PAST MASTERS 171

Oscar Wilde
C J Cutcliffe Hyne
"Sapper"
Anthony Hope
Ethel Lina White
Jacques Futrelle
Richard Marsh
Marjorie Bowen

and more

PAST MASTERS 171

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

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1: Away From it All

Beatrice Grimshaw

1870-1953

Blue Book, Jan 1935

THERE comes a time in the life of every man when he feels that he simply cannot keep on with it for one more minute— whatever it is.

Nine thousand, nine hundred and ninety-nine out of every ten thousand discover this just five minutes before they discover that they have got to keep on, whether or no. The ten-thousandth misses that discovery, and blows his brains out.

The ten-thousand-and-first finds a way. But not once in ten million, in a hundred million, does any other man find the way that Seagoe found....

Seagoe and Cooke encountered each other in the Bondi surf on a blazing December Sunday. There were perhaps fifteen hundred other young men of fine physique, sharing the matchless waters with them. There were more than fifteen hundred girls,— much better formed, on an average, than any short-waisted, suety-hipped Greek statue,— sun-bathing and swimming with the young men. The glory that was Greece never saw such girls; the grandeur that was Rome knew no such men. They were second-quarter Twentieth Century, and the earth had not seen their like.

Seagoe missed his wave, riding it without a board, as they do in Bondi. He tumbled all over Cooke; and Cooke, getting up half drowned, cursed him, looked at him, liked the looks of him, and asked him to come out and have a sun-bake and a smoke.

Seagoe came, apologizing for what he sincerely felt was not his fault. They bought cigarettes, and lay down on the hot sand.

A girl lolling near by— a glorious creature in a breech-clout and a brassiere— said to her friend:

"Viola, d'you see those two blokes that just knocked each other down? They're the dead spit of one another."

Viola (who liked to be pronounced as if she rhymed to pianola) disagreed.

"No, Irene," she said, "the near one is the handsomest."

"Well, it's the other that's looking at us."

"They're not looking at us; they're looking at each other. Come and have an icecream, and don't waste your time," advised Irene.

Being piqued, they went away, and so, for the mere lick of a spoon, passed out of the story.

SEAGOE and Cooke, baking on the sands, each thought that he liked the looks of the other; and neither yet knew that it was because the other resembled himself.

In fair complexion, in gray eyes, good build, and similarity of age, they were, as Irene had said, almost "the dead spit" of each other. As Viola herself had said, one was slightly better-looking. Seagoe had the fresh complexion of a man who lives in a good climate. He had also an intriguing little tooth-brush mustache, and his hair was brushed flat back, instead of being parted. Otherwise they were much alike. And what was most remarkable in the likeness was a strange effect of weariness, a shadow of age flung back upon brilliant youth, that distinguished both these young men lying side by side on Bondi sands.

They told each other who they were, and what. Seagoe, for some years an assistant in a colossal Sydney store, was, so he said, fed up with it to the last degree. Yes, the salary was good, and the work not hard. Yes, Sydney had lots of amusement, and plenty of girls.... Nevertheless, he was fed up. To the teeth. And Cooke?

COOKE had come down from the Islands for a holiday, and now he was due back again.

His job was plantation manager, on a small far-out island. Yes, it was beautiful. Yes, there was a good deal of adventure— if you wanted that. Cooke didn't. He wanted Sydney, golden glorious Sydney, with its picture-shows and its theaters, and its boxing nights at the stadium, everything foreseen, everything the same and safe and pleasant, forever and ever.

Seagoe was not listening now. A steamer had just made her way through Sydney Heads, was beginning to lift and scend in the long Pacific swell. She was black, with a checkered funnel.

"That's an Island boat," he said. "The Islands! " And again, with a sigh as long as the sigh of the breakers on the beach: "The Islands I"

"Sydney!" countered Cooke. "Oh, gosh, Sydney! "

"You can have it," jerked Seagoe as the checker-funneled steamer set her course northward to the Islands that are, for Sydney's youth—

The Hesperides
Of all their boyish dreams.

Cooke said suddenly, sharply: "Do you mean that?"

"Mean what?"

"That you'd change with me if you could."

"Oh, if fairy tales came true— yes." Seagoe kicked up the sand with his brown toes.

There was silence between them for a minute, silence filled with the creaming of the breakers, and the silvery cries of surf-riding girls. Then Cooke said: "Could you manage a holiday? You could stay with me, and I'd show you all round."

"Well— the sub-manager's a sort of relation of mine— not that he ever looks my way. I reckon I could get a month or maybe six weeks, if I paid my own substitute part of the time. Haven't had a holiday this year. And I won a bit in the Golden Casket last week, and some of it's left. Yes, I could, thanks very much; but— what's the good? It would only make me sick because I couldn't stay."

"Lord, you do talk! Me, I'm sick of the Islands, long ago; I was never meant for them. Offered the job, after a row at home— I'm English— and took it to get away. You're the lucky one."

Seagoe stared in amazement at him,

"What, in the gents' hats— a job that doesn't need any more brains than a rabbit's ?"

"The gents' hats— and Sydney— sounds like Paradise to me. People live, in Sydney."

"Now, I think they live, in the Islands. Something doing— some adventure! Your own master, too. I wish I dared chuck my job, and go. Anything available there ?"

Cooke shook his head.

"No chance. Not any more than there is here in Sydney, in these days, I suppose."

"That's right," Seagoe agreed mournfully. "If you came here looking for work, you might wear the soles off your boots, and find nothing. I suppose we're both lucky, but I don't feel so."

"The natives of the Shebas, where J am," Cooke said irrelevantly, "know gome funny things. Most savages could teach us a bit— if one didn't have to live white-man fashion. I sometimes wonder if they aren't laughing at us for a pack of fools. Do you know,— only you wouldn't believe,— when a Sheba headhunter chap gets fed up with things in general, he just goes off and is some one else."

"Sounds ratty," commented Seagoe. "But all sorts of queer starts happen in the Shebas, I believe. Do you know, I think I'll do it. I'm due for a holiday— and if you'd really show me round, it would be bonzer. I expect you know a thing or two."

Cooke, lying with his arms under his head, and staring up at the pale-blue Sydney sky, answered slowly, almost absently: "Yes— a thing or two."

IT seemed to Seagoe, lounging on the veranda of the hotel, that he must have arrived in the port of the Shebas quite a week ago. But it was only on that morning that he had landed. The beat of time was slow here; hours were like days, days like weeks and months. Slow and gentle, many things in the Shebas. Swift and violent, others.

Everything here seemed to burn and sparkle.

The tops of the coconut palms shone like polished silver; all the little leaves of other trees seemed varnished; the waves were full of broken diamonds, and the white trunks of the palms, the white sands of the beach, dung back the furious light of three o'clock, like glass on a western wall. A good way off, across the flat china blues of the harbor, blackpurple peaks lifted up their sinister horns. Froin one of the horns, volcanic smoke came out. There was a war-canoe on the water, making for those mountain islands. It sped like a launch; the four-and-twenty islanders who paddled it screamed as they went, and rattled their paddle-blades in a curious angry rhythm.

Seagoe looked at it all, and found it good. Even the mad contrasts, the lazy loafing and the wild speeding, the peace of the harbor and the fury of the smoking hills, pleased him, piqued him like some of the costly combinations of strange flavor he rarely had tried— icecream and burning brandy, mixed sweets and sours. The Shebas, he thought vaguely, were like that.

Cooke said, yawning: "We won't stay in this shack; they've no use for anyone but boozers from the bush. We'll get away in our schooner by sunup tomorrow. And I'll show you the real Shebas, as much as you want.... I wonder what's on at the Picture Palace in Sydney, this week?"

"Damn Sydney!" said Seagoe pleasantly.

"Oh, yes, damn anything and everybody I can't have."

"Everybody?" queried Seagoe.

"I said everything, didn't I ?" He rose, and strolled toward the bar. "Since they expect you to drink—" he said.

A ship's boy came up the pathway. He looked for Seagoe, called his name, and handed him a radio from the steamer. Seagoe signed for the message, and tore it open.

COOKE, coming back again, pleasantly mellowed, saw his companion standing with a paper in his hand.

"Read it," said Seagoe, his face tallow-white.

The radio ran:

RETURN AT ONCE STOP FREDERICKS KILLED STOP WILL HOLD JOB TILL STEAMER RETURNS — JEVONS

"When does this boat go back?" Seagoe demanded.

"Tomorrow night."

"No time to see anything?"

"Hardly. The local boats won't move till she's gone. You could— you could— " He stopped, and looked at Seagoe thoughtfully. "You could go over to the big island across the harbor, if you liked. Hard luck on you. I suppose Fredericks is your substitute, and Jevons the Lord God manager?"

"Yes." Seagoe's tone was bitter.

"I remember your place. I bought a hat in the Castle Emporium once. Gents' hats— quiet corner of the big floor, partitioned off, with windows— "

"Windows that don't open, looking out on the traffic," supplied Seagoe.

"That's right. Windows that keep out the noise, and show you all that's going on. And the light— "

"Half dark on a summer day, with a dark carpet, and a roof— "

"Yes. Nice brown arched roof like a church or something, and green carpet like moss. Glass cases with hats, and boxes, and one or two quiet fellows selling— "

"They're in boxes and glass cases too, if they only knew it. And I'm going back into the box. Me!"

The look he cast at the harbor was like the look a lover sends his maid, when the paper streamers are beginning to break on the ship's rail, and the stream of water widens.

"Maybe," said Cooke, staring at the blues and greens of the Shebas as a man stares, unseeingly, at a wife of whom he has long grown weary: "Maybe— not. Come with me to the big island tonight, and don't tell anyone you are going."

IT seemed to Dick Seagoe that he must have been watching the Sheba dancers for hours and hours. He had no idea how long it was since they had landed on a coral beach, ivory-pale in moonlight, and made their way, guided by the thrumming heartbeats of gigantic drums, to the cluster of tall brown houses, crazily roofed, and the square of beaten earth, where the dance was going on. He remembered that Cooke had shown a sort of pass— a crescent and circle cut in orange-colored shell— and said, half laughing: "Without this, you and I would maybe go home short of a head. Means safety for a day and a night— sun and moon— see ? Now you keep quiet, and ask me about

anything you don't understand; but don't talk more than you can help, because they're touchy brutes, and the Government don't count, outside the ports."

The dancers were all young fighting men, naked save for their decorations of bead and shell and dangling croton leaves. They had feathers on their heads; the feathers nodded to a prearranged rhythm, as the men danced, danced ceaselessly, rank with rank, brown skins shining with sweat in the torch-light, beads and boar-tusks jingling on broad chests. They were splendid people, curiously alike, standardized almost as a regiment is standardized; their arms were long like gorillas' arms, and their shoulders made you think of bisons ready for a charge. Their eyes were bisons' eyes too, small, dark and flaming, deepset beneath mats of black curling hair. Tirelessly they went on to the sound of the heart-beating drums, the drums that never ceased, that kept you from thinking, left you a sodden rag of mere sensation, hypnotized by that unending thrum — thrum — thrum. . ..

Of a sudden it ceased, and the silence hit Seagoe in the face like splashed water.

"What are they going to do?" he whispered.

"They are going into the big men's house, that sort of temple with the tower on it. You may come. They're going to exchange two men."

"What?"

"I told you before. It's a custom. When two men are tired of their lives, they pass through certain ceremonies, taking on each other's lives. Everyone is bound to recognize it; A is B, and B is A, thenceforth. Property— gardens— everything goes with the change. They die to their own lives. And the odd thing is— you won't believe it, you don't know how many secrets of personality these primitive people keep— that they really do become each other, in a way. Their faces grow different, and their manners, and mind you, there's something in these ceremonies that white men don't understand ; no words to express lots of things they can do. For example, there's a thunderstorm coming up—"

Yes, Seagoe had noticed that; they were going to have a "snorter," he thought.

"Well, that's not accidental; they knew it was coming, and they wouldn't have held the dance without. The dance, they say, calls spirit powers into action. The lightning and thunder— well, if you ask me, it looks uncommonly like some way of getting at electric power from the very source.... But wait. Come in."

WITH the carved "pass" well in view, the two white men entered the dark temple house where the ceremony was to take place. Torches of coconut

stump, held by young boys who were prisoners of the temple for the year of their initiation, lighted up the strangest, wildest sight that Seagoe had ever witnessed.

The dancers, forming in two long lines, stood underneath a rack filled with human heads, that stared down from white eyes of cowrie shell, of gleaming mothero'-pearl. The torches threw a smoky glaring light upon two men who stood between the lines of dancers; men of middle age, with strong brown limbs and the tremendous chests of Sheba savages.

"Keep back," warned Cooke, as a crashing peal of thunder spilled itself over the roof of the temple house, simultaneously with a flare of blue-mauve light. "They will begin now. Say nothing. You and I are going to be the next."

NOW it was morning; and Seagoe, running down the bay in a little schooner sped by engine and by sail, wondered if the things that he remembered were real— if he had only dreamed them, perhaps, and was still entangled by the dream.

Last night? Last night was incredible, even now. He recalled it as one recalls things seen and undergone in a fit of intoxication.

Some of it had been ugly— the bloodletting and blood-drinking of the ceremony. But it was nothing worse than transfusion, if you looked at it in that light.

Then there had been dancing and drumming and singing, and drumming and drumming. A man who was a sorcerer had gone into a trance. Other men had gone into trances. Spirits, they said, had spoken. It was all frightfully like the Sunday-night "seances" in Sydney's less reputable streets, but like with a difference. This thing had a punch to it that was lacking from the blitherings and scribblings of fat women in djibbah frocks. This thing had death in it somewhere, if you went far enough. Seagoe knew that, but didn't know how he knew — unless it was from the glittering eyes of the heads that swung above the dancers and the drummers.

At one period there were electric shocks, or something so like them that you couldn't tell the difference. The two men who had been first done were almost knocked down. They picked themselves up trembling, and went out by opposite doors of the temple, without looking at or speaking to each other. Henceforward, to all the Shebas, black A was black B, and black B was black A. People were waiting for them— greeted them by each other's names.

Then it was the turn of Cooke and Seagoe....

Not till the last day of his life could Seagoe have told just how the thing was done. The drumming seemed to sear your mind; the reek of torches choked you; the smell of some sort of incense made you half drunk, so that you hardly

understood the spirit-raising and general kicking up of hell that went on. When it was over, when the unseen force — maybe an electric shock, maybe not— had struck them both, and shaken them on their already shaky legs; when they were going out, as the others had gone, by opposite doors— then Seagoe saw something pass from the fingers of Cooke to the chief sorcerer's brown paw. Sovereigns, bright gold, such as hadn't been seen in Sydney for years and years.... He had heard that the Sheba savages hoarded gold, valued it above their own treasures, and now he knew it was true.

It put the cap on the climax of the whole queer, incredible thing.

Then he was outside, in the dark and the hot rain, and the thunderstorm was grumbling away toward the burning mountain. He was coming back to himself. His mind was clear and he knew that something in it had changed during the night. He was still Seagoe— though the boatmen who were to take them back addressed him as "Mistah Cooke." But he had new knowledge; he had looked, a little way, into the huge reservoir from which all human personality is drawn; he had carried something off.

It would be easy, strangely easy, now, if he wished, to play the part of Cooke— Cooke, who had all the world of wonder and adventure at his feet, and thought the gents' hats department in the Castle Emporium a better place.

That night, in the hotel, Cooke changed clothes with him, cut his hair for him, parted it on one side, and saw him shave off his tooth-brush mustache. Cooke had been growing a mustache during the two weeks' voyage, and his hair was sleeked back now as Seagoe's had been. It all made an amazing difference.

"The schooner and crew will be ready for you in the morning," he said. "I'll sail by the steamer for Sydney, and you'll hear no more of your Lord God manager; he'll be satisfied, maybe better than he was before. Yes, I know what you want to ask: you want to know why one couldn't just exchange jobs, and let it go at that, if employers were game? Well, first place, employers wouldn't be, and second, it wouldn't be a real getting away from yourself. I tell you, for all practical purposes, we've done that. I've no past but yours; and you— " He paused a moment, looked at Seagoe a little oddly. "Well," he went on, "so far as the islands are concerned, my past is yours, now. And I tell you— I tell you, even if we hadn't happened to be a common type, a good deal alike, the thing might have been done all the same. Only it wouldn't have been so simple. You believe me now; you wouldn't have — before."

Seagoe did believe; he knew there were depths he had not sounded. But he had no wish to sound them.

When they parted, publicly, next morning, Cooke said to him: "Good-by, Cooke— glad to have met you." And Seagoe, burning his boats, said before all

the loafers and the lodgers, on the hotel veranda: "Good-by, Seagoe— pleasant voyage." And nobody looked surprised.

LATER the little white-sailed schooner carried him away, over seas bluer, greener, than any seas by the gate of Sydney Heads. He knew that it was beginning, that he had got his wish at last.

The island plantation was reached in a couple of days. It was solitary to the last degree, lovely beyond telling. The long points plumed with coconuts, that ran out over grape-blue bays; the enclosed lagoons, secret and still, with clusters of pale orchids hanging above their stretches of silver glass; the reefs, the beaches, burning white, were the embodiment of all that he had dreamed as a boy. The plantation had a house— a good little timbered bungalow, with cane furniture. The labor force, of headhunting savages, proved easier to manage than he had expected; but he wouldn't have troubled, if it had been hard. It was all in the adventure.

He found the work surprisingly simple. He had only to call over in the morning, give out food and medicine, tie up wounds, and see that the day's tally of nuts was collected, the weeding done, and the nuts split and dried. He knew that the salary was small; that did not astonish him, in view of the work exected. But he expected in the end to nd it large; so much of it was paid by the realization of his dream.

They had told him that life in the outer islands was unbearably lonely. He didn't find it so, at first; he was too deeply intrigued by the delights of being so utterly his own master, of shooting a bit and fishing a bit, and sailing a great deal, of doing every darned thing when he pleased and how he liked. And by and by, neighboring planters began to call— from a neighborhood forty or fifty miles away. He thought they had not known Cooke very well, perhaps; they seemed to accept him without question. So did the labor. So, amazingly, did the traveling inspector, on his one hurried call. He seemed a bit surprised to find the books in such excellent order— told Seagoe that he was improving, and would get a good report; and hurried away in the steamer almost immediately.

Gents' hats! The dark, carpeted room with the windows that didn't open! The safe, sure existence, everything forseen, everything known! Had he ever lived like that ? He played with the idea that he never had, that he had always been Cooke and lived in the islands at the end of the world; captained his schooner, commanded his boys, got nearly wrecked and drowned now and then, quelled mutinies among the labor, knocked down a bison-faced head-hunter who went for him with a clearing-knife, and jollied the brute afterward

till he gave in and laughed, and became a model worker. All these things, he liked to tell himself, he had always done. And it was all good.

Or nearly all....

There were women on the island. Some of the "boys" had been permitted to bring their wives with them, and this was the main cause of the troubles and fights that Seagoe, every now and then, had to suppress at the risk of his own life. There was other trouble too. Seagoe himself was troubled when he passed the boys' quarters after knock-off— saw the fires lit and smelled the suppers that were cooked by the little brown women, and not eaten alone. All his meals were managed by a huge cannibal who flung things on the table, and burned everything he didn't serve raw. The men were no good as cooks. But Seagoe didn't want to establish the usual colored housekeeper. He was Australian, and strongly "white Australian." The mixture of races had always seemed blasphemous to him.

Nevertheless, the sight of the brown girls and the little brown babies who rolled laughing in the dust before the doors, made his heart ache. He thought of the girls on Sydney beaches. He thought of Irene in the scanty bathingsuit. He wished—

WEEKS went on. And now it was as if the curious preconceived knowledge won from the sorceries of the temple had begun to melt away. Real knowledge was taking its place. He was no longer a planter by the grace of some sort of spirit-control; he was a planter who had learned his job beneath rain and sun, in a common, wholesome way; he was a Sheba settler who knew the affairs of the neighbors and the islands, not through some sort of devilish second sight, but as a result of visiting and gossiping within a radius of a hundred miles. And the other fellows liked him. He liked them. It was most of it very good. Only when he met one of the rare white wives of the plantation world did his content crack suddenly across, like a mirror struck by a stone. He wondered that Cooke, during all the years of island life, had never thought of marrying. And he remembered Cooke's significant phrase (he saw it significant now) about damning anything and "everybody" he could not have.

"Some girl turned him down," he thought. "I don't much wonder. You might like him well enough for a start, but at bottom he's as hard as flint. He seemed soppy on those girls we saw at Bondi, the whole lot of 'em. Bit of a Turk, eh? I'm sorry for the one he picks." He could not say that Cooke was not good-looking— hadn't he himself been called "the Hermes of Bondi Beach" by a lady professor from whom he had fled as from the plague, and was not Cooke the "dead spit" of him? Well, good-looking or not, Cooke was a "hard case," and Seagoe thought that if he had had a sister, he wouldn't have wanted

her to marry Cooke. But he had no sister, and no people at all; he was in some ways the most solitary fellow in the world.

THE hot season had gone, and the cool season come; there was very little difference between the two in the burning Shebas, but at least, nights were milder, and it didn't rain every day. Seagoe planned an excursion to the far side of the island, where he seldom went. He wanted to try for swordfish in the big lagoon. There was a boat due that day from the main port of the Shebas, but he wasn't going to trouble about that; the boys would take and tally any cargo there might be for him, and he would escape the bother of entertaining unknown and undesired guests, if he kept away till night.

When he came back, it was quite dark, and the lights of the bungalow seemed to welcome him as he tramped up the path. On the veranda, Wakaka had laid the dinner-table; he could see the shine of the white cloth, the twinkle of silver. "Coming home's not so bad after all," he thought. There was no discontent in him that night; he was pleasantly tired; he had had good sport; and he wanted nothing but food and sleep....

What! He hadn't escaped the visitors, after all: there was some one on the veranda, sitting in a long chair, with his back to the steps. Seagoe could see the fellow's body bagging down the canvas, his dark head topping the chair-rail. "Curse it," he thought, feeling for his cigarettes, feeling suddenly more tired than he had thought he was. To have to entertain strangers, keep this man maybe for weeks—

The man rose, turned around and faced him. But it was not a man. It was a woman, short-skirted, slim, shingled— a woman of some seven-and-twenty years, with very beautiful dark eyes, with an egg-shaped face, and a pointed little chin. With hands— you couldn't help noticing them— like ivory flowers. Rings on the hands. Diamonds. And one ring more.

IT may have been the remnants of the temple sorcery— hypnotism, whatever had been— that whispered the truth to Seagoe. Certainly he knew, before the woman spoke, that she was Cooke's wife.

"Charley!" she said, coming toward him with her hands out. "Charley— you mustn't be angry. I never meant to see you again; but the baby died, Charley, and I was so lonely; and I hoped— I thought maybe— you hadn't taken to anyone else. I— "

She was embarrassed; she seemed to be pleading for mercy, this flowerlike thing, this woman like a velvet pansy. She seemed afraid of him. And yet Seagoe was as sure that she had done no wrong, as he was sure that he stood on his own feet. But somebody must have done wrong, to separate these two.

Charles Cooke— the fellow who was a bit of a Turk, the handsome hard chap, keen on all girls, maybe cruel to some— had he been the sinner? And had she, with a woman's divine kindness, forgiven him? But why was she embarrassed, awkward ? She was not the awkward kind. She was a little gentlewoman every inch. "More fit for me," ran the thought of Seagoe, "than for Cooke." For he could not but remember that he was the first of his people to serve in a shop or take a wage. There was family history behind the Seagoes.

Then came upon him the greatest temptation of his life. He was alone on the island, with a beautiful woman, who thought him to be her husband. They must have parted at least seven years ago, Seagoe knew, from what Cooke had said about his affairs. Any slight difference would be accounted for by those years; and after all, the sorcery of the temple— or the hypnotism of it— seemed to count. There was no doubt in Mrs. Cooke's eyes, as she lifted them to his. She had loved the man whom she thought was Charley Cooke. She was ready, more from duty than from passion, he thought, but still ready— to take him back again;

He stammered, choked. He did not know what to say. Some sort of phrases came at last. He heard himself telling Cooke's wife that he was glad to see her, mumbling about journey and tiredness, explaining that he would get the cookboy to prepare her room, and that they would have dinner by and by; would she like to go and tidy up?

She slipped away silently as a bird. He thought, but was not sure, that she cast him a look over her shoulder, and that it was a look of reproach.

She did not join him at dinner. From the spare bedroom he heard her voice, gently asking if something could be sent in to her. She was tired, she said.

That night Seagoe, word out as he was, could not sleep a wink. His life had crashed about him. Who would have thought of this? Cooke he excused of all complicity— plainly the fellow had thought himself separated for good, and probably he'd deserved it. But into what a hole he had flung the innocent Seagoe!

Seagoe was no fool; he realized that in actual life, things didn't fall out as they did in plays: that Cooke's wife was bound to find him out very soon. But she mightn't find him out just at once. He had heard of men coming home from the war to find their places taken by some impostor who, after four years' parting, had been unsuspiciously accepted by the wife. These things had happened, and happened not once or twice. But Seagoe couldn't believe, no matter how hard he tried, that the wives didn't really know, after a while. That they had not simply accepted things as they were— liking, maybe, the impostor better!

He flung himself about on his hot bed. The moon looked mistily through the mosquito-net upon him, tossing there. He hoped the woman in the next room couldn't hear. She had not made a sound — except once, when he thought he heard a half-suppressed sob. It might have been a ghost-pigeon, mourning in the woods outside. Again it might not. He supposed he hadn't given her a very kindly greeting, for a husband.

Curse this sorcery! It must have done something after all. The woman did think he was Charley.

She was too good for Charley, a thousand times. She was probably too good for him. But if he allowed the delusion to go on until familiarity shattered it, it might be that she wouldn't care to go back to Charley after all. It might be that, like the deserted wives of the war, she would come to like the impostor better than the real man.

And the loneliness of the island (yes, he knew that it was lonely now— as Eve and Adam, once their eyes were opened, knew that they were naked), and the sight of those cooking-fires, with the fat brown children rolling in the dust, the women waiting for their lords to come home— all that wouldn't sting any more.

He was certain, lying there on his creaking bed, trying to keep quiet, so that he could hear whether the little soul in the next room was really crying or not— he was as certain that he could love her, loved her already, as he was of the heartbeat in his own hot side. And he had only to stretch out a hand—

But that he could not do. It was too damned tricky. The sort of thing that Cooke would have done without a moment's hesitation. But he wasn't Cooke— in spite of all the bedevilments, the sorcery and the spirit-controlling of the Sheba temple. He was glad he wasn't. He would have scrubbed Cooke out of his soul, as he would have scrubbed dirt off a floor, if he hadn't been sure that the strange possession was almost at an end.

It was late now:' the ghost-pigeon wailed no longer; the owls had ceased lamenting in the bush beyond the lagoon. It was the dead hush of the night, when men, awake, see clearly— listen, in the silence, to the speech of their own souls.

Seagoe knew at last what he was to do. The certitude calmed him; he turned over and went to sleep.

BY noon next day Seagoe and this wife of Cooke's were far down the island coast, in Seagoe's schooner. He had told her that he was obliged to visit the port on sudden and important business; and she had agreed, with a hurt, puzzled look that went to his heart. Just once she had lingered beside him on the veranda, and said tremulously: "Don't you want me back, Charley?" And

he, not answering directly, had said: "We'll talk everything out in Port Absolom, when we get there."

"I've been sorry I did it," she said. "I was angry, and you know you gave me cause. But a woman alone, Charley— the world's hard. I've been teaching in a school in London ever since, and when I saw in a Sydney paper that you were managing a plantation in these islands, I couldn't help longing for the loveliness and the peace of them. London! The school! You don't know what it's been."

"Oh, yes, I do," thought Seagoe, suddenly seeing a vision of the Gents' Hats. "I know, much better than you think."

They went down the coast together in the little schooner; stormy weather met them halfway, and to Seagoe's great relief, there was no chance of talking things out, as Cooke's wife evidently intended. He could see by now that she was puzzled, that she thought him considerably changed. But his ready acceptance of the situation, in words if no more, had kept her from suspecting the actual, amazing truth.

As for himself, he was so busy running the ship and avoiding the numberless uncharted reefs of the Shebas, that he had little chance of picking up any further information about her. One thing he did learn: her name. She was called Beth— probably Elizabeth. She said to him once: "You haven't called me Beth since I came." And after that, holding the wheel through fierce and sudden squalls, warning her, as they jibbed, to avoid the swinging boom, lending her his oilskin to keep her dry when she came up from the stifling cabin for a breath of air, he addressed her always by the little pretty name of Beth.

There was time for thinking, if little chance of talk, during those long tricks at the wheel, and Seagoe found himself fighting bitterly against what he could not but call the mean close-fistedness of Fate.

"Never let a man have what he wants, and enjoy it," he mused, putting the wheel down and "meeting her" as the schooner answered. "Give him a lump of cake, and there's stones instead of currants in it. Give him money when he's too old to have fun, and public dinners when his digestion's gone to hell. Fate! Gives me the islands I've always wanted, and then makes them so lonely I could talk to my hat set up on a stick; gives me a woman like a pansy-flower, and marks her off married to some one else, and b'gosh, looking for him. That's you!" He didn't know whom exactly he was addressing— his classical education had been cut short; but he did remember that there was a fate, or fates, and that they were a pack of nasty spiteful old women. Also that there was a Latin tag about "*amari aliquid*" — something those same cursed fates dropped into your drink, he thought, to make it bitter, when there was any danger of your liking it too well.

"The old chaps who wrote the Greek and Latin books knew a thing or two," he told himself.... "Here, you beggars, ready about!"

IN this manner they made their way to the port, came to the little hotel— and as a matter of course were assigned by the half-drunken host to one room. Seagoe had meant to talk things over with Beth, tell her the truth, or not tell it, as seemed best— anyhow, pack her away again on the calling steamer. What else could you do, if you didn't mean to be a thorough cad?

But the steamer, like all island steamers, was running late— would not coine back for a day or two. Seagoe swore when he saw how he had been caught. He did not know what was going to happen next. He would get his letters from the mail,— not that he expected any,— go for a long walk, and turn up at the hotel in the evening so late that he'd have to camp on the veranda. And tomorrow— well, sufficient unto the day was the worry thereof.

There were letters, after all; one anyhow, addressed to Charles Cooke, and carrying the private mark that he and Cooke had agreed upon.

Seagoe opened it.

It spoke, cautiously enough, of the Castle Emporium and the Gents' Hats. It insinuated that Cooke was doing far better there than ever Seagoe had done; that he was up from promotion, and making his mark, in the Hats. ("He would say that," commented Seagoe.) It chattered a bit about Sydney, about the "fun of the fair," the fine food, the good drinks, the picture-shows, the theaters, the stadium, the beaches. It came by degrees to something that made Seagoe spring from the seat he had taken on a fallen palm, wave the letter above his head, and shout.

YOU may recall Irene, who with her friend Viola (pronounced to rhyme with pianola) ice-creamed herself out of the story at an early date. Irene was not the sort of girl you could keep down, or out of anything; and she didn't know she had walked out of a story, so she simply walked back into it.

Cooke had "picked up with" Irene, whom he had admired exceedingly when he saw her on Bondi Beach. He was engaged to her, and would be married before the letter reached Seagoe.

"I was married before," he Wrote, "and my first wife chucked me— divorced me by English law, for all the usual causes. I suppose she was too good for me. Irene isn't; I reckon she and I eill hit it off all right, better thah Elizabeth and I did.

"You'd better not tell anybody anything. Let things stop as they are. If you're content, I am."

He ended the letter there.

"Am I content?" thought Seagoe. He laughed, thinking of that dusky shingled hair, those pansy eyes, in the hotel. "Am I? Have I got the better of the vile old fates at last?"

He knew that he had ndt; that no man can, in the end. But When you are still in the blessed twenties, who thinks of ends?

"I wonder," he mused, "how long it takes one to get married, in this place? For I'm not going back to the plantation alone."

TWO days later Elizabeth was married, under her maiden surname, to the man commonly known in the Shebas as Charles Cooke, but entered privately on the register as Richard Seagoe. It was supposed by the officials that the bridegroom, like a good many other island settlers, had reasons for changing his name— reasons not good, but doubtless sufficient. They asked no questions. They had known him for years, and he seemed to be a good deal improved, of late.

To Beth, however, on the evening of their wedding-day, Seagoe told the whole truth.

"Do you think you can forgive me?" he asked her. "I wanted to make sure of you. And you did say that you were ready to remarry me— him— whatever you like to call it. And I was afraid to say anything, because I thought it would seem like nonsense to you— not knowing this queer place."

"It does," said Beth briskly. "It's the most absurd nonsense that ever was dreamed of, and I don't believe anything of it from beginning to end, and no woman would. My dear— do you think I didn't know?"

"Know? When?"

"I don't know when, any more than I know how. But I was sure, almost from the first. And I was afraid— "

"What?"

"That I might miss you," she said, with her arms about his neck.

"RICHARD Seagoe" of the Castle Emporium is very happy ih the Hats. He is going to be moved to the Coats soon. Irene is his master, but that is good for "Richard," who is getting on well, but not so much liked in the Emporium as he used to be, years ago.

"Charles Cooke" of Naruna Island, on the contrary, is better liked by everybody, every year.

Both men have done what maybe you and I would like to do, but never, never shall. And because no one, almost, believes in these queer tricks of the Shebas, nobody is likely to do it again.

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2: That Night

Valerie Jameson

fl 1900-1920s

Western Mail (Perth) 15 Oct 1904

GUM-BARK AVENUE was a likely place on dark nights for desperate deeds. Belated residents en route for home increased their pace as they passed between the huge trees and undergrowth that skirted the road, expecting the dreaded marauder to leap forth at any moment. But its secluded parts were favoured by lovers, who, in their enraptured state, fear neither man nor goblin. The lovers' walk commenced in the Avenue and meandered round the cemetery.

On the night whose mysterious happenings I am about to relate, even these devotees of the blind god had deserted the Avenue. A weird whispering in the tops of the trees was the only sound. The lamp opposite Perkins' residence threw a ghostly glimmer across the road. Phoebe Perkins, peering through the blind could just discern the figure of a man propped against the opposite fence.

"Dad," she said, in a stage whisper. "I see a man."

Comfortably settled in a chair by the fire dad concentrated his attention on a ponderous tome supported on his knee. But Sis, a girl of seventeen, rushed to her sister's side.

"So he is!" she exclaimed with bated breath.

Outside, a dog with a small voice barked frantically.

'There's Nipper," Sis added. "That man's up to no good, and Nipper knows it."

Dad, who had not heard their remarks, exclaimed, "Whatever's that dog yappin' at?"

"I'm sure that's a burglar," said Phoebe, still in a strained whisper. "He's watching this house."

"I'm glad dad's home," said Sis, laying a trembling hand on Phoebe's arm.

"Eh, what?" exclaimed dad, catching the word burglar. "Where is he?"

Dropping the tome, he joined the girls at the window, to view the suspicious-looking character hanging on to the opposite fence. But dad was near-sighted, and in the dim light he mistook the figure for a post, so he returned to bis cosy chair and book with instructions to be called if the post moved.

He was just seated when Phoebe gave a suppressed screech. "Look! There 'e goes!"

"Let me go!" growled dad. "Some moon-struck lunatic waitin' for a girl, I s'pose. Whatever's wrong with that dawg? Lie down, sir!"

A whispered colloquy ensued at the window.

"Oau you see 'im now, Sis?"

"No: he's not past Popcorn's yet. There's such a deep shade he's quite hidden; but we should easily see him if be passed that vacant block of land at the side."

"Poor Mrs. Popcorn! She's nearly always alone at night."

"Dad!" called Phoebe. "Mrs Popcorn's alone and that man's hanging round the house."

Dad dropped the book. "Get my hat, Phoebe, I'll soon shift the scoundrel."

"Oh, dad!" cried Sis, clinging to his arm, "he might shoot you."

"Tut!" said dad, putting her aside. "You girls stop here. Don't be seen lookin' through the blinds, an' I'll slip over and see if Popcorn's home."

Shivering and quaking, the two girls watched their brave parent leave the house by the back door, and tip-toe through the side gate and across the road.

"Oh!" exclaimed Phoebe, squeezing Sis's arm; "ain't it deliciously exciting?"

Disobeying instructions, they returned to their post of observation at the window, but could neither see dad nor the mysterious stranger. Their anxiety to discover the whereabouts of the latter provoked a fever of investigation. They searched every room in the house, though they knew for certain he could not be inside. Then, taking the pre-caution of bolting all doors and windows, with tho exception of the back door, they crept forth in timid apprehension to make a tour of the house outside.

"Take my arm, Sis," feaid Phoebe, the bolder spirit.

"What fun!" remarked Sis, through chattering teeth.

"If he was to pop out of those bush as whatever would we do?"

"Hit 'im on the 'ed with this," flourishing a flat-iron. "Ow! Ooh!"

With footsteps hushed in the soft sand, a figure lurched through the gate and collided with Phoebe, who yelled, dropped the flat-iron and fled, closely followed by Sis. Hie man, whose toe resented the weight of the flat-iron, muttered an execration and pursued them, only to find the door closed and bolted in his face.

"You confounded young fools! Let me in!"

"It's dad!" exclaimed Phoebe, as they sank on the floor limp; with fright.

"Open the door!" commanded the irate voice.

"Oh, dad! Are you sure it's you?" sobbed Sis, as Phoebe dragged herself up to admit the angry parent.

"A pretty mess you're made, you screeching lunatics!" he panted for breath. A loud knock sounded on the front door.

"Satlsfied now you've brought 'im over? He can have the pair or you if he finds his way in."

"Oh, dad!"

Rat-a-tat-tat!

'Tra darned if I'll go," said dad. . "Probably someone come te see if I'm murderin' you."

Rat-a-tat-tat.

"Who's there?" called dad.

"Me."

"What d'yer want?"

A mumbled explanation through the keyhole followed.

"It's Popcorn!" exclaimed dad in a relieved voice. "Come in, Popcorn. Open the door, Phoebe."

The visitor's face was the hue of chalk.

"What a night!" he exclaimed, clasping his long thin fingers. "I've come to tell you the detective will be here shortly. We did not know our danger till you warned us. Twice we heard the handle of the door turned and thought it was the cat!"

"Did you hear these squallers?" asked Dad nursing his wounded foot. "Took me for the burglar! Don't know their own father! Chucked a flat-iron at me."

''What a night," repeated Popcorn. "My wife is completely prostrated. I must not stay. Will you light me across the road? I am not afraid, but these beggars always strike in the dark."

"Sis, get the hurricane." Trusting the lantern into his hand, dad carefully closed the door. "Good-bye, old man! Sing out if you want help. I'll be there!" Dad's voice quavered on the last word.

Sis watched Mr. Popcorn's safe passage across the road. A minute after, the excitement recommenced.

"Phoebe! Phoebe! That's not a post, is it? Dad, come and look!"

Three pairs of eyes were riveted on the lonely figure that sure enough had take up its former position opposite the house.

"Feel my heart," said Sis, pressing Phoebe's hand to that palpitating organ. "I shall die of fright!"

"What's that?"

It was only a false move of the cat amongst the kitchen crockery, a resultant smash, and the over-pent nerves of the girl found relief in a succession of ear-splitting yells. Dad fanned her frantically with his hat. Phoebe coaxed, implored, and finally spilt a can of water down her throat to stop the sounds. A peremptory knock on the door brought a reaction. Sis grew brave, dad's teeth chattered, and Phoebe was speechless.

''Who's there?" demanded Sis, then *sotto voce*, "creep to the window, and see if that man's left the fence."

Phoebe reported the man's disappearance, and they stared in mute apprehension at each other as a second compelliug knock sounded on the door.

"What do you want?" shouted dad, his voice dropping on the last word.

"A drink of water," was the reply,

"The tap's in the back yard and we're all in bed," said dad.

A sound like a smothered guffaw greeted this and the terror-stricken family strained to hear departing footsteps, but any movement of the outsider was hushed in the soft loose sand.

Nipper kept up a frantic yelping. "That fool of a dog," groaned dad.

"He's not big enough to scare a burglar," said Phoebe. "You gave Tiger away, 'cos we had to buy meat for him, and Nipper can live on scraps. Tiger would have chewed that man directly he put his foot inside the gate—"

''Perhaps he's after my Wyandottes!" cried dad in new, alarm. "My prize Wyandottes! Give me a knife !"

"Don't go out, dad!" pleaded the giris.

"Leave go, I say. Give me a knife, two knives. I'll face the devil himself before I'd lose those birds. Open the door."

Out rushed dad, flourishing a knife in each hand.

A pair of silver Wyandottes blinked sleepily from their perch at the lighted match. "Dannie!" cried dad, "if it's you they want they'll have to bag me first!" Finding a box seat, he prepared to spend the remainder of the night in guarding the roost.

Meanwhile an officer of the law who had been summoned hy Popcorn to defend the lives and property of residents of the Avenue from a daring and blood-thirsty marauder, quietly strolled past the alarmed households. He encountered a man undoubtedly watching Perkins' residence from a concealed standpoint.

"What's the game?" he asked suspiciously.

"That's just what I want to know?" replied the man confidentially. "My opinion is a cove's tryin' ter murder a woman over in that there 'ouse. If I 'ears 'er yellin' agen, I'll bust the door in. I can't abear te see a woman ill-used, though thar'd vex a saint with skittish ways. Seems to me they jest make, appintments for the pleasure o' knowin' some great softy is coolin' 'is heels an' heatin' 'is bile waitin' for 'em. This is the second time she's slipped me up this week."

The constable turned on his heel in disgust, after glumly advising the disappointed lover to "Move on!"

"Gummy!" exclaimed the man, moving away reluctantly, "I wouldn't be s'prised to see a tragedy in ter-morrer's paper!"

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3: The Seven Missionaries

"Sapper"

Major H. C. McNeile, 1888-1937
McClure's Magazine, Oct 1923

This story appeared in McClures *as by Major H. C. McNeile. It was collected in "*Jim Maitland*", Hodder & Soughton, 1923. This text is from* McClures*.*

IT NEVER really got much beyond the rumor stage— Captain James Kelly of the S. S. *Andaman* saw to that. It wouldn't have done him any good, or his line, and since England was troubled with railway strikes and war scares at Agadir, things which happened on the other side of the globe were apt to be crowded out of the newspapers.

But he couldn't stop the rumors, and "Our Special Correspondent" in Colombo made out quite a fair story for his paper at home. It didn't appear; seemingly the editor thought the poor devil had taken to drink and was raving. In fact, all that did appear in the papers were two short and apparently disconnected notices. The first ran somewhat as follows, and was found under the Shipping Intelligence:

The S. S. Andaman *arrived yesterday at Colombo. She remained to carry out repairs to her wireless, and will leave tomorrow for Plymouth.*

And the second appeared some two or three months after:

No news has yet been heard of the S. Y. Firefly*, which left Colombo some months ago for an extensive cruise in the Indian Ocean. It is feared that she may have foundered with all hands in one of the recent gales.*

But she didn't— the sea was as calm as the proverbial duck pond when the S. Y. Firefly went down in a thousand fathoms of water not far from the Cocos Islands. And but for the grace of Heaven and Jim Maitland that fate would have overtaken the good Andaman instead.

And so for your eyes only, Mrs. Jim, I will put down the real facts of the case. For your eyes only, I say, because I'm not absolutely sure that legally speaking he was quite justified.

THE S. S. *Andaman* was a vessel of some three thousand tons. She was in reality a cargo boat carrying passengers, in that passengers were the secondary consideration. There was only one class, and the accommodation was sufficient for about thirty people. Twelve knots was her maximum speed, and she quivered like jelly if you tried to get more out of her. And last, but not

least, Captain James Kelly had been her skipper for ten years, and loved her with the love only given to men who go down to the sea in ships.

When Jim and I went on board she was taking in cargo, and Kelly was busy. He was apparently having words with the harbor master over something, and the argument had reached the dangerous stage of politeness. But Jim had sailed in her before, and a minute or two later a delighted chief steward was shaking hands with him warmly.

"This is great, sir!" he cried. "We got a wireless about the berths, but we had no idea it was from you."

"You can fix us up, Bury?" asked Jim.

"Sure thing, Mr. Maitland," answered the other. "We've only got twelve on board: two Yanks, a colored gentleman, two ladies and a missionary bunch." We had followed him below and he was showing us our cabins. "Seven of 'em, sir," he went on, "with two crates of Bibles and prayer books, all complete. Maybe you saw them sitting around on deck as you came on board."

"Can't say I did, Bury," said Jim indifferently.

"They never go ashore, sir," continued the steward. "We've been making all the usual calls, and you'd have thought they'd have liked to go ashore and stretch their legs— but they didn't. There they sit from morning till night reading and praying, till they fairly give you the hump."

"It doesn't sound like one long scream of excitement," said Jim. "But if they're happy, that's all that matters. Come on, Dick. Let's go up and see if old man Kelly is still being polite."

We went on deck to find that the argument was finished, and with a shout of delight the skipper recognized Jim. Jim went forward to meet him, and for a moment or two I stood where I was, idly watching the scene on the quay. And then quite distinctly I heard a voice from behind me say, "By God! It's Jim Maitland." Now as a remark it was so ordinary when Jim was about that I never gave it a thought. In that part of the world one heard it, or its equivalent, whenever one entered a hotel or even a railway carriage.

And so, as I say, I didn't give it a thought for a moment or two, until Jim's voice hailed me, and I turned around to be introduced to the skipper. It was then that I noticed two benevolent-looking clergymen seated close to me in two deck chairs. Their eyes were fixed on the skipper and on Jim, while two open Bibles adorned their knees. Not another soul was in sight; there was not the slightest doubt in my mind that it was one of them who had spoken. And as I stood talking with the skipper and Jim my mind was subconsciously working.

There was no reason, of course, why a missionary should not recognize Jim, but somehow or other one does not expect a devout man with a Bible lying open on his knee to invoke the name of the Almighty quite so glibly. If he had

said "Dear me!" or "Good gracious!" it would have been different. But the other came as almost a shock. However, the matter was a small one, and probably I should have dismissed it from my mind, but for the sequel a minute or two later. The skipper was called away on some matter, and Jim and I strolled back past the two parsons. They both looked up at us with mild interest as we passed, but neither of them gave the faintest sign of recognition.

Now that did strike me as strange. A Clergyman may swear if he likes, but why in the name of fortune he should utterly ignore a man whom he evidently knew was beyond me.

"Come and lean over the side, Jim," I said, when we were out of earshot. "I want to tell you something funny. Only don't look around."

He listened in silence, and when I ended he said:

"More people know Tom Fool, old boy, than Tom Fool knows. I certainly don't know either of those two sportsmen, but it's more than likely they know me, at any rate by sight. And wouldn't you swear if you had to wear a dog collar in this heat?"

Evidently Jim was inclined to dismiss the episode as trifling, and after a time I came around to the same view. Even at lunch that day, when the skipper was formally introducing us and the clergyman still gave no sign of claiming any previous acquaintance with Jim, I thought no more about it. Possibly to substantiate that claim he might have had to admit his presence in some place which would take a bit of explaining away to his little flock. For the man whose voice I had heard was evidently the shining light of the bunch.

He turned out to be the Reverend Samuel Longfellow, and his destination, as that of all the others, was Colombo. They were going to open a missionary house somewhere in the interior of Ceylon, and run it on novel lines of their own. But at that point Jim and I got out of our depths and the conversation languished. However, they seemed very decent fellows, even if they did fail somewhat signally to add to the general gaiety.

The voyage pursued its quiet, normal course for the first four or five days. The two Americans and the skipper made up the necessary numbers for a game of poker; the two ladies— mother and daughter they were by the name of Armstrong— knitted; the seven parsons prayed, and the colored gentleman effaced himself. The weather was perfect; the sea like a mill pond with every prospect of continuing so for some time. And so we lazed along at our twelve knots, making a couple of final calls before starting on the two-thousand-mile run to Colombo.

IT WAS the first night out on the last stage that Jim and I were sitting talking with the skipper on the bridge. Occasionally the sharp, hissing crackle of the wireless installation broke the silence, and through the open door of the cabin we could see the operator working away in his shirt sleeves.

"I guess it's hard to begin to estimate what we sailors owe to Marconi for that invention," said Kelly thoughtfully. "Now that we've got it, it seems almost incredible to think how we got along without it. And what can I do for you, sir?"

An abrupt change in his tone made me look around to see the Reverend Samuel Longfellow standing diffidently behind us. He evidently felt that he was trespassing, for his voice was almost apologetic.

"Is it possible, captain, to send a message from your wireless?" he asked.

"Of course it is," answered Kelly. "You can hand in any message you like to the operator, and he'll send it for you."

"You see, I've never sent a message by wireless before," said the parson mildly, "and I wasn't quite sure what to do. Can you get an answer quickly?"

"Depends on whom you are sending it to and where he is."

"He's on a yacht somewhere in this neighborhood," answered the clergyman. "He is a missionary, like myself, whose health has broken down, and a kind philanthropist is taking him for a cruise to help him recover. I felt it would be so nice if I could speak to him, so to say— and hear from him, perhaps, how he is getting on."

"Quite," agreed the skipper gravely. "Well, Mr. Longfellow, there is nothing to prevent your speaking to him as much as you like. You just hand in your message to the operator whenever you want to, and he'll send down the answer to you as soon as he receives it."

"Oh, thank you, Captain Kelly," said the parson gratefully. "I suppose there's no way of saying where I am," he continued hesitatingly. "I mean on shore when one sends a wire the person who gets it can look up where you are on a map, and it makes it so much more interesting for him."

The skipper knocked the ashes out of his pipe.

"I'm afraid, Mr. Longfellow," he remarked at length, in a stifled voice, "that you can't quite do that at sea. Of course, the position of the ship will be given on the message in terms of latitude and longitude. So if your friend goes to the navigating officer of this yacht, he'll be able to show him with a pin exactly where you were in the Indian Ocean when the message was sent."

"I see," said the clergyman. "How interesting! And then, if I tell him that we are moving straight toward Colombo at twelve knots an hour, my dear friend will be able to follow me in spirit all the way on the map."

The skipper choked slightly.

"Precisely, Mr. Longfellow. But I wouldn't call it twelve knots an hour if I were you. Just say— twelve knots."

The Reverend Samuel looked a little bewildered.

"Twelve knots. I see. Thank you so much. I'm afraid I don't know much about the sea. May I— may I go now to the gentleman who sends the messages?"

"By all manner of means," said Kelly, and Jim's shoulders shook. "Give the operator your message, and you shall have the answer as soon as it arrives."

Again murmuring his thanks, the missionary departed, and shortly afterward we saw him in earnest converse with the wireless operator. And that worthy, having read the message and scratched his head, stared a little dazedly at the Reverend Samuel Longfellow, obviously feeling some doubts as to his sanity. To be asked to dispatch to the world at large a message beginning "Dear Brother," and finishing "Yours in the church" struck him as being something which a self-respecting wireless operator should not be asked to do.

"Poor little bird," said the skipper thoughtfully, as the missionary went aft to join his companions, "I'm glad for his sake that he doesn't know what the bulk of our cargo is this trip. He wouldn't be able to sleep at night for fear of being made to walk the plank by pirates."

Jim looked up lazily.

"Why, what have you got on board, old man?"

The skipper lowered his voice.

"I haven't shouted about it, Jim, and as a matter of fact I don't think the crew know. Don't pass it on, but we've got over half a million in gold below, to say nothing of a consignment of pearls worth certainly another quarter."

Jim whistled. "By Jove! It would be a nice haul for some one. Bit out of your line, isn't it, James— carrying specie?"

"Yes, it is," agreed the other. "It generally goes on the bigger boats, but there was some hitch this time. And it's just as safe with me as it is with them. That has made it safe." He pointed to the wireless operator busily sending out the parson's message. "That has made piracy a thing of the past. And incidentally, as you can imagine, Jim, it's a big feather in my cap, getting away with this consignment. It's going to make the trip worth six ordinary ones to the firm, and— er— to me. And, with any luck, if things go all right, as I'm sure they will, I have hopes that in the future it will no longer be out of our line. We might get a share of that traffic, and I'll be able to buy that chicken farm in Dorsetshire earlier than I thought."

Jim laughed. "You old humbug, James! You'll never give up the sea."

The skipper sighed and stretched himself.

"Maybe not, lad; maybe not. Not till she gives me up, anyway. But chickens are nice companionable beasts they tell me, and Dorset is England."

We continued talking for a few minutes longer, when a sudden and frenzied explosion of mirth came from the wireless operator. I had noticed him taking down a message, which he was now reading over to himself, and after a moment or two of unrestrained joy he came out on deck.

"What is it, Jenkins?" said the skipper.

"Message for the parson, sir," answered the operator.

"There is a duplicate on the table."

He saluted, and went aft to find the Reverend Samuel.

"I think," murmured the skipper, with a twinkle in his eye, "that I will now inspect the wireless installation. Would you care to come with me?"

And this is what we, most reprehensibly, read:

Dear Brother how lovely the gentleman who guides our ship tells me we pass quite close about midday the day after tomorrow will lean over railings and wave pocket handkerchief.

Ferdinand.

"My sainted aunt!" spluttered the skipper. "'Lean over railings and wave pocket handkerchief!'"

"I think I prefer 'the gentleman who guides our ship,' said Jim gravely. "Anyway, James, I shall borrow your telescope as we come abreast of Ferdinand. I'd just hate to miss him. Good night, old man. You'd better have that message framed."

It was about half an hour later that the door of my cabin opened and Jim entered abruptly. I was lying in my bunk smoking a final cigarette, and I looked at him in mild surprise. He was fully dressed, though I had seen him start to take off his clothes twenty minutes before, and he was looking grave.

"You pay attention, Dick," he said quietly, sitting down on the other bunk. "I had just taken off my coat when I remembered I'd left my cigar case in a niche up on deck. I went up to get it, and just as I was putting it in my pocket I heard my own name mentioned. Somewhat naturally I stopped to listen. And I distinctly heard this sentence— *'Don't forget— you are absolutely responsible for Maitland*.' I listened for about five minutes, but I couldn't catch anything else except a few disconnected words here and there, such as 'wireless' and 'midday.' Then there was a general pushing back of deck chairs, and those seven black-coated blighters trooped off to bed. They didn't see me; they were on the other side of the funnel— but it made me think. You remember that remark you heard as we came on board? Well, why the deuce is this bunch of parsons so infernally interested in me? I don't like it, Dick." He looked at me hard through his eyeglass. "Do you think they are parsons?"

I sat up in bed with a jerk.

"What do you mean— do I think they're parsons? Of course they're parsons. Why shouldn't they be parsons?" But I suddenly felt very wide awake.

Jim thoughtfully lit a cigar.

"Quite so— why shouldn't they be? At the same time"— he paused and blew out a cloud of smoke— "Dick, I suppose I'm a suspicious bird, but this interest— this peculiar interest— in me is strange, to say the least of it. Of course it may be that they regard me as a particularly black soul to be plucked from the burning, in which case I ought to feel duly flattered. On the other hand, let us suppose for a second that they are not parsons. Well, I don't think I am being unduly conceited if I say that I have a fairly well-known reputation as a tough customer, if trouble occurs."

By this time all thoughts of sleep had left me.

"What do you mean, Jim?" I demanded.

He answered my question by another.

"Don't you think, Dick, that that radiograph was just a little too foolish to be quite genuine?"

"Well, it was genuine right enough. Jenkins took it down in front of our eyes."

"Oh, it was sent; I'm not denying that. And it was sent as he received it, and as we read it. But was it sent by a genuine parson, cruising in a genuine yacht for his health? If so, my opinion of the brains of the church drops below par. But if"— he drew deeply at his cigar— "if, Dick, it was not sent by a genuine parson, but by someone who wished to pose as the driveling idiot curate of fiction, why, my opinion of the brains of the church remains at par."

"Look here," I said, lighting a cigarette, "I may be stupid, but I can't get you. Granting your latter supposition, why should any one not only want to pose as a parson when he isn't one, but also take the trouble to send fool messages around the universe?"

"Has it occurred to you," said Jim quietly, "that two very useful pieces of information have been included in those two fool messages? First, our exact position at a given time, and our course and our speed. Secondly, the approximate time when the convalescing curate, in the yacht belonging to the kind friend, will impinge on that course. And the third fact— not contained in either message, but which may possibly have a bearing on things, is that on board this yacht there is half a million in gold, and quarter of a million in pearls.

"Good heavens!" I muttered, staring at him foolishly.

"Mark you, Dick, I may have stumbled into a real first-class mare's nest. The Reverend Samuel and his pals may be all that they say and more, but I don't like this tender solicitude for my salvation."

"Are you going to say anything to the skipper?" I asked.

"Yes," he answered. "I think I shall tell James. But he's a pig-headed fellow, and he'll probably be darned rude about it. I should, if I were he. They aren't worrying over his salvation."

And with that he went to bed, leaving me thinking fairly acutely. Could there be anything in it? Could it be possible that any one would attempt piracy in the twentieth century, especially when the ship, as the skipper had pointed out, was equipped with wireless? The idea was ridiculous, and the next morning I went around to Jim's cabin to tell him so. It was empty, and there was a note lying on the bed addressed to me. It was brief and to the point:

I am ill in bed with a sharp dose of fever. Pass the good news on to our friend— the parson.

Jim

I did so, at breakfast, and I thought I detected a shade of relief pass over the face of the Reverend Samuel though he inquired most solicitously about the sufferer and even went so far as to wish to give him some patent remedy of his own. But I assured him that quinine and quiet were all that were required, and with that the matter dropped.

