PAST MASTERS 175

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and more

PAST MASTERS 175

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

Sep 2024

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1: A Legend of Welly Legrave

Duncan Campbell Scott

1862-1947

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THERE are many songs on the river that play about the name of Welly Legrave. You can hear them by camp-fires as far north as the Temagami; and beyond the height of land where the rivers turn to Hudson Bay, many a lonely trapper shouts the name of this hero as he passes the last portage and sees the new moon in the deep pine-shadow of the clear lake. The deeds of this hero are preserved in verse, and he is a proud man who knows the whole interminable rhyme, and who can put the matter into sufficient prose with the proper details, when a youngster or a novice to the river from Becancour or beyond asks him to expound these dark sayings.

No one knew when Welly Legrave was born, or who were his parents, or how he died, but there are legends about these things. One will tell you how his mother was Algonquin and his father French, out of old France, and how he was known on the river as Count Paul from something he said one day when he was down at the Chats. Another will tell you that he had no touch of savage about him; that his mother was a white girl and his father a Spaniard from the Silver Islets in the Great Superior, and that Welly just wandered and came East for the love of life. It was true he was known from Spanish River to the Montagnais country; and the traditions about his burning eyes has something Spanish running through it.

But another will lead you aside when he hears these vain stories, and with awe in his mouth will tell you that Welly Legrave was a child of the spirit which lives in the pine woods, and that he was found after a great storm on the shore of Lake Temiscamingue by a party of trappers wrapped in a red shirt which vanished when the human hand touched him, and that a voice like thunder roared in the forest. He will offer to show you the very point of land, and here you will find a rude cross with the initials W. L., for no one would dare to cut the letters of his name.

The exploits of the hero are sometimes visionary and sometimes human, and their colour depends upon the character of the minds which have preserved them and handed them on from one generation to another. Now there is Laurent Pombere who can remember his grandfather, and whose grandfather could remember Welly Legrave. He has many a story of him, some of them deep in the charm of the woods, and others full of the strange life and the turmoil, wild intrigue, and sudden spring of danger in those old days when

the toil of the lumbermen on the Ottawa had a dash of romance. Sometimes Laurent Pombere will talk, remembering the things his grandfather told him; sometimes you could not get him to utter the name of Welly Legrave; and he will for hours remain as dumb as an idol, smoking his pipe, until it has come time to tread on the fire. Then you know that another evening has gone by and the oracle has not spoken.

When he begins to hum! then you should listen. He will begin to hum, fixing his pipe, maybe, by the light of the fire, or maybe splicing a favourite paddle that has given under strain. The humming will go on, formless, and avoiding tune; then you will catch a word or two, then under his breath he will chant something that has both tune and words; then he will say, without looking up, as if he were talking to himself—

"You never heard about that? eh!"

"About what?"

"About that Welly Legrave."

"That story about Welly Legrave you told the other night, about the Wendigo?"

Then he will look up at you in a pitying way, with such innocence in his face that you will begin to wonder whether he did really tell you the story.

"Who told you the story about Welly Legrave and the Wendigo? Nobody knew that story but my grandfather; he wouldn't tell me."

Then he will relapse into silence and you will fancy you have blundered, and have yourself to thank for nothing instead of a new yarn. But he will break out again.

"You heard what that fool Batiste Laroque tried to sing at the portage to-day; you remember now. He made it go—

The Remacs roar and The Remacs call,
Welly Legrave, Welly Legrave.
Where are the boys that went over the fall, Welly Legrave?
Apjohn was the only one to tell,
Welly Legrave, Welly Legrave,
How Billy Dormandy went to hell, Welly Legrave.

That's the way they all sing it, but they don't know what they mean. You ask them; you ask Batiste Laroque now, and he will tell you nothing at all, for he don't know. He will say, 'Oh, you ask Laurent Pombere; his grandfather told him everything; he knows.' But that's a story in those verses. I will tell that in my grandfather's way. He's dead now, and gone to heaven, if God has forgotten his sins. He was a wild one, I tell you— no holding him— he was a wild one.

"That Welly Legrave they make the verses about, he was on this river fifty years ago; he was never an old man and never a young man; he was always the same; he came one day, and many days after he went away, and that was all there was to it. Many people said he had the magic, and that when he liked he could call up a spirit that came out of the water like a black snake. My grandfather, he used to laugh at that, but when I asked him, 'Well, you don't believe that?' he would shut up his mouth, and would not say he did not believe it. My grandfather said he was a grand man, not too big, but iron all over and great brains in his head; quick and cunning as a wild thing, and he was something else besides. But it was queer that when my grandfather tried to tell what that was he would get muddled up and begin to talk as if he had swallowed too much brandy.

"Those were the days of the square timber on the river. They never put any trash into the water then, and there was mighty little sawing done. Those pieces were squared off and bound into cribs, and the rafts came down like cities. Those were great days. Now, this Welly Legrave was a great man on the river; great in every way. He knew the woods as a priest knows his mass-book. He knew every bit of the river, asleep or awake. He knew trees, and no one had any timber that he knew half as well as Welly Legrave knew it. And he knew men, too; whenever a new man came along he took his measure and set him just over where he belonged.

"Now all this made the big men wild to get hold of him, but they couldn't. He wouldn't come for wages; you might offer him a bake-kettle full of money, and he would turn Lis back on you. He wouldn't come for fair talk or for anything under the sun, so far as any one could see, but he would go just where he pleased and leave when he pleased, and no man was his master. And whoever he took up with was a happy man, for he got the best of his timber; and he got it to Quebec quicker and safer than any one else.

"There was another queer thing, and that is at the bottom of this story that they sing about: he would never be foreman, no; some other fellow was always the foreman, and Welly Legrave was head over him; and if they pulled together, all right, and if they pulled apart, all the men pulled with Welly Legrave, and the foreman just bossed himself. And sometimes it happened just so— on one side one man, big as a house, with all the power, and him drawing the pay, mad, mad all the time; and on the other that Welly Legrave, smiling all the time and the whole gang pulling with him. "Now, it was one winter a long time ago my grandfather said they were working on a limit back on the Coulonge for old McTavish Hamilton. It was a terrible winter— the snow was deep and the frost was heavy all the time; but that wasn't the worst of it. They had for foreman a man called Apjohn, a man from Wales, and he was a son of

the prince of devils. Nothing ever suited him, no matter how it went. If the work was bad, he seemed to like it better, for he could strike then; and if it went well he could only swear. He could strike, too; strike men, beat them; and when he once hit a man he went wild and every one had to stand clear. He hit pretty freely that winter, but all of a sudden he stopped.

"It was one night when he and the only man who was friendly with him, by name Dormandy, came in on snowshoes, about twenty miles from a camp back in the bush. His supper wasn't ready, for the cook had frozen his heels and couldn't walk very lively; and when they came in there were two of the men helping him— my grandfather over the soup-kettle, and a man by name Lemab Seriza making batter for pancakes. When he saw his supper wasn't ready he flew on the nearest like a wolf, which happened to be Lemab, and hit him over the head with an iron pan, the first thing he laid hands on.

"Lemab turned half round after the first blow, caught another full in the face, and went into the fire on his back. My grandfather wasn't very much afraid of anything, so he went right under Apjohn's nose and pulled Lemab out. He would have burned up, for he lay on the floor like stone, his hair singed off and blood on his face. Apjohn went raging round so wild he didn't know what he was wild about. The men got into corners, and my grandfather and the cook held Lemab. In a few minutes his soul came back and he sat up on the floor. He looked at Apjohn, who had got himself down a bit, and tried to get onto his feet. He did at last, and my grandfather held him, for the cook had to stand on his toes and was no good when it came to holding a half-dead man on his legs. There they stood, swinging to and fro, my grandfather, and Lemab, with ashes in his burnt hair and the scar on his face, with his eyes on Apjohn, fierce as an otter. He spoke the English well and after awhile he let out on him:

" 'Me cooking your supper, and you to come behind and strike me, you cowardly devil. You're a mean man and a bully. Your mother made you a strong man, but you'd break your own mother. There's no marrow in your bones, but they're as iron as your heart.'

"My grandfather, trying to hold him steady, mind you, and Apjohn, standing up stiff and horrible, looking ready to kill them both when Lemab got through. But Lemab wouldn't stop.

" 'Come on, hit me again, now you have half-killed me, and take me down the river lashed to the cribtimber to show the Bytown people how you bossed the job on the Coulonge. If you leave me alive, day nor night will I rest till I have my revenge of you. I'll see you whine for your life yet. There is one man on the river that'll do for you, and that's Welly Legrave. Ah! you shiver at his name, and every one sees the coward you are.'

"Now, no one knew where Welly Legrave was that winter; he was in none of the camps and there was talk that he had gone back to the Spanish River, but no one knew. My grandfather said he wondered that Apjohn didn't kill them both when Lemab taunted him with Welly Legrave, but something that happened made him hold his hand. You must know that it was a perfectly still night— not a sound, no wolves or anything, when suddenly, just as Lemab called out Welly's name for the first time, something began a long way off like a cry, and it grew and grew till it came so loud about the shanty that no one could bear the sound, worse than a jam when it breaks and the logs roar in the water. There stood Lemab and kept calling out, 'Welly Legrave, Welly Legrave!' and every one thought he had gone crazy. What with that terrible cry outside and Lemab shouting like a fool inside, my grandfather thought he would lose his wits. But the noise outside and Lemab stopped at the same time, and just when everybody thought the silence would end with killing, the door opened and in stepped Welly Legrave!

"My grandfather said it was a great sight that, and it was great to hear Welly say, as quiet as you like, 'Put that boy in his bunk.' Oh, dear, but it was a great sight to see Apjohn, with never a word out of his head, stand and have Welly look him over as if he was a steer for sale.

"There was no more bullying or striking after that. Apjohn might as well have taken to snowshoes and gone down to the depot. No one paid any attention to him but Dormandy. The whole gang worked for Welly with a song, as merry as a fiddle, and the Welsh devil and Billy Dormandy had their heads down all the time like two bear-cubs at a honeycomb; but it wasn't honey they were chewing. They were brewing some plot all the time and skimming the pot whenever they got alone; and my grandfather didn't spy on them, but the wind one day brought him over what they were saying:

" 'And you will write the letter to-night?' said Dormandy.

" 'I will write it to-night,' said Apjohn.

" 'And you will make it plain that the men are drunk all the time?'

" 'I will so, and no stroke of the work doing at all.'

" 'Well, I will take it to the depot myself.'

"And that night my grandfather watched Apjohn working his pen, and the next morning away went Dormandy with the letter. But the boys never paid any attention, they just worked away with Welly. Dormandy came back, black as a cloud, and my grandfather saw he brought no joy with him.

"My grandfather didn't take the letter, but it dropped out of ApJohn's pocket and the wind blew it over to him. It was English, and Lemab read it out to my grandfather. It told that Welshman that he would be docked five dollars for every word if he wrote a letter like that again, and everybody could see

that the boss at the depot was wild that Welly had come, and he knew that McTavish Hamilton would be a glad man, for he said, 'And I have written to Mr. Hamilton every word you wrote me.'

"So these plotters were not very well pleased, as you may well know, being cut so short by the boss at the depot, and they began to hold their hate as a cloud holds lightning, ready to drop it anywhere, when the time came.

"The time came. Winter went away with a rush, as a hard winter often does, and they had plenty of water for the drive, and the dear spring was very good to enjoy after that winter, and the young summer, too, when they slept out on the cribs they were building at the mouth of the Coulonge. They were building them up solid out of that good white pine; solid, so that when they passed all the rapids and slides, and came into the coves at Quebec, they would be as good as a ship. Welly Legrave was a great hand at building a crib, and the men worked with him and there was no fighting in any way, but there was Billy Dormandy and John Apjohn. Sometimes they would work and sometimes they wouldn't work; but 'just as you please, my gentlemen.' Nobody paid any attention to them, but treated them well, polite to them! for the gang was in good humour. Sometimes my grandfather would get the right side of the wind and hear them use great words against Welly Legrave and the men. But it wasn't until the raft was all bound up and well on the way to Bytown that he heard anything but hard words. Just the day before they got to The Remacs he heard something different.

"The Remacs is a bad rapid. Many a man has got into The Remacs and never come out again. It has an evil name, and many a heart living and dead remembers that name for something wicked and cruel. Every raft that comes there has to be broken up, and crib after crib goes down alone into the rapids, crosses the middle stream, and then back again to shore, and if you don't get back— well, the timber gets through, stick by stick, but never any live men. Now what my grandfather heard the day before they got to The Remacs was this, and he told it to Welly Legrave, for he thought it was curious. He was dead asleep and suddenly he was wide-awake, and he heard Apjohn and Dormandy talking outside in the moonlight. All that he heard was, 'And the crib will go into the rapids and over the rapids, and what will come out do you think?' and it was Dormandy's voice saying the words. He could not hear any more for the wind was springing around and tossing water at the edge of the raft.

"Welly Legrave didn't seem to think much of what my grandfather heard; but he took it into his head, and the next day they came to The Remacs, and the whole raft was tied up. Two days they worked taking the cribs down, and the second night nearly half of them were down safe. The crib with the little houses where Welly and the men slept was to go down the first thing the next

morning. My grandfather said they had music that night after supper, and Lemab danced and Welly Legrave told a story, and it was night before they thought of turning in. There was a bit of a fire on the crib and the wind from off shore blew little sparks from it out on the dark water. The moon was up and in clouds, and the clouds moved along slowly; when the light came full you could see the little dark houses covered with green boughs and flags standing out to the river, and the men sitting round smoking. One by one they went to their bunks until there was only Welly and my grandfather left. But there was Apjohn and Billy Dormandy sitting on the next crib away from the rest of the boys all evening. And Dormandy spoke up:

" 'We are thinking of going back to a dance at LaBelle's to-night.'

" 'It is five miles to LaBelle's,' said Welly Legrave.

" 'We will be back before morning.'

" 'Mr. Apjohn is the foreman!' said Welly.

" 'We were not asking your leave,' said Apjohn, as wild as he dared to be.

" 'You were just telling me and Mr. Pombere?' an swered Welly with a little rise in his voice.

" 'We were that,' said Dormandy.

" 'And you will not be back till morning?' said Welly.

" 'We will be back in time for the work,' said Dormandy again, for Apjohn, with rage, was long past speaking.

" 'Well, we will sleep sound,' said Welly as they started over the raft to the shore, Apjohn springing over the logs and looking back, every little while, over his shoulder, to curse Welly.

"Well, every one was gone to bed and so went Welly and my grandfather, and the moon got into a grove of clouds, and the night got dark. It got still, too, and the wind made the only sound with the flags and the cedar-boughs on the houses, and the water slapping on the side of the raft. Before three hours there were two men coming over the raft from the shore. It must have been a short dance at LaBelle's when Apjohn and Dormandy were back so soon; five miles away and the LaBelle girls as pretty as Belle de Jour in a garden-bed. They came along slowly and without any noise until they were on the crib. Instead of going to their bunks, they began to work in the dark, stooping over the edges of the crib. They were cutting the withes which bound the crib to the raft. After a while they both rose up, and, standing on the crib, began to shove against the raft with pikepoles.

"In a moment there were inches of black water between the crib and the raft; soon there were feet; soon no man could jump across. Then they could no longer lean against the pikepoles; they drew them in quietly. There they were, leaving the raft slowly; it grew more like the shoreline, and the fringe of cedars

on the bank seemed rooted on the dark level. Pulled up half way upon the crib, with her stern in the water, was one of the boats with the ropes coiled in her, and the oars.

"The wind was off shore and the current set out to the centre of the river half a mile away. It was no work to take a crib out there, but to get it back when the rocks were passed and when the growl of The Remacs could be heard! Six men it would take to do that, and now there were only two. Dormandy had an oar at one end, and Apjohn an oar at the other, and they never took them out of the water. Soon they came to the only cross current, where they had to work to keep her from swinging. Apjohn was pulling at his great oar, but Dormandy let her slew a bit. She might have swung round, but Apjohn braced himself on his oar like a rock and they got through safely. They let her float now, and came together, whispering alongside one of the houses.

"You could know, my grandfather said, that Dormandy made up this scheme.

" 'Is it time yet to take to the boat?' said Apjohn.

" 'Not till we have them well into the current. Then we'll go and you'll hear no more of Welly Legrave on this river.'

" 'Will they find us out, do you think?' said Apjohn, with his mind always turning coward.

" 'Never. We just had time to save ourselves, and that is our story.' The water began to grow rougher; the current pulled like an ox at the skidway, between the crib and the north shore the river was grey with foam, and the hammering of the rapids came up louder.

" 'Now we'll start,' said Dormandy.

"It was just at that point where the men begin to work the cribs back toward the shore into the safe current. To remain where they were for five minutes would be dangerous, the current would carry the crib beyond all hope of escape into the bad places of The Remacs, where the dead men never come away.

"They turned to the boat. But there was no boat there; the edge of the crib was as clear as a table, and the black water ripped by.

" 'The boat, the Boat!' It was Dormandy crying out, for it came over him that he couldn't swim a stroke. Just then the moon turned out of a cloud as you might take a lantern out of your coat, and they saw the speck of a boat farther down the river, moving like a shadow in a faster current. Then they knew, both together, that when they had come through the cross current the water had caught the boat and pulled her off the crib.

"They just looked at it a second or two; then ApJohn, who was foxy when he was in danger, with plenty of pluck, yelled:

" 'Boys, turn out, the crib's broke loose. Welly Legrave, Pombere, Lemab.' He knew their only chance was to set the whole gang at work, and there would be time, maybe, to pull into the safe current. He expected to see the boys tumble out, blind with sleep, Welly Legrave at their head.

"But there was silence in those little houses. No one moved. Dormandy was in pieces from fear. Apjohn rushed into the nearest house and tore at the bunks. Nothing but blankets— blankets rolled up as if men were inside them, but not a live boy on the whole of that crib but Dormandy and Apjohn.

" 'Now, what do you think of Welly Legrave?' my grandfather used to say. 'He wasn't very much asleep, was he? with those brave boys safe as the world, and only the two foxes alone in The Remacs. Oh! he understood!' And to have found out the whole thing from just those words my grandfather heard, and he couldn't understand them, but Welly Legrave had understood, and all the brave lads had slipped away when Welly gave them the word, and the great plotters with their backs turned making play to go to LaBelle's!

"When Apjohn came out to the danger his face was set like stone. The moonlight had left the boat and was feeling its way across the black water; then it broke all around the crib. It showed the men the swift river and the eddies going like spindles, and the long lines of current twisted like wire ropes.

"Apjohn looked a moment and knew what his one chance was. In a second he was pulling off his heavy boots and socks. Dormandy watched him with a white face, with terror crawling over it.

" 'You're not going to leave me?' he cried.

" 'I am that. Every man for himself; you planned this, and you put yourself against Welly Legrave, and now you can swim for it and take your chances.' Dormandy took one look at the water he hated and sprang upon Apjohn. But he had been watching for him; he leaped away and Dormandy fell between the crib-timbers.

" 'I waste no strength on you,' he cried; 'you stick to the crib,' and with never another word he leaped as far into the water as he could.

"Then Dormandy stood up and looked after him into the water, and he knew then in his heart that the life was surely gone out of him. My grandfather told grandly how he put his hands in the water and paddied there like a dog, afraid to swim, and howled, and ran along the crib, where the foam came up white to look at him and went away when he caught at it. And how the crib began to heave in the long waves, and the logs to play and grind against one another until the water twisted them and came crawling over the whole length of the timber; and how, when the boilers came up from below, the withes broke up and out spread the logs like a fan, and there was Dormandy astride of two, like a man with his feet on the backs of wild horses, with the light from

the moon and the foam crossing his white face. And how there came a roar and a plunge, with a great hill of foam and black water, and the big timber sticks playing like feathers in the air, and never any more on the river or in the woods a boy to answer to the name of Billy Dormandy, and make his mark on the pay-roll when scores were settled, and the work all over and done.

"My grandfather would tell you how Apjohn swam, who could swim like an otter, how he fought with the current when he had to fight, and how he floated with the eddies and struggled with the whirlpools, and lay to rest in the dead water, then out again, when the current came against him like the shoulder of a strong man, and he had to work and force himself by inches; and how the drift-wood caught at his throat, and him with no breath at all in his body; and how the moon followed him; and how he heard Dormandy cry, going down to death in the heavy water.

"But by and by he got in under the south shore, and the moon, like a good friend, showed him where he was and a pier that he knew, and he got his breath. He would need it to get to that pier, across a bit of current that ran like a tail-race. He swam slowly up with the eddy until he was a hundred feet above the pier. Then he went into the current with a dash. The heart almost went out of him when he felt it tug —he was drawn down like a chip. He was throwing himself through the water, but just as he was under the pier something rose up like a whale out of the blackness under his hand. It was a bit of boom timber, chained at one end to shore, kept swinging by the current. His strength was all gone when he grabbed it, but he might as well have tried to hold lightning. It was slippery with ooze and slime, and the current dragged him down the whole length of it while one lights a match.

"But his hand caught in the hole at the end of the stick, and there were a few links of chain, and there he clung for a few minutes more of dear life. The current played him out like a bit of flag on a pole; he could not draw himself up against the strong water, so well-done was he; and the boom dipped and rolled. The water washed over him when it liked and the boom dragged him up and down. There he floated, losing strength like a maskalonge at the end of a line.

"Then the moon turned into a clear sky and he looked up at the pier, not fifteen feet away. There he saw, standing up against the sky, the brave boys he wanted to drown, all of them, standing in a row with their arms locked looking down at him. And he was so far gone he thought they were happy spirits, or the holy saints in the parish church, and he called them by name to help him.

" 'Lemab Seriza,' he cried, 'save me!'

"No one answered and the boom swung far with him. " 'Laurent Pombere' (and that was my grandfather), 'save me!'

"No one said a word and he went down for the first time out of sight in the black water.

" 'Alexis Lachance— save me!'

"No one moved and he lay straight in the current. One by one he called them as he sank and struggled, until there was only one left. He came up just for a moment, and he knew then for sure they were ghosts standing there so calm with not , a movement. But when his face came into the moonlight he just said, under his breath: " 'Welly— Legrave— save— me!'

"And then Welly sprang off that pier, a leap that made my grandfather swear ever after that he flew, and lit on that boom swinging there in the black water, as a hawk lights on a blue pigeon, and took Apjohn by the arm with such a grip that he broke both the bones of it, and dragged him alive right up out of the throat of the current, and laid him down in the moonlight on the shore.

"AND THAT'S the story my grandfather told me about those verses the men sing, and he told me many another story of Welly Legrave and of those days when there were men on the river and big trees in the forest.

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2: Murder Magic

Edwin Truett Long (as by "Carey Moran")

1904-1945

Spicy Detective Stories, Oct 1936

"Carey Moran" was Edwin Truett Long's pseudonym used in "Spicy Detective Stories", and Johnny Harding was a series character.

JOHNNY HARDING, ace columnist of the *Daily Telegraph*, glared at the girl beside him, pulled his leg away. She had pressed it warmly with her own round knee. Her fingers were caressing his arm. In the dim light of the luxurious room her face was close to his as she chattered in his ear.

Johnny said, "Quit playing and try to keep still! Did I ever show you the picture of the dame that talked herself to death?"

Across the room Thalia Fitzhugh sat on a deep divan beside Carl Amherst, her husband's business partner. The girl beside Harding was Thalia's stepdaughter. The house itself, knee deep in luxury, speaking of wealth and opulence in every nook and cranny, belonged to Marshall Fitzhugh who stood against the mantel glass in hand.

Outside rain beat against the windows. The wind droned steadily. The steady beat of waves slapped the rocky shore. Paradise Arms was situated on Paradise Island, nearly a mile out in the bay.

At one end of the room were velvet curtains, partitioning off some twenty feet of the enormous salon, Every guest in the room was eyeing these curtains with a certain amount of expectancy in his or her eye.

The girl beside Johnny said, "But I'm not kidding! This friend of mine is going to back me in a revue. If you'll give me a little break and plug me in your column for a build-up— you know, society girl goes gaga about stage, and—"

Again her knee against his. She leaned so close that one firm breast throbbed against his skinny shoulder. His uneasy eyes saw the deep cleft between her arrogant breasts as the negligible dinner gown gaped. Again he pulled away impatiently.

"Nuts. You better marry this angel instead of taking a flyer at the stage."

"Why?" she persisted. "I can sing. I can dance a little, and I've got the build for it."

She thrust a leg out before her, pulled at the hem of her skirt. Fascinated, Johnny watched. Sheer chiffon, well filled, rounded, sleek. The dim light eventually revealed a five inch strip of dusky white flesh topping the chiffon.

"Plenty there," she said softly, "and plenty here!'

She preened herself, breasts jutting forth impudently, taut curves plainly seen through the thin material of her dress.

Johnny saw Thalia Fitzhugh's sardonic gaze across the room and groaned, "Put your dress down, simple mind! Legs and breasts are a dime a dozen on Theatre Row! If—"

HE paused, During the last half of her conversation weird music had filled the room. Now a faint spotlight illuminated the velvet curtains at the end of the room. The assembled guests tensed. Now the curtains parted a little and a grotesque statue slid by unseen hands took the center of the improvised stage. A voice intoned from behind the curtain.

"Siva! Siva! Siva! To whom we pray. Grant us the power, the ability to see into the future, to gaze into the past, to suspend all time."

The music droned on. The voice ceased. The statue grinned balefully in the amber light.

A slender figure slid from between the curtains, postured for a moment against the dark background, then made a genuflection before the gilded image. The audience gasped. The music swirled tonelessly but rhythmatically.

The dancer turned. Bare feet made no sound on the smooth floor. Her eyes seemed glazed, peered straight ahead lifelessly, but it was her body that held the watchers spellbound, The amber spotlight gave it a yellowish, a deep cream tinge. A thin, sheath-like Join cloth was of the same color. Tiny cups that shielded generous breasts matched perfectly. It was as if she stood nude before the watchers, the only spot of color being the red, passionate slash of heavily rouged lips.

A cream cloth obscured her hair and, directly in the center of her forehead, was a gleaming sapphire or rhinestone. At the apex of each breast cup was another, and a fourth and larger was embedded in the center of her tumultuous waist.

For a moment she swayed in rhythm to the music, then the melody seemed to sweep across her body. Muscles quivered, soft flesh vibrated, the gleaming stones danced and twinkled in scintillating orbits and parabolas. Johnny said, "Now if you had what that baby has—"

"I've got everything she has," said the girl beside him, "only more so." Her hand was laid caressingly on Johnny's. Johnny snorted, pulled away, noted that the skirt of her dress was still drawn above her stocking top.

For perhaps three minutes the dancer at the end of the room postured, pranced, wove, and vibrated before the leering statue. As the music sank to a sobbing finale, she knelt before Siva, touched the floor with her forehead once, twice, thrice. Then, respectfully she pushed the ugly thing far to one side of the curtains, returned to grasp a hanging golden cord. Her voice was dead, emotionless, her glazed eyes peering straight ahead. She was like a carven

Statue, the only thing that denoted life being the rapid rise and fall of her half exposed breasts, gleaming creamily in the amber light.

"Make way, make way, he comes, he comes! Rapinee, the man who knows, the favored of Siva, the master of illusion."

Slowly she drew on the cord. The Curtains parted noiselessly. She moved With them, stepping silently in her bare feet so that the scene of the improvised stage was revealed in its entirety. Some one of the guests gasped.

In the very center of the stage was a small table. Atop the table a gleaming crystal, Behind the table a huge throne-like chair. A man sat in the chair, a white robe covering his wide shoulders. Johnny's eyes widened.

The girl beside him whispered, "God!" softly.

Rapinee, master of illusion! Several of the guests applauded half heartedly. Suddenly Thalia Fitzhugh screamed fearfully, lurched toward the improvised stage, staggered and fainted. During the meleé that followed, the girl who had pulled the cord stood stiffly, woodenly in one spot, staring straight ahead over the heads of the milling guests. Johnny Harding was the first man to reach the side of the master of illusion.

Rapinee's last trick had been no illusion! His robed body sat stiffly erect in the massive chair; but his turbaned head was a full foot above the body, twisting from side to side gruesomely, white teeth flashing in the swarthiness of his face, lips pulled back in a leering snarl, eyes distended, gleaming white, glazed and stricken.

It was only after arriving at his side that Harding saw the severed head was tied by a black cord from a beam overhead. Blood dripped steadily from the head to fall on the once white robe. It welled in a spouting stream from the cut arteries in the decapitated body, trickled like great red serpents down across the once white chest and splashed softly on the hardwood floor.

Carl Amherst was the second person beside the body. His own eyes were wide with horror, his nostrils white and quivering at sight of the blood. Fitzhugh and several of the other guests bent over Thalia. The half nude woman, Rapinee's assistant, still stood woodenly at one side with the cord in her hand, staring straight ahead Beside the decapitated man on the floor lay a curved scimitar. Without touching it Johnny examined the death weapon. In spite of the gruesome blood, he saw that it had been lately sharpened, that the steel was bright and shiny far back from the razor sharp edge. With a single stride he reached the scimitar's mate where it hung on the wall. Its edge was blunt, dulled with age. The curtain flapped at the window which was up for a space of two inches.

Had the killer done this gruesome work and departed by that window?

As he turned, he saw the white faced Carl Amherst withdraw a hand from the corpse's robe. The hand slid immediately into the side pocket of Amherst's tuxedo. Johnny said, "Don't touch that body, Amherst! Has anyone called the police?"

As if in answer to his question, Marshall Fitzhugh burst into the room again, his face white. "The telephone is out!" he said. 'Either the storm has washed out the line or the killer has cut it!"

Harding said, "Get everyone in the place into this room, Marshall, and get them here at once. We'll have to send someone to the mainland."

He turned, made his way through the swirling group of horror stricken guests, approached the half nude girl who still stared stonily ahead at one side of the improvised stage.

"Snap out of it! Come on now!"

He slapped her face sharply. She did not move. He put a hand behind her neck, pressed her jaw sharply with the palm of his other hand.

"This is a hell of a time to play," giggled Rita Fitzhugh beside him.

"Shut up! She's hypnotized. Rapinee hypnotized her at the start of his performance. I've seen the act before. Stay with her a minute."

He turned as if to work his way through the crowd. Carl Amherst stood almost behind him. Johnny stumbled, fell against the man, caught him in both arms and finally fought his way erect,

Amherst said, "Clumsy ass," and Johnny hurried from the room with muttered apologies. Once outside the door he looked at the object he had lifted from Amherst's pocket. It was a packet of letters, tied with red cord. The top one was addressed to "Rapinee, 147 East Plymouth, City." He thrust them behind the cushion of a heavy chair and hurried back to the room.

Marshal! Fitzhugh had herded the wide-eyed servants into the room with the guests. Johnny surveyed them coldly. A butler, a cook, a scullion, a cook's helper, two maids, a negro man of all work. All servile, cringing, dismayed. "Someone will have to go for the police," snapped Johnny and, glaring about, "but damned if I want any of you to leave."

Amherst spoke stiffly. "Don't cast any of your aspersions at us, Harding. Remember we were all in this room, on this side of the curtain, Maybe the girl there, his helper, can throw a little light on the subject. Personally I think she's stalling."

Marshall Fitzhugh broke in, spoke to the ashen negro. "Go down to the boathouse and get Bulotti up. It's a bad night, but he'll have to go to the mainland for the police."

The negro hesitated, departed on unwilling feet.

Johnny said, "Who's Bulotti?"

"He takes care of the boat and the grounds. Lives on the other side of the island in a cottage. He'll be here presently."

Johnny walked to the rigid woman who was Rapinee's assistant. He picked her up in his arms. To Rita Fitzhugh he said. "Take me to the nearest bathroom."

AS they left the room, he saw Thalia Fitzhugh still sitting on the divan. She was staring straight ahead. Tears had ruined her makeup. Streaks of mascara ran across the rouge of her checks. Her eyes were wide with horror, bleak with hopelessness, her mouth twisted in a grimace of fear.

Johnny followed the girl, Rita, up the steps, his eyes on the muscles of her liquid, swinging hips, sliding beneath the snug dress. "Thalia," he said aloud, "is taking it pretty hard."

The girl opened the door of a bathroom, said, 'Why not? Rapinee was her boy friend. Everybody knew it but poor dad, and he was beginning to suspect! Do you want help?"

"Turn on the cold water."

The tub was half full of water when he put the nearly nude woman in it, Her flesh quivered warmly, but the set expression of her eyes did not change. Johnny set her down, began to splash water in her face, saying, "You're all right now, you're all right now," over and over. Presently he tired, jerked her to her feet. "Try the shower, Rita. Maybe hot water will do it."

The loin cloth, the breast cups, evidently had been affixed with a glue like preparation. As he stood her erect, one breast cup loosened, almost tumbled into the water. The clinging loin cloth released its grip. Johnny grabbed for a towel, wrapped it about flaring hips. The hot water sprayed onto the smooth slopes of her breasts. The gleaming stone at her waist broke loose, splashed into the water. Rita picked it up, tossed it contemptuously aside.

"Paste," she snorted. "I thought they were real! The sapphire Rapinee used in his turban was real. I know—" She stopped, looked at Johnny with wide eyes. They were thinking of the same thing.

"Gone!" snapped Johnny. "Rapinee's sapphire is gone!"

The hypnotized girl stirred.

"You're all right, you're all right," intoned Johnny and massaged soft flesh. Her breasts were nubile, firm yet resilient. Rita leaned to help him. Gradually the brown eyes awakened, took on a glimmer of intelligence. She moved he, head, tried to shake water from her eyes seemed to realize a man was watching her nakedness and covered her breasts with the palms of her hands,

"Where—?" she began.

"What's your name?" Snapped Johnny.

"Sheila, but my clothes! Where—"

Rita departed, giggling, for a negligee. Gently Johnny tried to explain as best he could.

"So you've got to try and help me," he concluded. "Try and remember all that happened while you were behind the curtain."

"Dead! Dead!" she repeated over and over. "Rapinee is dead." Miserably she turned to Johnny. "I can't help you. He hypnotized me before every performance. That's the last I remember."

Rita reappeared. They threw the negligee about the girl's quivering shoulders, went back down the steps to the assembled guests. Sheila dropped on a davenport beside Thalia.

Fitzhugh was talking to an Italian near the door. The Italian was shaking his head.

"I know it's rough, I know it's storming," snapped Fitzhugh. "But we've got to have the police. There's been murder, man! So get going."

Johnny looked at Bulotti curiously. The Italian was staring past him at the divan. Johnny turned. Sheila sat there dumb in her grief, the negligee gaping open. The curves of her provocative breasts rose and fell. One creamy thigh was revealed almost hip high, Johnny glanced back at the Italian. His black eyes were distended, utterly afire. A red tongue flicked out to lick at spittle that drooled from the corner of his mouth. Fitzhugh pushed him.

"Aw right, aw right, boss, I go." Unwillingly he left the room. Johnny went and sat down beside the dead man's assistant. Fitzhugh spoke slowly.

"The police will be here in an hour. I think it would be best if we all stayed close together." He nodded at the servants. "You will please prepare coffee for the group and also bring liquor, Until the police arrive there may be danger. After all we don't know—"

The assembled guests looked at one another suspiciously. Thalia glared at her husband. Fitzhugh glared back. Johnny began to wonder. He remembered that scimitar that had beheaded the man. Someone had sharpened it. It was premeditated murder. There was something fantastic about the suspended head. He wondered just where Carl Amherst fitted. Why had he removed a packet of letters from the dead man's clothing ? How had he known that packet of letters was there? He caught Amherst's eyes fixed on him glaringly, accusingly. Johnny grinned faintly and the man looked away.

Johnny had known Amherst for years, Not as a friend, but as a bright lights playboy. He knew that lately Amherst had been drinking more than usual, had been cutting an even gayer swath along the primrose path. Now where did it all fit? He remembered what Rita had said concerning an affair between Rapinee and Thalia Fitzhugh. Plenty of motive for murder there, but both

Thalia and her husband had been on the right side of the curtain! Their alibis were perfect. But what of the missing sapphire?

He took the Scotch and soda offered by the servant, sipped it thoughtfully. Amherst moved closer to the divan where Harding sat. To the girl Sheila, beside him, Johnny said, "Listen, I've got to talk to you privately." He kept his voice low but not too low. "There's a summerhouse at the end of that gravel walk that leads from the conservatory. I'll leave in a minute, then you leave. I'll meet you there."

Presently he arose, lit a cigarette and sauntered out. For several moments he smoked thoughtfully in the darkened hallway, listened to the subdued conversation from the salon. Presently he saw the shadow of the girl on the far wall as she moved slowly toward the conservatory. He waited, ground the cigarette out in the ash tray, and tiptoed toward the French doors that led toward the summerhouse. He stepped out into the storm.

Lightning flashed. He saw a dark figure with upraised hand behind the adjacent shrubbery. He tried to dodge but the descending arm was too quick. A sharp blow cracked against the side of his head. He crumpled, fell with his face in the gravel.

NEVER was he totally unconscious. He felt hands pawing through his pockets, hurling his belongings aside, a thick voice cursing with every movement. He tried to fight back the cobwebs, but his head was ringing, roaring too greatly. The dark figure cursed again, straightened and kicked him viciously in the ribs. Then it trotted away down the path toward the bay.

Rain in his face finally revived Harding. He struggled erect, gulped in the cool air and staggered down the pathway in the direction his assailant had taken. He passed the summerhouse, peered in. Empty. Evidently the girl had not as yet come down. He trotted on unsteadily. In the distance he saw the dark bulk of the boathouse. Lightning revealed the pier reaching out into the breakers.

Almost there he stumbled over something, sprawled at full length on the gravel again. Cursing, he scrambled up. Again lightning, He had stumbled over a body. He peered down at the face of the inert man. It was swarthy in the flickering light cast by his cigarette lighter. Bulotti, the caretaker! Blood ran down the side of his face from a two inch scalp wound. Johnny turned him over, let the rain revive him. The man groaned. His little eyes opened. He saw Johnny, spoke faintly.

"The boat— she is gone! Somebody steal the boat! I come back to tell Mister Fitzhugh and someone, somebody hit me on head!"

Johnny got him on his feet. So the boat was gone! The telephone out! No chance to get aid and a killer, a murderer loose on the island!

"Go back to the house and tell Fitzhugh to come down here," he said grimly. "Give me that flashlight you've got there."

The man handed him the light, started for the house with staggering steps. Johnny headed for the boathouse. The waves beat against the sturdy pier but no launch was to be seen. He cast the rays of the light about in all directions, even over the water. The light penetrated for a few feet and he saw something white beneath the surface. He ran into the boathouse, returned with an oar and jabbed at the shimmering white thing. When he arose, his lips were grim. The launch hadn't disappeared; it had been scuttled! It lay in six feet of water at the end of the pier.

The light flashed again over the wet boards. At the very edge of the pier he saw gleaming metal.

It was an axe. It had not been there long, for Johnny saw with a thrill of horror that the blade and handle was bloodstained. Someone had been killed or assaulted with that axe!

Where was Fitzhugh? Damn it, this thing was getting thicker and thicker. He went back toward the house at a half run. As far as the attack on he himself was concerned he almost had it figured out. Probably Amherst in search of the letters! If Amherst's clothes were damp, he'd beat the truth out of him. But the sinking of the boat, the blood on the axe!

AS he passed the summerhouse, he paused, flashed the light inside and caught his breath. Spread eagled on a stone bench was the body of Sheila, Rapinee's assistant. Horrified Johnny kept the light on her. The scanty negligee had been torn from her body. Her breasts were criss-crossed with scars, the wake of clawing nails. Even her milky thighs were splotched and bruised. Surely the marks of a fiend! And the head! Ah, God, the head, literally split from pate to chin, by a gruesome weapon.

The axe! The bloody axe!

"Harding! Where are you, Harding?" A voice from the house.

Amherst and Fitzhugh were standing just outside the open doorway. "What is it?" panted Harding.

Amherst's clothes were wet, but he was standing in the rain! Johnny's heart sank.

"Bulotti," said Fitzhugh in a thin voice. "We found him unconscious outside the door. There's a killer loose on this island!"

Johnny grunted. "And he just killed Sheila, Rapinee's girl in the summerhouse. I found the body!"

Amherst said, "My God!" His eyes glowed strangely. "What's the matter With you? There's blood all over your face?" Johnny felt their hostile gazes on him, wheeled and trotted into the house without answering,

TEN Minutes later the group stood again in the salon, nervous and distraught. Most of the men were armed from Fitzhugh's gunroom. All listening to Harding.

"All we can do is wait until daylight and signal for help," he said shortly. "In the meantime you can comb the island for the killer if you like. Personally, I'm going to bed and get some rest."

Fitzhugh snorted. "I don't get you, Harding. You claim to have been assaulted.. Bulotti was knocked out and Rapinee and the woman were killed. How can you rest when all of our lives are in danger?"

"Maybe," Johnny's voice was soft, "I don't think the killer is hiding on the island! Maybe I know who it is and now just waiting for the police."

Silence. At least a dozen pair of eyes glared at Johnny. He lit a cigarette, sat down between Rita and her stepmother Thalia, and watched sardonically while the men filed from the room.

Talk lagged. Thalia said, "For God's sake, let's get out of this room. It gives me. the creeps." Presently, in the library, Johnny yawned, asked for a bed. Thalia directed-him to the upper floor in a weary voice.

Harding went to the designated room, turned on the light. From his pocket he withdrew the packet of letters: he had hid in the upholstering of the hall chair. As he read them, his face was a study; They were passionate, inflamed; a woman's soul laid bare. Addressed to Rapinee, they were written by Thalia Fitzhugh.

He tiptoed to the head of the stair; listened to the babble of voices below. He entered roomy after room, lit a match in each and departed the way; he came: The last room or the east was the one he sought. Thalia's bedroom.

He moved pictures, looked behind bookcases, but nowhere was a safe concealed. He searched the bureau, the vanity, all the furniture. At the bedside he rose with a grunt of satisfaction. In his hand was an immense stack of stiff green bills. He thrust them in his pocket, tiptoed front the room.

A French door let him onto the portico. He clambered down the trellis and headed for the boathouse and the cottage where Bulotti lived. He spent at least half an hour prying carefully into nooks and crannies, another half hour in the man's workshop.

He returned to the house the way he had come, barely missing the returning search party. At the head of the steps he listened, heard Fitzhugh's booming voice. "We've searched every nook and cranny of the island with no

results: It's my notion that the killer had a boat and escaped after killing the woman. But we'll stand guard tonight and we're certain to get relief by morning!"

MIDNIGHT. Johnny lay on the bed and waited. Johnny was nervous, for Johnny was murder bait: He knew in his heart that one of the assembled guests had committed the murders. By hinting that he had found a clue, he placed his own name at the top of the prospective list of victims.

A clock struck one. He heard the click of the door, heard it open softly. He reached: his left hand to thee cord of the bed lamp, his right grasped a heavy candlestick. Padding footsteps— the approach of the killer! His nerves were tense, torturous: He could stand it no longer. He pulled the chain of the bed lamp and leaped to his feet

The wide eyes of Rita Fitzhugh stared down at him. She said, "Sssssh!" and came toward him on bare feet. She wore a gauzy nightdress, more revealing than concealing. Her pointed breasts surged against the thin material, the deep cleft between them was scarcely obscured. The odor of Scotch whiskey was heavy on her breath.

Johnny grinned, dropped the candlestick, and sat down on the bed weakly. She sat down beside him, put an arm about his shoulder, pressed a breast against his arm. The heat of her round thigh burned into him. She said, "I wasn't kidding about going in a musical, Johnny. You going to help me out?"

He reached over and flipped off the bed lamp. He said, "Sure!" She sighed and nestled close to him with a little shiver.

Once, nearly an hear later he thought he heard the click of the door catch again. He leaned over her, kissed her hard on the soft flesh of a shoulder. She groaned ecstatically. Johnny listened again— heard the door click closed.

HE was up early walking about the exterior of the house. The telephone wire had been cut near the house itself and, with Bluetit's help, he soon had it spliced. Bulotti looked like the aftermath of a hard night. To all of Johnny's questions he answered nothing at all, merely grunted, rolling his eyes and doing his work with trembling hands.

Before the others were fully awakened, Johnny was using the phone. His first call was to Pete Jackson, financial editor of the *Telegraph*. His second to Bill Nobles, head of the homicide squad.

Presently Jackson called him back, talked at some length. Johnny hung up the phone, went into the library where the others had gathered, and announced that the line had been repaired, that the Police were on their way.

Instead of a noticeable air of relief .8ppearing, tension seemed to set in. Amherst looked worried. Fitzhugh glared at Thalia; she glared back. Rita pressed Close to Johnny, an adoring smile on her face and, across the room, Amherst glared viciously at the pair of them. At nine-fifteen a police launch arrived bearing Bill Nobles and various other members of the homicide squad, including photographers, fingerprint men, and a doctor. The bodies were examined and photographed, carried out in wicker baskets. The doctor reported that Sheila, the girl in the summerhouse, had been assaulted as well as murdered.

Johnny Harding took Bill Nobles aside, spoke shortly. Nobles looked puzzled, but sent a man to bring in everyone on the place, including the servants. Once assembled, Johnny took the dull scimitar from the wall.

"Mr. Nobles has asked me to show him how this murder was committed," he spoke softly, "so if you folks will step back into the places you had last night, I'll show you how I'd reconstruct the crime. Bulotti will you sit here in the chair where Rapinee sat?"

A step at a time, slowly, slowly Bulotti came forward. He sat down gingerly. The others were arranged exactly as they had been the night before. "The killer," said Johnny, "had the mate to this scimitar all sharpened and prepared. It had been ground to a razor edge.

"He came in through this window while Rapinee was engrossed in his preparations. One blow of the scimitar severed the victim's head. Like this."

He drew back the dulled blade as if to swing it. Beneath his breath he said, "Should I swing it, Bulotti? The chair is a terrible death! Imagine frying there, Bulotti, burning and smoking!"

The Italian's face did not change. Only the irises of his eyes expanded, his nostrils quivered.

"The black cord," went on Johnny, "was to be used in one of Rapinee's illusions. The killer is a mad man!"

Sotto voce, "*You're mad, aren't you Bulotti? You're insane, aren't you*? *But that won't save you! And you murdered the girl— attacked her, too! They'll burn you for that!*"

"He liked the sight of the blood. He wanted to do something spectacular so while the girl danced he hung the head, suspended it above the still quivering body!"

Softly, "*Didn't you, Bulotti? It looked fine, didn't it? Dripping gore, running blood!*"

NOBLES broke in. "Very pretty, Johnny. You say you have this on your hip. What motive did the killer have?"

"Money," said Johnny softly. "The killer himself was only a tool. Another man paid him to commit the murder. Rapinee had a jewel worth much money. Find it and you find the killer."

"Where did you put it, Bulotti," sotto voce again. The Italian rolled his eyes, licked at his lips.

"And Rapinee had something else worth much money. Rapinee had been blackmailing a party in this household. That party was to pay him last night for the return of eleven letters. Rapinee had them. The person had the money. The man that hired the killer wanted one or both. He was desperately in need of money himself. He paid the murderer to do the killing but the insane killer forgot to search for the letters or the money!"

His voice sank to a whisper. "*Didn't you, Bulotti? The blood was so red, so pretty! You forgot everything else*!"

"That's enough," Marshall Fitzhugh said warily. "I killed him, Nobles. He was blackmailing my wife just as Harding says. She came to me, told me and I killed him. Harding is mistaken about everything but the blackmail angle. I came in through the window—"

"Tell him he lies, Bulotti. Tell him it was you!" Johnny roared the words.

Bulotti leaped to his feet, spittle trickling down his mouth. The pupils of his eyes expanded until they seemed etched on the white eyeballs themselves. He swung a hard fist against Johnny's jaw, staggering him. He dove for the window, but Bill Noble's slug tore into his shoulder, dropped him to the floor.

HARDING said, "He killed Rapinee. The only place on the island that has a grindstone is his tool shop. He sharpened the death scimitar, came in through the window, and cut off the mystic's head. After Fitzhugh sent him for help, he sank the boat, committed another murder then hit himself in the head to divert suspicion. He killed Sheila because he or the man behind him was afraid she wasn't fully under the influence of hypnotism. Bulotti assaulted her because the sight of warm red blood excited him. He's insane. You can read it in his eyes."

Dead silence. Johnny cleared his throat. He laid a package of letters and a sheaf of bills on the table. "The murder was committed for these, Bill. I learned last night that a certain guest here has promised to back Rita Fitzhugh in a musical comedy. I happen to know that guest is broke, that he's run through a sizeable fortune and has spent part of his business partner's money. I checked on that this morning."

Only the sound of strident breathing filled the room. Johnny grinned cheerfully at Rita.

"Through little Miss Dimwit there, this guest learned that Thalia was being blackmailed for about thirty grand for some love letters she wrote in a moment of weakness. The payoff was to be last night. This gentleman determined to get the letters or the money. He hired Bulotti to do the job for him. But he didn't know Bulotti was a blood killer! Either Bulotti or the master mind got the jewel Rapinee always wore in his turban. I—"

A new voice broke in. Over near the mantel Carl Amherst glared at Rita and said, "You damned dumb little fool! So it was you that spent the night with Harding! And I thought it was Thalia!" Every eye was on the paunchy little man. His eyes glowed with strange fires, his teeth were bared in a snarl of hate. "That's what I get for playing around with a nitwit! You're right, Harding, if it gives you any satisfaction. But you're lucky, you stumble on things, I had Bulotti do it all, even crack you on the head. I wish he'd have killed you! But, oh well—"

He shrugged. A small gun whipped up in his hand. Nobles and a uniformed policeman dove for him but the muzzle disappeared into his mouth, his finger tightened and a muffled sound rang out. As he fell, smoke poured from his mouth,

Presently Rita Fitzhugh touched Johnny on the shoulder. As he turned, she slapped him, hard. There was no sorrow in her eyes, only anger.

"Damn you," she said, "now who's going to back my show?"

———————————

3: The Mother Stone

John Galsworthy

1867-1933

Reedy's Mirror, 24 Nov 1916

Southern Cross (Adelaide, S. Aust), 27 Jan 1928

Best known for his novel series The Forythe Saga*, but also a short-story writer.*

IT WAS after dinner, and five, elderly Englishmen were discussing the causes of the war.

"Well," said Travers, a big, fresh-colored grey-beard, with little twinkling eyes and very low speech, "you gentlemen know more about it than I do, but I bet you I can lay my finger on the cause of the war at any minute."

There was an instant clamor of jeering; but a man called Askew, who knew Travers well, laughed, and said, " Come, let's have it!" Travers turned those twinkling little eyes of his slowly round the circle, and with heavy, hesitating modesty began:

"Well, Mr. Askew, it was in '67 or '68 that this happened to a great big feller of my acquaintance named Ray— one of those fellers, you know, that are always on the look-out to make their fortunes and never do. This Ray was coming back south one day after a huntin' trip he'd been in what's now Bechuanaland, and he was in a pretty bad way when he walked one evenin' into the camp of one of those wanderin' Boers.

"That class of Boer has disappeared now. They had no farms of their own, but just moved on with their stock and their boys, and when they came' to good pastures they'd outspan and stay there till they'd cleared it out— and then trek on again. Well, this old Boer told Ray to come right in and take a meal; and Heaven knows what it was made of, for those old Boers they'd eat the devil himself without onion sauce and relish him.

"After the meal, the old Boer and Ray sat smokin' and yarnin' in the door of the tent, because in those days these wanderin' Boers used tents.

"Right close by in the front the childrerl were playin' in the dust, a game, like marbles with three or four round stones, and they'd pitch 'em up to another stone they called the Moer-Klip, or Mother Stone— one, two, and pick up; two, three, and pick up— you know the game of marbles.

"Well, the sun was settin' and presently Ray poticed this Moer-Klip that they were pitchin' 'em up to shinin'; and he looked at it, and he said to the old Boer, 'What's that stone the children are playin' with?'

And the old Boer looked at him and looked at the. stone, and said, ' It's just a stone,' and went on smokin'.

"Well, Ray went down on his knees and picked up the stone and weighed it in his hand. About the 'size of a hazel nut it was, and looked— well, it looked like a piece of alum; but the more he looked at it the more he thought, 'By Jove, I believe it's a diamond!'

"So he said to the old Boer, 'Where did the children get this stone?' And the, old Boer said, 'Oh! the shepherd picked it up somewhere.' And Ray said, 'Where did he pick it up?' And the old Boer waved his hand, and said, 'Over the kopje there, beyond the river. How should I know, brother— a stone is a stone!' So Ray said, 'You let me take this stone away with me,' And thp old Boer went on smokin', and he said, 'One stone's the same as another. Take it, brother.' And Ray said, 'If it's what I think, I'll give you half the price I get for it.'

"The old Boer smiled arid said, 'That's all right, brother; take it, take it.!'

"The next morning Ray left this old Boer, and, when he was going, he said to him, 'Well,' he said, 'I believe this is a valuable stone!' And the old Boer smiled, because he knew one stone was the same as another.

"The first place Ray came to was C——, and he went to the hotel; and in the evenin' he began talkin' about the stone, and they all laughed, at him, because in those days nobody had heard of diamonds in South Africa. So presently he lost his temper and polled out the stone, and showed it round; but nobody thought it was a diamond, and they all laughed at him the more. Then one of the fellers said, 'If it's a diamond it ought to cut glass.'

"Ray took the stone, and, by Jove! he cut his name on the window, and there it is— I've seen, it— on the bar window of that hotel. Well, next, day, you bet he travelled straight back to where the old Boer told him the shepherd had picked - up the Stone; and he went to a native chief called Jointje, and said to him, 'Jointje,' he said, 'I go a journey. While I go, you go about and send all your boys about and look for all the stones that shine like this one; and when I come, back, if you find me plenty, I give you gun.' And Jointje said, ' mat all right, boss.'

"And Ray went down to Cape Town and took the stone to a jeweller, and the jeweller told him it was a diamond of about 30 or 40 carats, and gave him five hundred pounds for it. So he bought a waggon and a span of oxen to give to the old Boer, and went back to Jointje.

"The niggers had collected skinfuls of stones of all kinds, and out of all the skinfuls Ray found three or four diamonds. So he went to work and got another feller to back him, and between them they made the Government move. The rush began, and they found that place near Kimberiey; and after that they found De Beers, and after that Kimberley itself."

Travers stopped and looked around him. "Ray made his fortune, I suppose?"

"No, Mr. Askew; the unfortunate feller made next to nothin'. He was one of those fellers that never do any good for themselves."

"But what has all this to do with the war?"

Again Travers looked round, and more slowly than ever said:

"Without that game of marbles, would there have been a Moer-Klip— without the Moer-Klip, would there have been a Kimberley— without Kimberley, would there have been a Rhodes— without a Rhodes, would there have been a Raid, would the Boers have started armin'— if the Boers hadn't armed, would there have been a Transvaal War? And if there hadn't been the Transvaal War, would there have been the incident of those two German ships we held up, and all the general feelin' in Germany that gave the Kaiser the chance to start his navy programme in 1900? And if the Germans hadn't built their navy, would their heads have swelled till they challenged the world, and should we have had this war?"

He slowly drew his hand front his pocket and put it on the table. On the little finger was blazing an enormous diamond.

"My father," he said, "bought it of the jeweller."

The Mother Stone glittered and glowed, and the five Englishmen fixed their eyes on it in silence. Some of them had been in the Boer War, and three of them had sons in this. At last one of them said:

"Well, that's seeing God in a dewdrop with a vengeance. What about the old Boer?"

Travers' little eyes twinkled.

"Well," he said, "Ray told me the old fellow just looked at him as if he thought he'd done a damn silly thing to give him a waggon, and he nodded his old head, and said, laughin' in his beard, 'Wish you good luck, brother, wi' your stone.' You couldn't humbug that old Boer; he knew one stone was the same as another."

———————

4: Dr. Haselton's Theory

Anonymous

Eyre's Peninsula Tribune, 1 June 1923

"HOW DO you do?" said Haselton, as he drew his visitor in. "You don't look up to the mark, my friend. However, come in and have a quiet evening with me; I am all alone tonight."

The other entered silently and threw himself listlessly into a proffered chair. His rather weak face was drawn and haggard, and his hand trembled slightly as he took the refreshment his host offered him.

Haselton looked keenly at him. "Not at all up to the mark," he repeated slowly.

"Good heavens man, I know that," said the other, irritably. "If you had gone through half what I have—"

"My dear Williams, you had better tell me about it."

Williams pondered for a moment, and then he looked up.

"I will tell you about it. You are not like other men, Haselton; if you do not praise people for their virtues, at least you do not blame them for their vices. Sometimes I believe that you would as soon sit down to dinner with a murderer as with the veriest saint that ever walked the earth."

