the soldiers and condemned prisoners might please themselves when they consumed their scanty rations. This had been intimated to them through the coxswain, a ticket-of-leave man, and the only one in the barge.

"Yous lags'll be fed at twelve o'clock— did j'ear me! So ye can jest keep a-goin' till then. An' put yer bleedin' backs into it." There was little politeness in New South Wales in 1825.

The rising moon, almost full, lit them over the wide mud flats at the entrance to the river proper, and mounted higher and higher as they progressed up the stream, only the thud of the oars in the rowlocks, the regular faint splash of the blades as they entered and left the water, a tinkling, musical lapping of tiny wavelets against the run of the barge, and the occasional croaking cry of a mopoke in the dark trees ashore breaking the primeval silence of the lonely forest that shut them in. Not until they had travelled many miles up-stream did a solitary light, the mere glimmer of a slush-lamp in some glassless window on the bank,' speak of any habitation in this wilderness of tangled forest, whose only track or pathway was the placid river.

Silhouetted in detail against the moon, a sentry sat upon the roof of the cabin above the well where the two unhappy passengers occasionally clinked their irons, or rattled them, in the darkness. His tall shako was a monstrous, mis-shapen thing with the silvery light behind it, and the glimmer of his bayonet mingled with the sparkle of the eddying waters overside, as his musket lay across, his knees. Through the little window beside the cabin door the light within shone behind a red curtain, reminding the rowers of snug inns in their native counties at home.

The head and shoulders of the coxswain stood out above the cabin roof against the barge's flashing wake. There was a low murmur of conversation in the deep shadow of the well, where occasionally a pipe glowed dimly for a moment, lighting up a sunburnt nose and the peak of a shako.

And then a very singular thing took place— so strange and exceptional a thing to happen in those hard years that the rowers could scarcely believe the evidence of their hearing. A young soldier— a sandy, fresh-complexioned fellow of the last draft from home— was praying with the prisoners. One of them repeated his words, dully and mechanically; the other merely groaned a sort of acquiescence at intervals. It was all very low and hushed— the Commandant must not be disturbed— but quite distinct and audible throughout the barge's length.

" '*Ar Feyther w'ich art in 'Evvin— allard be Thoi name— Thoi kingdum coom'*— go on, Hegarty man, say th' words arter me."

A low tremulous murmur followed, in another voice. " '*Thoi will be done on airth, as it is in 'Evvin. Gie us this daay our daily bread. Forgi'e us aur trespasses, as we forgi'e them*—' "

And then the other man shrieked— so startlingly and suddenly that the rowers lost a stroke, and the barge seemed to jerk with the simultaneous movement of a dozen bodies. "*O Gawd— O Gawd*! *Ah canna bear it*!"

The scream of hysterical agony cut the silence of the night like a flash of lightning in a dark cloud, and there was a clash of jangling iron as the wretched man tumbled into the bottom of the boat in a fit. Almost instantly the cabin door opened, and the head and shoulders of the Commandant loomed blackly in the rectangles of yellow light.

"Corporal Tuft!" roared Major Morissett.

"Sir!" the alarmed voice of the N.C.O. answered him.

"Stop that d—d row at once! I want to go to sleep. If those fellows can't keep quiet, gag 'em. If I hear any more of it, I'll reduce you. D'ye hear me—as soon as we're back in Newcastle I'll have you smashed. Damme, I will. Coxs'n!"

"Sir!" from the stern.

"We won't halt till one o'clock— and not then, unless absolute silence is kept aboard. I won't have such d—d nonsense. Keep 'em at it till one o'clock. I'll hand you out my watch through the after window. Understand !"

"Aye, aye, sir."

The Commandant withdrew into the cabin, and closed the door. Soon after, the light went out, and then Isaac Penfold heard a faint snigger behind him, and a carefully modulated whisper reached his ears.

"Dear me— I'd not have missed this for worlds. Delightful! Exquisite!"

As he came back on his stroke, Penfold turned his head, and hissed over his shoulder.

"You devil, shut your mouth!"

WHEN THEIR hour of rest came, the rowers ate their meagre dole of corned beef and maize cake in their places. At the end of the meal the coxswain served each of them with a pannikin of rum, the corporal similarly refreshed his men, and the two prisoners were given his own allowance by the young soldier who had prayed with them. "Drink hearty, poor laads —'twill help ye through the night."

The Commandant slept soundly during the halt of the barge's progress up the river, and a careful silence was maintained by all, in pious accordance with the spirit of the ancient proverb which enjoins the wisdom of allowing slumbering dogs to continue to slumber. Some of the men lit their pipes from the coxswain's lantern, which he carried forward for the purpose, and two or three stretched themselves along the flooring-boards in the bottom of the barge, to snatch a brief half-hour of sleep before the real toils of the night began. Both tide and current would be against them at two o'clock, and the last third of their voyage would be the hardest portion of their task.

As he handed him his tot of rum, the coxswain whispered to Isaac Penfold : "Come down into th' starn-sheets. I've summat to say to ye, Isaac."

The young man followed him aft to his little deck behind the cabin.

"Lookye, lad, you're an old Navy man like meself— I'd be a-callin' ye 'mister' if we had our rights. I'm numb wi' till' cold, a-standin' here steerin'. You know th' river as well's what I do, so I'm a-goin' to get ye to steer an hour or so, whiles I warm me blood a-pullin' at your oar. Jimmy won't show up till daylight— he likes his night's rest. So 'twill be all right. If he should light his light, we can easy slip back to our places, while he's dressin'."

"Martin," whispered Penfold, "tell me— what's these two done that we're takin' them to Wallis Plains to hang 'em? Isn't the gallows working properly down below? Why couldn't they ha' been stretched in Newcastle?"

"Didn't ye know! These are the pair— Hegarty and Macpherson— that killed Black Sam, th' hoverseer of th' road-gang up at th' Plains. Jimmy's takin' 'em up there to string 'em up for an example to their mates. That's all. He's a-goin' to show 'em wot 'appens to coveys as splits open hoverseers' cocoanuts with their shovels —for a warnin', like. Not as it'll make much differ, in my belief— th' fear of 'angin' never saved a hoverseer's life yet. But Jimmy thinks it might— an' 'tis Jimmy's opinion counts in these parts. So up they goes, in front of their friends. 'Tis easier to take 'em to the gang than to bring th' gang to Noocastle. Besides, Jimmy's not a-goin 'to let th' gang lose a minute's work

over th' job. He's a-goin' to turn 'em off in th' dinner hour. Oh, a leery cove's our Jimmy. Yes! No holidays for hangin' matches w'ile Jimmy Morissett's in charge o' th' deck."

When they pushed off at two o'clock, and once more went gliding up the broad surface of the Hunter, young Mr. Isaac Penfold was busy with his thoughts. He knew the river well enough to steer almost mechanically on this bright moonlight night, and could give himself over to the contemplation of a certain grimly merciful notion that had come into his head with respect to the two unfortunate passengers who were to die at midday to-morrow. Also he was angry and disgusted with the venerable ruffian nicknamed the Parson, and would do much to cheat him of his sadistic satisfaction in his temporary appointment. He loathed the Parson, and the notion of thwarting the horrible old man's contemplated pleasure was not the least attractive feature of the course of action he was silently considering.

Moreover, he was thinking of himself. He was tired of being a galley-slave. It was almost the idea of it that affected him more than what was really the pick of the various employments for prisoners at the Hunter. He had once boarded a Spanish slave-galley in the harbor of Mahon, and in his fancy he was himself degraded to their level. A sensitive soul— with the weight of fourteen years' unmerited transportation weighing it down— was that of Isaac Penfold.

He would achieve three good things if he carried out his plan. Firstly, he would cease to be a galley-slave. Secondly, he would cheat the Parson of his pleasure. Thirdly, he would do a merciful thing to those two unfortunates who would assuredly drown in their irons. And it was possible that he might also drown the Commandant— which was itself sufficient justification for what he thought of doing.

He decided to do it.

So, in a long deep reach not far below the mouth of the Williams River—a straight stretch of half a mile or more— he lashed the tiller amidships. Then he opened the little hatch in the deck and thrust his arm down near the stern post of the barge, groping for the plug that screwed into her bottom by the keel, and was used to drain the hull when she was hauled up on the slipways at the boatshed. With difficulty he unscrewed it and felt the rush of water about his wrist as the river began to flood the boat. Then he sprang overboard and struck out for the shore. A musket flashed in the well. Throwing up his arms, the galley-slave took his dismissal from his degrading service— with a two-ounce bullet in his brain. And that was the only part of his plan that was successful.

For, when they had plugged the leak ashore, the barge went on to Wallis Plains, and both to the Commandant and the acting-hangman the day's doings were eminently satisfactory.

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5: Opera Synopses

Some Sample Outlines of Grand Opera Plots For Home Study

Robert Benchley

1889-1945

Collected in: *Inside Benchley* (1943)

Humorist, and occasional movie actor, Benchley wrote hundreds of comic pieces on every subject under the sun. Here he had obviously just recovered from a night at the Opera.

1: DIE MEISTER-GENOSSENSCHAFT
Scene: The Forests of Germany.
Time: Antiquity.

Cast
Strudel, God of Rain: *Basso*
Schmalz, God of Slight Drizzle: *Tenor*
Immerglück, Goddess of the Six Primary Colors: *Soprano*
Ludwig das Eiweiss, the Knight of the Iron Duck: *Baritone*
The Woodpecker: *Soprano*

Argument

The basis of "Die Meister-Genossenschaft" is an old legend of Germany which tells how the Whale got his Stomach.

Act 1

The Rhine at Low Tide Just Below Weldschnoffen.—

Immerglück has grown weary of always sitting on the same rock with the same fishes swimming by every day, and sends for Schwül to suggest something to do. Schwül asks her how she would like to have pass before her all the wonders of the world fashioned by the hand of man. She says, rotten. He then suggests that Ringblattz, son of Pflucht, be made to appear before her and fight a mortal combat with the Iron Duck. This pleases Immerglück and she summons to her the four dwarfs: Hot Water, Cold Water, Cool, and Cloudy. She bids them bring Ringblattz to her. They refuse, because Pflucht has at one time rescued them from being buried alive by acorns, and, in a rage, Immerglück strikes them all dead with a thunderbolt.

Act 2

A Mountain Pass.—

Repenting of her deed, Immerglück has sought advice of the giants, Offen and Besitz, and they tell her that she must procure the magic zither which confers upon its owner the power to go to sleep while apparently carrying on a conversation. This magic zither has been hidden for three hundred centuries in an old bureau drawer, guarded by the Iron Duck, and, although many have attempted to rescue it, all have died of a strange ailment just as success was within their grasp.

But Immerglück calls to her side Dampfboot, the tinsmith of the gods, and bids him make for her a tarnhelm or invisible cap which will enable her to talk to people without their understanding a word she says. For a dollar and a half extra Dampfboot throws in a magic ring which renders its wearer insensible. Thus armed, Immerglück starts out for Walhalla, humming to herself.

Act 3

The Forest Before the Iron Duck's Bureau Drawer.—

Merglitz, who has up till this time held his peace, now descends from a balloon and demands the release of Betty. It has been the will of Wotan that Merglitz and Betty should meet on earth and hate each other like poison, but Zweiback, the druggist of the gods, has disobeyed and concocted a love-potion which has rendered the young couple very unpleasant company. Wotan, enraged, destroys them with a protracted heat spell.

Encouraged by this sudden turn of affairs, Immerglück comes to earth in a boat drawn by four white Holsteins, and, seated alone on a rock, remembers aloud to herself the days when she was a girl. Pilgrims from Augenblick, on their way to worship at the shrine of Schmürr, hear the sound of reminiscence coming from the rock and stop in their march to sing a hymn of praise for the drying up of the crops. They do not recognize Immerglück, as she has her hair done differently, and think that she is a beggar girl selling pencils.

In the meantime, Ragel, the papercutter of the gods, has fashioned himself a sword on the forge of Schmalz, and has called the weapon "Assistance-in-Emergency." Armed with "Assistance-in-Emergency" he comes to earth, determined to slay the Iron Duck and carry off the beautiful Irma.

But Frimsel overhears the plan and has a drink brewed which is given to Ragel in a golden goblet and which, when drunk, makes him forget his past and causes him to believe that he is Schnorr, the God of Fun. While laboring under this spell, Ragel has a funeral pyre built on the summit of a high mountain and, after lighting it, climbs on top of it with a mandolin which he plays until he is consumed.

Immerglück never marries.

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2: IL MINNESTRONE (Peasant Love)
Scene: Venice and Old Point Comfort.
Time: Early 16th Century.

Cast:
Alfonso, Duke of Minnestrone: Baritone
Partola, a Peasant Girl: Soprano
Young Noblemen of Venice:
Cleanso: Tenor
Turino: Tenor
Bombo: Basso
Assassins in the service of Cafeteria Rusticano:
Ludovico: Basso
Astolfo: Methodist
Townspeople, Cabbies and Sparrows

Argument

"Il Minnestrone" is an allegory of the two sides of a man's nature (good and bad), ending at last in an awfully comical mess with everyone dead.

Act 1

A Public Square, Ferrara.—

During a peasant festival held to celebrate the sixth consecutive day of rain, Rudolpho, a young nobleman, sees Lilliano, daughter of the village bell-ringer, dancing along throwing artificial roses at herself. He asks of his secretary who the young woman is, and his secretary, in order to confuse Rudolpho and thereby win the hand of his ward, tells him that it is his (Rudolpho's) own mother, disguised for the festival. Rudolpho is astounded. He orders her arrest.

Act 2

Banquet Hall in Gorgio's Palace.—

Lilliano has not forgotten Breda, her old nurse, in spite of her troubles, and determines to avenge herself for the many insults she received in her youth by poisoning her (Breda). She therefore invites the old nurse to a banquet and

poisons her. Presently a knock is heard. It is Ugolfo. He has come to carry away the body of Michelo and to leave an extra quart of pasteurized. Lilliano tells him that she no longer loves him, at which he goes away, dragging his feet sulkily.

Act 3

In Front of Emilo's House.—

Still thinking of the old man's curse, Borsa has an interview with Cleanso, believing him to be the Duke's wife. He tells him things can't go on as they are, and Cleanso stabs him. Just at this moment Betty comes rushing in from school and falls in a faint. Her worst fears have been realized. She has been insulted by Sigmundo, and presently dies of old age. In a fury, Ugolfo rushes out to kill Sigmundo and, as he does so, the dying Rosenblatt rises on one elbow and curses his mother.

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3: LUCY DE LIMA
Scene: Wales.
Time: 1700 (Greenwich)

Cast
William Wont, Lord of Glennnn: Basso
Lucy Wagstaff, his daughter: Soprano
Bertram, her lover: Tenor
Lord Roger, friend of Bertram: Soprano
Irma, attendant to Lucy: Basso
Friends, Retainers and Members of the local Lodge of Elks

Argument

"Lucy de Lima," is founded on the well-known story by Boccaccio of the same name and address.

Act 1

Gypsy Camp Near Waterbury.—

The gypsies, led by Edith, go singing through the camp on the way to the fair. Following them comes Despard, the gypsy leader, carrying Ethel, whom he has just kidnapped from her father, who had previously just kidnapped her from her mother. Despard places Ethel on the ground and tells Mona, the old

hag, to watch over her. Mona nurses a secret grudge against Despard for having once cut off her leg and decides to change Ethel for Nettie, another kidnapped child. Ethel pleads with Mona to let her stay with Despard, for she has fallen in love with him on the ride over. But Mona is obdurate.

Act 2

The Fair.—

A crowd of sightseers and villagers is present. Roger appears, looking for Laura. He can not find her. Laura appears, looking for Roger. She can not find him. The gypsy queen approaches Roger and thrusts into his hand the locket stolen from Lord Brym. Roger looks at it and is frozen with astonishment, for it contains the portrait of his mother when she was in high school. He then realizes that Laura must be his sister, and starts out to find her.

Act 3

Hall in the Castle.—

Lucy is seen surrounded by every luxury, but her heart is sad. She has just been shown a forged letter from Stewart saying that he no longer loves her, and she remembers her old free life in the mountains and longs for another romp with Ravensbane and Wolfshead, her old pair of rompers. The guests begin to assemble for the wedding, each bringing a roast ox. They chide Lucy for not having her dress changed. Just at this moment the gypsy band bursts in and Cleon tells the wedding party that Elsie and not Edith is the child who was stolen from the summer-house, showing the blood stained derby as proof. At this, Lord Brym repents and gives his blessing on the pair, while the fishermen and their wives celebrate in the courtyard.

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6: Creation Reef

John Fleming Wilson

1877-1922

The Argosy June 1914

If this reads a bit like a silent movie story, it's because quite a few of the author's stories were made into movies in the teens of the 20th Century.

THE Alaska salmon season was closed. The last case of bright tins had been stowed into the hold of the big ship *Indian Star*; the manager of the cannery that stood in the tidewash under the hill locked his office door, tossed the key into the water, and waved his arms toward the ship.

Captain Merkel waved back, a small boat came out for the last party of us, the anchor chanty rose into the colorful air, sails dropped from the yards, and on the strong stream of the ebb tide we swung out of our summer's harbor and joined the great fall flight of the fishing fleet southward.

"That ends this trip," said Manager Evans, grimly surveying the crew he had fought with and ruled for five months. "And I'm glad of it!"

"So am I," said his wife, reddening as she saw her husband's eyes follow the slim figure of Meta Braun, his stenographer.

"We'll make the Golden Gate in sixteen days," the captain interrupted. He hadn't observed his superior's daily life for several months without gaining a deep sympathy for Mrs. Evans.

As one man to another, he saw no reason why he should specially blame Evans for liking Meta, whose youth was spiced with quick wit and a sufficient dash of the flirt to make her worth watching.

But he hated to see Mrs. Evans lose her temper. She flushed so slowly and painfully under her tan, and when an outburst did come lost her good looks for a week. And she was exceedingly strong and beautiful.

"Yes," he went on deliberately, "we'll fetch down in sixteen days with this nor'wester whooping us along."

Meta Braun drew in a long, easy breath, glanced upward at the drumming sails, and looked directly at Mrs. Evans.

"Only sixteen days more!" she said with an almost imperceptible drawl that brought the color again into the other woman's cheeks.

"And then?" demanded Rolf Anerson, the head bookkeeper.

Miss Braun glanced at him and shook her head. "I don't know," she replied with childlike wistfulness. "You know I hate to go back into an old office after this being out in the open and seeing the water and the mountains."

In that moment Mrs. Evans's deeper instincts told her that Meta Braun was really lovable, that she wanted care and a little mothering. Impulsively she touched the girl on the shoulder.

"We'll all go back next summer, Meta, together."

"I don't know whether I'd care to come back," was the reply in an indifferent voice. Thus the moment of reconciliation passed.

The Indian Star managed a brilliant run to Dutch Harbor, swept through the Pass into the Pacific, and fled down the slope of the world toward home, now lifting a sister sail on the horizon and calling to her by- signals, now seeing far-away lights at evening to mark the position of still some other cannery tender.

"We shall see Mount Tamalpais in eight days," Merkel triumphed at the dinner-table.

"H-m!" said the chief mate, staring into his plate. His tone was indescribably cynical.

The captain glanced at him sharply, raising his eyebrows in silent interrogation.

Nelson nodded back. "And it's the change of the moon, too."

So passed the word that the wind was due to haul against us and make a foul ending to our voyage.

That night a heavy squall from the southwest carried away the foretopgallantsail and made a hard watch of it for the crew, reenforced "as they were by the fishermen and cannery helpers.

In the gray of the forenoon Merkel's skill and Nelson's terrific driving energy availed nothing. At noon the *Indian Star* was riding to the drag of her cable, dismasted, with smashed decks, out of the track of all ships.

Out of the forty persons aboard a dozen had been swept overside, including the captain, who went over with the broken spokes of the wheel still in his faithful grasp.

I myself felt the disaster beyond repair. What hope was there for us in a sinking and helpless vessel, adrift on the loneliest ocean in the world?

There wasn't even the slim prospect of making land in the small boats; the mate and I figured that we were eight hundred miles from the coast—an impossibility in the storm that threatened to rage for weeks to come.

We debated it up and down during that miserable day until the fall of night made up a doubly dreadful scene.

"Luckily, she rides high and doesn't take any water over," Nelson said. "But as she fills up"— he knuckled the table furiously with his brine-drenched hands— "why haven't we a ship left? God!"

At that moment, as if invoked by the appeal, entered the cook, a Chinese known to us as One Hop. He bore in his slender brown arms a steaming bowl

of soup. This he deftly adjusted on the fiddles and then remarked imperturbably, "Chow!"

Nelson stared at him, and then nodded. The routine of life was resumed. I dragged Evans and Mrs. Evans out of their room, where they were foolishly trying to pack valuables; I found Meta Braun sitting very quietly on her bunk, and brought her, too, out to sit at the reeling table. We ate ravenously, warmed by the hot soup.

"There's one thing," Nelson remarked with a curious inflection of humor, "we can't starve with all this fish in the hold."

Evans nodded sourly. His wife said nothing for a moment, but seemed suddenly shocked.

"And— and we're short of provisions?" she demanded, turning pale. "How— how long will we be, Mr. Nelson?"

The mate— now, of course, in command— fell into profound thought. When he spoke it was gently, almost as though he wished to save himself from the pain of too sudden realization of the truth.

"Not long," he said. Then he smiled reassuringly, competently, and left for the deck. I followed him, to stand by the stump of the mizzenmast and there cling to the newly stretched lifelines and peer into the darkness.

It seemed as if that darkness moved past us in a terrific and steady stream, as if it flowed from the very heart of night.

The wreck rode to the drag of the cable in uneven swings. Now she took a wave on the starboard bow, now on the left. Once in a. while a sullen crash and sharp quiver of the hulk told of a surge met squarely.

Through the heavy glasses in the ports of the low deck-house came a slight glow, showing that the survivors of the crew still felt confidence in their shelter.

"She's riding it well!" I cried in Nelson's ear.

"Not long!" he bellowed back. "Ship's old— leaking— sea rising."

And then we were joined by a third figure, Meta Braun. She emerged from the companionway and was outlined dimly against the sheen from the open door.

Nelson— we must have been invisible to her— waved his arm in useless protest against her risking her life on the careening deck. She stepped out and we caught her between us.

To my amazement, she was not trembling. She balanced herself easily on the streaming planks, and her tones were steady when she said: "Will the ship go down to-night?"

Neither of us answered the query. Meta went on presently: "You see, if the ship is going down, I want to be up here." The feeling was natural; I

sympathized. But then she added an amazing reason: "It would be awful while I was drowning to be grabbed by Mrs. Evans."

"Well," said Nelson quickly and decidedly, "we're safe enough for tonight." He stepped into the darkness and started to claw his way forward to the half-deck.

Meta Braun crept closer to me. I had never paid her much attention, apart from an occasional admiring glance, but in this new relationship I felt that it was too bad that it was only during the windy blackness of what was likely to be my last night in this life that I had realized the desirableness of love and returned affection and a woman by a bright fire.

"I wish," she said very distinctly, "that you would put your arm around me and hold me very tight— just a moment. You see, I'm so afraid I'm going to be scared!"

I took an extra turn of the lashings about us both, and she snuggled into my wet arms and put her head on my shoulder. So we stood for five minutes, two atoms in a world of murk, swept by the steady and unfailing stream of the wind and dashed upon by stinging spray and shaken terribly by the dying throes of the strong ship. Then she twisted herself from my arms with a whispered "I'm all right now!" and went below.

When Nelson crawled back, a.few moments later, I could perceive from his tones that he had discovered some new peril to us. We leaned toward each other around the staff of the broken mast and he put his lips to my ear.

"Something is going to happen! The ship's not behaving the same—no chance for the boats— breaking up."

My own senses told me he spoke the truth. The wreck of the *Indian Star* no longer rode so freely. There was a curious drag now and again, a subsidence of her huge mass without a proper recovery.

Nelson and I stood a little while together, peering into the pitchy darkness and trying to feel what had happened. Then I saw something that made me gasp. A black, mountainous surge that rose right above us suddenly flashed into white, and the roar of its breaking was reenforced by other roars.

The deck under our feet shook as the hulk struck in the surf, and Nelson and I plunged down the companionsteps and into the cabin just as another terrific comber broke and submerged us under untold tons of water.

The old ship rolled far over, and then righted swiftly, only to roll furiously over to port again. Then she was lifted up and let down to strike once more.

It seemed an hour that we stood in the dark and reeking cabin waiting for the end. It came in a wild rush, amid the crashing of heavy timbers, the snapping of teakwood planks and an inrush of foamy water from above.

And the very end was a subsidence of the racket. The motion ceased. (Nelson turned up the flickering wick of the bulkhead lantern and we stared bt each other—the Evanses, Anerson, Meta Braun, and myself.

While the gale still bellowed overhead and we could hear the swift rush of water past the ship's side, we all distinctly heard the voice of Nelson saying: "Land! Land! We're ashore, by all that's holy— and there's no land here!"

"Are we dead?" demanded Meta shrilly.

The cabin door slid back resoundingly and a half-dozen figures threw themselves down among us. It was part of the crew, and they were shouting:

"Land, sir! Go ashore, sir! Get. away from this wreck before she breaks up!"

Then Nelson resumed his duties as master of a vessel and, with an alert jyet composed step, left the shattered cabin for the deck. The crew clambered after him. I was afraid to investigate, for there was no land in these latitudes.

ii

IT WAS LAND, as we saw in the first glimmer in the morning. The wreck of the Indian Star had been driven across hundreds of miles to strike on a small, uncharted islet, whose outline was that of a cock's comb. The miracle of that was lost in our thankfulness that the shore had been sheer enough to allow the heavy hulk to be driven up beyond the heaviest surf.

We clambered over the side and dropped to the shale just so soon as the light was sufficient. Nelson assembled us in the windy dawn and addressed us solemnly.

His remarks were made with the tilted hulk as a background— a grim commentary.

"We're on an island that no one ever heard about," he said. "How we got here doesn't concern us now. But we are. The Indian Star is a total wreck, so entire that we must hasten to secure what provisions may be left. And"— he lowered his tones— "this islet is absolutely barren, so far as I can tell now. So we must get provisions off the ship to last us until we are picked up."

Our commander stopped a moment here, and then said with unaffected simplicity: "God help us all!"

Examination of the wreck soon showed us that what we would save from the sea must be quickly saved. One Hop's galley was gone, and with it the gear. The lazaretto was a mass of sand and brine. All told, we couldn't accumulate more than enough flour and biscuits to last us a month.

Evans surveyed the little heap lying under the rough shelter we had built out of wreckage and smiled at his wife. "Salmon!" he murmured. "Two thousand tons of salmon, and that's all!"

She nodded, brushing her hair wearily from her eyes. "Yes; and Meta and I walked pretty nearly all the way around the island and, Tom, there isn't even a spear of grass!"

"Volcanic," Anerson explained briefly.

Now we all knew the history of the rise and subsidence of volcanic islands in Bering Sea, and Anerson's commonplace remark brought a pallor to Mrs. Evans's face that gave me a slight glimpse of all that lay ahead of us of fear and dread and the incredible toil of enduring a vacant horizon.

But no more was said until One Hop had succeeded in preparing us a meal that looked oddly scant and insufficient after the somewhat plentiful fare on the ship. However, everybody showed good temper, and the sailors worked hard and willingly, difficult as it was in the high wind.

By nightfall our shelter was fairly complete and dry; we had picked up plenty of salmon cases spewed out of a great hole in the wreck's side; Nelson had personally directed the gathering of broken planks for fuel, and my part had been to plan storage places and prepart for the safekeeping of our salvage.

Luckily, we had our clothes and the women the small trinkets, that make existence less wearisome. We also had plenty of bedding, even for the sailors.

That evening, after a hearty meal on salmon, Nelson and I withdrew from the rest to consider our future. It was gloomy enough.

"We're down the latitudes pretty well," he told me. "But I'm blessed if I can figure it closely. Look at that current that sets past that little point! It might ha' fetched us a couple of hundred miles farther south than I reckoned."

He glanced at the inky sky and shook his head. "And it's going to blow some more. The wreck'll be gone in another day, my son."

"I suppose no ships ever take this slant, either," I suggested.

Nelson sniffed. "Right you are; they don't. You can see that this island is as bare as a skull. No bird ever roosted here; there's only a few mussels on the rocks, and—well, human nature on a bare rock like this isn't what it is in a city. Evans had trouble enough with the men while we were at the cannery. We'll have hell here. And the women!"

In the windy dusk we contemplated our irremediable fate.

"One thing," Nelson resumed presently; "there are a couple of fishing boats stowed in the forehold, just under the hatch. If we can, we'll fetch 'em out to-morrow."

"There isn't a compass left," I said bitterly.

"Ah, we have the stars," he said simply.

So we all lay in the lee of our miserable refuge and slept. In the morning I wakened to find Meta Braun sitting beside me. It was barely light, but the air was almost warm.

"The sun will shine," she remarked.

"Then we'll save more stuff," I assured her.

"Salmon!" she breathed.

"Oh, we can catch fresh fish," I returned.

"But we'll never have any bread or any butter or any milk or any eggs!"

"Look here!" I said sternly. "This is better than being in the sea-ooze. Be brave!"

"Can I be brave ?" she cried.

Appeared at that instant One Hop, silently holding out to her a toasted biscuit with a freshly opened can of salmon, warmed.

"Littee missee ketchum chow, more better," he murmured.

So we ate our breakfasts and prepared this time to dig the last treasures out of the wreck. Our whole salvage didn't amount to much— a very much smashed twelve-foot skiff, a lot of rope and wood, nails and oarlocks, and a few carpenter's tools, canvas, and, most precious of all, a lamp and a case of heavy oil.

Evans and Mrs. Evans checked it all up. "We can build a boat out of this, and we've provisions enough for years, if the salmon will keep, and I think it will, for we canned it ourselves, and you all know it was good fish well packed."

Mrs. Evans held out her small, perfect hands to the little blaze by which we sat that night. "It is cold," she murmured. "Captain Nelson, will there be a hard winter here?"

"No," said Nelson; "we're in the semitropics— no snow at all."

"That will be better," Meta put in. "I suppose it's the gale that makes us so chilly."

"Yes," agreed Nelson. "But the storm is over for this time." He sighed. "But the *Indian Star* is gone, too."

A couple of the sailors stepped up from the darkness that rimmed the fire and asked for a word.

Permission given promptly, the man stated that he and his mates felt that there must be no misunderstanding of their position.

"You see," he explained, "some one has got to travel on and find a ship to take the rest off. We've been talkin' it over, sir, and we can fix up that skiff plenty good enough to fetch somewhere."

I saw Nelson's face grow wooden. He merely nodded. I, as well, knew what was coming, and I knew, as well, that the logic that the crew would use was irrefutable.

The speaker's face hardened also as he proceeded:

"The skiff and—"

"And," repeated Nelson, "what else?"

It was an extraordinary moment. Destiny was at the door, demanding her rights. The seaman lifted his weather-burnt countenance to the dark firmanent, as if in silent appeal to the justice of fate. Then he said bluntly:

"And the flour and biscuit and such, sir."

It had been said. We were to be left without either boat or other food than tinned fish on an absolutely sterile islet in a lonely sea. And this was right and proper— the equity of the sea.

The damaged skiff could carry only the eight survivors of the fo'c's'le hands. It would never carry us of the afterguard, much less the women. And in order that the skiff might stand a chance of arriving somewhere—on which our own safety also depended— its crew must have bread and whatever else we had that could give them strength for their voyage.

There was a profound stillness. Evans opened his mouth several times, but said nothing. Mrs. Evans merely stared at the shadowed figure of the grim sailor, while Meta Braun seemed lost in thought. Nelson finally spoke abruptly, as a commander to his men:

"Take the skiff and the grub. You ought to make the Hawaiians, with any kind of good 'weather. Tell 'em we're here. I'll give you the approximate bearings. Start as soon as the skiff is repaired and the weather fair. Go south."

"Aye, aye, sir," came the hoarse growl of the men, and they retired to their own little fire, where One Hop blinked over his little pipe in true Oriental acceptance of fate.

Anerson groaned. We all glanced at him. His somewhat saturnine young face had taken on a deeper hue than usual. Meta peered at him under drawn brows, studying him.

There was no cowardice in his expression; but I thought I read in it a determination that might make him an ugly customer for Nelson to handle if disagreements arose.

iii

SO IT happened that the Evanses, Anerson, Meta Braun, and myself and Nelson stood on the little easterly promontory of our barren islet the next evening and watched the swirling current bear the skiff with its eight occupants swiftly away to the southward.

There had been only the briefest of farewells, a few curt instructions from Nelson, and then a silent withdrawal from the boat under the stars. At last it vanished, and we walked slowly back to the camp, past the broken hull of the *Indian Star*, now almost overwhelmed by sand.

Anerson stepped along by himself, moodily kicking at the rough scoria. The Evanses were hand in hand, talking earnestly with Nelson. Meta Braun and I halted just above the wreck.

By the starlight I could see that she was profoundly affected by what we had just passed through, though all day long she had been cheerful, if silent. Now she turned her eyes to mine and said simply:

"There have never been any birds nor any living thing here!"

"Utterly uninhabited and lifeless," I returned.

"No bird ever dropped a seed from its bill, even a tiny one!"

"No."

She cast her gaze down on the grit at her feet. "And nothing has ever been born here!" she breathed.

"God-forsaken!"

"No," she corrected me gently. "God hasn't come yet. We're just in one of God's new empty houses. Not even a seed has grown!"

"It's the old question of the owl and the egg," I said, trying to jest. "The seed or the plant— which is first?"

"Only one seed, and we could have a new creation, couldn't we ?" she responded in a lighter tone. "Maybe we 'could find a seed."

"We'll have plenty of time to hunt for one," I couldn't help saying.

By the camp-fire, now replenished by the assiduous Chinaman, we found the rest of the party busy opening some salmon. Evans was testing it carefully.

"Best ever," he announced. "Ruthie, you and Meta will have to get up a salmon cook-book."

"Every recipe would read the same, seeing we've neither flour nor eggs nor cracker-crumbs nor milk, Tom."

But her tone was cheerful, and we made a fair meal, One Hop apparently satisfied with the menu he offered us. But after we had eaten and drunk our fill of the' slightly sulfury water supplied by the springs on the islet, despondency descended again.

The following two days we devoted to a minute examination of our new home. We allowed not a crevice in the rocks to go without careful scrutiny. Nelson even waded along in the water and dived along the rocks.

The universal finding was— nothing alive. Even the mussels below highwater mark proved to be dying, and the most assiduous fishing disclosed nothing.

"Natural," said Nelson. "This bit of land hasn't been long up from the sea-bottom, and even the fish would give it a wide berth."

"If we could build a boat out of this stuff we have here," Anerson suggested hopefully, "we might fish offshore and have a better chance at something. Any fish for a change."

"What I'd like to find is a pound of sugar," remarked Mrs. Evans, spreading her little hands out in dismay.

Meta smiled faintly. "I'd rather have a dozen lemons, seeing it's to go on salmon. Next time I'm wrecked I'm going to have all the seeds with me."

Nelson stopped short as he passed and looked down at her. "Seeds? Seeds? There ought to be seeds somewhere around. Why not look for 'em?"

"Just one seed!" she said eagerly. "Just one might do!"

I shall never forget the next three weeks. Imagine us all waking before the dawn to search for seeds.

We examined the beach, in hopes that some stray grains might have floated in from the wreck. We ransacked all our clothes, knelt under the hot sun at midday peering into the cracks in the wreckage.

It is incredible how engrossed we became in this exploration; how the yearning for just one germ of life grew in our hearts, how it seemed as if our very passionate seeking must succeed.

At the end of the three weeks Anerson's savage temper broke completely. He tossed his salmon away and sulked, bursting almost immediately into a frightful paroxysm that compelled Nelson and myself to exert every ounce of our tact. When the scene was over he retired bitterly to the promontory and was seen no more that night.

For there was no seed on the island.

Meta sat beside me and cried softly.

"An empty place!" she mourned hysterically. "Nothing will ever be born here or grow or live!"

And as she wept scalding tears One Hop stepped silently into the circle and held out, as he stooped before her, a single grain of corn.

Mrs. Evans's shrill laughter rang horribly out into the night, and her shriek sounded to the very stars:

"My God! My God! One seed! One seed!"

She collapsed into Evans's arms, her pallid face to the inexorable heavens.

But Meta Braun cuddled the irregular grain in her soft palm, and there was a light in her eyes such as I had never seen except in a mother's gaze.

I could barely catch her whisper: "It will live!"

One Hop laid his yellow, wrinkled finger-tip gently on the grain of corn.

"Bimeby bread, littee missee."

"Yes, yes!" she assented eagerly.

"Where you ketchum, Hop?"

"Pocket ol' clo', missee. Bimeby . bread."

Nelson bent his brows and shook his head. "I know how you feel about it, Miss Braun. But it's only one seed."

She folded the grain in her handkerchief and said quietly: "It must grow." And it did, and its growing brought God into an empty house.

iv

THE NEXT morning when Rolf Anerson came back to the camp and was told of the discovery of the single grain of com, he smiled sardonically and devoted himself in silence to his salmon.

But Meta Braun, after a long conversation with One Hop, departed to a little nook under the low crest of the islet. I found her busily rubbing into fine dust the scant soil she had dug up with a knife. She had a little rotind plot about three feet in diameter.

"I hope it will grow," I said awkwardly.

"Oh, Hop and I'll make it grow," she returned, smiling.

"But it will be years before we have anything worth while, even if it does come up and have ears on it. And what of the sunshine? And the soil mayn't be all right, either."

At this moment arrived the Chinese, carrying a pail of water and a piece of canvas. Together they prepared the bed for the solitary grain, and then Meta planted it delicately.

"Bimeby bread," said Hop briefly. And as if this were the sacrament of germination we departed.

Thereafter the cook slept and ate by this precious grain. I don't know what all he and Meta talked of nor how they forced pidgin English into the channels of their ideas.

But one morning I found them both kneeling over a small spear of green. When the announcement was made in the camp we made a pilgrimage to the spot.

Mrs. Evans, who had refused food, except the oil from the salmon, for two days, became hysterical. Evans himself stolidly supported her on his shoulder, and later he and Anerson carried her back to the shelter. She had fainted.

Ten days later I was amazed to see six shoots in the damp ground. Meta was busy earthing them up.

"Where did they come from?" I demanded.

She slipped over into a sitting posture and smiled down at them. "That's Hop's and my secret. But when they are bigger I'll show you all about it."

When half a hundred shoots were growing blithely under the warm sun, the camp suddenly awoke. I believe that had it not been for the interest we iall took in this bringing of life to the sterile islet none of us would have survived that month.