And then there began for me a time of irritating suspense. Not a sign of Jim did I see for the whole of that day and the following night. His cabin door had been locked since I went in before breakfast, and I didn't even know whether he was inside or not. All I did know was that something was doing, and there are few things more annoying than being out of a game that you know is being played. Afterward I realized that it was unavoidable; but at the time I cursed inwardly and often.

AND THE STRANGE thing is that when the thing did occur it came with almost as much of a shock to me as if I had had no previous suspicions. It was the suddenness of it, I think— the suddenness and the absolute absence of any fuss or shouting. Naturally I didn't see the thing in its entirety; my outlook was limited to what happened to me and in my own vicinity.

I suppose it was about half-past eleven, and I was strolling up and down the deck. Midday had been the time mentioned, and I was feeling excited and restless. Mrs. Armstrong and her daughter were seated in their usual place, and I stopped and spoke a few words to them. Usually Mrs. Armstrong was the talker of the two— a big, gaunt woman with yellow spectacles, but pleasant and homely. This morning, however, the daughter answered—and her mother, who had put on a veil in addition to the spectacles, sat silently beside her.

"Poor mother has such a headache from the glare that she has had to put on a veil," she said. "I hope Mr. Maitland is better."

I murmured that he was about the same, just as two of the parsons strolled past and I wondered why the girl gave a little laugh. Then suddenly she sat up, with a cry of admiration.

"Oh, look at that lovely yacht!"

I swung around quickly, and there, sure enough, about a hundred yards from us and just coming into sight around the awning, was a small steam yacht, presumably the one from which Ferdinand was to wave. And at that moment the shorter of the two parsons put a revolver within an inch of my face, while the other one ran his hands over my pockets. It was so unexpected that I gaped at him foolishly, and even when I saw my Colt flung overboard I hardly realized that the big holdup had begun.

Then there came a heavy thud from just above us, and I saw Jenkins, the wireless man, pitch forward on his face half in and half out of his cabin door. He lay there sprawling, while another of the parsons proceeded to wreck his instruments with the iron bar which he had used to stun the operator. Just then, with a squawk of terror like an anguished hen, Mrs. Armstrong rose to her feet, and with her pink parasol in one hand and her rug in the other fled toward the bow of the ship. She looked so irresistibly funny— this large, hysterical woman— that I couldn't help it, I laughed. And even the two determined-looking parsons smiled, though not for long.

"Go below," said one of them to Miss Armstrong. "Remain in your cabin. And you"— he turned to me— "go aft where the others are."

"You infernal scoundrel!" I shouted. "What are you playing at?"

"Don't argue, or I'll blow out your brains," he said quietly. "And get a move on."

I found the two Americans and the colored gentleman standing in a bunch with a few of the deck hands, and every one seemed equally dazed. One of the so-called parsons stood near with a revolver in each hand, but it was really an unnecessary precaution; we were none of us in a position to do anything. And suddenly one of the Americans gripped my arm.

"Gee! Look at the two guns on that yacht."

Sure enough, mounted fore and aft, and trained directly on us were two guns that looked to me to be of about three-inch calibre, and behind each of them stood two men.

"What's the game anyway?" he went on excitedly, as two boats shot away from the yacht. For the first time I noticed that the engines had stopped and that we were lying motionless on the calm, oily sea. But my principal thoughts were centered on Jim. Where was he? What was he doing? Had these

blackguards done away with him, or was he lying up somewhere— hidden away? And even if he was, what could he do? Those two guns had an unpleasant appearance.

A bunch of armed men came pouring over the side of the ship, and then disappeared below, only to come up again in a few minutes carrying a number of wooden boxes, which they lowered into the boats alongside. They worked with the efficiency of well-trained sailors, and I found myself cursing aloud. For I knew what was inside those boxes, and was so utterly helpless to do anything. And yet I couldn't help feeling a sort of unwilling admiration; the thing was so perfectly organized. It might have been a well-rehearsed drill, instead of a unique and gigantic piece of piracy.

I stepped back a few paces and looked up at the bridge. The skipper and his three officers were there— covered by another of the parsons. And the fifth member of the party was the Reverend Samuel Longfellow. He was smiling gently to himself, and as the last of the boxes was lowered over the side, he came to the edge of the bridge and addressed us.

"We are now going to leave you," he remarked suavely. "You are all unarmed, and I wish to give you a word of advice. Should either of the gunners on my yacht see any one move, however innocent the reason, before we are on board, he or both of them will open fire. So do not be tempted to have a shot at me, Captain Kelly, because it will be the last shot you ever have. You will now join your crew, if you please."

In silence the skipper and his officers came down from the bridge, and the speaker followed them. For a moment or two he stood facing us with an ironical smile on his face.

"Your brother in the church thanks you for your little gift to his offertory box," he remarked. Then he turned to one of the other parsons beside him. "Is it set?" he asked briefly.

"Yea," said the other. "We'd better hurry. What about that woman up there?"

"Confound the woman!" answered the Reverend Samuel. "A pleasant journey, Captain Kelly."

He stepped down the gangway into the second boat, and was pulled away toward the yacht. And, feeling almost sick with rage, I glanced at the skipper beside me. Poor devil! What he must be feeling, I hardly dared to think. To be held up on the High Seas and robbed of specie and pearls the first time he was carrying them was cruel luck. And I was prepared to see anything on his face, save what I did see. For he was staring at the bow of the ship, with a fierce blaring excitement in his eyes, and instinctively I looked too, though every one else was staring at the yacht.

And then for the first time I remembered Mrs. Armstrong. She was cowering down with her hands over her ears— the picture of abject terror. But now curiosity overcame her fright, and she knelt there, staring at the yacht. Her pink parasol was clutched in her hands; and tragic though the situation was, I could not help smiling involuntarily. Anyway, she would have something to talk about when she got home.

A mocking shout from the yacht made me look away again. The scoundrel who called himself the Reverend Samuel Longfellow was standing beside the boxes of gold and pearls which had been stacked on the deck. He was waving his hand and bowing ironically, with the six other blackguards beside him, when the last amazing development took place.

Literally before our eyes they vanished in a great sheet of flame. I had a momentary glimpse of the yacht apparently splitting in two, and then the roar of a gigantic explosion nearly deafened me.

"Get under cover!" yelled the skipper, and there was a general stampede, as bits of metal and wood began falling into the sea all around us. Then there came another smaller explosion as the sea rushed into the yacht's engine room, a great column of water shot up, and when it subsided the yacht had disappeared.

"What in heaven's name happened?" said one of the Americans dazedly. "What made her blow up like that?"

I said nothing; I felt too dazed myself. And unconsciously I looked toward the bow: Mrs. Armstrong had disappeared.

THE SKIPPER sent away a boat, but it was useless.

There was a mass of floating wreckage, but no trace of any survivor, and after a while the search was given up. Just one of those unexplained mysteries which in this case could only be accounted for as Divine retribution.

So, at any rate, Mrs. Armstrong said to me when I met her on deck half an hour afterward.

"Dreadful! Terrible!" she cried. "How more than thankful I am that I didn't see it."

"You didn't see it?" I said, staring at her. "But surely—"

And then I heard Jim's voice behind me.

"Mrs. Armstrong, I have a dreadful confession to make. Mrs. Armstrong, Dick, was good enough to lend me some clothes this morning, so that we could have a rag when crossing the line— and I've gone and dropped her parasol overboard."

I admit it; I wasn't bright.

"We're nowhere near the line," I remarked, but fortunately the good lady paid no attention.

"What does it matter, Mr. Maitland?" she cried. "To think of anything of that sort in face of this awful tragedy! Though I must confess I think it served the villains right."

She walked away like an agitated hen, and Jim smiled grimly.

"Poor old soul," he said, "let's hope she never finds out what I really wanted her clothes for."

"So it was you up in the bow," I remarked.

He nodded. "Didn't you guess? Dick, I feel I've treated you rather scurvily. Let's go and have a drink and I'll put you wise. I saw Kelly that night," he began, when we were comfortably settled, "and at first he laughed as I thought he would. Then after a while he didn't laugh quite so much, and later still he stopped laughing altogether. Finally I made a suggestion. If these men were what they said they were, the two big chests below, which common report had it were filled with Bibles, would prove their case. I suggested, therefore, that we examine these two chests. They would never know, and it would settle the matter. He took a bit of persuading, but finally we went below to where the passengers' luggage is stored. There were the two cases, and there and then we opened one. It was packed— not with Bibles— but with nitroglycerin."

Jim paused and took a drink, then lit a cigarette thoughtfully.

"I don't think that I have ever seen a man in quite such a dreadful rage as Kelly was," he went on gravely. "There was a clockwork mechanism which could be started by turning a screw on the outside of each box, and the whole diabolical plan was as clear as daylight. There was enough stuff there to sink a fleet of battleships, and when they had cleared off in the yacht with the gold we should suddenly have split in two and gone down with every soul on board. There would have been no one left to tell the tale, and these cold-blooded murderers would have got clean away. That was the little plot."

He smiled grimly.

"I had no small difficulty in preventing James from putting the whole bunch in irons on the spot, but finally I got him to agree to a plan of mine. We changed the cargo around— he and I. Their chests containing nitroglycerin we filled with gold; and the specie boxes we filled with nitroglycerin and some lead and iron as a make-weight. And then we let the plan proceed. We banked on a holdup and the wrecking of the wireless. We thought they'd send over a boatload of armed men, and transfer the stuff to the yacht— and in fact they did. Further, we banked on the fact that they wouldn't fool around with a fat, hysterical old woman, or a man in the throes of fever. Good girl— that Miss

Armstrong; she kept her mother below all the morning in great style. And that, I think, is all," he ended, with a quizzical glance at me.

"But it isn't!" I cried. "What made that stuff blow up, if it had been taken out of the boxes with the clockwork mechanism?"

"Well, old Dick," said Jim, "it may be that the Reverend Samuel kicked one of the boxes a trifle hard in his jubilation. Or perhaps he dropped his Corona inadvertently. Or maybe something hit one of those boxes very hard like a bullet from a gun. Come down to my cabin," he added, suddenly.

I followed him and he shut the door. On the bed was lying Mrs. Armstrong's pink parasol. The muzzle of an Express rifle stuck out through a hole that had been split in the silk near the ferrule; the stock was hidden by the material. Jim took it out and cleaned it carefully. Then he looked at the parasol and smiled.

"Beyond repair, old man. And since I told the old dear I had dropped her gamp overboard— well—"

He rolled it up slowly and threw it far out through the porthole, then stood for a moment watching it drift.

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4: The Remarkable Rocket

Oscar Wilde

1854-1900

In: *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*, 1888

THE KING'S SON was going to be married, so there were general rejoicings. He had waited a whole year for his bride, and at last she had arrived. She was a Russian Princess, and had driven all the way from Finland in a sledge drawn by six reindeer. The sledge was shaped like a great golden swan, and between the swan's wings lay the little Princess herself. Her long ermine cloak reached right down to her feet, on her head was a tiny cap of silver tissue, and she was as pale as the Snow Palace in which she had always lived. So pale was she that as she drove through the streets all the people wondered. 'She is like a white rose!' they cried, and they threw down flowers on her from the balconies.

At the gate of the Castle the Prince was waiting to receive her. He had dreamy violet eyes, and his hair was like fine gold. When he saw her he sank upon one knee, and kissed her hand.

'Your picture was beautiful,' he murmured, 'but you are more beautiful than your picture;' and the little Princess blushed.

'She was like a white rose before,' said a young page to his neighbour, 'but she is like a red rose now;' and the whole Court was delighted.

For the next three days everybody went about saying, 'White rose, Red rose, Red rose, White rose,' and the King gave orders that the Page's salary was to be doubled. As he received no salary at all this was not of much use to him, but it was considered a great honour and was duly published in the Court Gazette.

When the three days were over the marriage was celebrated. It was a magnificent ceremony, and the bride and bridegroom walked hand in hand under a canopy of purple velvet embroidered with little pearls. Then there was a State Banquet, which lasted for five hours. The Prince and Princess sat at the top of the Great Hall and drank out of a cup of clear crystal. Only true lovers could drink out of this cup, for if false lips touched it, it grew grey and dull and cloudy.

'It is quite clear that they love each other,' said the little Page, 'as clear as crystal!' and the King doubled his salary a second time.

'What an honour!' cried all the courtiers.

After the banquet there was to be a Ball. The bride and bridegroom were to dance the Rose-dance together, and the King had promised to play the flute. He played very badly, but no one had ever dared to tell him so, because he was the King. Indeed, he knew only two airs, and was never quite certain which one

he was playing; but it made no matter, for, whatever he did, everybody cried out, 'Charming! charming!'

The last item on the programme was a grand display of fireworks, to be let off exactly at midnight. The little Princess had never seen a firework in her life, so the King had given orders that the Royal Pyrotechnist should be in attendance on the day of her marriage.

'What are fireworks like?' she had asked the Prince, one morning, as she was walking on the terrace.

'They are like the Aurora Borealis,' said the King, who always answered questions that were addressed to other people, 'only much more natural. I prefer them to stars myself, as you always know when they are going to appear, and they are as delightful as my own flute-playing. You must certainly see them.'

So at the end of the King's garden a great stand had been set up, and as soon as the Royal Pyrotechnist had put everything in its proper place, the fireworks began to talk to each other.

'The world is certainly very beautiful,' cried a little Squib. 'Just look at those yellow tulips. Why! if they were real crackers they could not be lovelier. I am very glad I have travelled. Travel improves the mind wonderfully, and does away with all one's prejudices.'

'The King's garden is not the world, you foolish Squib,' said a big Roman Candle; 'the world is an enormous place, and it would take you three days to see it thoroughly.'

'Any place you love is the world to you,' exclaimed the pensive Catherine Wheel, who had been attached to an old deal box in early life, and prided herself on her broken heart; 'but love is not fashionable any more, the poets have killed it. They wrote so much about it that nobody believed them, and I am not surprised. True love suffers, and is silent. I remember myself once— But no matter now. Romance is a thing of the past.'

'Nonsense!' said the Roman Candle, 'Romance never dies. It is like the moon, and lives for ever. The bride and bridegroom, for instance, love each other very dearly. I heard all about them this morning from a brown-paper cartridge, who happened to be staying in the same drawer as myself, and he knew the latest Court news.'

But the Catherine Wheel shook her. head. 'Romance is dead, Romance is dead, Romance is dead,' she murmured. She was one of those people who think that, if you say the same thing over and over a great many times, it becomes true in the end.

Suddenly, a sharp, dry cough was heard, and they all looked round.

It came from a tall, supercilious-looking Rocket, who was tied to the end of a long stick. He always coughed before he made any observations, so as to attract attention.

'Ahem! ahem!' he said, and everybody listened except the poor Catherine Wheel, who was still shaking her head, and murmuring, 'Romance is dead.'

'Order! order!' cried out a Cracker. He was something of a politician, and had always taken a prominent part in the local elections, so he knew the proper Parliamentary expressions to use.

'Quite dead,' whispered the Catherine Wheel, and she went off to sleep.

As soon as there was perfect silence, the Rocket coughed a third time and began. He spoke with a very slow, distinct voice, as if he were dictating his memoirs, and always looked over the shoulder of the person to whom he was talking. In fact, he had a most distinguished manner.

'How fortunate it is for the King's son,' he remarked, 'that he is to be married on the very day on which I am to be let off! Really, if it had not been arranged beforehand, it could not have turned out better for him; but Princes are always lucky.'

'Dear me!' said the little Squib, 'I thought it was quite the other way, and that we were to be let off in the Prince's honour.'

'It may be so with you,' he answered; 'indeed, I have no doubt that it is, but with me it is different. I am a very remarkable Rocket, and come of remarkable parents. My mother was the most celebrated Catherine Wheel of her day, and was renowned for her graceful dancing. When she made her great public appearance she spun round nineteen times before she went out, and each time that she did so she threw into the air seven pink stars. She was three feet and a half in diameter, and made of the very best gunpowder. My father was a Rocket like myself, and of French extraction. He flew so high that the people were afraid that he would never come down again. He did, though, for he was of a kindly disposition, and he made a most brilliant descent in a shower of golden rain. The newspapers wrote about his performance in very flattering terms. Indeed, the Court Gazette called him a triumph of Pylotechnic art.'

'Pyrotechnic, Pyrotechnic, you mean,' said a Bengal Light; 'I know it is Pyrotechnic, for I saw it written on my own canister.'

'Well, I said Pylotechnic,' answered the Rocket, in a severe tone of voice, and the Bengal Light felt so crushed that he began at once to bully the little squibs, in order to show that he was still a person of some importance.

'I was saying,' continued the Rocket, 'I was saying— What was I saying?'

'You were talking about yourself,' replied the Roman Candle.

'Of course; I knew I was discussing some interesting subject when I was so rudely interrupted. I hate rudeness and bad manners of every kind, for I am

extremely sensitive. No one in the whole world is so sensitive as I am, I am quite sure of that.'

'What is a sensitive person?' said the Cracker to the Roman Candle.

'A person who, because he has corns himself, always treads on other people's toes,' answered the Roman Candle in a low whisper; and the Cracker nearly exploded with laughter.

'Pray, what are you laughing at?' inquired the Rocket; 'I am not laughing.'

'I am laughing because I am happy,' replied the Cracker.

'That is a very selfish reason,' said the Rocket angrily. 'What right have you to be happy? You should be thinking about others. In fact, you should be thinking about me. I am always thinking about myself, and I expect everybody else to do the same. That is what is called sympathy. It is a beautiful virtue, and I possess it in a high degree. Suppose, for instance, anything happened to me tonight, what a misfortune that would be for every one! The Prince and Princess would never be happy again, their whole married life would be spoiled; and as for the King, I know he would not get over it. Really, when I begin to reflect on the importance of my position, I am almost moved to tears.'

'If you want to give pleasure to others,' cried the Roman Candle, 'you had better keep yourself dry.'

'Certainly,' exclaimed the Bengal Light, who was now in better spirits; 'that is only common sense.'

'Common sense, indeed!' said the Rocket indignantly; 'you forget that I am very uncommon, and very remarkable. Why, anybody can have common sense, provided that they have no imagination. But I have imagination, for I never think of things as they really are; I always think of them as being quite different. As for keeping myself dry, there is evidently no one here who can at all appreciate an emotional nature. Fortunately for myself, I don't care. The only thing that sustains one through life is the consciousness of the immense inferiority of everybody else, and this is a feeling I have always cultivated. But none of you have any hearts. Here you are laughing and making merry just as if the Prince and Princess had not just been married.'

'Well, really,' exclaimed a small Fire-balloon, 'why not? It is a most joyful occasion, and when I soar up into the air I intend to tell the stars all about it. You will see them twinkle when I talk to them about the pretty bride.'

'Ah! what a trivial view of life!' said the Rocket; 'but it is only what I expected. There is nothing in you; you are hollow and empty. Why, perhaps the Prince and Princess may go to live in a country where there is a deep river, and perhaps they may have one only son, a little fair-haired boy with violet eyes like the Prince himself; and perhaps some day he may go out to walk with his nurse; and perhaps the nurse may go to sleep under a great elder-tree; and

perhaps the little boy may fall into the deep river and be drowned. What a terrible misfortune! Poor people, to lose their only son! It is really too dreadful! I shall never get over it.'

'But they have not lost their only son,' said the Roman Candle; 'no misfortune has happened to them at all.'

'I never said that they had,' replied the Rocket; 'I said that they might. If they had lost their only son there would be no use in saying any more about the matter. I hate people who cry over spilt milk. But when I think that they might lose their only son, I certainly am very much affected.'

'You certainly are!' cried the Bengal Light. 'In fact, you are the most affected person I ever met.'

'You are the rudest person I ever met,' said the Rocket, 'and you cannot understand my friendship for the Prince.'

'Why, you don't even know him,' growled the Roman Candle.

'I never said I knew him,' answered the Rocket. 'I dare say that if I knew him I should not be his friend at all. It is a very dangerous thing to know one's friends.'

'You had really better keep yourself dry,' said the Fire-balloon. 'That is the important thing.'

'Very important for you, I have no doubt,' answered the Rocket, 'but I shall weep if I choose;' and he actually burst into real tears, which flowed down his stick like raindrops, and nearly drowned two little beetles, who were just thinking of setting up house together, and were looking for a nice dry spot to live in.

'He must have a truly romantic nature,' said the Catherine Wheel, 'for he weeps when there is nothing at all to weep about;' and she heaved a deep sigh and thought about the deal box.

But the Roman Candle and the Bengal Light were quite indignant, and kept saying, 'Humbug! humbug!' at the top of their voices. They were extremely practical, and whenever they objected to anything they called it humbug.

Then the moon rose like a wonderful silver shield; and the stars began to shine, and a sound of music came from the palace.

The Prince and Princess were leading the dance. They danced so beautifully that the tall white lilies peeped in at the window and watched them, and the great red poppies nodded their heads and beat time.

Then ten o'clock struck, and then eleven, and then twelve, and at the last stroke of midnight every one came out on the terrace, and the King sent for the Royal Pyrotechnist.

'Let the fireworks begin,' said the King; and the Royal Pyrotechnist made a low bow, and marched down to the end of the garden. He had six attendants with him, each of whom carried a lighted torch at the end of a long pole.

It was certainly a magnificent display.

Whizz! Whizz! went the Catherine Wheel, as she spun round and round. Boom! Boom! went the Roman Candle. Then the Squibs danced all over the place, and the Bengal Lights made everything look scarlet. 'Goodbye,' cried the Fire-balloon, as he soared away, dropping tiny blue sparks. Bang! Bang! answered the Crackers, who were enjoying themselves immensely. Every one was a great success except the Remarkable Rocket. He was so damped with crying that he could not go off at all. The best thing in him was the gunpowder, and that was so wet with tears that it was of no use. All his poor relations, to whom he would never speak, except with a sneer, shot up into the sky like wonderful golden flowers with blossoms of fire. Huzza! Huzza! cried the Court; and the little Princess laughed with pleasure.

'I suppose they are reserving me for some grand occasion,' said the Rocket; 'no doubt that is what it means,' and he looked more supercilious than ever.

The next day the workmen came to put everything tidy. 'This is evidently a deputation,' said the Rocket; 'I will receive them with becoming dignity:' so he put his nose in the air, and began to frown severely, as if he were thinking about some very important subject. But they took no notice of him at all till they were just going away. Then one of them caught sight of him. 'Hallo!' he cried, 'what a bad rocket!' and he threw him over the wall into the ditch.

'BAD ROCKET? BAD ROCKET?' he said, as he whirled through the air; 'impossible! GRAND ROCKET, that is what the man said. BAD and GRAND sound very much the same, indeed they often are the same;' and he fell into the mud.

'It is not comfortable here,' he remarked, 'but no doubt it is some fashionable watering-place, and they have sent me away to recruit my health. My nerves are certainly very much shattered, and I require rest.'

Then a little Frog, with bright jewelled eyes, and a green mottled coat, swam up to him.

'A new arrival, I see!' said the Frog. 'Well, after all there is nothing like mud. Give me rainy weather and a ditch, and I am quite happy. Do you think it will be a wet afternoon? I am sure I hope so, but the sky is quite blue and cloudless. What a pity!'

'Ahem! ahem!' said the Rocket, and he began to cough.

'What a delightful voice you have!' cried the Frog. 'Really it is quite like a croak, and croaking is, of course, the most musical sound in the world. You will hear our glee-club this evening. We sit in the old duck-pond close by the

farmer's house, and as soon as the moon rises we begin. It is so entrancing that everybody lies awake to listen to us. In fact, it was only yesterday that I heard the farmer's wife say to her mother that she could not get a wink of sleep at night on account of us. It is most gratifying to find oneself so popular.'

'Ahem! ahem!' said the Rocket angrily. He was very much annoyed that he could not get a word in.

'A delightful voice, certainly,' continued the Frog; 'I hope you will come over to the duck-pond. I am off to look for my daughters. I have six beautiful daughters, and I am so afraid the Pike may meet them. He is a perfect monster, and would have no hesitation in breakfasting off them. Well, good-bye; I have enjoyed our conversation very much, I assure you.'

'Conversation, indeed!' said the Rocket. 'You have talked the whole time yourself. That is not conversation.'

'Somebody must listen,' answered the Frog, 'and I like to do all the talking myself. It saves time, and prevents arguments.'

'But I like arguments,' said the Rocket.

'I hope not,' said the Frog complacently. 'Arguments are extremely vulgar, for everybody in good society holds exactly the same opinions. Goodbye a second time; I see my daughters in the distance;' and the little Frog swam away.

'You are a very irritating person,' said the Rocket, 'and very ill-bred. I hate people who talk about themselves, as you do, when one wants to talk about oneself, as I do. It is what I call selfishness, and selfishness is a most detestable thing, especially to any one of my temperament, for I am well known for my sympathetic nature. In fact, you should take example by me; you could not possibly have a better model. Now that you have the chance you had better avail yourself of it, for I am going back to Court almost immediately. I am a great favourite at Court; in fact, the Prince and Princess were married yesterday in my honour. Of course, you know nothing of these matters, for you are a provincial.'

'There is no good talking to him,' said a Dragonfly, who was sitting on the top of a large brown bulrush; 'no good at all, for he has gone away.'

'Well, that is his loss, not mine,' answered the Rocket. 'I am not going to stop talking to him merely because he pays no attention. I like hearing myself talk. It is one of my greatest pleasures. I often have long conversations all by myself, and I am so clever that sometimes I don't understand a single word of what I am saying.'

'Then you should certainly lecture on Philosophy,' said the Dragonfly, and he spread a pair of lovely gauze wings and soared away into the sky.

'How very silly of him not to stay here!' said the Rocket. 'I am sure that he has not often got such a chance of improving his mind. However, I don't care a bit. Genius like mine is sure to be appreciated some day;' and he sank down a little deeper into the mud.

After some time a large White Duck swam up to him. She had yellow legs, and webbed feet, and was considered a great beauty on account of her waddle.

'Quack, quack, quack,' she said. 'What a curious shape you are! May I ask were you born like that, or is it the result of an accident?'

'It is quite evident that you have always lived in the country,' answered the Rocket, 'otherwise you would know who I am. However, I excuse your ignorance. It would be unfair to expect other people to be as remarkable as oneself. You will no doubt be surprised to hear that I can fly up into the sky, and come down in a shower of golden rain.'

'I don't think much of that,' said the Duck, 'as I cannot see what use it is to any one. Now, if you could plough the fields like the ox, or draw a cart like the horse, or look after the sheep like the collie-dog, that would be something.'

'My good creature,' cried the Rocket in a very haughty tone of voice, 'I see that you belong to the lower orders. A person of my position is never useful. We have certain accomplishments, and that is more than sufficient. I have no sympathy myself with industry of any kind, least of all with such industries as you seem to recommend. Indeed, I have always been of opinion that hard work is simply the refuge of people who have nothing whatever to do.'

'Well, well,' said the Duck, who was of a very peaceful disposition, and never quarrelled with any one, 'everybody has different tastes. I hope, at any rate, that you are going to take up your residence here.'

'Oh! dear no,' cried the Rocket. 'I am merely a visitor, a distinguished visitor. The fact is that I find this place rather tedious. There is neither society here, nor solitude. In fact, it is essentially suburban. I shall probably go back to Court, for I know that I am destined to make a sensation in the world.'

'I had thoughts of entering public life once myself,' remarked the Duck; 'there are so many things that need reforming. Indeed, I took the chair at a meeting some time ago, and we passed resolutions condemning everything that we did not like. However, they did not seem to have much effect. Now I go in for domesticity, and look after my family.'

'I am made for public life,' said the Rocket, 'and so are all my relations, even the humblest of them. Whenever we appear we excite great attention. I have not actually appeared myself, but when I do so it will be a magnificent sight. As for domesticity, it ages one rapidly, and distracts one's mind from higher things.'

'Ah! the higher things of life, how fine they are!' said the Duck; 'and that reminds me how hungry I feel:' and she swam away down the stream, saying, 'Quack, quack, quack.'

'Come back! come back!' screamed the Rocket, 'I have a great deal to say to you;' but the Duck paid no attention to him. 'I am glad that she has gone,' he said to himself, 'she has a decidedly middle-class mind;' and he sank a little deeper still into the mud, and began to think about the loneliness of genius, when suddenly two little boys in white smocks came running down the bank, with a kettle and some faggots.

'This must be the deputation,' said the Rocket, and he tried to look very dignified.

'Hallo!' cried one of the boys, 'look at this old stick; I wonder how it came here:' and he picked the Rocket out of the ditch.

'OLD STICK!' said the Rocket, 'impossible! GOLD STICK, that is what he said. Gold Stick is very complimentary. In fact, he mistakes me for one of the Court dignitaries!'

'Let us put it into the fire!' said the other boy, 'it will help to boil the kettle.'

So they piled the faggots together, and put the Rocket on top, and lit the fire.

'This is magnificent,' cried the Rocket, 'they are going to let me off in broad daylight, so that every one can see me.'

'We will go to sleep now,' they said, 'and when we wake up the kettle will be boiled;' and they lay down on the grass, and shut their eyes.

The Rocket was very damp, so he took a long time to burn. At last, however, the fire caught him.

'Now I am going off!' he cried, and he made himself very stiff and straight. 'I know I shall go much higher than the stars, much higher than the moon, much higher than the sun. In fact, I shall go so high that— '

Fizz! Fizz! Fizz! and he went straight up into the air.

'Delightful!' he cried, 'I shall go on like this for ever. What a success I am!'

But nobody saw him.

Then he began to feel a curious tingling sensation all over him.

'Now I am going to explode,' he cried. 'I shall set the whole world on fire, and make such a noise that nobody will talk about anything else for a whole year.' And he certainly did explode. Bang! Bang! Bang! went the gunpowder. There was no doubt about it.

But nobody heard him, not even the two little boys, for they were sound asleep.

Then all that was left of him was the stick, and this fell down on the back of a Goose who was taking a walk by the side of the ditch.

'Good heavens!' cried the Goose. 'It is going to rain sticks;' and she rushed into the water.

'I knew I should create a great sensation,' gasped the Rocket, and he went out.

5: A Three-Volume Novel

Anthony Hope

Anthony Hope Hawkins, 1863-1933
The English Illustrated Magazine, Oct 1894

IT WAS, I believe, mainly as a compliment to me that Miss Audrey Liston was asked to Poltons. Miss Liston and I were very good friends, and my cousin Dora Polton thought, as she informed me, that it would be nice for me to have someone I could talk to about "books and so on." I did not complain. Miss Liston was a pleasant young woman of six-and-twenty; I liked her very much except on paper, and I was aware that she made it a point of duty to read something at least of what I wrote. She was in the habit of describing herself as an "authoress in a small way." If it were pointed out that six three-volume novels in three years (the term of her literary activity at the time of which I write) could hardly be called "a small way." she would smile modestly and say that it was not really much; and if she were told that the English language embraced no such word as "authoress," she would smile again and say that it ought to, a position towards the bugbear of correctness with which, I confess, I sympathize in some degree. She was very diligent; she worked from ten to one every day while she was at Poltons; how much she wrote is between her and her conscience.

There was another impeachment which Miss Liston was hardly at the trouble to deny. "Take my characters from life!" she would exclaim. "Surely every artist (Miss Liston often referred to herself as an artist) must!" And she would proceed to maintain— what is perhaps true sometimes— that people rather liked being put into books, just as they liked being photographed, for all that they grumble and pretend to be afflicted when either process is levied against them. In discussing this matter with Miss Liston I felt myself on delicate ground, for it was notorious that I figured in her first book in the guise of a misogynistic genius; the fact that she lengthened (and thickened) my hair, converted it from an indeterminate brown to a dusty black, gave me a drooping mustache, and invested my very ordinary work-a-day eyes with a strange magnetic attraction, availed nothing; I was at once recognized, and, I may remark in passing, an uncommonly disagreeable fellow she made me. Thus I had passed through the fire. I felt tolerably sure that I presented no other aspect of interest, real or supposed, and I was quite content that Miss Liston should serve all the rest of her acquaintance as she had served me. I reckoned they would last her, at the present rate of production, about five years.

Fate was kind to Miss Liston, and provided her with most suitable patterns for her next piece of work at Poltons itself. There were a young man and a

young woman staying in the house— Sir Gilbert Chillington and Miss Pamela Myles. The moment Miss Liston was appraised of a possible romance; she began the study of the protagonists. She was looking out, she told me, for some new types (if it were any consolation— and there is a sort of dignity about it— to be called a type, Miss Liston's victims were always welcome to so much), and she had found them in Chillington and Pamela. The former appeared to my dull eye to offer no salient novelty; he was tall, broad, handsome, and he possessed a manner of enviable placidity. Pamela, I allowed, was exactly the heroine Miss Liston loved— haughty, capricious, difficile, but sound and true at heart (I was mentally skimming Volume I.). Miss Liston agreed with me in my conception of Pamela, but declared that I did not do justice to the artistic possibilities latent in Chillington; he had a curious attraction which it would tax her skill (so she gravely informed me) to the utmost to reproduce. She proposed that I also should make a study of him, and attributed my hurried refusal to a shrinking from the difficulties of the task.

"Of course," she observed, looking at our young friends who were talking nonsense at the other side of the lawn, "they must have a misunderstanding."

"Why, 'of course'," said I, lighting my pipe. "What should you say to another man?"

"Or another woman?" said Miss Liston.

"It comes to the same thing," said I. (About a volume and a half I meant.)

"But it's more interesting'. Do you think she'd better be a married woman?" And Miss Liston looked at me inquiringly.

"The age prefers them married," I remarked.

This conversation happened on the second day of Miss Liston's visit, and she lost no time in beginning to study her subjects. Pamela, she said, she found pretty plain sailing, but Chillington continued to puzzle her. Again, she could not make up her mind whether to have a happy or a tragic ending. In the interests of a tender-hearted public, I pleaded for marriage-bells.

"Yes, I think so," said Miss Liston, but she sighed, and I think she had an idea or two for a heart-broken separation, followed by mutual, life-long, hopeless devotion.

The complexity of young Sir Gilbert did not, in Miss Liston's opinion, appear less on further acquaintance; and indeed, I must admit that she was not altogether wrong in considering him worthy of attention. As I came to know him better, I discerned in him a smothered self-appreciation, which came to light in response to the least tribute of interest or admiration, but was yet far remote from the aggressiveness of a commonplace vanity. In a moment of indiscretion I had chaffed him— he was very good-natured— on the risks he ran at Miss Liston's hands; he was not disgusted, but neither did he plume

himself or spread his feathers. He received the suggestions without surprise, and without any attempt at disclaiming fitness for the purpose; but he received it as a matter which entailed a responsibility on him. I detected the conviction that, if the portrait was to be painted, it was due to the world that it should be well painted; the subject must give the artist full opportunities.

"What does she know about me?" he asked, in meditative tones.

"She's very quick; she'll soon pick up as much as she wants," I assured him.

"She'll probably go all wrong," he said, sombrely; and of course I could not tell him that it was of no consequence if she did. He would not have believed me, and would have done precisely what he proceeded to do, and that was to afford Miss Liston every chance of appraising his character and plumbing the depths of his soul.

I may say at once that I did not regret this course of action; for the effect of it was to allow me a chance of talking to Pamela Myles, and Pamela was exactly the sort of a girl to beguile the long pleasant morning hours of a holiday in the country. No one had told Pamela that she was going to be put in a book, and I don't think it would have made any difference had she been told. Pamela's attitude towards books was one of healthy scorn, confidently based on admitted ignorance. So we never spoke of them, and my cousin Dora condoled with me more than once on the way in which Miss Liston, false to the implied terms of her invitation, deserted me in favor of Sir Gilbert, and left me to the mercies of a frivolous girl. Pamela appeared to be as little aggrieved as I was. I imagined that she supposed that Chillington would ask her to marry him some day before very long, and I was sure she would accept him; but it was quite plain that, if Miss Liston persisted in making Pamela her heroine, she would have to supply from her own resources a large supplement of passion. Pamela was far too deficient in the commodity to be made anything of, without such reinforcement, even by an art more adept at making much out of nothing than Miss Liston's straightforward method could claim to be.

A week passed, and then, one Friday morning, a new light burst on me. Miss Liston came into the garden at eleven o'clock and sat down by me on the lawn. Chillington and Pamela had gone riding with the squire, Dora was visiting the poor. We were alone. The appearance of Miss Liston at this hour (usually sacred to the use of the pen), no less than her puzzled look, told me that an obstruction had occurred in the novel. Presently she let me know what it was.

"I'm thinking of altering the scheme of my story, Mr. Wynne," said she. "Have you ever noticed how sometimes a man thinks he's in love when he isn't really?"

"Such a case sometimes occurs," I acknowledged.

"Yes, and he doesn't find out his mistake—"

"Till they're married?"

"Sometimes, yes," she said, rather as though she were making an unwilling admission. "But sometimes he sees it before— when he meets somebody else."

"Very true," said I, with a grave nod.

"The false can't stand against the real." pursued Miss Liston; and then she fell into meditative silence. I stole a glance at her face; she was smiling. Was it in the pleasure of literary creation— an artistic ecstasy? I should have liked to answer yes, but I doubted it very much. Without pretending to Miss Liston's powers, I have the little subtlety that is needful to show me that more than one kind of smile may be seen on the human face, and that there is one very different from others; and finally, that that one is not evoked, as a rule, merely by the evolution of the troublesome encumbrance in pretty writing, vulgarly called a "plot."

"If," pursued Miss Liston, "some one comes who can appreciate him and draw out what is best in him—"

"That's all very well," said I, "but what of the first girl?"

"Oh, she's— she can be made shallow, you know; and I can put in a man for her. People needn't be much interested in her."

"Yes, you could manage it that way," said I, thinking how Pamela— I took the liberty of using her name for the shallow girl— would like such treatment.

"She will really be valuable mainly as a foil," observed Miss Liston; and she added generously, "I shall make her nice, you know, but shallow— not worthy of him."

"And what are you going to make the other girl like?" I asked.

Miss Liston started slightly; also she colored very slightly, and she answered, looking away from me across the lawn, "I haven't quite made up my mind yet, Mr. Wynne."

With the suspicion which this conversation aroused fresh in my mind, it was curious to hear Pamela laugh, as she said to me on the afternoon of the same day, "Aren't Sir Gilbert and Audrey Liston funny? I tell you what, Mr. Wynne, I believe they're writing a novel together."

"Perhaps Chillington's giving her the materials for one," I suggested.

"I shouldn't think," observed Pamela, in her dispassionate way, "that anything very interesting had ever happened to him."

"I. thought you liked him," I remarked, humbly.

"So I do. What's that got to do with it?" asked Pamela.

It was beyond question that Chillington enjoyed Miss Liston's society; the interest she showed in him was incense to his nostrils. I used to overhear fragments of his ideas about himself, which he was revealing in answer to her

tactful inquiries. But neither was it doubtful that he had by no means lost his relish for Pamela's lighter talk; in fact, he seemed to turn to her with some relief— perhaps it is refreshing to escape from self-analysis, even when the process is conducted in the pleasantest possible manner— and the hours which Miss Liston gave to work were devoted by Chillington to maintaining his cordial relations with the lady whose comfortable and not over-tragical disposal was taxing Miss Liston's skill. For she had definitely decided all her plot; she told me so a few days later. It was all planned out; nay, the scene in which the truth as to his own feelings bursts on Sir Gilbert (I forget at the moment what name the novel gave him) was, I understood, actually written; the shallow girl was to experience nothing worse than a wound to her vanity, and was to turn with as much alacrity as decency allowed to the substitute whom Miss Liston had now provided. All this was poured into my sympathetic ear, and I say sympathetic with all sincerity; for, although I may occasionally treat Miss Liston's literary efforts with less than proper respect, she herself was my friend, and the conviction under which she was now living would, I knew, unless it were justified, bring her into much of that unhappiness in which one generally found her heroine plunged about the end of Volume II. The heroine generally got out all right, and the knowledge that she would enabled the reader to preserve cheerfulness. But would poor little Miss Liston get out? I was none too sure of it.

Suddenly a change came in the state of affairs. Pamela produced it. It must have struck her that the increasing intimacy of Miss Liston and Chillington might become something other than "funny." To put it briefly and metaphorically, she whistled her dog back to her heels. I am not skilled in understanding or describing the artifices of ladies; but even I saw the transformation in Pamela. She put forth her strength and put on her prettiest gowns; she refused to take her place in the see-saw of society, which Chillington had recently established for his pleasure. If he spent an hour with Miss Liston, Pamela would have nothing of him for a day; she met his attentions with scorn unless they were undivided. Chillington seemed at first puzzled; I believe that he never regarded his talks with Miss Liston in other than a business point of view, but directly he understood that Pamela claimed him, and that she was prepared, in case he did not obey her call, to establish a grievance against him, he lost no time in manifesting his obedience. A whole day passed in which, to my certain knowledge, he was not alone a moment with Miss Liston, and did not, save at the family meals, exchange a word with her. As he walked off with Pamela, Miss Liston's eyes followed him in wistful longing; she stole away upstairs and did not come down till five o'clock. Then finding me strolling about with a cigarette, she joined me.

"Well, how goes the book?" I asked.

"I haven't done much to it just lately," she answered, in a low voice. "I— it's— I don't quite know what to do with it."

"I thought you'd settled?"

"So I had, but— oh, don't let's talk about it, Mr. Wynne!"

But a moment later she went on talking about it.

"I don't know why I should make it end happily," she said. "I'm sure life isn't always happy, is it?"

"Certainly not," I answered. "You mean your man might stick to the shallow girl after all?"

"Yes," I just heard her whisper.

"And be miserable afterwards?" I pursued.

"I don't know," said Miss Liston. "Perhaps he wouldn't."

"Then you must make him shallow himself."

"I can't do that," she said quickly. "Oh, how difficult it is!"

She may have meant merely the art of writing— when I cordially agreed with her— but I think she meant also the way of the world, which does not make me withdraw my assent. I left her walking up and down in front of the drawing-room windows, a rather forlorn little figure, thrown into distinctness by the cold rays of the setting sun.

All was not over yet. That evening Chillington broke away. Led by vanity, or interest, or friendliness, I know not which— tired maybe of paying court (the attitude in which Pamela kept him), and thinking it would be pleasant to play the other part for a while— after dinner he went straight to Miss Liston, talked to her while we had coffee on the terrace, and then walked about with her. Pamela sat by me; she was very silent; she did not appear to be angry, but her handsome mouth wore a resolute expression. Chillington and Miss Liston wandered on into the shrubbery, and did not come into sight again for nearly half an hour.

"I think it's cold," said Pamela, in her cool, quiet tones. "And it's also, Mr. Wynne, rather slow. I shall go to bed."

I thought it a little impertinent of Pamela to attribute the 'slowness' (which had undoubtedly existed) to me, so I took my revenge by saying, with, an assumption of innocence purposely and obviously unreal, "Oh, but won't you wait and bid Miss Liston and Chillington good-night?"

Pamela looked at me for a moment. I made bold to smile.

Pamela's face broke slowly into an answering smile.

"I don't know what you mean, Mr. Wynne," said she.

"No?" said I.

"No," said Pamela, and she turned away. But before she went she looked over her shoulder, and, still smiling, said, "Wish Miss Liston good-night for me, Mr. Wynne. Anything I have to say to Sir Gilbert will wait very well till to-morrow."

She had hardly gone in when the wanderers came out of the shrubbery and rejoined me. Chillington wore his usual passive look, but Miss Liston's face was happy and radiant. Chillington passed on into the drawing-room. Miss Liston lingered a moment by me.

"Why, you look," said I, "as if you'd invented the finest scene ever written."

She did not answer me directly, but stood looking up at the stars. Then she said in a dreamy tone, "I think I shall stick to my old idea in the book."

As she spoke Chillington came out. Even in the dim light I saw a frown on his face.

"I say, Wynne," said he, "where's Miss Myles?"

"She's gone to bed," I answered. "She told me to wish you good-night for her, Miss Liston. No message for you, Chillington."

Miss Liston's eyes were on him. He took no notice of her; he stood frowning for an instant, then, with some muttered ejaculation, he strode back into the house. We hoard his heavy tread across the drawing-room; we heard the door slammed behind him, and I found myself looking on Miss Liston's altered face.

"What does he want her for, I wonder?" she said, in an agitation that made my presence, my thoughts, my suspicions, nothing to her. "He said nothing to me about wanting to speak to her to-night." And she walked slowly into the house, her eyes on the ground, and all the light gone from her face and the joy dead in it. Whereupon I, left alone, began to rail at the gods that a dear, silly little soul like Miss Liston should bother her poor, silly little head about a hulking fool; in which reflections I did, of course, immense injustice not only to an eminent author, but also to a perfectly honorable, though somewhat dense and decidedly conceited, gentleman.

The next morning Sir Gilbert Chillington ate dirt— there is no other way of expressing it— in great quantities and with infinite humility. My admirable friend Miss Pamela was severe. I saw him walk six yards behind her for the length of the terrace; not a look nor a turn of her head gave him leave to join her. Miss Liston had gone upstairs, and I watched the scene from the window of the smoking-room. At last, at the end of the long walk, just where the laurel-bushes mark the beginning of the shrubberies— on the threshold of the scene of his crime— Pamela turned round suddenly and faced the repentant sinner. The most interesting things in life are those which, perhaps by the inevitable nature of the case, one does not hear; and I did not hear the scene which

followed. For a while they stood talking— rather, he talked and she listened. Then she turned again and walked slowly into the shrubbery. Chillington followed. It was the end of a chapter, and I laid down the book.

How and from whom Miss Liston heard the news, which Chillington himself told me without a glimmer of shame or a touch of embarrassment some two hours later, I do not know; but hear it she did before luncheon; for she came down, ready armed with the neatest little speeches for both the happy lovers. I did not expect Pamela to show an ounce more feeling than the strictest canons of propriety demanded, and she fulfilled my expectations to the letter; but I had hoped, I confess, that Chillington would have displayed some little consciousness. He did not; and it is my belief that, throughout the events which I have recorded, he retained, and that he still retains, the conviction that Miss Liston's interest in him was purely literary and artistic, and that she devoted herself to his society simply because he offered an interesting problem and an inspiring theme. An ingenious charity may find in that attitude evidence of modesty; to my thinking it argues a more subtle and magnificent conceit than if he had fathomed the truth, as many humbler men in his place would have done.

On the day after the engagement was accomplished Miss Liston left us to return to London. She came out in her hat and jacket and sat down by me; the carriage was to be round in ten minutes. She put on her gloves slowly and buttoned them carefully. This done, she said, "By the way, Mr. Wynne, I've adopted your suggestion. The man doesn't find out."

"Then you've made him a fool?" I asked bluntly.

"No," she answered. "I— I think it might happen though he wasn't a fool."

She sat with her hands in her lap for a moment or two, then she went on in a lower voice, "I'm going to make him find out afterwards."

I felt her glance on me, but I looked straight in front of me.

"What! after he's married the shallow girl?"

"Yes," said Miss Liston.

"Rather too late, isn't it? At least if you mean there is to be a happy ending."

Miss Liston enlaced her fingers.

"I haven't decided about the ending yet," said she.

"If you're intent is to be tragical— which is the fashion— you'll do as you stand," said I.

"Yes," she answered slowly, "if I'm tragical I shall do as I stand."

There was another pause, and rather a long one; the wheels of the carriage were audible on the gravel of the front drive. Miss Liston stood up. I rose and held out my hand.

"Of course," said Miss Liston, still intent on her novel, "I could—" She stopped again, and looked apprehensively at me. My face, I believe, expressed nothing more than polite attention and friendly interest.

"Of course," she began again, "the shallow girl— his wife— might— might die, Mr. Wynne."

"In novels," said I, with a smile, "while there's death there's hope."

"Yes, in novels," she answered, giving me her hand.

The poor little woman was very unhappy. Unwisely, I dare say, I pressed, her hand. It was enough; the tears leapt to her eyes; she gave my great fist a hurried squeeze. I have seldom been more touched by any thanks, however warm or eloquent, and hurried away.

I have read the novel. It came out a little while ago. The man finds out after the marriage; the shallow girl dies un-regretted (she turns out as badly as possible); the real love comes, and all ends joyfully. It is simple story, prettily told in its little way, and the scene of the reunion is written with genuine feeling— nay, with a touch of real passion. But then Sir Gilbert Chillington never meets Miss Liston now. And Lady Chillington not only behaves with her customary propriety, but is in the enjoyment of most excellent health and spirits.

True art demands an adaptation, not a copy, of life. I saw that remark somewhere the other day. It seems correct, if Miss Liston be any authority.

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6: Across The Moors

William Fryer Harvey

1885-1937

In: *Midnight House and Other Tales*, 1910

IT really was most unfortunate.

Peggy had a temperature of nearly a hundred, and a pain in her side, and Mrs. Workington Bancroft knew that it was appendicitis. But there was no one whom she could send for the doctor.

James had gone with the jaunting-car to meet her husband who had at last managed to get away for a week's shooting.

Adolph, she had sent to the Evershams, only half an hour before, with a note for Lady Eva.

The cook could not manage to walk, even if dinner could be served without her.

Kate, as usual, was not to be trusted.

There remained Miss Craig.

"Of course, you must see that Peggy is really ill," said she, as the governess came into the room, in answer to her summons. "The difficulty is, that there is absolutely no one whom I can send for the doctor." Mrs. Workington Bancroft paused; she was always willing that those beneath her should have the privilege of offering the services which it was her right to command.

"So, perhaps, Miss Craig," she went on, "you would not mind walking over to Tebbits' Farm. I hear there is a Liverpool doctor staying there. Of course I know nothing about him, but we must take the risk, and I expect he'll be only too glad to be earning something during his holiday. It's nearly four miles, I know, and I'd never dream of asking you if it was not that I dread appendicitis so."

"Very well," said Miss Craig, "I suppose I must go; but I don't know the way."

"Oh you can't miss it," said Mrs. Workington Bancroft, in her anxiety temporarily forgiving the obvious unwillingness of her governess' consent.

"You follow the road across the moor for two miles, until you come to Redman's Cross. You turn to the left there, and follow a rough path that leads through a larch plantation. And Tebbits' farm lies just below you in the valley."

"And take Pontiff with you," she added, as the girl left the room. "There's absolutely nothing to be afraid of, but I expect you'll feel happier with the dog."

"Well, miss," said the cook, when Miss Craig went into the kitchen to get her boots, which had been drying by the fire; "of course she knows best, but I don't think it's right after all that's happened for the mistress to send you

across the moors on a night like this. It's not as if the doctor could do anything for Miss Margaret if you do bring him. Every child is like that once in a while. He'll only say put her to bed, and she's there already."

"I don't see what there is to be afraid of, cook," said Miss Craig as she laced her boots, "unless you believe in ghosts."

"I'm not so sure about that. Anyhow I don't like sleeping in a bed where the sheets are too short for you to pull them over your head. But don't you be frightened, miss. It's my belief that their bark is worse than their bite."

But though Miss Craig amused herself for some minutes by trying to imagine the bark of a ghost (a thing altogether different from the classical ghostly bark), she did not feel entirely at her ease.

She was naturally nervous, and living as she did in the hinterland of the servants' hall, she had heard vague details of true stories that were only myths in the drawing-room. The very name of Redman's Cross sent a shiver through her; it must have been the place where that horrid murder was committed. She had forgotten the tale, though she remembered the name.

Her first disaster came soon enough.

Pontiff, who was naturally slow-witted, took more than five minutes to find out that it was only the governess he was escorting, but once the discovery had been made, he promptly turned tail, paying not the slightest heed to Miss Craig's feeble whistle. And then, to add to her discomfort, the rain came, not in heavy drops, but driving in sheets of thin spray that blotted out what few landmarks there were upon the moor.

They were very kind at Tebbits' farm. The doctor had gone back to Liverpool the day before, but Mrs. Tebbit gave her hot milk and turf cakes, and offered her reluctant son to show Miss Craig a shorter path on to the moor, that avoided the larch wood.

He was a monosyllabic youth, but his presence was cheering, and she felt the night doubly black when he left her at the last gate.

She trudged on wearily. Her thoughts had already gone back to the almost exhausted theme of the bark of ghosts, when she heard steps on the road behind her that were at least material. Next minute the figure of a man appeared: Miss Craig was relieved to see that the stranger was a clergyman. He raised his hat. "I believe we are both going in the same direction," he said. "Perhaps I may have the pleasure of escorting you." She thanked him. "It is rather weird at night," she went on, "and what with all the tales of ghosts and bogies that one hears from the country people, I've ended by being half afraid myself."

"I can understand your nervousness," he said, "especially on a night like this. I used at one time to feel the same, for my work often meant lonely walks

across the moor to farms which were only reached by rough tracks difficult enough to find even in the daytime."

"And you never saw anything to frighten you— nothing immaterial I mean?"

"I can't really say that I did, but I had an experience eleven years ago which served as the turning point in my life, and since you seem to be now in much the same state of mind as I was then in, I will tell it you.

THE TIME of year was late September. I had been over to Westondale to see an old woman who was dying, and then, just as I was about to start on my way home, word came to me of another of my parishioners who had been suddenly taken ill only that morning. It was after seven when at last I started. A farmer saw me on my way, turning back when I reached the moor road.

The sunset the previous evening had been one of the most lovely I ever remember seeing. The whole vault of heaven had been scattered with flakes of white cloud, tipped with rosy pink like the strewn petals of a full-blown rose.

But that night all was changed. The sky was an absolutely dull slate colour, except in one corner of the west where a thin rift showed the last saffron tint of the sullen sunset. As I walked, stiff and footsore, my spirits sank. It must have been the marked contrast between the two evenings, the one so lovely, so full of promise (the corn was still out in the fields spoiling for fine weather), the other so gloomy, so sad with all the dead weight of autumn and winter days to come. And then added to this sense of heavy depression came another different feeling which I surprised myself by recognising as fear.

I did not know why I was afraid.

The moors lay on either side of me, unbroken except for a straggling line of turf shooting butts, that stood within a stone's-throw of the road.

The only sound I had heard for the last half hour was the cry of the startled grouse— Go back, go back, go back. But yet the feeling of fear was there, affecting a low centre of my brain through some little used physical channel.

I buttoned my coat closer, and tried to divert my thoughts by thinking of next Sunday's sermon.

I had chosen to preach on Job. There is much in the old-fashioned notion of the book, apart from all the subtleties of the higher criticism, that appeals to country people; the loss of herds and crops, the break up of the family. I would not have dared to speak, had not I too been a farmer; my own glebe land had been flooded three weeks before, and I suppose I stood to lose as much as any man in the parish. As I walked along the road repeating to myself the first chapter of the book, I stopped at the twelfth verse.

"*And the Lord said unto Satan: Behold all that he hath is in thy power*" …

The thought of the bad harvest (and that is an awful thought in these valleys) vanished. I seemed to gaze into an ocean of infinite darkness.

I had often used, with the Sunday glibness of the tired priest, whose duty it is to preach three sermons in one day, the old simile of the chess board. God and the Devil were the players: and we were helping one side or the other. But until that night I had not thought of the possibility of my being only a pawn in the game, that God might throw away that the game might be won.

I had reached the place where we are now, I remember it by that rough stone water-trough, when a man suddenly jumped up from the roadside. He had been seated on a heap of broken road metal.

"Which way are you going, guv'ner?" he said.

I knew from the way he spoke that the man was a stranger. There are many at this time of the year who come up from the south, tramping northwards with the ripening corn. I told him my destination.

"We'll go along together," he replied.

It was too dark to see much of the man's face, but what little I made out was coarse and brutal.

Then he began the half-menacing whine I knew so well— he had tramped miles that day, he had had no food since breakfast, and that was only a crust.

"Give us a copper," he said, "it's only for a night's lodging."

He was whittling away with a big clasp knife at an ash stake he had taken from some hedge.

THE clergyman broke off.

"Are those the lights of your house?" he said. "We are nearer than I expected, but I shall have time to finish my story. I think I will, for you can run home in a couple of minutes, and I don't want you to be frightened when you are out on the moors again."

AS the man talked he seemed to have stepped out of the very background of my thoughts, his sordid tale, with the sad lies that hid a far sadder truth.

He asked me the time.

It was five minutes to nine. As I replaced my watch I glanced at his face. His teeth were clenched, and there was something in the gleam of his eyes that told me at once his purpose.

Have you ever known how long a second is? For a third of a second I stood there facing him, filled with an overwhelming pity for myself and him; and then without a word of warning he was upon me. I felt nothing. A flash of lightning ran down my spine, I heard the dull crash of the ash stake, and then a very gentle patter like the sound of a far-distant stream. For a minute I lay in perfect

happiness watching the lights of the house as they increased in number until the whole heaven shone with twinkling lamps.

I could not have had a more painless death.

MISS CRAIG looked up. The man was gone; she was alone on the moor.

She ran to the house, her teeth chattering, ran to the solid shadow that crossed and recrossed the kitchen blind.

As she entered the hall, the clock on the stairs struck the hour. It was nine o'clock.

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7: A Week End at Walker's

Thomas E. Spencer

1845-1911

In: *The Haunted Shanty*, Bookstall, 1910

Spencer was born in Hoxton, London, trained as a stone mason; he moved to Australia in 1875 and set up as a building contractor. He was also a sought-after industrial arbitrator. In his spare time he wrote a lot of verse and stories often of a wildly humorous nature.