"That," said Haselton, drily, "depends upon the relative merits of the dinners. But tell me your troubles. It certainly does not matter to me whether you have killed your mother-in-law or invented a new commandment for people to break. Possibly I can and will help you; possibly I can and will not; possibly I cannot. But the ultimate result will be the same in any case."

Williams looked away nervously; anywhere but at the inscrutable face before him, and when he spoke his voice was cracked and husky.

"Haselton." he said, as though each word cost him an effort, "I am going to kill myself."

"Yes?" (inquiringly). "I have often thought of doing the same thing, but *cui bono*?"

"Because," said the other, speaking more feverishly as he went on, "because to-morrow I shall be disgraced; to-morrow I may be standing in the dock charged with felony. Ay, and I am a felon, a thief," and as he said the last word his voice rose into a shriek that died away into sobs as he covered his face with his hands.

"How much is it?" asked Haselton, briefly.

"Forty thousand pounds," replied Williams, without looking up.

"Ah, quite beyond any possibility of assistance. Can't you escape?"

"Impossible ; it would only put off the evil day. And I could never bear the suspense. No, no, I must kill myself; I would have done it before, but it was so horrible. And I am afraid for my soul."

"Your soul?" said the other, contemptuously, "Your soul? How people cling to that fable What is the soul? The flame that comes from mere fuel; comes and then goes out as the fuel is dispersed, or as death comes like a douche of water and extinguishes it. But the fuel still exists, and some day the flame of life lights it up again. I tell you, my friend, that that which you call your soul is no more personal to you than to the dog you would deny its possession to. Call it electricity, force, what you will, but this soul of yours is but a larger share of an essence which the smallest gnat enjoys."

"And yet there must be something more than that, for all your sophistry. Haselton, strange memories come to me sometimes; vague and incomplete, but still always the same. And surely it must be the soul which gives me these memories. Haselton, I remember a far-off time when it seems to me that I knew mysteries of life that are lost to the present generation. Once I took a trip to Egypt, and the very stones of the Pyramids seemed familiar to me. I saw an inscription; it was three thousand years old, and in it was the name of Ramoth, a priest of Isis. And, Haselton, that seemed to be my name, and there came to me visions of wonderful truths, but always vague and always incomplete."

"Ramoth, you said; Ramoth?" Haselton was alert now, and for once his face showed interest. "Williams I have a theory of my own; let me tell it you. But stay; you are nervous and unhinged."

He got up, and in a few minutes returned with a draught, which he handed to his friend.

"As you know," he resumed, "of the soul I believe little; of the brain I believe much. I am not alone in my belief; everybody thinks alike if people but knew it. We profess to believe that his soul is the arbiter of a man's actions, and yet alcohol, or a hundred less known poisons, will make the best man in the world into a fiend, whom a benign law will hang, be his 'soul' pure as driven snow. But to the theory. We all of us at times have recollections of some prior existence; we see for the first time some scene that is yet familiar; we read some history of the past in which we seem to have been actors, but, as in your case, our visions are ever incomplete. What is the reason of this? Were it the soul which gives us these glimpses of the past, why should they be incomplete? I will tell you."

Haselton paused a moment; then he resumed.

"When a man dies, sooner or later his body goes back into the elements. Some part of him glistens a buttercup in the fields; another is cropped up by a

grazing cow. And at length some portions go up to make another man. Suppose he has some atom of the dead man's brain. Then proportionately will he have the dead man's character. And if he has any of that part which is the seat of memory, so, proportionally, will his memory go back. Because the chances are so great against the whole going to one individual, this memory is vague and sheds but a faint light on the past.

"Williams, I am going to make a proposal to you. You are going to kill yourself; give me your brain. Wait a moment, I am not mad. But,! Williams, I was that Ramoth as well, as yourself? I have those vague memories of Egypt, and with your knowledge to complete mine the wisdom of the past will come back again."

"Good God, man," cried Williams "you must he mad! What could you do with my brain if you had it ?"

"I should eat it," said Haselton, calmly. "You are a madman!"

"No, I am not," replied Haselton, still calmly. "Various ingredients are absorbed by those parts of the body suitable for their reception. My experiment may fail, but the chances seem to me to be all in favour of its success."

Williams strove to rise, but fell back into his chair. "I don't want to die; I was joking," he cried. And then, "Good God! what have yon done to me?"

"I have taken the liberty of drugging you. I thought you might raise some objections. But after all death is the best thing that can happen to you."

"You will he caught and hanged," said Williams, thickly, as he staggered to his feet.

"I think not," said Haselton. "Nobody knows that you are here, and your money difficulties will suggest that you have either absconded or committed suicide."

Williams gave a cry of terror, but the next moment he was on his back with a chloroform saturated handkerchief pressed tightly over his mouth and nose.

5: Dr. Deadshot and His Little Consignment

Walter Thornbury

1828-1876

The Belgravia Annual Christmas 1871

A wild and woolly farce instead of a traditional Christmas ghost story for Christmas 1871

1. The Avatar of the Doctor.

OUR vessel was ready to start; and Captain Benson, leaning over the side nearest the gate leading into the dock, was looking out eagerly for the last passenger. The cargo was in the hold, the fresh meat and vegetables had just arrived; we only stayed for our one more passenger, and the *Black Hawk* would slip out of the dock-gates, spread her broad white wings, and begin her long flight to Singapore. The captain, naturally a bluff irritable kind of man, was losing his temper fast, for the owners, angry at some unavoidable delay in the stowing, had insisted on our sailing on a Friday.

'If that fellow, whatever his name is, don't come in ten minutes more by the clock over the gate,' burst out the captain, 'though his fare is paid, off I go as sure as my name is Robinson. It's bad enough to have to sail on a Friday, without losing another twenty-four hours pottering about here. What is the d— fellow's name, Mr. Rawlins?'

The first mate, who held the list of the passengers and cargo in his hand, being thus appealed to, ran down the paper with his rough brown finger.

'Deadshot (Julius Caesar), 14 St. Peter's-churchyard, Rotherhithe. Fifty-four barrels of the Immortal Patagonian Pills, for Singapore.'

'Quack, quack!' at that moment went one of the live ducks we had taken on board, at which every one laughed.

'Four minutes past twelve,' cried the captain to the man standing ready to seize the shore-rope when it should be flung to us. 'Are you ready there, forward?'

'Ay, ay, sir!' shouted the man.

'Stay, here he is— belay there!' cried the captain.

At that very moment a black mourning coach, driven by a red-nosed man in black, and drawn by a long bony black horse with a long professional-looking tail, whirled through the gate and drove smartly up towards the vessel. The door flew open, and out stepped a tall lank person, with a long brown face, and green spectacles bestriding a long German professor's sort of nose. He was dressed in seedy black, and a long blue cloak with a ram's-wool collar, and carried in his hand a large crape hat-band, a new pair of black kid gloves, and a pair of well-worn saddle-bags. After him scrambled out a black servant,

carrying a medicine-chest, and a round parcel suspiciously like a pestle and mortar.

'A thousand apologies, honoured sir,' said Dr. Deadshot, for that eminent practitioner it soon proved to be— 'a thousand apologies for my breach of etiquette. Detained by professional engagement; paying the last act of respect to worthy patient who had lived for years— in fact, almost subsisted— on our glorious infusion of the Madagascar squill. Detained the coach to bring me round here. *Diluculo surgere salubemmum est; emollit mores, nec sinit esse feros*. Pardon my addressing you in a learned language, which use has made almost second nature. As Horace says, *Cras ingens iterabimus aequor*—To-morrow we traverse the great deep. My dear sir, I am very proud to make your acquaintance.'

So saying, the learned doctor strode up the plank that led into the vessel with the greatest sang froid, and shook hands warmly with the captain and all the passengers.

'My fare, sir, if you please!' shouted the driver of the sable vehicle.

The doctor looked round with mild astonishment, not unmixed with regret, at the man's somewhat stem and almost suspicious vehemence.

'Driver,' said he— 'driver of that grave but professional vehicle, you have deserved well of your country; behold your honorarium.'

The driver, beholding only a shilling, grew unbecomingly violent.

'You're a pretty fellow,' said he, following his fare up into the vessel, 'to bring me all the way from Kensal-green cemetery to these 'ere docks for a shilling! Look here. I want five bob, that's what I want; five bob, that's my charge.'

'Observe the violence,' said the doctor, addressing us, 'superinduced by a heated state of the epigastric region, caused by alcoholic excess.— The charge,' he said, turning to the driver, 'at first suggested by cupidity, has been urged with intemperance ; on that ground I refuse to pay. Try one of my pills night and morning; agents, Sexton and Co., St. Paul's-churchyard.—Boatswain, remove this clamorous man— For black eye, probably given you by sailor in act of removal, use our Perpetual Panacea Liniment, three and-six the bottle; agents, Coffin and Co., Mile-end-road. God bless you; and if for ever, still for ever, fare thee well!'

'What's all this? We can have none of this disturbance here; put that man out of the ship!' cried the captain; and as the driver manifested a desire to inflict injury on the doctor, the driver was instantly hustled down the plank by three robust sailors.

'Don't take none of his stuff, any of you,' shouted the driver from below, red with rage, and shaking his fist at us; 'he's half filled one cemetery already!

Yah, quack! yah, old bolus! Where's my four shillings! Cheat a poor driver! I 'm ashamed of yer! I only wish I 'd broken your scraggy old neck! Yah!'

'See how the excessive use of imperfectly purified spirits,' said the doctor, leaning over the side of the vessel, and appealing to us all, 'deteriorates the whole moral nature. I leave that class of my countrymen with little regret; whereas the inhabitants of Rotherhithe, though lost to sight, will be to memory dear, even though not so unhealthy as medical men of a less philanthropic kind than myself might desire.'

I discovered afterwards that the doctor, in his hurry to benefit fresh parts of the world with his immortal medicines, had forgotten to settle several Rotherhithean accounts.

2: The State Cabin.

THE DOCTOR soon became a favourite with the captain, officers, and passengers. He was chatty, talkative, amusingly pedantic, and full of a Micawberish self-conceit which was as amusing as his profound belief in his Patagonian pills.

'Well, doctor, and what have you been up to all the morning?' said the captain at dinner the tenth day out. 'We heard your pestle going as steady as a clock-beat.'

'I'm trying, captain, to prepare a lozenge, which shall contain within the compass of half a cubic inch the nourishment requisite for three hundred and sixty-five meals. The result of this discovery will be that armies will be able to carry with them the nourishment requisite for a whole campaign; that aeronauts will be able to cruise for several years without revisiting the earth; and that ships may use much of the room now devoted to provisions for more reimbursing goods.'

'I only wish, doctor, you could invent some pills to kill the infernal cockroaches,' said the captain, behind whose chair I was standing; 'that would be something like an invention! You projectors always fly too high. Every profession has its tricks. Now come, doctor, you don't really mean to tell us that there was ever really a Bishop of Barbadoes cured of an indisposition to all mental exertion by a liberal use of the Patagonian pills? Was there ever a Lord Bleepydon who restored his dilapidated liver of ten years' standing by Patagonian pills? And if the pills sell 14,000,000 boxes a year, pray what are you off to Singapore for?'

'Now then, doctor!' cried all the other passengers.

'Medicine, gentlemen,' said the doctor with exquisite gravity, helping himself to sherry as he spoke, 'is a profession entered upon from other

motives than mere cash. I tore myself from Rotherhithe to go to Singapore, induced by that inner voice that sends the patriot to the battle-field, the discoverer to the lonely Pole, the geologist to the mountain crag, the philanthropist to the home of misery. I wish to spread this favoured medicine wherever man has trodden. Wherever man has reared his hut, there the Patagonian pills shall search him out.'

Somebody laughed.

'Yes, I will say, in despite of the sneerer, that if I had means to reach the nearest star— its exact name at this moment I forget— I would ascend even there with the Immortal Patagonian Pill, and disseminate aloft the blessings of this glorious antidote of sorrow and suffering. I would scatter my circulars on every breeze, convinced that wherever they fell, they would waft a heirloom invaluable to posterity, and beneficial to every race. No vessel should pass from any port without carrying these circulars pasted on its side and sails; the Pyramids— nay, the very Alps— should be impressed with the eloquent words of my Patagonian pill advertisement; on the farthest shores of Africa I would let fly certain pigeons, to whose wings circulars in several negro languages should be attached, to spread its blessings into the centre of that enormous continent. I—'

'Take some more wine, doctor,' said the captain; 'you must be out of breath. Do you ever take your own pills?'

'I take no medicine now,' said the doctor, 'thank God, except dry sherry, the Immortal Pills taken in early youth have so fortified my constitution against all disease. Do you know my ultimate aims, captain, in relation to the Patagonian pills ?'

The doctor, having had quite enough wine, was rather more eloquent and diffuse than usual on the subject of his hobby.

'No.'

'Then I will tell you. The establishment in every nation of hospitals where these pills are to be given away gratis to all comers. I would prohibit the use of all other medicines, and should merely demand a small royalty on each box. Any medical man prescribing any other medicine should forfeit his permission to practise. The science thus simplified would make tremendous strides. Death might still knock, as Horace says, with equal hand at the *tabemas pauperum et regumque turres*; still the duration of human life would be, to say the least, doubled. In a century's time men of eighty would be thought in the first bloom of youth, and persons of one hundred-and-twenty in their prime. Thus the world would go on at a tremendous rate of progress; and all I should ask for would be a statue in every great city in the known globe, a small royalty on

every box for the benefit of myself and my posterity, and my portrait on every lid, out of common gratitude to the inventor.'

'Take some more wine, doctor,' said the cruel captain.— 'Mr. Johnson, why do you keep the bottle at your elbow?'

'The secret of these pills,' said the doctor, warming with his subject, 'is that they at once lessen physical decay, and supply all it needs to replace loss by daily wear and tear. The result is an excess over daily expenditure. The hair ceases to fall—'

The captain fixed his eye on a bald region of the doctor's head.

'Yes, true; I began the pills a little too late. The pills prevent decay, but do not replace what is lost, sir. They will not give a man, for example, brains, though they will prevent a diminution of cerebral force. The use of these pills should be compulsory. The benefited nation, taking so wise a precaution, would never reproach the well-intentioned government that advocated, urged, and finally enforced the scheme. Sickness would disappear; the sexton would bury his useless spade; every one's temper would improve; and universal litigation would change to universal benevolence. No more soldiers, no more lawyers, no more sextons, no more— '

Here the doctor rose to give force to his sentence, but finding himself unsteady, seized at the tablecloth for assistance; the result of which was, that he eventually nearly dragged down all the decanters and glasses, but was prevented by a simultaneous haul on the part of the captain opposite and his right and left man; upon which the doctor challenged to mortal combat every one who denied the infallibility of the Royal Immortal Patagonian Pills, and calling out, 'Steward, your arm,' took hold of me, and with extreme gravity stalked to his cabin, where he instantly turned in.

'A good fellow the doctor, after all,' the captain was saying when I returned; 'and the best of it is, I don't think he really knows he is a humbug.'

'A regular old double-dyed fox, I say; and the men all call him Old Nick's brother-in-law,' said the first mate to a passenger next me, who cordially agreed with him.

3: In Trouble

WE had been three weeks out— the last week bad weather— when one evening the doctor startled everybody on deck by expressing it as his opinion that the captain was a good deal out of his reckoning.

The captain, who was lighting his cigar at the doctor's, puffed furiously at this, then broke out into a scornful laugh.

'Well, come, I like that, doctor! You know a good deal of languages— a plaguey sight more than I ever did or ever shall— you have invented this extraordinary pill that is to kill or cure every one; you tell a good story; you play the violin very handily; but when you come here, and tell me how to navigate my vessel, that is coming it rather too strong.— What do you say, Mr. Rawlings?'

Mr. Rawlings, the mate, laughed bitterly, and remarked it was indeed just a trifle too strong. The doctor made no reply, but tucked the violin under his chin, and playing a bar or two of ' Caller herring,' that *chef-d'oeuvre* of Neil Gow's, laid the violin on his left knee, and began to screw up a refractory string.

'*Semper dormitat Homerus*,' he said at last coolly; 1 excuse a quotation from the Latin language; as Pope finely says, "To err is human, to forgive divine." I have been to Singapore before to disseminate the Royal Patagonians, which unfortunately did not go down with the Hindoos as I could have wished; I have also learnt at leisure moments a little navigation; and I tell you my worthy and excellent Palinurus, that we've got too far to the west.'

'Too far to the deuce!' said the captain.

'You'll perhaps tell me next you made an observation this very morning.'

'The very observation I was going to make,' said the doctor. 'The sun showed for a moment above meridian. It is from that observation I draw my data. It has been misty since then.'

'O, indeed!' said the captain. 'Perhaps you'd like to take the command.'

'If I took it, my dear sir, I should instantly steer several points to the east; you'll excuse the freedom of my remark.'

'Did you ever hear such a man, Rawlings? Only just hear him!'

'I hear him,' said Rawlings, with due emphasis; 'and I should like to set him reefing in a gale of wind.'

'I daresay you would, my dear young friend; but I should be more useful at the helm.'

'O, I suppose you'll say next you can steer too,' growled the captain.

'Yes, a little. I yachted a good deal when I was establishing my agency at Cuba.'

'Ever been in a gale round the Horn?' inquired the mate.

'Twice. The squills at Patagonia are of the finest description. There I found one ingredient of my pills— no, it was not squills, Mr. Rawlings. We're going to have a rough night of it.'

The captain said nothing, but went on deck. He returned in ten minutes, looking rather grave.

'Rawlings,' said he, 'I have quite decided to steer a point to the east. We're a little out, somehow. The boatswain says there was a land bird on the rigging this morning, and there shouldn't have been. There ought to be no land nearer now than the Incognita Islands.— Steward, yon can bring the soup.'

Dinner was just served, and I was rinsing a wine-glass at a side-table, when the vessel struck heavily on a reef.

Such a crash! I thought it was all over with us, and that the vessel was going to break up at once. The doctor was the only cool person.

'The great coral reef, half a mile off the south-eastern of the Incognita Islands,' he said; and gave the latitude and longitude. 'Thought we were too far west. I'll take a glass of wine, and then take my turn at the pumps.'

4. On The Reef.

THE HORROR of that scene I will not describe: the rush of frightened men, the frantic toil at the pumps, the roar of the wind, the fury of the breakers that swept over us as the gale began to rise. We had jammed so firm on the reef, that a sharp point of rock filled the hole it had made, and prevented the leak being instantaneously dangerous. If the sea only fell, and we could get out the boats, there was still hope to reach the nearest island, that now showed in a line of surf under the mist that rose for an instant at sunset, and then sank into the darkness. The boats would not live a moment in such a sea. If the vessel lifted off the rock, we should be drowned in a jiffy.

We took our turn in gangs at the pumps, and worked like madmen. That was our only hope.

About midnight my gang was relieved, and we were advised to turn in; so I and the doctor, quite worn out, went together to get a glass of spirits and any food we could find. As my cabin was under water, the doctor offered me a berth in his.

'If this gale continues,' he said, tucking one long leg over the other, as he munched gravely at a biscuit and some cold meat, 'there won't be a man of us alive in the morning. I know these islands pretty well by description. A brother of mine was once wrecked here, and was kept some months by the ignorant but hospitable inhabitants. He is now an agent for the Patagonian pills in Constantinople. I learned, indeed, a good deal of the language from him. Thank God, he will continue to spread the blessings of the pills oyer the world. In these emergencies I always take a Patagonian; I advise you, Davis, to do the same. I do not mind, at this juncture, mentioning that there is a strong narcotic ingredient in them, which at all events will render us unconscious that we are being drowned, I advise you to take a Patagonian; you'll be asleep in five

minutes. We sha'n't be wanted yet. Good-night' The doctor took a pill, and handed me one. In a few minutes we were both fast asleep.

5: The Day After the Storm

WHEN I awoke all was quiet as the grave. I rubbed my eyes. The doctor was gone. The wind was down. There was no jangle of voices, no shout of command, no clank at the pumps. The sunlight fell brightly on the doctor's blue cloak with the ram's-wool collar, that hung on a nail by the port-hole. The only sound was the quiet ripple of the sea against the sides of the vessel. I must have been dreaming. But no; there were the crumbs of the doctor's biscuit on the floor, and there were his saddle-bags.

In a moment I leaped up, and ran into the next cabin. There was no one— only an empty spirit-bottle and a telescope. As I stood there, dumb with astonishment at the apparent desertion of the vessel and the subsidence of the storm, I heard some one in the saloon playing 'Hope told a flattering tale,' followed by a bar or two of the 'Bay of Biscay.'

I ran into the room, and found the doctor sitting alone, with all the dignity of a chairman, at the head of the long table. A decanter of sherry stood by his side, and he was all the better for the glass or two he had evidently taken.

'Davis,' said he, 'sole companion, partner of my fame, we are deserted. The scoundrels have left us here on the wreck all blooming alone. As I always sleep with one ear open, I heard them letting out the boats, and went to take my place and book one for you. They took off the money and the ship's papers, but, I need scarcely say, left the Patagonian pills— the greatest treasure of all, the incomparable pills— behind to perish. I waved my lily hand. The captain, worthy fellow, wanted to put back; but the sailors cried out that I was the Jonah that had done all the mischief, that I was old Harry himself, and other offensive language too numerous to mention. The mate also, in the second boat, would have waited for me; but that matchless rascal my black servant shouted that I had poisoned ever so many people at Stratford-le Bow, and that I was running away from justice, which is an infernal lie; for the pills agreed with everybody but one old churchwarden, who revenged himself by never paying his bill. So here we are; but it's calm, my boy, and I am at the helm. It's only half a mile to shore; the materials for a raft are at hand; we can get the Royal Immortal Patagonian Pills out of the hold; and the inhabitants here restrict themselves, except on certain festivals, to a fish diet. Come, we must be stirring, for fear the wind rises again. I intend to represent myself to the inhabitants as a great magician, sent by the sea-gods to reign over them.—N.B. I have reason to suppose there is gold to be found in the island. I shall

represent the pills as securing those who take enough of them from every mortal disease. My young friend, I shall sell every one of them for three hundred times its weight in golddust. Such is my programme. Come to the raft— to the raft. If the resources of social life are cnt off from us, the treasures of hope are still our own.'

Nothing could damp the doctor's courage, or restrain his loquacity. In a very short time we had constructed a serviceable raft of spars, to which we lashed all the valuables we could find, some provisions, and a suit of uniform that had belonged to one of the passengers. We then, by a good deal of wading in the hold, fished up fifteen barrels of the Patagonians, and lashed them to the sides of the raft. We managed to rig a small mast with a square sail; and the doctor was delighted.

As we drifted slowly towards land, my extraordinary friend played 'Rule Britannia,' with all the unction of his eccentric nature. As we approached the land, a band of chiefs, dressed not unlike South-Sea Islanders, with plumes of parrot's feathers, and robes of matting, descended a sand-hill that sloped to the beach.

'Now's the time,' said the doctor, never at a loss. '*Robur et aes triplex*, Davis, which means in English, Keep up your pluck. Give me that uniform. They must take me for a creature of another planet. They always choose their kings this way. The last they had was a black cook, from a Spanish wreck, who drank himself to death after a glorious reign of fat pork and incessant intoxication. That's right. Now the violin. The march from Artaxerxes will impress them. All you have to do is to keep a good look-out, and fall on your nose, to show respect, every time I speak to you. Turn on the telescope now, and see what they are up to. I wish we had brought more pills. I only hope those rascals who deserted us are all drowned.'

6. Cocoroco.

I TURNED the telescope on, and saw the six chiefs, the moment they observed us, throw down their spears and war-clubs, and prostrate themselves on the sand. I told the doctor this, and he instantly commenced a lively movement on the violin, expressive of joy. We had now got so near the land that we could leap ashore. Having first lashed a rope to the raft, and drawn it up safe, the doctor in full fig, with cocked-hat and resplendent epaulettes, stepped on land, and commenced 'Would you win the gentle creature ?' from Acis and Galatea, expressive of peace and good-will. The chiefs advanced, crawling on hands and knees, and refused to rise till the doctor spoke to them in their own language, and announced himself as having come from a country

east of the sun, and west of the moon, to bring them a precious medicine that saved from any wounds in battle all those who took enough of them. The chiefs instantly hailed him with great applause, as one whom they venerated and feared, and were at once employed to carry the pills and the rest of our goods.

'All right, Davis,' said the doctor, interpreting as it went on all that he said. 'We'll get to windward of them now. Down on your nose directly I speak. I've slightly altered the programme of the pills, but they're good for every mortal thing. All we want is some of their gold, and time to get to the chief island of the group, where vessels from Singapore often touch. In my opinion we have made a very good first step. I'll give 'em "Jenny Jones" now, to express quiet contentment. One of the chiefs, running on before, just as we approached the principal town of the island— a huge circle of huts formed of matting, roofed with palm-branches— soon came back, followed by an enormous procession of men, beating on drums and waving spears.

'My violin will produce an im mense effect on them,' said the doctor to me, 'as I believe they have no instruments but those infernal drums, and a sort of flageolet they make out of a shark's backbone; not a successful instrument.— N.B. I believe the pork here is very good, and though a meat difficult of digestion, we will try a roast leg this very night, or I 'm not king of Cocoroco, or whatever else they call the misguided place. The only thing I dread here is the envy of the local medical man.'

The doctor was right. From the very first the great physician of the place regarded ns with suspicion, though we kept hard at work exchanging the pills for gold-dust. He was a little old malign one-eyed fellow, with a bad temper and a game leg. He, however, never won over a single chief to his side, and was generally regarded as a mere infidel, for despising a person sent specially by Providence as a legislator and ruler. At the first great Pow-wow, or congress, the doctor delivered a lecture on the pills that produced a profound sensation. He translated it to me afterwards.

'Great people of Cocoroco,' he said, 'I have brought you the medicine and the music of the country beyond the sun. The pills not only beneficially affect the liver, brain, heart, stomach, and general digestive system, but they also drive off all disease, prevent any wounds being mortal, and, if taken in sufficient quantities, extend life to an almost illimitable duration. Forbidden by the laws of the land beyond the sun to disclose these secrets without reward, I hereby offer to play this divine instrument to any rich man of the island for a pound of gold-dust, and to barter every one of these pain-destroying, long-life-producing pills for two pounds of the same commodity. The pills that prevent any one dying at all, I only dispose of for one hundred pounds of gold dust.'

I could see the little doctor swelling with envy. He rose when the acclamations were over and a tribute of three hundred pigs had been presented to the new king, and spoke.

'Men of Cocoroco,' he said, 'we are told much of these pills, brought by this stranger drifted upon our shore. Allipelago, the great sweet cane planter, bought three of these pills, that prevent any one dying; one was for himself, and the others for his two wives.'

'We know it,' cried many voices. 'Allipelago, the same night, in his joy, gave a feast to all his tenants. At that feast Allipelago and Calipash, having drunk too much palmwine, fell out, and fought with clubs.'

The doctor looked at me, and said, 'I don't much like this, Davis; I have always suffered from professional jealousy.'

'They fought with clubs,' went on the speaker, 'and the result was the severe fracture of Allipelago's skull, who now lies dead as the herring that is red.' The doctor in his excitement paraphrased the doctor's remarks. 'Allipelago is outside the tent now; any one can see him, and this is the result of the stranger's pill. Men of Cocoroco, it was the Evil Spirit, and not the Good, that sent this man here. Seize him!'

But no one seized the doctor; who, after a bar or two of 'Cease, rude Boreas,' denounced his rival as worthy to be hung for a detractor and a cheat.

'There has been some mistake,' he said, 'gentlemen. My servant Davis here must have taken a pill from the wrong cask. Moreover, I doubt Allipelago's having taken the pill at all.'

'I saw him swallow it,' said the rival; 'and he told me what he had given for it. If the pills have this virtue, let the doctor swallow one before us, and then fight our great warrior Sayeroo. Let him prove that Saycroo's club is unable to wound the consumer of this vaunted medicine. Mark this supposed magician. You see, be wavers. Seize him! I denounce him!' The people wavered. The doctor saw it, and seizing his violin, was beginning, 'I am the boy for bewitching them,' when his rival tore the violin from his hands, and leaping on it, scrunched it to pieces.

'The spell is broken!' cried the doctor's enemy: 'it all lay in that. He is harmless now. I knew from the beginning the Evil Spirit had sent him.'

'Eheu fujaces, Davis!' groaned the doctor, as they seized him. 'Perhaps I asserted too much for the Royal Patagonians. I was hoping we should get away before any one died. The incomparable virtue of these pills will now be for ever doubted in the island of Cocoroco. Of all the spiteful rascals— but I do think he was really afraid of the violin— O, I should like to have the doctoring of that fellow!'

The doctor's eloquence and soft-sawder were all in vain. He had scarcely had time to fill his pockets with half-a-cask of pills and some gold-dust, when we were both bound and led off towards the shore, not half a mile from where we had landed.

'They are going to drown us!' I cried to the doctor, half dead with fear.

'Oh no,' said he. 'They proposed that at first, but now they talk of tying us up in two palm-trees for the night. To-morrow they will hold two great public dinners round us— a lemon and a knife and fork to each man. Then they'll light two big fires, and shake us down for roasting. But don't be afraid. A friend of ours, whose daughter I was going to marry, and whom the incomparable pills really cured of a bad fever, is going to be left as our sentinel. He is afraid of me, and I'll threaten him with every disease I can think of if he does not free us at night. If that won't do, you must persuade him to take a pill— I 'll tell you how—if that sets him asleep, as it ought, we are safe. Here's the pill; mind, produce it when I tell you—but not till then.'

Our cruel enemy saw us mount the palm-trees with the greatest composure. Rings of lemons were placed round each tree, and fires laid ready for lighting. The sentinel the doctor had mentioned was placed to guard us, armed with spear and club.

'Men from the land beyond the sun,' said the Archbishop of Cocoroco, waving his crosier at us, 'you say you were sent to rule over us. If that was so, the sea will send a ship to-night to save you. If not, we shall offer you up to-morrow to the manes of Allipelago, and eat you afterwards. I think, perhaps, that will be a warning to you. Goodnight.—Badego, keep good ward.'

This struck me as rather melodramatic language; but that was the doctor's mode of translating, and he was of a theatrical, Micawberish, and romantic turn of mind.

7: Up a Tree

WE WERE in a dreadful position— in a savage country, perched up in two trees, to be made a meal of in the morning. But, somehow or other, I had seen so much of the doctor's extraordinary shrewdness and readiness of resource, that I felt that, by some device, he would extricate me and himself from this peril; and even when the chiefs left us alone with our guard just at moonrise, I could hardly repress a smile as I saw that lank figure in uniform curled up like a great roosting flamingo in the middle of the branches of a palm-tree. We were very near together, and were able to enter at once into conversation.

'I regret, Davis,' said the doctor, ' that I had not supplied myself with several articles that might have been useful at this juncture. If I had three

things now— some squibs, some crackers, and some phosphorus — I would tell that Badego such enormous lies, and so frighten him, that he would instantly let us escape. I would first rub this cerebral covering called a cocked-hat with phosphorus till his hair stood on end. I would let off a squib at every sentence, till he went into fits, and then drop down a dozen craekers; and if that didn't make him believe in my being sent by Providence to rule over this country, what would? Davis, that march over the sand-hills has made me, my boy, mighty athirst. I'll try to frighten this rascal. I will tell you what I say presently, so that you may know how I am getting on. *O tempora, O mores*! to think of the discoverer of the greatest blessing ever sold to mankind being at the mercy of an illiterate Cocorocan.'

The doctor then, seriously applying himself to work, threatened Badego that if he did not instantly let us escape, three hundred winged sharks would within half an hour come up from the sea, and destroy Badego and all his countrymen. That failing, a whirlwind, ten minutes after, would rise directly the doctor whistled; followed, in rapid succession, by an earthquake, a volcano, and three inundations. The solar Lord Chancellor and Minister of the Board of Trade were, he said, very angry at his detention, he was so great and useful a magician.

But Badego was inexorable.

'Chow bang no! No, yara! Boodle wing foo! Much threats no hurt,' he replied angrily; which meant, the doctor gloomily told me, that if he, the doctor, was so great a magician, he had better tell the ropes to drop off, and wish himself back in his own country. If he was so great a magician, he might have known that some men of his country had landed yesterday.

'Crass ignorance! Hear his lies!' said the doctor; 'but now I 'll try another tack. He has consulted me once or twice, and I know his weak points. O, if I could only get him to take a Patagonian! He is a hardhearted brute, and ungrateful as the viper in the fable.— Badego,' he said in a wheedling voice, 'your liver is disordered by too frequent draughts of rice-wine. You are old and shattered; you are gouty, and have a bad cough. You will not live three years. Would you like to know how to prolong your life ?'

Badego shook with fear, and gradually came trembling up to the doctor's tree. 'You cured me, king,' he said, 'of one fever. Tell me what to do.'

'Take a Patagonian pill. It will secure you from all disease, and give you a hundred years more of life. A boxful prevents you from dying at all, but there is only one hundred-year pill left.'

' But Allipelago?' suggested Badego, who was evidently wavering. 'He had only taken fourteen, and they weren't the true sort, of which I had only one left, and that belonged to my friend here.'

'Give me that, give me that, and I 'll let you go.'

'Davis,' said the doctor, 'he's swallowed the bait, so give him the Patagonian.' I gave it Badego, who at once swarmed up the tree after it, took it from the indicated pocket, and instantly swallowed it. 'Now, then, cut the ropes,' said the doctor.

'Yang, yang! no, no! No so foolo; no, no, no!' replied the monster, dancing round the trees, club and spear in hand.

'Did you ever in your born days know such a scoundrel?' said the doctor. 'But never mind. Look, he is getting giddy. He staggers. —Hullo, old boy! — Hurrah! he's down. Here goes!'

And in a moment more the doctor, who had long since secretly freed himself of the ropes, slipped down the tree with incredible agility, and tied the arms of the sleeping man. Then he swarmed up my tree, and unloosed my fetters.

'Davis,' said he, ' the Patagonian pills shall still be disseminated in new countries. Those people he speaks of may be part of our crew. We'll make for that light I see down there by the shore. I've a good mind to put an end to this ungrateful rascal' (here he kicked him violently); 'but, no— let the brute live. They'll be sure to knock him on the head when they find us gone. Come; time presses, and we've had almost enough of Cocoroco.'

8: The Pills Really Prove Useful.

AT THE CORNER of a belt of palm trees, about half a mile off, a gruff voice shouted as we approached, 'Who goes there?'

'Davis,' said the doctor proudly, 'that voice is the voice of Robinson the boatswain, hoarse with rum, but harmonised by honesty.— Hullo here, Robinson! We're friends — Dr. Deadshot, inventor of the Patagonian pill, and John Davis, late steward of the *Black Hawk*.— Davis, be kind enough to join me in "Rule Britannia." '

Robinson, delighted at our escape, instantly led us to some rough tents, built up with spars and sails, where we found the captain and the crew— all very jolly considering— except the doctor's black servant and the cook, who, drinking too much rum, had fallen out of the cutter, and been drowned.

'Doctor,' said the captain, 'you find us in an awful fix. There is a Chinese junk a mile off, come here to buy opium, and they can't get any. They won't take us off but on one condition— ten pounds of opium; and we haven't saved even the medicine-chest.'

The doctor ruminated for a moment.

'Friend Palinurus,' he exclaimed, 'it is no time to hoard up in one's own bosom the secrets of science. The Patagonian pills, I may now disclose, are three parts opium, the remaining third being composed of herbs from Tierra del Fuego, and a mineral, procured at enormous expense from the North Pole. The casks now in the wreck will supply the honorarium for passage demanded by these proud and mercenary barbarians. Put off the boats, and let us seek the matchless treasure; not saying a word, not breathing, in fact, a syllable, about the necessary adulteration, as they would, perhaps, irreverently call it.'

The captain's jaw fell.

'Doctor,' said he, ' we have recovered a few things from the wreck, especially my chest, &c.; but last night, the last fragment of the wreck disappeared, and nothing has since been washed on shore but one very acceptable cask of rum, which accounts for our present apparent contentment. These Chinese fools are off the day after to-morrow, and we are lost.'

'Not so, my dear sir,' said the doctor, 'I am proud to say. There are still under the fireplace of my house at Cocoroco eleven casks of the Royal Patagonians buried. We have but to obtain a guard of armed Chinese sailors, and the casks are easily recoverable. Every cask of Patagonians contains at least five pounds of the required drug; and so join us in "A life on the ocean wave," and respect the versatility of the scientific mind even when hard drove.'

At the moment of the doctor's fourth glass, the boatswain, followed by six of the men, entered the tent, and, with many rough bows and winks, said that the ship's company would be glad to drink the doctor's health, and many happy returns of the day.

'Ungrateful herd!' said the doctor, rising and shaking his right hand at them. 'But I forgive you. The world is like that. Still, henceforth leave a place in the boat, my countrymen, for scientific men in distress; and may the toast of "Never desert a friend in need," be ever remembered at your midnight repast. The discoverer of the Royal Immortal Patagonian Pills, when expiring, will have at least one proud satisfaction— that of thinking that if he has made some serious mistakes in medicine— and who has not?— he has at last nobly atoned for them by saving the band of twenty-eight' (there were only fourteen) 'brave British seamen he now sees before him, from the cruel and, when provoked, anthropophagous inhabitants of Cocoroco. Gentlemen and fellow sailors, in proposing the health of our excellent captain, let me couple with it the army and navy for ever— hurrah for the red, white, and blue ! and though fathoms five our good ship lies, with old England on the lee, let us rejoice to think, yea, let it be our pride to remember, that, though beset by enemies, we never raised our hand against a woman, and never lost a feeling of love for the British Constitution. Three times three for the House of Lords, which has

braved a thousand years the battle and the breeze; and if there should ever be danger on the deep, let us, shoulder to shoulder, march at the lead of Captain Rawlings— Benson, I should say— against the common enemy, with this one word upon our banners, "The liberty of the Press, and the British Constitooshun for ever!" Hoorah for the red, white, and blue!'

With apologies for the nervous excitement into which the danger had thrown him, the doctor retired, by zig-zag, for the night, amid three tremendous cheers.

'His jaw-tackle isn't injured,' said Rawlings, 'and he can take his tumbler, I see, as neat as ever. Well, never mind; he's got us out of a pretty hole, and he bears no malice— though we did not do quite the right thing by him— I like him for that. Come, Davis, you take another to wind up; then we can turn in.'

The doctor's plan answered perfectly. An armed Chinese escort brought us the next morning safe to Cocoroco, the natives flying at our approach. We burnt the town, captured the envious doctor, and sold him to the Chinese; carried off many dozen pigs, and all the eleven barrels of Patagonians, which, an hour later, were beaten into pound slabs of opium to pay for our passage.

We reached Singapore safely. A day or two after, the doctor— having prepared several casks of pills with incredible diligence, considering the difficulty of procuring Tierra del Fuego herbs, and the North Polar mineral— started for Central Asia, via Afghanistan, intending to establish an agency in Samarcand, and to paste his posters— in several languages— on the very wall of China itself. He is expected in Moscow early next December.

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6: Count Magnus

M. R. James

1862-1936

In: *Ghost Stories of an An*tiquary, London, 1904

BY WHAT MEANS the papers out of which I have made a connected story came into my hands is the last point which the reader will learn from these pages. But it is necessary to prefix to my extracts from them a statement of the form in which I possess them.

They consist, then, partly of a series of collections for a book of travels, such a volume as was a common product of the forties and fifties. Horace Marryat's *Journal of a Residence in Jutland and the Danish Isles* is a fair specimen of the class to which I allude. These books usually treated of some unknown district on the Continent. They were illustrated with woodcuts or steel plates. They gave details of hotel accommodation, and of means of communication, such as we now expect to find in any well-regulated guide-book, and they dealt largely in reported conversations with intelligent foreigners, racy innkeepers, and garrulous peasants. In a word, they were chatty.

Begun with the idea of furnishing material for such a book, my papers as they progressed assumed the character of a record of one single personal experience, and this record was continued up to the very eve, almost, of its termination.

The writer was a Mr Wraxall. For my knowledge of him I have to depend entirely on the evidence his writings afford, and from these I deduce that he was a man past middle age, possessed of some private means, and very much alone in the world. He had, it seems, no settled abode in England, but was a denizen of hotels and boarding-houses. It is probable that he entertained the idea of settling down at some future time which never came; and I think it also likely that the Pantechnicon fire in the early seventies must have destroyed a great deal that would have thrown light on his antecedents, for he refers once or twice to property of his that was warehoused at that establishment.

It is further apparent that Mr Wraxall had published a book, and that it treated of a holiday he had once taken in Brittany. More than this I cannot say about his work, because a diligent search in bibliographical works has convinced me that it must have appeared either anonymously or under a pseudonym.

As to his character, it is not difficult to form some superficial opinion. He must have been an intelligent and cultivated man. It seems that he was near being a Fellow of his college at Oxford— Brasenose, as I judge from the Calendar. His besetting fault was pretty clearly that of over-inquisitiveness,

possibly a good fault in a traveller, certainly a fault for which this traveller paid dearly enough in the end.

On what proved to be his last expedition, he was plotting another book. Scandinavia, a region not widely known to Englishmen forty years ago, had struck him as an interesting field. He must have alighted on some old books of Swedish history or memoirs, and the idea had struck him that there was room for a book descriptive of travel in Sweden, interspersed with episodes from the history of some of the great Swedish families. He procured letters of introduction, therefore, to some persons of quality in Sweden, and set out thither in the early summer of 1863.

Of his travels in the North there is no need to speak, nor of his residence of some weeks in Stockholm. I need only mention that some *savant* resident there put him on the track of an important collection of family papers belonging to the proprietors of an ancient manor-house in Vestergothland, and obtained for him permission to examine them.

The manor-house, or *herrgård*, in question is to be called Råbäck (pronounced something like Roebeck), though that is not its name. It is one of the best buildings of its kind in all the country, and the picture of it in Dahlenberg's *Suecia antiqua et moderna*, engraved in 1694, shows it very much as the tourist may see it today. It was built soon after 1600, and is, roughly speaking, very much like an English house of that period in respect of material— red-brick with stone facings— and style. The man who built it was a scion of the great house of De la Gardie, and his descendants possess it still. De la Gardie is the name by which I will designate them when mention of them becomes necessary.

They received Mr Wraxall with great kindness and courtesy, and pressed him to stay in the house as long as his researches lasted. But, preferring to be independent, and mistrusting his powers of conversing in Swedish, he settled himself at the village inn, which turned out quite sufficiently comfortable, at any rate during the summer months. This arrangement would entail a short walk daily to and from the manor-house of something under a mile. The house itself stood in a park, and was protected— we should say grown up— with large old timber. Near it you found the walled garden, and then entered a close wood fringing one of the small lakes with which the whole country is pitted. Then came the wall of the demesne, and you climbed a steep knoll— a knob of rock lightly covered with soil— and on the top of this stood the church, fenced in with tall dark trees. It was a curious building to English eyes. The nave and aisles were low, and filled with pews and galleries. In the western gallery stood the handsome old organ, gaily painted, and with silver pipes. The ceiling was flat, and had been adorned by a seventeenth-century artist with a strange and

hideous "Last Judgement", full of lurid flames, falling cities, burning ships, crying souls, and brown and smiling demons. Handsome brass coronae hung from the roof; the pulpit was like a doll's-house covered with little painted wooden cherubs and saints; a stand with three hour-glasses was hinged to the preacher's desk. Such sights as these may be seen in many a church in Sweden now, but what distinguished this one was an addition to the original building. At the eastern end of the north aisle the builder of the manor-house had erected a mausoleum for himself and his family. It was a largish eight-sided building, lighted by a series of oval windows, and it had a domed roof, topped by a kind of pumpkin-shaped object rising into a spire, a form in which Swedish architects greatly delighted. The roof was of copper externally, and was painted black, while the walls, in common with those of the church, were staringly white. To this mausoleum there was no access from the church. It had a portal and steps of its own on the northern side.

Past the churchyard the path to the village goes, and not more than three or four minutes bring you to the inn door.

On the first day of his stay at Råbäck Mr Wraxall found the church door open, and made those notes of the interior which I have epitomized. Into the mausoleum, however, he could not make his way. He could by looking through the keyhole just descry that there were fine marble effigies and sarcophagi of copper, and a wealth of armorial ornament, which made him very anxious to spend some time in investigation.

The papers he had come to examine at the manor-house proved to be of just the kind he wanted for his book. There were family correspondence, journals, and account-books of the earliest owners of the estate, very carefully kept and clearly written, full of amusing and picturesque detail. The first De la Gardie appeared in them as a strong and capable man. Shortly after the building of the mansion there had been a period of distress in the district, and the peasants had risen and attacked several châteaux and done some damage. The owner of Råbäck took a leading part in supressing the trouble, and there was reference to executions of ring-leaders and severe punishments inflicted with no sparing hand.

The portrait of this Magnus de la Gardie was one of the best in the house, and Mr Wraxall studied it with no little interest after his day's work. He gives no detailed description of it, but I gather that the face impressed him rather by its power than by its beauty or goodness; in fact, he writes that Count Magnus was an almost phenomenally ugly man.

On this day Mr Wraxall took his supper with the family, and walked back in the late but still bright evening.

"I must remember," he writes, "to ask the sexton if he can let me into the mausoleum at the church. He evidently has access to it himself, for I saw him tonight standing on the steps, and, as I thought, locking or unlocking the door."

I find that early on the following day Mr Wraxall had some conversation with his landlord. His setting it down at such length as he does surprised me at first; but I soon realized that the papers I was reading were, at least in their beginning, the materials for the book he was meditating, and that it was to have been one of those quasi-journalistic productions which admit of the introduction of an admixture of conversational matter.

His object, he says, was to find out whether any traditions of Count Magnus de la Gardie lingered on in the scenes of that gentleman's activity, and whether the popular estimate of him were favourable or not. He found that the Count was decidedly not a favourite. If his tenants came late to their work on the days which they owed to him as Lord of the Manor, they were set on the wooden horse, or flogged and branded in the manor-house yard. One or two cases there were of men who had occupied lands which encroached on the lord's domain, and whose houses had been mysteriously burnt on a winter's night, with the whole family inside. But what seemed to dwell on the innkeeper's mind most—for he returned to the subject more than once—was that the Count had been on the Black Pilgrimage, and had brought something or someone back with him.

You will naturally inquire, as Mr Wraxall did, what the Black Pilgrimage may have been. But your curiosity on the point must remain unsatisfied for the time being, just as his did. The landlord was evidently unwilling to give a full answer, or indeed any answer, on the point, and, being called out for a moment, trotted out with obvious alacrity, only putting his head in at the door a few minutes afterwards to say that he was called away to Skara, and should not be back till evening.

So Mr Wraxall had to go unsatisfied to his day's work at the manor-house. The papers on which he was just then engaged soon put his thoughts into another channel, for he had to occupy himself with glancing over the correspondence between Sophia Albertina in Stockholm and her married cousin Ulrica Leonora at Råbäck in the years 1705-1710. The letters were of exceptional interest from the light they threw upon the culture of that period in Sweden, as anyone can testify who has read the full edition of them in the publications of the Swedish Historical Manuscripts Commission.

In the afternoon he had done with these, and after returning the boxes in which they were kept to their places on the shelf, he proceeded, very naturally, to take down some of the volumes nearest to them, in order to determine which of them had best be his principal subject of investigation next day. The

shelf he had hit upon was occupied mostly by a collection of account-books in the writing of the first Count Magnus. But one among them was not an account-book, but a book of alchemical and other tracts in another sixteenth-century hand. Not being very familiar with alchemical literature, Mr Wraxall spends much space which he might have spared in setting out the names and beginnings of the various treatises: The book of the Phœnix, book of the Thirty Words, book of the Toad, book of Miriam, Turba philosophorum, and so forth; and then he announces with a good deal of circumstance his delight at finding, on a leaf originally left blank near the middle of the book, some writing of Count Magnus himself headed "*Liber nigræ peregrinationis*". It is true that only a few lines were written, but there was quite enough to show that the landlord had that morning been referring to a belief at least as old as the time of Count Magnus, and probably shared by him. This is the English of what was written:

"If any man desires to obtain a long life, if he would obtain a faithful messenger and see the blood of his enemies, it is necessary that he should first go into the city of Chorazin, and there salute the prince…." Here there was an erasure of one word, not very thoroughly done, so that Mr Wraxall felt pretty sure that he was right in reading it as *aëris* ("of the air"). But there was no more of the text copied, only a line in Latin: *Quære reliqua hujus materiei inter secretiora*. (See the rest of this matter among the more private things.)

It could not be denied that this threw a rather lurid light upon the tastes and beliefs of the Count; but to Mr Wraxall, separated from him by nearly three centuries, the thought that he might have added to his general forcefulness alchemy, and to alchemy something like magic, only made him a more picturesque figure; and when, after a rather prolonged contemplation of his picture in the hall, Mr Wraxall set out on his homeward way, his mind was full of the thought of Count Magnus. He had no eyes for his surroundings, no perception of the evening scents of the woods or the evening light on the lake; and when all of a sudden he pulled up short, he was astonished to find himself already at the gate of the churchyard, and within a few minutes of his dinner. His eyes fell on the mausoleum.

"Ah," he said, "Count Magnus, there you are. I should dearly like to see you."

"Like many solitary men," he writes, "I have a habit of talking to myself aloud; and, unlike some of the Greek and Latin particles, I do not expect an answer. Certainly, and perhaps fortunately in this case, there was neither voice nor any that regarded: only the woman who, I suppose, was cleaning up the church, dropped some metallic object on the floor, whose clang startled me. Count Magnus, I think, sleeps sound enough."

That same evening the landlord of the inn, who had heard Mr Wraxall say that he wished to see the clerk or deacon (as he would be called in Sweden) of the parish, introduced him to that official in the inn parlour. A visit to the De la Gardie tomb-house was soon arranged for the next day, and a little general conversation ensued.

Mr Wraxall, remembering that one function of Scandinavian deacons is to teach candidates for Confirmation, thought he would refresh his own memory on a Biblical point.

"Can you tell me," he said, "anything about Chorazin?"

The deacon seemed startled, but readily reminded him how that village had once been denounced.

"To be sure," said Mr Wraxall; "it is, I suppose, quite a ruin now?"

"So I expect," replied the deacon. "I have heard some of our old priests say that Antichrist is to be born there; and there are tales—"

"Ah! what tales are those?" Mr Wraxall put in.

"Tales, I was going to say, which I have forgotten," said the deacon; and soon after that he said good night.

The landlord was now alone, and at Mr Wraxall's mercy; and that inquirer was not inclined to spare him.

"Herr Nielsen," he said, "I have found out something about the Black Pilgrimage. You may as well tell me what you know. What did the Count bring back with him?"

Swedes are habitually slow, perhaps, in answering, or perhaps the landlord was an exception. I am not sure; but Mr Wraxall notes that the landlord spent at least one minute in looking at him before he said anything at all. Then he came close up to his guest, and with a good deal of effort he spoke:

"Mr Wraxall, I can tell you this one little tale, and no more— not any more. You must not ask anything when I have done. In my grandfather's time— that is, ninety-two years ago— there were two men who said: 'The Count is dead; we do not care for him. We will go tonight and have a free hunt in his wood'— the long wood on the hill that you have seen behind Råbäck. Well, those that heard them say this, they said: 'No, do not go; we are sure you will meet with persons walking who should not be walking. They should be resting, not walking.' These men laughed. There were no forestmen to keep the wood, because no one wished to live there. The family were not here at the house. These men could do what they wished.

"Very well, they go to the wood that night. My grandfather was sitting here in this room. It was the summer, and a light night. With the window open, he could see out to the wood, and hear.

"So he sat there, and two or three men with him, and they listened. At first they hear nothing at all; then they hear someone— you know how far away it is— they hear someone scream, just as if the most inside part of his soul was twisted out of him. All of them in the room caught hold of each other, and they sat so for three-quarters of an hour. Then they hear someone else, only about three hundred ells off. They hear him laugh out loud: it was not one of those two men that laughed, and, indeed, they have all of them said that it was not any man at all. After that they hear a great door shut.

"Then, when it was just light with the sun, they all went to the priest. They said to him:

"'Father, put on your gown and your ruff, and come to bury these men, Anders Bjornsen and Hans Thorbjorn.'

"You understand that they were sure these men were dead. So they went to the wood— my grandfather never forgot this. He said they were all like so many dead men themselves. The priest, too, he was in a white fear. He said when they came to him:

"'I heard one cry in the night, and I heard one laugh afterwards. If I cannot forget that, I shall not be able to sleep again.'

"So they went to the wood, and they found these men on the edge of the wood. Hans Thorbjorn was standing with his back against a tree, and all the time he was pushing with his hands— pushing something away from him which was not there. So he was not dead. And they led him away, and took him to the house at Nykjoping, and he died before the winter; but he went on pushing with his hands. Also Anders Bjornsen was there; but he was dead. And I tell you this about Anders Bjornsen, that he was once a beautiful man, but now his face was not there, because the flesh of it was sucked away off the bones. You understand that? My grandfather did not forget that. And they laid him on the bier which they brought, and they put a cloth over his head, and the priest walked before; and they began to sing the psalm for the dead as well as they could. So, as they were singing the end of the first verse, one fell down, who was carrying the head of the bier, and the others looked back, and they saw that the cloth had fallen off, and the eyes of Anders Bjornsen were looking up, because there was nothing to close over them. And this they could not bear. Therefore the priest laid the cloth upon him, and sent for a spade, and they buried him in that place."

The next day Mr Wraxall records that the deacon called for him soon after his breakfast, and took him to the church and mausoleum. He noticed that the key of the latter was hung on a nail just by the pulpit, and it occurred to him that, as the church door seemed to be left unlocked as a rule, it would not be difficult for him to pay a second and more private visit to the monuments if

there proved to be more of interest among them than could be digested at first. The building, when he entered it, he found not unimposing. The monuments, mostly large erections of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, were dignified if luxuriant, and the epitaphs and heraldry were copious. The central space of the domed room was occupied by three copper sarcophagi, covered with finely-engraved ornament. Two of them had, as is commonly the case in Denmark and Sweden, a large metal crucifix on the lid. The third, that of Count Magnus, as it appeared, had, instead of that, a full-length effigy engraved upon it, and round the edge were several bands of similar ornament representing various scenes. One was a battle, with cannon belching out smoke, and walled towns, and troops of pikemen. Another showed an execution. In a third, among trees, was a man running at full speed, with flying hair and outstretched hands. After him followed a strange form; it would be hard to say whether the artist had intended it for a man, and was unable to give the requisite similitude, or whether it was intentionally made as monstrous as it looked. In view of the skill with which the rest of the drawing was done, Mr Wraxall felt inclined to adopt the latter idea. The figure was unduly short, and was for the most part muffled in a hooded garment which swept the ground. The only part of the form which projected from that shelter was not shaped like any hand or arm. Mr Wraxall compares it to the tentacle of a devil-fish, and continues: "On seeing this, I said to myself, 'This, then, which is evidently an allegorical representation of some kind— a fiend pursuing a hunted soul— may be the origin of the story of Count Magnus and his mysterious companion. Let us see how the huntsman is pictured: doubtless it will be a demon blowing his horn."' But, as it turned out, there was no such sensational figure, only the semblance of a cloaked man on a hillock, who stood leaning on a stick, and watching the hunt with an interest which the engraver had tried to express in his attitude.

Mr Wraxall noted the finely-worked and massive steel padlocks— three in number— which secured the sarcophagus. One of them, he saw, was detached, and lay on the pavement. And then, unwilling to delay the deacon longer or to waste his own working-time, he made his way onward to the manor-house.

"It is curious," he notes, "how, on retracing a familiar path, one's thoughts engross one to the absolute exclusion of surrounding objects. Tonight, for the second time, I had entirely failed to notice where I was going (I had planned a private visit to the tomb-house to copy the epitaphs), when I suddenly, as it were, awoke to consciousness, and found myself (as before) turning in at the churchyard gate, and, I believe, singing or chanting some such words as, 'Are you awake, Count Magnus? Are you asleep, Count Magnus?' and then

something more which I have failed to recollect. It seemed to me that I must have been behaving in this nonsensical way for some time."

He found the key of the mausoleum where he had expected to find it, and copied the greater part of what he wanted; in fact, he stayed until the light began to fail him.

"I must have been wrong," he writes, "in saying that one of the padlocks of my Count's sarcophagus was unfastened; I see tonight that two are loose. I picked both up, and laid them carefully on the window-ledge, after trying unsuccessfully to close them. The remaining one is still firm, and, though I take it to be a spring lock, I cannot guess how it is opened. Had I succeeded in undoing it, I am almost afraid I should have taken the liberty of opening the sarcophagus. It is strange, the interest I feel in the personality of this, I fear, somewhat ferocious and grim old noble."