But now Hop and Meta took us partly into their confidence and showed us, too, how to earth up the slender shoots so that they sent out little rootlets, which, when carefully separated from the parent stock, became stalks themselves. In another month each of us had a garden of his own, and it was only Anerson whose crop didn't prosper.

At last Hop and Meta refused to give him any more. We all saw that scene when he was rebuffed. It was in the early dawn. The stalks were now almost two feet high, thriving richly in the carefully worked soil. And there were over three hundred stalks now.

Mrs. Evans had been helping Meta after tending to her own. Evans and Nelson were at their own patches, working with rude wooden plows. Anerson, whose patch had not increased strode up, made his usual remark about "poor place," and demanded an extra dozen for his share.

Meta looked up, and I saw wideeyed astonishment on her face. Then a cloud came over her bright and searching gaze. She shook her head, bending lovingly over the fresh hills.

"No," she said definitely.

I wondered at the strange look that Anerson had. He asked again insistently.

"No," she repeated.

You must understand that we were nearly crazed from our diet. I thought that Meta had finally succumbed to the dragging evil temper of the whole camp.

I saw Anerson's malignant and malicious expression change to one of rage. But he restrained himself and went away, muttering. Meta gazed after him with puzzled eyes.

"I wonder why his won't grow?" I demanded.

She crept over to me and looked me squarely in the face. "If you will put your arm around me and hold me tight while I cry!" she whispered.

For the second time in my life I took her into my arms. She sobbed on. my shoulder. I could hear her pitiful murmur: "My poor little seed! My poor little seed!"

But she did not tell me what had made her refuse Anerson further shoots.

What intensified the mystery— for you understand that in a community like ours all is mysterious that is not known to all— One Hop also showed a

very apparent dislike of Anerson. and would hardly serve him with his portion of salmon.

"Blamed funny thing all around," Nelson growled. "Well, three months of this would tangle anybody's mind and temper."

"I wonder—" I began.

Nelson turned savagely on me. "Stop wondering about that," he growled.

I had touched on the one forbidden topic— had the men in the skiff arrived at last and reported us or had their frail craft tossed them into the devouring sea?

A thousand times that question had been on the tip of our tongues. By common consent we had never uttered it.

Now that we really had fields of corn, with ears coming to maturity and a prospect of starchy food once more, Meta relaxed her efforts and allowed me more of her company.

But for all the hours I spent with her and all the speech we had, I discerned that she preserved inviolate the mystery of her thoughts. She brooded constantly, but happily. Her face daily grew more tender, until I could scarcely bear the sight ef her thinness.

For we had all got such a loathing for salmon that we ate only enough to keep us alive, or to satisfy an unnatural craving. Yet there was one gratification I had—she was barely civil to Anerson, who now openly and violently made love to her.

It seemed as though she saw some secret in his dark soul, discovered some dreadful cancer in his heart. Several times I saw her flinch when his hand accidentally touched hers over our rude table.

The result was, of course, that he turned his hatred on myself. I could not allow personal feeling to interfere with my duty to save outward unity and peace, so I refrained as much as possible from being in his company and took no notice of his sneers and innuendos. But the breaking point was nearing, and Nelson and I secretly scanned the empty sea around us with burning eyes.

We had kept careful count of the days of the week and of the dates. Time had elapsed sufficient for the skiff to have arrived at Honolulu and for a rescue steamer to come for us. But Nelson refused to discuss the matter. So at last I took it up with Meta one blowy morning while she tended the corn.

She dropped her rough hoe and looked at me long and intently when I had briefly stated the fact that every day made hope of rescue fainter.

"Yes," she admitted. "That is true. And Mrs. Evans will not live long."

She wrinkled her brows a little, glanced at the fat stalks amid which she stood, and then came to a sudden decision. She picked up her knife and told

me to hold out my hands. Into them she piled ear after ear of milky corn. Then she smiled faintly.

"My little seed!"

One Hop received this accession to the larder with the first expression of triumph I had ever seen on his brown visage, and within the hour we were ravenously devouring the corn and chewing even on the silk and the stalks.

But I noticed that Meta ate dreamily, nibbling daintily at the little grains and wrapped in meditation.

"There's enough to keep us off that salmon a while, anyway," said Nelson.

"And the sugar means my wife's life," Evans whispered to me.

So that day passed, a celebration. In the evening, under the rising moon,

Meta walked with me on the other side of the island.

She was very thin and pale, and for the first time I noticed how feeble her step was. My heart swelled within my breast. Then all my blood grew hot with desire to take this slender form into my arms forever and always see that gentle and tender smile and have the love of those eyes so full of mystery.

As simply as a child, she turned to me swiftly, with her eyes alight.

"Take me in your arms and hold me while I cry," she whispered.

"For sorrow?"

I felt her quiver and a hot tear scalded my cheek.

"No," she whispered. "For joy! My little seed! My little motherless grain of corn! And I saved it and it grew."

Mothered it? Mothered it! I touched her gently on her loose hair. And in that thrill I seemed for an instant to catch a glimpse of her pure and womanly heart, of all her dreams, of her lovely meditations.

"There is something else you've made grow, too," I found myself saying hoarsely. "Will you take it and mother it, Meta darling?"

She twisted herself out of my arms and stared at me, wonder on her face. Then the color flooded to her brow and she held out her own arms, gloriously calling to her mate.

As we came back to the camp across the little cornfield we met Anerson. He stopped in front of us, and I saw the dark menace of his contorted visage.

"Now for the settlement, Meta Braun," he said hoarsely. "And with you later, my fine fellow," he added, scowling at me.

Meta brushed me with her fingers, and I obeyed and stood still.

"Why have you avoided me?" he demanded of her, his veins swelling.

She faced him gallantly in the moonlight, her hair blowing about her throat.

"Because you didn't protect that poor little seed of corn. You pulled up the little sprouts and ate them. Hop saw you. You killed little living things! You killed growing things. I hate you!"

For a moment I was tempted to spring at his throat. But the expression of her face held him entranced. The look of ugly rage and imperious temper faded into a peculiar, curious respect.

He gazed at the stalks, about him, waving in the night wind. He bowed his head. The great mystery of growing life seemed to lighten his dark spirit in that moment, the tremendous secret of how empty lands are filled with life.

We left him standing among the com.

Nelson was still up and busy with One Hop by the light of the fire. As we came into the lit circle he stared up with a peculiar and triumphant expression on his bronzed and bearded face. He pointed to his feet. A freshly caught fish glistened there.

"An albacore!" he said huskily. "That means the fish are coming and the island is permanent."

"All same come from Japan," said Hop, shaking a wise head. "Bimeby maybeso birds fly."

Meta looked up at the Evanses hurrying up to view the miracle. I felt the quiver in her low tones as she said: "God's filling his empty house!" Mrs. Evans glanced quickly at her and a sudden blazing tenderness came into her weary eyes. "And you, too! You dear child!"

She held out her arms, and Meta swept into them, sobbing, "Yes, yes!"

When they were gone, crying over each other woman-like and softly, Nelson stood up and looked at me.

"Holding master's papers, I am competent to perform marriages, my son. Shake hands!"

But One Hop, the Chinese cook, bent smiling over his work, silent inscrutable; and up the hill Anerson stood amid the great stalks, alone in the garden he had no share in.

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7: The Ghost Patrol

Sinclair Lewis

1885-1951

The Red Book Magazine, June 1917

DONALD PATRICK DORGAN had Served forty-four years on the police force of Northernapolis, and during all but five of that time he had patrolled the Forest Park section.

Don Dorgan might have been a sergeant, or even a captain, but it had early been seen at headquarters that he was a crank about Forest Park. For hither he had brought his young wife, and here he had built their shack; here his wife had died, and here she was buried. It was so great a relief in the whirl of department politics to have a man who was contented with his job that the Big Fellows were glad of Dorgan, and kept him there where he wanted to be, year after year, patrolling Forest Park.

For Don Pat Dorgan had the immense gift of loving people, all people. In a day before anyone in Northemapolis had heard of scientific criminology, Dorgan believed that the duty of a policeman with clean gloves and a clean heart was to keep people from needing to be arrested. He argued with drunken men and persuaded them to hide out in an alley and sleep off the drunk. When he did arrest them it was because they were sedately staggering home intent on beating up the wives of their bosoms. Any homeless man could get a nickel from Dorgan and a road-map of the doss-houses. To big bruisers he spoke slowly, and he beat them with his nightstick where it would hurt the most but injure the least. Along his beat, small boys might play baseball, provided they did not break windows or get themselves in front of motor cars. The pocket in his coat-tail was a mine; here were secreted not only his midnight sandwiches, his revolver and handcuffs and a comic supplement, but also a bag of striped candy and a red rubber ball.

When the Widow Maclester's son took to the booze, it was Don Dorgan who made him enlist in the navy. Such things were Don's work— his art. Joy of his art he had when Kitty Silva repented and became clean-living; when Micky Connors, whom Dorgan had known ever since Micky was a squawking orphan, became a doctor, with a large glass sign lettered J. J. Connors, M.D., and a nurse to let a poor man in to see the great Doctor Connors!

Dorgan did have for one boy and girl a sneaking fondness that transcended the kindliness he felt toward the others. They were Polo Magenta, son of the Italian-English-Danish jockey who had died of the coke, and Effie Kugler, daughter of that Jewish delicatessen man who knew more of the Talmud than any man in the Ghetto— Effie the pretty and plump, black-haired and quick-eyed, a perfect armful for anyone.

Polo Magenta had the stuff of a man in him. The boy worshiped motors as his father had worshiped horses. At fourteen, when his father died, he was washer at McManus' Garage; at eighteen he was one of the smoothest taxi-drivers in the city. At nineteen, dropping into Kugler's Delicatessen for sausages and crackers for his midnight lunch, he was waited upon by Effie.

Thereafter he hung about the little shop nightly, till old Kugler frowned upon them— upon Polo, the gallantest lad in Little Hell, supple in his chauffeur's uniform, straightbacked as the English sergeant who had been his grandfather, pale-haired like a Dane, altogether a soldierly figure, whispering across the counter to blushing Effie.

Kugler lurked at the door and prevented Polo from driving past and picking her up. So Effie became pale with longing to see her boy; Polo took to straight Bourbon, which is not good for a taxi-driver racing to catch trains. He had an accident, once; he merely smashed the fenders of another car; but one more of the like, and the taxicompany would let him out.

Then Patrolman Don Dorgan sat in on the game. He decided that Polo Magenta should marry Effie. He told Polo that he would bear a message from him to the girl, and while he was meticulously selecting a cut of sausage for sandwich, he whispered to her that Polo was waiting, with his car, in the alley off Minnis Place. Aloud he bawled : '^Come walk the block with me, Effie, you little divvle, if your father will let you. Mr. Kugler, it isn't often that Don Dorgan invites the ladies to go a-walking with him, but it's spring, and you know how it is with us wicked cops. The girl looks as if she needed a breath of fresh air."

"That's r-r-r-right," said Kugler. "You go valk a block with Mr. Dorgan, Effie, and mind you come r-r-r-right back."

Dorgan stood like a lion at the mouth of the alley where, beside his taxi. Polo Magenta was waiting. As he caught the cry with which Effie came to her lover, he remembered the evenings long gone when he and his own sweetheart had met in the maple lane that was now the scrofulous Minnis Place.

"Oh, Polo, I've just felt dead, never seeing you nowhere."

"Gee, it hurts, kid, to get up in the morning and have everything empty, knowing I won't see you any time. I could run the machine off the Boulevard and end everything, my heart's so cold without you."

"Oh, is it, Polo, is it really?"

"Say, we only got a couple minutes. I've got a look in on a partnership in a repair shop in Thomwood Addition. If I can swing it, we can beat it and get hitched, and when your old man sees I'm prospering "

While Dorgan heard Polo's voice grow crisp with practical hopes, he bristled and felt sick. For Kugler was coming along Minnis Place, peering ahead,

hunched with suspicion. Dorgan dared not turn to warn the lovers, nor even shout.

Dorgan smiled. "Evening again," he said. "It was a fine walk I had with Effie. Is she got back yet?"

He was standing between Kugler and the alley-mouth, his arms akimbo.

Kugler ducked under his arm, and saw Effie cuddled beside her lover, the two of them sitting on the running-board of Polo's machine.

"Effie, you will come home now," said the old man. There was terrible wrath in the quietness of his graybeard voice.

The lovers looked shamed and frightened.

Dorgan swaggered up toward the group. "Look here, Mr. Kugler: Polo's a fine upstanding lad. He ain't got no bad habits— to speak of. He's promised me he'll lay off the booze. He'll make a fine man for Effie "

"Mr. Dorgan, years I have respected you, but— Effie, you come home now," said Kugler.

"Oh, what will I do, Mr. Dorgan?" wailed Effie. "Should I do like Papa wants I should, or should I go off with Polo?"

Dorgan respected the divine rights of love, but also he had an old-fashioned respect for the rights of parents with their offspring.

"I guess maybe you better go with your papa, Effie. I'll talk to him—"

"Yes, you'll talk, and everybody will talk, and I'll be dead," cried young Polo. "Get out of my way, all of you."

Already he was in the driver's seat and backing his machine out. It went rocking round the corner.

Dorgan heard that Polo had been discharged by the taxi-company for speeding through traffic and smashing the tail-lights of another machine; then that he had got a position as private chauffeur in the suburbs, been discharged for impudence, got another position and been arrested for joy-riding with a bunch of young toughs from Little Hell, He was to be tried on the charge of stealing his employer's machine.

Dorgan brushed his citizen's clothes, got an expensive haircut and shampoo and went to call on the employer, who refused to listen to maundering defenses of the boy.

Dorgan called on Polo in his cell.

"It's all right," Polo said. "I'm glad I was pinched. I needed something to stop me, hard. I was going nutty, and if somebody hadn't slammed on the emergency, I don't know what I would have done. Now I've sat here reading and thinking, and I'm right again. I always gotta do things hard, booze or be good. And now I'm going to think hard, and I ain't sorry to have the chanct to be quiet."

Dorgan brought away a small note in which, with much misspelling and tenderness, Polo sent to Effie his oath of deathless love. To the delivery of this note Dorgan devoted one bribery and one shocking burglarious entrance.

Polo was sentenced to three years in prison, on a charge of grand larceny.

That evening Dorgan climbed, panting, to the cathedral, and for an hour he knelt with his lips moving, his spine cold, as he pictured young Polo shamed and crushed in prison, and as he discovered himself hating the law that he served.

One month later Dorgan reached the age-limit, and was automatically retired from the Force, on pension. He protested; but the retirement rule was inviolable.

DORGAN WENT to petition the commissioner himself. It was the first time in live years, except on the occasions of the annual police parades, that he had gone near headquarters, and he was given a triumphal reception. Inspectors and captains, reporters and aldermen, and the commissioner himself, shook his hand, congratulated him on his forty-five years of clean service. But to his plea they did not listen. It was impossible to find a place for him. They heartily told him to rest, because he had earned it.

Dorgan nagged them. He came to headquarters again and again, till he became a bore, and the commissioner refused to see him. Dorgan was not a fool. He went shame-facedly back to his shack, and there he remained.

For two years he huddled by the fire and slowly became melancholy mad— gray-faced, gray-haired, a gray ghost of himself.

From time to time, during his two years of hermitage, Dorgan came out to visit his old neighbors. They welcomed him, gave him drinks and news, but they did not ask his advice. So he had become a living ghost before two years had gone by, and he talked to himself, aloud.

During these two years the police force was metropolitanized. There were a smart new commissioner and smart new inspectors and a smart new uniform— a blue military uniform with flat cap and puttees and shaped coats. After his first view of that uniform, at the police parade, Dorgan went home and took down from behind the sheetiron stove a photograph of ten years before— the Force of that day, proudly posed on the granite steps of the city hall. They had seemed efficient and impressive then, but— his honest soul confessed it— they were like rural constables beside the crack corps of today.

Presently he took out from the redwood chest his own uniform, but he could not get himself to put on its shapeless gray coat and trousers, its gray helmet and spotless white gloves. Yet its presence comforted him, proved to

him that, improbable though it seemed, the secluded old man had once been an active member of the Force.

With big, clumsy, tender hands he darned a frayed spot at the bottom of the trousers and carefully folded the uniform away. He took out his nightstick and revolver and the sapphire-studded star the Department had given him for saving two lives in the collapse of the Anthony building. He fingered them and longed to be permitted to carry them.... All night, in a dream and half-dream and tossing wakefulness, he pictured himself patrolling again, the father of his people.

Next morning he again took his uniform, his nightstick and gun and shield out of the redwood chest, and he hung them in the wardrobe, where they had hung when he was off duty in his days of active service. He whistled cheerfully and muttered: "I'll be seeing to them Tenth Street devils, the rotten gang of them."

Rumors began to come into the newspaper offices of a "ghost-scare" out in the Forest Park section. An old man had looked out of his window at midnight and seen a dead man, in a uniform of years before, standing on nothing at all. A stranger to the city, having come to his apartment-hotel, the Forest Arms, some ten blocks above Little Hell, at about two in the morning, stopped to talk with a strange-looking patrolman whose face he described as a drift of fog about burning, unearthly eyes. The patrolman had courteously told him of the building up of Forest Park, and at parting had saluted, an erect, somewhat touching figure. Later the stranger was surprised to note that the regulation uniform was blue, not gray.

After this there were dozens who saw the "Ghost Patrol," as the *Chronicle* dubbed the apparition; some spoke to him, and importantly reported him to be fat, thin, tall, short, old, young, and composed of mist, of shadows, of optical illusions and of ordinary human flesh.

Then a society elopement and a foreign war broke, and Ghost Patrol stories were forgotten.

ONE EVENING of early summer the agitated voice of a woman telephoned to headquarters from the best residence section of Forest Park that she had seen a burglar entering the window of the house next door, which was closed for the season. The chief himself took six huskies in his machine, and they roared out to Forest Park and surrounded the house. The owner of the agitated voice stalked out to inform the chief that just after she had telephoned, she had seen another figure crawling into the window after the burglar. She had thought that the second figure had a revolver and a policeman's club.

So the chief and the lieutenant crawled nonchalantly through an unquestionably open window giving on the pantry at the side of the house. Their electric torches showed the dining room to be a wreck— glass scattered and broken, drawers of the buffet on the floor, curtains torn down. They remarked "Some scrap!" and shouted:

"Come out here, whoever's in this house. We got it surrounded. Kendall, are you there Have you pinched the guy?"

There was an unearthly silence, as of someone breathing in terror, a silence more thick and anxious than any mere absence of sound. They tiptoed into the drawing room, where, tied to a davenport, was that celebrated character, Butte Benny.

"My Gawd, Chief," he wailed, "get me outa this. De place is haunted. A bleeding ghost comes and grabs me and ties me up. Gee, honest, Chief, he was a dead man, and he was dressed like a has-been cop, and he didn't say nawthin' at all. I tried to wrastle him, and he got me down; and oh. Chief, he beat me crool, he did, but he was dead as me great-grandad, and you could see de light t'rough him. Let's get outa this— frame me up and I'll sign de confession. Me for a nice, safe cell for keeps!"

"Some amateur cop done this, to keep his hand in. Ghost me eye!" said the chief. But his own flesh felt icy, and he couldn't help looking about for the unknown.

"Let's get out of this. Chief," said Lieutenant Saxon, the bravest man in the strong-arm squad; and with Butte Benny between them they fled through the front door, leaving the pantry window still open. They didn't handcuff Benny. They couldn't have lost him!

Next morning when a captain came to look over the damages in the burglarized house he found the dining room crudely straightened up and the pantry window locked.

When the baby daughter of Simmons, the plumber of Little Hell, was lost, two men distinctly saw a gray-faced figure in an old-time police helmet leading the lost girl through unfrequented back alleys. They tried to follow, but the mysterious figure knew the egresses better than they did; and they went to report at the station house.

Meantime there was a ring at the Simmons' door, and Simmons found his child on the doormat, crying but safe. In her hand, tight clutched, was the white-cotton glove of a policeman.

Simmons gratefully took the glove to the precinct station. It was a regulation service glove; it had been darned with white-cotton thread till the original fabric was almost overlaid with short, inexpert stitches; it had been whitened with pipe-clay, and from one slight brown spot it must have been

pressed out with a hot iron. Inside it was stamped, in faded rubber stamping: Dorgan, Patrol, 9th Precinct. The chief took the glove to the commissioner, and between these two harsh, abrupt men there was a pitying silence surcharged with respect.

"We'll have to take care of the old man," said the chief at last.

A detective was assigned to the trail of the Ghost Patrol. The detective saw Don Dorgan come out of his shack at three in the morning, stand stretching out his long arms, sniff the late-night dampness, smile as a man will when he starts in on the routine of work that he loves. He was erect; his old uniform was clean-brushed, his linen collar spotless; in his hand he carried one lone glove. He looked to right and left, slipped into an alley, prowled through the darkness, so fleet and soft-stepping that the shadow almost lost him. He stopped at a shutter left open and prodded it shut with his old-time long nightstick. Then he stole back to his shack and went in.

The next day the chief, the commissioner, and a selfappointed committee of inspectors and captains came calling on Don Dorgan at his shack. The old man was a slovenly figure, in open-necked flannel shirt and broken-backed slippers. Yet Dorgan straightened up when they came, and faced them like an old soldier called to duty. The dignitaries sat about awkwardly, while the commissioner tried to explain that the Big Fellows had heard Dorgan was lonely here, and that the department fund was, unofficially, going to send him to Dr, Bristow's Private Asylum for the Aged and Mentally Infirm— which he euphemistically called "Doc Bristow's Home."

"No," said Dorgan, "that's a private booby-hatch. I don't want to go there. Maybe they got swell rooms, but I don't want to be stowed away with a bunch of nuts."

They had to tell him, at last, that he was frightening the neighborhood with his ghostly patrol and warn him that if he did not give it up they would have to put him away some place.

"But I got to patrol!" he said. "My boys and girls here, they need me to look after them. I sit and I hear voices— voices, I tell you, and they order me out on the beat.... Stick me in the bughouse. I guess maybe it's better. Say, tell Doc Bristow to not try any shenanigans wit' me, but let me alone, or I'll hand him something; I got a wallop like a probationer yet— I have so, Chief."

The embarrassed committee left Captain Luccetti with him, to close up the old man's shack and take him to the asylum in a taxi. The Captain suggested that the old uniform be left behind.

DR. DAVIS BRISTOW was a conscientious but crotchety man who needed mental easement more than did any of his patients. The chief had put the fear of God into him, and he treated Dorgan with respect at first.

The chief had kind-heartedly arranged that Dorgan was to have a "rest," that he should be given no work about the farm; and all day long Dorgan had nothing to do but pretend to read, and worry about his children.

Two men had been assigned to the beat, in succession, since his time; and the second man, though he was a good officer, came from among the respectable and did not understand the surly wistfulness of Little Hell. Dorgan was sure that the man wasn't watching to lure Matty Carlson from her periodical desire to run away from her decent, patient husband.

So one night, distraught, Dorgan lowered himself from his window and ran, skulking, stumbling, muttering across the outskirts and around to Little Hell. He didn't have his old instinct for concealing his secret patrolling. A policeman saw him, in citizen's clothes, swaying down his old beat, trying doors, humming to himself. And when they put him in the ambulance and drove him back to the asylum, he wept and begged to be allowed to return to duty.

Dr. Bristow telephoned to the chief of police, demanding permission to put Dorgan to work, and set him at gardening.

This was very well indeed. For through the rest of that summer, in the widespread gardens, and half the winter, in the greenhouses, Dorgan dug and sweated and learned the names of flowers. But early in January he began to worry once more. He told the super that he had figured out that, with good behavior, Polo Magenta would be out of the pen now, and need looking after. ''Yes, yes— well, I'm busy; sometime you tell me all about it," Dr. Bristow jabbered, "but just this minute I'm very busy."

ONE DAY in mid-January Dorgan prowled uneasily all day long— the more uneasy as a blizzard blew up and the world was shut oflf by a curtain of weaving snow. He went up to his room early in the evening. A nurse came to take away his shoes and overcoat, and cheerily bid him go to bed.

But once he was alone he deliberately tore a cotton blanket to strips and wound the strips about his thin slippers. He wadded newspapers and a sheet between his vest and his shirt. He found his thickest gardening cap. He quietly raised the window. He knocked out the light wooden bars with his big fist. He put his feet over the windowsill and dropped into the storm, and set out across the lawn. With his gaunt form huddled, his hands rammed into his coat pockets, his large feet moving slowly, certainly, in their moccasiniike covering of cloth and thin slippers, he plowed through to the street and down toward Little Hell.

Don Dorgan knew that the blizzard would keep him from being traced by the asylum authorities for a day or two, but he also knew that he could be overpowered by it. He turned into a series of alleys, and found a stable with a snowbound delivery wagon beside it. He brought hay from the stable, covered himself with it in the wagon, and promptly went to sleep. When he awoke the next afternoon the blizzard had ceased and he went on.

He came to the outskirts of Little Hell. Sneaking through alleys, he entered the back of McManus' red-light district garage.

McManus, the boss, was getting his machines out into the last gasps of the storm, for the street-car service was still tied up, and motors were at a premium. He saw Dorgan and yelled: "Hello there, Don. Where did you blow in from. Ain't seen you these six months. T'ought you was living soft at some old-folks' home or other."

"No," said Dorgan, with a gravity which forbade trifling, "I'm a— I'm a kind of a watchman. Say, what's this I hear, young Magenta is out of the pen?"

"Yes, the young whelp. I always said he was no good, when he used to work here, and—"

"What's become of him?"

''He had the nerve to come here when he got out, looking for a job; suppose he wanted the chanct to smash up a few of my machines too! I hear he's got a job wiping, at the K. N. roundhouse. Pretty rough joint, but good enough for the likes o' him. Say, Don, things is slow since you went, what with these dirty agitators campaigning for prohibition "

"Well," said Dorgan, "I must be moseying along, John."

Three men of hurried manner and rough natures threw Dorgan out of three various entrances to the roundhouse, but he sneaked in on the tender of a locomotive and saw Polo Magenta at work, wiping brass— or a wraith of Polo Magenta. He was thin, his eyes large and passionate. He took one look at Dorgan, and leaped to meet him.

"Dad— thunder— you old son of a gun."

"Sure! Well, boy, how's it coming?"

"Rotten."

"Well?"

"Oh, the old stuff. Keepin' the wanderin' boy tonight wanderin'. The warden gives me good advice, and I thinks I've paid for bein' a fool kid, and I pikes back to Little Hell with two bucks and lots of good intentions and— they seen me coming. The crooks was the only ones that welcomed me. McManus offered me a job, plain and fancy driving for guns. I turned it down and looks for decent work, which it didn't look for me none. There's a new cop on your old beat. Helpin' Hand Henry, he is. He gets me up and tells me the surprisin'

news that I'm a desprit young jailbird, and he's onto me— see; and if I chokes any old women or beats up any babes in arms, he'll be there with the nippers— see: so I better quit my career of murder.

"I gets a job over in Milldale, driving a motor-truck, and he tips 'em off I'm a forger and an arson and I dunno what all, and they lets me out— wit' some more good advice. Same wit' other Jobs."

"Effie?"

"Ain't seen her yet. But say. Dad, I got a letter from her that's the real stuff— says she'll stick by me till her dad croaks, and then come to me if it's through fire. I got it here— it keeps me from going nutty. And a picture postcard of her. You see, I planned to nip in and see her before her old man knew I was out of the hoosegow, but this cop I was tellin' you about wises up Kugler, and he sits on the doorstep with the Revolutionary musket loaded up with horseshoes and cobblestones, and so— get me? But I gets a letter through to her by one of the boys."

"Well, what are you going to do?"

"Search me.... There ain't nobody to put us guys next, since you got off the beat, Dad."

"I ain't off it! Will you do what I tell you to?"

"Sure."

"Then listen: You got to start in right here in Northernapolis, like you're doing, and build up again. They didn't sentence you to three years but to six— three of 'em here, getting folks to trust you again. It ain't fair, but it is. See? You lasted there because the bars kep' you in. Are you man enough to make your own bars, and to not have 'em wished onto you?"

"Maybe."

"You are! You know how it is in the pen— you can't pick and choose your cell or your work. Then listen: I'm middlin' well off, for a bull— savin's and pension. We'll go partners in a fine little garage, and buck John McManus— he's a crook, and we'll run him out of business. But you got to be prepared to wait, and that's the hardest thing a man can do. Will you?"

"Yes."

"When you get through here, meet me in that hallway behint Mullins' Casino. So long, boy."

''So long, Dad."

When Polo came to him in the hallway behind Mullins' Casino, Dorgan demanded: "I been thinking; have you seen old Kugler?"

"Ain't dared to lay an eye on him, Dad. Trouble enough without stirrin' up more. Gettin' diplomatic."

"I been thinking. Sometimes the most diplomatic thing a guy can do is to go right to the point and surprise 'em. Come on."

They came into Kugler's shop, without parley or trembling; and Dorgan 's face was impassive, as befits a patrolman, as he thrust open the door and bellowed "Evenin'!" at the horrified old Jewish scholar and the maid.

Don Dorgan laid his hands on the counter and spoke.

"Kugler," said he, "you're going to listen to me, because if you don't, I'll wreck the works. You've spoiled four lives. You've made this boy a criminal, forbidding him a good, fine love, and now you're planning to keep him one. You've kilt Effie the same way— look at the longing in the poor little pigeon's face! You've made me an unhappy old man. You've made yourself, that's meanin' to be good and decent, unhappy by a row with your own flesh and blood. Some said I been off me nut, Kugler, but I know I been out beyont, where they understand everything and forgive everything— and I've learnt that it's harder to be bad than to be good, that you been working harder to make us all unhappy than you could of to make us all happy."

Dorgan's gaunt, shabby bigness seemed to swell and fill the shop; his voice boomed and his eyes glowed with a will unassailable. The tyrant Kugler was wordless, and he listened with respect as Dorgan went on, more gently:

"You're a godly man among the sinners, but that's made you think you must always be right. Are you willing to kill us all just to prove you can't never be wrong? Man, man, that's a fiendish thing to do. And oh, how much easier it would be to give way, onct, and let this poor cold boy creep home to the warmness that he do be longing so for, with the blizzard bitter around him, and every man's hand ag'in' him. Look— look at them poor, good children!"

Kugler looked, and he beheld Polo and Effie— still separated by the chill marble counter— with their hands clasped across it, their eyes met in utter frankness.

"Vell—" said Kugler wistfully.

"So!" said Patrolman Dorgan. "Well, I must be back on me beat— at the asylum... There's things that'd bear watching there!"

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8: The Sham Master of Arts

Sandy Sharp

fl 1900s

Riverina Recorder, NSW: 3 May 1905

A newspaper series under the general heading "Detective Sketches" and by-lined "by Sandy Sharp, the famous Glasgow ex-detective," which ran in various Australian country newspapers 1900-1905. I can find nothing more.

IN THE EARLY days of my professional career an old schoolfellow came specially to Glasgow to see me, in the hope that he might be able to induce me to take as a lodger a younger brother of his, who had completed his articles with a firm of Paisley solicitors, and had been duly admitted, but before embarking in business on his own account preferred to take a position in the office of a well-known Glasgow firm of high repute, I did not care much for having a lodger, being strongly of opinion that, when possible, a man's household should consist of his own family only; but as we had no children, and my old friend pleaded hard, I agreed that he should bring his brother over to sea us on the ensuing Saturday, and that we would then decide. When Neil Paterson made his appearance my wife and I were at once impressed in his favour. He could not be styled good-looking, for his features were too strongly marked for that, but his open face, kindly eyes, pleasant manner, and suave, winning voice so influenced Mary that she assumed my consent, and assured the brothers that Neil would had a home with us so long as he cared to stay.

I never had reason to regret having taken him in as a lodger. He was capital company in the evenings; seldom went out, except to an occasional entertainment, especially lectures on literary subjects, of which study he was very fond.

In the autumn be joined a Literary Society in connection with the church he attended, and was quickly recognised as the 'master mind' among the members, with whom he became a great favourite. After a time one of our inspectors told me that my lodger had got a sweetheart, a young lady who attended the meetings of the Literary Society.

'She is a bit of a flirt, is Jeannie Macleod, and will come into a nice little fortune when her old aunt dies; over £10,000 I've been told. I am telling you this, Sandy, so that you may warn young Paterson, for it is more than likely she will throw him over as she has done others before him.'

I thanked Inspector Offutt, and at the first opportunity spoke to Neil about Miss Macleod, bidding him beware of setting his heart upon winning the girl, who was well known to be a flirt.

'Who has been telling you such a lot of lies about Jeannie, Mr. Sharp? She has admitted having had a number of followers, but never gave them any encouragement. And she has accepted and wears my ring.'

I saw that any further attempt to make him cautious, would be futile, and thenceforward never mentioned the subject.

The winter passed, and the Literary Society gave up its meetings for the session, the result being that Neil Paterson saw less of Jeannie Macleod than be had been wont to do. He became moody and abstracted, lost his appetite, and looked at length so woebegone that I guessed what had happened, and made a few inquiries. Inspector Moffatt told me that the fair Jeannie had gone to Edinburgh for a long visit, and as no letters with the Edinburgh postmark ever came to the house, I knew that the young fellow's eyes had been opened. But as he never mentioned her, I forbore to broach the subject, hoping that time, the great healer, would enable Neil to bear his disappointment philosophically.

As the summer went on he became somewhat mere cheerful, and I gave up the intention of writing to his brother, which I had almost decided to do, thinking that a month or two at homo would be of benefit. October came round, and with the opening of the Literary Society returned Miss Macleod. I was in hopes that Neil would shun the girl, and let her see that she could not play fast and loose with him, whatever she might have done with other young men; but, like the moth that had singed its wings, and returns foolishly to the flame of the candle, so Neil Paterson again became the devoted slave of the capricious, imperious Jeannie. She pretended to be sorry for her long silence, and in other ways made Neil more infatuated than ever, even consenting to accept his escort for a day's sail to Rothesay and back.

But while on board the steamer, Neil chanced to pick up a letter minus the envelope during Jeannie's temporary absence, and not knowing that she had dropped it, he glanced at the contents. It was dated only two days before, and was a passionate love letter, addressed to Jeannie.

Losing sight of what he ought to do as an honourable man, he read it through, and thus realised the perfidy of the girl he worshipped, for he gathered from it that she had definitely promised to marry the writer, Charles Girdwood, after the death of her aunt, when Jeannie would be able to marry whom she pleased.

'Charles Girdwood, my persistent rival at school. Must be the same, for the lost I heard of him he had obtained a position in a private school at Morningside,' said Neil to himself.

The reflection that Girdwood had 'cut him out' of the good graces of the young heiress was as gall and wormwood to the young solicitor, who threw

down the letter where he had found it, whence it was taken up by a gust of wind and blown overboard. It was well the steamer was on its return when Neil's eyes were thus opened, for it probably prevented an open rupture between them. Jeannie found her escort bad become very grave and abstracted but she set it down to every cause but the right one. Most young fellows in his position would have contemptuously kept out of the way of Jeannie Macleod for a time at least; but she had managed to rivet her chains securely round him, and he would not give up all hope of even yet winning her.

Going out one morning, I noticed a large poster announcing that a lecture was to be given in ten days' time on 'The Later Scottish Poets,' by Charles Girdwood, Esq., M.A., in the Queen's Hall.

'I must tell Neil of this lecture,' I said to myself; 'he will be sure to attend.'

But when I ventured to refer to the lecture over the tea table that evening, Neil's brow became as black as thunder.

'There is a mystery somewhere, Mr. Sharp. Nothing will ever make me believe that Charles Girdwood, supposing I am right in thinking him identical with the Charlie Girdwood with whom I went to school, could pass the examination for the M.A. degree. Don't fancy I am judging him harshly without reason. In the last year he was at school he stole a teacher's silver penholder, and when we were all about to be searched was seen to drop the article into another boy's pocket. For that he had a sound flogging, in preference to being prosecuted. If he is entitled to place those letters after his name I'll go in for the degree myself.'

'You don't like Mr. Girdwood, Neil?' I said.

'No, I don't; I never did, and I have less reason for liking him now than ever I had.'

'Ah! is he still a rival of yours?'

'I— I have some reason to believe she has promised to marry him.'

'And yet you still go dangling after the heartless flirt? Neil, you are very silly.'

'Maybe I am, Mr. Sharp. But I shall not give up the hope of winning her until she marries someone else. I will go to that lecture; will you accompany me ? I should like to know your opinion of Charles Girdwood.'

'Ob, yes, I will go with you if nothing intervenes to make it impossible.' I replied.

From that evening my lodger grew more confidential in his conversation with me respecting Jeannie Macleod. She told him that she had made Mr. Girdwood's acquaintance in Edinburgh, and gave Neil one of six lecture tickets Mr. Girdwood had caused to be sent to her. After what Neil had said

respecting his former schoolfellow's mediocre attainments at school, I was curious to know what sort of a lecturer he would make.

Neil and I had decided not to enter the hall or to sit together. The hall was full when the lecturer and chairman came on the platform, but neither Neil nor I were aware that tickets of invitation had been sent out broadcast in order to ensure a good audience. With as much assurance as though he were as old hand at the lecturing profession, Charles Girdwood seemed quite at his ease while the chairman— the minister of the chapel which Miss Macleod attended— introduced the lecturer as 'our gifted fellow-citizen,' Girdwood having been born in Glasgow. And I was simply astounded as I listened to the lecture. It had been well got up, whoever was the writer, the poems cited in illustration being admirably selected with the view of affording a fair estimate of each poet's work. It was evident that Girdwood must have studied hard since he left school.

As the lecture proceeded the applause grew in volume and intensity, and from my corner I watched the face of Neil Paterson. Suspicion, I could perceive, still mingled with astonishment.

'Well, Mr. Sharp, what do you think of him?' asked Neil, when we were on our way home.

'I am scarcely qualified to judge,' I replied, 'but my idea is that if his reading of the poems he dissects were equal to his other merits as a lecturer he would become one of the foremost men in that profession.'

'Yes, Mr. Sharp, presuming that the lecture is really his own. His matter was very good; his reading of the illustrative poems war awfully poor. I could find a seventh form boy who could read better.'

I did not reply. To tell the truth I thought him unduly prejudiced and specially angry with Girdwood for having come to Glasgow to show off before Jeannie Macleod and her friends.

'I feel positive that lecture is not his own work,' went on Neil Paterson, 'and possibly the truth about the matter will come to light some day if he carries on the game too far.'

' It might be a goad thing for your prospects of seeming Jeannie Macleod if this fellow turns out a fraud before he manages to make her his wife,' I remarked, seeing that Paterson expected me to say something. 'Would it be possible to ascertain if a lecture with that title has been delivered at any town in Scotland during the season. It could be done, possibly, with a little trouble and the expenditure of a few shillings. I suppose you would not care to advertise?'