JOHN WALKER SAT in the smoking room of his club. His good-tempered face beamed with an expression of supreme satisfaction. As he turned up his cigar to an angle of forty-five degrees, and blew the smoke in curling clouds above his head, he smiled the smile of a man who has wrestled with a knotty problem and mastered it. John Walker (or Jack Walker, as he was more familiarly styled), was the manager of a large Sydney company and, being the owner of considerable property, was looked upon by his acquaintances as a solid and substantial man. By those who knew him more intimately, and valued him for his personal qualities, he was known as a genial jolly good fellow.

In the midst of his meditations entered Billings.

'Well, Jack,' said Billings, as he straddled a vacant chair, 'you seem to be remarkably pleased with yourself. More lucky speculations, I suppose?'

'My present speculations,' replied Walker, 'concern the future, and as you happen to be concerned with that future, you might as well learn what they are. Of course you know that Billy Graham is going to get married? I thought you did. The news is public property. The auspicious event is to take place on the sixteenth. Well, Saturday next is the fifth, and I am going to ask you and Tom Spicer, with Watty Strachan, and Jack Vennis, to meet Billy at my place on the mountains, and stay until Monday. Billy is going to take a trip to Europe after the wedding. The passages of himself and the future Mrs. Graham are booked by the Mulgravia, which leaves on the day after the ceremony, and so, we may not have a chance to meet all together again for some time. We are all such old chums that I think it will be nice to spend a couple of days together before we separate. What do you think?'

'I think the idea is splendid,' replied Billings. 'But you are sure we can get back on Monday? Let me see, Monday is Bank Holiday. I can spare Monday, but on Tuesday morning I must be back at the bank. You know that I am chief cashier, and must be on duty to the tick.'

'I suppose the bank would burst if you were not there,' said Walker, laughing.

'The bank might not burst,' said Billings, 'but if I were not there, there would be a row— a devil of a row,' he added, thoughtfully.

'Ah, well,' said Walker, 'you need not fear. I must be back on Monday myself. There is a meeting of the Great Bonanza Syndicate on Tuesday. I am proposing a candidate for secretary, and old Stinson is proposing another. He always makes it a rule to oppose me, and I wouldn't let him beat me this time for a thousand pounds.'

After some more conversation, which does not affect this story, Jack Walker adjourned to the library and wrote his invitations.

They were short but effective.

'Meet the 2.20 train on Saturday. Bring your tooth-brush and a divided skirt. Train accommodation and tickets will be provided. From the time the train leaves Redfern until it arrives there again, you are my guest.'

Jack Vennis said that he thought it was a mean way of doing things.

'He expects us,' said he, 'to pay our own cab fare.'

It would be difficult to find a more jovial party than that which filled the special compartment of the 2.20 train on that particular Saturday afternoon. Every man was punctual, and all were in high good humour. They were delighted to leave the cares and responsibilities of business behind, and to breathe the pure air of the mountains even for a little while.

Billy Graham was the lion of the party, for it was given in his honour.

'By Jove!' he said, as the train puffed out of the station, 'This is a treat. Jack must have got wind of my arrangements. I have got just three days to spare. My intended wife— you never met her, Spicer— she is the dearest little woman in the world. Tall and fair, with eyes like— like—'

'All right.' Spicer, 'we'll take her eyes for granted, and I'll write some verses about her. I know the style, all intended brides are like that. What about her?'

'Well, she's the dearest little woman, but she can't bear me out of her sight. I couldn't possibly have got away, you know, but for the fact that she had to go to Goulburn to bid good-bye to her cousins there. She will be down by the train arriving at 4.45 on Monday, and I have promised faithfully to meet her. We have an awful lot to do next week.'

'I suppose you will be coming down on Monday?' said Walker to Strachan.

'I must,' answered Strachan. 'I have been for weeks making up an estimate for the North Coast Railway, and the tenders have to be in on Tuesday morning. I must be on the spot in person, for I have to arrange for the deposit.'

'I,' said Jack Vennis, 'am retained for the defence in a case that is coming on at the Criminal Court on Tuesday. It promises to be a remarkable trial. I have been making a special study of it, and I reckon to make a name through it. It is the sort of case I have been dreaming about ever since my admission to the bar. When are you going back, Spicer?'

'I was just trying,' said Spicer, as he nibbled the point of a pencil, to find a rhyme for silver.'

Jack Walker's mountain residence was a large, square-built stone house, standing in the middle of a ten acre block, and was replete with every comfort and convenience. The grounds had been tastefully improved, and the flower and vegetable gardens, and orchard, were well kept by James Spratt, the caretaker, whose wife was responsible for the tidiness of the house itself.

Walker had sent up his daughter and his niece on the previous day, to prepare for his guests, and dinner awaited them.

The meal being over, some of Walker's cigars were sampled on the verandah, moistened with some whisky, at which, even the fastidious Strachan smacked his lips. The girls played and sang, Jack Vennis sang, Walker related anecdotes of the old coaching days, and so good-tempered were the party, that they even allowed Tom Spicer to recite some of his own verses.

The next morning all were up early, and the men went down the gully at the back of the house and enjoyed a shower bath under the waterfall near the Lady's Bower.

After breakfast they started on a trip to the Kanimbla Valley, arranging to call on the way at the Bushranger's Cave. Before they started, Walker apologised for a slight alteration in his plans.

'I intended,' he said, 'to send Spratt ahead with a hamper, and he would have lit a fire and boiled the billy, but his wife is not well this morning, and I don't like to leave her alone all day as she is sick, so it comes to this, we must take it in turns to carry the hamper, or we must leave the girls at home with Mrs. Spratt. Which do you prefer?'

'I'll carry the hamper until I drop,' said Jack Vennis, 'rather than leave the girls at home.'

'I'll take my turn,' said Strachan.

'So will I,' said Billy Graham.

'And I,' said Billings.

'And I,' echoed Spicer.

'Rather than leave the girls, I'll take the hamper,
And like a What's-his name, I'll gaily scamper.

'Oh! shut up,' said Jack Vennis. 'And, as a warning against repeating that kind of thing, you shall carry the hamper first.'

'It is all down hill to the valley,' said Walker, 'and I guess the hamper will not be quite so heavy coming back.'

They took a short cut through the bush, the sombre colouring of which was relieved by the brilliant flowers of the waratah, and they soon arrived at the top of the zigzag path which forms the only practical approach to the valley

from this direction. Fresh views of gorgeous mountain scenery were revealed by every turn of the path. Hill was piled upon hill, and rock upon rock, in the wildest confusion, while, in the background, rose mountain upon mountain, until the farthest ones lost themselves in the blue haze of the distance.

The path to the valley had been hewn out of of the side of the hill. On the one hand rose the mountain, thickly tangled with ferns of every description, on the other fell a steep precipice, low down which could be seen, like a piece of white tape, a continuation of the same zigzag path.

Jack Walker and Vennis walked ahead, Strachan was busy examining the rocks and calculating their possible commercial value, Billings and Graham were paying particular attention to Miss Walker, and her cousin, Miss Bell, whilst Spicer toiled slowly along in the rear, carrying the hamper.

They reached and explored the Bushranger's Cave, then prepared to continue their journey to the bottom of the valley. After going some little distance, Vennis, looking back, saw Spicer sitting on the hamper with his notebook in his hand.

'Come along Spicer,' shouted Vennis.

'I can't,' said Spicer, 'I haven't found that rhyme for silver.'

'You can think that out going along,' said Vennis.

'No I can't,' said Spicer. 'Not while I'm carrying that hamper.'

Then he added, as he mopped his face with his handkerchief, 'It is a curious fact that the higher, the altitude the lower the specific gravity. When we commenced to descend this path, this hamper weighed about fifty pounds. It now weighs a hundred and fifty. If I carry it to the bottom it will weigh a ton. That is beyond me. I will come, if you desire my company, but the hamper remains. I think it will be better for you all to go on. I will stay here and mind the hamper.'

'Not if I know it,' said Vennis. 'Why Miss Walker is turning pale at the mere suggestion. Let me take the hamper.'

'With the greatest pleasure,' said Spicer.

So Vennis took the hamper, and Spicer paired off with Miss Walker, to discuss the relative merits of Browning and Longfellow.

When the party reached home in the evening they were all tired, but of the unanimous opinion that they had had a glorious outing.

After dinner they rested. Music was prohibited, because the caretaker's wife was not well, so they talked. Walker of the meeting of the Great Bonanza, Billings of financial matters, Strachan of the number of men he should require to build the new railway, Vennis of the intricacies of the law, while Billy Graham discussed lawn tennis with Miss Bell. In the meantime, Tom Spicer, out

on the verandah, in the bright moonlight, compared the relative merits of Browning and Longfellow with Miss Walker.

When bidding his guests good night, Walker announced that he had arranged to take a drive along the Bathurst Road-in the morning.

'We shall return,' he said, 'in time for an early lunch, which will give us ample time to catch the train at two o'clock, and then, Hey! for Sydney and business.'

'Well,' said Vennis, 'We are having a real good time, and I feel that I shall be all the fresher for my case, after this little relaxation.'

'In going down that zigzag this morning,' said Strachan, 'I thought out a scheme that will save ten per cent. of the cost of the ballast on the new railway.'

'I was wishing,' said Billings, sadly, 'that I could leave the bank, and live this life for ever. But my desk is waiting, and I must be at it on Tuesday.'

'What do you say,' said Jack Walker to Spicer. 'Haven't you got an engagement for Tuesday morning?'

'I beg your pardon,' said Spicer, blushing, and glancing at Miss Walker, 'I was not listening. I was just trying to find a rhyme for dove.'

'I was asking you what engagement you have for Tuesday morning,'

'Oh,' replied the poet, 'The usual engagement at the office. You know what a continual grind it is to be a Civil servant. One long monotonous grind from ten till four. The hours are too long.'

'You have an hour off for lunch. It is only five a day.'

'I was not alluding to the length of the day,' said Spier, 'but to the length of the hours. They are too long.'

'Ah, well!' said Walker, 'Good night, sleep sound, andd don't get up in the morning until I call you.

The sun was shining over the Kanimbla Valley on they morning, long enough to dispel the morning, mists, when in response to Walker's call, his guess assembled in the large dining room.

'Are we all here?' he asked.

'All but Jack Vennis,' replied Billings.

'Then we are all here,' said Walker, 'for Jack Vennis is gone.'

'Gone!' echoed the others, in some surprise.

Yes,' said Walker. 'I have a note in my hand, left by him in his bedroom, and as it partly explains the situation I will read it. I may first say that I have been up since four o'clock this morning, and that I found this note when I went to call Jack about eight.'

Dear Walker,— I don't want you to think that I am a cocktail or that I would would fly away from danger merely because it was danger. The fact is, I must be in Sydney to-morrow

morning. My case is coming on, and to be absent would be to miss the chance of my life. Therefore I take no risks. I trust, for your sake that my rapid departure was unnecessary, but I will be on the safe side. You told us not to rise early, but I can never sleep when the magpies are whistling merrily outside so I got up intending to take a walk and return in time for breakfast. What I heard induced me to walk to the station instead. My door was partly open when the doctor was talking to you in the hall. I heard him mention "Scarlet Fever" and and "Local Health Officer." I put these two expressions together, and knowing the new regulations, I reduced them to one word. The word was "Quarantine." I thank you for your hospitality, and trust to see you again very soon. I also hope that my fears may be groundless. Goo-bye. Many thanks. Hope to see you all soon at the Club.

Yours, etc.

Jack Vennis.

Walker paused, and then continued,

'I regret to say, that before I discovered Jack's note, his prophecy had been fulfilled. The caretaker's wife has scarlet fever, and the Health Officer has placed the house in quarantine.'

'For how long?' enquired Spicer.

'It depends on the progress of the case,' replied Walker. 'It may be for a fortnight, or it may be for six weeks, but for a fortnight at least.'

'But this is nonsense,' said Strachan. 'They can't do it.'

'They have done it,' said Walker, shaking his head sadly. 'There is a policeman at the front and a policeman at the back.'

'I simply must leave,' exclaimed Billings. 'I have to be at the bank to-morrow morning or—'

'The simple fact is,' said Walker, 'that you can't leave. I would not have missed that director's meeting for a thousand pounds. I have begged, pleaded, and threatened in vain. I am sorry, but we must make the best of it.'

'The best of it!' echoed Billy Graham. 'But my dear fellow, you don't comprehend the situation. I have to meet my intended this afternoon at the 4.45. We are to be married on the 16th, and sail the next day for Europe. Our passages are booked. So you see, it is absolutely impossible. I can't stop here.'

To this Walker returned no answer, except a shrug of the shoulder.

'Your wedding can be put off,' said Strachan. 'But how about me?' And he faced Graham aggressively. 'The tenders for the new railway close to-morrow at eleven. If I am not there I can't tender, and if I don't tender I lose all my trouble and a cool twenty thousand pounds. Great Scott! man, can't it be arranged?'

'Thank heaven!' said Spicer, 'my clients can wait. I am a Civil servant. The same Government that has so thoughtlessly placed us in this peculiar position, will have also to pay my screw while I am here. Can anybody suggest a rhyme for funny?'

At this moment attention was diverted to Billings. He had fallen to the floor in a dead faint. Under the influence of restoratives he soon recovered consciousness. He complained, however, of a violent headache and retired to his room.

Billy Graham raved, Strachan swore, and the genial Jack Walker lost his temper. It was a melancholy, ill-tempered party, that sat down to lunch. Each was fretting over his own trouble. In the midst of the meal there was a commotion on the back verandah. This was caused by one of the policemen arresting Billings as he was trying to escape through his bedroom window. He was granted his parole on his promising, in a most dejected manner, that he would not do it again.

During the afternoon, he remained closely shut in his bedroom. Walker, Strachan and Graham were busy writing letters and dispatching telegrams, which were all delayed owing to the necessity for fumigation, while Spicer sat on the verandah, quietly puffing one of Walker's cigars and discussing, with Miss Walker, the relative merits of Browning and Longfellow.

The party which journeyed to Sydney some three weeks later, could not, by any reasonable expansion of the truth, be called a merry one. Pratique had been granted, it was true, but Walker and Strachan were seedy and morose. During their three weeks enforced companionship, they had discovered many subjects on which they differed, and only one on which they cordially agreed. That was the consumption of abnormal quantities of whisky.

Billy Graham sat in the corner of the carriage with his hat over his eyes, and in his pocket a letter, in which his intended stated that she had been told by a friend in whom she could trust (the word trust being heavily underlined), that there was no quarantine except at the proper quarantine station, and that he could have come down if he had liked. She had therefore returned all the wedding presents and all was over.

Billings travelled in a separate compartment. A quiet-looking gentleman, in a tweed suit sat at his side; and in the quiet-looking gentleman's pocket was a piece of paper authorising the quiet-looking gentleman to safely convey Mr. Billings to Sydney to answer a charge of embezzling large sums of money from the bank, which fact had been discovered by the officer who had to take charge of his books while Mr. Billings was in quarantine.

Among the male members of the party, but one was happy. That one was Spicer. During his enforced holiday he had, like the busy bee, improved each shining hour. He had written a poem which he had been long contemplating. He felt in his inmost soul that it would be the means of bracketing his name with those of the leading Australian poets. And Miss Walker agreed with him. Not only did she agree with him on this matter, but they had so effectually

discussed the relative merits of Browning and Longfellow, that they were returning to Sydney an engaged couple. And what was more important, he has never changed his mind. The last time I saw him he was trying to find a rhyme for 'Cradle.'"

OUR TASK was done. The day had arrived when we had to part. The horses were harnessed to Mr. McTavish's trap, and his instruments and personal belongings were carefully packed therein. Over a parting cup of tea, he was saying "good-bye."

"Well, boys," said he, "If we never meet again, take my parting advice. Wherever it may please God to place you, do your duty. Earn the guid will of your neighbours, if you can. But do your duty. Earn no man's guid will at the expense of your own self respect. Guid-bye boys, God's blessing and mine be with you all."

He shook hands with us warmly, jumped into the trap, and in five minutes no trace remained of our respected chief, but a cloud of dust which marked the track he had taken.

We had all been more or less afraid of Mr. Mctavish, but when he had gone, an air of supreme loneliness seemed to pervade the camp. No one called him "Old Dry-as-dust" after he had left.

For some time we sat, each busy with his owu thoughts, until at length the silence which enveloped us like a cloud, was broken by Otto.

"Ach!" said he, as he knocked the ashes from his pipe, "I vas glad to leave der old camp, and I vas sorry I vas glad. Mr. McTavish says I vas sure to go to der teffil. If I vas, I von't see Mr McTavish no more effer und effer. He vas neffer go to der teffil. Und he was neffer fix me mit his eye again. It vas alvays make me feel qveer vhen Mr. McTavish fix me mit his eye."

"There was a mighty conthrollin' power in thet eye of Mr. McTavish," remarked Flanagan. "But he has gone. 'Twill be a long time before we see the likes of him again. Faith! ye can never see the good there is in a man until ye've lost sight of him for ever, and ye can never feel the comfort of his presence so much as when he's absent."

The next day the camp was deserted, and the kookaburra was free to sit and chuckle on the empty ridge-poles of our tents.

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8: The Sign-Painter and the Crystal Fishes

Marjorie Bowen

Gabrielle M. V. Long, 1885-1952

In: *In a Good Cause*, London, John Murray, 1909

(Stories and Verses on Behalf of the Hospital for Sick Children)

1: The River and the House

THE HOUSE was built beside a river. In the evening the sun would lie reflected in the dark water, a stain of red in between the thick shadows cast by the buildings. It was twilight now, and there was the long ripple of dull crimson, shifting as the water rippled sullenly between the high houses.

Beneath this house was an old stake, hung at the bottom with stagnant green, white and dry at the top. A rotting boat that fluttered the tattered remains of faded crimson cushions was affixed to the stake by a fraying rope. Sometimes the boat was thrown against the post by the strong evil ripples, and there was a dismal creaking noise.

Opposite this house was a garden— a narrow strip of ground closed round by the blank, dark houses, and led up to from the water by a flight of crumbling steps.

Nothing grew in this garden but tall, bright, rank grass and a small tree that bore white flowers. The house it belonged to was empty and shuttered; so was every house along the canal except this one, at the top window of which Lucius Cranfield sat shivering in his mean red coat. He was biting his finger and looking out across the water at the tree with pale flowers knocking at the closed shutter beside it.

The room was bare and falling to decay. Cobwebs swung from the great beam in the roof, and in every corner a spider's web was spun across the dirty plaster walls.

There was no glass in the window, and the shutters swung loose on broken hinges. Now and again they creaked against the flat brick front of the house, and then Lucius Cranfield winced.

He held a round, clear mirror in his hand, and sometimes he looked away from the solitary tree to glance into it. When he did so he beheld a pallid face surrounded with straight brown hair, lips that had once been beautiful, and blurred eyes veined with red like some curious stone.

As the red sunlight began to grow fainter in the water a step sounded on the rotting stairway, the useless splitting door was pushed open, and Lord James Fontaine entered.

Slowly, and with a mincing step, he came across the dusty floor. He wore a dress of bright violet watered silk, his hair was rolled fantastically, and powdered such a pure white that his face looked sallow by contrast. To remedy this he had painted his cheeks and his lips, and powdered his forehead and chin. But the impression made was not of a pink and fresh complexion, but of a yellow countenance rouged. There were long pearls in his ears and under his left eye an enormous patch. His eyes slanted towards his nose, his nostrils curved upwards, and his thin lips were smiling.

He carried a cane hung with blood-coloured tassels, and his waistcoat was embroidered with green flowers, the hue of an emerald, and green flowers the tint of a pale sea.

"You paint signs, do you not?" he said, and nodded.

"Yes, I paint signs," answered the other. He looked away from Lord James and across the darkening water at the lonely tree opposite. The sky above the deserted houses was turning a cold wet grey. A flight of crows went past, clung for a moment round the chimney-pots, and flew on again.

"Will you design me a sign-board?" asked Lord James, smiling. "Something noble and gay, for I have taken a new house in town."

"My workshop is downstairs," said Lucius Cranfield, without looking round. "Why did you come up?" He laid down the mirror and rubbed his cold fingers together.

"I rang and there was no answer, I knocked and there was no answer, so I pushed open the door and came up; why not?" Lord James regarded the sign-painter keenly, and smiled again, and pressed the knob of his clouded cane against his chin.

"Oh, why not?" echoed Lucius Cranfield. "Only this is a poor place to come to for a gay and noble sign."

He turned his head now, and there was a curious twist on his colourless lips.

"But you have a very splendid painting swinging outside your own door," said Lord James suavely. "Never did I see fairer drawing nor brighter hues. It is your work?" he questioned.

"Mine, yes," assented the sign-painter drearily.

"Fashion me a sign-board such as that," said Lord James. Lucius Cranfield left off rubbing his hands together.

"The same subjects?" he asked.

The other lowered his lids.

"The subjects are curious," he replied. "Where did you get them?"

"From life," said the sign-painter, staring at the tattered veils of cobwebs fluttering on the broken window-frame. "From my life."

The bright dark eyes of the visitor flickered from right to left. He moved a little nearer the window, where, despite the thickening twilight, his violet silk coat gleamed like the light on a sheet of water.

"You have had a strange life," he remarked, sneering, "to cull from it such incidents."

"What did you behold that was so extraordinary?" asked Lucius Cranfield.

"On one side there is depicted a gallows, a man in a gay habit hanging on it, and his face has some semblance to your own; the reverse bears the image of a fish, white, yet shot with all the colours… it is so skilfully executed that it looks as if it moved through the water…"

An expression of faint and troubled interest came over the sign-painter's face.

"Have you ever seen such a fish?" he asked.

Lord James's features seemed to contract and sharpen.

"Never," he said hastily.

Lucius Cranfield rose slowly and stiffly.

"There are two in the world," he said, half to himself; "and before the end I shall find the other, and then everything will be mended and put straight."

"Unless you lose your own token first," remarked Lord James harshly.

"How did you know I had one?" asked the sign-painter sharply. Lord James laughed.

"Oh, you're going mad, my fine friend! Do you not feel that you must be, living alone in such fashion in this old house?" Lucius Cranfield dragged himself to a cupboard in the wall.

"How my limbs ache!" he muttered. "Mad?" A look of cunning spread over his features. "No, I shall not go mad while I have the one crystal fish, nor before I find the owner of the other."

It was so dark they could barely see each other; but the nobleman's dress still shone bright and cold in the gloom.

"Yet it is enough to make a man go mad," he remarked suavely, "to reflect how rich and handsome you were once, with what fine clothes and furniture and friends… and then to remember how your father was hanged, and you were ruined, and all through the lies of your enemy…."

"But my enemy died, too," said Lucius Cranfield. He took a thick candle and a rusty tinder-box out of the cupboard.

"His son is alive," replied Lord James.

A coarse yellow flame spurted across the dust.

"I wish I had killed them both," said the sign-painter; "but I could never find the son… How badly the candle burns!…"

He held the tinder to the cold wax, and only a small tongue of feeble fire sprang up.

"You are quite mad!" smiled Lord James. "You never killed either… and now that your blood is chilled with misery and weakened with evil days, you never will."

The candle-flame strengthened and illumined the chamber. It showed Lord James holding his sharp chin in a long white hand, and woke his diamonds into stars.

"Will you come downstairs and choose your design?" said Lucius Cranfield, shivering. "Take care of the stairs. They are rather dusty."

He shuffled to the door and held aloft the light. It revealed the twisting stairway where the plaster hung cracked and dry on the walls, or bulged damp and green in patches as the damp had come through. The rafters were warped and bending, and in one spot a fan-shaped fungus had spread in a blotch of mottled orange.

Lord James came softly up behind the sign-painter, and peered over the stairs.

"This is a mean place," he said, smiling, "for a great gentleman to live in… and you were a great gentleman once, Mr. Cranfield." The other gave him a cunning look over his shoulder.

"When I find the owner of the fish," he answered, "I shall be a great gentleman again or kill my enemy— that is in the spell." They went downstairs slowly because of the rotting steps and uncertain light. Lord James rested his long fingers lightly on the dusty balustrade.

"Do you not find the days very long and dull here?" he asked.

The reply came unsteadily from the bowed red figure of the sign-painter.

"No… I paint… and then I make umbrellas."

"Umbrellas!" Lord James laughed unpleasantly.

"And parasols. Would you not like a parasol for your wife, James Fontaine?"

"Ah, you know me, it seems."

"I know what you call yourself," said Lucius Cranfield. "And here is my studio. Will you look at the designs upon the wall?"

Lord James grinned and stepped delicately along the dark passage to the door indicated. It opened into a low chamber the entire depth of the house. There were windows on either side: one way looking onto the river, the other onto the street.

Lucius Cranfield set the candle in a green bottle on the table, and pointed round the walls where all manner of drawings on canvas, wood, and paper hung. They depicted horrible and fantastic things— mandrakes, dragons,

curious shells and plants, monsters, and distorted flowers. In one corner were a number of parasols of silk and brocade, ruffled and frilled, having carved handles and ribboned sticks.

Lord James put up his glass and looked about him.

"So you know who I am?" he said, speaking in an absorbed way and keeping his back to Lucius Cranfield, who stood huddled together on the other side of the table, staring before him with dead-seeming eyes.

There was no answer, and Lord James laughed softly.

"You paint very well, Mr. Cranfield, but I must have something more cheerful than any of these"— he pointed his elegant cane at the designs. "That fish, now, that you have on your own sign, that is a beautiful thing."

The sign-painter groaned and thrust his fingers into his untidy brown hair.

"I cannot paint that again," he said.

"Sell me the sign, then." Lord James spoke quickly.

"I cannot… it is hanging there that it may be seen… that whosoever holds the other fish may see it… and then…"

"How mad you are!" cried Lord James. "What then, even should one come who has the other fish?" His black eyes blinked sharply, and his lips twitched back from his teeth.

"Then I shall find my enemy. The witch said so…."

"But you may die first."

"I cannot die till the spell is accomplished," shivered Lucius Cranfield. "Nor can I lose the fish."

Lord James put his hand to his waistcoat-pocket.

"Your light is very dim," he remarked. "I do not see clearly, but I think I observe a violet-coloured parasol—"

The other lifted his head.

"They are very interesting to make."

"Will you show me that one?"

Lucius Cranfield turned slowly towards the far corner of the room.

"I began to work on that the night my father was hanged… as I sewed on the frills I thought of my enemies and how I hated them; and the night I killed one of them I finished it, carving the handle into the likeness of an ivory rose."

"You have sinned also," said Lord James, through his teeth. He took his hand from his pocket and put it behind his back. "I have been a great sinner," answered the sign-painter.

He took the purple parasol from the corner and shook out its shimmering silk furbelows.

"I will buy that." Lord James leant against the table, close to the candle flaring in the green bottle. In its yellow light the brilliant colour of his coat shone like a jewel.

"The parasol is not for sale," said Lucius Cranfield sourly, gazing down on it. "Why do you not choose your design and go?" Now it was quite dark, both outside, beyond the windows, and in the corners of the long room. The waters sounded insistently as they lapped against the house. There was no moon; but through a rift in the thick, murky sky one star flickered, and the sign-painter lifted his dimmed eyes from the candle-flame and looked at it.

"What do you see?" asked Lord James curiously. He came softly up bed the other.

"A star," was the reply. "It is shining above the lonely white tree that is always knocking at the closed shutters…."

Lord James's hand came round from behind his back.

"But one can never see them both at the same time," continued the sign-painter. "When the star comes out, the tree is hidden; and only when the star sets…"

Lord James's fine hand rose slowly and fell swiftly…

Lucius Cranfield sank on his face silently, and the flaring light of the unsnuffed candle glistened on the wet dagger as it was withdrawn from between his shoulders.

Lord James stepped back and gazed with a long smile at his victim, who writhed an instant and then lay still on the dusty floor.

The sound of the water without seemed to increase his strength. The secretive yet turbulent noise of it filled the chamber like a presence as Lord James turned over the body of the sign-painter and opened his red coat.

In an inner pocket he found it, wrapped in a piece of blue satin.

The crystal fish. It was of all colours yet of no colour; translucent as water, holding, like a bubble, all hues, finely wrought with fins and scales, light and cold to the hand, shining with a pure light of its own to the eye.

Lord James rose from his knees and put out the candle.

The river sounded so loud that he paused to listen to it. He thought he could distinguish the swish of oars and the latter of them in the rowlocks.

He went to the window and looked out. By the glimmer of the star and the radiance cast by the fish in his hand he could discern that there was nobody on the river, only the deserted boat fastened to the rotting stake.

He smiled; the faint light was caught in his ribbons, his diamonds, his dark, evil eyes. As he stared up and down the black road of water, the crystal fish began to writhe in his hand. It pushed and struggled, then leapt through his fingers and plunged into the blackness of the river.

Lord James peered savagely after it, his smile changing to a grin of anger. But the fish had sunk like a bolt of iron, and thinking of the depth of the river Lord James was comforted.

He came back to the table. It was quite dark, but his eyes served him equally well day or night. He picked up his clouded cane with the crimson tassels, his black hat laced with gold, his vivid green cloak, he kissed his hand to the prone body of the sign-painter, and left the room. In a leisurely fashion he walked down the passage, pushed open the crazy front door, and stepped out into the lonely street.

He looked up at the sign on which were painted the crystal fish and the man on the gallows; then he began to put on his gloves.

As he did so the violet parasol came to his mind. He turned back.

Softly he re-entered the long studio. The noise of the water had subsided to a mere murmur. Rats were running about the room and sitting on the body of Lucius Cranfield. He could see them despite the intense darkness, and he stepped delicately to avoid their tails.

The violet parasol was on the floor near the dead man. He stooped to pick it up, and the rats squealed and showed their teeth.

Lord James nodded to them and left the house again with the parasol under his arm.

2: The River and the Garden

THE GARDEN sloped down to the straight high-road upon the side to which the house faced, and at the back ran the river dividing the pleasaunce from the meadows.

Separating the garden from the road was a prim box hedge, very high, very wide, and very old. Behind this grew the neat garden flowers, and beneath it the tangled weeds that edged the road.

Here sat Lord James on a milestone, playing Faro with a one-eyed gipsy

The summer sunset sparkled on the red gables of the house and in the clothes of Lord James, which were of crimson and blue sarcenet branched with gold and silver.

The gipsy was young and ugly; he wore a green patch over his eyeless socket, and now and then listened, keenly, to the sound of the church-bells that came up from the valley, for the village ringers were practising for Lord James's wedding.

The two played silently. The red and black cards scattered over the close green grass shaded by the large wild-parsley flowers. Beside the milestone lay

Lord James's hat, stick, and cloak. His horse was fastened by its bridle to a stout branch of a laurel-tree that bent over from the garden.

"You always win," said the gipsy.

Lord James smiled, then coughed till he shook the powder off his face on to his cravat.

"Another game," he said, and shuffled the cards.

At this a lady looked over the box hedge, and gave them both a bitter frown.

Little bright pink and blue ribbons were threaded through her high-piled white curls, round her neck was a diamond necklace, and on the front of her black velvet bodice a long trail of jasmine was pinned. Her painted lips curled scornfully, and her azure eyes darkened as she stared across and over the box hedge at Lord James.

He looked up at her, waved his hand, and rose.

"You are late," she remarked stiffly.

"I have been playing cards," he answered. "May I present you to my friend?" He pointed to the gipsy.

"No," she said, and turned her back.

The gipsy laughed silently. The sound of the bells swelled and receded in the golden evening.

"Take my horse round to the stables." Lord James grinned at the gipsy, and gathered up his hat and cloak from the grass.

"I hate those bells!" cried the lady pettishly.

"They will ring no more after tomorrow, my dear."

Lord James came round to the gate as he spoke, and entered the garden.

She gave him a side-glance, and pouted. Her enormous pink silk hoop, draped with festoons of white roses, overspread the narrow garden-path, and crushed the southernwood that edged it. Her hands rested on her black velvet panniers embroidered with garlands of crimson carnations. There was a moon-shaped patch on her bare throat and one like a star on her rouged cheek; beneath her short skirts showed her black buckle shoes and immensely high red heels. Her name was Serena Thornton.

"I have broken my parasol," she said, looking at the gables of her house where the red-gold sunset rested. "The violet one you brought me."

"It can be mended," answered Lord James.

He came up to her, and they kissed.

"Yes," assented Serena. "I sent it to be mended today," she added. He laughed.

"There is no one here can mend a parasol like that. You must give it to me, Serena, and I will take it to town."

They moved slowly along the gravel walk, he in front of her, since her hoop did not allow him to be by her side.

It was a very pleasant garden. There were beds of pinks, of stocks, of roses, bushes of laurel, yew, and box, all intersected with little paths that crossed one another and led towards the house.

"There is a man in the village," said Lady Serena, "who is a maker of umbrellas. He came here yesterday."

"Ah?" questioned Lord James. He glanced back over his shoulder. "I heard he was painting a new sign for The Goat and Compasses, and that he had made a beautiful blue umbrella for the host, so I sent down my parasol."

A slight greenish tinge, visible through the paint and powder, overspread Lord James's handsome face.

"It was careless of you to break it," he said softly.

Lady Serena lifted her shoulders.

"I could not help it. Shall I tell you how it happened?"

They had reached a square plot of close grass round which ran the box hedge and a low stone coping. In the centre stood a prim fountain, and in its clear water swam the golden and ruby carp.

"Yes, tell me how it happened," said Lord James. He pressed his handkerchief to his thin lips and looked up at the sunset.

"I wish they would stop those bells!" cried Lady Serena.

"They are practising for our wedding tomorrow, my dear," he smiled.

They could walk now side by side, she looking in front of her, and he gazing at the sunset that was pale and bright, the colour of soft gold, of pink coral, and of a dove's wings above the gables of her house.

"I was walking by the river two days ago," said Lady Serena, "and I had in my hand the crystal fish. Do you remember, Lord James, that I showed it to you just before you left for town?"

"Yes; a foolish toy," he answered.

"How pleasant the box smells!" murmured Lady Serena, in a softer tone. "Well, I walked along the bank, thinking of you, and as I looked into the water I saw another fish— it floated just as if it were swimming— and oh, it was like the one I held in my hand! Just as it neared me it became entangled in the water weeds…."

"This does not explain how you broke your parasol," remarked Lord James.

"I drew the fish to land with it— my new parasol that your little black boy had just brought me— and broke the handle."

Lord James turned his pallid face towards her.

"Did you get the fish?"

"Yes. It is just like the one I have." She pulled out a green ribbon from the white velvet bag that hung on her arm, and at the end of it dangled two crystal fishes, cut and carved finely, holding a clear light, and filled with changing colours.

Lady Serena touched one with her scented forefinger. "That is the one I found. See, it has a bright blood-like stain across the side."

"So it has," said Lord James, putting up his glass. "It is curious you should have found it. A witch gave you the other, did you not say?"

"Yes," she answered half sullenly. "And she told me that the other was owned by my lover, and that he must live in misery till he found me." She turned the blue light of her eyes on her companion.

"You should have had it," she said, and slipped the fishes back into her bag.

The afterglow was fading from the sky, and they turned towards the house.

"I won three thousand pounds at Faro last night," said Lord James, "and I have brought you some presents."

And he thrust his hand into his pocket and drew out a string of amethysts.

"I dislike the colour," said Lady Serena, and put it aside. "It is the colour you wear," he answered.

She took the necklace at this with a sudden laugh, and fastened it round her long, pale throat.

They reached the three shallow steps that led to the open door of the house, and passed side by side out of the sunset glow into the soft-hued gloom of the wide hall.

In the great banqueting-room a dinner of two covers was laid. The service was of agate and silver, the glasses twisted with milk-white lines. The table was lit by six tall candles painted with wreaths of pinks and forget-me-nots, and their light ran gleaming and faint over the white cloth.

"I am going to try on my wedding-dress," said Lady Serena. "Will you wait for me?"

"It is unlucky to wear your wedding-dress before your wedding-day," answered Lord James.

But she left the chamber without a word or a smile.

The room opened by wide windows onto the terrace at the back that sloped down to the river, and the sound of the water throbbing between its banks seemed to grow in volume and to speak threateningly to Lord James as he sat at the table with the glass and silver glittering before him, and the heart-shaped candle-flames casting a flickering glow over his sickly face.

It was the same river, and he knew it. As the last flush of light faded from the heavens he could see the moon, a strong pearl colour, rise above the trees,

and a great sparkling reflection fell across the river, marking with lines of silver the turbulent eddies that chased one another down the stream.

After a while Lord James rose and walked softly to the window, and his eyes became wide and bright as he stroked his chin and stared at the river.

When he turned round again, Lucius Cranfield stood in the doorway looking at him.

A spasm of fear contracted Lord James's features; then he spoke evenly.

"Good evening," he said.

"Good evening," replied Lucius Cranfield, and he bowed. "I have brought back a parasol I have mended— a lady's parasol, purple, with an ivory rose on the handle."

Between them was an ill-lit space of room and the bright table bearing the candles. They looked at each other, and Lord James's face grew long and foxy.

"How much do I owe you, Mr. Cranfield?" he asked.

"A great deal," said the sign-painter, shaking his head. "Oh, a great deal!"

Smiling, he set the parasol against a chair. His eyes were no longer bloodshot nor his cheeks pallid. His hair was neatly dressed. He wore the same red suit, and between the shoulder-blades it had been slit and mended with stitchings of gold thread.

"How much?" repeated Lord James.

Lucius Cranfield laughed.

"I do not believe that you are alive at all," sneered the other, rubbing his hands together. "How did you get away from the rats?"

"Do you hear the river?" whispered the sign-painter. "It is the same river."

Lord James came towards the table.

"I will pay you tomorrow for your work," and he pointed to the mended parasol.

"That is no debt of yours," answered Lucius Cranfield. "I did it for the lady of the house, Serena Thornton."

"She is my betrothed," said Lord James. "And I will pay you tomorrow—"

"No… tonight."

And the sign-painter smiled and stepped nearer.

"You lost the crystal fish," murmured Lord James, biting his forefinger and glancing round the dark, lonely room.

"But someone else has found it."

The other gave a snarl of rage.

"No! It is at the bottom of the river!"

At that Lucius Cranfield leant forward and seized his enemy by the throat. Lord James shrieked, and they swayed together for a moment. But the sign-

painter twisted the other's head round on his shoulders and dropped him, a heap of gay clothes, on the waxed floor.

Then he began to sing, and turned to the open window.

The river was quiet now, flowing peacefully in between its banks, and Lucius Cranfield stepped out onto the terrace and walked towards its waters shining in the moonlight.

Almost before the last echo of his footsteps had died away in the silent room, Lady Serena Thornton entered, holding her dress up from her shoes.

Her gown was white, all wreathed across the hoop with ropes of seed-pearls, and laced across the bodice with diamonds. In her high head-dress floated two soft plumes fastened with clusters of pale roses. Round her neck hung Lord James's gift of amethysts.

She stood in the doorway, her painted lips parted, her dark blue eyes fixed on the body of her betrothed husband.

Presently she went up and looked at him; then she sat down on the chair by the table— sat down, breathing heavily— with her right hand on the smooth satin of her bodice, and slow, strange changes passing over her face. She glanced at the purple parasol, resting across the chair where Lord James should have sat, and then out at the distant river, that showed white as her bridal-dress where the moonlight caught its ripples.

She heard the far-off singing of the sign-painter, and she sighed, closing her eyes.

The six candles burnt steadily, casting a rim of dark shadow round the table and the dead man on the floor, and glittering in the embroidered flowers on his gaudy coat and in the jewels of the woman at the table.

The black clock on the mantelshelf struck ten. The sound was echoed by the chimes from the village church.

Lady Serena Thornton rose and went upstairs, he: wide hoop brushing the balustrade either side, her high heels tapping on the polished wood.

She entered her room and lit a little silver lamp on the dressing-table.

The chamber looked out upon the back; the window was open, and she could still see the river and hear Lucius Cranfield singing.

Slowly she took the feathers, ribbons and flowers out of her curls, and laid them on the tulip-wood table. Then she shook down her hair from its wire frame and brushed the powder out of it. She had almost forgotten what colour it was— in reality a ruby golden-brown, like the tint of wallflowers.

She unlaced her bodice and flung aside her jewels. She stepped out of her hoop and took off her satin coat, staring at herself in the gilt oval mirror.

Then she washed her face free of paint and powder in her gold basin, and tied up her locks with a red ribbon. She cast off her long earrings, her

bracelets, her rings, the necklace Lord James had given her. This slipped, like a glitter of purple water, through her fingers, and shone in a little heap of stars on the gleaming waxed floor.

She arrayed herself in a brown dress, plain and straight, and took the two fishes from their velvet bag to hang them round her neck. Again she looked at herself. Who would have known her? Not Lord James himself, could he have risen from the floor in the solitary room below, and come up the wide stairs to gaze at her. Her face was utterly changed, her carriage different.

She blew out the lamp. A faint trail of smoke stained the moonlight that filled the room. She listened and heard the river and the sign-painter singing. On her bosom the fishes throbbed and glowed, opal-coloured and luminous.

Leaving the room lightly, softly she descended through the dark to the dining-room.

The six flower-wreathed candles still burnt steadily among the glass and silver. She glanced at Lord James sorrowfully, and picked up the mended parasol.

As she did so the bells broke out in a volume of glad sound— the villagers practising yet again for her wedding on the morrow.

Lady Serena Thornton smiled, and as Lucius Cranfield had done, and almost in his steps, went down the long room and through the open window on to the terrace. Slowly she walked towards the river, which she could see moving restlessly under the moonlight. The bells were very loud, but through them came the words of his song—

"The clouds were tangled in the trees
They broke the boughs and spoiled the fruit;
The sleeper knows what the sleeper sees—
You play spades, and I follow suit!

The clouds came down the drops of rain,
And woke the grass to blooms of fire;
The sleeper tore his dream in twain,
And sought for the cards in the bitter mire!"

The bells ceased suddenly. Lady Serena saw the dark figure of the sign-painter, standing at the edge of the water, his back to her.

"If I have won, 'tis little matter;
If I have lost, 'tis naught at all;
The wind will chill and the sun will flatter,
And the damp earth fill the mouth of all."

There was a boat before him, rocking on the argent water, and as the lady came up the sign-painter stooped over it. Then he turned and saw her.

"Good even," said Lady Serena. He took her hands and kissed her face. The sound of the river was heavily in their ears.

"I found your fish," she whispered.

He nodded, and they entered the boat. It was lined with violet silk and scented with spices.

"The villagers will have practised for nothing," said Lady Serena. Lucius Cranfield loosened the rope that held the boat fast to a willow, and it began to drift down the stream towards the town.

"We are going to a house where a tree with white flowers knocks for admittance on the shutters," he said.

"I know," she answered; "I know."

She sat opposite to him, leaning back, and the light night wind blew apart her brown robe here and there on the gleam of the bright green petticoat beneath. Her yellow hair floated behind her, and the crystal fishes rose and fell with her breathing. Across her knees lay the purple parasol.

They looked at each other and smiled with parted lips. The boat sped swiftly under a high bank, treeless and full under the rays of the moon. Here, by a round stone, sat two figures playing cards.

Lucius Cranfield glanced up. The players turned white, grinning faces down towards the boat. They were the one-eyed gipsy and Lord James.

"Good night," nodded the sign-painter. "I do not believe you are alive at all. Why, I can almost see through you!…"

"Do you know me?" mocked Lady Serena.

And the boat was swept away along the winding river.

Lord James listened to the sign-painter's song that floated up from the dark water.

"If I win, 'tis little matter;
If I lose, 'tit naught at all;
The wind will chill and the sun will flatter,
And the red earth stop the mouths of all."

"They will never get there," grinned Lord James. "I shall go down tomorrow and see the empty boat upside down, tossing outside the shuttered house."

"There is no tomorrow for such as you," leered the gipsy. "You had your neck broken an hour ago… presently we will go home… your deal…"

Lord James sighed, and a great cloud suddenly overspread the moon.

The gipsy began to sing in a harsh voice, and his eyes turned red in his head as he shuffled the cards.

"If I win, 'tis little matter;
If I lose, 'tis naught at all;
The wind will chill and the sun will flatter,
And the red earth stop the mouths of all."

FAR AWAY down the river the boat flashed for the last time in the moonlight, then was lost to sight under the shadow of the overhanging trees.

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9: Reel Graft

Ellis Parker Butler

1869-1937

Blue Book, Feb 1917

IT was breakfast-time at Mrs. Wimmer's boarding-house, and Grandpa Jabez Bunker had adjusted his goldrimmed spectacles on his nubbin of a nose and was peering into his dish of prunes with his baby-blue eyes before eating them (the prunes, not his eyes). Dear old Grandma Bunker, who took all things on trust, had already dipped into her prunes, and from all parts of the dining-room came the clatter of silver and china and the morning babble of tongues. It was a cool and exhilarating morning, and everyone felt fine, even the thin, yellow Miss Minchin, who began her day with a goblet of hot water—and you know what that means.

Everyone felt fine, but especially young Mr. Bibble. He came into the dining-room glowing with smiles and saluted everyone cheerily and dropped into the chair opposite Mr. Bunker.

"Well, folks, this is the great day!" he exclaimed.

It was evident that he did not mean his wedding-day. He was too untrammeled in his gladness. On his weddingday a young man may be joyously happy, but he is apt to have an air of reserve. It is difficult to think 'of any occasion on which a young man could be as unreservedly happy as young Mr. Bibble was this morning, except the one occasion that caused Mr. Bibble's joy. He was an amateur scenario-writer, and was this day to see on the screen the first showing of his first accepted fivereel scenario.

For two months young Mr. Bibble had been quite another man from the one Mr. Bunker had first known when he came to Mrs. Wimmer's boarding-house. Young Mr. Bibble had been a boarder at that select establishment for a year before Mr. Bunker arrived there, and at the time of Mr. Bunker's arrival Mr. Bibble had been in a state of depression beyond description. Among the first things Mrs, Wimmer had said to dear old Grandma Bunker after they reached the confidential stage of friendship (which was soon after Mrs. Wimmer discovered that the Bunkers were able to pay their board on the dot) was:

"So the Coolings will have to go. I am a poor woman, Mrs. Bunker, and cannot afford to room and feed anyone free of charge, and the Coolings have reached the end of their string. Mr. Cooling is always ready enough to promise to pay me as soon as he puts through a deal, but three hundred dollars is more than any boarding-housekeeper ought to trust anyone for. The price of meat—awful! But young Mr. Bibble is different."

"He's a right nice-spoken young gentleman," agreed Mrs. Bunker.

"None more so," said Mrs. Wimmer; "and I must say he works as hard as any man I know. From early morning to late at night he pounds that typewriter of his, and never once has he asked Maggie for a second cup of coffee or anything. I may be only a poor boarding-house-keeper, Mrs. Bunker, but I hope I appreciate genius as much as any person, and although my bankaccount is nothing to speak of to such a person as you, I said to Mr. Bibble: 'Mr. Bibble, I know the ways of literature are slow and rocky, and it takes time to get going right. Ten weeks at eight dollars a week you owe me now, and never a dun have I dunned you, nor won't. One hundred dollars is a lot of money to a poor widow,' I said to him, 'but one hundred dollars I am willing to gamble on genius, and until your bill comes to that amount, just go right ahead and pursue the path of genius and don't worry.' "

"Nobody couldn't be kinder spoken than that," said Mrs. Bunker.

"No boarding-house on this street could," said Mrs. Wimmer. 'Nor am T complaining now, Mrs. Bunker. Don't think it! An agreement is an agreement, and one hundred dollars was the amount I mentioned to Mr. Bibble as the limit of his credit, but I am not pressing him hard, although his bill is now one hundred and twenty-five. Nor I wont. I hope I can do as much for genius as anyone, although my means aint as great as those of some."

If Mrs. Wimmer pretended she did not worry over Mr. Bibble's bill, there is no denying that Mr. Bibble worried. 'You will find that many. authors and artists are socialistically inclined, and the reason is that under the present capitalistic system they have all had weeks when the fire of creative genius has smoldered and smoked sullenly on account of worry over unpaid bills. Such folk would welcome a system that gave them bare food and lodging and permitted them to create without worrying over where to-morrow's food is to come from and how yesterday's food is to be paid for. Mr. Bibble worried and became depressed.

SUDDENLY, however, Mr. Bibble burst into joy like a bud that blooms overnight. He paid to Mrs. Wimmer every cent he owed her, and kissed her into the bargain, the kiss being chaste and humorously meant and taken in the same spirit. He bought a brand-new sixteen-dollar suit and three new collars and a new toothbrush and felt riotously spend-thrifty. He had sold his five-reel photoplay, "The Daughter of Despard," to the Agony Photoplay Company for five hundred dollars, outright. It made no difference to Mr. Bibble that the Agony Photoplay Company believed they had made a splendid bargain.

At that moment of his career five hundred dollars looked as big to Mr. Bibble as a Pike's Peak of ice-cream served on a butter-dish. After his riot of debt-paying and expenditure he had three hundred dollars left on hand, and

he felt like J. P. Morgan. He was so uplifted that he was able to dash off a five-reel scenario in one day, and it was so utterly and hopelessly poor that he could not have sold it in a million years if every scenario-editor were an idiot. And they are not. Sometimes we think they are, but we could not prove it to the satisfaction of a jury of twelve honest men and true.

The case of Mr. Cooling was far different, poor man! He was a small, gray man with an anxious expression and a small, gray, anxious wife. They were the most inoffensive people in the world, and if Mr. Cooling had been able to pay his debts and have three hundred dollars always in the bank, there is little doubt that they would have been the best loved couple in Mrs. Wimmer's boarding-house. A course of hard luck in his business and the knowledge that he owed Mrs. Wimmer a large sum and that everyone in the place knew it had made Mr. Cooling shamedly apologetic, and he and his wife were despised in an uninterested, slighting way by most of the more fortunate boarders.

Mrs. Wimmer, who would have treated the Coolings better if Mr. Cooling had bluffed more, shifted them from table to table at will and finally marooned them at a small table in a far corner, where Maggie often neglected them. Mr. Cooling would grow red in the face with anger at the slights put upon his wife, but his spunk was not equal to the occasion, and he would bend low over his prunes and swallow prunes with humility sauce, and when he spoke to Maggie, it was in the gentlest tone. The poor man was, as he felt, at the end of his string. He knew that Mrs. Wimmer was only allowing him-to stay because he owed so large a bill, and he did not dare to leave, because he might not be able to get into another boardinghouse, having no money whatever. To this was added the fact that he had boarded with Mrs. Wimmer many years and Mrs. Wimmer's was "home" to him and to his wife. He felt toward the boarding-house, up the stairs of which came at times the odor of fried onions, as the farmer feels toward the old homestead in which he has been born and where the odor of new-mown hay sweetens the evening air.

MR. COOLING, in his desperate straits, now did something he had never done before. He went up to Mr. Bunker's room, tapped on the door and, entering, closed the door softly behind him. Dear old Grandpa Bunker— then just arrived from Oroduna, Iowa, to enter the profession of bunco-steerer and confidence-man in New York— was reading his favorite work, *The Confessions of the King of Grafters*, and he put the book on the bed at his side and welcomed Mr. Cooling.

"Well, now, neighbor," he said, "I take it right kindly that you should come a-callin' like this, Seat yourself. Ma, this is the Mr. Cooling we met down to the dining-room."

Mr. Cooling talked awhile on various subjects, leading up to his own affairs and telling Mr. Bunker about the business in which he was engaged. He was a free-lance real-estate broker, handling only big deals, and with but one or two clients. In other words, he was an accelerator of reluctant sellers and buyers.

When Mr. Cooling had first undertaken the business, he had done well. He had been "nervy" then, and he would spend weeks going back and forth between a possible buyer and a possible seller, working them into the mood necessary to close a transaction; and while he did not put through many deals, those he did put through were large and his commission was proportionately large. He often lived a year on his share of one transaction. Unfortunately, he told Mr. Bunker, business had been poor, and also unfortunately,— but he did not tell Mr. Bunker, — his sad position in the boarding-house had weakened his "nerve" and he was not the chipper, insistent little fellow he had once been. He did tell Mr. Bunker that he now had on hand a deal that, if it went through, would net him a couple of thousand dollars, and that he was working on it and had good hope of success.

All this led up to a shame-faced, faltered plea that Mr. Bunker would lend him three hundred dollars. Mr. Bunker beamed at Mr. Cooling as he listened, his babylike pink face all smiles, and when Mr. Cooling had 'ended, Mr. Bunker went to his bureau-drawer, took from it five hundred dollars and gave the money to Mr. Cooling. The little man was overwhelmed. He actually wept, and Mr. Bunker patted him on the shoulder and said it was all right, that money was nothing if a man couldn't do what he pleased with it.

"Jabez," said dear old Grandma Bunker when Mr. Cooling had left the room, "I do say you're the best man in the world, and I'm right down glad you gave that Mr. Cooling the money he needed so much."

" 'Taint nothing, Ma," Mr. Bunker replied. "This here bunco-business I'm into looks like it was goin' to pay right good, and five hundred dollars aint goin' to break us, anyhow. I feel like when money comes as easy as it comes when a man is into the business of bunkin' New Yorkers, he had ought to give some in a sort of charitable way now and again."

"Well, Jabez," said Mrs. Bunker, "the idee does you credit, but it aint as if bunco-business was dishonest and you had to square yourself with your Maker for bunkin' folks. I wouldn't allow you to be into the business if I thought it wasn't honest and nice."

"And you needn't be scared I'd stay into it if I didn't think it was honest and nice," said Mr. Bunker firmly.

Mrs. Bunker, her eyes filled with tears of blessed joy, reached out her hand and pressed Jabez's hand, and for a minute or two she let her sewing lie idly in her lap while she looked out of the window with an absent gaze.

"What you thinkin' about, Ma?" he asked.

"I was just wonderin'," she said, "if maybe the money you loaned to Mr. Cooling mightn't be bread cast upon the waters after all, Who was that gentleman he said he figgered on sellin' that propputty to? Wasn't it John D. Bargus, Pa?"

" 'Twas so," agreed Mr. Bunker. "John D. Bargus, the rubber-king."

"I thought likely it might be him, though I didn't catch the name right clear, The famous big millionaire, aint he, Pa?"

"Well, I reckon that outside of The'dore Roosevelt and Andy Carnegie, and maybe Emperor William, there aint no better known man in the world, Ma."

"Jess so!" said Mrs. Bunker placidly. "Well, I was wonderin' if— by gettin' an introduction from Mr. Cooling— you couldn't maybe sell John D. Bargus a gold brick, or bunk him some way or other."

Mr. Bunker arose and kissed Mrs. Bunker a loud, smacking kiss.

"Ma," he said, "the' aint another wife like you in the whole world— taking an interest in your husband's business like you do. I don't know but what, some day, I'll remember what you say and have a try at John D. Bargus."

"And sting him with some sort of good, honest bunco-business, Pa," said Mrs. Bunker. "Sting him hard, for there aint no multiple-millionaire ever got his money in a more similar way than what John D. Bargus did."

IT so happened, however, that Mr. Bunker found his time well filled with other bunco affairs, and at heart he was loth to attempt a raid on the cashaccount of the world-famous millionaire. He knew very well that Mr. Bargus could not be sold a gold brick, for the old man was wise in his generation. Another difficulty was that Mr. Bunker was still a mere amateur at bunco and did not have the confidence that comes with longer experience. He did not forget Mr. Bargus, however, for he thought of him every time he saw Mr. Cooling.

Oddly enough, it was not through young Mr. Bibble that Mr. Bunker became interested in motion-pictures but through the policeman at the corner. On pleasant evenings Mr. Bunker liked to stroll down to the corner and chat with the policeman, who was full of that infantile sophistication that New Yorkers imagine is the complete worldly wisdom of all ages. You can hear thousands of New Yorkers say, as the policeman said to Mr. Bunker:

"Say, just look at the crowd going into that motion-picture place over there! Honest, there aint anything can take the place of the movies, is there? Big show for ten cents; that's what does it. Aint it wonderful to think of the number of men that has became millionaires just from a thin peeling peeled off of those dimes? But it's getting to be a regular graft-game."

Mr. Bunker pricked up his ears. Graft— honest graft, bunco— was his business.

"You don't mean to say!" he exclaimed. "I shouldn't think folks would rush so to spend their dimes if they was gettin' bunked."

"Oh! the dimes!" said the policeman. "It aint the dimes. I guess most of them get a dime's worth for their money, all right; it's the high finance end of the game, the high finance is where the graft comes in. Cookin' up a billion-dollar company and sellin' the stock to suckers— that's where the bunco-game is."

The policeman may have been right or he may have been wrong, but Mr. Bunker, as an honest bunco-man should, became interested in the movies from that moment. He fell into the habit of dropping into the little motion-picture theater, and finding nothing objectionable there, he induced Mrs. Bunker to accompany him. They became, in a mild way, movie fans— at least to the extent of being able to talk about Mary Pickford and Charlie Chaplin and tell one from the other.

WHEN Mr. Bunker discovered that young Mr. Bibble was a writer of scenarios, he turned to him as an elucidator of motion-picture mysteries, and young Mr. Bibble explained as well as he could the entire process, from the creation of the scenario to the projection of the picture on the screen, and thus it happened that on the happy morning when Mr. Bibble was to see the fizst fruits of his scenario-writing shown at the studio, he turned to Mr. Bunker.

"I say, Grandpa," he said, "how would you like to run over to Rockcliff with me and see just how movies are made? Come along! I was going alone, and I'd be glad to have you."

"Well, I dunno as I've got any real strong objection," said Mr. Bunker.

