PAST MASTERS 173

Arthur Machen
John Kendrick Bangs
Warwick Deeping
Peter Cheyney
Grant Allen
Stanley G Weinbaum
Ernest Favenc
P C Wren

and more

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

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1: The Bowmen

Arthur Machen

Arthur Llewellyn Jones, 1863-1947

The (London) Evening News 29 Sep 1914

Legenday short story, a vignette really, which was published in a popular evening newspaper immediately after the Retreat from Mons of August-September 1914. The story soon assumed a life of its own, often mistaken as a genuine report of an occult event.

IT WAS DURING the Retreat of the Eighty Thousand, and the authority of the Censorship is sufficient excuse for not being more explicit. But it was on the most awful day of that awful time, on the day when ruin and disaster came so near that their shadow fell over London far away; and, without any certain news, the hearts of men failed within them and grew faint; as if the agony of the army in the battlefield had entered into their souls.

On this dreadful day, then, when three hundred thousand men in arms with all their artillery swelled like a flood against the little English company, there was one point above all other points in our battle line that was for a time in awful danger, not merely of defeat, but of utter annihilation. With the permission of the Censorship and of the military expert, this corner may, perhaps, be described as a salient, and if this angle were crushed and broken, then the English force as a whole would be shattered, the Allied left would be turned, and Sedan would inevitably follow.

All the morning the German guns had thundered and shrieked against this corner, and against the thousand or so of men who held it. The men joked at the shells, and found funny names for them, and had bets about them, and greeted them with scraps of music-hall songs. But the shells came on and burst, and tore good Englishmen limb from limb, and tore brother from brother, and as the heat of the day increased so did the fury of that terrific cannonade. There was no help, it seemed. The English artillery was good, but there was not nearly enough of it; it was being steadily battered into scrap iron.

There comes a moment in a storm at sea when people say to one another, "It is at its worst; it can blow no harder," and then there is a blast ten times more fierce than any before it. So it was in these British trenches.

There were no stouter hearts in the whole world than the hearts of these men; but even they were appalled as this seven-times-heated hell of the German cannonade fell upon them and overwhelmed them and destroyed them. And at this very moment they saw from their trenches that a tremendous host was moving against their lines. Five hundred of the thousand remained, and as far as they could see the German infantry was pressing on

against them, column upon column, a grey world of men, ten thousand of them, as it appeared afterwards.

There was no hope at all. They shook hands, some of them. One man improvised a new version of the battlesong, "Good-bye, good-bye to Tipperary," ending with "And we shan't get there". And they all went on firing steadily. The officers pointed out that such an opportunity for high-class, fancy shooting might never occur again; the Germans dropped line after line; the Tipperary humorist asked, "What price Sidney Street?" And the few machine guns did their best. But everybody knew it was of no use. The dead grey bodies lay in companies and battalions, as others came on and on and on, and they swarmed and stirred and advanced from beyond and beyond.

"World without end. Amen," said one of the British soldiers with some irrelevance as he took aim and fired. And then he remembered— he says he cannot think why or wherefore— a queer vegetarian restaurant in London where he had once or twice eaten eccentric dishes of cutlets made of lentils and nuts that pretended to be steak. On all the plates in this restaurant there was printed a figure of St. George in blue, with the motto, *Adsit Anglis Sanctus Geogius*— May St. George be a present help to the English. This soldier happened to know Latin and other useless things, and now, as he fired at his man in the grey advancing mass— 300 yards away— he uttered the pious vegetarian motto. He went on firing to the end, and at last Bill on his right had to clout him cheerfully over the head to make him stop, pointing out as he did so that the King's ammunition cost money and was not lightly to be wasted in drilling funny patterns into dead Germans.

For as the Latin scholar uttered his invocation he felt something between a shudder and an electric shock pass through his body. The roar of the battle died down in his ears to a gentle murmur; instead of it, he says, he heard a great voice and a shout louder than a thunder-peal crying, "Array, array, array!"

His heart grew hot as a burning coal, it grew cold as ice within him, as it seemed to him that a tumult of voices answered to his summons. He heard, or seemed to hear, thousands shouting: "St. George! St. George!"

"Ha! messire; ha! sweet Saint, grant us good deliverance!"

"St. George for merry England!"

"Harow! Harow! Monseigneur St. George, succour us."

"Ha! St. George! Ha! St. George! a long bow and a strong bow."

"Heaven's Knight, aid us!"

And as the soldier heard these voices he saw before him, beyond the trench, a long line of shapes, with a shining about them. They were like men

who drew the bow, and with another shout their cloud of arrows flew singing and tingling through the air towards the German hosts.

The other men in the trench were firing all the while. They had no hope; but they aimed just as if they had been shooting at Bisley. Suddenly one of them lifted up his voice in the plainest English, "Gawd help us!" he bellowed to the man next to him, "but we're blooming marvels! Look at those grey… gentlemen, look at them! D'ye see them? They're not going down in dozens, nor in 'undreds; it's thousands, it is. Look! look! there's a regiment gone while I'm talking to ye."

"Shut it!" the other soldier bellowed, taking aim, "what are ye gassing about!"

But he gulped with astonishment even as he spoke, for, indeed, the grey men were falling by the thousands. The English could hear the guttural scream of the German officers, the crackle of their revolvers as they shot the reluctant; and still line after line crashed to the earth.

All the while the Latin-bred soldier heard the cry: "Harow! Harow! Monseigneur, dear saint, quick to our aid! St. George help us!"

"High Chevalier, defend us!"

The singing arrows fled so swift and thick that they darkened the air; the heathen horde melted from before them.

"More machine guns!" Bill yelled to Tom.

"Don't hear them," Tom yelled back. "But, thank God, anyway; they've got it in the neck."

In fact, there were ten thousand dead German soldiers left before that salient of the English army, and consequently there was no Sedan. In Germany, a country ruled by scientific principles, the Great General Staff decided that the contemptible English must have employed shells containing an unknown gas of a poisonous nature, as no wounds were discernible on the bodies of the dead German soldiers. But the man who knew what nuts tasted like when they called themselves steak knew also that St. George had brought his Agincourt Bowmen to help the English.

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2: The Ghost in the Bank of England

Anonymous

Stories from London Society, Christmas Annual 1879

A novelette in the Christmas ghost story tradition

AND WHY NOT in the Bank of England? If I had said in some rained Rhenish castle, or in some ancient graveyard, or on some lonely wind-swept moor where murderers have swung and rattled their bones in chains, the question would not be worth asking. Nay, there are places in London where a dream-haunted man who walks the streets arm in arm with the past would expect to meet ghosts whose name is legion. If Tower Hill be not the very Brocken, the very heart and centre of ghostland, then these unhappy spirits must indeed be left without a home. If ghosts be memories struggling hard against burial, and giving life to places where life and death have been more strongly intensified than elsewhere, then must the ghosts be as many in London as its bricks and stones. Speaking purely in the language of fancy, I should not be astonished to learn that even *ghostly* bulls and bears bargained for phantom scrip in Capel-court itself, remembering what mosses of memory gather about gold ; and *Lloyd*'*s* should have as many revenants as there are wrecks at the bottom of the sea. It is true that the Bank of England would not be chosen at once by a ghost-hunter as a hunting-ground. It is not more than a hundred and forty-five years old, so that there has scarcely been time enough for a ghost to grow. It has never, so far as I am aware, been the scene of a murder. It is the world's type of substantiality and of reality. It is built upon the rock of strong fact, and carried on, down to its smallest details, by the very perfection of human machinery. It goes to sleep soundly at night, and fives and works only by day. There is scarcely a chink in its substance large enough for the tiniest fancy to be hatched in. And yet, even here, those who have eyes to see might happen to meet some such figure as that of the founder himself, first a Preacher of the Word among the Scotch hills, then a Buccaneer of the Spanish Main, then a Prince of political finance, finally wrecked and ruined upon the shadow of Darien. Fauntleroy and Mathison would be at least as likely to haunt the place where their hearts were as the spirit of a murderer to cling to the scene of his crime. And what has become of the ghosts of Robert Thorne, Merchant Taylor, and of John Kendricks, and of the Houblons, all buried in the ancient church of St. Christopher le Stock which was pulled down in order that the more important Temple might have wider room to grow in? They must needs prowl about the Bank court, for want of graves wherein to lie.

But it is of no mere historical fancy, termed 'Ghost' by courtesy, of which I am about to tell this story— which is my own. I have no more belief in the

ghosts of legend than the majority of men and women. But I have been driven, at bitter cost, and sorely against my will, to learn that not only in Heaven and Earth, but in the Bank of England to boot, are more things than have been hitherto dreamed of by the most imaginative accountants and the most romantic cashiers. It is a true story: and it will accordingly be obvious, as I proceed, why I have thought it advisable, in most instances, to use certain names which will not be found in the Bank records under the identical form that I have given them. I give real names whenever obvious reasons for suppression do not apply.

MOST STORIES end with a marriage. Mine begins with one. The marriage was my own: and it was also Annie Burden's. I won't say it was the happiest day of my life ; but it was the very happiest up till then. I think we both liked our wedding-day the better for knowing that all our friends and relations on both sides thought us a couple of lunatics. The suspicion that they were very likely right gave a zest of romance to our hand-in-hand plunge into life which is wanting to those who walk quietly into smooth waters. So far as we could make out, our lunacy lay in my having no money and no prospects, and in her having no prospects and no money. She, as the second cousin of a baronet, should have looked higher, and, as the youngest of a country curate's five daughters, ought to have looked very decidedly richer. I, as a very young surgeon with no private means, ought to have waited till I could buy a practice and a carriage before I invested in a wife as the most expensive part of a medical trade-plant. The truth of the matter is that I had come down to D— to see if the place was really unhealthy enough to make it worth a newcomer's while to settle there. I found it nothing of the kind, but I found it admirably suited to find a wife in. So far as the Rev. John Burdon's fifth daughter was concerned, never did a love story run more smoothly. Singularly enough, to decide that the place was not worth trying, and to decide that Annie was the only girl in any place worth marrying, took up precisely the same number of journeys and the same amount of time.

We married— wisely, I thought more than fifty years ago; wisely, I think still, and know. But wisdom is very apt to look like rashness to on-lookers. I believe we only obtained a certain amount of family countenance on the ground that if we did not marry as things were and on the strength of what might be, Annie— whose obstinacy was as well known as her warmth of heart— would out-wait every better chance that the years of youth might bring her. After all, a penniless doctor, with all his way to make, was better than nobody, and— well, the long and the short of it is we left D— for London

as rich as two young people can be who have not means to live together for more than the space of a honeymoon.

I ought to say that I had been too hard a student to make many friends, without being brilliant enough to stand out from the mass, and, till I fell in love, without any desire to push myself forward. I had never had more than a student's ambition, who finds in books his only real world; but now all things were changed. My first and foremost duty was to justify Annie's thorough-going belief in me by getting on, instead of merely drifting along. I set to work, and conquered my naturally retiring temper by trying very hard indeed. If I had not been married I should not have tried; but then, on the other hand, the fact that made me try to win seemed to make me fail in winning. We took lodgings in a poor neighbourhood, where many patients might mean a few fees; we economised more and more; and I occasionally earned a guinea or two here and there from the medical journals. But we could not afford to wait, and meanwhile things kept getting worse instead of better. Sympathy sufficed to tell me of what Annie was thinking when she looked so grave: for I was beginning to accuse myself of having wronged the one woman I loved by marrying her. She, I knew, was wronging me by accusing herself of keeping me down; and yet I knew that she, as well as I, would have shared starvation rather than escape it by undoing what we had done. Love did not even look towards the window, though Poverty was knocking furiously at the door.

At last, when things had reached the threshold of the very worst, I was offered the place of surgeon on a ship bound for Jamaica, with a prospect of finding a West Indian settlement at the end of a few voyages. It was the only sort of appointment I had not asked for, because it was the only sort that would necessarily divide me from Annie; and therefore, as a matter of course, it was the only offer that came to me of its own accord. I was sorely tempted to say no. But there was nothing else to be done; and very shortly I should have to support not only a wife, but a child. That made the parting all the harder and all the more imperative at the same time.

So I made arrangements with my employers to pay my wages to my wife during my sailings, sent her down to her father's, and went on my first voyage.

The *Darien*, which was my ship, had many passengers; but none of them gave me much trouble in my professional capacity save one. But then he made up for everybody.

His name was Julius Mendez— a singular name for an Englishman; but I was told that he represented an old West Indian commercial house which had been established very nearly, if not quite, as long ago as the Spanish times. One of the ladies on board nicknamed him 'the Buccaneer.' But to my fancy he looked much more like a descendant of one of those much more successful

free-traders who bought and sold what the pirates and buccaneers took by the strong hand. I have never wondered what became of Captain Kidd's treasures. I expect some of the forefathers of Mr. Julius Mendez, and others like them, could account if they pleased for every dollar, and had sent it down to their remote descendant in company with their features. Mr. Mendez was a small, dried-up, bilious-looking man of between fifty and sixty, with a black fringe round a yellow bald scalp, a long hooked nose, and a pair of sharp black eyes round which had been pressed the claws of a whole flock of crows. His whole face was pinched and keen; his expression, harassed, eager, and yet not without dignity. People who knew something of him at home said he was a miser; others, who professed to know him better, said that, whatever one hand scraped in, the other threw away in all sorts of solitary self-indulgences that men call pleasures. Nobody spoke well of him, and most seemed a little afraid of him. In manner, he was always polite, but never cordial.

But I had not been twenty-four hours at sea before I found out his ruling passion, or rather his ruling terror. It was a morbid dread of death, and a perpetual fear that he was going to die, which almost amounted to a monomania. He undoubtedly had a very sluggish liver, but that did not account for such exaggerated symptoms of hypochondria. From the moment he found out I was the surgeon, I had no peace with him. He discovered some new and alarming symptom in himself every day at least, and more often twice or thrice every day. I expect, from his talk, that he studied medical books whenever he was alone, and cultivated the art, common enough, of feeling in himself every new symptom of which he read. I had to treat Mr. Mendez for heart, stomach, brain— every organ that he had about him, or rather to treat him for liver disease while affecting to treat him for these. And yet, where health was not concerned, he was no coward. The *Darien* was once in real peril; and while the other passengers were thinking of the boats, Mr. Mendez had no thought but for an itching in the nose, which he had heard was a symptom of incipient brain-softening. At last, I did not know whether most to detest or to pity Mr. Mendez.

The day before we were due at Kingston, said he, 'Mr. Wilson, I want to make a bargain with you. I have the greatest possible objection to every medical man in Jamaica; and if I had not, there is none that could give me his whole time. The fact is— it is nothing to me whether you believe it or not— I am in the most imminent peril of dying by some bodily disease before the end of my fifty-seventh year. I shall be fifty-seven on the tenth of September ; and if I once pass that date alive, I may safely look forward to nearly forty years of increasing health and happiness. Of course you think I am talking nonsense; but that is not the question. Perhaps I am an astrologer; perhaps the mystery

of Ob— which you are aware the black slaves brought with them from Africa to America, and which has never died— is something very different from the mere fetish worship which you doctors of mere science suppose. The question is that I am convinced of what I say, and with what I know to be reason. But my death is a threat only, not a doom, and is avertable by unsleeping skill. You are a stranger to Jamaica— you are young— you are free from other engagements— you have your whole time— you want money— and I trust your skill and your honour. Stay with me at my place till midnight on the tenth of September; it will be worth your while.'

I certainly felt disposed to transfer my attentions from the liver to the brain. But, in any case, what harm should I do by accepting the offer? Men with a fancy like that upon them have been known, and that not seldom, to die of their fancy. Some sort of disease he must have, whether of brain or otherwise, that wanted watching; and it was only too true that I wanted money as much as any man. I did not like my patient, nor did I like the prospect of being shut up alone with him for two months to come; but I had already learned that beggars most not be choosers. In short, I became private and confidential physician to Mr. Julius Mendez.

Mr. Mendez carried on his business at Kingston; but he carried m e with him to a sugar plantation near Trelawney, in the western part of the island. I was nominally at liberty to pass the greater part of my time in my own way, but in effect I seldom had an hour of liberty. Mr. Mendez had few neighbours, and saw none of them. He devoted himself to the discovery of symptoms, and I had to be on the spot to kill them as they came. His household consisted only of some black servants ruled over by an old mulatto woman, who acted as cook, nurse, and housekeeper; and I had to draw up recipes for dishes as if they were prescriptions. It was in vain that I tried the effect of horse-exercise, regular living, and open air. He followed all my directions with business-like care and punctually; and though the man grew to be as well as one who keeps a liver can ever expect to be, nothing would disabuse him of his central and ruling idea.

'Why should he dread death so much?' I often thought. 'He has nobody else to live for.'

I gathered little or nothing from others about his history or character, and indeed he had somehow made me feel it to be a sort of honourable understanding between us that I was not to inquire. He certainly held a good position in the island, and it was hard to say whether the higher families held aloof from him or he from them. At the end of the first month he paid me fifty guineas— the amount agreed upon— which I immediately sent off to Annie. And so there was half my time gone. So eager was I for the tenth of September

that I made a table of days like a schoolboy impatient for the holidays, scoring each one off as it went by. At last, thank Heaven, the tenth of September came.

Never shall I forget the state of Julius Mendez on that fatal day. He was far too preoccupied to have symptoms. He had tried to sleep late, but anxiety and excitement woke him early. He spent the whole day till six in the evening in an armchair with his fingers on his pulse, and with me by his side. He made me know what the temptation to strangle a man means. At six o'clock I made him take some food ; but he trembled at every morsel. At seven he began to grow feverish; at nine I began to be seriously alarmed. No doubt he was getting terrified out of his senses— but he might die of imagination. I gave him an opiate, hoping that he might sleep till past the fatal hour. But it did not act on his excited brain. And so, at last, the remaining three hours dragged by— and, at last, struck the first stroke of twelve.

He rose from his chair, and leaned on me, counting them as they fell slowly: 'Ten— eleven— twelve!' I don't think that I should myself have been surprised had he dropped down dead at the last chime. But, on the contrary, he drew a deep sigh of relief, and turned to me triumphantly.

'Thank you, Wilson,' said he, taking my hand. 'You've given me a forty years' lease of life, and I thank you. I am now fifty-seven years old, and have the best part of life still to come. I don't want you to think me inhospitable or ungrateful, but I shall be obliged by your leaving me to-morrow morning without seeing me again. Thanks to you, I've done with doctors now. Here is your second cheque for fifty guineas. By noon to-morrow I shall expect to hear you are gone.'

I certainly thought that my dismissal, under the circumstances, was odd and abrupt; but I was used to the eccentricities of Mr. Mendez, and was so utterly sick of them that I was glad at heart to be thus allowed to run away as soon as my time was out without seeming ill-mannered. I thanked him for his cheque, which was made payable in Kingston: we shook hands, and parted, and that was the last I ever saw of Mr. Julius Mendez of Trelawney.

Matters had been so arranged— I fancy by the special intervention of Mr. Mendez— that I was to return on board the *Darien* in a week or two. Meanwhile I sent the bulk of the second cheque to Annie, keeping only a few pounds to last me till the day of sailing. But, before that day came, the low-lying sugar-lands in which I had been living had done their work— I was prostrate with yellow fever.

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I LOOKED like a ghost myself when one day, long afterwards, I reached my father-in-law's at D—. Had I been a real ghost, nobody could less have expected to see me. I had written, of course, from Kingston as soon as I was strong enough to hold a pen; but my letter had never been delivered— the Burdon family had been scattered to the winds. My father-in-law had died a month ago. One of the sons, however (I learned in the village), had gone into an auctioneer's office in the county town, and I got there, by walking— weak as I was, I had not money enough to carry me otherwise. Tom Burdon was a young Englishman of the sort that makes a point of never being surprised at anything, or being glad to see anybody. He told me that one brother was here, another there, and both doing badly; that the sisters were looking out for situations, and that Annie was— thank God for that!— there, with him.

'And by the way,' he added, as if it were an after-thought, 'she's got a baby with her. I suppose you'll stop and dine?'

Need I describe such a meeting? For full five minutes I was happier than I had been even on my wedding day. The poor girl had shown her characteristic obstinacy by insisting on it that I must be dead, while everybody else would have it that I had deserted her to relieve myself of a burden. To her, it was as if her own true heart had called me from the grave. And then she gave me our child, whom she had thought an orphan. We had happiness enough for that one day.

But— for the future days? It was desperate to think of them; well nigh impossible to face them. My health had terribly given way— it would have been certain death to return to Jamaica for at least a year, and then it would be useless and out of my power. I had thrown away the only opening into practice into which I had ever put my finger. Annie had no saleable accomplishments even if I could have brought myself to let her use them when I was doing nothing; and then she was a young mother, whose hands were overfull. Stolid Tom Burdon had been as good as gold to both mother and child; but he had already done more than it was fair he should do, even for a widowed sister. Well, I must give up all my professional hopes and get a situation in some sort of office, like Tom— plain reading, writing, and arithmetic are after all the only useful kinds of learning in time of need.

Worry and anxiety preyed upon me more and more, as the days slipped away and brought me nothing; and my health kept growing worse instead of better. My failing strength led to a state of nervous prostration, in which the superstitious fancies of my late patient seemed much less absurd to me than when I had been well and strong. It was almost as if he had decoyed me to his detestable sugar plantation, where all sorts of wild notions and strange practices lingered among the neighbouring Maroons, in order that he might

convey to himself the additional years of health and life which had been given to me— as if there were only a certain amount of human vitality in the world, so that what one man gains he must needs take from another. Of course I knew such a fancy to be the merest nonsensical nerve-trick; but I seemed at that time to see and hear everything more clearly than one possibly can in a normal state of the brain, so that substances often became shadowy, and shadows substantial. I could not help seeing that my anxieties reflected themselves doubly in my poor wife, and that she was haunted by some feeling about me which she dared not name to herself, but which I understood perfectly well. We had one very substantial comfort, however— the boy throve exceedingly.

I knew all the time that my nervous state was simply the result of bodily weakness, and that it would pass if only I could contrive to get strong. I need not recount the way in which we managed to live through those bitter weeks— the very few pounds I made by my pen; the sale of little personal treasures, which we had kept throughout our original poverty; the chance scraps of employment I found in the town— and so on, and so on. It was all heartless and hopeless, and every penny I made seemed to make getting the next harder instead of easier.

But one day, when I was at Annie's writing-desk (not yet doomed to be sold) looking for a pen wherewith to write something or other for a local journal, my eye fell on an unopened letter directed to 'Andrew Wilson, Esq., M .D ., care of Mrs. Wilson, D— Rectory, near—, England.' It had been posted in Spanish Town as far back as the 12th of September.

'Bless me!' said Annie, as I held it up to her, 'put that letter away for you when it came; and then everything put it out of my head.' And well it might— the loss of her father, the breaking up of her home, the supposed death of her husband and his return, and the birth of her boy. I opened it— it contained a letter and another envelope, sealed, and also addressed to me. The letter was as follow s:

September 12th, 183—.

My dear Wilson,— You must have thought it strange that I did not recognise your success farther than by the fee which you would have received had you failed. I said nothing at the time, because, firstly, I felt sure you would make a fuss about receiving more than your due, and because I wanted all the thanks, in that supreme moment of my life, to be spoken by me; and secondly (to be frank) because I did not wish to enable you, for reasons of my own, to remain in Jamaica. Having learned from you Mrs. Wilson's address, I send this to await your arrival at home. Pray be kind enough to accept it, by way of thanks,

from yours very faithfully,

Julius Mendez.

I tore open the second envelope — it contained this:

London, the 12th September 183—. To the Chief Cashier of the Bank of England. Pay to Andrew Wilson, Esq., M .D ., or Order, One Thousand Pounds. £1000-0-0
Julius Mendez.

Could it be a dream that I held in my hand a piece of paper worth a thousand pounds, and for my own? Why, it meant everything— health, ease of mind, and a strong wedge to drive into the world! Annie started across the room to me— she thought I was fainting. And all this weary while we had had a fortune between our fingers! No wonder that, for a moment, I took it for some practical joke such as they play in dreamland, between sleeping and waking. A cheque for a thousand pounds on the Bank of England is just what a man in my plight would dream of, just as the starving dream of feasting.

But it was real enough— there it lay, tangible and true, before Annie's eyes and mine, of course I had no real scruple about accepting it: Julius Mendez was certainly not the man to spend more upon others than he could amply afford, and, in truth, it had once or twice occurred to me that the incessant services of two such months and their consequences had been rather poorly paid for, though of course I had no right to complain. The least possible hesitation about taking so handsome and generous a gratuity, otherwise than as a loan to be repaid from its hoped-for results, I could not help feeling; but, in any case, I had not only myself to think of; there were Annie and the boy. The cheque had all the air of being a gift from the skies, of which gratitude as well as need forbade refusal. I had rather that I had been paid it for what I had really done than for what Mr. Mendez only believed I had done— but then who can tell, in such a case, what one has really done or not done? In short, I accepted the gift— and everybody must decide for himself whether I did right or wrong.

I relieved myself by writing a letter of thanks to my late patient, taking care to let him know how welcome his generosity had become. After consultation with Annie, we decided not to take Tom into our confidence immediately; we wanted to do for him all we could out of our fortune— which seemed to us inexhaustible— and we knew that if he knew its limits just then, he would refuse to take as much as we wanted to give him. So, just for the time, I let him know that I had an unexpected stroke of good fortune, which gave me a professional opening and required my immediate presence in town. And he, who made a point of being never either glad or sorry or surprised or interested or curious about anything, simply said, 'Very well.'

It is not good to think that money should have any effect upon such sacred things as the joys and sorrows of a wife and mother— but, though it is not good to think, it must be good to be; for it is true. I saw in Annie's face, and

heard in her voice, how much things had suddenly changed with me— hope was born again. We had not dared, for weeks, to mention our future; to-night we talked of it almost till the sun rose. Our united knowledge of business was small, and possibly our plans ran a little wild, but still they were feasible. So much, added to what I might earn, would enable us to live for a year while I was recovering and looking out for the best means of starting fairly— supposing we had to wait so long; if not, there would be so much saved. A second so much should be made a fund for the purchase of a partnership or practice. A third so much should enable me to insure my life for another thousand. The rest should go as far as it would in pushing forward Annie's brothers and sisters— more particularly Tom.

Next morning I started for London, feeling, like almost everybody who has never had any dealings of the smallest consequence with Banks and Bankers, that I had to cash my cheque and receive my own money with my own hands, before opening an account with it elsewhere. I spent almost my last shilling on an inside place in the London coach, with a cheque for a thousand pounds safe in my pocket-book. I happened to have but one fellow traveller— an old gentleman named Deacon, with whom I had become slightly acquainted.

He was a fine old fellow, who in his eighty-seventh year was more hale, sound, and active than most men are at sixty— one of the best examples of a sound mind in a sound body that I ever knew. He had been in business in London a generation or two ago, but had retired upon a competence among his grandchildren and great-grandchildren, and was as well known in his native town as the steeple, where he was respected and consulted upon all subjects by all people. His one senile symptom was a formidable propensity to tell anecdotes of his younger days, without telling them very well; but, strange to say, he seldom told the same twice over. I rather sadly contrasted my feeble self, scarcely more than a third of his age, but wrapped up thickly from every least draught that could blow, with this hale old man, who, though it was one of the bleakest days of a biting spring, scorned even a single greatcoat or wrapper, and only, out of consideration for me, insisted on closing the windows.

'Going all the way to town?' asked Mr. Deacon, in his strong hearty voice, that seemed able to knock a man down and pick him up again.

'Yes— on business,' said I, a little proud of so new a word.

'So am I, worse luck. I'm going to give our Member a bit of the town's mind about the town pump— you've got no energy among you, all you boys. I mean to be at it though, till the new one's built, if it takes me twenty years, and I daresay it will: it took me ten to get the free library, but I got it— I oughtn't to grudge twice the time to get what's of twice the consequence to ten times the

number. Which way shall you be going? If you're anywhere near Westminster about dinner-time, I shall be glad of your company.'

'I have to g o to the Bank of England.'

'What— to my old shop? I haven't been in Threadneedle-street these forty years. But I believe I should go as straight to my old desk as if it had been yesterday. Yes— I was a paying-clerk there in the old times. If you go through the door in the left-hand corner of the court, you'll see where I used to stand; and if you've got anything to be cashed— and I hope it's a good big something— my great-great-great - great - grandson in office will cash it for you. By Jupiter, sir, I wonder when I think of it if a bank-desk doesn't feel itself to be the real body and soul of the whole thing, and the clerk behind it only a pair of hands that it gets new from time to time. It's a fact that some desks are lucky and some unlucky, and that some go right and some go wrong. There's some that a young man gets promotion from as sure as he stands there, and some that keep the same man for ever, as if be was a barnacle on a ship's side. We used to notice it, in my time— mine was always an easy-going sort of a desk: I wouldn't mind laying a wager that the clerk at it now is an honest sort of easy-going man.'

'That's a curious theory, Mr. Deacon.'

'It isn't a theory at all— it's a fact, sir. of course there are exceptions. Now the desk next to me was one of the downright unlucky ones. Bad in every way. I knew both the clerks there in my time— that of course; but I mean I knew rather more of them than anybody. The desk on the other side was a lucky one; men went up high in the Bank from it, as if it was a step in a ladder. Mine was betwixt and between, both in place and in luck ; and all the better for me, say I. But about that unlucky desk.' He settled himself back, stretched out his legs, and made ready for the inevitable anecdote of his younger days. 'Of course you've heard all about the White Lady of Threadneedle-street?' said he.

'I fancy I've read something of her— but that's all.'

'Then I'll tell you. When I first stood at the Bank counter, my left-hand neighbour— on the unlucky side— was a young fellow of the name of Frederick Hawes: Fred Hawes, we used to call him, for he was one of them that are made to be Bobbed and Jacked and Fredded by all the world. H e was a fine jolly young chap, with any quantity of spirit in him; we all liked him, and two or three of us, who got to know him best, liked his sister too, Nancy Hawes. She was a prettier girl than I've seen these fifty years; since the time when pretty girls went out and ugly bonnets came in. She and her brother Fred lived with an old aunt in Finsbury— in Windmill-street it was— and I've had tea there with, aunt Polly scores of times, and punch there with Fred scores of times more. Poor Fred — poor Nancy! She helped out the housekeeping by

doing sewing for an army clothier, and was as good as gold, and fonder of her brother than any girl I ever knew. She just sewed her fingers to the bone to keep him more like a fine gentleman than he'd any right to be, and she'd have cut off her head to please him. I'm not talking about the fine bankers' clerks of nowadays; I'm talking of things more than sixty years ago, when I was five-and-twenty, and so was King George. I believe six of us asked her to marry us six times a piece— I did, I know. But she laughed at us all round, and made us better friends with her than ever. "Brother Fred must marry first," she used to say; and we knew she meant it— she didn't think there was a man fit to clean Fred's shoes. From which, Mr. Wilson, you will doubtless surmise that Master Fred's shoes weren't worth blacking. For, take my word for it, sir, the way to make a sweetheart or a sister or a mother worship the ground you tread on is to be a silly young scamp, without the head of a sparrow-grass or the heart of a cabbage.'

'I hope not,' said I.

'I know it,' said Mr. Deacon. 'But there was one of our set that didn't take No like the rest of us. Isaac Ayscough was his name. He was older and closer than the rest, and the only one that never talked about Miss Nancy. And somehow, he was the only one with whom she never seemed to be easy or friendly. I know now, putting this and that together, and having near ninety years' knowledge of the world, that he loved her with all his soul, and that she knew it, and that it made her think of him— half frightened and half pleased— so that she couldn't laugh and chat as she did with us others. We all looked up to him. He was not only older, but he was cleverer, and better at business and pleasure, and stronger-willed and harder-headed (and harder-hearted, may be), and could drink more punch and spend more money. I fancy, too, he was of better birth; but of that I'm not sure. Anyway, as time went on, there seemed to come a kind of breach among us all— poor Nancy got less cheerful, and Fred less sociable, and at the same time more intimate with Ayscough, until we others hardly saw anything of any of them. Fred was always sweet and friendly with me, all the same, when we met— which of course was every day from ten to three; and often I used to think he wanted to tell me something, but didn't dare, though I encouraged him all in my power. And all the while he was with Ayscough more and more. I once spoke to Nancy about it— but she only cried, and "I hate Isaac Ayscough!" said she. I knew that she knew that Ayscough was leading poor Fred wrong, though nobody could tell how; and I know now that Ayscough was working in some villainous underhand way to get Fred into trouble, so that he might get Nancy into his power. Any way, God forgive me if I'm wrong.... Well, sir, one day it came out— it was in the year

'69, just when the news came of the Boston riots —how a signature had been forged to a transfer warrant; and then—'

'Hawes and Ayscough were the forgers?'

'I don't know, sir. I only know that Isaac Ayscough discovered the forgery, and that Fred Hawes was— hanged. In 1769.'

'Hanged?'

'Why not? They hadn't made it transportation then. Why I can remember when three hundred and fifty-two men and women were sentenced to be hanged for forgeries on the Bank of England in one single year— all but one a day. What was one more? No, sir— Threadneedle-street isn't what it used to be in my time. But I was telling you of that desk, Mr. Wilson. I don't believe Ayscough meant poor Fred Hawes to be hanged. I'm not sure that Fred— mind, I say Fred— committed the forgery. But when a man once puts his shoulders to send one of the devil's stones down hill, down to the bottom goes the stone, and wishing can't stop it. I won't go so far as to think, out loud, that Ayscough found it needful to get the brother out of the way— say in gaol— that he might get hold of the sister. I won't suggest that he did what he found needful. But, all the same, he was a close, masterful, passionate man; and if I say what I don't think is true, then I do say that the Bank of England has been the scene of one of the bloodiest sins ever dealt with by the gallows.'

'And the girl?'

'Ah, poor Nancy! That's the worst part of it all; unless madness is a better thing than becoming the mistress of a murderer. The day after the hanging, when Ayscough was just leaving his desk— no doubt for Windmill-street — in walks poor Nancy, dressed all in white as if for a wedding, and goes straight up to Ayscough, and asks him sweetly, "Is my brother, Mr. Frederick, here today?" Ayscough didn't answer her. But though I was ready to break down at the sight, I saw how things were, and that she was thenceforth wholly in God's hands, and said, just as quietly as if nothing had happened, and as if I 'd never seen her before, "No, Miss— not to-day." And so it went on, day after day, week after week, year after year. Every day, at twelve o'clock noon, she used to cross the Rotunda to Ayscough's desk at the pay-counter, and ask, "Is my brother, Mr. Frederick, here to-day?" And one of the clerks always used to answer, "No, Miss— not to-day." And then she always said, "Give my love to him when he returns, and say I'll call to-morrow." Poor thing! She was harmless, and never came to any harm; and some of us helped her aunt to keep her. But one to-morrow she didn't come. And then she was buried— poor girl! If Ayscough wanted her, there's no doubt but he went too far. Yes, sir, the Bank of England has been the scene of the foulest and bloodiest sin that ever was not dealt with by the gallows!'

'And Ayscough? What of him?'

'I never spoke to him after, and he never spoke to me. By a queer chance, he'd been at the lucky desk before; after Fred's death he was shifted to the unlucky one, where Fred had been. I suppose he didn't like to make any objection. We stood side by side, paying cash over the counter for many years, without exchanging a word. I noticed it was the same between him and the clerk on the other side of him. He didn't rise. For twenty-five years he kept on standing there, while everybody left or went over his head, till the old story was forgotten, and he had neighbours who spoke to him. At fifty he had become a strange, solitary, friendless old man. He was punctual in all his duties; he turned into a sort of machine. At ten he came to his desk. A t one he ate three biscuits of the same size and kind. When he left the Bank he went to a queer, out-of-the-way chop-house, where he always ate two chops and drank two pints of port one after the other. At nine in the evening he went out of sight, and nobody knew what became of him till ten o'clock next day. And at last he died, without warning, in a little lodging in Hackney. That was the life, sir, of Isaac Ayscough, whom we all thought destined to set the Thames on fire and to be a great man— and all because he went from one desk to another. While here am I, who never had one-tenth of his brains, alive and jolly at near ninety years old, without one day of my life that I wouldn't have the living of over again— except that I'd put the pump before the library. But here's our journey's end. Good day, Mr. Wilson, and thank you for your company.'

iii

THE wholesome bustle of the streets soon drove this rather ghastly reminiscence of old Mr. Deacon's youth, which had entered at one ear, out at the other. Though I had spent the greater part of m y grown-up life in London, I was not familiar with the City ; and I took a certain sort of fanciful pleasure that I, too, was for the day a small cog-wheel in the perpetual machine for making money change hands. Strength of heart and strength of limb seemed stirred up in me by the noise and the two meeting crowds. I felt myself a rich man; and if I built airy castles rather Alnaschar-wise, I really possessed a solid foundation for at any rate a very comfortable cottage on firm ground.

And so there stood the Bank of England, waiting, without a question, to pay over a thousand of its pounds into my hands. I entered the outer court, and was duly directed by a gorgeous beadle in black and scarlet to the first door in the left-hand corner. I found myself in a large office— which I have no doubt is well known to the greater number of my readers — with twelve desks ranged alphabetically and facing a quiet courtyard filled with trees and shrubs, in the

centre of which a fountain plashed lazily. I had expected that in this true heart of the City the bustle of the streets would have been doubled. But an almost monastic stillness, through which the ticking of the clock could be heard plainly, made the presentation of my cheque at one of the central desks feel like part of an impressive ceremonial. I went to one of the windows in front of the desks, and looked out at the as yet flowerless rhododendrons which a very slightly exaggerated sentiment might liken to a soul of flowers within a heart of gold. I took up a pen, and wrote on the back of the cheque 'Andrew Wilson.' Then I stood for a moment or two, hesitating as to which of the desks marked ' G— O' should honour the cheque of Julius Mendez.

Presently, by some slight chance or other, my eyes met those of a clerk standing behind the counter, who, seeming to notice my hesitation, beckoned to me with his eyes or with his hand— with which, I can hardly say. There were two clerks at his desk: one, in the middle, was engaged in making entries, and did not seem to notice me; the clerk whose attention I had caught was standing a little behind the other's left shoulder, but still close to the counter. The first time that a poor man goes to cash a fortune, he notices every little thing as apart of the history of an adventure. But there were other reasons why I, or anybody of an observant turn, should notice the clerk who had beckoned me towards him. He certainly did not look likely to g o out of his way to be polite to anybody.

He was a shrivelled, withered old man, who in appearance, though probably not in years, might have been the father of Mr. Deacon. It is necessary for me to describe him, though he was nothing to me save in his capacity of an automaton for paying me a thousand pounds on demand. But, as I have said, under such circumstances as mine, one takes note of everything. And yet I don't know that I should have observed him at all had it not been for the very obtrusive singularity of his costume. It was very odd that a Bank clerk, however old, should still persist in dressing himself after the fashion of his grandfather when his grandfather was a young man. He wore a snuff-coloured coat of quaker cut, with huge flapped pockets in the skirts; a flower-patterned silk waistcoat, over which a gold watch guard ran upwards from a fob; and his neck was swathed in at least a dozen folds of snow-white cambric, starched and frilled. Unless he muffled himself up in the largest and loosest of greatcoats when he left the Bank, I would not give much for his chance of not being followed by a long train of small boys. The lower part of his person was hidden by the counter; but in such wise, as to their superior parts, must those have been clothed to whom came, in 1769, the news to which Mr. Deacon had alluded of the riots in Boston. But the eye soon shifted from the clothes to the face and figure of the man who wore them.

It was simply the most hideous, ghastly face I had ever seen in a human being. In some ways it is indescribable; but for that very reason I must try to describe it as best I can. Hideous and ghastly as it was, the features were not ill formed— it is not impossible that they might have been regularly handsome once upon a time; only it must have been a long time ago. The contour of cheeks and chin was oval, the nose straight, and the eyes of a rich hazel; the brow was square and full. But the lips had shrivelled up into a parchment-like substance that stretched back so as to display two rows of broken black fangs. The skin of the face had aged into the semblance of badly stretched leather, through which the bones seemed bursting their way. The complexion was of a thin corpse-like gray, which ought to signify some strange disease, but which to my eyes looked as if the hand, not of any disease, but of Death itself, had passed over it and left a shadow. The cheeks had grown so hollow as to have become lost in the jaws. A thin circle of hair just prevented the wrinkled scalp from being wholly bald; the dark eyes were sunk in deep cup-like cavities; the nasal cartilage was of a livid blue. The man's head seemed to be degenerating, before death, into the skull of a living skeleton. But, ghastly as all this was, it was not all.

There was expression. I do not profess any especial skill in physiognomy; but some faces are to be read by a child without any chance of error, even if what they tell has been hitherto unfamiliar. This was the face of a living man who had died in sin— who had literally died, and yet who still lived on. I have said that, in some ways, it is indescribable. This is what I meant; and I can describe it, or rather its effect, in no other way. Even while it beckoned me with what, after the first moment, I could only call an obsequious grin, it was filled with a glow, not of remorse, which is for the living, but of that final despair which is for the dead alone. Even so would a corpse look which had murdered not only bodies, but brains, hearts, and souls. Even so would such eyes look as are the phantom windows of some soul in hell. I am not exaggerating. I have called this one of those faces which are absolutely plain to read; and to see such a face, and such a figure so costumed, behind a Bank counter, was startling enough to make every least detail of expression fix itself in the memory.

The sunken, hungry, desperate, deadly eyes looked like the reservoirs of the fire by which the flesh of the body was being slowly consumed. The clothes hung loosely, as if they had been made for a much taller and stouter wearer. To judge of the rest by the head, they might have covered a corpse half way on the road to being a skeleton, which the grave-worms had already half devoured. Every now and then a livid flush flitted over the ashiness of the gray. How the well-dressed young clerk at the middle of the desk could bear to have

such a suggestive incarnation of deadly sin unrepented of, but self-devouring, at his elbow, I could not understand. I had only time to notice two more details when the eyes attracted me again with a look of unutterable famine.

The first was a very remarkable scar, something in the shape of the letter Y— the stem descending down the left cheek, one limb branching diagonally across the forehead, and the other stretching nearly to the highest point of the ear. The colour of this scar was of a reddish purple. The second note was of dress only. It was a brooch used to fasten the voluminous cambric neckcloth, made of gold, and of a fashion such as I have never seen elsewhere. An oblong frame, slightly convex, and set all round with small seed-pearls, held a glass in the place of a stone; under the glass was a twisted lock of reddish-brown hair, fastened with a true-lover's knot of pearls like those in the setting, and with an 'A' on one side, in like pearls, and an 'H' on the other. I should certainly have chosen to receive my cash from the other clerk; but he was busy at the moment making his entries, and presently my cheque was in the thin dead-white fingers of the strange and evil-looking cashier who had attracted me. Surely, I thought, appearances must be indeed deceitful if fingers belonging to such a fiendish face as that are trusted by the Corporation of the Bank of England.

'How will you take it?' asked he, in a hoarse vague voice, without any strength or tone. 'Short or long?'

I never heard even a dying voice at the last gasp express such utter abandonment to weariness of being. Before I could answer such a mere routine question, I had to pass my hand over my eyes to make sure I was not looking at, and listening to, a figure in a dream, or rather in a nightmare. The reason was that, in a dream, one hears with the inner ear only; and it was so that I seemed to hear this man's 'How will you take it? Short or long?' But it was certainly not a dream. With my outer ears I heard the ticking of the clock and the scratching of many quills. My hand was still passing over my closed eyes while I answered, 'I will take it in one note, if you please.'

I heard a slight crisp rustle. I opened my eyes dreamily; they fell upon a clean bank-note lying before me at the edge of the counter. The very repulsion I felt drew me to look up from the note to the cashier; but he had left the desk; and the same feeling of repulsion which had forced my eyes to his while he was standing close to me kept them from following him now that he was gone. But the other clerk, at the centre of the desk, was still at his place; and I fancied that, while I took up my note, he eyed me rather curiously. He had no doubt, however, been too much absorbed in his entries to notice that my business was already done; at any rate he half held out his hand as if to attend to me.

'Thank you; I have been attended to,' said I; and he, having looked round him as well as at me a little oddly and absently, returned to the books before him. I took out my pocket-book, and began to fold up the note to stow it away safely in one of the divisions. As I did so, the note seemed to double of itself cross-ways, as if it had been already slightly creased in one direction ; but I was too completely unversed in the routine of the Bank of England to take any special heed of so seemingly slight, and to me so meaningless, a circumstance just then. But most certainly while I had to bring it into a new fold one way, it seemed to fall crossways into a natural fold ; and that is a great deal more singular than it sounds, as anybody who is fortunate enough to possess the materials may learn by experiment, so long as he is sure that the notes he experiments with are new.

But— well, after all, the whole transaction came simply to this: that my cheque had been duly paid by a very singular-looking man, to whom I should have very decidedly objected in the capacity of a fellow-clerk, but whose fingers were fully as good to receive a thousand pounds from as if they had been less like a dead man's.

I did not go to Westminster to lunch with Deacon, but took the return coach home. I had left D— with scarcely more than my fare; I returned to it a rich man.

iv

MY CASTLES proved remarkably well built, considering that they had been built so largely with the bricks of Alnaschar. My change of circumstances soon became known in D—, and it was certainly no fault of mine that my sudden stroke of good luck became considerably exaggerated by popular rumour. It never rains, but it pours; and the saying holds especially true of golden showers. By a piece of really good fortune I became able to step into a vacant practice in D— itself, on very easy terms, and within only a very few months out of the twelve I had allowed for looking about me. The practice was fairly good to start with, and it grew rapidly, helped at the very outset by two or three strikingly fortunate cures. My health began to come back at magical pace, and everything seemed destined to go on well, thanks to my West Indian patient, to whom I wrote once more, but from whom I never heard again. He was evidently one of those people who are ashamed of doing things that make people feel grateful. I found myself doing so well that I trusted in a year or two to be able to ask Mr. Mendez to do me the farther favour of letting me send him back what he had advanced me as the repayment of a loan. That I had never really earned so large a fee was the only thing I had on my mind, and

that was certainly not a heavy load. As for Annie, all her life was turning back into its natural happiness; and the child was thriving as well as even she could desire. Tom, too, was getting on in his slow and steady w ay; and the brothers and sisters were being drawn together again, thanks to my gleam of West Indian sunshine. I don't think that Annie and I were labelled lunatics any more.

In speaking of my good old friend Mr. Deacon I ought to have said, or at least I might have said, that he had two sons in the town, both middle-aged m en; one was a lawyer, the other was the manager of the branch bank where I had opened my account with my first thousand pounds. The lawyer was Mr. Robert, the bank manager was Mr. William , and both were very good friends of mine.

One afternoon when I happened to be at the bank, Mr. William asked to see me in his private room. I naturally thought it would turn out to be a matter of very ordinary business of either medicine or money ; and as he had a natural stiffness of manner very different from his father's ,! noticed nothing unusual in his way of receiving me. He had another visitor in the room, who was a stranger to me.

'Wilson,' he said, 'you remember opening your account with us last May?'

'Of course I do.'

'You paid-in a single Bank of England note! Should you know it if you saw it again?'

'I indorsed it with my name.'

'And when we received it from yon we entered the number and particulars. Look here.'

'Yes, that is my name; so I suppose that is my old friend.'

'Your name, in your own handwriting?'

'Certainly; I'm not likely to forget every pen-stroke I made in that signature. I hope there's nothing wrong.'

'We paid it to a customer of ours who was borrowing money from us on a mortgage; from him it passed back to the Bank of England. There are some reasons that make the Bank of England people a little curious as to its history, and this gentleman here has come down to make inquiry; perhaps you can help him. How long ago did you receive this note, and from whom?'

'On the 10th of May. I received it at the Bank of England itself, over the counter.'

The two gentlemen looked at one another.

'You say,' said the stranger, 'that you, on the 10th of May last, received over the counter of the Bank of England this note, any note, of this particular date and number? Is that so? Is that what you say?'

'Certainly. Why not?' asked I.

'Do I understand you would swear it in a court of justice, if need were?'

'I hope there is nothing wrong. But I would certainly swear to that anywhere.'

'And I also hope there is nothing wrong. But there is certainly something very strange. On what account was this note paid into your hands?'

'In payment of a cheque, drawn in my favour by Mr. Julius Mendez of Kingston, Jamaica.'

'To order or to bearer?'

'To order.'

'Can you give me the date of the cheque?'

'The 12th of September last.'

'You are sure of that?'

'Absolutely sure. But I suppose, if the date is of consequence, you can write to Mr. Mendez, or telegraph to him?'

'Mr. Mendez—' began Mr. Deacon; but the gentleman from the Bank interrupted him: 'You think— that is to say, you would advise us to communicate with Mr. Mendez? Yes; no doubt we can send him a message, if we please. So I understand your account is that you received this identical note over the counter of the Bank of England in payment of a cheque drawn to your order by Mr. Mendez, and dated the 12th of September; and that you received the note on the 10th of May. Is that so? And that you say you are ready to swear? Then in that case I need not detain you longer, or Mr. Deacon. Good-day.'

'What does it all mean?' I asked Mr. William Deacon, as soon as the other had gone. 'I hope you are not in any trouble about that note? I don't know yet much about banking, you know.'

'I hope,' he said, 'that nobody will be in any trouble; but I have told all I know about the matter, and so have you. I daresay we shall not hear of the matter again. Will you excuse me? I'm very busy just now, and—'

For perhaps five minutes, till I reached the door of my next patient, I wondered what circumstances could possibly be connected with this note that should lead the Bank of England to send an official down to D — to make inquiries, and hoped that, whatever they might be, I should not be troubled with a subpoena. But by the time I reached my immediate destination the whole thing had passed from my mind, with a wish, as idle as it was slight, that I had taken the note from the hands of some less strange-looking cashier than he whose appearance of half-wasting corpse, half-wasted skeleton, whole sin-eaten soul, had engraved themselves on my memory, and even now and then returned as a personage in some disagreeable dream when my nerves, not yet wholly strong, chanced to become a little overstrained.

I saw my patients as usual, made some purchases in view of approaching Christmas, and then went home, with my mind as free from any sort of anxiety as a mind can be. And, if I had felt anxious, as unbusiness-like people are apt to feel about business matters, I could have discovered no sort of tangible reason. The cheque had been duly honoured, and the Bank of England could not surely find any fault with a note issued from its own counter. I practically forgot the conversation in Mr. William Deacon's room so completely as not to remember to tell Annie, though I have always told her whatever I remembered to tell her. I remember that we passed a particularly pleasant and happy evening together. The following afternoon I was in the cell of a London police station. Within a week I had given bail to meet my trial on an indictment for having forged and uttered a note of the Bank of England for one thousand pounds.

V

I PASS OVER the history of that week. I have spoken enough of my mere self; and it is not my purpose, in writing this plain account of a strange affair, to describe the effect of a sudden and unexpected charge of serious crime brought all at once upon a man who thought he had left the worst struggles of life behind him, who was fortunate in all his outward conditions of life and work, and whose happiness in the inner life of home was growing day by day. Such sudden downfalls require no help for the imagination to realise them better without words than with them. I don't know that a consciousness of innocence, though so complete as to amount to ignorance, is much comfort in such cases. The guilty man has a comfort forbidden to the innocent— the consciousness that he is being treated justly, and the relief of being no longer compelled to live a lie. I had the one great comfort of Annie's inexhaustible lore and trust; but then, had I been guilty, I should have had this all the same. I have said that I had found bail, old Mr. Deacon being one of my sureties, partly out of friendship, but partly, I have no doubt, thanks to his overflowing energy, which compelled him to mix himself up actively with the affairs of everybody. Mr. Robert Deacon acted as my legal adviser; he was a shrewd, careful lawyer, but the case puzzled him as much as it baffled me. Whether he believed me guilty, I know not; but if he did not, he was more credulous than even I should have been.

The case was this. It has always been the practice of the Bank of England never to reissue a note, but to burn every note that returns to it; visitors to the Bank may have been shown, by way of curiosity, a charred mass consisting of the ashes of millions of pounds. Now on a certain day a note for 1000*l*., bearing a certain number and other marks of identification, had, in the usual course of

business, been returned to the Bank and duly burned with others. Of that there could be no question, unless there had been a conspiracy among many officials to save it from the fire. Some time afterwards a surgeon without practice, known by all who knew anything of him to be in a state of destitution, and as much without prospects as means, paid into the bank at D— a note corresponding in every recorded particular with the note which had been destroyed. My antecedents were very far from being in my favour, at any rate unless Mr. Mendez could be brought from Jamaica to confirm, partially, my own account of some part of them. I had, till within a few weeks of paying in the note, been wholly lost sight of by my own family. It is true I could say that I had been nearly dying of yellow fever in Jamaica; but that would have to be proved, and proof would take time, and might be difficult, and would probably be immaterial. A man may find time, during a long disappearance, for other pursuits than yellow fever, though of the same colour. I had come back as poor as I went away— apparently, that is to say. And then suddenly I opened a banking account with that note; my own account of the transaction consisting of such suppressions of truth and of such obvious lies as only to prove how completely a rogue may overreach himself, if he leaves himself a loophole to make a single blunder.