'No, that would put Girdwood on his guard, and I would like him again to commit himself,' replied Neil.

'Then borrow a *Newspaper Press Guide*, and write to the editors of the papers to the largest of our burghs, asking them for the information you require.'

My lodger acted on this advice, and a few days after sending off the second batch of letters he received one from Dumfries to the effect that Professor Kirkwood, who held the Chair of Literature at Cambridge University, was to deliver his celebrated lecture on 'The Later Scottish Poets' on the following Tuesday evening.

'Mr. Sharp, will you go with me to Dumfries? I must have a witness; she would say I was prejudiced and jealous of his attainments,' said Neil, eagerly, when I had read the letter of the editor of *The Dumfries Standard*.

'Let me see how the trains will fit in, and then I will tell you,' I replied.

I fount that we could leave Glasgow at 5.30, arriving at Dumfries in time for the lecture, and return early enough next morning for our respective duties.

Our journey had precisely the result hoped I for and welcomed by my companion, far the lecture delivered by Professor Kirkwood was precisely the same as that given by Charles Girdwood, the similarity of name having probably emboldened the ambitious and unscrupulous school assistant to commit the barefaced fraud.

When the lecture was over I quickly made my way to the ante-room, where the Professor was donning his coat, and, presenting my card, informed him that a Mr. Charles Girdwood had delivered the same lecture in Glasgow a fortnight previous.

'Mr. Girdwood did not obtain the lecture from us, of that I am quite positive,' said the Professor, 'and I can only account for his possession at my lecture by supposing that some clever shorthand writer has taken it down, and afterwards transcribed it. It is possible that this may have been done at the instigation of Mr. Girdwood himself. At all events, I shall take effectual means to stop him from delivering my lecture again.'

To our intense astonishment, on returning to Glasgow, we found the walls placarded with papers announcing that Mr. Charles Girdwood would, by special request, lecture the following Friday evening in Great St. Andrew's Hall on 'The Later Poems of Scott, with readings.'

'That is another lecture of Professor Kirkwood's,' exclaimed Paterson, rubbing his hands gleefully.

I wrote to the Professor immediately to Carlisle, enclosing a cutting of an advertisement of the coming lecture cut from a Glasgow paper. The result was seen in another advertisement, which appeared on Friday morning, and announced that Professor Kirkwood, of Cambridge, having reason to believe that his lectures on literature in connection with the Cambridge extension

movement, were being transcribed and delivered by unscrupulous persons in their own names, he intended to take proceedings against such literary thieves.

The rest of this sketch will best be told in Neil Paterson's own words.

CONTINUATION OF STORY, BY NEIL PATERSON.

WITH a copy of the paper in my pocket, I called that afternoon on Jeannie, and casually asked her is she intended to go to the lecture.

'Of course I shall go; it will be a treat, if the lecture is good as his last. Surely you will go, Mr. Patterson?'

'I think not.'

'I do believe you are a wee bit jealous of Mr. Girdwood's attainments,' she replied.

I was strongly tempted to let the cat out of the bag, but wanted a more drastic finale than would be obtained just then. On the following morning, notices in the papers and on the wall intimated that, owing to the sudden illness of Mr. Girdwood, the lecture would be postponed until a future date.

I called in again that evening at Miss Macleod's, and was not surprised to find Girdwood there, showing no signs of illness. Jeannie soon perceived that there was a derided coolness between us, and again she set it down to my jealousy. It was evident she know nothing of the warning advertisement, but Girdwood seemed horribly ill at ease.

'Charlie, you said a few moments since that you had the lecture in your pocket. Will you not read a bit of it for us?'

There were two girl-friends of Jeannie present.

'That would be scarcely fair, Jeannie dear.' (How my blood boiled to hear him say that). 'I hope to deliver the lecture in a week or two, you know.'

'I don't think it will be quite safe, Mr. Girdwood, unless you are prepared to indemnify those who take the money at the doors, if proceedings should be taken against you,' I said, quietly.

Girdwood's face grew black as thunder.

'I do not understand you. Please explain,' he said.

'Then you have not seen this advertisement?' I asked, taking from my pocket the paper in which the warning notice appeared, and reading it aloud.

'Don't believe him, Jeannie. This is same vile plot to ruin me in your eyes. The lectures are my own.'

'Well, I heard Professor Kirkwood— not Girdwood, bear in mind— deliver the lecture on 'The Later Scottish Poets' at Dumfries last Monday evening, and

he declared the lecture was his own. As our highly-esteemed friend here also insists that the lecture is his, there will be an investigation,' I answered.

An ominous silence fell on the company. Jeannie looked from Girdwood to me, not knowing which to believe. A loud ring at the front door bell was followed by the entrance into the hall of a man who bore a striking likeness to Girdwood, and who was evidently not sober.

'I know he is here, and I mean to see him. Oh, there you are, Cousin Charles. This is the great heiress you told me about? Proud to make your acquaintance, miss!'

'Be quiet, you idiot!' said Girdwood, seizing his relative by the arm, and trying to get him to quit the house.

'I'm not going until you have paid me the £100 you owe me, Charles Girdwood, M.A. Ha, ha! Master of Arts indeed! Thereby hangs a tale. Come, old fellow, out with the £.s.d.'

'I haven't got so much with me, Tom. Come to the Waverley Hotel to-morrow at noon, there's a good fellow,' and again he tried to push the man out.

'I mean to have the cash before I go, or I'll blow up on you. No more waiting until you have spliced the lady with the money-bags.'

'I haven't got as many shillings here,' said Girdwood, doggedly.

'I will give you £10 if you will tell us what you mean by the threats you have uttered,' said Miss Macleod, quietly.

'You, Jeannie? Surely you do not believe his lies?'

'Lies, eh? I can prove that you got your precious degree under false pretences by bribing a needy young fellow, cleverer than yourself, Cousin Charlie, to be examined in your name. Yes, miss, I ought to have that degree. Deny that if you dare, Mr. Girdwood. I can prove it, and you know it.'

'Show Mr. Girdwood the door, and do not admit him again under any circumstances,' said the angry Jeannie to the wondering servant who had let in the disreputable cousin. The discomfited schemer made no attempt to exculpate himself; he was too much crushed to do that. With a ferocious glare at me, he seized his hat from the stand, darted out of the house, and rushed away, as though desirous of getting as far as possible from the man who had exposed him.

'You have done me a service I shall never forget, Neil,' said Jeannie after she had paid the man the sum she had promised, and he had gone. 'I had half-promised to marry that detestable hypocrite, believing him to be as Honourable as he was clever, and never dreaming that he is really as imperfectly educated as he is certainly unscrupulous. When I heard him lecture I thought I had discovered my ideal, and he took every advantage of my

predilections in his favour, presuming upon my liking for the study of literature in a way that ought to have opened my eyes to his true character. What an escape I have had!'

For the first time during our acquaintance Jeannie was really kind to me that evening, and I left her full of hope that I should never have cause to doubt her affection again.

Next day, soon after I got to the office, a black-edged letter was handed to me, the address being in Jeannie's well-known handwriting. Her aunt had been found dead in bed in the Rothesay Hotel where she had been staying for some months, and Jeannie asked me to call upon her and advise her generally as to the funeral, &c. At her request I attended the funeral as her special representative and on entering the mourning coach after the interment I was startled by the appearance of Charles Girdwood at the side of the coach. He had been drinking, for his eyes were bloodshot, and his whole appearance unkempt and slovenly.

'You have won the game so far, Neil Paterson, but Jeannie shall never be your wife! I swear it before God! I'll kill the pair of you if you dare marry her.'

A passing constable forced the fellow away, and, the coach moving off, I Kit relieved, not knowing how far his frenzy might carry him. When I got home I told Sandy Sharp of Girdwood's threats, and he very strongly advised me to take out a summons against my late rival for a breach of the peace. I did not exactly care to do this, but it seemed expedient and Girdwood was served with the summons. He did not appear and a warrant for his arrest was issued. But he had disappeared from Glasgow, and from that time until my marriage with Jeannie Macleod I heard nothing of him.

The year that fallowed the death of her aunt seemed to Jeannie and me an awfully long one. She had given up flirting, and I was as happy in her oft-proven affection as lover need be. The time of probation came to an end at last, and Jeannie became my wife. We went to London and the Isle of Wight for the honeymoon, Jeannie's fortune having turned out to be nearer twenty thousand pounds than ten thousand.

We had been at Ryde for six weeks, and had returned to London for a few days prior to our return home, when, walking along Oxford-street one afternoon, Jeannie being busily engaged in shop window gazing, a number of sandwich men passed, attired in grotesque costumes. I glanced at each man's face as he went by me, wondering what had been the previous history of the slouching, woebegone wearers of the sham armour, polished to illustrate the excellence of a certain make of black lead. The face of one man attracted my attention, and I fancied I detected a gleam of intelligent in his ferrety eyes.

Where had I seen him before? Not until my wife and I had gone on for some distance did I identify him. It was Charles Girdwood.

What a terrible come-down! Like a flash the days of our boyhood came back to me; when Charlie and I were playmates, before school rivalry made us enemies. I found myself pitying the man, whose overweening ambition had been greater than his talents, and I determined to render him some assistance should I again encounter him. With this end in view I made an excuse to leave Jeannie alone in the hotel for an hour, and sallied forth to seek Girdwood. But I found on inquiry from a constable that Sandwich men disappeared from the streets about five, and thus I did not find the man I wanted.

THAT evening we visited the Adelphi Theatre, and on emerging from the front entrance after the performance there was a tremendous crush. At last I managed to get a cab, and as Jeannie was entering it some liquid was thrown at her; her dress being splashed all over with what I at once knew must be vitriol, a drop having fallen on her cheek, causing my wife to scream out with pain and fright.

'Seize the scoundrel!' I shouted, as a man was soon darting across the Strand through the thronged traffic. But he was not destined to get away unpunished. A horse knocked him down, the carriage went over him, and he was picked up unconscious. I knew the villain— at least I felt sure it was Charles Girdwood, who had tried to carry out a diabolical scheme of revenge against one who had learnt his baseness and duplicity ere it was too late.

Inquiring of the constable near the theatre entrance, I was told that Girdwood would probably be conveyed to Charing Cross Hospital. As may easily be imagined, Jeannie was in a state of alarm, but she had not seen the accident to her cowardly assailant. When I told her what had happened her alarm subsided.

'Neil, dear,' she said as we sat at supper, 'I shall be glad if you will go to the hospital in the morning and clear up a suspicion I can not get rid of— that the wretched man is Charles Girdwood. I fancied I caught a glimpse of a face I had once known as we entered the theatre.'

'I knew that you are right, Jeannie, for I saw him this afternoon carrying a pair of sandwich boards. It was to find him and render him some assistance that I went out after we returned here,' I replied.

'What a terrible wreck he has made of his life! How thankful I am that you were not driven away from me by my fickleness, Neil.'

'That was because I believed him to be utterly unworthy of you, Jeannie. Had I thought otherwise, I should have given way to him '

'Then your love was not very strong at that time, Neil,' she said, looking a little pained, I fancied.

'It was strong enough to constrain me to give you up had I been sure it would have ensured your happiness, Jeannie.'

'I have no wish to be happier than I am with you, Neil.'

EARLY in the morning I went to the hospital, and found Girdwood sinking fast. He was quite conscious, however, and on seeing me asked eagerly—

'Jeannie— your wife— was she much hurt?'

'Not at all; only much alarmed,' I answered.

'Thank God! I can die easy now. I must have been mad! She was too good for me. If she would but came and tell me I am forgiven—'

'I will ask her,' I said as I left his bedside.

But as I was leaving the ward I met the surgeon, and in answer to my question he said that Girdwood had not many minutes to live.

Some time afterwards his disreputable cousin called upon me, wanting the loan of a sovereign, and in return for my compliance he told me how Charles Girdwood had bribed him to sit in his name, and thus procure for him the degree of Master of Arts.

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9: The Will

Arthur Gask

1869-1951

Mail (Adelaide) 11 Nov 1944

AT TWENTY years of age, June Brandon was not only of a very nice disposition, but also an undeniably pretty girl. Of an aristocratic appearance, she had beautiful grey eyes, a good profile, and a faultless complexion.

She had no knowledge as to her parents, having been born in an apartment house in a poor suburb of North London. Her mother died within a few hours of her birth and left behind no clue to her identity. No relatives coming forward to make inquiries and with only a few pounds found among the dead mother's effects, the baby was taken to a public orphanage, where she passed all her childhood and girlhood days. She had been christened June because she had been born in that month.

She was so obviously of a superior class to the other girls at the institution that, instead of being put out into domestic service when she was 16, she was placed in the infirmary as a nurse-probationer. Then, some two years later, a wealthy and titled patroness of the orphanage came to hear about her and suggested taking her as a nurse-attendant. Accordingly, June was installed at Roding Hall, a large house near Brighton, to wait upon Lady Sandall, the childless and elderly widow of Sir James Sandall, who had been a high official in the Indian Civil Service.

A very bad-tempered woman, Lady Sandall was alternately kind and harsh to June. It pleased her to help on the girl's education by constant instruction and by encouraging her to study the best works in English literature. Also, finding her so quick and intelligent, she was soon using her as a private secretary, giving her a private room to herself and letting her take all her meals with the housekeeper.

On the other hand, when in her bad moods, her ladyship was very hard on June, furious about the most trivial things and often finding fault most unjustly. Masterful with everyone, her servants were greatly afraid of her, the one exception being Fordyce, the elderly butler who had served her and Sir James for nearly thirty years. A refined and even distinguished-looking man, Fordyce seemed to have a restraining influence upon his mistress, and it was said she often consulted him about her private affairs.

JUST over 60 when June came to her, Lady Sandall was in a bad state of health, suffering a lot from her heart. She had been repeatedly warned by her doctor not to give way to her emotions; in other words, to try to control her tempers.

She had only two relatives, both nephews. One was in the forties, a well-to-do stockbroker in the city, but the other, Reggie Wynward, only 22, was the favored one, which was as it should have been, as he had no means at all. He was within a few months of qualifying as a medical man. He was a good-looking, manly young fellow, but had to mind his steps very carefully to keep in the good graces of his irascible aunt.

June realised to the full how fortunate she had been to come to Lady Sandall, for after two years at the Hall she found she had so educated herself that she could well hold her own with any of the society callers who visited her employer. So putting up smilingly with the latter's frequent bouts of bad temper, she was really happy and contented, and she became happier still when young Wynward took to coming frequently to the Hall.

As was natural, the two fell in love, and very soon were making opportunities to meet alone, sometimes in the garden when Lady Sandall was in bed, and sometimes, upon much rarer occasions, when June had the day off and could spend it in London. They had to be very careful, however, that Lady Sandall learnt nothing of what was going on, as she made no secret that, as her heir, she had ambitious matrimonial plans for Reggie.

ONCE, as if suspecting something, she warned him sharply against June.

"You keep her at a distance, my boy," she ordered sternly, "and take care she doesn't lead you on. She's pretty enough, I admit, but I'm not going to have you mixed up with a girl of her history, or you'll lose every penny I intend to leave you. So you just take that in with no nonsense."

Reggie laughed it off, but about three months later . the worst happened for the lovers, as late one night she caught Reggie in June's room. Not feeling well, she had gone to bed early, but was unable to sleep. About 11 o'clock she had gone round to June's room intending to fetch her to give her some message. Opening the door unceremoniously, as was her wont, to her amazement she saw June sitting on Reggie's knee in an armchair drawn up before the fire. For a long moment she stood thunderstruck, and then she shouted to Reggie:

"You young blackguard!"

To June she addressed a horrid word. In consternation the two had sprung to their feet.

"But it's quite all right, Aunt," Reggie called out. "We are properly married. We were married more than a month ago."

"Married!" screamed Lady Sandall. "Oh, you young fool!" She was almost choking with rage. "Then both of you get out of this house at once. You shan't

remain here another minute, and I'll never have anything more to do with either of you. Get your things together in-stantly and go off."

And, standing in the doorway, she hurled every abusive word she could think of at them, rousing the whole house with her shouting.

Getting rid of her at last, Reggie rang up for a taxi, and, in less than half an hour, he and June were being driven to a hotel. The following morning, well before 8 o'clock, Lady Sandall was ringing up Mr. John Litchfield, her solicitor, in London, with the intention of ordering him to draw up a new will, leaving everything to her other nephew, Samuel Gorringe, but to her great annoyance she learnt he was out of town and would not be back for a couple of days.

Leaving nothing to chance, she immediately wrote out another will herself on the Hall notepaper. It read:

"I revoke all former wills. To my nephew, Reginald Wynward, I leave the sum of one shilling. To his wife, formerly known as June Brandon and for 18 years an inmate of the Balham Public Orphanage, an institution in the main for children born out of wedlock, I leave also one shilling towards the upkeep of the baby which is no doubt now well upon the way. All the rest of my estate and effects I leave to my nephew, Samuel Gorringe."

Fordyce and Mrs. Humphrey, the cook, were summoned to witness her signature, and then she had herself driven to the post office and despatched the will by registered letter to London.

Returning home, she collapsed altogether, and her doctor was phoned for to come in urgent haste. Her heart was failing quickly, and, with no response to treatment, she passed away during the night.

The following week Mr. Litchfield sent for Reggie and told him about the new will.

"I'm very sorry," he said, "but there will be only those shillings for you and your wife. The will she drew up herself is perfectly valid and the whole estate, about £65,000, goes to your cousin. It's an unjust and spiteful will, particularly as I know she promised your uncle just before he died to look after you. Still, there's no getting behind it."

REGGIE had a high opinion of Mr. Litchfield's abilities, and at once gave up all hope of getting anything. So he was very surprised when about a week later, a young Brighton solicitor, Charlie Jackson, came up to London, expressly to see him and suggest the will should be contested. Jackson was barely 24 and, only a few months previously, had been admitted to the practice of the law. Reggie knew him very slightly, and only because it happened they belonged to the same tennis club.

"But I'm told I haven't a hope in the world," said Reggie.

"Oh, but I think you have," said the other. "That will shows spite, and, besides, your cousin may be willing to compromise."

"Not he!" scoffed Reggie. "We've always disliked each other." He shook his head. "No, Jackson, I'll not dispute it I haven't the money for one thing."

"But never you mind about the money," said Jackson. "Of course, it's not ethical for me to take the case up on spec, but, if you're agreeable, I'll finance everything, and, if nothing comes of it, promise not to send you in any account." He laughed. "In any case, it'll be a ripping advertisement for me."

Upon these terms Reggie was quite agreeable and, accordingly, notice was served upon his cousin's solicitors that the will would be contested. When the day for the hearing arrived everyone in court was most amused at the idea of so boyish-looking a country solicitor pitting himself against the mighty Jarvis Romilly, one of the most eminent King's Counsel practising in the Probate Court. They were most curious as to exactly what line of action he was going to take.

Lord Royston was presiding over the proceedings. As a matter of formality, the deceased woman's will was first produced, and Mrs. Humphrey, the cook, went into the witness box to testify to having seen the dead woman put her signature to it.

"And you saw your mistress sign it," asked the K.C., "in the presence of your fellow-servant, Mr. Fordyce, and you put your signature in the presence of them both?"

"Yes. sir, I did," replied the cook, and the K.C. at once sat down.

Young Mr. Jackson rose to his feet.

"And did Lady Sandall seem quite all right that morning?" he asked.

"Quite capable of knowing what she was doing?"

"Oh, yes, sir," replied the cook. "She was not in a good temper, but she knew what she was doing all right."

And Mr. Jackson, too, resumed his seat, while Mrs. Humphrey proceeded to leave the witness box and the court.

The butler was then called, and he stepped briskly into the box. He was asked if he, too, had witnessed Lady Sandall's signature in the presence of the cook. Upon his replying in the affirmative, the K.C. again sat down.

"Now, Mr. Fordyce," asked young Jackson, "did her ladyship appear to you to be in a state of unusual agitation when she affixed her signature?"

The butler considered. "Well, at any rate, sir," he replied, "she was not so the moment before she signed"— he smiled— "but, as I did not actually see her write her name, I cannot say what was exactly her condition at that very moment."

It did not seem that Mr. Jackson could believe the evidence of his ears.

"What," he exclaimed, "you now tell us you did not see her sign the will?"

"Not actually, sir," said the butler, "because, just as she took up the pen to sign, I thought I heard the frontdoor bell ring and went out to see. I wasn't gone a minute and, when I came back, both she and Cook had signed. That's how it was Mrs. Humphrey witnessed the signature before me. Otherwise I was to have signed first."

A STUNNED silence filled the court. It was as if all present had been turned into graven images. Mr. Jackson recovered first, and with grim smile, turned to his lordship.

"Then that concludes my case, my lord, and it will not be necessary for me to proceed further. The testament was not properly executed and therefore is invalid," and he plumped down into his seat.

Jarvis Romilly jumped to his feet.

"I ask, my lord," he cried fiercely, "that the previous witness be detained before she has had time to leave the precincts of the court," and, upon a sign from the judge, an usher hurried out. The K.C. turned menacingly to the butler.

"Now, sir," he declaimed, "after having testified on oath that you saw deceased put her signature to the will— you now say you were not present when she signed."

The butler looked very frightened.

"Yes, sir. I am sorry, sir. It was a mistake. But I thought I had witnessed the signing all right, as, when I came back, the ink on the other signatures was still wet."

The K.C. now spoke quietly, almost in silky tones.

"And later," he asked, "you happened to mention to Mr. Wynward exactly what had taken place?"

"No, no, sir," cried Fordyce. "I never mentioned it to him at all. I haven't seen or spoken to him since that night he left the Hall," and no amount of questioning could now make him contradict himself.

Mrs. Humphrey was recalled.

"Now, madam," said Romilly, with a pleasant smile, "you told us your mistress signed the will in your presence and that of Mr. Fordyce, too. That is so, is it not?"

"Yes, sir," replied the cook.

"Mr. Fordyce was actually standing at your side," went on the K.C.

"Yes, sir," replied the cook again and then, a startled look coming into her face, she added quickly, "No, sir, not quite all the time. I remember now that he went out for a moment to attend to the bell."

"Before your mistress signed?" asked Ronuily, and the court was as hushed and still as the grave.

"Yes, sir," nodded the cook, "and before I signed, too, I recollect we had just written our names when he came back."

Most nonplussed at her corroboration of the butler's story, the great King's Council tried in every way to shake her testimony, until at last his lordship intervened.

"I do not think, Mr. Romilly," he said, "it will be any good your further questioning the witness. She is undoubtedly speaking the truth. The will is invalid, and I accordingly decline to grant probate."

"But your lordship," protested the K.C., "the intention of the testator is so clear and it is not justice if—"

"But how often have I not had to explain," interrupted his lordship wearily, "that it is law I have to dispense in this court, and not necessarily justice. No, I decline to grant probate."

So, under the previous will, Reggie Wynward succeeded to the estate, and one day some weeks later, Fordyce came to see him.

"Oh, I'm so glad to see you," said Reggie. "I couldn't find out where you had gone, and I wanted to do something for you."

The butler shook his head. "No thank you, sir I have all I need. Under my late master's will I came into £2,000 when her ladyship died or I left her service. I've only come now to clear up a few things."

"Well," said Reggie, "I have a lot to thank you for. But for your accidentally leaving the room when the will was being signed I should have only got that shilling."

"But it was no accident, sir," said the butler gravely. "I went out on purpose to invalidate the will. I only pretended to think I heard the bell, for, knowing her ladyship's impatience. I felt sure she would sign without waiting for me to come back."

Reggie was aghast. "But— but have you told this to anyone besides me?" he asked. A sudden light dawned upon him and his hand shot out accusingly. "A-ah! I know you have. You told Mr. Jackson."

Fordyce nodded. "Yes, sir, and we both thought it wisest not to mention it to you then, so that the other side should not be able to suggest there was any conspiracy between us."

"Conspiracy between us!" exclaimed the astounded Reggie. "What on earth do you mean? You had no interest in the will or me."

"Not so much perhaps in you, sir," said Fordyce, "but I certainly had an interest in your wife,"— he smiled drily— "as she happens to be my niece. No, no, she does not know it, and I have no wish she should. I only mention it now

so that you shall know you have no reason to be ashamed of her. Her mother was none of those dreadful things her ladyship called out that night. We come of a good yeoman family, and my sister was a schoolteacher when the gentleman who was your wife's father met her."

"Were they married?" asked Reggie hoarsely.

"No, sir, but I am sure they would have been if young Lord Rutland— he was your wife's father— had not been killed in the hunting field before it was known what was going to happen." Fordyce's voice shook. "I was in India for 20 years and knew nothing of my poor sister's misfortune until I came back four years ago. Then, with great difficulty, I found out about June and traced her to the orphanage.

"No, it was not chance she came to Lady Sandall. I got her ladyship interested in the orphanage by pretending I knew the matron, and then I suggested she should engage June as her nurse attendant."

The butler rose to go. "One thing more, sir. I have just posted to June, anonymously, of course, an old photograph of her father and mother taken at a county ball 24 years ago. You will recognise them both by their likeness to her. Good-bye, sir, and the best of happiness to you. I am sailing for Australia tomorrow, and neither of you will see me again," and, with a warm handshake, the two men parted.

That evening, in great excitement, June showed Reggie the photo which had just arrived. It was a flashlight one taken on a ballroom floor, and, under two of the dancers was written, "Your father and mother, who are both dead."

"I wonder who sent it," exclaimed June. "But oh, Reggie, aren't they both good looking. Do you really think they are my mother and father?" And when her husband nodded emphatically, she went on, "But isn't it strange? My mother somehow reminds me of— whom do you think?— why, Fordyce!"

And, after another long look at the photograph, Reggie agreed with her again.

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10: The Brink of Infinity

Stanley G. Weinbaum

1902-1935

Thrilling Wonder Stories, Dec 1936

Stanley Weinbaum's last story.

ONE WOULD HARDLY choose the life of an assistant professor of mathematics at an Eastern University as an adventurous one. Professors in general are reputed to drone out a quiet, scholarly existence, and an instructor of mathematics might seem the driest and least lively of men, since his subject is perhaps the most desiccated. And yet— even the lifeless science of figures has had its dreamers— Clerk-Maxwell, Lobachewski, Einstein and, the rest. The latter, the great Albert Einstein himself who is forging the only chain that ever tied a philosopher's dream to experimental science, is pounding his links of tenuous mathematical symbols, shadowy as thought, but unbreakable.

And don't forget that "Alice in Wonderland" was written by a dreamer who happened also to be a mathematician. Not that I class myself with them; I'm practical enough to leave fantasies alone. Teaching is my business.

At least, teaching is my main business. I do a little statistical work for industrial corporations when the occasion presents itself— in fact, you'll find my name in the classified section: Abner Aarons, Statistician and Consulting Mathematician. I eke out my professional salary, and I do at times strike something interesting. Of course, in the main such work consists of graphing trends of consumption for manufacturers, or population increases for public utilities.

And occasionally some up-and-coming advertising agency will consult me on how many sardine cans would be needed to fill the Panama Canal, or some such material to use as catchy advertising copy. Not exactly exciting work, but it helps financially.

Thus I was not particularly surprised that July morning to receive a call. The university had been closed for some weeks; the summer session was about to open, without however, the benefit of my presence. I was taking a vacation, leaving in two or three days for a Vermont village I knew, where the brook trout cared not a bit whether a prize-fighter, president, or professor, was on the hither end of the line. And I was going alone; three-quarters of the year before a classroom full of the tadpoles called college students had thoroughly wearied me of any further desire for human companionship; my social instincts were temporarily in abeyance.

Nevertheless, I'm not unthrifty enough to disregard an opportunity to turn an honest penny, and the call was far from unwelcome. Even the modest

holiday I planned can bite deeply enough into the financial foundation of an assistant professor's pittance. And the work sounded like one of these fairly lucrative and rather simple propositions.

"This is Court Strawn," the telephone announced. "I'm an experimental chemist, and I've completed a rather long series of experiments. I want them tabulated and the results analyzed; do you do that sort of work?"

I did, and acknowledged as much.

"It will be necessary for you to call here for your data," the voice continued. Strangely unctuous, that voice. "It is impossible for me to leave." There followed an address on West Seventieth Street.

WELL, I called for data before. Generally the stuff was delivered or mailed to me, but his request wasn't extraordinary. I agreed, and added that I'd be over shortly. No use delaying my vacation if I could help it.

I took the subway. Taxis are a needless luxury to a professor, and a car of my own was an unrealized ambition. It wasn't long before I entered one of the nondescript brown houses that still survive west of the Avenue. Strawn let me in, and I perceived the reason for his request. The man was horribly crippled; his whole left side was warped like a gnarled oak, and he was hard put to hobble about the house. For the rest—stringy dark hair, and little tense eyes.

He greeted me pleasantly enough, and I entered a small library, while my host hobbled over to a littered desk, seating himself facing me. The deep-set eyes looked me over, and he chuckled.

"Are you a good mathematician, Dr. Aarons?" he asked. There was more than a hint of a sneer in his voice.

"My work has been satisfactory," I answered, somewhat nettled. "I've been doing statistical work for several years."

He waved a shriveled left hand.

"Of course— of course! I don't doubt your practical ability. Are you, however, well versed, in the more abstract branches—the theory of numbers, for instance, or the hyper-spatial mathematics?"

I was feeling rather irritated. There was something about the man—

"I don't see that any of this is necessary in statistical analysis of experimental results," I said. "If you'll give me your data, I'll be going."

He chuckled again, seeming hugely amused.

"As a matter of fact, Dr. Aarons," he said smirking, "the experiment isn't completed yet. Indeed, to tell the truth, it is just beginning."

"What!" I was really angry. "If this is your idea of a joke—" I started to rise, thoroughly aroused.

"Just a moment," said Strawn coolly. He leveled a very effective-looking blue-barreled automatic at me. I sat down again open-mouthed; I confess to a feeling of panic at the sight of the cripple's beady little eyes peering along the ugly weapon.

"Common politeness dictates that you at least hear me out, Dr. Aarons." I didn't like the oily smoothness of his voice, but what was I to do? "As I was saying, the experiment is just beginning. As a matter of fact, you are the experiment!"

"Eh?" I said, wondering again if the whole thing might not be a joke of some sort.

"You're a mathematician, aren't you?" Strawn continued. "Well, that makes you fair game for me. A mathematician, my good friend, is no more to me than something to be hunted down. And I'm doing it!"

The man was crazy! The realization dawned on me as I strove to hold myself calm. Best to reason with him, I thought.

"But why?" I asked. "We're a harmless lot."

His eyes blazed up with a fierce light.

"Harmless, eh, harmless! Well, it was one of your colleagues that did— this!" He indicated his withered leg with his withered arm. "He did this with his lying calculations!" He leaned forward confidentially. "Listen to me, Dr. Aarons. I am a chemist, or was once. I used to work with explosives, and was pretty good, too. And then one of you damned calculators figured out a formula for me! A misplaced decimal point— bah! You're all fair game, to me!" He paused, and the sneer came back to his lips. "That's simple justice, now, isn't it?"

Well, you can imagine how thoroughly horrified I was, sitting there facing a homicidal maniac with a loaded gun in his hand. Humor him! I'd heard that was the best treatment. Use persuasion, reason!

"Now, Mr. Strawn," I said, "you're certainly entitled to justice. Yes, you certainly are! But surely, Mr. Strawn, you are not serving the ends of justice by venting your anger on me! Surely that isn't justice."

HE laughed wildly and continued.

"A very spacious argument, Dr. Aarons. You are simply unfortunate in that your name is the first in the classified section of the directory. Had your colleague given me a chance— any slightest chance to save my body from this that you see, I might be forgiving. But I trusted that fool's calculations!" He twisted his face again into that bitter leer. "As it is, I am giving you far more of a chance than I had. If, as you claim, you are a good mathematician, you shall have your opportunity to escape. I have no quarrel with the real students of figures, but only"— his leer became a very sinister scowl— "only with the

dullards, the fakes and the blunderers. Yes, you'll have your chance!" The grin returned to his lips, but his eyes behind the blue automatic never wavered.

I saw no other alternative but to continue the ghastly farce. Certainly open opposition to any of his suggestions might only inflame the maniac to violence, so I merely questioned. "And what is the proposition, Mr. Strawn?"

The scowl became a sneer again.

"A very fair one, sir. A very fair proposition, indeed." He chuckled.

"I should like to hear it," I said, hoping for an interruption of some sort.

"You shall. It is just this: You are a mathematician, and you say, a good one. Very well. We shall put your claim to the test. I am thinking of a mathematical quantity, a numerical expression, if you prefer. You have ten questions to discover it. If you do so you are free as far as I am concerned. But if you fail"— his scowl reappeared— "well, if you fail I shall recognize you as one of the tribe of blunderers against whom I war, and the outcome will not be pleasant!"

Well! It was several moments before I found my voice, and began to babble protests. "But, Mr. Strawn! That's an utter impossibility! The range of numbers is infinite; how can I identify one with ten questions? Give me a fair test, man! This one offers not a chance in a million! In a billion!"

He silenced me with a wave of the blue barrel of his weapon.

"Remember, Dr. Aarons, I did not say it was a number. I said a numerical expression, which is a vastly wider field. I am giving you this hint without deducting a question; you must appreciate my magnanimity!" He laughed. "The rules of our little game are as follows: You may ask me any questions except the direct question, 'What is the expression?' I am bound to answer you in full and to the best of my knowledge any question except the direct inquiry. You may ask me as many questions at a time as you wish up to your limit of ten, but in any event I will answer not less than two per day. That should give you sufficient time for reflection"— again that horrible chuckle— "and my time too is limited."

"But, Mr. Strawn," I argued, "that may keep me here five days. Don't you know that by tomorrow my wife will have the police searching for me?"

A glint of anger flashed in the mad eyes. "You are not being fair, Dr. Aarons! I know you are not married! I checked up on you before you came here. I know you will not be missed. Do not attempt to lie to me; rather help me serve the ends of justice! You should be more than willing to prove your worth to survive as one of the true mathematicians." He rose suddenly. "And now, sir, you will please precede me through the door and up those stairs!"

Nothing to do but obey! The stubby gun in his hand was enough authority, at least to an unadventurous soul like myself. I rose and stalked out of the room at his direction, up the stairs and through a door he indicated. Beyond

was a windowless little cell ventilated by a skylight, and the first glance revealed that this was barred. A piece of furniture of the type known as day-bed, a straight chair, a deep overstuffed chair, and a desk made up the furnishings.

"Here," said the self-appointed host, "is your student's cell. On the desk is a carafe of water, and, as you see, an unabridged dictionary. That is the only reference allowed in our little game." He glanced at his watch. "It is ten minutes to four. By four tomorrow you must have asked me two questions. Two questions, and have them well thought out! The ten minutes over are a gift from me, lest you doubt my generosity!" He moved toward the door. "I will see that your meals are on time," he added. "My best wishes, Dr. Aarons."

THE DOOR clicked shut and I at once commenced a survey of the room. The skylight was hopeless, and the door even more so; I was securely and ingloriously imprisoned. I spent perhaps half an hour in painstaking and fruitless inspection, but the room had been well designed or adapted to its purpose; the massive door was barred on the outside, the skylight was guarded by a heavy iron grating, and the walls offered no slightest hope. Abner Aarons was most certainly a prisoner!

My mind turned to Strawn's insane game. Perhaps I could solve his mad mystery; at the least, I could keep him from violence for five days, and something might occur in the interim. I found cigars on the desk, and, forcing myself to a degree of calm, I lit one and sat down to think.

Certainly there was no use in getting at his lunatic concept from a quantitative angle. I could waste all ten questions too easily by asking, "Is it greater or less than a million? Is it greater or less than a thousand? Is it greater or less than a hundred?" Impossible to pin the thing by that sort of elimination when it might be a negative number, a fraction or a decimal, or even an imaginary number like the square root of minus one— or, for that matter, any possible combination of these. And that reflection gave me my impulse for the first question; by the time my cigar had been consumed to a tattered stub I had formulated my initial inquiry. Nor had I very long to wait; it was just past six when the door opened.

"Stand away from the door, Dr. Aarons," came the voice of my host. I complied perforce; the madman entered, pushing before him a tea caddy bearing a really respectable meal, complete from bouillon to a bottle of wine. He propelled the cart with his withered left hand; the right brandished the evil automatic.

"I trust you have used your time well," he sneered.

"At least I have my first question," I responded.

"Good, Dr. Aarons! Very good! Let us hear it."

"Well," I continued, "among numbers, expressions of quantity, mathematicians recognize two broad distinctions—two fields in which every possible numerical expression may be classified. These two classifications are known as real numbers on the one hand, including every number both positive and negative, all fractions, decimals, and multiples of these numbers, and on the other hand the class of imaginary numbers, which include all products of operations on the quantity called 'e,' otherwise expressed as the square root of minus one."

"Of course, Dr. Aarons. That is elementary!"

"Now then— is this quantity of yours real or imaginary?"

He beamed with a sinister satisfaction.

"A very fair question, sir! Very fair! And the answer— may it assist you— is that it is either!"

A light seemed to burst in my brain! And student of numbers knows that only one figure is both real and imaginary, the one that marks the point of intersection between the real and imaginary numbergraphs. "I've got it!" The phrase kept running through my mind like a crazy drumbeat! With an effort I kept an appearance of calm.

"Mr. Strawn," I said, "is the quantity you have in mind zero?"

He laughed— a nasty, superior laugh that rasped in my ears.

"It is not, Dr. Aarons! I know as well as you that zero is both a real and imaginary number! Let me call your attention to my answer: I did not say that my concept was both real and imaginary; I said it was either!" He was backing toward the door. "Let me further remind you that you have eight guesses remaining, since I am forced to consider this premature shot in the dark as one chance! Good evening!"

He was gone; I heard the bar outside the door settle into its socket with a thump. I stood in the throes of despair, and cast scarcely a glance at the rather sumptuous repast he had served me, but slumped back into my chair.

It seemed hours before my thoughts were coherent again; actually I never knew the interval, since I did not glance at my watch. However, sooner or later I recovered enough to pour a tumbler of wine and eat a bite of the roast beef; the bouillon was hopelessly cold. And then I settled down to the consideration of my third question.

FROM STRAWN'S several hints in the wording of his terms and the answers to my first and second queries, I tabulated what information I could glean. He had specifically designated a numerical expression; that eliminated the x's and y's of algebraic usage. The quantity was either real or imaginary and was not

zero; well, the square of any imaginary is a real number. If the quantity contained more than one figure, or if an exponent was used, then I felt sure his expression was merely the square of an imaginary; one could consider such a quantity either real or imaginary. A means of determining this by a single question occurred to me. I scribbled a few symbols on a sheet of paper, and then, feeling a sudden and thorough exhaustion, I threw myself on the day-bed and slept. I dreamed Strawn was pushing me into a nightmarish sea of grinning mathematical monsters.