"Aint I heard you say the studio is over in New Jersey, young man?" asked Mrs. Bunker.

"Yes ma'am. You cross the ferry at—"

"Well, now, Jabez," said Mrs. Bunker, "I aint a mite of objection to your going with Mr. Bibble, but I do want you should be careful. Be right careful you don't let none of them Jersey mosquitoes bite you, for I've heard tell they give the malaria. And the first thing when you go aboard the ferryboat, you look to see where the lifepreservers are kept. Maybe you'd better get one down and have it on you in case of accident. And Jabez—"

"Yes, Ma?"

"If a thunderstorm comes up, be right sure to git into a safe place. I've heard tell how Jersey lightning is something awful."

"Well, Ma, it looks like to-day was goin' to be a clear day, so I reckon I'll be safe from Jersey lightning," chuckled Mr. Bunker, and so he went to New Jersey, daring the perils of the ferry-trip and reaching the studio in good time with Mr. Bibble.

To tell the truth, the experience was one of the most interesting Mr. Bunker had ever undergone. While the studio was not as large as some, it was very complete. An hour was to pass before Mr. Bibble could see his pictures, and the director showed Mr. Bunker and Mr. Bibble through the place. The small stages where the pictures were enacted, the complicated systems of lights needed, the dressingrooms, the wardrobes and propertyrooms were all interesting ; but far more interesting was the part of the studio devoted to the making of the reels of film. The strips of film seemed endless, and were indeed probably a thousand feet in length.

Mr. Bunker saw— or partly saw— how the negatives were developed, for this is done in a dark-room but dimly illuminated by red lights. He saw how the developing was done, how the long strips of film were dipped in one ckemical and then in another and washed in vats of clear water and dried on great skeleton drums on which the films were coiled like flat snakes. He saw the printing-machines, on which the "positive" films were printed from the single negative film, a light flashing as each little picture came opposite it. He saw the whole process, down to the dyeing vats where the films are given the blue of moonlight and the red of sunset and the soft yellow that is not noticed on the screen but gives a grateful softness of color to the picture when it is displayed in the theater.

All of this Mr. Bunker observed through his gold-rimmed spectacles with intense interest. The machine for printing the positive films from the negative film particularly fascinated him, and he stood before it as if hypnotized by the little flashes of light that transformed the blank strip of film into a story that would thrill some audience, or many audiences, in no one knew what parts of the world. He was standing thus when Mr. Bibble touched him on the shoulder.

"Come on," said Mr. Bibble. "Wacker is going to show me the *Daughter of Despard* in the demonstration-room."

Mr. Wacker was waiting for them in the office, and he had under his arm the five reels of the *Daughter of Despard*, each reel a skeleton-steel spool on which the film was wound. It was evident that there was too much film for each spool, for, tightly wound as it was, the film extended at least an inch beyond the edge of each reel. Mr. Wacker was a big, good-natured man.

"Bib," he said, for he was the sort of man who instinctively seeks a nickname and uses it, ""we've got a hummer in this five-reeler of yours—a Jim

J. Hummer! I broke my poor neck giving it the best that was in little me. Wait till you see Mabel May as Despard's daughter. A peach! But I've got to cut out about fifteen hundred feet—two thousand would be better. I like a nine-hundred-foot reel, and I've got sixty-five hundred feet here."

"I hope you don't have to cut out anything important," said Bibble nervously.

"Oh, no! I always film more than I'm going to use— better to have too much and then cut than to have too little and have to rig up the sets again and make more film after the whole thing is over. I know my biz, Bib. — Ready, Bill?"

Bill was the projector-man, who ran the machine that threw the pictures on the screen. He was ready, and the four men entered the small, hot demonstrating-room. The room was a box with metal walls and ceiling, longer than broad. A white screen covered the entire farther end of the room. Near the door by which the men entered was a bench and two chairs. Behind the bench and well above it was a hole, and out of the hole extended the lens of the projector.

"All right, Bill!' said Mr. Wacker when he was seated. "Let her go!"

THE title and the picture of the author appeared. Mr. Bibble saw himself seated in an elegant library such as he had little hope of ever owning. He leaned his head on his hand and thought, and then grasped a pencil and wrote feverishly. It is the way authors always do in the movies, "Good, hey?" said Wacker, and he continued his observations all through the five reels, sometimes to Bibble, sometimes to Bill and sometimes to Mr. Bunker. "Can cut a yard off there, Bill," he would say— or: "Have to take that leader again, Bill— got finish spelled with two n's." Many of the scenes ran a few feet longer than need be. "We can cut that where she opens the door," Wacker would say. The day was damp and muggy, and the film did not run off the reels well, and there were stops, while Bill swore in a low but earnest tone. "It won't do that when the film seasons," Wacker said; "we're running it pretty fresh."

"Well, what do you think of it?" Wacker asked while Bill was taking the first reel from the projector and preparing the second. Bibble said he liked it.

"That's a lot for an author to say," said Wacker. "They generally howl like a bee-stung steer. Hurry up there, Bill; it's hot."

"Aw! shut up! you aint got no kick. You ought to be up here for a while," said Bill with that sweet informality that obtains around photoplay studios.

"Now, right here," said Wacker when the second reel began to show on the screen, "is something you hadn't ought to have written in and that I had ought

to have cut out when I doped up the action. I'm going to cut out four full scenes— here it is, right here!"

There was utter silence in the room, except for the clicking of the projector, as the four scenes were thrown on the screen.

"Stop!" said Wacker, and the fleeting pictures stopped. Wacker turned his face toward Bibble. "Well, what have you got to say?"

For a moment Bibble was silent.

"What— what do you want to cut that out for?" he asked. "That's the best thing in the scenario. You can't cut it out without making the wind-up mean nothing at all. Why, that's the meat of the plot! If you cut that, there is no reason for Despard's daughter killing Despard— no reason for anything!"

"Yes, there is, Bibby!" said Wacker. "I looked out for that. I wrote in a scene or two later on— you'll see— that fixes that up as neat as pie. These four scenes have to be cut."

"But why?"

"Look here, now, Bib," said Wacker, "every man, woman and child in the United States knows that story of how John D. Bargus wrecked the Perkioma Rubber Company and then discarded his wife because she tried to make him hand back his gains, and how Phil Stelling killed himself because he had everything in Perkioma. That's all plain public knowledge. The minute anybody sees those four scenes they know you mean John D. Bargus."

"You mean you are afraid of libel?"

"I aint afraid of nothing!" said Wacker elegantly. "No, son, I mean that old John D. Bargus has just bought the control of this film company, and if I let those four acts go out, I'd be bounced so high I'd come down spattered with star-dust. They've got to come out. Go ahead, Bill."

Wacker was burly and uncouth, but he was an experienced photoplaymaker, and as the reels unwound, Bibble had to admit that he had substituted scenes that took the place of the four objectionable ones fairly well.

"Well, it is fine, Mr. Wacker," he said when the last reel was run. "I'm proud of it. It is well acted and well staged."

"And the photography is a pippin," said Mr. Wacker. "We've got a big hit in it— a whale of a hit. What time is it? Hang around a bit and we'll go over to Mike's and have a bite of lunch."

A! this, they all went into the office. Before one of the windows, on what might be called an extra wide window-sill, were two affairs like axles. They were set a foot or so apart. Mr. Wacker deposited the five reels of filrn on the window-sill and pulled a large wastebasket to him. He then placed one of the reels on one of the axles and attached a small crank to the other and began

winding the film from the full reel onto an empty one, holding his left forefinger under the film and watching the little pictures closely. Every now and then he stopped turning the crank, tore a foot or a yard or so of the film from the strip, dropped it into the wastebasket and pinned the raw edges of the film together. So he went through the reel, editing it, cutting out the superfluous parts, reducing it to the nine hundred feet he considered a proper length: Mr. Bunker stood watching him.

"Interesting, aint it? But this is one job I hate," said Mr. Wacker as he put the second reel on the axle. He wound a few yards onto the empty reel and ripped the film across. From the full reel he unwound foot after foot, stopped, ripped the film across again and pinned the raw edges together. What he had torn out he dropped into the wastebasket, a curling, tumbled mass. Mr. Bunker watched him edit the five reels. Then Mr. Wacker drew on his coat.

"What do you do with this?" asked Mr. Bunker, meaning the discarded film in the basket.

"Oh, we take it over in the lot and burn it," said Wacker. "It's bad stuff to leave around; a cigar-butt might set it off, and it burns like powder."

"I wonder if I might have a piece or two of this to show to my wife," asked Mr. Bunker. "I reckon Ma aint ever seen a piece of photoplay in her born days. It would be real interestin' to Ma."

"Why, sure!" said Mr. Wacker. "That discard stuff is worth just about as much as a snowflake at the North Pole. Help yourself. I'll be with you in a minute,"

He left the office, and Mr. Bunker, his kindly eyes beaming with innocent good nature, dug his plump hand into the waste-basket and rummaged in the odds and ends until he found the long strip that represented the unfortunate scene in the life of John D. Bargus. He held it to the light to make sure he had the right piece and then rolled it quickly and slipped it into his coat pocket. He beamed his gratitude when Mr. Wacker returned.

"Ma'll be right pleased," he said. "If you'll let me know when this photoplay is goin' to be showed, me and Ma will make a point to see it and tell the folks at our boardin'-house to go and see it too."

"Say, Bib," said Mr. Wacker as he seated himself at the table in Mike's while Mr. Bunker went to wash his hands, "your plump friend ought to be put into the movies. He ought to be an idea for you. Innocent old infant wanderin' around New York and every sharp guy takin' money away from him, hey? Honest, Bib, he's the innocentest old party! It wouldn't be right to let him go around alone. Why don't you make a five-reeler of him? We're looking for a five-reel comedy."

"He's a good old soul, just the same, for all his innocence," said Mr. Bibble. "Of course, if I do work him into a comedy, I'll have to make him a little less simple-minded. I'll think it over."

THE simple-minded old innocent came back to the table with his pink face beaming good will to all men, and his face still beamed when he reached Mrs. Wimmer's boarding-house. He hummed a little tune of joy as he pawed over the ancient magazines on Mrs. Wimmer's bookshelves. The one he desired met his hand at last, and he carried it to his room. It was a copy of *The Monthly Meteor*, and it contained the fifth installment of "The Life of John D. Bargus," which ran serially for twelve months in that magazine. Mr. Bunker read the installment of the old lifestory as he sat in his easy-chair, his carpet slipper dangling from one toe of his left foot.

The next morning Mr. Bunker, the roll of film in his pocket, sallied forth bright and early. He sat in the anteroom of *The Monthly Meteor* a full hour before the managing editor arrived, but when that gentleman did appear, it did not take Mr. Bunker long to conclude the business he had on hand, for the managing editor happened to be the author of "The Life of John D. Bargus."

"My name is Jabez Bunker, from Oroduna, Iowa," said Mr. Bunker, "and I been interested in these movie-picture photoplays quite some time. Me and Ma been goin' to see them off and on for some spell."

"Just so!" said the managing editor. "I'm a busy man, Mr. Bunker, and this is a busy day—"

"I don't cal'late to take up no more of your time than I have to," said Mr. Bunker soothingly. "I been sort of thinkin' over things, and readin' some of this article your magazine had about John D. Bargus, and I shouldn't wonder if a series of photoplay movies about great men mightn't make some money for somebody. I sort of wondered if you'd sell the right to movie the article?"

The managing editor was immediately deeply interested. He mentioned twenty thousand dollars, with ten per cent of the gross proceeds of the sales, as a proper figure. Mr. Bunker said he reckoned that would be about right.

"Of course," he said, "I've got to figger round some and see if I can raise the money. I got a thousand—"

The managing editor smiled.

"The thing you want, in that case," he said graciously, "is an option. It's like this: you pay me the thousand dollars, and I give you an option— a right to purchase the motion-picture rights— for one month. That will give you time to make your arrangements. If you can raise the other nineteen thousand dollars, you pay me at the end of the month and the thousand you give me now

applies to make up the full twenty thousand. If you don't raise the nineteen thousand—"

"Oh, I guess I can manage it somehow," said Mr. Bunker, and so the option was made out and Mr. Bunker paid the thousand dollars. He thanked the managing editor and carried the option away with him,

IN one of the big buildings in Wall Street the rubber-king, John D. Bargus, sat and fumed. He was growing old, and he hated coming to New York in the hot weather, but a kink in the European rubber situation had made his presence necessary. He was waiting for his secretary to put before him the details of the kink, when one of the assistant secretaries entered.

"I'm sorry to bother you, Mr. Bargus, but there is a man wishes to see you a moment. He says he understands you are interesting yourself in motion pictures—"

"Send him away! I am interested as I mean to be."

"Yes! I told him his matter would have to go through the usual routine, Mr. Bargus, but he was very insistent, He has purchased the motion-picture rights to *The Monthly Meteor*'s 'Life,' and he has a part of the film he proposes to use that I really think you ought to see."

The assistant secretary was properly reluctant in saying this. John D, Bargus pricked up his ears.

"Show him in!" he said.

Mr. Bunker entered the presence of the nation-famous rubber-king as he entered all presences, royal or plebeian. His blue eyes beamed good will as he seated himself as far back on a chair as his short legs permitted.

"You be Mr. Bargus?" he asked as he fumbled in his pocket. "I'm right glad to make your acquaintance. Seems like I knowed you already, I been thinkin' so much about you. I guess maybe I'd ought to feel sort-of related to you, seein' as I've spent a thousand dollars gettin' an option on that 'Life' of yours that was printed into *The Monthly Meteor*. But I aint kickin'. I reckon I'll make quite a bit of money out of it before I'm through."

"What do you want?" asked Mr. Bargus crossly.

"Well, I got an option on this here 'Life' of yours," said Mr. Bunker pleasantly, "and I figger to make a movie of it. Of course, nothin' like that has been did yet, and we'll have to make it sort of spicy-amuse the masses, as you might say. I got a'piece of film here that sort of gives my idee of how she ought to be did."

He handed Mr. Bargus the discarded strip of film, and the great rubberking ran it through his hands, holding it against the light. A slight tinge of color showed on his leathery face.

"H'm!" he ejaculated.

"I've got to pay the writer-fellow nineteen thousand dollars more,' said Mr. Bunker, "and I aint got it to spare, as you might say; so, hearin' you was interested in movie-businesses, I thought maybe you'd like to come into the company— financially, so to speak."

"You have an option on the 'Life?' For one month? And you paid one thousand for the option? My friend," said Mr. Bargus, "you are going to lose every cent you put into this idiotic scheme! Your masses, as you call them, want drama, They want melodrama, They don't want life-histories of business men, I wouldn't put a cent into the scheme!"

Mr, Bunker took up the strip of discarded film that Mr. Bargus had put down. He remained placid and beaming. "I guess you know more about business than what I do," he said. "But maybe I can get somebody to go into this."

"You wont get a living soul to go into it!" declared Mr. Bargus. "No, sir! But I should dislike to have my 'Life' peddled about and proven an unwanted commodity."

"I reckon that, the way we figger to film it, it might not be so eternal a fizzle as you've got a notion," said Mr. Bunker.

Mr. Bargus ignored this.

"It would be a source of annoyance to my family to have my 'Life' filmed and peddled and a failure," he said. He turned to his desk and opened a small drawer and shut it again. Then he turned sharply to Mr. Bunker. "I'll give you five thousand dollars for that option," he declared, "—not a cent more, not a cent less!"

"Did!" said Mr. Bunker instantly, and he tossed the strip of discarded film on Mr, Bargus' desk and drew the option from his pocket.

"JABEZ," said Mrs. Bunker to her husband that evening, "if so be you got that piece of movie-picture in your pocket, I'd like to show it to Mis' Wimmer. I been tellin' her about it, and she's right interested."

"Well, now, Ma," said Mr. Bunker regretfully, "I'm sorry you didn't say so sooner. I went and got rid of it."

"Dear, dear!" said Mrs. Bunker. "I dare say you throwed it away!"

Mr. Bunker chuckled.

"Well, putty near, Ma, putty near, considerin' how anxious the feller was to have it," he said.

10: The Water Goats

Ellis Parker Butler

The Water Goats, and other troubles, 1910

This short story and the next two short stories by Ellis Parker Butler, amounting to 15,000 words, are the entire contents the the slim volume "The Water Goats, and other troubles."

"AND THEN," said the landscape gardener, combing his silky, pointed beard gently with his long, artistic fingers, 'Mn the lake you might have a couple of gondolas. Two would be sufficient for a lake of this size; amply sufficient. Yes," he said firmly, "I would certainly advise gondolas. They look well, and the children like to ride on them. And so do the adults. I would have two gondolas in the lake."

Mayor Dugan and the City Council, meeting as a committee of the whole to receive the report of the landscape gardener and his plan for the new public park, nodded their heads sagely.

"Sure!" said Mayor Dugan. "We want two of thim— of thim gon— thim gon— "

"Gondolas," said the landscape gardener.

"Sure!" said Mayor Dugan, "we want two of thim. Remimber thim gondolas, Toole."

"I have thim fast in me mind," said Toole. "I will not let thim git away, Dugan."

The landscape gardener stood a minute in deep thought, looking at the ceiling.

"Yes, that is all!" he said. "My report, and the plan, and what I have mentioned, will be all you need."

Then he shook hands with the mayor and with all the city councilmen and left Jeffersonville forever, going back to New York where landscape gardeners grow, and the doors were opened and the committee of the whole became once more the regular meeting of the City Council.

The appropriation for the new park was rushed through in twenty minutes, passing the second and third readings by the reading of the title under a suspension of the by-laws, and being unanimously adopted. It was a matter of life and death with Mayor Dugan and his ring. Jeffersonville was getting tired of the joyful grafters, and murmurs of discontent were concentrating into threats of a reform party to turn the cheerful rascals out. The new park was to be a sop thrown to the populace— something to make the city proud of itself and grateful to its mayor and council. It was more than a pet scheme of Mayor Dugan, it was a lifeboat for the ring. In half an hour the committees had been

appointed, and the mayor turned to the regular business. Then from his seat at the left of the last row little Alderman Toole arose.

"Misther Mayor," he said, "how about thim— thim don— thim don—"

"Golas!" whispered Alderman Grevemeyer hoarsely, "dongolas."

"How about thim dongolas, Misther Mayor?" asked Alderman Toole.

"Sure!" said the mayor. "Will annyone move that we git two dongolas t' put in th' lake for th' kids t' ride on? Will annyone move that Alderman Toole be a committee of wan t' git two dongolas t' put in th'lake?"

"I make dot motions," said Alderman Grevemeyer, half raising his great bulk from his seat and sinking back with a grunt.

"Sicond th' motion," said Alderman Toole.

"Moved and siconded," said the mayor, "that Alderman Toole be a committee to buy two dongolas to put in th' lake for th' kids to ride on. Ye have heard the motion."

The motion was unanimously carried. That was the kind of City Council Mayor Dugan had chosen.

When little Alderman Toole dropped into Casey's saloon that night on his way home he did not slip meekly to the far end of the bar, as he usually did. For the first time in his aldermanic career he had been put on a committee where he would really have something to do, and he felt the honour. He boldly took a place between the big mayor and Alderman Grevemeyer, and said: "One of th' same, Casey," with the air of a man who has matters of importance on his mind. He felt that things were coming his way. Even the big mayor seemed to appreciate it, for he put his hand affectionately on Toole's shoulder.

"Mike," said the mayor, "about thim dongolas, now; have ye thought anny about where ye would be gettin' thim?"

"I have not," said Toole. "I was thinkin' 'twould be good t' think it over a bit, Dugan. Mebby 'twould be best t' git thim at Chicagy." He looked anxiously at the mayor's face, hoping for some sign of approval or disapproval, but the mayor's face was non-committal. "But mebby it wouldn't," concluded Toole. As a feeler he added: " Would ye be wantin' me t' have thim made here, Dugan?"

The big mayor patted Toole on the shoulder indulgently.

"It's up t' you, Mike," he said. "Ye know th' way Dugan does things, an' th' way he likes thim done. I trust thim that I kin trust, an' whin I put a man on committee I'm done wid th' thing. Of coorse," he added, putting his mouth close to Toole's ear, and winking at Grevemeyer, "ye will see that there is a rake-off for me an' th' byes."

"Sure!" said Toole.

The big mayor turned back to the bar and took a drink from his glass. Grevemeyer took a drink from his glass, also. So did Toole, gravely. Dugan wiped his mouth on the back of his hand and turned to Toole again.

"Mike," he said, "what do ye think? Mebby 'twould do as well t' git a couple of sicond-hand dongolas an' have thim painted up. If they was in purty good shape no wan would know th' difference, an' 'twould make a bit more rake-off fer th' byes, mebby."

"Th' same word was on th' ind o' me tongue, Dugan," said Toole, nodding his head slowly. "I was considerin' this very minute where I could lay me hand on a couple of purty good dongolas that has not been used much. Flannagan could paint thim up fine!"

"Or Stoltzenau could do such paintings," interposed Grevemeyer.

"Sure!" agreed the big mayor. He toyed with his glass a moment. "Mike," he said suddenly, "what th' divil is a dongola, anyhow?"

Mike Toole was just raising his glass to his lips with the movements of one accustomed to hold conversation with the mayor. His left hand rested on his hip, with his arm akimbo, and his hat was tipped carelessly to the back of his head. The hand raising his glass stopped short where it was when he heard the mayor's question. He frowned at the glass— scowled at it angrily.

"A dongola, Dugan"— he said slowly, and stopped. "A dongola"— he repeated. " A dongola— did ye ask me what a dongola might be, Dugan?"

The big mayor nodded, and Grevemeyer leaned forward to catch the answer. Casey, too, leaned on his bar and listened. Alderman Toole raised his glass to his lips and filled his mouth with the liquor. Instantly he dashed the glass furiously to the floor. He jerked off his hat and cast it into a far corner and pulled off his coat, throwing it after his hat. He was climbing on to the bar when the big mayor and Grevemeyer laid their hands on the little man and held him tightly. The big mayor shook him once and set him on the floor.

"Mike!" said the big mayor. "What's th' matter wid ye? What are ye goin' afther Casey that way for? Is it crazy ye are? Or have ye gone insane?"

"Knock-out drops!" shouted Toole, shaking his fist at Casey, who looked down at him in astonishment. "Knock-out drops! I will have th' law on ye, Casey. I will have th' joint closed! I'll teach ye t' be givin' knockout drops t' th' aldermin of th' city!"

"Mike!" cried the big mayor, giving him another vigorous shake. "Shut up wid ye! Casey wouldn't be givin' ye annything that wasn't good for ye. Casey wouldn't be givin' ye knock-out drops."

"No?" whispered Mike angrily. ''No? Wouldn't he, Dugan? An' what has he done t' me mimory, then, Dugan? What has he put in th' drink t' rob me of me mimory? Wan minute ago I knew as well anny other man what a dongola is

like, an' now I have no mimory of anny dongolas at all. Wan minute ago I could have told ye th' whole history of dongolas, from th' time of Adam up till now, an' have drawed a picture of wan that annywan could recognize— an' now I wouldn't know wan if ye was t' show it t' me! I was about t' tell ye th' whole history of dongolas, Dugan; 'twas on th' ind of me tongue t' give ye a talk on dongolas, whin I took a drink. Ye saw me take a drink, Grevemeyer?"

"Ya!" said Grevemeyer, nodding his head solemnly. "You took such a drink!"

"Sure," said Toole, arranging his vest. "Grevemeyer saw me take th' drink— an' now I have no mimory of dongolas at all. If ye was t' show me a chromo of wan I wouldn't know was it a dongola or what. I'm ashamed of ye, Casey!"

"If ye done it, Casey, ye hadn't have ought t' have done it," said Dugan reprovingly. "Th' mind of him might be ruined intirely."

"Stop, Dugan!" said Toole hastily. "I forgive him. Me mind will likely be all right by mornin'. 'Tis purty good yit, ixcipt on th' subjict of dongolas. I'm timporarily out of remimbrance what dongolas is. 'Tis odd how thim knock-out drops works, Grevemeyer."

"Ya!" said the alderman unsuspectingly, "gifing such a forgetfulness on such easy things as dongolas."

"Sure! You tell Dugan what dongolas is, Grevemeyer," said Toole quickly.

Grevemeyer looked at his glass thoughtfully. His mind worked slowly always, but he saw that it would not do for him to have knock-out drops so soon after Toole.

"Ach!" he exclaimed angrily. "You are insulting to me mit such questions Toole. So much will I tell you— never ask Germans what is dongolas. It is not for Germans to talk aboudt such things. Ask Casey."

Casey scratched his head thoughtfully.

"Dongolas?" he repeated. "I have heard th' word, Grevemeyer. Wait a bit! 'Tis something about shoes. Sure! I remimber, now! 'Twas dongola shoes wan of me kids had, last winter, an' no good they were, too. Dongolas is shoes, Grevemeyer— laced shoes— dongolas is laced shoes."

The big mayor leaned his head far back and laughed long and loud. He pounded on the bar with his fist, and slapped Toole on the back.

"Laced shoes!" he cried, wiping his eyes, and then he became suddenly serious.

" 'Twould not be shoes, Casey," he said gravely. "Thim dongolas was ricomminded by th' landscape-gardener from New Yorrk. 'Twould not be sinsible t' ricommind us t' put a pair of laced shoes in th' park lake fer th' kids t' ride on."

" 'Twould not seem so," said Toole, shaking his head wisely. "I wisht me mind was like it always is. 'Tis a pity—"

"Stop!" cried Casey. "I have it! Thim was kid shoes. Thim dongolas was kid shoes."

"So ye said, Casey," said Dugan. "For th' kid."

"No," said Casey, "*of* th' kid."

"Sure!" said Gravemeyer . "So it is— the shoes of the child."

"Right fer ye!" exclaimed Casey. "Th' kid shoes of th' kid. 'Twas kid leather they were made out of, Dugan. Th' dongola is some fancy kind of a goat. Like box-calf is th' skin of th' calf of th' box-cow. Th' dongola is some foreign kind of a goat, Dugan."

"Ho, ho-o-o!" cried Toole, suddenly, knocking on his forehead with the knuckles of his fist. The three men turned their eyes upon him and stared.

"What ails ye now, Mike?" asked Dugan, disgustedly.

"Ho-o-o!" he cried again, slapping himself on the top of his head. "Me mind is comin' back t' me, Dugan! Th' effects of th' knock-out drops is wearin' off! I recall now that th' dongola is some fancy kind of a goat. 'Twill all come back t' me soon."

"Go along wid ye!" exclaimed Dugan. "Would ye be puttin' a goat in th' lake for th' kids t' ride on?"

"Sure!" said Toole enthusiastically. "Sure I would, Dugan. Not th' common goat I wouldn't. But dongola goats I would. Have ye heard of dongola water goats, Casey? Was thim dongola goat skin shoes warranted t' be water-proof?"

Casey wrinkled his brow.

" 'Tis like they was, Toole," he said doubtfully. " 'Tis like they was warranted t' be, but they wasn't."

"Sure!'' cried Toole joyously. "'Tis water-proof th' skin of th' dongola water goats is, like th' skin of th' duck. An' swim? A duck isn't in it wid a water goat. I remimber seein' thim in ould Ireland whin I was a bye, Dugan, swimmin in th' lake of Killarney. Ah, 'twas a purty picture."

"I seem t' remimber thim mesilf," he said. "Not clear, but a bit."

"Sure ye do!" cried Toole. "Many's the time I have rode across th' lake on th' back of a dongola. Me own father, who was a big man in th' ould country, used t' keep a pair of thim for us childer. 'Twas himself fetched thim from Donnegal, Dugan. 'Twas from Donnegal they got th' name of thim, an' 'twas th' name ye give him that misled me. Donnegoras was what we called thim in th' ould country — donnegoras from Donnegal. I remimber th' two of thim I had whin I was a kid, Dugan — wan was a Nanny, an' wan was a Billy, an'—"

"Go on home, Mike," said Dugan. "Go on home an' sleep it off!" and the little alderman from the Fourth Ward picked up his hat and coat, and obeyed his orders.

Instituting a new public park and seeing that in every purchase and every contract there is a rake-off for the ring is a big job, and between this and the fight against the rapidly increasing strength of the reform party. Mayor Dugan had his hands more than full. He had no time to think of dongolas, and he did not want to think of them— Toole was the committee on dongolas, and it was his duty to think of them, and to worry about them, if any worry was necessary. But Toole did not worry. He sat down and wrote a letter to his cousin Dennis, official keeper of the zoo in Idlewild Park at Franklin, Iowa.

"Dear Dennis," he wrote*. " Have you any dongola goats in your menagery for I want two right away good strong ones answer right away your affectionate cousin alderman Michael Toole.*

"Ps monny no object."

When Dennis Toole received this letter he walked through his zoo and considered his animals thoughtfully. The shop- worn brown bear would not do to fill cousin Mike's order; neither would the weather-worn red deer nor the family of variegated tame rabbits. The zoo of Idlewild Park at Franklin was woefully short of dongola goats— in fact, to any but the most imaginative and easily pleased child, it was lacking in nearly every thing that makes a zoo a congress of the world's most rare and thrilling creatures. After all, the nearest thing to a goat was a goat, and goats were plenty in Franklin.

Dennis felt an irresistible longing to aid Mike— the longing that comes to any healthy man when a request is accompanied by the legend "Money no object." He wrote that evening to Mike.

"Dear Mike," he wrote*. "I've got two good strong dongola goats I can let you ave cheap. I'm overstocked with dongolas to-day. I want to get rid of two. Zoo is getting too crowded with all kinds of animals and I don't need so many dongola goats. I will sell vou two for fifty dollars. Apiece. What do you want them for? Your affectionate cousin, Dennis Toole, Zoo keeper. PS. Crates extra."*

"Casey," said Mike to his friend the saloon keeper when he received this communication, " 'tis just as I told ye— dongolas is goats. I have been corrispondin' with wan of th' celibrated animal men regardin' th' dongola water goat, an' I have me eye on two of thim this very minute. But 'twill be ixpinsive, Casey, mighty ixpinsive. Th' dongola water goat is a rare birrd, Casey. They have become extinct in th' lakes of Ireland, an' what few of thim is left in th' worrld is held at outrajeous prices. In th' letter I have from th' animal man,

Casey, he wants two hundred dollars apiece for each dongola water goat, an' 'twill be no easy thing for him t' git thim."

"Hasn't he thim in his shop, Mike?" asked Casey.

"He has not, Casey," said the little alderman. ''He has no place for thim. Cages he has, an' globes for goldfish, an' birrd cages, but th' size of th' shop I'aves no room for an aquarium, Casey. He has no tank for th' preservation of water goats. Hippopotamuses an' alligators an' crocodiles an' dongola water goats an' sea lions he does not keep in stock, Casey, but sinds out an' catches thim whin ordered. He writes that his agints has their eyes on two fine dongolas, an' he has tiligraphed thim t' catch thim."

"Are they near by, Mike?" asked Casey, much interested.

"Naw," said Toole. "'Twill be some time till I git thim. Th' last he heard of thim they were swimmin' in th' Lake of Geneva."

"Is it far, th' lake?" asked Casey.

"I disremimber how far," said Toole, " 'Tis in Africa or Asia, or mebby 'tis in Constantinople. Wan of thim countries it is, annyhow."

But to his cousin Dennis he wrote:

"Dear Dennis — I will take them two dongolas. Crate them good and solid. Do not send them till I tell you. Send the bill to me. Your affectionate cousin alderman Michael Toole. PS Make bill for two hundred dollars a piece. Business is business. This is between us two. M. T."

A Keeper of the Water Goats had been selected with the utmost care, combining in the choice practical politics with a sense of fitness. Timothy Fagan was used to animals— for years he had driven a dump-cart. He was used to children— he had ten or eleven of his own. And he controlled several votes in the Fourth Ward. His elevation from the dump-cart of the street cleaning department to the high office of Keeper of the Water Goats was one that Dugan believed would give general satisfaction.

When the goats arrived in Jeffersonville the two heavy crates were hauled to Alderman Toole's back yard to await the opening of the park, and there Mayor Dugan and Goat Keeper Fagan came to inspect them. Alderman Toole led the way to them with pride, and Mayor Dugan's creased brow almost uncreased as he bent down and peered between the bars of the crates. They were fine goats. Perhaps they looked somewhat more dejected than a goat usually looks— more dirty and down at the heels than a goat often looks— but they were undoubtedly goats. As specimens of ordinary Irish goats they might not have passed muster with a careful buyer, but no doubt they were excellent examples of the dongola.

"Ye have done good, Mike," said the mayor. "Ye have done good! But ain't they mebby a bit off their feed— or something?"

"Off their feed!" said Toole. "An' who wouldn't be, poor things? Mind ye, Dugan, thim is not common goats— thim is dongolas— an' used to bein' in th' wather continuous from mornin' till night. 'Tis suflferin' for a swim they be, poor animals. Wance let thim git in th' lake an' ye will see th' difference, Dugan. 'Twill make all th' difference in th' worrld t' thim. 'Tis dyin' for a swim they are."

"Sure!" said the Keeper of the Water Goats.

"Ye have done good, Mike," said the mayor again. "Thim dongolas will be a big surprise for th' people."

They were. They surprised the Keeper of the Goats first of all. The day before the park was to be opened to the public the goats were taken to the park and turned over to their official keeper. At eleven o'clock that morning Alderman Toole was leaning against Casey's bar, confidentially pouring into his ear the story of how the dongolas had given their captors a world of trouble, swimming violently to the far reaches of Lake Geneva and hiding among the bulrushes and reeds, when the swinging door of the saloon was banged open and Tim Fagan rushed in. He was mad. He was very mad, but he was a great deal wetter than mad. He looked as if he had been soaked in water over night, and not wrung out in the morning.

"Mike!" he whispered hoarsely, grasping the little alderman by the arm. "I want ye! I want ye down at th' park."

A chill of fear passed over Alderman Toole. He turned his face to Fagan and laid his hand on his shoulder.

"Tim,'' he demanded, "has annything happened t' th' dongolas?"

"Is annything happened t' th' dongolas!" exclaimed Fagan sarcastically. "Is annything wrong with thim water goats ? Oh, no, Toole! Nawthin' has gone wrong with thim! Only they won't go into th' wather, Mike! Is annything gone wrong with thim, did ye say? Nawthin'! They be in good health. but they are not crazy t' be swimmm'. Th' way they do not hanker t' dash into th' water is marvellous, Mike. No water for thim!"

"Hist!" said Toole uneasily, glancing around to see that no one but Casey was in hearing. "Mebby ye have not started thim right, Tim."

"Mebby not," said Fagan angrily. "Mebby I do not know how t' start th' water goat, Toole! Mebby there is one way unbeknownst t' me. If so, I have not tried it. But th' forty-sivin other ways I have tried, an' th' goats will not swim. I have started thim backwards an' I have started thim frontwardis, an' I have took thim in by th' horns an' give thim lessons t' swim, an' they will not swim! I have done me duty by thim, Mike, an' I have wrastled with thim, an' rolled in th' lake with thim. Was it t' be swinmiin' teacher t' water goats ye got me this job for?"

"Hist!" said Toole again. "Not so loud, Tim! Ye haven't told Dugan have ye?"

"I have not!'' said Tim, with anger. "I have not told annybody annything excipt thim goats an' what I told thim is not dacint hearin'. I have conversed with thim in strong language, an' it done no good. No swimmm' for thim! Come on down an' have a chat with thim yersilf, Toole. Come on down an' argue with thim, an persuade thim with th' soft sound of yer voice t' swim. Come on down an' git thim water goats used t' th' water."

"Ye don't understand th' water goat, Tim," said Toole in gentle reproof. "I will show ye how t' handle him," and he went out, followed by the wet Keeper of the Water Goats.

The two water goats stood at the side of the lake, wet and mournful, tied to two strong stakes. They looked weary and meek, for they had had a hard morning, but as soon as they saw Tim Fagan they brightened up. They arose simultaneously on their hind legs and their eyes glittered with deadly hatred. They strained at their ropes, and then, suddenly, panic-stricken, they turned and ran, bringing up at the ends of their ropes with a shock that bent the stout stakes to which they were fastened. They stood still and cowered, trembling.

"Lay hold!" commanded Toole. "Lay hold of a horn of th' brute till I show ye how t' make him swim."

Through the fresh gravel of the beach the four feet of the reluctant goat ploughed deep furrows. It shook its head from side to side, but Toole and Fagan held it fast, and into the water it went."

"Now!" cried Alderman Toole. "Git behind an' push, Tim! Wan! Two! Three! Push!"

Alderman Toole released his hold and Keeper of the Water Goats Fagan pushed. Then they tried the other goat. It was easier to try the other water goat than to waste time hunting up the one they had just tried, for it had gone away. As soon as Alderman Toole let it go, it went. It seemed to want to get to the other end of the park as soon as possible, but it did not take the short cut across the lake— it went around. But it did not mind travel— it went to the farthest part of the park, and it would have gone farther if it could. So Alderman Toole and Keeper Fagan tried the other water goat. That one went straight to the other end of the park. It swerved from a straight line but once, and that was when it shied at a pail of water that was in the way. It did not seem to like water.

In the Franklin Zoo Dennis Toole had just removed the lid of his tin lunch-pail when the telegraph boy handed him the yellow envelope. He turned it over and over, studying its exterior, while the boy went to look at the shop-worn brown bear. The zoo keeper decided that there was no way to find out

what was inside of the envelope but to open it. He was ready for the worst. He wondered, unthinkingly, which one of his forty or more cousins was dead, and opened the envelope.

"Dennis Toole, Franklin Zoo," he read*, "Dongolas won't swim. How do you make them swim? Telegraph at once. Michael Toole."*

He laid the telegram across his knees and looked at it as if it was some strange communication from another sphere. He pushed his hat to one side of his head and scratched the tuft of red hair thus bared.

" 'Dongolas won't swim!' " he repeated slowly. "An' how do I make thim swim? I wonder does Cousin Mike take th' goat t' be a fish, or what? I wonder does he take swimmin' to be wan of th' accomplishments of th' goat?" He shook his head in puzzlement, and frowned at the telegram. " Would he be havin' a goat regatta, I wonder, or was he expectin' th' goat t' be a web-footed animal? 'Won't swim!' " he repeated angrily.

" 'Won't swim!' An' what is it to me if they won't swim? Nayther would I swim if I was a goat. 'Tis none of me affair if they will not swim. There was nawthin' said about 'swimmin' goats.' Goats I can give him, an' dongola goats I can give him, an' jumpin' goats, an' climbin' goats, an' walkin' goats, but 'tis not in me line t'furnish submarine goats. No, nor goats t' fly up in th' air! Would anny one," he said with exasperation, "would anny one that got a plain order for goats ixpict t' have t' furnish goats that would hop up off th' earth an' make a balloon ascension? 'Tis no fault of Dennis Toole's thim goats won't swim. What will Mike be telegraphin' me nixt, I wonder? 'Dear Dennis: Th' goats won't lay eggs. How do ye make thim?' Bye, have ye a piece of paper t' write an answer t' me cousin Mike on?"

The Keeper of the Water Goats and Alderman Toole were sitting on a rustic bench looking sadly at the water goats when the Jeffersonville telegraph messenger brought them Dennis Toole's answer. Alderman Toole grasped the envelope eagerly and tore it open, and Fagan leaned over his shoulder as he read it:

"Michael Toole, Alderman, Jeffersonville," they read*. "Put them in the water and see if they will swim. Dennis Toole."*

"Put thim in th' wather!" exclaimed Alderman Toole angrily. "Why don't ye put thim in th' wather, Fagan? Why did ye not think t' put thim in th' wather?"

He looked down at his soaking clothes, and his anger increased. "Why have ye been tryin' t' make thim dongolas swim on land, Fagan?" he asked sarcastically. "Or have ye been throwin' thim up in th' air t' see thim swim?

Why don't ye put thim in th' wather? Why don't ye follow th' instructions of th' expert dongola water goat man an' put thim in th' wather if ye want thim t' swim?"

Fagan looked at the angry alderman. He looked at the dripping goats.

"So I did, Mike," he said seriously. "We both of us did."

"An' did we!" cried Alderman Toole in mock surprise. "Is it possible we thought t' put thim in th' wather whin we wanted thim t' swim? It was in me mind that we tied thim to a tree an' played ring-around-a-rpsy with thim t' induce thim t' swim! Where's a pencil? Where's a piece of paper?" he cried.

He jerked them from the hand of the messenger boy. The afternoon was half worn away. Every minute was precious. He wrote hastily and handed the message to the messenger boy.

"Fagan," he said, as the boy disappeared down the path at a run, "raise up yer spirits an' come an' give th' water goats some more instructions in th' ginteel art of swimmin' in th' wather."

Fagan sighed and arose. He walked toward the dejected water goats, and, taking the nearest one by the horns yanked it toward the lake. The goat was too weak to do more than hold back feebly and bleat its disapproval of another bath. The more lessons in swimming it received the less it seemed to like to swim. It had developed a positive hatred of swimming.

Dennis Toole received the second telegram with a savage grin. He had expected it. He opened it with malicious slowness.

"Dennis Toole, Franklin Zoo," he read. *"Where do you think I put them to make them swim? They won't swim in the lake. It won't do no good to us for them to swim on dry land. No fooling, now, how do you make them dongolas swim? Answer quick. Michael Toole."*

He did not have to study out his reply, for he had been considering it ever since he had sent the other telegram. He took a blank from the boy and wrote the answer. The sun was setting when the Jeffersonville messenger delivered it to Alderman Toole.

"Mike Toole, Jeffersonville," it said. *"Quit fooling, yourself. Don't you know young dongolas are always water-shy at first? Tie them in the lake and let them soak, and they will learn to swim fast enough. If I didn't know any more about dongolas than you do I would keep clear of them. Dennis Toole."*

"Listen to that now," said Alderman Toole, a smile spreading over his face. "An' who ever said I knew anny thing about water goats, anny how? Th' natural history of th' water goat is not wan of the things usually considered part of th' iducation of th' aldermin from th' Fourth Ward, Fagan, but 'tis surprised I am

that ye did not know th' goat is like th' soup bean, an' has t' be soaked before usin'. Th' Keeper of th' Water Goat should know th' habits of th' animal, Fagan. Why did ye not put thim in to soak in th' first place? I am surprised at ye!"

"It escaped me mind," said Fagan. "I was thinkin' these was broke t' swimmin' an' did not need t' be soaked. I wonder how long they should be soaked, Mike?"

" 'Twill do no harrm t' soak thim overnight, anny how," said Toole. "Over night is th' usual soak given t' th' soup-bean an' th' salt mackerel, t' say nawthin' of th' codfish an' others of th' water-goat family. Let th' water goats soak over night, Fagan, an' by momin' they will be ready t' swim like a trout. We will anchor thim in th' lake, Fagan— an' we will say nawthin' t' Dugan. 'Twould be a blow t' Dugan was he t' learn th' dongolas provided fer th' park was young an' wather-shy."

They anchored the water goats firmly in the lake, and left them there to overcome their shyness, which seemed, as Fagan and Toole left them, to be as great as ever. The goats gazed sadly, and bleated longingly, after the two men as they disappeared in the dusk, and when the men had passed entirely out of sight, the goats looked at each other and complained bitterly.

Alderman Toole thoughtfully changed his wet clothes for dry ones before he went to Casey's that evening, for he thought Dugan might be there, and he was. He was there when Toole arrived, and his brow was black. He had had a bad day of it. Everything had gone wrong with him and his affairs. A large lump of his adherents had sloughed off from his party and had affiliated with his opponents, and the evening opposition paper had come out with a red-hot article condemning the administration for reckless extravagance. It had especially condemned Dugan for burdening the city with new bonds to create an unneeded park, and the whole thing had ended with a screech of ironic laughter over the— so the editor called it— fitting capstone of the whole business, the purchase of two dongola goats at perfectly extravagant prices.

"Mike," said the big mayor severely, when the little alderman had offered his greetings, "there is the divil an' all t' pay about thim dongolas. Th' *News* is full of thim. 'Twill be th' ind of us all if they do not pan out well. Have ye tried thim in th' water yet?"

"Sure!" exclaimed the little alderman with a heartiness he did not feel. "What has me an' Fagan been doin' all day but tryin' thim? Have no fear of th' wather goats, Dugan."

"Do they swim well, Mike?'' asked the big mayor kindly, but with a weary heaviness he did not try to conceal.

"Swim!'' exclaimed Toole. "Did ye say swim, Dugan? Swim is no name for th' way they rip thro' the wather! 'Twas marvellous t' see thim. Ah, thim

dongolas is wonderful animals! Do ye think we could persuade thim t' come out whin we wanted t' come home? Not thim, Dugan! 'Twas all me an' Fagan could do t' pull thim out by main force, an' th' mmute we let go of thim, back they wint into th' wather. 'Twas pitiful t' hear th' way they bleated t' be let back into th' wather agin, Dugan, so we let thim stay in for th' night."

"Ye did not let thim loose in th' lake, Mike?" exclaimed the big mayor. "Ye did not let thim be so they could git away?"

"No," said Toole. "No! They'll not git away, Dugan. We anchored thim fast."

"Ye done good, Mike,'' said the big mayor.

The next morning Keeper of the Water Goats Fagan was down sufficiently early to drag the bodies of the goats out of the lake long before even the first citizen was admitted to the park. Alone, and hastily he hid them in the little tool house, and locked the door on them. Then he went to find Alderman Toole. He found him in the mayor's office, and beckoned him to one side. In hot, quick accents he told him the untimely fate of the dongola water goats, and the mayor— with an eye for everything on that important day— saw the red face of Alderman Toole grow longer and redder; saw the look of pain and horror that overspread it. A chilling fear gripped his own heart.

"Mike," he said. "What's th' matter with th' dongolas?"

It was Fagan who spoke, while the little alderman from the Fourth Ward stood bereft of speech in this awful moment.

"Dugan," he said, "I have not had much ixperience with th' dongola wather goats, an' th' ways an' habits of thim is strange t' me, but if I was t' say what I think, I would say they was over-soaked."

"Over-soaked, Fagan?" said the mayor crossly. "Talk sense, will ye?"

"Sure!" said Fagan. "An' over-soaked is what I say. Thim water goats has all th' looks of bein' soaked too long. I would not say positive, Yer Honour, but that is th' looks of thim. If me own mother was t' ask me I would say th' same, Dugan. 'Soakin' too long done it,' is what I would say."

"You are a fool, Fagan!" exclaimed the big mayor.

"Well," said Fagan mildly, "I have not had much ixperience in soakin' dongolas, if ye mean that, Dugan. I do not set up t' be an expert dongola soaker. I do not know th' rules t' go by. Some may like thim soaked long an' some may like thim soaked not so long, but if I was to say, I would say thim two dongolas at th' park has been soaked a dang sight too long. Th' swim has been soaked clean out of thim."

"Are they sick?" asked the big mayor. "What is th' matter with thim?"

"They do look sick," agreed Fagan, breaking the bad news gently. "I should say they look mighty sick, Dugan. If they looked anny sicker, I would be afther lookin' for a place t' bury thim in. An' I am lookin' for th' place now."

As the truth dawned on the mind of the big mayor, he lost his firm look and sank into a chair. This was the last brick pulled from under his structure of hopes. His head sank upon his breast and for many minutes he was silent, while his aides stood abashed and ill at ease. At last he raised his head and stared at Toole, more in sorrow than in resentfulness.

"Mike," he said, "Mike Toole! What in th' worrld made ye soak thim dongolas?"

"Dugan," pleaded Toole, laying his hand on the big mayor's arm. "Dugan, old man, don't look at me that way. There was nawthin' else t' do but soak thim dongolas. Many's th' time I have seen me old father soakin' th' young dongolas t' limber thim up for swimmin'. 'If iver ye have to do with dongolas, Mike,' he used t' say t' me, 'soak thim well firrst.' So I soaked thim, an' 'tis none of me fault, nor Pagan's either, that they soaked full o' wather. First-class dongolas is wather-proof, as iveryone knows, Dugan, an' how was we t' know thim two was not? How was me an' Fagan t' know their skins would soak in wather like a pillow case? Small blame to us, Dugan!'

The big mayor took his head between his hands and stared moodily at the floor.

"Go awn away!" he said after a while.

"Ye have done for me an' th' byes, Toole. Ye have soaked us out of office, wan an' all of us. I want t' be alone. It is all over with us. Go awn away!"

He looked toward the house.

"I'll not worry," he said. "Maggie will be sad t' hear th' job is gone, but she would have took it harder t' know her Tim was wastin' his time varnishin' th' slab side of a spongy goat."

11: Mr. Billings's Pockets

Ellis Parker Butler

The Saturday Evening Post 27 March 1909

ON THE sixteenth of June Mr. Rollin Billings entered his home at Westcote very much later than usual, and stealing upstairs, like a thief in the night, he undressed and dropped into bed. In two minutes he was asleep, and it was no wonder, for by that time it was five minutes after three in the morning, and Mr. Billings's usual bedtime was ten o'clock. Even when he was delayed at his office he made it an invariable rule to catch the nine o'clock train home.

When Mrs. Billings awoke the next— or, rather, that same— morning, she gazed a minute at the thin, innocent face of her husband, and was in the satisfied frame of mind that takes an unexpected train delay as a legitimate excuse, when she happened to cast her eyes upon Mr. Billings's coat, which was thrown carelessly over the foot of the bed. Protruding from one of the side pockets was a patent nursing-bottle, half full of milk. Instantly Mrs. Billings was out of bed and searching Mr. Billings's other pockets. To her horror her search was fruitful.

In a vest pocket she found three false curls, or puffs of hair, such as ladies are wearing to-day to increase the abundance of their own, and these curls were of a rich brownish red. Finally, when she dived into his trousers pocket, she found twelve acorns carefully wrapped in a lady's handkerchief, with the initials "T.M.C." embroidered in one corner.

All these Mrs. Billings hid carefully in her upper bureau drawer and proceeded to dress. When at length she awakened Mr. Billings, he yawned, stretched, and then, realizing that getting-up time had arrived, hopped briskly out of bed.

"You got in late last night," said Mrs. Billings pleasantly.

If she had expected Mr. Billings to cringe and cower she was mistaken. He continued to dress, quite in his usual manner, as if he had a clear conscience.

"Indeed I did, Mary," he said. "It was three when I entered the house, for the clock was just striking."

"Something must have delayed you," suggested Mrs. Billings.

"Otherwise, dear," said Mr. Billings, "I should have been home much sooner.

"Probably," said Mrs. Billings, suddenly assuming her most sarcastic tone, as she reached into her bureau drawer and drew out the patent nursing-bottle, "this had something to do with your being delayed!"

Mr. Billings looked at the nursing-bottle, and then he drew out his watch and looked at that.

"My dear," he said, "you are right. It did. But I now have just time to gulp down my coffee and catch my train. To-night, when I return from town, I will tell you the most remarkable story of that nursing-bottle, and how it happened to be in my pocket, and in the mean time I beg you— I most sincerely beg you— to feel no uneasiness."

With this he hurried out of the room, and a few moments later his wife saw him running for his train.

All day Mrs. Billings was prey to the most disturbing thoughts, and as soon as dinner was finished that evening she led the way into the library.

"Now, Rollin?" she said, and without hesitation Mr. Billings began.

1. The Patent Nursing-Bottle

YOU HAVE (he said), I know, met Lemuel, the coloured elevator boy in our office building, and you know what a pleasant, accommodating lad he is. He is the sort of boy for whom one would gladly do a favour, for he is always so willing to do favours for others, but I was thinking nothing of this when I stepped from my office at exactly five o'clock yesterday evening. I was thinking of nothing but getting home to dinner as soon as possible, and was just stepping into the elevator when Lemuel laid his hand gently on my arm.

"I beg yo' pahdon, Mistah Billings," he said politely, "but would yo' do me a favour?"

"Certainly, Lemuel," I said; "how much can I lend you?"

"'Tain't that, sah," he said. "I wish t' have a word or two in private with yo'. Would yo' mind steppin' back into yo' office until I git these folks out of th' buildin', so's I can speak to yo'?"

I knew I had still half an hour before my six-two train, and I was not unwilling to do Lemuel a favour, so I went back to my office as he desired, and waited there until he appeared, which was not until he had taken all the tenants down in his elevator. Then he opened the door and came in. With him was the young man I had often seen in the office next to mine, as I passed, and a young woman on whom I had never set my eyes before. No sooner had they opened the door than the young man began to speak, and Lemuel stood unobtrusively to one side.

"Mr. Billings," said the young man, "you may think it strange that I should come to you in this way when you and I are hardly acquaintances, but I have often observed you passing my door, and have noted your kind-looking face,

and the moment I found this trouble upon me I instantly thought of you as the one man who would be likely to help me out of my difficulty."

While he said this I had time to study his face, and also to glance at the young woman, and I saw that he must, indeed, be in great trouble. I also saw that the young woman was pretty and modest and that she, also, was in great distress. I at once agreed to help him, provided I should not be made to miss the six-thirty train, for I saw I was already too late for the six-two.

"Good!" he cried. "For several years Madge— who is this young lady— and I have been in love, and we wish to be married this evening, but her father and my father are waiting at the foot of the elevator at this minute, and they have been waiting there all day. There is no other way for us to leave the building, for the foot of the stairs is also the foot of the elevator, and, in fact, when I last peeped, Madge's father was sitting on the bottom step. It is now exactly fifteen minutes of six, and at six o'clock they mean to come up and tear Madge and me away, and have us married."

"To—" I began.

"To each other," said the young man with emotion.

"But I thought that was what you wanted?" I exclaimed.

"Not at all! Not at all!" said the young man, and the young woman added her voice in protest, too. "I am the head of the Statistical Department of the Society for the Obtaining of a Uniform National Divorce Law, and the work in that department has convinced me beyond a doubt that forced marriages always end unhappily. In eighty-seven thousand six hundred and four cases of forced marriages that I have tabulated I have found that eighty-seven thousand six hundred and three have been unhappy. In the face of such statistics Madge and I dare not allow ourselves to be married against our wills. We insist on marrying voluntarily."

"That could be easily arranged," I ventured to say, "in view of the fact that both your fathers wish you to be married."

"Not at all," said Madge, with more independence than I had thought her capable of; "because my father and Henry's father are gentlemen of the old school. I would not say anything against either father, for in ordinary affairs I they are two most suave and charming old gentlemen, but in this they hold to the old-school idea that children should allow their parents to select their life-partners, and they insist that Henry and I allow ourselves to be forced to marry each other. And that, in spite of the statistics Henry has shown them. Our whole happiness depends on our getting out of this building before they can come up and get us. That is why we appeal to you."

"If you still hesitate, after what Madge has said," said Henry, pulling a large roll of paper out of his pocket, "here are the statistics."

"Very well," I said, "I will help you, if I can do so and not miss the six-thirty train. What is your plan?"

"It is very simple," said Henry. "Our fathers are both quite near-sighted, and as six o'clock draws near they will naturally become greatly excited and nervous, and, therefore, less observant of small things. I have brought with me some burnt cork with which I will blacken my face, and I will change clothes with Lemuel, and, in the one moment necessary to escape, my father will not recognize me. Lemuel, on the other hand, will whiten his face with some powder that Madge has brought, and will wear my clothes, and in the excitement my father will seize him instead of me."

"Excellent," I said, "but what part do I play in this?"

"This part," said Henry, "you will wear, over your street clothes, a gown that Madge has brought in her suit-case and a hat that she has also brought, both of which her father will easily recognize, while Madge will redden her face with rouge, muss her hair, don a torn, calico dress, and with a scrub-rag and a mop in her hands easily pass for a scrub-woman.

"And then?" I asked.

"Then you and Lemuel will steal cautiously down the stairs, as if you were Madge and I seeking to escape, while Madge and I, as Lemuel and the scrub-woman, will go down by the elevator. My father and Madge's father will seize you and Lemuel—"

"And I shall appear like a fool when they discover I am a respectable business man rigged up in woman's clothes," I said.

"Not at all," said Madge, "for Henry and I have thought of that. You must play your part until you see that henry and I have escaped from the elevator and have left the building, and that is all. I have had the forethought to prepare an alibi for you. As soon as you see that Henry and I are safe outside the building, you must become very indignant, and insist that you are a respectable married woman, and in proof you must hand my father the contents of this package. He will be convinced immediately and let you go, and then Lemuel can run you up to your office and you can take off my dress and hat and catch the six-thirty train without trouble." She then handed me a small parcel, which I slipped into my coat pocket.

When this had been agreed upon she and Henry left the office and I took the hat and dress from the suit-case and put them on, while Lemuel put on Henry's suit and whitened his face. This took but a few minutes, and we went into the hall and found Henry and Madge already waiting for us. Henry was blackened into a good likeness of Lemuel, and Madge was quite a mussy scrub-woman. They immediately entered the elevator and began to descend slowly, while Lemuel and I crept down the stairs.

Lemuel and I kept as nearly as possible opposite the elevator, so that we might arrive at the foot of the stairs but a moment before Madge and Henry, and we could hear the two fathers shuffling on the street floor, when suddenly, as we reached the third floor, we heard a whisper from Henry in the elevator. The elevator had stuck fast between the third and fourth floors. As with one mind, Lemuel and I seated ourselves on a step and waited until Henry should get the elevator running again and could proceed to the street floor.

For a while we could hear no noise but the grating of metal on metal as Henry worked with the starting lever of the elevator, and then we heard the two voices of the fathers.

"It is a ruse," said one father. "They are pretending the elevator is stuck, and when we grow impatient and start up the stairs they will come down with a rush and escape us."