The day following was, as it turned out, the last of Mr Wraxall's stay at Råbäck. He received letters connected with certain investments which made it desirable that he should return to England; his work among the papers was practically done, and travelling was slow. He decided, therefore, to make his farewells, put some finishing touches to his notes, and be off.

These finishing touches and farewells, as it turned out, took more time than he had expected. The hospitable family insisted on his staying to dine with them— they dined at three— and it was verging on half past six before he was outside the iron gates of Råbäck. He dwelt on every step of his walk by the lake, determined to saturate himself, now that he trod it for the last time, in the sentiment of the place and hour. And when he reached the summit of the churchyard knoll, he lingered for many minutes, gazing at the limitless prospect of woods near and distant, all dark beneath a sky of liquid green. When at last he turned to go, the thought struck him that surely he must bid farewell to Count Magnus as well as the rest of the De la Gardies. The church was but twenty yards away, and he knew where the key of the mausoleum hung. It was not long before he was standing over the great copper coffin, and, as usual, talking to himself aloud. "You may have been a bit of a rascal in your time, Magnus," he was saying, "but for all that I should like to see you, or, rather—"

"Just at that instant," he says, "I felt a blow on my foot. Hastily enough I drew it back, and something fell on the pavement with a clash. It was the third, the last of the three padlocks which had fastened the sarcophagus. I stooped to pick it up, and— Heaven is my witness that I am writing only the bare truth— before I had raised myself there was a sound of metal hinges creaking, and I distinctly saw the lid shifting upwards. I may have behaved like a coward, but I could not for my life stay for one moment. I was outside that dreadful

building in less time than I can write—almost as quickly as I could have said—the words; and what frightens me yet more, I could not turn the key in the lock. As I sit here in my room noting these facts, I ask myself (it was not twenty minutes ago) whether that noise of creaking metal continued, and I cannot tell whether it did or not. I only know that there was something more than I have written that alarmed me, but whether it was sound or sight I am not able to remember. What is this that I have done?"

Poor Mr Wraxall! He set out on his journey to England on the next day, as he had planned, and he reached England in safety; and yet, as I gather from his changed hand and inconsequent jottings, a broken man. One of several small note-books that have come to me with his papers gives, not a key to, but a kind of inkling of, his experiences. Much of his journey was made by canal-boat, and I find not less than six painful attempts to enumerate and describe his fellow-passengers. The entries are of this kind:

24. Pastor of village in Skåne. Usual black coat and soft black hat.
25. Commercial traveller from Stockholm going to Trollhättan. Black cloak, brown hat.
26. Man in long black cloak, broad-leafed hat, very old-fashioned.

This entry is lined out, and a note added: "Perhaps identical with No. 13. Have not yet seen his face." On referring to No. 13, I find that he is a Roman priest in a cassock.

The net result of the reckoning is always the same. Twenty-eight people appear in the enumeration, one being always a man in a long black cloak and broad hat, and another a "short figure in dark cloak and hood". On the other hand, it is always noted that only twenty-six passengers appear at meals, and that the man in the cloak is perhaps absent, and the short figure is certainly absent.

On reaching England, it appears that Mr Wraxall landed at Harwich, and that he resolved at once to put himself out of the reach of some person or persons whom he never specifies, but whom he had evidently come to regard as his pursuers. Accordingly he took a vehicle— it was a closed fly— not trusting the railway and drove across country to the village of Belchamp St Paul. It was about nine o'clock on a moonlight August night when he neared the place. He was sitting forward, and looking out of the window at the fields and thickets— there was little else to be seen— racing past him. Suddenly he came to a cross-road. At the corner two figures were standing motionless; both were in dark cloaks; the taller one wore a hat, the shorter a hood. He had no time to see their faces, nor did they make any motion that he could discern.

Yet the horse shied violently and broke into a gallop, and Mr Wraxall sank back into his seat in something like desperation. He had seen them before.

Arrived at Belchamp St Paul, he was fortunate enough to find a decent furnished lodging, and for the next twenty-four hours he lived, comparatively speaking, in peace. His last notes were written on this day. They are too disjointed and ejaculatory to be given here in full, but the substance of them is clear enough. He is expecting a visit from his pursuers— how or when he knows not— and his constant cry is "What has he done?" and "Is there no hope?" Doctors, he knows, would call him mad, policemen would laugh at him. The parson is away. What can he do but lock his door and cry to God?

People still remembered last year at Belchamp St Paul how a strange gentleman came one evening in August years back; and how the next morning but one he was found dead, and there was an inquest; and the jury that viewed the body fainted, seven of 'em did, and none of 'em wouldn't speak to what they see, and the verdict was visitation of God; and how the people as kep' the 'ouse moved out that same week, and went away from that part. But they do not, I think, know that any glimmer of light has ever been thrown, or could be thrown, on the mystery. It so happened that last year the little house came into my hands as part of a legacy. It had stood empty since 1863, and there seemed no prospect of letting it; so I had it pulled down, and the papers of which I have given you an abstract were found in a forgotten cupboard under the window in the best bedroom.

7: The Heart's Desire.

E. Everett-Green

Evelyn Ward Everett-Green, 1856-1932

Western Mail (W.A.) 19 Dec 1908

IT CERTAINLY WAS tiresome and disappointing!

When you have been invited to join a Christmas house party in order to adorn it with your new dress and the eclat of your presence (I had just lately unexpectedly come into quite a big fortune from an old great aunt, who had been quietly and steadily amassing money for above half a century) it is most annoying for yourself and for your hosts that you should be unexpectedly prostrated by a violent headache just three hours before the arrival of the guests, for the most important function of the season and instead of donning your dress and playing your part, be simply obliged to go to bed, with little or no hope of rising from it before the dawn of a new day!

"But if you do feel better— if you should wake up free from pain— do, do, do dress and come down!" the girls of the house had pleaded. "Your Aurora dress is simply adorable! You ought to appear, even if only with the dawn! We shall keep it up till well into Christmas morning— even if not till day-light comes! Do be a darling, Aurora, sleep off the headache— and come down— no matter how late!"

Luckily for me, I can generally sleep even when my head is impossibly bad for any other place than bed. I did sleep, and when I woke I had no idea of the flight of time— whether I had slept minutes or hours. I listened for the throb of Christmas bells in the air, but as yet all was silence.

At the first moment of awakening I had no disposition to move. I did not actually forget the ball going on below— I even heard faint pulsating strains of music floating up through the open window: for the December night was wonderfully mild. But I decided that it was far too much trouble to get up and dress for dancing and that probably I should only bring back the headache by attempting such a thing. I had told my maid to leave me quite alone in the dark—not to come unless I sent for her. Probably she was enjoying herself mightily somewhere else; it would be cruel to disturb her.... But what was that?

I started more fully awake: I was roused by the faint sounds in that portion of my L-shaped bedroom which was hidden from my sight. The house was an old one, and these two quaint rooms which now formed one sleeping-chamber had originally been quite distinct. My bed and washing apparatus was in the shorter portion, whilst round the corner, through a curtained archway, lay the larger part of the room, with the couch, the dressing-table, writing-table and comfortable chairs, which made it almost like a parlour. The fire was here also,

and a lamp had been left burning by my maid before she left; but there had been no glow of light like the one I was conscious of now, and what was the meaning of those sounds I heard— the faint frou-frou of silken garments, and the quiet step which moved occasionally from place to place?

Forgetful of my disabilities and consumed by curiosity, I slipped from my bed, and into the long quilted dressing gown which lay beside it, and thrusting my feet into slippers, I stole across the room like a shadow till I stood behind the curtains which guarded the archway, and cautiously peeped through. What an astonishing vision was thus revealed!

My dress of softest tulle and chiffon, of all the blended colours of the dawn, rose and amethyst, sea-green, pink and azure— how they had been blended the Paris "creator" alone knew— had been laid ready to hand upon the couch, and all the accessories of the shining star for my hair, and my star-tipped wand, had been placed ready upon the table to facilitate a speedy toilet if circumstances permitted it. And there before the tall mirror— in all the glory of my Aurora robes, stood the loveliest creature I had ever seen. She bore a certain resemblance to me, that I noted at a glance. We were much of a height; had much the same figure; for my dress might have been made for her. Her hair was a lovely rich golden colour, whereas mine was merely a golden brown; and her eyes were deep violet blue, whilst mine were bluish grey. Still the likeness was there; the shape of the face was much the same; and she had done her hair in the style in which I wore mine. Beneath the disguise of the little mask and domino (which every lady was to wear till two o'clock) everyone would take her for me, who had known in what character I was to appear; and my name being Aurora the secret would be quickly an open one. I caught my breath as I looked at this radiant figure, who was plainly going to personate me in borrowed plumes! Who was she? What could be her motive? And what might not be the complications to follow?

For here let me state briefly, that I had been especially asked to this ball to give young Lord Raleigh his chance to propose to me! I liked him well enough; but I knew I should never do more than like him; yet I had almost made up my mind to accept him. I had an idea that I should never fall in love. Once upon a time— but that was another story— for a few happy weeks on shipboard— but though a brave and distinguished soldier, he had no fortune and I was then a poor travelling companion. We both, I think, realised the hopelessness of the situation; and probably he thought I only cared as a young girl may care for a man old enough to be her father, without any idea of anything beyond friendship. I did not know how that might be. We had parted friends— nothing more was possible. I had never seen him again. That was five years ago. He might be married or dead for all I knew. And I had begun to think that my life's

romance had died within me. I should not love again; but after all a woman alone in the world must marry. My friends were keen about it—and Lord Raleigh was handsome, agreeable, and apparently in earnest. I might do worse. I had almost made up my mind to it. And to-night— as Aurora— in my rosy finery I was to put the finishing touch to the conquest all my friends believed I had made.

That was one reason for their acute disappointment— their eagerness for me to appear— and now, in my room, in my dress— unless I dreamed it all— stood a replica of myself—putting the finishing touches to the portrait. To make sure whether I really dreamed or not, I drew aside the curtain and walked quietly into the lighted portion of the room.

The vision wheeled round, confronted me, flinched for a moment, and then stood proudly silent. The girl's beautiful face— far more beautiful than mine— flamed suddenly from brow to chin, but her eyes did not fall before my scrutinising gaze.

"Who are you?" I asked, "and what are you doing? No, I am not angry— only very curious. I seem to know your face, now I see it plainly; but I cannot remember where I have met you—"

"I am the children's governess— you may have seen me at lunch, or in the garden—"

"I suppose that was it. And somebody was saying something about you, too; that you were only playing at governess work; that you were really quite rich. I did not understand— my head was beginning to ache so—"

"May I tell you about it? It will help to explain what I am doing now—"

"Please do. I want to look at you— you are so beautiful. Sit down and finish yourself, and tell me. I shall make us some tea in the spirit-lamp: and you shall go to the ball and tell me all about it afterward. Were you going to personate me?"

"Let me explain, please. I was brought up as an heiress— my father's only child. I don't remember my mother. My father died two years ago. I had everything he left. I was thought of as very wealthy; but there was a great deal to do— he had ventures in so many places; but I had lots of people after me, wanting money for every kind of object—"

"And lovers, too, I don't doubt."

"Men, at least, who called themselves lovers. Yes, that is part of the story. One of them— the one, I thought, really cared, the one I cared for— is to be here to-night!"

"Are you engaged, do you mean?"

"No; it was like this. Suddenly it seemed as though everything might go. I don't understand business; I can't tell you much; and it wouldn't be interesting.

But for a time I thought I should be quite poor— my lawyers thought so; the rumour got about. I decided to treat it as though it were true; it might prove to be true any day. I went out as a companion for six months. Then I came here to look after the children. When I had been here a few weeks things took another turn—they are going to come almost right again. I shall be rich enough, though perhaps not quite the heiress they thought at first; and I have learned my lesson!"

I did not need to ask exactly what that was. I guessed.

"You mean that he— the one you spoke about— the one you cared for deserted you— when the trouble came?"

"I don't want to be hard on him. Perhaps he could not help it. He has relations; he has a title and impoverished estates. His position and circumstances almost make it incumbent upon him to marry a wife with a fortune. I am not a child; I understand these things; only— only— if he had been true—"

A sudden illumination came upon me. "You are speaking of Lord Raleigh! And he is coming here to propose to you to-night!"

We looked each other full in the face. Excitement had robbed me of every trace of headache. I was ardently interested.

"And you were going to personate me! Was that it?"

"Perhaps I am mad— perhaps I am wicked— but it came over me like a possession! I heard of your headache— I heard them talking of his disappointment; and a longing came over me. He should have his chance!—his chance to play the man! I would take your Aurora dress; I would mask myself and come down. They would all think it was you— Lord Raleigh, too. He would dance with me— get me away some where— press his suit on me— as you—"

"Yes, yes, yes— and then? Go on! No, I don't mind in the least. Tell me what you were going to do then!"

"Why, unmask myself; look him full in the eyes and bid him choose between us! Don't you see, one of two things must happen? If, knowing me, he still preferred you and the money— then that would kill my love. I could thrust it from my heart— I should watch it die— and begin life again without it. But if he should be brave enough— true enough— to let love conquer prudence—to take me, poor as he thinks me—in spite of all; then I shall know that after all he loves me; and I can tell him then that I am not the Beggar Maid he takes me for; though he will always be my King. Ah— but am I hurting you? I forgot—"

"My dear child— I am delighted! I do not want him— I do not love him. But I thought perhaps he did love me; and I was debating—you understand; we must debate these things; and he is attractive, as you know. Yet I had a feeling always that it was not the real thing on his side either. Now I understand!

There was always another— as the wise French proverb says. Now we will play out this little masquerade together. I am simply frightfully excited about it. Don't be too hard on him.... What is your name, please? I forget if I was told—"

"Call me Florence, please—how kind you are not to be angry! Most women would—"

"Then they would be great geese. Now, Florence, can you manage to get hold of another mask and domino?"

"Quite easily. I have one in my own room. I was going to look on a little anyway, and I had made provision against recognition."

"Capital, run and fetch it whilst I get into some clothes. I have a plan. We will carry it out together."

Whilst she was gone I made my toilet with the greatest rapidity; which was easy, as everything was laid ready to my hand. Then from one of my great trunks I pulled out the dress I had designed to wear, till I had been overborne by the wishes of my hosts, and had written off post-haste to Paris for an Aurora creation. I had intended to appear as "Night," in a black spangled dress with a gleaming foundation, intended to suggest moonlight.

"Help me into this mysterious robe!" I begged of Florence, as she re-appeared, "and then we will go down and slip amongst the dancers, one by one as we can. Remember you are me and I am just one of the crowd of guests. You carry out your programme exactly as you intended. Don't be too hard upon Lord Raleigh, poor fellow; and don't be surprised at my appearing on the scene at any moment!"

We put on our masks and the short domino which only partially disguised our dresses. I saw at a glance that everyone would take Florence to be me who knew of the Aurora dress. My heart was moved to an excited sense of coming triumph and satisfaction. How I hoped that Lord Raleigh would play the man— and be true to his love! I could never, never wed him now; but if only he would be true to himself how much happiness might result!

The great house was a bower of Christmas greenery; the gleam of scarlet berries and the white of mistletoe shone out everywhere against oak panelling and over pictures, arches, and doors. Mingling with the throb of music came little shrieks of merriment and confusion, as young men and maidens, more or less disguised, wandered through the big house, and the former tempted the latter beneath the "mistletoe bough"— and took toll there! Midnight had come already; bells sounded from without, and eager voices were exchanging greetings within. It was Christmas Day— the season of gladness and goodwill. What was this Christmas night going to bring to the two strongly contrasted figures of Darkness and Dawn, stealing along like shadowy spectres from the regions above?

We did not enter the ballroom together. I sent Florence on in advance, and myself glided along an upper corridor and down by a side-staircase which she had shown me, and found myself at the door of a small ante-chamber which led direct into the great ball-room, from which it was an offshoot.

The long, splendidly-decorated room was in itself a sight, the throng of gay and quaint and grotesque figures another. The ladies all wore their little masks; but the men's faces were only disguised when they had chosen to don false hair for their parts; they none of them wore masks. A great many of the men wore fancy dress; but a fair proportion had simply donned uniform of some kind. As I stood gazing about me with the greatest interest my eyes were suddenly caught and held by a face— a familiar face— a face the sight of which caused my heart to leap up, and I could have cried aloud in my joy.

It was he— it was he— it was he! There was the fine, handsome, eagle face— at once stern and thoughtful, tender and manly— the face of a soldier and of a hero— as I had always felt; there was the fine, tall, commanding figure, the distinguished and courtly bearing. I saw him salute a friend, watched the smile kindle in his eyes, saw the pleasant, kindly light which shone there as a young girl was introduced to him. How often had it kindled there for me! I must get near to him—I must hear his voice again—I edged my way slowly along the wall: I presently stood at his side. He just turned his head and looked at me.

"Can I find you a seat?" he asked, courteously.

"General Mainwaring—have you forgotten me?"

He had been colonel when we knew each other; but I knew he must be general now. At the sound of my voice he started. I saw how the light flashed into his eyes. When I put my hand into his, I felt as though the grip of his fingers almost crushed mine; yet not for the world would I have had him hold them less closely.

"Miss Adair— Miss Aurora— is it really you?"

"Ah, how nice it is to find a friend— a real friend— in a great crowd like this!"

"Do you feel that too?"

He took me aside into a quiet place, where we could talk. We exchanged our Christmas felicitations, as a sort of cover for our eager delight at this encounter. For the moment all thought of the other Aurora had faded from my mind. I had my friend beside me. I pulled off my mask, and we sat and talked. He told me a little of the story of the past five years. Things had gone well with him. A little property— a sufficient income— had been left to him. A very tender light came into his eyes as he turned them upon me.

"Not any great thing, my dear; but enough for one— enough for two— enough to keep up a happy little home for people with simple tastes. My child, I have so often thought of you!"

My heart was all in a tumult of happiness and wonder. That he should care! That he should think of me! A man of whom any woman might be proud. All the pent-up love of my hungry heart went out to him. What did he mean?— what did he mean?

"You have not told me of yourself, my child. Are you still a lonely little waif— as once you were?"

"I am still lonely— I have no one belonging to me— no one who really cares—"

"That is not quite true, my dear— I care."

"You!"

"Did you never guess it, little one? Sometimes I was afraid I went too far. I think I loved you from the first moment I saw you; but what had I to offer? You so young, so fair, with all your life before you. I nothing but a poor soldier, with so little to offer that I felt it would be a wrong to your youth and inexperience and girlish beauty—"

"And you never saw— you never knew— you never thought—?"

"What, sweetheart?" he whispered.

I looked into his dear, tender, truthful eyes, and then it was easy to say it,

"Why—that I loved you, too!"

I had almost forgotten why I was here at all; but I suddenly remembered.

"Oh, Reginald! —I had forgotten —everything. Do tell me what is the time?"

"Nearly two o'clock, sweetheart—have you any appointment to keep at unmasking time?"

He smiled down at me; I was putting on my mask.

"I must go and find somebody. Please come with me. Don't ask questions now; I'll tell everything afterwards."

I walked on air; I was so happy that I was glad of my mask to veil my jubilant face. How strangely things had turned out! This was the ball at which my fate was to be settled! And here was I— an engaged and triumphant woman— walking through the thronged, green-decked rooms upon the arm of my affianced husband in search of Lord Raleigh and his Aurora!

In the great conservatory we found them. I saw the variegated billows of foamy dawn-cloud, and heard voices low-toned and earnest— as though the man were pleading— the lady listening.

My companion seemed to divine that we were near to overhearing some confidence and made as though to draw me away; but I laid my finger on my

lips, and remained where I was behind the bank of palms. At that moment the big clock in the overhead tower tolled the hour of two.

From the ballroom there rose instant clamour of laughter, applause, merriment and banter. Masks were off— illusion and mystification at an end; and close beside me I heard a man's startled exclamation:

"Florence! You!"

"Yes— it is I. We have had a charming hour together. Shall we go back to the ballroom now?"

Suddenly there was a sound as though the man had made a swift movement.

"Florence— oh, confound it all— I don't understand it yet; but I don't care! No, I don't care one hang! I won't do the right and proper thing; I'll do the thing I want. I'll marry the woman I love— and everything else may go hang! I've tried to think I didn't care— that it would be wrong to you— wrong to me. I tried to fall in love with Miss Adair; I knew all the time I only cared for her because she brought you back to mind. There is a likeness, you know, I dare say you won't believe me! I deserve you shouldn't. But it's true, it's true, it's true! I shall never care for any woman but you. I don't care if you haven't a red cent to bless yourself with! Come and share what I've got, and we'll be happy together our own way. Florence, what does it matter about anything else? Miss Adair may keep her big pile to herself. I only want you— you— you!"

I felt the man beside me start, he was only remaining unwillingly at my side as this duologue proceeded. Now he bent over me and whispered:

"Darling, come away! What is the fellow raving about?"

"I'll tell you directly, dear love. But just now— come with me. It's all right— you will see."

I had my mask in my hand, and with my other upon my companion's arm, I stepped from our nook, and stood before the lovely girl and her handsome companion.

"Lord Raleigh, may I be the first to offer my congratulations?"

He stared at me in amazement. No wonder he felt as though the place was turning topsy-turvy about him.

"We were both nearly making a mistake," I said; I could take such a kindly, maternal air with him now, I could regard him from such a height of happy complacency! "We both tried to think that liking and friendship might perhaps be enough; but to-night has taught us both our mistake. I should like, with your leave, to present you to my affianced husband— General Mainwaring."

Florence jumped up with a little cry of amazement; the two men exchanged a hand-grip, surprise in their faces, but gratification in their hearts. I

was holding Florence by her shoulders and gazing into the beautiful, happy, changing face.

"He cares for you for yourself— you are satisfied!"

"I am satisfied. It has all come right. And it is all your doing— dear Aurora!"

"On the contrary, my dear, it is all your doing; but had it not been for your invasion of my room to-night, I should never have appeared at the ball; I might never have met again the man— I love. Everything might have drifted on to its dismal consummation, and four people might have lost the best that life has to give!"

Then I turned upon the young peer with great gladness shining from my happy eyes.

"I am so glad you took her for her own sweet sake; but it is all right. Her fortune is almost intact— it was all a blunder and a confusion; but nothing matters now, except that you have found one another. To wish you a very happy Christmas!— is that superfluous?"

We left them together, and as we moved away I explained in part the things which had happened, and Reginald listened, looking down at me with those dear, friendly, tender eyes of his.

"But tell me, sweetheart, what did he mean when he spoke of you and your 'big pile'? I had thought—"

"Dearest, I was as poor as a church mouse when first we met. It was only something quite unexpected which made me rich in money. And ah!— how little happiness it brought! But now I am rich— rich— rich— in another way. Darling, you are not going to throw me over just because I am not the church mouse! If you do I will endow every lunatic asylum in the kingdom and get rid of every shilling!"

He laughed then and took me into his brave strong arms. We were quite alone in a dim green place, and the music had begun again and was pulsating in the air.

"My Aurora!" he whispered; and though I wore the robe of night, and beautiful Florence the robe of dawn, I knew that a day-star had arisen in my heart and in my life.

"Oh, it has been a beautiful ball!" I cried. "It is the sort of thing that ought to happen on Christmas night and Christmas Day!"

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8: Rogues' Reward

W. E. Figgis

William Ernest Figgis, 1884-1929
Argus (Melbourne) 13 Oct 1928

The author worked in the mining industry, and had many years association with the Ballarat School of Mines. He died in a motor accident.

THE Golden Treasure mine, which I managed in the West about 30 years ago, was a very rich show, with free gold occurring frequently in patches-a great mine for specimens. On all goldfields there is a certain amount of loss by theft, but on this mine, owing to the coarse gold, have suffered particularly heavily An old saying of gold-stealing miners, that "the company never had it," saved many a guilty conscience, and no doubt our company never had a lot of gold which nevertheless came out of our own workings

There was an abandoned claim not very far from our boundary on which two old prospectors had sunk a shaft to a depth of about 50 ft, and had done a little exploratory work on a small quartz seam. There was nothing in it, however, and they had gone long since. A party of three new arrivals resumed this claim, installed a windlass, repaired the ladders, and commenced work where the others had stopped. Soon we noticed to our surprise that they were beginning to haul quartz, and a pile of stone began to accumulate on the surface.

We all knew the stone to be absolutely worthless. I had myself been down to see it on several occasions when the old prospectors were at work, and I had seldom been "hungrier" quartz. We were therefore inclined to pity the newcomers, who appeared to be hard-working and industrious. Although there were only three of them, they worked day, afternoon, and night shifts, and as each shift required two men they had little time for rest

Gradually the pile grew, until after about two months there were nearly 35 tons of "ore at grass," ore hauled out of the mine and dumped on the surface to await further treatment. Presently this was carted off in drays to the State battery, where parcels of stone were treated for those who had no plant of their own The crushing returned gold valued at nearly £600, which surprised us all very much, as it meant that the stone had averaged more than 4oz. of gold to the ton, a remarkable change in value, especially as nothing had been heard of any new development in the show.

The newcomers were reticent. They kept strictly to their, job and made no friends. Their camp consisted of a large tent for sleeping quarters, with a rough shed of mulga bushes built over it. And another brushwood shed for meals, the usual type of prospector's home, complete with flying pan hanging by a nail

from a sapling, and a wild collection of bottles and jam, fish, and meat tins at the back. It was only 100 yards from the shaft. The men were seldom seen in town except when one or other of them went in for supplies, and apparently they drank little, if at all rather a remarkable fact on the goldfields.

Meanwhile our affairs were prospering. The Treasure was booming. Returns had risen to 15,000 ounces a month. The result was that soon every available spare block of land for miles around was pegged out by prospectors, and as a result of the success of the new party's first crushing work began on the leases adjoining their little claim, and several prospecting shafts were sunk. None of these, however, disclosed anything of value, and the owners, party by party, gradually left them. The three continued steadily on nevertheless. Parcels of ore continued to go to the State battery at intervals and always the yields were excellent.

Lots of metal goes astray on all gold fields, but it is always extremely difficult to catch the thieves. Although from close personal and expert knowledge one may be practically positive where certain specimens have been got, such knowledge is of little value as legal evidence. Unless caught red handed the thieves have a good chance of escaping detection. Our losses were severe, and most of us soon began to suspect that much of the gold stolen from the Treasure was finding its way to the prospectors' show. The stone they were continually dumping at their shaft head seemed to be the same poverty stricken stuff as of old, mill j white, and without a trace of mineral or colouring

The Government mine inspector had from time to time to inspect the workings of all mines to see that everything was safe .He had therefore seen where the new party are working It was on the abandoned by the old prospectors. It looked no richer than it had looked in their time, and, "As you know," said he "it couldn't look poorer." Yet their crushings showed continued improvement. Where gold occurs in coarse form as it did with us, it is not at all difficult for a miner to bring up lumps of rich quartz with him in his billy or in other ways. Assuming that this was happening, the three must have confederates working in our mine, who brought up the specimens and left them at some prearranged spot to be collected later and skilfully mixed with the poor stone that they were hauling from their mine to camouflage their real activities.The police were doing their best to find clues, and O'Neill, the inspector a capable, active officer, admitted that, though he was as convinced as the rest of us who the culprits were, he was unable to prove any thing against them

The business was getting very much on my nerves. On several occasions directors had come over on visits from Melbourne or Adelaide, and always the question of gold stealing arose. Like ourselves they knew that the country

nearby had not disclosed any payable material. What was going on seemed so obvious that they could not help showing that they thought I should be able to stop it. Nevertheless, they could offer no suggestions that had not been tried already, and neither I nor anyone else could find a hole in the supposed culprits' armour. After the fourth crushing had been put through, however, an incident occurred which, I thought, might indicate that the strain was telling on their nerves also

The leader of the party was a big handsome bushman named Monahan. His mates were Butler, a thick-set, nuggetty fellow, and Fongo a lean, active Italian a man of tireless energy, hard as nails. I happened to meet Monahan in the street one evening. It was some time since I had seen him, and I thought that his good looking face was a trifle flushed

He stopped and said "Good night, Mr Mawson. When are you coming to have a look at our mines?"

"I don't know," I replied, taken back at the question "What have you got to show me?"

"Will you come down and see?" he said. "Name a day "

His eyes never left mine for an instant. There was not the least doubt that he was striving hard to suppress a smile I was also controlling myself with difficulty, though not from smiling.

"I'll let you know when I'm likely to come," was all I said, however, as I passed on my way

That night at the club, Inspector O'Neill called me quietly over to a corner and said that he thought he had a clue at last, and that one of his men had almost succeeded in catching Butler in the act of receiving specimens from one of our miners coming off night shift The constable had recognised the two men, but, before he could do anything a passing cloud bad obscured what little moonlight there was, and they had disappeared in opposite directions Monahan is extremely warm," the inspector said, "and I have to be very careful Fortunately my man was not seen by them, or at any rate he thinks he was not."

Next morning, to my amazement and chagrin, I read a paragraph in the local paper to the effect that "Mr Mawson, manager of the Golden Treasure, has arranged to make an inspection of the property known as Monahan's"

I had told O'Neill of my meeting with Monahan, and shortly after breakfast he called at the office

"Well " he said, pointing to the paragraph, "this is rather a smart move. I believe that they are not quite easy in their minds, and they have done this to allay public suspicion The fact that your company is likely to inspect will make people think you have some confidence in the show, and now that they have

succeeded in getting this published, the impression has gone abroad. Whether you deny it or not, it will be difficult to alter it"

It was a score to Monahan.

The following day produced another score. Two men arrived by the Perth express and put up at the loading hotel. It was made known that they represented a Melbourne syndicate, and had come to inspect the show with a view to purchase No one on the field know them, nor were their names familiar to us as those of mining experts. However, they began their work, and in due course took their departure with plenty of samples of ore in carefully scaled bags— all part of the bluff, of course.

At this stage Fate took a hand in the game. Monahan's mates had several times called at the chemist's for patent medicines, and the inquiries they had made had led the chemist to suspect a severe illness at the camp. He took the precaution to drop a hint to the health officer, who drove out and discovered Monahan in a high fever.

A message was sent to the Treasure asking for the loan of our ambulance. Ferguson, the mine surveyor, who had charge of our first-aid appliances, went over and saw the sick man safely to the isolation ward at the hospital.

He returned in a state of great excitement to report that Monahan was in a raving delirium, and that during the journey he had given the whole affair away, even mentioning the names of the con-federates in our mine, including one of the shift bosses.

I sent for O'Neill and gave him the facts. It was obviously a case for immediate action. The others would be more on the alert than ever now and they might take fright and bolt altogether. Yet the same old difficulty remained— what to do exactly?

Finally, as a better solution offered, it was decided to raid the camp and mine that evening with a search warrant. Complete preparations were made, and shortly after midnight O'Neill set out with four of his men.

Butler was discovered asleep in the tent. When awakened he said nothing at all, but dressed and quietly stepped outside, apparently resigned to the fact that the game was up. A search was made of the camp, and in a hole in the corner of the floor more than half a hundredweight of specimens was found

Lcaving Butler under a guard, O'Neill and two companions went over to the shaft to undertake the ticklish job of descending to interview the Italian Fongo. who was at work below.

O'Neill went first down the ladder in his stockinged feet, and with infinite precau-tion climbed to the drive beneath. As he reached the bottom of the shaft the muffled third of blows, rapidly repeated, reached him from afar off.

In the darkness he and his men crept quietly along the tunnel in the direction of the sounds, which continued without ceasing for a moment. At last a faint light showed far ahead, and as their eyes became more accustomed to the gloom they could discern the stoped-out portion of the "hungry" lode from which the men had mined the quartz to mix with the stolen specimens. As they went on the sound of the blows grew louder. At last heavy sibilant breathing and excited mutterings reached them. Pausing in astonishment to listen for a moment, O'Neill signed to his companions to be ready, and, advancing to a bend in the tunnel, peered quietly round.

There had been no need for caution. The Italian, stripped to the waist and glistening with sweat, was working with his pick like a man possessed. As the blows rained on the soft slate rock in the face of the drive, a trickle of water oozed out and occasionally a sharp metallic click told that the pick had struck harder rock.

As the watchers waited, undecided on their next step, the last of the slate fell before the frenzied onslaught, disclosing a fine face of quartz in which they golden specks glistened in the light of the two candles stuck in either side of the tunnel

Pongo flung down his pick, clapped his hands, and shouted with joy. Then, turning, he stared in astonishment at the three intruders. O'Neill advanced toward him and was greeted with a burst of derisive laughter.

"Da inspects' eh? He he! Good-day to you. People say no gold in da mine. You think so, too? No gold, eh? You come a too late. He! he!"

It was true enough. The villains had struck it rich, as much to their own surprise as to everyone else's. There was no further need of contributions from other people's mines. The three received large fortunes from what was in future known as Monahan's Reward.

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9: The Dragon of Kao Tsu

Robert E. Howard (as by "Sam Walser")

1906-1936

Spicy Adventure Stories Sep 1939

Lurid melodrama characteristic of the "Spicy" range of pulps: Spicy Adventure, Detective, Mystery, Western. Almost all the covers featured a damsel in distress, often tied up, and the stories involved scantily dressed dames. Howard, best known for his Conan the Barbarian stories, wrote numerous stories for the "Spicies", as they were known.

THE girl who stormed the back room of the Purple Dragon Bar where Wild Bill Clanton sat sipping a whiskey-and-soda, looked out of place in that dive. She advertised her place in the social register from her insolently tilted beret to her high French heels. She was tall and slender but her lines were supple and rounded, with melting curves that would make any man's blood run faster. Just now her purplish eyes flashed and her pertly-tilted breasts swelled stormily.

"You," she accused Clanton, "are a thief, a liar, and a rat!"

"So what?" he retorted unimpressed, as he poured another drink.

"Why, you low-lifed—!" Her refinement skidded a trifle in her resentment, and she began sketching his genealogy with language she never learned in the Junior League. He interrupted her peremptorily.

"Now you hold on! Some things nobody can call me, not even a lady! Sit down and cool off before somethin' unpleasant happens to you!"

She wilted at the threat and drooped into the chair opposite him.

"This," she said bitterly, "is what I get for associating with a gorilla like you. Why I do it, I don't know."

"I know," he retorted. "Because you wanted Shareef Ahmed's ivory dragon and I was the only man who could get it for you."

"Yes, you were!" There was rancor in her tone, and her basilisk glare made him uneasy. You never could tell about these society dames! If she yanked a knife out of her garter, he meant to smack her down.

But she had no knife in her garter, as he could tell when she crossed her silk-clad legs with the regal indifference of a true aristocrat. She twitched down her skirt an inch or so, but not before he had a glimpse of white skin that made the blood boil to his head. Her indifference to his emotions was maddening.

Probably it had never occurred to Old Man Allison's pampered daughter Marianne that a man on Clanton's social plane would even think of making a pass at her, but he had to clench his hands to keep them off of her.

"What's eatin' you?" he demanded.

FOR answer she produced something from her handbag and smacked it down accusingly before him. It was a small, pot-bellied ivory dragon, exquisitely carved and yellowed with age.

"It's a fake!" she declared.

"It's the one Ram Lal stole from Shareef Ahmed," he asserted.

"It's a fake," she contended moodily. "Either you've gyped me, or that *babu* you hired to do the job has, or Ahmed's fooled us all."

"Well, what of it?" he asked. "All you want it for is to show to your society friends back in the United States and brag about it bein' a rare antique. They won't know the difference."

"Some of them will," she answered, lighting a cigarette with an injured air. "The collection of Oriental antiques is a great hobby in my set. It's been a game to see who could get the rarest relic by fair means or foul. Betty Elston got hold of a priceless Ming vase in Canton, and she's gloated over the rest of us until I've wanted to kick her little— well, anyway, I heard about the Kao Tsu dragon in San Francisco, and I came all the way to Singapore to get it. It dates from the Early Han Dynasty, and it's the only one of its kind in the world. I knew Ahmed wouldn't sell it, so I hired you to have it stolen for me."

Clanton picked up the yellowed figure and turned it about.

"I dunno," he mused. "Ram Lal got into Ahmed's house and swiped this. He's the slickest thief on the Peninsula. But if it's the wrong one, he might be afraid to risk another try. Ahmed's bad business."

"But he's been paid, and it isn't the right dragon!" she snapped. "What kind of a man would he be to take money under false pretences?"

"Hire a thief and then squawk if he gyps you!" he mocked her. "But keep your shirt on. I'm a man of my word, anyway. I've taken your dough, and I aim to deliver the goods. Ram Lal's so scared of Ahmed he's hidin' in an old warehouse down on the waterfront. Maybe he just got the wrong dragon by mistake. Or he may be holdin' out on you for or more dough. You leave this thing with me, and tonight I'll go down there and talk to him. If he's on the level, maybe he'll try again. If he's tryin' to put somethin' over, well, we'll see."

"I'm going with you," she decided. "I don't trust either of you."

"It's no place for a white woman," he warned her.

She tilted a scornful nose.

"I can take care of myself, *Mister* Clanton— otherwise I'd never have dared to have any dealings with you! I'll pick you up near the mosque on Muscat Street. And I don't want to have to drag you out from under some table, or away from some brown-skinned wench, either."

"I'll be there, sober and respectable," he assured her, "But how about a little drink before you go?"

"No, thanks!" she declined. "I prefer to keep our relationship on a strictly business basis; and whiskey gives men ideas. I'll see you at dusk."

And she swung out of the room with a long-legged, hip-swaying gait that made Clanton moan with despair and grab the whiskey bottle. She had him buffaloed. If she'd been anybody else, he'd have made a pass at her, regardless. But there was a limit even to his audacity, and he didn't dare try any rough stuff on the daughter of Old Man Allison, millionaire and woolly wolf of finance that the old devil was.

He turned the ivory dragon about in his hands and frowned.

"Antique collectin', eh? Hokum!"

RISING, he bellowed to a half-caste waiter, plunked a coin on the table and barged out of a side door. A few moments later he was seated in a silk shop kept by one Yakub, an old jew who had a finger in many enterprises besides the one advertised by the sign over his door, and whose ear was always close to the mysterious pulse of the East. Clanton set the ivory dragon before him and demanded: "What's that?"

Yakub donned square, steel-rimmed spectacles, and regarded it.

"That's the Kao Tsu dragon," he said. "But I wouldn't handle it for you. You must have stolen it from Shareef Ahmed. I love life too much to handle anything stolen from that devil."

"It's a fake," asserted Clanton.

"If it's a fake, I'm a Gentile," answered old Yakub, lovingly fondling its smooth surface. "Tchk, tchk! Such a pity! I'd buy it myself if I weren't afraid of Ahmed. He'll slit your throat for this, sure."

"You'll swear it's genuine?" Clanton demanded.

"My head on it!" The old man's sincerity was convincing.

"Hmmm!" Clanton's scowl deepened. "I wonder what that hussy's tryin' to put over?"

Then he asked Yakub a strange question, and received a stranger answer.

IF MARIANNE Allison had known of that conversation, her poise might have been a trifle less confident when her big coupe purred up to the curb where Clanton stood, just as the street lights were coming on. He climbed in beside her and she turned off down a side street according to his directions.

"Did you bring any money, in case Ram Lal wants more?" he asked.

"I should say not!" she retorted. "He's been paid enough. He owes me any future service it takes to get the right dragon."

"You're an arrogant wench," he observed, his eyes glued on a rounded knee. Through accident or design her dress h ad worked up again, baring an inch of white skin above the stocking-top.

"When you get through inspecting my legs," she suggested, "you might tell me which way to turn at this next intersection."

She smiled cruelly as he reluctantly turned his attention to the street. Feeling perfectly safe from him, she took a feminine delight in tantalizing him. She was aware of her effect on him, and she enjoyed seeing the veins in his forehead swell with frustrated emotion.

"Pull up here," he directed presently, and they rolled to a halt in a shabby side street in the native quarter. "Have to leave the boat here. They may steal the wheels off of it before we get back, but it won't navigate the alley we've got to follow. Here, this is it"

It was dark in the alley. They groped their way along and presently came out into an open space, lined on one side by rotten, deserted wharves.

"That's the warehouse." Clanton indicated a building looming darkly before them. "He's got a camp cot and some canned grub in one of the lower rooms, and he aims to hide there till I let him know what move Ahmed's makin' about that theft"

NO LIGHT showed behind the shutters of the barred windows. Clanton knocked and softly called: "Ram Lal!" No answer. He tried the door and found it to be unlocked. He pushed it open and Marianne pressed close on his heels as he entered. She jumped and grabbed his arm as they stood in the darkness.

"The door! Somebody pushed it to behind us!"

"Wind must have blown it shut," he grunted. "But where the hell's Ram Lai?"

"Listen!" She clutched him convulsively. Somewhere in the darkness sounded a steady drip-drip as if somebody had left a faucet partly open. But Clanton's hair began to rise, because he knew there wasn't any faucet in that room. He struck a match in a hurry and held it up. Marianne clapped a hand over her mouth to stifle a shriek. Clanton swore. In the wavering light they saw Ram Lai. The fat. swarthy babu slumped drunkenly in a chair near a table. His head lolled on his breast and his eyes were glassy. And, from a throat slashed from ear to ear, blood still oozed sluggishly to fall drop by drop in a widening crimson puddle on the floor.

"God almighty!" muttered Clanton. "We've got to get out of here— *now*!"

Something that glinted swished at him out of the shadows. Marianne had a brief glimpse of an arc of gleaming steel and a dark contorted face behind it. Then the match went out, clipped from Clanton's hand by that slashing blade,

and the dark filled with hair-raising sounds. Marianne dropped to the floor and scurried on all-fours in the direction she hoped the door was. She'd lost touch with Clanton, but he couldn't be dead, because no corpse could put up the fight he was putting up.

Lurid Anglo-Saxon oaths mingled with Asiatic yowls, and she almost pitied his adversaries as she heard what sounded like beeves being knocked in the head with a maul, but which she knew to be the impact of his massive fists on human skulls. Howls of pain and rage filled the room, the table overturned crashingly, and then somebody stumbled over her in the dark.

IT WAS a Malay. She could tell by the smell, even in the dark. She heard him floundering on the floor near her, and her blood froze at the *wheep-wheep* of a keen blade being whirled at random. It was close behind her, and the flesh of her hips contracted as she scuttled away on her all-fours. Her groping hands found a door and pulled it open, but no light came in, and she felt steps leading upward. But any avenue of escape from that blind blade flailing the blackness was welcome.

She shut the door behind her and went up the stair as fast as she could and eventually emerged into an equally dark space that felt big and empty and smelled musty. There she crouched, shivering, while the noise of battle went on below, until it culminated in an amazing crash that sounded as though somebody had been knocked bodily through a closed door. Then the sounds died away and silence reigned. She believed that Clanton had broken away from his attackers and fled, pursued by them.

She was right. At that moment Clanton was racing down a winding alley, hearing the pad of swift feet close behind him, and momentarily expecting a knife thrust in the back. They were too many for even him to fight with his bare hands, and they were gaining on him. With a straining burst of effort he reached an empty, dim-lit side-street ahead of them, and before he vanished into an entrance on the other side, he cast something on the paving in the light of the dim street-lamp.

Startled yelps escaped his pursuers, and abandoning the chase, they pounced on the yellowed ivory dragon Clanton had discarded.

Back in the loft of the deserted warehouse Marianne crept down the stairs. For some time she had heard no sound below. Then just as she reached the stair-door, she checked, her heart in her throat. Somebody had entered the room beyond. But this man wore the boots of a white man; she could tell by his footfalls. Then she heard a smothered, English oath.

Clanton must have eluded his pursuers and returned. She heard a match struck, and light stole through the crack under the door. She pushed the door

ajar. A brawny figure, wearing a seaman's cap, with his back to the door, was bending over the corpse slumped in the chair.

"Clanton!" she exclaimed, stepping into the room— then checked in her tracks as a perfect stranger whirled around with an oath. He was as big as Clanton and much uglier. His bloodshot eyes glared, his black beard bristled, and he levelled a snub-nosed revolver at her quivering tummy.

"Don't shoot!" she gasped. "I— I won't hurt you!"

The stranger's reply was unprintable. Evidently her sudden appearance had given him a bad shock.

"Who the blinkin' hell are you and what're you doin' here?" he concluded. "Well, talk before I start sweepin' the floor with you!" He flourished a fist the size of a breakfast ham under her shrinking nose.

She shuddered and spoke hastily: "I lost my way and wandered in here by mistake— I've got to go now— glad to have met you—"

"Stow it!" bellowed the irate intruder. "You can't pull the wool over Bull Davies' eyes like that!" The aforesaid eyes narrowed wickedly in the light of the candle on a wall-shelf. "Oh, I get it!" he muttered. "Of course! You're after the dragon yourself! You killed Ram Lal to get it! Well, hand it over and you won't get hurt— maybe!"

"I haven't got it," she answered. "And I didn't kill Ram Lal. Shareef Ahmed's men did that. They were waiting in the dark when I and my companion came in here. I don't know where they went, or what happened to the man with me."

"Likely yarn," grumbled Mr. Davies. "Ram Lal knew my boss wanted the dragon. He sent me word to come here tonight and make him an offer. He'd stole it from Shareef Ahmed. I just now got here, and found him dead and the dragon gone. It ain't on him—it must be on you!" He pointed a hairy and accusing finger at Marianne.

"I tell you I haven't got it!" she exclaimed, paling. "I want it, yes! If you'll help me find it. I'll pay you—"

"I've already been paid," he growled. "And my boss would cut my throat if I sold him out. You've got that dragon on you somewheres! You dames are smart about hidin' things on you! Off with them clothes!"

"No!" She jumped back, but he grabbed her wrist and twisted it until she fell to her knees with a yelp of pain.

"Are you goin' to shed 'em yourself, or do I have to tear 'em off?*' he rumbled. "If I have to, it'll be the worse for you, blast you !"

"Let me up," she begged. "I know when I'm licked. I'll do it."

AND under his piglike eyes she shed garment after garment until she stood before him clad only in a scanty brassiere and ridiculously brief pink panties. As

she discarded each garment, he snatched it and ransacked it, snarling his anger at finding his quest fruitless. Now he glared at her, silent and wrathful, and she squirmed and made protecting motions with her hands. Red fires that were not of rage began to glimmer murkily in his blood-shot eyes.

"Isn't this enough?" she begged. "You could see if I had anything on me the size of that dragon."

"Well, maybe," he admitted grudgingly, laying a heavy hand on her naked shoulder and turning her about to inspect her from every angle.

"Baby, you've got what it takes!" he muttered thickly, clapping a hot, sweaty hand down on her smooth back. "No, it's easy to see you ain't got that dragon hid on you." He grinned wickedly as one hand started to move lower. She shrieked and slapped him resoundingly, and instantly regretted her indescretion. He grabbed her in a bear-like embrace and his ardor wasn't lessened a bit by the glassy stare of the dead man in the chair.

He was carrying her, squirming and fighting, toward the camp-cot in the corner when he stiffened.

Outside the door sounded a faint babble of approaching voices. He blew out the candle and turned through an inner door, clapping a big paw over Marianne's mouth when she tried to scream, and hissing! "Shut up, you little fool! Do you want your throat cut? That's Ahmed's men!"

He seemed to know his way about the warehouse, even in the dark. He stooped, fumbled at the floor, raised a trap-door, whispered: "If I hear one peep out of you, I'll come down there and twist your head off! I'll get you out later— if you're a good girl!"— and dropped her.

SHE was too scared to yell, even if she'd had breath for it. She did not fall far till she hit on her feet on a slimy floor. She heard the trap-door settle back in place, and then the creak of the stairs. Evidently Davies was taking refuge in the loft. She thought she heard an outer door open, and a mumble of voices, but forgot it the next instant at the sight of small red eyes winking fiercely at her from the gloom. Rats!

She had all a woman's natural fear of rodents, and she had heard horrifying tales about the ghoulish wharf-rats. But they made no move to attack her and she began to explore her prison, shivering In her near nudity. The stone floor stood in several inches of water, and she found no opening In the slimy walls. She had been dumped into a cellar and the only way out was up through that trapdoor above her head.

She squealed as a rat ran across her foot, and jumped back against the wall, bruising her hip and tearing her panties on a broken plank.

"This is what I get for associating with people like Bill Clanton," she told herself bitterly, and then the rats started fighting in a corner. Their hideous racket snapped her taut nerves. She screamed. She yelled. She was too panicky to care for Davies' threat. Having her head twisted off seemed preferable to being devoured by rats in that black well. She didn't care who heard her, just so somebody did, and got her out of that damnable cellar. She didn't care much what they did to her afterward.

And almost instantly her shrieks were answered by sounds overhead. The trap was lifted and she blinked in the glare of a lantern. But it was not Davies' bearded face which was framed in the opening. It was a dark, saturnine, handsome face— the face of Shareef Ahmed!

"Well, our little guest didn't run away, after all!" he commented satirically. "Help her up, Jum Chin."

A TALL, gaunt Chinese reached his long arms down, caught her lifted wrists and swung her up lightly and easily. The trap-door fell again and she found herself standing before Ahmed, whose dark eyes devoured her from head to foot. Four Malays with *krises* in their belts together with the Chinaman feasted their hot eyes on her semi-nudity. They were marked generously from Clanton's fists, from that fight in the dark room.

"A curious interlude!" smiled Ahmed dangerously. "You enter the building fully clothed, with that dog Clanton. Apparently you escape in the melee. But less than an hour later we find you imprisoned in the cellar, half-naked! His eyes went to the white hip exposed by the accident. She flinched, but did not reply nor resent the indignity. She was scared as only a girl can be who knows herself to be in the power of men absolutely merciless and cynical in their attitude toward women.

"Where is the Kao Tsu dragon?" Ahmed demanded peremptorily.

"I haven't it!" Her wits were working like lightning on a scheme.

Ahmed's eyes were poisonous.

"You must have it! Ram Lal stole two dragons out of my house. Clanton dropped one in his flight." He displayed it. "But it is not the right one. You must have it. Ram Lal must have stolen them for you, otherwise Clanton, who came here with you, would not have had this one. You have the other, or know where it is. Must you be persuaded to talk?"

"I had it," she said hurriedly, as the Malays moved toward her, grinning evilly. "But Bull Davies came while you were chasing Clanton—"

"Davies ?" It was a snarl from Ahmed. "Has that dog of General Kai's been here?"

"He is here— hiding upstairs. He took the dragon from me."

"Search the upper floor," snapped Ahmed, and his men made for the stair, soft-footed as weasels, with naked blades glimmering in their hands. Marianne breathed in momentary relief. At least she'd saved herself from torture for the moment. Ahmed was watching the stair, and she essayed a sneaking step toward the other door. But he wheeled and caught her wrist.

"Where are you going?"

"Nowhere, apparently." She flinched at his sarcasm. "Please, you're hurting my wrist. Why, the body's gone—"

"We threw it in the river after we returned from pursuing Clanton," said Ahmed absently, gazing at her half-exposed breasts. "I meant to take Ram Lai alive and make him talk. But he attacked my faithful servant, Jum Chin, who traced him here, and Jum Chin was forced to kill him. I arrived with the rest of my men just after he had killed Ram Lai. We had just completed a fruitless search of the body when we heard you and Clanton approaching. Why did you come here when you already had the dragon ?"

"I came to pay Ram Lal," she lied, afraid to admit the truth, now that she had already professed to have had possession of the dragon.

"Forget the dragon for a space," he muttered; his eyes were like flames licking her sleek body. "My men will capture Davies and get it for me. Meanwhile—you and I...."

REALIZING his intentions she sprang for the nearest door, but he was too quick for her. He was slender but his thews were like steel. She yelped as he reached for her— squealed despairingly as she realized how helpless she was. She clenched a small fist and struck him in the face, and in return got a slap that filled her eyes with stars and tears. He picked her up, fighting and kicking, and started toward the other room with her, when upstairs a shot banged, blows thudded, men yelled and heavy boots stampeded down the stair.

Ahmed dropped Marianne sprawling on the floor and turned to the stair door, drawing a pistol. An instant later Bull Davies, plunging through the stair-door, brought up short at the threat of that black muzzle. In an instant the five Orientals who were tumbling down the stair after him had fallen on him from behind, borne him to the floor, and had him bound hand and foot. Swift hands ransacked his garments, and then Jum Chin looked at Ahmed and shook his head. Ahmed turned on Marianne, who rose from the floor, rubbing her hip.

"You slut! You said he had it!" Ahmed grabbed a pink-white shoulder and squeezed viciously.

"Wait!" she begged, assuming a Venus d'Medici pose as he started to go even further in his third-degree methods. "He must have hidden it!"

This was going to be just too bad for Davies, she knew, but it was his hide or hers. Maybe she'd get a chance to slip away while they were giving him the works.

At a word from Ahmed, Jum Chin ripped Davies' shirt off. A Malay applied a lighted match to his hairy breast. A faint smell of singed hair arose and Davies bellowed like a bull.

"I tell you I ain't got it! She's lyin'! I dunno where it is!"

"If she's lying, we'll soon know," rasped Ahmed. "We'll try a test that will unlock the jaws of the stubbornest. If he still persists, we must conclude that he's telling the truth, and the girl's lying."

Jum Chin stripped off the prisoner's socks, and Davies broke into a sweat of fear. Intent on the coming torture, Ahmed relaxed his grip on Marianne's wrist— or maybe it was a trick to trap her into a false move.

As his fingers relaxed, she jerked loose and darted into the outer room. He was after her in an instant, and just as she reached the door that opened into the alley, his fingers locked in her hair. But that door burst suddenly inward.

A BIG form loomed in the door and an arm shot out. There was a crack that sounded as if Ahmed had run his face into a brick wall. But it was a massive fist he had run into, and the impact stretched him groaning on the floor. His conqueror swooped on the pistol that flew from his victim's hand, and Ahmed's henchmen, rushing from the inner room, checked at the menace of the leveled Luger, their hands shooting ceiling-ward.

"Clanton!" panted Marianne. He refused to look at her. With six desperate men before him, he couldn't risk being demoralized by the spectacle of loveliness her unclad figure presented.

"Put on some clothes!" he snapped. "And you, Ahmed, get up!"

Ahmed staggered up, a ghastly sight, minus three teeth and with his nose a gory ruin. Clanton grinned pridefully at the sight of his handiwork; few men could have done so much damage with only one clout. He profanely silenced Ahmed's impassioned ravings, and backed all his prisoners into the inner room, whither Marianne followed, having salvaged the table cloth which she wrapped rather sketchily, sarong-fashion, about her.

Briefly she explained the situation to Clanton, and he ordered the men to lie on their bellies and put their hands behind them, while she tied their wrists and ankles with their belts and turbans. He watched her in ecstatic silence while she was thus employed. The improvised sarong was something more than revealing, as she moved about, allowing glimpses of sweet contours that sent the blood to his head.

WHEN she had finished the job, he inspected each man, grunting his approval of her technique, and searching them for weapons. He lingered longer over Jum Chin, and when he rose, she was amazed to see a grey pallor tinging the Chinaman's face. Yet Clanton had done nothing to hurt him.

Clanton then untied Davies, and growled: "I ought to bust your snoot for pullin' off Miss Allison's clothes and throwin' her in that cellar, but I'm lettin' you off, considerin' what Ahmed did to you. Get out!"

"I'll get even with somebody, I bet!" sniveled Mr. Davies, and departed hastily, aided in his exit by the toe of the Clanton boot. When his lamentations had faded in the night, Clanton addressed his glowering prisoners.

"We're leaving. I'll send back a coolie to untie you. Ahmed, you better forget what's happened tonight. The dragon's gone. Only Ram Lal knew what became of it, and he's dead. And if the British find out you killed him, they'll hang you, sure as hell! You let us alone, and keep your mouth shut, and we'll keep ours shut."

Fear gleamed in Ahmed's one good eye at the mention of hanging. He was sullenly silent as Clanton followed the girl into the outer room and closed the door behind them.

"Do you think he'll drop the matter?" she asked nervously. "I can't afford to have this story get in the papers."

"No, you can't," he agreed. "Theft, murder, torture, bribin' a thief like Ram Lal and a pirate like me— it would ruin any debutante. Best thing you can do is to get out of Singapore as quick as you can. Ahmed won't forget this. He'll work under cover to get us, if he can. I ain't afraid of him, but you better take the first ship back to the USA."

"But I've *got* to have that dragon!" She was almost frantic.

Then her eyes dilated as he took something from his pocket— an ivory dragon, not so yellow nor so exquisite as the other she had seen.

"The Kao Tsu dragon!" She snatched at it, but he withheld it.

"You wait a minute!" He fumbled with the pot-belly for a moment, and then a section of it swung open. He drew out a strip of parchment, which had been rolled in the interior. One end remained fastened in the belly. The parchment was covered with tiny Chinese characters.

"Then you knew!" She was considerably agitated.

"I knew you wasn't any art collector, and I found out that the dragon Ram Lai gave me for you was the genuine Kao Tsu. So I did some sleuthing' and found out plenty. You wanted this for your old man, and he sent you after it because you're smarter than anybody working' for him.