The creaking of the door aroused me. Sunbeams illumined the skylight; I had slept out the night. Strawn entered balancing a tray on his left arm, holding the ever-present weapon in his free hand. He placed a half dozen covered dishes on the tea-cart, removing the remains of the evening meal to his tray.

"A poor appetite, Dr. Aarons," he commented. "You should not permit your anxiety to serve the ends of justice to upset you!" He chuckled with enjoyment of his sarcasm. "No questions yet? No matter; you have until four tomorrow for your next two."

"I have a question," I said, more thoroughly awakened. I rose and spread the sheet of paper on the desk.

"A numerical quantity, Mr. Strawn, can be expressed as an operation on numbers. Thus, instead of writing the numeral '4' one may prefer to express it as a product, such as '2 × 2,' or as a sum, as '3 + 1,' or as a quotient, as '8 ÷ 2' or 8/2 or as a remainder, as '5 - 1.' Or even in other ways— as a square, such as 2^2, or as a root, such as $\sqrt{16}$ or $\sqrt[3]{64}$. All different methods of expressing the single quantity '4.' Now here I have written out the various mathematical symbols of operations; my question is this: Which if any of these symbols is used in the expression you have in mind?"

"Very neatly put, Dr. Aarons! You have succeeded in combining several questions in one." He took the paper from me, spreading it on the desk before him. "This symbol, sir, is the one used." He indicated the first one in my list— the subtraction sign, a simple dash!

And my hopes, to use the triviality of a pun, were dashed as well! For that sign eliminated my carefully thought-out theory of a product or square of imaginaries to form a real number. You can't change imaginary to real by addition or subtraction; it takes multiplication, squaring or division to perform that mathematical magic! Once more I was thoroughly at sea, and for a long time I was unable to marshal my thoughts.

And so the hours dragged into days with the tantalizing slow swiftness that tortures the condemned in a prison death house. I seemed checkmated at every turn; curious paradoxical answers defeated my questions.

My fourth query, "Are there any imaginaries in your quantity?" elicited a cool, definite "No." My fifth, "How many digits are used in this expression?" brought forth an equally definite "Two."

Now there you are! What two digits connected by a minus sign can you name whose remainder is either real and imaginary? "An impossibility," I thought. "This maniac's merely torturing me!" And yet— somehow, Strawn's madness seemed too ingenious, too clever, for such an answer. He was sincere in his perverted search for justice. I'd have sworn to that.

On my sixth question, I had an inspiration! By the terms of our game, Strawn was to answer any question save the direct one, "What is this expression?" I saw a way out! On his next appearance I met him with feverish excitement, barely waiting for his entrance to begin my query.

"Mr. Strawn! Here is a question you are bound by your own rules to answer. Suppose we place an equal sign after your quantity, what number or numbers will complete the equation: What is the quantity equal to?"

WHY was the fiend laughing? Could he squirm out of that poser?

"Very clever, Dr. Aarons. A very clever question. And the answer is— anything!"

I suppose I shouted. "Anything! Anything! Then you're a fraud, and your game's a damnable trickery. There's no such expression!"

"But there is, Doctor! A good mathematician could find it!" And he departed, still laughing.

I spent a sleepless night. Hour after hour I sat at that hateful desk, checking my scraps of information, thinking, trying to remember fragments of all-but-forgotten theories. And I found solutions! Not one, but several. Lord, how I sweated over them! With four questions— two days— left to me, the solution of the problem began to loom very close. The things dinned in my brain; my judgment counseled me to proceed slowly, to check my progress with another question, but my nature was rebelling against the incessant strain. "Stake it all on your last four questions! Ask them all at once, and end this agony one way or the other!"

I thought I saw the answer. Oh, the fiendish, insane cleverness of the man! He had pointed to the minus sign on my list, deliberately misled me, for all the time the symbol had meant the bar of a fraction. Do you see? The two symbols are identical— just a simple dash— but one use means subtraction and the other division! "1 - 1" means zero, but "1/1" means one! And by division his problem could be solved. For there is a quantity that means literally anything, real number or imaginary, and that quantity is "0/0"! Yes, zero divided by zero. You'd think offhand that the answer'd be zero, or perhaps one, but it isn't, not

necessarily. Look at it like this: take the equation "2 × 3 = 6". See? That's another way of saying that two goes into six three times. Now take "0 × 6 = 0." Perfectly correct, isn't it? Well, in that equation zero goes into zero six times! Or "0/0 = 6"! And so on for any number, real or imaginary— zero divided by zero equals anything!

And that's what I figured the fiend had done. Pointed to the minus sign when he meant the bar of a fraction, or division!

He came in grinning at dawn.

"Are your questions ready, Dr. Aarons? I believe you have four remaining."

I looked at him. "Mr. Strawn, is your concept zero divided by zero?"

He grinned. "No, sir, it is not!"

I wasn't disheartened. There was just one other symbol I had been thinking of that would meet the requirement— one other possibility. My eighth question followed. "Then is it infinity divided by infinity?"

The grin widened. "It is not, Dr. Aarons."

I was a little panicky then! The end loomed awfully near! There was one way to find out if the thing was fraudulent or not; I used my ninth question:

"Mr. Strawn, when you designated the dash as the mathematical symbol used in your expression, did you mean it as the bar of a fraction or as the sign of subtraction?"

"As the subtraction sign, Dr. Aarons. You have one more question. Will you wait until tomorrow to ask it?"

The fiend was grinning in huge enjoyment. Thoroughly confident, he was, in the intricacies of his insane game. I hesitated in a torture of frenzied indecision. The appalling prospect of another agonized night of doubts decided me.

"I'll ask it now, Mr. Strawn!"

It had to be right! There weren't any other possibilities; I'd exhausted all of them in hour after hour of miserable conjecture!

"Is the expression— the one you're thinking of— infinity minus infinity?"

It was! I knew it by the madman's glare of amazed disappointment.

"The devil must have told you!" he shrieked. I think there were flecks of froth on his lips. He lowered the gun in his hand as I edged toward the door; he made no move to stop me, but stood in a sort of desolate silence until I gained the top of the stairway. Then—

"Wait a minute!" he screamed. "You'll tell them! Wait just a minute, Dr. Aarons!"

I was down the stairs in two leaps, and tugging at the door. Strawn came after me, his gun leveled. I heard it crash as the door opened and I slipped out into a welcome daylight.

Yes, I reported him. The police got him as he was slipping away and dragged him before an alienist. Crazy, but his story was true; he had been mangled in an experimental laboratory explosion.

OH, the problem? Don't you see? Infinity is the greatest expression of number possible— a number greater than any conceivable. Figure it out like this:

The mathematician's symbol for infinity is a tipsy eight— so: ∞.

Well, take the question, ∞ + 6 = ∞. That's true, because you can't add anything to infinity that will make it any greater than it is. See? It's the greatest possible number already. Well then, just by transposition, ∞ - ∞ = 6. And so on; the same system applies to any conceivable number, real or imaginary.

There you are! Infinity minus itself may equal any quantity, absolutely any number, real or imaginary, from zero to infinity. No, there was nothing wrong with Court Strawn's mathematics.

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11: Gifford Pinchot's Battle with a Somnambulist

Bob Davis

Robert Hobart Davis, 1869-1942

Argosy Allstory Weekly, 29 Sep 1928

GIVE EAR, my hearties, to a tale of the sea along the Jersey coast, a tale of dark deeds and black night, a narrative that will make the blood run cold and chill the marrow in the bones of men.

About five years ago, when the tide runners were coming into New Jersey waters from the south during the month of August, a small party of intrepid fishermen consisting of the Hon. Gifford Pinchot, former Governor of Pennsylvania; Van Campen Heilner, the ichthyologist who has recently been testing his theories about the appetites of sharks in Bahamian waters; Eltinge F. Warner, publisher of *Field and Stream*; Hy Watson, the illustrator; the bucko mate, Captain Bill Richmond, and the writer, set sail to enjoy an angle.

We tore put of the port of Spring Lake with a full cargo of delicatessen, surf casting tackle and the butts flooding with gasoline. 'Twas a fair day and a merry one. Down the coast we chugged twelve miles an hour in the good ship *Nepenthe*, named for that rare potation distilled on Mount Olympus.

While the *Nepenthe* plunged along in the blue waters of the Atlantic we rigged tackle and laid our wagers as to who would take the first fish, the largest fish and the most fish.

The soothing motion of the cradling sea lulled us finally into silence. Captain Bill broke out the bunks and invited us to turn in.

Mr. Pinchot, being the guest of honor, was forced into a lower berth. I took the other lower without being forced.

Heilner and Warner drew the uppers and Hy Watson went on deck with all the loose pillows on board. Just before I climbed into the hay I observed Captain Bill beckoning to me through the forward ventilator.

"There is something I ought to tell you," he said in a low voice as I emerged. "Heilner is a sleep walker. Watch him. He may be quiet all night, and then again he may not. I never can tell when he is going to cut loose and do one of his stunts. If he starts anything just speak to him quietly and put him back in bed."

"Where can he walk on this craft?" I asked, bewildered.

"Oh, he can walk in a cigar box. I've seen him travel two miles in a bathtub. He's a bird when he starts. Don't tell the other guests. I'll keep my eye peeled on the deck and you pipe him in the cabin. , Nothing serious ever happens; just a queer stunt, that's all. Mum's the word."

"Does he talk in his sleep?"

"Sometimes. But what he says never means anything," replied Captain Bill.

With that dark secret in my possession I retired almost instantly and the chorus of snoring set in. Charged with the duties of a night watchman, I resisted the inclination to pass away. Through the porthole I discerned numerous dancing stars passing to and fro as the *Nepenthe* rose and fell with the movement of the sea. "Let him walk," I soliloquized. Good night. Hypnotized, I fell asleep.

It may have been half an hour or an hour afterward when I was awakened by a yell from the upper bunk.

"H-o-l-d me! H-o-l-d me! Here— I come!"

Over the edge of Van's bunk I descried two pyjama clad legs dangling.

"Hold who?" answered Pinchot in a voice that seemed a mile away.

"Heilner!" I shouted just at the moment the somnambulist-ichthyologist came diving from his dreams to the cabin floor. The moment he struck, the lithe conservationist rolled from his own bunk and began to twine his person around Heilner in the manner of an octopus lassoing a jellyfish. It was a swift and terrible embrace, a complete, man sized catch-as-catch-can strangle hold beginning at Van's neck and terminating at his ankles. 'The long arms and the longer legs of Mr. Pinchot wrapped the sleepwalker in their meshes. No sound save the strained breathing of two gents in a death struggle broke the stillness. In the midst of that appalling drama Captain Bill appeared with a flashlight.

"What's up?" queried the captain.

"He asked for it," said Mr. Pinchot, rising and rearranging his disheveled pyjamas. "Asked for it twice."

Van lay flat on his back, breathing slightly, apparently asleep.

"Don't wake him up," cautioned Captain Bill. "Let's boost him back in his bunk. He'll never know about it." Warner and Watson woke up in time to help the sleepwalker back into his aerie.

I have not heretofore expressed myself definitely on the point, but it is a safe bet that from 2 A.M., when we put him back, until daybreak, Van Campen Heilner, F.R.G.S., owner and skipper of the gasoline launch *Nepenthe* was actually insensible.

When he came to in the morning he remarked that he had had a bad dream. "I seemed'to be walking along in front of a skyscraper, when, without warning, the whole structure from the third to the twenty-first story fell on me. Do I look a bit ratty?"

"Yes, Van, all of that," responded Warner. "But," quoting the mild Mr. Pinchot, "you asked for it."

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12: The Man With the Lying Eye

Bob Davis

Argosy All-Story Weekly 1 Sep 1927

ONCE UPON A TIME in the County of Douglas, State of Nevada, an honest German farmer who had bought for himself several hundred acres of sagebrush land upon which he was prepared to settle down for the balance of his life. He rounded up a score of Piute Indians at one dollar a day to clear the scrub away with grub hoes and prepare it for the plow. Richer soil does not exist anywhere in the Union and once cleared and planted wealth awaits its conqueror.

The Piute Indian, however, is not so easy to master. He toils not, neither does he spin; and so at the end of an experimental month with the red man as a farm hand the honest Teutonic agriculturist rode into town, tied his horse in front of the Magnolia Saloon and after five or six drinks hand high fell to complaining.

Lyman Frisbie, the bartender, distinguished as the only man in the county who possessed a glass eye, listened attentively at first, as becomes a servitor to cash customers, and then spoke his mind:

"You are right, Herman; Piutes are bums. They are sure enough sleepers. I could have told you that. What you need is a foreman who can put the fear of the devil into them. And that's me." Mr. Frisbie fixed his one good dull eye and his one bad glass eye on the farmer leaning across the bar.

"You can do someding mit 'em? Ya," answered the doubting Herman. "How much you charge, Herr Frisbie, come boss my ranch? Speak it."

"I can't see my way clear to take over the control of your place," said Mr. Frisbie in a confidential tone of voice, "but for a little matter of one hundred dollars in United States gold coin I will guarantee to make twenty Piute slobs grub ten acres of sagebrush a day for ten days, which is a matter of one hundred acres— and no questions asked."

"Ven you gommense, Mr. Frisbie? I took dot proposition!" shouted Herman, slapping his hand on the wet bar.

"Eight o'clock morning. You have twenty strong bucks ready and I'll be there in the cool of the morning. Just tell 'em I'm the boss and leave the rest to me. I'll make a vacation of this job."

Promptly on time Mr. Frisbie arrived in a buckboard, accompanied by his critical glass eye. He was presented formally to the Piutes as the new pain in their necks.

Beckoning the toilers to grab the implements of torture and fall in behind, Lyman led the little company off to the uncleared acres until he arrived at a

pine stump sawed off level and standing about five feet high. This he mounted and requested the red men to gather round and "hear something," as follows, to wit:

"Listen, Injun man, paleface know everything, all same big chief Washington. White man want Injun man grubbum sagebrush so farmer ketchum hay, ketchum wheat, ketchum corn. Injun man no foolum paleface.

"Me know everything, hear everything, see everything. Me big chief, big boss. Heap smart, plenty ear, plenty eye. You watchum me. I watchum you."

With this lucid burst of oratory Mr. Frisbie, the talented bartender of the Magnolia Saloon, began his vacation by stepping down from the pine stump and removing his glass right eye from its socket. Between his thumb and forefinger he held the glistening object aloft and in a slow but impressive voice announced to the terrified Piutes this self-evident truth:

"Me leavum eye here to watch Injun man. You ketchum grub hoe and go work damn quick."

With that Mr. Frisbie turned on his heel, strolled over to the willow grove on the river bank and promptly went to sleep, his wise head pillowed among the wild flowers.

Twenty terrified redskins, glancing backward at the gleaming and all seeing glass eye of the omnipotent paleface, sailed into the sagebrush bent on a campaign of extermination.

Strengthened by repose the ex-bartender of the Magnolia arose from the lush grass and returned at high noon te his watchful glass éye, where he summoned his wards with a series of war whoops.

"Injun man go catchum grub," said he in guttural tones, returning the optical masterpiece to its socket. And so to luncheon. He knocked them off again at five for the day, and took his eye to bed with him, not forgetting to put in a call for all hands on the morrow at the old pine stump.

The land began to clear of the scrub and the future looked rosy. In the meantime Lyman Frisbie put in a supply of first-class sleep to the murmur of a friendly river.

On the afternoon of the fifth day the farmer stepped out on his veranda and swept his eyes over the partly cleared land.

All movement had ceased. There was not a toiler in sight and the hot sun beat down on a scene of death-like inaction.

Something had gone wrong with the Frisbie System of Manual Labor. Herman made a cautious detour around the fields and found Mr. Frisbie snoring the afternoon away, his remaining good eye closed in peaceful slumber.

"Vat is der matter mit der Indians?" he asked, rousing the sleeping slave driver. Mr. Frisbie didn't know, but would have a look. With his employer trailing in his footsteps he crept to the top of an elevation and scanned the quiet scene.

Scattered over the field twenty Piutes snoozed their heads off.

Mr. Frisbie, reverting to the vernacular of the pub, began to swear.

A sudden palsy halted his flood of speech, while his solitary natural eye almost popped out into space. On the pine stump he saw not the artificial orb that had made vassals of the noble Piute, but a rusty tomato can.

Under the discarded tin container, sightless and a prisoner, reposed Mr. Lyman Frisbie's glass eye. At the base of the stump, flat on his back, reposed the intrepid buck Indian— who had sneaked up on the "all seeing" ornament and snuffed out its vision. With a cry of rage Mr: Frisbie struck the can violently away and with it went the glass eye, shattered.

TWENTY Piutes, the sleep still in their eyes, gathered about the pine pedestal and witnessed Mr, Frisbie's downfall.

To this day he is referred to by the Piutes as "the man with the lying eye."

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13: The Door in the Wall

H. G. Wells

1866-1946

The Daily Chronicle, 14 July 1906

ONE CONFIDENTIAL evening, not three months ago, Lionel Wallace told me this story of the Door in the Wall. And at the time I thought that so far as he was concerned it was a true story.

He told it me with such a direct simplicity of conviction that I could not do otherwise than believe in him. But in the morning, in my own flat, I woke to a different atmosphere, and as I lay in bed and recalled the things he had told me, stripped of the glamour of his earnest slow voice, denuded of the focussed shaded table light, the shadowy atmosphere that wrapped about him and the pleasant bright things, the dessert and glasses and napery of the dinner we had shared, making them for the time a bright little world quite cut off from every-day realities, I saw it all as frankly incredible. “He was mystifying!” I said, and then: “How well he did it!..... It isn’t quite the thing I should have expected him, of all people, to do well.”

Afterwards, as I sat up in bed and sipped my morning tea, I found myself trying to account for the flavour of reality that perplexed me in his impossible reminiscences, by supposing they did in some way suggest, present, convey— I hardly know which word to use— experiences it was otherwise impossible to tell.

Well, I don’t resort to that explanation now. I have got over my intervening doubts. I believe now, as I believed at the moment of telling, that Wallace did to the very best of his ability strip the truth of his secret for me. But whether he himself saw, or only thought he saw, whether he himself was the possessor of an inestimable privilege, or the victim of a fantastic dream, I cannot pretend to guess. Even the facts of his death, which ended my doubts forever, throw no light on that. That much the reader must judge for himself.

I forget now what chance comment or criticism of mine moved so reticent a man to confide in me. He was, I think, defending himself against an imputation of slackness and unreliability I had made in relation to a great public movement in which he had disappointed me. But he plunged suddenly. “I have” he said, “a preoccupation—”

“I know,” he went on, after a pause that he devoted to the study of his cigar ash, “I have been negligent. The fact is— it isn’t a case of ghosts or apparitions— but— it’s an odd thing to tell of, Redmond— I am haunted. I am haunted by something—that rather takes the light out of things, that fills me with longings....”

He paused, checked by that English shyness that so often overcomes us when we would speak of moving or grave or beautiful things. “You were at Saint Athelstan’s all through,” he said, and for a moment that seemed to me quite irrelevant. “Well”— and he paused. Then very haltingly at first, but afterwards more easily, he began to tell of the thing that was hidden in his life, the haunting memory of a beauty and a happiness that filled his heart with insatiable longings that made all the interests and spectacle of worldly life seem dull and tedious and vain to him.

Now that I have the clue to it, the thing seems written visibly in his face. I have a photograph in which that look of detachment has been caught and intensified. It reminds me of what a woman once said of him— a woman who had loved him greatly. “Suddenly,” she said, “the interest goes out of him. He forgets you. He doesn’t care a rap for you— under his very nose....”

Yet the interest was not always out of him, and when he was holding his attention to a thing Wallace could contrive to be an extremely successful man. His career, indeed, is set with successes. He left me behind him long ago; he soared up over my head, and cut a figure in the world that I couldn’t cut— anyhow. He was still a year short of forty, and they say now that he would have been in office and very probably in the new Cabinet if he had lived. At school he always beat me without effort— as it were by nature. We were at school together at Saint Athelstan’s College in West Kensington for almost all our school time. He came into the school as my co-equal, but he left far above me, in a blaze of scholarships and brilliant performance. Yet I think I made a fair average running. And it was at school I heard first of the Door in the Wall— that I was to hear of a second time only a month before his death.

To him at least the Door in the Wall was a real door leading through a real wall to immortal realities. Of that I am now quite assured.

And it came into his life early, when he was a little fellow between five and six. I remember how, as he sat making his confession to me with a slow gravity, he reasoned and reckoned the date of it. “There was,” he said, “a crimson Virginia creeper in it— all one bright uniform crimson in a clear amber sunshine against a white wall. That came into the impression somehow, though I don’t clearly remember how, and there were horse-chestnut leaves upon the clean pavement outside the green door. They were blotched yellow and green, you know, not brown nor dirty, so that they must have been new fallen. I take it that means October. I look out for horse-chestnut leaves every year, and I ought to know.

“If I’m right in that, I was about five years and four months old.”

He was, he said, rather a precocious little boy— he learned to talk at an abnormally early age, and he was so sane and “old-fashioned,” as people say,

that he was permitted an amount of initiative that most children scarcely attain by seven or eight. His mother died when he was born, and he was under the less vigilant and authoritative care of a nursery governess. His father was a stern, preoccupied lawyer, who gave him little attention, and expected great things of him. For all his brightness he found life a little grey and dull I think. And one day he wandered.

He could not recall the particular neglect that enabled him to get away, nor the course he took among the West Kensington roads. All that had faded among the incurable blurs of memory. But the white wall and the green door stood out quite distinctly.

As his memory of that remote childish experience ran, he did at the very first sight of that door experience a peculiar emotion, an attraction, a desire to get to the door and open it and walk in. And at the same time he had the clearest conviction that either it was unwise or it was wrong of him— he could not tell which— to yield to this attraction. He insisted upon it as a curious thing that he knew from the very beginning— unless memory has played him the queerest trick— that the door was unfastened, and that he could go in as he chose.

I seem to see the figure of that little boy, drawn and repelled. And it was very clear in his mind, too, though why it should be so was never explained, that his father would be very angry if he went through that door.

Wallace described all these moments of hesitation to me with the utmost particularity. He went right past the door, and then, with his hands in his pockets, and making an infantile attempt to whistle, strolled right along beyond the end of the wall. There he recalls a number of mean, dirty shops, and particularly that of a plumber and decorator, with a dusty disorder of earthenware pipes, sheet lead ball taps, pattern books of wall paper, and tins of enamel. He stood pretending to examine these things, and coveting, passionately desiring the green door.

Then, he said, he had a gust of emotion. He made a run for it, lest hesitation should grip him again, he went plump with outstretched hand through the green door and let it slam behind him. And so, in a trice, he came into the garden that has haunted all his life.

It was very difficult for Wallace to give me his full sense of that garden into which he came.

There was something in the very air of it that exhilarated, that gave one a sense of lightness and good happening and well being; there was something in the sight of it that made all its colour clean and perfect and subtly luminous. In the instant of coming into it one was exquisitely glad— as only in rare

moments and when one is young and joyful one can be glad in this world. And everything was beautiful there....

Wallace mused before he went on telling me. “You see,” he said, with the doubtful inflection of a man who pauses at incredible things, “there were two great panthers there... Yes, spotted panthers. And I was not afraid. There was a long wide path with marble-edged flower borders on either side, and these two huge velvety beasts were playing there with a ball. One looked up and came towards me, a little curious as it seemed. It came right up to me, rubbed its soft round ear very gently against the small hand I held out and purred. It was, I tell you, an enchanted garden. I know. And the size? Oh! it stretched far and wide, this way and that. I believe there were hills far away. Heaven knows where West Kensington had suddenly got to. And somehow it was just like coming home.

“You know, in the very moment the door swung to behind me, I forgot the road with its fallen chestnut leaves, its cabs and tradesmen’s carts, I forgot the sort of gravitational pull back to the discipline and obedience of home, I forgot all hesitations and fear, forgot discretion, forgot all the intimate realities of this life. I became in a moment a very glad and wonder-happy little boy— in another world. It was a world with a different quality, a warmer, more penetrating and mellower light, with a faint clear gladness in its air, and wisps of sun-touched cloud in the blueness of its sky. And before me ran this long wide path, invitingly, with weedless beds on either side, rich with untended flowers, and these two great panthers. I put my little hands fearlessly on their soft fur, and caressed their round ears and the sensitive corners under their ears, and played with them, and it was as though they welcomed me home. There was a keen sense of home-coming in my mind, and when presently a tall, fair girl appeared in the pathway and came to meet me, smiling, and said Well?’ to me, and lifted me, and kissed me, and put me down, and led me by the hand, there was no amazement, but only an impression of delightful rightness, of being reminded of happy things that had in some strange way been overlooked. There were broad steps, I remember, that came into view between spikes of delphinium, and up these we went to a great avenue between very old and shady dark trees. All down this avenue, you know, between the red chapped stems, were marble seats of honour and statuary, and very tame and friendly white doves....

“And along this avenue my girl-friend led me, looking down— I recall the pleasant lines, the finely-modelled chin of her sweet kind face— asking me questions in a soft, agreeable voice, and telling me things, pleasant things I know, though what they were I was never able to recall... And presently a little Capuchin monkey, very clean, with a fur of ruddy brown and kindly hazel eyes,

came down a tree to us and ran beside me, looking up at me and grinning, and presently leapt to my shoulder. So we went on our way in great happiness....”

He paused.

“Go on,” I said.

“I remember little things. We passed an old man musing among laurels, I remember, and a place gay with paroquets, and came through a broad shaded colonnade to a spacious cool palace, full of pleasant fountains, full of beautiful things, full of the quality and promise of heart’s desire. And there were many things and many people, some that still seem to stand out clearly and some that are a little vague, but all these people were beautiful and kind. In some way— I don’t know how— it was conveyed to me that they all were kind to me, glad to have me there, and filling me with gladness by their gestures, by the touch of their hands, by the welcome and love in their eyes. Yes—”

He mused for awhile. “Playmates I found there. That was very much to me, because I was a lonely little boy. They played delightful games in a grass-covered court where there was a sun-dial set about with flowers. And as one played one loved....

“But— it’s odd— there’s a gap in my memory. I don’t remember the games we played. I never remembered. Afterwards, as a child, I spent long hours trying, even with tears, to recall the form of that happiness. I wanted to play it all over again— in my nursery— by myself. No! All I remember is the happiness and two dear playfellows who were most with me.... Then presently came a sombre dark woman, with a grave, pale face and dreamy eyes, a sombre woman wearing a soft long robe of pale purple, who carried a book and beckoned and took me aside with her into a gallery above a hall— though my playmates were loth to have me go, and ceased their game and stood watching as I was carried away. ‘Come back to us!’ they cried. ‘Come back to us soon!’ I looked up at her face, but she heeded them not at all. Her face was very gentle and grave. She took me to a seat in the gallery, and I stood beside her, ready to look at her book as she opened it upon her knee. The pages fell open. She pointed, and I looked, marvelling, for in the living pages of that book I saw myself; it was a story about myself, and in it were all the things that had happened to me since ever I was born....

“It was wonderful to me, because the pages of that book were not pictures, you understand, but realities.”

Wallace paused gravely— looked at me doubtfully.

“Go on,” I said. “I understand.”

“They were realities— yes, they must have been; people moved and things came and went in them; my dear mother, whom I had near forgotten; then my father, stern and upright, the servants, the nursery, all the familiar things of

home. Then the front door and the busy streets, with traffic to and fro: I looked and marvelled, and looked half doubtfully again into the woman's face and turned the pages over, skipping this and that, to see more of this book, and more, and so at last I came to myself hovering and hesitating outside the green door in the long white wall, and felt again the conflict and the fear.

" 'And next?' I cried, and would have turned on, but the cool hand of the grave woman delayed me.

" 'Next?' I insisted, and struggled gently with her hand, pulling up her fingers with all my childish strength, and as she yielded and the page came over she bent down upon me like a shadow and kissed my brow.

"But the page did not show the enchanted garden, nor the panthers, nor the girl who had led me by the hand, nor the playfellows who had been so loth to let me go. It showed a long grey street in West Kensington, on that chill hour of afternoon before the lamps are lit, and I was there, a wretched little figure, weeping aloud, for all that I could do to restrain myself, and I was weeping because I could not return to my dear play-fellows who had called after me, 'Come back to us! Come back to us soon!' I was there. This was no page in a book, but harsh reality; that enchanted place and the restraining hand of the grave mother at whose knee I stood had gone— whither have they gone?"

He halted again, and remained for a time, staring into the fire.

"Oh! the wretchedness of that return!" he murmured.

"Well?" I said after a minute or so.

"Poor little wretch I was— brought back to this grey world again! As I realised the fulness of what had happened to me, I gave way to quite ungovernable grief. And the shame and humiliation of that public weeping and my disgraceful homecoming remain with me still. I see again the benevolent-looking old gentleman in gold spectacles who stopped and spoke to me— prodding me first with his umbrella. 'Poor little chap,' said he; 'and are you lost then?'— and me a London boy of five and more! And he must needs bring in a kindly young policeman and make a crowd of me, and so march me home. Sobbing, conspicuous and frightened, I came from the enchanted garden to the steps of my father's house.

"That is as well as I can remember my vision of that garden— the garden that haunts me still. Of course, I can convey nothing of that indescribable quality of translucent unreality, that difference from the common things of experience that hung about it all; but that— that is what happened. If it was a dream, I am sure it was a day-time and altogether extraordinary dream.... H'm!— naturally there followed a terrible questioning, by my aunt, my father, the nurse, the governess— everyone....

"I tried to tell them, and my father gave me my first thrashing for telling lies. When afterwards I tried to tell my aunt, she punished me again for my wicked persistence. Then, as I said, everyone was forbidden to listen to me, to hear a word about it. Even my fairy tale books were taken away from me for a time—because I was 'too imaginative.' Eh? Yes, they did that! My father belonged to the old school.... And my story was driven back upon myself. I whispered it to my pillow— my pillow that was often damp and salt to my whispering lips with childish tears. And I added always to my official and less fervent prayers this one heartfelt request: 'Please God I may dream of the garden. Oh! take me back to my garden! Take me back to my garden!'

"I dreamt often of the garden. I may have added to it, I may have changed it; I do not know.... All this you understand is an attempt to reconstruct from fragmentary memories a very early experience. Between that and the other consecutive memories of my boyhood there is a gulf. A time came when it seemed impossible I should ever speak of that wonder glimpse again."

I asked an obvious question.

"No," he said. "I don't remember that I ever attempted to find my way back to the garden in those early years. This seems odd to me now, but I think that very probably a closer watch was kept on my movements after this misadventure to prevent my going astray. No, it wasn't until you knew me that I tried for the garden again. And I believe there was a period— incredible as it seems now— when I forgot the garden altogether— when I was about eight or nine it may have been. Do you remember me as a kid at Saint Athelstan's?"

"Rather!"

"I didn't show any signs did I in those days of having a secret dream?"

ii

HE LOOKED up with a sudden smile.

"Did you ever play North-West Passage with me?.... No, of course you didn't come my way!"

"It was the sort of game," he went on, "that every imaginative child plays all day. The idea was the discovery of a North-West Passage to school. The way to school was plain enough; the game consisted in finding some way that wasn't plain, starting off ten minutes early in some almost hopeless direction, and working one's way round through unaccustomed streets to my goal. And one day I got entangled among some rather low-class streets on the other side of Campden Hill, and I began to think that for once the game would be against me and that I should get to school late. I tried rather desperately a street that seemed a cul de sac, and found a passage at the end. I hurried through that

with renewed hope. ‘I shall do it yet,’ I said, and passed a row of frowsy little shops that were inexplicably familiar to me, and behold! there was my long white wall and the green door that led to the enchanted garden!

“The thing whacked upon me suddenly. Then, after all, that garden, that wonderful garden, wasn’t a dream!”....

He paused.

“I suppose my second experience with the green door marks the world of difference there is between the busy life of a schoolboy and the infinite leisure of a child. Anyhow, this second time I didn’t for a moment think of going in straight away. You see... For one thing my mind was full of the idea of getting to school in time— set on not breaking my record for punctuality. I must surely have felt some little desire at least to try the door— yes, I must have felt that.... But I seem to remember the attraction of the door mainly as another obstacle to my overmastering determination to get to school. I was immediately interested by this discovery I had made, of course— I went on with my mind full of it— but I went on. It didn’t check me. I ran past tugging out my watch, found I had ten minutes still to spare, and then I was going downhill into familiar surroundings. I got to school, breathless, it is true, and wet with perspiration, but in time. I can remember hanging up my coat and hat... Went right by it and left it behind me. Odd, eh?”

He looked at me thoughtfully. “Of course, I didn’t know then that it wouldn’t always be there. School boys have limited imaginations. I suppose I thought it was an awfully jolly thing to have it there, to know my way back to it, but there was the school tugging at me. I expect I was a good deal distraught and inattentive that morning, recalling what I could of the beautiful strange people I should presently see again. Oddly enough I had no doubt in my mind that they would be glad to see me... Yes, I must have thought of the garden that morning just as a jolly sort of place to which one might resort in the interludes of a strenuous scholastic career.

“I didn’t go that day at all. The next day was a half holiday, and that may have weighed with me. Perhaps, too, my state of inattention brought down impositions upon me and docked the margin of time necessary for the detour. I don’t know. What I do know is that in the meantime the enchanted garden was so much upon my mind that I could not keep it to myself.

“I told— What was his name?— a ferrety-looking youngster we used to call Squiff.”

“Young Hopkins,” said I.

“Hopkins it was. I did not like telling him, I had a feeling that in some way it was against the rules to tell him, but I did. He was walking part of the way home with me; he was talkative, and if we had not talked about the enchanted

garden we should have talked of something else, and it was intolerable to me to think about any other subject. So I blabbed.

"Well, he told my secret. The next day in the play interval I found myself surrounded by half a dozen bigger boys, half teasing and wholly curious to hear more of the enchanted garden. There was that big Fawcett— you remember him?— and Carnaby and Morley Reynolds. You weren't there by any chance? No, I think I should have remembered if you were....

"A boy is a creature of odd feelings. I was, I really believe, in spite of my secret self-disgust, a little flattered to have the attention of these big fellows. I remember particularly a moment of pleasure caused by the praise of Crawshaw— you remember Crawshaw major, the son of Crawshaw the composer?— who said it was the best lie he had ever heard. But at the same time there was a really painful undertow of shame at telling what I felt was indeed a sacred secret. That beast Fawcett made a joke about the girl in green—."

Wallace's voice sank with the keen memory of that shame. "I pretended not to hear," he said. "Well, then Carnaby suddenly called me a young liar and disputed with me when I said the thing was true. I said I knew where to find the green door, could lead them all there in ten minutes. Carnaby became outrageously virtuous, and said I'd have to— and bear out my words or suffer. Did you ever have Carnaby twist your arm? Then perhaps you'll understand how it went with me. I swore my story was true. There was nobody in the school then to save a chap from Carnaby though Crawshaw put in a word or so. Carnaby had got his game. I grew excited and red-eared, and a little frightened, I behaved altogether like a silly little chap, and the outcome of it all was that instead of starting alone for my enchanted garden, I led the way presently— cheeks flushed, ears hot, eyes smarting, and my soul one burning misery and shame—for a party of six mocking, curious and threatening school-fellows.

"We never found the white wall and the green door..."

"You mean?—"

"I mean I couldn't find it. I would have found it if I could.

"And afterwards when I could go alone I couldn't find it. I never found it. I seem now to have been always looking for it through my school-boy days, but I've never come upon it again."

"Did the fellows—make it disagreeable?"

"Beastly.... Carnaby held a council over me for wanton lying. I remember how I sneaked home and upstairs to hide the marks of my blubbering. But when I cried myself to sleep at last it wasn't for Carnaby, but for the garden, for the beautiful afternoon I had hoped for, for the sweet friendly women and

the waiting playfellows and the game I had hoped to learn again, that beautiful forgotten game....

"I believed firmly that if I had not told—.... I had bad times after that—crying at night and wool-gathering by day. For two terms I slackened and had bad reports. Do you remember? Of course you would! It was you— your beating me in mathematics that brought me back to the grind again."

iii

FOR A TIME my friend stared silently into the red heart of the fire. Then he said: "I never saw it again until I was seventeen.

"It leapt upon me for the third time— as I was driving to Paddington on my way to Oxford and a scholarship. I had just one momentary glimpse. I was leaning over the apron of my hansom smoking a cigarette, and no doubt thinking myself no end of a man of the world, and suddenly there was the door, the wall, the dear sense of unforgettable and still attainable things.

"We clattered by— I too taken by surprise to stop my cab until we were well past and round a corner. Then I had a queer moment, a double and divergent movement of my will: I tapped the little door in the roof of the cab, and brought my arm down to pull out my watch. 'Yes, sir!' said the cabman, smartly. 'Er— well— it's nothing,' I cried. 'My mistake! We haven't much time! Go on!' and he went on...

"I got my scholarship. And the night after I was told of that I sat over my fire in my little upper room, my study, in my father's house, with his praise— his rare praise— and his sound counsels ringing in my ears, and I smoked my favourite pipe— the formidable bulldog of adolescence— and thought of that door in the long white wall. 'If I had stopped,' I thought, 'I should have missed my scholarship, I should have missed Oxford— muddled all the fine career before me! I begin to see things better!' I fell musing deeply, but I did not doubt then this career of mine was a thing that merited sacrifice.

"Those dear friends and that clear atmosphere seemed very sweet to me, very fine, but remote. My grip was fixing now upon the world. I saw another door opening— the door of my career."

He stared again into the fire. Its red lights picked out a stubborn strength in his face for just one flickering moment, and then it vanished again.

"Well", he said and sighed, "I have served that career. I have done— much work, much hard work. But I have dreamt of the enchanted garden a thousand dreams, and seen its door, or at least glimpsed its door, four times since then. Yes—four times. For a while this world was so bright and interesting, seemed so full of meaning and opportunity that the half-effaced charm of the garden

was by comparison gentle and remote. Who wants to pat panthers on the way to dinner with pretty women and distinguished men? I came down to London from Oxford, a man of bold promise that I have done something to redeem. Something— and yet there have been disappointments....

"Twice I have been in love— I will not dwell on that— but once, as I went to someone who, I know, doubted whether I dared to come, I took a short cut at a venture through an unfrequented road near Earl's Court, and so happened on a white wall and a familiar green door. 'Odd!' said I to myself, 'but I thought this place was on Campden Hill. It's the place I never could find somehow— like counting Stonehenge— the place of that queer day dream of mine.' And I went by it intent upon my purpose. It had no appeal to me that afternoon.