On my own showing, I had said nothing of any receipt of money— though living in the same house with a brother-in-law who knew all my circumstances— except to my wife, who was debarred by law from giving evidence in my favour. The letter in which the cheque (as I alleged) had reached me had not passed through the D — post office, but, according to my story, had been lost sight of for months, and had only been discovered accidentally. The whole story was in itself very suspiciously lame, even so far.

But the rest looked— fatal. I was not content with declaring that I had received a re-issued note from the Bank of England. I declared I had received it in payment of a cheque drawn on the 12th of September. And, to sum up all, the Bank had been long ago notified that its customer, Mr. Julius Mendez of Kingston, had been *accidentally drowned in Kingston Harbour on September 11th— the very day after I had left him to the enjoyment of a new lease of life for forty years.* And his cheque-book, containing the counterfoils, had been lost with him; and no evidence remained of his having drawn any such cheque save his letter to me— if it had not been written *by* me. The wholesome practice (which a forger learned the other day to his cost) had not then generally obtained among foreign customers of privately notifying the Bank of cheques drawn by them; at any rate it had not been observed by Mr. Julius Mendez.

And so much for Mr. Julius Mendez, his hopes and his fears! The man who had nothing to dread, save a death by disease on or before a certain Saturday, had perished by misadventure on the following Sunday. Perhaps he had mistaken his fifty-seventh birthday; perhaps not: but who can tell? At any rate there must have been some mistake— somewhere.

BUT his mistake was a terrible misadventure for me. Nothing but the nature of Mr. Robert Deacon's defence for me— that no official or expert could detect the slightest sign or symptom of forgery on the face of the note— warranted my admission to bail upon so serious a charge as forgery upon the Bank of England, which had been a hanging matter till within only a very few years before. I don't know whether I hare even yet made clear the whole gravity of the charge. It was not a mere question whether a country doctor should be sent to Botany Bay. The question reached far beyond the bearings of the criminal law— it affected the whole machinery of the Bank of England. I hare no doubt that many secret courts of inquiry were held in Threadneedle-street before and after my arrest— which was most surely called for. Was it possible, in spite of the perfection to which the manufacture of notes had been carried even then, that a mere amateur should be able to copy one of them so perfectly as to deceive the most expert eyes? Or, worse still, was foul play at work among the most trusted servants and officers of the Bank of England— was there a vast conspiracy whose ramifications must necessarily include many officials in the highest places! My lies might prove my personal guilt; but the nature of the note, assuming its forged character, seemed to disprove the possibility of my being solely responsible. I have mentioned the keynote of my defence. But, when once struck, nothing could prevent its coming to this: that I had presented a cheque which had been suppressed or forged in order that an old note, stolen from the furnace, might be put into my hands, as part and parcel of some system of fraud or plunder the nature of which was as yet beyond guessing. That a note of the same amount had been given, on the 10th of May, in payment of a cheque drawn by Mr. Mendez appeared, from the books, to be clear; but it was of a different number, and had not yet returned. But this only made the whole matter more alarming in the labyrinth of suspicion which it threw open.

If any one of my readers chances to be acquainted with any Bank official whose position or age should naturally imply some recollection of these matters, he may— perhaps— learn more of the details of these inquiries than I can possibly tell him. But it is far more likely that the more is remembered, the less will be told. I know that for my own part I should not like to ask any such questions, unless I wanted to be answered by a snub or a jest according to the

character of him whom I ventured to question. Banks should be, and are, confessionals; and unless some outsider like myself, who is bound by no confidential duties, tells what he knows, the psychology of gold must remain an unexplored field for ever.

The nature of my defence, and what it must needs lead to, although set up by his son, horrified old Mr. Deacon. H e had for the Bank of England, only in an intensified form, the feeling that other men have for their old regiments and colleges— he did not believe in my guilt, because he believed in Annie; but his son's defence was like a sacrilegious attempt to upset the world.

'There have been forgers enough,' he said, 'especially when they used to be hanged, and there have been bank clerks among them now and then, and they were always hanged. But I'll sooner believe that Mrs. Wilson, there, herself, forged a thousand-pound note with her own hands, than that the "Old Lady" isn't everything she ought to be. I must be a good deal older than I am yet before I take to putting the old times before the new; and I'll find out the whole thing myself, if I have to put off the pump twenty years more.' But it seemed unlikely that he would find out anything for me or against me, if for Annie's sake or for the Bank's he put off the pump for another century. I need not tell the nature of the cloud that came over me at D— while I was waiting to be tried. Pride and prudence combined forbade me to leave the place, even though all but the very poorest patients refused the prescriptions of a medical man who would soon be a slave in Botany Bay. I made a point of being seen about in the streets, and held my head up very high; but I felt the cloud over us all, and how near it was to breaking into a final and crashing storm. Perhaps my need to be brave for Annie's sake obliged me to show more courage than I felt; but it was only the courage of the ostrich, after all. of what other sort could it be in those days? In a few short weeks, she and the boy would be the wife and child of a convicted felon; and what end would that mean, for them?

I am bound to tell my story plainly. It is the only way in which such stories can ever be told. The first that I heard of any secret inquiry was a communication from Mr. Robert Deacon that the Bank would give me all facilities for identifying the clerk who had, according to my story, cashed my alleged cheque, if I thought fit to use them. The point had given rise to a great many questions on both sides. But at last it was arranged that I should try the experiment— indeed I should have to do it sooner or later, and I was convinced that I could as certainly put my finger on the clerk who had given me the note as upon the note he had given. I believe it had been ascertained what clerks had been at the desks at the paying counter on the day in question. At any rate, in company with my solicitor and with old Mr. Deacon, I once more travelled to London, and then left them in one of the private offices while I

walked the length of the counter. All was just as I had seen it before. I went to the same writing desk in the same window, that I might place myself in precisely the same circumstances as before, listened for a moment to the same ticking and scratching, and then turned round, just as some clock outside struck the first stroke of noon. I noticed it at the moment as a coincidence (though certainly not as a curious one) that the hour was the same, to a stroke, as when I had just finished indorsing my cheque on that 10th of May.

I saw twelve clerks at twelve desks; but the thirteenth, for whom I was looking, I did not see. I hardly knew whether to feel uneasy or relieved. To have seen him might have had the effect of relieving me from my own peril; but, on the other hand, I almost shuddered at the thought of seeing again that ghastly face of hopeless evil behind the shoulder of the clerk who had looked at me so curiously after my receipt of the money. No— certainly he was not at the counter, nor was he to be seen in the room, though my eyes went all over it, from desk to desk, in search of him. And yet I had been assured that every clerk present on that 10th of May was present now— that none had died or left the Bank, and that those who had changed situations in it had been sent back to their old desks for to-day. I could not suspect the directors of the Bank of England or their advisers of conspiracy to shield their system or their officers— my own liberty was hardly more important to myself than the necessity of probing the whole mystery to the bottom was to them. I no longer dreaded to meet that clerk's face now. I waited minute after minute, getting feverish with eagerness to find him, until, almost for a whole moment, I even fancied that I caught sight of him in the air. But that was only an instant's transparent illusion, born of anxiety. There was no use in lengthening our suspense— he was not there.

'Well' asked Mr. Allen, the director present at the interview.

'I can only say that I have not seen him,' I could but answer, while I felt my heart sink in me. I knew what sort of look passed between Mr. Allen, and Mr. Ash the lawyer, and Mr. Brown from the office of the Chief Cashier. And I knew it would have been shared by my own lawyer, had he not been representing me; and by myself, had I been sitting in judgment on another man.

'No: I have not seen him— today,' I went on, after full time for that look, and more. 'And I know what my not having seen him means— to me. But nevertheless he was there, at that desk, on that 10th of May; and he cashed that cheque with that banknote as surely as I am a living man. In that one thing I cannot forget, I cannot even be mistaken, in what I saw with my own eyes. I don't expect you to believe me. But I cannot help believing myself; and it is true.'

'Well,' said Mr. Allen, 'we have now done all that we met for; there is nothing more to be said, that I can see. Mr. Deacon,' he said, turning to my solicitor, 'you are satisfied that we have given Mr. Wilson every opportunity for identifying the clerk who paid him that note. He says that he received it from a clerk who never even existed. Have you any thing to say?'

Mr. Robert Deacon shrugged his shoulders— a little diplomatically, I am afraid. 'Only that Mr. Wilson has failed to remember one bank-clerk from another; nothing more. Many people remember faces badly— we don't rest our defence on my client's memory, you know.'

'But I do!' I could not help exclaiming, heedless of the look of angry warning that my lawyer threw me— surely I had committed myself to lies enough already without adding any more to the pile; and, as is well known, a prisoner who talks is the leading counsel for the crown.

'It is because I remember the man that I say he did pay me that note, and that I say now he is not there. If I did not remember him, I should say that, though I do not recognise him, he may be there. There are some faces that the worst memory cannot lose— his is one.'

'Perhaps Mr. Wilson can describe him?' asked Mr. Allen.

'Certainly not!' said Mr. Robert Deacon. 'Whatever he has to say his counsel will say for him at the right place and time. But this is not a court, and no one here has a right to ask questions— as Mr. Ash will tell you.'

'I can describe him,' I said; 'and, since this is not a court, I have a right to speak— and I will. He— that clerk—'

'D o you understand that I throw up your case,' whispered Mr. Robert Deacon sharply, 'if you say one word?'

'So be it,' said I. 'Since there was such a man, my description will find him. For aught I know the note may be forged, but not the man. Every detail of my whole story is true, from beginning to end; and I will answer everything, if it were to hang me. I can describe the clerk who cashed the cheque with that note as exactly as if I had seen him a hundred times. H e was a short, bent, shrivelled, elderly man of at least fifty; but he may be sixty, or more. He was quite bald, fearfully pale, and looking almost fleshless: he had an ashy, sallow, partly livid complexion, and dark deep-set eyes. It was a face never to be forgotten, if only seen once and never again. He wore a snuff-coloured quaker coat with large pockets, and a waistcoat of flowered silk, and he had many yards of frilled cambric round his neck, in the style, I should think, of at least seventy years ago. If such a man has ever been in the Bank of England— and I know there was such a man here at twelve o'clock on the 10th of May— he can easily be found.'

'I should say most decidedly that he could be found,' said Mr. Allen.

'And I should say most decidedly that he can not be found,' said Mr. Brown. 'And for the very obvious reason that there is no such clerk here.'

'But there was at twelve o'clock on the 10th of May,' said I. 'You cannot convince me that I have not seen what I have seen. I tell you he was a man whom no living eyes could forget. He looks like a living corpse— a corpse buried in its clothes seventy years ago, and unable to rest in its grave. No; I cannot be wrong. I noted every detail of face and costume. I can even tell you more. His face was marked by a large scar, running almost from the ear to the centre of the forehead and across the cheek-bone. His cravat was fastened by a curious old brooch with a setting of seed pearls, containing a lock of reddish-brown hair, fastened by a lover's knot in pearls, between the letters A and H . He—'

'Good God!' cried out old Mr. Deacon, hitherto silent, with the whole power of a voice that made the windows rattle. 'Good God! He's seen old Ayscough!... He's seen the living Corpse of Isaac Ayscough as sure as I'm a living man near ninety years old! Haven't you ever heard, Mr. Allen— and you, Mr. Brown— that the Ghost of Isaac Ayscough, that hanged Fred Hawes sixty years ago, is always at a clerk's elbow when he cashes the cheque of a Dead Man? That always used to be the story, as younger men than I am will tell you, ever since the old scoundrel cheated the gallows and went— where hanging would be mercy. I've seen that brooch, and I've seen him, every day for twenty years— and that's He!... A.H. — it's the hair of Nancy Hawes, poor girl!... The doctor has seen old Isaac Ayscough, who's paid with the Ghost of a burnt bank-note the cheque of a Dead Man!'

vi

I AM now nearly as old as old Mr. Deacon was then; and I am writing, or rather remembering, this strange chapter of my life in my own quiet study, in the quiet town which has been the scene of my life and my work ever since I came home from Jamaica, and where Annie and I kept our golden wedding— made of better gold than all in the Bank of England— years ago. I shall presently make an end of my story, in my own way. But first I must state one fact, which may possibly help the reader to a different reading of it than old Mr. Deacon's, though, as I shall show presently, it never satisfied him, and does not satisfy me.

The fact was this: when, at ten o'clock on the morning after my failure to see thirteen clerks in the private Drawing-room, the chief cashier opened his letters, he found in one of the envelopes, unaccompanied by any letter, or word, or any token to show whence or from whom it came, a Bank of England

note for one thousand pounds. On comparing its number with the proper entries it was found to be the note which, according to these entries, had been given to me in payment of Mr. Mendez's cheque on the 10th of May.

Now what should this imply? It may now be taken as impossible that any official of the Bank of England, high or low, would if he could, or could if he would, abstract from the notes to be burned on return one or more of them in order that he might, by paying or causing to be paid this old note over the counter, and by entering a new note instead of it, appropriate the new note to his own pocket. But it may certainly be taken that the machinery of the Bank was less absolutely perfect then than now; and it is just possible to suppose such an abstraction of an old note, and such an entry and appropriation of a new one. The old note would have been given to me. The new note would have been entered in place of it, but retained. If the manipulator was low in office and acting alone, he would run no more chances of detection than rogues always run; if high in office, or the instrument of one high in office, detection would be exceptionally difficult, if not impossible, supposing the checks and machineries to have been then imperfect enough to make the original manipulation possible at all. I know not the whole result or course of the farther investigations to which the return of the new note (whether for anonymously getting an innocent man out of an unexpected peril, or for the sake of throwing overboard a dangerous piece of property, or as part and parcel of the scheme, and by way of restoring a balance) gave rise. Whether the clerk who stood at the unlucky desk suffered alone, or whether any higher official suffered with him, or whether any malpractices were brought to light on the part of anybody, I never learned. But this I do know, that the checks and machinery of the Bank of England have, since these investigations, become in these matters a type and model of absolute perfection ; and that, when I surrendered to take my trial, no evidence was offered of my having forged or uttered a note which nobody could say with the least reason had been forged at all. I might have dreamed, I might have lied; but neither dreams nor simple lies are crimes, and I was discharged.

But, as I have said, this way of accounting for the mystery did not satisfy the mind of a man like old Mr. Deacon, who would believe anything rather than that the machinery of the Bank of England was more capable of breaking down at a pinch than that of the Solar System. And I knew that I had seen Isaac Ayscough— how else could my eyes, however excited, and my nerves, however highly strung, have imagined one whom I had never seen alive?— and I know it still.

NO death-sleep has he, the corpse of the man who murdered his friend by treachery and destroyed the brain of the girl whom he loved with what he called love— perhaps, before her brain, her woman's soul. Every day the rotting ghost is drawn, as if by a lodestone, to the desk whereon, in the flesh, it wrote its sin, turned to remorse now. It stood there day after day in the flesh; day after day the sin-corrupted spirit toils there still, at the old place and in the same old way. Perhaps its fingers, scratching ghostly entries, give a flavour of charnel-luck to the very desk where it stands. But, more than doom enough for it, it cannot escape; it must toil there, and rot on. And what work is there for such a ghost to do?

Enough, surely, and to spare. Such a ghost as this can never be without plenty of customers. If there be ghosts that haunt the scenes of common murder, how much more closely must not ghosts be bound to the scenes of gold and of passion, which are the very roots of murder? If they are bound to places which they loathe, how much more must they not haunt the places which contained the whole of their earthly treasure? Where the ghost of the treasure was, there may one look to find the ghost of the heart also. What is to become of those who never had any soul other than a lump of gold? There is no fitter doom for such than to wander round their grand treasure-house, learning by slow steps the vanity of a treasure which a dead hand cannot hold. The only lesson they are capable of is to spend an age or two in dealing with the mockery, which is the truth, of gold till they learn to hate its very name and ring, till they know how infinitely more precious are moonbeams. Yes, a ghost like Isaac Ayscough must have customers enough, and to spare.

I can see him still, in fancy, as I saw him once in visible fact, receiving what, by the ghostly error of a ghostly clerk, he mistook for a ghostly cheque drawn by a dead man from the hands of one who looked like a ghost, so worn out was I by the shadow of death through which I had so lately gone. The cheque post-dated by a day (according to the habit of some persons) for the sake of avoiding Sunday had become on its face the draft of a dead man; and if a living man may mistake a phantom for a fellow-mortal, it should follow that a dead man may mistake a living one for a fellow-phantom. I can still, when I will, see him as I saw him then, paying a dead customer in the ghosts of notes that had become no longer current among living men. Be it remembered that matter, like spirit, never dies. Bum a bank-note as thoroughly as you will, its particles are not destroyed, and may be restored by the process of ghostly cohesion, which, if such a thing be at all, is just as applicable to paper and to engraver's ink as to flesh and bone. A good book lives for ever in its soul, like a good man; a document, which may in its real life have been the cause or instrument of evil, would live on in its body, like an evil man. The body may die, but the

corpse may live; the paper may be burned, but the written words are not to be blotted out merely by man-kindled fire. Whether such a paper ghost is to be rematerialised by contact with living fingers is a question without an answer, unless my story may be taken in some sort as an answer thereto.

In any case, there, behind the counter over which cheques are paid,—there I know in my inner brain stands the corpse of Isaac Ayscough, in his habit, in his sin, and in his remorse as he lived, honouring with burned bank-notes the cheques of dead men. The live bank-clerk who deals with the living has only, as the clock strikes noon, to turn his head quickly enough to see the hideous and loathsome corpse of Isaac Ayscough at his very elbow. I know not if those livid remnants of lips ever whisper to the inner ears of their living desk-fellow. If so, I doubt if the hearer would ever tell the nature of the whisper which his heart hears, only it must fare ill with him if he be not in all things a true and honest man. If he be not, such whispers must carry with them the contagion of the wasting and banting flesh whence they come.

But this is a narrative of a fact, not an investigation into theories. I do not think that honesty need fear any desk-fellow, dead or alive. It is for a customer to beware who, having a cheque to present, catches the evil eye of a dead murderer, and worse than murderer, standing at the counter. By all the signs I have set down he may know himself to be face to face with the Ghost in the Bank of England, whom Lust and Greed will not suffer to sleep in the grave.

3: The Cosy Room
Arthur Machen

In: *Shudders*, Hutchinson, 1929

A neat little crime story, reprinted in Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine *in 1949*

AND HE FOUND to his astonishment that he came to the appointed place with a sense of profound relief. It was true that the window was somewhat high up in the wall, and that, in case of fire, it might be difficult, for many reasons, to get out that way; it was barred like the basement windows that one sees now and then in London houses, but as for the rest it was an extremely snug room. There was a gay flowering paper on the walls, a hanging bookshelf— his stomach sickened for an instant— a little table under the window with a board and draughtsmen on it, two or three good pictures, religious and ordinary, and the man who looked after him was arranging the tea-things on the table in the middle of the room. And there was a nice wicker chair by a bright fire. It was a thoroughly pleasant room; cosy you would call it. And, thank God, it was all over, anyhow.

ii

IT HAD BEEN a horrible time for the last three months, up to an hour ago. First of all there was the trouble; all over in a minute, that was, and couldn't be helped, though it was a pity, and the girl wasn't worth it. But then there was the getting out of the town. He thought at first of just going about his ordinary business and knowing nothing about it; he didn't think that anybody had seen him following Joe down to the river. Why not loaf about as usual, and say nothing, and go into the Ringland Arms for a pint? It might be days before they found the body under the alders; and there would be an inquest, and all that. Would it be the best plan just to stick it out, and hold his tongue if the police came asking him questions? But then, how could he account for himself and his doings that evening? He might say he went for a stroll in Bleadon Woods and home again without meeting anybody. There was nobody who could contradict him that he could think of.

And now, sitting in the snug room with the bright wallpaper, sitting in the cosy chair by the fire— all so different from the tales they told of such places— he wished he had stuck it out and faced it out, and let them come on and find out what they could. But, then, he had got frightened. Lots of men had heard him swearing it would be outing does for Joe If he didn't leave the girl alone. And he had shown his revolver to Dick Haddon and "Lobster" Carey, and Finniman, and others, and then they would be fitting the bullet into the

revolver, and it would be all up. He got into a panic and shook with terror, and knew he could never stay in Ledham, not another hour.

iii

MRS. EVANS, his landlady, was spending the evening with her married daughter at the other side of the town, and would not be back till eleven. He shaved off his stubbly black beard and moustache, and slunk out of the town in the dark and walked all through the night by a lonely by-road, and got to Darnley, twenty miles away, in the morning in time to catch the London excursion. There was a great crowd of people, and, so far as he could see, nobody that he knew, and the carriages packed full of Darnleyites and Lockwood weavers all in high spirits and taking no notice of him. They all got out at King's Cross, and he strolled about with the rest, and looked round here and there as they did and had a glass of beer at a crowded bar. He didn't see how anybody was to find out where he had gone.

iv

HE GOT a back room in a quiet street off the Caledonian Road, and waited. There was something in the evening paper that night, something that you couldn't very well make out. By the next day Joe's body was found, and they got to Murder— the doctor said it couldn't be suicide. Then his own name came in, and he was missing and was asked to come forward. And then he read that he was supposed to have gone to London, and he went sick with fear. He went hot and he went cold. Something rose in his throat and choked him. His hands shook as he held the paper, his head whirled with terror. He was afraid to go home to his room, because he knew he could not stay still in it; he would be tramping up and down, like a wild beast, and the landlady would wonder. And he was afraid to be in the streets, for fear a policeman would come behind him and put a hand on his shoulder. There was a kind of small square round the corner and he sat down on one of the benches there and held up the paper before his face, with the children yelling and howling and playing all about him on the asphalt paths. They took no notice of him, and yet they were company of a sort; it was not like being all alone in that little, quiet room. But it soon got dark and the man came to shut the gates.

v

AND AFTER that night; nights and days of horror and sick terrors that he never had known a man could suffer and live. He had brought enough money to keep him for a while, but every time he changed a note he shook with fear, wondering whether it would be traced. What could he do? Where could he go? Could he get out of the country? But there were passports and papers of all sorts; that would never do. He read that the police held a clue to the Ledham Murder Mystery; and he trembled to his lodgings and locked himself in and moaned in his agony, and then found himself chattering words and phrases at random, without meaning or relevance; strings of gibbering words: “all right, all right, all right… yes, yes, yes, yes… there, there, there… well, well, well, well…” just because he must utter something, because he could not bear to sit still and silent, with that anguish tearing his heart, with that sick horror choking him, with that weight of terror pressing on his breast. And then, nothing happened; and a little, faint, trembling hope fluttered in his breast for a while, and for a day or two he felt he might have a chance after all.

One night he was in such a happy state that he ventured round to the little public-house at the corner, and drank a bottle of Old Brown Ale with some enjoyment, and began to think of what life might be again, if by a miracle— he recognized even then that it would be a miracle— all this horror passed away, and he was once more just like other men, with nothing to be afraid of. He was relishing the Brown Ale, and quite plucking up a spirit, when a chance phrase from the bar caught him: “looking for him not far from here, so they say.” He left the glass of beer half full, and went out wondering whether he had the courage to kill himself that night. As a matter of fact the men at the bar were talking about a recent and sensational cat burglar; but every such word was doom to this wretch. And ever and again, he would check himself in his horrors, in his mutterings and gibberings, and wonder With amazement that the heart of a man could suffer such bitter agony, such rending torment. It was as if he had found out and discovered, he alone of all men living, a new world of which no man before had ever dreamed, in which no man could believe, if he were told the story of it. He had woken up in his past life from such nightmares, now and again, as most men suffer. They were terrible, so terrible that he remembered two or three of them that had oppressed him years before; but they were pure delight to what he now endured. Not endured, but writhed under as a worm twisting amidst red, burning coals. He went out into the streets, some noisy, some dull and empty, and considered in his panic-stricken confusion which he should choose. They were looking for him in that part of London; there was deadly peril in every step. The streets where people went to and fro and laughed and chattered might be the safer; he could walk with the others and seem to be of them, and so be less likely to be noticed by

those who were hunting on his track. But then, on the other hand, the great electric lamps made these streets almost as bright as day, and every feature of the passers-by was clearly seen. True, he was clean-shaven now, and the pictures of him in the papers showed a bearded man, and his own face in the glass still looked strange to him. Still, there were sharp eyes that could penetrate such disguises; and they might have brought down some man from Ledham who knew him well, and knew the way he walked; and so he might be haled and held at any moment. He dared not walk under the clear blaze of the electric lamps. He would be safe in the dark, quiet by-ways.

He was turning aside, making for a very quiet street close by, when he hesitated. This street, indeed, was still enough after dark, and not over well lighted. It was a street of low, two-storied houses of grey brick that had grimed, with three or four families in each house. Tired men came home here after working hard all day, and people drew their blinds early and stirred very little abroad, and went early to bed; footsteps were rare in this street and in other streets into which it led, and the lamps were few and dim compared with those in the big thoroughfares. And yet, the very fact that few people were about made such as were all the more noticeable and conspicuous. And the police went slowly on their beats in the dark streets as in the bright, and with few people to look at no doubt they looked all the more keenly at such as passed on the pavement. In his world, that dreadful world that he had discovered and dwelt in alone, the darkness was brighter than the daylight, and solitude more dangerous than a multitude of men. He dared not go into the light, he feared the shadows, and went trembling to his room and shuddered there as the hours of the night went by; shuddered and gabbled to himself his infernal rosary: “all right, all right, all right… splendid, splendid… that’s the way, that’s the way, that’s the way, that’s the way… yes, yes, yes… first rate, first rate… all right… one, one, one, one”— gabbled in a low mutter to keep himself from howling like a wild beast.

vi

IT WAS somewhat in the manner of a wild beast that he beat and tore against the cage of his fate. Now and again it struck him as incredible. He would not believe that it was so. It was something that he would wake from, as he had waked from those nightmares that he remembered, for things did not really happen so. He could not believe it, he would not believe it. Or, if it were so indeed, then all these horrors must be happening to some other man into whose torments he had mysteriously entered. Or he had got into a book, into a tale which one read and shuddered at, but did not for one moment credit; all

make-believe, it must be, and presumably everything would be all right again. And then the truth came down on him like a heavy hammer, and beat him down, and held him down— on the burning coals of his anguish.

Now and then he tried to reason with himself. He forced himself to be sensible, as he put it; not to give way, to think of his chances. After all, it was three weeks since he had got into the excursion train at Darnley, and he was still a free man, and every day of freedom made his chances better. These things often die down. There were lots of cases in which the police never got the man they were after. He lit his pipe and began to think things over quietly. It might be a good plan to give his landlady notice, and leave at the end of the week, and make for somewhere in South London, and try to get a job of some sort: that would help to put them off his track. He got up and looked thoughtfully out of the window; and caught his breath. There, outside the little newspaper shop opposite, was the bill of the evening paper: *New Clue in Ledham Murder Mystery*.

vii

THE MOMENT came at last. He never knew the exact means by which he was hunted down. As a matter of fact, a woman who knew him well happened to be standing outside Darnley station on the Excursion Day morning, and she had recognized him, in spite of his beardless chin. And then, at the other end, his landlady, on her way upstairs, had heard his mutterings and gabblings, though the voice was low. She was interested, and curious, and a little frightened, and wondered whether her lodger might be dangerous, and naturally she talked to her friends. So the story trickled down to the ears of the police, and the police asked about the date of the lodger's arrival. And there you were. And there was our nameless friend, drinking a good, hot cup of tea, and polishing off the bacon and eggs with rare appetite; in the cosy room with the cheerful paper; otherwise the Condemned Cell.

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4: A Night Adventure
Warwick Deeping
1877-1950
Australian Town and Country Journal (NSW), 30 April 1913

JIMMY BURRELL found himself stranded about 6 o'clock at Crestwick station. A solitary porter under a fluttering gas lamp could suggest nothing in the way of a conveyance. There was no village of Crestwick, and Jimmy Burrell had returned to the station for his suit case. He asked the solitary pointer how far it was to Rusthill Court.

"A matter of three miles, sir."

"Oh— well, I'll walk. There must have been some mistake, though; they were to meet me here with the car."

Jimmy Burrell picked up his suit-case, and tramped, leaving hat-box and golf bag in the hands of the porter.

It was a cloudy night with not a star showing. He had covered about a mile, and was growing heartily sick of the suit case, when he turned his head sharply to listen. A faint, yet cheery "chug, chug, chug" came upon the wind behind him.

Jimmy faced round, to see two great yellow eyes shining out of the distant darkness. It occurred to him suddenly that it was Earnshaw's car that had run down to the station by another road, missed him through being late, and was now overtaking him upon, the heath. Jimmy put his suitcase down at the side of the road, and watched the lights come nearer.

"Hallo — what's up now?"

The cheerful hum of the engine had broken suddenly into the irregular and spasmodic chatter of a series of "misfires." The little car spat, and faltered. Then silence descended.

He picked un his suit-case, and walked the twenty yards down the road, to see a dim figure laboring at the crank handle. Nothing seemed to come of it save a very eminent betrayal of temper.

"Bother the little beast!" The voice was a woman's, and Jimmy, who had a sentimental side to him, immediately felt very interested and sympathetic, though he could see little for the moment but the two lights and a dim figure standing by the motor.

Jimmy came up, and put his suit-case down in the road.

"Excuse me— can I be of any use?"

The figure turned sharply, and Jimmy was able to gauge the amount of interest the adventure might promise. A girl in a white motor cap and a long green coat stood in the light of the lamps. And Jimmy had a conviction that she was comely.

"Oh — thanks. I don't know what the little wretch is sticking for."

She looked Jimmy over intently, and was able to judge him even in the half light by the subtle significance of clothes. She also noticed the brown suit-case that he had deposited on the road.

Jimmy began to explain, but the girl seemed in too great hurry to tolerate explanations.

"You had better put your kit on the luggage platform. It's a bit thick down there. Awfully maddening being let down like this!"

She unfastened the bonnet clips, raised it, and unhooked a lamp. Jimmy gave a glance at the car.

"Six horse Wanderer; sound stuff. I know something about— them."

The girl stood fiddling with the wires, and biting her lip irritably. Jimmy insinuated his head beside hers under the bonnet.

"Accumulators charged?"

"Last week."

"No short circuit? Are you in a hurry?"

"A confounded hurry," she said, showing a certain slangy forcefulness that as rather to Jimmy's taste.

"Going far?"

"Two miles."

The distance seemed ludicrously short of her impatience. Jimmy stole a glance at her as he investigated wires and plug.

"Get her going in ten minutes and I'll be awfully grateful."

"Well, I'll try."

He began to notice that the girl seemed to be listening for some sound over the heath. She stood staring down the road in the direction of Crestwick. The whole affair began to puzzle Jimmy a little, but there was no displeasure about being puzzled. He set the throttle lever, flooded the carburettor, and took a few turns at the handle before switching on.

"Good mixture— now," he said, turning on the switch, "let's see if she'll go."

But there was no explosive life in the car, and no welcome "chug-chug."

Jimmy put his cap back, and wound valorously, all to no purpose.

"She's plugged — I believe,", he said; "let's have a look at the carburettor. Got any tools with you?"

"Yes. They are in the box."

She brought the lamp, and Jimmy raked about in the tool box for a screw driver and a pair of pliers.

"You seem in a hurry," he said tentatively.

"So would you be," she retorted, "if you had a mad ass chasing you with a pistol in his pocket."

"Oh!" said Jimmy vaguely, "got any fine wire?"

She rummaged about in the tool box. "Yes, somewhere."

"What's the chase about?" he asked, "if I may know."

"I don't know why you should."

"Nor do I," said Jimmy, "unless you happen to be going to Earnshaw's place."

She stared at him. "He's my brother-in-law. Are you going to Rusthill?"

"Well, I was ten minutes ago. They forgot to meet me at Crestwick, and I thought I'd walk."

The girl seemed to catch ac an inspiration. "Then— you're Jimmy Burrell?"

"Well— yes— I ought to be."

"Grand!" she said. "You are just the man I want."

"Eternally proud," said he, "but why? And what about that wire?"

She rummaged still further amid spanners, a pump, lifting jack, rags, and other accessories all tumbled up together.

"Here it is. You were middle-weight champion up at Cambridge?"

Jimmy looked at her curiously.

"Well?" said he.

"You can punch Fitzhodson's head if he catches us. That's all!"

Jimmy looked amused, but meditative. The "us" piqued him. "Oh— that's all— is it?" he said. "I thought you said something about a pistol."

"So I did. Fitzhodson's quite a loony. He's proposed to me seven times in a month."

"My word!" said Jimmy, "that settles it."

"Don't be rude. I want to be rid of the fool."

"But what about that pistol? Idiots who—"

"Oh, I don't suppose he'd shoot you, you know. But he goes daft when he's excited."

"I see," said Jimmy thoughtfully, "seems to me I had better get at that jet."

Floor boards were removed, and the carburettor top unscrewed. Then he took off the brake, pushed the car back a yard or two, and felt the road rather dubiously with his feet.

"I know these Wanderers," he said; "had one two years ago— for golf. To get at the jet one has to unscrew a nut— right in under there. I shall have to grovel. By the way, how much start had you?"

"About twenty minutes. He'll be riding."

He proceeded to insinuate himself under the car. The girl seemed to feel the pathos of it.

"I say — it seems a beastly shame making you mess about down there."

"Oh, it's all right," said Jimmy, feeling particularly noble on account of the mud. There was a good deal of heavy breathing and grunting, and an occasional exclamation. Jimmy's legs seemed restless, an evidence of progress. In due course Jimmy came squirming out, his back all mud, and his cap on at an absurd angle. He looked workman-like though not heroic, with a smear of black grease across one cheek bone. The girl laughed and turned the lamp on him.

"It's mean of me— but you do look funny."

"Thank you," said Jim, "so did you when you were winding at the handle." Jimmy had the carburettor screwed up, and was putting the floor boards back, when the girl turned and stood listening.

"He's coming!" she said, "Sharp's the word — then. Turn on the petrol — and screw that lamp on."

They bustled about eagerly as a faint clatter of hoofs came out of the darkness.

"Get in," said Jimmy. "I'll, work the handle. Please God— she'll start."

The girl climbed in, and sat down behind the steering wheel with a delighted little laugh. "I say— isn't it fine? Reminds one of Drury Lane."

"Oh, does it!" said Jimmy a little grimly, stooping for the crank handle. The clatter of hoofs came very near. Jimmy gave a turn, to the crank without success. At the third pull, however, there was the welcome explosion in the cylinders. The engine began to throb joyously. Jimmy swung round, and climbed into the car.

"Bother it," said she. "Won't the gears mesh? He's quite close."

"That's it." The clutch went in rather roughly, and the car went off with a bump.

"Push her along."

"All very fine, but we've got the hill against us."

Jimmy was looking back into the darkness. "Here he comes, by George!"

The girl got into the second speed, and pushed the throttle lever forward till the lamps rattled.

"Will she go on top speed?"

"I'll try."

"He'll catch, us, unless you can."

A mounted man came cantering but of the darkness. Jimmy eyed him, and began to slip off his overcoat.

"Confound the little beast," said the girl, "she's knocking. It's no go."

A shout came from behind them. The horse ranged up.

"Thought I'd catch your tootling pram! Pull up, Betty."

"Idiot! Shan't!" said the girl.

"Who's that there? Cave in. It's no use."

"Oh, isn't it!" came the echo.

"Try the hooter," said Jimmy. She tried it, but without effect. The man on horseback forged ahead, drew clear by thirty yards, and then put his horse across the road. The girl pulled up with an impatient exclamation.

"Get out, Jimmy," she said.

Jimmy got out.

"Go for him. Rag him off."

Fitzhodson edged his horse down the road, and Jimmy walked towards him casually, yet not unmindful of the hypothetical pistol.

"Hallo, sir," he said, "what's wrong?"

"Wrong? Who the deuce are you?"

"Betty picked me up at Crestwick Station,"— the Betty came out pat— "I'm due at Rusthill. Clear, please, will you."

"Blessed if I shall."

Jimmy gave a sudden spring, caught Fitzhodson and had him neatly out of the saddle. The horse, mildly surprised, walked sedately on to the grass as though scorning a share in any such vulgar rag. There was a short and vigorous scuffle. The girl had the little car gently on the move. She edged past the horse, with a glimpse of Jimmy urging Fitzhodson in the direction of the ditch. There was a burst of vituperation, a scrambling sound, and. a slushing splash of a body into muddy water.

"Quick, Jimmy," said the girl. He sprang back to the car, and climbed in as it was moving.

"Splendid, ripping!' said she, "we're close to the brow. It's down hill then. We can simply boost."

Jimmy was a little out of breath.

"It's all right," he said, looking back, "he isn't out yet. And I don't think he'll hurry."

The girl laughed joyously.

"I say, what about the pistol?" he asked.

"Goose," said she, "there wasn't one. That was all bunkum. A pretty flight of the imagination."

Jimmy looked at her doubtingly. "But I say! It's all right, isn't it? He did—"

"Oh, yes, that's all right. This would have been the eighth, and I'm tired."

Jimmy grew thoughtful. "Which eighth?' he asked at last, "does the number refer to the man or the— you know what?"

"Why, what does it matter?"

"Steady, a little, I say! You've no acetylene. There might be a ninth you know. It's possible."

"Oh, is it?" she retorted. "Well, mind you be careful."

The motor ran up the drive to Rusthill Court with a crunching and scattering of shingle. The front door was open under the big porch, and a little man in shooting jacket and knickers was standing under the lamp.

"Hallo, Betty, where the dickens have you been? Mab's been quite worried. And who's this? Why, Jimmy, I thought—"

The girl laughed, and blew the horn uproariously.

"The best piece of fun I've had for a long rime, Ben," she said, "Fitzhodson's had his eighth shot, and Jimmy wiped his eye."

The little man looked humorously solemn.

"Jimmy, what have you been doing?" he said, "we didn't expect you till seven."

"Oh, nothing," said James modestly. "I only started to walk."

5: Secret Intelligence

Violet Jacob

1863-1946

World's News (Sydney) 22 April 1916

IT would, perhaps, have been unkind to call Mr. Percy Chudworth Lee-Hickson conceited. It was only when he grew confidential— which the best of us are apt to do at times— that he talked much about himself. And younger men, with whom he adopted the paternal attitude (he was forty-three), were sometimes impressed by him.

"Yes," he had said one afternoon to a young fellow of his acquaintance, a clerk in the House of Commons, "I don't pretend to be a genius, but I keep my eyes open and my ears too. Very little escapes me, I can tell you. I'm like a hound— put me, on the scent, and I'll get there somehow. Now, my mind's never sleeping— it's always on the look-out. I look into the reasons,of things— the causes; It's good practice. You young fellows don't appreciate that, but none of the little signs of all that goes on are ever lost on me. I'm a sort of 'mind-scout,' you might say."

"Are you supposed to do one kind action a day?" inquired the youth, who was a little flippant, "because, If you are, you might try one on me."

"Well, so I will," said Mr. Lee-Hickson, who saw enough to suspect that he was having his leg his leg pulled. "I shall advise you not to wear such loud socks."

Mr. Lee-Hickson himself dressed quietly; in summer principally in blue serge. He was of middle height, fair and slender, and a little bald; he strove with his baldness by means of hairwashes and by the careful training of his hair, which he applied to the thin place, as though he were training Virginia creeper. He lived in the country, but was well enough off to make occasional visits to London, which he loved dearly, and as he was a bachelor, it may be presumed that he was free from cares. His house, On the outskirts of a south country cathedral town, was a pattern of com- fort. He was a good croquet player, an ar- dent collector of Welsh pewter, and he had just bought a small motor-car. All these things pleased him, and the knowledge of his own sagacity made a comfortable under-current to his life.

The young man with the loud socks attempted no further flippancies, and the next time that Mr. Lee-Hickson made reference to his own discernment, fee took a different tone.

"You should go into the secret service," he said, "that's the place for you. You'd be invaluable. "Why don't you apply to be taken on?"

This time Mr. Lee-Hickson had no misgivings. He felt the words to be so true that he did not suspect his companion of grinning internally at the thought of anyone of his appearance engaged in desperate deeds.

He smiled darkly. "Well," he said, "perhaps I have done so— who knows?"

He went home from the county club, where this conversation had taken place, in a reflective mood, for Ernest Darton had only voiced his own thoughts, his own convictions, Even that young ass had perceptions, it seemed, and he smoked among his pewter that evening, wondering whether destiny had been speaking to him through this unworthy medium.

He thought about it in bed, at breakfast, for days afterwards, and finally came to a tremendous resolution. He had always been interested in matters of intrigue, and he knew that the secret service was recruited from every conceivable branch of society. People of position, and people of none, people of both sexes and of all grades and professions formed part of the vast web spun round the unsuspecting public by those responsible for its safety. Why not himself? Even Henri Le Caron had, presumably, not been born with secret orders in his hand. There is a be-ginning to everything; and so Mr. Lee-Hickson told himself many, times in the couple of weeks that ensued before he made the plunge. And, one day, having decided to what official he should apply, he posted his letter. He gave the history of his own antecedents and position, and the capabilities which he knew himself to possess, asking to be employed (as a beginning) in even the most humble capacity. He then set about possessing his soul in patience until his deed should take effect.

Weeks passed with no result. It was a little over a month from the day of his resolution when a most unassuming envelope with a London postmark lay upon his hall table when he came in one night to dress for dinner.

He opened it with a sigh; it looked so like a bill. It had neither date, address, nor signature, and it was only when he had read it through that the meaning of its contents dawned upon him.

"On the 18th instant," the letter ran, "you will proceed to Ford Lane Station, on the Great Eastern line, arriving there before 6 p.m., when a local train due at that time will come in on a branch line. A tall lady will arrive by it, accompanied by a small King Charles spaniel. She will take the 6.25 to Harwich. You will find means to prevent her from starting by that train. Urgent (the word was thrice underlined). Destroy. You have been under consideration for some time."

Mr. Lee-Hickson stood thunderstruck. Here it was, the long-expected letter! It had come upon him so stealthily, with so little pomp or circumstance, that it took him a few minutes to collect his wits and screw up his feelings to the occasion. He had imagined something quite different. There was no

proposed interview, no producing of himself for inspection. Then, as he told himself how unlikely it was that an urgent secret order would carry its origin on its face, he began to wonder at his own astonishment.

The last sentence made his head buzz. Was it an explanation of the tardy reply, or did it mean that omniscient eyes had followed him, weighing his merits, even before he had taken action? Was he known? It was a giddy thought!

To-day was the 17th. Mr. Lee-Hickson swallowed his dinner in a dream, and when this was done, he burned the letter, making cryptic notes of its contents, then went to find Bradshaw. He looked up the trains mentioned, and saw that he could get to London quite comfortably and spend a pleasant few hours before starting for Ford Lane.

He began to construct some probable situation from what he had been told. Evidently the lady was going abroad, and crossing from Harwich, and for some unaccountable reason it was imperative to delay her; it was a political matter, of course— heaven knew what might not depend on his success! He was rather surprised to see that the missing of that particular train would not prevent her from sailing that evening, but, like a wise man, he questioned nothing for which he was not responsible, and concluded that there was, no need for him to understand more than his orders. He spent the evening in a chastened beatitude, shadowed by the faint fear of being unsuccessful. Not that he really felt incap- able of dealing with any matter. It was merely the preliminary shiver of the expert swimmer on the brink.

He departed for London next day, composed and resolute, having put together a rough plan of action. The dog was the key to the situation. If his mistress carried anything of vital importance she would certainly not part from it for a single moment, and he felt that the best means of delaying her would be to detain some of her property. A woman (so be reasoned) is always a slave to her pet dog, and so, by some contrivance, he must lay hands on the little beast. Short of breaking her leg or taking her purse, he could see no other way out of it. Being a devoted admirer of ladies, the first was ab- horrent, to him, and unless some miracle should happen, there would be no chance of getting hold of her money. Of course, he might try to steal her purse, but the thought of being taken up as a pickpocket was too much for his courage. Better to retire once more into obscurity than that. Should he manage to get hold of her ticket, and should she only dis-cover its loss in the train, no end would be served, for she would only have to make it good on the journey. No, unless some amazing chance presented itself, it was the dog. The waiter, who served him in the Lyons restaur-ant in which he lunched, was astonished, when

removing his plate, to see that, though the gentleman had eaten two small cutlets, there was only one bone left.

At last the time came when Mr. Lee-Hickson was at Liverpool Street, stepping into the train. He had not spent a pleasant afternoon, for the greasy bone in his coat pocket was offensive to him, and he had kept out of any known haunt of his own for fear of meeting acquaintances who might ask awkward questions or, worse still, be going his way. He had no connection with the East of England, but one never knows one's luck in this world; certainly one's ill-luck.

As he sat in his empty compartment with his unread evening paper, he wondered rather sadly whether the next day's issue would hold his own name, whether he might get into some hideous difficulty, only to be the sport of the halfpenny press, only to have his face pictured next Sunday— heavens, how horribly!— in the spicy columns of some week-end journal.

At last the train pulled up at Ford Lane Station, and he got out. It was a little place, with the branch line he had heard of running in on the other side of the platform, which made a sort of peninsula between the main and the lesser line. There was a covered book-ing-office and a small waiting-room, and far up at the further end of the platform, under the shadow of a bridge that carried the high road over the permanent way, was a nonde-script wooden shed with a few oil-lamps propped against it. There was only one porter, who stirred himself into temporary activity when trains came in.

Mr. Lee-Hickson laid the suit-case that he carried as a guarantee of travellership upon a bench; before starting, he had emptied it of everything that could give a clue to his identity. He informed the porter that he was going by the 6.25, and then proceeded to loiter up and down, taking stock of all that he saw. He walked as far as the bridge and noted the little shed, smiling as he noticed that the key was in the door. When some little time had been spent in looking about, he saw the signal go down on the branch line, and, with a beating heart, turned his steps with what nonchalance he could to the place where the incoming train would draw up.

Soon a puff of smoke showed round a corner, and the small train came clanking in. The third-class doors opened, disgorging a handful of country folk, and from the only first-class compartment there descended a tall, elegant figure, dressed in brown, with a be-veiled hat on its head and a little spaniel under its arm.

Mr. Lee-Hickson's heart beat like a drum, as he watched the lady directing the porter, who was hauling a small trunk and a huge hat-box from the van. He could hear her tell-ing the man that she was going by the 6.25 to Harwich.

To his immense relief the third-class passengers, one and all, filed out and took the road to the small town, whose houses began to border the road about a quarter of a mile off. Soon the newcomer's luggage had been deposited in a stack outside the ticket-office, and no one remained, in the station but him-self and the stranger. He was thankful to see that the dog was not on a leash; it was evidently a well-behaved little being, for it trotted quietly after it's mistress.

Mr. Lee-Hickson had heard the porter tell her that the ticket-office would not open till ten minutes before the train arrived. Then would be the critical moment; then, when she was buying her ticket, wonld be the time for the deed he had to do. So far, the ground seemed to prepare well. He strolled up and down, his hands in his pockets; the porter had gone off up the road to a little cottage, evidently his own, and, no doubt, would return in time for the 6.26.

The lady sat on a bench beside the usual wayside station flower-beds, and the dog, run-ning about, sniffed at Mr. Lee-Hickson's heels as he passed on his quarter-deck walk. He stooped and patted it, and as his fingers had just been in contact with the bone in his pocket, it licked his hand, and then followed him a little way. It was a good beginning.

At last the hands of Mr. Lee-Hickson's watch pointed to 6.15, ten minutes before train-time. The dusk was creeping on, but now that he was so close upon action Mr. Lee-Hickson had grown calm. He was only a few steps from the lady when she rose and turned towards the office, opening her bag.

Once more fortune favored the brave, for she passed Mr. Lee-Hickson, who found himself between her and the dog. The little creature was midway between himself and the lamp-house by the bridge. At the sight of its mistress walking away it came running back and approached Mr. Lee-Hickson just as the lady disappeared into the office.

He snatched the bone from his pocket and held it out to the dog. It stopped, sniffed, took the delicious morsel in its teeth, and was lost.

At a breathless run the triumphant man carried it up the platform. It struggled, but held tightly to the bone, while Mr. Lee-Hickson, smothering it with his pocket-handkerchief, made what speed he could. He just managed to knot the silk over its head and round its neck before he reached the lamp-house. Opening the door, he shot the spaniel into the darkness, shut it, turning the key, which he dropped into his pocket, and went back, panting but exultant, down the platform. He prayed that distance and the folds of his fine bandana would stifle any outcry the innocent animal might make; cheerfully would he have given twenty pounds to be sure that the 6.23 would be up to time.

He came back to find the ticket-office still closed, and the lady studying an advertisement on the wall while she waited for it to open. The clock showed that there were still six minutes to train-time. The little ticket-window went up.

Then it was that a great idea occurred to Mr. Lee-Hickson. As she came out to the platform, ticket in hand, he took off his hat and accosted her.

"Madam," he said, "your litle dog has run away."

"Oh!" she exclaimed blankly. "Oh, thank you so much! Good , heavens! Which way did he go?"

"Out there!" exclaimed Mr. Lee-Hickcson, pointing to the town. "I did all I could— I whistled— you must surely have heard me?"

"Indeed I didn't," said she.

"Through that little gate out into the road; that's the way it went," he continued.

"It's too dreadful!" she cried, dropping her arms at her sides. "I must hunt for him at once. What shall I do if my train comes in before I find him?"

"It won't," said he, looking at his watch, and praying that she might not take out hers. "We have a full eight minutes more in fact. Shall we go a little way towards the town? The dog will knew your call and it won't know mine!"

"We had better run," said she. So they ran. She was young and agile, and Mr. Lee-Hickson had to exert himself to keep up with her. They ran past the porter's cottage and past a small inn, and had got half-way to the town before they paused to call and whistle. Then they ran on again. Before them the street- lamps were beginning to be lit and to spot the dusk. The road rang with calls of "Ruby! Ruby!" and frantic whistling.

"Look at your watch again," she said, panting. "I mustn't lose that train."

"It's all right," said he, complying, "besides, they'd surely keep it a moment. They know you're going by it. We have four minutes before we need turn back— Why, there's your dog! Look! Look! Turning down between those two houses— call again!"

She called with all her might.

"I can't see him," she said, desperately. It was well within a minute of train-time. She ran on a few yards, whistled, and stopped short.

"It's no good," she exclaimed, "and I must go back. I've simply got to get on!"

She turned, and as she did so the noise of the approaching train came to her ears. Mr. Lee-Hickson had heard it before, but the sound of her own voice and her own whistling had kept it from her.

She began to run back, frantically, but they had come further than she supposed, and she was breathless from her exertions. She made a gallant run, leaving her companion standing where he was, but before she had covered

half the distance she fell into a walk, keeping all her strength to shout and wave to the porter, who had returned to the platform.

But Ford Lane was a small station, and the train had only one minute's wait there. She forced herself to some semblance of a run again, but even as she did so, the guard's green flag went up and the engine started. The train moved out into the dusk to lose itself under the bridge. In spite of what he had accomplished, the next ten minutes were among the worst of Mr. Lee-Hickson's life. His companion was in a state of distraction, and it was all she could do to keep within the bounds of civility. He protested that he had not known how much his watch had lost, he abased himself, he cursed himself for his folly, he offered apologies that should have melted a stone, he felt as though drowning in a sea of hypocrisy. She was so attractive, in such a quandary, and he had, in cold blood, put her, as the vulgar say, "in the cart," ruined prospects, perhaps, to which she looked for her livelihood. No wonder she was distraught, no wonder she was resentful! Also, he was far, far from indifferent to the hateful fact that she thought him an absolute fool. But his cup was not yet drained. There might be worse to come. He had yet to prevent the awful catastrophe of the discovery of the dog. What if the porter should need some implement from the lamp-house? What if he should produce another key or break in the door? What if the spaniel should make some lamentation loud enough to reach its mistress, and be found with his silk handkerchief bound tight about its bullet head?

Mercifully, her dismay seemed to have overpowered the thought of the lost Ruby, but, at any moment, she might remember her pet. Mr. Lee-Hickson grew cold at the thought.

There was nothing for it but to brace him-self for renewed action. The lady was in the telegraph office, sending a message—a cypher One, no doubt. She had not spoken to him since their return to the station, but he felt that he must, at all costs, get her out of the way, if he was to see the affair of the dog to its end. Also, he felt that the restoration of the spaniel was the one reparation in his power. He met her on the threshold of the telegraph office. His idea was to propose to escort her to the inn, where she could get some tea and rest until the next train for Harwich should arrive, while he made a more exhaustive search for the missing Ruby.

It took all the eloquence he could command to make her listen, but at last, after infinite pains, and the endurance of many biting words and allusions, he set forth once more up the road with his scornful companion. This time

they did not run; they walked in a strained and bitter silence that galled Mr. Lee-Hickson to the soul. He left her in the inn parlor, and, refusing to

partake of the tea she constrained herself to offer him, he went out into the dusk.