"That writing' is an agreement signed by the Chinese war-lord they call General Kai, given' your old man an option on an important oil concession. He

gave it to your old man a few years ago, in a moment of generosity, and like a Chinaman, rigged the agreement up in the belly of this dragon, which is a clever copy of the original Kao Tsu. Your old man thought all the time it was the Kao Tsu, and that's what you come after.

"BECAUSE a few months ago your old man decided to develop that concession son's to recoup his stock market losses, but General Kai had changed his mind. He wanted to give that concession to another firm. But if he refused. in the teeth of his own signed agreement, he'd lose face. So he had it stolen from your old man, meaning' to destroy the agreement and then claim he never made it, but Shareef Ahmed, who don't overlook many bets, had it stolen from Kai's agent. He already had the original Kao Tsu.

"Then Ahmed offered it to the highest bidder. Your old man had lost so much money in the stock market crash he was afraid General Kai would outbid him, so he sent you to steal it. General Kai also had his agents after it, Bull Davies bein' one of 'em. Ram Lai stole both dragons. He gave you the real Kao Tsu, but he kept the one with the contract in it, and was goin' to sell it to General Kai's agent. You know the rest."

"But the dragon—" she exclaimed bewilderedly. "That one, I mean!"

"Easy!" he grinned. "Jum Chin had it all the time. He killed Ram Lai and must have found the dragon on him before Ahmed got there. Ahmed trusts Jum Chin so it didn't occur to him to suspect him. An Arab's no match for a Chinaman in wits. I found it on Jum Chin when I searched him. He won't dare tell Ahmed we've got it because that'd betray his own treachery, I sneaked back when they quit chasing' me and was waitin' outside for a break. Well, I got it."

"Give the dragon to me!" she exclaimed. "It's mine! I paid you!"

"You paid me for the genuine Kao Tsu," he said, his eyes devouring a sleek thigh the sarong left bare. "You got it. This comes extra."

"How much?" she demanded sulkily.

"Money ain't everything," he suggested.

Suddenly she smiled meltingly and came up to him, laying a slender hand on his arm. Her nearness made him dizzy, and she did not resist as he passed an arm about her waist.

"I understand," she breathed. "You win. Give me the dragon first, though."

Trustingly he placed it in her hand— and quick as a cat she plucked the pistol from his belt and smashed him over the head with the barrel. The next instant she was streaking for the door. But she underestimated the strength of his skull. To her dismay he did not fall. He staggered with a gasping curse, then righted himself and leaped after her. He caught her as she grasped the knob,

slapped the pistol out of her hand and spun her back into the room, crushing her wrists in one hand as she tried to claw his eyes out.

"You little cheat!" he snarled. "You've never kept a bargain yet! Well, you're goin' to keep this one! You've got what you want, and I'm goin' to get what I want! And you can't squawk, because you can't have the world knowing' about this night's work!"

Knowledge that this was true pepped up her struggles, but to her dismay she found them useless against the strength of her irate captor. All her kicking and squirming accomplished was to disarrange the sarong, and he caught his breath at the sight of all the pink and white curves displayed.

"You don't dare!" she gasped, as he drew her roughly to him. "You don't dare—"

Bill Clanton didn't even bother to reply to her ridiculous assertion ....

IT WAS some time later when he grinned at her philosophically. He stooped and kissed her pouting mouth. "Maybe that'll teach you not to associate with people like me," he said.

Her reply was unprintable, but the look in her eyes contradicted her words as she took his arm and together they went out to the street.

———————

10: Six Gun Nurse

Laurence Donovan

1885-1948

Spicy Western Stories, Jan 1939

Just for comparison, a "Spicy Western", from another popular pulp writer of the era; the plot is preposterous, the "cowboys" speak a dialect unknown in the real West, and it mostly consists of shootups— and dames.

"WHAT I'll do," declared Steve Bradley, foreman of the Tilt-6, "Is mosey in thar an' resign. I'm lightin' a shuck for parts whar my back don't itch every time it comes on dark. I'm quittin'."'

"Yo're a liar, Steve," drawled Grit Harden. He was swabbing out a bullet nick in Steve's shoulder. "Yuh'll keep on ramroddin' the Tilt-6 in spite o' hell, dry gulchers or a lady boss. Yuh done too much to keep this rancho partly unrobbed. Somethin' scare yuh?"

They were in the bunkhouse. Steve winced under Grit's crude surgery. His steady gray eyes were as hot as murder.

"I'm scared o' myself, mister," he said. "I ain't safe to be allowed loose no more with that nurse critter in the blue specks. I'm gittin' tuh see this here J. N. Tolbert pers'nal an' ask do we fight Brand Lorton or do we fold up an' let a thousan' cows become bait for all the buzzards in Barranca County?"

Grit Harden pushed a needle of gut thread ruthlessly through the lead gash in Steve's skin. The wound had been made by a lone gulecher from Brand Lorton's Star-B spread less than an hour before. Steve had attempted to cut barbed wire that had fenced off the Tilt-6 cows from a strip trail leading to the only available waterhole.

Brand Lorton had been making a stab at harassing the Tilt-6 riders for all of the seven years that Steve Bradley had been its ramrod. But Lorton's tacties had never brought a complete showdown.

Then only a month ago, old Harney, the owner at that time had gone bust in a poker game down at Hermosillo and got himself gunned fatal in a ruckus. The Tilt-6 had been put up at auction.

Steve and Grit Harden had saved their dinero, hoping to buy in the spread at bottom. Brand Lorton also bid for it. But it was discovered that one J. N. Tolbert, from back East, held old Harney's notes. So the Tilt-6 had gone to this Tolbert.

And, up to this time and minute, neither Steve Bradley nor any of his riders had seen the boss, though he had arrived at the Tilt-6 two weeks before, accompanied by two women nurses.

This was the burr under Steve Bradley's saddle at this time. The new owner and his nurses had arrived when Steve and all the riders were on herd. Chung Wu, the Chinese cook, became the only source of information about that.

"New bloss vellee sick man," had been Chung Wu's version of the arrival. "New bloss have to be carried in to bed. Missee Tobe she say make him chicken bloth allee time. No see bloss. Missee Tobe and Missee Lee earry him in."

So for two weeks Steve Bradley had been denied the privilege of seeing the new owner. The nurses gave the names of Jane Tobe and Marilyn Lee, and the prim, dark-spectacled Miss Tobe was in complete charge of the sick man.

Steve could well believe that the prim Jane Tobe and the other filly had carried the new owner to his room upstairs in the hacienda. Hell! That slab-sided Tobe critter looked as if she could carry a horse.

And with the report of the new owner's arrival, Brand Lorton had renewed his worrying tactics. Fencing off that waterhole trail. Having hidden gulchers take unexpected shots at Steve and his riders.

But the long-geared Grit Harden, Steve's top rider, didn't believe Steve would quit, even if orders had been conveyed to him by Tolbert through Jane Tobe that there was to be no gun fighting. So Grit was tending Steve's wound and trying to soothe his temper.

"This Tolbert now?" opined Grit. "Yuh cain't blame a sick hombre who's off his feed an' bein' dry nussed day an' night by two female critters for not wantin' a gun ruckus. A tenderfoot like him with no cow sense wouldn't savvy he bought hisself into a range war."'

"Jehosophat!" snapped Steve, under the sting of his shoulder nick. "That ain't sayin' I have tuh be exposin' my carcass 'thout the priv'lege o' seein' the boss. I'm through havin' orders purveyed tuh me by that slat-sided, long-geared female. An' that other little filly with legs that are plumb scand'lous. The dumb waddies look at 'em an' git dumber. It ain't decent."'

GRIT HARDEN seemed suddenly to have been stricken speechless. His gaze had wandered out through the bunkhouse door. Lamplight from the main house was spraying out over the puncheon porch of the hacienda's long, middle room. Something soft and creamy white and shadowy made a breath-taking silhouette against the lamplight in the doorway.

This Marilyn Lee was a cute filly with fluffy black hair. The contours of her spine-ticklin' legs, all the way from small ankles to tapering thighs, stood out as if etched with a pencil.

So Grit Harden's mouth flopped open. That was bad. His mind had stopped up again. He snicked off the gut thread in Steve's shoulder wound and fidgeted with the rubber butts of his six-guns.

Steve swore and jerked the shirt over his aching shoulder. He reared to his six feet and some inches, seething with indignation.

"Yuh ain't meetin' that doggone filly up in the chaparral ag'in' tonight, Grit?" he rasped. "I've seen too much o' yore goin's-on, an' we've too many dain' complications already! Look at yoreself an' them other ory-eyed waddies!"

The eight other riders were lined up by the fence in the bunkhouse light. One quit singing. One quit whittling. All quit chawing their tobacco. Their minds had stopped up, too.

The little filly in the hacienda doorway had walked back into the room slowly enough to have the outline of her young breast join the shadow parade of her damn' sweet legs. Then—

The big lamp on the long room table went out with a crash.

Somewhere back of the hacienda, up by the wild brone corral, a sixgun went *brrrang-brrrang*! The cute, little day nurse let out one sereech that would have outdone a whole flock of coyotes.

Steve Bradley swooped his belt and holstered sixes off a chair back and went outside the bunkhouse in one long jump. Grit Harden was already starting toward the hacienda.

"Never mind the filly, she ain't hit!" yelled Steve. "You, Grit, look tuh the remuda! I've been expectin' Lorton tuh make a try at stampedin' the jugheads! It's a trick mebbe tuh pull us off, so's he kin git tuh the new boss himself an' play a bluff hand! Jehosophat! I'm goin' in thar for a showdown pronto!"

Grit Harden, who was so long and thin he looked like he might collapse in the middle, swore at Steve's order, but long-legged it toward the horse corral. Steve strode toward the main ranch-house. The long room downstairs was dark now. The only light showed in a window upstairs.

The other riders were grabbing their guns and rushing out of the bunkhouse. Steve shot a command at them over his shoulder.

"Git yore cayuses saddled! Grit'll look after that shootin' ranny! Maybe we're ridin'!"

Brrrang! Instinct caused Steve to throw himself flat. Twice already this afternoon he had been breezed by gulcher lead before a third pot shot had nicked him. Steve had whammed back with his six-guns in defiance of the dictum to maintain peace at any price.

That order had been passed along to him through the night nurse who wore dark blue glasses, rolled her yellow hair in an ugly knot at the back of her

head, and dressed in a long and shapeless skirt that wouldn't have stopped up any man's mind.

Steve's guns were in his hands again now. "Bigod!" he gritted. "Tolbert may be too sick to fight, but it ain't goin' to be at the expense of our hides! I'll git to him 'an '—"

Brrang! Brrang!

"O-ooh! Gawd!" That was the suddenly pain-filled, desperate voice of Lafe Long, the youngest waddy on the Tilt-6. He had been the last to grab his irons in the bunkhouse.

Steve jerked around. Young Lafe was staggering toward him, his hands pushing against a gaping hole in the side of his neck that was spurting blood between his fingers. Steve forgot about the whining lead as he came to his feet and got to the waddy.

But Steve was too late. Young Lafe couldn't hold back the blood that spouted through his hands and dripped down his body. He fell at Steve's feet and died without uttering another sound.

Steve whipped around. He heard Grit Harden shouting oaths up by the horse corral. Grit's guns whammed until they were emptied. In the following silence, Steve heard a cayuse pounding away on the grade up the Sunblaze Range hogback. There was but a single rider.

"Damn' 'em!" rasped Steve, sick all over as he looked at young Lafe Long's dead face, contorted with the agony of dying. "The same ol'? windy! An' this Tolbert lays up all pampered by them women critters an' says the Tilt-6 won't fight!"

By the "same old windy," Steve referred to a brainy scheme of Brand Lorton in his one-sided war upon the Tilt-6. Lorton sent single gulchers and skulkers who could hide, shoot and get away without being identified. Thus he afforded no proof that would stand up in a law court that his men and not some wandering owlhoot had done the gunning.

Grit Harden was striding back from the horse corral. The others had circled the ranchhouse and they were saddling. Grit looked down at Lafe Long's stiffening body.

"So Lorton has done it this time!" he groaned. "Up to now he has done no more than plague the Tilt-6! Jest one gulcher up thar by the corral an' he had the gate poles down! I dusted his boots with lead an' I'd-a drilled his guts if'n I'd knowed he was shootin' fatal! He rode off as I was headin' them jugheads from bustin' out! I got tuh see if'n the little gal's a'right, Steve!'

"I'll be doin' all the seein' about that, Grit!" snapped Steve. "Yuh git Lafe back into the bunkhouse an' be readyin' for a wide open gun ruckus! I'm seein'

Tolbert now if I have tuh dab a loop onto the neck o' that long-geared female nurse!"

After Marilyn Lee's scream from the long room. of the hacienda there had been no sound. Steve was too good at reading voices to imagine the filly with the pretty legs had been wounded. He glaneed up at the dimly lighted window of the sickroom over the porch. He was pesitive he saw a shadowy figure withdrawing from view. He bit off a short oath.

That would be Jane Tobe. Funny she had not rushed down when she had heard her companion nurse scream. Then Steve recalled the hacienda doors were thick and per- haps she hadn't heard anything but the guns outside.

STEVE BRADLEY wasn't quick to get his mad up. But the killing of Lafe Long was sending hot blood rushing to his brain. He clumped angrily onto the puncheon porch, looking into the still dark long room. He heard a fluttering gasp and he bent his neck to keep his head

from bumping the top of the doorway as he went in. He scratched a match and groped around until he found another lamp. When it flared up, he saw little Marilyn Lee's dark eyes staring at him. She was crouching in a corner. "Oh, what—what is it?" she gulped, and her curved lips were almost white. "I've been too scared to move. I guess maybe Jane was asleep and she didn't hear."

"It's all over, Miss Lee," said Steve shortly. He didn't want to add any to her scare. "Little trouble with the jugheads in the hoss corral, that's all."

He had known from the first she was the kind that knew all about what her damn' scrumptious legs did to the waddies. And she was right nice, Judging by what Steve knew about her and Grit Harden.

Grit had been meeting her nights for a walk through the chaparral, and Grit wouldn't talk about it. With Grit that was always bad.

So Steve ignored the quick way Marilyn Lee ran her white fingers through her fluffy black hair, and the way she looked him over with provocative approval.

"Then— then it will be all right for me to get a breath of fresh air?" murmured the little nurse. "I need it, being cooped up in the house all day with a sick man."

"Hell, yes!" grunted Steve. "But I reckon yuh'll not be meetin' up with Grit tonight, lady. He's got other business."

She perked her small head on one side and dark eyes looked him over. Her fright was passing and her mouth became red again, and teased into a little pucker.

"You don't like me much, do you, Steve Bradley?" she said softly. "Don't you ever believe in having fun, or don't you think about anything but cows? Jane says you don't."

She glanced down, smoothing her rumpled dress, but not quite making it hide a few inches of ivory skin above her perfect knees. Steve clenched his teeth and deliberately pulled his eyes away from that and the slick expanse of white that sloped downward to her firm young breast.

Damn 'em! Her kind were all alike. All right for Grit, if he liked them that way. Steve didn't believe in fooling around with her sort. He didn't want to think about other men's kisses when he took his own.

"I hadn't thought about likin' yuh," growled Steve. "I never yet cut another man's brand."

"Why, you—"

Her dark eyes blazed and her bosom quivered with rage. But Steve cut in, "Thar's yore boss nurse! Yuh'd best high-tail an' have yore walk!"

Marilyn Lee almost spat at him as she passed, moving through the doorway. Steve looked up and saw the prim Jane Tobe just coming from the bedroom in which this Tolbert was being kept plumb ignorant of the facts of life on the range, especially this Star-B plague of murderin' gulchers.

Jane Tobe's drab cloth skirt hung shapelessly to her shoe-tops. Her straight-cut waist made her look as flat-chested as a man, and her tight-drawn, yellow hair showed her ears and gave her face a hard look below the dark blue glasses.

"What's all this disturbance and shooting, Mr. Bradley?" she said in an even, colorless voice. "I was having a nap, and it wakened me. Mr. Tolbert's worse tonight, and I had to look after him. He was excited, and he doesn't want the cow riders raising a fuss with their guns. You will see that it—"

Steve took a long stride toward the stairway leading to the gallery around the long room of the hacienda.

"I will see that it don't bust loose again, if I can help it!" he rapped out. "An' I'm comin' up an' explain to this Tolbert himself! It happens I jest had tuh look after one of my own waddies, an' soon as I'm through speakin' my mind to the boss, I'll see that the cow riders, as you call 'em won't be raisin' any fuss. What they'll be raisin' is goin' to be plumb hell!"

"Mr. Bradley!" The prim nurse's voice crackled. "I'll have you understand—that Mr. Tolbert is a sick man and—"

Something in the grim, implacable set of Steve's hard jaw must have caught her eye, for she hesitated. Then she said suddenly, "I didn't quite catch what you said about looking after one of the riders? What is it? Is he hurt? Can I do something ?"'

Steve's booted foot was already on the lower step.

"It's too late to do anything for him, thanks," he said shortly. "He's past bein' herded by any nurse. Now I'll see Tolbert an'—"

FOR the second time tonight a six-gun brrranged close to the hacienda. Jane Tobe had just said, "You mean he's dead?" This time the lamp was not the target of the smashing lead. A slug slammed into the round top of the newel post on the stairway beside Steve. Taken by complete surprise, Steve tried to turn, lightning hands clawing for his low-slung sixes.

The silver rowel of his boot heel caught on the step and Steve fell sideways to his knees. The fall saved him, for the second bullet made a wind through his rusty hair, it was so close.

But the fall prevented Steve from bringing up his gun. The third explosion thundered into the hacienda, sounding like double sixguns blasting. Steve had just glimpsed the gun flash at a window of the long room. The lead plucked at his shirt sleeve and splintered a stairstep.

But in the window a man's bearded face reared briefly into view and a hoarse oath of pain roared from his mouth. The windowsill was gouged by a bullet and the slug went somewhere into the window gulcher's carcass.

Steve was up, but not in time to thumb an iron at the disappearing head and shoulders. But he knew the hombre had been hit. And when he looked up, the prim Jane Tobe was pushing a still smoking sixgun under her shapeless skirt and her eyes were still fixed upon the window.

"Well, I'll be—" began Steve, jaw dropping as he looked at the sudden flaming difference in the nurse's face.

"Damn!" finished Jane Tobe with a snap of her teeth. "I had to do it, Mr. Bradley! I saw the gun pointing at you and he couldn't keep on missing you all night! Besides, you were trying to tell me a rid— waddy— was murdered, weren't you?"'

"Yes— yes— Miss Tobe—" stammered Steve. "By cracky, lady! That was a plumb center an' teetotally onexpected shot! I'm— thankin' yuh, ma'am, an' I'd admire tuh apologize for the way I was talkin'—"

"You can pass over that, Mr. Bradley," the nurse interrupted stiffly. "I didn't think—I'm sorry you saw the gun in my hand— I— hadn't you better go see about whoever that was? I'm afraid I hurt him badly and— I have to go to Mr. Tolbert."

Just then Steve heard the crashing of ocotillo bushes beyond the window and shouts coming from the direction of the bunkhouse. He shot toward the window, making a elean dive through it and landing half on his feet.

He heard the prim Jane Tobe cry out as he caught his balance.

"Come back, Steve Bradley—I —Mr. Tolbert won't back up any gunplay—he—"

She was in the flooding yellow lamplight. Her dark glasses had fallen off. The knot of her hair had come loose and let the hair cascade in a cloud about her face. Although he didn't pause, but lunged onward toward the noise in the ocotillo bushes, Steve's flashing glimpse of the night nurse caused his breath to catch.

The thought percolated through his brain that it was damn' funny what a difference a woman's eyes and hair could make, or maybe he was a little dizzy with appreciation of her shooting that had probably saved him from being punetured. For it seemed to him he had seen the prettiest face within his recollection. Maybe it was the yellow lamplight?

STEVE went over the low hacienda fence. He hadn't caught a glimpse of the hombre who had tried to gulch him, so he judged the sneaking gunnie from the Star-B hadn't been badly hit. But there was another quick stirring in the bushes.

Steve whipped up both guns and triggered them in a one-two blast. As the lead whistled into the chaparral he heard a quick, little cry. His breath almost stopped. It was the scared voice of the little nurse, Marilyn Lee.

"Great jehosophat!" gritted Steve. "I didn't think o' the little filly bein' up here!"

He jammed his irons back into the leathers, making for the clump of soap bushes rising from a mound of grama grass. There was no movement there, no further outery. Cold sweat beaded Steve's forehead. He might have gunned the little nurse mortally.

Just then Grit Harden's edged voice rang out up above the hacienda.

"Thar goes the pizen skunk, fellers! Seen 'im make his hoss an' head into thet barranca! Fork yore broncs an' put a loop around it! The fust one sees 'im, let 'im have it in the gullet!"

The shadowy figures of the Tilt-6 riders showed in a line beyond the upper end of the hacienda over toward the horse corral. Grit was heading the pursuit and his commands snapped out.

"Guess he must o' gunned Steve!" yelled one of the riders.

Steve had no time to correct that. He was down on his hands and knees, crawling under the barrier of thorns in the soap bush. He made out a white figure lying in the grama grass. Steve reached the little nurse, swearing bitterly under his breath. Suddenly his breath went out of his lungs. Marilyn might be either dead or alive, but such a sight had never before greeted Steve's bugging eyes. The cute little nurse apparently had been frightened by the new gunplay

and she must have made a plumb reckless dash into the thorny bushes. Dead or alive, all of her sweet and dainty person was stripped down to some gauzy things, the like of which Steve Bradley had seen in the ads of magazines but hadn't really believed until now ever were worn by women critters.

She was lying with one lovely, curved leg partly drawn up and with her round, white arms shielding her face, as if that had been where the lead had hit her. A chilly shudder went through Steve's lanky body. He would rather have collected a slug in his innards than have put a hand upon her body, and he was sick all over as he gently touched her arms and pushed them aside.

The starlight gave just enough light to show that her eyes were closed, and her piquant face with the sweet, red-lipped mouth showed no bullet mark. Well, Steve closed his own eyes and put one hand down over her heart.

If the soft curve under the girl's breast had been a hot branding iron against his fingers, Steve wouldn't have known the difference. He couldn't feel her heart beat because his own pulse was pounding at his temples.

"If she's dead—" He whispered it and shook off his own chill as he put his ear down where his hand had been.

There was a sudden trembling and a convulsive movement of the beautiful white body. Two soft, clinging arms suddenly slipped around his neck and the little nurse gasped, "Grit! Grit! He said you wouldn't come— he—"

Steve's veins flooded with relief so swiftly he felt weak. And when moist, parted lips suddenly sought his mouth, and the arms went tighter about his neck, he discovered he was returning the kiss with savage intensity.

Then—

The trembling contours of her slim, curved form were against him, and her bosom was crushed to his wool shirt. He tried to choke out a hard oath from away deep in his throat, but he only gulped and hadn't the strength to put her away.

"I know— I know it's you, Steve Bradley—" She was murmuring, her voice low ecstasy as her quivering figure caused Steve's brain to go proddy in spite of himself. He had never believed that one of her kind ever could touch him, but his hands along her yielding back were cold, and his spine was even colder.

"Damn' yuh!" he grunted, even as her head went slowly back under the pressure of his mouth. "I ought tuh be—"

He was meaning to say he ought to be going for a cayuse and riding after Grit Harden and the other waddies. But what he meant to say and what he meant to do didn't matter a hoot in hell for the next few seconds.

He tried to think maybe it was his relief at knowing his bullets had missed her, but in the minute or two that followed he knew almighty well his own

mind had been stopped up, like the sight of the little nurse had got Grit Harden and the other boys.

Steve could hear faint shouts, and the still conscious part of his brain told him that Grit and the Tilt-6 waddies were helling away out of the nearest barranca and off toward the Sunblaze Range hog-back in pursuit of the Star-B gunnie. And he himself had given them orders for a showdown gun ruckus.

Whether this alone would have freed him from the demanding eagerness of the little nurse's kisses he never found out. For something else caused him suddenly to lift his hands and grip the girl's shoulders, holding her firmly.

"Keep quiet," he grated in a low tone. "Don't move. Don't make no sound."

THE slithering movement of several figures nearby in the chaparral was borne to his keen ears. Men were slipping through the concealment of the thorn bush toward the hacienda. A low, hard voice spoke with the caution of quick command.

"Buck run the windy on 'em! Steve Bradley an' his rannies are high-tailin' to hell an' gone after him! He'll run 'em all the way tuh the hogback gap! We'll git this sneakin' gopher Tolbert an' fire the buildings! 'Fore we're through with Tolbert, he'll sign over the Tilt-6 or he won't be needin' no more nurses!"

Steve's nerves went as taut as a dallied lass rope. So that was the play! All the gunnin' had been to lead the Tilt-6 riders away on an elusive trail. For it was the hard voice of Brand Lorton talking, and he had without doubt kept a few of his toughest gun slick hombres in waiting for the Tilt-6 waddies to clear his way.

So Brand Lorton was going after this new owner, Tolbert, personally. Dammit! Steve knew the kind of persuasion Lorton could hand out. A tenderfoot easterner with no cow sense, and a sick man to boot, would not have a chance. Lorton would have the Tilt-6 signed over to him, if he had to use a hot branding iron to get that signature.

They intended to fire the buildings? Maybe Lorton was figuring on outright murder? If the hacienda and the barns went up in smoke, and the sick owner proved to be stubborn, he might end up as buzzard bait and the nearly lawless range be none the wiser. Those who went into the matter would be made to believe Tolbert had died in the fire.

"Please, Steve," murmured Marilyn Lee. "I'm scared. What can you do? Oh, I'm sorry I—"

"Yuh needn't be noways sorry," grated Steve. "If it hadn't been for you—for me— I'd rode off with Grit an' the others, Lorton would o' had a clean sweep. Yuh stay right here. Don't yuh show yoreself no matter what kind o' ruckusin' yuh hear. I'm—"

"But Steve— Jane?" gasped the little nurse. "Oh, she's down there in the house, and she's all alone— please, I've got tuh help some way —I ain't afraid—you don't know what I mean—"

"Shut up!" commanded Steve. "'Yup! I guess yuh got that kind o' grit under all yore softness— so—"

He had an idea what would happen if the little nurse ever fell into the hands of Lorton's gunnies, 'specially seein' her lack of any decent duds. So it had to be—

His hard palm snapped up and the heel of his hand caught the soft round of her chin. She didn't even cry out as her head snapped back. If Steve was any judge of a knockout punch, Marilyn Lee was off his hands and safe for some time to come.

Steve broke his guns and refilled the cylinders. Brand Lorton and his hombres had spread out. Steve swore a hard oath as he realized he was almost helpless against the fan-shaped movement of the raiders who were now already crossing into the black and invisible yard around the hacienda.

Steve lifted an iron, thinking the blast of a gun might serve as a warning to Jane Tobe in the hacienda. But his finger refused to trigger the shot. Warning would do little good, if it brought a rush of encircling killers upon him in the darkness. He was but one against anywhere from possibly six to a dozen hombres who wouldn't hesitate to feed him lead.

SOME way he had to cut through the line of the Lorton raiders and get into the ranch house. He went over the low fence, listening to the rustling movement of Lorton's men. For the minute he was safe enough, seeing they believed him to be riding with the other waddies in pursuit of the decoy gun slick called Buck.

If there was only some way he could be the first into the hacienda and start the gunplay? He had the grimly ironical thought that maybe the prim Jane Tobe, who had been quick enough on the trigger to save his life, might back him up in a showdown ruckus?

A vision of her face as he had last seen it under the yellow lamplight flashed into mind. Hell! It made him a little sick, thinking how easily the other little nurse had put her loop onto him.

Now he was halfway between the fence and the low window into the long room, crawling flat on his stomach, and watching two other figures close by moving with crouching quickness. Lamplight still streamed through the lower window nearest him. He could have gunned either or both of the nearest raiders, but it would have left him open to every other gun.

As a last resort, he might have to do that and make a dash for it. He wondered if the strange Jane Tobe could possibly have any idea of what was happening? Then he knew she had not.

Two things happened with dazing suddenness.

Jane Tobe's tall figure was outlined in the lamplight at the low window. Low, growled oaths filtered to Steve's ears from close by. Lorton's men had seen her.

There came a whooshing, oily explosion from the bunkhouse. Quick, billowing flame shot from the doorway. The bunkhouse oil lamp had been smashed and its blaze would quickly make a bonfire of the dried slab shack.

Then Steve saw Jane Tobe stiffen and her hands came into view. Steve gulped back an oath. The amazing nurse was gripping two 45s, and she was coming through the window. Her eyes were on the bunkhouse and Steve knew he had to stop her.

"Git back, Miss Tobe! Git down! Yo're in a loop!"'

Steve's yelled warning burst upon the creeping raiders. It had the effect of bringing the two hombres nearest him to their feet, their irons sending slices of deadly blue fire in the direction of his voice as they triggered from hip level.

Steve wasted no time on his triggers. His ealloused thumbs rippled along both gun hammers. One hombre uttered an "Aw-rr-k!" He went over from his heels, trying to swallow blood where a slug went through his throat.

The other shooting hombre whirled half around as a .45 bullet smashed into his shoulder bones, but one of his guns kept on whamming. Steve was collecting lead in more than one place, and slugs made funny numbing sensations around his lean thighs and his ribs.

But none had yet been fatal, and he darted toward the window and Jane Tobe. He heard her cry out, "Steve— Steve Bradley! Get down out of line! Drop, Steve!"

He guessed she must be scared plumb crazy. He heard Lorton's chiseling voice ring out across the hacienda yard.

"Rush the house! Git that lamp, muy pronto!"

"The lamp, Jane Tobe! The lamp!' That was Steve's own warning as he hit the ground under the window.

His cry was too late. Brrang! The long room lamp crashed.

There was an instant licking tongue of fire running along the spilled kerosene. Lorton's voice whooped out, "Up them stairs! The damn' hellion went up thar! Git 'er an' see't she don't git Tolbert out!"

Steve saw he had been given a few seconds time by Lorton having spread his raiders around the house. Steve made the window ledge and rolled inside

the room. Flame was spreading along the kerosene and it was too late to stop it.

Six-guns brranged from two sides, the bullets thudding into the wall and floor. Steve picked out what looked like a possible place to make a stand in the darkness beside the heavily built stairs. He jumped from his toes, hit the floor rolling and made the corner just as a slug numbed his right leg completely.

He saw Lorton's men, four or five figures, make a massed rush across the blazing room toward the stairs. He got up his guns and one hombre went down, his clothes firing from the oil. Then both hammers clinked with sickening emphasis. His guns were empty.

"It's Steve Bradley!" bellowed Brand Lorton. "Git him cold! Damn' him, he'! pay up at last fer the years he's fought—"

Lorton's own iron was leveled and the leaping fire caught Steve in its light and made him a wide open target. He stood up, hurling one empty gun at Lorton's head and missing.

Lorton gave a hard, gloating laugh. Steve saw his thumb slowly cocking the hammer of his gun. And—

From over beyond the stairs, from an alcove behind a carved oak table, two six-guns started singing the fastest song that Steve had ever heard. He could just see two long-fingered white hands and two thumbs that seemed to be playing a rat-a-tat-tat across bright steel gnurls of the hammers.

From Brand Lorton's lips burst an agonized, screaming oath. His six-gun flamed, but its bullets went wild, for Lorton's eyes were already glazing in death. Two of four gunnies beside him were down beside their boss, drilled so plumb mortal that neither one moved after he fell. The remaining pair escaped long enough to drop, get up their guns and start lead pounding into the oak table protecting the figure of the amazing Jane Tobe.

THE two gunnies were shielded from the nurse's line of fire for a few seconds, then Steve saw her head appear, the yellow hair streaming about her set, white face. And even as her two guns spouted blobs of yellow flame, Steve realized it hadn't been the lamplight that had made hers the prettiest face he had ever seen.

But as the gun slinging nurse exchanged shot for shot with the hombres on the floor, Steve saw the oil flame suddenly shoot along a hanging drape and send a band of fire across the head of the single stairway.

His numbed leg handicapped him, but the quick thought of the sick owner, Tolbert, trapped in his bed poured strength through his muscles. He was scarcely conscious of Jane Tobe's voice crying out at him.

"Steve! Steve! No—no! Don't—"

For he was already halfway up the stairs, and he turned only his eyes, for he had seen that the last of Lorton's gun slick riders were finished. And then he didn't see Jane Tobe at all and he thought she might be coming around the fire, now half filling the long room, to follow him up the stairs.

The blaze ahead of him was still thin, licking along the boards toward the door of the sickroom where Tolbert had remained under the care of his two nurses. Smoke rolled up in choking density as Steve reached the door.

Because of his numbed and weakened leg, Steve fell and rolled on the floor inside the bedroom. And the voice of Chung Wu cried out in alarm.

"Missee Tobee say no comee boss's loom! Allee—"

The Chinese cook saw then the intruder was Steve. For he ran to him and gabbled, "Stevee Bladlee! You shot bad mebbe so?"

Steve was shot bad enough in places to feel his brain whirling into a fog. But he didn't pass out until his fading vision had taken in every item of the sickroom that had housed J. N. Tolbert.

Steve saw two single beds covered with clean white spreads, and neither was occupied. The delicate scent of perfume filled the room. The one dresser contained nothing but those things which go with a woman critter.

Steve heard the door open and Chung Wu squawking.

"Fire! Fire! Comee up stairs allee over! No can get—"

It didn't seem to matter a damn to Steve if hell-fire itself was cutting off the stairs. The strain of his wounds snapped the last shred of resistance in his brain. A white face framed by cascading yellow hair swam in front of his eyes, moved away, came closer. He didn't see it any more.

But the white, clear-cut, beautiful face again swam into view. Only the flowing yellow hair touched his own face this time. Warm, soft lips were upon his own. They were lifted and a clear, musical voice murmured.

"You'll never forgive me when you know, Steve Bradley—you'll find out how I tricked you into believing the Tilt-6 had a sick owner— because I never wanted it known I was the one they called—"

Steve opened his eyes and he was looking into wide blue ones that held tears. Jane Tobe's mouth was no longer prim, for it curved temptingly close. The flat, drab waist had been torn away and the rounded whiteness of smooth shoulders was graduated into a full and luscious bosom.

Steve's brain and museles seemed to act without any thinking on his part. He was lying on the smooth lawn of the still blazing hacienda, and he could hear the shouts of Tilt-6 waddies who were running buckets of water from the outside well. They were getting the fire under control, saving the raneh house, although the bunkhouse was already burned.

Steve's arms lifted and went around the shoulders of Jane Tobe. She breathed, "Oh, thank God!"

But for a second or so she seemed to resist his arms, and then—

She was beside him, her lips pressed upon his mouth. He was conscious that she must have stripped off that ungodly cloth skirt, perhaps because it had hampered her in the gun fighting action or when, as he was to learn, she had climbed the porch and helped Chung Wu bring him from the sickroom that had never had a patient.

And with that cloth skirt missing, and only the thinnest and briefest of silken slips remaining, Steve realized he had misnamed the prim nurse when he had called her "slab-sided" and "long-geared."

She surrendered to his arms for the briefest minute, and every yielding contour of the perfect body responded to the long kiss he gave her. Then she pulled away from his arms, her voice low and desperate.

"When you know, Steve Bradley— it won't make any difference that I loved you after the first few days— Steve, listen! Down Hermosillo way they knew me as 'Trigger Jane.' I had to sing down there, or starve. You would know, Steve, how it is. Anyway, I was born on the Colorado range and my dad taught me to shoot before I grew up. So it was quick guns in Hermosillo or quit singing, and I kept on singing.

"I never killed an hombre until tonight, but I taught several to respect my word. An uncle left me some money and I bought up John Harney's notes on the Tilt-6. I wanted it forgotten who I was, and I didn't want gun trouble with anybody that would bring out the truth. So Marilyn Lee and I thought up J. N. Tolbert and then—"

"And now, yuh mean, Jane Tobe," said Steve, one hard hand over her quivering mouth. " And now it don't make no damn' diff'runce, an' they ain't no call to be traducin' the gal I've made up my mind sudden like is bein' takin' on as my perm'nent lady boss. Even if I once said I was resignin' an' lightin' my shuck for other parts. I'm—"

"Steve, honey—" And that was lost ina kiss that brought a sudden hard chuckle into a nearby throat.

Grit Harden was standing there, and he had an Indian blanket draped around the intriguing figure of Marilyn Lee.

"Yo're the dangedest liar, Steve!" grinned Grit. "I said yuh'd keep on ramroddin' the Tilt-6 in spite o' hell an' lady bosses! I'm thinkin' mebbe so, Steve, when yuh git yore pins under yuh, we kin ride down tuh the county seat and make it a double hitch?"

Steve Bradley looked into the dark eyes of Marilyn Lee. There was a funny, little quirk at the corners of the little nurse's sweet mouth, as she looked long and steadily at Steve. Steve's throat suddenly went dry.

There was a blue bruise across the little nurse's rounded chin.

"If yuh want it that way, Grit," said Steve as steadily as he could. "I was thinkin' maybe now we'd be addin' the late Brand Lorton's Star-B tuh the Tilt-6 with them savin's o' ours. Nothin' like havin' neighbors yuh kin trust."

Marilyn Lee's dark eyes sparkled and she gave Steve a little smile.

11: A Samaritan of the Riverine

Randolph Bedford

1868-1941

Adventure Feb 1911

IN THE wild, burning sheep-walk of Central-Eastern Australia, watered by the mighty Darling and sundry smaller and deceitful streams; where the Winter is a flood; where the Summer is a furnace, and the sun and the baked dust and the parched gums are of a uniform dull red; and where the early Spring is as delicate as its sister seasons are fierce, the Samaritan of the Riverine lived in the body. And there he lives in the memory even unto this day.

But the people of the rivers did not generally know him as the Samaritan, nor do they. His real name was Stephen Been. The wags styled him "The Has Been."

He was over seventy years of age, erect as a gum-bole, strong almost as a man thirty years his junior, and, withal, gentle as a child, for his feet were very near the grave; and already there were whisperingly chanted in his ears the forewords of the wonderful song that all men shall one day, dying, hear, and that the new-born have not yet forgotten.

The world had dealt with him more cruelly than it does with its beasts, for he was merely a man, and a dull one, which is an animal of no fixed commercial value. This simple soul had been intended to pass through the furnace of the world unsullied. Here was a child's heart in a man's body, and everything had seemed to combine to degrade the mind of the man to the level of the beast.

When Stephen Been was arrested in a suburb of London, long ago when the last century was young, he might have been described on the charge-list thus: "A clod, eighteen years old." At any rate the law recognized that he was a clod, and immediately set about breaking him in twain as a preliminary to fertilizing the barren soil of his mind.

The poor, shivering, frightened animal had stolen half a sheep, value five shillings, and the law sentenced him to seven years' penal servitude to square the accounts. "Debit, one-half sheep, five shillings. Received payment, with thanks, seven years' transportation."

If the law had made out the account in a businesslike manner, that is the way it would have read.

So the Clod, with a number of other clods, and a fair sprinkling of genuine criminals, was embarked for Botany Bay to serve his sentence.

Botany Bay was not the Clod's destination, by the way. Port Jackson was the particular hell he was bound for, but the knowledge of Australian geography held by English state officials at that time was limited.

If that voyage did not make of the Clod a fiend, it was not his fault. The genuine criminals just referred to were bad enough; the marines and the crew were worse. An earlier voyage of this very ship had lasted nearly two years, for the transport had taken out a cargo of female convicts on that occasion. And now it had been entrusted with the conveyance of mostly first offenders, whose chief crimes had been poverty and hunger, and whom the state alleged it intended to reform. And the state's methods of reformation were the lash, the chain, the tube-gag, the collar, the scaffold; in a word, its instrument was the executioner, its example was blood.

That orgie was forty years old and strengthened by its experiences when Stephen Been landed at Sydney Cove. Being stupid, he was very quiet, and his jailers, mistaking his stupidity for stubbornness, brought him up for punishment on the paltriest of excuses.

"They would flog the mule out of him," said they, and instead they flogged a devil in. So he became an animal, and as he passed from the lower vegetable state he had been born in, to the higher life of the carnivora, he was made what the system called "a dangerous felon." He attempted to escape. Seven years were added to his first sentence— his floggings were more frequent; then Hobart Town and Maria Island, the aggravated hells of convictdom followed. Just before his additional sentence had expired, a member of the Clod's gang— a hybrid creature, half convict, half convict's jailer, proposed that the gang should escape in a body. The gang acted on his suggestion and attempted to break jail. Mr. Hybrid sold them to the commandant of the station, and all of them were captured.

More floggings, more jail, for the animal clod. The law limited the term of imprisonment then passed on him, but it did not specify the number of lashes he was to receive. The commandant could attend to that trivial question, and to do him the justice due to a zealous Government official, the commandant did.

The informer was at that time about twenty-four years of age. He had yet to serve five years of his sentence for forgery, but the Crown granted him a free pardon as the reward of his treachery, and he left Tasmania for the mainland.

Stephen Been returned to his cell in Hobart Jail and received the first of his new series of floggings. He did not feel the strokes; he was repeating to himself— as if he could forget it— the oath he had sworn to kill the informer. He did not flinch from the flogger, for he thought of his revenge, and revenge is the kindest liniment for wrong. So at last the most meritorious convict system had made the inoffensive Clod first an animal, now a devil. In '52 he was discharged from Hobart Jail after serving twenty-four years in a hell that

could have been made only by man. Twenty-four years of a life that might have been made a source of good to the living, thrown away in expiation of an alleged crime that had long been dead!

THE name of the hybrid Informer was Abel Shaw. He went to Australia, as stated, and when gold was discovered at Bendigo he went to the field, and was allowed to mine, for he held a free pardon. His claim was one of the lucky holes— the informer's fortune was assured from the hour.

In '54 Stephen Been also reached Bendigo and stepped into a new world. His intention was to raise himself into a respectability he had never known in the days of his innocence, and to do this only money was necessary; for the one-time Clod saw now that respectability is merely accumulated money in its most portable form. He had never borne the appearance of a typical criminal, and as the police inspection was lax, owing to the smallness of the force, he was allowed to secure a claim unquestioned.

In three days he had bottomed. With what trembling eagerness he washed his first pan of dirt ! The result of his labor with the pick and the shovel and the cradle and the dish meant more than gold to him. Good — they meant peace; bad — they were the prophets of a return to the old life. But the results were good. The Clod-animal poured the water from the dish very carefully, and saw seven water-worn pebbles, which he took up on the point of his clasp-knife, and felt anxiously with his tongue. Then he began to tremble and to flush hot and cold, and at last the tears came.

He had found gold. More, he had found hope. For over a fortnight he won at the rate of upwards of three ounces a day. Fortune, as if to atone for his twenty-four years in perdition, courted him and gave him gold. The ring of the pick was gold. The sweat of his brow, which had been agony at Maria Island, was wealth at old Bendigo.

And then the determination to kill the informer came back to him and blotted out all his visions of happiness. He had been planning what he would do with the money. Of course he would go back to his own little village in Devonshire, provided, of course, that he could escape the vigilance of the police. And when he reached England he would play the banker to his family and all of his old friends.

His people should never toil again. Happiness should be theirs for the rest of their days, and all the old daddies who had mumbled their kind-hearted commonplaces over him as a boy— worn old figures whose joints had been curved and gnarled by the bitterness of their unproductive labor, clods who had wrought to make the master rich— the master whose clay they were— should have their pipes alight and their glasses filled for ever and ever.

So the poor heart that wanted to buy love at any price, or to steal it if need be, builded his castles and day-dreamed between the pick-strokes. All the people he intended to benefit were long since dead and freed at last from the dread of starvation which had accompanied them as a shadow through all their cheerless, songless lives. But Stephen did not consider that death might have spoiled his plans. He had suffered so much and yet had lived, and he thought it must be terribly difficult to die. And so he planned lovingly for the few people who had given him a kind word or look in the days of his cloddishness— planned to requite them as their misery deserved— not with the measure of man, but with the measure of love, brimful and running over.

But a product of the old, half-forgotten hell, Shaw, the Informer, to wit, stepped in and blasted all these unselfish intentions.

Stephen Been met his enemy in a busy street, or rather track, of the camp some months after he began to win a fortune. The Samaritan-to-be forgot all his dreams of benevolence to the dwellers in the little English village he had left so long ago. Within the space of a thought he sprang at the informer, closed with him, and bore him to the ground, and there deliberately began to strangle him. A trooper, probably for the first time in the history of the world, was at hand, and he promptly struck Stephen Been with the blunt edge of his sword, and towed him to the large hut, with many intermissions in the slabs thereof, which served as a jail. Final result— the Informer was regarded as a martyr who had clone his duty to society and had been undeservedly punshed therefor; and Been was once again sentenced— to two years' imprisonment.

A few months after his sentence had expired he fell in with his enemy again, this time at Wood's Point. A little more gold-winning, another assault, another sentence, this time for five years. And when that sentence had expired he found himself with only a few pounds as capital— his gold had been deposited with a man who was shortly after detected robbing a sluice-box, and all the metal in the possession of the thief was handed to the robbed company as being their property.

Said Stephen Been, as he left Beechworth Jail in '62 and shook his impotent hand at its heavy blue-stone walls: "I'll kill the dog next time— I'll kill you if I live long enough!"

ii

BUT he did not stay long in the country of gold. The metal meant men, and the presence of men meant police and the law. Even to find his enemy and wreak a just vengeance on him was not inducement to brave these terrors; he saw that only in comparative solitude could he find peace. Wherefore he

shouldered his swag and stepped bravely north— an indescribably pathetic old man of fifty-five.

The System had done one good turn for him. Truly the torture of its rigorous discipline had brought the sorrow that whitens the hair and furrows the face. It had made his heart old before his heart had known youth, but it had also developed in him wonderful physical endurance— it had deadened his body to pain, made it indifferent to hunger; converted him into a perpetually adaptable creature to all, however rapidly changing, conditions of existence.

And as he trudged along the rough track his heart began to beat with youth as it had never beaten before. He had never felt love, except that dull half-awakening to human sympathy in old Bendigo in '54, and now the million scents and voices of the eternally beautiful bush told him that such pure attractions as it could offer were the especial property of such as he.

"Ting-a-ling," said the bell-bird, and the swag was heavy no more. "Tweet Tweet," said the minah, and the jail and the Informer were forgotten.

North, farther north, through the giant granite ranges, through the valleys of the Murray, and into the plains of the West he traveled, flying from man always, going deeper into the heart of the great wild whose message of peace had been breathed to him three hundred miles nearer the sea.

At the stations in his track he never asked for the usual ration of flour and mutton; he demanded it and paid for it, and then tramped to his lonely camp, a mile removed from even the horse-paddock. This sullen reserve lasted long after the Murrumbidgee had become a daily sight to him, and the speed of the current heralding its junction with the mighty Murray showed longer and stronger in the eddies at the bends. There, venturing near to a homestead unusually early in the day, a horseman rode up to him and inquired if he wanted work.

"Yes, sir," said Stephen Been, humbly pulling at his hat, as if he were still a number and not a man.

"I want a man to load wool and to take charge of a barge to Echuca."

Of course Stephen Been accepted, and a new era began for him. He fulfilled his contract satisfactorily and made many trips on the river, which he began to love as he loved children and all things that were young and were not men. He could not read, and yet he was the best freight clerk the rivers ever had.

"Two tons of wire for Burrabogie," said the carrier at Echuca, "and a case of whisky for Mungadal," and so on; and Stephen Been could have told you all his freight before he was out of port a day. He used to run over the names of the stations on the river just for the pleasure of feeling his importance as a freight

clerk. You might find him a dozen times a day chanting the euphony of the station nomenclature thus: "Groongal, Pevensey, Mungadal, Eli Elwah, Burrabogie, Illillawa, Albemarle, Terrywalka, Ulonga," to infinity.

And then it was a new life. His importance as steersman of the barge, the quiet, green, leaf-tinted water, the sobbing of the engine of the towing steamer as it breasted the current— all had the charm of novelty; and the appreciation of newness which is surely God's best gift to the adventurous man with a soul.

By-and-by he became a property-holder. The "boss" liked the strong old man who could work without a word; who never used the usual language of the river and the shearing-shed— (the boss could curse fluently, by the way, and the "super" was exceedingly profane and blastiferous), and who could be trusted alone with a barge-load in a " strange " port, because he never drank. So one day, being present at the sale of a river navigating company's fleet, the boss, having previously sounded his bargeman on the subject, purchased the *Tilpa*, a sidewheel steamer, ordinarily used for trading purposes, and her attendant giant, the *Bunyip* barge. Then he arranged instalment terms with the ex-convict, and Been entered on his new line of ship owning.

On the strength of being a shipowner, he secured long credit with several firms for the supply of miscellaneous stores, and started from Echuca one Summer night with steamer and barge laden almost hull-down with everything that the inhabitants of the West might require— sheep shears and moleskins, fencing-wire and onions, boots, saddles and tobacco— a floating store.

It was a happy life from the beginning. He managed to pay for the barge; he opened a bank-account; he was respected; men called him "Captain Been"; he had never to leave the beloved rivers. Most of his dealings with the stations lying on the three thousand miles of water were on the credit system, and here his absolute dearth of education told much against him. However, his faultless memory and a unique method of bookkeeping invented by himself and consisting chiefly of sundry knife-cuts on the starboard paddle-box enabled him to collect at least seventy-five per cent, of his money. That and one hundred per cent, profit considered left him very much on the right side of the ledger. He would sell his stock at the head of the Darling, and then load with wool for Echuca, to return with stores on the next fresh.

The life drew from him all sourness. He became the Samaritan of the Rivers. The *Tilpa*, up or down trip, continually carried men who wanted to work their passage and who evidently translated that phrase as meaning the consumption of as much tucker as the cook could prepare. And be the end of their stage at Brewarrina or Bourke or Tilpa or Louth or Wilcannia or Menindie,

they left with half a pint of whisky in their stomachs and a shilling or two in their pockets and some tobacco and rations in their swags.

Did not Bathurst, the educated loafer of the rivers, get three pounds of Captain Been by telling a story of an asthmatic mother, and did he not a year afterwards tell me that Been was the Samaritan of the Riverine, and wherefore is not this history written?

The loafers who sponged on him loved this simple old man who knew of nothing but the rivers and would talk of them for hours.

"You know that bend near 'Crismus Island'?" he would say, "There's two of the cunningest water-hens you ever see— I believe they know the *Tilpa* now. Why they've been there this five years, an' whenever we passes there they flies around to the stern's much as to say, 'Let's see if it's the dear old *Tilpa*, or that puffing Billy, the *Saddler*, what's always firin' rifles at us. I believe they can read the name of my boat, too."

And then he would repeat that only boast of his to the effect that he could take the *Tilpa*, what was drawing four-feet-seven, over a four-foot-six bar; and he could steer her from Dunlop to Albemarle blindfold— yes! he could! Oh, ye might stare, and yer might say no, but he could. If it comes to that, he'd give you a passage an' prove he could do it blindfold— there!

His friends loved him, and he knew no enemy. There was in his nature a stubborn good, which even the great penal system had been unable to destroy. From Fort Bourke to the Campaspe he was known and he was honored, and yet most men knew his history.

His moments of sadness were few. He felt fiercely revengeful when he thought of the Informer, but the memory of his wrong was beginning to fade in his prosperity. Only when he saw children playing he realized what he had lost and their voices were as the touch of a hand on his old loveless heart. If he could have stolen one of those curly-haired babies at Culpaulin or Dunlop I believe he would have done it. But '78 brought him the love he craved for.

NEAR Easter Island the *Tilpa* stopped i n the early moonlight to "wood up," and the gentlemen of the river who worked their passages wrestled languidly with the ax on the rottenest and therefore the most easily cut and the worst fuel they could find.

In the center of a space embayed in the shore by the island, a solitary traveler's fire gleamed fitfully. The traveler was extremely disgusted with his situation; he had been intended by nature to be the most gregarious of men, and circumstances had made him an Ishmael on the track. This was his second night away from home, and the prospect of the road, which had seemed to

him free and independent and glamoured with the romance of the bush, was now very, very dreary.

Therefore when he saw the *Tilpa* moored to the bank and all hands, from captain to cook, cutting wood for the engine, he walked over to the workers, wishing to lend a hand and too proud to risk a snub. So he stood by while they worked, and would very probably not have spoken to them but for the fact that he saw a tall, spare, magnificent old man bowing under the weight of a dead branch.

"I'll take that, daddy," he said.

"Daddy?"

Stephen Been staggered with amazement, and the weight fell on the traveler's shoulders.

WHEN the work was finished the Captain almost forced the young man to accompany him to the little saloon, where they drank a tot of whisky each. He questioned the young fellow in a kindly, inquisitive manner, which proved his interest and, little by little, he found that the traveler's name was George Garth, that he had quarreled with his father, whom he said he did not like, and there was an end to the matter. He had set out from Louth two days before to walk until he met something to do.

And then the Captain insisted on Garth 's remaining aboard, and he sent one of the gentlemen who were "working their passage" for the swag by the new chum's fire. Then he installed his friend in the best berth on the wheel-deck, and saw Garth, worn out with his unusual tramp, fall asleep as the Tilpa steamed down the moonlit river.

That word "Daddy" from such a man had given Stephen Been the son of his loveless dreams and won the Samaritan forever.

Next day Garth asked to be given something to do, and the old man, who had very hazy ideas on the subjest, suggested that he ought to take stock. And Garth did so, and placed the *Tilpa*'s financial condition in such a light that the Samaritan thought his knife-notch style of bookkeeping might not be absolutely perfect after all.

He broached the subject to the mate in the wheelhouse that evening. "Seems to me, Jim," said he, "that the young man might's well stay on an' look after the bills— be a what's-it?"

"Supercargo," said the mate shortly.

"Yes, that's it," assented Stephen Been. "Won't do makin' any more 'oles in the paddle-box."

"That's a fact. If you chop it much more there'll be no starb'd sponson at all. Bimeby you'll have a ship made of holes."

AND so George Garth became supercargo, and the trade with the young women at the stations increased amazingly, and the old man found the young one more valuable than he had dreamed, and loved him more dearly with the birth of each successive day.

The affection was mutual. The old man was lovable, and then they had so much in common; both loved the river— that was everything. And Been showed the supercargo the wonderful water-hens in the bend near Christmas Island, and told numberless stories of driving the steamer full speed ahead when the river was dangerously low because the banks were streets of fire, and of shooting the punt rope at Wilcannia when the stream was in flood— he sang, in his rough vocabulary, the epic of the river men. And when they passed a tortoise paddling and spluttering in an insanity of fear of the smoking bulk of the steamer, Been would remark that the terrapin was very like an old jew lizard he had known at Fort Bourke in '74 and " that there jew lizard— he was a terror for santypedes an' such like, an' he once et half a pound o' shin o' beef at a sittin', he did."

For his part, Garth was in paradise. The preliminary work of setting affairs in order being ended, he had nothing to do while the boat was between stopping places, and so he roamed over the steamer at his will, now in the wheelhouse, now on a sponson, then in the bows. With the first streak of the day the steamer's whistle ran along the river reaches, and as she steamed away the nude figure of the supercargo appeared on a paddle-box— he dropped a bucket into the foaming wheel-wash, drew it up, and drenched himself with the contents. And after that, by the time he was dressed, the steamer woke the life of the river before the sun had touched it, and the mallards started for the day's flight, for they were unreasoning creatures and flew on a straight line ahead of the steamer, too foolish to think of getting out of the way. And the ghostly cockatoos fled daily before the *Tilpa* westward, when the Summer was waning, for they intended to Winter in the Murray.

At eight o'clock the bell sounded breakfast, and Garth joined the Captain and his mate in the saloon, which was about the size of a fairly large packing-case, and after that, smoke-ho, and a revel in the careless knowledge that the next homestead would not be sighted till the afternoon. It is a fine life, this innocent exis.ence of the rivers; it is a paradise for whoever has a soul, and souls were owned by Been, the Captain, and his supercargo, Garth.

BUT discord came to the paradise. One day in June of '79, when the river was lowest and the Tilpa and her laden barge passed Dunlop on the last upward trip for the season, the super of the station hailed the steamer and

came aboard. He wanted only a few trifling things, he said, but he delayed the Tilpa half an hour, and in his desultory conversation with the Captain told him that Coruna, the next station eastward, had changed hands. The new owner, he remarked, was Mr. Garth, a J. P., and no end of a swell.

The Captain retailed the news to the supercargo later on, and was amazed at the confusion of the young man.

"You ought to know all about it, I suppose, dad," said Garth at last. "This Mr. Garth is my father, and we've never agreed— that's why I left him, that's why I don't want to see him again till I'm independent."