"I had just a moment's impulse to try the door, three steps aside were needed at the most— though I was sure enough in my heart that it would open to me— and then I thought that doing so might delay me on the way to that appointment in which I thought my honour was involved. Afterwards I was sorry for my punctuality— I might at least have peeped in I thought, and waved a hand to those panthers, but I knew enough by this time not to seek again belatedly that which is not found by seeking. Yes, that time made me very sorry....

"Years of hard work after that and never a sight of the door. It's only recently it has come back to me. With it there has come a sense as though some thin tarnish had spread itself over my world. I began to think of it as a sorrowful and bitter thing that I should never see that door again. Perhaps I was suffering a little from overwork— perhaps it was what I've heard spoken of as the feeling of forty. I don't know. But certainly the keen brightness that makes effort easy has gone out of things recently, and that just at a time with all these new political developments— when I ought to be working. Odd, isn't it? But I do begin to find life toilsome, its rewards, as I come near them, cheap. I began a little while ago to want the garden quite badly. Yes—and I've seen it three times."

"The garden?"

"No— the door! And I haven't gone in!"

He leaned over the table to me, with an enormous sorrow in his voice as he spoke. "Thrice I have had my chance— thrice! If ever that door offers itself to me again, I swore, I will go in out of this dust and heat, out of this dry glitter of vanity, out of these toilsome futilities. I will go and never return. This time I will stay.... I swore it and when the time came— I didn't go.

"Three times in one year have I passed that door and failed to enter. Three times in the last year.

"The first time was on the night of the snatch division on the Tenants' Redemption Bill, on which the Government was saved by a majority of three. You remember? No one on our side— perhaps very few on the opposite side— expected the end that night. Then the debate collapsed like eggshells. I and Hotchkiss were dining with his cousin at Brentford, we were both unpaired, and we were called up by telephone, and set off at once in his cousin's motor. We got in barely in time, and on the way we passed my wall and door— livid in the moonlight, blotched with hot yellow as the glare of our lamps lit it, but unmistakable. 'My God!' cried I. 'What?' said Hotchkiss. 'Nothing!' I answered, and the moment passed.

" 'I've made a great sacrifice,' I told the whip as I got in. They all have,' he said, and hurried by.

"I do not see how I could have done otherwise then. And the next occasion was as I rushed to my father's bedside to bid that stern old man farewell. Then, too, the claims of life were imperative. But the third time was different; it happened a week ago. It fills me with hot remorse to recall it. I was with Gurker and Ralphs— it's no secret now you know that I've had my talk with Gurker. We had been dining at Frobisher's, and the talk had become intimate between us. The question of my place in the reconstructed ministry lay always just over the boundary of the discussion. Yes— yes. That's all settled. It needn't be talked about yet, but there's no reason to keep a secret from you.... Yes— thanks! thanks! But let me tell you my story.

"Then, on that night things were very much in the air. My position was a very delicate one. I was keenly anxious to get some definite word from Gurker, but was hampered by Ralphs' presence. I was using the best power of my brain to keep that light and careless talk not too obviously directed to the point that concerns me. I had to. Ralphs' behaviour since has more than justified my caution.... Ralphs, I knew, would leave us beyond the Kensington High Street, and then I could surprise Gurker by a sudden frankness. One has sometimes to resort to these little devices.... And then it was that in the margin of my field of vision I became aware once more of the white wall, the green door before us down the road.

"We passed it talking. I passed it. I can still see the shadow of Gurker's marked profile, his opera hat tilted forward over his prominent nose, the many folds of his neck wrap going before my shadow and Ralphs' as we sauntered past.

"I passed within twenty inches of the door. 'If I say good-night to them, and go in,' I asked myself, 'what will happen?' And I was all a-tingle for that word with Gurker.

"I could not answer that question in the tangle of my other problems. 'They will think me mad,' I thought. 'And suppose I vanish now!— Amazing disappearance of a prominent politician!' That weighed with me. A thousand inconceivably petty worldlinesses weighed with me in that crisis."

Then he turned on me with a sorrowful smile, and, speaking slowly; "Here I am!" he said.

"Here I am!" he repeated, "and my chance has gone from me. Three times in one year the door has been offered me— the door that goes into peace, into delight, into a beauty beyond dreaming, a kindness no man on earth can know. And I have rejected it, Redmond, and it has gone—"

"How do you know?"

"I know. I know. I am left now to work it out, to stick to the tasks that held me so strongly when my moments came. You say, I have success— this vulgar, tawdry, irksome, envied thing. I have it." He had a walnut in his big hand. "If that was my success," he said, and crushed it, and held it out for me to see.

"Let me tell you something, Redmond. This loss is destroying me. For two months, for ten weeks nearly now, I have done no work at all, except the most necessary and urgent duties. My soul is full of inappeasable regrets. At nights—when it is less likely I shall be recognised— I go out. I wander. Yes. I wonder what people would think of that if they knew. A Cabinet Minister, the responsible head of that most vital of all departments, wandering alone— grieving— sometimes near audibly lamenting— for a door, for a garden!"

iv

I CAN SEE now his rather pallid face, and the unfamiliar sombre fire that had come into his eyes. I see him very vividly to-night. I sit recalling his words, his tones, and last evening's *Westminster Gazette* still lies on my sofa, containing the notice of his death. At lunch to-day the club was busy with him and the strange riddle of his fate.

They found his body very early yesterday morning in a deep excavation near East Kensington Station. It is one of two shafts that have been made in connection with an extension of the railway southward. It is protected from the intrusion of the public by a hoarding upon the high road, in which a small doorway has been cut for the convenience of some of the workmen who live in that direction. The doorway was left unfastened through a misunderstanding between two gangers, and through it he made his way....

My mind is darkened with questions and riddles.

It would seem he walked all the way from the House that night— he has frequently walked home during the past Session— and so it is I figure his dark

form coming along the late and empty streets, wrapped up, intent. And then did the pale electric lights near the station cheat the rough planking into a semblance of white? Did that fatal unfastened door awaken some memory?

Was there, after all, ever any green door in the wall at all?

I do not know. I have told his story as he told it to me. There are times when I believe that Wallace was no more than the victim of the coincidence between a rare but not unprecedented type of hallucination and a careless trap, but that indeed is not my profoundest belief. You may think me superstitious if you will, and foolish; but, indeed, I am more than half convinced that he had in truth, an abnormal gift, and a sense, something— I know not what— that in the guise of wall and door offered him an outlet, a secret and peculiar passage of escape into another and altogether more beautiful world. At any rate, you will say, it betrayed him in the end. But did it betray him? There you touch the inmost mystery of these dreamers, these men of vision and the imagination. We see our world fair and common, the hoarding and the pit. By our daylight standard he walked out of security into darkness, danger and death. But did he see like that?

———————————

14: The Adventure of the Wonderful Idea

W. Carey Wonderly

1890-1931

The Blue Book Magazine, Feb 1915

One of half a dozen stories under the collective name "Broadway Nights".

BECAUSE of the city's immensity David Marley had believed he could successfully hide himself in New York at will. Very shortly, however, he saw his mistake. Every time he moved, he found himself again occupying the center of the stage. And they say New York is cold and selfish and too busy with its own affairs to bother about its neighbor's! David wished things were so.

He was in love with the town— although the Sunday supplements had done their best to spoil it all for him. He was afraid to pick up a newspaper, during his first days on Gotham soil, for fear of seeing some ridiculous story of the fortune he had inherited from his uncle. For not only was the figure quoted preposterous; the write-ups were absurd enough to make him swear.

"Why do you think I am living in a cheap hotel in a side street if I have just come into a half-million?" he said once to a young journalist who had button-holed him on the Avenue.

"Well," replied the fellow, smiling crookedly, "you can get a better view of Broadway from Forty-second Street than you can from the Louis XIV suite at the Superba."

"Good Lord!' David wiped his brow. "Either you're mad or I am," he said, as he broke away.

Then he had made the mistake of writing to the papers and insisting that what they had printed was purely fiction— imaginary. So, instead of David Marley's being forgotten completely in the regulation nine days, he managed to keep himself— unwillingly, Heaven knew— before the public for many weeks to come. One journal in particular was hot after an interview; it said their readers demanded it, that David owed as much to New York. David didn't see it that way, but he met the man on the job and found him to be a decent young chap. They became almost friendly, although David was careful, when in his company, not to say anything for publication.

Kaufman was sitting with him one morning in the mean little lobby of the Pavilion Hotel when Horace Archer presented himself. Kaufman smiled as he listened to the man's story.

"You see, Marley," said he, "you can't get away with it."

"It seems as if I can't get away from 'em," remarked David gloomily. Horace Archer had a play.

PEOPLE had come to Marley with pretty much everything under the sun. He had been asked to sponsor this drama, publish that book, control one patent, finance another hallucination. He was weary of explaining to men and women alike, but to Archer he said:

"If I had backed every play that has been sent to me, my friend, there wouldn't be enough houses on Broadway to shelter them all."

"But there is always room, even on Broadway, for a real success," insisted the author. "Mine contains the most wonderful idea!"

"Has it ever been done?" asked Kaufman,

"Yes, on the road. That is what makes me so sure of its fitness for New York. But I haven't the money nor the reputation— nobody believes in me. With your name, Mr. Marley—"

"What good would my name be without any money?" asked David, smiling not unkindly.

"Well, you know you can— if you will."

Marley turned to Kaufman.

"Do you see?" he said. "That is what you have done—to me and to him."

"With ten thousand dollars," continued Archer, speaking rapidly, "just ten thousand— do you know what we could do with that, Mr. Marley? You had expected me to ask for more, but— the piece will not require an expensive production; it is neither a musical comedy nor a costume play— just a modern drama with a small cast and a single interior."

"Then what do you want with ten thousand dollars?" asked Kaufman. "You can rent a theater by the week."

"I want to spend it for advertising," Archer replied. "My little offering, by an unknown author, with a cast not made up of Broadway players—it would be lost in New York! The worth-while critics wouldn't even bother to attend the premiére, and their understudies would damn it because my name isn't Broadhurst or Klein or Sheldon, and my leading lady hasn't got more diamonds than Gaby has reputation. It would die without a chance, I tell you. New York would never know I had been in its midst. But let me spend ten thousand dollars for advertising purposes—"

"You think that would make your play a success?" asked David.

"It would let New York know I was in town; at least, I shouldn't die without a chance. Don't you see that, Mr. Marley?"

"By George, I know what you mean!" ripped out Kaufman.

David began to laugh. Turning to Archer, he said:

"Mr. Kaufman represents the yellowest of all the yellows— and he is enthusiastic over your plans because, naturally, his paper would get a slice of that ten thousand. Unfortunately, I haven't got that much money in the world;

if I had—" He was going to say, "I wouldn't be here in this cheap hotel," but the grin on Kaufman's face checked his tongue, and indeed he saw unbelief in the playwright's eyes too. That's what the Sunday supplements had done for him—made him out a liar every time he told the simple truth. Bitter resentment began to stir in his breast against these journals and their cubs.

Horace Archer was saying:

"Mr. Marley, you'll at least look at my play?"

"What would be the use," asked David wearily, "when I tell you I can do nothing ?"

"Don't say that until you read it."

"Advertising is a great stunt," popped Kaufman, officiously, David thought.

"It has always seemed to me that a play must stand or fall on its own merits," observed Marley, speaking to Archer.

"But mine sha'n't have a chance to stand unless New York is made aware of the fact that it is showing a new play by an unknown author with a road star! Why, it would come and go without a chance, I tell you. Lend me ten thousand dollars and your name—"

"What possessed you to come to me?" asked David bluntly.

ARCHER glanced town at the tip of his boot.

"Well, I knew you had just inherited a fortune— and the conditions of your uncles will," he answered at last, slowly. "It seemed to me that this would be a pretty good way for you to 'see Broadway,' Mr. Marley. Your name looms rather large in New York's mind just now, you know. That in itself would help—"

"All newspaper talk," muttered David, with a glance at Kaufman. "Would my name amount to anything without the money, Mr. Archer?"

"We'd have to have something."

"I t pays to advertise," sang out the journalist.

"This chance means everything to my wife, Mr. Marley," said the playwright. "She is my star— a wonder-woman who only needs an opportunity to show Broadway. She is an actress, not a personality on parade. For years she has played in the provinces ;. perhaps for that very reason she cannot get a New York showing; but when she does! I know her every mood; this play was written for her. But without a chance it might just as well never have been started."

David turned to Kaufman; he was interested in spite of himself.

"Can't you do something for them?" he asked.

The journalist smiled.

"The advertising department can; I'm not acquainted with their rates. Of course I only handle 'news.' "

"And this man's play?"

"Isn't news, of course! If David Marley becomes the producer—"

"I wish to God I could!" snapped David.

Horace Archer jumped up and tugged at Marley's coat-sleeve.

"Come round to the Brittany Hotel with me and meet Mrs. Archer," he urged. "She'll read the play to you."

"Good Lord, man, what's the use?" David cried, rising to his feet. "I have told you ten thousand dollars is as far Son my reach as—as Heaven. Why, then—"

The playwright had him by the arm; now he turned to Kaufman.

"Will you come? I am sorry I can't suggest a taxicab for you gentlemen, but the Brittany is just around the next corner— fortunately."

"You are wasting your time, my friend," said David. And he repeated it when Archer brought him, breathless and bewildered, into the room where Mrs. Archer sat waiting.

SHE was a pretty woman, small and blonde and quite girlish, Marley saw, the type which appealed to him most, and he was pleasantly surprised, for he had expected an altogether different sort. "Road star" spelled many things to David— and Cynthia Archer was none of them! She had delightful poise, a clear, musical voice, and she stood and sat and walked with unstudied grace— this combined with her beauty. And Horace Archer said she had genius as well.

He felt genuinely sorry as he looked at her that he couldn't help; and he was sure that his presence in this room must have raised great expectations in her heart. David was sentimental, or rather he was romantic— which you wouldn't have guessed from the appearance of the man; but.this doesn't mean he was always ready to fall in love with a pretty woman. There was scarcely a time when he wouldn't have liked to help a pretty woman in distress, but then he would as gladly have lent a hand to a man. David was wholesome; New York would never quite spoil him. He felt now that Horace Archer was sincere, and that Cynthia was deserving. As he listened to her reading the manuscript he wished he could do something. He had possibly three thousand dollars in the wide world!

The play might have possessed all the possibilities of "Hamlet;" David knew little about plays. And his taste leaned toward farce; this seemed very dramatic. But Cynthia's voice was very pleasant and soothing, and Kaufman muttered "Good! Great!" once or twice, toward the end. He supposed this was at the curtain of the big act. Well, if the play was as splendid as all that, why

didn't Kaufman interest his paper in it—do something for them? He felt a burning resentment toward him, toward all his tribe, because he found himself placed in an unenviable position. Archer's play might be the great American drama for which the country waited, and yet he could do nothing for him. And when he confessed as much they— Cynthia and Horace would call him mean in their hearts and believe him to be a liar. By George, he'd get even with Kaufman and his kind yet! He'd show them to believe a man when he spoke the truth!

"Well?" said Archer.

Cynthia had put down the script; the reading was over.

"Its immense!" declared Kaufman, offering his hand.

"Immense enough for a story?" asked Marley.

"What story is there in a good play which the author can't get produced?" asked the journalist in turn. "There must be hundreds of like cases here in New York at this minute. That isn't news."

"And yet you want to publish a lot of fool things about me which aren't true!" muttered David.

Kaufman smiled.

"You, David Marley, are news," said he. "Your uncle's will—"

David turned to Cynthia.

"I am sorry," he said simply. "If I could—"

"You wont?" she cried, starting up.

DAVID picked up his hat and turned it awkwardly in his hands. An idea was struggling in his brain, an idea which might prove just as wonderful as Horace Archer's. He looked up and met Kaufman's mocking smile. That decided him.

"I— I'll come back later, if I may," said he, bowing.

"If you wish to bring your lawyers — or we will go to them," Horace cried, his face lighting up.

"I'll come back here— at three," said David, and he hurried out of the room, followed by Kaufman.

"You will?" asked the newspaper man.

"When will you learn to believe the truth, Kaufman? I have told you I haven't got ten thousand dollars to my name."

"Then why go back at three?"

"It's hard for a clever little woman like Cynthia Archer not to get her chance, to condemn her to the road for the rest of her days. I thought Td like to talk—"

Kaufman smiled his famous crooked smile.

"Yes," said he, "Mrs. Archer is a very charming young woman, a genuine blonde without a blonde's temperament, the kind of actress the stock houses would eat up, without being a stock actress. Pretty, refined, youthful. What did you think of Archer's curtain for the third act?"

Marley hesitated, and Kaufman caught him.

"Why, it was very—strong," said he.

"Then you think the play is worthy of Cynthia Archer?"

"I think she would make a hit even if the play wasn't a success," replied David, and Kaufman smiled— as David knew he would when he deliberately picked his words.

He got rid of the man after that, Kaufman hurrying away with a satisfied air that wasn't lost on David. And he knew that at least one newspaper would keep an eye on the Archers and their attempted invasion of Broadway.

AT THREE o'clock promptly he returned to the Brittany Hotel, and was sent up to the room where Horace and Cynthia awaited his coming. And there he offered his idea; he said he had nothing else but his three thousand dollars. They were welcome to both— to the idea and the money.

"—Since it will not require an expensive production, you said."

Then he started in to tell them the true story of his inheritance— and he saw, when he was through, that Cynthia at least believed him.

"If you had deliberately set out to do such a thing you would never have been able to put it over on the New York newspaper men," cried she. "And now, when you insist, and offer all kinds of proofs!"

"They don't believe me," nodded David. "That is why I believe in my idea. If three thousand dollars—"

"We have a little money which we have been able to save and scrape," said Cynthia. "Together we can do it, Iam sure. Speak, Horace."

"There wont be a penny for advertising," Archer said.

"We don't want to spend a penny for advertising!" cried David. "We don't because we can't. But we'll get our publicity just the same. Keep everything dark until the day is ready; we mustn't strike until the iron's hot, eh, Mrs. Archer?"

"It would never do to anticipate our climax," replied Cynthia. "The 'news' mustn't grow stale. New York forgets so soon!"

"Sometimes," said David grimly.

And so they began. Everything was done in secret. The theater was leased in Cynthia's real name, and she was introduced to the company as Miss Wilson; of course she was unknown to this cast of Broadway players. Her relationship to Horace was not divulged and neither was the title of the play they were

rehearsing disclosed to the actors. Marley never showed up at the theater; it was really all done as quietly as it is possible to do such things. Horace was only afraid the company would grow suspicious of the venture and throw up their parts, but fortunately no such thing occurred. Possibly even they realized that this unknown play was developing big.

In the meantime, with his ear to the ground, Kaufman continued his visits to the Pavilion Hotel.

"I suppose," he said, once, "you haven't decided to do anything yet for Horace Archer?"

"What can I do, man?" demanded David.

"It was a good play."

"You said yourself that there were hundreds of them in New York at this minute. Cynthia,"— he stumbled purposely— "Archer ought to go after a job at the Empire. I hate to see such a clever actress lost on the road, you know, Kaufman."

"Your heart is in the right place, Marley," replied the newspaper man, with his famous smile. "It would be a shame for such a pret— such a clever actress to return to the tanks. But then, when properly appreciated, such actresses as Cynthia Archer seldom leave New York. Have lunch with me to-morrow ?"

DAVID said he would, but the next day when Kaufman showed up at the Pavilion, Marley had left that hotel without acquainting anybody of his destination. Now Kaufman rather expected to be confronted with this very situation, and he could scarcely restrain his appreciation.

"Left no mail directions, I suppose?" he said to the clerk.

"No, he didn't," replied the man. "And that makes it bad, for just this morning comes a letter marked 'important.' "

It required no great persuasion for Kaufman to be allowed to see the letter, and he returned it directly; but not before his sharp eyes had seen Whiteway Theater penned on the back of the envelope. He set off for that playhouse as fast as his legs would carry him— very much as David had expected him to do when he urged Cynthia to write that address on her letter, which was blank!

"These Hinterlanders think they're so blowed smart," muttered Kaufman, as he dashed toward Broadway.

At the theater he found it impossible to gain an entrance. The door-keeper told him a Miss Wilson was rehearsing a new play; he had never seen the lady before and didn't know the name of the play. Kaufman waited. An hour later, an actor came out whom he knew from past performances, and the newspaper man hailed him as a long lost friend.

"What's all this going on in there?" said he.

"Search me," replied the actor. "New play, new star."

" 'Shoe-string?' "

"Doesn't seem to be— ready money in sight. Whoever is backing her appears to be there with the pennies."

"I see. Does Miss Wilson look like this?" Kaufman gave a fairly good description of Cynthia Archer. "And does the play you're rehearsing run along these lines?" He described Horace's drama.

When the actor had heard him out, he nodded his head.

"Right-o, both times. What's the mystery?" he smiled.

"No mystery, but plenty of coin— you stick," Kaufman replied. "And now tell me if you've seen this person around the theater?" He drew a wordpicture of David Marley for the fellow to place, drew it carefully, minutely, but the actor failed to recognize it.

"I haven't seen any such man," he insisted.

WHICH pleased Kaufman mightily. Not until then was he sure. And when he learned that the theater was leased in the name of Cynthia Dwyer he was ready to toss his hat in the air and shout. It was like Marley not to wish his name to figure in any way. Kaufman wondered what yarn they had told Horace.

There were two clews he wished to follow up— Marley and Archer. He must find out where Marley lived and how and when he saw Cynthia. From the playwright he must learn what the wife had to say in regard to the production— Archer must be ignorant of the fact that David was supplying the money. A few days later, matters were further complicated when Kaufman's actor-friend confided to him that it was Miss Wilson to whom they were obliged to go when they wished to draw on their salaries; the company didn't even know that their star was the author's wife! Here was a bit of news, a story that was developing big. It was such copy as pleased the newspaper man best, for he was something of a scavenger.

He followed Cynthia one afternoon from the stage-door of the Whiteway Theater to a small restaurant in the West Forties, just off Broadway. Cynthia was veiled, but Kaufman knew her and he hung around on the opposite side of the street until he saw David Marley turn the corner and hurry along to the door through which the woman had disappeared, some ten or fifteen minutes before. Later, peering into the room, Kaufman saw the girl and the man sitting together at a table over in a corner— there was food and drink before them but they touched nothing, heads forward, whispering. Again he waited, secreted on the opposite side of the street, and when Cynthia and David came out of the restaurant, he followed them around to the Brittany Hotel, where

David left her at the elevator. So he didn't want to meet Horace! Kaufman rubbed his hands and smiled.

He was not really malicious, but his uppermost thought was for the paper he served, and now he believed he smelled a story. Such a story— with David Marley for its principal! He began to dog their every step, following David like a shadow— much to that young man's amusement.

Things were coming to a head now, for the play was rehearsed to the satisfaction of Horace Archer himself; it was time to pull off their coup. They began to lay their last lines, baited so cleverly that Kaufman was sure to bite. Coming out of the stage-door one afternoon, when he knew that Kaufman was lingering in the shadow, Archer let fall a package of letters, and when he came to gather them up, one lay unnoticed, so that he hurried off without reclaiming it. But the journalist saw it, and the moment that Horace had turned the corner Kaufman had his hands on the envelope.

The seal was broken; evidently Horace Archer had read it. This left no scruples for Kaufman to bother over. He drew the sheet from the envelope and glanced first for the signature. Unsigned, an anonymous letter!

This is to let you know that David Marley is in the habit of paying your wife a daily visit each afternoon when she returns from rehearsal and while you are still at the theater. A word to the wise.

A FRIEND.

Kaufman's eyes were alight; his fingers became all thumbs as he stuffed the page back in the envelope. The husband knew— at last! No doubt he was on his way to the rendezvous now.

There would be a scene, probably a shooting. He jumped in a cab in his anxiety to be there at the finish.

Fortunately the desk-clerk at the Brittany remembered him and he was permitted to go up to the Archer apartment unannounced. Arriving at their floor, he hung around in the corridor, not wishing to ring their bell. Once he thought of trying to gain an entrance by way of the fire-escape. A few minutes later, he was glad he hadn't attempted such a thing— Cynthia came out of her room and leaving the door ajar, hurried off down the long corridor, passing quite close to the crouching man yet failing to see him. Kaufman jumped up, even before she was out of sight, and ran toward the open door. A moment later he was down behind a Japanese screen, breathless but triumphant.

THE Archers occupied two rooms, and in the smaller, where Kaufman found himself, David Marley sat before a table on which stood a bottle and two glasses. Kaufman saw them over a corner of the screen; there were other

things on the table, it is true, but these objects loomed biggest in the journalist's eyes; good local color is always appreciated, doubly by the masses that bought the paper for which Kaufman wrote. Presently Cynthia returned.

"Everything's all right,' said she, sinking into a chair opposite David.

Then their heads went together; what they whispered was lost to the man behind the screen. Perhaps this is how he-came to be discovered too early in the game; he must have upset the screen in his eagerness to lean near enough to hear their conversation. Anyway, over it went, and around turned David and Cynthia.

"Hello!" cried Marley. "What the devil, Kaufman?"

"Why, it's your newspaper friend!" gasped Cynthia Archer. All of a sudden she gave a little moan and sank into a chair. "Why is he here, David?" she demanded. "Everything is up now!"

Kaufman scrambled to his feet, meeting David with his crooked smile.

"I know all there is to know, Marley," he said. "Mrs, Archer is right: the game's up."

David flashed Cynthia a look; she seemed ready to burst into tears.

"You know about the— Whiteway Theater?" said David at last. "About— our play?" whispered Cynthia.

"Yes to both questions," replied Kaufman grimly. "I know everything. Perhaps you'll deny this story when it appears to-morrow, Marley?"

"You mean that you'll connect my name with the Archers'?"

"Surely you'll not write this up in your paper, Mr. Kaufman!" flashed Cynthia.

"If it is the last thing I ever do," answered the journalist significantly,

"But we don't want the public to know!"

"Few people who are surprised as you have been want the public to know," smiled Kaufman. "I have all the necessary information: who Miss Wilson is at the Whiteway Theater, who leased the theater and who wrote the unnamed play which the company is rehearsing—Miss Wilson's husband. Why, even some of the actors didn't know that Horace Archer was Miss Wilson's husband!"

"You are a scoundrel, a damn human ferret!" cried Marley, his voice rising.

"You mustn't let him print those things, David!" wept the girl. "We have done everything so secretly!"

"I will give you ten thousand dollars, Kaufman, to kill that story," shouted David, his hand flying to his breast pocket. "Wait a minute, man, don't go; don't hurry off like that!"

Kaufman turned and smiled from the doorway.

"I understood that you hadn't ten thousand dollars in the world, Marley," he retorted.

"Never mind; I can get it. Listen to me!"

"You can't get it for me! Goodby!"

His hand touched the knob; at the same minute Marley sprang from his chair; Kaufman almost measured his length on the corridor floor, so quickly did he make his departure.

AN ELEVATOR had just stopped at his floor; somebody was getting off. Kaufman thought it must be Horace Archer; he was sorry he had knocked over the screen and so had been forced to show his hand before the, real climax. But he had enough story— and he could telephone from the office to learn if Marley and Archer had come to blows. He turned the corner of the corridor, expecting to see the husband; instead, he came face-toface with three newspaper men from rival sheets whom he knew in a business way. Somebody had tipped them off too! He must run; his paper must beat theirs to it. Possibly, however, they didn't know the whole story, about the theater lease and the disguised star. He— Kaufman— had even been present the day when David Marley had first met Cynthia Archer! David had been too busy appreciating her charms to listen to the reading of her husband's play.

He nodded to the three men.

"Tipped off ahead of us?" asked one, frowning.

"Oh, no!" smiled Kaufman. He leaped in the car. "Main floor— don't stop," he told the boy, as he slipped him a coin.

At the door of the Archer apartment David Marley and Cynthia stood waiting to greet the newspaper men. When they came up, introductions were in order, and they shook hands all around.

"Come in," said Cynthia, in her pleasant voice. "Mr. Archer is rehearsing a new scene in the next room. Horace!" She raised her voice slightly. "It was so damp and chilly at the theater; something went wrong with the fires," she turned to explain to the journalists. "That is why they are here to rehearse."

Horace opened the door of the larger room at that moment and came out, followed by two men and a middle-aged woman. One of the reporters recognized her as Mrs. Cartwright, a well-known Broadway *grande dame*, and one of the actors was Sydney Latham, the leading man. Everybody shook hands.

"It is just this," said Horace Archer, at last; "I've sent for you boys so that everybody may have the same chance— a chance I didn't want to give you, by the way. But one of your tribe, Mr. Kaufman—"

"We saw him coming away," spoke up somebody.

"Exactly! He thinks he's got a 'beat? The cad! You don't know me, gentlemen,' resumed Archer, "but I have written a play, and my wife, Miss Cynthia Archer, is to star in it at the Whiteway Theater. This gentleman— but you may know Mr. Marley by sight, David Marley from California. He is going to produce my play. Now because Mr. Marley has refused dozens of times over to take hold of other folks' plays he didn't want it known that he was sponsoring mine. He has never appeared at a rehearsal; the theater was leased in Mrs. Archer's maiden name; the company wasn't even told the name of the piece they were preparing— Mrs, Cartwright, Mr, Latham and Mr. Wheeler will bear me out in that. You see, David Marley had refused so many young authors and he was afraid if they knew about my good luck in interesting him, they—the others— would be upon him like a pack of hungry wolves."

"Mr. Marley has the right idea there," observed one of the men, smiling.

"In the first place the piece was to be produced without my name figuring at all," cried Marley, starting up.

"And we were so confident of its success that we wanted to come in on rubbers," Cynthia piped girlishly. "Both Mr. Archer and myself are utterly unknown in New York; we thought our triumph would be all the greater if we made our bow to Broadway unheralded; and so we didn't let on toa soul, Then Mr. Kaufman—"

David spoke up:

"I know the man slightly. Somehow he got wind of the fact that I am putting up the money for the Archers' venture. And he came here with a story of how he meant to publish the facts in his paper. I begged him not to do it, and told him why— just as I have told you, gentlemen, my reason for wishing to keep clear of this thing. I— I believe I even offered him a check to keep my name out of it, but he insisted it was 'news' and as such had to be printed. He called it a— a beat."

"And we determined to get him there," interrupted Horace Archer. "Since he wouldn't do as we wished, we made up our minds that he shouldn't have the glory of a beat, and we telephoned to you. I 'phoned in the other room while he was here talking to Mrs. Archer and Mr. Marley—I hoped you would arrive before Kaufman got away."

"We met in the corridor."

"We wanted to 'gum-shoe' it to success!" cried Cynthia. "Now he has to go and spoil it all!"

"Mr. Archer will call to see your advertising man to-night, gentlemen," David said:

"And now I'm ready with any details you may want to know," added Horace. "If Kaufman hadn't been so all-fired smart—"

NEW YORK opened its eyes the next morning to find Cynthia and Horace Archer and David Marley the most advertised trio in all Gotham. During the night, the Whiteway Theater had been plastered with their names, and billboards from the Battery to the Bronx bespoke the new star, the new playwright and David Marley, producer. And then the papers!

The paid advertisements were very small— one had to look for them, in fact— but front-page spreads and woman's page heart-interest stories acquainted all who read, of the long road struggle of Cynthia Archer and the final capitulation of David Marley after he had read Horace Archer's play: "This is the first and only play ever sponsored by David Marley, who has become known to New York as the 'million-dollar kid from the San Lucca Valley... who came East by the terms of his uncle's will to see Broadway life."

The other papers said this; Kaufman's paper, the yellowest of all the yellows, told of a love affair between the young millionaire and the beautiful actress— that was why her husband's play was produced after Marley had turned down better stuff every day. It hinted of intrigue; it told of the rendezvous at the Brittany Hotel; it stated that "our reporter was offered a bribe of ten thousand dollars to keep this information out of the paper and from our million readers."

At once Cynthia Archer and David Marley started libel suits against the journal. Mrs. Cartwright, Mr. Latham and Mr. Wheeler, as well as Horace Archer himself, were in the next room rehearsing a new scene all the time Kaufman was talking to Cynthia and David. They heard everything. Kaufman was asked to produce his letter— and he found it had disappeared.

The suits never amounted to a row of pins, except for their advertising values. Long before they were settled out of court New York had come to the conclusion that it had been hoaxed, but being New York it merely laughed at itself. The papers, all of them, even Kaufman's journal, must have thought the same things about the Archers and David Marley before they were through, but— it was done. The Whiteway Theater was filled for three months, and then star and play went on the road and made a fortune— albeit Cynthia wasn't such a clever actress, nor Horace such a brilliant playwright after all.

David's share of the profits was twenty thousand dollars.

"I might toddle back to California with this roll," he told Cynthia and Horace. "I may see a bit too much of New York if I stay any longer. And yet. H'm— I wonder."

15: Their Own Dear Land

Achmed Abdullah

1881-1945

Blue Book Magazine, Jan 1943

OMAR THE BLACK sighed— and grinned a little too— at the recollection.

"There was Esa, the chief eunuch, yelling at me," he said to his twin brother Omar the Red. "And there was Fathouma, the woman I had, if not loved, then at least left, smiling at me! Ah— I felt like a nut between two stones. Can you blame me that I sped from the place?"

He described how, with the help of crashing elbows and kicking feet, he bored through the crowd; how at a desperate headlong rush, he hurtled around a corner, a second, a third, seeking deserted alleys, while behind him, men surged into motion.

There was then pursuit, and the chief eunuch's shouts taken up in a savage chorus:

"Stop him!"

"What has he done?"

"Who cares? Did you not hear? A hundred pieces of gold to the man who stops him!"

"Money which I need!"

"No more than I! Money— ah— to be earned by my father's only son!"

Well, Omar the Black had decided, money not to be earned, if he could help it. He was not going to be stopped, and delivered up to the chief eunuch. It would mean one of two things: an unpleasant death or a life even more unpleasant.

For he knew the chief eunuch of old— knew that the latter, who had been fiercely jealous of him during the days of his affluence and influence at the court of the Grand Khan of the Golden Steppe, had always intrigued against him, always detested him, always tried to undermine him. And here, tonight, was Esa's chance.

A chance at bitter toll!

Either— oh, yes!— an unpleasant death or a life yet more unpleasant. Either to be handed over by the eunuch to the Grand Khan; and then— the Tartar considered and shuddered— it would be the tall gallows for him, or the swish of the executioner's blade. Or else— and again he shuddered— his fate would rest with Fathouma, the Grand Khan's sister.

And— ai-yai— the way she had peered at him through the fluttering silk curtains of the litter! The way she had smiled at him! Such a sweet, gentle, forgiving smile! Such a tender smile!

Allah— such a loving smile!

Why— this time she might be less proud, less the great lady. Might insist on carrying out their interrupted marriage-contract. And what then of this other girl, this Gotha? A girl— ah, like the edge of soft dreams— a girl whom he loved madly.…

He interrupted his thoughts.

What, he asked himself, as his legs, one sturdy and sound and the other aching rheumatically, gathered speed, was the good in thinking, right now, of Gotha? First he would have to find safety— from the Grand Khan's revenge no less than from Fathouma's mercy.

Faster and faster he ran— then swerved as a man, whom he passed, grabbed his arm and cried:

"Stop, scoundrel!"

Omar shook off the clutching fingers; felled, with brutal fist, another man who stepped square in his path; ran still faster, away from the center of the town, through streets and alleys that were deserted— and that a few moments later, as if by magic, jumped to hectic life.

Lights in dark houses twinkled, exploded with orange and yellow as shutters were pushed up. Heads leaned from windows. Doors opened. The coiling shadows spewed forth people— men as well as women. They came hurrying out of nowhere, out of everywhere.

They came yelling and screeching: "Get him!"

"Stop him!"

"There he goes!"

"After him!"

The pack in full cry— two abreast, three, four, six abreast. Groups, solitary figures!

A lumbering red-turbaned constable, stumbling out of a coffee-shop, wiping his mouth, tugging at his heavy revolver.

Shouted questions. Shouted answers:

"What is it?"

"What has happened?"

"A thief!"

"No! A murderer!"

"Three people he slew!"

"Four! I saw it with these eyes!"

"Ah— the foul assassin!"

And sadistic, quivering, high-pitched screams: "Get him!"… "Catch him!"… "Kill him!"

Ferocious gaiety in the sounds. For here was the cruel, perverted, thrill of the man-hunt.

"Get him!"

"Kill him!"

"Quick, quick, quick! Around the next corner! Cut him off!"

Swearing, shrieking. Throwing bricks and pots and clubs and stones. Pop! pop! pop!— the constable's revolver dropping punctuation marks into the night. And on, on, the sweep of figures. And Omar the Black running, his lungs pounding, his heart beating like a triphammer; darting left, right, left, right— steadily gaining on his pursuers, at last finding temporary refuge at the edge of town, in the old cemetery, among the carved granite tombstones that dreamed of Judgment Day.

There, stretched prone on the ground, he turned his head to watch the mob hurrying on and past on a false trail. He listened to the view-halloo of the chase growing fainter and fainter, finally becoming a mere memory of sound.

Then, slowly, warily, he got up. He looked about....

Nobody was within sight.

So he doubled on his tracks and left Gulabad from the opposite direction, hag-ridden by his double fear— of the Grand Khan's revenge and of Fathouma's loving tenderness.

To put the many, many miles between himself and this double fear, this double danger— that is what he must do, and do as quickly as possible. His resolve was strengthened by the knowledge that money was sultan in High Tartary as anywhere else in the world; that the tale of the rich reward which had been offered for his capture— a hundred pieces of gold— would be round and round the countryside in no time at all, and so every hand there would be against his, and every eye and ear seeking him out.

Therefore Omar the Black traveled in haste and in stealth. At night he traveled, hiding in the daytime, preferring the moors and forests to the open, green fields; taking the deer- and wolf-spoors instead of honest highways; plunging to the knee— and his rheumatic leg hurting him so— at icy fords rather than using the proper stone bridges that spanned the rivers; avoiding the snug, warm villages where food was plentiful and hearts were friendly. And living— as the Tartar saying has it— on the wind and the pines and the gray rock's lichen!

Footsore he was, and weary; and wishing: "If only I had a horse!"

A fine, swift horse to take between his two thighs and gallop away. Then ho for the far road, the wild, brazen road, and glittering deeds, glittering fame! Yes— glittering fame it would be for him; and he hacking his way to wealth and power; and presently returning to Gulabad.

No longer a fugitive, with a price on his head and the Grand Khan's revenge at his heel, but a hero, a conqueror; the equal— by the Prophet the Adored!— to any Khan.

Omar was quite certain of his ultimate success, and for no better or, belike, no worse reason than that he was what he was: a Tartar of Tartars— the which is a thing difficult to explain with the writing of words to those who do not know our steppes and our hills.

Perhaps it might best be defined by saying that his bravery overshadowed his conceit— or the other way about— that both bravery and conceit were overshadowed by his tight, hard, shrewd strength of purpose, and gilded by his undying optimism. Anyway, whatever it was, he had it. It made him sure of himself; persuaded him, too, that some day Gotha would be his, so sweet and warm and white in the crook of his elbow.