"But we are not so silly as that," said the other father. "We will stay right here and wait until they come down."

At that Lemuel and I settled ourselves more comfortably, for there was nothing else to do. I cursed inwardly as I felt the minutes slip by and knew that half-past six had come and gone, but I was sure you would not like to have me desert those two poor lovers who were fighting to ward off the statistics, so I sat still and silent. So did Lemuel.

I do not know how long I sat there, for it was already dark in the narrow stairway, but it must have been a long time. I drowsed off, and I was finally awakened by Lemuel tugging at my sleeve, and I knew that Henry had managed to start the elevator again. Lemuel and I hastened our steps, and just as the elevator was coming into sight below the second floor we were seen by the two fathers. For an instant they hesitated, and then they seized us. At the same time the elevator door opened and Henry and Madge came out, and the two fathers hardly glanced at them as they went out of the door into the street.

As soon as I saw that they were safe I feigned great indignation, and so did Lemuel.

"Unhand me, sir!" I cried. "Who do you think I am? I am a respectable married lady, leaving the building with her husband. Unhand me!"

Instead of doing so, however, the father that had me by the arm drew me nearer to the hall light. As he did so he stared closely at my face.

"Morgan," he said to the other father, "this is not my daughter. My daughter did not have a moustache."

"Indeed, I am not your daughter," I said; "I am a respectable married lady, and here is the proof."

With that I reached for the package Madge had given me, but it was in my coat-pocket, underneath the dress I had on, and it was only with great difficulty and by raising one side of the skirt that I was able to get it. I unwrapped it and showed it to the father that had me by the arm. It was the patent nursing-bottle.

When Mr. Billings had finished his relation his wife sat for a moment in silence. Then she said:

"And he let you go?"

"Yes, of course," said Mr. Billings; "he could not hold me after such proof as that, and Lemuel ran me up to my office, where I changed my hat and took off the dress. I knew it was late, and I did not know what train I could catch, but I made haste, and, on the way down in the elevator, I felt in my pocket to see if I had my commutation ticket, when my hand struck the patent nursing-bottle. My first impulse was to drop it in the car, but on second thought I decided to keep it, for I knew that when you saw it and heard the story you would understand perfectly why I was detained last night."

"Yes?" said Mrs. Billings questioningly. "But, my dear, all that does not account for these."

As she said that she drew from her workbasket the three auburn-red curls.

"Oh, those!" said Mr. Billings, after a momentary hesitation. "I was about to tell you about those."

"Do so!" said Mrs. Billings coldly. "I am listening."

2: The Three Auburn-Red Curls

WHEN I WENT down in the elevator (said Mr. Billings) with the nursing-bottle in my pocket, I had no thought but to get to the train as soon as possible, for I saw by the clock in my office that I had just time to catch the eleven-nine if I should not be delayed. Therefore, as soon as I was outside the building I started to run, but when I reached the corner and was just about to step on a passing street-car a hand was laid on my arm, and I turned to see who was seeking to detain me. It was a woman in the most pitiable rags, and on her arm she carried a baby so thin and pale that I could scarcely believe it lived.

One glance at the child showed me that it was on the verge of death by starvation, and this was confirmed by the moans of the mother, who begged me for humanity's sake to give her money with which to provide food for the child, even though I let her, herself, starve. You know, my dear, you never allow me to give money to street beggars, and I remembered this, but at the same time I remembered the patent nursing-bottle I still carried in my pocket.

Without hesitation I drew the patent nursing-bottle from my pocket and told the mother to allow the infant to have a sufficient quantity of milk it contained to sustain the child's life until she could procure other alms or other aid. With a cry of joy the mother took the nursing-bottle and pressed it to the poor baby's lips, and it was with great pleasure I saw the rosy colour return to the child's cheeks. The sadness of despair that had shadowed the mother's face also fled, and I could see that already she was looking on life with a more optimistic view.

I verily believe the child could have absorbed the entire contents of the bottle, but I had impressed upon the mother that she was to give the child only sufficient to sustain life, not to suffice it until it was grown to manhood or womanhood, and when the bottle was half-emptied the mother returned it to me. How much time all this occupied I do not know, but the child took the milk with extreme slowness. I may say that it took the milk drop by drop. A great deal of time must have elapsed.

But when the mother had returned the patent nursing-bottle to me and saw how impatient I was to be gone, she still retained her hold upon my arm.

"Sir," she said, "you have undoubtedly saved the life of my child, and I only regret that I cannot repay you for all it means to me. But I cannot. Stay!" she cried, when I was about to pull my arm away. "Has your wife auburn-red hair?"

"No," I said, "she has not, her hair is a most beautiful black."

"No matter," said the poor woman, putting her hand to her head. "Some day she may wish to change the colour of her hair to auburn-red, which is easily done with a little bleach and a little dye, and should she do so these may come handy;" and with that she slipped something soft and fluffy into my hand and fled into the night. When I looked, I saw in my hand the very curls you hold there. My first impulse was to drop them in the street, but I remembered that the poor woman had not given them to me, but to you, and that it was my duty to bring them home to you, so I slipped them into my pocket.

When Mr. Billings had ended this recital of what had happened to him his wife said:

"Huh!"

At the same time she tossed the curls into the grate, where they shrivelled up, burst into blue smoke, and shortly disappeared in ashes.

"That is a very likely story," she said, "but it does not explain how this came to be in your pocket."

Saying this she drew from her basket the handkerchief and handed it to Mr. Billings.

"Hah!" he exclaimed. For a moment he turned the rolled-up handkerchief over and over, and then he cautiously opened it. At the sight of the twelve

acorns he seemed somewhat surprised, and when the initials "T. M. C." on the corner of the handkerchief caught his eye he blushed.

"You are blushing— you are disturbed," said Mrs. Billings severely.

"I am," said Mr. Billings, suddenly recovering himself; "and no wonder."

"And no wonder, indeed!" said Mrs Billings. "Perhaps, then, you can tell me how those acorns and that handkerchief came to be in your pocket."

"I can," said Mr. Billings, "and I will."

"You had better," said Mrs. Billings.

3: The Twelve Acorns and the Lady's Handkerchief

YOU MAY have noticed, my dear (said Mr. Billings), that the initials on that handkerchief are "T. M.C.," and I wish you to keep that in mind, for it has a great deal to do with this story. Had they been anything else that handkerchief would not have found its way into my pocket; and when you see how those acorns and that handkerchief, and the half-filled nursing-bottle and the auburn-red curls all combined to keep me out of my home until the unearthly hour of three A. M., you will forget the unjust suspicions which I too sadly fear you now hold against me, and you will admit that a half-filled patent nursing-bottle, a trio of curls, a lady's handkerchief and twelve acorns were the most natural things in the world to find in my pockets.

When I had left the poor woman with her no-longer-starving baby I hurriedly glanced into a store window, and by the clock there saw it was twenty minutes of one and that I had exactly time to catch the one o'clock train, which is the last train that runs to Westcote. I glanced up and down the street, but not a car was in sight, and I knew I could not afford to wait long if I wished to catch that train. There was but one thing to do, and that was to take a cab, and, as luck would have it, at that moment an automobile cab came rapidly around the corner. I raised my voice and my arm, and the driver saw or heard me, for he made a quick turn in the street and drew up at the curb beside me. I hastily gave him the directions, jumped in and slammed the door shut, and the auto-cab immediately started forward at what seemed to me unsafe speed.

We had not gone far when something in the fore part of the automobile began to thump in a most alarming manner, and the driver slackened his speed, drew up to the curb and stopped. He opened the door and put his head in.

"Something's gone wrong," he said, "but don't you worry. I'll have it fixed in no time, and then I can put on more speed and I'll get you there in just the same time as if nothing had happened."

When he said this I was perfectly satisfied, for he was a nice-looking man, and I lay back, for I was quite tired out, it was so long past my usual bedtime; and the driver went to work, doing things I could not understand to the fore part of the automobile, where the machinery is. I remember thinking that the cushions of this automobile were unusually soft, and then I must have dozed off, and when I opened my eyes I did not know how much time had elapsed, but the driver was still at work and I could hear him swearing. He seemed to be having a great deal of trouble, so I got out of the automobile, intending to tell him that perhaps I had better try to get a car, after all. But his actions when he saw me were most unexpected. He waved the wrench he held in his hand, and ordered me to get back into the automobile, and I did. I supposed he was afraid he would lose his fare and tip, but in a few minutes he opened the door again and spoke to me.

"Now, sport," he said, "there ain't no use thinkin' about gettin' that train, because it's gone, and I may as well say now that you've got to come with me, unless you want me to smash your head in. The fact is, this ain't no public automobile, and I hadn't no right to take you for a passenger. This automobile belongs to a lady and I'm her hired chauffeur, and she's at a bridge-whist party in a house on Fifth Avenue, and I'm supposed to be waiting outside that house. One-fifteen o'clock was the time she said she would be out. But I thought maybe I might make a dollar or two for myself instead of waiting there all that time, and she would never know it. And now it is nearly two o'clock, and if I go back alone she will be raving mad, and I'll get my discharge and no references, and my poor wife and six children will have to starve. So you will have to go with me and explain how it was that I wasn't there at one-fifteen o'clock."

"My friend," I said, "I am sorry for you, but I do not see how it would help you, should I refuse to go and you should, as you say, smash my head in."

"Don't you worry none about that," he said. "If I smashed your head in, as I could do easy enough with this wrench, I'd take what was left of you up some dark street, and lay you on the pavement and run the machine across you once or twice, and then take you to a hospital, and that would be excuse enough. You'd be another 'Killed by an Automobile,' and I'd be the hero that picked you up and took you to the hospital."

"Well," I said, "under the circumstances I shall go with you, not because you threaten me, but because your poor wife and six children are threatened with starvation."

"Good!" he said. "And now all you have to do is to think of what the excuse you will give my lady boss will be."

With that he lay back against the cushions and waited. He seemed to feel that the matter did not concern him any more, and that the rest of it lay with me.

"Go ahead!" I said to him. "I have no idea what I shall tell your mistress, but since I have lost the last train I must try to catch the two o'clock trolley car to Westeote, and I do not wish to spend any more time than necessary on this business. Make all the haste possible, and as we go I shall think what I will say when we get there."

The driver got out and took his seat and started the car. I was worried, indeed, my dear. I tried to think of something plausible to tell the young man's employer; something that would have an air of self-proof, when suddenly I remembered the half-filled nursing-bottle and the three auburn-red curls. Why should I not tell the lady that a poor mother, while proceeding down Fifth Avenue from her scrub-woman job, had been taken suddenly ill, and that I, being near, had insisted that this automobile help me convey the woman to her home, which we found, alas! to be in the farthest districts of Brooklyn? Then I would produce the three auburn-red curls and the half-filled nursing-bottle as having been left in the automobile by the woman, and this proof would suffice.

I had fully decided on this when the automobile stopped in front of a large house in Fifth Avenue, and I had time to tell the driver that I had thought of the proper thing to say, but that was all, for the waiting lady came down the steps in great anger, and was about to begin a good scolding, when she noticed me sitting in her automobile.

If she had been angry before she was now furious, and she was the kind of young woman who can be extremely furious when she tries. I think nothing in the world could have calmed her had she not caught sight of my face by the light of two strong lamps on a passing automobile. She saw in my face what you see there now, my dear— the benevolent, fatherly face of a settled-down, trustworthy, married man of past middle age— and as if by magic her anger fled and she burst into tears.

"Oh, sir!" she cried, "I do not know who you are, nor how you happen to be in my car, but at this moment I am homeless and friendless. I am alone in the world, and I need advice. Let me get into the car beside you—"

"Miss," I said, "I do not like to disoblige you, but I can never allow myself to be in an automobile at this time of night with a strange woman, unchaperoned."

These words seemed almost more than she could bear, and my heart was full of pity, but, just as I was about to spring from the automobile and rush away, I saw on the walk the poor woman to whose baby I had given the half of

the contents of the patent nursing-bottle. I called her and made her get into the automobile, and then I let the young woman enter.

"Now," I said, "where to?"

"That," she said, "is what I do not know. When I left my home this evening I left it forever, and I left a note of farewell to my father, which he must have received and read by this time, and if I went back he would turn me from the door in anger, for he is a gentleman of the old school."

When I heard these words I was startled. "Can it be," I asked, "that you have a brother henry?"

"I have," she admitted; "Henry Corwin is his name." This was the name of the young man I had helped that very evening to marry Madge. I told her to proceed.

"My father," she said, "has been insisting that I marry a man I do not love, and things have come to such a point that I must either accede or take things into my own hands. I agreed to elope this evening with the man I love, for he had long wished me to elope with him. I was to meet him outside his house at exactly one-fifteen o'clock, and I told him that if I was not there promptly he might know I had changed my mind. When the time came for me to hasten to him in my automobile, which was then to hurry us to a waiting minister, my automobile was not here. Unfortunately I did not know my lover's address, for I had left it in the card pocket in this automobile. I knew not what to do. As the time passed and my automobile did not appear I knew that my lover had decided that I was not coming, and had gone away into his house. Now I cannot go home, for I have no home. I cannot so lower my pride as to ring the bell of his house and say I wish to be forgiven and married even yet. What shall I do?"

For answer I felt in the card pocket of the automobile and drew out the address of her lover, and without hesitation I gave the address to the chauffeur. In a few minutes we were there. Leaving the young woman in the car with the poor woman, I got out and surveyed the house. It was unpromising. Evidently all the family but the young man were away for the summer, and the doors and windows were all boarded up. There was not a bell to ring. I pounded on the boards that covered the door, but it was unavailing. The young woman called to me that the young man lived in the front room of the topmost floor, and could not hear me, and I glanced up and saw that one window alone of all those in the house was not boarded up. Instantly I hopped upon the seat beside the driver and said, "Central Park."

We dashed up Fifth Avenue and into the Park at full speed, and when we were what I considered far enough in I ordered him to stop, and hurrying up a low bank I began to grope among the leaves of last year under the trees. I was

right. In a few minutes I had filled my pockets with acorns, was back in the car, and we were hurrying toward the house of the lover, when I saw standing on a corner a figure I instantly recognized as Lemuel, the elevator boy, and at the same time I remembered that Lemuel spent his holidays pitching for a ball nine, He was just the man I needed, and I stopped and made him get into the car. In a minute more we were before the house again, and I handed Lemuel a fistful of acorns. He drew back and threw them with all his strength toward the upper window.

My dear, will you believe it? Those acorns were wormy! They were light. They would not carry to the window, but scattered like bits of chips when they had travelled but half-way. I was upset, but Lemuel was not. He ordered the chauffeur to drive to lower Sixth Avenue with all speed, in order that he might get a baseball. With this he said he could hit any mark, and we had started in that direction when, passing a restaurant on Broadway, I saw emerge Henry and Madge.

"Better far," I said to myself, "put this young woman in charge of her brother and his new wife than leave her to elope alone," and I made the chauffeur draw up beside them. Hastily I explained the situation, and where we were going at that moment, and Henry and Madge laughed in unison.

"Madge," said Henry, "we had no trouble making wormy acorns travel through the air, had we?" And both laughed again. At this I made them get into the automobile, and while we returned to the lover's house I made them explain. It was very simple, and I had just tied a dozen acorns tightly in my handkerchief, making a ball to throw at the window, when the poor woman with the baby noticed that the window was partly open. I asked Lemuel if he could throw straight enough to throw the handkerchief-ball into the window, and he said he could, and took the handkerchief, but a brighter idea came to me, and I turned to the eloping young lady.

"Let me have your handkerchief, if it has your initials on it," I said; "for when he sees that fall into his room he will know you are here. He will not think you are forward, coming to him alone, for he will know you could never have thrown the handkerchief, even if loaded with acorns, to such a height. It will be your message to him."

At this, which I do pride myself was a suggestion worthy of myself, all were delighted, and while I modestly tied twelve acorns in the handkerchief on which were the initials "T.M.C.," all the others cheered. Even the woman from whom I had received the three auburn-red curls cheered, and the baby that was half-filled out of the patent nursing-bottle crowed with joy. But the chauffeur honked his honker. Lemuel took the handkerchief full of acorns in his hand and drew back his famous left arm, when suddenly Theodora Mitchell

Corwin— for that was the eloping young lady's name— shrieked, and looking up we saw her lover at the window. He gave an answering yell and disappeared, and Lemuel let his left arm fall and handed me the handkerchief-ball.

In the excitement I dropped it into my pocket, and it was not until I was on the car for Westcote that I discovered it, and then, not wishing to be any later in getting home, I did not go back to give it to Theodora Mitchell Corwin; in fact, I did not know where she had eloped to. Nor could I give it to Madge or Henry, for they had gone on their wedding journey as soon as they saw Theodora and her lover safely eloped.

I had no right to give it to the poor woman with the baby, even if she had not immediately disappeared into her world of poverty, and it certainly did not belong to Lemuel, nor could I have given it to him, for he took the ten dollars the lover gave him and stayed out so late that he was late to work this morning and was discharged. He said he was going back to Texas. So I brought the handkerchief and the twelve acorns home, knowing you would be interested in hearing their story.

When Mr. Billings had thus finished his relation of the happenings of his long evening, Mrs. Billings was thoughtful for a minute. Then she said:

"But Rollin, when I spoke to you of the handkerchief and the twelve acorns you blushed, and said you had reason to blush. I see nothing in this kind action you did to cause a blush."

"I blushed," said Mr. Billings, "to think of the lie I was going to tell Theodora Merrill Corwin—"

"I thought you said her name was Theodora Mitchell Corwin," said Mrs. Billings.

"Mitchell or Merill," said Mr. Billings. "I cannot remember exactly which."

For several minutes Mrs. Billings was silent. Occasionally she would open her mouth as if to ask a question, but each time she closed it again without speaking. Mr. Billings sat regarding his wife with what, in a man of less clear conscience, might be called anxiety. At length Mrs. Billings put her sewing into her sewing-basket and arose.

"Rollin," she said, "I have enjoyed hearing you tell your experiences greatly. I can say but one thing: Never in your life have you deceived me. And you have not deceived me now."

For half an hour after this Mr. Billings sat alone, thinking.

12: Our First Burglar

Ellis Parker Butler

Everybody's Magazine Feb 1909

WHEN OUR new suburban house was completed I took Sarah out to see it, and she liked it all but the stairs.

"Edgar," she said, when she had ascended to the second floor, "I don't know whether it is imagination or not, but it seems to me that these stairs are funny, some way. I can't understand it. They are not a long flight, and they are not unusually steep, but they seem to be unusually wearying. I never knew a short flight to tire me so, and I have climbed many flights in the six years we have lived in flats."

"Perhaps, Sarah," I said, with mild dissimulation, "you are unusually tired to-day."

The fact was that I had planned those stairs myself, and for a particular reason I had made the rise of each step three inches more than the customary height, and in this way I had saved two steps. I had also made the tread of the steps unusually narrow; and the reason was that I had found, from long experience, that stair carpet wears first on the tread of the steps, where the foot falls. By making the steps tall enough to save two, and by making the tread narrow, I reduced the wear on the carpet to a minimum. I believe in economy where it is possible. For the same reason I had the stair banisters made wide, with a saddle-like top to the newel post, to tempt my son and daughter to slide downstairs. The less they used the stairs the longer the carpet would last.

I need hardly say that Sarah has a fear of burglars; most women have. As for myself, I prefer not to meet a burglar. It is all very well to get up in the night and prowl about with a pistol in one hand, seeking to eliminate the life of a burglar, and some men may like it; but I am of a very excitable nature, and I am sure that if I did find a burglar and succeeded in shooting him, I should be in such an excited state that I could not sleep again that night— and no man can afford to lose his night's rest.

There are other objections to shooting a burglar in the house, and these objections apply with double force when the house and its furnishings are entirely new. Although some of the rugs in our house were red, not all of them were; and I had no guarantee that if I shot a burglar he would lie down on a red rug to bleed to death. A burglar does not consider one's feelings, and would be quite as apt to bleed on a green rug, and spoil it, as not. Until burglarizing is properly regulated and burglars are educated, as they should be,

in technical burglary schools, we cannot hope that a shot burglar will staunch his wound until he can find a red rug to lie down on.

And there are still other objections to shooting a burglar. If all burglars were fat, one of these would be removed; but perhaps a thin burglar might get in front of my revolver, and in that case the bullet would be likely to go right through him and continue on its way, and perhaps break a mirror or a cut-glass dish. I am a thin man myself, and if a burglar shot at me he might damage things in the same way.

I thought all these things over when we decided to build in the suburbs, for Sarah is very nervous about burglars, and makes me get up at the slightest noise and go poking about. Only the fact that no burglar had ever entered our flat at night had prevented what might have been a serious accident to a burglar, for I made it a rule, when Sarah wakened me on such occasions, to waste no time, but to go through the rooms as hastily as possible and get back to bed; and at the speed I travelled I might have bumped into a burglar in the dark and knocked him over, and his head might have struck some hard object, causing concussion of the brain; and as a burglar has a small brain a small amount of concussion might have ruined it entirely. But as I am a slight man it might have been my brain that got concussed. A father of a family has to think of these things.

The nervousness of Sarah regarding burglars had led me in this way to study the subject carefully, and my adoption of jet-black pajamas as nightwear was not due to cowardice on my part. I properly reasoned that if a burglar tried to shoot me while I was rushing around the house after him in the darkness, a suit of black pajamas would somewhat spoil his aim, and, not being able to see me, he would not shoot at all. In this way I should save Sarah the nerve shock that would follow the explosion of a pistol in the house. For Sarah was very much more afraid of pistols than of burglars. I am sure there were only two reasons why I had never killed a burglar with a pistol: one was that no burglar had ever entered our flat, and the other was that I never had a pistol.

But I knew that one is much less protected in a suburb than in town, and when I decided to build I studied the burglar protection matter most carefully. I said nothing to Sarah about it, for fear it would upset her nerves, but for months I considered every method that seemed to have any merit, and that would avoid getting a burglar's blood— or mine— spattered around on our new furnishings. I desired some method by which I could finish up a burglar properly without having to leave my bed, for although Sarah is brave enough in sending me out of bed to catch a burglar, I knew she must suffer severe nerve strain during the time I was wandering about in the dark. Her objection to explosives had also to be considered, and I really had to exercise my brain

more than common before I hit upon what I may now consider the only perfect method of handling burglars.

Several things coincided to suggest my method. One of these was Sarah's foolish notion that our silver must, every night, be brought from the dining-room and deposited under our bed. This I considered a most foolhardy tempting of fate. It coaxed any burglar who ordinarily would have quietly taken the silver from the dining-room and have then gone away peacefully, to enter our room. The knowledge that I lay in bed ready at any time to spring out upon him would make him prepare his revolver, and his nervousness might make him shoot me, which would quite upset Sarah's nerves. I told Sarah so, but she had a hereditary instinct for bringing the silver to the bedroom, and insisted. I saw that in the suburban house this, would be continued as "bringing the silver upstairs," and a trial of my carpet-saving stairs suggested to me my burglar-defeating plan. I had the apparatus built into the house, and I had the house planned to agree with the apparatus.

For several months after we moved into the house I had no burglars, but I felt no fear of them in any event. I was prepared for them.

In order not to make Sarah nervous, I explained to her that my invention of a silver-elevator was merely a time-saving device. From the top of the dining-room sideboard I ran upright tracks through the ceiling to the back of the hall above, and in these I placed a glass case, which could be run up and down the tracks like a dumbwaiter. All our servant had to do when she had washed the silver was to put it in the glass case, and I had attached to the top of the case a stout steel cable which ran to the ceiling of the hall above, over a pulley, and so to our bedroom, which was at the front of the hall upstairs. By this means I could, when I was in bed, pull the cable, and the glass case of silver would rise to the second floor. Our bedroom door opened upon the hall, and from the bed I could see the glass case; but in order that I might be sure that the silver was there I put a small electric light in the case and kept it burning all night. Sarah was delighted with this arrangement, for in the morning all I had to do was to pay out the steel cable and the silver would descend to the dining-room, and the maid could have the table all set by the time breakfast was ready. Not once did Sarah have a suspicion that all this was not merely a household economy, but my burglar trap.

On the sixth of August, at two o'clock in the morning, Sarah awakened me, and I immediately sat straight up in bed. There was an undoubtable noise of sawing, and I knew at once that a burglar was entering our home. Sarah was trembling, and I knew she was getting nervous, but I ordered her to remain calm.

"Sarah," I said, in a whisper, "be calm! There is not the least danger. I have been expecting this for some time, and I only hope the burglar has no dependent family or poor old mother to support. Whatever happens, be calm and keep perfectly quiet."

With that I released the steel cable from the head of my bed and let the glass case full of silver slide noiselessly to the sideboard.

"Edgar!" whispered Sarah in agonized tones, "are you giving him our silver?"

"Sarah!" I whispered sternly, "remember what I have just said. Be calm and keep perfectly quiet." And I would say no more.

In a very short time I heard the window below us open softly, and I knew the burglar was entering the parlour from the side porch. I counted twenty, which I had figured would be the time required for him to reach the dining-room, and then, when I was sure he must have seen the silver shining in the glass case, I slowly pulled on the steel cable and raised case and silver to the hall above. Sarah began to whisper to me, but I silenced her.

What I had expected happened. The burglar, seeing the silver rise through the ceiling, left the dining-room and went into the hall. There, from the foot of the stairs, he could see the case glowing in the hall above, and without hesitation he mounted the stairs. As he reached the top I had a good view of him, for he was silhouetted against the light that glowed from the silver case. He was a most brutal looking fellow of the prize-fighting type, but I almost laughed aloud when I saw his build. He was short and chunky. As he stepped forward to grasp the silver case, I let the steel cable run through my fingers, and the case and its precious contents slid noiselessly down to the dining-room. For only one instant the burglar seemed disconcerted, then he turned and ran downstairs again.

This time I did not wait so long to draw up the silver. I hardly gave him time to reach the dining-room door before I jerked the cable, and the case was glowing in the upper hall. The burglar immediately stopped, turned, and mounted the stairs, but just as he reached the top I let the silver slide down again, and he had to turn and descend. Hardly had he reached the bottom step before I had the silver once more in the upper hall.

The burglar was a gritty fellow and was not to be so easily defeated. With some word which I could not catch, but which I have no doubt was profane, or at least vulgar, he dashed up the stairs, and just as his hand touched the case I let the silver drop to the dining-room. I smiled as I saw his next move. He carefully removed his coat and vest, rolled up his sleeves, and took off his collar. This evidently meant that he intended to get the silver if it took the whole night, and nothing could have pleased me more. I lay in my comfortable

bed fairly shaking with suppressed laughter, and had to stuff a corner of a pillow in my mouth to smother the sound of my mirth. I did not allow the least pity for the unfortunate fellow to weaken my nerve.

A low, long screech from the hall told me that I had a man of uncommon brain to contend with, for I knew the sound came from his hands drawing along the banister, and that to husband his strength and to save time, he was sliding down. But this did not disconcert me. It pleased me. The quicker he went down, the oftener he would have to walk up.

For half an hour I played with him, giving him just time to get down to the foot of the stairs before I raised the silver, and just time to reach the top before I lowered it, and then I grew tired of the sport— for it was nothing else to me— and decided to finish him off. I was getting sleepy, but it was evident that the burglar was not, and I was a little afraid I might fall asleep and thus defeat myself. The burglar had that advantage because he was used to night work. So I quickened my movements a little. When the burglar slid down I gave him just time to see the silver rise through the ceiling, and when he climbed the stairs I only allowed him to see it descend through the floor. In this way I made him double his pace, and as I quickened my movements I soon had him dashing up the stairs and sliding down again as if for a wager. I did not give him a moment for rest, and he was soon panting terribly and beginning to stumble; but with almost superhuman nerve he kept up the chase. He was an unusually tough burglar.

But quick as he was I was always quicker, and a glimpse of the glowing case was all I let him have at either end of his climb or slide. No sooner was he down than it was up, and no sooner was the case up than he was up after it. In this way I kept increasing his speed until it was something terrific, and the whole house shook, like an automobile with a very powerful motor. But still his speed increased. I saw then that I had brought him to the place I had prepared for, where he had but one object in life, and that was to beat the case up or down stairs; and as I was now so sleepy I could hardly keep my eyes open, I did what I had intended to do from the first. I lowered the case until it was exactly between the ceiling of the dining-room and the floor of the hall above— and turned out the electric light. I then tied the steel cable securely to the head of my bed, turned over, and went to sleep, lulled by the shaking of the house as the burglar dashed up and down the stairs.

Just how long this continued I do not know, for my sleep was deep and dreamless, but I should judge that the burglar ran himself to death sometime between half-past three and a quarter after four. So great had been his efforts that when I went to remove him I did not recognize him at all. When I had seen him last in the glow of the glass silver case he had been a stout, chunky fellow,

and now his remains were those of an emaciated man. He must have run off one hundred and twenty pounds of flesh before he gave out.

Only one thing clouded my triumph. Our silver consisted of but half a dozen each of knives, forks, and spoons, a butter knife, and a sugar spoon, all plated, and worth probably five dollars, and to save this I had made the burglar wear to rags a Wilton stair carpet worth twenty-nine dollars. But I have now corrected this. I have bought fifty dollars worth of silver.

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13: Fear of the Light

Alice C. Tomholt

1887-1949

Weekly Times (Melbourne) 2 Aug 1913

SHE WAS listless and weary, after a busy day at the office when she opened the door of her little suburban home. But her eyes brightened wonderfully when they fell on the letter that lay upon the floor of the hall.

She tore it open eagerly, and read. it. As she neared the end, the letter began to dance, oh, so gaily, before her eyes, so that she could scarcely read.

He was coming back! She read it all again; gave herself a severe little pinch on her cold, cheek to assure herself that she was not dreaming; then dropped heavily on the chair in the hall with a half-smothered gasp of sheer joy.

He had kept his word. Now that he had made his way up there in the heart of New South Wales, he was coming back to claim her, after all these years of waiting— coming back to take her away from her loneliness to the home he had made for her. Oh, her heart was joyful, joyful! Life was sweet with such promise in store.

The steamer, by which, he was coming, was due to arrive in Melbourne early that evening.

"She must know," he wrote, "that he would come to her, then, just as soon as tram and train could carry him!" Her heart bounded at the thought. She sprang up, throwing off her weariness as she would an irksome cloak for which she had no further need. There was so much to be done— now. The little sitting-room must wear its brightest face for him. There must be a right royal fire glowing in the grate, even though it took every bit of her small stock of fuel to feed it. The old red chair, big arid cosy, must be wheeled close to the hearth, inviting him when he came. The big brass lamp must be polished and polished, so that it would fairly beam at him. The heavy curtains must be drawn close— close over the darkened windows, so that not one chill breath of the wintry air could steal in upon the warmth of his welcome. And then— she must get ready herself to wait for his coming. (She hoped her grey voile would not look quite so shabby at night as it did in the daylight.)

It was not until she had gone to her room to dress that reaction set in after the unusual bustle and excitement, and the old sick feeling of faintness came over her. She sat on the edge of the bed a moment, her elbows, on her knees, her face in her hands. She had often felt like this after that severe attack of rheumatic fever last winter. Her heart had been queer, so queer, since then. The doctor had told her that she must take things quietly, and here she — But this was a wonderful red-letter day! Why, even the most matter-of-fact person could not refrain from excitement on such a joyous day of days! And she tried

to shake off her sickness with a light bit of a laugh as she got up to remove her dark dress, change her damp boots for a dainty little pair of house slippers, wash, and sit down at her dressing table to dress her hair. But her upraised hands were arrested half-way as her ghost-like reflection looked back at her from the mirror. How haggard, how blue -lipped, how— old she looked when these wretched sick feelings came over her...

Her hands dropped weakly into her lap. She looked into- the mirror for a moment, and suddenly, the joy that had glimmered at the back of her tired eyes was blotted out with, a something that was like fear. Turning her head slowly, she looked to ward the mantelpiece, on which was a small photograph of herself, taken, by his wish, just before his departure, many years ago. She stood up mechanically, went forward, and took it in her hands. What a merry-eyed, full-cheeked, joyous-lipped, glossy-haired girl she had been. She looked up at the face reflected in the mirror above the mantel, and her mouth quivered. What a change— what a pitiful change the years had wrought. How faded her eyes now, how sunken her cheeks, how pale her mouth, and how dull and lifeless-looking the brown hair that he had once said was, her crowning glory, figure— what a thin, unattractive little wisp of a thing it was! That last illness seemed to have sapped all the youth from her veins, all the rosy glow of her health from cheek and lip, the gloss from her hair, the brightness from her eyes. What if, on seeing her now, he were disappointed; for all these years he must have carried in his heart the memory of that other that was once she, and he would not know, he could not know, how much she had changed...

The thought grew and grew until it became an obsession, and, as it grew, fear crept in and slowly crushed out all the joyous anticipation that had been hers so little a while before. She knew him too well to think that, no matter how great his disappointment in the little wreck of a woman he was coming back to claim, he would wish to go back on his promise to take her with him to the dear home-nest for which her starved heart longed. But if he were disappointed (her woman's heart would tell her at once if he were) she would not go. She would free him, and never let him know that in freeing him she had shut out all that was best from her life.

The silvery chime of the little clock in the sitting-room roused her. She laid the portrait face downwards on the mantelpiece, hurried into her dress, and merely brushed up the stray ends of her hair. Somehow she could not bear to sit in front of that mirror again, while her reflection stared back at her with that vague fear of the light in its eyes.

She pinned a prim little knot of lace at her throat, and went slowly from the room, without one backward glance into any of the mirrors.

The little sitting-room was cosy and bright with lamp and firelight. On a side table near the door was a big bunch of violets that she had brought home with her from town. She loved the tiny fragrant things. Impulsively she took them out of the little glass bowl, shook the water gently from their stems, and tucked them in her belt. Sweet they looked against the softness of her dress, but the next moment she replaced them in the bowl. They adorned the table better than she did, she thought.

How bright was the room with the light of the big brass lamp— it flooded every nook and corner. She— she was afraid of it. It would show him the change in her with such cruel plainness... A dull flush crept up into her face, as she turned down the wick, lower, lower, until its flame went completely out. What a coward she was! But they had often sat in the firelight on a winter's evening... And fire light was soft and generous to faded youth.

The fat cosy arms of the big red chair seemed to invite her. She sank into them gratefully, but the next moment sat bolt upright, her hands clinging tightly to them, her heart fluttering so that it almost robbed her of her breath....

It was like him to dispense with the ceremony of knocking. A slight smile flickered across her face as he opened the hall door in the old impetuous, determined way. She got up slowly, and stood waiting, a slim grey-clad figure in the flickering firelight, one hand on the back of the chair, the other pressed hard over her rebellious heart.... Then, came a big someone, who flung his hat on a chair, crossed the room in a couple of strides, and took her completely into his arms.

Oh, it was good to feel their strength again! Speechless and breathless, she clung to him, her small brown head burrowed close against the roughness of his coat. It seemed to smell of the wattle-clad country from which he had come— the wattle-clad-country on which he had toiled to build a home for himself and for her. The sweetness and joy of it brought quick tears gushing up into her eyes. A little sob shook her. There was color, soft and sweet, coming and going in her face when at last he freed her. He held her front him with a puzzled bit of a frown on his own glowing face.

"Not crying dear little woman of mine?" he said.

"Yes," she answered, unsteadily; "but just for sheer joy, Jeff. It's good to see you. I— I almost stood on my head when I got your letter."

He laughed— a great big contented guffaw of a laugh, dropped into the red chair, and pulled her down on to his knee.

"I've been standing on my head ever since things began to go right, up at Woolara, because then" (he hugged her tighter) "each day brought me nearer

to you. Now soon can you come back with me, Nell? Oh, its a bonnie little home-nest I have built for you, and—"

She listened joyously as he told her of it. But soon the insidious little canker-worm forced its way in upon her happiness, the color ebbed slowly from her face, and her hand became cold in the warmth of his. What a fool's paradise, she told herself, bitterly. He must see her as she was sooner or later. Why not light the lamp now— turn its flame up just as high as it would go— and await her fate?

"What are you wriggling for?" he demanded. "Little worm of unrest, can't you sit quietly for a while in a pair of arms that have been aching and aching for you longer than I care to remember?"

"I— want to light the lamp," she faltered. "It— it seems so silly sitting here in the dark."

"Dark," he scoffed, "with all this firelight!" He chuckled mischievously. "You thought it just delightful at one time."

She flushed again, but the color ebbed as swiftly as it came. "And, besides" — a doubtful laugh rah through his voice— "I'm a bit afraid of a strong light just now, Nell— it might make you disappointed in this old sweetheart of yours. You see, little woman, I'm not as young as I was, and the sun has burnt my face until I'd pass for a nigger. A deuce of a lot of lines have cropped up in it, too, and there's a scar. I got it when a brute of a horse that I was breaking-in up there threw me fair on to the jagged stump of a tree. It wouldn't show much in this light, but I'm afraid you would find it rather prominent if you lit the lamp."

So the years had wrought a change in him, too. Somehow that knowledge gave the cankerworm less power to hurt. Her breath hurried a bit, but she did not speak.

"And my hands"— he gave a rueful bit of a laugh— "they're that sand-papery now that it's fearful I am of hurting these wisps of soft things of yours, or I'd hold 'em a mighty lot tighter than I'm holding 'em now."

She looked up at him with a small ghost of a smile. He started as he saw the pallid whiteness of her face in the firelight.

"Why, Nell," he said in dismay, "you're not feeling ill, are you, girl? You've lost all the color you had when I came in! Was I holding you too tightly? Was I hurting ,9'»

"No, no!" she broke in hurriedly, freeing herself and standing before him. "I am not ill, but I seldom have any color now. It— it is only when I get— excited. But Jeff" — she gulped back a sudden sob of trepidation--

"I think we had better light the lamp, boy. We— we can't see each other properly like this, and I want to see you. You need not be afraid," looking up

with a tender little smile as he stood above her. "I would go on loving you if your hands were hard as flint and your face all covered with lines and scars. But— I am afraid for myself, I have changed so,"

And, with difficulty strangling another sob in her throat, she turned from., him and lit the lamp with unsteady hand. Its yellow flame shone brightly, and as he saw her little, shrunken face, her pale, quivering lips, and the fear in her eyes, he started; yet it was not disappointment, but a great protective love that flashed into his own eyes as he took her into his arms again and lifted her pallid face to his.

"Nell!" he exclaimed, "you have been ill; you are ill yet. And you did not tell me. Why didn't you, girl? But never mind, we will have those roses hurrying back into your cheeks before you are very long up at the home-nest."

He kissed her. "It is time I came to look after you, you poor little white-faced wife," he said. And the cankerworm shrivelled up and died within her.

14: Blackout

Ethel Lina White

1879-1944

The Winnipeg Tribune, 28 Sep 1940

Roy Glashan's Library, May 2024

British thriller novelist Ethel Lina White, several of whose novels were filmed including the classic "The Lady Vanishes" (Alfred Hithcock, 1938; remade in 1979 and 2013), also wrote many short stories. A number were syndicated and published only in North American magazines and newspapers, such as this one.

THE blackout over London was nearly absolute. When Christina drew aside the window curtains of the sitting room, at first she could distinguish nothing. It was as though a wall had been built up outside the glass. As her eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, she saw the dimmed lights of traffic and glow-worm gleams speckling the pavement, cast by the electric torches of invisible pedestrians.

In spite of dangers and difficulties, the nation was carrying on as usual. Young people made dates— and kept them. Old people went out after dark; they were not to be stampeded out of their habits.

Christina was acutely affected by the Blackout, because it was a definite physical handicap. She had dark blue eyes and had to pay for their beauty with the defective vision which often accompanies that color. But although it was dark when she returned from the munitions factory where she worked, she made the journey with other employees, while the route had grown familiar. Once she was back in the flat, she settled down for the evening and refused all invitations.

That evening, she peered out at the dark, withdrawn world beyond the window as though it were a hostile judge concealing unknown peril. Her nerves were somewhat frayed, owing to lack of sleep.

She went to bed late because she was afraid of a recurrent nightmare. It was always the same dream. She found herself walking down an unknown road, in absolute darkness— with the knowledge that she had a long distance to go. Suddenly— she felt herself gripped by invisible hands— then the horror always shook her awake.

She was furious over this leakage of energy at a time when she needed all her reserves of strength. Recently she had the honor of a personal interview with a Mr. T.P. Fry— a younger member of the firm which owned the factory. It look place in his private room, when the august man explained the facts.

"Every country in war time," he said, "is subject to the abuse of sabotage. The scum of a nation will always seize its chance to profit. To protect our

interests in the factory, we have organized some of our most trusted workers as counter-espionage agents."

Christina thrilled as she listened, although his next sentence conveyed a warning.

"The work requires courage and discretion. You remain anonymous and— in your own interests— you must not try to make contacts. You should take extra precautions against accidents inside the factory and not go out in the blackout, if you can avoid it. You may be followed by malcontents... No extra pay— but I hope there will be a bonus at the end of the war."

AFTER the minimum of reflection, Christina volunteered for the special service. Instead of dull routine, she felt elevated to something in the John Buchan tradition. At first, although she was especially zealous in the prevention of carelessness; she made no exposures. But— as though her vigilance had been marked as inconvenient to the cause of sabotage, a few days previously, she had been nearly the victim of an accident.

One of the girls had turned faint and in the general rush to help her, Christina had been pushed up against a machine... For a terrible moment, her heart felt iced, before a worker switched off the mechanism.

When she went over the incident, she felt doubtful about one of the Good Samaritans who had dragged her to safety. Meta Rosenburg was a thin attractive brunette, slant-eyed and over-painted. She was always expensively dressed, when she discarded her slops, while her style of living indicated an income which could have a tainted source.

Christina shared the expenses of a flat with Ida Brown— a plump reliable girl. That evening, she was looking around at the comfort of the room with its fire and softly-glowing lights, when the telephone bell began to ring. As she went to answer it, a warning sense reminded her that ambushes were always prepared by fake invitations. Primed by her intuition, she was scarcely surprised to hear Meta's deep husky voice at the other end of the line.

"I'm throwing a sherry-party. Come over."

"No thanks." she replied. "I don't drink."

"But you must come. Montrose is here. He wants to know you."

Christina's heart beat faster, for— like all the girls at the factory— she was attracted by Montrose. He held an important position and was tall and handsome. There was also a legend about him that he had been an air-ace before a smash which took mysterious toll but thoughtfully left no visible marks.

"Montrose?" she repeated. "How do you get to know everyone?"

"Wait to be introduced," replied Meta derisively.

"Is it safe to pick up strangers?"

"Not safe, no. But the other way's too dull... I shall expect you."

Before she could protest, Meta rang off.

"You shouldn't keep on saying 'no,'" advised Ida Brown, who always listened to telephone conversations. "No wonder you are getting queer and jumpy."

"I'm not... Or am I?"

Suddenly weary of mental isolation and wholesale suspicion, Christina wanted reassurance from Ida.

"Snap out of it. Go to this sherry-party."

"I don't know where she lives."

"I'll look her up in the telephone book."

"Thanks... I will."

Christina told herself that it was important to reassure Ida, lest— in perfect innocence— she might start the first fatal whisper. In reality, however, it was the thought of Montrose's handsome face which lured her out into the blackout.

SHE put on an ice-blue frock and made up her face with delicate care. While she was slipping on a near-white coat, Ida came into the bedroom to tell her the number of her bus.

"I've written down the address and put it in your gas-mask carrier." she explained. "You get off at the terminus."

Her journey was reduced to such a simple and effortless proposition, that she felt ashamed of her former hesitation. But as she stood in the doorway of the entrance-hall of the Mansions, waiting to accustom her eyes to the darkness, a man nearly knocked her down.

Both laughed at the encounter, but she fell exactly as though she had bumped into the Invisible Man. It was with a return of her old inhibition that she snailed along the pavement, There was neither moon nor stars, while the air seemed tangible as a black curtain. When she had to cross the road, she trusted to the eyes of other pedestrians to detect the colors of the traffic lights— reduced to thin crosses of red or green.

She reached her starting point, only to realize the handicap of her poor eyesight. Other people boarded the vehicles while she remained on the pavement, running from bus to bus, as fresh ones drew up at the halt. Unable to see their numbers, she always left it too late and boarded them, to be told by the conductor "Full Up."

She was thinking rather desperately of Montrose when someone flashed a torch over the face of the crowd. It cursed him as one man, although—as the

bus was stationary— there was no risk of an accident. Christina blinked at the tiny searchlight with a sense that her identity had been revealed. Her mind flooded with morbid wonder as to whether Ida were in league with Meta to lure her into a trap.

Her turn had come at last. She felt herself borne upwards to the step on a human surge and then pressed forward Into a darkened interior.

"Where's the empty seat?" she appealed. "I can't see a thing."

Helpful hands passed her along the aisle and drew her down on a seat beside a stout woman who smelt strongly of cloves.

"There you are, lidy."

With the comfortable sensation of being enclosed in the safety of on ark— tossing on a stormy sea— she felt the bus move onwards. From now on, the driver would have the headache. She was merely another fare—his responsibility.

They journeyed on through the black blanket, occasionally stopping with a back-breaking jerk, to avoid some too optimistic pedestrian. Presently, as the stout lady continued to overlap her, Christina fell as though she were slowly smothered by a feather-bed. Her chance of release came when a semi-visible young man who sat on the opposite side— level with their seat— leaned across the aisle.

"Change places with me, mother," he urge. "I want to sit by my young lady."

"Right you are, duck," consented the lady.

Christina waited for the exchange to be made before she spoke softly to her slimmer neighbor.

"I'm afraid I must break it to you. I'm not your friend."

"I know," said the young man. "I had to lake a chance on you. I saw your face when someone flashed a torch. I knew I could trust you."

ALTHOUGH his voice was uneven— either pitched to a crack or blurred to thickness—his accent was educated and inspired her with the confidence engendered by the snobbish tradition of the old school tie.

"What do you mean?" she asked distantly.

"When I tell you, you'll think me mad," he said.

"I do already... Or drunk."

"Not drunk. No. I'm drugged... Like a fool. I had a drink with a man. He's following me on this bus... But you must see who you are backing— and use discretion."

Before she could protest, he lit a cigarette. In the flame of the match, she saw a face which was too charming and delicate for a man. Its oval shape—

combined with fair hair and large blue eyes—suggested some universal Younger Brothers who needed coddling and protection.

"I seem to know your face," she said. "Are you at Fray's Munition Factory?"

"Yes," he replied eagerly. "I'm a draftsman there. You've probably seen me in the Canteen."

Then he lowered his voice to whisper.

"Are you one of Us?" he asked.

She scented a trap in time to avoid It

"Yes. I work there," she said coldly.

"Then you are in this too... Listen carefully. I've a letter here. It's desperately important. Secret Service. I got involved— never mind how... You must take it to Bengal avenue, sixth house on left. It's the second stop. The man is waiting to pounce on me when I leave the bus. But he won't suspect you."

Christina grew wretchedly uncomfortable as she listened. If she had not been enrolled for confidential service at the factory, she would have been immune to suggestion. Now. however, she was susceptible, because she admitted to herself that the young man's story could be true. Stolen documents, espionage, secret agents— these were the phantasy of Peace, but the commonplace of War.

She struggled desperately to get free of the coils.

"Don't talk like a film," she said. "I can't swallow that melodramatic stuff from a stranger."

"But you dare not refuse!" The young man's voice was stern. "It is not for myself. It is for England... Do you remember the address?"

"Of course not. I don't need it."

HEEDLESS of her refusal, he tore a leaf from his notebook, and after scrawling on it, stuffed it inside her gas-mask carrier.

"That's enough to remind you," he said, blinking his eyes. "My head's beginning to buzz. Thank heaven I lasted long enough to contact you. Look! That man—by the door He's waiting for me."

The vehicle was too dimly lit to distinguish faces, but straining her eyes in the gloom, Christina saw a tall man whose hard felt hat was jammed over his eyes. He was strap-hanging near the door; but as the bus slackened speed, he stepped out on to the platform. As he was above average height; he had to stoop slightly to scrutinize the passengers who were getting off at the stage. This crouching posture gave him an appearance of tense vigilance which made the girl think of a jungle beast on the hunt.

"I'll call the conductor," she whispered to the young man.

The words roused him out of his lethargy.

"For heaven's sake, no," he implored. "Don't start anything like that. The chap would plug him—and then us. We haven't got a chance in the dark. It's up to you. You— must—"

Suddenly his head jerked forward and then drooped, while his eyes closed, As she listened to his heavy breathing, Christina wondered what she ought to do. Self-interest, as well as common-sense, told her to keep out of the mess and continue on her way to the sherry party. On the other hand, in a remote lighted corner of her brain, was a reminder that Meta's Invitation might be a trap. In such a case, this mission— which involved her in no danger—might be a providential intervention.

There was third consideration which outweighed the others. The youth had spoken the truth when he said that she dared not accept the responsibility of inaction, if there was the slightest chance to prevent some vital leakage.

"Your friend's having a nap," grinned the conductor as he came up the aisle.

"Not mine," she said quickly.

As she disclaimed him, the man in the felt hat was swift to seize his chance.

"That's all right, mate," he said to the conductor. "My pal and I will see him home. He's had one over the eight."

THIS dramatic fulfilment of the young man's fears spurred Christina to immediate action. She dared not extract the secret document from the young man's gas-mask carrier, lest she should fumble and attract the attention of the nearest passenger. Such an action might look like an attempt to rob a drunken man. Snatching up the young man's gas-mask carrier from, the seat— in exchange for her own— she groped her way to the door, where she waited for the next stop.

Fortunately the conductor did not remember her stage, since in the blackout, one girl looked much like another. He lowered her down on the pavement as though she were a precious consignment. Then she heard the ping of his bell and the bus rolled on its way.

In contrast with the subdued lighting of the vehicle, the surrounding blackness seemed pitch black as the depths of a coal mine; out after flicking her torch about, she discovered the name "BENGAL AVENUE," printed on the corner of a wall. The bus had dropped her on the left-hand side of the road, so she had only to walk straight ahead.

It was also a very lonely locality, for as she followed long stretches of stone wall, partially revealed by the light of her torch, she met no one, she heard no footsteps— no voices— no hoot of passing car.

"Everyone might be dead," she thought.

For the sake of morale, she told herself that there was light and life inside each blacked-out exterior. Civilization still functioned, for she had only to ring at a door to get in touch with humanity again. Probably, if she cared to deliver her document personally at No. 6— instead of dropping it into the letter-box— she would meet with a welcome.

"I suppose he lives here with his family," she thought.

In order to settle this point, she scraped his identification card from a pocket of the carrier— fishing out two Yale latchkeys, to get hold of it.

"Why two?" she wondered.

She knew the reason— or thought she did— after she had read the particulars about the young man in the bus, by the light of her torch. She discovered that his name was "Ivor Thomas" and that he lived in a North London suburb. Apparently No; 6 was an accommodation address, or belonged to a close friend, since he appeared to possess its key as well as his own.

She plodded on doggedly through the darkness, although she was beginning to wish she were not pledged to the adventure. At the back of her mind was a feeling of apprehension, while she was also teased by a sense of familiarity.

"I know this place," she thought "But when have I been here before?"

The answer crashed from the depths of her inner consciousness. This was her nightmare. There was the same long endless road— the utter blackness— the total loneliness. It only lacked the horror of gripping hands.

But those came later— in the dream...

She began to run—the fixity of her purpose propelling her on instead of turning back. It was panic flight which burned itself out, for when she was forced to stop, her heart was leaping as much from exertion as fright. She had reached No. 6, which was also named "Elephant House" and had two roughly carved elephants surmounting its gate-posts, to demonstrate its claim to the title.

WITH the feeling that her ordeal was nearly over— for her run back to the bus-stop would seem much shorter— she pushed open the heavy gate. As she groped her way up the drive, the small dancing light of her torch revealed a general appearance of desertion and neglect. The front-door steps were dirty and the brass knocker had not been cleaned recently.

It was no surprise, therefore, to find that the slit to the letter box was blocked.

"I must unload this darn document," she decided. "It's too jolly risky to carry it round with me."

Once again she hooked up the two Yale keys, one of which fitted the lock. It turned easily as she pushed open the door and stepped inside into total darkness.

The precaution of shutting herself in, after she had slipped the key back in the carrier, was a test of her courage: but It was not until she felt secure from outside observation, that she flashed her light around.

The next second, she suppressed a scream as she stepped backwards in an instinctive movement to save herself from being trampled underfoot. Towering above her— from the wall— was the head of an enormous bull-elephant with gleaming tusks and upraised trunk. It dominated the most extraordinary hall she had ever seen.

It was screened with fretted woodwork and hung with the stuffed heads of wild beasts, as well as weapons.

"What a place," she murmured. "The home of Anglo-Indians, I should think. Wonder if the sahibs are at home."

Flashing her torch, first low and then high, she saw a dusty Indian carpet— partially covered with drugget— and a flight of stairs leading to a landing on which was posed a black marble statue. Beyond was a shorter flight of steps, the top of which was wiped out by shadows.

"Hullo! Any one there?"

Christina's hail was weak and tremulous, revealing that she was afraid of the empty house.

There was no answer to her call. Feeling that she had fulfilled her duty in England, she listened to the warning voice which told, her to get out of the house and rush back to safety.

"Run— run."

She was about to place the document on a carved teak table, when she noticed that she had torn a corner of the envelope in her extraction of the keys from the carrier. As she stared at the flimsy paper, she was assailed by doubt. It looked so unofficial that she told herself that she must see the contents before she left it.

Feeling guilty of crime, she ripped open the envelope— to reveal what she dreaded to find— tracings.

They confirmed her lightning suspicion. Ivor Thomas was a rat who was stealing the factory's secrets.. The men in the bus were trailing him; but to save himself from being caught with the evidence, he had fooled them and tricked her into taking it to his hiding-place.

Slipping the document into her coat pocket, she was about to rush from the house when she was startled by a noise from above. It was a heavy thud,

as though a statue had crashed down from its pedestal. With a recollection of the figure on the landing, she flashed her torch upwards.

What she saw drained the blood from her heart... A stiff, white, shapeless bundle— like a corpse— was rolling down the stairs.

AT that moment, she understood this hypnotic force of shock. She wanted to flee, but her muscles were locked so that she could not stir, although the thing was drawing nearer to her. Bumping from stop to step, it reached the landing, where it lay— formless, without face or limbs, muffled in its burial clothes.

As she stood and stared, suddenly Christina thought she detected a quiver in the object... Goaded by the elemental duty to make certain whether life was really extinct, she began to mount the stairs.

Kneeling beside the human parcel, she wrenched away a fold of linen and exposed the shriveled, sunburnt face of an elderly woman with an arrogant nose. Her brave old eyes smoldered in token of an unbroken spirit as Christina first tore away the scarf over her mouth and then dragged from her blackened lips the pad with which she had been gagged.

The woman drew a deep breath, gasping like a fish.

"Thank Heaven, I'm a nose-breather," she gasped. "I was choking. I heard you call— and I managed to make it under my own steam."

"Who are you?" asked Christina.

"Miss Monteagle. This house belongs to my brother—the General. We were in Cornwall when war broke out and we stayed on. I came up to see the house... I was attacked by thugs. Two of them." Her face grew suddenly tense as she added, "I can hear them in the cellars. Get help at once."

"But I can't leave you..."

"Quick. No time to loosen knots. If you can't make it, hide. Watch your chance to escape... Cover my face."

Although Christina lacked Miss Monteagle's uncanny faculty of hearing, she realized the urgency. After winding the corner of the sheet around the elder woman's head, she rushed down the stairs. The hall was clear, but before she could reach the door, a series of knocks on the wood, told her that Ivor Thomas was outside.

She was caught between two fires. The thugs had heard the summons and the sound of their footsteps in the distance was audible to her. Desperately flashing her torch around, she darted behind the velvet curtain which muffled a door— praying the while that the men would not come that way.

Her petition was mercifully granted, for the men entered through a low door at the rear. Although she could see nothing, Christina guessed that they

carried a lamp from the faint glow which sprayed around the corner of the portière. Then she heard the catch withdrawn and someone entered the house.

"Has the girl left the plans?" asked Ivor Thomas— his voice cracking with excitement.

Without waiting for a reply, he dashed to the letter-box.

"Hell, it's nailed up," he complained.

"Sure, we had to pick an empty house," growled one of the men. "What's this about a girl?"

It was no satisfaction to Christina to learn that her suspicions were confirmed, since she was trapped and unable to save the plans. As Thomas told his story, she realized that he was cowed by the other men and eager to justify his action.

"The girl will come back when she finds the key," he assured them. "She fell for it all right. Besides it worked. The dicks had to let me go. The laugh was on me."

"Did they follow you?" asked a new voice.

"Hell, no. Why? They found nothing on me."

AS she listened. Christina noticed the difference between the voices of the two men. One was gruff and fierce, but the other frightened her more, because of its flat unhuman quality. It was as though a dead man spoke from the grave.

She trembled violently as this second man made a discovery.

"I can see high heels in the dust. That girl has been here. Look around."

Even as Christina realized the horror of the situation, Miss Monteagle came into action! Risking a broken neck, she flexed her muscles in a supreme effort to distract attention. The men iIn the hall heard a thud from the upper darkness— outside the radius of their lamp— followed by the gruesome spectacle of a corpse-like object rolling down the stairs.

As Thomas gave a high, thin scream, like a trapped rabbit, Christina recognized her signal to escape. Not daring to creep towards the entrance, lest a man should turn his head, she leaped lightly over the thick pile of the carpet. Drawing back the catch of the lock, she slipped through the gap and drew the door softly to— fearing to shut it.