These remarks, of course, resulted only in making Been all the more curious, and by judicious pumping he learned all the facts. Garth Senior was very unscrupulous. He had done shady things in stock deals and mining transactions. Garth Junior objected, and the old man had told him to clear out with his honesty and not come back again unless his honesty brought him enough to live on. And therefore Garth Junior had cleared. "You're a white man," commented Been, when the young fellow had concluded. "We'll let him see that honesty does pay— I 'aven 't much longer to live, and the craft's yours when I go. No, no talk now— I've said it, and I wouldn't go back on my word for no man."

They stopped at Coruna to canvass the new owner before some other trading rivertramp secured the business. Captain Been, now quite an experienced diplomat in his way, sent a message by the mate requesting Mr. Garth, J. P., to honor the steamer with his presence, and five minutes after a whitehaired old gentleman stepped on the *Tilpa*'s deck. He was Mr. Garth. He started violently as the supercargo came forward saying, "How are you, father?"

He did not start when the supercargo introduced him to Captain Been; he merely said, "Glad to meet you, Captain. I hope we shall be able to do business together."

But Stephen Been, as he took his customer's proffered hand, felt sick with long-thwarted revenge, for Mr. John Garth, J. P., and the Informer of the old Maria Island were one man.

iii

THE shock to the Samaritan had been very great. There, in the new life of fairness and clean hands and free goings out and untrammeled comings in, the corpse of the convict-time had come to resurrection. For several hours following the departure of the Informer, who had left the Tilpa without any idea of her Captain's identity, he sat in the little cabin next the wheelhouse

with his arms folded and his head fallen on his breast. The supercargo looked in once or twice to ask where the steamer was to tie up, and was told to "steam easy till I tell you." The dusk crept over the river, and the great sponson and bow lamps were lighted, and the cook rang the bell for supper, but the Captain still sat in the cabin on the wheel-deck arid told his friendly querists that he was 'all right— never better— leave him alone.'

He sat there and thought until he was almost mad. At nine o'clock the mate went to him and insisted on being heard. 'The night was very dark, the river was dangerously low, the stream was sown with snags; hadn't they better tie up?'

Stephen Been aroused himself by great effort; rose and went into the wheelhouse. There he went over the rough chart— which was rolled up in a great box and was almost as long as the river itself— and told them to tie up in the next bend. His voice, hollow as the voice of the dying, made mate and supercargo look at him surprisedly. They saw that the face was not the face of the Samaritan. Always clean-shaven, it had resumed the expression of the hunted convict at bay; its lines had hardened, the lips seemed to have become thin and sneering and cruel; the eyes were shot with yellow gleams of revengeful madness; the mouth was half open in a horribly hungry fashion; the eye-teeth, standing conspicuously in the bare and livid gums, were like the fangs of the wild dog.

"You are ill, dad," said the supercargo pityingly.

"No, I'm not," answered Been. "I lifted a big weight to-day, an' I've strained my back."

The mate suggested a sweating bath in a wet sheet, but Stephen Been refused all the remedies of the river, and, without waiting to see the beloved *Tilpa* snug for the night, turned in.

In the darkness there came to him strange old shapes he hoped he had forgotten— the ghosts of the gang who attempted the escape for which Abel Shaw had sold them to the commandant. There came the ghost of young Hitchins— the boy who had in the frenzy of recapture killed the constable who had attempted his arrest, the boy who had, in the awful desperation of his gallows-death, uttered blasphemies that made even the executioner shudder. There came the shape of Peter Wells who died on the triangles during his punishment as ringleader of the escape; there came to him others— sad shapes saying hesitatingly that the time for justice had arrived; noisy, blasphemous shapes, calling on him in the name of his manhood and of his oath to avenge their stripes and the greatness of their old-time misery. Some were cold and half apathetic, some despairing, some hot with the white heat

of long-nursed wrong. But all of them commanded him to do the one deed— to slay their common enemy.

And as if they had been so many men and he were indeed their captain, too, he had told them that justice should be done, and had waved them aside as if they interfered with his thoughts. Then the shapes left him to decide on the manner of Garth's death.

All sorts of schemes, mostly impracticable, suggested themselves to him. He would decoy the informer into the dry wastes in the backblocks of the river, kill his horse, and leave him to die of thirst; he would invite him aboard the steamer and leap into the river with him; he would lock him in the cabin and shoot him. These and a hundred other plans worked in his brain.

He rose early the next morning, still undecided on the manner of Garth's death— still determined to exact full payment of the revenge owing him. However, for that week at least he could do nothing. He must mature his scheme.

The *Tilpa* resumed her journey up-stream with her Captain in the same undecided frame of mind. Three days after they had reached Brewarrina the river fell alarmingly, and the *Tilpa* was forced to remain tied up at the wharf until the next fresh. During this period of enforced idleness the Captain came to a conclusion as to the way the death sentence passed by the ghosts of the murdered on the Informer should be carried out. The accepted plan was grotesquely horrible— the jury of dead felons by their foreman, Stephen Been, had both found the verdict and imposed the expiation. Garth, the owner of Coruna, was sentenced to be dressed in the old Canary costume, then to be tied up and flogged to death. The labor of decoying and binding him was easy to the Samaritan's diplomacy, and the Samaritan's strength and revenge would make his arm tireless of the scourge until the end. A fine revenge, truly. The Samaritan felt almost happy as he thought over it.

THE fresh did not arrive until August, and then it was small, and carried them only a score of miles west of Louth. The mate and supercargo worried and fretted under the delay. They cursed the river, which was not much more than a chain of pools. They stamped the deck, because September was very close at hand. Ere this they should have been half way back from Echuca, ready to sell out the store to the shearers and to get the earliest bales of the clip, and beat the hated *Saddler* and the *Warrego* on the down-stream journey.

Stephen Been smiled calmly at the delay. There was plenty of time, he said; he did not care if the barge went down-stream empty— let the *Saddler* have the wool— what did he care? A few homestead lessees,— men with a paltry ten thousand sheep or so— had cut out early, and the clip of these small men

came to the *Tilpa* and filled the barge fairly well, and this fact served to cheer the supercargo and the mate. They would not be able to trade very much, because the store was almost empty, but they could get wool-loading in early, so that they would be ready to race to the market on the rise when it did come. But they felt uneasy for all that, simply because all the life of the stream seemed uneasy also.

The rats began to leave the river and scurry up the banks and on to the plains; every day saw an exodus of rabbits. And then there came that leaden hush of everything which precedes any unusual occurrence in nature. The river did not seem to ripple as it struck the floats of the *Tilpa*'s wheels; and the ducks flew away from their natural home; the screaming cockatoos screamed no more and flew south instead of west as usual; the gum leaves murmured not; the air was heavy with suppressed fear— even the birds of the month, the parakeets, which were merely animated shrieks in a dress of emerald and crimson flying athwart the gold of the sun, were strangely mute; the whole earth seemed to hold its breath so that it might not sigh the apprehension which filled it.

And Stephen Been, noting these signs, stretched a wire cable from the towing-frame of the *Tilpa* to the great eucalypt growing in the billabong inside the southern bank, and the engine, rusted by its long rest, drove the steamer to an opening in the tree-fringe just abeam of the anchoring gum. They prepared, in short, with the impudent daring of man, for a standing fight with an inundation.

They saw no man belonging to the land; they were as much alone as if the river had been a trackless sea. No news of the flood had come to them; they blamed Bourke for not having sent warnings. But Bourke itself was wrestling despairingly with the water giant. The founders of the town have built it in the shorter parallel of a horseshoe bend, just where the river can do its greatest, most destructive work. While the people of the *Tilpa* grew sick with anxiety, Bourke was up to its arm-pits in water— Bourke was disheveled and drunken with the flood.

It came to the *Tilpa* in a wall of water and wreckage— a wall of water that broke and reformed and fell upon itself with the sound of thunder; a wall that tore patriarchal trees from their roots and hurled them along like matches; a wall that hissed like a great serpent, and gathered and crushed the face of the world in its constricting folds. It came with the battering-rams of trees, of wreckage covered with snakes and other creeping things huddled together like friends, their venom sapped by fear.

As the *Tilpa* and her barge rose with the flood the crew hauled on the cable and started the engines, and so by-and-by drew the steamer and her charge up to the tree, which the mate said would stand forty floods.

But at three o'clock the next morning, when the rain was falling in sheets, the mate recanted. The fastening of the cable disappeared; the water crept into the limbs of the tree and shook it till it groaned. And still they held on.

In mid-current the water was black with timber and living trees; rafts of debris carrying hopeless animals— opossums swooning with fear, bears wailing like little children lost in the streets of a great city.

At four o'clock they heard a steamer's whistle shrieking above the roar of the water, and a few minutes later a wool-laden barge shot past them. Then followed a steamer, her red lights tinging the water as with blood, her stack vomiting sparks. The men on the *Tilpa* could see that one wheel had been carried away by the battering of wreckage; very probably the rudder had gone also and she was attempting to steer out of the current with the remaining wheel. It was the *Warrego*; she had ridden from Louth on the face of the flood.

The *Warrego* disappeared. Then came more wreckage; the flood drew back for an effort, advanced again, and passed triumphant, carrying with it the *Tilpa*'s barge and £3,000 worth of the season's clip.

Just after daylight the savior eucalypt was torn from the soil. Stephen Been sprang to the towing-frame and cut the cable with two lightning strokes of the axe, and the *Tilpa* went full speed ahead, steering south on to the plain which was now a sea. Any one of these logs that came down with the current like stones from a sling would sink the steamer in an instant, and they tried to make for the dead water. But it took time to leave the current; its force was so great that the helm answered spasmodically, and between the spasms the engine drove the steamer down the stream with a frightful velocity. They were not caught by the dreaded wreckage— they caught it.

FINALLY, at eleven o'clock, they reached the still water covering a treeless plain and there they anchored. That plain, although the Samaritan knew it not, covered Corona station.

They breakfasted at noon, and the captain was unusually jolly. The loss of the barge did not matter much, he thought, with a curious smile on his face. He wouldn't want it any more, but he was sorry for the boy's sake, all the same.

During the afternoon the wreckage became larger. It was not confined to tree and river debris now; fence-rails, boxes, furniture and, to show how far the water could penetrate, a cradle came bobbing and turning into the haven of the steamer. They found that the cradle, by virtue of its shape, was an ark of

this deluge, the rescued being mostly snakes and tarantulas and scorpions and centipedes and all the insect horrors and creeping things which no living man may imagine.

At four o'clock a hut came down, escaped from the current, careered wildly in the eddies, and then collapsed with a noise like the discharge of artillery against a tree which had so far been too strong for the flood. Then a minute later another hut, swimming high out of the water, ran down in midstream and then abeam of the Tilpa, suddenly shot athwart the current and collided with the same tree.

But it did not go to pieces. A projection in the timber wedged it in the tree fork, and there it stood, exposing its bulk to the swirl of the deluge. Stephen Been and the mate and Garth looked at the arrested shanty, expecting it to break up. Suddenly the Captain exclaimed, "if there ain't a man on the thing!" Quite as suddenly he lowered the dingey, one of the two only boats of the Tilpa, sprang into her, and pulled for the wreck before anybody fairly understood his intention.

He had become a Samaritan again. He had forgotten his revenge at the sight of a man in danger; he had left a haven for the jaws of death.

The man on the hut was still now. He had been waving his arms to the *Tilpa* until he saw the boat put off to his rescue.

The Samaritan pulled to the wreckage as if his own existence depended on his speed. His struggle to keep the broadside on to the boiling current was almost titanic, but at last he reached the lee of the anchored hut, and after fastening the dinghy to a projecting spar, swung himself into the tree.

The castaway greeted him with a cry of joy. Stephen Been clambered on to the hut and straddled the ridge-pole, so that he was face to face with the man who had suffered the perilous voyage on the quaking building.

And then the Samaritan Been became the Convict again. His face was transfigured— he looked at the wretch whose eyes were so close to his as a terrier might look at a rat. His face expressed an awful joy— the happiness of the strong, courageous devil who finds a coward devil in his grasp.

The Informer noted that sudden change, and in the space of a thought recognized his old enemy and shrieked aloud.

"So I've got you," said Stephen Been very slowly, enjoying to the full Shaw's accession of fear. "I knew I'd get you sometime." And then, with the snarl of a wolf, "D'ye remember little Hutchins an' Peter Wells, you dirty liar? Do yer? D'ye remember Bendigo and Wood's Point? An' you're a swell now, are you? An' a squatter an' a J. P., an' all— an' ye've got a son who'd drown yer if he knew what y'are; and I've been playin' a lone 'and all me life. Through you, you dog; through you!"

The Informer opened his mouth to shriek for mercy, but the roar of the water drowned his voice, and the grip of the Captain on his wrist made him dumb.

"I'm goin' to leave ye here," said Been again. "An' it's an easier death than I meant for yer— it's an easier death than they'd agree to— they'll 'ave ter content themselves with it."

He spoke of "them" as if they were indeed men and not impotent shadows.

The Informer made no answer— he was dumb with terror.

"So good-by to yer," concluded the Captain. "May ye go to the hell ye sent those boys ter, an' may ye meet 'em there!"

He ceased and swung himself from the roof, but ere his foot touched the tree the Informer, mad with fear, caught his wrists in a grip of steel and screamed aloud above the artillery of the flood.

The struggle was very brief. Stephen Been wrestled with his enemy on the swaying hut for a moment and, freeing himself, reached the tree and looked down for a foothold in the boat.

But that struggle had given them both to death. The swaying of the hut had loosed the spar, and spar and boat had darted off with the current.

The convict gnashed his teeth in rage and climbed higher into the tree to signal for the other dinghy. To his surprise it was not more than a dozen lengths away— the mate and the supercargo had seen the struggle and had hastened with their assistance. They steered the boat under the gum and called to Stephen Been to drop in.

"It'll hold only one more safely," advised the supercargo.

Stephen Been prepared to take the jump, and seeing him, the Informer shrieked again. Then the supercargo looked to the figure on the hut and recognized in the blood-eyed, foam-flecked, wild animal in the coverings of man— his father.

Still he did not falter. "There's only room for one," he repeated to the man whom he respected. "Jump, dad!"

Been hesitated— the expression of affection had half killed the wolf in him.

The Informer began to cry and pray and blaspheme by turns, his big round face working convulsively.

"Jump, dad!" said the supercargo. "Jump quick— we can't hold on here much longer!"

Stephen Been had decided. The wolf was altogether dead; the Samaritan breathed again.

"I'll wait till nex' time," he said. "Take this snivellin' vermin, though he ain't good enough to sit in the boat with you, George."

Even in that awful moment George Garth wondered at the words and the expression of dying hatred, but he had no time to think just then.

A crying, shivering bundle fell through the air and into the boat, and the dinghy headed for the steamer, the mate calling to the Captain to hold on a little longer. But before they could reach him the great gum tree went down, and the hut, with Stephen Been perched on its roof, drifted with the boiling current.

They got away from their moorings, and had the engines going in a marvelously short time, but the hut was not then in sight. The darkness did not end the search. All through the night the *Tilpa* was a blaze of red lights tramping up and down the water-road, one moment staggering painfully up-hill against the swift stream, the next shooting like an arrow from a bow with the current; and the whistle shrieking at every pile of wreckage. At dawn they spoke of him as dead, yet they persevered in the search. They intended to find his body if they tramped the river as long as Philip Vanderdecken cruised off Table Mountain.

And at ten o'clock they found him, and he was yet alive. The house had collapsed against a heap of debris, and the timber had pinned him by the waist. During the night the pile had largely increased, and the great weight almost cut him in two. Yet he had survived the awful experience. His feet had been frozen in the icy water; his middle had been crushed by the weight of the floorwreck, and still the wonderful vitality the convict system had developed in him had strengthened him to triumph.

He did know them as they hailed his discovery with cries of pity and affection; as they dug him clear of the debris; as they tenderly lifted his bruised body and dangling, useless limbs from wreck to raft, and from raft to the steamer-ark. He heard only the fearful chorus of the flood— the rushing of great waters and the clarion song of the New-born at its antiphon.

In the afternoon he awoke to find himself in his own berth with the supercargo bending anxiously over him.

"Oh, dad, dad!" said the young man. "You're all right, ain't you? You don't feel any pain?"

Stephen Been smiled. " I'm not all right, George; but I ain't feelin' any pain. My back's broke— that's what it is."

And then he dozed again. As the lamps were lighted he asked if the river had gone down.

"Not enough to be safe out of the dead water," the mate told him, "but they could get a boat ashore in the back-wash easily."

Then Stephen Been cried fiercely, "Let him go ashore, then! Put the vermin ashore! I'm the last of them all— don't let him see me dead!"

And wondering, they obeyed him. The supercargo, quite at a loss to account for the hatred of his father, told Garth Senior that he must quit the steamer, and a deck-hand rowed the pariah to the edge of the flood near to a point where the sight of a slush lamp said very plainly: "I am the cheer of a man. "

AT NINE the Samaritan made his will in a style peculiarly his own. He called into the cabin the cook, the engineer, the deck-hands and the gentlemen of leisure who had, in the search for him, probably for the first time in their lives become energetic, and there verbally transferred the *Tilpa* and her trade to the mate and the supercargo.

"Ye've all been called as witnesses that this day, the twenty-seventh of September, eighteen seventy-nine, I've given the *Tilpa* an' two barges at Echooky, an' the book debts, an' trade, an' all to Jim Drake an' George Garth, so help me Gawd."

And they all said they witnessed the bequest, and the ceremony was over.

Only Drake and the supercargo were to watch the sick man that night and when the cabin was cleared of the others he lay on his pillow quite exhausted.

They suggested sending to Louth for a doctor, but he said, 'A doctor could do him no good— he was cast right enough,' and so they fed his flickering strength with brandy. Despite his exhaustion, he insisted on giving them full particulars of the trade. In this way: "There was a man on Burrabogie who owed twenty-six shillings in seventyfour— nex' time you're on the 'Bidgee collect it— I don't reck'lect his name, but ye're bound to find 'im— he was a little cove with a wart under his ear and a ginger beard. When ye're up that way, too, leave a bag o' loolies with the super at Benduck; 'e's got a lot of babies an ' one of 'em useter cotton ter me quite reg'lar. An' alwus give a nip to the puntman at Wilcannia, and he'll drop the rope for yer any time at night."

He fell into a half sleep towards midnight, and the watchers turned the lamp-light low. The change of light seemed to awaken him, but although he spoke again he did not regard their presence. "Up at Crismus Island there's the cunningest water-hens you ever see and when the old *Tilpa*—"

And again— "Yer can drive this yer *Tilpa* over a four-foot-six bar, an' she draws four-foot-seven." And yet again— "the *Saddler*! I'll beat her to Echooky blindfold!"

At two o'clock in the morning he awoke out of the present to the memories of his old life— the little Devonshire village, Maria Island, Norfolk, the beautiful hell of the Pacific, of the boy Hitchins, of Peter Wells, of old Bendigo, and then, as he came to the association with the supercargo, he made Garth's tears well anew.

"That vermin can't be yer father," said the Samaritan. And then he added, "For I love you, George, my boy." He lay there with his brain strangely active, thinking and sorrowing for the life that had known nor wife, nor child, nor friend— for, of even the love George Garth held for him he was as uncertain as a girl with her first sweetheart— sorrowing for his wrongs a little, but glad to know the long journey was to end at last. He had known only the embraces of the gyves and the caresses of the flogger's lash, and the memories made him break into words anew.

"I've had a hard life," he said. "A hard life it's been ; an' only me an' Gawd knows it— only me an' Gawd."

After that he lay very still for the night and most of a day, and when he awoke again the flood had retreated to the river and the *Tilpa* was stranded on the plain. Like her Captain, she would never move again.

In that hour before the dawn when the wind, laden with the death-fog, springs from the river, the Samaritan spoke with a material tongue for the last time.

"Only me an' Gawd knows it— only me an' Gawd."

And as the first rose spire of the dawn leaped from the land-rim and tinged the stranded steamer and the haggard earth with light, Stephen Been received his absolute pardon.

In the new joy of the world reprieved for yet another day, the watchers seemed to hear the song of the New-born swelling triumphant.

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12: The Voice of the Mountain

Stephen Crane.

Stephen Townley Crane, 1871-1900
The Pocket Magazine, Nov 1896

Best known for "The Red Badge of Courage", "The Bride comes to Yellow Sky" and "The Open Boat"; this is one of his lesser known tales.

THE OLD MAN Popocatepetl was seated on a high rock with his white mantle about his shoulders. He looked at the sky, he looked at the sea, he looked at the land— nowhere could he see any food. And he was very hungry, too. Who can understand the agony of a creature whose stomach is as large as a thousand churches, when this same stomach is as empty as a broken water jar? He looked longingly at some Islands in the sea.

"Ah, those flat cakes! If I had them."

He stared at storm-clouds In the sky.

"Ah, what a drink is there."

But the King of Everything, you know, had forbidden the old man Popocatepetl to move at all because he feared that every footprint would make a great hole in the land. So the old fellow was obliged to sit still and wait for his food to come within reach. Anyone who has tried this plan knows what intervals lie between meals. Once his friend, the little eagle, flew near and Popocatepetl called to him.

"Ho, tiny bird, come and consider with me as to how I shall be fed."

The little eagle came and spread his legs apart and considered manfully, but he could do nothing with the situation.

"You see," he said, "this is no ordinary hunger which one goat will suffice— " Popocatepetl groaned an assent "—but it is an enormous affair," continued the little eagle, "which requires something like a dozen stars. I don't see what can be done unless we get that little creature of the earth— that little animal with two arms, two legs, one head and a very brave air, to invent something. He is said to be very wise.

"Who claims it for him?" asked Popocatepetl.

"He claims it for himself," responded the eagle.

"Well, summon him! Let us see! He is doubtless a kind little animal and when he sees my distress he will invent something."

"Good!"

The eagle flew until he discovered one of these small creatures.

"Oh, tiny animal, the great chief Popocatepetl summons you!"

"Does he Indeed?"

"Popocatepetl, the great chief," said the eagle again, thinking that the little animal had not heard rightly.

"Well, and why does he summon me?"

"Because he is in distress and he needs your assistance."

The little animal reflected for a time and then said: "I will go."

When Popocatepetl perceived the little animal and the eagle he stretched forth his great solemn arms.

"Oh, blessed little animal with two arms, two legs, a head, and a very brave air, help me in my agony. Behold, I, Popocatepetl, who saw the King of Everything fashioning the stars, I, who knew the sun in his childhood, I, Popocatepetl, appeal to you, little animal. I am hungry."

After a while the little animal asked: "How much will you pay?"

"Pay?" said Popocatepetl.

"Pay?" said the eagle.

"Assuredly," quoth the little animal. "Pay!"

"But," demanded Popocatepetl, "were you never hungry? I tell you I am hungry and is your first word then 'pay'?"

The little animal turned coldly away. "Oh, Popocatepetl, how much wisdom has flown past you since you saw the King of Everything fashioning the stars and since you knew the sun in his childhood? I said 'pay' and moreover your distress measures my price. It is our law. Yet it is true that we did not see the King of Everything fashioning the stars. Nor did we know the sun in his childhood."

Then did Popocatepetl roar and shake in his rage. "Oh, louse— louse— louse! Let us bargain then! How much for your blood?"

Over the head of the little animal hung death. But he instantly bowed himself and prayed: " Popocatepetl, the great, you who saw the King of Everything fashioning the stars and who knew the sun in his childhood, forgive this poor little animal. Your sacred hunger shall be my care. I am your servant."

"It is well," said Popocatepetl at once, for his spirit was ever kindly. "And now what will you do?"

The little animal put his hand upon his chin and reflected. "Well, it seems you are hungry and the King of Everything has forbidden you to go for food in fear that your monstrous feet will riddle the earth with holes. What you need is a pair of wings."

"A pair of wings!" cried Popocatepetl delightedly.

"A pair of wings," screamed the eagle in joy. "How very simple, after all!"

"And yet how wise!"

"But," said Popocatepetl, after the first outburst, "who can make me these wings?"

The little animal replied: "I and my kind are great, because at times we can make one mind control a hundred thousand bodies. This is the secret of our performances. It will be nothing for us to make wings for even you, great Popocatepetl. I and my kind will come"— continued the crafty little animal— "we will come and dwell on this beautiful plain that stretches from the sea to the sea and we will make wings for you."

Popocatepetl wished to embrace the little animal.

"Oh, glorious! Oh, best of little brutes? Run! run! run! Summon your kind, dwell in the plain and make me wings. Ah, when once Popocatepetl can soar on his wings from star to star, then indeed—"

POOR OLD stupid Popocatepetl! The little animal summoned his kind, they dwelt on the plains, they made this and they made that, but they made no wings for Popocatapetl. And sometimes when the thunderous voice of the old peak rolls and rolls, if you know that tongue, you can hear him say:

"Oh, traitor! Traitor! Traitor! Where are my wings? My wings, traitor! I am hungry! Where are my wings?"

But this little animal merely places his finger beside his nose and winks.

"Your wings, indeed, fool! Sit still and howl for them! Old idiot!"

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13: A Flaw in the Organization

A. E. W. Mason

1865-1948

In: *Dilemmas*, Hobber & Stoughton, 1934

ORGANIZATION was the long suit of Julian Clere, the eminent solicitor. Not probity, nor affection, but organization. Years and years ago when he had been defending in the Police Courts, prisoners little poorer than himself, one of his failures, not so indignant at the severity of his sentence as bewildered that he should have been sentenced at all, said:

"I saw a pigeon and I plucked 'im. Ain't that right, Mister?"

To Julian Clere that was very, very right. What was wrong was that the prisoner had not organized what he would doubtless have called his get-away. Mr. Clere meant to make no such mistake himself and through the years, as he rose, one might say, from pigeon to pigeon, he tucked a comfortable little fortune away in a bank at Stockholm, under the name of Hiram T. Clegg, of Cleveland, Ohio. He had made the acquaintance of the Bank Manager in Stockholm and through him had bought a small island with a comfortable house upon it on the lovely stretch of river between the city and the sea. All the links in the long and devious chain which stretched from his office in Waterloo Place, S.W.1, to his island had been regularly tested and he felt pleasantly safe.

He had need of that feeling now. Up till this year, by paying incomes out of capital, and some fortunate speculations made at critical moments, he had been able to meet all the clients whose affairs he had mis-managed, with an unclouded brow. But the American slump had caught him in the fall of last year and the recovery was too slow. It was now the month of May, he was fifty-one years old, a widower with a daughter of nineteen, and his time had come. Young Charlie Heseltine would come of age on Friday morning and to-day was Monday. Mr. Julian Clere had the sensation of pride a great general might feel who launches a campaign of which every detail has been planned and tested through a long succession of years.

Yet suddenly there appeared a crack in the organization. A clerk knocked upon and opened the door of his private office and before he could announce Mr. Heseltine, Mr. Heseltine with his boyish faith that everyone was his friend and delighted to see him, pushed by into the room.

"How do you do, Mr. Clere?" he cried. "I was passing. I thought that I'd run in;" and he shook his trustee and solicitor warmly by the hand.

Julian Clere rose hastily. He was aware of an odd sinking in the pit of his stomach. "Panicky! That won't do," he said to himself. But none of the panic showed in his face.

"Of course, of course," he replied heartily, and turning to his clerk, "Put a chair for Mr. Heseltine, Willis."

Whilst Willis placed the chair in position by the table Mr. Clere opened a drawer and slipped into it the little map on which he had been marking a neat little star in red ink. It was a map of the Cruising Club, giving the contours and the depths of some lonely inlets in the south-western corner of Ireland. "Did Heseltine notice it?" he asked himself.

But Charlie Heseltine gave no sign that he had noticed anything at all.

"I am really not going to take up your time, Mr. Clere," he said. "What I ran in to say was that I am crossing to Ireland to-night for three days of fishing."

"Where?" Julian Clere asked.

"The Shannon. But I shall be back on Friday for the meeting. It's fixed for ten in the morning, isn't it? Well, I might be a little late. Does that matter?"

"Not a bit," said Mr. Clere, speaking the truth. "I shall have all the securities and papers ready for you," he added, telling a lie. "Any time on Friday morning will do."

Obviously Charlie Heseltine had never noticed the map. Even if he had, what could he have made of it, except that a hard-worked solicitor was planning out his summer holiday? Mr. Clere breathed more easily. But he realized with a little shock of astonishment that he had been afraid. For fear had not entered at all into any of his possibilities. His organization was a thing of cast-iron solidity. There could not be the shadow of a reason for fear. Yet... yet... absurdly he had been in a veritable panic. Another shock awaited him. For as Charlie Heseltine edged towards the door, he said with some embarrassment:

"You know, perhaps, Mr. Clere, that I have been meeting your daughter a good deal lately, at luncheons, and dances, and that sort of thing."

Mr. Clere sat very still, but with his usual cordial smile upon his face.

"No, Marjorie hasn't mentioned it. But nowadays young people manage their own affairs, don't they? We're lucky if we're consulted at all."

"Well, I'm consulting you now, sir," said Heseltine, gathering his courage. He returned into the room and sat down again in the chair. "I know that I only come of age on Friday, but I can tell you," and with his face reddening he blurted out, "Marjorie means all the world to me."

Julian Clere nodded his head, once or twice. Then he asked:

"Have you said anything of this to Marjorie?"

"Not a word."

Once more fear had gripped Mr. Clere and once more it relaxed its hold. He hardly listened to Heseltine's explanation.

"I thought you ought to know. I mean to ask Marjorie to marry me in any case. I want to be frank about that. But I hope you won't see any objection."

Mr. Clere raised his eyebrows and laughed genially.

"You are both of you rather young for matrimony, aren't you?" he said.

"I don't think so," Heseltine urged. "After all, I've taken my degree. I'm down from Oxford. And I shall be very well off, shan't I?"

The solicitor looked sharply at the young man.

"Very well off of course," he said.

"And I don't intend to waste my life doing nothing," Heseltine continued. "I'm going to work. I took a First, you know, in History."

Julian Clere patted the young man's arm.

"I know your record, my dear boy. It's clean and good, as good as any father could wish for his daughter. But you see, Marjorie is my daughter and—I've no one else." Nothing could have been better than his simple unaffected statement. He was the man of affairs quizzing himself because across his busy life a great love shone. "I would hate Marjorie to run into unhappiness because she had mistaken the depth of her feelings. Or because you had mistaken the depth of yours."

"I haven't," Heseltine insisted.

"I wonder how many young men have said that and learnt within the year that they were wrong," Mr. Clere rejoined. "You must remember," he added whimsically, "that I am a solicitor and come across a good many unhappy marriages. It's natural that I should be cautious. However, that's all that I am—cautious. I want you to think over the thing very carefully, whilst you are away."

He saw Charlie Heseltine's face brighten.

"I want you really to examine yourself whilst you are in Ireland. I am not a fisherman myself, but I understand that even with the best of you there are opportunities for a good deal of reflection." He laughed and Heseltine joined in his laughter. "Well, then, if when you come back you are still certain that you have made your choice for good and all, you shall have my blessing."

Young Heseltine wrung the solicitor's hand until he winced.

"Thank you very much, sir," he said.

Mr. Clere accompanied him to the door.

"But meanwhile," he said, "you have promised me, haven't you, not to hold any communication with Marjorie."

Heseltine had made no such promise, but he was not for the moment aware of it. The kindness of his father-in-law to be filled him with enthusiasm. He was ready to make him any reasonable promise, so long as it brought him nearer to Marjorie.

"I agree to that," he said.

"You are leaving for Ireland to-night," Mr. Clere insisted. "Mind, not even a telephone message before you go."

"I agree," Heseltine repeated. "But on Friday, after I'm definitely my own master, I'm going to try to get Marjorie to lunch with me."

"And in my turn I agree," said Julian Clere, with all the goodwill in the world. "You shall telephone to her through this instrument," and he touched the telephone upon his table.

But as soon as he was once more alone in his office his uneasiness returned. Heseltine's proposal, however, had no share in it at all. Marry Marjorie, would he! The idea was grotesque. Marjorie was a link in the organization though she was as yet unaware of it. She had her work to do. Besides, when he reached his island in the Baltic, Hiram T. Clegg would need a companion. Marjorie's marriage did not produce a single wrinkle in his forehead.

But— for a moment he had been afraid; and the sensation left an unpleasant savour in his mouth. Fear had not occurred to him as a possibility when he was creating his organization. Therefore he had not organized against it— as no doubt he might have done. He had a shadowy vision of himself living upon his lovely island in an unending palpitation of terror; starting to run if a launch swept up to his landing-stage; shivering at a knock upon the door. Mr. Clere looked about his office, frowning. He hated the room in which fear had first come to him.

It was six o'clock. He rang for his clerk and ran over the list of his appointments for the morning. He wrapped his map round a little wooden roller and sealed it and placed it in his pocket. Then putting on his hat and taking his stick he sauntered a hundred yards or so to his Club in Pall Mall and played a couple of rubbers of Bridge, just as he had done on most days of his working months during the last fifteen years. The rubbers reassured him. His judgment was as cool, his calls as acute as they always had been. When bathed, and comfortable in his dinner-jacket he sat down at his table in his house in Charles Street, Mayfair, to dine with his daughter, he felt ready to press the button and set the organization in action.

"My dear," he said. "I want you to do something for me if you will."

Marjorie, his very pretty daughter, turned towards him a pair of big grey eager eyes.

She didn't ask "What?" she just said "Yes."

How well I have trained her, reflected Julian Clere. And indeed he had. He had sent her all by herself to Madrid to identify a man who had once dined at his house, and he had sent her with a false passport so that her relationship to

him might not be suspected. Again, he had telegraphed to Marjorie in London to pick up a letter at an office in Berlin and join him secretly in Buda-Pesth. And he had found her waiting for him in the sitting-room of his hotel a day before he had expected her. Both these odd missions were nothing but a training and a preparation for the real work long-foreseen which she was now to do.

"I want you to take the train to Southampton tomorrow night," he explained. "You'll cross by the night boat to Havre. In Havre harbour I have a motor-yacht of two hundred tons. It's a French yacht, manned by a French crew, and it's called, like a hundred other yachts, *Bagatelle*. I want you to go on board of it as soon as you arrive on Wednesday morning. You will hand a letter to the Captain— Captain Morbaix— and a chart. You will sail that evening." He nodded carelessly. "You might travel as Miss Sadie Clegg, of Cleveland, Ohio."

For a second or two the quiet grey eyes rested upon Mr. Julian Clere with a look of doubt in them; and again fear caught him. Could Marjorie suspect? Could Marjorie know? He felt that he was standing on the edge of a precipice and growing dizzy. But Marjorie put her doubt into words— and Julian Clere stepped back from his precipice.

"Isn't Sadie short for another name?"

"You were christened Sadie at Cleveland, Ohio," Julian returned, and the girl clapped her hands and bubbled over with laughter.

"What fun!" she cried.

Here was another of the odd exciting missions in which from time to time she helped her father. That he never explained them enhanced their importance. She made of them deep mysterious affairs in which her father took a silent and dangerous part. They were not to be talked about, even when he and she sat alone at their dinner-table. For if he never took her into his confidence, she had the completest confidence in him.

"And after we have sailed?" she asked. She wanted her orders— that was all. Julian Clere, for his part, reflected, "The idea of a girl like that marrying Charlie Heseltine! Ridiculous!"

Aloud he said:

"We'll go into the library and I'll tell you."

He took her by the arm affectionately and sat her down in an arm-chair at the side of his writing-table.

"This is more important than anything else we have done together, Marjorie," he began, and her eyes shone and her body thrilled as he spoke. He certainly knew the right words to use. "I hate the phrase Secret Service. It has become rather silly, since the war. It has come to mean little conjuring tricks with chemicals, hasn't it? And yet I don't know a better one. I should take a

good many clothes. Sadie Clegg of Cleveland wouldn't travel with a suit-case. Here's your passport. I've had it put through by Cook's."

He unlocked a drawer and took it out and opened it.

"Sadie's travelled a good deal," he said, with a smile. He made sure that the last visa was stamped correctly for Sweden and then he handed it to her. She shut up the little book and put it away at once in her hand-bag and leaned forward towards him.

"You had better get me your own passport," he continued, "before we forget it, and I'll lock it away."

Marjorie went off to her room whilst Julian Clere wrote his letter of instructions to Captain Morbaix. It was short and he had finished it by the time when Marjorie returned. He took her passport from her and laid it on his table.

"The other one— the one you used for Madrid and Buda-Pesth— we destroyed that, didn't we?" he asked.

"In the fire here," Marjorie replied.

"Good!"

Mr. Clere brought into view now the two little Cruising Club charts wrapped about the roller.

"Captain Morbaix will make for the inlet on the Irish Coast marked on these maps with a star. It's important that he should not arrive there before nightfall on Thursday and I don't want him hanging about in the neighbourhood during daylight either. He must slow down a good way out and then make a rush for it. You understand, Marjorie?"

"Yes, Father."

"It's quite easy. The entrance is broad, there's no bar, and there's a depth of forty feet. Show as few lights as possible when you are entering and dowse them all once you are in— until midnight. From midnight onwards show one strong light towards the sky."

"I give one chart to the Captain?" said Marjorie.

"Yes."

"And I keep the other?"

"No," said Julian Clere. He had come to a moment of peril. He had known that he must come to it ever since Charlie Heseltine had left his office that afternoon. Did Marjorie know that Friday was the day when he must render an account of his stewardship to Heseltine? Even if Heseltine had kept his promise to send no message of any kind to Marjorie, he might easily have told her that much before he gave the promise. But not a trace of his anxiety showed in his manner.

"No, I keep the other," he said gaily.

"You, Father! Oh, then— yes— you are joining us."

There was a hint of— something— in her voice. Disappointment? Perplexity? She knew! She knew! He must find a reason, and quickly, to explain why on Friday morning he must be in a creek of Ireland rather than in his office, handing over his inheritance to young Heseltine.

"Oh, of course, I am glad really," cried Marjorie, noticing the disorder of his face. "Just for a second I wanted to be doing something for you by myself."

Julian Clere took his handkerchief and wiped his forehead. "It wouldn't do," he was saying to himself. For the third time already, since the late afternoon, he had been in a panic— he who had made the perfect unassailable organization. There wasn't a flaw in it really— no. But the one thing he hadn't organized against was fear. Fear baseless and unreasonable, but still fear— fear that shook one to the centre and made one ill.

"Yes, I shall join you, or rather Hiram T. Clegg will join you," he said gaily. "And now, my dear, you had better get on with your packing."

After she had gone to her room he burnt carefully her genuine passport and his own in the fire.

"That's the end of the Clere family," he said. "Charlie Heseltine indeed. Marry my girl, would he! Charlie Heseltine must think again. Why, the fellow's a pauper. Damned impudence, I call it!"

Mr. Clere indignantly stamped the remnants of the passports into the burning coals and betook himself to bed.

On Thursday afternoon he returned to his office after luncheon at half-past two. He signed some letters, remarked that he would probably not be back again that day, put on his hat and went out. He walked up Lower Regent Street to the Circus, took a taxi which had just put down a passenger at Swan and Edgar's, and rode to Paddington. There he entered a first-class carriage in the three-thirty to Weston-super-Mare. He did not tip the guard to secure the compartment to himself, because he had no wish to call attention to himself in any way. He was not likely to meet any of his acquaintances on that train, and he did not. He arrived at Weston-super-Mare at seven-thirty-five. As he walked along the Parade a French seaplane roared over the hills and dropped through the mists of that evening of early summer on to the smooth water of the Bristol Channel. It taxied towards the land beyond the town and came to rest. Mr. Julian Clere ate in a shelter of the Parade some sandwiches which he had brought from town. Then he strolled out beyond the town and, coming to a small beach in a tiny bay after it was dark, he flashed an electric torch three times and waited. In a very little while he heard a splash of oars. He turned on his torch again and, laying it down with the light directed seawards, he took off his shoes and his socks and rolled up his trousers as high up his thighs as he could. By the time he had knotted his shoes together and hung them round his

neck, a collapsible Berthon boat sculled by one man quietly approached the beach. Mr. Clere switched off his torch and walked into the water. He climbed carefully into the boat, and the sculler bent again to his sculls. A quarter of an hour later a flurry of broken water patched the darkness with white and the roar of the seaplane rose and diminished above the Channel. In the early hours of the morning the Irish hills heard it, but only the stars saw it swoop to an inlet of the sea where a small ship showed a great light. By daylight the seaplane was on its way back to France and the small ship under the full power of her Diesel engines was driving due West into the heart of the Atlantic.

For four days *Bagatelle* held her course, a little to the North of the curved trade-route to New York. Throughout the first day Mr. Clere was in fantastically high spirits. A schoolboy on a winter holiday at St. Moritz would have seemed sullen by the side of him.

"We are flying the French flag," said Marjorie, as they sat at their luncheon in the charmingly decorated saloon.

"Well, it's a French yacht," Julian Clere replied, with a chuckle.

"We ought to have a wireless on board," said Marjorie.

"So we ought, my dear. I must have forgotten about it." He laughed immoderately, as if aware that he had been very, very witty.

On the second day, however, hours of apprehension alternated with the hours of gaiety. He spent his time chiefly on the bridge with a telescope as often as not to his eye. In the late afternoon, against a clear red sunset, far to the South a great ship was sighted.

"A cruiser," cried Julian, in a panic.

"No, sir, a liner," the officer of the watch replied.

At dinner that night when they sat with the side ports secured and a covering over the skylight, he exclaimed after a long silence:

"They always go South. Spain or the Argentine. Sunny climes and the rest of it. Stupid! We go North."

He proposed to make a wide sweep round the Shetlands, creep down the coast of Norway, and run the Cattegat at night.

"Who always go South?" Marjorie asked.

"The explorers," Mr. Clere returned quickly, upbraiding himself for his imprudence. "I mustn't make mistakes like that again," he argued. "Some time, of course, I'll have to have a show-down with Marjorie. But not yet. Not till we reach my island."

He glanced apprehensively at Marjorie. He had not hitherto given much thought to what her reactions to his crime might be when she came to learn of it. He tried to push all such speculations out of his mind now. "Every little thing alarms me," he said to himself. "Absurd!"

Nevertheless he was up on the bridge with his telescope by daylight of the third day. They were North of the trade-route now, yet Mr. Clere managed to detect a good many destroyers and cruisers pursuing him, and gaining on him during the course of the day.

"This won't do," he said, taking himself to task. "I'm afraid when there's nothing to be afraid of. Of course it'll be different when we get home to the island."

But he no longer felt so sure upon that point. The vision of a life spent in terror which he had dimly seen in his office in Waterloo Place was getting clearer and clearer and more and more real. The hideous sinking in the pit of his stomach which had so surprised him, took him unawares now for such slight causes as an abrupt movement at his elbow or the dropping of a teacup on the deck.

On the fourth day after Captain Morbaix and his chief officer had worked out the position of the yacht and marked it on the chart, Julian Clere gave an order. Captain Morbaix ported his helm and steered due North; and with the change of direction Clere recovered some of his spirits. There was a small deck-house aft and he took his tea there with his daughter at five o'clock. The sea was like a shining mirror continually splintered by the swift and steady thrust of the yacht, the sun warm, the air balmy and mild. Mr. Clere was inclined to seize the moment and take his daughter a little deeper into his confidence.

"My dear girl," he had actually begun, when there was a sudden flurry on the deck. A whistle sounded, sailors were running, the First Officer who had been standing by the clock of the log hurried forward to the bridge— and Mr. Clere turned grey and sprang to his feet. He stood for a moment staring at his daughter as if she were a stranger; and for a moment, too, she did not know him. It was as if some chemical change had taken place in his blood, making him a creature different from man. She had never seen terror so dreadful.

Clere ran out of the deck-house. All about the yacht the sea was empty; ahead hung a curious fog. An expression of despair crept into Clere's face. The least little thing— the blast of a whistle, for instance— and he was overthrown. How long could one live if that was to be normal? Julian climbed to the bridge, with Marjorie upon his heels. The Captain and the First Officer stood together, perplexed, alarmed, looking ahead and every now and then exchanging a word. Certainly the spectacle at which they stared was disturbing and no one was surprised when Captain Morbaix laid his hand on the engine-room telegraph and signalled for half-speed. The yacht was moving over a smooth sunlit sea in the stillest and clearest air. But ahead a curtain of mist thick as wool and dark as night stretched across the world from rim to rim. It had indeed the look of a wall rather than of a curtain, it was so solid, so abrupt.

Towards this wall *Bagatelle* was moving and not one of those upon her bridge could resist the fancy that there must be a collision and a shipwreck when mist and yacht met. They held their breath in suspense as the space between lessened and lessened.

"Two minutes... one minute... thirty seconds," said Captain Morbaix, and he began to count, "one, two, three," and so on like a man holding a watch at the start of a race. Another second and the bowsprit touched and pierced the mist and disappeared entirely from before their eyes. The bows of the little ship followed— vanished. It was as though some unknown elemental force destroyed the yacht section by section noiselessly and dispersed it into atoms so fine as to be invisible. Then the bridge was swallowed up; and at once it was night and very cold. The beat of the propellers in the water astern alone seemed to belong to this world. Captain Morbaix pressed a button and his siren screamed harshly twice. To the consternation of passengers and crew it was answered loudly from a spot on the port side very near at hand. Captain Morbaix with a cry once more seized the handle of the telegraph and jammed it down to stop.

"No, no," Julian Clere shouted— it was less a shout than a panic- stricken scream. "Carry on, Captain. Starboard her and carry on! At full speed!"

He moved towards the telegraph to wrest it out of the Captain's hand, and suddenly there was no motion in the ship. Mr. Clere turned and hurried down the ladder from the bridge. On the bridge they heard him stumbling along the deck to the companion.

Marjorie was troubled. She had never known her father to be nervous. And nervousness had been growing upon him these last days. No doubt this odd change from sunlight to darkness and winter-cold was enough to make anyone nervous. The Captain and the First Mate were talking together in hushed tones. They, sailors, more accustomed to the violent transformations of the sea, were at a loss. She listened for the siren again to sound across the water, and suddenly realized that she was chilled to the bone.

She descended to her cabin, feeling her way down the companion ladder, for the cabin lights had not yet been switched on from the engine-room. She came to her father's door and knocked upon the panel.

"Father, are you all right?" she asked, and she got no answer. She turned the handle and opened the door. It was quite dark in the cabin.

"Father," she cried, and hearing nothing but her own voice she went in. Something touched her and yielded to her, something soft and fluttering. She thought that she caught a whisper very close to her. Then the something swung against her or she pushed it— she never knew which. But she knew what the something was. She called aloud for help and until the help came she

supported her father in her arms. But when the rope was untied and her father laid upon his bed it was too late. His heart had ceased to beat.

"Will you leave us together now," she asked in a quiet voice. "For the moment what is to be done, I can do."

They left her alone in the dark cabin with the dead body of her father. In half an hour the propellers began once more to beat the water and the ship to vibrate. But Marjorie was not aware that the yacht was moving until many minutes had passed. Then she went up again on to the bridge. The mist was thinning. Between wraiths of it overhead could be seen patches of blue and suddenly the yacht burst out of it into the sunlight.

Captain Morbaix was free to offer his sympathies to Sadie Clegg, alias Marjorie Clere. She listened and thanked him and asked:

"What ship was that in the fog which signalled you to stop? A cruiser? A destroyer?"

Captain Morbaix looked at the girl in bewilderment.

"But, Miss Sadie, there was no ship. What you heard was the echo of our siren flung back at us from an iceberg."

There was, you see, after all a flaw in Julian Clere's organization. He had not organized against fear.

14: Getting Rid of Pongo

A Story From the Shades

Harold Mercer

1882-1952

Sydney Mail 14 Dec 1938

'YOU'VE got to choose between that dog and me,' said Maria.

Maria was strong on this choose-between business. It had come out in regard to horse-racing, smoking, my men friends— in fact, in a score of ways. Maria was cock-sure that there can be only one answer. If I only had had the courage to express my real choice I might have been happy. It was the sad reflection that, again, I might not that had made a coward of me and kept me silent.

I was very fond of dogs. Maria said I was very like one myself, only that a. dog is a faithful animal. Pongo was quite an accident. He simply arrived one day, chased the cat over the fence, and gave Maria's pet poodle such a fright that he spent most of his time for three days under the wardrobe. He then lay down on the mat. The next day he was quite at home. He defied the milkman to enter, bit the baker, and badly scared a policeman who called about some municipal business; and— this may have helped the development of my affection for him— he frightened my mother-in-law away when she called to pay a visit. It was all done, of course, to show us what a. valuable watchdog he was.

THE mat didn't satisfy him when he was sure of his footing. 'What's good enough for you is good enough for me,' seemed to be his genial philosophy. He thought our bed was a nice comfortable place for a snooze, and he chose times when he was wet from rolling in tne grass ana a nice new cover had been put on. An easy chair would do him if he was found and turned off the bed. He liked playing with Maria's shoes, too, in a way that was not good for the shoes. There were a hundred things he liked which Maria didn't like at all.

But there was something about him. If you scolded him, he looked with such pleading in his eyes while he knocked over vases and pot-plants with his flogging tail that you had to forgive him. At least, I did, not Maria. Women are hard.

SHE showed that when she raked up an old kennel and chain and attached them to Pongo. Poor Pongo was a friendly dog who didn't like being shut away from companionship. He objected vocally. Neighbours rang us up on the telephone to tell us about it, as if we didn't know. I knew especially. I suppose if Maria told me once that I would have to get rid of that dog she mentioned it

fifty times. Finally I went out and slept in the kennel— a roomy one— to keep the poor fellow company. My idea was that it would show Maria how hard she was. She told me next day that it only showed the condition I had been in when I came home.

Finally I decided that for the sake of peace Pongo would have to go. Maria was hinting drastically about poison; and I couldn't think of that about a dog that was certainly fond of me. r didn't like the way the poor dog was insulted— chased out with a broom, or heaved out of a door by the scruff of the neck.

THE difficulty was to get rid of Pongo. He was given to a friend in the next suburb; but that was easy. He came back after two days, trailing a broken chain; and he was so glad to be back that he came right into the house through a closed window to let us know about it. Try as I would, it was impossible to make Maria see that the animal's faithfulness and enthusiasm might be set against the cost of the broken window.

Smith, who lives in a suburb very remote from ours, about fifteen miles away, mentioned that he wanted a watchdog. He got Pongo. The first we knew of his return was when we heard him biting the milkman— or rather we heard the milkman. Pongo had got used to the regular milkman, but this chap was doing relieving work.

Smith told me later, coldly, that if ever I gave him a dog again it would be the end of our friendship. He did not deign to explain, when I asked him what the dog had done; his look implied that I dashed well knew the sort of things Pongo would do. I did, in a way.

LATER I took Pongo out for a ride in a car and dropped him about forty miles away. He was pretty footsore when he got back, but he didn't entertain any malice. He treated his dropping in the wilderness as if it had been an unfortunate mistake.

Pongo might not have been much to look at; I would hardly say that he was one dog in a hundred, although you might say he was a hundred dogs in one, his breeding being very mixed; but a dog that could get back in that way had some points in intelligence. Trying to make Maria feel that she should admire him, however, was wasted effort.

When Maria's conversation began to be really unpleasant somebody mentioned th Dogs Home. The Dogs Home people were quite amiable, but they didn't know Pongo. Certainly a dog was destroyed, but it was another dog that the man caught after Pongo had escaped from the dog-box; heaven knows how anyone could mistake any other dog for our Pongo. He came home wagging his tail nearly off at seeing us again. He may have realised that he had

had a close call. The owner of the other dog found out what had happened, somehow, and was very unpleasant, and the Dogs' Home did not want anything more to do with Pongo.

Maria's references to poison became definite. It was cold-blooded murder, of course, with an affectionate animal like Pongo. But women don't mind a murder or so if they can get someone to do it for them.

It was after Pongo had made the mistake of thinking that a cold chicken on the kitchen table had been left there for him that the poison was bought. I was not given time to ponder on the enormity of the crime. Maria stood in the background like a Lady Macbeth as I— under her fierce supervision— shut my eyes and handed Pongo his poisoned meat.

IN the morning Pongo greeted me with joyful barking and a great appetite. I was relieved but puzzled.

Some time later Tomkins, who owns racing dogs, looked over the front hedge.

'Hey,' he remarked, 'have you heard that dog poisoners have been about? Two of my dogs got a bait last night. They were stiff this morning. Worth a hundred quid apiece those dogs were. I wish I could find out the cow who did it.'

I knew when to be silent; so does Maria occasionally, although it seems hard to believe that. I only said: 'A man who poisons a dog deserves to be hanged! And anyone who instigates such a crime deserves to be hung, drawn, and quartered,' I added for the benefit of Maria, who was on the verandah.

When I learned that the cat next door was dead, also, I remembered certain sounds I had heard, and reconstructed the tragedy. Two cats had been curious to see what I had given Pongo. While Pongo had strained as far as the chain would allow to reach one on the fence the other had made off with the meat. A lengthy dispute and chase between the cats had taken the bait well away from our home.

Maria seemed afraid to even mention poison after that, but she began, shortly, to talk about other methods.

'If I tried to borrow a revolver,' I said nastily, 'people might mistake what I wanted to do with it, knowing about us.'

'What do you mean?' she said.

'Nothing,' I replied vaguely.

It wasn't that that made the real trouble. No: it was Pongo himself. The discovery of some feathers sticking out of a cushion, a new and expensive one, roused all his playful, sporting humour. Scattered feathers certainly do not improve the appearance of a sitting-room; some were still there when I came

home. In spite of my efforts to argue with Maria on the lines that she had been a girl herself once, which only seemed to annoy her, I slept in the kennel with poor Pongo again that night. I felt it was his last night on earth and I wanted to spend it with him.

I DIDN'T go home at all the next night, nor the next. If Maria was going to insist on a tragedy she could do the dark deed herself. My intention was to wait until it was all over; and I tried to forget. To some extent I succeeded.

But Maria always left the dirty work to me. What happened was that poor Pongo was only left chained up. Even Maria's hard heart softened about that after a time. When she let him off the chain he leapt and tumbled about her as if he regarded her as a real friend. Then he took the fence in a stride, chased the Binks's cat through their premises, found the Bloggs's dog, which had grown incautious after Pongo's temporary absence, and gave him the hiding that had long been delayed, and then discovered that an open gate admitted him to a poultry yard.

Pongo always regarded fowls as great fun. He had hardly been chased out before the passing of a motor cyclist aroused all his hunting instincts. The cyclist, dodging him, went right into a stone wall.

ALTOGETHER he had a great day. I know what it feels like to be let off the chain myself, so I had a sympathetic understanding when I heard about it. His adventures led him a long way away, and it wasn't until rather late that he made his way home, rather doubtfully. He had remembered that he hadn't seen his master for some time and there was a chain waiting for him.

He gave a joyful bark when he realised that the figure sitting on the kerbing hugging the telegraph-post was me. I had been trying to make up my mind to go home; and it was nice to have a greeting like that. There was a bond of sympathy between us; we were both subject to the harsh tyranny of woman. Maria found us in the morning sleeping together on the doormat, locked in one another's arms, so to speak.

It was shortly after that that the people began to arrive— Bloggs about his dog, Simpson about his fowls, a worse-for-wear motor cyclist about sundry damages. Long before the last of them had paid his visit I decided that Maria was right. We would have to part with Pongo.

Feeling like an executioner, I took Pongo, a big sack, and some chloroform down to the river; there were some boulders there to weight the bag, and the chloroform made the final act humane.

But a dog who had come through all that Pongo had come through was not finished as easily as that. To my amazement, in spite of the weights, the bag

came back to the surface, moving convulsively. It wrung my heart. Then Pongo began to emerge. He was making a struggle to get away from the bag which encumbered him.

I couldn't let an old companion die like that. I plunged in to the rescue, and I was drowned. Pongo wasn't. The ungrateful hound swam to the shore, leaving me to it. At the inquest circumstantial evidence served to make a newspaper canine hero of Pongo. The dog had heroically plunged to *my* rescue.

That brings the queer result. My wife makes a pet of the canine hero she once wanted me to poison. He tried to rescue her dear husband. On the anniversary of my death she ties crepe round his neck and feeds him with chicken. He enjoys it immensely.

The great point about it, perhaps, is that the commemoration thoroughly annoys Maria's second husband.

15: The Wolves of Cernogratz

"Saki" (H. H. Munro)

1870-1916

The Morning Post, 7 Jan 1913

"ARE THERE any old legends attached to the castle?" asked Conrad of his sister. Conrad was a prosperous Hamburg merchant, but he was the one poetically-dispositioned member of an eminently practical family.

The Baroness Gruebel shrugged her plump shoulders.

"There are always legends hanging about these old places. They are not difficult to invent and they cost nothing. In this case there is a story that when any one dies in the castle all the dogs in the village and the wild beasts in forest howl the night long. It would not be pleasant to listen to, would it?"