The imagining intoxicated him. He laughed aloud— and a moment later grew unhappy and morose. Only a fool, he told himself, will grind pepper for the bird still on the wing.

Not a bird, in his case, but a horse. A horse was the first thing he had to have for the realization of his stirring plans. Without a horse, these plans were useless, hopeless— as useless and hopeless as trying to throw a noose around the far stars or weaving a rope from tortoise-hair.

Yes, the horse was essential. And how could he find one, here in the lonely wilderness of moor and forest?

Thus, despondent and gloomy, he had trudged on. Night had come; and the chill raw wind, booming out of the Siberian tundras, had raced like a leash of strong dogs; and hunger had gnawed at his stomach; and thirst had dried his throat; and his leg had throbbed like a sore tooth. "Help me, O Allah, O King of the Seven Worlds!" he had sobbed— and as if in answer to his prayer, he had heard a soft neighing, had seen a roan Kabuhi stallion grazing on a short halter, had sneaked up noiselessly, had unhobbled the animal and been about to mount.... And then:

"By Beelzebub," he said now, angrily, to his twin-brother, "it had to be yours!"

Again he sighed.

"Ah," he added, "am I not the poor, miserable one, harried by the hounds of fate!"

OMAR THE RED looked up.

"Not poor, surely," he remarked.

"What do you mean— not poor?"

"Unless, in your flight, you lost the jewels which you took from the rich Jew."

Omar the Black jumped up.

"As the Lord liveth," he exclaimed, "I had forgotten them!"

Anxiously he tapped his loose breeches. There was a pleasant tinkle, and a few seconds later a pleasant sight as he brought out a handful of emeralds and rubies that sparkled in the moon's cold rays.

Then once more he became despondent.

"What good," he asked, "are these jewels to me? As much good as a comb to a bald-headed man. Why, not even were you to give me your horse—"

"Which, decidedly, I shall not."

Omar the Black paid no attention to his brother's unfeeling comment.

"No," he repeated, "not even were you to give me your horse."

For, he went on to say, Gotha was a slave in the harem of Yengi Mehmet, the Khan of Gulistan. The latter, according to Timur Bek, was as eager for money as a young flea is for blood. Therefore, before Omar the Black had a chance to leave his mark upon High Tartary and return to Gulabad, a hero, a conqueror, somebody else might covet the girl, might offer a great price for her— and Yengi Mehmet would sell her....

He drew a hand across his eyes.

"Allah, Allah!" he cried. "What am I to do? Ah, if you could see this girl! As a garment, she is silver and gold! As a season, the spring!"

"So," was the other's impatient interruption, "you told me before— and bored me profoundly. The question is— you desire this girl?"

"As Shaitan, the Stoned Devil, the Accursed, desires salvation."

"Very well. You shall have her."

"But— how?"

"I shall help you"— Omar the Red paused. "For a consideration."

"There would be,"— bitterly,—"a consideration, you being you."

"There is, I being I— or for that matter, anybody being anybody. Therefore, if I help you to get your heart's desire, will you—"

"Yes, yes! Anything! Put a name to it!"

"A dear name! A grand and glorious name! The old palace back home where you and I were born, which I lost to you—"

"In a fair fight."

"Fair enough. I want it back."

"Is that all? Help yourself."

"Thanks. Only— I have not enough money. But you, with a tenth of these jewels, can pay off the old debts.... Listen!" He spoke with deep, driving seriousness. "Far have I wandered, astride a horse and on stout shoes, and too,

at times, on the naked soles of my feet, fighting thy own fights— and other men's fights— for the sport of it and a bit of loot. But over yonder"— he pointed north—"is the only place I have ever seen worth hacking sound steel for in earnest. And over yonder the one girl, Ayesha, worth loving. Ah— somebody once told me there is no happiness in another man's shoes, nor in another man's castle, nor with another man's wife. So— what say you— we go home, you and I, and live there— I with Ayesha and you with Gotha—"

"I— with Gotha? But—"

"Did I not tell you I would help you?"

"How can you?"

"I shall buy her for you."

"What with— since you have no money?"

"But you have the jewels. And did not Timur Bek offer to arrange the matter with the Khan?"

"Yes."

"There you are. Timur Bek will be your intermediary with the Khan— and I shall be your intermediary with Timur Bek. Hand over the jewels. I shall hurry to Gulabad, sell the jewels, talk to Timur Bek, have him buy the girl, then return here with her and—"

"No!" came Omar the Black's loud bellow.

"No?"

"No, indeed!"

"Why not?"

The other smiled thinly.

"Would you leave meat on trust with a jackal."

"In other words, you do not trust me?"

"Neither with the jewels, nor with the girl."

"And perhaps," was the shameless admission, "you are wise. But— well, there is another way."

"Yes?"

"We shall both go to Gulabad."

"I— with a price on my head?"

"On your black-bearded head, don't forget. But who, tell me, will recognize this same head— without the beard?"

"Oh"— in a towering rage—"dare you suggest that I should—"

"Shave off your beard? Right."

"Impossible! Why, by the Prophet the Adored, this beard,"— he ran a caressing hand through it—"has been my constant and loyal companion in joy and in sorrow. It is the pride and beauty of my manhood."

"The pride and beauty will grow again."

For quite a while they argued, until finally Omar the Black gave in.

But he cursed violently while scissors and razor did their fell work. He cursed yet more violently when, having announced that the stallion was strong enough to carry the two of them, he was informed by his twin brother that such a thing was out of the question.

For, opined Omar the Red, here was he himself most splendidly clad as became a gentleman of High Tartary. And here was the other, in stained and odorous rags— a very scarecrow of a man. It would seem strange to people, whom they might meet, to see them in such an intimacy, astride the same horse.

Better far, he said, for the other to run sturdily in back of the stallion, with outstretched hand, like some importunate beggar crying for zekat! zekat! zekat!— alms for the sake of Allah.

He clapped his brother heartily on the back. "It will be safest for you," he added. "Besides, you will see more of this fine broad world, walking on your two feet, than cocked high and stiff upon a saddle."

Omar the Red laughed.

SO, on an evening almost a week later, did Timur Bek laugh, back in Gulabad, when— for at first he had not recognized him, with his beard shorn off— he learned that this smooth-cheeked man was Omar the Black.

"Here you are," exclaimed Timur Bek, "with your face as soft as a girl's bosom!"

He laughed more loudly. "Oh," he cried, "if Gotha could see you!"

Omar the Black swallowed his anger.

"She is still here?" he demanded.

"And pining for you, I have no doubt."

"And— your promise?"

"I have not forgotten it."

Timur Bek went on to say that he was ready to open negotiations about the girl's purchase with Yengi Mehmet. He would do it tactfully and drive as good a bargain as he could.

"I know, of course," he added, "that you have the jewels." He smiled. "The Jew, Baruch ben Isaac ben Ezechiel, made a great ado about it. Swore that nineteen tough Tartars, armed to the teeth, broke into his shop and assaulted him!"

"Nor," said Omar the Black, "did he lie— exactly. For am I not the equal of the nineteen toughest Tartars in the World? Very well. My brother and I shall sell the jewels. Do you know a place— oh— a discreet place where we—"

"Can sell the jewels? Not necessary."

"But—"

"The Khan likes precious gems as much as minted gold."

"Still, he may suspect—"

"He will not listen to the evil voice of suspicion— if the jewels be rich enough. If they be rich enough, his left eye will look west, and his right east. Let's have a look at the loot."

The other reached into his breeches. He poured the gems in a shimmering stream on a low divan; and Timur Bek licked his lips. He said:

"It may take a good many of these trinkets to—"

"Nothing too much to buy me my heart's desire. Here— take half the stones!"

Timur Bek coughed.

"There is also," he said, "the matter of the money which I borrowed from the Khan, giving the little slave-girl, whom I love, as security. You were going to help me pay back the loan— remember?"

"I do. And I shall keep my word."

"The sooner, the better— for you."

Omar the Black frowned. "Eh?"

"This girl, you see, has the Khan's ear. I need her assistance. Loving me as I love her, she is anxious to return to me. And so, unless I buy her back, I am afraid she—"

"Yes, yes, yes!" Omar the Black interrupted impatiently. "Here— take another fourth of the stones. Surely it will be enough."

"Not quite."

"But—"

"Thirty thousand tomans I borrowed. It will take the rest of the stones to—"

"All right!" with a sigh. "Take them all!"

Timur Bek's hands were about to scoop up the jewels, when Omar the Red cried:

"Wait!"

He touched his brother's knee.

"You are forgetting our agreement," he told his brother. "You were going to use some of the treasure to pay off your old debts, so that we can return home and—"

"I have not forgotten."

"Why—"

"Listen!" Omar the Black winked slowly at his twin brother. "That time I broke into the Jew's shop, I was in a hurry. I took only half the jewels. The other half is waiting for you and me."

He turned to Timur Bek:

"When will you speak to the Khan?"

"Tonight. At once."

Timur Bek left his house. He went round the corner to the garden gate of Yengi Mehmet's palace.

There, while night was falling thicker and thicker, wrapping the streets in a cloak of trailing purple shadows, he whistled: two high, shrill notes, followed by a throaty, fluting tremolo, like a crane calling to its mate.

There was silence.

He waited; listened tensely, then repeated the call— and the gate opened softly; and a small white-robed figure slipped out and rushed into his arms with a little cry of joy.

"O my beloved!"

"O soul of my soul!"

"O king!"

"O sweetmeat!"

They spoke in a whisper, at length. They laughed. They kissed. And presently Timur Bek returned to the roof-top of his house, where Omar the Black was pacing up and down impatiently, while Omar the Red was applying himself to a bottle of Persian wine.

"Well—?" demanded the former.

"I talked to my girl."

"Not to the Khan?"

"She, as I told you, has the Khan's ear. And it seems that he is willing to sell Gotha. But—"

"Is there a but?"

"Isn't there always?" Timur Bek paused. "He is fond of her."

"What's that?"— excitedly.

"In a fatherly manner. Yes— as if she were his daughter. Therefore he insists that whoever buys the girl must marry her."

"I— marry?"

"Yes. It is part of the bargain. You must marry her at once. Tomorrow evening, at the Mosque of Hassan. A simple ceremony, with no witnesses. The girl, being shy, insists on it."

Omar the Black did not reply immediately.

Marriage, he reflected— as more than once, on his lawless path, his brother had reflected— meant bonds of steel. It meant the orderly homespun ways of life; meant— oh, all sorts of disagreeable things.... An end to freedom!

And it was on his tongue to exclaim: "No! Let Yengi Mehmet keep the girl!"

But he reconsidered as he thought of her— with her full red lips, and her brown hair as smooth as oil, and her gray eyes that seemed to hold all the secret wisdom, all the secret sweet mockery of womanhood.

Lovely! So very lovely!

He loved her.... Besides, coming to think of it, marriage was not necessarily the end. Bonds of steel, too, could be broken— by a strong and ruthless man.

"Very well," he announced. "Marriage it will be." And, severely, to his brother: "Let this be a lesson to you— to follow in my virtuous footsteps!"

"As virtuous," remarked Timur Bek, "as mine own. For I too shall take a wife unto myself— the little slave-girl whom I love."

"You have repaid your loan to the Khan?"

"Thanks to you, Great-Heart. Tomorrow morning my love and I are going away. Therefore if, for the time being, you and your bride and your brother would care to live in my house, you are welcome. There is food in the larder and wine in the cellar. And after all, with your jewels gone—"

"I shall be poor, I know."

"Only," chimed in Omar the Red, "until Baruch, the rich Jew, contributes another handful of gems."

LATE ON THE following evening, Omar the Black, arrayed in some of his brother's handsome clothes, went to the Mosque— an ancient and beautiful building raised on a flight of broad marble steps, its great horseshoe gateway covered with delicate mosaic arabesques in mauve and silver and heliotrope and elfin-green.

There the bride, wrapped from head to foot in three heavy white wedding veils, awaited him.

She saw his smooth cheeks. But she gave no more than a little start. For she had been warned of what had happened to his beard; and with or without his beard, she loved him— loved him dearly.

Slowly he walked up to her. He bowed— and so did she.

HAND IN HAND they stepped before the green-turbaned priest, who united them in holy wedlock, according to the rites of Islam:

"Will you, O son of Adam, take this woman to wife— before God the One, and the Prophet the Adored, and the multitude of the Blessed Angels?"

"I will!"

"Will you, O daughter of Eve, take this man to husband— before God the One, and the Prophet the Adored, and the multitude of the Blessed Angels?"

"I will!"

Silence.... Omar the Black stared at his wife.

"Soon to be mine!" he whispered. "Soon— soon!"

Then there was the priest chanting a surah from the Koran in nasal, sacerdotal tones:

For the Merciful hath taught the Koran,
He created the male and the female,
He taught them clear speech,
He taught them desire and fulfilment.
An echo of His own creation.
So which of the Lord's bounties would ye twain deny?
The sun and the moon in their courses,
And the planets do homage to Him,
And the heaven He raised it and appointed the balance,
And the earth He prepared it for living things.
Therein He created fruit, and the palm with sheaths,
And grain with its husks, and the fragrant herb,
And the male and the female of man and of beast.
So which of the Lord's bounties would ye twain deny?

"Not I," said Omar the Black to his wife, "to deny this particular bounty."

She gave a happy little laugh; the priest finished; husband and wife salaamed toward Mecca; and then Omar took her to Timur Bek's house, up to the rooftop beneath the stars.

There his brother was. He greeted the couple with loud shouts of:

"Yoo-yoo-yoo!"

But Omar the Black cut him short.

"Enough 'yoo-yoo-yoo' for the nonce," he said. "This is the one moment— of many, many moments— when I can do without your company."

So Omar the Red left— winking, in passing, at the bride. And a few seconds later, slowly and clumsily, since his hands trembled so, Omar the Black raised the three wedding veils one by one.

"Wah," he whispered throatily, "you are all my dreams come true!"

Then, swiftly, he receded a step. For, with the moon laying a mocking silver ribbon across her features, he saw that the woman whom he had married was Fathouma, the Grand Khan's sister, and not Gotha.

Omar stood there without speaking. He stared at her.

Even more faded she was than when he had seen her last; more gray the hair that curled on her temples; more sharply etched the network of wrinkles at the corners of her brown gold-flecked eyes. But still the same eyes— with the same tenderness in them, the same sweetness and simplicity, the same depth of feeling. Eyes that lit up as she said to him:

"You broke my heart, years ago, when you left me. But now, the Lord be praised, you have made it whole again."

She walked up to him. And what could he do but take her into his arms?

"Last night," she went on, "when Timur Bek sent me word through Gotha that you had come to Gulabad in search of me, that you wanted me— wanted me for wife— I almost swooned with the great joy of it. And it was so tactful of you to insist on a simple wedding, you and I— " he winced a little at her next words— "being no longer young, lest people ridicule us. Already Esa is on his way to tell my brother the news; and my brother, too, will be so very happy—"

She stopped for breath. She kissed him.

"And," she went on, "I talked to my cousin, the Khan of Kulistan. He will make you a captain in the palace guard, although—" with a fleeting smile curling her lips— "he is a little angry at you."

"Why?"

"Because of Gotha."

"Oh!"

"He liked her, and," she laughed— "more than merely liked her. Hayah— the old cat, though blind and lame, still hankers after mice! And you, like the generous soul you are, giving all your jewels to Timur Bek, so that he could pay back to Yengi Mehmet what he owed him, and free Gotha, and marry her!"

He gave a start.

"You said— marry?"

"Did you not know? Very early this morning they went to the mosque and became man and wife. And now they are off to the steppe, the wilderness, to spend their honeymoon. For they are young. They can stand the rigor, the chill harsh winds, the open air. Well—" and again she smiled, while again he winced a little— "we are not young, you and I. But our love is as great as theirs— is it not, my lord?"

He did not reply immediately. He looked at her, with a long and searching look. And then— nor was it altogether because he feared her brother the Grand Khan, and knew that this time he would have no chance at all to get away, but also, and chiefly, because of a queer feeling in his soul, something akin to tender pity— he inclined his head and said: "There was never love greater than mine, O heart of seven roses!"

He was silent; and he thought, with supreme self-satisfaction: When I do a thing, by Allah and by Allah, I do it in style! It is the glorious way of me.

So he bowed gallantly in the Persian manner, his hand on his breast. He was about to kneel before her, and had already bent his left leg, when suddenly he felt a stabbing pain and gave a cry.

"Why! Oh," was her anxious query.

"What is the matter?"

"Nothing, nothing."

"But I heard you—"

"A little pain— in my left leg."

"A wound?"

"No. A touch of rheumatism."

She shook a finger at him.

"Your own fault!"

"Eh?"

"Yes. To be up here on the roof late at night, in the cold, as if you were in your teens!"

"But—"

"You are old enough to have more sense! Off to bed with you— and a hot brick at your feet, and a glass of mulled wine to put you to sleep. Tomorrow we'll leave this draughty house, and stay with my cousin the Khan of Gulistan, and—"

"Look—" he interrupted indignantly.

"Be quiet! I know what is good for you."

Firmly she took him by the arm and led him down the stairs.

He did not resist. They passed Omar the Red's room. And Omar the Black bit his lips and frowned as he heard a faint, "Yoo-yoo-yoo!" heard, a moment later, something which sounded, suspiciously, like laughter.

IT CANNOT be said that, during the days that followed, Omar the Black was exactly unhappy. In fact, though he hated to admit it, he was enjoying life.

There was his wife. Faded, sure enough, and wrinkled. Not lovely at all, not the one to quicken a man's heartbeat and set his flesh to aching. On the other hand, she was so kindly, so very, very kindly— and so strangely humble when, frequently, she said to him:

"You bring me great happiness. I love you, O best beloved!"

He would kiss her gently; lying like a gentleman, and after a while not lying at all, though he thought he did, he would reply:

"So do I love you, O delight!"

Furthermore— oh, yes, Fathouma was right— he was no longer in his teens, no longer eager to travel the hard road, with ever danger and death lurking around the corner. And it was pleasant to be once more, as formerly at the court of the Grand Khan of the Golden Steppe, a man of fashion, dressed in cloak and breeches of handsomely embroidered, Bokharan satin, and hose of gossamer silk, and boots of soft red leather, and a voluminous turban that had cost fifty pieces of silver— and always a deal of money clanking in his breeches,

what with his captain's pay and his wife's generosity— and the work quite suiting his fancy.

Indeed, Omar did no work to speak of. Except that, as a captain in the service of the Khan of Gulistan, he would mount guard at the palace every forenoon for a leisurely, strolling hour or two, swapping yarns and boasts and lies with the other tall captains. And in the afternoons he would whistle to his tawny Afghan hound and stalk through the streets and bazaars, buying whatever he wished, and once in a while getting into a row because of insult real or, more often, imagined.

And in the evenings he would go on an occasional riotous drinking-bout, rolling home late and noisy— and Fathouma would be waiting for him, would cool his throbbing temples with scented water, nor give him the sharp edge of her tongue, but warn:

"You must be careful, best beloved. A man of your years—"

He would flare up.

"What do you mean— a man of my years?" he would demand. "Why, my heart is the same as ever it was, keen and lightsome! And my soul has the same golden fire, and my joints are still greased with the rich grease of youth, and—"

"Of course," she would agree soothingly. "And yet you look a little tired, and so you had better have your breakfast in bed tomorrow. And here"— stirring a cup that held a steaming, dark, strong-smelling broth—"some tea of bitter herbs for your stomach."

"No, no!"

"Yes, yes! Drink it at one swallow, hero, and it will not taste so bad."

He would sigh— and obey.

He would, to tell the truth, feel better for it the next day, and get up later and later as morning succeeded morning.

And as time progressed, moreover, Omar went on fewer drinking-bouts; and, gradually he became less, eager at smelling out insults and picking quarrels with all and sundry. In fact, the only quarrel which he had— and carefully nursed— was with his brother.

It was the latter, he would reflect, who by persuading him to return to Gulabad, had been responsible for everything: his marriage as well as the loss of his fine black beard. And while, a little grudgingly, he might forgive him the marriage, he could not forgive the matter of the beard.

It had grown again— and rapidly— oh, yes! But thanks to the shaving, it was not as silky as formerly; and two gray hairs sprouting for each one he plucked out; and he, with his wife knowing it, rather embarrassed at using gallnut dye.

And furthermore, the mocking way his brother, that night after the wedding, had yoo-yoo-yooed and laughed!

No, no— he could not forgive him.

Therefore when Omar the Red called at the palace, asking his twin brother to fulfil his side of the agreement— to supply the cash for settling the old debts and help him get back to the castle and to Ayesha— Omar the Black raised an eyebrow.

"Do you expect me, an honorable Tartar gentleman," he demanded, "a captain in the Khan's service, to take part in such a wicked enterprise as robbing a shop? Ah— shame on you!"

"We don't have to rob the shop."

"Then how—"

"You are rich."

"I am not."

"But—"

"My captain's pay is a mere pittance."

"Your wife—"

"Has plenty. Yes. And,"— self-righteously,— "it would never do for a gentleman to accept money from a woman. Surely even you know that."

Then, when the other grew angry and abusive, Omar the Black pointed to the door:

"Begone, O creature!" he shouted.

He instructed the palace servants that hereafter his twin brother was no longer to be admitted; and when Fathouma, who had heard him give the order, argued with him, he told her:

"You do not know my brother. Always, since his early childhood days, he has been a most lawless and sinful person, has always tried to lead me down the crooked road of temptation. He, I assure you, is not the proper companion for the like of me. And his way with the women— to kiss and ride away— shocking, shocking!"

Hypocritical? Not really. Or if he was, he did not know it.

Indeed, somehow, he meant what he said; began to fancy himself as a most sober and respectable citizen.

NO LONGER did his heart leap and skip like a gay little rabbit across the land whenever he beheld a new face, a young face, a pretty face. And one day when Fathouma mentioned that Timur Bek and his bride were expected home from their honeymoon— and what about entertaining them at dinner?— he shook his head.

"No," he said.

"But— isn't Timur your friend?"

"He is. But Gotha—"

"Yes?"

"A toothsome morsel, I grant you. Only— inclined to be flighty."

"I don't think so."

"I know. Why, the very first time I saw her, she gave me the quirk of the eye. She asked me, if you want blunt speech—"

"Please! Not too blunt!"

"You are quite right. It would not be fit for your ears. Anyway, I would have none of her. For by the Prophet, I have always followed the white road of honor— naturally, being what I am. Besides, was not my friend Timur Bek in love with the young person? So, as you know, I let him have my jewels, so that he might buy himself his heart's desire."

He smiled benignly; went on in resonant and rather unctuous accents: "The Lord's blessings on them both!"

Maybe Omar the Black believed that he spoke the truth. Maybe Fathouma did likewise; and maybe, being as clever in one way as she was simple in another, she did not— though without letting on.

For she loved her husband. She loved his very failings, and defended them, even to herself. She was happy— and happiest when, more and more frequently, he would spend the night at home and they would be alone; when he would sit by her side, pleasant and jovial and companionable, and tell her tales of his past life, his past prowess and bravery, his past motley adventures, east, north, south, west.

The love in her brown, gold-flecked eyes would enkindle his imagination. And— oh, the clanking, stirring tales he would tell then:

"The pick of the lads of the far wide roads I was, with ever my sword eager for a bit of strife, ever a fine thirst tickling my gullet, ever the bold, bold eyes of me giving the wink and smile at the passing girls, and they— the dears, the darlings!— giving the same wink and smile straight back at me—"

He would interrupt himself.

"That was," he would add, "before I met you."

"Of course."

She would laugh. She was not jealous of the past, being wiser than most women. Also— oh, yes, she was clever— the very fact that his mind was dwelling more and more on former days and former deeds, proved to her that he was getting old and ready to settle down— which was as she wished.

And so late one afternoon when— it happened rarely nowadays— Omar the Black had gone to split a bottle or two with a boon companion, Fathouma

decided that she would surprise him, would buy him a present: the handsomest carved emerald to be had in Gulabad.

She put on her swathing street veils and called to one of the lackeys, a Persian, who had recently been hired and who was a most conscientious servant— always present when he was needed and ready to do her bidding:

"Hossayn!"

He salaamed. "Heaven-born?"

"I am going to the bazaar to do some shopping. Come with me."

"Listen is obey!"

Again he salaamed. He led the way out of the palace, crying loudly:

"Give way, Moslems! Give way for the Heaven-born, the Princess of High Tartary!"

He stalked ahead, clearing a path with the help of a long brass-tipped stave.

Fathouma followed. She was excited, elated. Ah, what an emerald she would buy her lord! She tripped along. And she did not know that, as they passed a dark postern, Hossayn exchanged a cough and a fleeting glance with a stranger who stood there hidden in the coiling, trooping shadows. Nor could she know that several days earlier Hossayn had been buttonholed on the street by this same stranger, who had spoken to him at whispered length and taken him to a tavern.

There, over glasses of potent milk-white raki, they had continued the conversation. There had been spirited haggling and bargaining. Finally with a sigh, the other had well greased the Persian's greedy palm, giving him whatever gold and silver coins remained in his waist-shawl. He had added, for good measure, a couple of rings and a dagger.

He had leaned across the table, had asked:

"Do you know what I am thinking?"

"Well?"

"I am thinking,"— in a purring voice,— "that I have three more daggers, not as handsome as this but quite as sharp— and thinking, also, that, should you deceive me, yours might be a fine throat for slitting."

The Persian had turned pale.

"Do not bristle at me, tall warrior!" he had begged. "I— deceive you? Never!"

"Of course not."

"Only—"

"Only?" threateningly.

"I am not the only servant. Nor can I tell when the Heaven-born will—"

"I know. And I do not demand the impossible. All I expect you to do is to be attentive to her, to make a point of hovering near, being watchful."

He muttered instructions; and the Persian inclined his head.

"I understand."

So there was now, in passing, the glance, the cough— and once more:

"Give way, Moslems! Give way for the Heaven-born, the Princess of High Tartary!"

The people gave way as well as they could. But as Fathouma and the lackey approached the Street of the Western Traders, where the jewelers displayed their precious wares, the alleys and squares and marketplaces became ever more packed with milling, moiling, perspiring humanity, not to mention humanity's wives and children and mothers-in-law and visiting country cousins.

For today— and as it turned out, it was a lucky stroke of fortune for the stranger who had left the postern and was following the two as closely as he could— was a great Islamic festival: the day preceding the Lelet el-Kadr, the Night of Honor, the anniversary of the blessed occasion when Allah, in His mercy, revealed the Book of the Koran to His messenger Mohammed.

A most solemn occasion, the Lelet el-Kadr— it being the night when the Sidr, which is the lotus tree and which bears as many leaves as there are human beings, is shaken in Paradise by the Archangel Israfel, and on each leaf is inscribed the name of a person who will die during the coming year, should it drop.

SMALL WONDER that strong, personal interest is behind the prayers after sunset. Small wonder, furthermore, that all lights are extinguished— lest dark and evil djinn find their way up to Paradise and nudge the Archangel, startling him and causing him to shake down the wrong leaf.

Small wonder, finally, that on the preceding day there should be merry-making— a fit prelude to the Night of Honor, the Night of Fear, the Night of Repentance.

So here in Gulabad as in the rest of the Islamic world, gay throngs were everywhere, people of all High Tartary, with here and there men from the farther east and south and north and west— Persians, Afghans, Chinese, Siberians, Tibetans, even men from distant Hindustan and Burma, come across mountains and plains to fatten their purses on the holiday trade.

Doing well, making handsome profits.

For all were ready to spend what they could— and could not— afford. All were enjoying themselves after the Orient's immemorial fashion, resplendently and extravagantly and blaringly.

The men swaggered and strutted, fingering daggers, cocking immense turbans or shaggy sheepskin bonnets at rakish devil-may-care angles. The women minced along, rolling their hips and, above their thin, coquettish face-veils,, their eyes. The little boys tried to emulate their fathers in swaggering and strutting; to emulate each other in the shouting of loud, salty abuse. The little girls rivaled the other little girls in the gay, pansy shades of their loose trousers and the consumption of greasy, poisonously pink-and-green sweetmeats.

There were jugglers and knife-tossers, sword-swallowers and fire-eaters and painted dancing-girls.

There were cook-shops and toy-booths and merry-go-rounds.

There were itinerant dervish preachers chanting the glories of Allah the One, the Prophet Mohammed and the Forty-Seven True Saints.

There were bear-leaders, ape-leaders, fortune-tellers, bards, buffoons, and Punch-and-Judy shows.

There were large, bell-shaped tents where golden-skinned gypsy girls trilled and quavered melancholy songs to the accompaniment of guitars and tambourines. There was, of course, a great deal of love-making— the love-making of Asia, which is frank and a trifle indelicate.

There were the many street-cries.

"Sugared water! Sugared water here— and sweeten your breath!" would come the call of the lemonade-seller as he clanked his metal cups, while the vendor of parched grain, rattling the wares in his basket, would chime in with: "Pips! O pips! Roasted and ripe and rare! To sharpen your teeth— your stomach— your mind!"

"Trade with me, O Moslems! I am the father and mother of all cut-rates!"

"Look! Look! A handsome fowl from the Khan's chicken coop!"

"And stolen— most likely!"

Laughter then— swallowed, a moment later, by more and louder cries.

"Out of the way— and say, 'There is but One God!' "— the long, quivering yell of the water-carrier, lugging the lukewarm fluid in a goat's-skin bag, immensely heavy, fit burden for a buffalo.

"My supper is in Allah's hands, O True Believers! My supper is in Allah's hands! Whatever you give, that will return to you through Allah!"— the whine of a ragged old vagrant whose wallet perhaps contained more provision than the larder of many a respectable housewife.

"The grave is darkness— and good deeds are its lamps!"— the shriek of a blind beggarwoman, rapping two dry sticks together.

"In your protection, O honorable gentleman!"— the hiccoughy moan of a peasant, drunk with hasheesh, whom a constable was dragging by the ear in the direction of the jail, the peasant's wife trailing on behind with throaty

plaints of: "O calamity! O great and stinking shame! O most decidedly not father to our sons!"— her balled fists meanwhile ably assisting the policeman.

There was more laughter; and Fathouma, too, laughed as she followed Hossayn.

Only rarely she left the palace; and everything amused her. She decided she would tell Omar the Black all about it tonight when she saw him— and she progressed slowly through the throng, with the stranger still in back; then she stopped, a little nervous, as there was a brawl between a Persian merchant and a Turkoman nomad who disputed the right of way.

Neither would budge. They glared at one another. Presently they became angry, and anger gave way to rage— and then a stream of abuse, of that vitriolic and picturesque vituperation in which Central Asia excels.

"Owl! Donkey! Jew! Christian! Leper! Seller of pigs' tripe!" This from the lips of the elderly Persian whose carefully trimmed, snow-white whiskers gave him air aspect of patriarchal Old Testament dignity in ludicrous contrast with the foul invective which he was using. "Uncouth and swinish creature! Eater of filth! Wearer of a verminous turban!"

The reply was prompt: "Basest of hyenas! Goat of a smell most goatish! Now, by my honor, you shall eat stick!"

The stick, swinging by a leather thong from the Turkoman's wrist, was two pounds of tough blackthorn. It was raised and brought down with full force— the Persian moving away just in time and drawing a curved dagger.

People rushed up, closed in, took sides.

It was the beginning of a full-fledged battle royal— and Fathouma cried:

"Hossayn! Hossayn! Get me out of here!"

But Hossayn was not near her. All she saw of him, some yards away, was his red fez bobbing up and down in the mob, as if he were drowning.

"Hossayn! Oh, Hossayn!"

Farther and farther floated the fez; the mob seemed to be carrying the man away; and Fathouma became terribly frightened— jostled and pushed about— and everywhere the striking fists, the glistening weapons— everywhere the shrieks of rage and pain.

She wept helplessly, hopelessly. Almost she fainted.

Then she felt a firm grip on her elbow; heard a reassuring voice in her ear: "This way, Heaven-born!"

A moment later, a man, tall and broad-shouldered, tucked her under one arm as if she were a child, while with the other, wielding a sword, he carved a path through the crowd. They turned a corner; reached a back alley; his knee pushed open a door; and she found herself in the shed of a provision merchant's shop.

There, in the dim light that drifted through a window high on the wall, she saw her rescuer: a man with an eagle's beak of a nose, thin lips, small, greenish eyes. A man— she thought with a start— as like to her husband as peas in a pod, except that his beard was red and not black....

She knew at once who he was:

"You— you are Omar the Red! Ah, the lucky, lucky day for me!"

"Luckier for myself!"

"My husband will be so grateful."

"Doubtless. But this time, knowing my brother, I shall make sure, quite sure, of his gratitude." A smile like milk curdling flitted across his face. "Tell me," he asked, "how good are you at the riding?"

"The— riding?"

"Yes. On a horse. A horse, swift and powerful, to carry the two of us, and you on the saddle in front of me, and with one of my arms— wah! there have been plenty women in the past who liked the strength of it— around your waist to hold you steady."

She looked at him.

"Oh," she faltered, "but—"

"Listen!"

He spoke at length. And, he wondered, was that a laugh trembling on her lips? No, no! it must be the beginning of a cry of fear; and, at once, there was his sword to the fore.

"Be quiet!" he warned her. "Or else— and you the woman and I the tough ruffian— here is the point of my blade for the whitest breast!"

So she was quiet; and he went on:

"Come! My horse is waiting for us— and so are the steppes of High Tartary."

He led her out of the shed, walking close to her. A loving couple, people would have thought; and none to know that, hidden by the folds of the man's cloak, a dagger was pressed against the small of the woman's back.

By this time, the merry-making had ceased. There came the booming of the sunset gun from the great Mosque where, in the west, it raised its minaret of rosy marble. There came, immediately afterwards, the muezzin's throaty chant that the Night of Honor, the Night of Fear and Repentance, was near; and then lights were extinguished everywhere against the malign flitting of the dark and evil djinns, and the places of worship were filled with the Faithful, the streets and alleys became deserted.

Not a wayfarer anywhere. Hardly a sound.

Only, as a sturdy stallion with two in the saddle rode through the northern gate, a sleepy sentinel's challenge:

"Who goes there?"

"A merchant and his wife."

"Travel in peace, O Moslems!"

So Fathouma and Omar the Red were off at a gallop; while at just about the same time, when Omar the Black returned to the palace, there was a Persian lackey telling him a terrible tale— a tale of heroism, showing, in proof, various bruises and even a bandaged shoulder and explaining how he had been attacked by a shoda, a rough customer, had been kicked, cuffed, knocked down, sliced and stabbed with a number of sharp weapons.

With a great throng of men, each intent on his own brawl, all about him, he had been helpless; and— Allah!— the cruel, brutal strength of this red-bearded scoundrel....

"Eh?" interrupted Omar the Black. "You— you said red-bearded?"

"Superbly, silkily red-bearded. And hook-nosed. And armed to the teeth...."

"And with an evil glint in his eyes?"

"Most evil!"

THE PERSIAN went on to relate that here he was, prone on the ground, grievously wounded. And there was the other, with the Heaven-born in a faint and slung across his shoulders as if she were a bag of turnips; and the man's parting words had been:

"Take a message to Omar the Black. Tell him to come quickly, and alone, and with a queen's ransom in his breeches. Let him take the Darb-i-Sultani, the King's Highway, straight north into High Tartary. And, presently, at a place of my own choosing, I shall have word with him."

Such was the lackey's story; and Omar the Black did not doubt it, since he knew his brother.

What puzzled him later on— and what, indeed, he cannot understand to this day, though frequently he has asked his wife about it— was what she did or, rather, what she did not do.

Why— he wondered— did she not resist? Why did she neither struggle nor cry out?

"How could I?" she would explain. "At first I thought he had come to rescue me. I was grateful."

"Still— after you discovered that he…?"

"I was helpless. I am a weak woman— and there was the point of his dagger pressed against my spine."

"Even so— when you passed, on the saddle in front of him, through the gate— a word to the sentinel…"

"It would have been my last. The dagger…"

"Omar the Red would not have carried out his threat."

"How was I to know? Such a scoundrel, this brother of yours— you yourself used to tell me— and not at all to be trusted."

SO, AFTERWARDS, was Fathouma's explanation; and we repeat that Omar the Black— and small blame to him— was puzzled.

But, at the time of the kidnaping, the only emotion he felt was worry. Dreadful worry. Why, he loved his wife— and ho, life without her, like a house without a light, a tree without a leaf…

As soon as Hossayn told him the news, he took all his money, all his jewels and whatever of Fathouma's he could find. As an afterthought, he went to the shop of Baruch ben Isaac ben Ezechiel, the rich Jew.

Better too much treasure— he reflected— than too little. He told himself— since, after all, in spite of his worry, he was still the same Omar the Black— that loot was loot and would always come in handy. Therefore, courteously, he asked for credit; was courteously granted it— for was he not the husband of a Tartar Princess and a captain in the Khan's palace guard?

The merchant salaamed.

"Do not worry about credit, lord. Take whatever you wish."

Omar wished a lot, took a lot; and, within the hour, followed his wife and his twin brother up the Darb-i-Sultani, into the north.

All night he rode and all the following morning.

At first, near Gulabad, the land was fertile, with tight little villages and checkerboard fields folded compactly into valleys where small rivers ran. But, toward noon, the steppe came to him.

The heart of the steppe.

The heart of High Tartary.

IT CAME with orange and purple and heliotrope; with the sands spawning their monotonous, brittle eternities toward a vague horizon. It came with an - insolent, lifeless nakedness; and when, occasionally, there was a sign of life— a vulture poised high on stiff, quivering wings, a jackal loping along like an obscene, gray thought, or a nomad astride his dromedary, his jaws and brows bound up in mummy-fashion against the whirling sand grains, passing with never a word of cheerful greeting— it seemed a rank intrusion, a weak, puerile challenge to the infinite wilderness.

A lonely land.

A harsh and arid land. No silken luxury here. No ease and comfort.

The heat was brutish, brassy. His rheumatic leg ached.

Yet, gradually, he became conscious of a queer elation.

It had been long years— he told himself— since he had left High Tartary. Nor had he ever wished to return. Still— why— it was his own land, his dear land.... "Yes, yes!" he cried; and, almost, he forgot what had taken him here, almost forgot Fathouma. "Here— rain or shine, cloudy sky or brazen sun— is my own land, my dear land! Here is freedom! And here, ever, the stout, happy heart!"

He put spurs to his horse and galloped on, grudging each hour of rest. And afternoon died; and evening brought a gloomy iridescence, a twilight of pastel shades, a distant mountain chain with blues and ochres of every hue gleaming on the slopes; and a few days' ride beyond the range— he knew— was Nadirabad nestling in the shadows of the old, ancestral castle; and he dismounted and made a small campfire; and night dropped, suddenly, like a shutter, the way it does on the steppe; and out of the night came a mocking call:

"Welcome, brother!"