The station was again deserted, but, as it was too dark to see much, it would not have mattered had it been full. Mr. Lee-Hickson made a dash towards the bridge, and, stopping by the lamp-house, laid his ear to the door. Scratching and whining came from within.

Softly he took the heavy key from his pocket and softly he turned it in the lock. As the door opened, a thing like a miniature whirl- wind dashed at his legs; he had just time to clap his ankles firmly, together and make a dive at the dog before it could dodge round them. He got it by the loose skin of its back and lifted it, struggling, to his arms. His bandana was in ribbons, and he had some difficulty in disentangling them from its collar. Mr. Lee-Hickson was a man who liked to do things artistically, and the dim light glim- mering on a muddy ditch a few paces down the line showed him how to throw a glamor of realism on the episode. In its waters he rolled the outraged Ruby, mopping its shallow bed with the little brute as a housemaid mops a flooded floor. It was not easy to get his victim consistently wet, but he did it at last. Then he started with the spluttering creature for the inn.

He burst into the parlor with the dripping bundle in his arms.

"Ruby!" cried the owner, snatching it from him.

"Poor little animal!" exclaimed Mr. Lee-Hickson, "no wonder it did not come to your whistle! It had fallen headlong into a bottomless ditch beyond the railway bridge, and it was making the most pitiful efforts to get out when I heard it cry. I am thankful I thought of going in that direction. It must have rushed back when I saw it turn down behind the houses."

She overwhelmed him with thanks. As he met her eye he saw that she had employed some of her time crying. It was time for flight.

"And now," he said, "you will be all right here, waiting for the seven-thirty so I will leave you. I am so infinitely relived to have found your dog, after all the trouble I have caused you. You may forgive me, but I shall never be able to forgive myself."

He spoke with a melancholy dignity— the dignity of one whose misfortune is greater than his fault— and left her.

The propitious sight of the porter back on the platform greeted him as he reached the station.

"Is there a London train due soon?" he asked, breathlessly, "if not, where can I get a motor-car, or a carriage, or a bicycle, or a—"

'"Ere be the seven-five a-comin' in, just signalled," said the man.

"Thank God!" exclaimed Mr. Lee-Hickson.

Having some experience of official delays, Mr. Lee-Hickson was prepared to wait calmly for the recognition of his services, and it was a week after his exploit that he walked into the county club, well-pleased with life and with his own part in it. An acquaintance was sitting there, reading a letter; otherwise

the place was empty.

"You seem amused," he observed, noticing his expression.

"So I am," replied the other. "Ernest Darton has run away with an heiress."

"I am really delighted," said Mr. Lee-Hickson, recalling his last conversation with the young man; "he is a very sensible, deserving youth."

"Yes, but listen to this," continued his companion, shaking with laughter. "You see, the girl's people wouldn't have it, and they decided to bolt. She was in the north and he was in London, and they were to meet at Harwich and cross to Rotterdam together. Well, the day before, he found that he'd be detained in the House of Commons too late to meet her at the time they'd settled. It wasn't safe to wire, and there wasn't time to write, as she'd already started from Wick, or some infernal place, so he got some ass of a fellow to contrive that she should miss her train at a small station, and when the next one came in Darton was in it, and they went off together. The fellow fancied himself as a detective, and thought he'd got a commission to do the job from the secret service. It's almost too good to be true. Lord! I respect Darton!"

He shook again.

When Mr. Lee-Hickson got home there was a foreign letter on the hall-table. He opened it to find the photograph of a King Charles spaniel and a visiting card. On the former was written, "With fond love from Ruby," and on the latter, "With Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Darton's compliments."

"I've paid him out for my loud socks," Darton had said, as he posted the letter.

"Ye—es," replied Mrs. Darton, without enthusiasm.

6: The Mystery of Pinkham's Diamond Stud

John Kendrick Bangs

1862-1922

Harper's Bazaar, 1 April 1899

A Sherlockian parody

"IT IS the little things that tell in detective work, my dear Watson," said Sherlock Holmes as we sat over our walnuts and coffee one bitter winter night shortly before his unfortunate departure to Switzerland, whence he never returned.

"I suppose that is so," said I, pulling away upon the very excellent stogie which mine host had provided— one made in Pittsburg in 1885, and purchased by Holmes, whose fine taste in tobacco had induced him to lay a thousand of these down in his cigar-cellar for three years, and then keep them in a refrigerator, overlaid with a cloth soaked in Château Yquem wine for ten. The result may be better imagined than described. Suffice it to say that my head did not recover for three days, and the ash had to be cut off the stogie with a knife. "I suppose so, my dear Holmes," I repeated, taking my knife and cutting three inches of the stogie off and casting it aside, furtively, lest he should think I did not appreciate the excellence of the tobacco, "but it is not given to all of us to see the little things. Is it, now?"

"Yes," he said, rising and picking up the rejected portion of the stogie. "We all see everything that goes on, but we don't all know it. We all hear everything that goes on, but we are not conscious of the fact. For instance, at this present moment there is somewhere in this world a man being set upon by assassins and yelling lustily for help. Now his yells create a certain atmospheric disturbance. Sound is merely vibration, and, once set going, these vibrations will run on and on and on in ripples into the infinite— that is, they will never stop, and sooner or later these vibrations must reach our ears. We may not know it when they do, but they will do so none the less. If the man is in the next room, we will hear the yells almost simultaneously— not quite, but almost— with their utterance. If the man is in Timbuctoo, the vibrations may not reach us for a little time, according to the speed with which they travel. So with sight. Sight seems limited, but in reality it is not. *Vox populi, vox Dei*. If *vox*, why not *oculus*? It is a simple proposition, then, that the eye of the people being the eye of God, the eye of God being all-seeing, therefore the eye of the people is all-seeing— Q. E. D."

I gasped, and Holmes, cracking a walnut, gazed into the fire for a moment.

"It all comes down, then," I said, "to the question, who are the people?"

Holmes smiled grimly. "All men," he replied, shortly; "and when I say all men, I mean all creatures who can reason."

"Does that include women?" I asked.

"Certainly," he said. "Indubitably. The fact that women don't reason does not prove that they can't. I can go up in a balloon if I wish to, but I don't. I can read an American newspaper comic supplement, but I don't. So it is with women. Women can reason, and therefore they have a right to be included in the classification whether they do or don't."

"Quite so," was all I could think of to say at the moment. The extraordinary logic of the man staggered me, and I again began to believe that the famous mathematician who said that if Sherlock Holmes attempted to prove that five apples plus three peaches made four pears, he would not venture to dispute his conclusions, was wise. (This was the famous Professor Zoggenhoffer, of the Leipsic School of Moral Philosophy and Stenography.—Ed.)

"Now you agree, my dear Watson," he said, "that I have proved that we see everything?"

"Well—" I began.

"Whether we are conscious of it or not?" he added, lighting the gas-log, for the cold was becoming intense.

"From that point of view, I suppose so— yes," I replied, desperately.

"Well, then, this being granted, consciousness is all that is needed to make us fully informed on any point."

"No," I said, with some positiveness. "The American people are very conscious, but I can't say that generally they are well-informed."

I had an idea this would knock him out, as the Bostonians say, but counted without my host. He merely laughed.

"The American is only self-conscious. Therefore he is well-informed only as to self," he said.

"You've proved your point, Sherlock," I said. "Go on. What else have you proved?"

"That it is the little things that tell," he replied. "Which all men would realize in a moment if they could see the little things— and when I say 'if they could see,' I of course mean if they could be conscious of them."

"Very true," said I.

"And I have the gift of consciousness," he added.

I thought he had, and I said so. "But," I added, "give me a concrete example." It had been some weeks since I had listened to any of his detective stories, and I was athirst for another.

He rose up and walked over to his pigeon-holes, each labelled with a letter, in alphabetical sequence.

"I have only to refer to any of these to do so," he said. "Choose your letter."

"Really, Holmes," said I, "I don't need to do that. I'll believe all you say. In fact, I'll write it up and sign my name to any statement you choose to make."

"Choose your letter, Watson," he retorted. "You and I are on terms that make flattery impossible. Is it F, J, P, Q, or Z?"

He fixed his eye penetratingly upon me. It seemed for the moment as if I were hypnotized, and as his gaze fairly stabbed me with its intensity, through my mind there ran the suggestion "Choose J, choose J, choose J." To choose J became an obsession. To relieve my mind, I turned my eye from his and looked at the fire. Each flame took on the form of the letter J. I left my chair and walked to the window and looked out. The lamp-posts were twisted into the shape of the letter J. I returned, sat down, gulped down my brandy-and-soda, and looked up at the portraits of Holmes's ancestors on the wall. They were all J's. But I was resolved never to yield, and I gasped out, desperately,

"Z!"

"Thanks," he said, calmly. "Z be it. I thought you would. Reflex hypnotism, my dear Watson, is my forte. If I wish a man to choose Q, B takes hold upon him. If I wish him to choose K, A fills his mind. Have you ever observed how the mind of man repels a suggestion and flees to something else, merely that it may demonstrate its independence of another mind? Now I have been suggesting J to you, and you have chosen Z—"

"You misunderstood me," I cried, desperately. "I did not say Z; I said P."

"Quite so," said he, with an inward chuckle. "P was the letter I wished you to choose. If you had insisted upon Z, I should really have been embarrassed. See!" he added. He removed the green-ended box that rested in the pigeon-hole marked Z, and, opening it, disclosed an emptiness.

"I've never had a Z case. But P," he observed, quietly, "is another thing altogether."

Here he took out the box marked P from the pigeon-hole, and, opening it, removed the contents— a single paper which was carefully endorsed, in his own handwriting, "The Mystery of Pinkham's Diamond Stud."

"You could not have selected a better case, Watson," he said, as he unfolded the paper and scanned it closely. "One would almost think you had some prevision of the fact."

"I am not aware," said I, "that you ever told the story of Pinkham's diamond stud. Who was Pinkham, and what kind of a diamond stud was it— first-water or Rhine?"

"Pinkham," Holmes rejoined, "was an American millionaire, living during business hours at Allegheny City, Pennsylvania, where he had to wear a

brilliant stud to light him on his way through the streets, which are so dark and sooty that an ordinary search-light would not suffice. In his leisure hours, however, he lived at the Hotel Walledup-Hysteria, in New York, where he likewise had to wear the same diamond stud to keep him from being a marked man. Have you ever visited New York, Watson?"

"No," said I.

"Well, when you do, spend a little of your time at the Walledup-Hysteria. It is a hotel with a population larger than that of most cities, with streets running to and from all points of the compass; where men and women eat under conditions that Lucullus knew nothing of; where there is a carpeted boulevard on which walk all sorts and conditions of men; where one pays one's bill to the dulcet strains of a string orchestra that woo him into a blissful forgetfulness of its size; and where, by pressing a button in the wall, you may summon a grand opera, or a porter who on request will lend you enough money to enable you and your family to live the balance of your days in comfort. In America men have been known to toil for years to amass a fortune for the one cherished object of spending a week in this Olympian spot, and then to be content to return to their toil and begin life anew, rich only in the memory of its luxuries. It was here that I spent my time when, some years ago, I went to the United States to solve the now famous Piano Case. You will remember how sneak thieves stole a grand piano from the residence of one of New York's first families, while the family was dining in the adjoining room. While in the city, and indeed at the very hotel in which I stopped, and which I have described, Pinkham's diamond stud disappeared, and, hearing that I was a guest at the Walledup-Hysteria, the owner appealed to me to recover it for him. I immediately took the case in hand. Drastic questioning of Pinkham showed that beyond all question he had lost the stud in his own apartment. He had gone down to dinner, leaving it on the centre-table, following the usual course of most millionaires, to whom diamonds are of no particular importance. Pinkham wanted this one only because of its associations. Its value, $80,000, was a mere bagatelle in his eyes.

"Now of course, if he positively left it on the table, it must have been taken by some one who had entered the room. Investigation proved that the maid, a valet, a fellow-millionaire from Chicago, and Pinkham's children had been the only ones to do this. The maid and the valet were above suspicion. Their fees from guests were large enough to place them beyond the reach of temptation. I questioned them closely, and they convinced me at once of their innocence by conducting me through the apartments of other guests wherein tiaras of diamonds and necklaces of pearls— ropes in very truth— rubies,

turquoise, and emerald ornaments of priceless value, were scattered about in reckless profusion.

"'D' yez t'ink oi'd waste me toime on an eighty-t'ousand-dollar shtood, wid all dhis in soight and moine for the thrubble uv swipin' ut?" said the French maid.

"I acquitted her at once, and the valet similarly proved his innocence, only with less of an accent, for he was supposed to be English, and not French, as was the maid, although they both came from Dublin. This narrowed the suspects down to Mr. Jedediah Wattles, of Chicago, and the children. Naturally I turned my attention to Wattles. A six-year-old boy and a four-year-old girl could hardly be suspected of stealing a diamond stud. So drawing on Pinkham for five thousand dollars to pay expenses, I hired a room in a tenement-house in Rivington Street— a squalid place it was— disguised myself with an oily, black, burglarious mustache, and dressed like a comic-paper gambler. Then I wrote a note to Wattles, asking him to call, saying that I could tell him something to his advantage. He came, and I greeted him like a pal. 'Wattles,' said I, 'you've been working this game for a long time, and I know all about you. You are an ornament to the profession, but we diamond-thieves have got to combine. Understand?' 'No, I don't' said he. 'Well, I'll tell you,' said I. 'You're a man of good appearance, and I ain't, but I know where the diamonds are. If we work together, there's millions in it. I'll spot the diamonds, and you lift 'em, eh? You can do it,' I added, as he began to get mad. 'The ease with which you got away with old Pinky's stud, that I've been trying to pull for myself for years, shows me that.'

"I was not allowed to go further. Wattles's indignation was great enough to prove that it was not he who had done the deed, and after he had thrashed me out of my disguise, I pulled myself together and said, 'Mr. Wattles, I am convinced that you are innocent.' As soon as he recognized me and realized my object in sending for him, he forgave me, and, I must say, treated me with great consideration.

"But my last clew was gone. The maid, the valet, and Wattles were proved innocent. The children alone remained, but I could not suspect them. Nevertheless, on my way back to the hotel I bought some rock-candy, and, after reporting to Pinkham, I asked casually after the children.

" 'They're pretty well,' said Pinkham. 'Billie's complaining a little, and the doctor fears appendicitis, but Polly's all right. I guess Billie's all right too. The seventeen-course dinners they serve in the children's dining-room here aren't calculated to agree with Billie's digestion, I reckon.'

" 'I'd like to see 'em,' said I. 'I'm very fond of children.'

"Pinkham immediately called the youngsters in from the nursery. 'Guess what I've got,' I said, opening the package of rock-candy. 'Gee!' cried Billie, as it caught his eye. 'Gimme some!' 'Who gets first piece?' said I. 'Me!' cried both. 'Anybody ever had any before?' I asked. 'He has,' said Polly, pointing to Billie. The boy immediately flushed up. ''Ain't, neither!' he retorted. 'Yes you did, too,' said Polly. 'You swallered that piece pop left on the centre-table the other night!' 'Well, anyhow, it was only a little piece,' said Billie. 'An' it tasted like glass,' he added. Handing the candy to Polly, I picked Billie up and carried him to his father.

"'Mr. Pinkham,' said I, handing the boy over, 'here is your diamond. It has not been stolen; it has merely been swallowed.' 'What?' he cried. And I explained. The stud mystery was explained. Mr. Pinkham's boy had eaten it."

Holmes paused.

"Well, I don't see how that proves your point," said I. "You said that it was the little things that told—"

"So it was," said Holmes. "If Polly hadn't told—"

"Enough," I cried; "it's on me, old man. We will go down to Willis's and have some Russian caviare and a bottle of Burgundy."

Holmes put on his hat and we went out together. It is to get the money to pay Willis's bill that I have written this story of "The Mystery of Pinkham's Diamond Stud."

7: Professor Dodo's Experiment

Ernest Favenc

1845-1908

Evening News (Sydney) 2 Nov 1895

I SUPPOSE no man ever had a more devoted admirer than Professor Dodo had in myself. I metaphorically sat at his feet and drank in learning through my ears. He was a very taking man, absorbed in scientific research; but what attracted me most was the fact that he was a daring experimentalist.

At that time I was a young man, living at home with my family, and, like most young men, apt to make a fool of myself by going in for extremes of hero-worship. Just at that period it was Professor Dodo.

For some time, however, he had been somewhat more reticent and uncommunicative than usual. Whatever it was that he was engaged on, he did not invite me to share his confidence. The professor, however, had one weakness, common, as I know now, to the greatest of men, but as I then thought a weakness far beneath him. It was a consuming jealousy of Dr. Panto, a man who could not possibly aspire to rival him. Be that as it may; Panto and he were mortal enemies.

One evening the professor came to our house in a wonderfully pleasant frame of mind. I could tell at once that the experiment, whatever it was, that he had been engaged upon, had turned out a success. I was suffering from an attack of neuralgia at the time, and he soon noticed it.

'I will send you something that will quickly relieve you,' he said as he left, and in about half an hour's time his man came round with a bottle of medicine and a note telling me how to use it. True enough, it relieved my pain speedily, and I slept soundly throughout the night. In fact, next morning I felt stronger and more active than I had done for a long time. I went to see the professor, and on his inquiring after my health I told him how I felt.

'You've run down a bit, my boy,' he said, 'I am not a professional M.D., but still I can give you something that will make a new man of you.' Afterwards I understood the fiendish meaning of those words.

I thanked him cordially, and he sent me the medicine, with instructions how to use it. Certainly it was a wonderful invigorative, and seemed to- put the most uncommon strength into my limbs. At the same time, I did not feel up to much brain work, and what I did was with great exertion. One evening the professor strolled up to ask after me.

'I noticed that you were a little feverish to-day,' he said, 'so I have brought round a soothing draught which will give you a sound night's rest. Take half when, you go to bed, and go early. You will probably wake in some three hours, then take the other half. In the morning you won't know yourself.'

We shook hands, and I followed his advice, and fell off to sleep as soon as my head touched the pillow. Then I dreamt a strange dream. I saw before me a boundless sea— a sea that seemed to stretch further than our earthly one, as though I was high up in the air and had a more extended view. Gigantic creatures of strange and awful shape swam and floated on this great sea, and fought and devoured each other, until it all passed from my view, and there was nothing but mud— mud everywhere— and through, it and over it crawled horrible reptiles of all kinds; and these, too, fought and devoured each other. I awoke with a start of horror, and struck a light; it was half past 12.

I hastily drank the remainder of the draught and went back into bed, trusting that I would nave no more dreams of that description. There was one strange thing which did not strike me at the time, for I fell asleep at once, but when I got into bed, instead of doing it in the ordinary manner, I leaped lightly on the bed from the floor and then laid myself down.

At once I was in a forest so dense, so thick and high, that it made twilight underneath. But that did not matter, for I was one of a band of apes who sported amid the upper branches. How we frisked and fought and swung ourselves about, and watched the great beasts struggling in combat underneath; and pelted them with dead limbs, and then marched away to some other part, and there met with other apes, and battled for the new territory. Oh! it was a mad life; until one day, chasing one of my fellows, a branch broke with me, and I fell clear eight on to the ground—

I was awake; sitting up in my bed, with my heart beating fast. Was this the sound sleep promised me? The day had just commenced, a summer morning, and I got out of bed, intending to dress and go out, for I felt that I must get into the fresh air. I sat down on the edge of the bed to dress, and quite unconsciously picked up my sock with my toes instead of my hand. I started as I did so, and looked at my foot.

Good God! It was not my foot! It was long, narrow, and the great toe was like a thumb. My hands! They, too, were altered. I rushed to the glass, and at the first glimpse I turned to see who was looking over my shoulder. No one! I was gazing at what purported to be my own reflection, but surely that ape-like countenance was not mine? It was, though. It was myself, and not myself. I shuddered with disgust.

This, then, was the experiment he had been employed on. This the hell-brew he had been administering to me! I grew quite calm, for I saw the necessity for it. I would go at once to the villain. Scarcely any one was stirring, and I could depart unobserved. If he refused to undo his devilish work I would kill him first and myself afterwards. I would not live like I was.

I dressed myself, and with some trouble got my boots on; then I started on my errand of vengeance.

What a lovely morning it was, and what a miserable wretch I felt As I crossed the park an irresistible impulse made me leap up and, catching hold of a branch, swing myself up into a tree and sit on a limb; then I remembered myself, and dropped to the ground. Fortunately no one was about to witness this wild antic.

I reached the professor's house just as a sleepy servant was opening the door. Pushing past her, I went straight up to his room, which I knew well. Evidently he expected me, for he was awake and sitting up in bed.

'How do you find yourself?' he asked, sneeringly.

'The question is how will you find yourself directly,' I replied.

'Then your visit is—'

'To choke the life out of you and then kill myself.'

'Indeed! And what good will that do? The whole of my experiment, and its success— Its success, mark you!—is written down and deposited in a safe place. You may kill me, but the record remains. You may kill yourself, but your body and skeleton remain as a proof of my success, which will stamp me the most wonderful scientist in the world's history.'

'I will drown myself from a steamer.'

His face changed, and I saw his hand steal underneath the pillow, but with my ape-like agility I had the revolver from his hand, and sent it crashing through the window. Then I took him by the throat, and shook him soundly. The madman would have shot me for my skeleton.

'Now,' I said, 'will you restore me to my natural shape?'

'On one condition. Allow yourself to be photographed in all the different positions I want, and then I will do it.'

'Never.'

'Remember. If you kill me, you kill the only man who can restore your form. Reflect.'

'I have reflected,' I returned, as a bright thought flashed through me. 'I am going now to Dr. Panto. I will allow him to photograph me, and exhibit me if he likes. I will swear that you had nothing whatever to do with it; that you are a humbug and an impostor; and Dr. Panto shall claim the successful experiment, and reap all the honor and glory of it. Good morning.'

What a howl of anguish burst from that bed!

'You mean it?' he yelled.

'Mean it! Do you suppose a man in my position sticks at trifles?'

'I will do it,' he said feebly, and in a broken tone.

He went to his laboratory, and presently returned with certain drugs, which he told me how to use.

'Now, mark me,' I said, as I left. 'Before I take these I am going to write to Dr. Panto a detailed account of your experiment and its success. This will be sealed up to be opened after my death, so that should you have given me poison you will not gain by it.'

'One thing,' he said humbly, 'have you any sign of a tail coming?'

I withered him with a look, and left. It was still early, and I regained my home without observation. The charm worked backwards, and I arose a man once more.

Dodo died soon afterwards from sheer disappointment. But we did not speak in the interim.

8: The Three Grey Men Of Mote Hall

Peter Cheyney

1896-1951

Queenslander 19 June 1926

In the 1920s Peter Cheyney produced a flood of short stories for newspapers and magazines, before he found his feet with the Slim Callaghan and Lemmy Caution private eye series, and a set of WW2 Secret Service novels. Like many such writers, he had several series characters; this is an Alonzo MacTavish story, the hero being a sort of gentleman crook.

THE ATMOSPHERE of the Lyon's Tea Shop was restful. Outside, the busy traffic in. Southampton Row, and the summer heat, made life unendurable. Alonzo had already consumed three pots of China tea, mainly as an excuse for staying on, in order to consider the problem which, for the last hour had engrossed his attention. He propped the newspaper up against the tea pot, and read, once again, the paragraph which had caught his eye early that morning.

MOTE HALL MURDER MYSTERY.

BODY IDENTIFIED.

The body of the man who was found murdered in the entrance hall at Mote Hall, the deserted Sussex Mansion, was today identified as that of Carl Kleiner. This information serves to deepen the extraordinary mystery which has puzzled Scotland Yard and the Sussex Police for the last fortnight.

Kleiner is a clever American crook, who landed in this country only three days before he was found stabbed to the heart in Mote Hall. His presence in the empty house is unaccountable. He had been staying at Carret's Hotel, Mayfair, and had told the hall porter that he was going to Sussex for two days and would return to the Hotel.

Robbery was not the motive for the crime, as his watch and a large diamond ring were found on the body. The medical evidence at the inquest stated that the force which drove the dagger to Kleiner's heart must have been practically superhuman.

Alonzo ordered a fourth pot of tea, and considered the mystery. Carl Kleiner was a clever American crook, who had managed, very successfully, to evade the police for the last five years. What was he doing down at Mote Hall, in Sussex? An expert burglar does not usually amuse himself inspecting deserted country mansions, Alonzo thought, and Kleiner was very expert, besides which be was a man of imagination, and something told Alonzo that there was more in the sudden visit to the empty mansion than was obvious at the moment.

A slim, dark young fellow entered the tea shop, and, catching sight of Alonzo, made his way to the table. "Hullo, Mac," he said cheerfully. "I got your

'phone message all right, but I had to jump about a bit to get the job done, but I think I've got the dope on Kleiner."

"Where did you get it, Lon ?" asked Alonzo, signalling for another cup.

Lon Ferris grinned. "Do you remember Lopey Steve, Mac?" he asked. "Well, he wasn't particularly fond of Kleiner, but he knew more about him than anybody this side of the Atlantic. Here you are..."

He threw a folded paper across the table, and drinking the cup of tea which Alonzo had poured out for him, put on his hat.

"So long, Mac," he said. "I'd like to know what the game is. but I know it's no use asking. Till next time. So long!"

Alonzo, left to himself, opened the slip of paper and read :—

"Kleiner came over three days before he was found croaked in Mote Hall. He was believed to have some game on down there. Said he was thinking of buying the place, but that was all eye wash. There must have been something big on, for Kleiner only went out for big stuff. Hertz, a Dago, who used to be Kleiner's 'side stepper landed in England the day after Kleiner arrived. He had it in for Kleiner, who, he said, had twisted him on their last deal. Hertz may have done Kleiner in. He will stick at nothing. Photo herewith."

Alonzo examined the photograph of Hertz carefully. He came to the conclusion that he had never seen such a villainous-looking face in the course or his adventurous career.

After some further consideration, Alonzo came to the conclusion that there was nothing for it but to go down to Mote Hall and investigate. He was certain that there was something tangible in Mote Hall, and that Kleiner had been after it.

An A.B.C. borrowed from an adjacent chemist's shop told him that there was a train for East Shallock— a station about five miles from Mote Hall— at four-thirty. He took a cab to his flat at Earl's Court, and packing a suitcase, into which he slipped his automatic pistol, he caught the train and was soon *en route* for Mote Hall.

East Shallock was a small country station that boasted of no cabs or other means of conveyance. Alonzo learned that there was an inn two miles further along the road where he could find accommodation. Gripping his suit case he swung cheerfully along the road, his brain busily endeavouring to evolve some scheme of action.

Presently he inn came in sight. It was a prepossessing-looking, old-fashioned place, where Alonzo obtained. a hearty greeting from the landlord, who, he was glad to find, was inclined to be talkative.

"Terrible thing, this 'ere murder, sir," he volunteered presently, as Alonzo was eating his dinner in the tiny dining room. "We ain't 'ad a murder in these

parts for nigh on 30 year. A strange business for a man to be found stabbed m a 'ouse that 'asn't been lived in for two 'undred years. But Mote 'All's a strange place—I wouldn't like to spend a night there, and many's the strange tales they do tell about the old house."

"Haunted?" queried Alonzo, with a smile.

"They do say so, sir," replied: the landlord. "You see, the 'all used to be a monastery in the olden times, and the monks as were in it never came out of the place. When they died they were just buried by the others. Well, the story goes that at last there was only three of 'em left, an' these three used to take turn and turn about to guard the treasure that was supposed to be in the vaults underneath. Some rapscallion in the neighbourhood, thinking to get the treasure, climbed the monastery wall one night. He was never 'eard of again, but years after they found, what was left of 'im in the 'all, just the same as this 'ere Mr. Kleiner. There's old folk about 'ere who swear they've seen the ghosts of the Three Grey Men of Mote Hall— as they are called— walkin' about the grounds at night with daggers in their 'ands, and tho' it may sound silly like. I've often thought I've seen a light in the windows late at night myself."

Alonzo, his dinner finished, lit a pipe. It was strange, he thought, that Kleiner should have met his death in the manner of the old legend, for although. Alonzo did not believe in ghosts, he had encountered strange coincidences in his time. After a few minutes he strolled into the passage between the dining-room and the private bar. He looked through the bar door, then drew back quickly out of sight, for, sitting against the bar, drinking a whisky and soda, was the man whose photograph was in Alonzo's pocket— Hertz!

Alonzo, back in the dining-room, considered the situation. What was Hertz doing at Mote Hall? Was it merely curiosity to see the scene of his late partner's death, which had brought him here, or was there some other and more sinister motive?

A glance at the inn's register showed him that Hertz had registered as a "Tourist." with an address in Paris. Alonzo smiled gently to himself, and, knocking out his pipe, went up to bed.

IT WAS 3 o'clock the next morning. The moon had sunk behind the clouds, and the night was dark as Alonzo ascended the bracken-covered path which led to Mote Hall. The outline of the old mansion, ghostly in the dim light, brought to Alonzo's mind the landlord's story of 'The Three Grey Men." A convenient tree helped him to scale the wall, and ten minutes afterwards he forced the dusty shutters which covered a ground floor window and made his way into the house.

Walking on tiptoe he quickly found the entrance hall and examined the spot where the body of Kleiner had been found. The ominous red stain was still on the wooden floor, and, as Alonzo's electric flash lamp travelled over the walls of the old place, he wondered whether the story of the treasure was true, and whether Kleiner had. thought the tale worth investigating. After a few minutes' search he left the hall and, mounting the wide staircase, examined the rooms on the first floor. Empty and thick with dust, they told him nothing, and, after some fifteen minutes' fruitless search he returned to the entrance hall.

He flashed his lamp round the place once more, and as the white beam of light fell on the back of the ancient fireplace he stifled an exclamation. Almost hidden behind a projecting stone was a piece of white paper. He picked it up, and a soft whistle of astonishment escaped him. The handwriting was the same as that in the inn register. The note in his hand had been written by Hertz. He opened the folded paper and read:

"Dear K.,—The stuff is in the third vault next to the old torture chamber. Wall facing the door. Fourth stone from the ground upwards, sixth stone from the wall sideways. Press. When wall opens out, you will, find oak cupboard inside. Press middle rose in bunch of flowers carved on right panel, and the cupboard opens. Meet you as arranged. Good. luck. H."

So Hertz had been in the game with Kleiner! And, the stuff was downstairs in the vaults!' Alonzo sat for a moment, his torch switched off, staring straight at the darkness in front of him. Then a smile curved his lips, and he nodded his head, in silent amusement.

After a minute he rose and, walking as quietly as a cat, made his way by the winding stone staircase down to the vaults. The light of his torch enabled him to, find the middle vault—the one next to the small square room which had been used, as a torture chamber in the olden times. He walked to the opposite wall and, carrying out the instructions in the note, threw his weight against the brick indicated. A moment passed, then, with a creaking noise, a square of the stone wall moved outwards, disclosing, as the note had said, the door of an ancient oak-carved cupboard.

Alonzo stepped back, every nerve strained to catch the slightest sound. Suddenly he switched off his torch, and, moving quickly and silently to the stone staircase which led upstairs, he ascended halt a dozen steps. Above him he heard a slight shuffle. Descending quickly, he switched on his torch again, and making his way to the treasure cupboard, he found the middle rose in the bunch of flowers carved on the right panel. He put his thumb on the rose and

pressed, and, an the cupboard doors slowly commenced to open, he sprang backwards.

A second later an iron bar, worked by come hidden mechanism, came downwards and outwards from the cupboard. Affixed to the top of the bar was a gloaming knife. The bar struck suddenly at the place where Alonzo had been standing, then disappeared back into the cupboard. Alonzo switched off his torch and dropped it with a crash ; then, giving a deep groan, he moved into the shadows. As he did so the light of an electric torch appeared on the stairs and; a moment later, his face working with excitement, the figure of Hertz appeared at the bottom of the stairway.

Alonzo stepped forward into the circle of light.

"Good evening, Mr. Hertz!" he said, smiling into the astounded countenance of the other. "How disappointed you must be at the failure of your little scheme. Your annoyance at not seeing me lying dead on the floor must be acute, I am sure!"

"What the hell do you mean?" gasped Hertz, his face white with fear and anger.

"I'll tell you, my friend, exactly what I mean." replied Alonzo. "You knew of the existence of this treasure and you wanted to get it; at the same time you were aware that the doors were guarded by this device of the olden time monks, and that if any one attempted to open the door without knowing the actual secret they would be stabbed by the mechanical knife. I've seen another, exactly like it, in Strasbourg. But you had to got the doors open somehow, and so the idea came to you, that you might kill two birds with one stone. You put Kleiner on to the job, and when he was stabbed you came down to Mote Hall and moved the body upstairs carrying away just as much of the treasure as you could.

"You saw me enter the Hall tonight, and you wrote out that note, which I found in the fireplace, whilst I was on the first floor. You knew that I would descend to the vaults and carry out the instructions in the note, and you hoped to get me out of the way and the treasure chest open a second time. Luckily for me I realised that the note which I found had been written only a few minutes before. I have good eyesight, and I realised that that note was not three weeks old. Hard luck, Mr. Hertz!"

"Who are you, any way?" asked Hertz angrily.

"My name is Alonzo MacTavish," replied Alonzo quietly.

Hertz gave an exclamation of surprise. "MacTavish," he ejaculated, "Why Kleiner often told me about you— the cleverest crook in the world, he called you. Now, look here, MacTavish, you've got me beat. I guess you're right about Kleiner. I had to get him out of the way, but he'd have done the same to me.

Help me get this stuff away, and we'll go halves. There's a king's fortune in that cupboard. Well, what do you say?"

"I don't do business with murderers, Hertz," replied Alonzo, quietly.

"Say, don't be a fool,'' Hertz pleaded. "Do you know what that stuff is in the cupboard ? Well, I'll tell you. Don't you believe any old stories about monks' treasure— the stuff in that chest is the jewels brought from the Russian Churches during the revolution. There's diamond crosses and things worth thousands. I guess some refugee royalists put it here for safety, so that the Bolsheviks shouldn't claim 'em, thinking that nobody would ever find 'em out. I found out anyway, and I'm. going to have my whack at 'em."

"Oh, no, you're not, Mr. Hertz," said Alonzo. "I've done some funny things in my time, but I don't work with murderers, and I don't rob churches. This stuff is going to stay exactly where if is for the moment."

Alonzo took out his cigarette case and lit a cigarette. Then he looked up— straight into the barrel of the heavy automatic which shone in Hertz's hand.

"Oh, you think so, my chivalrous friend, do you?" answered Hertz. "Well, I'll tell you what I'm going to do. You know too much, and I'm going to see that you don't talk. I'm going to shoot you, my friend, and your body is going into that cupboard when I've cleared it of some of the stuff that's in it. Dead men tell no tales, and—"

Something whizzed past Alonzo's head, and Hertz, dropping the revolver, staggered back, his eyes wide with fear. A long knife, unerringly thrown, had transfixed his right arm. Alonzo spun round then stepped back with an involuntary gasp of astonishment. Half of the wall which separated the vault from the torture chamber had swung back, and in the opening stood the Three Grey Men of Mote Hall!

The dim light from the chamber beyond showed faintly on the long grey monk's gown and the hoods which concealed the faces of the wearers. The tallest of the three stepped forward and spoke to Hertz.

"Do not be alarmed, my burglaring friend," he said, speaking with a slight accent. "We are not ghosts, but very much flesh and blood."

He bowed to Alonzo.

"Sir," he said, "may I introduce myself— Colonel Count Stefan Ketivra, late of the Russian Imperial Life Guard." The next grey-gowned figure stepped forward— "Lieutenant Kapek Packski, of the Sharpshooters, and"— as the third figure advanced— "Lieutenant Karolis Ivanoff, of the same regiment."

Alonzo returned his bow.

"I am Alonzo MacTavish," he said— "gentleman adventurer, night of the road, or, if you will, plain crook!"

Ketivra held up his hand.

"Sir," he said, "crook or not, you would have protected the holy treasure which we guard, and for that we salute you. For years we have guarded this, the remnants of our churches' treasure, and, but for the conversation which we overheard, this murderer would have succeeded in his foul plot. We shall deal with him in good time. As for you, you must leave Mote Hall at one, and never set foot in it again. This you must swear upon your honour, also that you will never mention what you have seen this night."

"I give you my word," said Alonzo.

"Good," replied the Count. "We have found the ancient legend of The Three Grey Men most useful for our secrecy, and it must be guarded. And now. Good-bye. Kapek will see you safely away."

Alonzo bowed and followed the silent lieutenant of Sharpshooters.

AS THE VILLAGE clock struck five and the dawn broke, Alonzo, whistling quietly to himself, walked along the country road towards the inn. The mystery of Kleiner's death was solved, and Alonzo's curiosity was satisfied. He stood on the crest of the hill and looked back at Mote Hall. Suddenly, on the quiet morning air, a shot rang out: then all was silence. Alonzo raised his cap.

"Good-bye. Mr. Hertz," he said, and, singing, strode off to the inn.

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9: The Chinese Play At The Haymarket

Grant Allen

1848-1899

The Belgravia Annual Christmas 1880

(as by "J. Arbuthnot Wilson"; collected in the Grant Allen short story collection Ivan Greet's Masterpiece*, 1893)*

"I DON'T KNOW how it is, Meenie," said the manager gloomily, "but this theatre don't seem to pay at all. It's a complete failure, that's what it is. We must strike out something new and original, with a total change of scenery, properties, and costume."

It was the last night of the season at the Crown Prince's Theatre, Mayfair. The manager was an amiable young man, just beginning his career as a licensed purveyor of dramatic condiments; and though he had peppered and spiced his performances with every known form of legitimate or illegitimate stimulant, the public somehow didn't seem to see it. So here he was left at the end of the last night, surveying the darkened house from the footlights, and moodily summing up in his mind the grand total of the season's losses. Meenie, better known to the critical world as Miss Amina Fitz-Adilbert, was his first young lady, a lively little Irish girl, with just the faintest *soupçon* of a brogue; and if the Crown Prince's had turned out a success under his energetic management, Jack Roberts had fully made up his mind that she should share with him in future the honours of his name, at least in private life. She was an unaffected, simple little thing, with no actress's manners when off the stage; and as she had but one relative in the world, a certain brother Pat, who had run away to foreign parts unknown after the last Fenian business, she exactly suited Jack, who often expressed his noble determination of marrying "a lone orphan." But as things stood at present, he saw little chance of affording himself the luxury of matrimony, on a magnificent balance-sheet in which expenditure invariably managed to out-run revenue. So he stood disconsolate on the pasteboard wreck of the royal mail steamship which collided nightly in his fifth act; and looked like a sort of theatrical Marius about to immolate himself amid the ruins of a scene-painter's Carthage.

"We've tried everything, Meenie," he went on disconsolately, "but it doesn't seem to pay for all that. First of all we went in for sensational dramas. We put "Wicked London" on the stage: we drove a real hansom cab with a live horse in it across Waterloo Bridge; we had three murders and a desperate suicide: *you* nearly broke your neck leaping out of the fourth-floor window from the fire, when Jenkins forgot to put enough tow in the sheet to break your fall; and *I* singed my face dreadfully as the heroic fireman going to the

rescue. We had more railway accidents, powdered coachmen, live supernumeraries, and real water in that piece than in any piece that was ever put on the London boards; and what did the *Daily Irritator* say about it, Meenie, I ask you that? Eh?"

"They said," Meenie answered regretfully, "that the play lacked incident, and that the dullness of its general mediocrity was scarcely relieved by a few occasional episodes which hardly deserved the epithet of sensational."

"Well, then we went in for æsthetics and high art, and brought out Theophrastus Massinger Villon Snook's 'Ninon de l'Enclos.' We draped the auditorium in sage-green hangings, decorated the proscenium with peacock patterns by Whistler, got Alma-Tadema to design the costumes for the classical masque, and Millais to supply us with hints on Renaissance properties, and finally half ruined ourselves over the architecture of that château with the unpronounceable name that everybody laughed at. You got yourself up so that your own mother wouldn't have known you from Ellen Terry, and I made my legs look as thin as spindles, so that I exactly resembled an eminent tragedian in the character of Hamlet: and what came of it all? What did the *Evening Stinger* remark about that play, I should like to know?"

"They observed," said Meenie, in a lone of settled gloom, "that the decorations were washy and tasteless; that the piece itself was insipid and weakly rendered; and that no amount of compression or silk leggings would ever reduce your calves to a truly tragic diameter."

"Exactly so," said the despondent manager. "And then we went in for scenic spectacle. We produced 'The Wide World: a Panorama in Five Tableaux.' We laid our first act in Europe, our second in Asia, our third in Africa, our fourth in America, and our fifth in the islands of the Pacific Ocean. We hired five full-grown elephants from Wombwell's menagerie, and procured living coconut palms at an enormous expense from the Royal Gardens, Kew. We got three real Indian princes to appear on the stage in their ancestral paste diamonds; and we hired Farini's Zulus to perform their complete toilette before the eyes of the spectators, as an elevating moral illustration of the manners and customs of the South Sea Islanders. We had views, taken on the spot, of England's latest acquisition, the Rock of Raratonga. Finally, we wrecked this steamer here in a collision with a Russian ironclad, supposed to be symbolical of the frightful results of Mr. Gladstone's or Lord Beaconsfield's foreign policy— I'm sure I forget which: and what was the consequence? Why, the gods wanted to sing the National Anthem, and the stalls put on their squash hats and left the theatre in a fit of the sulks."

"The fact is," said Meenie, "English plays and English actors are at a discount. People are tired of them. They don't care for sensation any longer,

nor for æsthetics, nor for spectacle: upon my word, their taste has become so debased and degraded that I don't believe they even care for legs. The whole world's gone mad on foreign actors and actresses. They've got Sarah Bernhardt and the Comédie Française, and they go wild with ecstasies over her; as if I couldn't make myself just as thin by a judicious course of Dr. Tanner."

"No, you couldn't," said Jack, looking at her plump little face with a momentary relaxation of his brow. "Your fresh little Irish cheeks could never fall away to Sarah's pattern." And to say the truth, Meenie was a comely little body enough, with just as much tendency to adipose deposit as at one-and-twenty makes a face look temptingly like a peach. She blushed visibly through her powder, which shows that she had no more of it than the custom of the stage imperatively demands, and went on with her parable unrestrained.

"Then there are the Yankees, with the Danites and Colonel Sellers, talking tragedy through their noses, and applauded to the echo by people who would turn up their own at them in a transpontine melodrama. But that's the way of English people now, just because they're imported direct. That comes of free-trade, you know. For my part, I'm a decided protectionist. I'd put a prohibitory tariff upon the importation of foreign livestock, or compel them to be slaughtered at the port of entry. That's what I'd do."

Jack merely sighed.

"Well, then there are the Dutch, again, going through their performances like wooden dolls. 'Exquisite self-restraint,' the newspapers say. Exquisite fiddlesticks! Do you suppose *we* couldn't restrain ourselves if we chose to walk through Hamlet like mutes at a funeral? Do you suppose *we* couldn't show 'suppressed feeling' if we acted Macbeth in a couple of easy-chairs? Stuff and nonsense, all of it. People go because they want other people to think they understand Dutch, which they don't, and understand acting, which they can't see there. If we want to get on, we must go in for being Norwegians, or Russians, or Sandwich Islanders, or something of that sort; we really must."

Jack looked up slowly and meditatively. "Look here, Meenie," he said seriously; "suppose we get up a Chinese play?"

"Why, Jack, we're not Chinamen and Chinawomen. We don't look in the least like it."

"I don't know about that," said Jack, quietly; "your eyes are not quite the thing perhaps, but your nose is fairly well up to pattern."

"Now, sir," said Meenie, pouting, and turning up the somewhat *retroussé* feature in question, "you're getting rude. My nose is a very excellent nose, as noses go. But you could never make yours into a Chinaman's. It's at least three inches too long."

"Well, you know, Meenie, there's a man who advertises a nose-machine for pushing the cartilage, or whatever you call it, into a proper shape. Suppose we get this fellow to make us nose-machines for distorting it into a Chinese pattern. You'll do well enough as you stand, with a little walnut-juice, all except the eyes; but your warmest admirer couldn't pretend that your eyes are oblique. We must find out some dodge to manage that, and then we shall be all right. We can easily hire a few real Chinamen as supernumeraries— engage Tom Fat, or get 'em over from New York, or San Francisco, or somewhere; and as for the leading characters, nobody'll ever expect them to be very Chinese-looking. Upon my word, the idea has points about it. I'll turn it over in my mind and see what we can make of it, We may start afresh next season, after all."

The next six or eight weeks were a period of prodigious exertion on the part of Jack Roberts. At first, the notion was a mere joke; but the more he looked at it, the better he liked it. An eminent distorter of the human countenance not only showed him how to twist his nose into Mongoloid breadth and flatness, but also invented an invisible eyelid for producing the genuine Turanian almond effect, and rose with success to the further flight of gumming on a pair of undiscoverable high cheek-bones. In a few days, the whole company were so transformed that their own prompter wouldn't have known them, some allowance in the matter of noses and cheek-bones being naturally made in the case of the leading ladies, though all alike underwent a judicious course of copious walnut-juice. Jack telegraphed wildly to all parts of the globe for stray Chinamen; and when at last he picked up half a dozen from vessels in the Thames, it was unanimously decided that they looked far less genuinely celestial than the European members of the company. As for the play, Jack settled that very easily. "We shall give them George Barnwell," he said, with wicked audacity; "only we shall leave out all the consonants except *n* and *g*, and call it 'Hang Chow, the Apprentice of Fa Kiang.' It'll be easy enough to study our parts, as all we've got to do is to know our cues, and talk hocus-pocus in between as long as necessary." Very wicked and unprincipled, no doubt, but very natural under the circumstances.

In a few weeks Jack was able to announce that the celebrated Celestial Troupe of the Mirror of Truth, specially decorated by his Majesty the Emperor of China and Brother of the Sun with the order of the Vermilion Pencil-case, would appear in London during the coming season in an original Chinese melodrama, for a limited number of nights only. Enthusiasm knew no bounds. The advent of the Chinese actors was the talk of society, of the clubs, of private life, and of the boys at the street corners. The *Daily Irritator* had a learned article next morning on the origin, progress, and present condition of the Chinese stage, obviously produced upon the same principle as the famous

essays on the metaphysics of the Celestial Empire which attracted so much attention in the columns of the *Eatanswill Gazette*. The *Hebdomadal Vaticinator* ventured to predict for its readers an intellectual treat such as they had not enjoyed since the appearance of Mr. Jefferson in "Rip van Winkle"—evidently the only play at the performance of which the editor of that thoughtful and prophetic journal had ever assisted. Eminent Oriental travellers wrote to the society weeklies that they had seen the leading actress, Mee-Nee-Shang, in various well-known Chinese dramas at Pekin, Nagasaki, Bangkok, and even Candahar. All of them spoke with rapture of her personal beauty, her exquisite singing, and her charmingly natural histrionic powers; and though there were some slight discrepancies as to the question of her height, her age, the colour of her hair, and the soprano or contralto quality of her voice, yet these were minor matters which faded into insignificance beside their general agreement as to the admirable faculties of the coming *prima donna*.

Applications for stalls, boxes, and seats in the dress circle poured in by the thousand. Very soon Jack became convinced that the Crown Prince's would never hold the crowds which threatened to besiege his doors, and he made a hasty arrangement for taking over the Haymarket. "Hang Chow, the Apprentice of Fa Kiang," was duly announced, and the play was put in rehearsal with vigour and effect.

At the beginning of the season, Jack opened the theatre with a tremendous success. Such a first night was never known in London. Duchesses intrigued for boxes, and peers called personally upon Jack to beg the favour of a chair behind the dress circle, as all the stalls were secured beforehand for a month ahead. The free list was *really* suspended, and the pit and gallery were all transformed into reserved places at five shillings a head. Jack even thought it desirable to ensure proper ventilation by turning on a stream of pure oxygen from a patent generator in the cellars below. It was the grandest sensation of modern times. Sarah Bernhardt was nowhere, Mr. Raymond took a through ticket for California, and the Dutch players went and hanged themselves in an agony of disgrace.

The curtain lifted upon a beautiful piece of willow-plate pattern scenery in blue china. Azure trees floated airily above a cerulean cottage, while a blue pagoda stood out in the background against the sky, with all the charming disregard of perspective and the law of gravitation which so strikingly distinguishes Chinese art. The front of the stage was occupied by a blue shop, in which a youth, likewise dressed in the prevailing colour with a dash of white, was serving out blue tea in blue packages to blue supernumeraries, the genuine Chinamen of the Thames vessels. A blue lime-light played gracefully over the whole scene, and diffused a general sense of celestiality over the

picture in its completeness. Applause was unbounded. Æsthetic ladies in sage-green hats tore them from their heads, lest the distressful contrast of hue should mar the pleasure of their refined fellow-spectators; and a well-known Pre-Raphaelite poet, holding three daffodils in his hand, fainted outright, as he afterwards expressed it, with a spasmodic excess of intensity, due to the rapturous but too swift satisfaction of a subtle life-hunger.

The youth in blue, by name Hang Chow, appeared, from the expressive acting of the celestial troupe, to be the apprentice of his aged and respectable uncle, Wang Seh, proprietor of a suburban grocery in a genteel neighbourhood of Pekin. At first impressively and obviously guided by the highest moral feelings, as might be observed from the elevated nature of his gestures, and the extreme accuracy with which he weighed his tea or counted out change to his customers, his whole character underwent a visible deterioration from the moment of his becoming acquainted with Mee-Nee-Shang, the beautiful but wicked heroine of the piece. Not only did he become less careful as to the plaiting of his pigtail, but he also paid less attention to the correct counting out of his change, which led to frequent and expressive recriminations on the part of the flat-faced supernumeraries. At length, acting upon the suggestions of his evil angel, with whom he appeared about to contract a clandestine marriage, George Barn— I mean, Hang Chow— actually robbed the till of seventeen strings of cash, represented by real Chinese coins of the realm, specially imported (from Birmingham) among the properties designed for the illustration of this great moral drama. Of course he was hunted down through the instrumentality of the Chinese police, admirably dressed in their national costume; and after an interesting trial before a Mandarin with four buttons and the Exalted Order of the Peacock's Feather, he was found guilty of larceny to the value of twenty shillings, and sentenced to death by the bastinado, the sentence being carried out, contrary to all Western precedent, *coram populo*. Meenie, whose admirable acting had drawn down floods of tears from the most callous spectators, including even the directors of a fraudulent bank, finally repented in the last scene, flung herself upon the body of her lover, and died with him, from the effect of the blows administered by one of the supernumeraries with a genuine piece of Oriental bamboo.

The curtain had risen to applause, it fell to thunders. Meenie and half the company came forward for an ovation, and were almost smothered under two cartloads of bouquets. The dramatic critic of the *Daily Irritator* loudly declared that he had never till that night known what acting was. The poet with the daffodils asked to be permitted to present three golden blossoms with an unworthy holder of the same material to a lady who had at one sweep blotted out from his heart the memory of all European maidens. Five sculptors

announced their intention of contributing busts of the Celestial Venus to the next Academy. And society generally observed that such an artistic and intellectual treat came like a delightful oasis amid the monotonous desert of English plays and English acting.

That night, as soon as the house was cleared, Jack caught Meenie in his arms, kissed her rapturously upon both cheeks, and vowed that they should be married that day fortnight. Meenie observed that she might if she liked at that moment take her pick of the unmarried peerage of England, but that on the whole she thought she preferred Jack. And so they went away well pleased with the success of their first night's attempt at heartlessly and unjustifiably gulling the susceptible British public.

Next day, both Jack and Meenie looked anxiously in the papers to see the verdict of the able and impartial critics upon their Chinese drama. All the fraternity were unanimous to a man. "The play itself," said the *Irritator*, "was perfect in its naïve yet touching moral sentiment, and in its profound knowledge of the throbbing human heart, always the same under all disguises, whether it be the frock-coat of Christendom or the graceful tunic of the Ming dynasty, in whose time the action is supposed to take place. As for the charming acting of Mee-Nee-Shang, the 'Pearl of Dazzling Light'— so an eminent Sinaist translates the lady's name for us— we have seen nothing so truthful for many years on the Western stage. It was more than Siddons, it was grander than Rachel. And yet the graceful and amiable actress 'holds up the looking-glass to nature,' to borrow the well-known phrase of Confucius, and really acts so that her acting is but another name for life itself. When she died in the last scene, medical authorities present imagined for the moment that the breath had really departed from her body; and Sir John McPhysic himself was seen visibly to sigh with relief when the little lady tripped before the curtain from the sides as gaily and brightly as though nothing had occurred to break the even tenor of her happy thought. It was a pleasure which we shall not often experience upon British boards."

As for the *Hebdomadal Vaticinator*, its language was so ecstatic as to defy transcription. "It was not a play," said the concluding words of the notice, "it was not even a magnificent sermon: it was a grand and imperishable moral revelation, burnt into the very core of our nature by the searching fire of man's eloquence and woman's innocent beauty. To have heard it was better than to have read all the philosophers from Aristotle to Herbert Spencer: it was the underlying ethical principle of the universe working itself out under our eyes to the infallible detection of all shams and impostures whatsoever, with unerring truth and vividness."