"It would be weird and romantic," said the Hamburg merchant.

"Anyhow, it isn't true," said the Baroness complacently; "since we bought the place we have had proof that nothing of the sort happens. When the old mother-in-law died last springtime we all listened, but there was no howling. It is just a story that lends dignity to the place without costing anything."

"The story is not as you have told it," said Amalie, the grey old governess. Every one turned and looked at her in astonishment. She was wont to sit silent and prim and faded in her place at table, never speaking unless some one spoke to her, and there were few who troubled themselves to make conversation with her. To-day a sudden volubility had descended on her; she continued to talk, rapidly and nervously, looking straight in front of her and seeming to address no one in particular.

"It is not when *anyone* dies in the castle that the howling is heard. It was when one of the Cernogratz family died here that the wolves came from far and near and howled at the edge of the forest just before the death hour. There were only a few couple of wolves that had their lairs in this part of the forest, but at such a time the keepers say there would be scores of them, gliding about in the shadows and howling in chorus, and the dogs of the castle and the village and all the farms round would bay and howl in fear and anger at the wolf chorus, and as the soul of the dying one left its body a tree would crash down in the park. That is what happened when a Cernogratz died in his family castle. But for a stranger dying here, of course no wolf would howl and no tree would fall. Oh, no."

There was a note of defiance, almost of contempt, in her voice as she said the last words. The well-fed, much-too-well dressed Baroness stared angrily at the dowdy old woman who had come forth from her usual and seemly position of effacement to speak so disrespectfully.

"You seem to know quite a lot about the von Cernogratz legends, Fraulein Schmidt," she said sharply; "I did not know that family histories were among the subjects you are supposed to be proficient in."

The answer to her taunt was even more unexpected and astonishing than the conversational outbreak which had provoked it.

"I am a von Cernogratz myself," said the old woman, "that is why I know the family history."

"You a von Cernogratz? You!" came in an incredulous chorus.

"When we became very poor," she explained, "and I had to go out and give teaching lessons, I took another name; I thought it would be more in keeping. But my grandfather spent much of his time as a boy in this castle, and my father used to tell me many stories about it, and, of course, I knew all the family legends and stories. When one has nothing left to one but memories, one guards and dusts them with especial care. I little thought when I took service with you that I should one day come with you to the old home of my family. I could wish it had been anywhere else."

There was silence when she finished speaking, and then the Baroness turned the conversation to a less embarrassing topic than family histories. But afterwards, when the old governess had slipped away quietly to her duties, there arose a clamour of derision and disbelief.

"It was an impertinence," snapped out the Baron, his protruding eyes taking on a scandalised expression; "fancy the woman talking like that at our table. She almost told us we were nobodies, and I don't believe a word of it. She is just Schmidt and nothing more. She has been talking to some of the peasants about the old Cernogratz family, and raked up their history and their stories."

"She wants to make herself out of some consequence," said the Baroness; "she knows she will soon be past work and she wants to appeal to our sympathies. Her grandfather, indeed!"

The Baroness had the usual number of grandfathers, but she never, never boasted about them.

"I dare say her grandfather was a pantry boy or something of the sort in the castle," sniggered the Baron; "that part of the story may be true."

The merchant from Hamburg said nothing; he had seen tears in the old woman's eyes when she spoke of guarding her memories— or, being of an imaginative disposition, he thought he had.

"I shall give her notice to go as soon as the New Year festivities are over," said the Baroness; "till then I shall be too busy to manage without her."

But she had to manage without her all the same, for in the cold biting weather after Christmas, the old governess fell ill and kept to her room.

"It is most provoking," said the Baroness, as her guests sat round the fire on one of the last evenings of the dying year; "all the time that she has been with us I cannot remember that she was ever seriously ill, too ill to go about and do her work, I mean. And now, when I have the house full, and she could be useful in so many ways, she goes and breaks down. One is sorry for her, of course, she looks so withered and shrunken, but it is intensely annoying all the same."

"Most annoying," agreed the banker's wife, sympathetically; "it is the intense cold, I expect, it breaks the old people up. It has been unusually cold this year."

"The frost is the sharpest that has been known in December for many years," said the Baron.

"And, of course, she is quite old," said the Baroness; "I wish I had given her notice some weeks ago, then she would have left before this happened to her. Why, Wappi, what is the matter with you?"

The small, woolly lapdog had leapt suddenly down from its cushion and crept shivering under the sofa. At the same moment an outburst of angry barking came from the dogs in the castle-yard, and other dogs could be heard yapping and barking in the distance.

"What is disturbing the animals?" asked the Baron.

And then the humans, listening intently, heard the sound that had roused the dogs to their demonstrations of fear and rage; heard a long-drawn whining howl, rising and falling, seeming at one moment leagues away, at others sweeping across the snow until it appeared to come from the foot of the castle walls. All the starved, cold misery of a frozen world, all the relentless hunger-fury of the wild, blended with other forlorn and haunting melodies to which one could give no name, seemed concentrated in that wailing cry.

"Wolves!" cried the Baron.

Their music broke forth in one raging burst, seeming to come from everywhere.

"Hundreds of wolves," said the Hamburg merchant, who was a man of strong imagination.

Moved by some impulse which she could not have explained, the Baroness left her guests and made her way to the narrow, cheerless room where the old governess lay watching the hours of the dying year slip by. In spite of the biting cold of the winter night, the window stood open. With a scandalised exclamation on her lips, the Baroness rushed forward to close it.

"Leave it open," said the old woman in a voice that for all its weakness carried an air of command such as the Baroness had never heard before from her lips.

"But you will die of cold!" she expostulated.

"I am dying in any case," said the voice, "and I want to hear their music. They have come from far and wide to sing the death-music of my family. It is beautiful that they have come; I am the last von Cernogratz that will die in our old castle, and they have come to sing to me. Hark, how loud they are calling!"

The cry of the wolves rose on the still winter air and floated round the castle walls in long-drawn piercing wails; the old woman lay back on her couch with a look of long-delayed happiness on her face.

"Go away," she said to the Baroness; "I am not lonely any more. I am one of a great old family..."

"I think she is dying," said the Baroness when she had rejoined her guests; "I suppose we must send for a doctor. And that terrible howling! Not for much money would I have such death-music."

"That music is not to be bought for any amount of money," said Conrad.

"Hark! What is that other sound?" asked the Baron, as a noise of splitting and crashing was heard.

It was a tree falling in the park.

There was a moment of constrained silence, and then the banker's wife spoke.

"It is the intense cold that is splitting the trees. It is also the cold that has brought the wolves out in such numbers. It is many years since we have had such a cold winter."

The Baroness eagerly agreed that the cold was responsible for these things. It was the cold of the open window, too, which caused the heart failure that made the doctor's ministrations unnecessary for the old Fräulein. But the notice in the newspapers looked very well—

"On December 29th, at Schloss Cernogratz, Amalie von Cernogratz, for many years the valued friend of Baron and Baroness Gruebel."

———————

16: The Ship in the Desert

Harry Hale

Evelyn Observer, and South and East Bourke Record (Victoria) 14 Dec 1894

I can find nothing about this author, nor anything else written by him

THIS STORY was told me by Bunyap, the old prospector, some little time before he was killed by the Apaches, and I give it as neatly as possible in his own words:—

"In 1867 Cy Barker and I started out from Barton (west Arizona) on a prospecting trip to the North and West. We were both well mounted, and had a pack-mule to carry our tent and mining tools.

"Our idea was, that if we found the route too difficult after trying the trail by way of Death Valley, we could swing off in the direction of the Buckskin Mountains, where we heard of some rich finds the previous season.

"Cy Barker was a man that I didn't know very much about only in a general way. He was anything but a favorite at Bradley's Flats, where I first met him; was quarrelsome when in liquor, and given to shooting on sight at the smallest provocation. But he was a lucky prospector, a dead shot, afraid of nothing living; and those were the main things in a companion for such an undertaking as lay before us.

"We worked along, day after day, down along Alapaso Gulch and across the Mojave Plains, without anything particular happening. The worst part of it was being half-starved, for our dried venison wasn't properly 'jerked,' and went back on us, and no game could live on the alkali land we were crossing excepting sage-hens and jack-rabbits, and these were uncommonly scarce.

"Then bad luck began in dead earnest. The pack mule stepped into a sand-rat hole and broke its leg; that was the first of it. We ended his suffering with a bullet, and had broiled mule meat for supper. Tough? Well, I should say so! But it was meat.

"If I b'lieved in p'sentiments, I should say somethin' was goin' to happen to-night. Mebbe it'll be what an old Mexican woman told me down to Tucson a spell ago,' growlcd Cy, as we sat silently smoking by our camp-fire, which we had kindled in an old buffalo wallow, in case of any Apaches being in the vicinity.

" 'What was that?' I asked.

" 'Vi'lent death inside of a year,' was the curt response.

" 'Well,' I said, 'I don't believe in presentiments, or in fortune-telling, either.'

"And then I went on to describe what I had been told before I was hardly out of my teens:

" 'You'll hunt and hunt for gold all your life, The most gold you'll ever find will be in a ship's hold; and none of it will do you much good, for you'll never die in your bed!'

" 'Think of me, who never saw salt water, finding gold in a ship's hold!' I laughed. 'I should as soon—'

"The most infernal screeching I ever heard in all my life stopped my further speech in quick time, while almost simultaneously came the rapid clatter of hoof-beats close down upon us.

" 'Paches!' yelled Cy. "And making a grab for our rifles, we broke for cover-the only cover, however, being the pitchy darkness of the night itself, and twenty yards away we were as safe as if we were twenty miles.

"I got a snap at one redskin as he jumped from his saddle close by our fire, and Cy winged another; then, taking the north star for a guide, we lit out, abandoning our horses, blankets, tin dishes, and, worst of all, our haversacks, in one of which was a pocket compass.

"The sand plain was tolerably even, and only for the danger of alkali sinks or gropher burrows there wasn't much trouble in getting along; but two heavier-hearted chaps couldn't have been found in the Territory. We didn't fear being followed, for the wind kept the dust and sand shifting so our footprints were covered, and so we kept on, making but mighty little talk, till day-dawn, seeing or hearing nothing more of the Apaches, who had probably struck to the eastward toward their reservation.

"We had our rifles, revolvers, and a goodish supply of cartridges, and luckily each had some matches in a waterproof case, with one pipe and a plug of tobacco between us. But we were two hundred miles from the nearest settlement, the country swarmed with roving bands of Indians, and altogether it was a tremendous hard outlook.

"Well, we shaped our course as nearly as we could by the position of the sun, and struck out in the direction of the Buckskin Mountains. I have seen some hard experiences in my day, but this was the worst.

"Weak from hunger and thirst, which an occasional sup from a brackish, salty mud-hole only aggravated ; footsore, and with eyes half-blinded by the glare from the sun-baked sand, we toiled sullenly on day after day in a heat almost unendurable, while not the first vestige of vegetation, excepting the everlasting sage bush and prickly aloe, could be anywhere seen. The only break to the awful monotony was the bleaching bones and whole skeletons, not only of mules and oxen, but not unfrequently of human beings, scattered on every side, and after a time even these were wanting.

"We seemed to have entered upon a region where the foot of man and beast had perhaps never trod. And a peculiar feature of the grey, barren waste was that it seemed to slope gradually to the west and south until everything was grey and desolate, barren of shrub or vegetation, as far as the eye could reach.

"But against the distant horizon we dimly discerned a snow-clad range, which must be no other than the Buckskin Mountains; and as to go back meant certain death, we could only keep blindly on.

"It was about noon of the same day on which we had entered the valley or basin when Cy, whose eyes were less affected by the sun glare than my own, uttered an ex-clamation:

" 'There's somethin' ahead that looks like a bluff.' he said, hoarsely.

" 'Pray heaven it may be!' I answered: for an elevation of the kind suggested water and possibly a trifling growth of willow or cottonwood, whose leaves and bark would at least deaden the pangs of hunger.

"After two hopurs of exhaustive stumbling onward and then stopping short, Cy rubbed his eyes and stared steadfasly at what was before us. I never shall forget his peculiar exclamation.

" 'Bunyap,' he muttered, in a sort of awe-struck voice, 'I'm derned if we haven't discovered Noah's ark.'

"For my own part I could not speak, much less smil;e at the quaint conceit, for I was dumb with amazement. On the very summit of a high, irregular-shaped mass of a singular-looking porous ledge, which rose abruptly. from the sand, was what I knew, from pictures I had seen, must be an ancient galley, or galleon, with a high-carved bow and lofty castellated stern.

"Hunger, thirst, and exhaustion were momentarily forgotten in this strangely-bewildering sight. Clambering hastily up the rugged projection of the ledge, we stood, silent and speechless, gazing at the antique vessel, which was in a wonderful state of preservation.

"It lay partly on one side, impaled, so to speak, on a sharp angle of the ledge, that had broken a large hole in the bottom, which was curiously sheathed with sheets of tarnished lead, apparently hammered thin by hand.

"Suddenly I remembered to have heard that in San Jose there was some old Spanish chronicles, speaking of a vast inland sea of which, some hundreds of years ago, the present gulf of California was an outlet.

"If so, the galleon had sailed up the gulf, and in crossing the then existing body of water had been wrecked on the ledge or reef where we were standing, which probably extended downward many feet to the bottom of the basin, that must have gradually filled in with drifting sand and dust during the lapse of centuries.

"This I briefly explained to Cy as the only possible theory for the presence of the antique vessel.

" 'Mebbe,' said Cy, slowly, 'an' p'r'aps there's money aboard!'

"A similiar thought had occurred to myself, and with it flashed across my mind the prediction I had repeated to Barker some time before— 'the most gold you'll ever find will be in the ship's hold.'

"We clambered over the low rail, and stood for a moment on the slightly-inclined deck, gazing about it.

"Drift sand and alkali dust covered every-thing, but we could see the stumps of the masts standing, and even sun-dried pieces of rigging, preserved by their coating of tar, attached to copper ringbolts.

"A door in the forward part of the high poop gave way before some vigorous kicks and we entered a large and once sumptuously furnished cabin, hung with stamped and gilt Spanish leather, now dim and tarnished. On either side were the officers' rooms, but those we did not examine.

"For we could see nothing but one object, that being a skeleton, to which tattered fragments of antique clothing still clung. And the ghastly occupant of the cabin was in a kneeling posture in front of a small shrine.

"But now the greed of possible gain had taken possession of me, and heedless of that which we saw, my eye fell upon a ring-bolt in the floor, attached to a square hatch covering, which I knew must lead into the after-hold.

"Pointing it out to my companion, we raised it without difficulty. A rude torch was quickly prepared, and lighting it we descended, with fast-boating hearts, by a steep step-ladder. What has composed the bottom layers of do not know; but before our astonished eyes lay bars of crude silver, stamped with the Spanish crown, just as they had probably come from the rude smelting furnaces among the lost mines of Mexico and Lower California. And piled among these were 'bricks' of virgin gold, varying in weight from ten to twenty pounds.

" 'We've struck it rich this time, Bunyap!' exultantly exclaimed Cy, whose astonishment seemed to be completely overpowered by a sort of rapturous satisfaction.

" 'Yes,' I said, slowly; 'but what good is it all as we are fixed-two or three hundred miles from civilisation, and without the means of carrying the smallest part of this great treasure away? I'd give one of those gold bricks now for a drink of cool water and some hard tack.

"Cy made no answer, and I had hard work to tear him away from the treasure on which he was feasting his greedy eyes. But we returned to the

cabin, and having re-moved the unpleasant skeleton to one of the state-rooms, made a further examination of the premises.

"The highly rarefied air seemed to have prevented moisture and decay. We found a parchment log-book, written in Spanish, together with the vessel's papers, in the same language, though neither of us could decipher them.

"There were heavy cutlasses and boarding-pikes of strange design, but so far as we could discover no signs of firearms of any description, showing that the galloon must have existed before such weapons came into general use.

All the remainder of the day Cy Barker was silent and moody, hardly speaking, excepting when I addressed him, and then only in monosyllables. I naturally attributed this to the terrible gnawings of hunger and the cravings of thirst which came with the reaction after the excitement of discovery. But I was destined to be terribly undeceived

" 'We must get away from here in the morning,' I said, as, after dark, we lay down on the floor of the ancient cabin for needed rest. 'We can't eat gold and silver, that's certain. '

"Cy uttered an inaudible reply, and after a little time I fell into an uneasy slumber. We had left the cabin doors wide open to admit the air, and I was awakened a couple of hours later by the beams of the rising moon shining full in my face.

"And not a moment too soon. Stooping over my prostrate form stood Cy Barker, with his heavy revolver cocked, and the muzzle pointed downward directly at my heart!

"With the quickness of thought I grasped the revolver barrel and throw it up just as his forefinger curled about the trigger. A sharp explosion followed, and to my horror Cy Barker fell forward on his face, dead-shot plumb through the forehead by a ball from his own weapon, which had been intended for myself.

"I never can distinctly remember just what followed. I have a confused recollection of rushing out on deck and clambering over thc side to the plain below, then all is a sort of blank.

"As far as I know it was four days before I was discovered by party of friendly Navajoes, walking rapidly over the sands, with my ayes steadily fixed on the distant peaks of the Buckskin Mountains. They fed me cautiously, mounted me on a spare pony, and finally left me at Fort Streight, in a half-delirius condition, babbling of treasures of gold and silver, and of some one who was trying to kill me.

"Good care and proper food brought me round all right again. Confiding my discovery to Captain Keogh, Lieutenant Place, and the surgeon of the fort, a small party was organised, and we set out in search of the lost ship.

"But, alas! the needle in the haystack memory was a blank as far as the direction I had travelled was concerned, and after three weeks of fruitless endeavor, the party returned to the fort, believing my story to be the fancy of a disordered brain. I pursued the search alone until my provisions gave out, and reluctantly abandoning it, reached Benners' ranch, in Pasquil County, more dead than alive.

"But somewhere east of the Buckskin Mountains the Ship of the desert remains to be discovered sooner or later; of that I am positive."

17: The Judge and the Cur

Temple Bailey

1869-1953

Western Mail (Perth) 2 April 1904

U.S. popular novelist and short story writer

TONY'S STAND was on the coldest corner of the windswept street. In summer this was very fortunate, for Tony could catch the occasional coolness of such breezes as straggled up from the river; but in winter Tony's fingers grew red and his nose blue in the chill, searching blasts.

There was consolation, however, in the peanut-roaster. By hugging very close to it, Tony could keep himself warm on one side at least. In the bitterest weather Tony kept his fruit covered. The man who owned the stand did not wish to have the fruit freeze, but he was not so careful of Tony. He came every morning to see that all was in order, to scold Tony until the boy was stubbornly resentful, and then to leave him, through all the tiresome hours until night came on, when he returned and sent Tony home to a poor little supper, and a poor little bed.

Tony could not have stood it, if it had not been for "Smuggler." Smuggler was a dog. Tony had named him Smuggler because he had to be smuggled into odd corners whenever the man who owned the stand came around; and Smuggler, like the wise little tramp he was, took refuge under his piece of carpet beneath the stand whenever the dog catchers or a policeman of unfriendly aspect walked by, or stopped at the peanut roaster. The big policeman on the corner, however, kept his eyes and ears closed to the fact that there was an unlicensed cur on his beat. Now and then the proprietor of a little restaurant across the street treated Tony to a bowl of soup— thick, hot soup, with two slices of bread. So with these occasional feasts, and with the nights of comfort when he and Smuggler lay curled close together, Tony managed to live without running away, and even to be a little happy.

But the dog catchers had their eyes on Smuggler. One very cold morning they swept up the street with nets ready, but Smuggler disappeared at the first sound of the yelping, barking, waggon load, and there was nothing to be seen under the stand but an innocent piece of old carpet. When, however, the dog catchers had vanished round the corner, Tony gave a little whistle, the carpet be-came suddenly animated, a scrubby head emerged, and with a glad bark of freedom, Smuggler charged down on the sparrows in the street. And it was just then that the Judge drove up.

"It's just such curs, Johnson," he said, looking at Smuggler with great disfavour, as the small vagabond darted under the horses' feet, "that make

dogs a menace to the community. A good dog," he continued, with his hand on the head of Emperor II., "is a precious possession, but I haven't any use for common canines."

"No Suh," grinned, the darky coachman, as he climbed down. "Dem is fine oranges, suh! A dozen, did you say, suh?"

"Yes," said the Judge.

Emperor II sat quietly in front of the Judge. Between the two there was the dignified understanding that exists when the dog is of noble breed and the master of noble instincts. They were both of them gentlemen of the old school, and if Emperor II rarely received a caress from the old man's hand, he knew every inflection of the testy, kind old voice, and, his tail would move slightly at the mere sound of his master's name.

Tony was putting up the fruit stolidly. He could not understand why people wanted fruit in such weather, nor could he understand why so fine a gentleman should be buying fruit at his stand instead of patronising one of the fashionable high-priced fruit stores up town. Why didn't he get one of the hot pies at the little restaurant across the way. If Tony had money he would buy ten hot pies at one time, and then he and Smuggler would eat and eat.

Just then the dog catchers executed a flank movement. They had spotted Smuggler, and they had moved away merely to allay suspicion.

"Good," said the Judge, as he saw the man with the net making for Smuggler.

Tony dropped the bag of oranges and opened his arms to his little dog, but the man with the net ran between them and reached for Smuggler, who was huddled up under the stand.

Then suddenly there was the rush of big grayish body, and Emperor II., in spite of the Judge's efforts to hold hit leaped to the rescue of Smuggler of the frightened, cowering Smuggler. Emperor II stood in front of him, his massive head raised, his white teeth bared in menace, defying anyone to touch— him who wore on his massive silver-mounted collar the tag that made him a free dog within the limits of the city. At this the dog catcher stopped.

"Call off your dog, sir," he said to the Judge, respectfully but firmly. Tony stood with his two small red hands clasped closely together, his miserable, imploring face turned up to the Judge.

"Please, please!" he gasped, and the tears made dirty little rivers down his checks.

"Oh, by George!" said the Judge. The big policeman had strolled up and a small crowd had gathered.

"Fine mastiff, sir," said the big policeman, as he looked at grand old Emperor II., who still had the catchers at bay; "but you will have to call him off."

"Emperor, boy, come here!" commanded the Judge, reluctantly. Then Emperor's head drooped. He looked from the shivering little cur in the corner to his master. Then, seeing no sign of relenting in the Judge's face, he went to the carriage and leaped in, with ears down— a disappointed knight errant.

The dog catchers then carried off the struggling, yelping Smuggler. Tony seeing that remonstrance was useless with dulled and unquestioning submission to more suffering, went on putting the fruit into bags.

The big policeman strolled over to the side of the carriage.

"Poor little chap!" he said. "The dog was all he had."

The Judge cleared his throat.

"Such dogs are a nuisance," he began but his voice wavered a little, and Emperor, noting the kinder tone, turned on his master two beautiful, pleading eyes and put a paw on the Judge's knee.

"There's nothing to be done. I suppose?" mused the Judge, with his eye on the distant waggon of the dog catcher.

"No; unless you could go to the pound and pay his tax."

"Humph!" said the Judge, testily "My dinner is waiting and then Johnston climbed in with the fruit, and they drove away.

The big policeman tried to comfort Tony, and went over to the restaurant and soon a waiter brought him a bowl of soup and a hot pie; but the boy was dumb with misery.

Whirling around in his brain was but one thought: Smuggler was gone, and he would never see his little dog again. After that nothing mattered. He didn't care whether he took care of the stand or not. He would co away somewhere and never come back. When the man who owned the stand came that night, he scolded and fussed and brutally struck at the boy; but the big policeman interfered. "Stop that," he said, "or I'll run you in."

All night long, in his miserable bed, the boy sobbed and slept, and dreamed that Smuggler was back again, and woke to find his arms empty. He thought of Smuggler with, the other yelping, down-cast, condemned dogs at the pound. He hoped they would not hurt him. He wondered if he missed his little master, and then he sobbed again as he yearned for the small warm body that had lain for so many nights at his side. Smuggler might not be beautiful, but he was loving, and— "He was all I had," groaned Tony, with heavy weeping as he sank into heavy troubled slumber.

In the morning he had made up his mind that he would run away. There was country somewhere, and perhaps he could find it, and sleep in some barn

on the hay. No one cared for him, no one but Smuggler, and perhaps even now Smuggler was about to die. Then, in the grey dawn, he went back to the fruit stand to sit with his head in his hands.

Towards noon, as he crouched shivering and unhappy in his cold corner, there came the sound of swift trotting horses, and Tony was conscious all at once of a picture in which the Judge, in his big fur overcoat, was the main feature. At his feet was the great mastiff, his head up, his eyes blazing with joyous excitement.

And what was that in the corner of the seat? Something small and yellow and scrubby! Tony gasped, but before he could cry out, the carriage stopped, and the small, yellow, scrubby object bolted out of it straight into Tony's arms.

It was Smuggler! Little Smuggler, with a collar studded with silver nails, in everything but size just like the one around Emperor's neck, and hanging from the collar was the precious tag that made him a licensed dog.

The judge's face was beaming as he explained, but he could scarcely make himself heard, for the little dog was barking and Emperor bayed excitedly as he leaped back and forth from the Judge to Tony.

"We had a time, I tell you," laughed the Judge. "We went down to the pound this morning. I couldn't tell which was your dog, but old Emperor knew him, and we paid the fine and got the licence and bought a collar, and here we are!"

But the Judge did not tell of his troubled conscience of the night before when, in his easy chair before a glowing fire, with Emperor stretched full length on the rug, the thought of the lonely little figure on the windy corner had come between him and his book. And when the old dog had laid his head on his master's knee, and looked at him with enquiring, loving eyes, the Judge had made a decision.

"We'll do it the first thing in the morning, old fellow," he had said, and Emperor gave him his paw, and they shook hands on it.

At first Tony could not thank the Judge. He simply stood there with a glorified look on his swarthy face, the wriggling, happy dog in his arms, and said over and over again:

"Smuggler, Smuggler, Smuggler!"

The Judge's eyes were watery. He took a bill out of his pocket.

"Here, boy," he said; "spend this on yourself and the dog."

Tony went over to the carriage, and put one arm, around Emperor's great neck.

"Thank you both— thank you," he began.

But all at once the Judge was in a great hurry. "There, there," he said, sharply, "I'll be late at my office." But he smiled as Johnston gathered up the

reins. Then, as he drove off, he gave a backward glance at the thin little figure and the yellow cur, and he laid his hand on Emperor's head with one of his rare caresses,

"By George!" he said, huskily. "By George!"

18: Number 17

Edith Nesbit (as by E. Bland)

1858-1924

The Strand Magazine, June 1910

I YAWNED. I could not help it. But the flat, inexorable voice went on.

"Speaking from the journalistic point of view— I may tell you, gentlemen, that I once occupied the position of advertisement editor to the *Bradford Woollen Goods Journal*— and speaking from that point of view, I hold the opinion that all the best ghost stories have been written over and over again; and if I were to leave the road and return to a literary career I should never be led away by ghosts. Realism's what's wanted nowadays, if you want to be up-to-date."

The large commercial paused for breath.

"You never can tell with the public," said the lean, elderly traveller; "it's like in the fancy business. You never know how it's going to be. Whether it's a clockwork ostrich or Sometite silk or a particular shape of shaded glass novelty or a tobacco-box got up to look like a raw chop, you never know your luck."

"That depends on who you are," said the dapper man in the corner by the fire. "If you've got the right push about you, you can make a thing go, whether it's a clockwork kitten or imitation meat, and with stories, I take it, it's just the same— realism or ghost stories. But the best ghost story would be the realest one, I think."

The large commercial had got his breath.

"I don't believe in ghost stories, myself," he was saying with earnest dullness; "but there was a rather a queer thing happened to a second cousin of an aunt of mine by marriage— a very sensible woman with no nonsense about her. And the soul of truth and honour. I shouldn't have believed it if she had been one of your flighty, fanciful sort."

"Don't tell us the story," said the melancholy man who travelled in hardware; "you'll make us afraid to go to bed."

The well-meant effort failed. The large commercial went on, as I had known he would; his words overflowed his mouth, as his person overflowed his chair. I turned my mind to my own affairs, coming back to the commercial room in time to hear the summing up.

"The doors were all locked, and she was quite certain she saw a tall, white figure glide past her and vanish. I wouldn't have believed it if—" And so on *da capo,* from "if she hadn't been the second cousin" to the "soul of truth and honour."

I yawned again.

"Very good story," said the smart little man by the fire. He was a traveller, as the rest of us were; his presence in the room told us that much. He had been rather silent during dinner, and afterwards, while the red curtains were being drawn and the red and black cloth laid between the glasses and the decanters and the mahogany, he had quietly taken the best chair in the warmest corner. We had got our letters written and the large traveller had been boring for some time before I even noticed that there was a best chair and that this silent, bright-eyed, dapper, fair man had secured it.

"Very good story," he said; "but it's not what I call realism. You don't tell us half enough, sir. You don't say when it happened or where, or the time of year, or what colour your aunt's second cousin's hair was. Nor yet you don't tell us what it was she saw, nor what the room was like where she saw it, nor why she saw it, nor what happened afterwards. And I shouldn't like to breathe a word against anybody's aunt by marriage's cousin, first or second, but I must say I like a story about what a man's seen himself."

"So do I," the large commercial snorted, "when I hear it."

He blew his nose like a trumpet of defiance.

"But," said the rabbit-faced man, "we know nowadays, what with the advance of science and all that sort of thing, we know there aren't any such things as ghosts. They're hallucinations; that's what they are— hallucinations."

"Don't seem to matter what you call them," the dapper one urged. "If you see a thing that looks as real as you do yourself, a thing that makes your blood run cold and turns you sick and silly with fear— well, call it ghost, or call it hallucination, or call it Tommy Dodd; it isn't the name that matters."

The elderly commercial coughed and said, "You might call it another name. You might call it—"

"No, you mightn't," said the little man, briskly; "not when the man it happened to had been a teetotal Bond of Joy for five years and is to this day."

"Why don't you tell us the story?" I asked.

"I might be willing," he said, "if the rest of the company were agreeable. Only I warn you it's not that sort-of-a -kind-of-a- somebody-fancied-they -saw-a-sort- of-a-kind- of-a-something -sort of story. No, sir. Everything I'm going to tell you is plain and straightforward and as clear as a time-table— clearer than some. But I don't much like telling it, especially to people who don't believe in ghosts."

Several of us said we did believe in ghosts. The heavy man snorted and looked at his watch. And the man in the best chair began.

"Turn the gas down a bit, will you? Thanks. Did any of you know Herbert Hatteras? He was on this road a good many years. No? well, never mind. He was a good chap, I believe, with good teeth and a black whisker. But I didn't

know him myself. He was before my time. Well, this that I'm going to tell you about happened at a certain commercial hotel. I'm not going to give it a name, because that sort of thing gets about, and in every other respect it's a good house and reasonable, and we all have our living to get. It was just a good ordinary old-fashioned commercial hotel, as it might be this. And I've often used it since, though they've never put me in that room again. Perhaps they shut it up after what happened.

"Well, the beginning of it was, I came across an old schoolfellow; in Boulter's Lock one Sunday it was, I remember. Jones was his name, Ted Jones. We both had canoes. We had tea at Marlow, and we got talking about this and that and old times and old mates; and do you remember Jim, and what's become of Tom, and so on. Oh, you know. And I happened to ask after his brother, Fred by name. And Ted turned pale and almost dropped his cup, and he said, 'You don't mean to say you haven't heard?' 'No,' says I, mopping up the tea he'd slopped over with my handkerchief. 'No, what?' I said.

" 'It was horrible,' he said. 'They wired for me, and I saw him afterwards. Whether he'd done it himself or not, nobody knows; but they'd found him lying on the floor with his throat cut.' No cause could be assigned for the rash act, Ted told me. I asked him where it had happened, and he told me the name of this hotel— I'm not going to name it. And when I'd sympathised with him and drawn him out about old times and poor old Fred being such a good old sort and all that, I asked him what the room was like. I always like to know what the places look like where things happen.

"No, there wasn't anything specially rum about the room, only that it had a French bed with red curtains in a sort of alcove; and a large mahogany wardrobe as big as a hearse, with a glass door; and, instead of a swing-glass, a carved, black-framed glass screwed up against the wall between the windows, and a picture of 'Belshazzar's Feast' over the mantelpiece. I beg your pardon?" He stopped, for the heavy commercial had opened his mouth and shut it again.

"I thought you were going to say something," the dapper man went on. "Well, we talked about other things and parted, and I thought no more about it till business brought me to— but I'd better not name the town either— and I found my firm had marked this very hotel— where poor Fred had met his death, you know— for me to put up at. And I had to put up there too, because of their addressing everything to me there. And, anyhow, I expect I should have gone there out of curiosity.

"No. I didn't believe in ghosts in those days. I was like you, sir." He nodded amiably to the large commercial.

"The house was very full, and we were quite a large party in the room— very pleasant company, as it might be to-night; and we got talking of ghosts—

just as it might be us. And there was a chap in glasses, sitting just over there, I remember— an old hand on the road, he was; and he said, just as it might be any of you, 'I don't believe in ghosts, but I wouldn't care to sleep in Number Seventeen, for all that'; and, of course, we asked him why. 'Because,' said he, very short, 'that's why.'

"But when we'd persuaded him a bit, he told us.

"'Because that's the room where chaps cut their throats,' he said. "There was a chap called Bert Hatteras began it. They found him weltering in his gore. And since that every man that's slept there's been found with his throat cut.'

"I asked him how many had slept there. 'Well, only two beside the first,' he said; 'they shut it up then.' 'Oh, did they?' said I. 'Well, they've opened it again. Number Seventeen's my room!'

"I tell you those chaps looked at me.

"'But you aren't going to sleep in it?' one of them said. And I explained that I didn't pay half a dollar for a bedroom to keep awake in.

"'I suppose it's press of business has made them open it up again,' the chap in spectacles said. 'It's a very mysterious affair. There's some secret horror about that room that we don't understand,' he said, 'and I'll tell you another queer thing. Every one of those poor chaps was a commercial gentleman. That's what I don't like about it. There was Bert Hatteras— he was the first, and a chap called Jones— Frederick Jones, and then Donald Overshaw— a Scotchman he was, and travelled in children's underclothing.'

"Well, we sat there and talked a bit, and if I hadn't been a Bond of Joy, I don't know that I mightn't have exceeded, gentlemen—yes, positively exceeded; for the more I thought about it the less I liked the thought of Number Seventeen. I hadn't noticed the room particularly, except to see that the furniture had been changed since poor Fred's time. So I just slipped out, by and by, and I went out to the little glass case under the arch where the booking-clerk sits— just like here, that hotel was— and I said:—

" 'Look here, miss; haven't you got another room empty except seventeen?'

" 'No,' she said; 'I don't think so.'"

" 'Then what's that?' I said, and pointed to a key hanging on the board, the only one left.

"'Oh,' she said, 'that's sixteen.'

" 'Anyone in sixteen?' I said. 'Is it a comfortable room?'

" 'No,' said she. 'Yes; quite comfortable. It's next door to yours—much the same class of room.'

" 'Then I'll have sixteen, if you've no objection,' I said, and went back to the others, feeling very clever.

"When I went up to bed I locked my door, and, though I didn't believe in ghosts, I wished seventeen wasn't next door to me, and I wished there wasn't a door between the two rooms, though the door was locked right enough and the key on my side. I'd only got the one candle besides the two on the dressing-table, which I hadn't lighted; and I got my collar and tie off before I noticed that the furniture in my new room was the furniture out of Number Seventeen; French bed with red curtains, mahogany wardrobe as big as a hearse, and the carved mirror over the dressing-table between the two windows, and 'Belshazzar's Feast' over the mantelpiece. So that, though I'd not got the room where the commercial gentlemen had cut their throats, I'd got the furniture out of it. And for a moment I thought that was worse than the other. When I thought of what that furniture could tell, if it could speak——

"It was a silly thing to do— but we're all friends here and I don't mind owning up— I looked under the bed and I looked inside the hearse-wardrobe and I looked in a sort of narrow cupboard there was, where a body could have stood upright—"

"A body?" I repeated.

"A man, I mean. You see, it seemed to me that either these poor chaps had been murdered by someone who hid himself in Number Seventeen to do it, or else there was something there that frightened them into cutting their throats; and upon my soul, I can't tell you which idea I liked least!"

He paused, and filled his pipe very deliberately. "Go, on," someone said. And he went on.

"Now, you'll observe," he said, "that all I've told you up to the time of my going to bed that night's just hearsay. So I don't ask you to believe it— though the three coroners' inquests would be enough to stagger most chaps, I should say. Still, what I'm going to tell you now's my part of the story— what happened to me myself in that room."

He paused again, holding the pipe in his hand, unlighted.

There was a silence, which I broke.

"Well, what did happen?" I asked.

"I had a bit of a struggle with myself," he said. "I reminded myself it was not that room, but the next one that it had happened in. I smoked a pipe or two and read the morning paper, advertisements and all. And at last I went to bed. I left the candle burning, though, I own that."

"Did you sleep?" I asked.

"Yes. I slept. Sound as a top. I was awakened by a soft tapping on my door. I sat up. I don't think I've ever been so frightened in my life. But I made myself say, 'Who's there?' in a whisper. Heaven knows I never expected any one to answer. The candle had gone out and it was pitch-dark. There was a quiet

murmur and a shuffling sound outside. And no one answered. I tell you I hadn't expected any one to. But I cleared my throat and cried out, 'Who's there?' in a real out-loud voice. And 'Me, sir,' said a voice. 'Shaving-water, sir; six o'clock, sir.'

"It was the chambermaid."

A movement of relief ran round our circle.

"I don't think much of your story," said the large commercial.

"You haven't heard it yet," said the story-teller, dryly. "It was six o'clock on a winter's morning, and pitch-dark. My train went at seven. I got up and began to dress. My one candle wasn't much use. I lighted the two on the dressing-table to see to shave by. There wasn't any shaving-water outside my door, after all. And the passage was as black as a coal-hole. So I started to shave with cold water; one has to sometimes, you know. I'd gone over my face and I was just going lightly round under my chin, when I saw something move in the looking-glass. I mean something that moved was reflected in the looking-glass. The big door of the wardrobe had swung open, and by a sort of double reflection I could see the French bed with the red curtains. On the edge of it sat a man in his shirt and trousers— a man with black hair and whiskers, with the most awful look of despair and fear on his face that I've ever seen or dreamt of. I stood paralyzed, watching him in the mirror. I could not have turned round to save my life. Suddenly he laughed. It was a horrid, silent laugh, and showed all his teeth. They were very white and even. And the next moment he had cut his throat from ear to ear, there before my eyes. Did you ever see a man cut his throat? The bed was all white before."

The story-teller had laid down his pipe, and he passed his hand over his face before he went on.

"When I could look around I did. There was no one in the room. The bed was as white as ever. Well, that's all," he said, abruptly, "except that now, of course, I understood how these poor chaps had come by their deaths. They'd all seen this horror— the ghost of the first poor chap, I suppose— Bert Hatteras, you know; and with the shock their hands must have slipped and their throats got cut before they could stop themselves. Oh! by the way, when I looked at my watch it was two o'clock; there hadn't been any chambermaid at all. I must have dreamed that. But I didn't dream the other. Oh! And one thing more. It was the same room. They hadn't changed the room, they'd only changed the number. It was the same room!"

"Look here," said the heavy man; "the room you've been talking about. My room's sixteen. And it's got that same furniture in it as what you describe, and the same picture and all."

"Oh, has it?" said the story-teller, a little uncomfortable, it seemed. "I'm sorry. But the cat's out of the bag now, and it can't be helped. Yes, it was this house I was speaking of. I suppose they've opened the room again. But you don't believe in ghosts; you'll be all right."

"Yes," said the heavy man, and presently got up and left the room.

"He's gone to see if he can get his room changed. You see if he hasn't," said the rabbit-faced man; "and I don't wonder."

The heavy man came back and settled into his chair.

"I could do with a drink," he said, reaching to the bell.

"I'll stand some punch, gentlemen, if you'll allow me," said our dapper story-teller. "I rather pride myself on my punch. I'll step out to the bar and get what I need for it."

"I thought he said he was a teetotaller," said the heavy traveller when he had gone. And then our voices buzzed like a hive of bees. When our story-teller came in again we turned on him— half-a-dozen of us at once— and spoke.

"One at a time," he said, gently. "I didn't quite catch what you said."

"We want to know," I said, "how it was— if seeing that ghost made all those chaps cut their throats by startling them when they were shaving—how was it you didn't cut your throat when you saw it?"

"I should have," he answered, gravely, "without the slightest doubt— I should have cut my throat, only," he glanced at our heavy friend, "I always shave with a safety razor. I travel in them," he added, slowly, and bisected a lemon.

"But— but," said the large man, when he could speak through our uproar, "I've gone and given up my room."

"Yes," said the dapper man, squeezing the lemon; "I've just had my things moved into it. It's the best room in the house. I always think it worth while to take a little pains to secure it."

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19: Extraordinary Little Cough

Dylan Thomas

1914-1953

Life and Letters Today Sep 1939

In: *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog*, 1940

ONE AFTERNOON, in a particularly bright and glowing August, some years before I knew I was happy, George Hooping, whom we called Little Cough, Sidney Evans, Dan Davies, and I sat on the roof of a lorry travelling to the end of the Peninsula. It was a tall, six-wheeled lorry, from which we could spit on the roofs of the passing cars and throw our apple stumps at women on the pavement. One stump caught a man on a bicycle in the middle of the back, he swerved across the road, for a moment we sat quiet and George Hooping's face grew pale. And if the lorry runs over him, I thought calmly as the man on the bicycle swayed towards the hedge, he'll get killed and I'll be sick on my trousers and perhaps on Sidney's too, and we'll all be arrested and hanged, except George Hooping who didn't have an apple.

But the lorry swept past; behind us, the bicycle drove into the hedge, the man stood up and waved his fist, and I waved my cap back at him.

'You shouldn't have waved your cap,' said Sidney Evans, 'he'll know what school we're in.' He was clever, dark, and careful, and had a purse and a wallet.

'We're not in school now.'

'Nobody can expel me,' said Dan Davies. He was leaving next term to serve in his father's fruit shop for a salary.

We all wore haversacks, except George Hooping whose mother had given him a brown-paper parcel that kept coming undone, and carried a suitcase each. I had placed a coat over my suitcase because the initials on it were 'N. T.' and everybody would know that it belonged to my sister. Inside the lorry were two tents, a box of food, a packing-case of kettles and saucepans and knives and forks, an oil lamp, a primus stove, ground sheets and blankets, a gramophone with three records, and a table-cloth from George Hooping's mother.

We were going to camp for a fortnight in Rhossilli, in a field above the sweeping five-mile beach. Sidney and Dan had stayed there last year, coming back brown and swearing, full of stories of campers' dances round the fires at midnight, and elderly girls from the training college who sun-bathed naked on ledges of rocks surrounded by laughing boys, and singing in bed that lasted until dawn. But George had never left home for more than a night; and then, he told me one half-holiday when it was raining and there was nothing to do but to stay in the washhouse racing his guinea-pigs giddily along the benches,

it was only to stay in St Thomas, three miles from his house, with an aunt who could see through the walls and who knew what a Mrs Hoskin was doing in the kitchen.

'How much further?' asked George Hooping, clinging to his split parcel, trying in secret to push back socks and suspenders, enviously watching the solid green fields skim by as though the roof were a raft on an ocean with a motor in it. Anything upset his stomach, even liquorice and sherbet, but I alone knew that he wore long combinations in the summer with his name stitched in red on them.

'Miles and miles,' Dan sad.

'Thousands of miles,' I said. 'It's Rhossilli, U.S.A. We're going to camp on a bit of rock that wobbles in the wind.'

'And we have to tie the rock on to a tree.'

'Cough can use his suspenders,' Sidney said.

The lorry roared round a corner— 'Upsy-daisy! Did you feel it then, Cough? It was on one wheel'— and below us, beyond fields and farms, the sea, with a steamer puffing on its far edge, shimmered.

'Do you see the sea down there, it's shimmering, Dan,' I said.

George Hooping pretended to forget the lurch of the slippery roof and, from that height, the frightening smallness of the sea. Gripping the rail of the roof, he said: 'My father saw a killer whale.' The conviction in his voice died quickly as he began. He beat against the wind with his cracked, treble voice, trying to make us believe. I knew he wanted to find a boast so big it would make our hair stand up and stop the wild lorry.

'Your father's a herbalist.' But the smoke on the horizon was the white, curling fountain the whale blew through his nose, and its black nose was the bow of the poking ship.

'Where did he keep it, Cough, in the washhouse?'

'He saw it in Madagascar. It had tusks as long as from here to, from here to...'

'From here to Madagascar.'

All at once the threat of a steep hill disturbed him. No longer bothered about the adventures of his father, a small, dusty, skull-capped and alpaca-coated man standing and mumbling all day in a shop full of herbs and curtained holes in the wall, where old men with backache and young girls in trouble waited for consultations in the half-dark, he stared at the hill swooping up and clung to Dan and me.

'She's doing fifty!'

'The brakes have gone, Cough!'

He twisted away from us, caught hard with both hands on the rail, pulled and trembled, pressed on a case behind him with his foot, and steered the lorry to safety round a stone-walled corner and up a gentler hill to the gate of a battered farm-house.

Leading down from the gate, there was a lane to the first beach. It was high tide, and we heard the sea dashing. Four boys on a roof— one tall, dark, regular-featured, precise of speech, in a good suit, a boy of the world; one squat, ungainly, red-haired, his red wrists fighting out of short, frayed sleeves; one heavily spectacled, small-paunched, with indoor shoulders and feet in always unlaced boots wanting to go different ways; one small, thin, indecisively active, quick to get dirty, curly— saw their field in front of them, a fortnight's new home that had thick, pricking hedges for walls, the sea for a front garden, a green gutter for a lavatory, and a wind-struck tree in the very middle.

I helped Dan unload the lorry while Sidney tipped the driver and George struggled with the farm-yard gate and looked at the ducks inside. The lorry drove away.

'Let's build our tents by the tree in the middle,' said George.

'Pitch!' Sidney said, unlatching the gate for him.

We pitched our tents in a corner, out of the wind.

'One of us must light the primus,' Sidney said, and, after George had burned his hand, we sat in a circle outside the sleeping-tent talking about motor cars, content to be in the country, lazily easy in each other's company, thinking to ourselves as we talked, knowing always that the sea dashed on the rocks not far below us and rolled out into the world, and that to-morrow we would bathe and throw a ball on the sands and stone a bottle on a rock and perhaps meet three girls. The oldest would be for Sidney, the plainest for Dan, and the youngest for me. George broke his spectacles when he spoke to girls; he had to walk off, blind as a bat, and the next morning he would say: 'I'm sorry I had to leave you, but I remembered a message.'

It was past five o'clock. My father and mother would have finished tea; the plates with famous castles on them were cleared from the table; father with a newspaper, mother with socks, were far away in the blue haze to the left, up a hill, in a villa, hearing from the park the faint cries of children drift over the public tennis court, and wondering where I was and what I was doing. I was alone with my friends in a field, with a blade of grass in my mouth, saying, 'Dempsey would hit him cold,' and thinking of the great whale that George's father never saw thrashing on the top of the sea, or plunging underneath, like a mountain.

'Bet you I can beat you to the end of the field.'

Dan and I raced among the cowpads, George thumping at our heels.

'Let's go down to the beach.'

Sidney led the way, running straight as a soldier in his khaki shorts, over a stile, down fields to another, into a wooded valley, up through heather on to a clearing near the edge of the cliff, where two broad boys were wrestling outside a tent. I saw one bite the other in the leg, they both struck expertly and savagely at the face, one struggled clear, and, with a leap, the other had him face to the ground. They were Brazell and Skully.

'Hallo, Brazell and Skully!' said Dan.

Skully had Brazell's arm in a policeman's grip; he gave it two quick twists and stood up, smiling.

'Hallo, boys! Hallo, Little Cough! How's your father?'

'He's very well, thank you.'

Brazell, on the grass, felt for broken bones. 'Hallo, boys! How are your fathers?'

They were the worst and biggest boys in school. Every day for a term they caught me before class began and wedged me in the waste-paper basket and then put the basket on the master's desk. Sometimes I could get out and sometimes not. Brazell was lean, Skully was fat.

'We're camping in Button's field,' said Sidney.

'We're taking a rest cure here,' said Brazell. 'And how is Little Cough these days? Father given him a pill?'

We wanted to run down to the beach, Dan and Sidney and George and I, to be alone together, to walk and shout by the sea in the country, throw stones at the waves, remember adventures and make more to remember.

'We'll come down to the beach with you,' said Skully.

He linked arms with Brazell, and they strolled behind us, imitating George's wayward walk and slashing the grass with switches.

Dan said hopefully: 'Are you camping here for long, Brazell and Skully?'

'For a whole nice fortnight, Davies and Thomas and Evans and Hooping.'

When we reached Mewslade beach and flung ourselves down, as I scooped up sand and let it trickle grain by grain through my fingers, as George peered at the sea through his double lenses and Sidney and Dan heaped sand over his legs, Brazell and Skully sat behind us like two warders.

'We thought of going to Nice for a fortnight,' said Brazell--he rhymed it with ice, dug Skully in the ribs--'but the air's nicer here for the complexion.'

'It's as good as a herb,' said Skully.

They shared an enormous joke, cuffing and biting and wrestling again, scattering sand in the eyes, until they fell back with laughter, and Brazell wiped the blood from his nose with a piece of picnic paper. George lay covered to the

waist in sand. I watched the sea slipping out, with birds quarrelling over it, and the sun beginning to go down patiently.

'Look at Little Cough,' said Brazell. 'Isn't he extraordinary? He's growing out of the sand. Little Cough hasn't got any legs.'

'Poor Little Cough,' said Skully, 'he's the most extraordinary boy in the world.'

'Extraordinary Little Cough,' they said together, 'extraordinary, extraordinary, extraordinary.' They made a song out of it, and both conducted with their switches.

'He can't swim.'

'He can't run.'

'He can't learn.'

'He can't bowl.'

'He can't bat.'

'And I bet he can't make water.'

George kicked the sand from his legs. 'Yes, I can!'

'Can you swim?'

'Can you run?'

'Can you bowl?'

'Leave him alone,' Dan said.

They shuffled nearer to us. The sea was racing out now. Brazell said in a serious voice, wagging his finger: 'Now, quite truthfully, Cough, aren't you extraordinary? Very extraordinary? Say "Yes" or "No."'

'Categorically, "Yes" or "No,"' said Skully.

'No,' George said. 'I can swim and I can run and I can play cricket. I'm not frightened of anybody.'

I said: 'He was second in the form last term.'

'Now isn't that extraordinary? If he can be second he can be first. But no, that's too ordinary. Little Cough must be second.'

'The question is answered,' said Skully. 'Little Cough is extraordinary.' They began to sing again.

'He's a very good runner,' Dan said.

'Well, let him prove it. Skully and I ran the whole length of Rhossilli sands this morning, didn't we, Skull?'

'Every inch.'

'Can Little Cough do it?'

'Yes,' said George.

'Do it, then.'

'I don't want to.'

'Extraordinary Little Cough can't run,' they sang, 'can't run, can't run.'

Three girls, all fair, came down the cliffside arm in arm, dressed in short, white trousers. Their arms and legs and throats were brown as berries; I could see when they laughed that their teeth were very white; they stepped on to the beach, and Brazell and Skully stopped singing. Sidney smoothed his hair back, rose casually, put his hands in his pockets, and walked towards the girls, who now stood close together, gold and brown, admiring the sunset with little attention, patting their scarves, turning smiles on each other. He stood in front of them, grinned, and saluted: 'Hallo, Gwyneth! do you remember me?'

'La-di-da!' whispered Dan at my side, and made a mock salute to George still peering at the retreating sea.

'Well, if this isn't a surprise!' said the tallest girl. With little studied movements of her hands, as though she were distributing flowers, she introduced Peggy and Jean.

Fat Peggy, I thought, too jolly for me, with hockey legs and tomboy crop, was the girl for Dan; Sidney's Gwyneth was a distinguished piece and quite sixteen, as immaculate and unapproachable as a girl in Ben Evans' stores; but Jean, shy and curly, with butter-coloured hair, was mine. Dan and I walked slowly to the girls.

I made up two remarks: 'Fair's fair, Sidney, no bigamy abroad,' and 'Sorry we couldn't arrange to have the sea in when you came.'

Jean smiled, wriggling her heel in the sand, and I raised my cap.

'Hallo!'

The cap dropped at her feet.

As I bent down, three lumps of sugar fell from my blazer pocket. 'I've been feeding a horse,' I said, and began to blush guiltily when all the girls laughed.

I could have swept the ground with my cap, kissed my hand gaily, called them señoritas, and made them smile without tolerance. Or I could have stayed at a distance, and this would have been better still, my hair blown in the wind, though there was no wind at all that evening, wrapped in mystery and staring at the sun, too aloof to speak to girls; but I knew that all the time my ears would have been burning, my stomach would have been as hollow and as full of voices as a shell. 'Speak to them quickly, before they go away!' a voice would have said insistently over the dramatic silence, as I stood like Valentino on the edge of the bright, invisible bull-ring of the sands. 'Isn't it lovely here!' I said.

I spoke to Jean alone; and this is love, I thought, as she nodded her head and swung her curls and said: 'It's nicer than Porthcawl.'

Brazell and Skully were two big bullies in a nightmare; I forgot them when Jean and I walked up the cliff, and, looking back to see if they were baiting George again or wrestling together, I saw that George had disappeared around

the corner of the rocks and that they were talking at the foot of the with Sidney and the two girls.

'What's your name?'

I told her.

'That's Welsh,' she said.

'You've got a beautiful name.'

'Oh! it's just ordinary.'

'Shall I see you again?'

'If you want to.'

'I want to all right! We can go and bathe in the morning. And we can try to get an eagle's egg. Did you know that there were eagles here?'

'No,' she said. 'Who was that handsome boy on the beach, the tall one with dirty trousers?'

'He's not handsome, that's Brazell. He never washes or combs his hair or anything. And he's a bully and he cheats.'

'I think he's handsome.'

We walked into Button's field, and I showed her inside the tents and gave her one of George's apples. 'I'd like a cigarette,' she said.

It was nearly dark when the others came. Brazell and Skully were with Gwyneth, one each side of her holding her arms, Sidney was with Peggy, and Dan walked, whistling, behind with his hands in his pockets.

'There's a pair,' said Brazell, 'they've been here all alone and they aren't even holding hands. You want a pill,' he said to me.

'Build Britain's babies,' said Skully.

'Go on!' Gwyneth said. She pushed him away from her, but she was laughing, and she said nothing when he put his arm around her waist.

'What about a bit of fire?' said Brazell.

Jean clapped her hands like an actress. Although I knew I loved her, I didn't like anything she said or did.

'Who's going to make it?'

'He's the best, I'm sure,' she said, pointing to me.

Dan and I collected sticks, and by the time it was quite dark there was a fire crackling. Inside the sleeping-tent, Brazell and Jean sat close together; her golden head was on his shoulder; Skully, near them, whispered to Gwyneth; Sidney unhappily held Peggy's hand.

'Did you ever see such a sloppy lot?' I said, watching Jean smile in the fiery dark.

'Kiss me, Charley!' said Dan.

We sat by the fire in the corner of the field. The sea, far out, was still making a noise. We heard a few nightbirds. '"Tu-whit! tu-whoo!" Listen! I don't

like owls,' Dan said, 'they scratch your eyes out!'--and tried not to listen to the soft voices in the tent. Gwyneth's laughter floated out over the suddenly moonlit field, but Jean, with the beast, was smiling and silent in the covered warmth; I knew her little hand was in Brazell's hand.

'Women!' I said.

Dan spat in the fire.

We were old and alone, sitting beyond desire in the middle of the night, when George appeared, like a ghost, in the firelight and stood there trembling until I said: 'Where've you been? You've been gone hours. Why are you trembling like that?'

Brazell and Skully poked their heads out.

'Hallo, Cough my boy! How's your father? What have you been up to to-night?'

George Hooping could hardly stand. I put my hand on his shoulder to steady him, but he pushed it away.

'I've been running on Rhossilli sands! I ran every bit of it! You said I couldn't, and I did! I've been running and running!'

Someone inside the tent put a record on the gramophone. It was a selection from *No, No, Nanette*.

'You've been running all the time in the dark, Little Cough?'

'And I bet I ran it quicker than you did, too!' George said.

20: The Circle of Zero

Stanley G. Weinbaum

1902-1935

Thrilling Wonder Stories, Aug 1936

1: The Law of Chance

If there were a mountain a thousand miles high, and every thousand years a bird flew over it, just brushing the peak with the tip of its wing, in the course of inconceivable eons the mountain would be worn away. Yet all those ages would not be one second to the length of eternity....