Omar the Red stepped from behind a rock; and Omar the Black jumped up, sword in hand.

"Dog with a dog's heart!" he yelled.

"I shall fight you for Fathouma!"

"Fight? No, no! You shall pay me for her— and, by the same token, live up to our agreement."

So, since curses and threats did not help matters, there was, presently, a deal of money thrown on the ground and a wealth of glittering jewels— some come by honestly, and some less so.

"Enough," remarked Omar the Red "to pay back the debts to the Nadirabad merchants— and to lift the mortgage on the castle— and for Ayesha and me to live on comfortably for a number of years."

"For more than a number of years," announced Fathouma, stepping into the flickering light of the campfire. "Indeed until the end of your days— if you are ready to do your share of proper toil."

She turned to her husband.

"The soil up yonder, your brother tells me, is fat," she continued, "and the grass is green and sappy and the water pure. A fine chance, in your own country, for a man's hard, decent work— even a man of your years— and there we shall live, the four of us, and thrive— God willing!"

"You," stammered Omar the Black "you said— the four of us?"

"Ayesha and your brother— and you and I. Can you not add two and two?"

Now this— to live once more at home— had been the very thing which, deep in his soul, he had dreamed of and longed for, ever since he had come to the steppe. But it would not do for a man to give in too quickly to his wife.

"Nothing of the sort!" he replied. "We shall ride back to Gulabad and—"

"Listen!" she interrupted.

"Yes?"

She stepped up close to him.

"Would you want," she demanded, lowering her voice, "your child to be born in an alien land?"

He gave a start.

"My— my child?"

"Mine too." She smiled. "Our child, before the end of many months. Oh yes— my hair is gray. But,"— blushing a little—"I am not as old as all that."

Then he took her tenderly into his arms. "By the Prophet the Adored!" he cried triumphantly. "Let it be a man-child, a little son, to you and me! A strong little son! The strongest in all High Tartary—"

"Except," cut in Omar the Red, "for the son whom Ayesha shall bear to me."

"Liar!"

"Liar yourself!"

"Drunkard!"

"Unclean pimple!"

Almost, they came to blows.

AND THE end of the tale?

The end of the tale is not yet.

But, up there in the ancient castle in High Tartary, live two white-haired men. White-haired, too, their wives. And the latter exchanging winks when, occasionally, their husbands comment naggingly, querulously, about the morals of Islam's younger generation, including their grandsons....

———————————

16: Midnight at Marshland Grange

Arthur Locker

1828–1893

Once a Week, 21 Nov 1863

THE SUPERNATURAL INVESTIGATION SOCIETY— that was what we styled ourselves— was limited to six members: namely, Messieurs Toombs, Graves, Knight, Gashleigh, Scully, and Bone. For a twelvemonth or more we had been addling our brains by culling ghost-stories out of books, or collecting them from our friends. But this was, at best, second-hand evidence.

"What we want," said Jack Toombs, our president, bringing his fist upon the table with a crash, and startling us all (for twelve months of continuous spectral literature tends to unstring the nerves)— "what we want is to *see* a ghost!"

"That," observed Mr. Gashleigh, "is easier said than done. Gentlemen," he continued, solemnly, "although there is not a rood of ground in this mighty city upon which some deed of blood and darkness has not been perpetrated, I don't believe there's a ghost to be heard of in all London. Either the noise of the night-cabs, or the carbonised atmosphere, or the policemen's bulls-eyes, or the cats on the roofs— whatever it is, something keeps 'em away. For aught we know, a frightful and mysterious murder may have been committed under this very roof— nay, on that exact spot where you, Scully, are now sitting."

(Mr. Scully looked uncomfortable, and shifted the position of his chair.)

"Why don't we hear of that murder?" pursued Mr. Gashleigh. "Because, sir," said the honourable member, fixing his eye on the president, "in this bustling, excitable metropolis, it was probably only a nine-days' wonder. In a secluded country place it would have afforded gossip for a century. Now this is the gist of my argument. Ghosts don't care to walk except where there's a public who know all about their affairs. Here in London, if you met a ghost on the stairs you would take him for a housebreaker, and insist on giving him in charge; whereas in the country, your blood would curdle with horror at a similar visitation, because you would recognise the spectre of old Job Tatterly, the miser, who was found in the horsepond one November morning, but whose hoarded wealth was never discovered."

"Why not advertise," said Bone, "for a Haunted House?"

The proposal was received with acclamation, an advertisement was composed and inserted in the public prints; all answers to be addressed to me, A. Wynter Knight, Esq., secretary to the Society.

We received several written replies, which I may dismiss very briefly. Two or three of them were palpable hoaxes, while one was from the landlord of a boarding-house who alleged that he had lost all his lodgers owing to

supernatural noises. This gentleman wanted us to take the lease of his house off his hands, and we had nearly concluded the bargain, when Graves, our vice-president, met one of the late boarders in society, who informed him that he and the other inmates had quitted the house not because of ghosts, but because a frightful and mysterious stench pervaded the lower part of the premises, which not even Burnett's Disinfecting Fluid could cure. In short, the landlord was a humbug, as I periphrastically told him during our last interview.

Then there was an old lady, widow of a master-mariner, resident in Three Colt Lane, Victoria Park, N.E., who wrote thus:

Sir,— I have a drawing-room floor to let, furnished, with use of kitchen if not cooking too late dinners. The house is haunted, not that I have ever seen anything myself; but my son, who is mate of a collier-brig, coming home late from the Commercial Docks, stumbled over a Newfoundland dog on the first-floor landing, which ran down stairs, and though he followed it was no longer visible. Now, sir, a party lived in the drawing-room sett who threw himself into Sir George Duckett's Canal, through sporting and betting. I never heard he kept a dog, but why not, on the sly? His employers being aware that paunches are expensive, and naturally suspicious, as his salary was only eighty pounds a year. I can give you reasonable attendance; and remain, sir, your humble servant,

Mary Clack

We could not accept this worthy dame's proposal. There was a vein of honesty running through her somewhat confused letter which pleased us; but a haunted first-floor, with an obsequious landlady cooking chops for us on the basement storey, in the intervals of spectral visitation, was too absurd.

More than a week passed away, and we despaired of getting anything to suit us, when one day, as I was seated in my office (I may mention that, when not supernaturally engaged, I am in the hemp, jute, and gunnybag business)— one day, as I was seated in my office alone, a gentleman entered and introduced himself by laying a card on my desk. It was a large, old-fashioned, thick card, and bore the name *Mr. Edgar Batesford*, beneath which was written, in yellow-rusted ink, *Marshland Grange, Essex*.

"You advertised for a haunted house?" he said, smiling.

I started; for at that moment my thoughts were immersed in fibrous commodities.

"Yes, sir, I did. Have you anything eligible to offer us?"

"Possibly I have, on certain conditions."

"Will you name them?"

"That you visit the house in question alone in my company, without informing your brother-clubmen of your intention until the following day."

I regarded my visitor earnestly, to see if he looked like a rogue. His appearance was in his favour. He was a tall, thin young man, with good

features and (what is noticeable in these bearded days) a clean-shaven face. His clothes were new and fashionably cut; but I observed that he wore an old-fashioned stand-up collar and stock.

"Where is the haunted house?" I asked.

"This is the place," he answered, pointing to the card— "Marshland Grange, my own property. Owing to all sorts of absurd sinister rumours I haven't been able to let it for years. I shall therefore be delighted to have the mystery cleared up by your Society."

"What are your terms?"

"My terms! My dear sir, I shall be only too happy to pay *you*, if you can prove the house unhaunted. Should it, on the contrary, appear to be supernaturally infested, a few guineas to repay my expenses will amply suffice— say ten guineas; you can put the amount in your pocket."

My features must have betrayed some hesitation, for Mr. Batesford continued:

"You demur to my suggestion, and very naturally too. You say to yourself: 'I know nothing of this man. What is to prevent his inveigling me into some lonely ruinous place, and then extorting the ten guineas by violence?' Now, I know *your* respectability. Your firm, A. W. Knight & Co., was established in 1803, if I mistake not, just before Boney became Emperor."

"It was; and it strikes me I have seen the name of Batesford in our old ledgers."

"Very possibly: but never mind that at present. Now, I am going to give you a guarantee of *my* respectability. Here is a twenty-pound Bank of England note. Lock that up in your safe until tomorrow, and meet me this evening at the Shoreditch Station for the 6.40 train. We will go together, and sit up till twelve o'clock at Marshland Grange. Do you agree?"

"I do," I replied, as I turned my Chubb-key on his deposit. "There's my hand upon it!"

Mr. Batesford did not appear to notice my proffered palm, but bowing slightly quitted the office.

"This is a queer customer," I thought. "As I have an hour to spare, I will follow the fellow, and see what becomes of him." I put on my hat, and went out into Thames Street; but though I traced his tall figure for some time, out-topping the ordinary run of wayfarers, I lost sight of him under the arch of London Bridge.

"Never mind," said I. "I shall see if he is true to his appointment this evening."

I must confess I felt rather nervous as my cab rattled up Bishopsgate Street towards the station. But the possible honour and glory in store for me buoyed

me up. Perhaps while my brother-inquirers have only been talking about ghosts, I may be privileged to see one. Still I experienced some secret qualms, and I should have breathed more freely if Mr. Batesford had *not* been awaiting me in front of the booking-office.

He nodded slightly, and said:

"Netherwood is our station. I presume, Mr. Knight, you will pay the fares? I am not above travelling second-class."

I took the tickets accordingly, and entered a carriage that was pretty full of people; for I felt rather shy of my companion.

To beguile the tedium of the journey, I tried to engage him in conversation, but with little success. He appeared to be totally uninterested in politics, and in reply to my remarks on our financial prosperity, said:

"I believe in Billy Pitt, sir. Look at his Sinking Fund. There's a masterpiece!"

Now, if the man who uttered these words had been eighty years old, I should have regarded him with interest as a harmless old fossil of the past; but here was a young man of five-and-twenty, who invariably spoke of guineas instead of pounds, called the French Emperor Bonaparte, and mentioned Pitt, as if that financier were still living. I could make nothing of him; so I drew out the *Evening Standard*, and plunged into Manhattan's last letter.

Presently I heard the rustling of paper opposite, and peeping over my own broadsheet, observed that Mr. Batesford was also engaged with a newspaper. I felt anxious to know what journal he patronised, and was surprised to see the name of a well-known daily paper which has recently become extinct. The diminutive size of the sheet also astonished me; it appeared to have shrunk to half its normal bulk. I peeped again; and being an adept at the old schoolboy accomplishment of reading upside down, managed to spell out the date— 19th October, 1863.

"Today's paper!" thought I; "and yet, certainly, that journal has ceased to exist for months past." My curiosity was on tiptoe. I determined to have an explanation.

"Mr. Batesford, would you oblige me by exchanging papers?"

"Thank you," he replied, blandly; "I shall take no interest in yours, and I do not care to part with my own. However, you may just look at it."

He reversed the sheet, so as to hold the title before my eyes. I had made a slight mistake in my topsy-turvy decipherings. I had added a flourish to a figure where no such flourish existed; for Mr. Batesford's paper was the *Morning Chronicle* of the 19th October, 1803!

"Sixty years ago, this very day! I should like to read that paper. It must be quite a curiosity."

"Wait till we get home," said Mr. Batesford, smiling, and folding up the newspaper. "Come, here we are at Netherwood. There is your carpet-bag. We will walk across to the Grange, as it is dry under foot."

Mr. Batesford was probably an Essex man, and connected by Darwinian affiliation with the frogs of his native swamps; for in my opinion it was as damp, greasy, oozy, and slushy a walk as I ever took on a murky, lowering October night. We traversed lanes where the water dripped down our backs from the overhanging hedgerows; we got over stiles which led into clayey footpaths by the side of slow-moving streams; we entered, at last, upon a region of bulrushes, where the chilly water actually gurgled up about my ankles. I endeavoured to keep up a stout heart. I said:

"A. W. Knight, remember that you are a Searcher after Truth; remember, also, that there are a pair of dry shoes and socks in your carpet-bag."

At length, after three miles of this glutinous journeying, we came out upon a firm high-road. I blessed the memory of Macadam, and strode merrily onwards. Presently we halted in front of a house separated from the road by a small garden.

"Marshland Grange," observed my companion, breaking a long-continued silence.

I looked up at the house with a sigh of disappointment: it was such an utterly commonplace dwelling. I had pictured Marshland Grange as a rambling old edifice, exhibiting in its wings, gables, and additions, specimens of half-a-dozen architectural eras, and situated far from other human abode in a desolate swamp. In place of this, I beheld a common ten-roomed brown brick box, built evidently about the end of the last century, when picturesqueness was deemed a barbarism, and within hail of half-a-dozen labourers' cottages.

"This a haunted house?" I asked, half-contemptuously, as Mr. Batesford led the way into the parlour.

"So the neighbours say," replied my companion.

For some seconds I was unable to tell why he was such a long time striking a light. I then saw that he used a flint, steel, and tinder-box.

"You are singularly old-fashioned," I remarked. "To be consistent, you should have travelled down from London in the old Essex Highflyer, Mr. Batesford."

"The railway was more convenient, this evening," he answered quietly: as much as to say, "On other evenings I should prefer the Highflyer."

As soon as he had lighted the candle (which, by the way, was a common, guttering, snuff-accumulating dip) I looked round the room. It was desolate enough: several windows were broken, while the furniture consisted of a couple of rickety chairs and a dilapidated deal table.

"Change your boots, Mr. Knight, and then I will show you over the house."

He took up the candle and preceded me. We went upstairs and downstairs, examining both kitchens and attics. The remainder of the rooms were entirely bare of furniture; and the house was a regular formal up-and-down affair, which might have been situated on the Duke of Bedford's Bloomsbury estate. There were no gloomy corridors— no deep-sunk unexpected cupboards— no possibility of secret doors or passages. It was damp, mouldy, and depressing, but perfectly commonplace.

"No room for a ghost to hide here," said I, jocularly.

"It don't look like it," observed Mr. Batesford; "still the neighbours say otherwise. Let us return to the parlour, close the shutters, and make ourselves as comfortable as we can till twelve o'clock strikes. That is, I believe, the legitimate hour for ghostly visitants."

We took our seats in the comfortless apartment, which felt chilly and miserable enough to depress any professional ghost-hunter. The wind whistled through the chinks of the decaying shutters, threatening every moment to extinguish our feeble candle.

"Let us fortify our spirits with a little supper, Mr. Batesford," I said, diving into my carpet-bag, and producing a cottage-loaf, a chicken-and-ham sausage, and three bottles of Bass's ale. My companion fell to work with alacrity, eating and drinking in a singularly rapid yet noiseless manner. He consumed the lion's share of two bottles of ale, and watched me with wistful eyes as I opened a third. I began to despise him. "He drinks," I said to myself, "to obtain a stock of Dutch courage. So much the better. Had he not swallowed more than his share, I might have been tempted to tipple, whereas now my head is cool. I am prepared for anything."

For one thing I was not prepared;— for Mr. Batesford suddenly falling asleep, and snoring hideously. I called to him once or twice, when he ceased for a few moments without waking up, but presently began again as bad as ever. I looked at my watch; it was only eleven o'clock. What should I do till twelve? I did not like to smoke. I fancied it would look disrespectful, when you expected a ghost, to be puffing out the vapour of tobacco. I had forgotten to bring a pack of cards, or I might have had a game at Patience. What should I do? Just then my companion emitted a more energetic snore than usual, which caused me to turn towards him. His legs were stretched out, his chair was tilted back, and his head was supported by the edge of the table. For a sparely-built man he was a most uncomfortable sleeper. His breathing was perfectly convulsive. But his breast-pocket rather than himself engaged my attention, for from it protruded that newspaper which I had been so eager to see in the railway-carriage. I could no longer restrain my curiosity, but drew it softly

forth, and settled myself down to read it by the flickering candlelight. I soon became interested in the tiny old newspaper. The England of 1803, just as we were recommencing that tremendous struggle which terminated in Waterloo and St. Helena, rose before my eyes. But a paragraph of half-a-dozen lines in the third page put politics completely out of my head.

I felt my blood congeal, and my skin roughen with horror as I read those words. I rose slowly to my feet. "Gracious Powers!" I murmured; "I sneered at the notion of this house being haunted, and here, within a yard of me, in yonder chair, sits—"

I bent cautiously over him. His head was thrown back. I shuddered with affright. I could guess now why he wore a high collar and stock. I could see the fatal—

Just then a distant clock struck twelve. My companion suddenly woke, and said, with a yawn, "What! twelve o'clock, and no ghost yet! Come, Mr. Knight, I think you will be able to certify that, barring a few repairs, the house is fit for anybody to live in; and I shall be happy to give you a liberal commission if you can find me a respectable tenant."

While he spoke thus, I was staring at him with a fixed gaze of horror. He did not seem to notice my expression of countenance, but presently, observing the newspaper in my hand, exclaimed, in an angry voice, "How dare you, sir!" and snatched it from me.

Just then an unusually strong gust of wind penetrated the crazy shutters, and blew the candle out. The snuff was still redhot, and I contrived to relight it; as I did so, I heard a distant door bang. I looked round for my companion, but he was gone!

With trembling knees, and a swiftly-palpitating heart, I hastily packed my carpet-bag and quitted that house of desolation. After trudging a hundred yards or more along the road, I reached the village inn, and was surprised to observe a stream of light pouring from the chinks of the door at that late hour. I knocked, and was immediately admitted.

"Why, you look 'most as scared as we do, master," observed the landlord; "and we've been a watching the corpse-light over in the Haunted House yonder. Just as twelve o'clock struck, out went the light, 'zackly as I said it would; didn't I, missus?"

"Aye, that ye did, Joe," replied the wife.

"My friends, I can explain something of this," said I. "I belong to a Society up in London, instituted with the view of inquiring into ghost-stories; and I came down to visit Marshland Grange for that purpose, in company with the landlord. That accounts for the light you saw."

"Why, there bain't ne'er a landlord," piped out a village patriarch. "The house has been in Chancery ever since Batesford the forger cut his throat, in the front-parlour, sixty year ago."

I RETURNED to London next day in such an excitable state, that I was scarcely able to attend to business; but I made a circumstantial report of my adventures to the Supernatural Investigation Society. I added the singular fact, that on examining our old ledgers I found the name of Edgar Batesford among our customers during the year 1803, and that his account had been ruled off suddenly with a considerable debit, which was passed to Profit and Loss.

This certainly sounds like a genuine ghostly visitation. But, on the other hand, I am bound to confess that, on unlocking my safe, I found the twenty-pound note to be an unmistakable sham— in fact, it was drawn on the Bank of Elegance. Now, I am positive I locked up a genuine Bank of England note. Supernaturalists will say that this strengthens their belief in the story: for the substitution of a counterfeit for a genuine note, by some shadowy sleight-of-hand, was the very trick to be expected from the spirit of a forger; but Jack Toombs, our President, who is a hard-headed sceptical fellow, holds another view. He reasons thus:

"It is well known that our respected secretary has a younger brother in his office, who is perpetually gibing and jeering at our Society. This gentleman possesses a duplicate key of the safe. Supposing that he has learnt the fact of Edgar Batesford's connection with the house of A. W. Knight and Co. in 1803, and his subsequent suicide, what is to prevent him suborning some clever fellow to impersonate the forger? At the right moment this pretended ghost blows the light out, and slips away by the back-door. That banging of the back-door is fatal to the supernatural theory: a real spectre would have disappeared silently."

To this I will rejoin but little. Whichever view you adopt, the matter is surrounded with difficulties: but this I will say, that if Jack Toombs had seen that Being as I saw him, with his head thrown back, he would not have been in a condition to theorise so dispassionately. At any rate, I have had enough of it. My nerves are completely shattered; so I purpose resigning my secretaryship, and joining the German *Turnverein*. Gymnastics will, I trust, make me myself again.

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17: The Enchanted Bluff

Willa Cather

1873-1947

Harper's Monthly Magazine April 1909

WE HAD our swim before sundown, and while we were cooking our supper the oblique rays of light made a dazzling glare on the white sand about us. The translucent red ball itself sank behind the brown stretches of cornfield as we sat down to eat, and the warm layer of air that had rested over the water and our clean sand bar grew fresher and smelled of the rank ironweed and sunflowers growing on the flatter shore. The river was brown and sluggish, like any other of the half-dozen streams that water the Nebraska corn lands. On one shore was an irregular line of bald clay bluffs where a few scrub oaks with thick trunks and flat, twisted tops threw light shadows on the long grass. The western shore was low and level, with cornfields that stretched to the skyline, and all along the water's edge were little sandy coves and beaches where slim cottonwoods and willow saplings flickered.

The turbulence of the river in springtime discouraged milling, and, beyond keeping the old red bridge in repair, the busy farmers did not concern themselves with the stream; so the Sandtown boys were left in undisputed possession. In the autumn we hunted quail through the miles of stubble and fodder land along the flat shore, and, after the winter skating season was over and the ice had gone out, the spring freshets and flooded bottoms gave us our great excitement of the year. The channel was never the same for two successive seasons. Every spring the swollen stream undermined a bluff to the east, or bit out a few acres of cornfield to the west and whirled the soil away, to deposit it in spumy mud banks somewhere else. When the water fell low in midsummer, new sand bars were thus exposed to dry and whiten in the August sun.

Sometimes these were banked so firmly that the fury of the next freshet failed to unseat them; the little willow seedlings emerged triumphantly from the yellow froth, broke into spring leaf, shot up into summer growth, and with their mesh of roots bound together the moist sand beneath them against the batterings of another April.

Here and there a cottonwood soon glittered among them, quivering in the low current of air that, even on breathless days when the dust hung like smoke above the wagon road, trembled along the face of the water.

It was on such an island, in the third summer of its yellow green, that we built our watch fire; not in the thicket of dancing willow wands, but on the level terrace of fine sand which had been added that spring; a little new bit of

world, beautifully ridged with ripple marks, and strewn with the tiny skeletons of turtles and fish, all as white and dry as if they had been expertly cured.

We had been careful not to mar the freshness of the place, although we often swam to it on summer evenings and lay on the sand to rest.

This was our last watch fire of the year, and there were reasons why I should remember it better than any of the others.

Next week the other boys were to file back to their old places in the Sandtown High School, but I was to go up to the Divide to teach my first country school in the Norwegian district. I was already homesick at the thought of quitting the boys with whom I had always played; of leaving the river, and going up into a windy plain that was all windmills and cornfields and big pastures; where there was nothing wilful or unmanageable in the landscape, no new islands, and no chance of unfamiliar birds-such as often followed the watercourses.

Other boys came and went and used the river for fishing or skating, but we six were sworn to the spirit of the stream, and we were friends mainly because of the river. There were the two Hassler boys, Fritz and Otto, sons of the little German tailor.

They were the youngest of us; ragged boys of ten and twelve, with sunburned hair, weather-stained faces, and pale blue eyes. Otto, the elder, was the best mathematician in school, and clever at his books, but he always dropped out in the spring term as if the river could not get on without him. He and Fritz caught the fat, horned catfish and sold them about the town, and they lived so much in the water that they were as brown and sandy as the river itself.

There was Percy Pound, a fat, freckled boy with chubby cheeks, who took half a dozen boys' story-papers and was always being kept in for reading detective stories behind his desk. There was Tip Smith, destined by his freckles and red hair to be the buffoon in all our games, though he walked like a timid little old man and had a funny, cracked laugh. Tip worked hard in his father's grocery store every afternoon, and swept it out before school in the morning. Even his recreations were laborious. He collected cigarette cards and tin tobacco-tags indefatigably, and would sit for hours humped up over a snarling little scroll-saw which he kept in his attic. His dearest possessions were some little pill bottles that purported to contain grains of wheat from the Holy Land, water from the Jordan and the Dead Sea, and earth from the Mount of Olives. His father had bought these dull things from a Baptist missionary who peddled them, and Tip seemed to derive great satisfaction from their remote origin.

The tall boy was Arthur Adams. He had fine hazel eves that were almost too reflective and sympathetic for a boy, and such a pleasant voice that we all

loved to hear him read aloud. Even when he had to read poetry aloud at school, no one ever thought of laughing. To be sure, he was not at school very much of the time.

He was seventeen and should have finished the High School the year before, but he was always off somewhere with his gun. Arthur's mother was dead, and his father, who was feverishly absorbed in promoting schemes, wanted to send the boy away to school and get him off his hands; but Arthur always begged off for another year and promised to study. I remember him as a tall, brown boy with an intelligent face, always lounging among a lot of us little fellows, laughing at us oftener than with us, but such a soft, satisfied laugh that we felt rather flattered when we provoked it. In after-years people said that Arthur had been given to evil ways as a]ad, and it is true that we often saw him with the gambler's sons and with old Spanish Fanny's boy, but if he learned anything ugly in their company he never betrayed it to us. We would have followed Arthur anywhere, and I am bound to say that he led us into no worse places than the cattail marshes and the stubble fields.

These, then, were the boys who camped with me that summer night upon the sand bar.

After we finished our supper we beat the willow thicket for driftwood. By the time we had collected enough, night had fallen, and the pungent, weedy smell from the shore increased with the coolness. We threw ourselves down about the fire and made another futile effort to show Percy Pound the Little Dipper. We had tried it often before, but he could never be got past the big one.

"You see those three big stars just below the handle, with the bright one in the middle?" said Otto Hassler; "that's Orion's belt, and the bright one is the clasp." I crawled behind Otto's shoulder and sighted up his arm to the star that seemed perched upon the tip of his steady forefinger. The Hassler boys did seine-fishing at night, and they knew a good many stars.

Percy gave up the Little Dipper and lay back on the sand, his hands clasped under his head. "I can see the North Star," he announced, contentedly, pointing toward it with his big toe.

"Anyone might get lost and need to know that."

We all looked up at it.

"How do you suppose Columbus felt when his compass didn't point north any more?" Tip asked.

Otto shook his head. "My father says that there was another North Star once, and that maybe this one won't last always. I wonder what would happen to us down here if anything went wrong with it?"

Arthur chuckled. "I wouldn't worry, Ott. Nothing's apt to happen to it in your time. Look at the Milky Way! There must be lots of good dead Indians."

We lay back and looked, meditating, at the dark cover of the world. The gurgle of the water had become heavier. We had often noticed a mutinous, complaining note in it at night, quite different from its cheerful daytime chuckle, and seeming like the voice of a much deeper and more powerful stream. Our water had always these two moods: the one of sunny complaisance, the other of inconsolable, passionate regret.

"Queer how the stars are all in sort of diagrams," remarked Otto. "You could do most any proposition in geometry with 'em.

They always look as if they meant something. Some folks say everybody's fortune is all written out in the stars, don't they?"

"They believe so in the old country," Fritz affirmed.

But Arthur only laughed at him. "You're thinking of Napoleon, Fritzey. He had a star that went out when he began to lose battles. I guess the stars don't keep any close tally on Sandtown folks."

We were speculating on how many times we could count a hundred before the evening star went down behind the cornfields, when someone cried, "There comes the moon, and it's as big as a cart wheel!"

We all jumped up to greet it as it swam over the bluffs behind us. It came up like a galleon in full sail; an enormous, barbaric thing, red as an angry heathen god.

"When the moon came up red like that, the Aztecs used to sacrifice their prisoners on the temple top," Percy announced.

"Go on, Perce. You got that out of Golden Days. Do you believe that, Arthur?" I appealed.

Arthur answered, quite seriously: "Like as not. The moon was one of their gods. When my father was in Mexico City he saw the stone where they used to sacrifice their prisoners."

As we dropped down by the fire again some one asked whether the Mound-Builders were older than the Aztecs. When we once got upon the Mound-Builders we never willingly got away from them, and we were still conjecturing when we heard a loud splash in the water.

"Must have been a big cat jumping," said Fritz. "They do sometimes. They must see bugs in the dark. Look what a track the moon makes!"

There was a long, silvery streak on the water, and where the current fretted over a big log it boiled up like gold pieces.

"Suppose there ever was any gold hid away in this old river?" Fritz asked. He lay like a little brown Indian, close to the fire, his chin on his hand and his

bare feet in the air. His brother laughed at him, but Arthur took his suggestion seriously.

"Some of the Spaniards thought there was gold up here somewhere.

Seven cities chuck full of gold, they had it, and Coronado and his men came up to hunt it. The Spaniards were all over this country once."

Percy looked interested. "Was that before the Mormons went through?"

We all laughed at this.

"Long enough before. Before the Pilgrim Fathers, Perce. Maybe they came along this very river. They always followed the watercourses."

"I wonder where this river really does begin?" Tip mused.

That was an old and a favorite mystery which the map did not clearly explain. On the map the little black line stopped somewhere in western Kansas; but since rivers generally rose in mountains, it was only reasonable to suppose that ours came from the Rockies. Its destination, we knew, was the Missouri, and the Hassler boys always maintained that we could embark at Sandtown in floodtime, follow our noses, and eventually arrive at New Orleans.

Now they took up their old argument. "If us boys had grit enough to try it, it wouldn't take no time to get to Kansas City and St. Joe."

We began to talk about the places we wanted to go to. The Hassler boys wanted to see the stockyards in Kansas City, and Percy wanted to see a big store in Chicago. Arthur was interlocutor and did not betray himself.

"Now it's your turn, Tip."

Tip rolled over on his elbow and poked the fire, and his eyes looked shyly out of his queer, tight little face. "My place is awful far away. My Uncle Bill told me about it."

Tip's Uncle Bill was a wanderer, bitten with mining fever, who had drifted into Sandtown with a broken arm, and when it was well had drifted out again.

"Where is it?"

"Aw, it's down in New Mexico somewheres. There aren't no railroads or anything. You have to go on mules, and you run out of water before you get there and have to drink canned tomatoes."

"Well, go on, kid. What's it like when you do get there?"

Tip sat up and excitedly began his story.

"There's a big red rock there that goes right up out of the sand for about nine hundred feet. The country's flat all around it, and this here rock goes up all by itself, like a monument. They call it the Enchanted Bluff down there, because no white man has ever been on top of it. The sides are smooth rock, and straight up, like a wall. The Indians say that hundreds of years ago, before the Spaniards came, there was a village away up there in the air. The tribe that

lived there had some sort of steps, made out of wood and bark, bung down over the face of the bluff, and the braves went down to hunt and carried water up in big jars swung on their backs. They kept a big supply of water and dried meat up there, and never went down except to hunt. They were a peaceful tribe that made cloth and pottery, and they went up there to get out of the wars. You see, they could pick off any war party that tried to get up their little steps. The Indians say they were a handsome people, and they had some sort of queer religion. Uncle Bill thinks they were Cliff-Dwellers who had got into trouble and left home. They weren't fighters, anyhow.

"One time the braves were down hunting and an awful storm came up-a kind of waterspout-and when they got back to their rock they found their little staircase had been all broken to pieces, and only a few steps were left hanging away up in the air. While they were camped at the foot of the rock, wondering what to do, a war party from the north came along and massacred 'em to a man, with all the old folks and women looking on from the rock. Then the war party went on south and left the village to get down the best way they could. Of course they never got down. They starved to death up there, and when the war party came back on their way north, they could hear the children crying from the edge of the bluff where they had crawled out, but they didn't see a sign of a grown Indian, and nobody has ever been up there since."

We exclaimed at this dolorous legend and sat up.

"There couldn't have been many people up there," Percy demurred.

"How big is the top, Tip?"

"Oh, pretty big. Big enough so that the rock doesn't look nearly as tall as it is. The top's bigger than the base. The bluff is sort of worn away for several hundred feet up. That's one reason it's so hard to climb."

I asked how the Indians got up, in the first place.

"Nobody knows how they got up or when. A hunting party came along once and saw that there was a town up there, and that was all."

Otto rubbed his chin and looked thoughtful. "Of course there must be some way to get up there. Couldn't people get a rope over someway and pull a ladder up?"

Tip's little eyes were shining with excitement. "I know a way. Me and Uncle Bill talked it over. There's a kind of rocket that would take a rope over-lifesavers use 'em-and then you could hoist a rope ladder and peg it down at the bottom and make it tight with guy ropes on the other side. I'm going to climb that there bluff, and I've got it all planned out."

Fritz asked what he expected to find when he got up there.

"Bones, maybe, or the ruins of their town, or pottery, or some of their idols. There might be 'most anything up there. Anyhow, I want to see."

"Sure nobody else has been up there, Tip?" Arthur asked.

"Dead sure. Hardly anybody ever goes down there. Some hunters tried to cut steps in the rock once, but they didn't get higher than a man can reach. The Bluff's all red granite, and Uncle Bill thinks it's a boulder the glaciers left. It's a queer place, anyhow. Nothing but cactus and desert for hundreds of miles, and yet right under the Bluff there's good water and plenty of grass.

That's why the bison used to go down there."

Suddenly we heard a scream above our fire, and jumped up to see a dark, slim bird floating southward far above us-a whooping crane, we knew by her cry and her long neck. We ran to the edge of the island, hoping we might see her alight, but she wavered southward along the rivercourse until we lost her. The Hassler boys declared that by the look of the heavens it must be after midnight, so we threw more wood on our fire, put on our jackets, and curled down in the warm sand. Several of us pretended to doze, but I fancy we were really thinking about Tip's Bluff and the extinct people. Over in the wood the ring doves were calling mournfully to one another, and once we heard a dog bark, far away.

"Somebody getting into old Tommy's melon patch," Fritz murmured sleepily, but nobody answered him. By and by Percy spoke out of the shadows.

"Say, Tip, when you go down there will you take me with you?"

"Maybe."

"Suppose one of us beats you down there, Tip?"

"Whoever gets to the Bluff first has got to promise to tell the rest of us exactly what he finds," remarked one of the Hassler boys, and to this we all readily assented.

Somewhat reassured, I dropped off to sleep. I must have dreamed about a race for the Bluff, for I awoke in a kind of fear that other people were getting ahead of me and that I was losing my chance. I sat up in my damp clothes and looked at the other boys, who lay tumbled in uneasy attitudes about the dead fire. It was still dark, but the sky was blue with the last wonderful azure of night. The stars glistened like crystal globes, and trembled as if they shone through a depth of clear water. Even as I watched, they began to pale and the sky brightened. Day came suddenly, almost instantaneously. I turned for another look at the blue night, and it was gone. Everywhere the birds began to call, and all manner of little insects began to chirp and hop about in the willows. A breeze sprang up from the west and brought the heavy smell of ripened corn. The boys rolled over and shook themselves.

We stripped and plunged into the river just as the sun came up over the windy bluffs.

When I came home to Sandtown at Christmas time, we skated out to our island and talked over the whole project of the Enchanted Bluff, renewing our resolution to find it.

ALTHOUGH that was twenty years ago, none of us have ever climbed the Enchanted Bluff. Percy Pound is a stockbroker in Kansas City and will go nowhere that his red touring car cannot carry him. Otto Hassler went on the railroad and lost his foot braking; after which he and Fritz succeeded their father as the town tailors.

Arthur sat about the sleepy little town all his life— he died before he was twenty-five. The last time I saw him, when I was home on one of my college vacations, he was sitting in a steamer chair under a cottonwood tree in the little yard behind one of the two Sandtown saloons. He was very untidy and his hand was not steady, but when he rose, unabashed, to greet me, his eyes were as clear and warm as ever. When I had talked with him for an hour and heard him laugh again, I wondered how it was that when Nature had taken such pains with a man, from his hands to the arch of his long foot, she had ever lost him in Sandtown. He joked about Tip Smith's Bluff, and declared he was going down there just as soon as the weather got cooler; he thought the Grand Canyon might be worth while, too.

I was perfectly sure when I left him that he would never get beyond the high plank fence and the comfortable shade of the cottonwood. And, indeed, it was under that very tree that he died one summer morning.

Tip Smith still talks about going to New Mexico. He married a slatternly, unthrifty country girl, has been much tied to a perambulator, and has grown stooped and grey from irregular meals and broken sleep. But the worst of his difficulties are now over, and he has, as he says, come into easy water. When I was last in Sandtown I walked home with him late one moonlight night, after he had balanced his cash and shut up his store. We took the long way around and sat down on the schoolhouse steps, and between us we quite revived the romance of the lone red rock and the extinct people. Tip insists that he still means to go down there, but he thinks now he will wait until his boy Bert is old enough to go with him. Bert has been let into the story, and thinks of nothing but the Enchanted Bluff.

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18: Bylestones

Arthur Morrison

1863-1945

The Strand Magazine, Aug 1912

MORE than once already I have said that Snorkey Timms was not a person of any constitutional honesty, except in an oblique and cranky way toward such of his intimates as trusted the honour he never claimed to possess. Perhaps his chief personal characteristic was a dislike of the particular form of violence called work; and no argument could change his views.

It ain't that I've never tried work, he said, sucking with much enjoyment at his pipe, just filled from my pouch— his taste in tobacco was almost his only creditable characteristic— you mustn't suppose that. I've tried it right enough, though not often, bein' only 'uman, as you might say. It may pay some, but I don't seem to be that sort. Born different, I s'pose. Why, the hardest work I ever did— my word, it was a drive, too!— I lost money over— *lost* it. An' after workin' like two 'orses all night, too! Fair makes me shudder when I remember it.

Somebody had been a-preachin' about honesty to me I s'pose, like what you do sometimes. So I took on a job as a book-maker's minder— you know what that is, o' course. You just 'ang about your bloke's pitch on the course, an' if anybody gets makin' a dispute with him, or claimin' what your bloke don't mean to pay, or what not, why you just give 'im a push in the fore. O' course, you get it back sometimes, but that's what you're paid for. Choppy Byles was my bloke— he was a nut, and no mistake. There wasn't nothing that Choppy Byles wasn't up to. He was up to such a lot o' things that he kep' *two* minders reg'lar— and he wanted 'em, too, I can tell ye. We could 'a' done with a few more to 'elp us most times, could me and Jerry Stagg, the other minder. Both of us had either one eye or the other black, permanent, while the flat-racin' season was on; an' once we went 'ome from Alexander's Park with about three-quarters of a weskit between us an' nothing else on us but bruises. But Choppy Byles, he was all right, and a mile away 'fore the row got into its swing; he 'ad quite a payin' afternoon.

Chipstead Spring Meeting and Felby races is within a few days of each other, and not more'n twenty mile apart— as o' course you know, like any other educated feller. About 'alf-way between them two towns is a little place called Nuthatch, and the year I'm a-speakin' of Mr. Choppy Byles and us two, Jerry Stagg and me, we stayed at Nuthatch over the day or two between the two meetin's; I dunno why, unless there was somebody in London as Choppy Byles didn't want to see afore he'd made a bit at Felby.