Jack and Meenie winced at that last sentence a little; but they managed to swallow it, and were happy enough in spite of the moral principle which, it seemed, was working out their ultimate confusion unperceived.

For ten nights "Hang Chow, the Apprentice of Fa Kiang," continued to run with unexampled and unabated success. Mee-Nee-Shang was the talk of the clubs and the *salons* of London, and her portrait appeared in all the shop windows, as well as in the next number of the *Mayfair Gazette*. Professional beauties of Aryan type discovered themselves suddenly at a discount; while a snub-nosed, almond-eyed little countess, hitherto disregarded by devotees of the reigning belles, woke up one morning and found herself famous. On the eleventh night, Jack's pride was at its zenith. Royalty had been graciously pleased to signify its intention of occupying its state box, and the whole house was ablaze, from the moment of opening the doors, with a perfect flood of diamonds and rubies. Meenie peeped with delight from behind the curtain, and saw even the stalls filled to overflowing ten minutes before the orchestra struck up its exquisite symphony for bells and triangle, entitled, "The Echoes of Nankin."

But just at the last moment, as the curtain was on the point of rising, Jack rushed excitedly to her dressing-room, and pushing open the door without even a knock, exclaimed, in a tone of tragic distress, "Meenie, we are lost."

"Goodness gracious! Jack! what on earth do you mean?"

"Why, who do you suppose is in the next box to the Prince?— the Chinese Ambassador with all his suite! We shall be exposed and ruined before the eyes of all London, and His Royal Highness as well."

Meenie burst away to the stage, with one half of her face as yet unpowdered, and took another peep from behind the curtain at the auditorium. True enough, it was just as Jack had said. There, in a private box, with smiling face and neat pigtail, sat His Excellency the Marquis Tseng in person, surrounded by half a dozen unquestionable Mongolians. Her first impulse was to shriek aloud, go into violent hysterics, and conclude with a fainting fit. But on second thoughts she decided to brazen it out. "Leave it to me, Jack," she said, with as much assurance as she could command. "We'll go through the first act as well as we can, and then see what the Ambassador thinks of it."

It was anxious work for Meenie, that evening's performance; but she pulled through with it somehow. She had no eyes for the audience, nor even for His Royal Highness; she played simply and solely to the Ambassador's box. Everybody in the theatre noticed the touching patriotism which made the popular actress pay far more attention to the mere diplomatic representative of her own beloved sovereign than to the heir-apparent of the British throne.

"You know, these Chinese," said the Marchioness of Monopoly, "are so tenderly and sentimentally attached to the paternal rule of their amiable Emperors. They still retain that pleasing feudal devotion which has unfortunately died out in Europe through the foolish influence of misguided agrarian agitators." At any rate, Meenie hardly took her eyes off the Ambassador's face. But that impassive oriental sat through the five acts without a sign or a movement. Once he ate an ice *à la Napolitaine*, and once he addressed a few remarks to an *attaché*; but from beginning to end he watched the performance with a uniformly smiling face, unmoved to tears by the great bastinado scene, and utterly impervious even to the touching incidents of the love-making in the third act.

When the curtain fell at last, Meenie was fevered, excited, trembling from head to foot, but not hopeless. Calls of "Mee-Nee-Shang" resounded loudly from the whole house, and even dukes stood up enthusiastically to join in the clamour. When she went forward she noticed an ominous fact. The Ambassador was still in his place, beaming as before, but the interpreter had quitted his seat and was moving in the direction of the manager's room.

Meenie curtseyed and kow-towed in a sort of haze or swoon, and managed to reel off the stage somehow with her burden of bouquets. She rushed eagerly to Jack's room, and as she reached the door she saw that her worst fears were realized. A celestial in pig-tail and tunic was standing at the door, engaged in low conversation with the manager.

Meenie entered with a swimming brain and sank into a chair. The interpreter shut the door softly, poured out a glass of sherry from Jack's decanter on the table, and held it gently to her lips. "Whisht," he said, beneath his breath, in the purest and most idiomatic Hibernian, "make yourself perfectly aisy, me dear, but don't spake too loud, if you plase, for fear ye should ruin us botht."

There was something very familiar to Meenie in the voice, which made her start suddenly. She looked up in amazement. "What!" she cried, regardless of his warning, "it isn't you, Pat!"

"Indade an' it is, me darlin'," Pat answered in a low tone; "but kape it dark, if ye don't want us all to be found out togither."

"Not your long-lost brother?" said Jack, in hesitation. "You're not going to perform Box and Cox in private life before my very eyes, are you?"

"The precise thing, me boy," Pat replied, unabashed. "Her brother that was in trouble for the last Faynian business, and run away to Calcutta. There I got a passage to China, and took up at first with the Jesuit missionaries. But marrying a nate little Chinese girl, I thought I might as well turn Mandarin, so I passed their examinations, and was appointed interpreter to the embassy. An' now

I'm in London I'm in deadly fear that Mike Flaherty, who's one of the chief detectives at Scotland Yard, will find me out and recognize me, the same as they recognized that poor cricketer fellow at Leicester."

A few minutes sufficed to clear up the business. Pat's features lent themselves as readily as Meenie's to the Chinese disguise; and he had cleverly intimated to the Ambassador that an additional interpreter in the national costume would prove more ornamental and effective than a recognized European like Dr. Macartney. Accordingly, he had assumed the style and title of the Mandarin Hwen Thsang, and had successfully passed himself off in London as a genuine Chinaman. Moreover, being gifted with Meenie's theatrical ability, he had learned to speak a certain broken English without the slightest Irish accent; and it was only in moments of emotion, like the present, that he burst out into his native dialect. He had recognized Meenie on the stage, partly by her voice and manner, but still more by some fragments of Irish nursery rhymes, which they had both learned as children, and which Meenie had boldly interpolated into the text of the *Fantaisies de Canton*. So he had devoted all his energies to keeping up the hoax and deluding the Ambassador.

"And how did you manage to do it?" asked Jack.

"Sure I tould him," Pat answered quietly, "that though ye were all Chinamen, ye were acting the play in English to suit your audience. And the ould haythen was perfectly contint to belave it."

"But suppose he says anything about it to anybody?"

"Divil a word can he spake to anybody, except through me. Make yourselves aisy about it; the Ambassador thinks it's all as right as tinpence. The thing's a magnificent success. Ye'll jest coin money, and nobody'll ever find ye out. Sure there's nobody in London understands Chinese except us at the embassy, and I'll make it all sthraight for ye there."

Meenie rushed into his arms, and then into Jack's. "Pat," she said, with emotion, "allow me to present you my future husband."

"It's proud I am to make his acquaintance," Pat answered promptly; "and if he could lend me a tinpound note for a day or two, it 'ud be a convanience."

Three days later, Meenie became Mrs. Jack Roberts; and it was privately whispered in well-informed circles that the manager of the Chinese play had married the popular actress Mee-Nee-Shang. At least, it was known that a member of the embassy had been present at a private meeting in a Roman Catholic Chapel in Finsbury, where a priest was seen to enter, and Jack and Meenie to emerge shortly afterwards.

Of course the hoax oozed out in time, and all London was in a state of rage and despair. But Jack coolly snapped his fingers at the metropolis, for he had

made a small fortune over his season's entertainment, and had accepted an offer to undertake the management of a theatre at Chicago, where he is now doing remarkably well. Of course, too, his hoax was a most wicked and unprincipled adventure, which it has given the present writer deep moral pain to be compelled to chronicle. But then, if people *will* make such fools of themselves, what is a well-meaning but weak-minded theatrical purveyor to do?

10: Death Lands a Cargo

Arthur Leo Zagat

1895-1949

Dime Mystery Magazine, Oct 1935

An example of the 1930s "weird menace" genre

1. Mark of the Devil's Hoof

THEY had taken away the rude wooden trestles on which the coffin had lain, and the room to which tragedy had called back Ruth Adair was just the same as it had been two years ago when she had left it— except for the heavy, cloying scent of funeral flowers mingling with the salt tang of the sea.

"Jim!" The girl's speech was muted, tight with a queer dread. "Why didn't they let me look at my father before they took him away?"

The driftwood fire within the deep embrasure of the stone-smudged fireplace was shot through with darts of green and scarlet. Shadows overhung the two— dark shadows brooding between the adze-hewn, time-blackened rafters of the low ceiling. Against the firelight Jim Horne's stalwart figure was a tall silhouette, somehow ungainly in the suit of Sunday best he had worn to Cap'n Eli's obsequies. His wind-reddened, broad-planed features were expressionless, masklike.

"You were late." The words boomed from his deep chest. "If we had been any longer, the dark would have caught us out on Dead Man's Arm."

"But it was my father, Jim. My father! I had a right to say good-bye to him."

The man's big fists knotted at his sides. "You had a right to stay here with your father and your old mother and not go off to New York, draining them of their little savings while you studied singing." There was almost savage rebuke in his tone, and bitterness. "If you had stayed here—"

"Jim!" Her sharp cry cut him short. "My life is none of your affair. I told you that—"

"—two years ago, yes. You have not changed." A tiny muscle pulsed in his cheek. "Then I have no business here." He turned abruptly away, was across to the door in three stiff-legged strides. But he twisted around just as he reached it, and there was tortured urgency in his voice. "I came back to say one thing, and I will say it. You must go back. You must go back to the city tonight. You must not stay here."

An old anger flared within the girl. "I must not! Who are you to tell me when to come or go? When I take orders from any man it will not be a slow-minded fisherman, a great hulking clod good for nothing but to heave a net and pull an oar."

Jim's eyes blazed, then suddenly were bleak. "All right," he mumbled thickly. "It'll be your fault..." He pulled the door open— was gone.

Ruth stared at the drab, fitfully lighted oak, and the dull ache beating in her brain was not all because of her loss. Behind her the fire crackled, and slow feet thudded.

"Some tea mak' yoh feel better, Miss Ruth." The corpulent negress coming in from the kitchen had a cup and saucer in her lumpish, black hands. She set them down on the slab-topped chartroom table at which Cap'n Eli would never sit again, conning his maps and sailing in fancy remembered voyages. "Yoh ain't had a mite t'eat sence yoh come home."

"No, Lidy," the girl said drearily. "No, thank you. It would choke me."

"Then stir it. Please, Miss Ruth, stir it for me."

"You're still at that foolishness, Lidy? I..."

"Please." There was an odd insistence in the way her old nurse said it. Ruth shrugged. She was too tired to argue, too dreadfully tired. She swirled a spoon in the streaming liquid, laid it down. The black woman leaned heavily on the table, peering at the circling of leaves on the tea's surface, and she seemed cloaked with an eerie shadow, blacker than the mourning garments in which she was clothed. For a long moment there was no sound save for the dully booming advance of the sea that the ancient walls could not keep out, the surge of the sea coming up close to the house and the swishing hiss of its retreat.

Ruth's finely chiseled nostrils flared a bit, and her chin quivered. "Lidy." Anguish edged the girl's tones, though her eyes were dry. "What was the matter with everyone at the funeral? Why didn't they talk to me or to mother? Why did they run away right after father was— was buried, as though they were afraid of something?"

Afraid! Voicing it, Ruth suddenly knew what the strangeness was that had overlain the heavy-bodied, bony-visaged fisherfolk from the village beyond the dunes. It was fear that lurked in their eyes, some crawling, inexplicable fear that had hurried them along the sandy spit and away as soon as that which had to be done was done, and Cap'n Eli lay couched at the very tip of Dead Man's Arm. Fear had been a tangible presence under the scrub pines that grew only on that narrow peninsula jutting into the water, was inexplicably even now a chill warning in her veins. In God's name what was this aura of fear to which she had returned?

"Lawd a-massy!" Lidy's exclamation jerked Ruth's startled glance to her. "De good Lawd p'eserve us!" It was half prayer, half groan. The woman's work-calloused fingers clutched the table edge and shook with an uncontrollable

ague. She was staring into the tea-cup. Grayness filmed her face so that it was like chocolate that has been alternately heated and cooled.

A cold prickle chilled Ruth's spine. "What is it," she cried, momentarily back in her childhood. "What is it you see, Lidy?"

"Ah sees mo' trouble a-comin' to dis house," Lidy chanted in a hushed, rapt monotone. "Ah sees de debbil hisself a-comin' outta de sea." She was looking at Ruth now, and in the black depths of her distended eyes light- worms crawled. "Dis very night—"

Ruth fought herself out of a billowing miasma of unaccountable dread. "Nonsense," she cried. "You can't frighten me with your silly nonsense any more. I'm grown up, Lidy. I'm no longer a little girl."

Protruding, thick lips, a leaden blue, writhed. "No, Miss Ruth. Yoh is no little girl. Yoh is ripe foh Satan an he comin' foh yoh. De leaves say it an' de leaves doan lie. De debbil boat sail on de bosom o' de ocean, an' de fingers o' Dead Man's Arm beckon it. Yoh got to go away. Yoh got to flee right now befoh de moon rise to mak' a path foh de ship f'om Hell. Yoh got to go away."

A queasy dread twisted at the pit of Ruth's stomach. Had Jim's words been a warning then? Was the negress reechoing that warning? "Go away? Lidy, how can I go away and leave my poor mother alone in this lonely house? She is so old, so feeble—"

"How yoh think yoh mother gwine feel when she see yoh wid you pretty haid stomped to bits by de debbil's hoofs like yoh daddy..." The negress' hand flew to her twitching mouth, but Ruth saw only the affrighted, staring eyes, saw only the horror that had leaped to their surface.

"Stamped!" The girl's skin was an icy sheath for her body. "Oh God! That was why the coffin's lid was screwed down so tightly! That was why they wouldn't let me kiss his dead lips! What was it that happened, Lidy? What was it that killed him?"

Lidy's terrified glance crept to the teacup, to the black oblong of the window beyond which the sea surged, came back to Ruth. "De same thing dat killed Otis Blake. De debbil..."

"Shut up, yoh ol' fool!" The hoarse roar from behind pulled Ruth around to the kitchen doorway. "Shut up yoh fool talk o' de debbil." A huge negro filled the aperture, his shoulders touching the jamb on either side. The firelight slid silkily over the brown gleam of his big-muscled arms, over his columnar neck, was quenched by the sleeveless shirt tight over his barrel chest. "I done tol' yoh I done had enough o' dat." In the dimness Lidy's son was a simian brute; half crouched, prognathous jaw outthrust, corrugated black brow receding from bony eye-ridges.

"William! What does she mean?" Ruth gasped the question at him, forcing the sounds past cold fingers that seemed to clutch her throat. "What— How did my father die?"

The negro's gaze shifted to her, his small eyes red-lit with smoldering, bestial hate. Just for an instant, then a veil seemed to drop over them, and there was only an emotionless black face looking at her. "Doan yoh pay mammy no never min', Miss Ruth."

"Answer me!"

"He walk on de breakwater an' de rocks give way. Big stone fall on his haid. He daid w'en Misteh Hohne fin' him." He was mumbling, evasive. Ruth caught herself up. Lidy's wild words, her own grief, were clouding her reason. "Mammy gettin' weak in de haid, cryin' de debbil done it."

The woman whimpered, "Stones doan' kill Mist' Blake. He lie under de pines an' blood pour outta he t'roat dat's tore open by de sea-debbil's claws."

"By de knife he kill hisself wid."

Lidy's voice rose. "Whah de knife? Dey ain' foun' no knife..."

"Hush." Ruth swayed, clutched at a chair-back for support. "Hush, both of you. You'll wake up mother with your wrangling." Weariness dragged at her, was an aching flood torturing her body.

"Get me a candle. I'll talk to you tomorrow."

Would Jim Horne come to her tomorrow, realizing she had not meant her harsh words?

"Yoh heah dat, mammy. Get Miss Ruth her candle an' den come along to de village."

"To the village? You— aren't you sleeping in your room behind the kitchen, Lidy? Aren't you...?"

"De las' year Cap'n Eli mak' me leave de house w'en I get troo my work. He say he doan wan' nobody in de house at night. But I stay here tonight. I sleep in my ol' baid."

"Yoh will not!" William's protest was harsh-voiced. "Yoh'll come home..."

The black woman turned on him, and suddenly her cringing was gone and she was erect, determined. "I sleeps heah, an' I watches ober Miss Ruth. Remembeh dat, Willyum. I watches dat no harm come to huh, like I done watched foh sebenteen year ontell she went to de city." Ruth was aware that the glances of mother and son had tangled, that a silent, meaningful conflict raged between them. And this time it was the man who gave way.

"Yoh suits yohself," he mumbled.

"I want you, Lidy," the girl put in. "I want you to stay here. It's bad enough that father will not be here tonight."

"Good night, den." The negro growled. "Ah's gwine home befoh de moon rises."

Climbing the partition-enclosed stairwell, shadows retreated from the flickering flame of Ruth's candle and formed again behind her. The worn wood treads vibrated vaguely with the beat of the sea as though the old structure itself were shivering at some dim threat. A sense of foreboding brooded about her, a sense of impending evil. In the hallway Ruth stopped at the door of her mother's room, listened. There was no sound from within, no sound at all.

Her cold hand crept to the knob, closed on it. She was afraid— she was almost afraid to open the door. She turned the knob, noiselessly, pushed against the seamed wood to swing it open, slowly, without a sound.

Candlelight filtered into the slant-ceiled, papered room. It painted with luminance a pinched, worn face that was as white as the pillow on which it lay, as white as the hair that was a wraithlike aureole about the wrinkled brow. One thin, almost transparent hand lay curled, flaccid on the coverlet.

Flaccid— there was utterly no movement in that bed. Janet Adair was ghastly still. Dread squeezed Ruth's heart— and then her held breath hissed softly from between her teeth. Her mother had sighed in her sleep, tremulously. The pale lips moved.

"No, Eli. Don't do it." The breathed words were just audible. "Don't betray the sea you love." So low the muttered speech was that the girl was not quite sure she heard. "Not even for Ruth. The sea's vengeance is terrible. It will take us all before it is through."

The girl waited, but the sleeping woman said no more. After awhile Ruth closed the door and stumbled down the hall to her own old room.

2. The Hell Ship Lands

RUTH ADAIR came awake with a start. Dread squeezed her heart, lay heavily upon her, more heavily than the coverlet that seemed to stifle her breathing. The voice of the sea beat against stillness. From outside a sharp sound came, and Ruth knew what it was that had awakened her. There was nothing ominous about the sound. It was only the flap of a sail, of a wet sail spilling the wind. Yet somehow the girl was afraid.

The window was a grey oblong, glowing with the luminance that is forerunner of the moon. Ruth stared at it, chill little shivers running through her. Beyond the window was a sandy beach, running down to the breakwater that defied the nibbling of the waves, and beyond that was the sea. It was all as it had been as long as she could remember, she told herself. Just as it had

been—there was nothing out there to fear. Nothing. If she looked out of the window she would see nothing but the beach and the sea.

If she looked out! She dared not look out, and yet she knew she must. She could not lie here, cowering with a nameless terror. She could not lie here watching the shadows move across the ceiling as the moon rose, watching the shadows and waiting, waiting with bated breath for the doom that was creeping upon her, to strike— the doom against which Jim Horne had warned her, the evil Lidy had seen in the Sibylline cup. Her bare feet thumped on the floor, and slowly, step by step, she forced her reluctant legs to carry her to the window.

Water swished, rippling against a long keel. A ship was coming into the cove and the moon was rising. The moon...

The sea was a long, oily heave, and to the right it was blotched by a black bar that was Dead Man's Arm. The cape angled, halfway out, like a bent elbow, and its farther end split into five curled fingers of bleached rock that looked for all the world like a beckoning, skeleton hand. A thicket of dwarfed evergreens made a loose, shaggy sleeve for the arm, ended abruptly at the wrist of that bony hand. It was just there Cap'n Eli had asked to be buried...

There was nothing in the little bay before the house. The vast, darkly undulant expanse to the far horizon was utterly empty. A light showed above and beyond the pines, a point of yellow light. Even as Ruth glimpsed it, it grew, became a crescent whose lower edge the pine-tips jagged. A silvery shimmer glinted on the water, became a lane of golden radiance lying on the bay's surface. From the skeleton wrist it made a path of light to the breakwater— to the gap in the breakwater that must be the very spot her father had lain, pulped by falling rocks the sea had loosened.

A path! The moon was making a path... The girl's throat was suddenly dry and her scalp prickled with eerie fear. A shadow was forming, there in the crook of Dead Man's Arm. It darkened the bosom of the sea— was sweeping along the luminous lane with silent swiftness. Ruth gulped. It was only a catspaw of wind, she tried to tell herself, roughening the water. She had seen it a thousand times... Oh God! It was the shadow of a full-rigged schooner sliding over the cove's surface! Clearly, unmistakably, it was the shadow of a ship close-hauled— but there was no ship to cast the shadow. There was only that ominous silhouette darting toward the shore, toward the house, with a grisly soundlessness...

The shadow of the breakwater swallowed it, and it was gone. But somewhere a pulley creaked, and furling canvas slatted. Somewhere a phantom rope screeched, reeving through protesting sheaves. Ruth moved icy hands, thrusting them at nothingness as if to ward off the approach of terror...

A footfall thudded just below.

Fear slowed, then shook Ruth's pulse, so that her heart jerked like a live creature in her breast. The beach was silvery with moonlight, but the glow had not yet reached the house and a murky gloom lay along the stone foundation walls. Within that pall of shadow something moved, a pallid something, wraithlike, without form.

The little hairs at the back of her neck bristled, and her throat contracted in a low whimper.

A voice rang out. "Who dat?" Lidy's voice, challenging, a-thrill with terror. "Who dat climbin' oveh de breakwater?"

Ruth's gaze darted to the retaining wall of piled, loose stone. The blue lunar glow lay clear along its tumbled disorder, and there was nothing there, nothing except a vague shimmer that might have been the quiver of air rising from the sun-heated rock. Nothing. But a hissing whisper came from the sands as though someone moved across it.

"Who dat a-comin?" The black woman surged out into the light, crouched, staring at nothingness. She was a hulking shape at the edge of the shadow, a white cotton nightgown enveloping her rotund form, flapping against her black shins. "Stop! Stop dah!" Lidy's arm lifted and Ruth saw that a carving knife was clenched in her fist. "Yoh cain't have Miss Ruth whilst I lives. Keep back!"

The knife flickered as if Lidy were slashing at some attacker. It stabbed out and down into empty air, but there was a gruesome chunk as if it had plunged into flesh. The negress tugged it back— its polished blade was oddly dull now, swallowing the light— and slashed again. Then, suddenly, the weapon flew from her hand, arced, thudding to the sand, and she was clutching at her throat, was clawing at it. She was being forced backward, was being driven down to her knees— by what? Mother of Mercy! What grisly invisible power was it that had Lidy by the neck, that was overpowering the old servant?

A horrible, choking gurgle came up to Ruth. It was grotesque, unbelievable. The colored woman was alone out there, absolutely alone, and yet she had fought an invisible someone and had been conquered, was swaying on her knees, was battling unseen fingers that squeezed her throat, cutting off breath, life itself.

A scream rasped Ruth's throat. Lidy was down. She was a convulsed hulk, writhing on the sand. Her head twisted around in the spasm of her anguish, and the girl could see her bulging eyes, her contorted face, the tongue protruding from her mouth. Life was being choked from her, and still Ruth could see nothing of her attacker, could see that there was no attacker.

It was over. Lidy Nore was a still, black heap on the sands, an almost naked corpse, flaccid, pitiful. Lidy was dead on the sands, killed by some dread

presence from beyond the pale. Was it thus that death had come to Otis Blake? To Cap'n Eli? Death striking unseen out of the moonlight?

Was that death stalking Ruth now? "Yoh is ripe foh Satan an' he comin' foh yoh." The slain woman's warning sounded in her ears, and horror gibbered at her from the moonlight. "Keep back," Lidy had defied the invisible. "Yoh cain't have Miss Ruth whilst I live." And now she no longer lived.

Lidy had given her life to protect her and she could not leave the old woman's body out there for the crabs and the sand-worms. She pulled herself around from the window, padded to the door. She was out in the musty, lightless passage and its murk was alive with a dark malevolence that had infested all the house. Against the pound of terror in her breast, by sheer force of will compelling her strength-drained limbs to function, she forged through the gloom to the staircase, groped for the banister and went down until she was crouched, trembling and weak, against the rough wood of the entrance door.

Through the panel the sound of movement came, of something dragging through the sand, the whispering sound of furtive movement across the hissing sand. Ruth's hand froze on the door knob. Her whole body was rigid, icy in the grip of a crawling nightmare paralysis that was the acme of fear. The phantom killer was outside. He was coming for her.

Why had she not heeded Jim's warnings, and Lidy's? Why had she not fled from this accursed place while yet there was time? She had stayed because of her mother, and now the doom from the sea was coming to finish its work, to slay her and her mother and leave the house an empty, lifeless shell, staring out at the waters from windows through which there would be none left to look.

No! A sudden, desperate courage surged up in her, broke the impalpable thongs by which terror bound her. It was she for whom the invisible presence came— Lidy's vision had warned that— and if it did not enter the house her mother would be safe...

Ruth jerked open the door, lurched out to meet her doom, lurched down high steps to the sand. Then she stopped, tensed for the leap of the killer, for the pounce of the slayer from the sea.

The roar of the tide beat about her, and damp cold of the shore night struck through the sheerness of her nightdress to chill her body. Moonlight lay, a pallid blue film on the sands, mounded over Lidy's contorted corpse like a shimmering, winding sheet. Dead Man's Arm held the ripple of the cove in its crook, and its skeleton fingers lay beckoning under the gibbous moon. Otherwise there was nothing— appallingly nothing. No living thing moved on the deserted beach.

Ruth moaned, got somehow to the dead negress, knelt to her. The sand here was trampled, torn up by Lidy's struggles. But there were only the tracks of the devoted servant, coming from the steps to the place where she had died in futile sacrifice. There were no footprints, no spoor of whatever it was she had challenged and fought, between here and the breakwater. No sign of any other presence. No sign of how death had approached.

Breath hissed from between Ruth's teeth, and the pounding of her heart slowed. The clean, briny redolence of the on-shore wind was blowing the cobwebs from her throbbing brain. Sanity returned, seeping slowly back to her bewildered soul. Smatterings of things she had read came back to her.

Lidy had challenged something invisible, had fought with an apparition unseen, had been slain by it. Impossible. Was there not some reasonable explanation? Might it not be that the woman had been self-hypnotized, driven half-mad perhaps by her adventurings into the occult, her heritage of superstition? That she had imagined the menace approaching from the breakwater, imagined his attack, and fighting a creation of her imagining died through the collapse of a diseased heart? That was it, of course. She had had a weak heart. Ruth remembered her sinking spells, her distress on occasions of excitement or stress. That was it! The girl gasped with relief grasping reality once more.

The negress' hands were still clutched at her throat, as they had been in her final paroxysm. Ruth reached for them, pulled them gently away.

An eerie dread closed in on her once more. Livid across the folds of the brown skin, a puckered weal ran, and tiny drops of blood oozed where a strangling cord had cut deep. Where a noose had cut—but there was no noose! There was no cord— it had vanished like the garroter who had used it. It had vanished— or never been visible.

Ruth stared at the telltale mark while horror crawled her spine. No phantasm of the mind, no weakness of the heart, had killed Lidy. There was the evidence, clear, unmistakable. The woman had been murdered, cruelly murdered, by a thing unseen, invisible. By a horror fashioned of the moonlight and sea-spume, a slayer visible only to his victim in the final, fatal moment...

A footfall thudded behind Ruth, and a shadow fell across her. The bulking shadow of something man-formed, compact of imminent threat, lay on her, and on the dead woman, and on the sand beyond. She felt the appalling loom of that which cast the shadow towering above her. The shadow's arm moved, and something lengthened the silhouetted arm. Something that must be a thick, gnarled club. Terror blazed across the girl's mind like a bolt of lightning.

3. Death Is Better

RUTH cowered, bent over, waiting for the blow to smash down on her, crushing her skull, pounding her into oblivion. It did not come. Time stretched into infinity, and the club did not fall, and the waiting was more dreadful than imminent death. The waiting, and the slow, cold realization that it was not death with which she was threatened. Not death...

Then— what?...

The question pronged white-hot fingers into her brain, twisted her around. Her staring eyes found columnar, spraddled legs, traveled up to a thick torso, to a ridged, outthrust jaw, and baleful, threatening eyes glaring down at her. To Jim Horne's eyes! It was Jim Horne who stood over her, clad again in dungarees. It was Jim Horne's great arm that hung over her, his raised fist clutched about the butt-end of a stout club!

"Jim!" Ruth heard the name, was aware only after a moment that it had come from her own cold lips. "Jim. You."

His mouth twisted across his colorless face, the only life in that grim mask. "You stayed." His voice was a husked growl. "You stayed here— tonight."

Somehow the girl tottered to her feet. She faced him in white-faced silence.

Horne's club dropped slowly, as though some force outside himself had held it aloft, and now was relaxing its grip. Ruth saw that a long shudder was racking his great body, that the stony composure of his countenance was breaking, that his rough-modeled features were working, were tortured as with some obscure, terrific struggle going on within him. His mouth opened, closed...

And suddenly he was shouting at her, "Get in there!" His blunt thumb stabbed at the house. "Get inside, quick, and bolt the door. Don't open it for anyone. Not even for me. Do you understand? Not even for me."

"Jim. Why..."

"Get in there." His club was coming up again, she could see his knuckles whiten with the strength of his clutch on it, could see his biceps swelling. "For God's sake go, before... Go!"

The impact of his voice whirled her around, hurled her willy-nilly to the house door, through it. She slammed the oak leaf shut behind her, rattled a sturdy bolt into its socket. Leaned against the wood, whimpering. The echo of Jim's thick shout was still in her ears. "Go, before..." Before what? What was the emotion, the madness against which he had seemed to fight? Why had his weapon been raised over her? Why had he warned her against himself? Where had he come from, so silently, so mysteriously, out of nothingness?

It was Jim Horne, she remembered William saying, who had found her father's dead body. Found it? That club, the heavy club his hand had clutched, could smash an old man's head so that it might seem that a rock had pulped it... A grisly speculation trailed across the morass of her pulsing mind.

Oh God, what was she thinking? Jim Horne couldn't be a murderer. Not Jim. Not the boy with whom she had played along the beach and out on the water. Not the youth who had taught her to swim, who had given her her first, clumsy kiss...

But might not some alien being have taken possession of him? Some disembodied spirit brought from out of a watery hell by the ghost ship that, itself unseen, had darkened the sea's bosom with its uncanny shadow...

Ruth jumped, whirled around in response to a sudden, sharp sound. Embers of the driftwood fire glowed fitfully on the hearth, light shimmering through them in glimmering waves... A pine knot must have crackled, burst by the dying heat. That was all.

Ruth's mind flew back to Jim. Her spine prickled to the sensation of a gaze upon her, a hostile, inimical gaze. And then fabric slithered against fabric, far back in the room's vagueness. Stone grated, and in the obscurity under the chartroom table something bulked. Its shadow elongated, a hand came out into the light, a taloned yellow hand. It curved, clawed at the rug, tugged. A head appeared, high-cheek-boned, slant-eyed, thin lips curled over a wide-bladed, cruel knife. Even in that frantic moment Ruth rocked to redoubled horror as she saw it was the futile weapon Lidy had wielded...

The Chinese writhed out from under the table in a single lithe movement, was on his feet. His beady eyes went straight to Ruth, he snatched the dagger from his mouth, leaped for her. She screamed, hurled herself away from the door. Her feet struck the first step of the staircase. She fairly threw herself upward, into the weltering, tar-barrel murk to which it rose. Slippered feet thudded on the stairs behind her, and her heart pounded against its caging ribs, pounded as if it would burst through. She reached the upper landing, whirled to the passage.

The silent pursuer was close behind. Ruth snatched for the knob of her mother's door, twisted, flung the door in, slammed it shut behind her, and twisted the key in the lock... Just in time. A body thudded against the wood, the frail portal shook to the impact.

The girl whirled to look for something, anything, to shove against the door to strengthen it against the attack of the saffron specter that had so weirdly appeared to terrify her with a new menace. She saw a dresser, rolled it against the portal. Rolled it! It wouldn't be of much use when the lock was smashed...

The bed! The great four-poster would make a barricade. She turned to it—and froze motionless, aghast.

The bed was empty! There was the imprint of her mother's head on the pillow. The tumbled sheets still held the mold of her old body. But she wasn't there. She wasn't anywhere in the room. She had vanished, as mysteriously, as unaccountably, as Lidy had died; as Jim Horne had come to order Ruth back into the house.

To order her— not to safety, to the clutches of the Chinese, whose knife was scraping now at the wood of the door, slowly, methodically cutting away the fibers that held its lock! The steel point came through, sliced downward. In minutes the thin panel would give way and he would come in.

He would come in— to sink that steel into her quivering flesh. To tear at her with his pointed talons! Terror engulfed Ruth— all the eerie, incredible terror of the dreadful night that had turned the home in which she was born to a pesthouse of mad menace. Her father, her old servant, mysteriously murdered. Her childhood friend, the man who had not been out of her thoughts in all the long months of her absence, metamorphosed into an avatar of strange threat. An impossible, blood-lusting Oriental impossibly materialized into a vacant room, pursuing her with a curious, silent fury. Her aged, feeble mother weirdly vanished, and the scrape, scrape of cutting steel paring away her own last defense. The doom the black seeress had predicted was closing relentlessly in on the helpless girl!

Mind-shattering, livid fear, voiced at her from the obscurity of the moonlit chamber. Fear was a blaze of black fire in her blood, of madness in her brain. Her wide, staring eyes flickered to the bed where her mother had reposed...

Then the dark mantle of her terror dropped away, and cold rage replaced it. She was no longer a soft, civilized maid. She became a primitive woman, fighting for life, for sanity. Fighting for a loved one. She would find out where they had taken her mother. She would make the yellow devil tell. And then she would wrest their captive from his fellows, if she had to go down to Hell itself to find them, if she had to battle every fiend in Hades.

Ruth crossed to the dresser, pulled out a drawer. Her groping hand touched chill metal, came out with a long scissors, the scissors with which her mother had laboriously cut out little dresses for her, long ago. Razor-edged with many sharpenings, its blades were narrow; their ends, where they joined in a point, paper-thin. The girl clutched her weapon, slid around the dresser and crouched against the wall beside it...

A screech of metal against metal sliced through the swirling chaos of her brain. The carved-out door-lock fell to the floor. The panel banged inward, crashed against the dresser. Something thumped against the portal with a

meaty thud and the piece of furniture rolled in on its oiled casters. Ruth glimpsed an emaciated body in the widening aperture, a ribbed, jaundiced torso naked to the waist, crisscrossed by curious, raised lines, its back to her, its sharp shoulder against the wood. Then the muscles in her straining thighs exploded like unleashed springs, catapulting her at the intruder, the scissors in her hand flailing, unsheathed claws of the enraged tigress she had become.

The scissors point struck flesh at the base of the Mongol's neck, met gruesome resistance, ripped a jagged gash, came away. The Asiatic whirled, his scrawny arm darting up, slicing his knife down at Ruth. Her fingers caught the bony wrist in mid-air, halted its lethal swoop.

In the same instant she felt her own right wrist clutched. She strained to get free from the steely grip that held her improvised weapon powerless. She tightened her own grasp on the Chinese's arm. The two froze in a ghastly, heaving deadlock, their feet planted on the floor, quivering muscles battling for mastery. Fetid breath gusted in Ruth's face. Almond eyes glittered malevolently at her from deep-sunk sockets. The Mongolian was hairless, and his skin so tightly drawn over the bones of his head that it was a skull that leered at her, a saffron tinted skull.

Ruth could see the gash she had made in the Asiatic's shoulder, and though it was so deep that the bone showed grayish in the slit, no blood flowed from the wound!

No blood flowed, and no sound came from between the greenish, pointed fangs exposed by writhing, fleshless lips. Eerie terror was back, netting Ruth's form with an icy, prickling mesh. Terror clawed at her, more poignant than the excruciating agony tearing her back and the sinews of her legs and arms. Agony pierced her lungs with each labored, hissing breath as the strength of her first mad onslaught seeped away and she bent back, ever back under the increasing, terrible pressure of her ghastly antagonist.

She was beaten! She gave way, suddenly, toppling backward. The Chinese's own straining effort threw him forward, against Ruth, as the resistance against which he fought unexpectedly vanished. A final despairing instinct jerked the girl's knees up as she fell, they pounded into the yellow man's groin. Even then no sound came from him, but his gaunt features twisted with pain, and his grip on Ruth's right wrist relaxed. She twisted it free, drove the point of her scissors into the corded, yellow neck.

The metal sank in, nauseating her with the sliding sough of its stab. Her fingers touched skin that was clammy, cold, and the weight lying on her was suddenly limp. The deathly chill of it was damp against her nearly nude body. Revulsion galvanized her into a last fury of action. She thrust at the flaccid corpse, beat her shaking fists against it, until she had forced it from her. She

rolled away from the horrible cadaver, and lay panting, face down on the polished floor. The flooring vibrated beneath her with a monotonous rhythm in time to the long, dull boom of the sea. She lifted and fell on a weltering tide of dark horror.

"Thank you," a toneless voice grated from above. "You saved me the trouble of disposing of this carrion."

Ruth looked up. Water splashed into her face, a drop of water, stinging, and she stared up into a narrow, grey countenance. In a single frantic flash she saw glittering eyes, a hooked nose and pointed chin, a thin-lipped Satanic grin. She saw dark, stringy hair wet pasted like clinging seaweed to a livid brow, and drenched garments tight on an incredibly thin body, tight and shimmering with a ripple of emerald light like moonlight on windless, stagnant water. She saw long nailed, curved fingers, dripping water, reaching down for her.

Realization rocketed through her. This was the Master of Horror, the fiend come up out of the sea to take her to his dread domain. One reaching claw touched her arm, and its touch was a frigid burning, an electric shock that galvanized her body, so that she sprang to her feet.

The apparition laughed gloatingly, came toward her with appalling surety that she could not escape. He was between her and the door. Ruth whirled, her frantic glance found the open window. Death, any clean death, were better than capture by this sinister creature. She catapulted to the opening. The soles of her bare feet felt the sill as she sprang. She flung herself headlong out, and fell toward the silver glimmer of the moonlit sands.

4. On Dead Man's Arm

IT seemed to Ruth that the air was viscid, strangely buoyant, that her fall to death on the glistening sand was weirdly slow as a dive sometimes is from a great height. She did not want to die, terror of oblivion suffocated her even as she fell. She was a child of the sea, and in her extremity the lessons the sea had taught her flashed to her aid. She brought knees up, tucked her arms between them and the soft warmth of her body. Made of herself a flaccid bundle dropping down, every muscle relaxed. The impact of her landing pounded breath out of her, half-stunned her; but her limpness, the shock-absorbers she had made of her limbs, took the blow of the landing and no bones were broken.

She toppled sidewise. Her cheek fell against something, cold, clammy. It was the thigh of Lidy's corpse, and a crab scuttled away. Ruth pulled briny air into agonized lungs, jerked her head away from the grisly touch of the cadaver.

Brown-skinned flesh hung in strips where already the beach- scavengers had been at their loathly feeding.

Her glance recoiled from gruesomeness, swung to the wall of the house. She saw the somber roughness of the house's stone foundation, the paint-peeled frame of a tiny cellar window. A spectral something moved vaguely across the black square.

The girl twisted over and attempted to rise from the sand. She had to get up and run over the dunes to the left, over the dunes and away from this outpost of hell. If she ran fast enough she could get away, she could get to the village where people were, human beings who would take her in, who would shelter her against the grisly evil that pursued her. Behind her a hinge squealed, and feet thudded on wood of the threshold.

Ruth sprang erect. A swift, terrified backward glance showed the brine-soaked apparition plunging out, the water-devil with the visage of Satan. Her heels dug into the sand. And then, in an instant before her muscles responded to the frenzied command of her brain, a moving something caught her gaze, something moving at the angle where Dead Man's Arm jutted out from the shore. It vanished under the trees clothing the cape, but Ruth knew what she had seen was the bulking form of William Nore, Lidy's son— and over his shoulders had been the thin, white clad figure of her mother.

She leaped into a frantic, staggering run. She twisted, not to the left, where chance of safety lay, but to the right, to the grisly spit whose skeleton hand had beckoned the hell ship from the sea. The cape cloaked with ominous pines into whose gloom the black man had carried her mother.

Sand spurted from under the girl's flying feet, and the thud, thud of the pursuing fiend pounded after her. The dark thicket flashed nearer, nearer, but the sound of the phantom hunter drew up on her. Terror spurred her to incredible speed, terror of the foul thing stalking her, of the fate to which her mother was being borne. Oh God!— What fate was it to which the negro was bearing the aged woman?

The pines were closed ahead, their lightless obscurity opening to swallow her. And then, suddenly Jim Horne came running from behind the house to intercept her, his club upraised. "Ruth!" he called. "Ruth— stop..."

She did not hear the rest; a final, desperate leap had launched her into the blackness of the pine thicket, and as it swallowed her it blotted out the sound of pursuit, of the two grim antagonists who had joined forces for her destruction.

Ruth plunged through underbrush that tore her flesh, that whipped stinging lashes across her face and body. Brambles caught her nightdress, ripped the filmy stuff from her, so that only a few shreds remained to flutter

about her flanks, her breasts. She was following the vague sound of a huge body threshing through the thicket ahead; she was fleeing from the servants of evil who hurtled after her.

Once she heard Jim's voice, distance-muffled, shouting: "Ruth! Wait..." Calling to her as if he thought she was still blind to his betrayal, to his oneness with the fiends evolved from the sea and the moon's lifeless beams. Once she heard a scream from far ahead, a thin, quavering scream that could come only from the throat of her mother. Panic swept her at that sound— and was followed by despair. And then there were no more sounds except those she made herself, crashing through the thicket. That, and the unceasing mutter of the ocean, unseen but close now on either hand...

It seemed that she ran forever, fighting the battering of the dark woods that were in league with her enemies; fighting the weariness that tugged at her muscles, the pain that was a garment for her naked body. She was a wild, mad creature hurtling through an unreal, cruel purgatory...

Light glimmered through the tree-trunks before her, a vine caught her ankles. She staggered, the impetus of her headlong flight carrying her out into a clearing. She pitched to her knees. Stayed there, moaning, not feeling pain any longer, feeling nothing but a renewed burst of horror within her as she stared at something that swayed back and forth, penduluming against the yellow round of the full moon, which rode high now in a lowering sky.

It was a body, it was a woman's body, swinging at the end of a rope, and that rope hung down, straight down from the yardarm of a mast. There were other masts, their yards thickened by furled canvas, their rigging a tangle of black meshing the lunar grow. They sprang from a long, low keel; a black keel that slowly rose and fell on the oily heave of an unreal sea. A sea that shimmered greenly like the shimmer of the garments the fiend wore, who was the captain of the schooner from hell at which she gazed.

Ruth Adair's body twitched and a great wave of terror-spawned hysteria suddenly shook it. Abruptly the girl burst into loud, crazed laughter. Her hold on reason slipped, and an illusory clairvoyance seemed now to reveal the sinister plan of her persecutors. They had played with her. They had let her go, not bothering to overtake her. Of course they had let her go, she was going just where they wanted her to go— to the landing place of their ship, of their schooner from Hades. How they must have laughed, watching her struggle through the woods, watching her running. She could laugh with them. It was funny. Oh how funny it was.

And the funniest of all was that they had used the phantom of her mother to lure her on. The phantom of her mother!

Suddenly the girl's mad laughter ceased. They were coming for her now. A splash in the water was followed by a shadow jutting out from the penumbra of the hellship's keel, and a longboat was riding the water, its oars skimming the waves, dipping and skimming again, like a monstrous water-spider scuttling toward her. It was a spider, and she the fly, and there was no escape for her. She no longer wanted to escape. She wanted them to take her aboard the schooner. She wanted to see her body hang from the other end of that yardarm. And then she would take the spokes of the wheel and steer the vessel back to hell. She knew how to steer, Jim Horne had taught her how to steer. She would sing as they sailed, and Jim would be on the bridge too. Jim Horne, Captain Satan's first mate. And then she saw that Jim was standing above her.

"Jim," she said to him. "Jim, I will steer the ship for you." It was not strange that he was here in the clearing, that he was bending down to her, not strange at all. "When we get to hell Satan will wed us." She could say it now that they were both dead. She couldn't say it in life. She could only mouth bitter words at him, words bitter because he would not love her as she had always loved him. "And then because of our love hell will be heaven."

Then a form came up out of a dark rock pile behind Jim. His grey face was furious, and he bounded toward Jim, a rock upraised in his taloned hand. "Jim!" the girl screamed. "Behind you!"

5. Grisly Cargo

HORNE whirled, grating an oath. The stone flew at him, bounced off his shoulder. His leap carried him yards across the clearing, his fist slapped into Satan's face. There was a squashing sound, and that gaunt visage was splotched with red. Then two forms were locked in a snarling, growling combat, and Ruth was aghast as the madness died within her and she was aware that Jim Horne was fighting for her, had all through the ghastly night been fighting to protect her.

The girl staggered to her feet. Against any human antagonist Jim could hold his own. But was it a human being he was fighting? And even if it were, even if Jim could defeat him, his confederates were coming from the black-hulled schooner, were coming fast in the longboat that skimmed the water under the drive of powerful oars.

Ruth twisted around. The dory was very close, and she could see its occupants, their swinging backs, their white fists tugging at the oar handles. She could see that there were others in the boat who were not rowing, bent

forms squatting between the thwarts. Now a hand lifted and she caught the glint of metal on a yellow wrist, could hear the clank of chains.

Oh God! What was this grisly small craft oaring in, who were the chained beings that made its living cargo? The terror of the night closed in again on her. The keel of the rowboat grated on rock, the bow oarsman turned. It was the negro, William Nore!

Ruth whirled again, just in time to see Jim's great arms lift the struggling, writhing, reptilian form of his opponent high in the air, to see Jim pound him crashing down. "Jim," she screamed. "Watch out! The others..."

Jim came around, a scarlet weal across his cheek, his mouth awry. "It's all right, Ruth. It's all right. They're friends."

He was striding toward her, was tearing the straps of his overalls from his shoulders, and stripping the dungarees down. He stopped to pull them off. "Put these on, darling." He tossed them to her.

The girl caught the garment, started toward the curtaining shrubbery. But a cry halted her, a thin, piping cry from the longboat. "Ruth. Ruth. Are you all right?"

She turned. Her mother was standing up, her old arms outstretched. Her mother!— But the woman's form still hung, a ghastly pendulum swinging against the moon.

The blaze from the driftwood fire on the hearth in the living room of the old Adair house reached high between the age-blackened rafters of its low ceiling, driving away the shadows. "Jim," Ruth said. "I can't understand any of it. Did I dream it all?"

Horne turned from the fire, looked moodily at her. "No. It wasn't a dream. I— I hate to explain it, but I suppose I'll have to... Look, Ruth, you didn't realize how little your father really had when you wrote him for more money. He couldn't deny you. And when William Nore came to him with a proposition that they handle live contraband, he said yes, even though it must have gone against his grain."

"Live contraband?"

"Chinese, smuggled into the country to evade the law. Cap'n Eli didn't realize what he was letting himself in for. The men in that trade aren't human, they're fiends. And this particular crew was the worst of the lot.

"The government realized the Chinks were coming in somewhere along this coast. They couldn't send strangers in, and I was appointed an undercover agent, to try and stop it. Otis Blake was selected to help me, and we were thunderstruck when we discovered that the smugglers were landing their living merchandise on Dead Man's Arm.

"It still didn't occur to us that Cap'n Eli was mixed up in the thing, though we did suspect the negro. However, we couldn't make out how they were being taken away from the spit. From out at sea we could see only that they were being taken into the pines, and they weren't there in the morning. Otis volunteered to hide out there, spy on them. The next day he didn't show up—poor fellow, we found his body on the skeleton hand, his throat cut.

"Lidy started a lot of talk about the devil haunting the cape. A lot of damned fools in the village believed her.

"This was last week. I kept snooping around— and found out that a tunnel had been dug from the woods, along behind the breakwater, then into the cellar of this house. I came to Cap'n Eli with my discovery— and he told me he knew all about it, that he was in on the thing. He showed me a trapdoor under the table, that had been arranged for the Chinks to be brought up and out of if the cellar exit out back were being watched.

"Ruth! I couldn't arrest your father. I gave him a chance to get out of it. He promised me that he would tell the gang he was quitting. He did tell them— I imagine that was the reason they bashed his head in with a rock, out there.

"This morning I got word from our operative in Halifax that a shipment was going out, and I knew they would be landed tonight. With your father gone, I didn't hesitate to have a Coast Guard boat sent down here, had it waiting down the coast, hidden in a cove. I tried to warn you..."

"Lidy tried to warn me too. She must have sensed something coming, and she tried to frighten me away with her talk of a hell ship sailing a moon path on the water."

"I've seen that eerie effect myself. When the schooner came in the other side of the point the just rising moon threw its shadow on the cove out here... Well, I was out behind the house, signaling the coast guard launch when I heard Lidy yelling her defiance of the devil— perhaps that was to frighten you some more, drive you away, perhaps her mind had really given way and she believed the story she had herself invented. At any rate, there was a Chinese in the cellar who was left from the last shipment. He hadn't paid his passage and the devils had been torturing him to get even. The window was too small for him to get out, but when he saw Lidy's knife, he wanted it. He unraveled an old net down there, made a noose which he flipped out through it, got it around her neck. He had a long pole by which he fished the knife in, and somehow he managed to get the strangling cord loose and pull that back in too. He started working at the fastenings of the trapdoor—"

"And got through just in time to attack me," said Ruth, shuddering.

"The poor fellow thought you were one of his tormentors, was wild for revenge. In the meantime William Nore, who had never really gone to the

village, had looked out and seen his dead mother. He thought that had been done by the smugglers, scuttled up the backstairs to warn you and your mother. You were not in your room. Again he thought the contraband runners were responsible, he went to your mother. Warning her to be silent he carried her out and down the way he had come. I saw him coming out with her, and by that time had gotten a message that the ship was captured but that Grange, the leader of the gang, had dived overboard and gotten away. I thought that perhaps Grange might make for the house, that the safest place was the ship, sent Nore out there... started around to look for you. As I came out from the corner of the house I saw you running, and Grange after you. I threw my club at him, he dodged it, made the woods. Then I lost him in the underbrush... You know the rest."

"Who— who was the woman they hung?"

"Our operative in Halifax. They discovered she was a spy, took her along and killed her when they landed here, just before the coast guard boat came into sight. They were too late to save her."

"Oh, the poor girl!" Ruth blinked away tears.

"Ruth." The new authority was suddenly gone from Jim, he was again gawky, awkward. "Ruth. I— I want to ask you something."

"What is it?" A pulse beat in her wrists, and suddenly she too was very shy.

"You— you said out there— hell would be heaven because of our love. You— didn't mean that— you..." He bogged down.

"I meant that I love you," she said, and then she was in his arms. "Oh my dear, with all my heart and soul." Hot lips were crushed against hers... After awhile she pulled away, smiled tremulously. "This isn't hell, Jim," she whispered. "But that was a good imitation of heaven."

11: A Martian Odyssey
Stanley G. Weinbaum

1902-1935

Wonder Stories, July 1934

This was the first published SF story by this notable writer, whose career was effectively three years. There is now a crater on Mars named after him

JARVIS STRETCHED himself as luxuriously as he could in the cramped general quarters of the *Ares*.

"Air you can breathe!" he exulted. "It feels as thick as soup after the thin stuff out there!" He nodded at the Martian landscape stretching flat and desolate in the light of the nearer moon, beyond the glass of the port.

The other three stared at him sympathetically— Putz, the engineer, Leroy, the biologist, and Harrison, the astronomer and captain of the expedition. Dick Jarvis was chemist of the famous crew, the *Ares* expedition, first human beings to set foot on the mysterious neighbor of the earth, the planet Mars. This, of course, was in the old days, less than twenty years after the mad American Doheny perfected the atomic blast at the cost of his life, and only a decade after the equally mad Cardoza rode on it to the moon. They were true pioneers, these four of the *Ares*. Except for a half-dozen moon expeditions and the ill-fated de Lancey flight aimed at the seductive orb of Venus, they were the first men to feel other gravity than earth's, and certainly the first successful crew to leave the earth-moon system. And they deserved that success when one considers the difficulties and discomforts— the months spent in acclimatization chambers back on earth, learning to breathe the air as tenuous as that of Mars, the challenging of the void in the tiny rocket driven by the cranky reaction motors of the twenty-first century, and mostly the facing of an absolutely unknown world.

Jarvis stretched and fingered the raw and peeling tip of his frostbitten nose. He sighed again contentedly.