I DON'T KNOW what philosophical mind penned the foregoing, but the words keep recurring to me since last I saw old Aurore de Néant, erstwhile professor of psychology at Tulane. When, back in '24, I took that course in Morbid Psychology from him, I think the only reason for taking it at all was that I needed an eleven o'clock on Tuesdays and Thursdays to round out a lazy program.

I was gay Jack Anders; twenty-two years old, and the reason seemed sufficient. At least, I'm sure that dark and lovely Yvonne de Néant had nothing to do with it; she was but a slim child of sixteen.

Old de Néant liked me, Lord knows why, for I was a poor enough student. Perhaps it was because I never, to his knowledge, punned on his name. Aurore de Néant translates to Dawn of Nothingness, you see; you can imagine what students did to such a name. "Rising Zero"— "Empty Morning"— those were two of the milder sobriquets.

That was in '24. Five years later I was a bond salesman in New York, and Professor Aurora de Néant was fired. I learned about it when he called me up; I had drifted quite out of touch with University days.

He was a thrifty sort. He had saved a comfortable sum, and had moved to New York, and that's when I started seeing Yvonne again, now darkly beautiful as a Tanagra figurine. I was doing pretty well, and was piling up a surplus against the day when Yvonne and I...

At least, that was the situation in August, 1929. In October of the same year, I was as clean as a gnawed bone and old de Néant had but little more meat. I was young, and could afford to laugh; he was old, and he turned bitter. And indeed, Yvonne and I did little enough laughing when we thought of our own future; but we didn't brood like the professor.

I REMEMBER the evening he broached the subject of the Circle of Zero. It was a rainy, blustering fall night, and his beard waggled in the dim lamplight

like a wisp of grey mist. Yvonne and I had been staying in evenings of late; shows cost money, and I felt that she appreciated my talking to her father, and— after all— he retired early.

She was sitting on the davenport at his side when he suddenly stabbed a gnarled finger at me and snapped, "Happiness depends on money!"

I was startled. "Well, it helps," I agreed.

His pale blue eyes glittered. "We must recover ours!" he rasped.

"How?"

"I know how. Yes, I know how!" He grinned thinly. "They think I'm mad. *You* think I'm mad; even Yvonne thinks so."

The girl said softly, reproachfully, "Father!"

"But I'm not," he continued. "You and Yvonne, and all the fools holding chairs at universities— yes! But not me."

"I will be, all right, if conditions don't get better soon," I murmured. I was used to the old man's outbursts.

"They will be better for us," he said, calming. "Money! We will do anything for money, won't we, Anders?"

"Anything honest."

"Yes, anything honest. Time is honest, isn't it? An honest cheat, because it takes everything human and turns it into dust." He peered at my puzzled face. "I will explain," he said, "how we can cheat time."

"Cheat—"

"Yes. Listen, Jack. Have you ever stood in a strange place and felt a sense of having been there before? Have you ever taken a trip and sensed that sometime, somehow, you had done exactly the same thing—when you know you hadn't?"

"Of course. Everyone has. A memory of the present, Bergson calls it—"

"Bergson is a fool! Philosophy without science. Listen to me." He leaned forward. "Did you ever hear of the Law of Chance?"

I laughed. "My business is stocks and bonds. I *ought* to know of it."

"Ah," he said, "but not enough of it. Suppose I have a barrel with a million trillion white grains of sand in it, and one black grain. You stand and draw a single grain, one after the other, look at it, and throw it back into the barrel. What are the odds against drawing the black grain?"

"A million trillion to one, on each draw.".

"And if you draw half of the million trillion grains?"

"Then the odds are even."

"So!" he said. "In other words, if you draw long enough, even though you return each grain to the barrel and draw again, some day you will draw the black one— *if you try long enough*!"

"Yes," I said.

"Suppose now you tried for eternity?"

"Eh?"

"Don't you see, Jack? In eternity, the Law of Chance functions perfectly. In eternity, sooner or later, every possible combination of things and events must happen. *Must* happen, *if* it's a possible combination. I say, therefore, that in eternity, *whatever can happen will happen*!" His blue eyes blazed in pale fire.

I was a trifle dazed. "I guess you're right," I muttered.

"Right! Of course I'm right. Mathematics is infallible. Now do you see the conclusion?"

"Why—that sooner or later everything will happen."

"Bah! It is true that there is eternity in the future; we cannot imagine time ending. But Flammarion, before he died, pointed out that there is also an eternity in the past. Since in eternity everything possible must happen, it follows that everything *must already have happened*!"

I GASPED. "Wait a minute! I don't see—"

"Stupidity!" he hissed. "It is but to say with Einstein that not only space is curved, but time. To say that after untold eons of millenniums, the same things repeat themselves because they must! The Law of Chance says they must, given time enough. The past and the future are the same thing, because everything that will happen must already have happened. Can't you follow so simple a chain of logic?"

"Why— yes. But where does it lead?"

"To our money! To our money!"

"What?"

"Listen. Do not interrupt. In the past, all possible combinations of atoms and circumstances must have occurred." He paused, then stabbed that bony finger of his at me. "Jack Anders, *you* are a possible combination of atoms and circumstances! Possible because you exist at this moment!"

"You mean— that *I* have happened before?"

He sneered. "How apt you are! Yes, you have happened before, and will again."

"Transmigration!" I gulped. "That's unscientific."

"Indeed?" He frowned as if in effort to gather his thoughts. "The poet Robert Burns was buried under an apple tree. When, years after his death, he was to be removed to rest among the great men of Westminster Abbey, do you know what they found? Do you know?"— shouting.

"I'm sorry, but I don't."

"They found a root! A root with a bulge for a head, branch roots for arms and legs, and little rootlets for fingers and toes. The apple tree had eaten Bobby Burns— but who had eaten the apples?"

"Who— what?"

"Exactly. Who and what? The substance that had been Burns was in the bodies of Scotch countrymen and children, in the bodies of caterpillars who had eaten the leaves and become butterflies and been eaten by birds, in the wood of the tree. Where is Bobby Burns? Transmigration, I tell you! Isn't that transmigration?"

"Yes— but not what you meant about me. His body may be living, but in a thousand different forms."

"Ah! And when some day, eons and eternities in the future, the Laws of Chance form another nebula that will cool to another sun and another earth, is there not the same chance that those scattered atoms may reassemble another Bobby Burns?"

"But what a chance! Trillions and trillions to one!"

"But eternity, Jack! In eternity that one chance out of all those trillions must happen— *must* happen!"

I was floored. I stared at Yvonne's pale and lovely features, then at the glistening old eyes of Aurore de Néant.

"You win," I said with a long sigh. "But what of it? This is still nineteen twenty-nine, and our money's still sunk in a very sick securities market."

"Money!" he groaned. "Don't you see? That memory we started from— that sense of having done a thing before— that's a memory but of the infinitely dead past— or, which is the same, the infinitely remote future. If only— if only one could remember clearly! But I have a way." His voice rose suddenly to a shrill scream. "Yes, I have a way!"

Wild eyes glared at me. I said, "A way to remember our former incarnations?" One had to humor the old professor. "To remember— the future?"

"Yes! Reincarnation!" His voice crackled wildly. "*Re-in-carnatione*, which is Latin for 'by the thing in the carnation', but it wasn't a carnation—it was an apple tree. The carnation is *dianthus carophyllus*, which proves that the Hottentots plant carnations on the graves of their ancestors, whence the expression 'nipped in the bud.' If carnations grow on apple trees—"

"Father!" cut in Yvonne sharply. "You're tired!" Her voice softened, "Come. You're going to bed."

"Yes," he cackled. "To a bed of carnations."

2: Experiments in Hypnotism

SOME evenings later, Aurore de Néant reverted to the same topic. He was clear enough as to where he had left off.

"So in this millennially dead past," he began suddenly, "there was a year nineteen twenty-nine, and two fools named Anders and de Néant, who invested their money in what are sarcastically called securities. There was a clown's panic, and their money vanished." He leered fantastically at me. "Wouldn't it be nice if they could remember what happened in, say, the months from December, nineteen twenty-nine, to June, nineteen thirty— next year?" His voice was suddenly whining. "They could get their money back then!"

I humored him. "If they could remember."

"They can!" he blazed. "They can!"

"How?"

His voice dropped to a confidential softness. "Hypnotism! You studied Morbid Psychology under me, didn't you, Jack? Yes— I remember."

"But, hypnotism!" I objected. "Every psychiatrist uses that in his treatments, and no one has remembered a previous incarnation, or anything like it."

"No. They're fools, these doctors and psychiatrists. Listen—do you remember the three stages of the hypnotic state, as you learned them?"

"Yes. Somnambulism, lethargy, catalepsy."

"Right. In the first, the subject speaks, answers questions. In the second, he sleeps deeply. In the third, catalepsy, he is rigid, stiff, so that he can be laid across two chairs, sat on— all that nonsense."

"I remember. What of it?"

He grinned bleakly. "In the first stage the subject remembers everything that ever happened during his life. His subconscious mind is dominant, and that never forgets. Correct?"

"So we were taught."

He leaned tensely forward. "In the second stage, lethargy, my theory is that he remembers everything that happened in his other lives! He remembers the future!"

"Huh? Why doesn't someone do it, then?"

"He remembers while he sleeps; he forgets when he wakes. That's why. But I believe that with proper training he can learn to remember."

"And you're going to try?"

"Not I. I know too little of finance. I wouldn't know how to interpret my memories."

"Who, then?"

"You!" He jabbed that long finger against me.

I was thoroughly startled. "Me? Oh, no! Not a chance of it!"

"Jack," he said querulously, "didn't you study hypnotism in my course? Didn't you learn how harmless it is? You know what tommyrot the idea is of one mind dominating another. You know the subject really hypnotizes himself, and that no one can hypnotize an unwilling person. Then what are you afraid of?"

I— well, I didn't know what to answer. "I'm not afraid," I said grimly. "I just don't like it."

"You're afraid!"

"I'm not!"

"You are!" He was growing excited.

It was at that moment that Yvonne's footsteps sounded in the hall. His eyes glittered; he looked at me with a sinister hint of cunning.

"I dislike cowards," he whispered. His voice rose. "So does Yvonne!"

The girl entered, perceiving his excitement. "Oh!" she frowned. "Why do you have to take these theories so to heart, father?"

"Theories?" he screeched. "Yes! I have a theory that when you walk you stand still and the sidewalk moves back. No— then the sidewalk would split if two people walked toward each other— or maybe it's elastic. Of course it's elastic! That's why the last mile is the longest; it's been stretched!"

Yvonne got him to bed.

WELL, he talked me into it. I don't know how much was due to my own credulity and how much to Yvonne's solemn dark eyes. I half-believed the professor by the time he'd spent another evening in argument, but I think the clincher was his veiled threat to forbid Yvonne my company. She'd have obeyed him if it killed her; she was from New Orleans too, you see, and of Creole blood.

I won't describe that troublesome course of training. One has to develop the hypnotic habit; it's like any other habit, and must be formed slowly. Contrary to the popular opinion, morons and people of low intelligence can't ever do it. It takes real concentration; the whole knack of it is in the ability to concentrate one's attention— and I don't mean the hypnotist, either.

I mean the subject. The hypnotist hasn't a thing to do with it except to furnish the necessary suggestion by murmuring, "Sleep— sleep— sleep— sleep—" And even that isn't necessary, once you learn the trick of it.

I spent half an hour or more, nearly every evening, learning that trick. It was tedious, and a dozen times I became thoroughly disgusted and swore to have no more to do with the farce. But, always, after the half-hour's humoring

of de Néant, there was Yvonne, and the boredom vanished. As a sort of reward, I suppose, the old man took to leaving us alone; and we used our time, I'll wager, to better purpose than he used his.

But I began to learn, little by little. Came a time, after three weeks of tedium, when I was able to cast myself into a light somnambulistic state. I remember how the glitter of the cheap stone in Professor de Néant's ring grew until it filled the world, and how his voice, mechanically dull, murmured like the waves of sleep in my ears. I remember everything that transpired during those minutes, even his query, "Are you sleeping?" and my automatic reply, "Yes."

By the end of November we had mastered the second state of lethargy, and then— I don't know why, but a sort of enthusiasm for the madness took hold of me. Business was at a standstill; I grew tired of facing customers to whom I had sold bonds at par that were now worth fifty or less, and trying to explain why. After a while I began to drop in on the professor during the afternoon, and we went through the insane routine again and again.

Yvonne comprehended only a part of the bizarre scheme. She was never in the room during our half-hour trials, and knew only vaguely that we were involved in some sort of experiment that was to restore our lost money. I don't suppose she had much faith in it, but she always indulged her father.

It was early in December that I began to remember things. Dim and formless things at first— sensations that utterly eluded the rigidities of words. I tried to express them to de Néant, but it was hopeless.

"A circular feeling," I'd say. "No— not exactly— a sense of spiral— not that, either. Roundness— I can't recall it now. It slips away."

He was jubilant. "It comes!" he whispered, grey beard a-waggle and pale eyes glittering. "You begin to remember!"

"But what good is a memory like that?"

"Wait! It will come clearer. Of course not all your memories will be of the sort we can use. They will be scattered. Through all the multi-fold eternities of the past-future circle you can't have been always Jack Anders, securities salesman. There will be fragmentary memories, recollections of times when your personality was partially existent, when the Laws of Chance had assembled a being who was not quite Jack Anders, in some period of the infinite worlds that must have risen and died in the span of eternities. But somewhere, too, the same atoms, the same conditions, must have made *you*. You're the black grain among the trillions of white grains, and with all eternity to draw in, you *must* have been drawn before— many, many times."

"Do you suppose," I asked suddenly; "that anyone exists twice on the same earth? Reincarnation in the sense of the Hindus?"

He laughed scornfully. "The age of the earth is somewhere between a thousand million and three thousand million years. What proportion of eternity is that?"

"Why— no proportion at all. Zero.

"EXACTLY, and zero represents the chance of the same atoms combining to form the same person twice in one cycle of a planet. But I have shown that trillions, or trillions of trillions of years ago, there must have been another earth, another Jack Anders, and"— his voice took on that whining note— "another crash that ruined Jack Anders and old de Néant. That is the time you must remember out of lethargy."

"Catalepsy!" I said. "What would one remember in that?"

"God knows."

"What a mad scheme!" I said suddenly. "What a crazy pair of fools we are!" The adjectives were a mistake.

"Mad? Crazy?" His voice became a screech. "Old de Néant is mad, eh? Old Dawn of Nothingness is crazy! You think time doesn't go in a circle, don't you? Do you know what a circle represents? I'll tell you! A circle is the mathematical symbol for zero! Time is zero— time is a circle. I have a theory that the hands of a clock are really the noses, because they're on the clock's face, and since time is a circle they, go round and round and round and round—"

Yvonne slipped quietly into the room, and patted her father's furrowed forehead. She must have been listening.

3: Into the Future

"LOOK HERE," I said at a later time to de Néant. "If the past and future are the same thing, then the future's as unchangeable as the past. How, then, can we expect to change it by recovering our money?"

"Change it?" he snorted. "How do you know we're changing it? How do you know that this same thing wasn't done by that Jack Anders and de Néant back on the other side of eternity? I say it *was*!"

I subsided, and the weird business went on. My memories—if they were memories—were coming clearer now. Often and often I saw things out of my own immediate past of twenty-seven years, though of course de Néant assured me that these were visions from the past of that other self on the far side of time.

I saw other things too, incidents that I couldn't place in my experience, though I couldn't be quite sure they didn't belong there. I might have forgotten, you see, since they were of no particular importance. I recounted

everything dutifully to the old man immediately upon awakening; and sometimes that was difficult, like trying to find words for a half-remembered dream.

There were other memories as well— bizarre, outlandish dreams that had little parallel in human history. These were always vague and sometimes very horrible, and only their inchoate and formless character kept them from being utterly nerve-racking and terrifying.

At one time, I recall, I was gazing through a little crystalline window into a red fog through which moved indescribable faces— not human, not even associable with anything I had ever seen. On another occasion I was wandering, clad in furs, across a cold grey desert, and at my side was a woman who was not quite Yvonne.

I remember calling her Pyroniva, and knowing even that the name meant "Snowy-fire." And here and there in the air about us floated queer little bloated fungoid things, bobbing around like potatoes in a water-bucket; and once we stood very quiet while a menacing form that was only remotely like the small fungi droned purposefully far overhead, toward some unknown objective.

At still another time I was peering fascinated into a spinning pool of mercury, watching an image therein of two wild, winged figures playing in a roseate glade— not at all human in form, but transcendently beautiful, bright and iridescent.

I felt a strange kinship between these two creatures and myself and Yvonne, but I had no inkling of what they were, nor upon what world, nor at what time in eternity, nor even of what nature was the room that held the spinning pool that pictured them.

Old Aurore de Néant listened carefully to the wild word-pictures I drew.

"Fascinating!" he muttered. "Glimpses of an infinitely distant future caught from a ten-fold infinitely remote past. These things you describe are not earthly; it, means that somewhere, sometime, men are actually to burst the prison of space and visit other worlds. Some day—"

"If these glimpses aren't simply nightmares," I said.

"They're not nightmares," he snapped, "but they might as well be, for all the value they are to us." I could see him struggle to calm himself. "Our money is still gone. We must try, keep trying, for years, for centuries, until we get the black grain of sand, because black sand is a sign of gold-bearing ore—" He paused. "What am I talking about?" he said querulously.

Well, we kept trying. Interspersed with the wild, all but indescribable visions came others almost rational. The thing became a fascinating game. I was neglecting my business— though that was small loss— to chase dreams

with old Professor Aurore de Néant. I spent evenings, afternoons, and finally mornings, too, lying in the slumber of the lethargic state, or telling the old man what fantastic things I had dreamed— or, as he said, remembered. Reality became dim to me; I was living in an outlandish world of fancy, and only the dark, tragic eyes of Yvonne tugged at me, pulled me back into the daylight world of sanity.

I HAVE mentioned more nearly rational visions. I recall one— a city, but what a city! Sky-piercing, white and beautiful, and the people of it were grave with the wisdom of gods, pale and lovely people, but solemn, wistful, sad. There was the aura of brilliance and wickedness that hovers about all great cities, that was born, I suppose, in Babylon, and will remain until great cities are no more.

But there was something else, something rather intangible; I don't know exactly what to call it, but perhaps the word decadence is as close as any word we have. As I stood at the base of a colossal structure there was the whir of quiet machinery, but it seemed to me, nevertheless, that the city was dying.

It might have been the moss that grew green on the north walls of the buildings; it might have been the grass that pierced here and there through the cracks of the marble pavements; or it might have been only the grave and sad demeanor of the pale inhabitants. There was something that hinted of a doomed city and a dying race.

A strange thing happened when I tried to describe this particular memory to old de Néant. I stumbled over the details, of course; these visions from the unplumbed depths of eternity were curiously hard to fix between the rigid walls of words. They tended to grow vague, to elude the waking memory. Thus, in this description, I had forgotten the name of the city.

"It was called," I said hesitatingly, "Termis or Termolia, or—"

"Termopolis!" hissed de Néant impatiently. "City of the End!"

I stared amazed. "That's it! But how did you know?" In the sleep of lethargy, I was sure, one never speaks.

A queer, cunning look flashed in his pale eyes. "I knew," he muttered. "I knew." He would say no more.

But I think I saw that city once again. It was when I wandered over a brown and treeless plain, not like that cold grey desert, But apparently an arid and barren region of the earth. Dim on the western horizon was the circle of a great cool, reddish sun; it had always been there, I remembered, and knew with some other part of my mind that the vast brake of the tides had at last slowed the earth's rotation to a stop, and day and night no longer chased each other around the planet.

The air was biting cold, and my companions and I— there were half a dozen of us— moved in a huddled, group, as if to lend each other warmth from our half-naked bodies. We were all of us thin-legged, skinny creatures, with oddly deep chests and enormous, luminous eyes, and the one nearest me was again a woman who had something of Yvonne in her, but very little. And I was not quite Jack Anders, either; but some remote fragment of me survived in that barbaric brain.

Beyond a hill was the surge of an oily sea. We crept circling about the mound, and suddenly I perceived that sometime in the infinite past that hill had been a city. A few Gargantuan blocks of stone lay crumbling on it, and one lonely fragment of a ruined wall rose-gauntly to four or five times a man's height. It was at this spectral remnant that the leader of our miserable crew gestured, then spoke in somber tones— not English words, but I understood.

"The gods," he said— "the gods who piled stones upon stones are dead, and harm not us who pass the place of their dwelling."

I knew what that was meant to be. It was an incantation, a ritual; to protect us from the spirits that lurked among the ruins—the ruins, I believe, of a city built by our own ancestors thousands of generations before.

As we passed the wall I looked back at a flicker of movement, and saw something hideously like a black rubber doormat flop itself around the angle of the wall. I drew closer to the woman beside me and we crept on down to the sea for water— yes, water, for with the cessation of the planet's rotation rainfall had vanished also, and all life huddled near the edge of the undying sea and learned to drink its bitter brine. I didn't glance again at the hill which had been Termopolis, the City of the End; but I knew that some chance-born, fragment of Jack Anders had been—or will be; what difference, if time is a circle?— witness of an age close to the day of humanity's doom.

IT WAS EARLY in December that I had the first memory of something that might have been suggestive of success. It was a simple and very sweet memory, just Yvonne and I in a garden that I knew was the inner grounds on one of the New Orleans' old homes—one of those built, in the Continental fashion, about a court.

We sat on a stone bench beneath the oleanders, and, I slipped my arm very tenderly about her and murmured, "Are you happy, Yvonne?"

She looked at me with those tragic eyes of hers and smiled, and then answered, "As happy as I have ever been."

And I kissed her.

That was all, but it was important; It was vastly important, because it was definitely not a memory out of my own personal past. You see, I had never sat

beside Yvonne in a garden sweet with oleanders in the Old Town of New Orleans, and I had never kissed her until we met again in New York.

Aurore de Néant was elated when I described this vision.

"You see!" he gloated. "There is evidence. You have remembered the future! Not your own future, of course, but that of another ghostly Jack Anders, who died trillions and quadrillions of years ago."

"But it doesn't help us, does it?" I asked.

"Oh, it will come now! You wait. The thing we want will come."

And it did, within a week. This memory was curiously bright and clear, and familiar in every detail. I remember the day. It was the eighth of December, 1929, and I had wandered aimlessly about in search of business during the morning. In the grip of that fascination I mentioned I drifted to de Néant's apartment after lunch. Yvonne left us to ourselves, as was her custom, and we began.

This was, as I said, a sharply outlined memory— or dream. I was leaning over my desk in the company's office, that too-seldom-visited office. One of the other salesmen— Summers was his name— was leaning over my shoulder, and we were engaged in the quite customary pastime of scanning the final market reports in the evening paper. The print stood out clear as reality itself; I glanced without surprise at the date-line. It was Thursday, April 27th, 1930— almost five months in the future!

Not that I realized that during the vision, of course. The day was merely the present to me; I was simply looking over the list of the day's trading. Figures— familiar names. Telephone, 210 3/8; U.S. Steel, 161; Paramount, 68 1/2.

I jabbed a finger at Steel. "I bought that at 72," I said over my shoulder to Summers. "I sold out everything today. Every stock I own. I'm getting out before there's a secondary crack."

"Lucky stiff!" he murmured. "Buy at the December lows and sell out now! Wish I'd had money to do it." He paused. "What you gonna do? Stay with the company?"

"No. I've enough to live on. I'm going to stick it in Governments and paid-up insurance, and live on the income. I've had enough of gambling."

"You lucky stiff!" he said again. "I'm sick of the Street too. Staying in New York?"

"For a while. Just till I get my stuff invested properly. Yvonne and I are going to New Orleans for the winter." I paused. "She's had a tough time of it. I'm glad we're where we are."

"Who wouldn't be?" asked Summers, and then again, "You lucky stiff!"

De Néant was frantically excited when I described this to him. "That's it!" he screamed. "We buy! We buy tomorrow! We sell on the twenty-seventh of May, and then— New Orleans!"

Of course I was nearly equally enthusiastic, "By heaven!" I said. "It's worth the risk! We'll do it!" And then a sudden hopeless thought. "Do it? Do it with what? I have less than a hundred dollars to my name. And you—"

The old man groaned. "I have nothing," he said in abrupt gloom. "Only the annuity we live on. One can't borrow on that." Again a gleam of hope. "The banks. We'll borrow from them!"

I had to laugh, though it was a bitter laugh. "What bank would lend us money oh a story like this? They wouldn't lend Rockefeller himself money to play this sick market, not without security. We're sunk, that's all."

I looked at his pale, worried eyes. "Sunk," he echoed dully. Then again that wild gleam. "*Not* sunk!" he yelled. "How can we be? We *did* do it! You remembered our doing it! We *must* have found the way!"

I GAZED, speechless. Suddenly a queer, mad thought flashed over me. This other Jack Anders, this ghost of quadrillions of centuries past— or future— he too must be watching, or had watched, or yet would watch, me— the Jack Anders of this cycle of eternity. He must be watching as anxiously as I to discover the means. Each of us watching the other; neither of us knowing the answer. The blind leading the blind! I laughed at the irony.

But old de Néant was not laughing. The strangest expression I have ever seen in a man's eyes was in his as he repeated very softly, "We must have found the way, because it was done. At least you and Yvonne found the way."

"Then all of us must," I answered sourly.

"Yes. Oh, yes. Listen to me, Jack. I am an old man, old Aurore de Néant. I am old Dawn of Nothingness, and my mind is cracking. Don't shake your head!" he snapped. "I am not mad. I am simply misunderstood. None of you understand. Why, I have a theory that trees, grass, and people do not grow taller at all; they grow by pushing the earth away from them, which is why you keep hearing that the world is getting smaller every day. But you don't understand; Yvonne doesn't understand—"

The girl must have been listening. Without my seeing her, she had slipped into the room and put her arms gently about her father's shoulders, while she gazed across at me with anxious eyes.

4: A Prophecy

THERE WAS one more vision, irrelevant in a way, yet vitally important in another way. It was the next evening. An early December snowfall was dropping its silent white beyond the windows, and the ill-heated apartment of the de Néants was draughty and chill. I saw Yvonne shiver as she greeted me, and again as she left the room, and I noticed that old de Néant followed her to the door with his thin, arms about her, and that he returned with very worried eyes.

"She is New Orleans born," he murmured. "This dreadful arctic climate will destroy her. We must find a way at once."

That vision was a somber one. I stood on a cold, wet, snowy ground; just myself and Yvonne and one who stood beside an open grave. Behind us; stretched rows of crosses and white tombstones, but in our corner the place was ragged, untended, unconsecrated. The priest was saying, "And these are things that only God understands."

I slipped a comforting arm about Yvonne. She raised her dark, tragic eyes and whispered: "It was yesterday, Jack— just yesterday that he said to me, 'Next winter you shall spend in New Orleans, Yvonne.' Just yesterday!"

I tried a wretched smile, but I could only stare mournfully at her forlorn face, watching a tear that rolled slowly down her right cheek, hung glistening there a moment, then was joined, by another and splashed unregarded on the black bosom of her dress.

That was all, but how could I describe that vision to old de Néant? I tried to evade; he kept insisting.

"There wasn't any hint of the way," I told him. Useless; at last I had to tell anyway.

He was very silent for a full minute. "Jack," he said finally, "do you know when I said that to her about New Orleans? This morning when we watched the snow. This morning!"

I didn't know what to do. Suddenly this whole concept of remembering the future seemed mad, insane; in all my memories there had been not a single spark of real proof, not a single hint of prophecy. So I did nothing at all, but simply gazed silently as old Aurore de Néant walked out of the room. And when, two hours later, while Yvonne and I talked, he finished writing a certain letter and then shot himself through the heart— why, that proved nothing either.

So it was the following day that Yvonne and I, his only mourners, followed old Dawn of Nothingness to his suicide's grave. I stood beside her and tried as best I could to console her, and roused from a dark reverie to hear her words: "Just yesterday that he said to me, 'Next winter you shall spend in New Orleans, Yvonne.' Just yesterday!"

I watched the tear that rolled slowly down her right cheek, hung glistening there a moment, then was joined by another and splashed on the black bosom of her dress.

But it was later, during the evening, that the most ironic revelation of all occurred. I was gloomily blaming myself for the weakness of indulging old de Néant in the mad experiment that had led, in a way, to his death. It was as if Yvonne read my thoughts, for she said suddenly, "He was breaking, Jack. His mind was going. I heard all those strange things he kept murmuring to you."

"What?"

"I listened, of course, behind the door there. I never left him alone. I heard him whisper the queerest things— faces in a red fog, words about a cold grey desert, the name Pyroniva, the word Termopolis. He leaned over you as you sat with closed eyes, and he whispered, whispered all the time."

Irony of ironies! It was old de Néant's mad mind that had suggested the visions! He had described them to me as I sat in the sleep of lethargy!

Later we found the letter he had written, and again I was deeply moved. The old man had carried a little insurance; just a week before he had borrowed on one of the policies to pay the premiums on it and the others. But the letter— well, he had made me beneficiary of half the amount! And the instructions were:

"You, Jack Anders, will take both your money and Yvonne's and carry out the plan as you know I wish."

Lunacy! De Néant had found the way to provide the money, but— I couldn't gamble Yvonne's last dollar on the scheme of a disordered mind.

"What will we do?" I asked her. "Of course the money's all yours. I won't touch it."

"Mine?" she echoed. "Why, no. We'll do as he wished. Do you think I'd not respect his last request?"

Well, we did. I took those miserable few thousands and spread it around in that sick December market. You remember what happened, how during the spring the prices skyrocketed as if they were heading back toward 1929, when actually the depression was just gathering breath. I rode that market like a circus performer; I took profits and pyramided them back, and on April 27th, with our money multiplied fifty times, I sold out and watched the market slide back.

Coincidence? Very likely. After all, Aurore de Néant's mind was clear enough most of the time. Other economists predicted that spring rise; perhaps he foresaw it too. Perhaps he staged this whole affair just to trick us into the gamble, one which we'd never have dared otherwise. And then when he saw

we were going to fail from lack of money, he took the only means he had of providing it.

Perhaps. That's the rational explanation, and yet— that vision of ruined Termopolis keeps haunting me. I see again the grey cold desert of the floating fungi. I wonder often about the immutable Laws of Chance, and about a ghostly Jack Anders somewhere beyond eternity.

For perhaps he does— did— will exist. Otherwise, how to explain that final vision? What of Yvonne's words beside her father's grave? Could he have foreseen those words and whispered them to me? Possibly. But what, then, of those two tears that hung glistening, merged, and dropped from her cheeks?

What of them?

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21: The Affair of the Corridor Express

Victor L. Whitechurch

1868-1933

The Royal Magazine, Sep 1905

THORPE HAZELL stood in his study in his London flat. On the opposite wall he had pinned a bit of paper, about an inch square, at the height of his eye, and was now going through the most extraordinary contortions.

With his eyes fixed on the paper he was craning his neck as far as it would reach and twisting his head about in all directions. This necessitated a fearful rolling of the eyes in order to keep them on the paper, and was supposed to be a means of strengthening the muscles of the eye for angular sight.

Presently there came a tap at the door.

"Come in!" cried Hazell, still whirling his head round.

"A gentleman wishes to see you at once, sir!" said the servant, handing him a card.

Hazell paused in his exercises, took it from the tray, and read:

Mr F. W. Wingrave, M.A., B.Sc.

"Oh, show him in," said Hazell, rather impatiently, for he hated to be interrupted when he was doing his "eye gymnastics"

There entered a young man of about five-and-twenty, with a look of keen anxiety on his face.

"You are Mr Thorpe Hazell?" he asked.

"I am."

"You will have seen my name on my card— I am one of the masters at Shillington School— I had heard your name, and they told me at the station that it might be well to consult you— I hope you don't mind— I know you're not an ordinary detective, but—"

"Sit down, Mr Wingrave," said Hazell. interrupting his nervous flow of language. "You look quite ill and tired."

"I have just been through a very trying experience," replied Wingrave, sinking into a seat. "A boy I was in charge of has just mysteriously disappeared, and I want you to find him for me, and I want to ask your opinion. They say you know all about railways, but—"

"Now, look here, my dear sir, you just have some hot toast and water before you say another word. I conclude you want to consult me on some railway matter. I'll do what I can, but I won't hear you till you've had some refreshment. Perhaps you prefer whiskey— though I don't advise it."

Wingrave, however, chose the whiskey, and Hazell poured him out some, adding soda-water.

"Thank you," he said. "I hope you'll be able to give me advice. I am afraid the poor boy must be killed; the whole thing is a mystery, and I—"

"Stop a bit, Mr Wingrave. I must ask you to tell me the story from the very beginning. That's the best way."

"Quite right. The worry of it has made me incoherent, I fear. But I'll try and do what you propose. First of all, do you know the name of Carr-Mathers?"

"Yes, I think so. Very rich, is he not?"

"A millionaire. He has only one child, a boy of about ten, whose mother died at his birth. He is a small boy for his age, and idolized by his father. About three months ago this young Horace Carr-Mathers was sent to our school— Cragsbury House, just outside Shillington. It is not a very large school, but exceedingly select, and the headmaster, Dr Spring, is well known in high— class circles. I may tell you that we have the sons of some of the leading nobility preparing for the public schools. You will readily understand that in such an establishment as ours the most scrupulous care is exercised over the boys, not only as regards their moral and intellectual training, but also to guard against any outside influences."

"Kidnapping, for example," interposed Hazell.

"Exactly. There have been such cases known, and Dr Spring has a very high reputation to maintain. The slightest rumour against the school would go ill with him— and with all of us masters.

"Well, this morning the headmaster received a telegram about Horace Carr-Mathers, requesting that he should be sent up to town."

"Do you know the exact wording?" asked Hazell.

"I have it with me," replied Wingrave, drawing it from his pocket.

Hazell took it from him, and read as follows:

Please grant Horace leave of absence for two days. Send him to London by 5.45 express from Shillington, in first— class carriage, giving guard instructions to look after him. We will meet train in town— Carr-Mathers

"Um," grunted Hazell, as he handed it back. "Well, he can afford telegrams."

"Oh, he's always wiring about something or other," replied Wingrave; "he seldom writes a letter. Well, when the doctor received this he called me into his study.

" 'I suppose I must let the boy go,' he said, 'but I'm not at all inclined to allow him to travel by himself. If anything should happen to him his father

would hold us responsible as well as the railway company. So you had better take him up to town, Mr Wingrave.'

" 'Yes, sir.'

" 'You need do no more than deliver him to his father. If Mr Carr-Mathers is not at the terminus to meet him, take him with you in a cab to his house in Portland Place. You'll probably be able to catch the last train home, but, if not, you can get a bed at an hotel.'

" 'Very good, sir.'

"So, shortly after half-past five, I found myself standing on the platform at Shillington, waiting for the London express."

"Now, stop a moment," interrupted Hazell, sipping a glass of filtered water which he had poured out for himself. "I want to get a clear notion of this journey of yours from the beginning, for, I presume, you will shortly be telling me that something strange happened during it. Was there anything to be noticed before the train started?"

"Nothing at the time. But I remembered afterwards that two men seemed to be watching me rather closely when I took the tickets and I heard one of them say 'Confound,' beneath his breath. But my suspicions were not aroused at the moment."

"I see. If there is anything in this it was probably because he was disconcerted when he saw you were going to travel with the boy. Did these two men get into the train?"

"I'm coming to that. The train was in sharp to time, and we took our seats in a first— class compartment."

"Please describe the exact position."

"Our carriage was the third from the front. It was a corridor train, with access from carriage to carriage all the way through. Horace and myself were in a compartment alone. I had bought him some illustrated papers for the journey, and for some time he sat quietly enough, looking through them. After a bit he grew fidgety, as you know boys will."

"Wait a minute. I want to know if the corridor of your carriage was on the left or on the right— supposing you to be seated facing the engine?"

"On the left."

"Very well, go on."

"The door leading into the corridor stood open. It was still daylight, but dusk was setting in fast— I should say it was about half-past six, or a little more. Horace had been looking out of the window on the right side of the train when I drew his attention to Rutherham Castle, which we were passing. It stands, as you know, on the left side of the line. In order to get a better view of it he went out into the corridor and stood there. I retained my seat on the right

side of the compartment, glancing at him from time to time. He seemed interested in the corridor itself, looking about him, and once or twice shutting and opening the door of our compartment. I can see now that I ought to have kept a sharper rye on him, but I never dreamed that any accident could happen. I was reading a paper myself, and became rather interested in a paragraph. It may have been seven or eight minutes before I looked up. When I did so, Horace had disappeared.

"I didn't think anything of it at first, but only concluded that he had taken a walk along the corridor."

"You don't know which way he went?" inquired Hazell.

"No. I couldn't say. I waited a minute or two, and then rose and looked out into the corridor. There was no one there. Still my suspicions were not aroused. It was possible that he had gone to the lavatory. So I sat down again, and waited. Then I began to get a little anxious, and determined to have a look for him. I walked to either end of the corridor, and searched the lavatories, but they were both empty. Then I looked in all the other compartments of the carriage, and asked their occupants if they had seen him go by, but none of them had noticed him."

"Do you remember how these compartments were occupied?"

"Yes. In the first, which was reserved for ladies, there were five ladies. The next was a smoker with three gentlemen in it. Ours came next. Then, going towards the front of the train, were the two men I had noticed at Shillington; the last compartment had a gentleman and lady and their three children."

"Ah! how about those two men— what were they doing?"

"One of them was reading a book, and the other appeared to be asleep."

"Tell me. Was the door leading to the corridor from their compartment shut?"

"Yes, it was."

"I was in a most terrible fright, and I went back to my compartment and pulled the electric communicator. In a few seconds the front guard came along the corridor and asked me what I wanted. I told him I had lost my charge. He suggested that the boy had walked through to another carriage, and I asked him if he would mind my making a thorough search of the train with him. To this he readily agreed. We went back to the first carriage and began to do so. We examined every compartment from end to end of the train; we looked under every seat, in spite of the protestations of some of the passengers; we searched all the lavatories— every corner of the train— and we found absolutely no trace of Horace Carr-Mathers. No one had seen the boy anywhere."

"Had the train stopped?"

"Not for a second. It was going at full speed all the time. It only slowed down after we had finished the search— but it never quite stopped."

"Ah! We'll come to that presently. I want to ask you some questions first. Was it still daylight?"

"Dusk, but quite light enough to see plainly— besides which, the train lamps were lit."

"Exactly. Those two men, now, in the next compartment to yours— tell me precisely what happened when you visited them the second time with the guard."

"They asked a lot of questions— like many of the other passengers— and seemed very surprised."

"You looked underneath their seats?"

"Certainly."

"On the luggage— racks? A small boy like that could be rolled up in a rug and put on the rack."

"We examined every rack on the train."

Thorpe Hazell lit a cigarette and smoked furiously, motioning to his companion to keep quiet. He was thinking out the situation. Suddenly he said:

"How about the window in those two men's compartment?"

"It was shut— I particularly noticed it."

"You are quite sure you searched the whole of the train?"

"Absolutely certain; so was the guard."

"Ah!" remarked Hazell, "even guards are mistaken sometimes. It— er— was only the inside of the train you searched, eh?"

"Of course."

"Very well," replied Hazell, "now, before we go any further, I want to ask you this. Would it have been to anyone's interest to have murdered the boy?"

"I don't think so— from what I know. I don't see how it could be."

"Very well. We will take it as a pure case of kidnapping, and presume that he is alive and well. This ought to console you to begin with."

"Do you think you can help me?"

"I don't know yet. But go on and tell me all that happened."

"Well, after we had searched the train I was at my wits' end— and so was the guard. We both agreed, however, that nothing more could be done till we reached London. Somehow, my strongest suspicions concerning those two men were aroused, and I travelled in their compartment for the rest of the journey."

"Oh! Did anything happen?"

"Nothing. They both wished me good-night, hoped I'd find the boy, got out, and drove off in a hansom."

"And then?"

"I looked about for Mr Carr-Mathers, but he was nowhere to be seen. Then I saw an inspector, and put the case before him. He promised to make inquiries and to have the line searched on the part where I missed Horace. I took a hansom to Portland Place, only to discover that Mr Carr-Mathers is on the Continent and not expected home for a week. Then I came on to you— the inspector had advised me to do so. And that's the whole story. It's a terrible thing for me, Mr Hazell. What do you think of it?"

"Well," replied Hazell, "of course it's very clear that there is a distinct plot. Someone sent that telegram, knowing Mr Carr-Mathers' proclivities. The object was to kidnap the boy. It sounds absurd to talk of brigands and ransoms in this country, but the thing is done over and over again for all that. It is obvious that the boy was expected to travel alone, and that the train was the place chosen for the kidnapping. Hence the elaborate directions. I think you were quite right in suspecting those two men, and it might have been better if you had followed them up without coming to me."

"But they went off alone!"

"Exactly. It's my belief they had originally intended doing so after disposing of Horace, and that they carried out their original intentions."

"But what became of the boy?— how did they—"

"Stop a bit, I'm not at all clear in my own mind. But you mentioned that while you were concluding your search with the guard the train slackened speed?"

"Yes. It almost came to a stop— and then went very slowly for a minute or so. I asked the guard why, but I didn't understand his reply."

"What was it?"

"He said it was a P.W. operation."

Hazell laughed. "P.W. stands for permanent way," he explained, "I know exactly what you mean now. There is a big job going on near Longmoor— they are raising the level of the line, and the up-trains are running on temporary rails. So they have to proceed very slowly. Now it was after this that you went back to the two men whom you suspected?"

"Yes."

"Very well. Now let me think the thing over. Have some more whiskey? You might also like to glance at the contents of my book-case. If you know anything of first editions and bindings they will interest you."

Wingrave, it is to be feared, paid but small heed to the books, but watched Hazell anxiously as the latter smoked cigarette after cigarette, his brows knit in deep thought. After a bit he said slowly:

"You will understand that I am going to work upon the theory that the boy has been kidnapped and that the original intention has been carried out, in spite of the accident of your presence in the train. How the boy was disposed of meanwhile is what baffles me; but that is a detail— though it will be interesting to know how it was done. Now, I don't want to raise any false hopes, because I may very likely be wrong, but we are going to take action upon a very feasible assumption, and if I am at all correct, I hope to put you definitely on the track. Mind, I don't promise to do so, and, at best, I don't promise to do more than put you on a track. Let me see—it's just after nine. We have plenty of time. We'll drive first to Scotland Yard, for it will be as well to have a detective with us."

He filled a flask with milk, put some plasmon biscuits and a banana into a sandwich case, and then ordered his servant to hail a cab.

An hour later, Hazell, Wingrave, and a man from Scotland Yard were closeted together in one of the private offices of the Mid-Eastern Railway with one of the chief officials of the line. The latter was listening attentively to Hazell.

"But I can't understand the boy not being anywhere in the train, Mr Hazell," he said.

"I can— partly," replied Hazell, "but first let me see if my theory is correct."

"By all means. There's a down-train in a few minutes. I'll go with you, for the matter is very interesting. Come along, gentlemen."

He walked forward to the engine and gave a few instructions to the driver, and then they took their seats in the train. After a run of half an hour or so they passed a station.

"That's Longmoor," said the official, "now we shall soon be on the spot. It's about a mile down that the line is being raised."

Hazell put his head out of the window. Presently an ominous red light showed itself. The train came almost to a stop, and then proceeded slowly, the man who had shown the red light changing it to green. They could see him as they passed, standing close to a little temporary hut. It was his duty to warn all approaching drivers, and for this purpose he was stationed some three hundred yards in front of the bit of line that was being operated upon. Very soon they were passing this bit. Naphtha lamps shed a weird light over a busy scene, for the work was being continued night and day. A score or so of sturdy navvies were shovelling and picking along the track.

Once more into the darkness. On the other side of the scene of operations, at the same distance, was another little hut, with a guardian for the up-train. Instead of increasing the speed in passing this hut, which would have been usual, the driver brought the train almost to a standstill. As he did so the four

men got out of the carriage, jumping from the footboard to the ground. On went the train, leaving them on the left side of the down track, just opposite the little hut. They could see the man standing outside, his back partly turned to them. There was a fire in a brazier close by that dimly outlined his figure.

He started suddenly, as they crossed the line towards him.

"What are you doing here?" he cried. "You've no business here— you're trespassing."

He was a big, strong-looking man, and he backed a little towards his hut as he spoke.

"I am Mr Mills, the assistant-superintendent of the line," replied the official, coming forward.

"Beg pardon, sir; but how was I to know that?" growled the man.

"Quite right. It's your duty to warn off strangers. How long have you been stationed here?"

"I came on at five o'clock; I'm regular night-watchman, sir."

"Ah! Pretty comfortable, eh?"

"Yes, thank you, sir," replied the man, wondering why the question was asked, but thinking, not unnaturally, that the assistant-superintendent had come down with a party of engineers to supervise things.

"Got the hut to yourself?"

"Yes, sir."

Without another word, Mr Mills walked to the door of the hut. The man, his face suddenly growing pale, moved, and stood with his back to it.

"It's— it's private, sir!" he growled.

Hazell laughed. "All right, my man," he said. "I was right, I think— hullo!— look out! Don't let him go!"

For the man had made a quick rush forward. But the Scotland Yard officer and Hazell were on him in a moment, and a few seconds later the handcuffs clicked on his wrists. Then they flung the door open, and there, lying in the comer, gagged and bound, was Horace Carr-Mathers.

An exclamation of joy broke forth from Wingrave, as he opened his knife to cut the cords. But Hazell stopped him.

"Just half a moment," he said: "I want to see how they've tied him up."

A peculiar method had been adopted in doing this. His wrists were fastened behind his back, a stout cord was round his body just under the armpits, and another cord above the knees. These were connected by a slack bit of rope.

"All right!" went on Hazell; "let's get the poor lad out of his troubles— there, that's better. How do you feel, my boy?"

"Awfully stiff!" said Horace, "but I'm not hurt. I say, sir," he continued to Wingrave, "how did you know I was here? I am glad you've come."

"The question is how did you get here?" replied Wingrave. "Mr Hazell, here, seemed to know where you were, but it's a puzzle to me at present."

"If you'd come half an hour later you wouldn't have found him," growled the man who was handcuffed. "I ain't so much to blame as them as employed me."

"Oh, is that how the land lies?" exclaimed Hazell. "I see. You shall tell us presently, my boy, how it happened. Meanwhile. Mr Mills, I think we can prepare a little trap— eh?"

In five minutes all was arranged. A couple of the navvies were brought up from the line, one stationed outside to guard against trains, and with certain other instructions, the other being inside the hut with the rest of them. A third navvy was also dispatched for the police.

"How are they coming?" asked Hazell of the handcuffed man.

"They were going to take a train down from London to Rockhampstead on the East-Northern, and drive over. It's about ten miles off."

"Good! they ought soon to be here," replied Hazell, as he munched some biscuits and washed them down with a draught of milk, after which he astonished them all by solemnly going through one of his "digestive exercises."

A little later they heard the sound of wheels on a road beside the line. Then the man on watch said, in gruff tones:

"The boy's inside!"

But they found more than the boy inside, and an hour later all three conspirators were safely lodged in Longmoor gaol.

"Oh, it was awfully nasty, I can tell you," said Horace Carr-Mathers, as he explained matters afterwards. "I went into the corridor, you know, and was looking about at things, when all of a sudden I felt my coat-collar grasped behind, and a hand was laid over my mouth. I tried to kick and shout, but it was no go. They got me into the compartment, stuffed a handkerchief into my mouth, and tied it in. It was just beastly. Then they bound me hand and foot, and opened the window on the right-hand side— opposite the corridor. I was in a funk, for I thought they were going to throw me out, but one of them told me to keep my pecker up, as they weren't going to hurt me. Then they let me down out of the window by that slack rope, and made it fast to the handle of the door outside. It was pretty bad, There was I, hanging from the door-handle in a sort of doubled-up position, my back resting on the foot-board of the carriage, and the train rushing along like mad. I felt sick and awful, and I had to shut my eyes. I seemed to hang there for ages."

"I told you you only examined the inside of the train," said Thorpe Hazell to Wingrave. "I had my suspicions that he was somewhere on the outside all the time, but I was puzzled to know where. It was a clever trick."

"Well," went on the boy, "I heard the window open above me after a bit. I looked up and saw one of the men taking the rope off the handle. The train was just beginning to slow down. Then he hung out of the window, dangling me with one hand. It was horrible. I was hanging below the footboard now. Then the train came almost to a stop, and someone caught me round the waist. I lost my senses for a minute or two, and then I found myself lying in the hut."

"Well, Mr Hazell," said the assistant-superintendent, "you were perfectly right, and we all owe you a debt of gratitude."

"Oh," said Hazell, "it was only a guess at the best. I presumed it was simply kidnapping, and the problem to be solved was how and where the boy was got off the train without injury. It was obvious that he had been disposed of before the train reached London. There was only one other inference. The man on duty was evidently the confederate, for, if not, his presence would have stopped the whole plan of action. I'm very glad to have been of any use. There are interesting points about the case, and it has been a pleasure to me to undertake it."

A little while afterwards Mr Carr-Mathers himself called on Hazell to thank him.

"I should like," he said, "to express my deep gratitude substantially; but I understand you are not an ordinary detective. But is there any way in which I can serve you, Mr Hazell?"

"Yes— two ways."

"Please name them."

"I should be sorry for Mr Wingrave to get into trouble through this affair— or Dr Spring either."

"I understand you, Mr Hazell. They were both to blame, in a way. But I will see that Dr Spring's reputation does not suffer, and that Wingrave comes out of it harmlessly."

"Thank you very much."

"You said there was a second way in which I could serve you."

"So there is. At Dunn's sale last month you were the purchaser of two first editions of *'The New Bath Guide*.' If you cared to dispose of one, I—"

"Say no more, Mr Hazell. I shall be glad to give you one for your collection."

Hazell stiffened.

"You misunderstand me!" he exclaimed icily. "I was about to add that if you cared to dispose of a copy I would write you out a cheque."

"Oh, certainly," replied Mr Carr-Mathers with a smile, "I shall be extremely pleased."

Whereupon the transaction was concluded.

22: The Chronicle of the Yellow Girl

Fred Merrick White

1859-1935

The London Magazine, Aug 1905

The first of a short series about Paul Beggarstaff, "The Sage of Tyburn Square", a consulting detective.

1: The Yellow Girl

THE door of No. 1, Tyburn Square, was painted black, with bell, letter-box, and massive knocker enamelled in vivid scarlet. In a few weeks' time this portal had passed from the limbo of conventional thresholds into the picturesque popularity of evening newspaper records. This spells fame in an age when genius means an infinite capacity for making money.

In less than two months all that was best and brightest in society had passed beyond the flare of lampblack and vermilion. Beyond was a hall, paved and lined with white marble, filled with lemon-trees. Beyond this again was a large room, the walls unpapered, the white boards absolutely bare, and containing no furniture beyond a couple of saddlebag armchairs. The big bay window at the far end was fitted with cathedral glass.

In this primitive fashion Paul Beggarstaff received his clients. At all times and seasons a good fire burned upon the hearth. Ladies came here to have their fortunes expounded, their lines of life vigorously told, and to get advice upon everything, from the selection of a servant to the backing of a horse.

And yet, two months ago, nobody had heard of Paul Beggarstaff. He did not come in clouds of mystery, there was no flavour of the East about him, his very name had an Anglo-Saxon suggestiveness. He merely claimed certain occult powers, and seldom did he promise in vain.

Beggarstaff was a young man, with pale, scholarly features, an aquiline nose supporting gold-threaded *pince-nez*, and a drooping blonde moustache. There were no magic circles, no black cats, no anything. The very novelty of the thing was one of its great attractions. Surely nobody but a very strong man could afford to dispense with the properties.

Beggarstaff had made his reputation over that case of Lady Summerbright's. The affair is woven into the diaphanous fabric of history by this time. Her ladyship, the loveliest and silliest woman in London, had lost her diamond necklace. *Truth* will tell you that the gaud has a bloody history of its own. Commercially, the stream of light would have ransomed quite a number of mediaeval kings.

Lord Summerbright, whose literary ability had been throttled by patrician ties, could suggest nothing better than a visit to Beggarstaff, whose original doorway had arrested his cynical attention. With the sublime creed that folly follows, her ladyship went.

She returned with a wonderful story. She was quite certain she had had the dubious delight of an interview with the devil, clad in frock-coat, mathematically pressed trousers, and glasses rimmed with gold. Also her ladyship was quite certain that the father of lies was a graduate of one of our universities.

"James," she declared, "the man is a marvel. He told me everything I had done on that fatal night. Things that happened in my bedroom!"

"Lucky— er— devil," Summerbright murmured.

"No; but really, James. He motioned me into a chair, he actually knew why I came, and then he began to tell me things. I never was so frightened in my life. And he says I dropped my necklace close here as I was getting out of my carriage, and that the same will be found down the drain which is opposite the door."

Summerbright smiled. When a man laughs at a woman in that irritating way she is generally inspired to new and dazzling heights of folly.

"I am going to have that drain searched at once," said her ladyship. And she did.

The necklace was found as Beggarstaff predicted. Within a week the name of Paul Beggarstaff was known from one end of England to another. This was notoriety. But when the Purple Pill King and the greatest Soap Emperor worked the incidents into full-page advertisements, fame followed.

Hundreds of fashionable clients flocked to Tyburn Square. The Sage's prices were trebled, but this only served to increase the crush. Nor could it be denied that Beggarstaff was wonderfully successful with his patients, as he chose to call them. To put the matter tersely, Beggarstaff had become an institution.

It was Saturday afternoon, a day when occult science slacked her bow, and Beggarstaff sat alone. In a Sage his occupation was a prosaic one, and not even the most latitudinarian of critics can exactly regard the *Sporting Times* as literature. The rapid pulse of the electric bell thrilled, and Beggarstaff put the pink sheets aside. A minute later, and a tall figure entered. "I beg your pardon," said the intruder, "but I presume you—"

"Paul Beggarstaff, at your service. You wish to consult me, Sir Peter?"

Sir Peter Mallory looked slightly uncomfortable. He was a handsome young man, with a bronzed face and an eye suggestive of higher things than sighting a choke-bore with a dusky flight of partridge drumming into the September

haze. Mallory was a sportsman by environment, an enthusiast and dreamer by instinct.

"If you were a woman," said Beggarstaff, "you could feel more easy. Sit down."

"Woman," Mallory murmured, as he sank into the chair, "can do things sublimely. Honestly, I came here against my better convictions."

"Of course, that's why you *do* come. Just at present you are out of sorts with common honesty. Believing me to be a thorough-paced humbug you come to me as an antidote. Strychnine is a valuable medicine, and Longman is behaving very badly."

"What do you know about Longman?"

"I know he has disappointed you, and yet his pseudo-Socialism is no more meretricious than yours. He has been robbing you in the name of political humanity."

"Over two thousand pounds," Mallory muttered. "I'm sick of politics. Those fellows are all alike. But I didn't come to talk of that to you."

Beggarstaff smiled slightly.

"No," he said. "You came to discuss a girl. The girl puzzles you."

"How in the name of fortune do you come to know that?"

Beggarstaff gave a lofty wave of his hand. The gesture seemed to imply the triviality of the problem to a mind of wide grasp.

"Suffice it that I do know," the Sage remarked. "The question is: Are you in earnest? Because, if you are not, the matter is likely to lead you into serious trouble. What are your intentions in the matter of the Yellow Girl?"

"Beggarstaff, you are in league with Satan?"

"There are worse syndicates," the Sage said drily. "All the same, you are mistaken. I have no connexion whatever with the firm you mention. Are you serious?"

"I was never more earnest in my life."

"Because you are a clever man, and consequently dilettante. And you were not always serious. Don't be angry. Do you remember Phillpotts, of Jesus? He was an elderly man, and he had a daughter. Wasn't her name Jessie? Then there was the 'Pearl of Price.' She married a butcher at Newmarket subsequently. Then what of 'She of the Dainty Feet'? She in the fulness of time got mixed up—"

"For Heaven's sake, stop!" Mallory cried. "Good God! if I were a man of right mind I should cut my throat after an hour with you! How— how do you— "

The speaker paused, absolutely at a loss to proceed. For the first time in his life he was frightened; a knowledge of nerves had suddenly been thrust upon him.

"The thing is ridiculously easy," Beggarstaff said. "You will perhaps wonder at my asking if you have recovered the Mallory diamonds yet."

"You know they are lost also? Those Scotland Yard people—"

"Have not uttered a word. You lent the family jewels to your sister to attend a Drawing-Room, and the stones disappeared under the most mysterious circumstances. Scotland Yard suggested an absolute secrecy, but you see I know all about it."