Once she was outside, she began to run, her high heels turning perilously on the slippery drive. She lost precious time in opening the heavy gate and barely reached the road before the sound of heavy footsteps in the distance told her that she was being followed.

Maddened by terror, she rushed on wildly, praying for help; but the road was as deserted as before. There was no welcome torch-light advertising an A.R.P. Warden on his round— no resident returning to his home. It was useless to scream— hopeless to hide in a garden; she knew that the glimmer of her white coat was visible and that if she tore it off her ice-blue frock would betray her.

Realizing that capture was inevitable, she determined that the men should not get the drawings; and since she could be tortured into revelation of their hiding-place, she must put them in a safe place.

Suddenly she remembered that— on her way to Elephant House— she had passed a pillar-box. Running blindly and keeping to the outside edge of the pavement, she collided with it before she saw it. The crash of the impact winded her completely, but before she collapsed, she managed to push the envelope through the slit.

Then she felt herself gripped by unseen hands, in ghastly fulfilment of her nightmare.

AFTER an interlude of strain and semi-suffocation, when—blinded by a coat over her head, she had been bumped along through the darkness—she realized that she was back in the hall of Elephant House. She looked around her fearfully, hardly daring to glance at a white shape doubled up at the foot of the stairs, because of its hideously unnatural posture.

With the exception of Thomas, the men had concealed their faces with dark scarves, while their eyes gleamed through slits in the material; but she recognized their tones.

It was the dead voice that spoke to her.

"Where is that envelope? If you don't talk, I can make you."

"Oh, I'll talk," she said with faint triumph, "I posted it in that pillar-box."

"Very clever," he sneered. "You may like to hear you've killed a man by that master stroke."

"Who? How?"

"The postman... If we force the box, it might attract attention. We will let him unlock it for us and then make sure he won't talk."

Christina stared at him in horror.

"It's all my fault. My fault."

She sat thinking, thinking— until her brain ceased to function. She had grown dead to emotion when she was startled back to life by the sound of knocking at the front door. It was so loud and persistent that the dead voice whispered a command.

"Gag the girl. Open the door, Thomas, and stall."

Nearly choked by the handkerchief which was roughly forced down her throat, Christina was dragged back into the shadow. She heard the door being opened a few inches and then Meta Rosenburg's voice.

"Where's Christina Forbes?" she demanded.

"Never heard of her," replied Ivor Thomas.

"You will... The police are here. Come on, boys."

At the sound of a shot, Christina closed her eyes. She kept them closed throughout the sensational fight which followed and did not open them until her gag was removed by her rescuing hero— Montrose.

LATER in the evening, she sat in Meta's flat. Montrose was there, as well as Miss Monteagle, who smoked a cigar and drank most of the sherry. The postman had already finished his round in safety, after having delivered an unstamped envelope to the detectives from the Munition Factory.

"Sorry my diversion failed to let you get clear away," remarked the sporting lady to Christina. "You made a hell of a noise. I'll never take you stalking... Lucky I didn't break my neck. I've broken every other bone, huntin', but I'm reserving that for my last fence."

"You were wonderful," Christina assured her, although her eyes spoke to Montrose.

"Want to know how the Master Minds found you?" cut in Meta. "Thomas left your gas-mask behind in the bus, since he was bound to be searched. He reckoned that when the conductor found it and took it to Lost Property, there would be nothing to connect it with him. But an A.R.P. Warden was on the bus and he spotted it and looked at your identification card. He's a bright local lad and knows me my sight— so when he found an envelope with my address on it, it seemed a good excuse to bring it round, as my flat was near."

As she stopped to refill the glasses. Montrose finished the tale.

"Meta got rattled as you hadn't turned up, while your gas mask proved you were on the bus. Fortunately we discovered a scrap of paper stuck in your carrier, with 'Bengal 6' scrawled on it. That gave us the Idea where you'd got out."

"It's wonderful," repeated Christina, still looking at Montrose. "The funny part is, I suspected Meta, when really she is one of Us."

Meta burst out laughing.

"Us?" she repeated. "You're too nice to be a mug. That sabotage-espionage is T.P.'s bright stunt to make the girls careful with the machinery. I know, because he's a relative of mine. Of course, the firm employs trained detectives."

"Oh," Christina's mouth drooped with disappointment. "It was such a thrill to feel part of the war."

"Never mind," said Miss Monteagle. "I'm dated, so I can afford to spout Kipling, although I can't say I'm quoting word for word.

"Two things greater than all things are.
The first is Love and the second is War,
And since we know not what War may prove...."

Intercepting the message flashing between Christina and Montrose, her bass voice softened to the tones of a girl who had vanished into the past, as she finished the quotation:

"Heart of my heart, let us speak of Love."

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15: Mrs. Riddle's Daughter

Richard Marsh

1857-1915

In: *Between the Dark and Daylight*, 1902

WHEN they asked me to spend the Long with them, or as much of it as I could manage, I felt more than half disposed to write and say that I could not manage any of it at all. Of course a man's uncle and aunt are his uncle and aunt, and as such I do not mean to say that I ever thought of suggesting anything against Mr. and Mrs. Plaskett. But then Plaskett is fifty-five if he's a day, and not agile, and Mrs. Plaskett always struck me as being about ten years older. They have no children, and the idea was that, as Mrs. Plaskett's niece— Plaskett is my mother's brother, so that Mrs. Plaskett is only my aunt by marriage— as I was saying, the idea was that, as Mrs. Plaskett's niece was going to spend her Long with them, I, as it were, might take pity on the girl, and see her through it.

I am not saying that there are not worse things than seeing a girl, single-handed, through a thing like that, but then it depends upon the girl. In this case, the mischief was her mother. The girl was Mrs. Plaskett's brother's child; his name was Riddle. Riddle was dead. The misfortune was, his wife was still alive. I had never seen her, but I had heard of her ever since I was breeched. She is one of those awful Anti-Everythingites. She won't allow you to smoke, or drink, or breathe comfortably, so far as I understand. I dare say you've heard of her. Whenever there is any new craze about, her name always figures in the bills.

So far as I know, I am not possessed of all the vices. At the same time, I did not look forward to being shut up all alone in a country house with the daughter of a "woman Crusader." On the other hand, Uncle Plaskett has behaved, more than once, like a trump to me, and as I felt that this might be an occasion on which he expected me to behave like a trump to him, I made up my mind that, at any rate, I would sample the girl and see what she was like.

I had not been in the house half an hour before I began to wish I hadn't come. Miss Riddle had not arrived, and if she was anything like the picture which my aunt painted of her, I hoped that she never would arrive— at least, while I was there. Neither of the Plasketts had seen her since she was the merest child. Mrs. Riddle never had approved of them. They were not Anti-Everythingite enough for her. Ever since the death of her husband she had practically ignored them. It was only when, after all these years, she found herself in a bit of a hole, that she seemed to have remembered their existence. It appeared that Miss Riddle was at some Anti-Everythingite college or other. The term was at an end. Her mother was in America, "Crusading" against one

of her aversions. Some hitch had unexpectedly occurred as to where Miss Riddle was to spend her holidays. Mrs. Riddle had amazed the Plasketts by telegraphing to them from the States to ask if they could give her house-room. And that forgiving, tender-hearted uncle and aunt of mine had said they would.

I assure you, Dave, that when first I saw her you might have knocked me over with a feather. I had spent the night seeing her in nightmares— a lively time I had had of it. In the morning I went out for a stroll, so that the fresh air might have a chance of clearing my head at least of some of them. And when I came back there was a little thing sitting in the morning-room talking to aunt— I give you my word that she did not come within two inches of my shoulder. I do not want to go into raptures. I flatter myself I am beyond the age for that. But a sweeter-looking little thing I never saw! I was wondering who she might be, she seemed to be perfectly at home, when my aunt introduced us.

"Charlie, this is your cousin, May Riddle. May, this is your cousin, Charles Kempster."

She stood up— such a dot of a thing! She held out her hand— she found fours in gloves a trifle loose. She looked at me with her eyes all laughter— you never saw such eyes, never! Her smile, when she spoke, was so contagious, that I would have defied the surliest man alive to have maintained his surliness when he found himself in front of it.

"I am very glad to see you— cousin."

Her voice! And the way in which she said it! As I have written, you might have knocked me down with a feather.

I found myself in clover. And no man ever deserved good fortune better. It was a case of virtue rewarded. I had come to do my duty, expecting to find it bitter, and, lo, it was very sweet. How such a mother came to have such a child was a mystery to all of us. There was not a trace of humbug about her. So far from being an Anti-Everythingite, she went in for everything, strong. That hypocrite of an uncle of mine had arranged to revolutionise the habits of his house for her. There were to be family prayers morning and evening, and a sermon, and three-quarters of an hour's grace before meat, and all that kind of thing. I even suspected him of an intention of locking up the billiard-room, and the smoke-room, and all the books worth reading, and all the music that wasn't "sacred," and, in fact, of turning the place into a regular mausoleum. But he had not been in her company five minutes when bang went all ideas of that sort. Talk about locking the billiard-room against her! You should have seen the game she played. Though she was such a dot, you should have seen her use the jigger. And sing! She sang everything. When she had made our hearts go pit-a-pat, and brought the tears into our eyes, she would give us

comic songs— the very latest. Where she got them from was more than we could understand; but she made us laugh till we cried— aunt and all. She was an Admirable Crichton— honestly. I never saw a girl play a better game of tennis. She could ride like an Amazon. And walk— when I think of the walks we had together through the woods, I doing my duty towards her to the best of my ability, it all seems to have been too good a time to have happened in anything but a dream.

Do not think she was a rowdy girl, one of these "up-to-daters," or fast. Quite the other way. She had read more books than I had— I am not hinting that that is saying much, but still she had. She loved books, too; and, you know, speaking quite frankly, I never was a bookish man. Talking about books, one day when we were out in the woods alone together— we nearly always were alone together!— I took it into my head to read to her. She listened for a page or two; then she interrupted me.

"Do you call that reading?" I looked at her surprised. She held out her hand. "Now, let me read to you. Give me the book."

I gave it to her. Dave, you never heard such reading. It was not only a question of elocution; it was not only a question of the music that was in her voice. She made the dry bones live. The words, as they proceeded from between her lips, became living things. I never read to her again. After that, she always read to me. Many an hour have I spent, lying at her side, with my head pillowed in the mosses, while she materialised for me "the very Jew, which Shakespeare drew." She read to me all sorts of things. I believe she could even have vivified a leading article.

One day she had been reading to me a pen picture of a famous dancer. The writer had seen the woman in some Spanish theatre. He gave an impassioned description— at least, it sounded impassioned as she read it— of how the people had followed the performer's movements, with enraptured eyes and throbbing pulses, unwilling to lose the slightest gesture. When she had done reading, putting down the book, she stood up in front of me. I sat up to ask what she was going to do.

"I wonder," she said, "if it was anything like this— the dance which that Spanish woman danced."

She danced to me. Dave, you are my "fidus Achates," my other self, my chum, or I would not say a word to you of this. I never shall forget that day. She set my veins on fire. The witch! Without music, under the greenwood tree, all in a moment, for my particular edification, she danced a dance which would have set a crowded theatre in a frenzy. While she danced, I watched her as if mesmerised; I give you my word I did not lose a gesture. When she ceased—

with such a curtsy!— I sprang up and ran to her. I would have caught her in my arms; but she sprang back. She held me from her with her outstretched hand.

"Mr. Kempster!" she exclaimed. She looked up at me as demurely as you please.

"I was only going to take a kiss," I cried. "Surely a cousin may take a kiss."

"Not every cousin— if you please."

With that she walking right off, there and then, leaving me standing speechless, and as stupid as an owl.

The next morning as I was in the hall, lighting up for an after breakfast smoke, Aunt Plaskett came up to me. The good soul had trouble written all over her face. She had an open letter in her hand. She looked up at me in a way which reminded me oddly of my mother.

"Charlie," she said, "I'm so sorry."

"Aunt, if you're sorry, so am I. But what's the sorrow?"

"Mrs. Riddle's coming."

"Coming? When?"

"To-day— this morning. I am expecting her every minute."

"But I thought she was a fixture in America for the next three months."

"So I thought. But it seems that something has happened which has induced her to change her mind. She arrived in England yesterday. She writes to me to say that she will come on to us as early as possible to-day. Here is the letter. Charlie, will you tell May?"

She put the question a trifle timidly, as though she were asking me to do something from which she herself would rather be excused. The fact is, we had found that Miss Riddle would talk of everything and anything, with the one exception of her mother. Speak of Mrs. Riddle, and the young lady either immediately changed the conversation, or she held her peace. Within my hearing, her mother's name had never escaped her lips. Whether consciously or unconsciously, she had conveyed to our minds a very clear impression that, to put it mildly, between her and her mother there was no love lost. I, myself, was persuaded that, to her, the news of her mother's imminent presence would not be pleasant news. It seemed that my aunt was of the same opinion.

"Dear May ought to be told, she ought not to be taken unawares. You will find her in the morning-room, I think."

I rather fancy that Aunt and Uncle Plaskett have a tendency to shift the little disagreeables of life off their own shoulders on to other people's. Anyhow, before I could point out to her that the part which she suggested I should play was one which belonged more properly to her, Aunt Plaskett had taken advantage of my momentary hesitation to effect a strategic movement which removed her out of my sight.

I found Miss Riddle in the morning-room. She was lying on a couch, reading. Directly I entered she saw that I had something on my mind.

"What's the matter? You don't look happy."

"It may seem selfishness on my part, but I'm not quite happy. I have just heard news which, if you will excuse my saying so, has rather given me a facer."

"If I will excuse you saying so! Dear me, how ceremonious we are! Is the news public, or private property?"

"Who do you think is coming?"

"Coming? Where? Here?" I nodded. "I have not the most remote idea. How should I have?"

"It is some one who has something to do with you."

Until then she had taken it uncommonly easily on the couch. When I said that, she sat up with quite a start.

"Something to do with me? Mr. Kempster! What do you mean? Who can possibly be coming here who has anything to do with me?"

"May, can't you guess?"

"Guess! How can I guess? What do you mean?"

"It's your mother."

"My— mother!"

I had expected that the thing would be rather a blow to her, but I had never expected that it would be anything like the blow it seemed. She sprang to her feet. The book fell from her hands, unnoticed, on to the floor. She stood facing me, with clenched fists and staring eyes.

"My— mother!" she repeated, "Mr. Kempster, tell me what you mean."

I told myself that Mrs. Riddle must be more, or less, of a mother even than my fancy painted her, if the mere suggestion of her coming could send her daughter into such a state of mind as this. Miss Riddle had always struck me as being about as cool a hand as you would be likely to meet. Now all at once, she seemed to be half beside herself with agitation. As she glared at me, she made me almost feel as if I had been behaving to her like a brute.

"My aunt has only just now told me."

"Told you what?"

"That Mrs. Riddle arrived—"

She interrupted me.

"Mrs. Riddle? My mother? Well, go on?"

She stamped on the floor. I almost felt as if she had stamped on me. I went on, disposed to feel that my back was beginning to rise.

"My aunt has just told me that Mrs. Riddle arrived in England yesterday. She has written this morning to say that she is coming on at once."

"But I don't understand!" She really looked as if she did not understand. "I thought— I was told that— she was going to remain abroad for months."

"It seems that she has changed her mind."

"Changed her mind!" Miss Riddle stared at me as if she thought that such a thing was inconceivable. "When did you say that she was coming?"

"Aunt tells me that she is expecting her every moment."

"Mr. Kempster, what am I to do?"

She appealed to me, with outstretched hands, actually trembling, as it seemed to me with passion, as if I knew— or understood her either.

"I am afraid, May, that Mrs. Riddle has not been to you all that a mother ought to be. I have heard something of this before. But I did not think that it was so bad as it seems."

"You have heard? You have heard! My good sir, you don't know what you're talking about in the very least. There is one thing very certain, that I must go at once."

"Go? May!"

She moved forward. I believe she would have gone if I had not stepped between her and the door. I was beginning to feel slightly bewildered. It struck me that, perhaps, I had not broken the news so delicately as I might have done. I had blundered somehow, somewhere. Something must be wrong, if, after having been parted from her, for all I knew, for years, immediately on hearing of her mother's return, her first impulse was towards flight.

"Well?" she cried, looking up at me like a small, wild thing.

"My dear May, what do you mean? Where are you going? To your room?"

"To my room? No! I am going away! away! Right out of this, as quickly as I can!"

"But, after all, your mother is your mother. Surely she cannot have made herself so objectionable that, at the mere thought of her arrival, you should wish to run away from her, goodness alone knows where. So far as I understand she has disarranged her plans, and hurried across the Atlantic, for the sole purpose of seeing you."

She looked at me in silence for a moment. As she looked, outwardly, she froze.

"Mr. Kempster, I am at a loss to understand your connection with my affairs. Still less do I understand the grounds on which you would endeavour to regulate my movements. It is true that you are a man, and I am a woman; that you are big and I am little; but— are those the only grounds?"

"Of course, if you look at it like that—"

Shrugging my shoulders, I moved aside. As I did so, some one entered the room. Turning, I saw it was my aunt. She was closely followed by another woman.

"My dear May," said my aunt, and unless I am mistaken, her voice was trembling, "here is your mother."

The woman who was with my aunt was a tall, loosely-built person, with iron-grey hair, a square determined jaw, and eyes which looked as if they could have stared the Sphinx right out of countenance. She was holding a pair of pince-nez in position on the bridge of her nose. Through them she was fixedly regarding May. But she made no forward movement. The rigidity of her countenance, of the cold sternness which was in her eyes, of the hard lines which were about her mouth, did not relax in the least degree. Nor did she accord her any sign of greeting. I thought that this was a comfortable way in which to meet one's daughter, and such a daughter, after a lengthened separation. With a feeling of the pity of it, I turned again to May. As I did so, a sort of creepy-crawly sensation went all up my back. The little girl really struck me as being frightened half out of her life. Her face was white and drawn; her lips were quivering; her big eyes were dilated in a manner which uncomfortably recalled a wild creature which has suddenly gone stark mad with fear.

It was a painful silence. I have no doubt that my aunt was as conscious of it as any one. I expect that she felt May's position as keenly as if it had been her own. She probably could not understand the woman's cold-bloodedness, the girl's too obvious shrinking from her mother. In what, I am afraid, was awkward, blundering fashion, she tried to smooth things over.

"May, dear, don't you see it is your mother?"

Then Mrs. Riddle spoke. She turned to my aunt.

"I don't understand you. Who is this person?"

I distinctly saw my aunt give a gasp. I knew she was trembling.

"Don't you see that it is May?"

"May? Who? This girl?"

Again Mrs. Riddle looked at the girl who was standing close beside me. Such a look! And again there was silence. I do not know what my aunt felt. But from what I felt, I can guess. I felt as if a stroke of lightning, as it were, had suddenly laid bare an act of mine, the discovery of which would cover me with undying shame. The discovery had come with such blinding suddenness, "a bolt out of the blue," that, as yet, I was unable to realise all that it meant. As I looked at the girl, who seemed all at once to have become smaller even that she usually was, I was conscious that, if I did not keep myself well in hand, I was in danger of collapsing at the knees. Bather than have suffered what I

suffered then, I would sooner have had a good sound thrashing any day, and half my bones well broken.

I saw the little girl's body swaying in the air. For a moment I thought that she was going to faint. But she caught herself at it just in time. As she pulled herself together, a shudder went all over her face. With her fists clenched at her side, she stood quite still. Then she turned to my aunt.

"I am not May Riddle," she said, in a voice which was at one and the same time strained, eager, and defiant, and as unlike her ordinary voice as chalk is different from cheese. Raising her hands, she covered her face. "Oh, I wish I had never said I was!"

She burst out crying; into such wild grief that one might have been excused for fearing that she would hurt herself by the violence of her own emotion. Aunt and I were dumb. As for Mrs. Riddle— and, if you come to think of it, it was only natural— she did not seem to understand the situation in the least. Turning to my aunt, she caught her by the arm.

"Will you be so good as to tell me what is the meaning of these extraordinary proceedings?"

"My dear!" seemed to be all that my aunt could stammer in reply.

"Answer me!" I really believe that Mrs. Riddle shook my aunt. "Where is my daughter— May?"

"We thought— we were told that this was May." My aunt addressed herself to the girl, who was still sobbing as if her heart would break. "My dear, I am very sorry, but you know you gave us to understand that you were— May."

Then some glimmering of the meaning of the situation did seem to dawn on Mrs. Riddle's mind. She turned to the crying girl; and a look came on her face which conveyed the impression that one had suddenly lighted on the key-note of her character. It was a look of uncompromising resolution. A woman who could summon up such an expression at will ought to be a leader. She never could be led. I sincerely trust that my wife— if I ever have one— when we differ, will never look like that. If she does, I am afraid it will have to be a case of her way, not mine. As I watched Mrs. Riddle, I was uncommonly glad she was not my mother. She went and planted herself right in front of the crying girl. And she said, quietly, but in a tone of voice the hard frigidity of which suggested the nether millstone:

"Cease that noise. Take your hands from before your face. Are you one of that class of persons who, with the will to do evil, lack the courage to face the consequences of their own misdeeds? I can assure you that, so far as I am concerned, noise is thrown away. Candour is your only hope with me. Do you hear what I say? Take your hands from before your face."

I should fancy that Mrs. Riddle's words, and still more her manner, must have cut the girl like a whip. Anyhow, she did as she was told. She took her hands from before her face. Her eyes were blurred with weeping. She still was sobbing. Big tears were rolling down her cheeks. I am bound to admit that her crying had by no means improved her personal appearance. You could see she was doing her utmost to regain her self-control. And she faced Mrs. Riddle with a degree of assurance, which, whether she was in the right or in the wrong, I was glad to see. That stalwart representative of the modern Women Crusaders continued to address her in the same unflattering way.

"Who are you? How comes it that I find you passing yourself off as my daughter in Mrs. Plaskett's house?"

The girl's answer took me by surprise.

"I owe you no explanation, and I shall give you none."

"You are mistaken. You owe me a very frank explanation. I promise you you shall give me one before I've done with you."

"I wish and intend to have nothing whatever to say to you. Be so good as to let me pass."

The girl's defiant attitude took Mrs. Riddle slightly aback. I was delighted. Whatever she had been crying for, it had evidently not been for want of pluck. It was plain that she had pluck enough for fifty. It did me good to see her.

"Take my advice, young woman, and do not attempt that sort of thing with me— unless, that is, you wish me to give you a short shrift, and send at once for the police."

"The police? For me? You are mad!"

For a moment Mrs. Riddle looked a trifle mad. She went quite green. She took the girl by the shoulder roughly. I saw that the little thing was wincing beneath the pressure of her hand. That was more than I could stand.

"Excuse me, Mrs. Riddle, but— if you would not mind!"

Whether she did or did not mind, I did not wait for her to tell me. I removed her hand, with as much politeness as was possible, from where she had placed it. She looked at me, not nicely.

"Pray, sir, who are you?"

"I am Mrs. Plaskett's nephew, Charles Kempster, and very much at your service, Mrs. Riddle."

"So you are Charles Kempster? I have heard of you." I was on the point of remarking that I also had heard of her. But I refrained. "Be so good, young man, as not to interfere."

I bowed. The girl spoke to me.

"I am very much obliged to you, Mr. Kempster." She turned to my aunt. One could see that every moment she was becoming more her cool collected

self again. "Mrs. Plaskett, it is to you I owe an explanation. I am ready to give you one when and where you please. Now, if it is your pleasure."

My aunt was rubbing her hands together in a feeble, purposeless, undecided sort of way. Unless I err, she was crying, for a change. With the exception of my uncle, I should say that my aunt was the most peace-loving soul on earth. I believe that the pair of them would flee from anything in the shape of dissension as from the wrath to come.

"Well, my dear, I don't wish to say anything to pain you— as you must know!— but if you can explain, I wish you would. We have grown very fond of you, your uncle and I."

It was not a very bright speech of my aunt's, but it seemed to please the person for whom it was intended immensely. She ran to her, she took hold of both her hands, she kissed her on either cheek.

"You dear darling! I've been a perfect wretch to you, but not such a villain as your fancy paints me. I'll tell you all about it— now." Clasping her hands behind her back, she looked my aunt demurely in the face. But in spite of her demureness, I could see that she was full of mischief to the finger tips. "You must know that I am Daisy Hardy. I am the daughter of Francis Hardy, of the Corinthian Theatre."

Directly the words had passed her lips, I knew her. You remember how often we saw her in "The Penniless Pilgrim?" And how good she was? And how we fell in love with her, the pair of us? All along, something about her, now and then, had filled me with a sort of overwhelming conviction that I must have seen her somewhere before. What an ass I had been! But then to think of her— well, modesty— in passing herself off as Mrs. Riddle's daughter. As for Mrs. Riddle, she received the young lady's confession with what she possibly intended for an air of crushing disdain.

"An actress!" she exclaimed.

She switched her skirts on one side, with the apparent intention of preventing their coming into contact with iniquity. Miss Hardy paid no heed.

"May Riddle is a very dear friend of mine."

"I don't believe it," cried Mrs. Riddle, with what, to say the least of it, was perfect frankness. Still Miss Hardy paid no heed.

"It is the dearest wish of her life to become an actress."

"It's a lie!"

This time Miss Hardy did pay heed. She faced the frankly speaking lady.

"It is no lie, as you are quite aware. You know very well that, ever since she was a teeny weeny child, it has been her continual dream."

"It was nothing but a childish craze."

Miss Hardy shrugged her shoulders.

"Mrs. Riddle uses her own phraseology; I use mine. I can only say that May has often told me that, when she was but a tiny thing, her mother used to whip her for playing at being an actress. She used to try and make her promise that she would never go inside a theatre, and when she refused, she used to beat her cruelly. As she grew older, her mother used to lock her in her bedroom, and keep her without food for days and days—"

"Hold your tongue, girl! Who are you that you should comment on my dealings with my child? A young girl, who, by her own confession, has already become a painted thing, and who seems to glory in her shame, is a creature with whom I can own no common womanhood. Again I insist upon your telling me, without any attempt at rhodomontade, how it is that I find a creature such as you posing as my child."

The girl vouchsafed her no direct reply. She looked at her with a curious scorn, which I fancy Mrs. Riddle did not altogether relish. Then she turned again to my aunt.

"Mrs. Plaskett, it is as I tell you. All her life May has wished to be an actress. As she has grown older her wish has strengthened. You see all my people have been actors and actresses. I, myself, love acting. You could hardly expect me, in such a matter, to be against my friend. And then— there was my brother."

She paused. Her face became more mischievous; and, unless I am mistaken, Mrs. Riddle's face grew blacker. But she let the girl go on.

"Claud believed in her. He was even more upon her side than I was. He saw her act in some private theatricals—"

Then Mrs. Riddle did strike in.

"My daughter never acted, either in public or in private, in her life. Girl, how dare you pile lie upon lie?"

Miss Hardy gave her look for look. One felt that the woman knew that the girl was speaking the truth, although she might not choose to own it.

"May did many things of which her mother had no knowledge. How could it be otherwise? When a mother makes it her business to repress at any cost the reasonable desires which are bound up in her daughter's very being, she must expect to be deceived. As I say, my brother Claud saw her act in some private theatricals. And he was persuaded that, for once in a way, hers was not a case of a person mistaking the desire to be, for the power to be, because she was an actress born. Then things came to a climax. May wrote to me to say that she was leaving college, that her mother was in America, and that so far as her ever becoming an actress was concerned, so far as she could judge, it was a case of now or never. I showed her letter to Claud. He at once declared that it should be a case of now. A new play was coming out, in which he was to act, and in which, he said, there was a part which would fit May like a glove. It was

not a large part; still, there it was. If she chose, he would see she had it. I wrote and told her what Claud said. She jumped for joy— through the post, you understand. Then they began to draw me in. Until her mother's return, May was to have gone, for safe keeping, to one of her mother's particular friends. If she had gone, the thing would have been hopeless. But, at the last moment, the plan fell through. It was arranged, instead, that she should go to her aunt— to you, Mrs. Plaskett. You had not seen her since her childhood; you had no notion of what she looked like. I really do not know from whom the suggestion came, but it was suggested that I should come to you, pretending to be her. And I was to keep on pretending till the rubicon was passed and the play produced. If she once succeeded in gaining a footing on the stage, though it might be never so slight a one, May declared that wild horses should not drag her back again. And I knew her well enough to be aware that, when she said a thing, she meant exactly what she said. Mrs. Plaskett, I should have made you this confession of my own initiative next week. Indeed, May would have come and told you the tale herself, if Mrs. Riddle had not returned all these months before any one expected her. Because, as it happens, the play was produced last night—"

Mrs. Riddle had been listening, with a face as black as a thunder-cloud. Here she again laid her hand upon Miss Hardy's shoulder.

"Where? Tell me! I will still save her, though, to do so, I have to drag her through the streets."

Miss Hardy turned to her with a smile.

"May does not need saving, she already has attained salvation. I hear, not only that the play was a great success, but that May's part, as she acted it, was the success of the play. As for dragging her through the streets, you know that you are talking nonsense. She is of an age to do as she pleases. You have no more power to put constraint upon her, than you have to put constraint upon me."

All at once Miss Hardy let herself go, as it were.

"Mrs. Riddle, you have spent a large part of your life in libelling all that I hold dearest; you will now be taught of how great a libel you have been guilty. You will learn from the example of your daughter's own life, that women can, and do, live as pure and as decent lives upon one sort of stage, as are lived, upon another sort of stage, by 'Women Crusaders.' "

She swept the infuriated Mrs. Riddle such a curtsy…. Well, there's the story for you, Dave. There was, I believe, a lot more talking. And some of it, I dare say, approached to high faluting. But I had had enough of it, and went outside. Miss Hardy insisted on leaving the house that very day. As I felt that I might not be wanted, I also left. We went up to town together in the same carriage. We

had it to ourselves. And that night I saw May Riddle, the real May Riddle. I don't mind telling you in private, that she is acting in that new thing of Pettigrewe's, "The Flying Folly," under the name of Miss Lyndhurst. She only has a small part; but, as Miss Hardy declares her brother said of her, she plays it like an actress born. I should not be surprised if she becomes all the rage before long.

One could not help feeling sorry for Mrs. Riddle, in a kind of a way. I dare say she feels pretty bad about it all. But then she only has herself to blame. When a mother and her daughter pull different ways, it is apt to become a question of pull butcher, pull baker. The odds are that, in the end, you will prevail. Especially when the daughter has as much resolution as the mother.

As for Daisy Hardy, whatever else one may say of her proceedings, one cannot help thinking of her— at least, I can't— as, as they had it in the coster ballad, "such a pal." I believe she is going to the Plasketts again next week. If she does I have half a mind— though I know she will only laugh at me, if I do go. I don't care. Between you and me, I don't believe she's half so wedded to the stage as she pretends she is.

———————————

16: The Leconbridge Diamonds

Percy James Brebner

1864-1922

Yes or No, 8 Feb 1913

A Christopher Quarles Case. Collected in *Christopher Quarles*, 1914 as "The Diamond Necklace Scandal"

I NEVER heard Lord Leconbridge address the House of Lords, but it has been said that every sentence he uttered required half a dozen marginal notes, that his speeches were the concentrated essence of his vast knowledge, and, without annotation, were quite incomprehensible to those who were less familiar with the subject. I understood the truth of this when I was brought in contact with him over the affair of the diamond necklace, a sensation which set fashionable London gossiping all the season, and, according to some people, has never been cleared up satisfactorily.

I can give the story Lord Leconbridge told me in a few lines:

With his wife and Mr. Rupert Lester, his son by his first marriage, he attended a reception at the Duchess of Exmoor's, in Park Lane. Lady Leconbridge was wearing the famous diamonds. He was about to present Jacob Hartman, the banker, to his wife, when he noticed that the necklace was gone. His wife was quite unconscious of the fact till that moment. A search was instituted, but without result, and in the few hours which had elapsed between the time of the loss and my interview with him nothing had been heard of the jewels.

The story, as I told it three days later to Christopher Quarles, was an edition with marginal notes, the result of investigation and questions put to many people.

"I am interested in Lord Leconbridge," said the professor; "he is one of the few men who count. Whether I shall get interested in his family jewels is another matter. Still, we happen to be in the empty room, and Zena is here to ask absurd questions; so tell your story, Wigan."

"When Lady Leconbridge came down to dinner that evening she was wearing pearls. As she entered the drawing-room her husband admired her appearance and her dress, but suggested that the diamonds would be more suitable than the pearls. She questioned his taste, and appealed to her stepson. This only appeared to make her husband more determined, and Lady Leconbridge went upstairs and changed the pearls for the diamonds. The jewels were certainly not lost on the way to Park Lane, for the Duchess of Exmoor noticed them five minutes before they were missing. The loss was discovered by Lord Leconbridge when he was about to present Jacob

Hartmann to his wife. The reception was a semi-political one; a footman says he knew everyone who passed through the hall; and I have ascertained that the known thieves, who might be able to deal with such stones as these, were not at work that night. A curious story comes from a housemaid. On the chance of catching a glimpse of some of the guests, she was looking down from a dark corner of the stairs on to a corridor which was only dimly lighted, not being used much that evening, when she heard the low voices of a man and woman talking eagerly. The woman was either afraid or angry, and the man seemed excited. Then she saw a man come quickly along the corridor, and the next moment there was the sound of broken glass. She did not know who he was, and the woman she did not see at all. The servant thought no more of the incident until she heard that the diamonds were missing. The window of a small room opening out of this corridor was found broken, and I find ample evidence that it was broken from inside. A thief might have escaped that way, but it would be a difficult task."

"Who first told you that Lady Leconbridge was wearing pearls when she went down to dinner?" asked Quarles.

"Her maid."

"Lord Leconbridge did not mention this fact?"

"No; but later he corroborated the maid's story; as did also his wife and his son."

"What is Lord Leconbridge's attitude?" asked Quarles.

"He is extremely irritated, rather at the annoyance caused to his wife than at the loss of the jewels, I fancy."

"Were I Lady Leconbridge I should be something more than annoyed," Zena remarked.

"Ah! that's not the point, my dear," and the professor picked up an evening paper. "At the end of a column of stuff dealing with this robbery there is this paragraph: 'Before her marriage Lady Leconbridge was Miss Helen Farrow, an actress, who was rapidly making a reputation. Not long ago, it will be remembered, she played Lady Teazle at a command performance of Sheridan's masterpiece. Her last part was that of Mrs. Clare in Brickell's play, which was such a success at the St. George's Theater, and her charming impersonation of the heroine will be fresh in the public mind. Her marriage came as a great surprise, both to the theatrical and social world.'

"A short paragraph," Quarles went on, "but with a sting in the tail of it. People talked a great deal at the time of the marriage three years ago. Leconbridge was called an old fool for going to the stage for a second wife, and it was suggested that, if he must marry an actress, he might have made a better choice. When this kind of thing is said about a beautiful woman there

are plenty of evil-minded persons to make the worst of it. You see, Zena, there is some reason for Lord Leconbridge's irritability."

"I do not believe there was the slightest foundation for the gossip," I said. "Lady Leconbridge is a most charming person."

"I know nothing about her," said Quarles, tapping the paper; "but I am certain that this affair will revive the old gossip."

"I wonder why the duchess noticed the diamonds so particularly that evening," said Zena.

"Probably because she had not seen them before," I answered. "Mr. Lester told me they were seldom worn— suggested, indeed, that their size and setting were so conspicuous as to make them rather vulgar."

"I did not know that famous family jewels could be considered vulgar," she returned; "but, if so, why was Lord Leconbridge so anxious that his wife should wear them on this occasion?"

Quarles nodded and looked at me.

"A whim," I said; "hardening into a firm determination when his son opposed him. Men are like that."

"Are father and son not on good terms, then?"

"It has been said that Lord Leconbridge worships his son," I returned.

"What age is Rupert Lester?" Zena asked.

"About twenty-five."

"And Lady Leconbridge?"

"Two or three years older."

"And Mr. Lester's support of Lady Leconbridge when she preferred the pearls only made his father more determined that the diamonds should be worn. I wonder—"

"Ah! that past gossip is having its effect upon your judgment," said Quarles.

"You may put that idea out of your mind, Zena," I said. "Mr. Rupert Lester is engaged to Miss Margery Dinneford. It is common knowledge that old Dinneford had other views for his only daughter, but finally allowed his opposition to be overruled. Margery Dinneford and Lady Leconbridge are the greatest of friends."

"As a matter of fact, such an idea had not entered my mind," Zena said. "I was wondering why Lord Leconbridge introduced Jacob Hartmann to his wife."

"Hartmann is a very wealthy banker," I answered, "who has been extremely useful to the Conservative Party. He is the first of his family, so to speak, and is engaged in winning a big social position. Since Lord Leconbridge is a very important member of the Conservative Party, it is quite natural that such an introduction should take place."

"Very interesting," said Quarles; "but are we really required to clear Lady Leconbridge's character? Let us get back to the diamonds. They were kept in the house, I presume?"

"In a safe in the wall in Lady Leconbridge's bedroom."

"The maid knew they were there?"

"Yes."

"It is a point to remember," said Quarles. "We may have to come back to it if we find no other way out of the difficulty. The diamonds were seldom worn, therefore we may assume that any question of suiting the particular dress Lady Leconbridge had on that night is beside the question. For some reason her husband wished her to wear the diamonds on this occasion. Now, if he had reason to suppose that the jewels were not in the safe, his determination is explained, also his annoyance that his son should attempt to thwart him by agreeing with Lady Leconbridge. However, the diamonds were forthcoming, and at a certain moment the Duchess of Exmoor is able to say that Lady Leconbridge was wearing them. Five minutes later they had disappeared. You make a point of the fact that expert thieves were not at work that night, Wigan. Do you imagine that an amateur could take the jewels from the lady's neck without her knowing it?"

"You must not lay too much stress upon my point about the expert thieves," I said. "Some gang we know nothing about may have been at work. It certainly is possible to remove a necklace without the wearer being aware of the fact, especially if her mind is fully occupied at the time. In a few moments, no doubt, some movement of her body would have caused Lady Leconbridge to discover the loss, but before this happened her husband was beside her."

"With the banker," said Quarles. "It was at the moment that he brought up Hartmann to present him to his wife that he noticed the diamonds were missing. Is it not possible that Hartmann and the diamonds were in some way connected in his mind?"

"Possible, of course, but—"

"Remember, Wigan, Lord Leconbridge did not mention the substitution of the diamonds for the pearls to you— a curious omission. I have a theory that the stones were to be a demonstration, a proof of something, and that Lord Leconbridge's irritation arises from the fact that he has not been able to give this proof."

"Proof of what?"

"Ah! that's the question, Wigan; and we have nothing at present to help us to an answer."

"You don't suppose Hartmann was responsible for the jewels not being there?"

"I have no fact to support such a theory."

"Do you suggest that Lady Leconbridge was as anxious that Hartmann should not see the jewels as her husband was that he should?"

"I have not made such a suggestion. Since Leconbridge did not tell his wife why he wanted her to wear the diamonds, he probably did not prepare her for Hartmann's introduction. It is difficult to see what time she would have to rob herself and conceal the spoil."

"Is Lord Leconbridge a poor man?" Zena asked.

"No," I answered; "although I dare say he has plenty of use for his money."

"Perhaps he wanted to sell the diamonds."

"It is possible," said Quarles. "The stones were a means to some end. Just hand me paper and a pencil, Wigan. My theory grows. Is Lady Leconbridge still in town?"

"I believe she has gone to Grasslands, their seat in Worcestershire."

"Poor lady! The middle of the season, too. Read that, Wigan," and he passed me the paper on which he had been scribbling. I read it aloud:

"If the person who took, or found, the diamond necklace lost on the evening of Monday, the 14th inst., at the Duchess of Exmoor's house, in Park Lane, will return the same to Lord Leconbridge, at 190 Hill Street, the said person will save himself or herself all further trouble."

"Get Lord Leconbridge's consent to insert that in the papers," said Quarles. "If he presses you for a reason, you can say that an entirely innocent person is likely to be saved from grave suspicion."

"If you think that Lady Leconbridge is—"

"I do not fancy I mention her name there," said Quarles sharply. "We are after the truth; and, Wigan, when the diamonds are returned, tell Lord Leconbridge not to mention the fact to anyone— anyone, mind, until you have seen them. When you go to see them I want to go with you. You must arrange that as best you can."

I had considerable difficulty in getting Lord Leconbridge to agree to the insertion of this notice, and his reluctance certainly gave support to part of the professor's theory. It looked as if he were bent on concealing some point of importance.

However, he gave his consent, and the day following the appearance of the advertisement I heard from him that the necklace had been returned.

I had told him that when I came to see the stones it would be necessary to bring a fellow officer with me, so there was no need to explain Quarles's presence when we went to Hill Street.

The necklace had been packed in wadding in a small, flat, wooden box, had come through the post, unregistered, and had been posted in London. The

writing on the brown paper covering was evidently disguised, and might be either a man's or a woman's.

Quarles examined it with a lens, but made no comment.

"You did not expect to regain possession of the necklace so easily, Lord Leconbridge," he said, looking at the stones.

"No."

"A curious robbery, and, since the jewels have been returned, a curious reason for it exists, no doubt. I suppose you cannot give us any helpful suggestion in that direction?"

"No."

"Of course, we have promised not to worry the person responsible any further, but for our own satisfaction—" And then, after a pause, he added: "I suppose it would be a satisfaction to you to get at the exact truth?"

"I don't quite follow the drift of your question," said Leconbridge.

"You have the diamonds; the matter might be allowed to drop if you have any reason to think that, by taking further steps, family affairs might be disclosed which would cause scandal."

For a moment Leconbridge remained silent, his jaw very firmly set.

"I wish to know the exact truth," he said slowly, "but under no circumstances must the person who has returned the diamonds suffer. Our word is pledged."

"That is understood," Quarles said. "Let me ask one or two questions, then— rather impertinent ones, but necessary. These stones have been in your family a long while?"

"Three hundred years."

"They are not often worn, I believe?"

"Not often."

"And on this particular night you expressed a wish that they should be worn?"

"I did."

"Quite natural at such an important reception," said Quarles, as though the idea of there being a definite purpose behind the wish had never entered his head. "Lady Leconbridge offered no objection, I presume?"

"She preferred the pearls, but she changed them at my request."

"You were not in the habit of keeping the jewels at your banker's?"

"No; they were kept in a safe in my wife's room."

"Rather risky," said Quarles. "To an outsider it seems foolish to keep such jewels constantly in the house, especially when they are so seldom worn. Have you ever contemplated selling the diamonds?"

"Never."

"Has Lady Leconbridge at any time suggested that you should?"

"Certainly not!"

"You are prepared to swear that your wife wore this necklace at the Duchess of Exmoor's reception?" said Quarles, holding up the jewels.

"I am."

"It only shows how risky it is to keep such valuables in the house. These stones are not diamonds, but paste."

"What!"

Well might Lord Leconbridge start forward and look at the necklace. I did the same myself.

"Very well executed, but paste," said Quarles.

"Do you suggest—"

"Pardon me, I have made no suggestion; I have merely stated a fact."

"It isn't true; it's absurd!"

"You may prove me right or wrong by showing the stones to an expert. Why not show them to Jacob Hartmann?"

"Hartmann! Why to him?"

"Because I believe he knows more about precious stones than any man in this country."

For the space of a minute Leconbridge and the professor stood looking at each other in silence.

"I did not know that," said Leconbridge.

"I am a man of the world rather than a detective," said Quarles, his manner suddenly changing, "and to some extent I can appreciate your position. May I become a friendly adviser? Lock this necklace up, and let no one know it has been returned. Take my word for it that the stones are imitation, and leave the matter in my hands. I give you my word that I believe, when the full explanation is forthcoming, you will be perfectly satisfied with it. Will you trust me, Lord Leconbridge?"

"Yes," came the firm answer, after a pause.

"It will be the work of a few hours, I hope," said Quarles, taking up his hat; "and, of course, it is agreed that the person who returned the jewels is not to suffer."

Quarles was thoughtful as we walked away from Hill Street, and well he might be. He had promised a great deal, and how he was going to fulfil that promise was beyond my comprehension.

"You expected to surprise Lord Leconbridge into an admission and were disappointed?" I said.

"On the contrary, he told me rather more than I expected," was the answer. "Evidently he had a purpose in wanting his wife to wear the diamonds.

It is fairly clear, I think, that he did not believe she had parted with the necklace, therefore his purpose had to do with some one who would be at the reception that night. Jacob Hartmann seems to fit that part. It is wonderful, Wigan, what a lot of trouble is caused when a person tells only half the truth."

"I can understand Lord Leconbridge's reticence," I said.

"Yes. As a fact, I wasn't thinking of Lord Leconbridge just at the moment. My present difficulty is to decide which road to take. One is easy, the other difficult. Let us get into this taxi. How true it is that the longest way round is often the shortest road home."

He told the man to drive to Old Broad Street.

"A theory may lead to disaster, professor," I said.

"Ah! but we are going into the city to look for facts. I have noticed, Wigan, that lately you have become strangely susceptible to beauty."

I wondered if he had guessed that I was in love with Zena.

"If you refer to Lady Leconbridge—"

"I don't. I speak in the abstract. Still, there exists a certain amount of evidence against her, and your refusal to admit it has warped your judgment in this case, I fancy. Do you know Jacob Hartmann?"

"No."

"A very pleasant man, I am told. We are going to see him, so shall be able to judge for ourselves. You must question; I am merely your assistant. Your line is this: You have got Lord and Lady Leconbridge's story, and you are not quite satisfied. You recognize that the affair is a delicate one, but you are not going to wink at the compounding of a felony to hush up a family scandal."

All the way to the city Quarles continued to coach me, giving me certain points and questions which I was to lead up to gradually. I understood why he had warned me against susceptibility to beauty, for the whole trend of these questions was toward damning Lady Leconbridge.

Mr. Hartmann received us in his private room, and, although reluctant to talk about an affair which was no business of his, was willing to give any help in his power. I repeated the story as Lord Leconbridge had first told it to me, just the bare facts, and I dwelt upon the delicacy of the affair.

"You did not actually see the necklace, I suppose?"

"No; and in the excitement I was not presented to Lady Leconbridge," Hartmann answered.

"Was she very much agitated?" I asked.

"She was curiously calm."

"I believe you know something about precious stones, Mr. Hartmann?"

"Gems are a hobby of mine," he said with a smile.

"I want your opinion. Do you think paste might deceive an expert?"

"At a casual glance— yes, if it were good paste."

"For instance," I said, "if Lady Leconbridge had been wearing the necklace when you approached her would you have known had it been paste?"

"I should," he answered, with a satisfied smile.

"But yours would have been only a casual glance. A man is more likely to be interested in a woman's beauty than in the jewels she is wearing. Besides, you would not expect Lady Leconbridge to be wearing paste."

"I should have known," he said.

"You say Lady Leconbridge was not agitated by her loss?"

"I said she was curiously calm," he answered. "She was hiding her true feelings, perhaps. At the moment the actress may have predominated. You know, of course, that Lady Leconbridge was an actress before her marriage?"

"Helen Farrow— yes. Wasn't there some gossip about her at the time of her marriage?"

"There was."

"No truth in it, I suppose?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Evidently you think there was."

"So much smoke must have had some fire behind it, I am afraid," said the banker. "You have hinted at the delicacy of this affair, so you must ask me no more questions in that direction."

"Her past could hardly have any bearing on the loss of the diamonds," I said.

"I should have thought it might have," said Hartmann, "but then I am not a detective."

Quarles shifted his position a little. From the moment he had sat down he had been absorbed in the pattern of the carpet, apparently.

"You might be right, I think," I said. "One thing is certain, an ordinary thief would have great difficulty in dealing with the stones."

"I suppose so."

"He could only pass them to some one who could afford to bide his time, receiving small payment for the risk he had run?"

"True."

"And it would be extremely awkward for the person in whose possession the stones were found. That is the detective's point of view."

"Such a person might be able to prove that he was a legitimate possessor."

"I was thinking of the Slade case," I answered. "Messrs. Bartrams, the pawnbrokers, you know, came very badly out of that. They looked uncommonly like receivers of property which they knew had been stolen."

"Now I am out of my depth," said the banker, rising to bring the interview to an end.

"Just one question," said Quarles, looking up suddenly. "Is the necklace in one of your safes in the bank here?"

"Here! It is hardly a joking matter."

"It is not a joke, but curiosity," said Quarles. "I thought you would keep the jewels at Messrs. Bartrams and not here at the bank. It is rather awkward for you, Mr. Hartmann."

"What do you mean?"

"I am wondering how you will explain your possession of Lady Leconbridge's stolen diamond necklace."

Hartmann stretched out his hand to the bell on his table.

"Ring if you want it to be known that Jacob Hartmann, the well-known and much respected banker, is also Bartrams, who have a very bad name, I can assure you."

"So you are here to trick me?" said Hartmann, thrusting his hands into his pockets as though to prevent himself touching the bell.

"No; to warn you," Quarles answered. "I have not collected all the details yet, but I think you know more of Miss Farrow than you have admitted, and are inclined to be revengeful. You must not use the weapon which chance has put into your hands."

"Must not?"

"It would be folly. The jewels will be applied for in due course, and there the matter must end. A detrimental word concerning Lady Leconbridge, and your position as sole owner of Bartrams would become awkward, while your chance of getting a footing in the society you are striving so hard to enter would be gone. Unfortunately for you, I know too much. I am inclined to be generous."

"A poor argument," laughed Hartmann. "The interview is over."

"Generosity is at a discount," said Quarles. "By the first post to-morrow Lord Leconbridge must receive from you an ample apology. You must state emphatically that there is not a shadow of truth in the hints you have dropped lately concerning his wife. You must also confess that three years ago you were instrumental in spreading utterly false reports about Helen Farrow. You may excuse yourself as best pleases you."

"I shall send no apology."

"By the first post, please," said Quarles, "or by noon Scotland Yard will be busy with the career of Mr. Jacob Hartmann. Good day to you."

It was not until we were in the empty room at Chelsea, Zena with us, that the professor would discuss the case.

"The difficult way was the right one, Wigan," he said. "You are convinced, I presume, that Hartmann has the diamonds?"

"Yes."

"Let me deal with the banker's part in the story first— some theory in the solution, but with facts to support it. Since Leconbridge is an important member of the Conservative Party, and Hartmann has for some time supported the party, I asked myself why Hartmann had not met Lady Leconbridge before. Lord Leconbridge was practically bound to extend him hospitality; that he had not done so, in the only way serviceable to the banker, pointed to the probability that Lady Leconbridge would not know him. Why? Had he pestered her in her theater days and, because she scorned him, had he been responsible for the gossip three years ago? It was evident, I argued, that there was some connection, in Lord Leconbridge's mind, between Hartmann and the diamonds. The banker had done or said something to make Leconbridge suspicious; had suggested possibly, among other things, that his wife could not produce the diamonds were she asked to do so. The real necklace had come into his hands, and he meant to take his revenge."

"But how did he get the jewels?" asked Zena.

"Let me clear up the banker first," said Quarles. "To-day, Wigan, he gave himself away when he said he would know if Lady Leconbridge were wearing paste. Of course he would know, because he had the real stones. No doubt he would have pronounced them paste before the assembled guests— a disclosure which might have proved disastrous to Lady Leconbridge. Whether Hartmann knows the true story of the necklace or not, I cannot say."

"What is the true story?" asked Zena.

"We may conjecture fairly confidently up to a certain point," said the professor. "As Wigan told us the other day, Mr. Dinneford objected to his daughter's engagement to Rupert Lester. Dinneford is a wealthy man, fond of his money; Lester was a spendthrift, and in debt. Lord Leconbridge came to the rescue and paid his debts, after a severe interview with his son, no doubt. I will hazard a guess that the son did not tell his father everything— sons, in these circumstances, seldom do. The creditor left unpaid, some hireling of Hartmann's it may be, began to press the young man— may have suggested, even, how easily he could raise money on the diamonds, which were so seldom worn."

"Do you mean that Lady Leconbridge helped him?" asked Zena.

"It may be," said Quarles. "Knowing how enraged her husband would be with his son, she may have lent Lester the diamonds to pawn. The fact that she appealed to him to support her in her choice of the pearls lends weight to this view, but the housemaid's story of hearing an angry woman's voice in the

corridor leads me to think otherwise. I fancy Lester must have heard his father speak to Hartmann at the reception, and gathered that the diamonds were to be a proof of something to the banker. Knowing Hartmann's knowledge of stones, he went to Lady Leconbridge, took her into the corridor, where she learnt for the first time that he had taken the real jewels, and that she was wearing the imitation he had put in their place. She was angry, refused to have anything to do with the deception, and then, partly to help him, but chiefly to thwart her enemy, Hartmann, she consented to lose the diamonds. Lester took the necklace, and, to give the idea that a robbery had taken place, and the thief escaped, broke the window of the small room. When he saw the advertisement he returned the necklace, hoping the mystery would come to an end so far as the outer world was concerned; and at the present time, I imagine, he is either trying to raise money enough to redeem the jewels, or is getting up his courage to confess to his father. He has probably promised Lady Leconbridge that he will do one or the other before she returns from Grasslands."

What Rupert Lester's confession meant to his father no one will ever know probably. Practically, in every detail, he confirmed the professor's theory, and possibly Quarles and I saw Lord Leconbridge nearer the breaking point than anyone else.

Leconbridge showed us Hartmann's letter of apology.

"The snake's fangs are drawn," said Quarles. "Now you can let it be known through the press that the necklace lost at the Duchess of Exmoor's has been returned. It is the exact truth. The real diamonds you may redeem as soon as you like, and I think this letter insures that no lies will be told about your wife in future."

"But my son is—"

"He is your son, Lord Leconbridge, and our word is pledged not to make the person who returned the necklace suffer."

Leconbridge held out his hand.

"May I give one other word of advice?" said Quarles. "This must have been a terrible ordeal to Lady Leconbridge. If I were you I should go to Grasslands to-day."

And the professor and I went out of the room, closing the door gently behind us.

17: The Quest of Douglas Wynne

Frederick R. Bechdolt

1874-1950

The Popular Magazine 7 May 1917

THE EVENING after the Guarantee went to smash a moon-faced man wearing a derby hat and a black overcoat, in one of whose pockets there was a warrant, rang Judge Wynne's doorbell. A few minutes later the ex-jurist, whose name had been a synonym for honor of the old-fashioned sort, departed from the house, a prisoner charged with misusing other people's money. For once Douglas Wynne happened to be at home after dinner, and so he witnessed the service of the warrant; he heard the officer's words and saw his father's head bend suddenly as under a blow, then slowly rear again until the pained eyes were gazing straight before them.

Up to that time the big, young idler had looked upon his world as being sheltered from all the ugly winds of adversity, a pleasant playground, dotted with country clubs and polo fields, peopled by carefree men and pretty: girls who danced well. The first shock of disillusionment brought a surge of anger, but when Judge Wynne had waved him back, silencing his hot words of protest to the detective, the rage was succeeded by a sense of futility. He watched the pair leave in very much the same frame of mind as a man witnessing an appalling act of nature.

His sister met him in the hallway, and he'saw that she was weeping, which gave him a chance to relieve his own feelings somewhat by comforting her. "Now, Amy," he said finally, "it's going to be all right, you know— just an outrageous mistake, some infernal business mix-up or other."

She clung to his arm. "Douglas," she cried, "you'll go downtown and see what you can do to help, won't you?" It is worth passing remark that. this was the first occasion during his twenty-two years when any one had treated him as a responsible, full-grown human being, and perhaps it was for that reason that her words impressed him.

"Of course I will," he told her. "I'm off right now."

At the central police station, Douglas cooled his heels in the dingy office of the desk sergeant while a conference over bail bonds was going on behind the closed door of the inspector's room. Among these surroundings he looked particularly expensive and useless. It was the first occasion, with the single exception of his mother's death, when anybody had seen him really grave, and with the gravity there was mingled a puzzled, hurt expression, which accentuated that appearance of incapability.

At length the door of the inspector's office opened, and Judge Wynne came forth, a good ten years older than he had been an hour ago, but holding his

head well back. One of the policemen by the desk sergeant's wicket saluted him with the same respect they had shown when he was on the superior bench a decade before; beside him walked John Roger, probably the best criminal lawyer they ever had out on the coast. Douglas joined the pair and went down the street with them.

In those first days of the Klondike rush Seattle's sidewalks were crowded at all hours, and as he looked at the stream of men passing in the opposite direction the young idler felt a curious sensation of hostility toward all of them. Heretofore he had liked mankind, many of whom called him by the first half of his first name and showed anxiety to buy him drinks.

"I'm going home," Judge Wynne said in answer to his question. "Mr. Roger has arranged. matters for the present. Thank you, Douglas; no, there's nothing you can do for me." There was in his voice, and in the stress he gave the pronoun, a trace of that bitterness which often comes to slack fathers when their sons have grown to manhood. He shook the lawyer's hand and hurried into the street to catch a cable car.

For some moments Douglas stood, watching him and wishing that there were a closer intimacy between them that he might perhaps receive some confidences or offer some suggestions to lighten his father's load of perplexity. Those last words stung him; nothing that he could do! There came to him, with that knowledge of his own uselessness, a savage jealousy, and he turned abruptly to speak to John Roger, but the lawyer was already on his way down the hill. Then Douglas thought of his sister's little outburst of faith, and he hurried after the man. "I 'want," he said, when he was beside Roger, "to know the nature of the charge against my father, and whether there is anything that I can do."