"Well," exploded Harrison abruptly, "are we going to hear what happened? You set out all shipshape in an auxiliary rocket, we don't get a peep for ten days, and finally Putz here picks you out of a lunatic ant-heap with a freak ostrich as your pal! Spill it, man!"

"Speel?" queried Leroy perplexedly. "Speel what?"

"He means '*spiel*'," explained Putz soberly. "It iss to tell."

Jarvis met Harrison's amused glance without the shadow of a smile. "That's right, Karl," he said in grave agreement with Putz. "*Ich spiel es*!" He grunted comfortably and began.

"ACCORDING to orders," he said, "I watched Karl here take off toward the North, and then I got into my flying sweat-box and headed South. You'll remember, Cap— we had orders not to land, but just scout about for points of interest. I set the two cameras clicking and buzzed along, riding pretty high— about two thousand feet— for a couple of reasons. First, it gave the cameras a greater field, and second, the underjets travel so far in this half-vacuum they call air here that they stir up dust if you move low."

"We know all that from Putz," grunted Harrison. "I wish you'd saved the films, though. They'd have paid the cost of this junket; remember how the public mobbed the first moon pictures?"

"The films are safe," retorted Jarvis. "Well," he resumed, "as I said, I buzzed along at a pretty good clip; just as we figured, the wings haven't much lift in this air at less than a hundred miles per hour, and even then I had to use the under-jets.

"So, with the speed and the altitude and the blurring caused by the under-jets, the seeing wasn't any too good. I could see enough, though, to distinguish that what I sailed over was just more of this grey plain that we'd been examining the whole week since our landing— same blobby growths and the same eternal carpet of crawling little plant-animals, or biopods, as Leroy calls them. So I sailed along, calling back my position every hour as instructed, and not knowing whether you heard me."

"I did!" snapped Harrison.

"A hundred and fifty miles south," continued Jarvis imperturbably, "the surface changed to a sort of low plateau, nothing but desert and orange-tinted sand. I figured that we were right in our guess, then, and this grey plain we dropped on was really the Mare Cimmerium which would make my orange desert the region called Xanthus. If I were right, I ought to hit another grey plain, the Mare Chronium in another couple of hundred miles, and then another orange desert, Thyle I or II. And so I did."

"Putz verified our position a week and a half ago!" grumbled the captain. "Let's get to the point."

"Coming!" remarked Jarvis. "Twenty miles into Thyle— believe it or not— I crossed a canal!"

"Putz photographed a hundred! Let's hear something new!"

"And did he also see a city?"

"Twenty of 'em, if you call those heaps of mud cities!"

"Well," observed Jarvis, "from here on I'll be telling a few things Putz didn't see!"

He rubbed his tingling nose, and continued. "I knew that I had sixteen hours of daylight at this season, so eight hours— eight hundred miles— from

here, I decided to turn back. I was still over Thyle, whether I or II I'm not sure, not more than twenty-five miles into it. And right there, Putz's pet motor quit!"

"Quit? How?" Putz was solicitous.

"The atomic blast got weak. I started losing altitude right away, and suddenly there I was with a thump right in the middle of Thyle! Smashed my nose on the window, too!" He rubbed the injured member ruefully.

"Did you maybe try vashing der combustion chamber mit acid sulphuric?" inquired Putz. "Sometimes der lead giffs a secondary radiation—"

"Naw!" said Jarvis disgustedly. "I wouldn't try that, of course— not more than ten times! Besides, the bump flattened the landing gear and busted off the under-jets. Suppose I got the thing working— what then? Ten miles with the blast coming right out of the bottom and I'd have melted the floor from under me!" He rubbed his nose again. "Lucky for me a pound only weighs seven ounces here, or I'd have been mashed flat!"

"I could have fixed!" ejaculated the engineer. "I bet it vas not serious."

"Probably not," agreed Jarvis sarcastically. "Only it wouldn't fly. Nothing serious, but I had my choice of waiting to be picked up or trying to walk back— eight hundred miles, and perhaps twenty days before we had to leave! Forty miles a day! Well," he concluded, "I chose to walk. Just as much chance of being picked up, and it kept me busy."

"We'd have found you," said Harrison.

"No doubt. Anyway, I rigged up a harness from some seat straps, and put the water tank on my back, took a cartridge belt and revolver, and some iron rations, and started out."

"Water tank!" exclaimed the little biologist, Leroy. "She weigh one-quarter ton!"

"Wasn't full. Weighed about two hundred and fifty pounds earth-weight, which is eighty-five here. Then, besides, my own personal two hundred and ten pounds is only seventy on Mars, so, tank and all, I grossed a hundred and fifty-five, or fifty-five pounds less than my everyday earth-weight. I figured on that when I undertook the forty-mile daily stroll. Oh— of course I took a thermo-skin sleeping bag for these wintry Martian nights.

"Off I went, bouncing along pretty quickly. Eight hours of daylight meant twenty miles or more. It got tiresome, of course— plugging along over a soft sand desert with nothing to see, not even Leroy's crawling biopods. But an hour or so brought me to the canal— just a dry ditch about four hundred feet wide, and straight as a railroad on its own company map.

"There'd been water in it sometime, though. The ditch was covered with what looked like a nice green lawn. Only, as I approached, the lawn moved out of my way!"

"Eh?" said Leroy.

"Yeah, it was a relative of your biopods. I caught one— a little grass-like blade about as long as my finger, with two thin, stemmy legs."

"He is where?" Leroy was eager.

"He is let go! I had to move, so I plowed along with the walking grass opening in front and closing behind. And then I was out on the orange desert of Thyle again.

"I plugged steadily along, cussing the sand that made going so tiresome, and, incidentally, cussing that cranky motor of yours, Karl. It was just before twilight that I reached the edge of Thyle, and looked down over the grey Mare Chronium. And I knew there was seventy-five miles of that to be walked over, and then a couple of hundred miles of that Xanthus desert, and about as much more Mare Cimmerium. Was I pleased? I started cussing you fellows for not picking me up!"

"We were trying, you sap!" said Harrison.

"That didn't help. Well, I figured I might as well use what was left of daylight in getting down the cliff that bounded Thyle. I found an easy place, and down I went. Mare Chronium was just the same sort of place as this— crazy leafless plants and a bunch of crawlers; I gave it a glance and hauled out my sleeping bag. Up to that time, you know, I hadn't seen anything worth worrying about on this half-dead world— nothing dangerous, that is."

"Did you?" queried Harrison.

"Did I! You'll hear about it when I come to it. Well, I was just about to turn in when suddenly I heard the wildest sort of shenanigans!"

"Vot iss shenanigans?" inquired Putz.

"He says, *'Je ne sais quoi,'* " explained Leroy. "It is to say, 'I don't know what.' "

"That's right," agreed Jarvis. "I didn't know what, so I sneaked over to find out. There was a racket like a flock of crows eating a bunch of canaries— whistles, cackles, caws, trills, and what have you. I rounded a clump of stumps, and there was Tweel!"

"Tweel?" said Harrison, and "Tveel?" said Leroy and Putz.

"That freak ostrich," explained the narrator. "At least, Tweel is as near as I can pronounce it without sputtering. He called it something like 'Trrrweerrlll.' "

"What was he doing?" asked the captain.

"He was being eaten! And squealing, of course, as any one would."

"Eaten! By what?"

"I found out later. All I could see then was a bunch of black ropy arms tangled around what looked like, as Putz described it to you, an ostrich. I

wasn't going to interfere, naturally; if both creatures were dangerous, I'd have one less to worry about.

"But the bird-like thing was putting up a good battle, dealing vicious blows with an eighteen-inch beak, between screeches. And besides, I caught a glimpse or two of what was on the end of those arms!" Jarvis shuddered. "But the clincher was when I noticed a little black bag or case hung about the neck of the bird-thing! It was intelligent! That or tame, I assumed. Anyway, it clinched my decision. I pulled out my automatic and fired into what I could see of its antagonist.

"There was a flurry of tentacles and a spurt of black corruption, and then the thing, with a disgusting sucking noise, pulled itself and its arms into a hole in the ground. The other let out a series of clacks, staggered around on legs about as thick as golf sticks, and turned suddenly to face me. I held my weapon ready, and the two of us stared at each other.

"The Martian wasn't a bird, really. It wasn't even bird-like, except just at first glance. It had a beak all right, and a few feathery appendages, but the beak wasn't really a beak. It was somewhat flexible; I could see the tip bend slowly from side to side; it was almost like a cross between a beak and a trunk. It had four-toed feet, and four-fingered things— hands, you'd have to call them, and a little roundish body, and a long neck ending in a tiny head— and that beak. It stood an inch or so taller than I, and— well, Putz saw it!"

The engineer nodded. "*Ja*, I saw!"

Jarvis continued. "So— we stared at each other. Finally the creature went into a series of clackings and twitterings and held out its hands toward me, empty. I took that as a gesture of friendship."

"Perhaps," suggested Harrison, "it looked at that nose of yours and thought you were its brother!"

"Huh! You can be funny without talking! Anyway, I put up my gun and said 'Aw, don't mention it,' or something of the sort, and the thing came over and we were pals.

"By that time, the sun was pretty low and I knew that I'd better build a fire or get into my thermo-skin. I decided on the fire. I picked a spot at the base of the Thyle cliff, where the rock could reflect a little heat on my back. I started breaking off chunks of this desiccated Martian vegetation, and my companion caught the idea and brought in an armful. I reached for a match, but the Martian fished into his pouch and brought out something that looked like a glowing coal; one touch of it, and the fire was blazing— and you all know what a job we have starting a fire in this atmosphere!

"And that bag of his!" continued the narrator. "That was a manufactured article, my friends; press an end and she popped open— press the middle and she sealed so perfectly you couldn't see the line. Better than zippers.

"Well, we stared at the fire a while and I decided to attempt some sort of communication with the Martian. I pointed at myself and said 'Dick'; he caught the drift immediately, stretched a bony claw at me and repeated 'Tick.' Then I pointed at him, and he gave that whistle I called Tweel; I can't imitate his accent. Things were going smoothly; to emphasize the names, I repeated 'Dick,' and then, pointing at him, Tweel.'

"There we stuck! He gave some clacks that sounded negative, and said something like 'P-p-p-root.' And that was just the beginning; I was always 'Tick,' but as for him— part of the time he was 'Tweel,' and part of the time he was 'P-p-p-proot,' and part of the time he was sixteen other noises!

"We just couldn't connect. I tried 'rock,' and I tried 'star,' and 'tree,' and 'fire,' and Lord knows what else, and try as I would, I couldn't get a single word! Nothing was the same for two successive minutes, and if that's a language, I'm an alchemist! Finally I gave it up and called him Tweel, and that seemed to do.

"But Tweel hung on to some of my words. He remembered a couple of them, which I suppose is a great achievement if you're used to a language you have to make up as you go along. But I couldn't get the hang of his talk; either I missed some subtle point or we just didn't think alike— and I rather believe the latter view.

"I've other reasons for believing that. After a while I gave up the language business, and tried mathematics. I scratched two plus two equals four on the ground, and demonstrated it with pebbles. Again Tweel caught the idea, and informed me that three plus three equals six. Once more we seemed to be getting somewhere.

"So, knowing that Tweel had at least a grammar school education, I drew a circle for the sun, pointing first at it, and then at the last glow of the sun. Then I sketched in Mercury, and Venus, and Mother Earth, and Mars, and finally, pointing to Mars, I swept my hand around in a sort of inclusive gesture to indicate that Mars was our current environment. I was working up to putting over the idea that my home was on the earth.

"Tweel understood my diagram all right. He poked his beak at it, and with a great deal of trilling and clucking, he added Deimos and Phobos to Mars, and then sketched in the earth's moon!

"Do you see what that proves? It proves that Tweel's race uses telescopes— that they're civilized!"

"Does not!" snapped Harrison. "The moon is visible from here as a fifth magnitude star. They could see its revolution with the naked eye."

"The moon, yes!" said Jarvis. "You've missed my point. Mercury isn't visible! And Tweel knew of Mercury because he placed the Moon at the third planet, not the second. If he didn't know Mercury, he'd put the earth second, and Mars third, instead of fourth! See?"

"Humph!'' said Harrison.

"Anyway," proceeded Jarvis, "I went on with my lesson. Things were going smoothly, and it looked as if I could put the idea over. I pointed at the earth on my diagram, and then at myself, and then, to clinch it, I pointed to myself and then to the earth itself shining bright green almost at the zenith.

"Tweel set up such an excited clacking that I was certain he understood. He jumped up and down, and suddenly he pointed at himself and then at the sky, and then at himself and at the sky again. He pointed at his middle and then at Arcturus, at his head and then at Spica, at his feet and then at half a dozen stars, while I just gaped at him. Then, all of a sudden, he gave a tremendous leap. Man, what a hop! He shot straight up into the starlight, seventy-five feet if an inch! I saw him silhouetted against the sky, saw him turn and come down at me head first, and land smack on his beak like a javelin! There he stuck square in the center of my sun-circle in the sand— a bull's eye!"

"Nuts!" observed the captain. "Plain nuts!"

That's what I thought, too! I just stared at him open-mouthed while ne pulled his head out of the sand and stood up. Then I figured he'd missed my point, and I went through the whole blamed rigmarole again, and it ended the same way, with Tweel on his nose in the middle of my picture!"

"Maybe it's a religious rite," suggested Harrison.

"Maybe," said Jarvis dubiously. "Well, there we were. We could exchange ideas up to a certain point, and then— blooey! Something in us was different, unrelated; I don't doubt that Tweel thought me just as screwy as I thought him. Our minds simply looked at the world from different viewpoints, and perhaps his viewpoint is as true as ours. But— we couldn't get together, that's all. Yet, in spite of all difficulties, I liked Tweel, and I have a queer certainty that he liked me."

"Nuts!" repeated the captain. "Just daffy!"

"Yeah? Wait and see. A couple of times I've thought that perhaps we—" He paused, and then resumed his narrative. "Anyway, I finally gave it up, and got into my thermo-skin to sleep. The fire hadn't kept me any too warm, but that damned sleeping bag did. Got stuffy five minutes after I closed myself in. I opened it a little and bingo! Some eighty-below-zero air hit my nose, and that's

when I got this pleasant little frostbite to add to the bump I acquired during the crash of my rocket.

"I don't know what Tweel made of my sleeping. He sat around, but when I woke up, he was gone. I'd just crawled out of my bag, though, when I heard some twittering, and there he came, sailing down from that three-story Thyle cliff to alight on his beak beside me. I pointed to myself and toward the north, and he pointed at himself and toward the south, but when I loaded up and started away, he came along.

"Man, how he traveled! A hundred and fifty feet at a jump, sailing through the air stretched out like a spear, and landing on his beak. He seemed surprised at my plodding, but after a few moments he fell in beside me, only every few minutes he'd go into one of his leaps, and stick his nose into the sand a block ahead of me. Then he'd come shooting back at me; it made me nervous at first to see that beak of his coming at me like a spear, but he always ended in the sand at my side.

"So the two of us plugged along across the Mare Chronium. Same sort of place as this— same crazy plants and same little green biopods growing in the sand, or crawling out of your way. We talked— not that we understood each other, you know, but just for company. I sang songs, and I suspect Tweel did too; at least, some of his trillings and twitterings had a subtle sort of rhythm.

"Then, for variety, Tweel would display his smattering of English words. He'd point to an outcropping and say 'rock,' and point to a pebble and say it again; or he'd touch my arm and say 'Tick,' and then repeat it. He seemed terrifically amused that the same word meant the same thing twice in succession, or that the same word could apply to two different objects. It set me wondering if perhaps his language wasn't like the primitive speech of some earth people— you know, Captain, like the Negritoes, for instance, who haven't any generic words. No word for food or water or man— words for good food and bad food, or rain water and sea water, or strong man and weak man— but no names for general classes. They're too primitive to understand that rain water and sea water are just different aspects of the same thing. But that wasn't the case with Tweel; it was just that we were somehow mysteriously different— our minds were alien to each other. And yet— we liked each other!"

"Looney, that's all," remarked Harrison. "That's why you two were so fond of each other."

"Well, I like you!" countered Jarvis wickedly. "Anyway," he resumed, "don't get the idea that there was anything screwy about Tweel. In fact, I'm not so sure but that he couldn't teach our highly praised human intelligence a trick or two. Oh, he wasn't an intellectual superman, I guess; but don't overlook the

point that he managed to understand a little of my mental workings, and I never even got a glimmering of his."

"Because he didn't have any!" suggested the captain, while Putz and Leroy blinked attentively.

"You can judge of that when I'm through," said Jarvis. "Well, we plugged along across the Mare Chronium all that day, and all the next. Mare Chronium— Sea of Time! Say, I was willing to agree with Schiaparelli's name by the end of that march! Just that grey, endless plain of weird plants, and never a sign of any other life. It was so monotonous that I was even glad to see the desert of Xanthus toward the evening of the second day.

"I was fair worn out, but Tweel seemed as fresh as ever, for all I never saw him drink or eat. I think he could have crossed the Mare Chronium in a couple of hours with those block-long nose dives of his, but he stuck along with me. I offered him some water once or twice; he took the cup from me and sucked the liquid into his beak, and then carefully squirted it all back into the cup and gravely returned it.

"Just as we sighted Xanthus, or the cliffs that bounded it, one of those nasty sand clouds blew along, not as bad as the one we had here, out mean to travel against. I pulled the transparent flap of my thermo-skin bag across my face and managed pretty well, and I noticed that Tweel used some feathery appendages growing like a mustache at the base of his beak to cover his nostrils, and some similar fuzz to shield his eyes."

"He is a desert creature!" ejaculated the little biologist, Leroy.

"Huh? Why?"

"He drink no water— he is adapt' for sand storm—"

"Proves nothing! There's not enough water to waste any where on this desiccated pill called Mars. We'd call all of it desert on earth, you know." He paused. "Anyway, after the sand storm blew over, a little wind kept blowing in our faces, not strong enough to stir the sand. But suddenly things came drifting along from the Xanthus cliffs— small, transparent spheres, for all the world like glass tennis balls! But light— they were almost light enough to float even in this thin air— empty, too; at least, I cracked open a couple and nothing came out but a bad smell. I asked Tweel about them, but all he said was 'No, no, no,' which I took to mean that he knew nothing about them. So they went bouncing by like tumbleweeds, or like soap bubbles, and we plugged on toward Xanthus. Tweel pointed at one of the crystal balls once and said 'rock,' but I was too tired to argue with him. Later I discovered what he meant.

"We came to the bottom of the Xanthus cliffs finally, when there wasn't much daylight left. I decided to sleep on the plateau if possible; anything dangerous, I reasoned, would be more likely to prowl through the vegetation

of the Mare Chronium than the sand of Xanthus. Not that I'd seen a single sign of menace, except the rope-armed black thing that had trapped Tweel, and apparently that didn't prowl at all, but lured its victims within reach. It couldn't lure me while I slept, especially as Tweel didn't seem to sleep at all, but simply sat patiently around all night. I wondered how the creature had managed to trap Tweel, but there wasn't any way of asking him. I found that out too, later; it's devilish!

"However, we were ambling around the base of the Xanthus barrier looking for an easy spot to climb. At least, I was. Tweel could have leaped it easily, for the cliffs were lower than Thyle— perhaps sixty feet. I found a place and started up, swearing at the water tank strapped to my back— it didn't bother me except when climbing— and suddenly I heard a sound that I thought I recognized!

"You know how deceptive sounds are in this thin air. A shot sounds like the pop of a cork. But this sound was the drone of a rocket, and sure enough, there went our second auxiliary about ten miles to westward, between me and the sunset!"

"Vas me!" said Putz. "I hunt for you."

"Yeah; I knew that, but what good did it do me? I hung on to the cliff and yelled and waved with one hand. Tweel saw it too, and set up a trilling and twittering, leaping to the top of the barrier and then high into the air. And while I watched, the machine droned on into the shadows to the south.

"I scrambled to the top of the cliff. Tweel was still pointing and trilling excitedly, shooting up toward the sky and coming down head-on to stick upside down on his beak in the sand. I pointed toward the south and at myself, and he said, 'Yes— Yes— Yes'; but somehow I gathered that he thought the flying thing was a relative of mine, probably a parent. Perhaps I did his intellect an injustice; I think now that I did.

"I was bitterly disappointed by the failure to attract attention. I pulled out my thermo-skin bag and crawled into it, as the night chill was already apparent. Tweel stuck his beak into the sand and drew up his legs and arms and looked for all the world like one of those leafless shrubs out there. I think he stayed that way all night."

"Protective mimicry!" ejaculated Leroy. "See? He is desert creature!"

"In the morning," resumed Jarvis, "we started off again. We hadn't gone a hundred yards into Xanthus when I saw something queer! This is one thing Putz didn't photograph, I'll wager!

"There was a line of little pyramids— tiny ones, not more than six inches high, stretching across Xanthus as far as I could see! Little buildings made of pygmy bricks, they were, hollow inside and truncated, or at least broken at the

top and empty. I pointed at them and said 'What?' to Tweel, but he gave some negative twitters to indicate, I suppose, that he didn't know. So off we went, following the row of pyramids because they ran north, and I was going north.

"Man, we trailed that line for hours! After a while, I noticed another queer thing: they were getting larger. Same number of bricks in each one, but the bricks were larger.

"By noon they were shoulder high. I looked into a couple— all just the same, broken at the top and empty. I examined a brick or two as well; they were silica, and old as creation itself!"

"How you know?" asked Leroy.

"They were weathered— edges rounded. Silica doesn't weather easily even on earth, and in this climate— !"

"How old you think?"

"Fifty thousand— a hundred thousand years. How can I tell? The little ones we saw in the morning were older— perhaps ten times as old. Crumbling. How old would that make them? Half a million years? Who knows?" Jarvis paused a moment.

"Well," he resumed, "we followed the line. Tweel pointed at them and said 'rock' once or twice, but he'd done that many times before. Besides, he was more or less right about these.

"I tried questioning him. I pointed at a pyramid and asked 'People?' and indicated the two of us. He set up a negative sort of clucking and said, 'No, no, no. No one-one-two. No two-two-four,' meanwhile rubbing his stomach. I just stared at him and he went through the business again. 'No one-one-two. No two-two-four.' I just gaped at him."

"That proves it!" exclaimed Harrison. "Nuts!"

"You think so?" queried Jarvis sardonically. "Well, I figured it out different! 'No one-one-two!' You don't get it, of course, do you?"

"Nope— nor do you!"

"I think I do! Tweel was using the few English words he knew to put over a very complex idea. What, let me ask, does mathematics make you think of?"

"Why— of astronomy. Or— or logic!"

"That's it! 'No one-one-two!' Tweel was telling me that the builders of the pyramids weren't people— or that they weren't intelligent, that they weren't reasoning creatures! Get it?"

"Huh! I'll be damned!"

"You probably will."

"Why," put in Leroy, "he rub his belly?"

"Why? Because, my dear biologist, that's where his brains are! Not in his tiny head— in his middle!"

"*C'est impossible!*"

"Not on Mars, it isn't! This flora and fauna aren't earthly; your biopods prove that!" Jarvis grinned and took up his narrative. "Anyway, we plugged along across Xanthus and in about the middle of the afternoon, something else queer happened. The pyramids ended."

"Ended!"

"Yeah; the queer part was that the last one— and now they were ten-footers— was capped! See? Whatever built it was still inside; we'd trailed 'em from their half-million-year-old origin to the present.

"Tweel and I noticed it about the same time. I yanked out my automatic (I had a clip of Boland explosive bullets in it) and Tweel, quick as a sleight-of-hand trick, snapped a queer little glass revolver out of his bag. It was much like our weapons, except that the grip was larger to accommodate his four-taloned hand. And we held our weapons ready while we sneaked up along the lines of empty pyramids.

"Tweel saw the movement first. The top tiers of bricks were heaving, shaking, and suddenly slid down the sides with a thin crash. And then— something— something was coming out!

"A long, silvery-grey arm appeared, dragging after it an armored body. Armored, I mean, with scales, silver-grey and dull-shining. The arm heaved the body out of the hole; the beast crashed to the sand.

"It was a nondescript creature— body like a big grey cask, arm and a sort of mouth-hole at one end; stiff, pointed tail at the other— and that's all. No other limbs, no eyes, ears, nose— nothing! The thing dragged itself a few yards, inserted its pointed tail in the sand, pushed itself upright, and just sat,

"Tweel and I watched it for ten minutes before it moved. Then, with a creaking and rustling like— oh, like crumpling stiff paper— its arm moved to the mouth-hole and out came a brick! The arm placed the brick carefully on the ground, and the thing was still again.

"Another ten minutes— another brick. Just one of Nature's bricklayers. I was about to slip away and move on when Tweel pointed at the thing and said 'rock'! I went 'huh?' and he said it again. Then, to the accompaniment of some of his trilling, he said, 'No— no— ,' and gave two or three whistling breaths.

"Well, I got his meaning, for a wonder! I said, 'No breath?' and demonstrated the word. Tweel was ecstatic; he said, 'Yes, yes, yes! No, no, no breet!' Then he gave a leap and sailed out to land on his nose about one pace from the monster!

"I was startled, you can imagine! The arm was going up for a brick, and I expected to see Tweel caught and mangled, but— nothing happened! Tweel pounded on the creature, and the arm took the brick and placed it neatly

beside the first. Tweel rapped on its body again, and said 'rock,' and I got up nerve enough to take a look myself.

"Tweel was right again. The creature was rock, and it didn't breathe!"

"How you know?" snapped Leroy, his black eyes blazing interest.

"Because I'm a chemist. The beast was made of silica! There must have been pure silicon in the sand, and it lived on that. Get it? We, and Tweel, and those plants out there, and even the biopods are carbon life; this thing lived by a different set of chemical reactions. It was silicon life!"

"*La vie silicieuse*!" shouted Leroy. "I have suspect, and now it is proof! I must go see*! Il faut que je—"*

"All right! All right!" said Jarvis. "You can go see. Anyhow, there the thing was, alive and yet not alive, moving every ten minutes, and then only to remove a brick. Those bricks were its waste matter. See, Frenchy? We're carbon, and our waste is carbon dioxide, and this thing is silicon, and its waste is silicon dioxide— silica. But silica is a solid, hence the bricks. And it builds itself in, and when it is covered, it moves over to a fresh place to start over. No wonder it creaked! A living creature half a million years old!"

"How you know how old?" Leroy was frantic.

"We trailed its pyramids from the beginning, didn't we? If this weren't the original pyramid builder, the series would have ended somewhere before we found him, wouldn't it?— ended and started over with the small ones. That's simple enough, isn't it?

"But he reproduces, or tries to. Before the third brick came out, there was a little rustle and out popped a whole stream of those little crystal balls. They're his spores, or eggs, or seeds— call 'em what you want. They went bouncing by across Xanthus just as they'd bounced by us back in the Mare Chronium. I've a hunch how they work, too— this is for your information, Leroy. I think the crystal shell of silica is no more than a protective covering, like an eggshell, and that the active principle is the smell inside. It's some sort of gas that attacks silicon, and if the shell is broken near a supply of that element, some reaction starts that ultimately develops into a beast like that one."

"You should try!" exclaimed the little Frenchman. "We must break one to see!"

"Yeah? Well, I did. I smashed a couple against the sand. Would you like to come back in about ten thousand years to see if I planted some pyramid monsters? You'd most likely be able to tell by that time!" Jarvis paused and drew a deep breath. "Lord! That queer creature! Do you picture it? Blind, deaf, nerveless, brainless— just a mechanism, and yet— immortal! Bound to go on making bricks, building pyramids, as long as silicon and oxygen exist, and even

afterwards it'll just stop. It won't be dead. If the accidents of a million years bring it its food again, there it'll be, ready to run again, while brains and civilizations are part of the past. A queer beast— yet I met a stranger one!"

"If you did, it must have been in your dreams!" growled Harrison.

"You're right!" said Jarvis soberly. "In a way, you're right. The dreambeast! That's the best name for it— and it's the most fiendish, terrifying creation one could imagine! More dangerous than a lion, more insidious than a snake!"

"Tell me!" begged Leroy. "I must go see!"

"Not this devil!" He paused again. "Well," he resumed, "Tweel and I left the pyramid creature and plowed along through Xanthus. I was tired and a little disheartened by Putz's failure to pick me up, and Tweel's trilling got on my nerves, as did his flying nosedives. So I just strode along without a word, hour after hour across that monotonous desert.

"Toward mid-afternoon we came in sight of a low dark line on the horizon. I knew what it was. It was a canal; I'd crossed it in the rocket and it meant that we were just one-third of the way across Xanthus. Pleasant thought, wasn't it? And still, I was keeping up to schedule.

"We approached the canal slowly; I remembered that this one was bordered by a wide fringe of vegetation and that Mudheap City was on it. "I was tired, as I said. I kept thinking of a good hot meal, and then from that I jumped to reflections of how nice and home-like even Borneo would seem after this crazy planet, and from that, to thoughts of little old New York, and then to thinking about a girl I know there— Fancy Long. Know her?"

"Vision entertainer," said Harrison. "I've tuned her in. Nice blonde— dances and sings on the Yerba Mate hour."

"That's her," said Jarvis ungrammatically. "I know her pretty well— just friends, get me?— though she came down to see us off in the *Ares*. Well, I was thinking about her, feeling pretty lonesome, and all the time we were approaching that line of rubbery plants.

"And then— I said, 'What 'n Hell!' and stared. And there she was— Fancy Long, standing plain as day under one of those crack-brained trees, and smiling and waving just the way I remembered her when we left!"

"Now you're nuts, too!" observed the captain.

"Boy, I almost agreed with you! I stared and pinched myself and closed my eyes and then stared again— and every time, there was Fancy Long smiling and waving! Tweel saw something, too; he was trilling and clucking away, but I scarcely heard him. I was bounding toward her over the sand, too amazed even to ask myself questions.

"I wasn't twenty feet from her when Tweel caught me with one of his flying leaps. He grabbed my arm, yelling, 'No— no— no!' in his squeaky voice. I tried

to shake him off— he was as light as if he were built of bamboo— but he dug his claws in and yelled. And finally some sort of sanity returned to me and I stopped less than ten feet from her. There she stood, looking as solid as Putz's head!"

"Vot?" said the engineer.

"She smiled and waved, and waved and smiled, and I stood there dumb as Leroy, while Tweel squeaked and chattered. I knew it couldn't be real, yet— there she was!

"Finally I said, 'Fancy! Fancy Long!' She just kept on smiling and waving, but looking as real as if I hadn't left her thirty-seven million miles away.

"Tweel had his glass pistol out, pointing it at her. I grabbed his arm, but he tried to push me away. He pointed at her and said, 'No breet! No breet!' and I understood that he meant that the Fancy Long thing wasn't alive. Man, my head was whirling! Still, it gave me the jitters to see him pointing his weapon at her. I don't know why I stood there watching him take careful aim, but I did. Then he squeezed the handle of his weapon; there was a little puff of steam, and Fancy Long was gone! And in her place was one of those writhing, black, rope-armed horrors like the one I'd saved Tweel from!

"The dream-beast! I stood there dizzy, watching it die while Tweel trilled and whistled. Finally he touched my arm, pointed at the twisting thing, and said, 'You one-one-two, he one-one-two.' After he'd repeated it eight or ten times, I got it. Do any of you?"

"Out!" shrilled Leroy. "*Moi— je le comprends*! He mean you think of something, the beast he know, and you see it! *Un chien*— a hungry dog, he would see the big bone with meat! Or smell it— not?"

"Right!" said Jarvis. "The dream-beast uses its victim's longings and desires to trap its prey. The bird at nesting season would see its mate, the fox, prowling for its own prey, would see a helpless rabbit!"

"How he do?" queried Leroy.

"How do I know? How does a snake back on earth charm a bird into its very jaws? And aren't there deep-sea fish that lure their victims into their mouths? Lord!"

Jarvis shuddered. "Do you see how insidious the monster is? We're warned now— but henceforth we can't trust even our eyes. You might see me— I might see one of you— and back of it may be nothing but another of those black horrors!"

"How'd your friend know?" asked the captain abruptly.

"Tweel? I wonder! Perhaps he was thinking of something that couldn't possibly have interested me, and when I started to run, he realized that I saw something different and was warned. Or perhaps the dream-beast can only

project a single vision, and Tweel saw what I saw— or nothing. I couldn't ask him. But it's just another proof that his intelligence is equal to ours or greater."

"He's daffy, I tell you!" said Harrison. "What makes you think his intellect ranks with the human?"

"Plenty of things! First, the pyramid-beast. He hadn't seen one before; he said as much. Yet he recognized it as a dead-alive automaton of silicon."

"He could have heard of it," objected Harrison. "He lives around here, you know."

"Well how about the language? I couldn't pick up a single idea of his and he learned six or seven words of mine. And do you realize what complex ideas he put over with no more than those six or seven words? The pyramid-monster— the dreambeast! In a single phrase he told me that one was a harmless automaton and the other a deadly hypnotist. What about that?"

"Huh!" said the captain.

"Huh if you wish! Could you have done it knowing only six words of English? Could you go even further, as Tweel did, and tell me that another creature was of a sort of intelligence so different from ours that understanding was impossible— even more impossible than that between Tweel and me?"

"Eh? What was that?"

"Later. The point I'm making is that Tweel and his race are worthy of our friendship. Somewhere on Mars— and you'll find I'm right— is a civilization and culture equal to ours, and maybe more than equal. And communication is possible between them and us; Tweel proves that. It may take years of patient trial, for their minds are alien, but less alien than the next minds we encountered— if they are minds."

"The next ones? What next ones?"

"The people of the mud cities along the canals." Jarvis frowned, then resumed his narrative. "I thought the dream-beast and the silicon-monster were the strangest beings conceivable, but I was wrong. These creatures are still more alien, less understandable than either and far less comprehensible than Tweel, with whom friendship is possible, and even, by patience and concentration, the exchange of ideas.

"Well," he continued, "we left the dream-beast dying, dragging itself back into its hole, and we moved toward the canal. There was a carpet of that queer walking-grass scampering out of our way, and when we reached the bank, there was a yellow trickle of water flowing. The mound city I'd noticed from the rocket was a mile or so to the right and I was curious enough to want to take a look at it.

"It had seemed deserted from my previous glimpse of it, and if any creatures were lurking in it— well, Tweel and I were both armed. And by the

way, that crystal weapon of Tweel's was an interesting device; I took a look at it after the dream-beast episode. It fired a little glass splinter, poisoned, I suppose, and I guess it held at least a hundred of 'em to a load. The propellent was steam— just plain steam!"

"Shteam!" echoed Putz. "From vot come, shteam!"

"From water, of course! You could see the water through the transparent handle and about a gill of another liquid, thick and yellowish. When Tweel squeezed the handle— there was no trigger— a drop of water and a drop of the yellow stuff squirted into the firing chamber, and the water vaporized— pop!— like that. It's not so difficult; I think we could develop the same principle. Concentrated sulphuric acid will heat water almost to boiling, and so will quicklime, and there's potassium and sodium— Of course, his weapon hadn't the range of mine, but it wasn't so ad in this thin air, and it did hold as many shots as a cowboy's gun in a Western movie. It was effective, too, at least against Martian life; I tried it out, aiming at one of the crazy plants, and darned if the plant didn't wither up and fall apart! That's why I think the glass splinters were poisoned.

"Anyway, we trudged along toward the mud-heap city and I began to wonder whether the city builders dug the canals. I pointed to the city and then at the canal, and Tweel said 'No— no— no!' and gestured toward the south. I took it to mean that some other race had created the canal system, perhaps Tweel's people. I don't know; maybe there's still another intelligent race on the planet, or a dozen others. Mars is a queer little world.

"A hundred yards from the city we crossed a sort of road— just a hard-packed mud trail, and then, all of a sudden, along came one of the mound builders!

"Man, talk about fantastic beings! It looked rather like a barrel trotting along on four legs with four other arms or tentacles. It had no head, just body and members and a row of eyes completely around it. The top end of the barrel-body was a diaphragm stretched as tight as a drum head, and that was all. It was pushing a little coppery cart and tore right past us like the proverbial bat out of Hell. It didn't even notice us, although I thought the eyes on my side shifted a little as it passed.

"A moment later another came along, pushing another empty cart. Same thing— it just scooted past us. Well, I wasn't going to be ignored by a bunch of barrels playing train, so when the third one approached, I planted myself in the way— ready to jump, of course, if the thing didn't stop.

"But it did. It stopped and set up a sort of drumming from the diaphragm on top. And I held out both hands and said, 'We are friends!' And what do you suppose the thing did?"

"Said, 'Pleased to meet you,' I'll bet!" suggested Harrison.

"I couldn't have been more surprised if it had! It drummed on its diaphragm, and then suddenly boomed out, 'We are v-r-r-riends!' and gave its pushcart a vicious poke at me! I jumped aside, and away it went while I stared dumbly after it.

"A minute later another one came hurrying along. This one didn't pause, but simply drummed out, 'We are v-r-r-riends!' and scurried by. How did it learn the phrase? Were all of the creatures in some sort of communication with each other? Were they all parts of some central organism? I don't know, though I think Tweel does.

"Anyway, the creatures went sailing past us, every one greeting us with the same statement. It got to be funny; I never thought to find so many friends on this Godforsaken ball! Finally I made a puzzled gesture to Tweel; I guess he understood, for he said, 'One-one-two— yes!— two-two-four— no!' Get it?"

"Sure," said Harrison. "It's a Martian nursery rhyme."

"Yeah! Well, I was getting used to Tweel's symbolism, and I figured it out this way. 'One-one-two— yes!' The creatures were intelligent. 'Two-two-four— no!' Their intelligence was not of our order, but something different and beyond the logic of two and two is four. Maybe I missed his meaning. Perhaps he meant that their minds were of low degree, able to figure out the simple things— 'One-one-two— yes!'— but not more difficult things— 'Two-two-four— no!' But I think from what we saw later that he meant the other.

"After a few moments, the creatures came rushing back— first one, then another. Their pushcarts were full of stones, sand, chunks of rubbery plants, and such rubbish as that. They droned out their friendly greeting, which didn't really sound so friendly, and dashed on. The third one I assumed to be my first acquaintance and I decided to have another chat with him. I stepped into his path again and waited.

"Up he came, booming out his 'We are v-r-r-riends" and stopped. I looked at him; four or five of his eyes looked at me. He tried his password again and gave a shove on his cart, but I stood firm. And then the— the dashed creature reached out one of his arms, and two finger-like nippers tweaked my nose!"

"Haw!" roared Harrison. "Maybe the things have a sense of beauty!"

"Laugh!" grumbled Jarvis. "I'd already had a nasty bump and a mean frostbite on that nose. Anyway, I yelled 'Ouch!' and jumped aside and the creature dashed away, but from then on, their greeting was 'We are v-r-r-riends! Ouch!' Queer beasts!

"Tweel and I followed the road squarely up to the nearest mound. The creatures were coming and going, paying us not the slightest attention, fetching their loads of rubbish. The road simply dived into an opening, and

slanted down like an old mine, and in and out darted the barrel-people, greeting us with their eternal phrase.

"I looked in; there was a light somewhere below, and I was curious to see it. It didn't look like a flame or torch, you understand, but more like a civilized light, and I thought that I might get some clue as to the creatures' development. So in I went and Tweel tagged along, not without a few trills and twitters, however. The light was curious; it sputtered and flared like an old arc light, but came from a single black rod set in the wall of the corridor. It was electric, beyond doubt. The creatures were fairly civilized, apparently.

"Then I saw another light shining on something that glittered and I went on to look at that, but it was only a heap of shiny sand. I turned toward the entrance to leave, and the Devil take me if it wasn't gone!

"I suppose the corridor had curved, or I'd stepped into a side passage. Anyway, I walked back in that direction I thought we'd come, and all I saw was more dim-lit corridor. The place was a labyrinth! There was nothing but twisting passages running every way, lit by occasional lights, and now and then a creature running by, sometimes with a pushcart, sometimes without.

"Well, I wasn't much worried at first. Tweel and I had only come a few steps from the entrance. But every move we made after that seemed to get us in deeper. Finally I tried following one of the creatures with an empty cart, thinking that he'd be going out for his rubbish, but he ran around aimlessly, into one passage and out another. When he started dashing around a pillar like one of these Japanese waltzing mice, I gave up, dumped my water tank on the floor, and sat down.

"Tweel was as lost as I. I pointed up and he said 'No— no— no!' in a sort of helpless trill. And we couldn't get any help from the natives. They paid no attention at all, except to assure us they were friends— ouch!

"Lord! I don't know how many hours or days we wandered around there! I slept twice from sheer exhaustion; Tweel never seemed to need sleep. We tried following only the upward corridors, but they'd run uphill a ways and then curve downwards. The temperature in that damned ant hill was constant; you couldn't tell night from day and after my first sleep I didn't know whether I'd slept one hour or thirteen, so I couldn't tell from my watch whether it was midnight or noon.

"We saw plenty of strange things. There were machines running in some of the corridors, but they didn't seem to be doing anything— just wheels turning. And several times I saw two barrel-beasts with a little one growing between them, joined to both."

"Parthenogenesis!" exulted Leroy. "Parthenogenesis by budding like *les tulipes*!"

"If you say so, Frenchy," agreed Jarvis. "The things never noticed us at all, except, as I say, to greet us with 'We are v-r-r-riends! Ouch!' They seemed to have no home-life of any sort, but just scurried around with their pushcarts, bringing in rubbish. And finally I discovered what they did with it.

"We'd had a little luck with a corridor, one that slanted upwards for a great distance. I was feeling that we ought to be close to the surface when suddenly the passage debouched into a domed chamber, the only one we'd seen. And man!— I felt like dancing when I saw what looked like daylight through a crevice in the roof.

"There was a— a sort of machine in the chamber, just an enormous wheel that turned slowly, and one of the creatures was in the act of dumping his rubbish below it. The wheel ground it with a crunch— sand, stones, plants, all into powder that sifted away somewhere. While we watched, others filed in, repeating the process, and that seemed to be all. No rhyme nor reason to the whole thing— but that's characteristic of this crazy planet. And there was another fact that's almost too bizarre to believe.

"One of the creatures, having dumped his load, pushed his cart aside with a crash and calmly shoved himself under the wheel! I watched him being crushed, too stupefied to make a sound, and a moment later, another followed him! They were perfectly methodical about it, too; one of the cartless creatures took the abandoned pushcart.

"Tweel didn't seem surprised; I pointed out the next suicide to him, and he just gave the most human-like shrug imaginable, as much as to say, 'What can I do about it?' He must have known more or less about these creatures.

"Then I saw something else. There was something beyond the wheel, something shining on a sort of low pedestal. I walked over; there was a little crystal about the size of an egg, fluorescing to beat Tophet. The light from it stung my hands and face, almost like a static discharge, and then I noticed another funny thing. Remember that wart I had on my left thumb? Look!" Jarvis extended his hand. "It dried up and fell off— just like that! And my abused nose— say, the pain went out of it like magic! The thing had the property of hard ex-rays or gamma radiations, only more so; it destroyed diseased tissue and left healthy tissue unharmed!

"I was thinking what a present that'd be to take back to Mother Earth when a lot of racket interrupted. We dashed back to the other side of the wheel in time to see one of the pushcarts ground up. Some suicide had been careless, it seems.

"Then suddenly the creatures were booming and drumming all around us and their noise was decidedly menacing. A crowd of them advanced toward us; we backed out of what I thought was the passage we d entered by, and they

came rumbling after us, some pushing carts and some not. Crazy brutes! There was a whole chorus of 'We are v-r-rriends! Ouch!' I didn't like the 'ouch'; it was rather suggestive.

Tweel had his glass gun out and I dumped my water tank for greater freedom and got mine. We backed up the corridor with the barrel-beasts tallowing— about twenty of them. Queer thing— the ones coming in with loaded carts moved past us inches away without a sign. Tweel must have noticed that. Suddenly, he snatched out that glowing coal cigar-lighter of his and touched a cart-load of plant limbs. Puff! The whole load was burning— and the crazy beast pushing it went right along without a change of pace! It created some disturbance among our 'v-r-r-riends,' however— and then I noticed the smoke eddying and swirling past us, and sure enough, there was the entrance!

"I grabbed Tweel and out we dashed and after us our twenty pursuers. The daylight felt like Heaven, though I saw at first glance that the sun was all but set, and that was bad, since I couldn't live outside my thermo-skin bag in a Martian night— at least, without a fire.

"And things got worse in a hurry. They cornered us in an angle between two mounds, and there we stood. I hadn't fired nor had Tweel; there wasn't any use in irritating the brutes. They stopped a little distance away and began their booming about friendship and ouches.

"Then things got still worse! A barrel-brute came out with a pushcart and they all grabbed into it and came out with handfuls of foot-long copper darts— sharp-looking ones— and all of a sudden one sailed past my ear— zing! And it was shoot or die then.

"We were doing pretty well for a while. We picked off the ones next to the

pushcart and managed to keep the darts at a minimum, but suddenly there was a thunderous booming of 'v-r-r-riends' and 'ouches,' and a whole army of 'em came out of their hole.

"Man! We were through and I knew it! Then I realized that Tweel wasn't. He could have leaped the mound behind us as easily as not. He was staying for me! "Say, I could have cried if there'd been time! I'd liked Tweel from the first, but whether I'd have had gratitude to do what he was doing— suppose I had saved him from the first dream-beast— he'd done as much for me, hadn't he? I grabbed his arm, and said 'Tweel,' and pointed up, and he understood. He said, 'No— no— no, Tick!' and popped away with his glass pistol.

"What could I do? I'd be a goner anyway when the sun set, but I couldn't explain that to him. I said, "Thanks, Tweel. You're a man!' and felt that I wasn't paying him any compliment at all. A man! There are mighty few men who'd do that.

"So I went 'bang' with my gun and Tweel went 'puff with his, and the barrels were throwing darts and getting ready to rush us, and booming about being friends. I had given up hope. Then suddenly an angel dropped right down from Heaven in the shape of Putz, with his under-jets blasting the barrels into very small pieces!

"Wow! I let out a yell and dashed for the rocket; Putz opened the door and in I went, laughing and crying and shouting! It was a moment or so before I remembered Tweel; I looked around in time to see him rising in one of his nosedives over the mound and away.

"I had a devil of a job arguing Putz into following! By the time we got the rocket aloft, darkness was down; you know how it comes here— like turning off a light. We sailed out over the desert and put down once or twice. I yelled 'Tweel!' and yelled it a hundred times, I guess. We couldn't find him; he could travel like the wind and all I got— or else I imagined it— was a faint trilling and twittering drifting out of the south. He'd gone, and damn it! I wish— I wish he hadn't!"

The four men of the *Ares* were silent— even the sardonic Harrison. At last little Leroy broke the stillness.

"I should like to see," he murmured.

"Yeah," said Harrison. "And the wart-cure. Too bad you missed that; it might be the cancer cure they've been hunting for a century and a half."

"Oh, that!" muttered Jarvis gloomily. "That's what started the fight!" He drew a glistening object from his pocket.

"Here it is."

12: The Other Story.

G. B. Burgin

George Brown Burgin, 1856-1944

Queenslander 22 March 1913

British journalist, critic, and short story writer

THE GIRL was as fair as he was dark; and they were equally handsome, equally young, equally well-dressed, equally reckless as to what the future might have in store for them. His was the courage of despair, hers that of careless indifference.

Anyone gazing round the little flat, with its costly yet tasteful furniture, its harmonious hangings, its exquisite pictures, would have thought it impossible that its occupier could have a single care in the world. But, at the moment, she was full of care. There was a frown on her pretty face, her delightful lips were puckered up, and her soulful blue eyes gazed questioningly at the elaborately-dressed young man who sat opposite her. She decided that if he were a little less idly composed a little less reserved, he might be very delightful. The girl held a letter in her hand, and she had the grace to blush as she read it once more.

The young man noticed the blush, and a slight smile played about his well cut lips. Then he gazed at his immaculate new boots with a certain scorn of himself which he was pleased to see reflected in their polished surfaces. As he glanced again, he caught the girl's eyes looking at him with a certain curiosity.

He bowed interrogatively.

"It is a little awkward," the girl confessed.

"Most things are," said the young man easily. "When Racktons wrote to me a few weeks ago and asked me to call on them, they explained that they wanted to hire me as a professional diner out."

"A professional diner out?"

"Yes," he said, indifferently, his glance once more straying to his boots. "My father came a cropper. Left me nothing. I'd been brought up to do nothing. Brains aren't my strong point. I'd heard of this dining out scheme (two pounds a week and your clothes found), and so they put me on their list. I'm supposed to dine out and amuse people. Only the host and hostess know I'm not a guest. I've exhausted all my anecdotes already." he said, a little wearily. "Heaven alone knows where I'm to get any more."

"I don't think that heaven has much to do with anecdotes." the girl said, with equal weariness, "not if it's as sick of them as I am—"

"I'm going to give it another month," the young man explained. "I'd emigrate if I'd enough capital; but I haven't. I should do some good in Canada or California. Here I'm only so many wasted Possibilities."

"Don't call yourself such an awful tame as that," the girl said, a little more sympathetically. She want to the table, laid out ten portraits in a row, and selected his.

"I picked you out because you look like a gentleman." She held up his photo.

"When that was taken I was one," he answered indifferently. "Now I'm only a cut above the waiters. You don't know how all these beastly dinners disagree with me. At the Reform Club you can always get a good chop." He stopped suddenly. "But that's putting on side."

"No," said the girl, with a smile which revealed her exquisite teeth. "I sympathise with you."

"All these French dishes are the very devil." he murmured, sorrowfully.

"They are, but one must eat to live—"

"The places at which I dine they live to eat. I beg your pardon. May I make a note of it for my next dinner?"

"Certainly, if you think it worth while."

"You stimulate one's brain power." he said, admiringly. "I should never have been able to think of that at a dinner."

Then he became reserved again. "It you will kindly tell me what you want me to do at the dinner I'll try to— to sparkle. I've just been reading Greville's Memoirs, and I think I could cabbage three or four stories out of them—"

She stamped her little foot imperatively. "I don't want you for a dinner; I don't want any anecdotes."

"Just my luck," he said, resignedly, as he got up. "Forgive me for saying so, but you're so different from the fat suburban hostesses who call me 'young man' that I should have enjoyed coming to you. Of course I ought to have known that you can get any number of fellows to fetch and carry for you. Good morning."

"But. Mr.—"

"Heriot. Arthur Heriot's my real name. When I'm hired out to dine I'm De Lancy Jones."

The girl's lips again curved in one of her rare smiles. "It's a beautiful name."

"It is. Racktons seem to think that I ought to pay them two pounds a week for using it"

Her face suddenly became serious. "Sit down again, please. "

"Oh, very well. They don't usually expect me to sit when I take my orders," he said, with a little catch in his breath.

"Of course that's rubbish. We're both unfortunate."

"We are. In other circumstances, I should have said exactly the reverse. When we meet at the dinner you'll get awfully sick of me."

"There you go again," she said, petulantly. "I don't want you to dine with me."

"Then," he got up in astonishment, his handsome face a little flushed, "I shall have Racktons bullying me for not bringing it off. Well, it's worth it," he added, almost inaudibly.

"You don't understand," said the girl, her colour coming and going deliciously. "I don't want you to dine with me."

"You said that just now, although it would be heavenly to dine with you," murmured the young man. "Perhaps you'll have the kindness to remember that I'm only a myrmidon of Racktons and give your orders. What, do you want with me. Miss Leclaire?"

"I want you to marry me," said that incomprehensible young lady, with a vivid blush.

"You're quite well?" he asked anxiously. "My drivel hasn't been too much for you?"

"Not at all. My poor dear father bullied me because I didn't marry the man he selected for me. Unless I merry some one by the first of May the £80,000 will to— to a hospital, and I shall go to—"

"The workhouse!" She nodded desperately.

"Very well. You'd better pay Racktons the dining out fee and keep this quiet, or they'll want ten per cent, on the £80.000."

She thanked him for thinking of it. "I will." Her blushes deepened. "Of course, we part at the registrar's and never meet again-"

"I thought there was a catch in it some where."

"And I will give you £500 so that you can emigrate and free yourself from this degrading bondage," she added, sympathetically. Heriot looked at her curiously, drew a deep breath.

"Very well." he said, curtly, "send me the details, and I'll do what you want." He came a little nearer to her. "You're very, very beautiful. God ought to have given you a soul above money;" and he sorrowfully went away.

ELSIE LECLAIRE hesitated as she drew near the registrar's office a month latter. She was beginning to feel annoyed with this young man. who was prepared to assume the matrimonial responsibilities in so matter of fact a way. Once or twice, however, when he thought the was not looking at him, although, as a matter of course, she was, she had seen an expression of yearning wistfulness in his fine eyes. He despised her as much as she did him;

they had an equal right, to despise each other. She knew him in spite of his misfortunes to be the very soul of honour. Somehow, it had been necessary for him to come to her nearly every day for a month. She had even invented anecdotes for Heriot, taught him the point of each, and was much gratified to hear of his social success as a suburban raconteur. When her stock of anecdotes ran short she racked her brains for fresh ones— mostly about dukes; and when the anecdotes would not come she invented them. On the strength of the ducal anecdotes Racktons raised his salary ten shillings per week.