Me and Jerry Stagg, we thought we was in for a nice little day or two's holiday in the country. But Mr. Choppy Byles didn't take no holidays— he was out for business all the time. He'd race two earwigs over a cabbage-leaf and bet pennies on it with the green-grocer's boy, rather than miss a chance. And as luck would have it, we found the people at Nuthatch quite a sportin' lot; in fact, we didn't give 'em full credit till we come away; and then we was ready to swear they 'atched 'arder nuts at Nuthatch than any place forty times its size.

It was a rest-an'-be-thankful sort o' place to look at, though, and as comfortable and cosy a pub to stay at as ever I see. It 'ud convert any teetotaller to look at it, would the *Fox and 'Ounds*. We got there in the evenin' after Chipstead, an' sat in the parlour a-talkin' to the Nuthatchers an' doin' our best to astonish the natives. And all through the conversation, whatever was said, there was our bloke, Mr. Choppy Byles, feelin' round and hintin' to find if he couldn't get a bet on with somebody about any ol' thing. At last he got on to runnin', an' it turns out the Nuthatchers had got a chap they fancied could run a good mile.

That was enough for Choppy Bytes. He was on it. The runnin' chap's name was Dobbin— Jarge Dobbin they called 'im— an' it didn't seem to stand to reason that a chap with a name like that could run a fast mile. What was more, Choppy Byles's memory was wonderful, and, follerin' the Sheffield 'andicaps reg'lar, he knew the name o' pretty well everything on two legs that could raise a toddle, and the name o' Jarge Dobbin wasn't one of 'em. But he always wanted the best bargain he could make, did Choppy; so he began comin' the innocent kid.

"'E must be a wonderful runner," he said, "this here Dobbin. I s'pose 'e could run a mile in four minutes quite easy?"

"Why, no," says the Nuthatcher as was talkin' most— chap called Gosling— "nobody could do that. The best as was ever done in the world was nearly thirteen seconds more'n that."

"Was it?" says Choppy, lettin' on to be surprised. "Well, o' course, I dunno nothin' about them things. I only seemed to 'ave a sort of idea that four minutes would be pretty quick. I s'pose he'd do it all right in four minutes and a 'alf?"

"No," says Gosling; "that's championship time, too. Jarge Dobbin ain't a champion, not yet. But he'd run a mile on the road in five minutes."

"That seems rather slow for sich a very fine runner," says Choppy.

"Well, I think he could beat that," says Gosling; and a whole lot o' the others there said they was sure he could.

"Ah!" says Choppy. "Sich a man as him ought. You don't seem to be stickin' up for your pal half enough. I expect you'd be glad to bet big odds he'd do it in four minutes an' three-quarters?"

"Why, yes," says one chap in the crowd, "I would." An' some o' the others says "'Ear, 'ear!" But Gosling, he sat considerin'. He was a fat, jolly-lookin' feller, but very thoughtful, with sharp little eyes.

"I wouldn't bet very big odds," he says, presently. "But I'd give a bit of odds he'd do it— say between the forty-fourth and forty-fifth milestones along the main London road here."

"What odds?" asks Choppy, snappin' him up quick. "Two to one?"

"Why, no," says Gosling, in his slow way; "not sich odds as them. 'Five to four."

Choppy 'aggled a bit, but he couldn't get the odds no longer. So it was settled and put down in writin' that Jarge Dobbin was to run from the forty-fourth to the forty-fifth milestone, next day, in four minutes forty-five seconds, if he could, the stakes bein' five quid to four on his doin' it. An' as soon as that was fixed Choppy Byles began offerin' side bets all round.

"Not in my 'ouse," says the landlord. "I can't 'ave no bettin' 'ere. I've got my licence to think of. You'll 'ave to go outside if that's your game."

So everybody got up an' went out. Jist as we came tumblin' out into the lane Choppy gives me a drive in the ribs and whispers "'Ere's your chance to make a bit for yourself. Take the odds, same as me, an' tell Jerry Stagg."

What his game was o' course I didn't know, but it was pretty clear there was something up his sleeve— it was the sort o' sleeve there's allus something up, was Choppy's. Well, I told you the Nuthatchers were a sportin' lot, but it would ha' surprised you to see the little crowd out there under the stars in that peaceful village a-backin' and a-layin' that evenin'. Choppy Byles, he took every bet he could get, givin' evens when there was no more odds to be got, an' then offerin' odds against— anything to pile it up. Jerry Stagg an' me, we got our little bit on soon and stopped; and sooner or later all the others stopped too, and went 'ome. It was the sort o' place where they go to bed in the middle o' the evenin'.

The back door o' the Fox and 'Ounds was left on the latch all night for the potman to come in in the mornin'. Choppy found that out by tellin' the landlord he'd take a evenin' stroll, and might be in late. So Choppy gave us the tip and went out for his stroll; and when everybody else was in bed *we* went out very quiet by the back way, and found Choppy waitin' for us.

"Come along," says he. "Don't make no row, and don't waste time; there's a job o' work for you two."

"Work?" says we; an' I could 'ear Jerry Stagg shudderin' in the dark.

"Yes," says Choppy, "and you'll 'ave to do it smart if you want to win them bets you've made."

"'Ow's that?" says I.

"Why," says he, "we're goin' to shove one o' them milestones a bit further along the road. We *might* win with 'em where they are, but it's always best to make sure."

Quite a genius, you see, was Choppy Byles— a genius out an' out. How many 'ud 'a' thought o' sich a move as that? Not one in a million.

"But won't they spot it?" says Jerry, a bit doubtful.

"Not if we do it careful," says Choppy. "And, besides, what odds if they do? We ain't takin' no witnesses, and it's down plain enough, in black an' white. Between the forty-fourth and forty-fifth milestones, it says, an' nothing about 'ow far apart they're to be. Nobody can't get over that. What's more, that chap Gosling, I believe he knows something about them milestones. What for should he pick on them two and no others? And it was him as put it down on the paper; remember— not a mile, but between them stones. It struck me mighty odd at the time. It's a short mile, that's what that is an' he knows it. There's lots of 'em like that about the country, where they put the motor traps. So we shall only be putting the mistake right, or thereabouts, and doin' the nation a favour, as well as takin' it out o' that dishonest sharp, Gosling. Come along. That won't be a short mile tomorrow mornin', whatever else it is."

The village was mostly scattered about a lane leadin' out o' the main road, you understand, so up the lane we goes. It was a windy night and very dark— just as suited us.

When we come out on the main road we looks up an' down in the dark for two or three minutes 'fore we spotted there was a milestone right opposyte the end o' the lane. So across the road we went, and began strikin' matches to read what was on it.

I began, but arter about fifteen matches had blown out before I could see anything more than it was a milestone, Choppy Bytes lost his temper and had a go himself. We stood round, Jerry and me, and spread our coats while Choppy knelt down and struck more matches, talkin' about 'em that pretty all the while I wonder the milestone didn't catch fire itself. It was a worn old thing and not easy to make out, but presently Choppy persuaded a match to keep alight a bit, and then he jumped up.

"*That's* one of 'em," he says; "number forty-five. But it's right opposite the end o' the lane and everybody'll remember that. P'r'aps forty-four's in a easier place. Let's see— that'll be *this* way." So we starts off walkin' to the right.

We hadn't gone much more'n half-way when we came to the church, with the graveyard round it.

"Just the place we want," says Choppy. "There's sure to be a shed with spades and things in it. I was rather lookin' for a farm shed."

So we went gropin' about round the church, and, sure enough, we found a shed all right, with no lock on the door and a whole lot o' shovels and picks and what not in it, and a wheelbarrer— one o' them wide, flat sort as navvies use. It looked as though Choppy Byles's usual luck was in.

We shoved a crowbar and a couple o' shovels and picks on the barrer, and Jerry Stagg had just started wheelin' it down the path to the gate when we got one o' the biggest frights I ever had in my life. We very near ran into a man standing in the gateway.

"Ullo!" says the man. "What's all this?"

"'Sh!" Choppy whispers to us. "Not a word!" and he shoved in front.

"Good evenin'!" says he to the chap. "We thought you'd ha' been in bed, or we'd ha' come round. We just wanted to borrow— *hire*, that is— the barrer and shovels for a hour or two, to bury a— a dawg."

"Well," says the chap, "you've come out a rum time to bury a dawg."

"Why, yes," says Choppy, "we 'ave left it a bit late; but we wanted to keep it very private— not 'avin' a licence for the dawg, you see. Now, what should you think might be a fair charge for us borrowin' these things for a couple of hours, strictly private, to bury a dawg?"

"Well," says the chap, "it'll come a bit dear. That there Christian wheelbarrer an' things out of a churchyard oughtn't properly to be used to bury a dawg at all— specially a dawg with no licence. There's the strain on my conscience to consider," he says. "Say a quid."

"Bit 'igh, ain't it?" Choppy says, with his hand in his pocket. He was always a dreadful 'ard 'un to part, was Choppy.

"I told you it 'ud come a bit 'igh," says the chap; "specially if it's got to be kep' private. A quid."

So, seein' there was no help for it, Choppy lugged out the money and 'anded over. "Mind," he says, "this is strict Q. T.— between ourselves. We'll be careful to put the things back again."

"I don't care whether you do or not," says the chap, turnin' out o' the gate and chucklin' all over. "They ain't my things. I only took a look in as I went along!"

I'd almost 'a' give another quid to see Choppy's face just then, but I could guess it. We shoved out into the road, and I could hear Choppy's rage almost bustin' out through his ears and nose. "If it wasn't for givin' away the show," he said, presently, as we went along the road, "we'd have it back out of him. Never mind— I'll get it all back to-morrow. Keep your eyes a-goin' for that milestone."

It wanted watchin' for in the dark, for there was a lot o' big trees along the hedge just thereabout, which made it darker than ever. Pretty soon we spotted it, however, right in against the bank, with long grass and thistles and what not all round it. The trees sheltered us a bit more here, so we didn't have to waste so many matches, and there was the "44 miles" all right and plain enough. So we set to work.

Me and Jerry did the diggin' and Choppy Byles did the lookin' out— just the department he would choose. It was a sight easier than our job, anyhow, for that ground was very near as hard as the milestone itself. We dug pretty hard for a bit, and then Jerry took hold o' the top o' the stone and gave it a shove. It stood like a rock. "My wig!" says Jerry. "I wonder 'ow far it goes down?"

We went at it again, and the more we dug the 'arder the ground got. I never had sich work; and I was just slackin' off a bit for a rest when we had another startler.

A strange voice says, all of a sudden: "Look 'ere— I'm sharin' in that!"

Jerry Stagg fell over his spade, and I sat down whop. Choppy Byles spun round with a jump, and there in the road was a chap standin' watchin' us.

"I've bin sittin' over *'Ome Chips* 'arf the night workin' out that clue," says the chap, "and now I come along and find you diggin' on the very spot. I reckon I share in that treasure."

This was the time when the buried-treasure rage was on, as you'll remember. All sorts o' papers buried money all over the shop, and parties was a-diggin' and pokin' about everywhere after it. We was relieved the chap wasn't up to our game, but it was a bit awkward.

"What rot!" says Choppy. "We're buryin' a dawg!"

"Dawg be blowed!" says the chap. "Show me your dawg!"

"Certainly not," Choppy says, very decided. "It's a private dawg. You've done the clue wrong, that's what it is. Go back and do it again, careful."

"I have done it careful," says the chap; "and now I'll stop here and see if I'm wrong or not."

"No," says Choppy Byles, gettin' nasty, "you *won't* stop here, not when you come to think of it you won't. When we go out buryin' dawgs, private dawgs, we want to be let alone, see? And there's three of us, *with* shovels. No, when you come to think of it, this is what you'll think," says Choppy, speakin' more friendly, and gettin' nearer to the chap, with his hand in his pocket again; "this is what you'll think. You'll think to yourself, ''Ere's three genelmen buryin' a dawg, a private dawg, what they're very grieved over. *If* I was right about that there treasure,' you'll think, 'why, they're there first anyhow, an' there's three of 'em *with* shovels and other things just as 'ard, and I'd better not make 'em angry,' you'll think. 'I'd better take a friendly quid what they offer me and go

away, and write to the editor of *'Ome Chips* for a consolation prize.' That's what you'll think if you're a reasonable chap, as knows what's best and safest."

"Well," says the chap, steppin' back a bit and speakin' milder, "I *am* a-thinkin' something o' the sort, since you put it that way. Only I'm a-thinkin' the friendly quid ought to be two."

Choppy was a hard parter in general, but prompt when it paid. "Here y'are," he snapped out; "two quid take 'em and hook it, 'fore I change my mind."

So the chap took the two quid and went off along the road. We listened to hear his footsteps dyin' away, and then Choppy grabs a pick himself.

"W'e'll get this over quick," he says, "before any more 'Ome Chippers comes along. Them papers is a public noosance upsettin' people's minds like this. But keep a lookout in that there hole, in case that feller's right."

I don't like thinkin' about the job we had. Nobody ain't got any right to ask me to work again for the rest o' my life after what I did that night. That milestone was like them icebergs you read about— about ten times as much down below as up above. And the ground— well, you'd ha' sworn we'd found a iron mine, all solid metal. Choppy dropped his pick soon and put in all his energy stimulatin' Jerry and me, and gropin' about in the dirt for any odd thing *'Ome Chips* might ha' put there.

Well, we did it at last. That is, we got the milestone a-lollin' over sideways in a big hole, and we began sich a fight to get it on the wheelbarrer as we'd never gone through before not even at Alexander's Park. Jerry and me was down the hole heavin' most desprit at the bottom of the stone, and Choppy Byles was haulin' at the top to pull the thing into the barrer, and the chorus was enough to roast the little birds a-sleepin' on the trees overhead. Our tempers was none the better for all this, and before we got the stone fair on the barrer we nearly had a fight among ourselves. I'd ha' sworn I 'eard Choppy laughin' at us, but he said it was Jerry, an' Jerry said it was us two, and we never properly settled it. But we did get the stone on the barrer at last, filled in the hole, and started off along the road.

It was a pretty straight bit o' road, with trees along the side all very much the same so it looked as though we could stretch out that mile a good bit without makin' the change look very noticeable. So we went along lookin' for a place as looked as much as possible like the one we took it from when something else 'appened.

I never see sich a country road as that one was that night; it was like the Strand, pretty near, barrin' the lights an' the evenin' papers. We was just steadyin' up to look at what seemed a good place when we heard footsteps.

"What shall we do?" I says.

"Stand still," whispers Choppy. "P'r'aps he won't notice, Get in front o' the barrer." Then we heard the footsteps again, and they was all over the road at once; and the next minute the chap comes in among us like a Catherine-wheel, and bang over the wheel-barrer we was tryin' to hide.

"Whash this?" says the new chap turnin' over very unsteady on the milestone.

"What they leave wheelbarrers about in public road for people tummle over for, eh? Wheelbarrers an'— an' tombstones! I say there's a tombstone on thishyer barer D'y'ear? Tombstone. What you want tombstone on barrer middle o' night for?" An' with that he lifts up and sits in the barrer talkin' to us by and large.

"I know what you think," says he; "you think I'm drunk. That's my legs; they're shockin', but *I'm* allri'— sober as judge. Now what about tombstone?"

"It's all right, old chap," says Choppy tryin' to haul him up. "It's for a dawg we're buryin'."

The chap sat and wagged his head and chuckled. "Dawg?" he said. "Dawg? You don't seem believe I'm sober. *I* know what you've done. You've bin an' boned thishyer tombstone out o' the churchyard 'long there, to make— make— here, I say what you goin' to make out o' that tombstone?"

"You get up, old feller, and come along o' me," says Choppy, "and I'll tell you all about it. I got a drink for you a little further up the road— in a flask. It's a beautiful night for a walk; come along— the drink ain't very far off."

We never knew Choppy had got his flask with him, or it 'ud 'a' been empty long before this, with what we'd gone through. But we got the chap up somehow between us, and him and Choppy went staggerin' off along the road the way we'd come.

Choppy was gone a most rabunculous long time, and me and Jerry pretty well fell asleep on the milestone waitin' for him. When he came at last he was spittin' and snarlin' with rage like an old tom-cat.

"That there drunken tyke's been and lost my flask," he said. "Swigged it empty and then dropped it in the ditch or somewhere— he didn't know. I've bin gropin' all over the road and ditch and burnt all my matches, and had to give it up. But he's fast asleep an' safe enough, up against a stile. These here Nuthatch people owe me a bit more over this; but I'll have it all out of 'em to-morrow. We'll shove this milestone on a bit further still. But spread your coats over it, in case we meet somebody else in this here busy thoroughfare."

So Jerry and me put our coats over it and started off once more. We didn't go far this time— about fifty or sixty yards. We'd made it a pretty long mile by now, and there was a sort o' place here that seemed a good deal like the one the milestone came from, so we stopped. And here we found the first bit o'

reasonable luck since we left the churchyard shed; the ground seemed pretty soft.

So we whanged in with the picks and shovels, and soon had a pretty tidy hole. The boss took a hand quite serious this time, for he was gettin' nervous. Not that he was much good. If you get three men as ain't used to it all a-diggin' one hole together on a dark night, you'll find they get a bit tangled up, one way and another. Jerry and me both resigned our appointments several times in that hole, and it was only business considerations as prevented a fight.

Now, we was diggin' this hole just at the foot of the bank by the roadside, and there was a hedge atop of the bank. We'd got the hole, as we thought, pretty near deep enough, and was just a-stoppin' to say so, when there came a most terrifyin' voice from over the top o' the hedge.

"Oo— oo— oo!" says the voice. "It's murder! Nothing but murder!"

We looked up, and there was a monstrous sort of ragged head lookin' down at us from the hedge.

"YOU'VE woke me up," says the head, "with your horrid language. I may be obliged by circumstances to sleep agin a hedge, but I've got my feelin's. You've got a corpse in that there barrer, covered over with coats, and you're a-buryin' of it. I ain't goin' to stand and see that done, not free of charge, I ain't. I may be a tramp, but I've got my feelin's!"

Here was another fine go. To think we should ha' picked on the very spot where this tramp was dossin'! But Choppy spoke up again.

"'S-sh!" he said. "We're very sorry we disturbed you— didn't know you was there. Do you read *'Ome Chips*?"

"Read *what*?" says the head.

"*'Ome Chips*. The best and most 'olesome family paper in the world. Full of excitin' but moral stories, interestin' puzzles, and instructive articles by Aunt Eliza. One penny weekly. We're advertisin' it."

"Are you?" says the tramp. "Well, I'm a nervous chap and always carry a police whistle. I'll blow it 'ard, and advertise *'Ome Chips* a little more."

"No," says Choppy, very hasty, "don't do that. We don't advertise that way— anybody can blow a whistle."

"*I* can," says the tramp. "You hear me!" And he shoved the whistle in his mouth.

"Stow it!" says Choppy, scramblin' up the bank. "Don't do a silly thing like that. You see, we're out buryin' treasure."

"All right, I don't mind that," says the chap in the hedge. "Bury it quick, so's I can come an' dig it up. Or give it me now, and save trouble."

"That ain't likely." says Choppy. "You don't seem to understand liter'y work. We cha'n't bury no treasure here now, when you've spotted the place; not likely, is it? But we'll give you five bob to go and sleep somewhere else."

"Why?" asks the tramp. "I ain't doin' no 'arm, and it's a very nice hedge. No, I don't believe this treasure yarn. My theory's murder. It's a habit I don't 'old with, is murder. I never allow a murder under two quid; and this whistle's a very loud 'un. Don't you get no nearer— I'm nervous."

Choppy Byles looked up at the tramp and down at us, helpless. Then he pulled out the money and handed it over. The tramp was off in a jiffy; and presently we could hear him whistlin' a little tune a long way off. I believe he did that to give us another scare.

"Two more this peaceful village owes me," says Choppy. "Just till to-morrow."

So we tumbled that milestone into the hole holus-bolus, and shovelled in the earth quick and stamped it down. There was a rare lot there was no room for, but we kicked it about among the long grass and made it pretty tidy. And then we went home. We put the things back all right in the churchyard shed, and we crawled very quiet into the *Fox and 'Ounds* not very long afore the potman.

In the mornin', after breakfast, Choppy Byles says to the landlord, in a casual sort o' way, "I s'pose you're goin' to see the runnin' match this afternoon?"

"Why, yes," says the landlord. "I did hink o' goin' over after dinner."

"Where is it?" asks Choppy, innocent as putty. "I don't know my way about here."

"Well," the landlord says, takin' him to the window, "you see the church right away there to the right?"

"Yes," says Choppy.

"Well, the forty-fourth milestone's a little way beyond that, along the road, and the forty-fifth's further on still."

"Further on still?" says Choppy, with a sort o' fall in his voice. "Further on still?"

"Why, yes, o' course," says the landlord. "A mile further on. It would be wouldn't it?"

Choppy Byles looked round at me and Jerry Stagg with a face like a paper kite.

"What's this mean?" he gasped, as soon as the landlord was out o' the room.

"I'll go along the lane and see," says Jerry. And we both went with him.

We came out at the end o' the lane, and there was the first milestone we'd seen, straight in front of us. We took a look round and went across. It was the forty-third! The forty-third!

The figures was worn, and not particular clear, and the three was one o' them with the flat top and a corner instead of a curl; very much like a five on a pitch-dark night with a match in a wind; but a three all the same.

The three of us stood a-blinkin' at each other over that milestone, as it come to us that we'd gone and made the mile a lump shorter instead of longer! And such a lump!

"Look out!" says Jerry, very sudden. "There's Gosling comin' up the lane with another chap. Get behind the hedge!"

There was a gate close by, and we nipped in like winkin' and stooped behind the hedge. It was Gosling, sure enough, with a pal, talkin' and laughin' like anything. He seemed to have a lot to say, but we only heard one bit, and that was enough.

"Five quid and a silver flask," says Gosling "not to mention a night's fun. But that'll be nothing to the afternoon's!"

We three just sat down behind that hedge and looked at each other like waxworks. We saw a whole new picture-show of that awful night in two seconds, us workin' and them peepin' and laughin'.

Then says Choppy Byles, "My bag's in the bedroom at the *Fox and 'Ounds*. Cheaper to leave it there. Foller the railway line. We'll hoof it."

So we did.

19: The Story of an Obstinate Corpse

Elia W. Peattie

1862-1935

In: *The Shape of Fear, and other ghostly tales*, 1898

VIRGIL HOYT is a photographer's assistant up at St. Paul, and enjoys his work without being consumed by it. He has been in search of the picturesque all over the West and hundreds of miles to the north, in Canada, and can speak three or four Indian dialects and put a canoe through the rapids. That is to say, he is a man of adventure, and no dreamer. He can fight well and shoot better, and swim so as to put up a winning race with the Indian boys, and he can sit in the saddle all day and not worry about it to-morrow.

Wherever he goes, he carries a camera.

"The world," Hoyt is in the habit of saying to those who sit with him when he smokes his pipe, "was created in six days to be photographed. Man— and particularly woman— was made for the same purpose. Clouds are not made to give moisture nor trees to cast shade. They have been created in order to give the camera obscura something to do."

In short, Virgil Hoyt's view of the world is whimsical, and he likes to be bothered neither with the disagreeable nor the mysterious. That is the reason he loathes and detests going to a house of mourning to photograph a corpse. The bad taste of it offends him, but above all, he doesn't like the necessity of shouldering, even for a few moments, a part of the burden of sorrow which belongs to some one else. He dislikes sorrow, and would willingly canoe five hundred miles up the cold Canadian rivers to get rid of it. Nevertheless, as assistant photographer, it is often his duty to do this very kind of thing.

Not long ago he was sent for by a rich Jewish family to photograph the remains of the mother, who had just died. He was put out, but he was only an assistant, and he went. He was taken to the front parlor, where the dead woman lay in her coffin. It was evident to him that there was some excitement in the household, and that a discussion was going on. But Hoyt said to himself that it didn't concern him, and he therefore paid no attention to it.

The daughter wanted the coffin turned on end in order that the corpse might face the camera properly, but Hoyt said he could overcome the recumbent attitude and make it appear that the face was taken in the position it would naturally hold in life, and so they went out and left him alone with the dead.

The face of the deceased was a strong and positive one, such as may often be seen among Jewish matrons. Hoyt regarded it with some admiration, thinking to himself that she was a woman who had known what she wanted, and who, once having made up her mind, would prove immovable. Such a

character appealed to Hoyt. He reflected that he might have married if only he could have found a woman with strength of character sufficient to disagree with him. There was a strand of hair out of place on the dead woman's brow, and he gently pushed it back. A bud lifted its head too high from among the roses on her breast and spoiled the contour of the chin, so he broke it off. He remembered these things later with keen distinctness, and that his hand touched her chill face two or three times in the making of his arrangements.

Then he took the impression, and left the house.

He was busy at the time with some railroad work, and several days passed before he found opportunity to develop the plates. He took them from the bath in which they had lain with a number of others, and went energetically to work upon them, whistling some very saucy songs he had learned of the guide in the Red River country, and trying to forget that the face which was presently to appear was that of a dead woman. He had used three plates as a precaution against accident, and they came up well. But as they developed, he became aware of the existence of something in the photograph which had not been apparent to his eye in the subject. He was irritated, and without attempting to face the mystery, he made a few prints and laid them aside, ardently hoping that by some chance they would never be called for.

However, as luck would have it,— and Hoyt's luck never had been good, — his employer asked one day what had become of those photographs. Hoyt tried to evade making an answer, but the effort was futile, and he had to get out the finished prints and exhibit them. The older man sat staring at them a long time.

"Hoyt," he said, "you're a young man, and very likely you have never seen anything like this before. But I have. Not exactly the same thing, perhaps, but similar phenomena have come my way a number of times since I went in the business, and I want to tell you there are things in heaven and earth not dreamt of—"

"Oh, I know all that tommy-rot," cried Hoyt, angrily, "but when anything happens I want to know the reason why and how it is done."

"All right," answered his employer, "then you might explain why and how the sun rises."

But he humored the young man sufficiently to examine with him the baths in which the plates were submerged, and the plates themselves. All was as it should be; but the mystery was there, and could not be done away with.

Hoyt hoped against hope that the friends of the dead woman would somehow forget about the photographs; but the idea was unreasonable, and one day, as a matter of course, the daughter appeared and asked to see the pictures of her mother.

"Well, to tell the truth," stammered Hoyt, "they didn't come out quite— quite as well as we could wish."

"But let me see them," persisted the lady. "I'd like to look at them anyhow."

"Well, now," said Hoyt, trying to be soothing, as he believed it was always best to be with women,— to tell the truth he was an ignoramus where women were concerned,— "I think it would be better if you didn't look at them. There are reasons why— " he ambled on like this, stupid man that he was, till the lady naturally insisted upon seeing the pictures without a moment's delay.

So poor Hoyt brought them out and placed them in her hand, and then ran for the water pitcher, and had to be at the bother of bathing her forehead to keep her from fainting.

For what the lady saw was this: Over face and flowers and the head of the coffin fell a thick veil, the edges of which touched the floor in some places. It covered the features so well that not a hint of them was visible.

"There was nothing over mother's face!" cried the lady at length.

"Not a thing," acquiesced Hoyt. "I know, because I had occasion to touch her face just before I took the picture. I put some of her hair back from her brow."

"What does it mean, then?" asked the lady.

"You know better than I. There is no explanation in science. Perhaps there is some in— in psychology."

"Well," said the young woman, stammering a little and coloring, "mother was a good woman, but she always wanted her own way, and she always had it, too."

"Yes."

"And she never would have her picture taken. She didn't admire her own appearance. She said no one should ever see a picture of her."

"So?" said Hoyt, meditatively. "Well, she's kept her word, hasn't she?"

The two stood looking at the photographs for a time. Then Hoyt pointed to the open blaze in the grate.

"Throw them in," he commanded. "Don't let your father see them— don't keep them yourself. They wouldn't be agreeable things to keep."

"That's true enough," admitted the lady. And she threw them in the fire. Then Virgil Hoyt brought out the plates and broke them before her eyes.

And that was the end of it— except that Hoyt sometimes tells the story to those who sit beside him when his pipe is lighted.

20: The Pearls and the Swine

Barry Pain

1864-1928

In: *The New Gulliver, and other stories*, 1913

MISS MARKHAM in certain respects was a fortunate lady. She had a flat in town and had recently acquired a little bungalow for week-end purposes on a cliff that overlooked the sea. There are one or two other little bungalows in the vicinity, and the people who own them do not give away the name of the place; they fear the penalties of popularity.

Miss Markham had sufficient means and no worries; she was good-looking enough for all practical purposes. She was forty-five years of age, had never been engaged, had never even come within a mile of being engaged.

In her London flat Miss Markham was quite conventional, and kept the usual servants; in the sacred privacy of her bungalow by the sea, she kept no regular servants at all. An old woman who lived in the village was paid to keep an eye on the place while Miss Markham was away, though no one could have said precisely what good it had done the place to have an eye kept there. The same old woman, when Miss Markham grew tired of town and came down for the week-end, spent the day at the bungalow, and— to use her own expression, which is not to be taken literally— "did for her".

July in London was very hot that year. Miss Byles said that she would only be too delighted to go down to the bungalow, at the place which may not be mentioned, in company with Miss Markham. At the last moment Miss Byles was compelled, by health, to break her engagement. She did everything at the wrong time; she got hay fever at the wrong time; therefore Miss Markham went down alone, and the old woman made some perfunctory preparations for her, cooked an alleged dinner for her, and made no secret of the fact that she regarded it as a grievance that she should have to do anything whatever in return for the money which she received.

Having done as little as possible, she returned, so to speak, to her nest, and Miss Markham was left absolutely alone in the bungalow.

At ten o'clock that night Miss Markham, who was almost excessively refined, had just put down her copy of Walter Pater's "Imaginary Portraits", and was thinking of crossing the passage to go to bed. At that moment, her attention was attracted by a gentle tap on her front door: it was not the urgent, sharp, business tap of the Post Office; it was the rippling, social tap. Miss Markham was not nervous; she looked out of the window before deciding to open the door. Even with the moon to help her she could see nothing very distinctly, but it was obviously a man who was standing there, and he appeared to be a well-dressed man. She at once decided that he was a guest

on his way to one of the other bungalows, and that he had called on her by mistake. Having come to this totally erroneous conclusion, she opened the door.

The visitor stood in the light now, and there was nothing about him to cause her perturbation. He was a tall man, about thirty years of age, with a short yellow beard and trustful, melancholy blue eyes. He wore a grey lounge suit and patent leather shoes, and he carried in his hand a very small brown bag.

"Miss Markham?" he said, raising his hat.

"I am Miss Markham."

"I really must apologise for disturbing you at this time of night. The fact of the case is that you live in a lonely spot; I wish to inquire if you are insured against burglary."

Miss Markham was rather amused by the impertinence of him. It was all very well for an insurance-office tout to call upon her to get her to take out a policy, but it did seem a little bit too much that he should call at so late an hour. If Miss Markham had not liked the man's appearance, she would have been even more severe than she was.

"I am afraid," she said, "that you have troubled yourself, and incidentally have troubled me, to no purpose. I am already insured against burglary, fire, employers' liabilities, and all the rest of it, and I am not proposing to take out any further policy."

"I am so glad," said the stranger, and in a flash stepped into the hall, and shut the door behind him.

"What are you doing?" said Miss Markham. "You must not come in here like that. Go away at once!"

"I know, my dear lady, it is quite unconventional and wrong, and I can only assure you if you had not been insured against burglary I should never have come in. You may believe me that in the exercise of my profession, I have always done my best to consult the feelings of others."

"Your profession! What profession?"

"We won't give it a name. 'What's in a name?' Some of my confrères are rough and violent; I am nothing of the kind. Naturally if you began to make a noise, I should have to take some steps to prevent it. The police in this neighbourhood are few in number and quite inefficient, and I think there is no other bungalow within a quarter of a mile."

Miss Markham was now alive to the state of the case.

"I think," she said, "that a police-whistle can be heard at that distance."

She raised her police-whistle just as he raised his revolver; the two hands went up together.

"Really, Miss Markham, you ought not to force me into such a totally false position. My feelings towards you are those of a chivalrous gentleman; it absolutely repels me to do anything whatever which would appear in the nature of a threat. You have put the police-whistle down? That's right. Now then we can talk about this necklace. It would be pleasanter if we sat down; we will go into the dining-room, shall we? I say the dining-room rather than the drawing-room, because I think you might possibly like to ask me to take a whisky-and-soda, and the decanters are there."

Miss Markham followed him into the dining-room; she did not ask him to take a whisky-and-soda. Notwithstanding this, he took it.

"Tell me one thing," she said, "how did you know about this necklace?"

"That is just it; servants will talk. They are an eternal nuisance, aren't they? If their employer has anything which is believed to be valuable, they like to brag about it a little. You know, one can understand it; they enjoy reflected glory. It is exactly twelve months ago since I learned in casual conversation with a lady of inferior station to myself— your housemaid, I believe— that you not only possessed a pearl necklace valued at £500, but that you always wore it."

"The jeweller told me that pearls should always be worn; they keep their colour better that way."

"Yes," said the stranger, "they do give that advice; very useful advice it is too."

"If there is nothing else that you want to take," said Miss Markham, "perhaps you would not mind going."

"Certainly, my dear lady. I understand your point of view exactly. Here we have an abominable intrusion at a late hour; my sex makes the intrusion all the worse. When you are about to summon assistance, I raise my revolver, and if you had not put the police-whistle down, I should have been reluctantly compelled to shoot you dead. I then take away from you, as I shall do presently, a pearl necklace, which you value at £500, though I shall be quite satisfied if I get £120 for it myself. Well, when you come to think of it, you must admit that you have suffered nothing but a little inconvenience. The insurance company will give you £500 to buy another necklace, and the one which I am about to take away with me has no sentimental associations for you."

"How do you know that?"

"You bought the silly thing yourself; correct me if I am wrong."

She did not correct him. She said, "I don't see how you know."

"Ah!" said the burglar, "there we come to another point— my point of view; we have had yours, but you have not had mine. I wonder if it would

interest you to hear it? It might possibly, simply on the score of novelty. One hears a very great deal about the feelings of the householder towards the burglar, but precious little of the feelings of the burglar towards the householder; and I am not even a common burglar, as I hope you have recognised. It might interest you to talk the thing over for a few minutes, and it would be a great privilege and pleasure to myself. It might not, and in that case I will leave you at once."

Miss Markham hesitated. Then she took a chair by the table and sat down.

"Well," she said, "I will hear what you have to say."

"I have never seen you before to-night. I opened the door and you stood in the light. In the background were the white walls of the bungalow and on them good mezzotints after the eighteenth-century masters, and on a small rosewood table was your bedroom candlestick— Sheffield, and I should say a very good piece; good Sheffield, as you know, fetches more than silver nowadays. But it was upon you principally that my attention was centred. The rest all came in a flash; your grey quaker dress, the green serge curtains, the copper knocker, everything told the same story of simplicity and taste. But in your face I read very much more, so much that was not simple, so much that still perplexes me."

Miss Markham was slightly embarrassed. It was not usual for her to hear herself discussed. One part of her said this was monumental impertinence, and she must check it. The other part said that she rather liked it. It was the other part of her that won. If he had not been an unusually handsome man, with melancholy blue eyes and a beautiful respectful manner, perhaps the other part would have won.

She laughed. "I do not see what there is to puzzle you."

"I saw the face of a saint. You have lived absolutely apart from the world; in a walled-in garden as it were. Now I personally have all the vices." He took from his pocket a gold cigarette case with another man's monogram on it, took out a cigarette and lit it. "As I was saying, I have all the vices, but that does not mean that I am without a very keen appreciation of the other thing; perhaps the keener, because I have not got it. I have seen faces like yours before, but they have always belonged to someone who wore the garb of a nun. The nuns shut out the world from them; you, on the contrary, have lived in the world, and have still kept apart from it. I cannot make out how you have done it. I cannot make out how you have been allowed to do it. Tell me, has no man ever kissed you?"

"Never," she said fervently.

"I believe you," said the burglar. "I think I have never met another woman in whom I would have believed a similar declaration. You will observe that I did

not offer you a cigarette, because I knew for a fact that you have never smoked."

"Never," she said.

"I knew it; just as I knew that you had bought this pearl necklace yourself; just as I knew that you had never been kissed; just as I knew that you were good enough to compel even the abject reverence of as bad a man as myself."

Her hand, toying nervously with things on the table, happened to strike the decanter. "But won't you have some more of this?" she said.

He glanced at a gold watch, on the back of which another man's armorial bearings were engraved. "I have only two minutes," he said, "but I must drink your health at parting. Do you know that it is absolutely right for you to wear pearls? Coloured stones would be quite wrong; diamonds are too hard; pearls give just the right note of purity and softness. I suppose you have realised that with the exception of one ring, you wear no other gems. I noticed that ring as I came in. Those large table-cut emeralds, when they are of that fine quality, fetch a good deal of money. I should sell it if I were you. It is not in keeping. Perhaps it seems to you a trifle not worth mentioning, but you remember what Walter Pater says about some trifling and pretty graces being insignia of the nobler world of aspiration and idea."

Miss Markham clasped her hands. "How strange," she said. "I was reading that just as you came in. How strange that you should have known it!"

"My dear lady, you must not imagine that I am a romantic man, for I am not, nor am I a good man. I am not highly connected, and I have not got a better self; the only self I have got is the one before you. But I do claim to be able to appreciate. I have appreciated this evening immensely. Walter Pater is not the last word just now, but I have always appreciated beautiful prose. Far more than beautiful prose I appreciate the pure poetry of your own temperament." He raised his glass. "To your good health, Miss Markham, and good night."

As he neared the door, she called him back. "You have forgotten the pearls," she said.

"No, but I wanted you to remind me."

She unclasped them, and handed them to him. He held them in his hand for a moment. "They are warm," he said, "from your soft, round neck." He raised them to his lips for a moment and then dropped them into a prosaic inside pocket of his coat.

"Yes," he said, "from time immemorial women have been fond of casting their pearls before swine, haven't they? But you have kept the real pearls." He bowed low to her, and in a moment was gone.

IN A LETTER which Miss Markham wrote to Miss Ryles appeared the following passage:

It was such a pity, dear, that you could not come down to the bungalow the other week-end, it was so quiet and peaceful; incidentally, by mere chance, I met quite the most charming man I have ever seen in my life. No more news, except that I got tired of my old pearl necklace and am getting another.

Oh, and I was quite forgetting; you said that if ever I wanted to part with my emerald ring, I was to give you the first refusal of it. My dear, you can have it. I have decided that pearls are the only things I can wear.

Naturally Miss Markham had to give notice to the police of the fact that she had lost her pearl necklace.

She had heard something moving in her bedroom, and on entering it a man had jumped out through the window. All she could say for certain was that he was clean-shaven, and had close-cropped black hair.

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