Roger maintained his pace, which was brisk for one so clumsily built, and looked straight ahead. "Nothing in the case to discuss at present." His voice was edged with the nasty rasp which he used when he wanted to bully a witness in cross-examination, but Douglas managed to keep silent, biting his lips until his purpose overrode his anger.

"Now," he urged, "you've no right to conceal from me what the whole town is going to read in to-morrow morning's paper, and there must be something I can do."

Roger turned his head, and regarded the big, handsome idler with a stare like that of a boiled codfish; he saw the white lips and the blazing eyes, and he slackened his pace, stroking his Vandyke beard with thick fingers. "All right," he growled. "Come up to the office."

In an inner room of his long suite, surrounded by many tiers of yellowbound volumes, most of which were filled with recipes for cooking up

cases, the lawyer waved his visitor to a chair and took another himself. "Now," he said, "you don't know a thing about your father's situation, I suppose."

"I know that his business has been worrying him lately and that he was arrested this evening, that's all." Douglas gripped the polished arms of his chair and did his best to keep his voice emotionless.

John Roger continued: "Judge Wynne may go to prison, and, prison or not, he will be disgraced."

The boy started to rise, still gripping the chair arms. "You mean to say—" He checked himself with difficulty.

"Oh, he won't be the first innocent man who's gone to Walla Walla, but that's not the point." The lawyer waved his hand to indicate his contempt for the question of guilt or innocence. "The point is, he's going there because he lacks one witness—"

"I wish," Douglas interrupted, "you'd give me an idea of the trouble."

"Listen!" Roger kept his eyes on the young man as if one part of his brain were attending to the compressed story while the major portion was studying his auditor's X-rayed soul. "Judge Wynne is a poor business man; other officials of the Guarantee and Loan are sharp as— wolves. These fellows got rich by milking the company— wrecking it. Technically, your father is responsible for their shady deals; morally, he's an innocent gull. But we can't prove that, and furthermore, when it comes to trial, he'll be shown up as the actual manipulator. It's all a matter of bookkeeping."

"There must be accountants," the boy cried, "who know the facts."

"I said we lacked one witness," Roger reminded him. "An accountant has left town."

"The other people shipped him out? Douglas asked quickly.

"Yes, sir," the lawyer growled; "the other people shipped him out. He took the books with him, thinking to shield the rogues— not expecting to harm Judge Wynne; I'm sure of that."

"Can't the man be caught?" Douglas demanded.

Roger smiled unpleasantly. "If you could furnish money to hire a private detective; you see, this fellow's somewhere in Alaska."

The young ornament to society. was silent, thinking of that untracked northern wilderness, whence gaunt, hard-eyed miners had emerged with their tales of hardship and starvation, and then "All right," said he quietly. "Who is the man and what does he look like?"

John Roger leaned slightly forward in his chair, the first bodily movement he had made to betoken any interest. "Why?"

"Because I mean to find him," Douglas said.

Roger settled back in his chair again, and there was a bare flicker of kindness in his eyes, but he spoke coldly: "I could keep your father out of jail— get bonds, obtain postponements, and so forth— but I fail to see— you don't strike me as the person to bring missing people back from Alaska."

Douglas flushed darkly, and swallowed hard. "My aunt left me some money— I've five hundred dollars or so of it yet— and I am not afraid of a little cold and hardship. I want that man's name and his description." He had risen, and was towering over the lawyer, who gazed up at that six feet of sartorial perfection and sighed. "Very well! Henry Bush, a little man, black beard, bent shoulders, and the middle finger of his right hand is crooked. He bought his ticket for Dyea, and has an outfit to go over the pass."

ii

EIGHT DAYS later Douglas Wynne floundered through the sticky ooze of Dyea's wide flat toward the roaring town of tents and pine shacks through which men were pouring from all the world, and began his quest for a little, stoop-shouldered man with a black beard and a crooked middle finger. He was serenely confident of quick success, and the idea of hardship rather appealed to him; hardship would be a novelty.

Then he started carrying his food and supplies on his sweating back, racking his soft muscles with the same fierce punishment that the first man endured when he encountered the primal curse. Trembling with weariness at each day's close, he bungled at the cooking of his evening meal, after which he crept into his mildewed blankets on the sodden earth. He underwent the dreary ordeal of putting the same question over and over to heedless men, sullen with their lust for gold; of hearing the same curt answer every time. Occasionally, when the gray curtains of the rain parted, he saw the great, steep wilderness ahead, the black forests clinging to the flanks of snow-crested peaks, and wondered in what corner of that enormous land this little man might be.

Always at night there came to him the memory of his father's head bending suddenly as under a blow, then rearing again until the pained eyes were gazing straight before them, and with it the memory of his sister's little outburst of faith. And so, although he was beginning to know now what hardship was and to realize that success might lie a long, long way ahead, he stayed.

The trail from Dyea to Chilkoot summit was crowded with burden-bearing men whose camps covered the level places by the stream bed; a myriad of tents, a myriad of wood fires sending threads of blue smoke toward the little strip of heaven. Strings of pack ani-mals tramped by, churning the mud to

liquid thinness; the gorge resounded to oaths and outcries of rage; every face was looking toward the remote notch between snow peaks; every man was striving toward that pass as in a race.

There came to Douglas a feeling of helplessness. So many men; so many outspread camps; what earthly chance was there to find one whom he was seeking in this hegira? Then, just as he had steeled himself to bear toil's pain beyond the point where it had seemed as if he must succumb, he used his new-found will to outface the problem and to conquer it. "If I could only go on ahead of all of them and pick some place where I could watch them passing me," he reflected. The idea stuck, and, abiding, took possession of him. "A place where I could watch them passing me." He said it to himself, as if it were a creed. And so it came that one evening he repeated it half unconsciously to another on the trail.

They met at dusk in a narrow place, with a high bank on one side and the brawling river on the other; there was scant room for passage, and as he drew aside Douglas asked the man his time-worn question:

"A little man with bent shoulders, and a black beard, one crooked middle finger." The stranger repeated the description easily. "It's the second time you've asked me that to-day, young fellow." He was a tall man, rawboned, wide-shouldered, and there was a peculiar bleakness in his face; his eyes were like gray ice. They remained fixed on Douglas, as if the big, young fellow had awakened in him a peculiar interest. "There are so many on the trail," Douglas began half in explanation, half apology, and then, because in the loneliness of this throng his heart was yearning for some one in whom he might confide, the outburst came. "If I could only find a place where I could watch them passing me!" he cried. "That's luck," the bleak-faced man said abruptly. "For I'm looking for a good man who ain't crazy to shove right on inside, and I've got the place." He let his eyes sweep Douglas from head to*foot. "You're big enough; you look as if you'd stick."

"You know of such a place, you say?" Douglas asked eagerly.

The other nodded coolly. "My name's Wilson," said he. "And yours?" When Douglas had told him: "Well, Wynne, the idea's this: I'm packing grub and lumber over the pass to build a boat. Im going to ferry outfits across Crater Lake when the jam comes. If you don't see your man there, it'll be because he's gone inside already, and you can grubstake enough in two months to follow him halfway to hell."

SO IT CAME that Douglas Wynne grew hard and gaunt and bearded carrying provisions and lumber across the narrow alleyway between the rocks where Chilkoot summit stands out against the sky. Until cache and camp were made, and they knocked their bateau together under the hill which drops inland from the pass.

"Now," Wilson said quietly one morning, "let them come." He stood in the prow of a rude boat, leaning on a long pole; behind him, shrouded in mists through which phantasmal rocks loomed on its treeless shores, stretched Crater Lake; naked mountains walled it in, their sides obscured by driving clouds from which the rain oozed endlessly.

Douglas gazed beyond his partner across the black water at the gray curtains of the rain that hid the trail toward Linderman. "If he's not gone down there." He pointed toward Yukon's distant headwater.

"Ain't one chance in a hundred," Wilson replied surely. "We've passed outfits who've been up here since May, and this fellow's a chechahco." His voice became sharper. "Well make five thousand dollars in the next two months."

The thousands who had hurried from all parts of the world, drawn northward by the tale of Klondike's wealth, began streaming down from the pass with their first loads. They found Crater Lake and its long, difficult portage a snarl of bowlders, precarious footing even for unladen men; they discovered the little boat with its two bearded ferrymen, one of whom always named the fee, while the other asked them whether they had seen anything of a bent-shouldered little man with a black beard and one crooked middle finger.

The days went by, the portage became crowded with striving men, an endless stream of faces drifting back and forth among the rocks; the number of the ferry's customers increased, but, watching all from dawn until dark, Douglas never got a glimpse of the man whom he sought.

The two partners loaded their little craft until its gunwale came within three inches of the water, and the winds howled down from the cafions, piling up seas which often compelled one man to bail with might and main while the other poled shoreward for dear life. Wilson, who had been inside before at Forty Mile, grinned at his frightened passengers. "Wait till you've seen Whitehorse," he told more than one. "This here is pie." Douglas made no comment at all, but always stood frowning, gazing straight ahead. It was as if his quest had made him oblivious to the trials of others. Many a weary packer, terrorized by the swift advance of the season, begging for more reasonable tolls, would find himself interrupted with a sharp "Say, have you seen anything of a little, stoop-shouldered man named Henry Bush, with a black beard and one crooked middle finger?"

But one morning in late summer, when sleet was mingling with the rain, Douglas was awakened from that indifference to others with a jerk. He was splitting some of their precious store of wood for the breakfast fire in the twilight of dawn when he heard some one talking among the caches by the portage. It was long before the first packers were due from Sheep Camp, and his mind reverted to the man whom he was seeking. He walked swiftly toward the place whence the sound had come.

A woman's voice rang out, rising in a brief outburst of despair: "I can't go on. Let me stay here." He saw her now, huddled at the foot of a great rock. A man was reaching toward her with both hands as if to raise her to her feet; his body was bending under a heavy pack. "There, there! We'll make it, dear." Douglas recognized him as one who had sought transportation for his outfit a week or so before, but had not the amount of the ferry toll. In the gray light of the early morning his face showed, drawn by pain and effort, but indomitable with the light of love.

"Only a little way, dear." The man's back bent lower, and his face came closer to hers; her eyes lighted, and she rose slowly. Swaying, she followed him, and Douglas watched them moving painfully away until the great rocks hid them from his sight.

Business was brisk that day. Men clambered round the landing place seeking passage for their goods. Toiling with Wilson at the heavy sacks and boxes, poling the little boat across the cold, black lake, Douglas remained silent, but instead of looking straight ahead, as he had always done before, he watched the portage.on the left bank, seeking that man bent nearly double under his pack and the woman who staggered after him.

That evening, when the throng had departed for Sheep Camp and Douglas was standing alone outside the tent, he heard the rattle of a displaced stone on the portage, and he walked quickly to the cache where he had seen those two in the morning. The man was there alone, wrestling with a huge, bulky roll of canvas. As he strove to heave the bundle to his back there was a futility in his movements which made him seem like the inanimate thing, while the material seemed to be imbued with life and handling him.

"Have you got to get this across the portage to-night?" Douglas demanded, standing over him.

The man's eyes widened, and he dropped the pack straps wearily from his arms. "Yes," he said dully, "I've got to get it across. My wife—" His voice rose suddenly, and he resumed the wrestling with the pack. "She's sick. Pve got to pitch this tent or—"

"Here!" Douglas, took the bundle from his shoulders. "You fetch some of those boxes down and we'll ferry the whole cache across.

"That's all right," he explained, as the other started to speak of the price. "I don't want your money. I'm doing this because I want to help you." And then he laughed, taking pleasure in this good deed done for another.

Long before they reached the opposite shore Douglas saw a little patch of radiance there, and steered his course by it. Crouching beside the fire, he finally distinguished the woman's form. As soon as the prow touched the stones his passenger leaped out and hurried to her. Douglas heard his voice, and its vibrance sent a thrill through him. He began unloading the bateau, working so rapidly that when the packer returned he found the cargo on the bank and Douglas shoving off.

"On top of one of those boxes," the boy called, "there's a canvas bag with a couple of hundred dollars or so in it. You take her down to Linderman to-morrow and make a decent camp. Hire Siwashes to pack the outfit for you; that way she'll get a rest and"— there came a catch into his voice— "she'll have her proper chance." He leaned heavily on his pole, and the boat shot out upon the darkened lake.

"Wait!" the packer shouted after him. "Tell me your name! Some day—"

Douglas laughed for the second time that evening. "All right," he called. "Fair enough. But don't you bother looking too hard for me. Wynne, Douglas Wynne. I hope—your wife— I wish you both good luck."

He was whistling when he came into the lighted tent at the other end of the lake, and Wilson glanced sharply at him. "Find your man?" he asked.

"By Jove!" Douglas shook his head. "I never even thought to ask the man."

The novelty of helping another had made him forget his own trouble.

Two days later a customer, who had hearkened to Douglas' question with more than the usual attention, repeated the description slowly. "Yes," said he, "I've seen that man. He was camped next to me down near Dyea last May. He hooked up with a sourdough outfit and they crossed the pass in June going light. They must be in Dawson long ago."

Wilson, who had been listening, shrugged his wide shoulders. "Anyway, you've got his trail. What's more, two Swedes are bringing lumber down the hill to build another boat. I'm ready to start inside with you, and we'll be in Dawson before the snow flies."

iv

ON LINDERMAN they whipsawed boards and knocked their bateau together, and when the days were growing bleak and gray they started down the lakes among the last of the year's strange fleet. They sailed Bennet's Length before a rainy wind; they shot Whitehorse while the foaming waters

yelled beside their gunwale, and they rowed across La Barge in the teeth of sleet-laden gales. One evening as they were lying close to the bank above Five Fingers, stowing their cargo- more snugly, they saw a Peterborough emerging from the darkening north. A bearded giant hailed them from the bow, holding his hand aloft in warning. "If you've any sense," he called, "turn back."

Douglas rose abruptly from between the thwarts. "Have you seen anything of a man by the name of Henry Bush, a little man with a black beard and one crooked middle finger?"

The canoe edged in closer to their own craft, and the giant nodded. His eyes were large, and his face was drawn as with great fear. "That man was working in the Alaska Commercial Company's office the day before we left." And then his voice rose again. "Take my advice. Turn back. They're out of food." As if the words had awakened his terror anew, he bent to his paddle, and the canoe swept out into the stream. Douglas called after him, but he only shook his head. "I've got to get out before snow flies or starve," he called.

Wilson smiled grimly into the great north. "Grub enough to last us two years," he said, "and two thousand dollars in our money belts to boot. Let Dawson starve."

Douglas gripped his oar, and turned his face into the dusk-shrouded north as his partner had done; his eyes were blazing with eagerness. "Shove off!" He waved his oar defiantly at the wilderness ahead. "I've got him now!"

They pushed the boat into the stream, and let her drift toward the rapids, with Wilson at the steering oar. When they saw before them the gaunt, black pinnacles of rock rising from the foamlashed waters, and heard the bellow of the river chafing in its narrow bed, the current gave the prow a mighty tug. They shot into the channel, and the roaring of the waters beat upon their ears, a hurricane of sound. A few brief seconds of overwhelming noise, of movement that took away the breath, and they were emerging at the lower end; the sourdough was leaning hard on his steering oar, Douglas was crouching in the bow, peering at the swirling, white-patched surface ahead. There came a sharp crack, and Wilson saved himself from falling overboard by a supreme effort; the stout oar had snapped in his hands. The prow wavered uncertainly, and swerved toward a glistening black rock; there came a lurch, and while both men were fighting with their hands to fend her off, the craft tilted until the most of her load had gone into the hissing stream. Then, as if the river were satisfied at the toll it had exacted, the bateau righted herself once more and floated away into more placid waters. They headed 'her into the shore a mile below, and crawled, dripping, to the bank, while the north wind whipped them to the bone.

Wilson found dry matches in his box, and they got wood together for a fire.

While they were drying themselves by the blaze the sourdough looked at the remnant of their outfit. "Three-quarters of our grub is gone, and my money belt was on the top; it's at the bottom of the river now. We've barely food enough to last us until spring."

Douglas said nothing, gazing straight into the north. He was thinking of the little man with a black beard, and Dawson only a few days ahead. But in Dawson, roaring through the long nights with its horde of fresh-come adventurers and its nugget-weighted sourdoughs, with its pallid camp followers and dance-hall women, Douglas learned that Henry Bush had disappeared again. Two weeks before he came the little man had left, without a word to any of those about him.

Day after day of asking the same weary question brought no news, and finally, when he came to camp one evening, Wilson looked at him curiously. "I've bought some dogs," the sourdough said grimly, "and to-morrow were going to. clear out. There's been a strike up near the Dome." Douglas remained silent, and the other frowned. It's like this. I'm after gold, and if you don't get gold before the winter's over, you're going to leave the country broke, without an ounce of grub."

"Bush is as apt to be up near the Dome as anywhere," Douglas answered quietly. "I'll go."

v

WINTER lay heavy on the northland hills behind the Klondike's mouth; gray twilight hovered over the white snow; the air was absolutely still; from the earth a fog rose like frozen breath from a fur-wrapped man. Out of a hundred ravines wood smoke climbed into the drab mist. Here, where the Klondike's tributaries were sleeping their eight months' sleep beneath the ice, ten thousand men were delving ten thousand pits into the frozen hills. In one of these ravines, a shallow gulch upon whose slopes a scattering of prim spruces and dainty birches remained, survivors of last summer's forest, Douglas toiled that day with Wilson. He had combed down the surrounding creeks, and he had met with no tidings of Henry Bush. It was as if the northern wilderness had swallowed the accountant. Now, with their last hundred pounds of flour and their last side of bacon, with a few dried salmon for their dogs, the two men were bending their backs in the hope that the next day would reveal the gold upon whose discovery depended their staying in the country. Otherwise they must journey on to Fort Yukon, where the companies were feeding refugees.

This evening ended the completion of the last shaft. The sourdough was huddled in the bottom of the hole, whose thin layer of gravel they had thawed

by banked fires the night before. Lifting his filled shovel, dumping its contents into a rude tub beside him, his eyes gleamed in the murky pit. Finally, "All right," he called. Into the frozen silence came the long whine of the winch; the rope tight-ened, the tub began its ascent.

On a platform at the shaft mouth . Douglas stood turning the heavy crank. Save for a narrow slit above his high, upturned collar, through which his eyes showed, an aperture all rimmed with hoarfrost, the fur cap hid his face. He gripped the crank with mittened hands, bending his back, then straightening again, and the tub came crawling up. At last it reached the surface, and he dumped its contents. At the day's little heap of frozen dirt which held their fate he gazed with hope.

That evening, when their meal was done, the sourdough nodded. "Once more," said he, and then he shrugged his shoulders; he was old in this battle against hostile fate. They went over to their stove, and Douglas rolled up his sleeves, revealing his huge arms, as hard as iron now. He plunged them into a tubful of lukewarm water, and lifted out a pan of the dirt which they had brought with them from the day's mining. "Here's hoping," he said lightly, and began breaking up the larger pieces. He grasped the edges of the pan, and tilted it to one side, took in some water, and began the peculiar, rotary movement which miners use. Wilson watched him gravely as he swished the pan's edge at intervals in the water and washed away the lighter dirt. Bit by bit the contents grew less; he stooped and picked out several pebbles, looking longingly for the dullyellow glint of gold. At last, when only a handful of dirt was left, he sank the pan edge for the final time, and, with a quick wrist movement, spread the contents over the flaring side. Black sand, and that was all.

The two men faced each other, and as they looked into each other's eyes the sourdough was the first to speak.

"Well, lad," said he, "we done our best. Looks like one meal a day and beat it for the outside when the first steamer comes."

Douglas stood silent for a moment. Then, "I'm going to stay," he said.

vi

TWO DAYS later, while Douglas and Wilson were standing before their cabin door, a dog team came up the trail. Leader, swing dogs, wheelers, six long-haired huskies, tawny gray like wolves, they leaped into their collars; behind them whined the long Yukon sled with its lashings, its side pieces of webbed rawhide, and its two plowlike steering handles.

"Humph!" Wilson muttered as he saw these things. "A sourdough!"

The driver was wearing mukluks like a native, his fur-trimmed parka fluttered round 'his knees; its hood was thrown well back, and now, as he came nearer, his face showed. The frost had left a scar straight across it, a livid mark, as if a red-hot iron had passed over cheeks and nose from side.to side. The man was walking with a smooth, tireless swing, which suggested steel rather than bone and muscle. In dogs and sled and driver, in the very load under the crossed lashings, there was a grim harmony. The sight brought with it the picture of a long trail leading over ice hummocks, on through silent forests, and across wind-swept summits toward the flashing aurora borealis.

The lead dog came opposite the cabin, snatching a mouthful of snow as he passed; the gaunt-faced driver raised his eyes and saw the two men watching him. "Whoa!" he called, and the dogs threw themselves upon the trail, tongues lolling, grinning like wolves.

"Morning!" The driver scanned Wilson and Douglas briefly. "Know a -man named Wynne in these parts?" he asked abruptly.

"That's him." Wilson gestured toward Douglas. The driver released his hold on the sled handles; the lead dog, who had been turning his head occasionally, peering back at him, threw himself full length on the snow and ceased attending on his movements.

"My name's Fraser.". The man walked over to them and shot a sidelong look at Wilson. "This your pardner?"

Douglas, puzzled, answered in the affirmative.

"All right." Frasers voice had dropped, as if he feared some one overhearing him, and he nodded curtly toward Douglas. "They told me down at Hunker I'd run across you here some'rs. I got a pardner named Jim Davis—"

Douglas shook his head. "Never heard of him."

"Maybe." Fraser shrugged his wide shoulders. "But you're the man I'm lookin' for; you fit the specifications he give me, and I've a message to leave for you." His voice had grown louder, but now it sank again. "There's a stampede on. If you come down to Dawson, you are in. It's a good crick, rich dirt and only ten feet to bed rock."

He turned to go. "Wait!" Douglas called after him. "Who is Jim Davis? Where did he say he knew me?"

"Can't say; he didn't tell me where he'd crossed trails with you. e prospected together— three of us. Of course, if you don't want to go—" He strode over to the sled and gripped the handles.

"Oh, we'll go all right,' Wilson called.

"I'll see you, then, in Dawson." Fraser was shaking the steering handies from side to side. "Mush!" His voice was harsh; the whole team leaped into their collars. "Haw!" the sled went swishing through the deep snow, describing

a wide arc, and came back into the trail again. Douglas stood staring after it as it went down the ravine.

"Man." Wilson cried. "We're off for Dawson!"

"But who," Douglas demanded, "is Jim Davis?"

"Ask Jim Davis when you come to the end of Fraser's trail." Wilson was dragging their own sled dogs to the harness. "Don't waste wind now; stampedes don't come to everybody these days. It's your last chance and mine."

Douglas shook his head as he turned to help in the packing. "I never asked that fellow about Bush," he said.

"Get busy!

vii

MIDNIGHT was near. Where Dawson faced the Yukon's furrowed ice a hundred windows glared on the arid snow. Within the. barrooms men crowded thick, gambling, dancing, drinking, and the gold dust flowed from the long buckskin pokes upon the weigher's scales. Yet in the revelry there was a strange undernote of expectation. A bearded waltzer loosed his grasp of his rouged partner and leaned toward a man passing in the dance. "Dollar to the pan on bedrock; I got it straight," he whispered. A gambler looked up from the faro layout, forgetting to turn the cards, and asked one of the crowd behind him: "Any one know when he's going to start?" Whenever a front door opened cloaking that portion of the room in a dense cloud of steam, a hundred pairs of eyes peered into the fog, searching it for Fraser's face.

Back on the hill, among the silent cabins, men sat in dimly lighted little rooms, leaning forward, listening for footsteps on the snow, and dogs lay sleeping in shadowed places with their harness on them, the laden sleds behind, while fur-clad drivers stood near, waiting in the night like sentinels.

The street door of a log hotel opened, and in the brief interval before it closed again a form stood out against the yellow lamplight; Fraser's face showed below his cap of lynx skin, and the frost scar stood out on it like a black bar. A half dozen spies were racing away in silence before the man had gained the sidewalk, and a few minutes later the murmur of voices in the glaring dance halls had swelled into a roar. The sentinel drivers were dragging their dogs from the drifts, lining them out in the harness; the watchers in the cabins straightened suddenly, hearing swift footsteps in the snow.

Fraser went straight to the river bank. A man hailed him in a whisper from the darkness, and he found his waiting sled. He seized the steering handles,

shook them from side to side until the runners were freed from the frozen snow, and. then his voice rose sharp on the keen night air:

"Mush!" As the dogs leaped forward and the sled swept down the bank into the river trail, a score of other voices came like a score of echoes in the rear. And now the yelp of huskies, the crack of whips, the oaths of striving men following him as he raced on. Across the northern heavens swept the aurora, silent, majestically cold. Under its radiance the whining sleds, the panting dogs, the men striding on limbs of steel moved on, black patches against the snow. Near the head of that procession were Wilson and Douglas Wynne.

All night the sourdough led them at a relentless pace, and he was hard—lean as a timber wolf when the snow is on the ground. His dogs were the pick of Dawson. Down the river for nearly five miles, then to the right and up the bank. After that the trail climbed into a nest of barren hills. Behind him, as the night wore on, the procession changed its order; gaps grew wider, sleds fell back, and others passed them. Already the fit were forging to the front, the weaker were lagging in the rear, but Wilson and Douglas hung to the place in which they had started. The former was conserying the strength of his dogs whenever there was any chance, sparing neither. himself nor his partner to lighten the work, and the latter was toiling as grimly as the oldest miner in the line, his face set, his eyes looking straight ahead into the darkness as if searching for a bent-shouldered little man with a black beard.

When daylight began to glint along a lofty ridge it revealed, in silhouette against the sky, a score of black patches struggling, far apart, crawling through the drifts. Far down in a ravine beyond smoke columns were climbing toward the heavens, and a cluster of tents showed around Fraser's camp. Wilson in one of them nodded to Douglas: "If the dogs hold out, we'll make it among the first."

Late that afternoon they leaped from their sleeping bags and cooked a hasty meal. They struck their tent, and were away among the earliest. That night their route lay along watercourses where the snow was deep and soft, and the stampeders united their efforts, beating the drifts with boughs, trampling them down with snowshoes before the dogs. The temperature was falling rapidly; the wind had died down, and the still cold, which makes great trees crack open, crawled in through their furs. The aurora flashed lurid, terrible, and there came from the heavens, where it was playing, a faint sound like brushing of giant wings. Always the grim, silent leader, with the dark cold scar across his face, urged his dogs onward, never slackening for rest or breath. Behind him the unprepared and the unfit fell away at wider and wider intervals, and gradually departed on the back track. Always Wilson and Douglas hung to their own place. The sourdough's eyes were as bleak as the

snowcovered ridges around him; the eyes of Douglas were burning with a passionate eagerness.

The next day the cold invaded their tents and leaked into their fur-lined sleeping bags, and when they started the third night the dogs whined, rebelling against facing it. They traveled over a broken country, crossing barren ridges, coasting down into valleys, zigzagging slowly upward again to other sky lines. Toward morning, while the sleigh was running down one of these steep slopes, Wilson, who was at the steering handles, uttered a sharp oath, and Douglas saw him reel in his tracks. He had sprained his ankle badly.

"Get on the load!" Douglas shouted harshly. "Get on! I'll keep them going." He steered and drove; he heaved to lift the runner over bad places, and toiled, trail breaking, and when he had made camp in the morning he cooked their meal. The sourdough was biting his lips with pain, and weak from the cold which had attacked him as he lay inert on the load, but when he spoke of the possibility of their dropping out Douglas laughed grimly. "We are going on," he said.

Other outfits passed them one by one that night, but they hung on, and when the light began drifting downward from the hilltops across the snow they were the last of the procession. The frozen sun was glowing through a frigid aura of frost particles, surrounded by three weird, distorted sun dogs, when Douglas urged the wearied team up a narrow valley and beheld the members of the party clustered round a common center. There Fraser stood, and another man was. beside him.

The dogs halted on the fringes of the semi-circle of men and sleds, and the sourdough clambered painfully from his resting place. Fraser glanced at them under his cap of lynx skin, and said a word to the other man, who nodded. Now Douglas noticed a thread of smoke ascending from behind a little ridge,.and close beside the pair, in the center of the half circle, a shaft mouth. Fraser raised his hand. "Them that I call come on with me; the others wait until they have staked." His voice was commanding; it was the old law of the stampede, the law of Forty Mile and Circle City, of Porcupine and Telegraph before them.

Then Fraser pointed to Douglas, "You're number one," he called. The other man smiled and held out his hand as Douglas staggered up to him. "I'm Jim Davis," said he, "the man you grubstaked that night on Crater Lake."

Mechanically Douglas took the proffered hand; he felt his senses slipping from him. As from a long distance he heard Fraser, calling other names, and, like a vision through clouded glass, he beheld the bearded contenders. in that grim van walking from the semicircle toward them. He summoned all his energies to hold himself erect, and finally, as his mind began to work again. "I

remember you now," he said dully. "Lord, that seems long ago!" A minute passed. "Your wife?" he asked.

"She's fine. Down in Dawson." Davis smiled at him. "The baby came on Linderman and his name is Wynne."

An hour went by; the work of staking was done. Jim Davis took Douglas by the arm. "In the cabin," said he, "there's room for you and your pardner to sleep; it beats a tent this cold weather. Come on, now; we'll get a bite to eat."

As he was helping Wilson up the trail toward the cabin, whose smoke he had seen coming over the ridge, Douglas thought once: more of Henry Bush, and it came to him with a throb of self-reproach— so like a religion had this quest become to him— that he had allowed the accountant to leave his mind during these last hours of excitement. Then they entered the warm room.

There were three bunks along the side, and a man was sleeping in one of them— sleeping very quietly, it would seem. Jim Davis waved his hand toward him. "He's in bad shape; there was three of us staked, and it was his last day's work. Country's got him, I guess; I doubt if he'll ever go out."

Mechanically— for the habit of looking closely at every man whom he met was now a part, of him— Douglas stepped nearer to the bunk, and first he saw that the black-bearded little man, whose waxen hands were lying motionless outside the fur robes, had one crooked middle finger; then, even as he recognized the other points of the description, realizing that he had ended his quest, he discovered that Henry Bush was dead.

He made no outcry; no sound escaped his lips. But as he stood gazing down at that white face, whose pallor was accentuated by the darkness of the beard, his own face became grim. It was as if fate had used death to play a practical joke on him.

But later, when the flutter which the tragedy brought with it had died away, Jim Davis, the man of Crater Lake, said to Douglas: "It's queer about him; he had a package that he always kept under the bunk, and he seemed to set a store by it. I've always wondered what it might hold."

Then Douglas remembered the books of which John Roger had spoken that evening of his father's arrest. He found them there under the bunk, wrapped in oiled paper, which, in its turn, was covered by heavy canvas, and so, when the stampeders returned to Dawson and recorded their claims with the gold commissioner, he brought the bundle with him. He stored it in the safe of the Alaska Commercial Company, and when he came out again from the new diggings in the spring he took it from its place of safe-keeping.

In June the first steamer down from the Yukon docked in Elliot Bay, and the usual old-time crowd of miners came streaming down the gangplank, grim-faced men, bearded, and weather-worn. Of the procession Big Fraser was one

and one was Wilson, the sourdough. Before those two walked Douglas Wynne, and there was something of the sterness of the Northland in his eyes now.

Judge Wynne had aged a great deal in those months, but his head was still back, and his eyes were still looking bravely straight ahead of him. And now, when he looked upon those long missing books, the removal of that load of accusation seemed to make his shoulders straighten. But that was from relief. The thing which abided with him, the pride which made him over after that period of heavy stress, came from the sight of a man who had come back to him from the distant Northland. That man was Douglas Wynne.

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18: Two Gentlemen Incog.

(The Secret Exploits of Paul Darraq 1)

Jacques Futrelle

1875-1912

The Popular Magazine 1 Oct 1912

Futrelle's final series of stories was "The Secret Exploits of Paul Darraq", but he wrote only three episodes before he died in the Titanic *sinking. This is how the curtailed series began:*

Introducing Mr. Paul Darraq.

MY first meeting with Paul Darraq occurred in Washington a few days after Grover Cleveland's Venezuelan message had sent a flame of war talk around the world; our subsequent meetings, in all sorts of remote corners of the earth, under circumstances sometimes strange, sometimes strenuous. In a way, these meetings reflect the high lights of history during the last fourteen years. Yet I had known Darraq for eight years before I knew his profession, or, indeed, knew that he had a profession; and I had known him a dozen years, two years of that time intimately, before he ever let drop in my presence any reference whatsoever to anything he had ever done. And first and last and all the time Darraq is a man who does things.

It was in 1895 that the Venezuelan message was sent to Congress. At that time I was connected with the Washington bureau of a great New York newspaper. Darraq had just returned from Caracas, and I tried to get a statement from him as to existing conditions there. At my question, he looked at me as if astonished, then denied flatly, albeit pleasantly, that he had ever been in South America. My information had come from no less a source than a member of Mr. Cleveland's cabinet. Foolishly, I told him so.

"He has made a mistake," he replied simply.

In after years that casual remark came to mean more to me than it did then, because it was not a great while before that particular member of the cabinet was permitted to resign. Now I am convinced, although he has never referred to the matter again, that Darraq had something to do with that resignation. The cabinet member did make a mistake— a mistake in telling me that Darraq had ever been in Caracas; a mistake in even mentioning Darraq's name to me; a mistake in allowing to escape anything which would associate Darraq with the government, in my mind.

Twice after that, within a few months, I met Darraq in the streets of Washington. Each time I nodded to him and each time he nodded to me and smiled his recognition. Finally he passed beyond my ken, the whirligig of time revolved, and I became a special correspondent for my paper. It was in that

capacity that I was hustled off to Havana in 1898, immediately after the disaster to the battleship *Maine* in the harbor there. I had been in Havana only a few hours when I ran across Darraq and another gentleman, this last of a pronounced Castilian type, in the Malecón.

It had been only a little more than a year since I had seen Darraq, and I remembered him perfectly. I nodded to him. He stared at me and passed on, still talking, with not one sign of recognition. My impression a: the moment was merely that he had forgotten me. True, there had been a nodding acquaintance in Washington, but here, fifteen hundred miles away, in a foreign city, meeting me unexpectedly— there was no particular reason why he should have remembered me. This first impression was dispelled, however, when I returned to my hotel. I found a note there, just a couple of lines, signed "D." It ran like this:

Please do not recognize or address me unless I address you. I don't want to seem discourteous, but believe me, this is of the highest importance.

Naturally, the note piqued my curiosity, but it was several years later that that curiosity was satisfied. Now I know that Darraq is the only living man who knows what happened to the *Maine*; the other man who knew was assassinated at the Buffalo Exposition in 1901. I didn't see Darraq again until some time in July of 1898— the day I remember that Hobson and his seven men were exchanged by the Spanish admiral Cervera for some of his own men held prisoners by the American blockading force. On the afternoon of that day a small boat put out from shore three miles west of the entrance to Santiago harbor and made for the flagship— the New York. Darraq was in the boat. He was closeted with Admiral Sampson for four hours, and when he came out I met him face to face on deck. Remembering the note, I waited for him to speak. He didn't. Instead, he re-entered the boat and returned ashore.

Our next meeting occurred in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, in 1899. I was one of three war correspondents

who had managed to get that far before we were stopped and compelled to remain there cooling our heels while the Boer-British war was raging. The three of us were at dinner one night when Darraq sauntered into the dining room and dropped into the odd chair at our table.

"Hello, Lester," he greeted me familiarly.

We were knocking about there together for a week or more, the four of us, and it was then and there that I began to understand the man and like him. In all of that week there was not the slightest reference between us to the circumstances of either of our previous meetings. I think it was in

Pietermaritzsburg that I first got a glimmering of an idea as to who and what Darraq really was; but it was four years later before I really knew.

The world whirled on, and at the end of another year I found myself in Peking, being one of the foreigners who were besieged in that city during the Boxer trouble. We "foreign devils," as the Boxers classically dubbed us, were huddled about the embassies and legations— American, English, French, German, all of us— awaiting the inevitable with differing degrees of equanimity. Of necessity, every foreigner in Peking at that time was known to every other foreigner; and Darraq was not one of us. Yet one day I spied him standing upon the alabaster steps of the Temple of Heaven staring down thoughtfully into the streets below.

"Hello, Lester," he said again, much as if he had seen me an hour or so before. "How are you?"

My astonishment must have been obvious.

"Where did you come from?" I demanded. "You haven't been here all along? How did you get in?"

Darraq smiled that ready smile of his and shook his head.

"I have just delivered some good news to the embassies," he replied.

"You mean that we are to be relieved?" I asked.

Darraq smiled again. Forty-eight hours later the Indian army corps, headed by its British officers, came rattling into Peking, sweeping a path ahead of them by a continuous, spitting fire of rifles and— well, the world knows the rest of it. In some way, and alone, Darraq had penetrated that line of yellow-skinned murderers who for weeks pounded at the gates of the Chinese city with the lust of blood upon them; in some way he had run the gantlet ahead of the relieving force and slid through the encircling talons. Some day he will tell me how he did it; I have never asked him. It would be useless, because he answers fewer questions than any man I have ever met.

For many months after that I lost sight of him. Several of those months he had spent in Berlin, I learned later, but he managed to be in Servia at the time of the assassination of Alexander I. and Queen Draga. I next met him in a geisha house in Tokyo during the Russo-Japanese war; next, four months after that, in Moscow, when that Russian city ran red with rioting. A month passed and I came upon him in Pall 'Mall, and two days later, quite by accident, we had dinner together in a cozy little student place in the Latin Quarter of Paris— Café d'Harcourt, it was— one of those familiar "places where the waiter is always willing to correct one's French. J know he put himself to a good deal of trouble with mine. A few weeks later I sailed from Liverpool for New York, and the last man I saw on Prince George's Dock was Darraq.

Shortly after this the character of our relations changed; the barriers of his reserve melted, and I came to know him for what he was. I had believed him to be connected with the secret-service bureau, but this I found to be incorrect. His was a power beyond that, and greater. I suppose secret diplomatic agent would give a better idea of his profession, but it was beyond even that.

Perhaps the best way to make it clear would be to explain that the president of the United States is allowed each year by Congress about one hundred thousand dollars as an emergency fund, and there is never any accounting to be made of the manner in which the president utilizes this fund. Each year the bulk of it is turned back into the treasury minus a sum which, if we allow for a liberal salary and traveling expenses, would be fair payment for a man of Darraq's ability.

At the beginning of our intimacy Darraq had returned to New York— I wasn't aware of it— and hailed me one day from a taxicab in Forty-second Street. I hardly knew the thin, wan face peering at me from the window; a face marred ruthlessly by lines of suffering, the eyes sunken, the lips pale. There was the same ready smile, but obviously it came with an effort. grasped his hand heartily; it was waxlike, flabby.

"Hello, Lester," he greeted me as always. "I am glad to see you; get in."

"What's the matter?" I inquired anxiously. "Have you been ill?"

"More than that," he replied. "I got a pistol shot out West a couple of months ago, and I am just pulling myself together again. I am afraid I am out of commission for some time to come."

"Who shot you? How did it happen?"

Darraq smiled and shook his head. I might have known that would be the answer.

When we reached Darraq's hotel and I assisted him out, I was amazed to see the change in him, a change which had not been entirely apparent in the cab. The broad, well-set-up shoulders were drooping now; the elasticity of his walk had gone, and he tottered feebly; the vitality and glow of health was no more, and he seemed old, old.

Soon after this Darraq took an apartment adjoining mine, and there began our friendship. We were together a great deal in those days, and, in a way, Darraq was dependent upon me, for I represented the greater outer world and he had no other callers. There I did my work, and there, as months passed, the color came back to Darraq's face, the sparkle to his eyes, his lips grew red again, his smile lost that suggestion of suffering— and he became himself,

So it was I came to know Paul Darraq, know him, I believe, as no other man ever did or ever will. At times he has taken me into his confidence and has told me things casually that illumined as if by daylight a dozen dark mysteries and

sinister tragedies in high places. In my writings there have been times when I have required exact information upon all subjects on the earth and above it. I have never hesitated to ask Darraq a question when I thought I was not encroaching upon forbidden ground, and he has never hesitated at such times to answer.

His fund of knowledge is as varied as it is astounding. He knows as much about the fighting strength of Britain's navy as her prime minister; he knows more about Germany's huge army and her forts and her ordnance than the Kaiser; he knows more about Japanese trickery as related to the United States and its future than the Mikado; he

1: Two Gentlemen Incog.

ON the seventeenth of May, 19— , it was officially announced by the press of a northern capital of Europe that the sovereign was slightly indisposed and probably would not be able to leave his room for several days. It was nothing serious— a cold or some other trivial thing— and, while assurance was given that there was not the remotest cause for uneasiness, yet bulletins as to his majesty's condition would be issued from time to time. On the afternoon of that same day Paul Darraq, at his apartments in New York City, received a cable dispatch in the code from Paris, and eight days later he appeared upon the docks of the Blue Star Line in the uniform of a customs inspector. At his own request he was assigned to the A-B-C inspection division.

It so chanced that the great transatlantic liner due that afternoon from Cherbourg, Southampton, -and Plymouth was delayed a dozen hours by wind and storm, therefore she was not warped in until the following morning, knows more about the Dreyfus case than high officials were ever permitted to learn, and he knows— he knows— what happened to the Maine in Havana harbor.

There is no mystery as to Darraq's profession, for the simple reason that to the world at large he has none; he is merely a gentleman of leisure who travels extensively. Nor is there, in his physical make-up, the slightest thing to suggest the glamour of mystery which surrounds him. He is of medium height, clean-shaven, well set up, with frank, friendly eyes and a charming smile. He speaks many languages, and is of that neutral complexion which, while it fails to stamp him as a native of any country, would at the same time aid him in passing as a native of either.

As a matter of fact, he is French-American. His father came to this country about the time of the Civil War, and married a Miss Calvert, of Maryland.

Immediately the gangplank was cleared, there was a rush of impatient, travel-tired passengers, eager to know again the solid feel of earth under their feet; a clamor and a hubbub, a kissing and embracing, a laughing and weeping, and a scurrying for baggage. For a moment the customs inspectors were the most important individuals in the world — the objective point of an insistent flood of persuasion oddly mingled with invective.

Two gentlemen, who had been among the first down the gangplank, paused uncertainly at its foot, asked a question of a porter, then hurried over to the A-B-C inspector division. One of them, a man of perhaps fifty years, was of medium height, sturdily set up, square as a soldier across the shoulders; and there was that in the unwavering eyes, the straight nose, the positive chin, the hauteur of his manner, which marked him as a man of distinction, of power even. His hair was slightly gray at the temples, his face clean-shaven, his complexion of that ruddiness which is characteristic of northern Europe. In his right hand he carried a heavy cane; his left was thrust idly into a pocket of his light overcoat. The other gentleman was shorter, grosser, coarser, and typically Teutonic.

They paused beside Darraq.

"Will you tell us, please," the shorter gentleman inquired in faltering English, "if baggage for Von Arnim will come to this division or to the V division?"

"It will come here," Darraq replied, without looking around.

The shorter man turned to his companion, and now he spoke in French,

"Your baggage will come to this division," he translated, and he bowed slightly. "Mine will go farther down in the H division, If you will pardon me, I will go immediately and attend to it."

The taller man made an impatient motion of assent.

"Ts there no way to hurry up the inspection?" he asked brusquely in French. "I should like— I must— get away from here as soon as possible. We've already lost twelve hours." His eyes darted hither and thither through the crowd. "And there's always a chance of being recognized, you know," he added significantly.

"I understand, sire," his companion agreed hurriedly. Peculiarly enough, he was speaking English now.

"S-s-sh!" warned the other suddenly with a quick, meaning glance at Darraq. "Be careful!" And this, too, was spoken in English, very excellent English.

But Darraq was paying not the slightest attention to them; he was busily turning over the contents of a couple of hand bags. The taller gentleman's cane rattled a nervous tattoo on the dock; the shorter gentleman addressed Darraq.

"If it would be possible to oblige us by examining Herr Von Arnim's baggage immediately," he began tentatively.

Darraq straightened up suddenly and faced the tall man. For one scant instant there was an expression of astonishment on his face, and the other must have noticed it, for his eyes were fixed in an unwavering stare. It was a challenge.

"Is this Herr Von Arnim?" Darraq inquired.

"Yes," was the unhesitating response in English. "You seem to be astonished ?"

"Do I?" Darraq questioned evasively. "Perhaps it was your startling resemblance to— to some picture or some person I have seen somewhere. I beg your pardon. Here is your baggage now, I believe ; if you will give me your keys?"

He turned away to open the trunk. Herr Von Arnim shot an exultant glance at his companion.

"You had better hurry up your own baggage, Hauptmann," he said measuredly— this, too, in English. "I'll be ready before you are."

To the accompaniment of the cane's restless tattoo Darraq finished the inspection of the baggage, and looked up to find Herr Von Arnim graciously extending a bank note.

"We are not permitted to accept gratuities," Darraq told him courteously. And then, curiously: "Did any one ever tell you, sir, that you greatly resemble one of the reigning monarchs of Europe?"

"I have been told so, yes,' was the steady reply. "Why? ??" And again there seemed to be a challenge in his eyes.

"I was merely struck by a resemblance that is perfectly amazing," and Darraq shrugged his shoulders. "I believe, though, the pictures show this particular monarch with a mustache; you are clean-shaven, of course."

Herr Von Arnim and Herr Hauptmann entered an automobile on the dock and were driven away. For a minute or more Darraq stood staring after them . with a puzzled, bewildered expression.

At the end of another hour he was in possession of the few facts concerning them to be picked up aboard ship. They had taken passage at Cherbourg at the last moment and had occupied adjoining suites connected by a door. During the trip they had held aloof from the remainder of the ship's company, having their meals in their suites, rarely, appearing on deck, and then only at night. Further, Herr Von Arnim was accompanied by his secretary and a valet.

"I should like to have seen them," Darraq mused when he heard of it.

In his hotel on the following morning Herr Von Arnim received a letter dated Washington, D. C., and signed by Chief Campbell of the secret service. Briefly, it said:

Out of consideration for the personal safety of certain distinguished visitors to the United States, this bureau has made it a rule to delegate men to attend them, inconspicuously, of course. This precaution has been taken in your case. My men will in no way embarrass or annoy you— probably you will never even see them— while, if there should come an occasion when you need them, they will be at your service.

Herr Von Arnim read the note and, laughing heartily, tossed it across the breakfast table to Herr Hauptmann.

"We have drawn the enemy's fire, Hauptmann," he remarked.

And meanwhile Darraq had utterly disappeared.

AGAINST a languorous, deep-toned background of blue a woman sat studying with velvet-amber eyes the thoughtful face of the man before her. It was a striking rather than a strong face, deeply bronzed, with straight nose, full lips, and dark, moody eyes. Gradually her scarlet mouth curled into a smile of amusement, and finally she laughed outright, a little rippling laugh that dispelled instantly the shadows which had settled down upon Lieutenant Ralph Stuart's countenance. Impetuously he stretched out one hand toward her.

"No," she laughed, and drew back her slim, white fingers. Her eyes met his fairly, daringly, and the shimmering head was tilted. "No," she said again.

The man arose suddenly, and paced back and forth across the room half a dozen times. He stopped in front of her at last with clouded brow, and she looked up at him soberly.

"But, Carline, it's treason," he declared bluntly.

The woman raised her brows in astonishment.

"No," she objected. "It's only— "

"And knowing it's treason, you don't hesitate to ask what you are asking?"

The woman regarded him earnestly for a long time; the smile had gone.

"Suppose, Ralph," she interrogated slowly, "suppose you and you alone had access to some great commercial secret which had been permitted to lie dormant for years, would you hesitate to take advantage of it?"

"That would merely be dishonesty," Lieutenant Stuart explained. "This is treason."

"It would not be dishonesty even," she denied. "According to standards of to-day, you would merely be taking advantage of an opportunity. I am offering you an opportunity,' she went on rapidly, "an opportunity to exchange your

minor rank of lieutenant in the United States navy for the rank of commodore in one of the greatest navies of Europe. I fail to see 72

"With conditions," he interrupted, "conditions which I hardly believe you would ask me to accept if— if you understood them fully."

"Certainly with, conditions," she agreed readily. "One cannot expect extraordinary promotion without some extraordinary return for it. It would be treason for a man to sell his country, or do that thing which would weaken or endanger his country if, for instance, his country was engaged in or on the verge of war. The United States is not even remotely threatened with war; my country is." Her eyes were aflame; her voice thrilled with earnestness. "For more years than you would believe we have been preparing for it. It may come to-day, to-morrow, or next week, or it may not come for five years, but it will come."

Lieutenant Stuart was staring at her, then he dropped into a seat facing her.

"You mean war with— " he began.

"I mean war with the country that you think," she ran on hurriedly. Her hand fluttered a little and came to rest on his sleeve, "So, you see, this thing which is of no great immediate value to your country because you are beyond the possible reach of war at present, will make my country invincible. You can give it to us; my sovereign will pay your price because we need it immediately, not two or three years from now. We could get it, of course, in that time by other methods, so we will get it whether you give it to us or not; but if you give it now, there is promotion waiting for you, promotion, too, without dishonor, because tracings of the plans could be delivered, the originals left where they are, and in a few weeks you could offer your resignation to accept this higher rank in the naval service of my country."

The amber-velvet eyes were raised to his eagerly; his hands were working nervously.

"Treason, again, nevertheless," he said.

"No," she denied. Then, suddenly, her manner changed; the ivory-white of her face flushed to rosiness, a filmy mist obscured the limpid eyes, and the lids were lowered. "You have asked all of me, Ralph, and yet you refuse this single thing which would mean so much to both of us. I am ambitious for you — there's no limit to my ambition— and it's so simple, after all." Timidly her eyes were raised again. "It will be ten, perhaps twenty, years before you could hope to reach the same rank in your navy, and is

She stooped under the steady, hungry gaze of the man, and the shimmering head dropped wearily. Her hands lay quiescent in his own, limp.

"Look at me, Carline," he commanded. Slowly she raised her face. "I have asked you to be my wife because I love you more than any other thing in this world. Do you want the man who gives you a love so holy as mine— do you want me— to go hand in hand with dishonor? Even a dishonor that is hidden?"

"You won't understand me, Ralph," she argued pleadingly. "It isn't dishonor. The secret is useless to your country now; it is of untold value to mine. In return for a service of such value my sovereign is prepared to honor you as no foreigner was ever before honored by my country. I am ambitious for you," she smiled sadly, "and perhaps for myself, too. And, please don't misunderstand me, I am not mercenary, but you are not rich, and I have always been accustomed to every luxury. It seems so sordid to put our love upon such a basis, but you understand, don't you? Why make me go on?"

She was pleading now, her misty, moist eyes upraised to his face. Suddenly he arose, lifted her to her feet and held her close, close to him for a dozen heartbeats.

"You love me, Carline?" he whispered.

"With all my heart and soul," she said softly.

"Then why does— does it all matter?"

"Because I *do* love you so," she explained. "Because I should want my— my husband to be a great man among great men." She was silent a moment. "You will do it, Ralph?" she begged hurriedly, pantingly. "You will? You will for my sake? It wouldn't take an hour to trace the plans. They are in your custody alone, and no one need ever know. You will? You will?"

"It is treason," the man said again earnestly; "no argument will make it anything less; but, after all, treason is a little thing compared to your love."

"You mean you will?" she asked quickly, eagerly.

For a long time he stood motionless, staring at her. The lights were at play in her tawny hair; the glow of the poppy was on her cheeks, and the perfume of her breath went to his head like wine.

"You want me to, don't you?" he asked in turn.

"If you would— if you only would?" she pleaded.

"There's nothing in the world that I wouldn't do for you," he said fiercely between clenched teeth. He bent forward and pressed his lips reverently to her own.

After a moment she slid out of his arms.

"When?" she queried eagerly.

"It's only a matter of hours," he re plied absently. "I could have duplicate plans ready by to-morrow night."

The woman stretched out both hands to him and laughed gleefully, triumphantly. His powerful fingers gripped her white wrists savagely and he dragged her to his arms.

"Don't laugh!' he commanded harshly. "I don't want you to laugh. You have made a traitor of me."

She laughed again.

"Ungrateful wretch!" she taunted. "I have made a commodore of you."

THAT NIGHT Lieutenant Stuart returned to Washington. On the following morning a New York newspaper carried a semi-jocose article in which it brought Herr Von Arnim and Herr Hauptmann into a sudden glare of publicity. The point of it was the startling resemblance between Herr Von Arnim and a certain wilful monarch of northern Europe who was supposed to be ill and confined to his palace. As the newspapers pointed out, the only real difference in photographs of the two men was Herr Von Arnim's lack of a mustache. Purely as a coincidence, it was pointed out that Herr Von Arnim always carried his left hand in his pocket, and the emperor in question, as is well known, is afflicted with a distorted left arm.

While the press of New York was assimilating this odd little newspaper story, there came another development which might or might not have been significant. The German ambassador left Washington suddenly and called upon Herr Von Arnim at his hotel. He remained with him for an hour or more, all of which led to vivid conjectures in the afternoon papers. Herr Von Arnim, either wittingly or unwittingly, complicated the situation by utter silence. :

Lieutenant Stuart, on his way to New York that afternoon, read the newspapers in so far as they related to Herr Von Arnim with blankly incredulous eyes. Of all men in the world perhaps he could best understand the motive which might perhaps bring the emperor of to America. It would be, of course, to get possession of those half dozen thin tissue sheets which the lieutenant carried in his pocket. But why had he not entrusted the work to an agent?

Lieutenant Stuart found no direct answer to that question, but it was possible to reach a hazy general conclusion that the emperor would not dare trust any one else on a mission so delicate that the least misstep might precipitate unpleasantness with the United States.'

His brow still clouded, the lieutenant went straight to a small hotel in Fifth Avenue and sent his card to Miss Wessels. She received him in her private parlor, and there, as he held her in his arms again, he forgot that hideous sense of shame which had tormented him mercilessly ; forgot the emperor and Herr

Von Arnim; forgot everything save this woman who had given herself to him as a price of his dishonor.

"Carline!" he whispered, as he kissed her lips, her hair, her slim, white fingers. "Now you are mine, mine!"

The woman held him off at arm's length the while she studied his face with searching eyes.

"Did you bring the— the tracings?" she asked eagerly.

He nodded and touched his breast; there was the crisp crackling of paper. Dumbly, moodily, he stood for a long time with her hands held prisoner in his own.

"I would have killed a man who dared to say that I would ever do such a thing," he said slowly, "and yet for you there is nothing I would leave undone."

"Nonsense!" She laughed a little nervously, and there was a peculiar exultant note in her voice. "You have taken advantage of an opportunity, and now, immediately, you shall receive your reward. You shall personally deliver the plans into the hands of my emperor— now within the hour."

Lieutenant Stuart was staring at her, startled, dazed even. "You mean he is here? Here in New York?" he asked breathlessly. "The emperor of— "

The word was stifled on his lips by one white hand. She nodded.

"This Herr Von Arnim story, then, is correct?" he went on.

"Not altogether," she replied soberly. "But come, we are wasting time," she continued gayly. "In half an hour now you will be a commodore in one of the greatest navies of the world."

They left the hotel in a cab, and a few minutes later ascended the steps of one of the small, old-fashioned dwelling houses in East Thirty-second Street. Lieutenant Stuart was left downstairs for ten minutes while Miss Wessels was ushered into a reception room on the second floor. Seated near a window was a man of perhaps fifty years, of medium height, sturdily set up, square as a soldier across the shoulders, and there was that in the unwavering eyes, the straight nose, the positive chin which marked him as a man of distinction, of power even. His hair was slightly gray at the temples, his face clean-shaven, his complexion of that ruddiness which is characteristic of northern Europe. In his right hand he held a heavy cane; his left was thrust idly into a pocket of his coat.

IT SO happened that at just that particular moment Herr Von Arnim and Herr Hauptmann were at dinner in their hotel, a score of blocks away, directly under the eyes of a dozen reporters and half that many photographers.

MISS WESSELS bowed to the floor; the man inclined his head, but did not rise.

"Well?" he asked impatiently.

"The plans are ready to be placed in your hands, your— "

The man raised his right hand quickly, and she stopped.

"All of them?" he asked.

"All of them."

"And the price?"

"Lieutenant Ralph Stuart will, within a few weeks, resign from the American navy with the expectation of accepting a commission as commodore in your navy."

The man's white teeth closed with a snap; avaricious dreams of conquest long cherished were near to realization; a great island nation, bound hand and foot, was about to be laid at his feet.

"There will be no unpleasant consequences?" he asked curtly.

"There can be none. When Lieutenant Stuart learns that I do not love him, there will be an end of it." The woman shrugged her shapely shoulders. "He will kill himself."

"A traitor can do no less, in decency," the man commented tartly. "But he will not betray us before that? He will not be piqued to the point of confessing what he has done?"

"He is a coward," the woman sneered. "Cowards never confess. He is below awaiting your pleasure."

"Very good!" The man extended his hand, and Miss Wessels curtsied low as she touched it with her lips. "You have done well, *fraulein*."

Miss Wessels went out, and he arose as the door opened again to receive Lieutenant Stuart. The lieutenant brought his hand to salute and remained rigid, motionless, his face chalk-white. If there had been in his mind the slightest doubt of the identity of this man, it was dissipated at that moment when their eyes met.