But the shameful deed was nearly done. Even the gutter sparrows chirruped cheerful scorn at Elsie Leclaire as they went about with straws in their chubby little bills— straws a good deal longer than themselves. They were busy building nests, making homes for the draggle-tailed feathered ladies who sat on the edges of the gutters and noisily encouraged them.

The girl gave a little shiver.

"After today I shan't have anyone to invent anecdotes for," she said; mournfully, "and I thought of a beauty for him— about a prince— just as I got into my bath this morning."

Heriot, dressed in black, awaited her coming, with a nondescript sort of witness, who might have been anything from a jockey to a valet. As a matter of fact, he had been Heriot's father's trainer, and was under the impression that Heriot was the happiest man in the world. He stood respectfully at the table with a grimy female in a bonnet, which had once been black, who was the other witness, and, after the fray-haired registrar had complied with the usual formalities and scrutinized their certificates of having resided for three weeks in the parish, he set to work in earnest, and pronounced them man and wife, gazing at them the while with a certain satisfaction in their youth and beauty.

They took it very seriously, too. he was glad to notice. And he sighed the sigh of a man who had once been young and handsome himself. When Heriot's witness had departed and the bonneted female more than adequately remunerated for her services, there was a slight pause. Mr. and Mrs Heriot stood on the steps looking different ways. He raised his hat and was about to move off, after handing her the marriage certificate, when she touched him somewhat timidly on the arm. "You will see me back to my flat ? Miss Jones" (Miss Jones was her chaperon), "expects us."

"I'd rather not, if you don't mind."

"But of course I mind," she said, cheerfully. "We've one or two little matters to settle up before we— separate."

"Yes, of course," he said, absently; and led her to the hired brougham.

When they reached the flat Miss Jones was out, and Heriot followed his wife drearily into the room. Curiously enough the late breakfast— their wedding breakfast— was laid for two.

"We'll have some breakfast," she said, "and then we can talk. I've another beautiful story for you."

"I've lived in one for the last month." He answered her even more drearily than before, and, with a thrill of pity, she noticed the blue shadows under his eyes, when, with an effort, he roused himself and tried to discover the point of her story about the prince. And she had to give it up. Although he had called himself stupid, she knew very well that he was not really so. When he was not paid for telling stories, he could tell very good ones. Now, however, after the servants had left the room, and he rose to go, she experience a curious thrill. She had saved her fortune and lost her self-respect. Would he reproach her?

He did nothing of the sort but with the same set, melancholy took in his fine eyes, put out his hand.

"Good-bye and good luck," he said, with mock cheeriness. "I shall often think of you— and your stories."

She handed him an envelope.

"What's this?"

"The— the five hundred. I thought you might prefer an open cheque."

"l'm glad there's an open fire," he said, and with sudden heat walked to the fireplace, threw the cheque into the fire, and came back to her.

"I've been very— very happy, but the ending's rather a facer."

"Why won't you take the money, and why is it good-bye?" Her own voice was a little unsteady.

"I've saved enough to pay for my steerage fare to Canada, have chucked Racktons, and start tomorrow. Somehow, at first, I thought you weren't in earnest, then I saw you were, and I've gone through with it. Do you know why?"

"N-no," she faltered.

"To save you from some scoundrel who would not have kept his word. Someday. when I've gone under, you may meet a man whom you can really love as I—"

"As you—"

"As you deserve to be loved;" and he heroically endeavoured to leave the room.

"Don't go. I've another story to tell you." she said, almost inaudibly.

He looked at his watch. "Will it take long, the other story?"

MISS JONES put her head in at the door, then discreetly withdrew it. "I knew it would end that way directly they told me what she was going to do." she said, happily. "Even a blind old thing like myself could see that they were madly in love with each other from the first."

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13: Smart Rascality

F. Martyn

Frederic Martyn, *fl.* 1900s-1920s

The Grand Magazine, Jan 1908

Sun (Kalgoorlie) 23 Feb 1908

"YES," said Number Eighty-Two, in answer to my question, "I have come across a few smart bits of 'cross-work' of one kind or another in my time,, and I have heard of a great many smarter bits than I have come across."

"If you are going to start yarning again as we are going round," interjected the schoolmaster, "just keep your eyes skinned for the principal warder. He told me the other day that he had noticed that you two did a great deal of unnecessary 'gassing' while we were going round changing the books."

"It's only Seventy Eight here wanting to pump all he can out of me to make a book of," replied Eighty-Two deprecatingly

"I will stash it if you like—"

"It's hardly that," I said, "but Eighty-Two's yarns make dinner and supper time come quicker than usual."

"You know that I don't want to crab you chaps more than I am obliged to," said the easy-going schoolmaster, "but I think that it would be best for you not to talk much while we are going round, because if the principal spots you again, it may lead to one or both of you being taken off the job. The best way to arrange the matter will be to slip round as quickly as we can, and then you have a couple of hours in the library before the supper-bell goes. I don't mind you yarning together so long as there's nobody about."

Number Eighty-Two and myself suitably expressed our thanks, and the remainder of the book-changing was got through at piece-work speed.

"Now then, Eighty-Two, what were you going to say about clever crooks?" asked the schoolmaster, who appeared to be as much interested in Eighty-Two's reminiscences as I was myself, when were settled down in the library that afternoon, leisurely looking through the books we had brought in to see that they had not been damaged or defaced.

"Nothing much, I suppose, that you haven't heard already," replied Eighty-Two. "You've heard about the Bow-street magistrate's watch, haven't you?"

The schoolmaster shook his head, and in response to an inquiring look I did likewise.

"Well, it was a really smart thing which I thought was a bit of a chestnut, but it can't be that, since neither of you has ever heard of it. The story goes that one day a man was brought before the magistrate charged with stealing a watch from another man in a railway carriage. The man who had lost the

watch had fallen asleep, and when he awoke had found that his watch was gone. There was no one but the other man in the carriage, so when the train arrived in London the man who lost the watch gave his travelling companion into custody. The magistrate was going to remand the case for a week, but the prisoner protested that to do so would be to virtually sentence him to a week's imprisonment, as he had only just arrived from abroad, and knew nobody in London who would go bail for him. Under these circumstances the magistrate consented to take the case on the following day, and the unfortunate prisoner spent the night in gaol. Next morning, when the case came on, the prosecutor got into the box with a very long face, and said that he had received a wire from his wife to the effect that his watch and chain were on the dressing-table at home. The prisoner was, of course, discharged at once, and announced his intention, of making matters hot for his careless accuser. The magistrate, in trying to smooth matters over, mentioned as a very curious coincidence that he had been guilty of the same oversight that very morning, and had come away without his watch.

"Half-an-hour later a hansom drove up to the magistrate's residence, and a police inspector got out. Knocking at the door, he demanded to see 'the mistress,' and being shown in to her, blandly stated that the magistrate had sent him to fetch his watch and chain, which he had inadvertently omitted to put on when dressing. Without any misgiving whatever the magistrate's wife, handed over her husband's sixty-guinea watch and chain to the bogus inspector, and their owner never saw or heard of them again.

"That was a pretty smart trick, you'll admit, but it was small potatoes to the Trodmore Race Meeting fake, which few people outside Fleet-street have heard of, for the sporting paper which was taken in didn't advertise the fact. It was nothing less than the spoofing of one of the leading sporting papers to insert the programme and the returns of the racing at a bogus race meeting, to enable the engineer of the scheme to make a pile by fleecing the bookmakers, who hold themselves out as willing to accept bets for any meeting, however small, so long as the programme and results are published in the paper in question.

"The thing was quite successful, and it was not until some days later that the newspaper people discovered that there was no such place as Trodmore, and that they had been bamboozled into publishing the programme and reports, with starting prices, of a race meeting which had no existence. Such a thing could not be done now because the newspaper has closed the little gap in their arrangements which made it possible. It was a great coup, and the fellow who brought it off was a genius."

"He must have had a very intimate acquaintance with the interior economy of that newspaper office," I remarked.

"He had so," said Eighty-Two, smiling.

"Shouldn't wonder if he was doing time here at this minute," said the schoolmaster musingly, as with a pen he printed the title on the back of a newly-bound book.

"I can't tell you anything about that," said Eighty-Two, with an air that implied he could if he would.

"Another clever scheme for besting the bookies," he continued, " was the 'tapping the tape' at one of the biggest of the London betting clubs. Not one of the hole-and-corner clubs which are always going in fear of the police, but a club where legitimate betting to big money was carried on for Monday settlement. As you probably know, these clubs have either a tape machine or a column printer, or even both, to give the runners, the results, and the betting by telegraph from the course. Now the remainder of the building not taken up by the club was let out as offices, and the top floor being vacant once on a time, it occurred to a chap who knew all there was to be known about telegraph instruments of sorts that it offered a good opportunity to work a little idea that had been simmering in his head for some time about a way to back horses without the risks attendant on the game. He opened up his mind to a chap who is well known among our mob as being open to finance any promising scheme, and that top floor was taken and an assortment of telegraphic apparatus installed there. Then the financier got three chaps that were working with him, young, well-educated, and gentlemanly fellows, and secured their election to the club; but the three didn't lot on to be known to each other. They were well provided with money, and didn't mind spending it, and, as it was given out by each of them in a different way that they had joined the club for the purpose of betting to money, they were counted a great acquisition, for the bookmakers, of which the club was mainly composed, knew from experience that it spells good business when gilded mugs from the West End, as these were thought to be, start betting to money.

"Well, those three young mugs betted in that club for months, and seldom had a losing week. The bookies thought that it was another case of mugs for luck' and waited patiently till the tide turned, but it was so long in turning that one bookmaker after another dropped the mugs as being 'too hot'—which is a bookie's euphemism for a customer who has too many winning weeks. Things got so slack that at last the mugs dropped off one by one, and the big tapping; the tape swindle was wound up."

"What was the modus operandi?" I asked.

"Why, on racing days the telegraph man on the floor would get out on the roof and cut the telegraph wire, attaching one end to a receiver and the other end to a transmitter, both in the top room. Then, when the runners in each race came-over the wire to his receiver, he would hold them over until the winner came up his receiver. Then he would start sending the runners down to the club by his-transmitter, and another member of the syndicate, who posed as an itinerant cornet-player and played on and off all the afternoon; up and down the street at different pitches within sight of the instrument-room window, would be unobtrusively signalled to, and would strike up a pre-arranged tune, which would communicate the name of the winning horse to the 'mugs' inside, and one of them would saunter up to the tic-tac machine where the runners were ticking out, and then put a good stake on the horse which he knew had won, while the other two would either not bet upon the race at all or would put a smaller stake on a loser.

"The three hardly ever spoke to one other, never moved out of the club during racing hours; and never saw any one from outside; so the most suspicious bookmaker could hardly have imagined that he was the victim of a swindle, and, as far as I am aware, there is not one of the bookies that that syndicate got five or six thousand of the best out of who knows the truth about those three 'mugs' to this day."

"I think that it's about time to shut up," said the schoolmaster, rising. "They've shouted for the cleaners to fetch the suppers."

"Shan't keep you- a minute now," said Eighty-Two. "This is a short one. One day, before the Doncaster St. Leger meeting, there were half-a-dozen disconsolate racing rouseabouts gathered at King's Cross Station, wanting badly to go to Doncaster to get a bit; but there wasn't a fare among them, and, unfortunately, the railway officials were too wide-awake to make 'macing the rattler' (travelling without a ticket) possible. At last, just when the train was getting full up, one of them sees a porter's uniform cap lying on the table in the porters' room, and a brilliant idea took possession of him. He rushes in, collars the cap, giving his own bowler to one of his pals to mind, and, going- up to a full first-class carriage, said 'Tickets, gentlemen, please.' The occupants of the carriage gave up their tickets without question, on the strength of the cap ; and the six deadheads, ticketless no longer, spread themselves out all over the train."

14: The Red Specks

Fred Merrick White

1859-1935

Cassell's Magazine, UK, Aug 1899

The Argus, Melbourne, 4 Oct 1899

The South Eastern Times (S. Aust), 5 Apr 1912

One of a series of short stories featuring Drenton Denn, a roving journalist

WITH a lean brown hand limp as a rag, Drenton Denn helped himself to quinine enough to blow the roof off the head of an ordinary man.

"A blight upon the man who lured me to Madagascar!" he said, with his teeth clenched "You get me here as a war correspondent when there is no war to speak of and no facilities for getting my 'copy' away in any case. And how that I am down with the fever you calmly tell me that you have orders to send me back to the seaboard!"

Captain Le Boeuf quivered uneasily. He it was who had lured Drenton Denn from Paris with specious promises of what might happen in the way of graphic things to describe at Tamatave.

"It is only a hundred miles," Le Boeuf said, tentatively.

"But what a hundred miles!" Drenton groaned, "Even if I get over this fever I shall be good for nothing for days to come. It is impossible for me to return the way we came. And how a handful of Kanaka boys are going to get me down to Tara I can't understand!"

"But, my dear Denn, you can't stay here."

"Of course I can't. I must do my best to get back to the coast, and that right through an unfriendly tribe. Is there any truth in the rumour that the Hamas are led by a woman who wears Paris gowns and imports her own champagne?"

Le Boeuf showed his teeth in a dazzling smile.

"There is something in it," he said. "Do you remember that magnificent Hama girl—Sabina, they called her—who performed those marvellous snake and bird tricks at the Moulin Rouge two years ago?"

Denn nodded. He recollected the girl perfectly well and the sensation she had created at the him. The handsome chieftainess had taken to Denn somewhat, and quite a Platonic friendship had sprung up between them. Denn flushed slightly as he called this to his mind. He had touched the heart of the dusky Hama, and he had deemed it best to retire gracefully from Paris before anything foolish transpired.

"You think she is close here?" Denn asked.

"I am certain of it," said Le Boeuf. "Sabina quitted Paris directly trouble was threatened here to return to her own people. I shouldn't wonder if she gave you assistance in getting to Tara."

The next day Denn set out on his perilous journey. His escort consisted of eight Kanaka boys—lusty fellows, black as coal, and quite devoted to the service of a man who paid them liberally. Their rate of progress was exasperatingly slow, for they had to make a track through the virgin forest, and such implements as they possessed were from traders' stores.

At the end of the fourth day even Denn begin to despair. They had certainly not progressed more than eight miles, the dried fish and rice were getting low, and the water-bags looked crinkled and flabby. There was danger, terrible danger, of death from starvation and thirst in that primitive forest. The Kanakas could only trust then own instincts and steer in a blundering rule o' thumb kind of way.

With a grim face Denn watched the last grains of rice shaken out for the evening meal.

"To-morrow," he muttered, "we shall starve. What a fool I was to believe that yarn about Sabina!"

But to-morrow brought better things. The interlaced gloom of the forest grew less dense, and the sun shone golden through the network of boughs in front. Then the little caravan emerged into an open plain. A small river rolled along the valley, and on the slope or clearing, opposite a cluster of bamboo and matting, huts were gathered.

"Hamas," the head Kanaka boy, muttered. "If they are friendly—".

But there was going to be no 'if' about it so far as Denn was concerned. He rolled out of his litter and waded across the shallow stream. The earth seemed to move under him like a ribbon, for the nausea of his illness was still strong upon him.

From the largest of the huts a girl emerged, and stood contemplating the stranger with eyes as dark as those of a deer. Then, as Denn literally staggered up to her, she gave vent to a queer, frightened cry.

"It is my lord Denn!" she exclaimed. "Go back. Quick! Better anything than that she should see you."

All this in the queerest French from a girl dressed in a long linen robe with a gold band round her waist, and nothing more. Her hair was piled high upon her head, and skewered with silver bodkins.

"I'm off my head!" Denn muttered. "I've fribbled my brain up with too much quinine. What, is it really you, Zara?"

The girl so addressed quivered behind a smile. The last time Denn had seen her was in the guise of Sabina's maid in Paris.

"Why did you come here?" the girl moaned. "You were good to me, and I would save you if I could. Go—go before it is too late. Our queen.."

"Meaning Sabina, of course?"

"Yes, yes. She has it in her head that you played her false. Don't you know that she came to love you? And when a Hama loves..."

Zara threw up her hands to express a passion or a jealousy outside the span of mere words. Her eyes were full of terror.

"Flattering, if slightly embarrassing." Denn muttered. "But it seems to be too late to fall back upon one's base."

It was. Half a score of Hamas had gathered around the strangely assorted pair. Their attitude was one of armed neutrality. Take them all in all, they were not inviting to a man on a peace footing. Attracted by their clamour, a woman emerged from the largest hut there. She was a magnificent looking creature, tall and sinuous, in the full flush of her powers, and strikingly handsome.

The brightness of her eyes somewhat detracted from the passionate sensuousness of her full crimson lips. As she caught sight of Denn she started back, and a scream of joy escaped her. But the expression of her face seemed to prick Denn's spine like a red-hot needle. Behind the glad smile was the hungry look of vengeance deferred.

Then, as suddenly, Sabina's manner changed as she came forward. She took Denn's flabby palm in her own, and carried it to her lips.

"I knew you would come back to me," she murmured.

Sabina had become all smiles again. Nor had she forgotten much of the artificiality two years in Paris had given her. But the leopard cannot change its spots—Hama was still there.

"This is a meeting the most extraordinary," she said.

"Isn't it?" was Denn's banal reply. "I was with the French force towards Tamatave, and they sent me back. I was trying to get down to the coast this way. Will you try and get me down there?"

"Oh, Yes," said Sabina. "Oh, yes. Dead or alive, you shall be got to the coast. Yes, yes. To the coast alive or—dead."

Denn murmured his thanks. He did not care for this insistence in case of his premature demolition.

He suffered himself to be conducted inside the hut which Sabina made her own, and then, with what appetite he could, he despatched stewed goat and rice, washed down with native wine.

"I suppose my men are being looked after?" he asked.

"Your men had fled back to the woods," said Sabina. "It is my misfortune that I have a bad reputation in these parts. But they do not know that I have

had advantage of what you call civilisation. And now, dear fly, how do you like the web of your spider?"

Again Denn felt the hot pain crawl along his spine.

"I know nothing of spiders," he said.

"Not yet, not yet, dear friend. But you will soon. To-night I show you something you do not deem of. The birds and snakes? Bah!"

DRENTON DENN sat with a huge native cigar in his mouth, and what content he could on his keen, angular features. He was by no means a handsome man, but at the present moment he found himself wishing that nature had been still more niggardly physically.

By his side sat the woman whose wayward heart he had won. It pleased Sabina to be alternately passionate and disdainful.

And though Denn had dined, and dined well, no feeling of content embalmed him. The fever had been burned and blistered by the quinine out of his system, and his brain was once more clear, alert, and vigorous.

Denn sat in a kind of gallery looking upon a courtyard in which a circular wooden building had been erected. The sides of the building were wooden bars, and the roof was made of some kind of white cloth, or, rather, coarse matting. And above the netting was a thatch of straw.

Inside the building half-a-dozen sullen-looking Kanaka prisoners had been placed.

That some kind of punishment awaited them they seemed to know perfectly well.

In most forms these men had little fear of death but they knew the character of their captors, and from certain uneasy glances at the straw thatch they seemed to have a hazy kind of idea what was going to take place.

"What are you going to do?" Denn asked.

"That in a minute you shall know," Sabina laughed. It was not the kind of laugh that added to the gaiety of nations. "You used to admire my performance in Paris; you said you could not imagine anything more calculated to make your blood run cold. But you were wrong—and you are going to see that with your own eyes."

Sabina clapped her hands, and a Hama warrior crossed to the thatched cage, bearing a long-handled mop in his hand. With this he worried away at the thatch of the cage. Then the warrior retreated to a little distance and sat down.

The effect of this apparently simple manoeuvre was appalling. The prisoners jumped to their feet with the most heart-rending cries. In their frenzy of some unseen horror they beat their heads and breasts against the bars. Terror seemed to have robbed them of all sense of pain. There were sounds of

blows upon flesh, and the cracking of bones. One poor wretch with a fractured knee literally danced in utter ignorance of his bodily torture. They might have been turned to raving lunatics by some fatal poison.

A sudden nausea came over Denn. "I don't understand it," he said.

"No, but they do," Sabina said, with a strange, glittering smile.

"And so will you only too well—presently. Now, watch carefully."

There was no need to give any such warning. Drenton Denn knew only too well that he was witnessing a rehearsal of the unspeakable horrors which were presently to be thrust upon him.

Presently the Kanakas grew quieter. On some of them had fallen the sullen apathy of despair. Other lead-coloured faces showed the fighting spirit. But all, all, kept their intent gaze turned upwards.

"Do you see anything now?" Sabina asked Denn.

He was too hideously fascinated to reply. He saw that the coarse white matting had become alive with little red specks no larger than grains of wheat. They might have been ants suddenly disturbed and angry with the intruders upon their suburban solitude.

But presently one or two of the tiny red specks dropped down a foot or two, and seemed to be suspended in the amber air. And by this same token Denn knew that he was watching the antics and gyrations of a large family of red spiders.

Presently there were some hundreds of them held up by shining needles of web from the floor. Then suddenly the air outside seemed to be alive with a cloud of purple humming-birds. From the way they feathered around the bars of the cage, they were evidently bent upon a raid upon the bloated scarlet spiders. A couple of Kanakas, armed with a long net, sufficed to scare the birds away.

By this time there were hundreds of spiders suspended from the thatch. They looked like scarlet peas or beans upon a thread. And the unhappy Kanakas watched them with starting eyes.

"In heaven's name," Denn cried, "what does it mean?"

Again Sabina smiled. Her eyes were like points of electric flame. Her face was as that of an avenging fury.

"All in good time," she whispered, "all in good time."

Presently the spiders began to drop like crimson hail. Like so many marionettes the wretched Kanakas danced round the cage. They tore at their arms and their shoulders; they shook themselves like wet dogs. Anything, anything seemed better than to come in contact with the bloated spiders.

Presently one prisoner gave a louder yell than the rest, and collapsed upon the floor.

He lay there for a moment or two gazing at the back of one hand and moaning piteously. Then the stolid fatalism of his race came uppermost, and he squatted against the side of the cage seemingly indifferent to his fate.

Within five minutes every Kanaka but one was on the floor. The last one was more agile than the rest, for he wriggled and twisted out of the way of the falling spiders in a marvellous manner.

But no man could be expected to dodge a rainstorm, and over he fell and was lost.

And then a painful silence followed.

For some little time this continued. Then the Kanaka who had been the first to fall rose to his feet. There was a queer jerky grin upon his face, his feet began to move in dance, and he broke out into mirth as extravagant and hideous as had been his previous fear. In less than five minutes every man there was carrying on in the same insane fashion.

Drenton Denn felt as if he had been suddenly plunged into a cold bath. The sudden transition had got even upon his strong nerves.

"Let me get out of this!" he cried. "I can stand a good deal, but I shall go mad if I stay here."

"You are coming to my hut," said Sabina. "We will talk of the old times, eh; the time when you cared for me. Then in two hours' time we will come and see the last scene yonder."

"Do you mean to say," Drenton asked, "that those infernal little spiders can produce terror and madness like that? In the name of all that is evil, what do you call the diabolical insects?"

No reply came from Sabina until the hut was reached. Once inside, the sound of that horrid mirth ceased.

"You appear to be curious," said Sabina.

"I have reason to be," Denn responded, "because I fancy that you intend to give me a personal experience."

The woman nodded three times quickly.

Under her white gown she trembled with a passion that rendered her almost speechless. When at length she spoke, she did so like one who has run fast and far.

"I hate you!" she gasped. "Oh, if you only knew! I fancied that you loved me and I was mistaken. You laughed at me."

"I haven't the slightest recollection of the fact."

"Ah, but in your sleeve, I mean. You cannot understand a hatred like mine. And I had to leave Paris with my passion eating my heart. When I think of you in the night I bite my flesh. See."

She drew back a flowing robe and displayed a brown arm seared and scarred as if from a bad burn. Her eyes flickered and danced.

"And now Fate has given you to me. The gods have answered my prayers, and sent you to me. I am going to kill you."

"Then do so, and let there be an end to it."

Sabina smiled. On the whole, Denn preferred her passion.

"Ah, no," she cried, "that would be too slow, too clumsy. A child might do that. Remain here till I return."

And Sabina swept from the room. Denn made no effort to move, for he knew perfectly well that he was closely watched. For and hour or more he sat there racking his brains for some method of escape. At the end of that time Sabina returned.

"Follow me," she said curtly.

Denn obeyed without a word. Sabina conducted him back to the gallery where he had watched the ghastly drama. So far as he could see now, the cage was empty.

Not quite. On the earth lay a knot of twisting figures, slowly rolling over and over each other like so many worms. Their eyes were dilated; there was no mistaking the agony they were enduring, but not a single sound came from their parched lips.

The dumb agony of it was absolutely revolting. The poor wretches were now suffering to such an extent that they were utterly incapable of making a sound. It was the archetype of human agony.

A physical sickness smote Denn. He noted every detail down to the blue tinge on the skin of the unfortunates, and the great yellow tumours that had formed on the spot where the fatal bite had bee given.

With sudden anger, Denn turned upon his companion. He would have deemed it no sin to take this beautiful tigress by the throat and squeeze the life out of her.

"You devil!" he screamed. "How you can stand there and see such awful suffering—"

His arm shot out, but Sabina had darted forward from his side. Denn was unarmed, and Sabina had a knife in her hand. With her beautiful sinuous strength and courage, she was no mean antagonist.

Denn took no thought that he was un-armed. If he could get that knife there might be a chance for him yet. He had not the least doubt that he was destined to endure the fate of those poor wretches, the agony of whose sufferings was, in sooth, enough to unnerve a bold man. He gripped Sabina by the wrist, and fought like a madman for the knife. Under ordinary

circumstances Denn might have succeeded. But the fever had rendered him weak and low, and the issue was never in doubt.

"Coward, to touch a woman!" Sabina panted.

"When I see the woman," Denn said between his teeth, "I'll make amends."

He pressed Sabina's knuckles together—an old trick he had learnt in Tahiti—and the knife fell to the ground. The creature screamed, as Denn shot down like a swallow and grasped the blade. Then he darted as a hare to cover, a yell of triumph on his lip.

In the language of his own land, he was a little too previous. A gigantic Hama carrier rose out of the grass and sent the shaft end of his spear whizzing after the fugitive. It caught Denn full upon the temple, and brought him like a log to the ground.

In a confused kind of way he seemed to dream that he was being gagged and bound, there were voices booming in his ears as the diver hears them, he felt himself carried along over uneven ground, and then he floated away into a midnight land. For a long time he lay thus—lay as a child in a deep and placid sleep.

WHEN Denn came to himself again he was lying flat on his back, looking up to a thatched roof, the underpart of which was covered with a coarse white matting. He was in a kind of cage, the bars being of stout bamboo. A cold perspiration broke our on Denn as he realised he was in the cage where the Kanakas had suffered their infernal torture. It wanted an hour or more to sunset, for the long forest shadows were falling. Denn was no longer bound; he was free to move about as he chose. A little table had been placed in the centre of the cage, and on it stood a lamp filled with palm oil.

"Sort of footlights," Denn muttered; "and I am the star actor, positively for this night only. Good heavens! Fancy jesting over it! And presently those infernal little red specks will be on me, and I shall die a death the horror of which is unknown to millions."

Denn glanced up to the roof. As yet the bloated crimson specks were not to be seen. In and out of the roof there darted a purple zigzag cloud of humming-birds. They passed through the bars like shadows; they clung to the thatch, twittering like swallows.

"If I could only have those little fellows for company," Denn muttered again, "I should not fear the red speck. Evidently these tiny little creatures prey upon the spiders. Strange that so awful a scourge should be conquered by so small a bird! And if they are not molested—"

But they were, and without delay. A sinewy brown Kanaka arm was thrust between the bars, and a net followed. Within a minute the last little purple

shadow had vanished from the cage, and then on all sides from without coarse canvas blinds were let down, and Denn was alone, secure from public eye with the unknown horrors to face. The main fact of the solitude struck him like a blow.

There are limits to the strongest nature, and Denn had reached his. Not that he lost hope; he had been in too many tight places for that. But for the moment his manhood gave way; he covered his face with his hands, and he cried like a child.

But they were not senile tears. They were wrung from Denn by the knowledge of his utter helplessness. Then his mood changed. He set his teeth hard, resolved, if he had to die, to die hard.

The sense of utter solitude was in itself depressing. Doubtless the canvas blinds had been drawn to keep the birds out, and in all probability Sabina cared nothing to watch the torture of her victim in an early stage. She could witness it by lamplight later on.

There was a good hour to sunset, and a good two hours more before that demoniacal woman would feel inclined to rise to the occasion, and already, with the drawn blinds and the lamp, the atmosphere was growing oppressive. Denn was bathed from head to foot.

He would have given anything to have stripped himself of his clothing. But, so long as there was a chance for life, he had not the slightest intention of running any risk that way. Nor dared he extinguish the lamp.

"I couldn't do it," Denn told himself.

"An hour in the dark with those red little terrors all about me and I should be hopelessly insane. I'll stick to my clothes and I'll stick to my light till it is too late. But where are the horrors?"

The crimson specks were not far off. There was a sound as if somebody was attacking the thatch, and presently a tiny pink speck came straddling and tumbling over the coarse matting. A vigorous shake sent it down to the ground, where it lay close to Denn's feet.

He examined it closely and critically. It was like a split pea, red and hairy, with two tiny beady eyes and several legs like black tread. A tiny, innocent-looking insect enough, but capable, as Denn knew, of dealing out perhaps the most terrible of all deaths. Denn felt his hair rising up the back of his scalp.

"Good heavens," he cried, "it's the Specky Spider!* I dared not believe it till this moment, but I have felt it all along."

** The Specky Spider is no figment of imagination. It really exists! F.M.W.*

He knew the spider by repute in Brazil and South Australia. He knew that its bite dried up the vessels of the blood, and produced and agony that could only

faintly be imagined. And Denn also knew that when men got bitten by this insect they generally blew their brains out without further delay. For the bite is fatal, and the suffering—well, Denn had seen the suffering for himself.

Denn touched the spider with the toe of his boot. The insect squatted like a toad and attacked the leather. An instant later all that remained of it was a pink round blob upon the floor.

Denn glanced upwards again with a shudder that shook him to the very soul. In the instant that his attention had been directed to the floor, half a score of those terrors might have dropped upon him. The white cloth of the patch was thickly speckled with red by this time. The tiny insects ran about angrily. And soon, instead of a while cloth dotted with red, it was a red curtain with tiny white blotches upon it.

From previous experience—as a spectator, Denn knew exactly what was going to happen. Ere long there would be no room for the invading multitudes, and the weakest would go to the wall—i.e. they would drop to the floor like rain. And once they did so!

Denn forced himself not to think of it. The nervous effort was in itself sufficient to take all the strength out of his legs. And cause him to drop upon his knees. And all the time his anxious gaze was upward, upward! He meant to fight to the bitter end.

Then the spiders began to drop, holding on with their elastic needles until hundreds of them depended just over Denn's head. His senses reeled, and the world seemed to spin round like a top. Once he was down, he knew that it would be all over with him.

He crouched against the bars of the cage, so as to offer as little space as possible to the crimson army. One of the red dots fell upon his hair, and dropped upon his chest.

With a yell, Denn dashed it away. Despite his iron nerve, he was fast becoming desperate. He was losing his head. Half a dozen spiders were crawling up his coat.

Denn cried aloud. It seemed to him that somebody was creeping along without on the further side from the village. Then there was a ripping, tearing sound, and a long strip of the canvas blind was torn away. Denn saw the light of the setting sun.

He saw something more than that, a sight welcome as cool, sweet water in a weary desert. He saw a darting, hurtling flash of blue lightning, as scores upon scores of the purple humming- birds came flashing into the cage, their wings whirring.

They cleared the air as if by magic. A red spider had actually dropped upon Denn's cheek; and, before he could realise the sticky slime of the thread-like

legs, a blue streak had plucked it away. In ten seconds there was not a spider to be seen.

Denn dropped forward on his face, a huddled heap of ragged humanity—pulseless, limp, and inert as a rope of sand. But he did not faint. He rose in time to note the pale face of Zara, Sabina's hand-maiden, looking at him through the bars, a knife in her hand. In the other she had what was still more precious—a revolver and package of cartridges, taken from a French soldier who had fallen by the way. At the same moment the tropical night fell like a cloud.

"Quick," Zara whispered. "She comes in a few moments. If you go straight forward down the valley, you will find your Kanakas awaiting you. They have lingered on the chance of your escape."

Denn needed no second bidding. The knife in his hand and the revolver at his belt gave him new strength. With desperate energy he sawed through three of the bamboo poles and crawled along the ground.

As he did so, a huge Hama confronted him.

There was a flash of a revolver barrel, a long squib of flame, and the big Hama pitched with a groan on to his face. Instantly the settlement was in an uproar. Denn could see Sabina framed with light standing in the doorway of her hut. She made a splendid mark. Denn's finger pressed the trigger.

But he did not fire; something restrained him. A moment later, and the opportunity was lost.

"I ought to have done it in the interests of humanity," Denn muttered as he darted like a flash down the valley. "It was my plain duty not to let that woman live. And yet..."

Denn raced away, but there was no reason to do so. The use of firearms had been too much for the Hamas, who had no taste for magic of that kind. And surely enough, as Zara had promised, he found his Kanakas awaiting him at the foot of the valley. They would have utterly failed to recognise him but for Zara, who had followed.

"No go back there," she exclaimed; "too dangerous. You get me down to Malcha, where I have friends, and that plenty reward for me." "But we don't know the way," said Denn.

Zara knew the route, however, and that did just as well, Denn feeling that he would be just as well off at Malcha as anywhere else. And before morning a comfortable distance was placed between Sabina and her late prisoner. It was not till the next day that Denn understood the queen looks of his dusky companions.

He glanced at his features in a transparent forest pool. His ragged moustache was its normal colour, but his hair was streaked like the coat of a badger. That one hour's agony had done it.

"After all," said Denn, "it was a cheap price to pay for what has been my most terrible experience."

15: The Greater Sin

Mark Hellinger

1903-1947

Sporting Globe (Melbourne) 18 Oct 1941

Hellinger was a New York newspaperman,theatre critic, prolific short-short story writer, and producer of such celebrated Warner Brothers "film noir" movies as The Roaring Twenties *(Cagney and Bogart),* They Drive by Night *(Bogart and George Raft),* High Sierra*, (Bogart), and* The Naked City*, (Barry Fitzgerald, Howard Duff, directed by Jules Dassin). He was the narrator of the last film, with its closing line in his distinctive New York accent: "There are eight million stories in the naked city. This has been one of them."*

THE starchy nurse went through the ward, propping pillows, taking temps, jotting notes on charts that hung over the foot of all beds, listening to complaints, confiscating cigarettes, administering, medicines. examining wet dressings and tersely asking one and all how they were.

She was Mary Casey, short, broad beamed, and in charge of the ward, Under her authority were two probationers who had not vet achieved a starched apron.

When Mary Casey finished her chores she went to the porch she always reserved Josiah Porter for the final morning duty. Josiah was an ancient sack of yellow skin, eternally sitting on the ward porch in a wheel chair. No one, except Miss Casey and Dr. Marberg, knew exactly how long he had been in the hospital, or even what ailed him. He was a sad, lonely character who sat and brooded on the porch all day, moving only when he was wheeled inside for meals.

Miss Casey flashed him a smile on this particular morning. She propped his pillow and asked him how he felt. For Josiah Porter was her favorite patient. She liked the old man in the affectionate way that some young people grope for a father after they have lost their own.

He leaned against the porch rail. "I've got some news for you," she said. He looked at her. He didn't smile. He just looked. She waited for him to coax her about the news, But he didn't.

"It's wonderful news," she declared. "Dr. Marberg says you can go home in a week."

She waited for the full import to dawn on him. He blinked his eyes in the sun and his bony hands grasped the rubber wheels. "My goodness. Mr Porter," the nurse cried, "doesn't that give you a thrill? Didn't you hear me? Dr. Marberg says you can go home in a week!"

The old man nodded.

"I heard you," he said softly. Then he put a weary hand over his eyes. "I don't want to go. Oh, please. Miss Casey. I appreciate it so much, but I don't want to go,"

Miss Casey stared at him.

"Now look, Mr Porter," she asserted patiently, "you're almost well again. You're a nice guy and you're positively my best boy friend. I like you— but you can't stay here. No one in his right mind wants to stay in a hospital."

But Mr Porter was very evidently not in the mood for Miss Casey's bright dialogue. As she talked, he kept shaking his head vigorously. And now he looked up at her, and there was tragedy in his eyes.

"Home," he said, bitterly. "What is home to me? A cheap little furnished room, that's what it is. Sitting alone, wishing I could die and get it all over with.

"No one to talk to. Drinking a bottle of milk. Going to bed. Trying to read an old newspaper until my eyes get tired. That's home to me, Miss Casey."

The Nurse looked hastily away at the other hospital buildings. She cleared throat and then turned back to him.

"No children?" she asked.

He said no.

"Wife die?"

He said no. And then suddenly, as she kept prodding him with questions, lie started to talk. It came out of him easily and softly, as though it were a story none could tell so well as he.

"We were married over thirty years," he said. "Myra and I were very happy. Oh, we had our spats now and then, but we always made up.

"I was a man of habit. Myra used to make fun of me. She said I always combed my hair the same way, and that I always shaved exactly the same way, and that I'd even wear the same shoes forever, unless she bought me a new pair now and then.

"Well, Miss Casey, that marriage ended on the rocks after one terrible night. I made the mistake of going out and getting drunk."

The nurse was startled.

"And she left you after all those years?"

The old man nodded.

"You see, Miss Casey, I don't drink. I mean, I don't ever drink." He seemed to grow a little fearful now as he went on with his story. It was as if the memory of that one frightful night had haunted him silently ever since.

"I'm very much a creature of habit," he continued. "I was born that way and I stayed that way. Whatever came over me on the awful day I'm speaking of, I don't know. I'll never be able to explain, but I suddenly tired of being a creature of habit.

"And do you know what I did, Miss Casey? When I got my pay that day, instead of bringing it right home to Myra, I opened the envelope!" He paused to permit the enormity of his action to seep into Miss Casey's brain.

"Yes, I opened it," he said, "and I counted the money myself for the first time. Then I took a cab— a cab, mind you— and I went downtown and bought me the swellest dinner you ever heard of. Then I went to a cafe and I drank highballs.

"Well, I got to talking with some of the men, and I bought them highballs. They were young and they started calling me Pop. I think maybe I liked that 'cause Myra and me never had chick nor child. Pretty soon they said they knew a cabaret where I'd have at lot of fun. No, not a cabaret. They call it something else. A night club. That's it. A night club. So we went there, and I knew all the time they were only sticking me with the bill."

He covered his eyes again. "One of them had a car," he went on, "and when we left the night club, I was drunk. Yes, Miss Casey, I was drunk. We rode through the night through woods and towns, and you could hear the tyres scream when the car turned.

"Then a siren sounded behind me and the fellows said 'step on it,' and the driver did. And soon there were shots, and they all fell on the car floor, and they pulled me down, too.

"Was I scared? Miss Casey, I really said my prayers on that car floor. Then I passed out. I don't know what happened, but the next thing I remember it was morning and I was walking to my house, and my coat was torn, and one cheek was bleeding.

"When l went into my house, Myra was gone. Forever."

Miss Casey's face held a puzzled frown.

"I just don't understand it, Mr Porter," she said. "After all, it was only one silly escapade in thirty years. It teems a shame she left you for that."

The old man looked at her.

"Oh, it wasn't for that," he returned. "No, indeed. Her note said I could never break any habits— and she was sick and tired of me leaving wet towels on the bathroom floor!"

16: The Saint of Bon Désir.

William Merriam Rouse

1884-1937

Argosy, 2 Aug 1919

FEW men believed that he was seventy-five years old— this *vieillard* who stood as straight as a pine, whose hair was black, and who could still eat with his back teeth. Yet such was the truth.

Noël Lefrançois, who kept a house which was half hotel and half store, had seen the snow melt five times since he had passed three-score-and-ten. He was full of years, but not of heaviness, and there was no man of his acquaintance in all French-Canada who did not wish him another lifetime. They called him, in all honesty, the Saint of Bon Désir.

The house in which Noël Lefrançois had chosen to settle down for his latter years was of the old time when they used to build three-foot walls and chimneys more than big enough to take the body of a man. This was fitting, for he himself was of the old time. In winter he wore a red *ceinture fléchée*, which passed twice around his waist and hung in a fringe at one side. This was an honor to him and an example to the young men, who are ever in danger of becoming Yankeefied.

For a decade he had sold flour and tobacco at Bon Désir, and opened his door to all the world; a gratefully quiet life after wanderings such as few men in bas-Canada had ever experienced. There was no one who did not know him. Explorers from the Ungava territory, woodsmen of Maine, *bûcherons* from Lake St. John, boatmen of the St. Lawrence, and many from the cities. There was no *voyageur* east of Montreal who could not have claimed acquaintance with Noël Lefrançois.

"You are rich," said old Zénon Lamotte one August day when half a dozen men of Bon Désir sat on the porch of the *maison* Lefrançois and smoked together. "You are rich, M. Lefrançois. Why don't you stop working? You could have a house on the Rue St. Louis in Quebec, and do nothing but smoke and drink gin from morning to night."

A less kindly-man than Noël Lefrançois might have been angry at such familiarity, even though a *habitant* means no offense when he asks what disease your grandfather died of— but not M. Lefrançois. He threw his head back until his long black hair tossed in the breeze. and laughed goodnaturedly.

"Perhaps I am rich," he said as he took his browned clay pipe from his mouth, "and perhaps not. But I would not be seventy-five years on earth if I had lived in cities: and as for gin, I drink it only at the New Year, weddings, baptisms, and when there is a good excuse. *Mon Dieu*, Zénon! In Quebec I should be as lonesome as the devil at mass!"

Zénon grinned foolishly; and whatever he might have said was cut off by the coming of three men. They were *bûcherons*, and the paddles which they carried told that they had just come down the Saguenay to the St. Lawrence. Bright-shirted, sweating, stepping with the light step of men used to the forest. they nevertheless came awkwardly up to the presence of Noël Lefrançois. They halted.

"You are welcome, *messieurs*," said the old man with all the courtesy of a *seigneur*. "I know you, Jacques Morin. As to the others, I have not that pleasure."

"Amédée Bois and Napoléon Laferté," said Morin, a stoop-shouldered giant with a tremendous, straggling mustache. "Napoléon, he is in trouble."

"Enter, *messieurs*," invited Lefrançois.

He led the way through the store, where all manner of goods were 'piled in a kind of rough orderliness, to a pleasant little room at the rear which served him as an office. It contained an old-fashioned secretary, stuffed full of yellowing papers, and a half-dozen chairs.

"How can I serve you?" asked M. Lefrançois, when his visitors had seated themselves with the stiff movements of embarrassment and on the edges of their chairs.

"I told you he was a good man!" burst out Morin, glancing at Napoléon. "But you would not believe me—"

"Keep still!" sputtered Laferté, growing brick red. Amédée Bois said nothing, but he wore a frank look of skepticism.

"*Eh bien*!" smiled Noël Lefrançois. "Father Giroux, our priest, is a good man. But as for me "— he shrugged— "I am a sinner!"

"But no, *monsieur*," contradicted Laferté, gaining a little confidence. "If what Jacques here says is true, you are a saint!"

"He needs money—" began Morin; but Laferté cut in hurriedly to make his own plea.

"My woman, she is sick, *monsieur*. And at Chateau Richer, which is far up the river toward Quebec. The doctors say she will die— the news was brought to me at Lake St. John. Now you and I know, monsieur, that if she can go to the shrine of Ste. Anne de Beaupre she will be cured. Is it not so?"

"Certainly," agreed Lefrançois. "You have no money?"

"Yes, *monsieur*, I have forty dollars!" He pulled out a blackened leather wallet to prove it. "However, it will cost all of a hundred to go and get her and take her to Ste. Anne."

"True, M. Laferté." Noël Lefrançois turned to the secretary and opened a drawer. He took out a sheaf of green money as big as his big hand could grasp.

"*Mon Dieu*!" breathed Amédée Bois. 'What a way to keep good money?"

"It is more convenient like this," answered the old man absently. He counted out seventy-five dollars in soiled notes and handed them to Napoléon. "It is better to have too much rather than too little. And may the good Sainte Anne intercede for your wife!"

Napoléon Laferté took the money with a hand that trembled. It was plain that he had had no faith in the assertions of Morin, and that this unexpected generosity shook him.

"*Monsieur*," he said, "I do not know how to thank you, but if you will make out a paper I will sign—"

"That would be a waste of good time," interrupted Lefrançois. "When you are able you will pay it back and the matter will be forgotten."

Laferté got up and stumbled from the room. Morin and Bois rose to follow him, but their host put out his hand in a restraining gesture.

"Sit down, *messieurs*," he said. "It is better that he be left to himself just now— and meanwhile you can smoke a pipe with me and tell me the news of the Lake St. John country. Since I stopped my wanderings and settled down here I have to depend upon good *voyageurs* like yourself to bring me the news of Canada."

Morin, at least, knew that this kind of gossip of the far places, and indeed of any place, was the delight of M. Lefrançois. So he not only told all that he had heard and seen during the past few months, but drew from Amédée Bois accounts of fights, strange meetings, hard work and harder sprees. All this reputation of being a kindly gossip-lover had grown up since M. Lefrançois came to Bon Désir., and was considered a natural weakness in an old man who no longer felt able to swing an ax in the woods. Now he listened intently, occasionally putting in just the right word to keep the loose narrative going.

There was all the questing restlessness of a young man in his bright eves as he sat with his pipe cold in his hand and his big frame held taut as though he were ready to spring up at any moment. Bois, warmed to a certain tale and somewhat inclined to be boastful, was telling of a free-for-all fight in which he had participated at Chicoutimi.

"It began like this, *monsieur*. We were all in the bunkhouse smoking when the door opened and in walked this stranger— an old man with a scar on his cheek—"'

"What's that?" barked Lefrançois, letting his pipe clatter to the desk. "Say that again!"

Both Bois and Morin looked at him in astonishment. His cheeks burned and his square old shoulders were quivering with the tenseness of his posture.

"An old man with a scar on his cheek," repeated Bois.

"With eyes the color of a knife-blade and a hooked nose?" demanded Lefrançois in a whisper.

"No, monsieur." Bois shook his head wonderingly. "I remember very well that his eyes were black because his skin was dark like an Indian's— as for the nose I can't say."

"Bah! A man's eyes don't alter!" Lefrançois made the exclamation good-naturedly, with a complete change of manner. He leaned back in his chair and laughed heartily— so heartily that he forced the others to smile. "It is always like that— I think I am on the trail of one of my old friends, and it turns out to be an entirely different man. When you mentioned the scar I was deceived, M. Bois."

Amédée Bois went on, but rather haltingly, so that it was not long before Lefrançois perceived that the time had come to show the men to their room; for Laferté would have to wait there until a boat going up the river touched at Bon Désir, and the others would at least remain overnight. Noël Lefrançois was his own hotel clerk and storekeeper: he had an old woman to cook and make the beds for his scattering guests, but otherwise he was alone in his house.

A little later Lefrançois went out to the rear of the rambling building. As he paused for a moment in the door of the woodshed, where no eyes were upon him, his shoulders drooped, and for an almost imperceptible instant the weight of years seemed to bend his proudly held head and dim the sparkle in his eye.

Suddenly he shook himself. He seized an ax and moved to the woodpile with the quick step of twenty. For an hour, without a break in the steady rhythm of his movements, he split wood. When he finished his clear skin was bright with a healthful flush.

"It grows harder," he muttered as he went back into the house to prepare for supper. "But I will keep young! I will. I will!"

He ate well of *paté da la viande* and beans cooked deliciously with pork— meanwhile talking with his three guests and trying not to see the frankly worshipful glances of Napoléon Laferté. After the meal, when the others had gone to smoke their pipes with those who gathered every evening on the porch, he went into the kitchen and took a bowl of *soupe aux pois* and some strong coffee from the hands of old Roxanne, the housekeeper.

Up to the third and top floor of the capacious building he mounted and walked along a corridor into a wing which gave forth the sound and smell of empty: rooms. At the end of the corridor he put the tray and the candle which he carried on the dusty floor and unlocked with a big brass key a door solidly constructed of plank. He picked up his burdens and entered a slanting-roofed chamber.

The wavering light of the candle played over bare walls, a window barred with stout-looking irons, and a tousled cot bed. On the bed lay a young man, partly dressed, whose burning, deep-set eyes turned eagerly toward the old man. He raised up and extended an uncertain hand.

"Give me a drink!" he demanded.

"Of course, my son," promised Lefrançois cheerfully. He drew a small flask from his pocket and measured a generous drink of whisky *blanc* into the cap. "A little drink will do you good now, and then some soup and coffee."

The man on the bed nodded. He drank the whisky, sighed, and lay back. But Noël Lefrançois put a thick and powerful arm under his shoulders and lifted him up.

"Take the soup quickly," he said with a ring of command. "Then we will have a little talk, you and I."

With a growl of mingled protest and obedience the young man swallowed the soup in slow spoonfuls. Almost at once there was more strength and steadiness in him. He looked up at his visitor inquiringly, although with sadness lying over his face like a pall.

"Robert Poisé," began Lefrançois solemnly, "you have been drinking more than is good for any man. That is why I dragged you up here by the neck and locked you in. To-night you are sober— to-morrow you will have some strength and you can go out. But be warned. At this rate you will make yourself an old man while you are still young, you will never have any money, and undoubtedly you will go to hell when you die!"

Poisé suddenly turned over and buried his face in his arms. His body heaved with long sobs. Noël Lefrançois laid a hand upon his thick, dark hair and stroked it slowly.

"You are a fool, my son," he said huskily, "but this folly is nothing— it is like smoke from a chimney, to be blown away at once. You are foolish to permit yourself to worry."

"You don't understand!" cried the boy. "You know that I am a salesman for Morency Fréres in Montreal, do you not? Good! Then let me tell you that I have spent three hundred dollars of their money and that I cannot pay it back. I will be put in jail— my mother will die! I was running away when I stopped here and began to drink to forget!"

"Do Morency Fréres know?"

"Yes—it is hopeless."

"Would they accept restitution?"

"Undoubtedly. But even then I would be disgraced and unable to get work anywhere."

"I believe"— spoken very slowly and thoughtfully— "that you have suffered enough, and that you have an honest heart— it is written in your face. Therefore I shall loan you three hundred dollars, you will go home on the first boat, and after that one of my friends in Quebec will give you work. You will say to your mother that her son will never again be foolish. All I ask is that you shall bring the money back to me yourself—a little at a time— and sit and gossip an hour or two with a lonely old man. Now sleep!"

Noël rose quickly and turned to leave the room. The eyes of the boy, astonished, shining with renewed hope, followed him with a doglike devotion.

"May *le bon Dieu* give you all blessings here and hereafter!" he cried. "You are a saint!"

Lefrançois passed out of the room and locked the door. He walked down the corridor slowly, his head bent so low that his chin rested upon his breast. But when he entered the kitchen again his head was held high, as usual, and he walked with the springing step of a young man. Roxanne, hands on hips and face drawn down with woe, met him.

"Bad news, M. Lefrançois!" she exclaimed. "Very bad news."

"What is it now?" he asked with a smile.

Roxanne was one who took a melancholy enjoyment in the sorrows of the world: moreover, she held to a suspicion that there was some kind of sorcery in the long preserved youth of her employer. She herself, fifteen years younger, was an old woman.

"It is the widow of M. Duhamel, the *avocat*," she said. 'I have just learned tonight that there is not enough to eat in the house. Of course all the world knew that he died poor, but no one thought it was as bad as that, even when she sold part of her furniture. Father Giroux just stopped at the door and asked me to tell you."

"*Mon Dieu*!" exclaimed Lefrançois. "That is bad— and all the worse because one cannot offer money to a woman like Mme. Veuve Duhamel. To-night do you take a new basket out of the store so that no one will know where it came from, and fill it with all things necessary to eat for two days. Leave it in her woodshed. That will give me time to think of some way to help her."

"Very well, monsieur," grunted Roxanne, pleased, and yet at the same time deprived of a mournful subject of thought.

By this time Noël Lefrançois, although the evening was yet young, felt tired. He went to his room, a neat, severely furnished chamber, and began slowly to take off his worn clothing. The store, as usual, was left to take care of itself.

If Roxanne remembered to lock the door, very well—if not, it made no difference to the old man. Nearly every one in Bon Désir owed him a debt of gratitude, large or small, and those mean enough to steal from him were held

back, he knew, by a kind of superstitious awe. It was said, indeed, that so holy was his life that he would go direct to heaven when he died. Had not Jean Legrand, who had stolen a side of bacon from the store eight years back, been taken violently ill the same night? So ill that his wife was a widow before the next noon!

This had been a hard day, for M. Lefrançois suffered with those about him who suffered. He had felt the anxiety of Napoléon Laferté, the remorse of Robert Poisé, and the despair of Mme. Veuve Duhamel. His hands trembled a little as he pulled on his patched cotton night-shirt. But the feeling of weakness disappeared when he was at last stretched out comfortably in the dark, and in five minutes he slept. He went to sleep peacefully, but with a keen feeling of hunger for something he did not have and dare not take—the comfort of prayer. A silver crucifix hung where it could be seen from the bed, and a rosary lay upon the bureau— yet Noël Lefrançois had not dared to pray for forty-five years.

ii

WITH the coming of the sun, Lefrançois was up and searching the St. Lawrence from one of the upper windows of his house. This had been his custom, during the season of navigation, ever since he had been at Bon Désir; for the arrival of a river-boat was to him of even more importance than the arrival of a *voyageur* from the remote places of the province.

This morning he picked up a *goélette*, then a schooner, and finally one of the river-steamers plying between Montreal and the Gulf. It was outward bound, and as yet a long way off. He decided that he would have time for breakfast before its arrival. Unless it was absolutely impossible he met at the wharf all boats, even the tiniest sloops, touching at the village.

When the gangplank of *La Belle Marguerite* clattered on the dock it turned out that there were only two passengers to come ashore— and they were an odd pair— an old man, richly dressed in American clothes, and a very young man with that quick, nervous air which all American tourists seem to have. The old man leaned rather heavily upon the arm of the young one, while on the opposite side he supported himself by a gold-headed cane. Their baggage, which followed them to the dock, made a good pile of expensive leather trunks and bags.

Noël Lefrançois's first glance at the strangers passed over them calmly and on to the unloading freight. Then his gaze wandered back to the face of the old man, who was inquiring for a hotel. Their glances met, and for an instant it seemed to Lefrançois that his heart stopped.

A sudden coldness set him trembling. He had looked into a pair of pale, steel blue eyes, set prominently on either side of a heavy, curving nose. The lower part of the face, which had been that of a handsome man in youth, was covered by a straggling white beard. Did that beard hide a scar on one cheek? Lefrançois walked over to the pair, but without haste.

The old man whom he confronted turned, if possible, more parchment-like. His cane rattled against the planking of the dock, and the young man glanced at him rather apprehensively, frowning at Lefrançois. The hotel-keeper bore the scrutiny of both of them without allowing a single muscle of his face to move; he had taken on a high color, but otherwise he was unchanged, and his voice sounded calm and clear as he spoke:

"Do you wish rooms for the night, messieurs?" he asked—"and a good Canadian cuisine?"

It was the young man who answered in halting French with the accent of Paris.

"M. Joseph Bramley expects to remain here a day or two, I think. He is making a pleasure-trip along the coast of the St. Lawrence. I am called Frederick Stone, his secretary. If you have a good hotel we might as well go there."

"It is the only one!" smiled Lefrançois.

"Very well, then. You will see to the baggage?"'

"But yes. And M. Bramley does not speak French?"

"Not at all," answered Stone. "He is an American like myself."

Again Noël Lefrançois smiled, and to himself whispered "Liar!" as he looked with a calculatingly searching glance into the steel-blue eyes. Bramley turned to his secretary and spoke rapidly in English— so rapidly that Lefrançois, who knew a good deal of the tongue, could not catch more than a word here and there.

"You are sure there is no other hotel?" asked the secretary uneasily.

"Quite sure."

"Tell him we will go— it makes no difference," from Bramley, and this time he spoke slowly enough so that Lefrançois could understand.

The three of them set off in the direction of the hotel, while the voyageurs who had come the day before followed with the baggage— having volunteered to carry it out of friendliness for Lefrançois. Once in the house Bramley fussed about his room; he objected to the color of the wall-paper, to the size of the bed, and all the while that he talked to his secretary he darted glances of suspicion and cold dislike at his host.

Noël Lefrançois kept a smiling face and a calm temper. He offered every furnished room in the house for inspection, and when at last his guest had

chosen one for himself and another for his secretary, he departed with the same unfailing smile that he had worn in the beginning. To the kitchen he went first of all, to give orders to Roxanne, and then to the privacy of his own room.

Once within-the walls of that small chamber a mask dropped from the face of Noël Lefrançois. His eyes became suffused with blood, his upper lip drew back until the strong, old 'teeth were visible at both corners of the mouth. He stretched out his great arms and crooked them together until he resembled nothing so much as a bear crushing an enemy.

"At last!" he growled. "After all these years of search and of waiting he has come to me in my own house!"

His arms dropped. Gradually the habitual expression of benevolent kindness took possession of his features, and when he went down again to face the eyes of men he was the straight, smiling, black-haired old man whom they knew so well in Bon Désir— incapable of a frown and so tender-hearted that he would not kick even a thieving cat.

Throughout that day Bramley, the rich American, kept to his room; but he sent innumerable questions by his harassed secretary.

When would the next boat go back to Montreal or Quebec? Could one go out to the Gulf and thence south to Boston or New York? Had the boats any regular schedule? And a thousand other inquiries of the same nature.

Young Stone, in a moment of confidence, confessed to Lefrançois that his employer had become more eccentric than ever within the past twelve hours— apparently he had given up his original intention of wandering through Canada at his leisure. By Stone, Lefrançois was informed that Joseph Bramley was a New Yorker, somewhat ailing, very old, and of late years obsessed by a strongly combated desire to visit the north. He had been there as a young man, said Frederick Stone.

Night came. Bramley had had his meals sent up and had not left his room all day. This suited Lefrançois. He jested with Morin and Bois and the humbly grateful Laferté, he smiled down the gloom of Roxanne, and he liberated the now happy Poisé, and gave him one of the best rooms. At nine o'clock, having-made sure that all his guests had retired, Lefrançois went up to his own and set the candle down upon the bureau.

There was to be no comfort of clean sheets and soft feathers for him that night. With his face set in a strange loathing— strange to him— he paced back and forth, back and forth, muttering to himself now and then and twisting his strong fingers behind his back.

It was about two o'clock, when a man might be supposed to sleep deeply, that Lefrançois took off his shoes and went softly out of his room. He had no need of a light for every turn and angle of the big building was familiar to him.

Before the door of the room occupied by Joseph Bramley he stopped and listened. No sound came from within. He tried the knob and found the door locked. That was as he had expected. He drew a slender pair of steel nippers from his pocket and with infinite patience found the end of the key, which had been left in the lock, and turned it. The bolt went back with a faint click, and he set his hand to the knob again. It took him all of five minutes to open the door.

The room was in darkness. From the bed he could hear uneven breathing, broken now and then by a sigh. For a moment he stood by the bed waiting, to make sure of the location of the head of the sleeper. Bramley stirred a little and caught his breath— he was waking up. Deliberately, and yet with swiftness, the left hand of Lefrançois reached out and sealed his mouth; then the right arm encircled his meager body and lifted him as though his weight had been nothing.

The hands of Bramley clutched frantically; he kicked. The right arm of his captor drew in slowly and inexorably so that breath whistled painfully between the fingers over the mouth. After that the prisoner lay still, limp and drooping, as he was carried out of the room and through corridors and up flights of stairs. In that same room, where young Robert Poisé had found rehabilitation, Lefrançois dropped the other old man upon the bed.

"Lie still and keep still," he said, "otherwise I shall take pleasure in breaking your neck at once."

Noël Lefrançois waited a moment to see that his command was going to be obeyed. Then he lighted a candle and saw to it that the door was fastened. He reached through the bars of the window and locked the padlock on a heavy pair of wooden shutters, putting the key into his pocket. And finally he drew up one of the chairs in the room and sat down by the bed, leaning forward to peer at the figure there.

Bramley lay as he had fallen, only his steely blue eyes moved. The candle-light brought out the sheen of silk pajamas and gave a semblance of health to his pallor. Lefrançois laughed with a sound like grating metal.

"You tried to hide the scar with a beard," he said, "but I saw it the moment I looked at you— and you couldn't hide that nose and those eyes!"

A bit of ancient white cicatrix showed on one cheek at the edge of the beard. Bramley sat up with a slight shiver and drew the covers about him.

"I was a fool to come back," he said. It was impossible to tell whether he was frightened— whether he was moved by any emotion.

"Yes," agreed Lefrançois, "but the north was stronger than the fear of me— you could not die without seeing beau Canada once more. Was it not so?"

"It was so. Nights when the stars are jewels over Quebec and the air makes one young again. I thought you might be dead by now."

"Ah!" The eyes of Lefrançois flashed and a triumphant hate overspread his face. "*Dieu, seigneur*! I have preserved myself for this hour! I knew it would come. You could not have stepped foot in the province of Quebec, except possibly in Montreal, without my knowledge. For years I traveled the province, here and there and everywhere, always looking for you and always making friends. Making friends, because I knew the day must come when age would compel me to remain in one place. From Fort Chimo to the States I have them, these friends, who bring me the gossip of every village and camp and Hudson Bay post— of every town.

"How they humor me, the men who are always drifting in and out of Bon Désir! And they come often, for when a man is in trouble he searches out Noël Lefrançois. They humor my desire for gossip. From east and west, from the sea and the barren lands they bring me tales of things they have seen and done. Always, as I smoke my pipe and listen, I ask a little question here and there as to the strangers they have met.

"Consider that well! I have given away everything, I have served all the world in order that I might build this great unconscious service of intelligence. Once I went to Labrador to run down a man with light blue eyes and a scar on his cheek— it was not you. Six times in forty-five years have I hunted down the wrong man!"

Lefrançois paused, with a devilish quality of joy burning in his gaze. The man on the bed shuddered. "I begin to understand," he said in a low voice. "That's why they call you the Saint of Bon Désir— with false kindness you've hired all French-Canada to watch for me!"

"Yes, Fernand Choquette, as surely as you came back— and I knew you could not die without breathing the air of the North once more— you were doomed!"

"Fernand Choquette!" murmured the other. "It seems strange to hear that name again!"

"You thought you could escape from yourself by changing your name— by speaking no French! *Mon Dieu*! Can a Frenchman change his soul? A man is shaped by what he is even as he himself shapes his acts!"

"Behold yourself!" answered Choquette. "You have acted the saint more than half a lifetime and your heart is still black with hatred! As black as it was— "

Choquette stopped. If such a thing was possible he became even paler than his natural hue— at least it seemed to the eyes watching him that he blanched, and immediately Lefrançois seized upon that hint for torture.

"As it was that night you lay at anchor in Chaleur Bay," he growled. "Two days after you had stolen Aimé-Marie Savard away from me—" His voice broke

on the name and a sob wrenched his big body. "Perhaps you don't know that I know all of it. You stole her out of her father's house when she was alone, you dog, and took her screaming on board your *goélette*! I learned that afterward from one of your men. And I followed you, alone in my sloop, beating up short-handed against a wind which I cursed. I was stealing toward you in a skiff that night when she broke out of your cabin and jumped into the sea! *Dieu*! How I rowed! But it was too late— there was only a little flash of her hands above the water and she was gone.

"Ah, if I could have spoken to her just once! What did I care that she had been on board your boat two days? I loved her with a kind of love that you cannot understand! And then I put that scar on your face with my pistol— but you made sail and got away. For that escape I thank *le bon Dieu*, because now I have time and opportunity to make you feel a little of the torture that is waiting for you in hell, Fernand Choquette!"

It had been as though Noël Lefrançois were breathing a withering fire upon his enemy. He had risen from his chair, and, indeed, his features seemed to flame with the consuming power of his wrath. When he ceased speaking Choquette lifted his face from a hiding place in trembling hands— a face from which all the pretense of indifference had been wiped away by terror and remorse.

"Don't speak to me of Aimé-Marie!" he whispered. "I swear to you that she met no harm from me— I was trying to make her promise to marry me! And I can still see her standing at the foot of the companionway, her eyes filled with the wrath of God and her white hands lifted to draw down His curses!"

"Thou!" purred Lefrançois, using the second person singular in contempt. He had regained control of himself as quickly as he had lost it— the better to drench his words in scorn. "Thou slimy thing!"

Choquette was broken. He fell against the pillow and groveled, rooting his face deep into the bed as though he would hide himself. Lefrançois was satisfied for the moment. He smiled with a smile far different from that with which he met all the rest of his world.

"*Au revoir*," he said, and walked toward the door.

"What are you going to do to me?" cried the prisoner, starting up.

"Leave you here, my friend!" Lefrançois looked down upon him with rich enjoyment. "Leave you here now. The rest you will learn later on."

He went, out and locked the door very carefully, chuckling to himself as he did so.

Of course, Fernand Choquette would try to escape unless he had lost all of his ancient courage. But the window was barred, the shutters were locked, the door was of stout plank. That room had been waiting for him a long time, and

in it there was nothing to work with. The chairs were of cheap pine which would break in the hands, and the cot was a flimsy, home-made thing. It had, in fact, nearly broken down under the weight of Poisé, and there was not a stick in it of sufficient strength to pry off a bar from the window much less to break open the door.

As to noise, Lefrançois had no fear. The room itself was nearly sound-proof, and it was in a wing of the building never used. Even the window opened upon a moldering, seldom-visited orchard.

Noël Lefrançois went to his room and waited there until the bright dawn had painted river and distant Laurentians. When young Frederick Stone came wandering out of the hotel he found his host gazing off over the broad St. Lawrence with his usual kindly smile. They talked together, and the secretary of Choquette, alias Joseph Bramley, went in to breakfast with his mind thoroughly made up that this country magnate was a man of parts.

It was about eight o'clock when Stone went to the room of his employer and, after prolonged knocking, dared to put his head in at the door. Then came bewilderment and growing panic. He fled downstairs to find Lefrançois smoking calmly on the front porch, much engrossed with old Zénon Lamotte in a discussion of the best way to take a panther alive. Five minutes after that a search of the hotel and village was begun.

That search proved fruitless. Stone and Lefrançois, aided by a curiosity filled company which included the three *voyageurs* and Poisé, went over the hotel thoroughly. They even went into the corridor, at the end of which Fernand Choquette was imprisoned, but the trial of a few locked doors convinced every one that Lefrançois spoke the truth when he said that every door was fastened.

How could any one doubt him under any circumstances? It was only the American who had the effrontery to try the knobs. Poisé knew of the prison chamber, but he would as soon thought of calling attention to it as he would have thought of striking his benefactor.

A murder would have been more tangible. For hours, while Stone ran frantically up and down the village calling upon what authorities he could find to do something, the more leisurely French-Canadians speculated. Some thought that the devil had made off bodily with the rich American; others, more learned, decided that he had wandered away from the hotel during the night, for it had been plain to see when he landed that he was a sick man.

At length this was the theory upon which his secretary worked. Stone organized searching parties to go east and west along the shores of the St. Lawrence, while he headed one to go north. Noël Lefrançois, for his part, sat

on the porch and wished them all good luck and regretted that he was no longer young enough for such hard marching.

With night two of the searching parties returned; but the one with Stone remained out, for he had promised excellent pay to all who went with him, and a reward in case Joseph Bramley were found. Lefrançois condoled gravely the failure of the expeditions, and after supper he retired early to his room.

Noël Lefrançois sat down upon his bed. For a long time he sat there with his chin cupped in his hands, staring at the floor. Slowly he got up, entirely without that spring in his muscles which had made him the wonder of the parish, and walked to the bureau. He lifted the candle and peered at himself in the looking-glass. Gray hairs that had been so few as to be almost unnoticeable two days before were now thickly sprinkled among the black. The change was startling. And yet— why not? The event for which he had kept himself young by sheer force of will was taking place. What need, after it should be completed, for youth— or even for life?

Until long after midnight he walked, as he had done the night before, from window to door and back again. Then, in the dead hours of the morning, he went back to the prison of Fernand Choquette. This time he took a plate of stale corn bread from the kitchen.

Something resisted, although yieldingly, his attempt to open the door of the barred room. He stepped in quickly, turned the key, and felt his way to the candle. Light revealed that Choquette had been lying upon the rough boards, pressed against the crack of the door. He raised himself and looked up with eyes clouded by fear and suffering.

"End it!" he begged. "If you have any pity, give me a drink of water and then end it!"

Lefrançois, smiling, put the plate of bread on the floor and sank into one of the chairs. Choquette rose and moved with evident weakness to the bed.

"You have had a bad day?" inquired Lefrançois.

"I have been in hell— a hell of remorse and loneliness! I have been hungry and thirsty! Are you a devil? I am too old to go without care like this! Take your revenge, Noël, and be done with it!"

"But I am taking my revenge, my friend!"

The prisoner groaned.

"At least give me a drink!"

"That is something you will never have again," replied Lefrançois, as slowly and solemnly as a judge in court might pronounce a sentence.

"What— no water? You're going to make me die of—"

"Thirst!" finished Lefrançois. "A little dry food now and then, but no water."

Choquette raised his hands— his whole body shook as with a chill.

"I'm an old man," he said hoarsely. "Have mercy, Noël!"

"Did you have mercy on Aimé-Marie?"

"I told you I was only trying to make her marry me! I will swear it by the cross!"

"Perhaps that is true. Indeed, I believe you. But you killed her, Fernand, as truly as though you had thrown her overboard, and you are going to die now. She loved me. And I— I said my prayers to her!"

"Don't you think that I have suffered these years? What do you suppose my life has been? Among strange people and always with her face before my eyes— her face as she stood at the foot of the companionway!"

"So much the better"— the reply came very quietly.

Lefrançois made the retort with all the coolness he had shown up to that moment; and then in the span of a second his restraint slipped away from him, and he leaped to his feet with arms flung out in a wide gesture— a gesture as though he would sweep away some attack.

"Do you want to cheat me?" he shouted. "For what have I lived these forty-five years without Aimé-Marie? For what have I made friends? For what have I exercised every day to keep myself young and strong? To find you and to be ready to kill you against all odds!"

With that he snatched the candle and ran from the room. He locked the door with fumbling hands and dashed toward the haven of his own room, careless of who might hear him. Once there he sank down upon the bed and lay inert.

Something that he could not at first analyze, or even name, was happening to him. The look of Napoléon Laferté as he took that money to go to his sick wife came before the mental vision of Noël Lefrançois. Again he heard the words of Robert Poisé. Out of the dim reaches of the years came scores and hundreds of such looks of gratitude and such words of veneration.

The gifts that he had given so freely, and the things he had done for men and women and little children, almost all with a selfish purpose, rose up and haunted him. They gathered around his soul— a ring of compelling ghosts. They would not go away. The dying men he had comforted in order that their relatives might humor his whim for gossip, the homes he had preserved, the ones he had saved from real sin, became each a separate instrument of agony. This vast, cunning scheme he had devised to bind men to him so that he could have a chain of spies through the north dissolved. The links became separate entities; and together they cried in a sad and accusing chorus: "You are not the good Noël Lefrançois!"

He groaned and tottered to his feet— knowing in that moment that the thing he had worked and lived for was slipping away from him. His acts had shaped him. Revenge lay to his hand, but he could not take it. No power of his will, nor any hell-given power of hatred, could break his habit of being kind. His soul was molded otherwise than he knew.

With feet that dragged along hallways and marched heavily up-stairs he went again to the room where Fernand Choquette awaited a slow and terrible death. Into the chamber he went, his candle dripping grease. Choquette started up.

"I have come to give you freedom, M. Bramley," said Lefrançois.

Ignoring the look of renewed terror, the fluttering resistance of feeble hands, he gathered Choquette under one arm and went out— down to the room from which he had carried his enemy the night before. He pulled back the covers of the bed and put Choquette gently down.

"I ask your pardon," he said simply, "and I shall pray for forgiveness from the good God!"

Out into the hall, and for third time that night to his own chamber. He was very tired, so tired that it required all the strength of purpose he could summon to undress. Yet that night, for the first time in nearly half a century, he knelt before his crucifix.

iii

YOUNG Frederick Stone came in swearing, exhausted, and not a little terrified the next morning: he planned to rest a few hours and go back to the search, which, however, he feared would be fruitless, as the search just made had been most thorough.

With a chill he forced himself to open the door of the chamber from which his employer had disappeared— but it would be necessary to look into his papers, to hunt for possible relatives and friends. He glanced at the bed and became frozen with astonishment. Joseph Bramley was there, sleeping quietly.

"Mr. Bramley!" whispered Stone, hardly able to believe the evidence of his senses; then he reached out a tentative hand and touched the sleeper. "Mr. Bramley!"

The old man stirred and opened his cold, steel-blue eyes. He appeared to be slightly annoyed at the breaking in upon his slumbers.

"Well?" he said. "Is it time to get up?"

"What— what—" stuttered the secretary. "Where have you been?"

"None of your business," answered Bramley. "How soon will breakfast be ready? Come now, inquire at once of the proprietor of the hotel. We must be on the move early to-day. We take the first boat for Quebec."

The news reached the porch of the hotel store with much less shock than would have been the case had the body of the rich American been found in the woods. Napoléon Laferté, Jacques Morin, and Amédée Bois had thought from the first that the devil had had a hand in the affair, as might be expected in connection with a heretic. What better argument to this end than that the American refused to explain anything? As to old Zénon Lamotte, he was quite sure that Satan had carried M. Bramley into purgatory and back. Only Robert Poisé was puzzled— but he said nothing. More important to them all, however, than what had happened to the stranger was the effect upon Noël Lefrançois.

He sat among them, as had been his habit, with his well browned pipe in his hand. But it was not the same man who, two days since, had swung his shoulders with the air of twenty. Now those shoulders bent forward, even as he rested in his chair, and the hair that had been so black was gray, very gray. His eyes were dimmed a little, with that look of age which seems to see things beyond the vision of other men. Noël Lefrançois was old with sudden age— yet he was not broken. Upon his face there was a look of perfect and eternal peace. In his heart there was that which made him truly the Saint of Bon Désir.

17: Desert Madness

P. C. Wren

1875-1941

Barrier Miner (Broken Hill, NSW) 5 Aug 1939

"NO," said Captain Le Sage, "Sergeant-Major Brille is not what you think him at all. "I have known him since he was a recruit, and I can tell you quite authoritatively that he is not mad. He is not a maniac; he is not a drunkard; nor is he brutal; and definitely he is not insubordinate."

"Perhaps you'd tell me what he is then, sir," smiled Lieutenant Andre Tabouille.

"Well, he's a victim of Oriental diseases, a man who has had every form of fever and illness to which the flesh is heir.

"And I'll tell you another thing, my lad. I have known him carry on, in command of a post, with a temperature that was never below a hundred — usually over 102, and sometimes 104. He's done things when he ought to have been on a stretcher that would have been highly creditable to men in the pink of condition. Half his time he's a crock and a cripple; he's a grumbler, a grouser, and a surly old dog. He's also a hero."

"HE'S behaving very funnily just now," observed the young officer.

"So you'd be, if you had his medical history, not to mention his experiences in half a hundred tropical holes... In what way is he be-having queerly?"

"Well, his manner..."

"Don't you worry about his manner, or his manners. If ever you are in a tight place, with the odds a hundred to one against you, you pray to have Sergeant-Major Brille there with you. What was wrong with his manner?"

"Well, as you said just now, surly. Almost insolent. All but insubordinate. If one were choosing words carefully, one might even say threatening."

"Him. You must have put his back up."

"Well, I'd like to put it down again. After all, one's an officer..."

"And he is a magnificent soldier of blameless record and unique experience. I've known him for more years than you have weeks. Possibly he has got a touch of nerves."

"Well, it's a pretty bad example to other ranks, and if one cannot depend on one's sergeant-major..."

"Well, you can depend on him. There's no more dependable man in the battalion, nor in the whole Legion. Nevertheless, since you've made a complaint against him, I'll have him on the mat."

"Young fool," growled Captain Le Sage, as Lieutenant Tabouille saluted and left the tent.

"Orderly!" he shouted, and his orderly stepped smartly into the tent and saluted. "Tell Sergeant-Major Brille I should like a word with him."

A FEW minutes later that non-commissioned officer stood at the door of Captain Le Sage's tent.

Looking up from his papers, Captain Le Sage studied the lined, tanned face of the man before him, that of a professional soldier fifty years of age; hard-bitten, grizzled and lean; a face expressive rather of determination, strength and discipline than of thought and intelligence.

He looked ill; his face flushed, his brow furrowed and corrugated by a heavy frown, as though he were suffering both mentally and physically. The officer noticed that regularly his mouth twitched and that his hands were trembling.

Hiding all trace of friendliness, liking, or sympathy, Captain Le Sage spoke sharply.

"I have had a complaint against you, and have sent for you to warn you that I must not have another unless you are tired of the rank you occupy."

The non-commissioned officer's frown deepened and his face darken-ed. "Complaint? Against me? From whom?"

"Silence. I will invite your questions when I want them. Don't you presume upon your length of service, your rank, your decorations, nor any-thing else. You are a sergeant-major. Behave as one to your superiors as well as to those below you in rank. Do you understand me?"

"No."

"Are you addressing me?"

"Yes."

H'm. Young Tabouille was right, worse luck. Poor old Brille was definitely difficult.

"I should be sorry to put you through a recruit's course of military manners, saluting, recognition of officers' rank-badges, smartness combined with deference, conduct to-wards superiors, and so forth, Sergeant-Major Brille.''

The non-commissioned officer's fists clenched and his eyes blazed with anger.

"You've been reported to me for conduct prejudicial to good discipline, and..."

"I? Conduct prejudicial—"

"Silence. You've been reported to me for conduct prejudicial to good discipline, inasmuch as you had adopted a surly, insolent and insubordinate manner toward your superior officer, and..."

"It's a lie!" It was almost a cry; a shout of defiance, as well as of denial.

CAPTAIN LE SAGE, in no way offended or indignant, was perturbed.

As his heart softened with sympathy, understanding, and regret, his face and voice hardened with assumed anger.

"And what of your manner now, to me, your captain? What is this but insolence and insubordination? It is a fortunate thing for you, my friend, that we are alone, and that I cannot personally accuse you of conduct prejudicial to good discipline, inasmuch as you are setting an example of insubordinate manner to men of your section. As it is, consider yourself under arrest. Go at once to your tent, and remain there until I send for you. Dismiss."

With a venomous glare at his captain, the sergeant-major wheeled about and marched swiftly from the tent.

Captain Le Sage gazed at the retreating figure of the old soldier. Should he call him back and really treat him to the rough side of his tongue for going off like that, with-out saluting?

No. He had given him a pretty severe telling-off, and had put him under arrest. He'd send for him again when he had had time to cool off, and talk to him as man to man, for his soul's sake, and, what was more important, for his career's sake, He had never known him to drink to excess, and he did not think he was drinking now. Perhaps he had had some bad news from home, if he had got a home. Perhaps Tabouille had been riding him; a cocksure young man who was liable to think that a young officer showed his mettle if he rough-rode a sergeant-major in front of his men.

Discipline must be maintained, of course. Discipline, which is the life-blood of the army, the very air which it breathes, and without which it must decay and rot and die, must be rigid as a rifle barrel; but a good officer can temper justice with mercy.

Poor old Brille....

HULLO, what was this?

A sound of running feet. Greffier, Kramm, Wicking, rushing swiftly towards his tent. A shout from the leading man, Greffier: "Look out, sir! Sergeant-Major's loading his revolver, and shouting that he's going to shoot you dead."

Captain Le Sage took his cigarette case from the side pocket of his tunic.

"Don't run about this camp like a mad dog," he said quietly. "Don't shout. And don't address me without halting, coming to attention, and saluting."

"But, sir..." cried Kramm.

"Silence. Dismiss. Go away. Do you hear me?"

"But, sir..."

"Be off!"

Captain. Le Sage rose to his feet, took his cap and cane, and went from his tent, followed by the men who had rushed to warn him— this presumably having appealed to them as a more desirable course of action than assaulting and seizing the sergeant-major, a terrible breach of discipline, particularly terrible when the sergeant-major, trembling with rage, was fumblingly loading his revolver.

Tapping his riding boot with his cane, Captain Le Sage walked in the direction of the sergeant-major's tent. As he approached it Sergeant-Major Brille dashed out, saw Captain Le Sage and levelled the revolver straight at his breast, and at less than six paces range.

The sergeant-major was a crack revolver shot, and the hand that had trembled was now steady.

"Oh, by the way, sergeant-major," said Captain Le Sage, speaking precisely, as he always did when addressing him. "I have just heard that you are going to shoot me."

Would that hammer never fall? Would he have the ghost of a chance if he sprang at the man? No. The slightest movement would be plain, simple suicide.

"I don't think it should be done out here— not where your action might be seen by your subordinates. You would be the first to admit that it is prejudicial to discipline for a company sergeant-major to shoot his captain. In public, I mean; before the men. And there are several approaching now. (Stand back, Greffier, you damned fool. Don't move!) When that has to be done, it should be done decently, privately, and without setting a bad example. Isn't that so? Come, Come, now, Sergeant-Major Brille. Isn't that so? You are a very senior non-commissioned officer and should know. Of course you do. Well, then— come along to my tent. That's the proper place for it to be done. Follow me."

AND Captain Le Sage turned his back upon the man who was taking aim at his heart. As the tar-get over his foresight moved, a look of annoyance crossed the sergeant major's face, the sort of look it would have worn at the rifle range when just as he was about to press the trigger of his rifle and win another cup, a fly settled on the back-sight across which he was concentrating on the foresight and the bull's-eye.

He lowered his revolver and mechanically, almost subconsciously, followed the man whose orders he had obeyed ten thousand times.

"Go away, you gaping, goggling mules," growled Le Sage beneath his breath as he passed the men who had warned him and others who had been attracted to the spot by the unusual sight of a non-commissioned officer presenting his revolver at the heart of the commandant.

Strolling on, Captain Le Sage reached his tent, stood aside and, with the manner of one who assumes that whatever he suggests will be done as a matter of course, motioned the sergeant-major to enter before him.

"Sit down, Brille," he said, indicating his own chair, and seating himself on the bed.

The sergeant-major obeyed, and sat staring dully at the revolver in his hand. His hand was again shaking, the fingers twitching.

"That'll go off in a moment if you are not careful," said Le Sage. "Open the breech."

The sergeant-major obeyed.

"May as well draw the cartridges.... But here, let me do it," he added. "Your fingers are all thumbs today. That's better. Now I'll tell you what I want you to do. Lie down on my bed here."

"Sir, I—"

"Come on, Brille. Come and lie down and we'll have a mug of good coffee each. Come on now. Take off your tunic and your boots."

WITH fumbling fingers, the non-commissioned officer rose and clumsily removed his tunic. Seating himself on a chair he tried to untie his bootlaces. "I can't. I'm..."

"Come on, I'll help you.''

And with cool but swift and accurate movements Captain Le Sage unfastened the man's boots and drew them off.

"Now then, on to the bed with you," he said.

The sergeant-major obeyed, lay down on the bed, buried his face, in the pillow and burst into tears.

Drawing up his chair beside the bed, Captain Le Sage patted the heaving shoulders of the stricken old soldier.

"There, there, my old friend," he said. "I know all about it. You nearly shot me today— and it's not so long since I nearly shot myself! Fact, I know all about it.... Now you are not to get off that bed until I order you to do so. Understand?"

Sergeant-Major Brille, man of iron, feared as well as respected by every soldier in the company, turned his head, raised his face from the pillow, seized his captain's hand and pressed it to his lips.

To all who are rightly disgusted at such exhibitions of heroics and emotionalism, it will be learned with regret that the story is absolutely true.

18: The Great Return
Arthur Machen
Faith Press, 1915

A very different story from Machen's The Cosy Room*; an addition to the Holy Grail mythology.*

Chapter 1 The Rumour of the Marvellous

THERE ARE strange things lost and forgotten in obscure corners of the newspaper. I often think that the most extraordinary item of intelligence that I have read in print appeared a few years ago in the London Press. It came from a well known and most respected news agency; I imagine it was in all the papers. It was astounding.

The circumstances necessary— not to the understanding of this paragraph, for that is out of the question— but, we will say, to the understanding of the events which made it possible, are these. We had invaded Thibet, and there had been trouble in the hierarchy of that country, and a personage known as the Tashai Lama had taken refuge with us in India. He went on pilgrimage from one Buddhist shrine to another, and came at last to a holy mountain of Buddhism, the name of which I have forgotten. And thus the morning paper.

His Holiness the Tashai Lama then ascended the Mountain and was transfigured.— Reuter.

That was all. And from that day to this I have never heard a word of explanation or comment on this amazing statement.

There was no more, it seemed, to be said. "Reuter," apparently, thought he had made his simple statement of the facts of the case, had thereby done his duty, and so it all ended. Nobody, so far as I know, ever wrote to any paper asking what Reuter meant by it, or what the Tashai Lama meant by it. I suppose the fact was that nobody cared two-pence about the matter; and so this strange event— if there were any such event— was exhibited to us for a moment, and the lantern show revolved to other spectacles.

This is an extreme instance of the manner in which the marvellous is flashed out to us and then withdrawn behind its black veils and concealments; but I have known of other cases. Now and again, at intervals of a few years, there appear in the newspapers strange stories of the strange doings of what are technically called *poltergeists*. Some house, often a lonely farm, is suddenly subjected to an infernal bombardment. Great stones crash through the windows, thunder down the chimneys, impelled by no visible hand. The plates

and cups and saucers are whirled from the dresser into the middle of the kitchen, no one can say how or by what agency. Upstairs the big bedstead and an old chest or two are heard bounding on the floor as if in a mad ballet. Now and then such doings as these excite a whole neighbourhood; sometimes a London paper sends a man down to make an investigation. He writes half a column of description on the Monday, a couple of paragraphs on the Tuesday, and then returns to town. Nothing has been explained, the matter vanishes away; and nobody cares. The tale trickles for a day or two through the Press, and then instantly disappears, like an Australian stream, into the bowels of darkness. It is possible, I suppose, that this singular incuriousness as to marvellous events and reports is not wholly unaccountable. It may be that the events in question are, as it were, psychic accidents and misadventures. They are not meant to happen, or, rather, to be manifested. They belong to the world on the other side of the dark curtain; and it is only by some queer mischance that a corner of that curtain is twitched aside for an instant. Then— for an instant— we see; but the personages whom Mr. Kipling calls the Lords of Life and Death take care that we do not see too much. Our business is with things higher and things lower, with things different, anyhow; and on the whole we are not suffered to distract ourselves with that which does not really concern us. The Transfiguration of the Lama and the tricks of the *poltergeist* are evidently no affairs of ours; we raise an uninterested eyebrow and pass on— to poetry or to statistics.

Be it noted; I am not professing any fervent personal belief in the reports to which I have alluded. For all I know, the Lama, in spite of Reuter, was not transfigured, and the *poltergeist*, in spite of the late Mr. Andrew Lang, may in reality be only mischievous Polly, the servant girl at the farm. And to go farther: I do not know that I should be justified in putting either of these cases of the marvellous in line with a chance paragraph that caught my eye last summer; for this had not, on the face of it at all events, anything wildly out of the common. Indeed, I dare say that I should not have read it, should not have seen it, if it had not contained the name of a place which I had once visited, which had then moved me in an odd manner that I could not understand. Indeed, I am sure that this particular paragraph deserves to stand alone, for even if the *poltergeist* be a real *poltergeist*, it merely reveals the psychic whimsicality of some region that is not our region. There were better things and more relevant things behind the few lines dealing with Llantrisant, the little town by the sea in Arfonshire.

Not on the surface, I must say, for the cutting I have preserved it— reads as follows:—

LLANTRISANT.— The season promises very favourably: temperature of the sea yesterday at noon, 65 deg. Remarkable occurrences are supposed to have taken place during the recent Revival. The lights have not been observed lately. "The Crown." "The Fisherman's Rest."

The style was odd certainly; knowing a little of newspapers. I could see that the figure called, I think, *tmesis*, or cutting, had been generously employed; the exuberances of the local correspondent had been pruned by a Fleet Street expert. And these poor men are often hurried; but what did those "lights" mean? What strange matters had the vehement blue pencil blotted out and brought to naught?

That was my first thought, and then, thinking still of Llantrisant and how I had first discovered it and found it strange, I read the paragraph again, and was saddened almost to see, as I thought, the obvious explanation. I had forgotten for the moment that it was war-time, that scares and rumours and terrors about traitorous signals and flashing lights were current everywhere by land and sea; someone, no doubt, had been watching innocent farmhouse windows and thoughtless fanlights of lodging houses; these were the "lights" that had not been observed lately.

I found out afterwards that the Llantrisant correspondent had no such treasonous lights in his mind, but something very different. Still; what do we know? He may have been mistaken, "the great rose of fire" that came over the deep may have been the port light of a coasting-ship. Did it shine at last from the old chapel on the headland? Possibly; or possibly it was the doctor's lamp at Sarnau, some miles away. I have had wonderful opportunities lately of analysing the marvels of lying, conscious and unconscious; and indeed almost incredible feats in this way can be performed. If I incline to the less likely explanation of the "lights" at Llantrisant, it is merely because this explanation seems to me to be altogether congruous with the "remarkable occurrences" of the newspaper paragraph.

After all, if rumour and gossip and hearsay are crazy things to be utterly neglected and laid aside: on the other hand, evidence is evidence, and when a couple of reputable surgeons assert, as they do assert in the case of Olwen Phillips, Croeswen, Llantrisant, that there has been a "kind of resurrection of the body," it is merely foolish to say that these things don't happen. The girl was a mass of tuberculosis, she was within a few hours of death; she is now full of life. And so, I do not believe that the rose of fire was merely a ship's light, magnified and transformed by dreaming Welsh sailors.

But now I am going forward too fast. I have not dated the paragraph, so I cannot give the exact day of its appearance, but I think it was somewhere between the second and third week of June. I cut it out partly because it was

about Llantrisant, partly because of the "remarkable occurrences." I have an appetite for these matters, though I also have this misfortune, that I require evidence before I am ready to credit them, and I have a sort of lingering hope that some day I shall be able to elaborate some scheme or theory of such things.

But in the meantime, as a temporary measure, I hold what I call the doctrine of the jig-saw puzzle. That is: this remarkable occurrence, and that, and the other may be, and usually are, of no significance. Coincidence and chance and unsearchable causes will now and again make clouds that are undeniable fiery dragons, and potatoes that resemble Eminent Statesmen exactly and minutely in every feature, and rocks that are like eagles and lions. All this is nothing; it is when you get your set of odd shapes and find that they fit into one another, and at last that they are but parts of a large design; it is then that research grows interesting and indeed amazing, it is then that one queer form confirms the other, that the whole plan displayed justifies, corroborates, explains each separate piece.

So, it was within a week or ten days after I had read the paragraph about Llantrisant and had cut it out that I got a letter from a friend who was taking an early holiday in those regions.

"You will be interested," he wrote, "to hear that they have taken to ritualistic practices at Llantrisant. I went into the church the other day, and instead of smelling like a damp vault as usual, it was positively reeking with incense."

I knew better than that. The old parson was a firm Evangelical; he would rather have burnt sulphur in his church than incense any day. So I could not make out this report at all; and went down to Arfon a few weeks later determined to investigate this and any other remarkable occurrence at Llantrisant.

Chapter 2 Odours of Paradise

I WENT DOWN to Arfon in the very heat and bloom and fragrance of the wonderful summer that they were enjoying there. In London there was no such weather; it rather seemed as if the horror and fury of the war had mounted to the very skies and were there reigning. In the mornings the sun burnt down upon the city with a heat that scorched and consumed; but then clouds heavy and horrible would roll together from all quarters of the heavens, and early in the afternoon the air would darken, and a storm of thunder and lightning, and furious, hissing rain would fall upon the streets. Indeed, the torment of the world was in the London weather. The city wore a terrible

vesture; within our hearts was dread; without we were clothed in black clouds and angry fire.

It is certain that I cannot show in any words the utter peace of that Welsh coast to which I came; one sees, I think, in such a change a figure of the passage from the disquiets and the fears of earth to the peace of paradise. A land that seemed to be in a holy, happy dream, a sea that changed all the while from olivine to emerald, from emerald to sapphire, from sapphire to amethyst, that washed in white foam at the bases of the firm, grey rocks, and about the huge crimson bastions that hid the western bays and inlets of the waters; to this land I came, and to hollows that were purple and odorous with wild thyme, wonderful with many tiny, exquisite flowers. There was benediction in centaury, pardon in eye-bright, joy in lady's slipper; and so the weary eyes were refreshed, looking now at the little flowers and the happy bees about them, now on the magic mirror of the deep, changing from marvel to marvel with the passing of the great white clouds, with the brightening of the sun. And the ears, torn with jangle and racket and idle, empty noise, were soothed and comforted by the ineffable, unutterable, unceasing murmur, as the tides swam to and fro, uttering mighty, hollow voices in the caverns of the rocks.

For three or four days I rested in the sun and smelt the savour of the blossoms and of the salt water, and then, refreshed, I remembered that there was something queer about Llantrisant that I might as well investigate. It was no great thing that I thought to find, for, it will be remembered, I had ruled out the apparent oddity of the reporter's-or commissioner's?— reference to lights, on the ground that he must have been referring to some local panic about signalling to the enemy; who had certainly torpedoed a ship or two off Lundy in the Bristol Channel. All that I had to go upon was the reference to the "remarkable occurrences" at some revival, and then that letter of Jackson's, which spoke of Llantrisant church as "reeking" with incense, a wholly incredible and impossible state of things. Why, old Mr. Evans, the rector, looked upon coloured stoles as the very robe of Satan and his angels, as things dear to the heart of the Pope of Rome. But as to incense! As I have already familiarly observed, I knew better.

But as a hard matter of fact, this may be worth noting: when I went over to Llantrisant on Monday, August 9th, I visited the church, and it was still fragrant and exquisite with the odour of rare gums that had fumed there.

Now I happened to have a slight acquaintance with the rector. He was a most courteous and delightful old man, and on my last visit he had come across me in the churchyard, as I was admiring the very fine Celtic cross that stands there. Besides the beauty of the interlaced ornament there is an inscription in Ogham on one of the edges, concerning which the learned

dispute; it is altogether one of the more famous crosses of Celtdom. Mr. Evans, I say, seeing me looking at the cross, came up and began to give me, the stranger, a resume— somewhat of a shaky and uncertain resume, I found afterwards— of the various debates and questions that had arisen as to the exact meaning of the inscription, and I was amused to detect an evident but underlying belief of his own: that the supposed Ogham characters were, in fact, due to boys' mischief and weather and the passing of the ages. But then I happened to put a question as to the sort of stone of which the cross was made, and the rector brightened amazingly. He began to talk geology, and, I think, demonstrated that the cross or the material for it must have been brought to Llantrisant from the south-west coast of Ireland. This struck me as interesting, because it was curious evidence of the migrations of the Celtic saints, whom the rector, I was delighted to find, looked upon as good Protestants, though shaky on the subject of crosses; and so, with concessions on my part, we got on very well. Thus, with all this to the good, I was emboldened to call upon him.

I found him altered. Not that he was aged; indeed, he was rather made young, with a singular brightening upon his face, and something of joy upon it that I had not seen before, that I have seen on very few faces of men. We talked of the war, of course, since that is not to be avoided; of the farming prospects of the county; of general things, till I ventured to remark that I had been in the church, and had been surprised, to find it perfumed with incense.

"You have made some alterations in the service since I was here last? You use incense now?"

The old man looked at me strangely, and hesitated.

"No," he said, "there has been no change. I use no incense in the church. I should not venture to do so."

"But," I was beginning, "the whole church is as if High Mass had just been sung there, and—"

He cut me short, and there was a certain grave solemnity in his manner that struck me almost with awe.

"I know you are a railer," he said, and the phrase coming from this mild old gentleman astonished, me unutterably. "You are a railer and a bitter railer; I have read articles that you have written, and I know your contempt and your hatred for those you call Protestants in your derision; though your grandfather, the vicar of Caerleon-on-Usk, called himself Protestant and was proud of it, and your great-grand-uncle Hezekiah, *ffeiriad coch yr Castletown*— the Red Priest of Castletown— was a great man with the Methodists in his day, and the people flocked by their thousands when he administered the Sacrament. I was born and brought up in Glamorganshire, and old men have wept as they told

me of the weeping and contrition that there was when the Red Priest broke the Bread and raised the Cup. But you are a railer, and see nothing but the outside and the show. You are not worthy of this mystery that has been done here."

I went out from his presence rebuked indeed, and justly rebuked; but rather amazed. It is curiously true that the Welsh are still one people, one family almost, in a manner that the English cannot understand, but I had never thought that this old clergyman would have known anything of my ancestry or their doings. And as for my articles and such-like, I knew that the country clergy sometimes read, but I had fancied my pronouncements sufficiently obscure, even in London, much more in Arfon.

But so it happened, and so I had no explanation from the rector of Llantrisant of the strange circumstance, that his church was full of incense and odours of paradise.

I went up and down the ways of Llantrisant wondering, and came to the harbour, which is a little place, with little quays where some small coasting trade still lingers. A brigantine was at anchor here, and very lazily in the sunshine they were loading it with anthracite; for it is one of the oddities of Llantrisant that there is a small colliery in the heart of the wood on the hillside. I crossed a causeway which parts the outer harbour from the inner harbour, and settled down on a rocky beach hidden under a leafy hill. The tide was going out, and some children were playing on the wet sand, while two ladies— their mothers, I suppose— talked together as they sat comfortably on their rugs at a little distance from me.

At first they talked of the war, and I made myself deaf, for of that talk one gets enough, and more than enough, in London. Then there was a period of silence, and the conversation had passed to quite a different topic when I caught the thread of it again. I was sitting on the further side of a big rock, and I do not think that the two ladies had noticed my approach. However, though they spoke of strange things, they spoke of nothing which made it necessary for me to announce my presence.

"And, after all," one of them was saying, "what is it all about? I can't make out what is come to the people."

This speaker was a Welshwoman; I recognised the clear, over-emphasised consonants, and a faint suggestion of an accent. Her friend came from the Midlands, and it turned out that they had only known each other for a few days. Theirs was a friendship of the beach and of bathing; such friendships are common, at small seaside places.

"There is certainly something odd about the people here. I have never been to Llantrisant before, you know; indeed, this is the first time we've been

in Wales for our holidays, and knowing nothing about the ways of the people and not being accustomed to hear Welsh spoken, I thought, perhaps, it must be my imagination. But you think there really is something a little queer?"

"I can tell you this: that I have been in two minds whether I should not write to my husband and ask him to take me and the children away. You know where I am at Mrs. Morgan's, and the Morgans' sitting-room is just the other side of the passage, and sometimes they leave the door open, so that I can hear what they say quite plainly. And you see I understand the Welsh, though they don't know it. And I hear them saying the most alarming things!"

"What sort of things?

"Well, indeed, it sounds like some kind of a religious service, but it's not Church of England, I know that. Old Morgan begins it, and the wife and children answer. Something like; 'Blessed be God for the messengers of Paradise.' 'Blessed be His Name for Paradise in the meat and in the drink.' 'Thanksgiving for the old offering.' 'Thanksgiving for the appearance of the old altar,' 'Praise for the joy of the ancient garden.' 'Praise for the return of those that have been long absent.' And all that sort of thing. It is nothing but madness."

"Depend upon it," said the lady from the Midlands, "there's no real harm in it. They're Dissenters; some new sect, I dare say. You know some Dissenters are very queer in their ways."

"All that is like no Dissenters that I have ever known in all my life whatever," replied the Welsh lady somewhat vehemently, with a very distinct intonation of the land. "And have you heard them speak of the bright light that shone at midnight from the church?"

Chapter 3: A Secret in a Secret Place

NOW HERE was I altogether at a loss and quite bewildered. The children broke into the conversation of the two ladies and cut it all short, just as the midnight lights from the church came on the field, and when the little girls and boys went back again to the sands whooping, the tide of talk had turned, and Mrs. Harland and Mrs. Williams were quite safe and at home with Janey's measles, and a wonderful treatment for infantile earache, as exemplified in the case of Trevor. There was no more to be got out of them, evidently, so I left the beach, crossed the harbour causeway, and drank beer at the "Fishermen's Rest" till it was time to climb up two miles of deep lane and catch the train for Penvro, where I was staying. And I went up the lane, as I say, in a kind of amazement; and not so much, I think, because of evidences and hints of things strange to the senses, such as the savour of incense where no incense had

smoked for three hundred and fifty years and more, or the story of bright light shining from the dark, closed church at dead of night, as because of that sentence of thanksgiving "for paradise in meat and in drink."

For the sun went down and the evening fell as I climbed the long hill through the deep woods and the high meadows, and the scent of all the green things rose from the earth and from the heart of the wood, and at a turn of the lane far below was the misty glimmer of the still sea, and from far below its deep murmur sounded as it washed on the little hidden, enclosed bay where Llantrisant stands. And I thought, if there be paradise in meat and in drink, so much the more is there paradise in the scent of the green leaves at evening and in the appearance of the sea and in the redness of the sky; and there came to me a certain vision of a real world about us all the while, of a language that was only secret because we would not take the trouble to listen to it and discern it.

It was almost dark when I got to the station, and here were the few feeble oil lamps lit, glimmering in that lonely land, where the way is long from farm to farm. The train came on its way, and I got into it; and just as we moved from the station I noticed a group under one of those dim lamps. A woman and her child had got out, and they were being welcomed by a man who had been waiting for them. I had not noticed his face as I stood on the platform, but now I saw it as he pointed down the hill towards Llantrisant, and I think I was almost frightened.

He was a young man, a farmer's son, I would say, dressed in rough brown clothes, and as different from old Mr. Evans, the rector, as one man might be from another. But on his face, as I saw it in the lamplight, there was the like brightening that I had seen on the face of the rector. It was an illuminated face, glowing with an ineffable joy, and I thought it rather gave light to the platform lamp than received light from it. The woman and her child, I inferred, were strangers to the place, and had come to pay a visit to the young man's family. They had looked about them in bewilderment, half alarmed, before they saw him; and then his face was radiant in their sight, and it was easy to see that all their troubles were ended and over. A wayside station and a darkening country, and it was as if they were welcomed by shining, immortal gladness—even into paradise.

But though there seemed in a sense light all about my ways, I was myself still quite bewildered. I could see, indeed, that something strange had happened or was happening in the little town hidden under the hill, but there was so far no clue to the mystery, or rather, the clue had been offered to me, and I had not taken it, I had not even known that it was there; since we do not so much as see what we have determined, without judging, to be incredible,

even though it be held up before our eyes. The dialogue that the Welsh Mrs. Williams had reported to her English friend might have set me on the right way; but the right way was outside all my limits of possibility, outside the circle of my thought. The palæontologist might see monstrous, significant marks in the slime of a river bank, but he would never draw the conclusions that his own peculiar science would seem to suggest to him; he would choose any explanation rather than the obvious, since the obvious would also be the outrageous— according to our established habit of thought, which we deem final.

The next day I took all these strange things with me for consideration to a certain place that I knew of not far from Penvro. I was now in the early stages of the jig-saw process, or rather I had only a few pieces before me, and— to continue the figure my difficulty was this: that though the markings on each piece seemed to have design and significance, yet I could not make the wildest guess as to the nature of the whole picture, of which these were the parts. I had clearly seen that there was a great secret; I had seen that on the face of the young farmer on the platform of Llantrisant station; and in my mind there was all the while the picture of him going down the dark, steep, winding lane that led to the town and the sea, going down through the heart of the wood, with light about him.

But there was bewilderment in the thought of this, and in the endeavour to match it with the perfumed church and the scraps of talk that I had heard and the rumour of midnight brightness; and though Penvro is by no means populous, I thought I would go to a certain solitary place called the Old Camp Head, which looks towards Cornwall and to the great deeps that roll beyond Cornwall to the far ends of the world; a place where fragments of dreams— they seemed such then— might, perhaps, be gathered into the clearness of vision.

It was some years since I had been to the Head, and I had gone on that last time and on a former visit by the cliffs, a rough and difficult path. Now I chose a landward way, which the county map seemed to justify, though doubtfully, as regarded the last part of the journey. So I went inland and climbed the hot summer by-roads, till I came at last to a lane which gradually turned turfy and grass-grown, and then on high ground, ceased to be. It left me at a gate in a hedge of old thorns; and across the field beyond there seemed to be some faint indications of a track. One would judge that sometimes men did pass by that way, but not often.

It was high ground but not within sight of the sea. But the breath of the sea blew about the hedge of thorns, and came with a keen savour to the nostrils. The ground sloped gently from the gate and then rose again to a ridge, where a

white farmhouse stood all alone. I passed by this farmhouse, threading an uncertain way, followed a hedgerow doubtfully; and saw suddenly before me the Old Camp, and beyond it the sapphire plain of waters and the mist where sea and sky met. Steep from my feet the hill fell away, a land of gorse-blossom, red-gold and mellow, of glorious purple heather. It fell into a hollow that went down, shining with rich green bracken, to the glimmering sea; and before me and beyond the hollow rose a height of turf, bastioned at the summit with the awful, age-old walls of the Old Camp; green, rounded circumvallations, wall within wall, tremendous, with their myriad years upon them.