"I, the ruler of a great empire, have traveled far to meet you, Lieutenant Stuart," his host said at last in English. "You will realize that that necessity must be overwhelming which brings me here secretly, against all precedent, to meet you, a private citizen." There was a mocking note in his voice.

"I believe I understand you— " Lieutenant Stuart began. A gesture halted the phrase of courtesy.

"Miss Wessels has acted with my authority throughout. Whatever promises of promotion or reward she has made I will myself assume, in the event, of course, the duplicate drawings are correct."

"They are correct." Lieutenant Stuart placed the thin tissue tracings in an eagerly outstretched right hand. "I would like you to understand," he went on, as if in justification of the thing he had done, "that it is not alone promotion that prompts me to this action. It is— "

"The heart of a woman, perhaps?"

"The heart of a woman."

"You will report to me in my capital at your leisure, lieutenant. Every promise that has to do with anything more substantial than the heart of a woman I will fulfill."

One raised hand indicated that the interview was at an end, The lieutenant bowed and withdrew. As his. sturdy figure melted into the night the shadows opened and from the void came— Paul Darraq. He ascended the steps Lieutenant Stuart had just gone down, and handed a sealed envelope to a servant. Five minutes later he entered the room Lieutenant Stuart had just left, and bowed low before the man he found there. There was a bewildered, puzzled expression on this man's face, which gave way instantly to an expression of utter amazement as the light of recognition flashed in those eyes which, only a minute before, had been feverishly aglitter in a hurried scrutiny of the plans Lieutenant Stuart had left. For the moment the plans were hidden in a desk drawer.

"Herr Darraq!"

"Your majesty!"

Again Darraq bowed low. They had met before, these two; the strange manner of their meeting is a story for another time.

"Is it necessary for me to say that I am astonished, *mein Herr*, to see you here now?"

"I can well believe that, your majesty," returned Darraq. "I am here to tender the felicitations of my government to the most distinguished visitor our country has ever had, who is none the less welcome because he chooses to come secretly, and whose obvious desire to remain incognito will be most scrupulously respected. The note I bring from Washington is merely an excuse for me to extend congratulations to your majesty in person upon a speedy recovery from the illness which, according to daily bulletins in your majesty's capital, has afflicted you, and at the same time to offer my government's hospitality. Coming in any other manner or through any other person, as your majesty will readily see, the expression of my government's pleasure at your presence might have attracted that attention which your majesty is evidently so desirous of avoiding."

The unwavering eyes were searching Darraq's impassive face: with mingled apprehension and curiosity. What did he know? What was being veiled behind

this mask of courtesy? The duplicate plans! No. Stuart would not be such a fool as to leave his path open behind him.

"My appreciation of your government's solicitude in my behalf is equalled only by my embarrassment that by some unwitting act I have disclosed my presence here and made an expression of that solicitude necessary."

"Our chiefest regret is that your majesty did not choose to come at a time and in a manner which would have enabled my government to offer such entertainment as befitted your rank," Darraq continued. "And permit me, also, to express our regret that circumstances are such that your majesty must hasten back to your own country on the steamer which sails to-morrow."

The courteous little comedy was being played gravely.

"May I inquire, Herr Darraq, in what manner your government became aware of my presence? And how you happen to be acquainted with my intention of sailing to-morrow?" There was frank curiosity here.

"Your majesty's coming was made known to us by cable from a foreign agent of my government," Darraq elucidated readily. "Because I have the honor to be known to your majesty, I was on the dock. To my surprise, the man whom we supposed would be your majesty was, instead, Herr Von Arnim, whose startling resemblance to your majesty has in the past been utilized to draw attention from your majesty, thus insuring you a greater degree of freedom. I don't believe I am incorrect in assuming that your majesty foresaw the possibility of your trip to this country becoming known, and, therefore, Herr Von Arnim and Herr Hauptmann came with instructions to draw attention to themselves. They acted their rôles well, your majesty ; their affected clumsiness in the alternate use of English and French in speaking to each other in my presence, and Herr Von Arnim's deep concern at the possibility of his assumed identity becoming known were, to put it mildly, quite sufficient to compel one's attention."

"But how— how does it come that you found me, *mein Herr*? There has been absolutely no communication between us?"

Darraq didn't answer the question.

"As to your majesty's intention of sailing for home to-morrow," he went on, "that was easily established through the steamship offices once we had located your majesty in this house, and had convinced Herr Von Arnim by a note from the chief of our secret service that we actually believed him to be your majesty. To use a colloquialism, we permitted him to think he had drawn the enemy's fire, because we knew it would conduce to your majesty's peace of mind; and it fitted in perfectly with the call on Herr Von Arnim by the German ambassador,"

Darraq met the perturbed gaze of the other man for one long, tense minute, but whatever he read in it brought no change of expression in his face.

"I dare say," came the tentative question at last, "that my presence in your country incognito has aroused a good deal of speculation as to my motive?"

Again Darraq bowed low.

"It is not for us to question your majesty's motive in so honoring us," he replied. "It is enough for us to know you are here, and, knowing it, express to you our welcome, and our pleasure at being convinced that your reported illness was incorrect."

Here was dissimulation, plus evasion. Bowing low, Darraq craved permission to go, and it was granted curtly. He went, leaving behind him here in this modest little house in Thirty-second Street, deeply perturbed, a reigning sovereign of Europe. They met again aboard ship on the afternoon of the following day, fifteen minutes— before the great liner cast off her hawsers, Miss Wessels, from the window of her stateroom, watched them curiously.

Darraq bowed with deep courtesy.

"I dare say you have come to express your government's regret at my departure?" the emperor queried ironically.

However disconcerted he had been the night before by the sudden realization that all efforts to keep his identity hidden had failed, his journey had been a success; the tracings were safe, and in an hour America would be a penciled line, fading into the horizon. He was returning home with arms strengthened incalculably against that great island nation of Europe with which, some day, war would come.

"And to wish you *bon voyage*," Darraq amended. The nearest of the moving crowd compelled him to drop the formal manner of address. "Permit me to express my regret that your visit has been fruitless."

"Fruitless!" The emperor laughed exultantly.

"Yes," replied Darraq steadily. "You will find the tracings of the plans and specifications which you were at such pains to secure, which you came to this country to purchase at the cost of Lieutenant Stuart's honor, have vanished from the receptacle in the body of the heavy cane in your hand and— that is all, Permit me to again wish you bon voyage." He bowed ceremoniously.

"Vanished!" The word came in a burst of amazement.

"Vanished is the word I used," remarked Darraq coolly. "A man entered your apartments as you slept last night and removed them. You will find in your cane several thin, tissue sheets, blank as the open sky. I will add that my method of locating you was simplicity itself. What one thing in all the United States could be of such importance that it would bring you to this country? Obviously, some instrument of war. But every improvement in every airship,

every man-of-war, every submarine, every gun, every secret of armor making, is shared in common by all civilized countries. But suppose your secret police had learned of some invention held by my government which, in your possession, would make your power upon the seas beyond dispute? That would be the answer to the hypothetical question hanging upon your presence here. Lieutenant Stuart was in charge of plans of an invention which, when announced, will revolutionize warfare. I followed Lieutenant Stuart from Washington to your very door in New York, and, incidentally, I became aware of Miss Wessels' part in the affair."

For an instant the emperor, nonplussed, stared at him, then without a word he turned away and entered his suite, slamming the door behind him.

Just before the big liner sailed Herr Von Arnim and Herr Hauptmann arrived breathlessly in an automobile and ran up the gangplank.

The steamer's great whistle bellowed a warning across the busy bosom of the Hudson, and she moved out majestically.

Six hours later Paul Darraq sent a telegram to Chief Campbell of the secret service in Washington. It ran like this:

Lieutenant Ralph Stuart may attempt suicide to-night. Take steps to prevent if, if possible.

The telegram was too late. They found Stuart dead with a bullet in his brain. Gripped in his left hand was a telegram, signed Carline Wessels, coldly, brutally announcing her departure for Paris, where, she explained, she was to join her husband.

It was several months later that Darraq looked up from his reading one day and addressed me.

"Don't you think," he asked, "that suicide is the most merciful manner. of escape for a man who has been tricked into treason; who has sold the secrets of his country?"

"It strikes me so," I responded.

"I'm glad you agree with me," he remarked. "I could have sent a telegram once in time to prevent a man's suicide, but it seemed more merciful not to send it— and I didn't."

Whereupon he resumed his reading.

———————

19: The Rajah's Vacation

Harold MacGrath

1871-1932

The Popular Magazine 1 Oct 1912

MacGrath was a best-selling, prolific novelist, a silent movie scriptwriter, and a short story writer.

HE WAS thin and fibrous; he was also red-headed, and freckled, and dynamic. He was an orphan, and wasn't afraid of anything or anybody, if one excepted his landlady, who chanced to be as red-headed as he was and far more vigorously built. He was, besides, one of the best authorities on sports in the State. He could tell you offhand anything you wanted to know, from prize fighters to champion pingpong players. At the time of this veracious chronicle he was the sporting editor of the *Evening Herald*, and reveled in the fact that he had interviewed John L. before Corbett had knocked him out.

It is proverbial that sporting editors shall be improvident. Thus Hennessy was always in debt, always looking around to add a few dollars to his pay envelope. Once he had gone so far as to edit a book of poems by a local poetess. With the check he had purchased a diamond stickpin, and up to the Rajah's advent had reclaimed it from one Moses Cohen one hundred and thirty-six times. There were lean months when it represented both his capital and income.

Early on the day of the fifteenth of May— never mind the year— he sat before his typewriter. He was grouchy, for the aforesaid landlady had issued an ultimatum that morning, between prunes and ham and eggs, and had plainly indicated that his room was better than his company, eight dollars the week better. In the parlance of the office boy, who admired Hennessy next to the star pitcher, he was having a "stiff go" with the machine. He jabbed viciously, uppercut, swung right and left, and had the typewriter "going," when the bell rang.

Hennessy took advantage of the intermission to refill his corncob pipe, and then began round two. Any one standing behind him could have traced the words "punk" and "piffle" and sundry other inelegancies of the English language which pass muster on the sporting page, but nowhere else. He was retorting to the persiflage of the sporting editor of the *Morning Standard*. They never agreed. They warred upon each other's decisions with a vindictiveness which, in earlier times, would have had its climax in the death of one or the other, but which, in these unromantic days, resulted in nothing more serious than a complimentary drink at Schmidt's, over the way, when, work was done.

Hennessy was taking exception, violent and abusive, to Morris' decision in regard to the "scrap" between two local lightweights at the Elks' Club the night before. Morris had given the decision to "Kid" Dorgan, while his rival was determined that justice should be done to K. O. Henkel. Not because he really believed Henkel won, but to give the "rag," as the phrase goes, to the betting cliques. As referees were— and still are— utilized only to separate the fighters when they threatened to fall asleep on one another's shoulders and "to count ten," betters had to depend upon the newspapers. And a fine time they had settling their monetary arguments.

"Hello, Hen!"

"That you, Morris?" Hennessy looked up at the clock. He had moved his desk so that he could always see the clock without having to turn his head around. "You had a fine hunch last night. How much did you get for giving that boob the decision?"

"Aw, you know Dorgan won by a mile. Come on over to Schmidt's. I've got a bit of cheerful for you."

"In ten minutes."

Morris glanced over the files of newspapers while Hennessy finished his story and devoted the remaining minutes to scissors and paste pot. He folded his "copy" once and carried it over to the city editor's desk.

"How about that tennis tournament?" asked the city editor.

"Rained last night. Nothing doing until to-morrow."

"Well, I don't suppose I'll lay eyes on you again to-day. But if you don't bring in that bowling match at eight by the clock you're always looking at, a. m., I'll fire you. There's no use paying you twenty per and letting Morris there do all your work."

"Piffle!"

"That's right," said Morris. "I ought to be drawing your pay, Hen. Come on."

The two young men, deadly enemies in public life, but Damon and Pythias in private, passed out of the building and crossed the street to Schmidt's. Schmidt owned what he called "The Press Café." He edited choice hops, and rye, and barley, and American grape, and loaned half of his profits to the improvident reporters who frequented his bar. His "business men's lunch" was the only thing that kept him from becoming a county charge.

"Two, and no collars," ordered Hennessy.

"And a couple of Pessimist cigars," added Morris generously.

"Now, what's your grand news?"

"Remember Hobart?"

"Sure. He was a kind of four-flusher, who did drama and books on your sheet, some years ago. Got a job last year, I understand, as press agent for the Rigtop One-ringed Circus. What's he want us to do— lend him money?"

"No. He broke his leg day before yesterday, and he has offered me fifty to do the press work for this town and see about the lot. And distribute free tickets to the boys and the city fathers." Morris beamed.

"Fifty dollars!" murmured Hennessy. "That's a lot of money for a bum sporting editor to make. What de you want to break the news to me for? Grudge?"

"Bum, eh? If I was in your class I'd hire out to teach parrots. You never wrote anything in your life that I didn't write the night before. Forget it. It's like this: I'm in wrong with the old codger who owns the only available lot. If L go to him, he's likely to soak me; and two-fifty is all the circus will stand. Now, I'll be decent, and give you twenty-five to make the deal with him, and I'll handle all the hard work, as usual."

"What could I do with a measly twenty-five?"

"You could square up with your landlady. Say, I'd like to see you two bricktops do a ten-round go? It would be worth watching."

Hennessy frowned and fumbled with his collar. "Moses has my pin this month. Got twelve until Monday ?"

"Twelve! You're an hour slow. Make it one. Why, Hen, I haven't the price of a shine."

"What do you do with your salary? You never have any money," aggrieved.

"I have a family to take care of."

Hennessy's beer went down the wrong way. "Whose?" he sputtered.

"My landlady's. Oh, it's the old yarn. I've been exercising the ponies."

"They never got a bone out of me. No blackboards for mine."

"I notice you're always trying to fill in a four-flush."

"I filled last week."

"I heard about that. Bentley caught his full house."

Hennessy tacked. "Got any contract from Hobart?"

"His letter."

"Let me see it." Hennessy read it carefully. He had had some experience with fighters' agreements, and thought he knew something about contracts. "Don't see Rigtop here anywhere. Better telegraph him and find out if he backs Hobart in this deal."

"Good idea."

"You can get a reply by three this afternoon, and I'll hike out to old man Warren and lease the lot. Two-fifty is the limit. All right. Twenty-five will pay for my vacation. Huh? Oh, charge it, Schmidt."

"Chee, how easy you fellers say dot! Charche it! Vy nod say forged it?"

"Aw, Schmidt!" said the two newspaper men in chorus.

"Some tay; ven somepody ties und leafs you money, I ged mine. It's a tough pusiness to haf cheniuses hanging arount a saloon. Ven you fellers come in, nopody hears der cash rechister make any music." Schmidt returned to the bar.

"Peeved, eh?" was Hennessy's comment.

"He's all right. He's only working himself up to ask some cub to settle his account. See you at the game this afternoon. So long."

Alone Hennessy fished out an envelope— which contained the bill for his winter suit— and began to do some figuring on the back. Twenty-five would hold off his landlady and take him up to Lake Ontario for the opening of the bass season. He knew a hotel where he could get board and boat and bait for twelve per. With the remains of the twenty-five and his two weeks' pay he could live like a prince. The circus would arrive the tenth of June. Next week he would pay the landlady something on account and let the tailor whistle. Tailors and undertakers always had to wait.

A few days later "the greatest one-ringed circus in the world" awoke the interest of the small boy. Posters and "three-sheets" and cotton banners began to appear on barns and fences. Dozens of beauteous ladies could be seen flying from trapeze to trapeze, five or six hundred feet above the ring, which was as large as the town reservoir, and some were leaping through paper hoops from the backs of wild dray horses; and strong men held up incredible weights; and there were fierce lions, and tigers, and gorillas, and toothsome hippopotamuses, and crocodiles, and boa constrictors, all cavorting in the loveliest jungle.

But standing aloof from all this bewildering scenery was a "single-sheet," portraying "the most learned elephant in captivity, Rajah, the royal Udaipur mastodon, mate in size to the lamented Jumbo, but vastly his superior in intelligence. Watch for the parade! June tenth!" What Udaipur meant even the erudite Hennessy never found out. It must have been a disease, or a brand, or a locality.

The days went on. Morris toiled like a beaver. He harried the local billposter until that gentleman began to mix the "three-sheets"; and no human being, eyen in the clutch of the most horrible nightmare, ever saw such a menagerie as bedecked some of the hoardings.

Hennessy pursued the even tenor of his way, watching the clock, which not only told the hours, but the days and months as well. His vacation had been arranged. He had varnished his rods and had purchased new tackle. There was nothing now but baseball, and that was easy, for Morris was always to be

relied upon for the percentages and the averages. All Hennessy had to do was to write the story of the game, which he did interestingly well. His vernacular was marvelous. He never repeated. It was as easy as falling off a log to state that Doyle picked up a hot biscuit and browned it to the first sackerino, from whence Miller took the hammer up and nailed Morgan on the all-but bag. The umpire said he was safe. Murphy then sprained three layers of new-mown air in trying to connect with Johnson's airship to the official stand. What's the matter with making umpires wear mourning?"

Yes, Hennessy was getting along nicely. He had invented a fine tale for his landlady, which was so good that she had concluded to let him believe that she ate it, rind and all. For she wasn't a bad landlady, not by any means; only she was like the boy, swift to anger and swift to forget.

Red hair is all right. Napoleon didn't have any, to be sure, but nine-tenths of Wellington's men wore plenty of it. Nobody knows what the color of George Washington's hair was, for in all the death scenes he died under a wig. But it - has been duly recorded that he had freckles.

So, but for his fiery top, Hennessy would never have stepped upon a pedestal in the local hall of fame. True, he wasn't always to remain there, but it was something to have climbed that far. Seventy-five years hence his name will be bandied to and fro by the oldest inhabitants, whenever a circus comes to town. When they die, oblivion. See any old poet on the longevity of fame.

ii

ON THE EVENING of the ninth of June Hennessy and Morris foregathered at Schmidt's for a game of pinochle. The former had nothing to do except to secure a copy of Professor Meyerbeer's lecture on "The Life of Prehistoric Granite," while Morris intended to witness "The Wife"—as given by the local stock company— from the program only. In fact, he had already written his criticism, and the office boy was carrying it around in his pocket until eleven o'clock should arrive.

In a provincial city, such as I write about, the sporting editor had other dignities thrust upon him. There were nights and days when nothing happened in the sporting world, and, in order to keep him from growing rusty, the city editor would give him general assignments, such as church fairs, weddings, fires, interviews with persons of importance who stopped the night at the best hotel, and Sunday sermons.

The sporting editor would accept these assignments without feeling any great loss of prestige; he was still the idol of the office boy; he was still the man who could go up to the ex-champion— when he came to town with a show—

and ask him what he thought of "Lanky Bob's" chances with the "Boilerman." No newspaper man lives who, at one time or another, hasn't wanted to be a sporting editor; unless, indeed, he was cut out for the ignoble job of writing book reviews.

The boys sat down at their usual table and started the game. There was a deadly side bet attached to-night. It was to settle the question as to who should collect the fifty from Mr. Rigtop. At eleven Morris laid down a "hundred aces," and the game was done. In other words, the ticklish job of corralling Mr. Rigtop and extracting fifty dollars from his funereal frock coat was left to Hennessy.

"I guess that'll hold you, Hen. If you hadn't been in such a hurry to 'meld' those sixty queens, you'd have won out on double pinochle."

"That was Schmidt. He was jawing over my shoulder," said the disgruntled Hennessy.

"Vy, I vanted you to vin," asserted the abused Schmidt. "Putt you blay. pinochle like a pullhead."

"Whats Rigtop look like?' asked Hennessy.

"Search me," answered Morris. "Hobart'll have to point him out to us. He wrote he'd be in here at nine to-morrow."

"Supposing he balks?"

"How can he? I've got Hobart's letter and Rigtop's telegram: Nothing more is needed."

"You made the contract with the bill-poster?"

"Nix. The telegram was enough for him. He went ahead on that."

"I guess that fifty looks good," sighed Hennessy. "Say, how do you ask a man for fifty dollars?"

"Quit kidding. Here, Schmidt," said Morris, reaching into a pocket; "here are four complimentaries for the circus to-morrow night. Take the frau and the whatchamucallits."

"Dot's fine! Vot'll you poys haf?"

If Morris had paid cash for the tickets and had emphasized the fact, Schmidt would have accepted them without comment. But there was something irresistibly magical in the word "complimentary." Somehow, it made him feel that he was intimately acquainted with Mr. Rigtop, and that he was lifted out of the common rut. Anybody could buy a ticket, but only a chosen few— about three hundred— were accorded the compliments of the showman. Schmidt added the name Rigtop to his vocabulary, and used it for months.

PROMPTLY at nine the next morning Hennessy and. his friend met Hobart. He carried a crutch, and the boys agreed that he looked rather seedy.

"Morris," he began, ."I'll introduce you to Mr. Rigtop this afternoon. Get a voucher from him and hand it into the ticket-wagon window after the crowd gets in."

"You're lookin' kind of punk," said Morris.

"And punk's the word." Hobart glanced around cautiously. "The truth is, we're up against it stone-hard. If it wasn't for our private train we couldn't move. Sheriffs are getting interested in our route."

Morris grew pale, while Hennessy bit off the wrong end of his cigar.

"Our fifty doesn't look good, eh?"

"Honestly, it doesn't."

Hennessy eyed his perfecto, a real Havana. Sadly he replaced it in his vest pocket. This was not the occasion, after all.

Hobart eased his leg. "I'm putting you fellows wise because we used to work together. If Rigtop refuses to pay, hike back to town as soon as you can and fix up paper for levying on the Rajah, the only thing in the show worth looking at. That's all I can say. I'll see you at the big top at two. It's up to you chaps to get your money."

"How about the bill-poster?"

"Same boat for him, too." And the ex-newspaper man hobbled out.

"Ain't it fierce?" breathed Morris hoarsely. "Fierce? Morris, I'll get the hook into this Rigtop person if it's the last thing I ever do. We'll attach the elephant."

"Hobson will stretch a point for us, after all we've done for him. We'll have the papers ready in case Rigtop renegs."

"He'll have to wake up milkman time to put this over on us. Let's get amove on." Hennessy was boiling with wrath,

At half after two they were introduced to Mr. Rigtop. Hobart, after the introduction, disappeared. Mr. Rigtop was very glad to see any of the newspaper boys. What? A telegram from him offering fifty for press work? Some mistake. His man Hobart had charge of that end of the business.

"I guess you'd better pay it, Mr. Rigtop," said Hennessy, the hair stirring at the base of his neck. "We've worked like nailers to boost this show, hired the lot and seen to the bill-posting."

"Let me see that telegram."

" 'No's' the word," replied Morris. "You'd probably say that the signature was a forgery. We want fifty dollars, peacefully if possible."

"What! You threaten?" Mr. Rigtop looked around for his "Hey-Rubes." "I tell you that I sent no telegram. I'll fire Hobart for this. If you two chaps took charge of the billing, you did it on your own. No blackmail for mine." And with

a flourish of his arm Mr. Rigtop entered the ticket wagon and slammed the door.

"The sneaking hound!" cried Hennessy, giving the door a kick.

"All right, Rigtop!" shouted Morris. "Come on, Hen. We'll show this duffer that there are some live ones in this town yet."

They boarded the trolley and rode back to town. Morris was strongly in favor of Nero, the lion, but Hennessy held out for the Rajah.

"I tell you, the elephant's the whole show, or Hobart wouldn't have tipped us off. We'll get Hobson to body-snatch the Rajah to-night. We can get fifty for his feet as umbrella stands any day in the week."

"All right. We'll attach the elephant. Rigtop'll come across when he sees his whole show walking off. The elephant for ours."

Which was the very thing Mr. Rigtop prayed and hoped for.

Hobson, the sheriff, in view of past favors, agreed to levy on the elephant until the affair could be settled in court. So, at eight that night, the three of them went out to the grounds and started a still hunt for the showman. They found him as he intended they should. The demand for fifty dollars was made again, and refused. Then the sheriff informed Mr. Rigtop that he would immediately attach the Rajah.

"We'll take your elephant!' bawled Hennessy, for the band was banging out a ragtime and he could hardly hear his own voice.

"The Rajah?" dismayed. "Why, gentlemen, you'll ruin my show."

"Fifty dollars!" cried Morris.

"I refuse to be blackmailed," returned the showman angrily. "If you take that elephant out of the tent you'll have the 'hottest time you ever ran up against." Mr. Rigtop re-entered the ticket wagon.

So far as he was concerned, the matter was closed. All the sheriffs could come if they wanted to. The only thing in the animal tent he could call his own was the llama, and nobody wanted the beast because it had the habit of puffing its food into the faces of the spectators.

Once out of this State he could get on his legs again. He did not worry about the Rajah. Indeed, he began to whistle a popular air from "Wang." He knew more about elephants than a thousand and one sheriffs. It had rained for weeks, and he was broke. It did not hurt his conscience— tough as a rhino's hide—that two improvident newspaper men would be held responsible for the lot and the billposting.

Said Hobson as they entered the animal tent: "Kinda seems too easy. He didn't make no great hullabaloo 's I suspected he would. Maybe th' elephant is dyin' or sick."

"He's all right. Old, maybe; but he-was spry enough in the parade this morning. We may have some trouble," Hennessy added.

"Not with me," said Hobson, pulling his Colt. "I've seen circuses before." Then he lamented: "Wish I'd seen th' show this afternoon. We'll have a chat with that Mohammydin— what d'y' call him— mayhoot? If we get an elephant on our hands we want t' know how t' feed him."

"There's truth in that," assented Morris. "Come along."

They found the Mohammedan mahout. He was taking off a bright red harness studded with brass nails. They introduced themselves and made known their business.

"My name is Cassidy," returned the mahout. He knew what was in the wind. "So ye're after the Rajah? Poor sowl! Well, well, so it's come at last? Yell be kind t' him till we kin sind fer him?"

"We'll get him a high chair and a fine nursing bottle,' Hennessy agreed, in fine feather. Wouldn't the town sit up and take notice? His glance ran over the Rajah. So close he looked fifty feet high and two million pounds, for he was a big' elephant, as elephants go. Came a day when these were trifling figures.

"An' don't lave him out av doors at night. He ketches cowld aisy. The show business has a har-rd world t' face. It's a wonder ye didn't levy on the side shows. They's more money in thim."

"The Rajah's our meal ticket."

"Aye, he will be." Cassidy patted the huge trunk. "Salaam, ye infant!" The Rajah curled up his trunk and made a noise like a rusty hinge in the wind.

"Can't you get any bigger noise out of him than that?" asked Hennessy, touching the elephant gingerly. Morris stood ten feet away.

"Not when he's peaceful. Whin do ye have yeer county fair?"

"In September. Why?"

"Well, if ye kape fee thot long, ye'll be makin' a wad. Eh, owld flabby sides?" poking the elephant playfully in the side with the butt end of the goad. "Yell be nadin' this shtick. Touch him as ye would a cavalry horse. Lift side, he goes right; an' vicey versy. Gintle as a lamb. Hes niver gone musth, They'll be the car-r at the sidin'. Ye kin put him aboord whin we sind fer him. An' ye'll want this rid harness, too. Now, mind, ye kin ride him as ye would the back shteps av a stame roller, he's thot gintle. Don't be afraid av him. A pail av wather or two in the marnin' an' the same at night. I've bin with him fer sivin years now, an' he's niver so much as shtepped on me cor-rns. Fifty dollars is a shmall sum agin' the bist iliphant thot iver ate his ton av hay; ate thousind, if a cint."

"Is that all you feed him?" asked Hennessy. Away down in his soul somewhere he was worried. This was going to be a bigger job than he had calculated ; but he'd die rather than back down at this late hour.

"Oh, he'll ate paynuts an' benannies an' grane stuff.". And Cassidy went on to explain the caretaking.

"Too easy, too easy," muttered the sheriff under his breath. There was a nigger in the woodpile somewhere, but just where he couldn't fathom.

"Where do you sit on him when you get on him?" asked Hennessy.

"Behint his ears. 'Tis aisy. Any ladder'll do the job. He won't move."

At twelve o'clock that night the Rajah was in the big box stall of the barn in the rear of the Grangers' Hotel. The mahout tenderly bade him farewell, and then hot-footed it for the train.

Three o'clock the following afternoon the local team, having won the toss, marched to the field. Hennessy and his partner, in the press stand, received the guying congratulations of the other reporters. They took it all good-naturedly. After all, they had waked up the town. Hennessy was sharpening his pencil, when Morris nudged him.

"There's' your boy."

"Where?"

"Coming down toward us."

When the boy espied Hennessy, he made a megaphone of his hands and bawled:

"Hey, Hennessy, your elephunt has broke loose!"

iii

THE TWO returned to town as soon as the trolley could take them. They saw a great crowd in Jones Street, a respectful crowd, be it added, packing the far side of the street to the curb, and leaving the thoroughfare itself free and unobstructed. In front of the Grangers' Hotel was the Rajah, fondling the contents of several ashcans and impatiently tossing aside the sardine tins. He was no goat. Three or four policemen kept— or pretended to keep— the public from getting within the danger zone. Hennessy and Morris were appalled. Nobody seemed to know what to do. The care of elephants evidently was not down on the police regulations.

"What's happened?" gasped Morris of the hotel proprietor.

"Happened?" roared that indignant person. "Why, your darned elephant simply walked out of the barn about an hour ago, carrying the box stall and the doorframe with him. Happened!"

"Maybe he was lonesome," suggested Morris. "Did you feed him?" turning upon Hennessy.

"Feed him?" cried Hennessy. "I thought you'd given orders for the hay. The old brute is hungry."

"I told you to take the lion," whispered Morris.

"Shut up!" hissed Hennessy. He was Irish and possessed a fertile imagination. "You run around to the wagon maker and get some chains and a stout post, and bring him along, too."

Morris rushed off, grasping the idea. Chains, anything to hold the elephant. On his part, Hennessy ran back to the barn, or what was left of it, and secured the goad, returning breathless and hatless. Which end should he use first? Should he be conciliatory or peremptory? The elephant now looked as high as the hotel. When this was all over he would tell Morris just what he thought of him. He was to blame for all this muddle. Fifty dollars! Both of them would remain in debt for the rest of their lives. They couldn't sell the elephant, they couldn't rent him; he was simply an attachment, a legal proceeding by which they protected their fifty dollars. And they might have to keep him until Rigtop died, which Hennessy hoped would be on the morrow.

He paused about ten feet east of the Rajah's port. His coarse red hair shone fiery in the sunshine. Silence fell upon the spectators, The little murmurings died away. They waited expectantly for the tragedy to begin. Here was going to be something they could hand down to their descendants, along with the antique furniture, the wax flowers, and the family albums.

The Rajah eyed that red head. It was the only familiar thing he had seen since yesterday; for Cassidy had a red top also. Next, the Rajah espied the goad. He waggled his frayed ears. Red-headed Irishmen with goads were bad propositions. Nevertheless, he was hungry and thirsty. He lifted a hind leg. The young man with the goad did not stir or speak. The Rajah lifted his fore leg. Still the young man made no move. The elephant was puzzled. He began to sway irresolutely. Then an idea entered his pachydermous-bound skull. He rolled up his trunk and let out that hingelike noise.

Then Hennessy did a truly brave thing. He knew that he was going to his death. He vaguely wondered whether the elephant would throw him over the post office, a block away, or trample him, The fact that there were a thousand pairs of eyes upon him screwed up his courage to the Homeric point. He murmured a long-forgotten prayer, stepped briskly forward, and poked the Rajah amidship. The Rajah wheeled and shuffled toward the alley-way out of which he had come. Hennessy, laughing hysterically, followed with a good batting average on the hindquarters of the Rajah. The *vox populi* rang wildly up and down Jones Street.

Morris, followed by the wagon maker, both staggering under a load of chains, any one of which would have tethered a drove of wild elephants, let alone a peaceful one, hove around the corner. Such are the moods of fickle fame. He had arrived too late. The hero of the hour was one Hennessy, sporting editor and- mahout, pro tem.

"Hay!" shouted Hennessy.

The Rajah had gone directly into what remained of the box stall.

Somebody dashed up to the loft and" dropped down a pressed bale. Hennessy broke the wires with his goad. The Rajah reached for a mouthful.

"He's eating!' cried Morris, waving his hands toward the crowd, which gradually dissolved, now that the Neronic possibilities were vanished from the scene.

"Aw, he's all right," said Hennessy. "The beggar was hungry, that was all. If you'd have given him his hay this morning, all this fuss would not have happened." He patted the Rajah's starboard side. "Salaam!" he bawled out, with sudden recollection. Up went the trunk, still curled about some hay, and out came the incredible squeak.

Morris wiped the perspiration from his brow and backed away.

"Drive the stake there," commanded Hennessy, pointing to a spot of earth.

The wagon maker obeyed energetically. He was greatly desirous of returning to his shop. He felt it in his bones that customers were just filling the doors, calling for axles and hubs and spokes.

"Now, put that chain around it so it won't come off."

It was done.

"And help me to tie it around his leg."

"Not me," said the wagon maker.

"What are you afraid of?" jeered Hennessy. "You, Morris, anyhow. I'm danged if I'll do all the work myself." Morris had always been bragging about his revolutionary ancestors; but he hesitated.

"Huh!" said Hennessy. "I bet your great-grandfather was a sutler. Get a gait on you."

After a quarter of an hour's labor the two succeeded in adjusting the chain; and for the present the Rajah was safe. 'True, he might take the whole barn with him the next time; but that was on the knees of the gods.

On returning to the office, Hennessy applied for his two weeks' vacation. He felt that he was going to need fourteen days right away.

Morris wrote a great story for the *Morning Standard*, which was wired to the press association. From Portland, Maine, to Portland, Oregon, Hennessy's deed became known. Morris made his friend one of the heroes of modern times; but he could not resist a joke or two, which Hennessy, from his lofty

pinnacle, declined to notice. He bought the *Mirror* and the *Clipper*, and hunted "dates ahead." The Rigtop was "billed" for Erie on the eighteenth. Hennessy wrote a letter, stating that he would keep the elephant exactly fourteen days. If, after that time, the fifty was not forthcoming, he would immediately procure authority to sell the elephant to the first man who wanted one. This was final. There was no reply.

Every morning for a week Hennessy went over and visited the Rajah. He gave him bananas and peanuts, and the great beast, while he mourned the absence of his keeper, took a fancy to the slim young man who could say nothing more intelligent than "Salaam!" But he knew, deep down in his big heart, that there was a bond between him and the blue-eyed, red-headed young fellow, the bond of loneliness. On the third day Hennessy unchained him and exercised him up and down the alleyway. The Rajah obeyed every move of the goad. He recognized two other things besides the loneliness— that his new master was kind and unafraid. Moreover, he had not had so much hay in all his circus days. He "whuffed" along the dust: His first vacation in forty-four years. Of course, he missed the music and the routine; but what were these compared to the present peace and quiet?

The Rajah was not jungle-born. He had come into this world of sin and care in the Antwerp Gardens, and from the time they had hoisted him aboard the big freighter until now he had had no rest. Sometimes, in the hot afternoons, when the band in the big top had stopped, he had dreamed, and in these dreams he had seen great reaches of rolling land, covered with vast forests, stretches of desert and blinding sand, wonderful birds, screaming monkeys, sleek tigers— unlike those in the cages— and shallow streams wherein his brothers and sisters lolled all the day. Then, into the heart of these pleasant dreams would come that abominable harness and the disgraceful exhibitions, such as standing on his hind legs on barrels, ringing a bell, sitting at a table, and pretending to drink from a battered bottle made of wood. Whuff!

The whole town was on the "who lives," as the French say. The circulation of the morning paper had increased, for everybody arose in hopes of learning that the tragedy had taken place. The new left-handed pitcher had arrived without creating more than a flutter among the fanatics. The temperance agitation didn't agitate. On Saturday Hennessy boldly paraded the elephant around the post office, and came near being arrested for not having a circus license. On the eighth day, so far as the public was concerned, the interest began to wane. The Rajah up to date hadn't killed anything but time.

Hennessy used to drop into the office about noon. The boys had ceased to whistle:

When the band, begins to play
And the elephant goes around!

The pastime threatened to prove unhealthy. For Hennessy had promised to "knock the block off the first man who whistles that tune again." He was sitting at his desk, idly musing, when the proprietor of the Granger. Hotel entered and laid down a sheet of paper, upon which was neatly written:

To hay for one elephant.....	$40
at $20 the ton	
Carpenters and lumber, repairs.....	$32
	$72

"What's this?" demanded Hennessy, laying down his pipe.

"Can't you read?" countered the proprietor.

"Send it to Rigtop. The Rajah isn't my elephant."

"But I guess you'll pay this bill, though. The elephant's yours until Rigtop sends for him. Seventy-two dollars to-morrow night, or no more hay."

"But I may get a draft from Rigtop any day now. I guess you can hold your horses until I get my end. Besides, there's. Morris. He's in on this for half."

"Where'll I find him, then?"

"Oh, about two, in the editorial room of the *Morning Standard*."

But Morris had gone directly to the ball grounds upon leaving his hall bedroom, "The proprietor of the Granger Hotel found Hennessy at Schmidt's later.

"I'm going to give you twenty-four hours to settle. If you don't, out goes that elephant."

"All right. Put him out. Fine job. Look here; be a sport. You don't pay your bills but once a month. Why do you jump on me?"

"Well, I don't want that brute in the barn. He frightens the horses; and guests can hear the chains rattling all night, I'll tell you what I'll do. Take him somewhere else and I'll split the bill in half."

"I'll make a stab at it," Hennessy agreed,

But a large and resonant negative met him in the other fourteen wards of the city. And no mail from Rigtop. It began to look serious. Morris and Hennessy practically "roomed" at Schmidt's trying to figure out where they stood.

"Vy don't you raffle him?" suggested the saloon keeper.

"No joshing, Schmidt," growled Hennessy, rubbing the calluses on his palms. Carrying water twice a day for the Rajah was no sinecure.

"Vell, you haf an elephant on your hants alreaty, und you vant to ged rit uff him. Vy don't you?"

Hennessy ignored him. "And there's that old skinflint Warren; he's after me now. But he can go hang. He got his voucher from Rigtop, and it's not my fault if the ticket wagon had disappeared when he got around to it."

"Let him holler."

Castle, the bill-poster, came in, flushed and out of breath. He made for Morris.

"Say, looky here. Where's that dub Rigtop? I've sent me bill to him five times and not a rise. He told me that he'd send a money order from Erie. Three hundred dollars."

Morris and Hennessy gazed sadly at each other. It was a hard world.

"Do you mean to tell us that you let him put you off?" demanded Hennessy. "You've handled circuses for ten years, and ought to know that you get your cash before they take down the tent, or you don't get it."

"You're the dub that made me so easy," volleyed the billposter, shaking his finger at Morris. "I took your word for it that I'd get my pay."

"Say, sit down," urged Hennessy. "Three, Schmidt."

Schmidt brought three very small ones. Hennessy eyed him savagely, but said nothing.

"Let's get together on the thing. Morris here and I were promised fifty to see that you did your work well, feed the deadheads, and lease the lot. Rigtop has shied the whole shooting match."

"I told you to attach the lion," said Morris sadly.

"You wall-eyed pike! What! A lion on our hands and sirloins at thirty-four the pound ?"

"You wouldn't have had to feed him sirloins."

"No; but as soon as the butchers saw how we were fixed, meat bones would go kiooting. Be joyful; cheer up. Hay is steady at twenty the ton. Now, listen. The bill for hay is forty. Perhaps we give him too much. I don't know. Anyhow, it keeps him quiet. The damage to the barn is thirty-two. Fifty and three hundred and seventy-two make four hundred and twenty-two dollars. The Rajah's got to dig that up for us.'

"Lord's name, and how?" asked Castle.

"I don't know; but something's got to be done. I don't like this business. There is something shady about it. That four-flusher Hobart was surely in on it. It was he who steered us into the elephant. Hobson says it was all too easy. And, on top of all this, the district attorney is hunting up the law to see if the city can't get something out of the Rajah's hide. He claims we ought to pay a license fee of some kind. And the chief of police has warned me that if any one

gets hurt I'll be held responsible. That's because I'm taking care of him. What can we do? My lawyer says I can't sell the elephant without hearing from Rigtop first."

"Three hundred!" wailed Castle, for there would not be any more fat contracts until the regular theatrical season opened in the fall.

"I've got it!" cried Hennessy, banging the table with his fist. 'We'll use old rubber sides for advertising purposes."

"How?"

"Listen."

iv

THE MANAGER of the Imperial Drygoods Store listened attentively. He had heard all about the elephant.

"Not half bad, Mr. Hennessy; but a hundred a day is pretty stiff."

"All right," said Hennesy, getting up. "If you can't recognize a good thing when it's passed up to you, that's your affair. Why, the free advertising you'll get out of it is worth a hundred alone. The whole State has heard about it. One hundred or nothing."

"Wait just a moment until I call up Mr. Hann." The manager caught up the telephone and talked lowly for a minute. He turned with a smile. "Very well, Mr. Hennessy. We engage to pay you one hundred for the Rajah tomorrow. We'll have the side banners painted at once. You agree to lead the elephant up and down Main Street, once in the morning and once in the afternoon, the hundred to be paid at five o'clock."

"There's the contract. If the Rajah kicks, you can. I'm taking that chance."

From the Imperial he started over to the Sheehan-Cort Company. He met Morris coming out, beaming.

"Got a bully contract from them; two-fifty for Friday, day after to-morrow."

"But I only said a hundred," was Hennessy's protest. "We can't charge one price to the Imperial and another to the Sheehan people."

"Yes; but this is an extra contract. Cort—"

"Oh, yes; I know Cort. Some snide game. He's got it in for me. I guyed him in the paper the time his auto broke down between town and the country club, and he and his chorus girls had to walk in. What did you agree to?"

"Two-fifty if you'd ride the elephant from Jones' up to the canal."

"You blamed jackass!" exploded Hennessy. "Well, what are you afraid of? You've been bragging about what you could do. Do it." Morris was crafty.

The Irish blood in Hennessy began to mount. "All right, you fish. I'll ride him if it breaks my neck. But when we're squared up, you see a lot of your share of the cash."

"I'm only looking out for our interests."

"And I'm looking out for my neck."

They walked along the street, arguing, with a crowd of newsboys at their heels. They were almost as popular as a pair of prize fighters. By the time the two had reached the barn Hennessy had forgiven. He went into the stall, and the Rajah "salaamed," lifted his hind leg and fore leg, and was as amiable as could be.

"I don't see how you do it, Hen," said Morris, in frank admiration.

"I guess I can ride him."

"Telephone call for you, Mr. Hennessy," said the bell boy, coming into the barn.

It was from the chief of the police.

"This you, Hennessy?"

"Yep."

"What's this I hear about you riding that elephant up and down Main?"

"Has Cort been phoning you?"

"Never mind how I found out."

Hennessy put his hand over the phone and turned to Morris. "Cort has told the chief, thinking he'd stop the thing, so he could break the contract. I'll fool him." Into the phone he said: "Aw, chief, there isn't any danger. He's as gentle as a lamb. Children used to ride him as they did Jumbo. He minds me as if I'd always been his trainer. Don't queer us, chief. We're only trying to break even."

"Forget it. Supposin' he runs amuck, as they say?"

"He's got rheumatism," lied Hennesy, "and can't run."

"I'll tell you what. To-night at seven I'll drop over. If you can ride him up and down the alleyway without killing any one, I'll let you go ahead."

"That's fair enough. Be here prompt at seven, then." Hennessy hung up the telephone and mused. He was like a bather. The water was cold. Should he take a plunge or not? They were closing in on him. If he backed out now, he'd have to leave town. He would never hear the last of it. But it was hard to die so young.

At seven the chief and two patrolmen stood at the entrance of the alleyway, ready to hike, should the situation warrant hiking. The alleyway was hazy with the soft dusk of summer twilight. They squinted, but could not see very well, for the Rajah was of the same weather-beaten drab as the barn. They heard a squeak and a "Hey, old-rubber sides!" And then they saw the

elephant's bulk take form as it came forward, They did not recognize the white patch over the elephant's head, but they knew it to belong to Hennessy. It was his face, pale as the new moon. The Rajah passed the uneasy officials, swung to port, and went as far as the post office; then he came about, and three minutes later was securely chained for the night.

"All right," said the chief. "But don't take any chances. From Jones Street up Main to the canal and back. How'd you get on him?"

"Ladder."

"You can't beat the Irish," admitted the chief, as he climbed into his buggy and drove away.

Hennessy sat down on the curb. He was glad that he was alone. His legs would no longer support him. He had actually done it; he, Hennessy, had got upon the elephant all by himself. The church steeple wasn't in it. He had died ten thousand deaths, and yet here he was, alive and actually hungry.

I repeat, this is a veracious tale. Like Æneas, I may say that I saw all of it and was of necessity part of it. As a matter of fact, I was the cub who first started to whistle:

When the band begins to play
And the elephant goes around!

I was also the first to cease firing, Hennessy is to-day a power in politics, honest and fearless, and Morris is piloting a budding prize fighter toward the goal of championship, and making more money than Hennessy and myself put together. They never mention the Rajah. As a subject it is taboo. But whenever Hennessy goes to New York There! I am wandering away from the tale proper.

The parade began at ten-thirty. The Rajah shuffled up Main, the huge side banners showing vividly.

THE IMPERIAL DRY-GOODS STORE
HAS NO ELEPHANT ON ITS HANDS
SPECIAL HOUR SALES UNTIL FIVE

Hennessy, his heart full of bitter pride, marched along, touching the elephant encouragingly from time to time and passing out a banana whenever the long drab proboscis turned to the rearward. Grimly he recognized that there was one bright spot in all this; he wasn't in love. Any girl would have given him the go-by, or she would have rushed out into the street and wept upon his shoulders, which would have been far worse. One thing was certain: this punk town would know a man hereafter when they saw him. Besides, if he could work this game for a week, he'd be richer than he had ever been before.

A thousand boys formed the main procession. When the Rajah tacked and reversed the order of his going, they scattered like water bugs when you drop a stone into the pool. But presently they formed and followed as far as the barn.

The proprietor of the Granger Hotel mused upon the ways of humanity. Never had his luncheons been so popular, The diners not only wanted to see the elephant at close range, but they wanted a near view of the amateur mahout who had had his picture in the New York Sunday papers.

THAT NIGHT Hennessy and his friend fondled the check from the Imperial. It was handsomely lithographed, and was worth exactly what it called for, one hundred dollars. Meanwhile, Castle had delivered his ultimatum. He would hold Morris liable for the three hundred, if by the first of the week he did not hear from Rigtop.

"You see how it is, Hen."

"Yes, Morris. If the Rajah doesn't break my neck Saturday, I think we can pull out of the rut. But you hand it out to the bunch that I'm going to take no more joshing. I'm just aching for a fight."

"AII right; I'll tip 'em off when yow're peevish."

"And you tell Sheehan-Cort that Friday will have to be Saturday. The Bellevue Real-estate Company has closed for to-morrow and Friday at one-fifty a day. All I have to do is to lead the Rajah out to their dinky park and fed him hay. Chain him, you know, and make him salaam a few times. Thousand'll take the trolley out. Cash at night each day."

"By Jingo, Hen, it looks great. If this keeps up, we'll have some real money."

"If we can get rid of the Rajah quick enough. What's worrying me is, supposing Rigtop never sends for him?"

"We can go to law, then. Sell him to some zoo. If he's worth eight thousand, we can surely sell him for half that. Lets see. One hundred to-day, three from the Bellevue people, and two-fifty from the Sheehan-Cort—six hundred and fifty. And suppose we pay Castle; that'll leave one-seventy-five apiece."

"It would be great, if I was sure it wasn't going to end in my funeral. These elephants are queer birds. They always kill those they love best, and I don't know but old rubber sides is beginning to take a shine to me. He salaams every time I enter the stall. Well, what's the difference?" philosophically. "There's no one to care but my landlady, and her affections are worth just three weeks' board. The hired girl put an extra prune in my dish this morning for breakfast. That's fame!"

Saturday was a memorable day. The morning paper had carried a full-page advertisement, stating that at ten o'clock

"Hennessy, the mahout," would ride the Rajah from Jones Street up Main to the Erie Canal. There would be special bargains every hour until eleven that night. The Sheehan-Cort Company never missed a chance to instruct and benefit its patrons.

A score of policemen lined Main Street. The Saturday bargaining crowd is always large in a provincial town, but on this occasion it was abnormal. The country people had come in for the markets, the schoolchildren and the unruly urchins, everybody in town who was anybody, waited and watched the clock in the savings-bank tower. "There he comes!" echoed and re-echoed. But it was eleven before "the extraordinary spectacle" hove in sight. There were cheers. Hennessy, in order to give full measure, had contrived to put on the Rajah's gaudy harness. It had taken some time and some mathematics. The Rajah was interested. This meant parade, and formerly his one happy hour was shuffling through the crowded streets, out in the sunshine.

How Hennesy got behind the Rajah's ears is history. The ladder broke. For a while the redoubtable amateur was stumped. Finally he and Morris succeeded in tying a rope from the hayloft. Down this Hennessy slid to the broad back, of the elephant.

"Gimme the goad," said Hennessy. He shook it triumphantly, but as he did so the steel barb fell off and left in his hand nothing more dangerous than the end of a broomstick. He didn't appreciate this at the time, but the Rajah did. He was a wily old boy, and, aged as he was, was not without his pachydermous humor. Besides, he felt Hennessy's legs tremble behind his ears. Elephants are like horses. A man of courage may do as he pleases, and it is not well that the brute should sense fear in his rider. Now, Hennessy was not afraid. He was terribly nervous. The breaking of the ladder had shaken him, and he hadn't been sure of landing on the Rajah's back, via the rope. Once in the street, however, his courage was of a high order.

But if the Rajah had seemed a hundred feet high the other night he was miles high in the daylight. Hennessy recalled some pictures he had seen of the Alps. He hung somewhere between the Matterhorn and the Gornergrat. There was, however, the blood of County Antrim backing him in his exploit, and he was confident of both himself and the elephant.

The Rajah obeyed the erstwhile goad, turned into Main Street, and slowly and solemnly made headway toward the canal, which was about six hundred yards to the north. He cocked his ears up now and then, wondering why the band didn't begin. Hennessy's long legs saved him; otherwise he would have

lost his balance and gone overboard. By putting his left hand back he could catch hold of the harness, and there was a sense of security in that.

The parade was a huge success as far as the Erie Canal. In the public square, which faced the canal, there stood a fountain. It was not as wide as a church door nor as deep as a well, but it was sufficient for the calamity which followed. The Rajah scented the water, and he headed for it, impervious to the whacks of the now useless goad. The Rajah arrived. So did the crowd, the police, and the ambulance, which, ghoul-like, saw a possible emergency case.

The Rajah drew in several gallons of water and washed out his mouth. Then he drew in several more gallons and squirted it along his sides. The crowd yelled delightedly. Hennessy might as well have attacked a carpet as the Rajah's skull. He rested his aching arm, and waited. Not for long. Once more the Rajah drew in water. *Blash*! Hennessy yelled this time, but the crowd shrieked. And again, *blash*! Hennessy, half strangled, laid down with his face against the elephant's raspy, warm head. One could hear the laughter for miles.

And then Hennessy had his revenge. The Rajah, as if sorry for the ridicule he had heaped upon his friend, turned his attention to the crowd. My! but there was a scattering and a tumbling to get out of range. The Rajah could throw water like a fire tower. A fat lady fainted, and the funeral directors who owned the ambulance were rewarded for their foresight. After this, the Rajah washed his feet, like the good Mohammedan he was.

And then, into the silence which had suddenly fallen upon everybody, the Rajah heard music. Somehow or other he must have missed the main parade. He swung westward, toward the sound, along the street which faced the canal. *Boom-boom-boom*! went a bass drum. There was also the tinkle of a tambourine and the umpaha of a jaded trombone.

Now it came to pass that the Salvation Army, realizing the possibilities of such an enormous crowd, had come out with the intent of making conversions on a magnificent scale. They had as usual taken their stand in front of a saloon. Next door, east, was Desimone's fruit and vegetable shop.

Behind the bass drum the Rajah paused. The Salvationists, who had not expected to bring an elephant around to their way of thinking, fled simultaneously and precipitately down the street toward the towpath. All save the drummer. *Boom-boom-boom*! He went on banging away with closed eyes. He was making so much noise that he did not notice the sudden cessation of the tambourine and the trombone. A puff of moist, hot air, such as might come from a clothes boiler on Monday, stirred the hair at the base of the drummer's "neck. He looked around peevishly. That one look was enough. The quickest

thing he ever did was to get rid of that drum; the second quickest thing was the air-line route he selected for the first canal bridge.

As for Hennessy, he had "put his house in order,' as the saying goes. At any moment the Rajah might throw him off. And he dared not slip off himself. So he waited.

Meanwhile the Rajah eyed the oranges and bananas and crisp lettuce. He selected carefully— after the manner of shrewd housewives— the largest and crispest bunch of lettuce and ate it with supreme relish.

Desimone shrilled: '"Poleece!' He shook his fist at Hennessy. "Poleece! He steala my lettuce! Poleece! *Subito*, *subito*! Villanzone!" As this did not suffice, he appealed to all his Calabrian saints.

"Forget it!" snarled Hennessy, tossing down a ten-dollar bill, the only one he had in the world. He threw it away thus carelessly because he knew that he was never going to need ten-dollar bills any more. Having prepared to die, he had recovered his nonchalance.

Desimone waved his apron. "*Va*, *va*!"

The Rajah took up a fat beet, swung it to and fro, like a hammer thrower at a track meet, and flung it far into the canal. He was having the time of his life. He did not mean any harm; he was merely full of that mischief which besets a puppy. Next, he began to juggle the oranges. He caught hold of a leg of the stand and drew it toward him. A golden torrent flowed into the gutter. By this time the Italian was weeping. He was ruined, now and forever after. The Black Hand was back of this, somewhere.

"Hennessy," shouted a policeman, from a safe distance, "get that brute back to the stables or I'll arrest you."

"Arrest me? Kerry, I'll give you ten if you will. I can't do anything with the old codger. Get the hook-and-ladder and take me off."

The Rajah ate all the lettuce in sight, and then looked for further amusement. He espied the drum. He picked it up, and of his own accord wheeled and shuffled for Main Street. Hennessy whacked him on the left side, and the elephant turned down the thoroughfare, willing enough. He had had his fun, and he was now ready to obey the man behind his ears.

So, why speak of the thousands that followed the pair to the barn? Why refer to the undignified descent of the amateur mahout? Or that the Rajah took the bass drum with him into the stall and declined to surrender the mellifluous souvenir?

But Hennessy's troubles weren't over yet, not by any means. The chief of police gave him twenty-four hours to rid the town of the elephant. On Monday morning he would be shot as a menace to public safety. Morris sent a dozen

telegrams, but none "scared up" Rigtop. The telegraph company, however, assured him that all the wires had been received.

The *Evening Herald* published a Sunday paper. Hennessy came into the editorial rooms about nine that night. He looked careworn. Seated by the city editor's desk were three men. But Hennessy, usually so curious, gave them no heed. How was he going to save poor old rubber sides? To be shot Monday morning, when he hadn't hurt any one! Why, he was going to miss that old elephant like sixty. He hadn't done anything but squirt water on the crowd, and many of them needed it. And as for Desimone's shop, the ten would cover all the damages. It wasn't square—

"Hennessy!"

"All right," mechanically. "What's wanted?"

"These gentlemen here want to see you."

"What about? More bills?"

"Its about your blasted elephant. You take another two weeks to-morrow. Don't poke your nose into this office until I send for you. Get out of town. Fade away. This gentleman here," indicating the dapper man of the three, "is the attorney representing a Mr. Tredwell. The other two are from the Brinx Zoo."

"What?"

"Yes, Mr. Hennessy. We'd like to talk with you."

"All right. Come over to Schmidt's."

Hennessy called up Morris and Castle.

The story was simply told. Rigtop had mortgaged the Rajah to Mr. Tredwell for four thousand, and the elephant belonged to him by default. In turn he had sold the elephant to the Brinx Zoo, and the two dark-bearded gentlemen were trainers. They would put the Rajah on his car Monday morning.

Hennessy reached into his pocket and exhibited the bill from the proprietor of the Granger Hotel. "When did this go by default?" he inquired cautiously.

"On June tenth."

"In that case your zoo will have to foot this bill. We are not responsible."

"Hm!" said the attorney, adjusting his glasses. "Forty for hay—"

"There's twenty more not there," interposed Hennessy.

"Ha! Well, sixty and thirty-two make ninety-two. Very well, Mr. Hennessy. We'll pay that. But, on the other hand, we'll have to ask you for the six hundred odd dollars you've made, as the elephant was ours at the time of the transaction."

Hennessy looked at Morris; Castle looked at the two. Hennessy, almost a nervous wreck from the strenuous day, laid his head on his arms. He was all in.

The attorney reached over and patted the young man's shoulder. "Cheer up! You've got the, right kind of stuff in you, my boy; and any time you're out

of a job, write Mulligan here, and he'll fix you up. I have in my pocket here one thousand as a maximum for damages, and so forth. I'll pay the bill, and you chaps can keep the six hundred, and welcome."

"Hey, Schmidt!" yelled Hennessy. "Bring the silver bucket!"

End