Within these smoothed, green mounds, looking across the shining and changing of the waters in the happy sunlight, I took out the bread and cheese and beer that I had carried in a bag, and ate and drank, and lit my pipe, and set myself to think over the enigmas of Llantrisant. And I had scarcely done so when, a good deal to my annoyance, a man came climbing up over the green ridges, and took up his stand close by, and stared out to sea. He nodded to me, and began with "Fine weather for the harvest" in the approved manner, and so sat down and engaged me in a net of talk. He was of Wales, it seemed, but from a different part of the country, and was staying for a few days with relations— at the white farmhouse which I had passed on my way. His tale of nothing flowed on to his pleasure and my pain, till he fell suddenly on Llantrisant and its doings. I listened then with wonder, and here is his tale condensed. Though it must be clearly understood that the man's evidence was only second-hand; he had heard it from his cousin, the farmer.

So, to be brief, it appeared that there had been a long feud at Llantrisant between a local solicitor, Lewis Prothero (we will say), and a farmer named James. There had been a quarrel about some trifle, which had grown more and more bitter as the two parties forgot the merits of the original dispute, and by some means or other, which I could not well understand, the lawyer had got the small freeholder "under his thumb." James, I think, had given a bill of sale in a bad season, and Prothero had bought it up; and the end was that the farmer was turned out of the old house, and was lodging in a cottage. People said he would have to take a place on his own farm as a labourer; he went about in dreadful misery, piteous to see. It was thought by some that he might very well murder the lawyer, if he met him.

They did meet, in the middle of the market-place at Llantrisant one Saturday in June. The farmer was a little black man, and he gave a shout of rage, and the people were rushing at him to keep him off Prothero.

"And then," said my informant, "I will tell you what happened. This lawyer, as they tell me, he is a great big brawny fellow, with a big jaw and a wide mouth, and a red face and red whiskers. And there he was in his black coat and

his high hard hat, and all his money at his back, as you may say. And, indeed, he did fall down on his knees in the dust there in the street in front of Philip James, and every one could see that terror was upon him. And he did beg Philip James's pardon, and beg of him to have mercy, and he did implore him by God and man and the saints of paradise. And my cousin, John Jenkins, Penmawr, he do tell me that the tears were falling from Lewis Prothero's eyes like the rain. And he put his hand into his pocket and drew out the deed of Pantyreos, Philip James's old farm that was, and did give him the farm back and a hundred pounds for the stock that was on it, and two hundred pounds, all in notes of the bank, for amendment and consolation.

"And then, from what they do tell me, all the people did go mad, crying and weeping and calling out all manner of things at the top of their voices. And at last nothing would do but they must all go up to the churchyard, and there Philip James and Lewis Prothero they swear friendship to one another for a long age before the old cross, and everyone sings praises. And my cousin he do declare to me that there were men standing in that crowd that he did never see before in Llantrisant in all his life, and his heart was shaken within him as if it had been in a whirl-wind."

I had listened to all this in silence. I said then:

"What does your cousin mean by that? Men that he had never seen in Llantrisant? What men?"

"The people," he said very slowly, "call them the Fishermen."

And suddenly there came into my mind the "Rich Fisherman" who in the old legend guards the holy mystery of the Graal.

Chapter 4: The Ringing of the Bell

SO FAR I have not told the story of the things of Llantrisant, but rather the story of how I stumbled upon them and among them, perplexed and wholly astray, seeking, but yet not knowing at all what I sought; bewildered now and again by circumstances which seemed to me wholly inexplicable; devoid, not so much of the key to the enigma, but of the key to the nature of the enigma. You cannot begin to solve a puzzle till you know what the puzzle is about. "Yards divided by minutes," said the mathematical master to me long ago, "will give neither pigs, sheep, nor oxen." He was right; though his manner on this and on all other occasions was highly offensive. This is enough of the personal process, as I may call it; and here follows the story of what happened at Llantrisant last summer, the story as I pieced it together at last.

It all began, it appears, on a hot day, early in last June; so far as I can make out, on the first Saturday in the month. There was a deaf old woman, a Mrs.

Parry, who lived by herself in a lonely cottage a mile or so from the town. She came into the market-place early on the Saturday morning in a state of some excitement, and as soon as she had taken up her usual place on the pavement by the churchyard, with her ducks and eggs and a few very early potatoes, she began to tell her neighbours about her having heard the sound of a great bell. The good women on each side smiled at one another behind Mrs. Parry's back, for one had to bawl into her ear before she could make out what one meant; and Mrs. Williams, Penycoed, bent over and yelled: "What bell should that be, Mrs. Parry? There's no church near you up at Penrhiw. Do you hear what nonsense she talks?" said Mrs. Williams in a low voice to Mrs. Morgan. "As if she could hear any bell, whatever."

"What makes you talk nonsense your self?" said Mrs. Parry, to the amazement of the two women. "I can hear a bell as well as you, Mrs. Williams, and as well as your whispers either."

And there is the fact, which is not to be disputed; though the deductions from it may be open to endless disputations; this old woman who had been all but stone deaf for twenty years— the defect had always been in her family— could suddenly hear on this June morning as well as anybody else. And her two old friends stared at her, and it was some time before they had appeased her indignation, and induced her to talk about the bell.

It had happened in the early morning, which was very misty. She had been gathering sage in her garden, high on a round hill looking over the sea. And there came in her ears a sort of throbbing and singing and trembling, "as if there were music coming out of the earth," and then something seemed to break in her head, and all the birds began to sing and make melody together, and the leaves of the poplars round the garden fluttered in the breeze that rose from the sea, and the cock crowed far off at Twyn, and the dog barked down in Kemeys Valley. But above all these sounds, unheard for so many years, there thrilled the deep and chanting note of the bell, "like a bell and a man's voice singing at once."

They stared again at her and at one another. "Where did it sound from?" asked one. "It came sailing across the sea," answered Mrs. Parry quite composedly, "and I did hear it coming nearer and nearer to the land."

"Well, indeed," said Mrs. Morgan, "it was a ship's bell then, though I can't make out why they would be ringing like that."

"It was not ringing on any ship, Mrs. Morgan," said Mrs. Parry.

"Then where do you think it was ringing?"

"*Ym Mharadwys*," replied Mrs. Parry. Now that means "in Paradise," and the two others changed the conversation quickly. They thought that Mrs. Parry had got back her hearing suddenly— such things did happen now and then—

and that the shock had made her "a bit queer." And this explanation would no doubt have stood its ground, if it had not been for other experiences. Indeed, the local doctor who had treated Mrs. Parry for a dozen years, not for her deafness, which he took to be hopeless and beyond cure, but for a tiresome and recurrent winter cough, sent an account of the case to a colleague at Bristol, suppressing, naturally enough, the reference to Paradise. The Bristol physician gave it as his opinion that the symptoms were absolutely what mighty have been expected.

"You have here, in all probability," he wrote, "the sudden breaking down of an old obstruction in the aural passage, and I should quite expect this process to be accompanied by tinnitus of a pronounced and even violent character."

But for the other experiences? As the morning wore on and drew to noon, high market, and to the utmost brightness of that summer day, all the stalls and the streets were full of rumours and of awed faces. Now from one lonely farm, now from another, men and women came and told the story of how they had listened in the early morning with thrilling hearts to the thrilling music of a bell that was like no bell ever heard before. And it seemed that many people in the town had been roused, they knew not how, from sleep; waking up, as one of them said, as if bells were ringing and the organ playing, and a choir of sweet voices singing all together: "There were such melodies and songs that my heart was full of joy."

And a little past noon some fishermen who had been out all night returned, and brought a wonderful story into the town of what they had heard in the mist and one of them said he had seen something go by at a little distance from his boat. "It was all golden and bright," he said, "and there was glory about it." Another fisherman declared "there was a song upon the water that was like heaven."

And here I would say in parenthesis that on returning to town I sought out a very old friend of mine, a man who has devoted a lifetime to strange and esoteric studies. I thought that I had a tale that would interest him profoundly, but I found that he heard me with a good deal of indifference. And at this very point of the sailors' stories I remember saying: "Now what do you make of that? Don't you think it's extremely curious?" He replied: "I hardly think so. Possibly the sailors were lying; possibly it happened as they say. Well; that sort of thing has always been happening." I give my friend's opinion; I make no comment on it.

Let it be noted that there was something remarkable as to the manner in which the sound of the bell was heard— or supposed to be heard. There are, no doubt, mysteries in sound as in all else; indeed, I am informed that during one of the horrible outrages that have been perpetrated on London during this

autumn there was an instance of a great block of workmen's dwellings in which the only person who heard the crash of a particular bomb falling was an old deaf woman, who had been fast asleep till the moment of the explosion. This is strange enough of a sound that was entirely in the natural (and horrible) order; and so it was at Llantrisant, where the sound was either a collective auditory hallucination or a manifestation of what is conveniently, if inaccurately, called the supernatural order.

For the thrill of the bell did not reach to all ears— or hearts. Deaf Mrs. Parry heard it in her lonely cottage garden, high above the misty sea; but then, in a farm on the other or western side of Llantrisant, a little child, scarcely three years old, was the only one out of a household of ten people who heard anything. He called out in stammering baby Welsh something that sounded like "*Clychau fawr*, *clychau fawr*"— the great bells, the great bells— and his mother wondered what he was talking about. Of the crews of half a dozen trawlers that were swinging from side to side in the mist, not more than four men had any tale to tell. And so it was that for an hour or two the man who had heard nothing suspected his neighbour who had heard marvels of lying; and it was some time before the mass of evidence coming from all manner of diverse and remote quarters convinced the people that there was a true story here. A might suspect B, his neighbour, of making up a tale; but when C, from some place on the hills five miles away, and D, the fisherman on the waters, each had a like report, then it was clear that something had happened.

And even then, as they told me, the signs to be seen upon the people were stranger than the tales told by them and among them. It has struck me that many people in reading some of the phrases that I have reported, will dismiss them with laughter as very poor and fantastic inventions; fishermen, they will say, do not speak of "a song like heaven" or of "a glory about it." And I dare say this would be a just enough criticism if I were reporting English fishermen; but, odd though it may be, Wales has not yet lost the last shreds of the grand manner. And let it be remembered also that in most cases such phrases are translated from another language, that is, from the Welsh.

So, they come trailing, let us say, fragments of the cloud of glory in their common speech; and so, on this Saturday, they began to display, uneasily enough in many cases, their consciousness that the things that were reported were of their ancient right and former custom. The comparison is not quite fair; but conceive Hardy's old Durbeyfield suddenly waking from long slumber to find himself in a noble thirteenth-century hall, waited on by kneeling pages, smiled on by sweet ladies in silken côtehardies.

So by evening time there had come to the old people the recollection of stories that their fathers had told them as they sat round the hearth of winter

nights, fifty, sixty, seventy years; ago; stories of the wonderful bell of Teilo Sant, that had sailed across the glassy seas from Syon, that was called a portion of Paradise, "and the sound of its ringing was like the perpetual choir of the angels."

Such things were remembered by the old and told to the young that evening, in the streets of the town and in the deep lanes that climbed far hills. The sun went down to the mountain red with fire like a burnt offering, the sky turned violet, the sea was purple, as one told another of the wonder that had returned to the land after long ages.

Chapter 5: The Rose of Fire

IT WAS during the next nine days, counting from that Saturday early in June the first Saturday in June, as I believe— that Llantrisant and all the regions about became possessed either by an extraordinary set of hallucinations or by a visitation of great marvels.

This is not the place to strike the balance between the two possibilities. The evidence is, no doubt, readily available; the matter is open to systematic investigation.

But this may be said: The ordinary man, in the ordinary passages of his life, accepts in the main the evidence of his senses, and is entirely right in doing so. He says that he sees a cow, that he sees a stone wall, and that the cow and the stone wall are "there."

This is very well for all the practical purposes of life, but I believe that the metaphysicians are by no means so easily satisfied as to the reality of the stone wall and the cow. Perhaps they might allow that both objects are "there" in the sense that one's reflection is in a glass; there is an actuality, but is there a reality external to oneself? In any event, it is solidly agreed that, supposing a real existence, this much is certain— it is not in the least like our conception of it. The ant and the microscope will quickly convince us that we do not see things as they really are, even supposing that we see them at all. If we could "see" the real cow she would appear utterly incredible, as incredible as the things I am to relate.

Now, there is nothing that I know much more unconvincing than the stories of the red light on the sea. Several sailors, men on small coasting ships, who were working up or down the Channel on that Saturday night, spoke of "seeing" the red light, and it must be said that there is a very tolerable agreement in their tales. All make the time as between midnight of the Saturday and one o'clock on the Sunday morning. Two of those sailormen are

precise as to the time of the apparition; they fix it by elaborate calculations of their own as occurring at 12.20 a.m. And the story?

A red light, a burning spark seen far away in the darkness, taken at the first moment of seeing for a signal, and probably an enemy signal. Then it approached at a tremendous speed, and one man said he took it to be the port light of some new kind of navy motor-boat which was developing a rate hitherto unheard of, a hundred or a hundred and fifty knots an hour. And then, in the third instant of the sight, it was clear that this was no earthly speed. At first a red spark in the farthest distance; then a rushing lamp; and then, as if in an incredible point of time, it swelled into a vast rose of fire that filled all the sea and all the sky and hid the stars and possessed the land. "I thought the end of the world had come," one of the sailors said.

And then, an instant more, and it was gone from them, and four of them say that there was a red spark on Chapel Head, where the old grey chapel of St. Teilo stands, high above the water, in a cleft of the limestone rocks.

And thus the sailors; and thus their tales are incredible; but they are not incredible. I believe that men of the highest eminence in physical science have testified to the occurrence of phenomena every whit as marvellous, to things as absolutely opposed to all natural order, as we conceive it; and it may be said that nobody minds them. "That sort of thing has always been happening," as my friend remarked to me. But the men, whether or no the fire had ever been without them, there was no doubt that it was now within them, for it burned in their eyes. They were purged as if they had passed through the Furnace of the Sages, governed with Wisdom that the alchemists know. They spoke without much difficulty of what they had seen, or had seemed to see, with their eyes, but hardly at all of what their hearts had known when for a moment the glory of the fiery rose had been about them.

For some weeks afterwards they were still, as it were, amazed; almost, I would say, incredulous. If there had been nothing more than the splendid and fiery appearance, showing and vanishing, I do believe that they themselves would have discredited their own senses and denied the truth of their own tales. And one does not dare to say whether they would not have been right. Men like Sir William Crookes and Sir Oliver Lodge are certainly to be heard with respect, and they bear witness to all manner of apparent eversions of laws which we, or most of us, consider far more deeply founded than the ancient hills. They may be justified; but in our hearts we doubt. We cannot wholly believe in inner sincerity that the solid table did rise, without mechanical reason or cause, into the air, and so defy that which we name the "law of gravitation." I know what may be said on the other side; I know that there is no true question of "law" in the case; that the law of gravitation really means just

this: that I have never seen a table rising without mechanical aid, or an apple, detached from the bough, soaring to the skies instead of falling to the ground. The so-called law is just the sum of common observation and nothing more; yet I say, in our hearts we do not believe that the tables rise; much less do we believe in the rose of fire that for a moment swallowed up the skies and seas and shores of the Welsh coast last June.

And the men who saw it would have invented fairy tales to account for it, I say again, if it had not been for that which was within them.

They said, all of them, and it was certain now that they spoke the truth, that in the moment of the vision, every pain and ache and malady in their bodies had passed away. One man had been vilely drunk on venomous spirit, procured at "Jobson's Hole" down by the Cardiff Docks. He was horribly ill; he had crawled up from his bunk for a little fresh air; and in an instant his horrors and his deadly nausea had left him. Another man was almost desperate with the raging hammering pain of an abscess on a tooth; he says that when the red flame came near he felt as if a dull, heavy blow had fallen on his jaw, and then the pain was quite gone; he could scarcely believe that there had been any pain there.

And they all bear witness to an extraordinary exaltation of the senses. It is indescribable, this; for they cannot describe it. They are amazed, again; they do not in the least profess to know what happened; but there is no more possibility of shaking their evidence than there is a possibility of shaking the evidence of a man who says that water is wet and fire hot.

"I felt a bit queer afterwards," said one of them, "and I steadied myself by the mast, and I can't tell how I felt as I touched it. I didn't know that touching a thing like a mast could be better than a big drink when you're thirsty, or a soft pillow when you're sleepy."

I heard other instances of this state of things, as I must vaguely call it, since I do not know what else to call it. But I suppose we can all agree that to the man in average health, the average impact of the external world on his senses is a matter of indifference. The average impact; a harsh scream, the bursting of a motor tyre, any violent assault on the aural nerves will annoy him, and he may say "damn." Then, on the other hand, the man who is not "fit" will easily be annoyed and irritated by someone pushing past him in a crowd, by the ringing of a bell, by the sharp closing of a book.

But so far as I could judge from the talk of these sailors, the average impact of the external world had become to them a fountain of pleasure. Their nerves were on edge, but an edge to receive exquisite sensuous impressions. The touch of the rough mast, for example; that was a joy far greater than is the joy of fine silk to some luxurious skins; they drank water and stared as if they had

been *fins gourmets* tasting an amazing wine; the creak and whine of their ship on its slow way were as exquisite as the rhythm and song of a Bach fugue to an amateur of music.

And then, within; these rough fellows have their quarrels and strifes and variances and envyings like the rest of us; but that was all over between them that had seen the rosy light; old enemies shook hands heartily, and roared with laughter as they confessed one to another what fools they had been.

"I can't exactly say how it has happened or what has happened at all," said one, "but if you have all the world and the glory of it, how can you fight for fivepence?"

The church of Llantrisant is a typical example of a Welsh parish church, before the evil and horrible period of "restoration."

This lower world is a palace of lies, and of all foolish lies there is none more insane than a certain vague fable about the mediæval freemasons, a fable which somehow imposed itself upon the cold intellect of Hallam the historian. The story is, in brief, that throughout the Gothic period, at any rate, the art and craft of church building were executed by wandering guilds of "freemasons," possessed of various secrets of building and adornment, which they employed wherever they went. If this nonsense were true, the Gothic of Cologne would be as the Gothic of Colne, and the Gothic of Arles like to the Gothic of Abingdon. It is so grotesquely untrue that almost every county, let alone every country, has its distinctive style in Gothic architecture. Arfon is in the west of Wales; its churches have marks and features which distinguish them from the churches in the east of Wales.

The Llantrisant church has that primitive division between nave and chancel which only very foolish people decline to recognise as equivalent to the Oriental iconostasis and as the origin of the Western rood-screen. A solid wall divided the church into two portions; in the centre was a narrow opening with a rounded arch, through which those who sat towards the middle of the church could see the small, red-carpeted altar and the three roughly shaped lancet windows above it.

The "reading pew" was on the outer side of this wall of partition, and here the rector did his service, the choir being grouped in seats about him. On the inner side were the pews of certain privileged houses of the town and district.

On the Sunday morning the people were all in their accustomed places, not without a certain exultation in their eyes, not without a certain expectation of they knew not what. The bells stopped ringing, the rector, in his old-fashioned, ample surplice, entered the reading-desk, and gave out the hymn: "My God, and is Thy Table spread."

And, as the singing began, all the people who were in the pews within the wall came out of them and streamed through the archway into the nave. They took what places they could find up and down the church, and the rest of the congregation looked at them in amazement.

Nobody knew what had happened. Those whose seats were next to the aisle tried to peer into the chancel, to see what had happened or what was going on there. But somehow the light flamed so brightly from the windows above the altar, those being the only windows in the chancel, one small lancet in the south wall excepted, that no one could see anything at all.

"It was as if a veil of gold adorned with jewels was hanging there," one man said; and indeed there are a few odds and scraps of old painted glass left in the eastern lancets.

But there were few in the church who did not hear now and again voices speaking beyond the veil.

Chapter 6: Olwen's Dream

THE WELL-TO-DO and dignified personages who left their pews in the chancel of Llantrisant Church and came hurrying into the nave could give no explanation of what they had done. They felt, they said, that they had to go, and to go quickly; they were driven out, as it were, by a secret, irresistible command. But all who were present in the church that morning were amazed, though all exulted in their hearts; for they, like the sailors who saw the rose of fire on the waters, were filled with a joy that was literally ineffable, since they could not utter it or interpret it to themselves.

And they too, like the sailors, were transmuted, or the world was transmuted for them. They experienced what the doctors call a sense of *bien être* but a *bien être* raised, to the highest power. Old men felt young again, eyes that had been growing dim now saw clearly, and saw a world that was like Paradise, the same world, it is true, but a world rectified and glowing, as if an inner flame shone in all things, and behind all things.

And the difficulty in recording this state is this, that it is so rare an experience that no set language to express it is in existence. A shadow of its raptures and ecstasies is found in the highest poetry; there are phrases in ancient books telling of the Celtic saints that dimly hint at it; some of the old Italian masters of painting had known it, for the light of it shines in their skies and about the battlements of their cities that are founded on magic hills. But these are but broken hints.

It is not poetic to go to Apothecaries' Hall for similes. But for many years I kept by me an article from the *Lancet* or the *British Medical Journal*— I forget

which— in which a doctor gave an account of certain experiments he had conducted with a drug called the Mescal Button, or Anhelonium Lewinii. He said that while under the influence of the drug he had but to shut his eyes, and immediately before him there would rise incredible Gothic cathedrals, of such majesty and splendour and glory that no heart had ever conceived. They seemed to surge from the depths to the very heights of heaven, their spires swayed amongst the clouds and the stars, they were fretted with admirable imagery. And as he gazed, he would presently become aware that all the stones were living stones, that they were quickening and palpitating, and then that they were glowing jewels, say, emeralds, sapphires, rubies, opals, but of hues that the mortal eye had never seen.

That description gives, I think, some faint notion of the nature of the transmuted world into which these people by the sea had entered, a world quickened and glorified and full of pleasures. Joy and wonder were on all faces; but the deepest joy and the greatest wonder were on the face of the rector. For he had heard through the veil the Greek word for "holy," three times repeated. And he, who had once been a horrified assistant at High Mass in a foreign church, recognised the perfume of incense that filled the place from end to end.

It was on that Sunday night that Olwen Phillips of Croeswen dreamed her wonderful dream. She was a girl of sixteen, the daughter of small farming people, and for many months she had been doomed to certain death. Consumption, which flourishes in that damp, warm climate, had laid hold of her; not only her lungs but her whole system was a mass of tuberculosis. As is common enough, she had enjoyed many fallacious brief recoveries in the early stages of the disease, but all hope had long been over, and now for the last few weeks she had seemed to rush vehemently to death. The doctor had come on the Saturday morning, bringing with him a colleague. They had both agreed that the girl's case was in its last stages. "She cannot possibly last more than a day or two," said the local doctor to her mother. He came again on the Sunday morning and found his patient perceptibly worse, and soon afterwards she sank into a heavy sleep, and her mother thought that she would never wake from it.

The girl slept in an inner room communicating with the room occupied by her father and mother. The door between was kept open, so that Mrs. Phillips could hear her daughter if she called to her in the night. And Olwen called to her mother that night, just as the dawn was breaking. It was no faint summons from a dying bed that came to the mother's ears, but a loud cry that rang through the house, a cry of great gladness. Mrs. Phillips started up from sleep in wild amazement, wondering what could have happened. And then she saw

Olwen, who had not been able to rise from her bed for many weeks past, standing in the doorway in the faint light of the growing day. The girl called to her mother: "Mam! mam! It is all over. I am quite well again."

Mrs. Phillips roused her husband, and they sat up in bed staring, not knowing on earth, as they said afterwards, what had been done with the world. Here was their poor girl wasted to a shadow, lying on her death-bed, and the life sighing from her with every breath, and her voice, when she last uttered it, so weak that one had to put one's ear to her mouth. And here in a few hours she stood up before them; and even in that faint light they could see that she was changed almost beyond knowing. And, indeed, Mrs. Phillips said that for a moment or two she fancied that the Germans must have come and killed them in their sleep, and so they were all dead together. But Olwen called, out again, so the mother lit a candle and got up and went tottering across the room, and there was Olwen all gay and plump again, smiling with shining eyes. Her mother led her into her own room, and set down the candle there, and felt her daughter's flesh, and burst into prayers and tears of wonder and delight, and thanksgivings, and held the girl again to be sure that she was not deceived. And then Olwen told her dream, though she thought it was not a dream.

She said she woke up in the deep darkness, and she knew the life was fast going from her. She could not move so much as a finger, she tried to cry out, but no sound came from her lips. She felt that in another instant the whole world would fall from her— her heart was full of agony. And as the last breath was passing her lips, she heard a very faint, sweet sound, like the tinkling of a silver bell. It came from far away, from over by Ty-newydd. She forgot her agony and listened, and even then, she says, she felt the swirl of the world as it came back to her. And the sound of the bell swelled and grew louder, and it thrilled all through her body, and the life was in it. And as the bell rang and trembled in her ears, a faint light touched the wall of her room and reddened, till the whole room was full of rosy fire. And then she saw standing before her bed three men in blood-coloured robes with shining faces. And one man held a golden bell in his hand. And the second man held up something shaped like the top of a table. It was like a great jewel, and it was of a blue colour, and there were rivers of silver and of gold running through it and flowing as quick streams flow, and there were pools in it as if violets had been poured out into water, and then it was green as the sea near the shore, and then it was the sky at night with all the stars shining, and then the sun and the moon came down and washed in it. And the third man held up high above this a cup that was like a rose on fire; "there was a great burning in it, and a dropping of blood in it, and a red cloud above it, and I saw a great secret. And I heard a voice that sang

nine times, 'Glory and praise to the Conqueror of Death, to the Fountain of Life immortal.' Then the red light went from the wall, and it was all darkness, and the bell rang faint again by Capel Teilo, and then I got up and called to you."

The doctor came on the Monday morning with the death certificate in his pocket-book, and Olwen ran out to meet him. I have quoted his phrase in the first chapter of this record: "A kind of resurrection of the body." He made a most careful examination of the girl; he has stated that he found that every trace of disease had disappeared. He left on the Sunday morning a patient entering into the coma that precedes death, a body condemned utterly and ready for the grave. He met at the garden gate on the Monday morning a young woman in whom life sprang up like a fountain, in whose body life laughed and rejoiced as if it had been a river flowing from an unending well.

Now this is the place to ask one of those questions— there are many such— which cannot be answered. The question is as to the continuance of tradition; more especially as to the continuance of tradition among the Welsh Celts of today. On the one hand, such waves and storms have gone over them. The wave of the heathen Saxons went over them, then the wave of Latin mediævalism, then the waters of Anglicanism; last of all the flood of their queer Calvinistic Methodism, half Puritan, half pagan. It may well be asked whether any memory can possibly have survived such a series of deluges. I have said that the old people of Llantrisant had their tales of the Bell of Teilo Sant; but these were but vague and broken recollections. And then there is the name by which the "strangers" who were seen in the market-place were known; that is more precise. Students of the Graal legend know that the keeper of the Graal in the romances is the "King Fisherman," or the "Rich Fisherman"; students of Celtic hagiology know that it was prophesied before the birth of Dewi (or David) that he should be "a man of aquatic life," that another legend tells how a little child, destined to be a saint, was discovered on a stone in the river, how through his childhood a fish for his nourishment was found on that stone every day, while another saint, Ilar, if I remember, was expressly known as "The Fisherman." But has the memory of all this persisted in the church-going and chapel-going people of Wales at the present day? It is difficult to say. There is the affair of the Healing Cup of Nant Eos, or Tregaron Healing Cup, as it is also called. It is only a few years ago since it was shown to a wandering harper, who treated it lightly, and then spent a wretched night, as he said, and came back penitently and was left alone with the sacred vessel to pray over it, till "his mind was at rest." That was in 1887.

Then for my part— I only know modern Wales on the surface, I am sorry to say— I remember three or four years ago speaking to my temporary landlord of certain relics of Saint Teilo, which are supposed to be in the keeping of a

particular family in that country. The landlord is a very jovial, merry fellow, and I observed with some astonishment that his ordinary, easy manner was completely altered as he said, gravely, "That will be over there, up by the mountain," pointing vaguely to the north. And he changed the subject, as a Freemason changes the subject.

There the matter lies, and its appositeness to the story of Llantrisant is this: that the dream of Olwen Phillips was, in fact, the Vision of the Holy Graal.

Chapter 7: The Mass of the Sangraal

"*FFEIRIADWYR Melcisidec! Ffeiriadwyr Melcisidec!*" shouted the old Calvinistic Methodist deacon with the grey beard. "Priesthood of Melchizedek! Priesthood of Melchizedek!"

And he went on:

"The Bell that is like *y glwys yr angel ym mharadwys*— the joy of the angels in Paradise— is returned; the Altar that is of a colour that no men can discern is returned, the Cup that came from Syon is returned, the ancient Offering is restored, the Three Saints have come back to the church of the *tri sant*, the Three Holy Fishermen are amongst us, and their net is full. *Gogoniant, gogoniant*— glory, glory!"

Then another Methodist began to recite in Welsh a verse from Wesley's hymn.

God still respects Thy sacrifice,
Its savour sweet doth always please;
The Offering smokes through earth and skies,
Diffusing life and joy and peace;
To these Thy lower courts it comes
And fills them with Divine perfumes.

The whole church was full, as the old books tell, of the odour of the rarest spiceries. There were lights shining within the sanctuary, through the narrow archway.

This was the beginning of the end of what befell at Llantrisant. For it was the Sunday after that night on which Olwen Phillips had been restored from death to life. There was not a single chapel of the Dissenters open in the town that day. The Methodists with their minister and their deacons and all the Nonconformists had returned on this Sunday morning to "the old hive." One would have said, a church of the Middle Ages, a church in Ireland today. Every seat— save those in the chancel— was full, all the aisles were full, the

churchyard was full; everyone on his knees, and the old rector kneeling before the door into the holy place.

Yet they can say but very little of what was done beyond the veil. There was no attempt to perform the usual service; when the bells had stopped the old deacon raised his cry, and priest and people fell down on their knees as they thought they heard a choir within singing "Alleluya, alleluya, alleluya." And as the bells in the tower ceased ringing, there sounded the thrill of the bell from Syon, and the golden veil of sunlight fell across the door into the altar, and the heavenly voices began their melodies.

A voice like a trumpet cried from within the brightness.

Agyos, Agyos, Agyos.

And the people, as if an age-old memory stirred in them, replied:

Agyos yr Tâd, agyos yr Mab, agyos yr Yspryd Glan. Sant, sant, sant, Drindod sant vendigeid. Sanctus Arglwydd Dduw Sabaoth, Dominus Deus.

There was a voice that cried and sang from within the altar; most of the people had heard some faint echo of it in the chapels; a voice rising and falling and soaring in awful modulations that rang like the trumpet of the Last Angel. The people beat upon their breasts, the tears were like rain of the mountains on their cheeks; those that were able fell down flat on their faces before the glory of the veil. They said afterwards that men of the hills, twenty miles away, heard that cry and that singing, roaring upon them on the wind, and they fell down on their faces, and cried, "The offering is accomplished," knowing nothing of what they said.

There were a few who saw three come out of the door of the sanctuary, and stand for a moment on the pace before the door. These three were in dyed vesture, red as blood. One stood before two, looking to the west, and he rang the bell. And they say that all the birds of the wood, and all the waters of the sea, and all the leaves of the trees, and all the winds of the high rocks uttered their voices with the ringing of the bell. And the second and the third; they turned their faces one to another. The second held up the lost altar that they once called Sapphirus, which was like the changing of the sea and of the sky, and like the immixture of gold and silver. And the third heaved up high over the altar a cup that was red with burning and the blood of the offering.

And the old rector cried aloud then before the entrance:

Bendigeid yr Offeren yn oes oesoedd— blessed be the Offering unto the age of ages.

And then the Mass of the Sangraal was ended, and then began the passing out of that land of the holy persons and holy things that had returned to it after the long years. It seemed, indeed, to many that the thrilling sound of the bell was in their ears for days, even for weeks after that Sunday morning. But

thenceforth neither bell nor altar nor cup was seen by anyone; not openly, that is, but only in dreams by day and by night. Nor did the people see Strangers again in the market of Llantrisant, nor in the lonely places where certain persons oppressed by great affliction and sorrow had once or twice encountered them.

But that time of visitation will never be forgotten by the people. Many things happened in the nine days that have not been set down in this record— or legend. Some of them were trifling matters, though strange enough in other times. Thus a man in the town who had a fierce dog that was always kept chained up found one day that the beast had become mild and gentle.

And this is odder: Edward Davies, of Lanafon, a farmer, was roused from sleep one night by a queer yelping and barking in his yard. He looked out of the window and saw his sheep-dog playing with a big fox; they were chasing each other by turns, rolling over and over one another, "cutting such capers as I did never see the like," as the astonished farmer put it. And some of the people said that during this season of wonder the corn shot up, and the grass thickened, and the fruit was multiplied on the trees in a very marvellous manner.

More important, it seemed, was the case of Williams, the grocer; though this may have been a purely natural deliverance. Mr. Williams was to marry his daughter Mary to a smart young fellow from Carmarthen, and he was in great distress over it. Not over the marriage itself, but because things had been going very badly with him for some time, and he could not see his way to giving anything like the wedding entertainment that would be expected of him. The wedding was to be on the Saturday— that was the day on which the lawyer, Lewis Prothero, and the farmer, Philip James, were reconciled— and this John Williams, without money or credit, could not think how shame would not be on him for the meagreness and poverty of the wedding feast. And then on the Tuesday came a letter from his brother, David Williams, Australia, from whom he had not heard for fifteen years. And David, it seemed, had been making a great deal of money, and was a bachelor, and here was with his letter a paper good for a thousand pounds: "You may as well enjoy it now as wait till I am dead." This was enough, indeed, one might say; but hardly an hour after the letter had come the lady from the big house (*Plas Mawr*) drove up in all her grandeur, and went into the shop and said, "Mr. Williams, your daughter Mary has always been a very good girl, and my husband and I feel that we must give her some little thing on her wedding, and we hope she'll be very happy." It was a gold watch worth fifteen pounds. And after Lady Watcyn, advances the old doctor with a dozen of port, forty years upon it, and a long sermon on how to decant it. And the old rector's old wife brings to the beautiful dark girl two

yards of creamy lace, like an enchantment, for her wedding veil, and tells Mary how she wore it for her own wedding fifty years ago; and the squire, Sir Watcyn, as if his wife had not been already with a fine gift, calls from his horse, and brings out Williams and barks like a dog at him, "Goin' to have a weddin', eh, Williams? Can't have a weddin' without champagne, y' know; wouldn't be legal, don't y' know. So look out for a couple of cases." So Williams tells the story of the gifts; and certainly there was never so famous a wedding in Llantrisant before.

All this, of course, may have been altogether in the natural order; the "glow," as they call it, seems more difficult to explain. For they say that all through the nine days, and indeed after the time had ended, there never was a man weary or sick at heart in Llantrisant, or in the country round it. For if a man felt that his work of the body or the mind was going to be too much for his strength, then there would come to him of a sudden a warm glow and a thrilling all over him and he felt as strong as a giant, and happier than he had ever been in his life before, so that lawyer and hedger each rejoiced in the task that was before him, as if it were sport and play.

And much more wonderful than this or any other wonders was forgiveness, with love to follow it. There were meetings of old enemies in the market-place and in the street that made the people lift up their hands and declare that it was as if one walked the miraculous streets of Syon.

But as to the "phenomena," the occurrences for which, in ordinary talk, we should reserve the word "miraculous"? Well, what do we know? The question that I have already stated comes up again, as to the possible survival of old tradition in a kind of dormant, or torpid, semi-conscious state. In other words, did the people "see" and "hear" what they expected to see and hear? This point, or one similar to it, occurred in a debate between Andrew Lang and Anatole France as to the visions of Joan of Arc. M. France stated that when Joan saw St. Michael, she saw the traditional archangel of the religious art of her day, but to the best of my belief Andrew Lang proved that the visionary figure Joan described was not in the least like the fifteenth-century conception of St. Michael. So, in the case of Llantrisant, I have stated that there was a sort of tradition about the Holy Bell of Teilo Sant; and it is, of course, barely possible that some vague notion of the Graal Cup may have reached even Welsh country folks through Tennyson's Idylls. But so far I see no reason to suppose that these people had ever heard of the portable altar (called Sapphirus in William of Malmesbury) or of its changing colours "that no man could discern."

And then there are the other questions of the distinction between hallucination and vision, of the average duration of one and the other, and of

the possibility of collective hallucination. If a number of people all see (or think they see) the same appearances, can this be merely hallucination? I believe there is a leading case on the matter, which concerns a number of people seeing the same appearance on a church wall in Ireland; but there is, of course, this difficulty, that one may be hallucinated and communicate his impression to the others, telepathically.

But at the last, what do we know?

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19: A Whisker Story

Anonymous

Victorian Express (Geraldton, W. Aust) 18 Sep 1878

THERE LIVED in Macon, Georgia, a dandified individual, whom we, will call Jenks. This individual had a tolerably favourable opinion of his personal appearance. His fingers were hooped with rings, and his shirt-bosom was decked with a magnificent breast-pin; coat, hat, vest, and boots were made exactly to fit; he wore kid gloves of remarkable whiteness; his hair was oiled and dressed in the latest and best style; and to complete his killing appearance, he sported an enormous pair of Real Whiskers! Of these whiskers, Jenks was as proud as a young cat is of her tail when she first discovers she has one.

I was sitting one day in a broker's office, when Jenks came in to inquire the price of exchange on New York. He was invited to sit down, and a cigar was offered him. Conversation turning on the subject of buying and selling stocks, a re-mark was made by a gentleman present, that he thought no person should sell out stock in such-and-such a bank at that time, as it must get better in a few days.

"I will sell anything I've got, if I can make anything on it," replied Jenks.

"Oh, no," replied one, "not anything; you wouldn't sell your whiskers!"

A loud laugh followed this chance remark. Jenks immediately answered, "I would— but who would want them? Any person making the purchase would lose money by the operation, I'm thinking."

"Well," I observed, "I would be willing to take the speculation, If the price could be made reasonable."

"Oh, I'll sell 'em cheap," answered Jenks, winking at the gentlemen present.

"What do you call cheap?" I inquired.

"I'll sell 'em for fifty dollars," Jenks answered, puffing forth a cloud of smoke across the counter, and repeating the wink.

"Well, that is cheap; and you'll sell your whiskers for fifty dollars?"

"I will."

"Both of them?"

"Both of them."

"I'll take them! When can I have them?"

"Any time you choose to call for them."

"Very well— they're mine. I think I shall double my money on them, at least."

I took a bill of sale as follows:—

"Received of Sol. Smith, Fifty Dollars in full for my crop of whiskers, to be worn, and taken care of by me, and delivered to him when called for.
J. JENKS."

The sum of fifty dollars was paid, and Jenks left the broker's office in high glee, flourishing five Central Bank X's, and telling all his acquaintances of the great bargain he had made in the sale of his whiskers. The broker and his friends laughed at me for being taken in so nicely.

"Never mind," said I "let those laugh that win; I'll make a profit out of those whiskers, depend upon it."

For a week after this, whenever I met Jenks, he asked me when I intended to call for my whiskers.

"I'll let you know when I want them," was always my answer, "Take good care of them — oil them occasionally; I shall call for them one of these days."

A SPLENDID BALL was to be given. I ascertained that Jenks was to be one of the managers— he being a great ladies man (on account of his whiskers I suppose), and it occurred to me that before the ball took place I might as well call for my whiskers.

One morning I met Jenks in a barber's shop. He was Adonising before a large mirror, and combing up my whiskers at a furious rate.

"Ah! there you are, old fellow," said he, speaking to my reflection through the glass. "Come for your whiskers, I suppose?"

"Oh, no hurry," I replied, as I sat down for a shave.

"Always ready, you know," he answered, giving a final tie to his cravat.

"Come to think of it," I said, musingly, as the barber began to put the lather on my face, "perhaps now would be as good a time as any other ; you may sit down, and let the barber try his hand at the whiskers."

"You couldn't wait until to-morrow, could you ?" he asked, hesitatingly. "There's a ball to-night, you know—"

"To be sure there is, and I think you ought to go with a clean face; at all events, I don't see any reason why you should expect to wear my whiskers to that ball; so sit down."

He rather sulkily obeyed, and in a few moments his cheeks were in a perfect foam of lather. The barber flourished his razor, and was about to commence operations, when I suddenly changed my mind.

"Stop, Mr. Barber," I said; "you needn't shave off those whiskers just yet."

So he quietly put up his razor, while Jenks started up from the chair in something very much resembling a passion.

"This is trifling !" he exclaimed. "You have claimed your whiskers— take them."

"I believe a man has a right to do as he pleases with his own property," I remarked, and left Jenks washing his face.

At dinner time that day, the conversation turned upon the whisker affair. It seems the whole town had got wind of it, and Jenks could not walk the streets without the remark being continually made by the boys: "There goes the man with old Sol's whiskers!"

And they had grown to an immense size, for he dared not trim them.

In short, I became convinced Jenks was waiting very impatiently for me to assert my rights in the property.

It happened that several of the party were sitting opposite me at dinner who were present when the singular bargain was made, and they all urged me to take the whiskers that very day, and then compel Jenks to go to the ball whiskerless, or stay at home. I agreed with him it was about time to reap my crop, and promised that if they would all meet me at the broker's shop, where the purchase had been made, I would make a call on Jenks that evening after he had dressed for the ball. All promised to be present at the proposed shaving operation in the broker's office, and I sent for Jenks and the barber. On the appearance of Jenks, he was much vexed at the sudden call Upon him, and his vexation was certainly not lessened when he saw the broker's office was filled to overflowing by spectators anxious to behold the barbarous proceeding.

"Come, be in a hurry," he said, as he took a seat, and leaned his head against the counter for support, "I can't stay here long ; several ladies are waiting for me to escort them to the ball."

"True, very true— you are one of the managers— I recollect. Mr. Barber, don't detain the gentleman — go to work at once."

The lathering was soon over, and with about three strokes of the razor one side of his face was deprived of its ornament.

"Come, come," said Jenks, "push ahead— there is no time to be lost—let the gentleman have his whiskers— he is impatient."

"Not at all," I replied, coolly. "I'm in no sort of a hurry myself— and now I think of it, as your time must be precious at this particular time, several ladies being in waiting for you to escort them to the ball, I believe I'll not take the other whisker to-night."

A loud laugh from the bystanders, and a glance in the mirror, caused Jenks to open his eyes to the ludicrous appearance he cut with a single whisker, and he began to insist upon my taking the whole of my property! But all wouldn't do. I had a right to take it when I chose; I was not obliged to take all at once ; and I chose to take but half at that particular period— indeed, I intimated to him very plainly that I was not going to be a very hard creditor; and that if "he

behaved himself," perhaps I should never call for the balance of what he owed me!

When Jenks became convinced I was determined not to take the remaining whisker he began, amidst the loudly expressed mirth of the crowd to propose terms of compromise— first offering me ten dollars, then twenty, thirty, forty— fifty! to take off the remaining whisker.

I said firmly, "My dear sir, there is no use talking; I insist on your wearing that whisker for me for a month or two."

"What will you take for the whiskers?" he at length asked. "Won't you sell them back to me—"

"Oh," replied I, "now you begin to talk as a business man should. Yes, I bought them on speculation— I'll sell them, if I can obtain a good price."

"What is your price ?"

"One hundred dollars must double my money?"

"Nothing less?"

"Not a farthing less— and I'm not anxious to sell even at that price."

"Well, I'll take them," he groaned, " there's your money, and here, barber, shave off this infernal whisker in less than no time I shall be late at the ball."

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20: Old Dick's Story

Tom Ilbery

Thomas Horsfall Ilbery, 1880-1949

Western Mail (Perth) 24 March 1906

IN A ROUGH HUT in the East Kimberley district of Western Australia, half a dozen men sat round a log fire. Out-side it rained as it can rain only in the tropics, and the Ord River in flood roared as its swollen torrent rushed on its long journey to the sea. The men within seemed to have made themselves comfortable, for pipes and yarns were in full swing when the rickety door was thrust open from the outside and the mailman entered.

"Biggest flood for three years," he remarked, divesting himself of his oil-skin, "I'm stuck here for a day or two, anyhow."

"That's so, Jack," agreed a man in a cotton shirt near the fire, "I reckon you are."

"Talkin' of floods," said a tall bronzed stockman, "reminds me of the big flood on the Darling in New South Wales, when me and the missus lived up a box-tree for a week."

"Let's hear about it, Bill," was the chorus which greeted this remark, and Bill, only too glad to be the centre of interest, willingly complied.

The stockman's neighbour told of bush fires in Victoria, of burnt-out homesteads and ruined farms. His neighbour in turn told a yarn, and in this manner they went round the little circle of bushmen. A returned trooper related stories of the veldt, the flood-bound mailman strove to rival Bill's yarn of waters with local experiences, and the roar of the swollen river seemed to tend confirmatory evidence of his veracity.

At some little distance from the fire sat an old man who seemed to take no interest in the talk of his mates, and who gazed steadily into the fire with that far-away expression which told that his mind dwelt on other scenes. A man of medium height, squarely built, with a firm and honest face was he, and one of whom all spoke with respect and even kindness. Many years ago he had arrived in the Kimberley, and it was a mystery where he had come from, or who he was. To his mates he was just Dick— Old Dick— and to them it mattered little who he was. With the rough good-fellowship of the bush they accepted him on his present merits.

The old man's meditations were somewhat roughly terminated by the stockman who gave him a friendly slap between the shoulders, and exclaimed in a cheery voice:

"What ho! Dick, a penny for your thoughts."

"My thoughts?" replied Dick, mechanically.

"Yes, man, your thoughts; come, let us have them," broke in the mail-man.

"I was thinking of my brother, and—"

"Your, brother?" they interrupted, ."didn't know you had one."

'Yes," said the old man, "I once had a brother."

"Your talk to-night," he continued, "has wakened memories of years ago; of the last night we spent together."

"If you would rather not Dick—" began the stockman, impressed by the old man's unusual and agitated manner.

"It will be a relief," replied Dick, "for years I have kept my secret. Because of it I have grown old before my time. Mates! Mates! I am cursed like Cain. I— I killed my own brother."

"What?" they exclaimed, incredulously.

"Yes," repeated old Dick, "I killed any brother, God help me. I will tell you how it happened and you can judge me."

They remained coldly silent. Nothing but the beat of the rain on the roof and the roar of the swollen river broke the stillness of the night.

Warm as had been their rough friendship for the man before them his confession had stunned it. After all these years, a murderer. A Cain. They had suspected— well, a dark page— but this— was it possible?— where was there a more honest and upright man than Old Dick? They remembered his many acts of unselfishness— his humanity— how he had risked his life in the flooded river to save others.

"Dick," said the mailman, "it can't be so bad as that."

"You shall judge, said the. old man, brokenly. "Early in the eighties," he continued, "my only brother and I arrived in Sydney from England, and went straight to the goldfields. My brother left his sweetheart to try his luck on the diggings with me, and hoped for the luck that would settle us both comfortably for life. But we had none at all. We followed rush after rush, but only just made tucker. Will heard often from his sweetheart, and her letters kept us on the diggings, hoping every day to strike it rich. Things got very low at last, and we decided to go inland for work on some of the stations, and make enough to carry us home again.

" 'Will,' I said, 'take what money there left and go now. I will follow later.' But he would not hear of it."

Very old and feeble Dick looked now, he who but yesterday could cut out a beast with the best man present, but tonight sat dejectedly on a box, his grey head bowed with grief under the weight of painful memories.

Bill, the stockman, seized a flask from the rough table, and held it hurriedly to the old man's lips.

"Yes," he continued, and his voice, which before had been firm, was now halting and weak. "I wonder— but you, will judge me.

"After squaring up we struck out for a small inland town . where we heard we could easily pick up a job droving. We had been about a week on the road when that happened which put an end to all our plans. Tuesday was hot and dusty, the flies were in countless hundreds, and when early in the afternoon we came to the Bogan camp, and refreshed ourselves in the cool water. The season was a good one, on all sides tall and luscious grass grew almost waist-high. Some three or four hundred yards to our right was the road we had come by. It ran to the water's edge, disappeared, and was to be seen again on the opposite bank. Behind us was the river with its slow muddy current and steep banks fringed on both sides by tall river gums. Far away on our left was another line of these gum trees, denoting the course of some creek, or billabong, and in front was the usual grassy plain. Our camp was in the shade of a good sized box tree. When night came we did not trouble to shift, but made our fire under the tree and turned in one on each side of it.

"In our camp neither of us was sleepy ,and we must have talked for a couple of hours or more. We spoke of the dear old land we hoped soon to see again; of my brother's sweetheart; of scenes on the goldfield, and men who had figured in them and so on, until we both grew tired and fell asleep.

"It must have been well past midnight when I got up to put more wood on the fire. The bush looked weird in the moonlight, and the river in the shadow of its great high banks, and the trees lining them added to the solemnity. Putting some wood on the fire, I turned in again. There I lay, enjoying the warmth, and sleepily watching the leaves of the tree overhead. The ascending heat caused them to twist and writhe as if in agony. I gradually fell asleep, but the leaves were still with me; I dreamed of them. I dreamt that something with long leech-like feelers was reaching down at me out of space, that it was trying to grasp me. I could not move, and at last, with a crash it came towards me and I awoke.

"It did not take long to realise what had happened. Those long leech-like feelers were a limb of the tree, and it had fallen, not on me, but on my poor brother. I could see by the moonlight and the glow of dawn that dear old Will was fatally injured and that he had not long to live. He did not seem to be suffering, and called me to him in his usual voice.

" 'Dick,' he said, 'don't leave me to try for help, but listen to what I am going to say. After I am gone don't lose any time, but go back to Dolly, tell her how I died, that my last I thoughts were of her, and-and tell her, Dicky, that I would like her to— to marry you; I know that you love her, brother.'

"I promised to do this, mates. It was true that I had loved my brother's sweetheart. But my love for her could never shatter our brotherhood, and

now, I could do nothing else, so I promised. 'God bless you,' he said 'dear Dolly, she will be happy; I can trust her to you. Pray for me, Dick.' "

"I tried to pray, but could not. So pressing my brother's hand to my lips, crouched beside him and cried like a woman. Then after this I prayed. I prayed to the Creator for my brother, that He might receive my brother's soul into His holy keeping ; that he would not suffer, and that he might live, and— and— It was a wild prayer offered by one distracted with grief, and at last, exhausted, I ceased, and hand in hand we silently waited for the end.

"The sun was now rising, and by its light I could see that the ground under my brother was soaked with blood, and that he was suffering agonies. With his old unselfishness, he was striving to keep it from me. As I gazed on his white face, old scenes came back to me; I remembered our boyhood in the old village, our voyage out, and adventures in the diggings, and a great love for him filled my heart: I prayed that I might die beside him."

Old Dick broke down again and sobbed, tears running down his honest old cheeks, and mingling with his long gray beard.

"So we waited hand in hand," he continued, in so weak a voice that the men in the hut had to lean forward to catch his words, "for the end. Suddenly my brother seemed to be sensed with a fit of agony. Screaming with pain, he raised himself on his hands, trying to drag his crushed loins from under the tree. I sprang up and saw what was the matter— he was swarming with bull-dog ants. His sufferings wore frightful. He writhed on the ground and gnashed his teeth, and the hideous large ants were everywhere on his face and body. Frantically I fought them. I tried to scrape them away from him, but they came on in countless hundreds. They were upon me; I felt their bites, and saw that my efforts were hopeless.

"Seizing me by the arm, Will begged me to end his sufferings as a last brotherly act, reminding me that he must die in any case. Much as I loved him I hesitated. I did not again pray to God. No. Was it not His will that all this had happened, and, as if in answer to my prayers, had He not sent this horrible plague of ants? In my madness I cursed.

"My brother appealed to me again. My position was terrible; he asked me to do an awful thing— to shoot him. Could I do it? The horrible ants were everywhere, in his eyes, ears, and hair— no earthly power could rid him or them. I loved him, and would do as he begged, if I lost my soul. With a swollen hand I grasped my pistol— fired and fled."

"I did not return to England. How could I go to Dolly, tell her how her lover died— that I had killed him— and speak of his dying wish? I could not keep my promise. Two years after, on a lonely part of the Paroo I saw an advertisement

in an old paper, imploring W. or S. Thompson to communicate with their friends in B—— Surrey, England.

"I could not answer, and could not stay in the colony that held poor Will's remains, Seeking solitude, I buried myself in the black-blocks of Queensland, but again I saw that advertisement. I left Queensland, and at last I found myself in the Kimberley. Here I have been for nearly twenty years, and here I will lay my bones.

"Mates! mates! Did I, like Cain, murder my brother, or did I do him a last kindness?"

Without waiting for a reply, old Dick rose, moved unsteadily to the door, and before the men in the hut realised what he was doing, passed out into the night and rain. He never had his answer; never felt the warm hand-clasps that were to have been his, for next day the mailman and the man in the cotton shirt recovered his body from the flood-waters of the Ord, and brought it back to the others.

"Poor old Dick," said the stockman, after burial. "He was a real good sort."

End