"I never felt more hopelessly at sea, never in my life—"

"And yet you are an exceptionally clever fellow, Peter."

Mallory started at the change of voice. With one sweep of his hand Beggarstaff seemed to have entirely altered his features. And yet he had merely removed his glasses, and given the long, saffron moustaches an upward curl.

"As I live," Mallory cried, "it's Paul Clibburn, of Jesus!"

"The same, at your service, Peter. You wonder to find me in this guise."

"Wonder! The feeblest way of putting it. Second Wrangler! A first-class classic! Greek and English verse prizeman. The prettiest bat for a late cut I ever saw. And perhaps the finest comedian ever seen on the banks of the Cam. And to be doing this kind of thing!"

Beggarstaff touched the bell and gave the servant instructions that he was in to nobody. Then he carefully locked the door and produced the cigarettes.

"I gather from your manner that you are slightly disgusted, Peter," he said.

"Well, who wouldn't be? You are masquerading in this cheap-Jack style; you, a man that might have been Lord Chancellor had you liked."

A film of regret dimmed Beggarstaff's eyes. His voice was dominated by it also.

"Unfortunately, all those things require money," said he. "And when I came down from Cambridge not only was I penniless, but I had succeeded in dissipating every penny my poor old father had. He would pay my debts, you see. When he died, two years later, my mother and two sisters were totally unprovided for. But for the thoughtless blackguard who sits before you, they could have had every comfort.

"Mallory, to lead Cambridge by the nose and London by the ear are two cruelly different things. Honestly, I tried my hand at a dozen things: at every one of them I was a ghastly failure. I couldn't afford to wait. There comes the time when cynicism and ungodliness get you down and strangle you. I could play the liar, and humbug, and knave, perched up on cee-springs, building

churches and the like. That is why I decided to become a successful humbug also."

"But you had to get a start, Paul."

"Well, didn't that Lady Summerbright business give me a magnificent one?"

"Still, I never believed that there was anything in that thought-reading—"

"Absolute humbug," Beggarstaff interrupted. "To be perfectly candid with you, the thing was arranged between Summerbright and myself. You will remember that we were the greatest of friends at Cambridge. Summerbright placed the jewels in the drain, and then suggested that his wife should come to me, first posting me up in the local colour. After that the rest followed like a flock of sheep. They come to me with the most sacred of family secrets. I hold the honour of a hundred families in the hollow of my hand. Peter, there is absolutely no limit to human credulity and weakness. Did I but choose, I could become the greatest blackmailer of this or any other age. But there is no need. The money comes in like a flood; and my own flesh and blood reap the benefit."

"Still, I have heard people speak very highly of you."

"Because I am cleverer than they. I never advise unless I know. I put people off; and, in the meantime, I coach up for them. Some of my adventures are worthy of a place in the *Arabian Nights*, I could tell you—"

"Crimes! Are you the latest revision of Sherlock—"

"Pshaw! I am not a detective. One stumbles upon crime sometimes; but I make it a rule to avoid that class of thing if possible. Crime is so vulgar and conventional. And I am getting to love the solution of the social mystery for its own sake. For instance, this Yellow Girl problem promises to be most fascinating."

Mallory flushed slightly.

"I may as well confess the occasion of my visit here," he said. "Indeed, seeing how much you know already, it would be folly to do otherwise. But how do you get your information?"

"You need not go any further," said Beggarstaff, "because I am not going to tell you. In my business— the business of life— one thing is woven into another. My few facts came to me quite accidentally, and your face shows the state of your mind. Now tell me all about the Yellow Girl and where you met her."

"But still to betray the secrets— of the— of the—"

"New Bohemian Club. There, you see. I know the name. Also, I may remark that their place of meeting is somewhere near Battersea Park. You are a member!"

Mallory commenced to speak with greater freedom.

"I am a member," he said. "There are two hundred and fifty of us altogether. Our symposiums take place every Wednesday night, eight till two."

Beggarstaff nodded and passed the cigarettes.

"So I understand," he said. "You are a very exclusive coterie."

"In a way, very exclusive. Some of the very best people come there constantly. We dance and sing, and play cards and the like, the supper being prepared beforehand, so that there are no waiters, and our own members provide the orchestra. We are free, I must confess— very free indeed. Conventionality is left in the cloakroom. Each member has an ivory ticket; and when he or she cannot attend; this ticket may be passed on to a friend who can be trusted. So well is the secret kept that none of the society papers have got hold of it yet."

"I could go if I liked," said Beggarstaff. "Proceed."

"There is very little more to tell," said Mallory. "With some of the best and brightest society people, with a choice selection of artists, authors, and the like, I need hardly say that our functions are enjoyable in the extreme. There are no sets and cliques whatever; everybody speaks to everybody else; in fact, we are quite a happy family."

"In fact, the Yellow Girl is the only mystery you have."

"Precisely. She never misses a night. She comes at eight and goes at one, regularly."

"By goes I suppose you mean disappears," Beggarstaff suggested drily.

"I have certainly tried to trace her," Mallory admitted with a splash of red on his cheeks, "but the Yellow Girl, or Zilla, as she prefers to be called, simply melts away. The laws of our coterie preclude any personal questions, so that Zilla may be an empress for all we know. That she is wonderfully popular is certain."

"So I have heard," Beggarstaff said thoughtfully. "And she invariably dresses in yellow silk and black lace, with shoes to match. There is quite a flavour of Dumas about the thing. I presume the lady is beautiful."

Mallory caught his breath, his eyes dilated.

"The cant phrase is utterly inadequate," he remarked fervently. "Zilla is fascination itself. She is the essence of the ages, the crystallisation of centuries of prettiness. Sometimes she suggests Cleopatra, then in a flash she is Clytemnestra, then she is Ellen Terry. Dark as night, a kind of dream with lovely liquid eyes floating in it. Then the fascination of her manner and the brilliant airiness of her conversation baffle description. One minute she is tender and confidential, the next she eludes you in the strangest fashion. And yet she had never seen plovers' eggs till last Wednesday."

Mallory's last remark savoured of worldly philosophy. The incident of the plovers' eggs suggested the wildest possibilities. Beggarstaff smiled. Already he had formed the still gauzy threads of a still more gossamer theory of his own.

"Really," he said, "a much more classic point than would at first appear. Do you know that those plovers' eggs form the turning-point of the tragedy, Peter?"

"Is it necessarily a tragedy?" Mallory asked.

"I fear so, unless comedy crosses it. Now, as to your intentions?"

"My fixed resolution is to make Zilla my wife."

"Quite so. I see your mind is absolutely made up on the point. And Zilla?"

"Loves me! In one of her indiscreet moments she confessed as much."

Beggarstaff made no reply for a few minutes. He seemed to dream in the smoke of his cigarette.

"Women are only women," he said presently. "But you will never marry Zilla; that is, if my theory be the correct one. You might as well go to the King, and demand the hand of a princess. The great Chinese Wall is as a box of bricks compared to the obstacles lying before you."

"Any fool can get over a wall with a ladder," Mallory said impatiently. "And I don't want you to try the sage business on me."

The seal of earnestness wrinkled Beggarstaff's forehead. His eyes were grave.

"I'm not," he said. "I am terribly in earnest! Most men would let you go to the devil in your own way, but I prefer to accompany you part of the journey. I am going to carry the ladder in fact. In other words, I am going to solve the mystery of the Yellow Girl for you, and leave the rest to Providence."

"That's exactly what I want you to do."

"Then we are agreed. You will attend Wednesday's symposium, of course?"

"I have not missed one for the past six months."

"Good. I am going to accompany you upon this occasion. Mind, I am to have a free hand in this matter, and, not being under the glamour of the siren, I am to treat her as I please. My mission is to find out who she is and where she comes from. You will procure me a ticket?"

"With pleasure, Paul; and you shall be my best-man."

Beggarstaff smiled in a significant manner. He shuddered from the head downwards.

"In a shirt of mail, then," he muttered. "This is an adventure after my own heart, mysterious, full of danger, rococo, almost fantastic. Mind, I merely surmise. A princess of the gutter, a beggar-maid in Belgravia. Which?"

Mallory rose. He was too deadly in earnest to jest.

"It is arranged for Wednesday, then?" he asked.

"I shall not fail you," Beggarstaff responded. "*À la bonne heure!*"

2: The First Stage

DESPITE Beggarstaff's frankness, Mallory's belief in the occultism of his friend was as yet concrete. And Mallory was still by way of being a rhapsodist. Even close commercial contact with the professional type of politician had not killed all the poetry that lay within him.

This he touched upon on the way to the New Bohemian. Beggarstaff laughed.

"Your mind is harping upon my startling knowledge concerning the loss of your jewels," said the latter. "You cannot understand whence came my information. What could be easier? Your sister told me. She came and asked me to recover them. And upon my word I almost fancy I am going to do so."

More Beggarstaff would not say. Even to a friend he could not wipe all the colour out of his reputation. Presently the cab stopped.

"We have got to get out here," Mallory explained. "It is one of our rules that no cab shall approach within three hundred yards of the hall. The reason is obvious. If the night is wet, why, there is an end of it."

Mallory led the way down a narrow but none the less respectable street, and turned finally into a paved yard. A flight of stone steps terminated in what appeared to be a large stable-loft. Once inside a vestibule, this prosaic suggestion vanished. The grouping of the palms and the arrangement of the drapery might have been Liberty's own handiwork, plus a daring eccentricity and head-strongness suggestive of the best Parisian instinct.

On either side were closed doors, obviously leading to dressing-rooms. The draperies, half-hanging, disclosed the dancing saloon, and beyond this, in a corridor, a glimpse of supper was afforded. Some threescore people were already dancing to excellent music provided by a party of the guests themselves.

Most of the people there were celebrities in their way— society leaders, a literary lion or two, some artists of repute.

Mallory nodded carelessly to one or another, for the majority were known to him, as indeed they were by sight to Beggarstaff also.

Gaiety rippled along the room like the song of a summer brook.

"A sight perfectly unique," Beggarstaff murmured— "nearly a hundred of the Celtic race together, and all actually enjoying themselves!"

A dazzling vision in diaphanous green, translucent as sea- foam, and fresh as Aphrodite smiling to the morn, came forward.

Beggarstaff knew the lady well. She was quite the latest success in the way of duchesses.

"Sage of Tyburn," she said imperiously, "you are going to waltz with me."

It came to Beggarstaff as it does to men past thirty sometimes, that life is fitfully worth the living. He allowed the flood- tide to carry him away. It was past eleven before he suddenly returned to a knowledge of himself— and the Yellow Girl.

There she was— close beside him. Dancing had ceased for the time, and would not be resumed till after supper. Beggarstaff gasped.

He could not mistake Mallory's description. It struck him now as being singularly apt. The afflatus of love had stood Peter in good stead over that prose poem. Those eyes were the closely guarded heritage of centuries. The face was Cleopatra's. Then— Well, Beggarstaff could not be quite sure. And yet the vision could have been moulded in no crucible forged later than the sere Victorian.

Three or four men stood round her. Her lips were gay with laughter, her conversation sparkled with happy felicities. Beggarstaff had never before met any woman with so perfect a mental equipment outside America. And yet the Yellow Girl was no American. Might as well mistake Kenilworth for a Fifth Avenue pork-palace.

At a sign from Mallory, Beggarstaff came forward. Evidently Peter had been speaking of him, for Zilla held out her hand with a smile and challenge in her eyes.

"They tell me you are a marvellous man," she cried.

"Then this meeting should go down to history," Beggarstaff suggested.

Some magnetic attraction about the pair seemed to bring others around them. And Zilla was in one of her brightest and most audacious moods. Here was a chance for the Sage to distinguish himself. Why should he not solve the enigma, explain who the Yellow Girl was, expound the *raison d'être* for the curious?

An impatient rustling of silks and laces followed this suggestion from the duchess. The cry was taken up by those standing around. Again Zilla flashed the challenge of those fathomless eyes full upon Beggarstaff.

"Come," she cried. "Come, sir, who am I?"

"That most mysterious of created things, a woman," said Beggarstaff.

"But what woman? Whence came I? Am I a sprite born of the gaslight, a miasma? Or am I but the triumph of the age of new women and machinery? Sir, you can no more tell, than— than a Cambridge professor."

"I can, and I will," Beggarstaff responded, "on one condition."

"Name it, and it is yours."

"That you take off your gloves, and show me one of your hands— the left one."

For the first time the dusky eyes fell. A creamy whiteness crept over Zilla's face.

"I have promised," she said, "and I must perform. Stand back, all of you. This does not concern anyone but the Sage and myself. Only, if he prove my master, I will let you know."

The flashing circle widened as Zilla proceeded to remove her glove. Then, with a sudden rush of passion in her face, she gave her palm to Beggarstaff. The hand was small, but shapely, yet the fingers were hard and horny, the forefinger scored to the bone. Beggarstaff bent over it to conceal the triumph on his lips.

"I suppose this is why you never sup," he whispered.

"Ah, I do sup. But you understand it is one of my whims never to remove my gloves. Dear Sage, Dear Master, do not press me any further.

"I do not intend to press you at all. What I have discovered will never be made known to these people here. Only you challenged me, and I had, perforce, to look to my reputation. But if I happened to meet— There! I will not torture you more. Why should I spoil your evening by relating what you already know? There are conditions, though."

Zilla's lips curved between tears and scorn.

"There are always conditions where a man and a beautiful woman are concerned," she said, "and especially, when the latter is at the mercy of the former. Go on."

"You are utterly mistaken. The Ego finds no place in the problem. You are ruining the life of my friend Mallory. The intrigue must cease."

"Intrigue! How dare you! From my soul I love the man."

"And yet to marry him is out of the question. But the wise man always temporises with the psychological woman, and I give you a fortnight: Smile, you lovely fool, smile, or God knows what people will think!"

Zilla burst into the most, musical of laughs. With a sweeping bow, she took up her glove, and replaced it on her hand.

"Good people," she cried. "I was mistaken. The seer knows everything. Let any one who wishes to feel humble throw down the same challenge."

The women gathered round Zilla, plying her with questions. With an eagerness he could ill conceal, Mallory drew Beggarstaff aside.

"You have fathomed the mystery?" he gasped.

"I have fathomed nothing," Beggarstaff responded. "And for the present I say nothing."

And Beggarstaff spoke the truth. He had put the nude surmise to the test, and found it clothed. But it was surmise, all the same.

When the drawing was complete, Mallory should see it, but not before. Already many of the guests, were passing under the green silk *portière* into the supper-room. Zilla flashed a backward glance at Beggarstaff. A sinuous streak of amber danced before him, a trail of indescribable perfume seemed like a track upon the air. In her moments of seductive devilry Zilla was irresistible.

"Carpe diem!" Beggarstaff muttered. "But I must not forget my mission, all the same."

He followed. Zilla had already taken a seat at a round table, and with a wave of her fan drew Mallory and the Sage on either side of her. The duchess was also there, with a famous comedian in her train. Diamonds flashed and glittered round the board; the flowers were a striking admixture of blood-red and white. Supper was of the plainest and the daintiest. There was only one wine— champagne.

Absolute freedom reigned. Zilla seemed to lead them all where she pleased. To Beggarstaff she was a new and delightful study. He rose at length from the table with a keen regret. Still, there was work to be done. As Zilla stood near him he placed his foot on the point of the dainty satin shoe, and twisted the same until the silken seams gaped in a tear.

"Clumsy!" Zilla cried. "See what you have done!"

She held up her little foot, which Beggarstaff examined gravely.

"It is so small," he pleaded. "But I will see what can be done."

As if it were the most natural thing in the world, he withdrew the shoe from Zilla's foot, and placed it on the table.

"That plate is all over jelly!" Zilla protested.

Beggarstaff took no heed. From the neck of a bottle of potass water he drew the wire, and straightened it between his fingers. Then he dexterously threaded it through the seam, and twisted the ends off neatly.

"There," he said, "now you can go and dance again. Not with me— with Mallory. I am going to stay here and smoke a cigarette."

But Beggarstaff did not remain there long. He saw Zilla presently slide out of the ballroom, flashing away when nobody heeded her departure. Into an empty bonbon box Beggarstaff poured the contents of a basin of sifted sugar. With this in his hand he threaded his way to the vestibule. Then he proceeded to dust the steps leading down to the courtyard with the sparkling powder. There was a dim corner of the vestibule where one might stand unseen.

Beggarstaff had not long to wait. Presently out of the dressing-room came the figure of a woman, a lady's maid perhaps. She wore a veil, and carried a letter in her hand. Nobody could have taken the demure figure for that of Zilla.

But Beggarstaff accepted no risks. He knew Zilla to be as elusive as a sunbeam, for was not secrecy everything to her? No sooner bad the maid disappeared than Beggarstaff examined the steps.

He caught up his hat and overcoat, struggling into the latter as he plunged for the night. On the sugar he had seen the print of the damaged satin slipper plainly. Once in the street he could see Zilla flitting along a hundred yards ahead. At a certain point she entered a cab, and the spy did the same with obvious intentions.

On and on they went back to civilisation, then through the uneasy, fitful slumber of the City, along towards the unknown East. Whitechapel came at length, and finally a street given over to the Chosen People.

There Zilla dismissed her cabman, and Beggarstaff did the same, at the outlay of a sovereign. Zilla appeared to be quite unconscious that she was being followed. By the fitful light of the gas Beggarstaff could see something in her hand, which he rightfully judged to be a latchkey. Before a little shop the girl paused.

At the same moment a hand, followed by an arm, shot out of the darkness and fastened with a snaky sinuousness around Beggarstaff's neck. He did not struggle. To do so would have merely rendered the garotte an accomplished feat. Despite his danger, Beggarstaff distinctly heard Zilla's key rattle in the lock.

"Spy!" hissed a voice in Beggarstaff's ear. "I know who you are following. If I gave the call, the rest of them would come and murder you. The girl's done you no harm."

The prisoner made no reply. He had estimated the strength of his opponent to an ounce. Once free, he had no fear of the other. With the point of his elbow he caught the ruffian under the ribs, knocking the breath out of his body.

Then Beggarstaff wrenched himself away. The wiry little antagonist gave a hoarse cry. Like a flash of light, Beggarstaff's fist crushed on the hooked nose of the other. A heap of black garments wriggled worm-like on the asphalt. The sound of hastening feet could be heard coming in that direction.

Beggarstaff darted away like an arrow from a bow. It was a time when discretion was the better part of valour. A "level time" man like himself had no difficulty in eluding pursuit. Once in the Whitechapel Road, Beggarstaff slackened. He lighted a cigarette, and proceeded to make his way home leisurely on foot.

"This is going to be a remarkable adventure," he said— , "a pearl of coincidences. I shall have no difficulty in remembering the name of the street and the house— Calcraft Lane, Whitechapel, *chez* Israel. What a romance!"

3: The Second Stage

"AND you call yourself a friend!" Mallory said reproachfully. "You promise to do certain things for me, and, instead, you keep out of my way for three days. But there! I know that Zilla would elude even your vigilance."

Beggarstaff smiled as he lay back in the chair. He had had a hard day's work, and had subsequently dined intelligently. There is no armour like a good dinner.

"I only combat three of your statements," he said. "I am a friend, I am going to perform all I promised, and Zilla did not elude my vigilance. Her name and address are as well known to me as if they were published in *Kelly's*."

"Wonderful man! Tell me how you managed it."

"I shall do nothing of the kind, Peter. A princess told me I was a wonderful man this morning because I solved a domestic problem for her. Really, the thing looked supernatural, and so it would have been had not the husband been to me on a side-issue of the same puzzle. Once for all, Peter, are you absolutely resolved to go through with this thing?"

"Nothing short of premature dissolution shall dissuade me."

"Even if the lady turns out to be a fascinating heroine with a ticket-of-leave in lieu of a pedigree?"

"If you were not Beggarstaff, what an ass you would make! I am resolved."

Beggarstaff smiled. He had expected no other reply.

"Very well," he said. "Presently we will make a journey into a far-off country. I am going to show you a kingdom within a kingdom; and I warn you that you will require all your courage. Now come with me."

So saying, Beggarstaff led the way up to his bedroom. From the wardrobe he took down two suits of clothes, bell-bottomed black trousers, double-breasted coats, and cloth caps with ear-flaps.

"Put yours on," he said. "Never mind about your shirt— the cleaner that is the better. And when you come to tie that queer cravat around the neck, minus a collar, you will be perfect. The collar as a civilising force is not fully appreciated."

Mallory examined himself dubiously in the glass.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "I do look a Yahoo! I'd no idea of the difference. But won't what the late Laureate called 'the merits of a spotless shirt' make—"

"No difference at all. Clean linen, when a gentleman of Alsatia is taking his pleasure, is quite indispensable of late. Now turn your collar up and we'll start, There's no reason why we shouldn't have a cab as far as Liverpool Street."

Once the latter point was reached the cab was dismissed, and collars turned down again. Mallory felt like a man plunged into another sphere. Mars might be as this. They dived deeper into the surge of struggling humanity. The narrow streets were thronged with people. Every shop glittered with points of flame. Mallory noted a new type in the features of those who jostled him, a prominence of nose, a dilation of the nostril.

"Jews every one," said Beggarstaff, "We are in the Ghetto. The Jew is the most marvellous thing in Nature. Other animals assimilate; even a change of climate often produces a change of creed; but look at these people after the lapse of nigh on two thousand years! And here we are in Calcraft Lane at last."

"Do you mean that we have reached our destination?"

"Yes; don't show yourself too openly. Now look into that window. I was here myself last night, and something there attracted my immediate attention. Inadvertently I might mention that this establishment belongs to one Benjamin Israel."

Mallory peered in behind the dusty panes. The window was filled with tawdry finery. Cheap silk dresses, gowns of superior make and finish, filtered down to the depths, the flag of femininity flaunted from West to East. Feathers there were in any quantity, and by them a case of genuine diamond rings.

"I see nothing to attract me here," said Mallory.

"Look again. Above that blue silk with the claret stain on it. A pair of yellow satin slippers. The sole of one is seamed by a wire. They are marked tenpence. And yet I warrant that Pinet did not part with them under forty francs."

"Zilla's!" Mallory gasped. "The pair she wore last Wednesday! I'd like to buy them!"

"Go in and do so. There is only one customer in the shop. Do nothing and say nothing till she has gone, because a great surprise awaits you. And if you are asked any questions, be discreetly silent as to your friend outside. I will wait for you."

With a fast-beating heart Mallory entered. A coster-girl was haggling over a heap of feathers with another girl behind the counter. The latter was clad in some homespun, without the semblance of an ornament. From the shadow Mallory watched her.

"Two shillings," said the purchaser; "not one penny more."

"My dear," came the shrill response, "you must be joking. A real ostrich feather for two bob! Do you want to ruin me! In the name of the Fathers, that feather cost two-and-three, I swear. From the bonnet of a princess, Rachel. Oh, I bought it myself from a house in Grosvenor Crescent. Rachel, half-a-crown."

The dark face was eager. The crystal essence of business shone in her eyes. A matter of life and death seemed to hang on that threepence. The purchaser sullenly assented.

"Well, I suppose I must," she said. "But you're a hard hand at a bargain, and you've got a rare wheedling tongue of your own. And you so rich, too."

"My dear, we are poor, so poor. That is all a joke of the neighbours. Stop! There is nothing more that I could show you! A ring, dear, a brooch, with a diamond—"

"Give me my change, and let me be off. You'd coax the heart out of me. Oh, you're a cunning one, you are! Ask any one down the Lane, and see."

The speaker grabbed up the coppers and flounced out of the shop. Then the assistant turned her attention to Mallory. He still stood in the shadow. The girl smiled, the coquettish siren smile, yet shrewd withal, that draws money everywhere.

Twice did the girl repeat her question ere Mallory replied. Then he strode forward, and caught the girl's hand with painful force in his.

"Zilla," he whispered— "Zilla, in the name of Heaven, what does this mean!"

A little cry broke from Zilla's lips. The beautiful face was white with terror. She trembled like a bird fresh to the hand of the fowler.

"Why— why did you come here?" she asked hoarsely.

"I was bound to come. You might have known that I would find you out sooner or later. Now I am here, you must tell me what this means."

Very slowly Zilla was recovering herself. Her bosom ceased to palpitate; the hot, red blood crept to her face again.

Yes; she was glad this man had found her out. There could be no playing with fire any more. She, the dainty and fastidious, took a pure joy in the appalling hideousness of her attire. He must be illuminated.

"What does it matter now?" she asked recklessly.

"It matters just the same, Zilla. I shall always love you."

"Wonderful— most wonderful! Do you know what I would do now if I had a revolver?"

"God knows!"

"Shoot you, and myself afterwards. I would indeed! It would be lovely for us to die together."

A flaming light seemed to burn luridly in Zilla's eyes.

"I tell you it is impossible," she cried passionately. "I am a Jewess. Oh, if you could but faintly grasp what that means! Do you know that I can trace my descent back to the Fathers! If you saw my grandfather you would understand

what a patriarch means. He would kill me before I wedded a Gentile; he would forfeit all his money first; and he loves that better than his soul."

"But this is a free country, Zilla—"

"I am not of your country, neither am I free. Even now we stand together in deadly peril. Do you suppose that I enjoy this life? Would *I* stay here if I could cut away the environment? But for the fleeting glimpses of the moon I should go mad. And now the moon has gone. You must never see me again after to-night."

Mallory passed behind the counter recklessly. He caught Zilla to his side, and covered her face with kisses. The girl floated along the tide like human flotsam carried on the crest of the storm. Her soul seemed to be fused in a smile.

"Oh, you fool!" she murmured. "You dear, dear, handsome fool!"

A cry of rage behind them rang to the greasy rafters. Mallory faced round upon what seemed to be the archetype of the ages. A man so old was he that the striking features were a mere mass of wrinkles criss-crossed in thousands of minute lines, and yet the skin was clear as ivory. Despite his years, the patriarch stood erect; the hot blood had tinged his bald scalp; His long beard seemed to be tossed by an angry wind.

"So this is what comes of your masquerading," he cried. "This is the end of your phantasm— a low intrigue with a Christian, a man of the people—"

"You are utterly mistaken," Mallory exclaimed. "I am a gentleman of title; my position can be easily defined. I could make your grandchild my wife if—"

The old man smiled with withering scorn.

"Truly, this is generosity," he said. "*You* marry my son's child— *you*! Rather would I take her by the throat and slay her! And when your forbears were tilling the soil, mine were masters of the universe. You shall never see the girl again, of that you may be certain. Go, I tell you; go before worse befalls you."

Ben Israel strode for the door, raising his voice as he went. Zilla stepped before Mallory. In passionate agitation she pointed to the street.

"Oh, be warned, be warned in time!" she cried. "If you care for me, if you have the least feeling, leave me. You are full young to die."

Mallory hesitated. He glanced at the old man, whose dilating nostrils showed the extent of the storm pent up within.

"I will go," he said, "but I shall see you again. If you think that in a free country like this you are going to fetter—"

He said no more, for Zilla flew at him like a tiger whose young is in danger. The force of the impact carried Mallory into the street, so that he stumbled and fell in the gutter. Then the door of the shop was banged to, the key rattled

in the lock, and the gas went out suddenly. Mallory stood there dazed, nor did he notice for a moment the hand of Beggarstaff on his shoulder.

4: The Journey's End

MALLORY swayed under the stress of his emotions. He was drunk with the turmoil of passion that fumed within. All these combined to promote cerebral intoxication. Naturally, wounded pride fought uppermost. Was he, Mallory of Mallory, to be flouted like this by a Hebrew old-clothes man! That the other's pride was as Aaron's rod compared with his the baronet did not realise.

"Are you absolutely mad?" Beggarstaff demanded sternly.

Mallory's arrested hand dropped to his side. Then he became conscious of a jagged flint in his fist. How it had got there was vague, its destination obvious. But Israel's window no longer stood in peril.

"If you had heard Moses declaiming!" Mallory protested.

"Peter, I heard every word. And I saw the patriarch. When you come to look at it in your calmer moments, you will realise his possession of the only point of view. And perhaps the absence of collar turned the scale. Your present appearance is not calculated to appeal to the better side of a Father in Israel."

"It can't possibly end here!" Mallory declared.

"Neither is it going to," Beggarstaff smiled significantly. "My glimpse of the old gentleman just now has merely precipitated matters. Would you be surprised to hear that Ben Israel is a patient of mine?"

"After what has happened I am surprised at nothing," said Mallory.

"Ah, in that case, you could be in no better mood for my purpose, The climax is at hand, the crux of the mystery in our grasp. You are still of the same mind?"

"I would commit crime to possess Zilla."

"Good! Then come on!"

And Beggarstaff coolly rang the bell by the door on the side of the shop. Mallory watched with admiration. A slatternly girl answered the summons. Beggarstaff placed a card in her hands.

"Take this to your master, and say I must see him at once."

The grimy one reappeared presently, and beckoned Beggarstaff to follow her.

He and Mallory passed up a grimy staircase, and from thence through baize doors into a softly-illuminated drawing-room.

There was no space in Mallory for astonishment, or he might have expressed surprise. The shaded lamps, the ferns, the pictures; nothing would have been out of place in Belgravia.

"Perfect!" Beggarstaff muttered. "Haroun al Raschid was a fool to me."

At the same moment Ben Israel entered. He bowed with a benign grace. He had lost all traces of his recent leonine passion. His manner was too distinctly old-world to betray any surprise at the guise of his visitors. Then his lips grew white as he recognised Mallory. Beggarstaff hastened to interfere.

"I was bound to bring my friend," he said. "Circumstances compel it. Rest assured he will not intrude here again."

"I am not afraid," Israel said significantly. "But your presence, sir—"

"Is intentional. You have a secluded paradise here."

"A whim of my granddaughter's. Weak mortal that I am, I deny her nothing; and yet if you only knew how she repaid me!"

"We will come to that presently," said Beggarstaff. "Call your granddaughter."

Beggarstaff spoke in tones of terse command. It was evident that Israel regarded his every word as pregnant with wisdom. The superstition which bade him consult the Sage still held him to the spell.

Zilla came up, hard, brilliant, her cheeks in red rebellion. She looked at Mallory, saying nothing. But she was as a polished diamond to Beggarstaff.

"I guessed I had to thank you for this," she said.

"I am afraid you will have to thank me for a great deal more," said Beggarstaff in his most caustic manner. "My story is not long, but it is none the less interesting for that. I must say that some time ago Ben Israel came to consult me on a professional matter. During that past year from time to time he has been missing jewels from a safe. I could not divine the thief then, but I undertook to do so within a certain time, and I have done so."

"You found me out here, and after that you could do anything," Ben Israel said, with a note of admiration in his voice. "I was in despair at my loss, for the key of the safe never left me. Tell me."

"I will tell you in a word. The thief stands there—"

He indicated Zilla with a gesture. The girl smiled. With some difficulty Mallory restrained his feelings.

"It would be better to own this," Beggarstaff proceeded, "because I know where the gems have been disposed of."

Zilla stood calmly forward. Her face was stern and set. Beyond the lurid red on her cheeks she had her team of Furies well in hand.

"I am not going to deny it," she said. "Why should I? What do I owe my grandfather? My mother had money of her own, but I have never had a *maravedi* of it."

"Two hundred a year on your education for five years," Israel snarled. "A fortune!"

"And not one penny since. Why, I have made more than that in the shop. Did you suppose that with my intellect and beauty I was going to live and die here? And that old man is worth thousands and thousands— the richest Hebrew in the Ghetto. Half the jewels of half the families in Mayfair are stored here.

"I had tasted of better things, I had picked up the ways and manners of the great world, I have played my part in it. You gentlemen can testify to my powers. I did rob him— I robbed him when he slept. And as to the select gathering we know of I bought my ticket from a member who came here once to pledge some cider-cups. Yes; we have seen titled people here.

"My education, my intellect, my vast and general reading, are all my own. As to dress. Worth and Jouvin, and Redfern are responsible. I robbed my grandfather to pay for it, and I would do it again."

Zilla paused for breath, and then she proceeded rapidly.

"I lived, I had to live— my soul was perishing here. But for those changes, I should have killed him and destroyed myself afterwards. Is it so strange that I should be what I am? Look at my purity of race; remember that no girl could possibly have been better educated than I; wit, beauty, and ambition were mine. I am the Phoenix risen from the garbage of this place. And I am not ashamed."

Ben Israel burst out furiously. The recollection of his losses aroused all the gall in his nature. The listeners could not follow the storm for want of a knowledge of the language. It was a tempest of words, a devastation of lightning glances, all the wild oratory that comes from majestic wrath.

Then the Hebrew paused, spent and trembling with the anticyclone.

"What does he mean?" Mallory asked.

"Simply that he disowns me. He curses me," said Zilla. "A Christian cannot understand. And I could have robbed him more had I chosen. Look here."

She drew aside a panelled slide from a sideboard, and disclosed a safe.

"A fortune is there," she said, "and I have the key of that."

With a cry, Israel darted forward, trembling like a mother who sees a nursling of hers in danger. Beggarstaff took up a wax candle from a table, and lighted it, as Israel threw back the ponderous iron door. He beckoned Mallory to his side. There were scores of velvet cases in the safe. Then it was Mallory's turn to cry out. Darting his hand forward, he withdrew a green case with a crest and monogram stamped in gold thereon.

"Where did you get this?" he demanded sternly.

"And what right have you to ask?" came the ready response.

"A fair one, I take it," Beggarstaff said drily. "I may as well tell you, Israel, that my friend's proper designation is Sir Peter Mallory."

Israel looked from one to the other. A senile cunning had crept into his face. The dignity of the patriarch remained as an outraged memory. The features became so old and worn and pitiful that Mallory was touched.

"You old rascal!" he exclaimed. "These diamonds are my own property. They were stolen from my town house some time ago. How did you get them?"

"I think mine is the fitter state of mind to give the solution," said Beggarstaff. "Our friend here deals in stolen goods of the highest class. When he came to see me I surmised something of the kind at the time. No man could have been in so abject a state of terror as he was over a mere loss. For my own sake I made inquiries here. I found Israel dubbed a millionaire and a miser. That he has confederates I had physical proofs a while ago. But until to-night I was not absolutely certain of my man. I came here to denounce yonder young lady, because after the New Bohemian adventure, I could give a pretty good guess who stole the jewels. The fact is, I surmised Israel had a monomania for jewels, and would retain the stones. I was right. I could not be certain yours were here, Mallory, but I played up to it on the off chance. Did I not tell you that this was going to prove a most remarkable adventure?"

Zilla came forward hastily.

"On my word I am innocent of this knowledge!" she said.

Obviously she spoke the truth. It was impossible to look in her face and doubt. Israel crouched miserably in a chair, waiting for his sentence.

"Zilla," said Mallory, "I am of the same mind still."

"But the religious element," suggested Beggarstaff.

Zilla smiled through a mist of tears.

"Woman has but one religion," she said; "and there is the man who taught me. So long as I have him, the rest is nothing."

Beggarstaff turned sternly to Ben Israel.

"You hear that," he said. "You can dispose of your ill-gotten property as you please, but you are going to consent with a good grace. And you are going to lay your hand on the head of your son's child and pray for her happiness."

"Give me till to-morrow," Israel pleaded. "My curses I recall willingly. Am I to be outdone in clemency by a mere Christian? But as to the rest, I am an old, old man, and you do not know what you ask."

IT was well into the marrow of the morning, and a cab stood at Mallory's door. Out of it stepped Zilla, sweet and chastened, a dream in black lace. Mallory congratulated himself on the fact of his sister's presence.

"Zilla," he exclaimed—. "Zilla as I always see her—"

"And always will, Peter. My grandfather died in the night; they found him dead in his bed this morning. And I have come to you."

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23: The Hole In The Wall

G. K. Chesterton

1874-1936

Cassell's Magazine, Sep 1921

Although best known for his "Father Brown" series of detective stories, the author had at least two other series characters. This story is from his series of stories featuring Horne Fisher, which was collected in 1922 in the volume "The Man Who Knew Too Much". (The Alfred Hitchcock film which appeared some years later has no relation to the Chesterton stories.)

TWO MEN, the one an architect and the other an archaeologist, met on the steps of the great house at Prior's Park; and their host, Lord Bulmer, in his breezy way, thought it natural to introduce them. It must be confessed that he was hazy as well as breezy, and had no very clear connection in his mind, beyond the sense that an architect and an archaeologist begin with the same series of letters. The world must remain in a reverent doubt as to whether he would, on the same principles, have presented a diplomatist to a dipsomaniac or a ratiocinator to a rat catcher. He was a big, fair, bull-necked young man, abounding in outward gestures, unconsciously flapping his gloves and flourishing his stick.

"You two ought to have something to talk about," he said, cheerfully. "Old buildings and all that sort of thing; this is rather an old building, by the way, though I say it who shouldn't. I must ask you to excuse me a moment; I've got to go and see about the cards for this Christmas romp my sister's arranging. We hope to see you all there, of course. Juliet wants it to be a fancy-dress affair— abbots and crusaders and all that. My ancestors, I suppose, after all."

"I trust the abbot was not an ancestor," said the archaeological gentleman, with a smile.

"Only a sort of great-uncle, I imagine," answered the other, laughing; then his rather rambling eye rolled round the ordered landscape in front of the house; an artificial sheet of water ornamented with an antiquated nymph in the center and surrounded by a park of tall trees now gray and black and frosty, for it was in the depth of a severe winter.

"It's getting jolly cold," his lordship continued. "My sister hopes we shall have some skating as well as dancing."

"If the crusaders come in full armor," said the other, "you must be careful not to drown your ancestors."

"Oh, there's no fear of that," answered Bulmer; "this precious lake of ours is not two feet deep anywhere." And with one of his flourishing gestures he stuck his stick into the water to demonstrate its shallowness. They could see

the short end bent in the water, so that he seemed for a moment to lean his large weight on a breaking staff.

"The worst you can expect is to see an abbot sit down rather suddenly," he added, turning away. "Well, au revoir; I'll let you know about it later."

The archaeologist and the architect were left on the great stone steps smiling at each other; but whatever their common interests, they presented a considerable personal contrast, and the fanciful might even have found some contradiction in each considered individually. The former, a Mr. James Haddow, came from a drowsy den in the Inns of Court, full of leather and parchment, for the law was his profession and history only his hobby; he was indeed, among other things, the solicitor and agent of the Prior's Park estate. But he himself was far from drowsy and seemed remarkably wide awake, with shrewd and prominent blue eyes, and red hair brushed as neatly as his very neat costume. The latter, whose name was Leonard Crane, came straight from a crude and almost cockney office of builders and house agents in the neighboring suburb, sunning itself at the end of a new row of jerry-built houses with plans in very bright colors and notices in very large letters. But a serious observer, at a second glance, might have seen in his eyes something of that shining sleep that is called vision; and his yellow hair, while not affectedly long, was unaffectedly untidy. It was a manifest if melancholy truth that the architect was an artist. But the artistic temperament was far from explaining him; there was something else about him that was not definable, but which some even felt to be dangerous. Despite his dreaminess, he would sometimes surprise his friends with arts and even sports apart from his ordinary life, like memories of some previous existence. On this occasion, nevertheless, he hastened to disclaim any authority on the other man's hobby.

"I mustn't appear on false pretences," he said, with a smile. "I hardly even know what an archaeologist is, except that a rather rusty remnant of Greek suggests that he is a man who studies old things."

"Yes," replied Haddow, grimly. "An archaeologist is a man who studies old things and finds they are new."

Crane looked at him steadily for a moment and then smiled again.

"Dare one suggest," he said, "that some of the things we have been talking about are among the old things that turn out not to be old?"

His companion also was silent for a moment, and the smile on his rugged face was fainter as he replied, quietly:

"The wall round the park is really old. The one gate in it is Gothic, and I cannot find any trace of destruction or restoration. But the house and the estate generally— well the romantic ideas read into these things are often rather recent romances, things almost like fashionable novels. For instance,

the very name of this place, Prior's Park, makes everybody think of it as a moonlit mediaeval abbey; I dare say the spiritualists by this time have discovered the ghost of a monk there. But, according to the only authoritative study of the matter I can find, the place was simply called Prior's as any rural place is called Podger's. It was the house of a Mr. Prior, a farmhouse, probably, that stood here at some time or other and was a local landmark. Oh, there are a great many examples of the same thing, here and everywhere else. This suburb of ours used to be a village, and because some of the people slurred the name and pronounced it Holliwell, many a minor poet indulged in fancies about a Holy Well, with spells and fairies and all the rest of it, filling the suburban drawing-rooms with the Celtic twilight. Whereas anyone acquainted with the facts knows that 'Hollinwall' simply means 'the hole in the wall,' and probably referred to some quite trivial accident. That's what I mean when I say that we don't so much find old things as we find new ones."

Crane seemed to have grown somewhat inattentive to the little lecture on antiquities and novelties, and the cause of his restlessness was soon apparent, and indeed approaching. Lord Bulmer's sister, Juliet Bray, was coming slowly across the lawn, accompanied by one gentleman and followed by two others. The young architect was in the illogical condition of mind in which he preferred three to one.

The man walking with the lady was no other than the eminent Prince Borodino, who was at least as famous as a distinguished diplomatist ought to be, in the interests of what is called secret diplomacy. He had been paying a round of visits at various English country houses, and exactly what he was doing for diplomacy at Prior's Park was as much a secret as any diplomatist could desire. The obvious thing to say of his appearance was that he would have been extremely handsome if he had not been entirely bald. But, indeed, that would itself be a rather bald way of putting it. Fantastic as it sounds, it would fit the case better to say that people would have been surprised to see hair growing on him; as surprised as if they had found hair growing on the bust of a Roman emperor. His tall figure was buttoned up in a tight-waisted fashion that rather accentuated his potential bulk, and he wore a red flower in his buttonhole. Of the two men walking behind one was also bald, but in a more partial and also a more premature fashion, for his drooping mustache was still yellow, and if his eyes were somewhat heavy it was with languor and not with age. It was Horne Fisher, and he was talking as easily and idly about everything as he always did. His companion was a more striking, and even more sinister, figure, and he had the added importance of being Lord Bulmer's oldest and most intimate friend. He was generally known with a severe simplicity as Mr. Brain; but it was understood that he had been a judge and police official in

India, and that he had enemies, who had represented his measures against crime as themselves almost criminal. He was a brown skeleton of a man with dark, deep, sunken eyes and a black mustache that hid the meaning of his mouth. Though he had the look of one wasted by some tropical disease, his movements were much more alert than those of his lounging companion.

"It's all settled," announced the lady, with great animation, when they came within hailing distance. "You've all got to put on masquerade things and very likely skates as well, though the prince says they don't go with it; but we don't care about that. It's freezing already, and we don't often get such a chance in England."

"Even in India we don't exactly skate all the year round," observed Mr. Brain.

"And even Italy is not primarily associated with ice," said the Italian.

"Italy is primarily associated with ices," remarked Mr. Horne Fisher. "I mean with ice cream men. Most people in this country imagine that Italy is entirely populated with ice cream men and organ grinders. There certainly are a lot of them; perhaps they're an invading army in disguise."

"How do you know they are not the secret emissaries of our diplomacy?" asked the prince, with a slightly scornful smile. "An army of organ grinders might pick up hints, and their monkeys might pick up all sort of things."

"The organs are organized in fact," said the flippant Mr. Fisher. "Well, I've known it pretty cold before now in Italy and even in India, up on the Himalayan slopes. The ice on our own little round pond will be quite cozy by comparison."

Juliet Bray was an attractive lady with dark hair and eyebrows and dancing eyes, and there was a geniality and even generosity in her rather imperious ways. In most matters she could command her brother, though that nobleman, like many other men of vague ideas, was not without a touch of the bully when he was at bay. She could certainly command her guests, even to the extent of decking out the most respectable and reluctant of them with her mediaeval masquerade. And it really seemed as if she could command the elements also, like a witch. For the weather steadily hardened and sharpened; that night the ice of the lake, glimmering in the moonlight, was like a marble floor, and they had begun to dance and skate on it before it was dark.

Prior's Park, or, more properly, the surrounding district of Holinwall, was a country seat that had become a suburb; having once had only a dependent village at its doors, it now found outside all its doors the signals of the expansion of London. Mr. Haddow, who was engaged in historical researches both in the library and the locality, could find little assistance in the latter. He

had already realized, from the documents, that Prior's Park had originally been something like Prior's Farm, named after some local figure, but the new social conditions were all against his tracing the story by its traditions. Had any of the real rustics remained, he would probably have found some lingering legend of Mr. Prior, however remote he might be. But the new nomadic population of clerks and artisans, constantly shifting their homes from one suburb to another, or their children from one school to another, could have no corporate continuity. They had all that forgetfulness of history that goes everywhere with the extension of education.

Nevertheless, when he came out of the library next morning and saw the wintry trees standing round the frozen pond like a black forest, he felt he might well have been far in the depths of the country. The old wall running round the park kept that inclosure itself still entirely rural and romantic, and one could easily imagine that the depths of that dark forest faded away indefinitely into distant vales and hills. The gray and black and silver of the wintry wood were all the more severe or somber as a contrast to the colored carnival groups that already stood on and around the frozen pool. For the house party had already flung themselves impatiently into fancy dress, and the lawyer, with his neat black suit and red hair, was the only modern figure among them.

"Aren't you going to dress up?" asked Juliet, indignantly shaking at him a horned and towering blue headdress of the fourteenth century which framed her face very becomingly, fantastic as it was. "Everybody here has to be in the Middle Ages. Even Mr. Brain has put on a sort of brown dressing gown and says he's a monk; and Mr. Fisher got hold of some old potato sacks in the kitchen and sewed them together; he's supposed to be a monk, too. As to the prince, he's perfectly glorious, in great crimson robes as a cardinal. He looks as if he could poison everybody. You simply must be something."

"I will be something later in the day," he replied. "At present I am nothing but an antiquary and an attorney. I have to see your brother presently, about some legal business and also some local investigations he asked me to make. I must look a little like a steward when I give an account of my stewardship."

"Oh, but my brother has dressed up!" cried the girl. "Very much so. No end, if I may say so. Why he's bearing down on you now in all his glory."

The noble lord was indeed marching toward them in a magnificent sixteenth-century costume of purple and gold, with a gold-hilted sword and a plumed cap, and manners to match. Indeed, there was something more than his usual expansiveness of bodily action in his appearance at that moment. It almost seemed, so to speak, that the plumes on his hat had gone to his head. He flapped his great, gold-lined cloak like the wings of a fairy king in a

pantomime; he even drew his sword with a flourish and waved it about as he did his walking stick. In the light of after events there seemed to be something monstrous and ominous about that exuberance, something of the spirit that is called fey. At the time it merely crossed a few people's minds that he might possibly be drunk.

As he strode toward his sister the first figure he passed was that of Leonard Crane, clad in Lincoln green, with the horn and baldrick and sword appropriate to Robin Hood; for he was standing nearest to the lady, where, indeed, he might have been found during a disproportionate part of the time. He had displayed one of his buried talents in the matter of skating, and now that the skating was over seemed disposed to prolong the partnership. The boisterous Bulmer playfully made a pass at him with his drawn sword, going forward with the lunge in the proper fencing fashion, and making a somewhat too familiar Shakespearean quotation about a rodent and a Venetian coin.

Probably in Crane also there was a subdued excitement just then; anyhow, in one flash he had drawn his own sword and parried; and then suddenly, to the surprise of everyone, Bulmer's weapon seemed to spring out of his hand into the air and rolled away on the ringing ice.

"Well, I never!" said the lady, as if with justifiable indignation. "You never told me you could fence, too."

Bulmer put up his sword with an air rather bewildered than annoyed, which increased the impression of something irresponsible in his mood at the moment; then he turned rather abruptly to his lawyer, saying:

"We can settle up about the estate after dinner; I've missed nearly all the skating as it is, and I doubt if the ice will hold till to-morrow night. I think I shall get up early and have a spin by myself."

"You won't be disturbed with my company," said Horne Fisher, in his weary fashion. "If I have to begin the day with ice, in the American fashion, I prefer it in smaller quantities. But no early hours for me in December. The early bird catches the cold."

"Oh, I shan't die of catching a cold," answered Bulmer, and laughed.

A CONSIDERABLE group of the skating party had consisted of the guests staying at the house, and the rest had tailed off in twos and threes some time before most of the guests began to retire for the night. Neighbors, always invited to Prior's Park on such occasions, went back to their own houses in motors or on foot; the legal and archeological gentleman had returned to the Inns of Court by a late train, to get a paper called for during his consultation with his client; and most of the other guests were drifting and lingering at various stages on their way up to bed. Horne Fisher, as if to deprive himself of

any excuse for his refusal of early rising, had been the first to retire to his room; but, sleepy as he looked, he could not sleep. He had picked up from a table the book of antiquarian topography, in which Haddow had found his first hints about the origin of the local name, and, being a man with a quiet and quaint capacity for being interested in anything, he began to read it steadily, making notes now and then of details on which his previous reading left him with a certain doubt about his present conclusions. His room was the one nearest to the lake in the center of the woods, and was therefore the quietest, and none of the last echoes of the evening's festivity could reach him. He had followed carefully the argument which established the derivation from Mr. Prior's farm and the hole in the wall, and disposed of any fashionable fancy about monks and magic wells, when he began to be conscious of a noise audible in the frozen silence of the night. It was not a particularly loud noise, but it seemed to consist of a series of thuds or heavy blows, such as might be struck on a wooden door by a man seeking to enter. They were followed by something like a faint creak or crack, as if the obstacle had either been opened or had given way. He opened his own bedroom door and listened, but as he heard talk and laughter all over the lower floors, he had no reason to fear that a summons would be neglected or the house left without protection. He went to his open window, looking out over the frozen pond and the moonlit statue in the middle of their circle of darkling woods, and listened again. But silence had returned to that silent place, and, after straining his ears for a considerable time, he could hear nothing but the solitary hoot of a distant departing train. Then he reminded himself how many nameless noises can be heard by the wakeful during the most ordinary night, and shrugging his shoulders, went wearily to bed.

He awoke suddenly and sat up in bed with his ears filled, as with thunder, with the throbbing echoes of a rending cry. He remained rigid for a moment, and then sprang out of bed, throwing on the loose gown of sacking he had worn all day. He went first to the window, which was open, but covered with a thick curtain, so that his room was still completely dark; but when he tossed the curtain aside and put his head out, he saw that a gray and silver daybreak had already appeared behind the black woods that surrounded the little lake, and that was all that he did see. Though the sound had certainly come in through the open window from this direction, the whole scene was still and empty under the morning light as under the moonlight. Then the long, rather lackadaisical hand he had laid on a window sill gripped it tighter, as if to master a tremor, and his peering blue eyes grew bleak with fear. It may seem that his emotion was exaggerated and needless, considering the effort of common sense by which he had conquered his nervousness about the noise on the

previous night. But that had been a very different sort of noise. It might have been made by half a hundred things, from the chopping of wood to the breaking of bottles. There was only one thing in nature from which could come the sound that echoed through the dark house at daybreak. It was the awful articulate voice of man; and it was something worse, for he knew what man.

He knew also that it had been a shout for help. It seemed to him that he had heard the very word; but the word, short as it was, had been swallowed up, as if the man had been stifled or snatched away even as he spoke. Only the mocking reverberations of it remained even in his memory, but he had no doubt of the original voice. He had no doubt that the great bull's voice of Francis Bray, Baron Bulmer, had been heard for the last time between the darkness and the lifting dawn.

How long he stood there he never knew, but he was startled into life by the first living thing that he saw stirring in that half-frozen landscape. Along the path beside the lake, and immediately under his window, a figure was walking slowly and softly, but with great composure— a stately figure in robes of a splendid scarlet; it was the Italian prince, still in his cardinal's costume. Most of the company had indeed lived in their costumes for the last day or two, and Fisher himself had assumed his frock of sacking as a convenient dressing gown; but there seemed, nevertheless, something unusually finished and formal, in the way of an early bird, about this magnificent red cockatoo. It was as if the early bird had been up all night.

"What is the matter?" he called, sharply, leaning out of the window, and the Italian turned up his great yellow face like a mask of brass.

"We had better discuss it downstairs," said Prince Borodino.

Fisher ran downstairs, and encountered the great, red-robed figure entering the doorway and blocking the entrance with his bulk.

"Did you hear that cry?" demanded Fisher.

"I heard a noise and I came out," answered the diplomatist, and his face was too dark in the shadow for its expression to be read.

"It was Bulmer's voice," insisted Fisher. "I'll swear it was Bulmer's voice."

"Did you know him well?" asked the other.

The question seemed irrelevant, though it was not illogical, and Fisher could only answer in a random fashion that he knew Lord Bulmer only slightly.

"Nobody seems to have known him well," continued the Italian, in level tones. "Nobody except that man Brain. Brain is rather older than Bulmer, but I fancy they shared a good many secrets."

Fisher moved abruptly, as if waking from a momentary trance, and said, in a new and more vigorous voice, "But look here, hadn't we better get outside and see if anything has happened."

"The ice seems to be thawing," said the other, almost with indifference.

When they emerged from the house, dark stains and stars in the gray field of ice did indeed indicate that the frost was breaking up, as their host had prophesied the day before, and the very memory of yesterday brought back the mystery of to-day.

"He knew there would be a thaw," observed the prince. "He went out skating quite early on purpose. Did he call out because he landed in the water, do you think?"

Fisher looked puzzled. "Bulmer was the last man to bellow like that because he got his boots wet. And that's all he could do here; the water would hardly come up to the calf of a man of his size. You can see the flat weeds on the floor of the lake, as if it were through a thin pane of glass. No, if Bulmer had only broken the ice he wouldn't have said much at the moment, though possibly a good deal afterward. We should have found him stamping and damning up and down this path, and calling for clean boots."

"Let us hope we shall find him as happily employed," remarked the diplomatist. "In that case the voice must have come out of the wood."

"I'll swear it didn't come out of the house," said Fisher; and the two disappeared together into the twilight of wintry trees.

The plantation stood dark against the fiery colors of sunrise, a black fringe having that feathery appearance which makes trees when they are bare the very reverse of rugged. Hours and hours afterward, when the same dense, but delicate, margin was dark against the greenish colors opposite the sunset, the search thus begun at sunrise had not come to an end. By successive stages, and to slowly gathering groups of the company, it became apparent that the most extraordinary of all gaps had appeared in the party; the guests could find no trace of their host anywhere. The servants reported that his bed had been slept in and his skates and his fancy costume were gone, as if he had risen early for the purpose he had himself avowed. But from the top of the house to the bottom, from the walls round the park to the pond in the center, there was no trace of Lord Bulmer, dead or alive. Horne Fisher realized that a chilling premonition had already prevented him from expecting to find the man alive. But his bald brow was wrinkled over an entirely new and unnatural problem, in not finding the man at all.

He considered the possibility of Bulmer having gone off of his own accord, for some reason; but after fully weighing it he finally dismissed it. It was inconsistent with the unmistakable voice heard at daybreak, and with many

other practical obstacles. There was only one gateway in the ancient and lofty wall round the small park; the lodge keeper kept it locked till late in the morning, and the lodge keeper had seen no one pass. Fisher was fairly sure that he had before him a mathematical problem in an inclosed space. His instinct had been from the first so attuned to the tragedy that it would have been almost a relief to him to find the corpse. He would have been grieved, but not horrified, to come on the nobleman's body dangling from one of his own trees as from a gibbet, or floating in his own pool like a pallid weed. What horrified him was to find nothing.

He soon become conscious that he was not alone even in his most individual and isolated experiments. He often found a figure following him like his shadow, in silent and almost secret clearings in the plantation or outlying nooks and corners of the old wall. The dark-mustached mouth was as mute as the deep eyes were mobile, darting incessantly hither and thither, but it was clear that Brain of the Indian police had taken up the trail like an old hunter after a tiger. Seeing that he was the only personal friend of the vanished man, this seemed natural enough, and Fisher resolved to deal frankly with him.

"This silence is rather a social strain," he said. "May I break the ice by talking about the weather?— which, by the way, has already broken the ice. I know that breaking the ice might be a rather melancholy metaphor in this case."

"I don't think so," replied Brain, shortly. "I don't fancy the ice had much to do with it. I don't see how it could."

"What would you propose doing?" asked Fisher.

"Well, we've sent for the authorities, of course, but I hope to find something out before they come," replied the Anglo-Indian. "I can't say I have much hope from police methods in this country. Too much red tape, habeas corpus and that sort of thing. What we want is to see that nobody bolts; the nearest we could get to it would be to collect the company and count them, so to speak. Nobody's left lately, except that lawyer who was poking about for antiquities."

"Oh, he's out of it; he left last night," answered the other. "Eight hours after Bulmer's chauffeur saw his lawyer off by the train I heard Bulmer's own voice as plain as I hear yours now."

"I suppose you don't believe in spirits?" said the man from India. After a pause he added: "There's somebody else I should like to find, before we go after a fellow with an alibi in the Inner Temple. What's become of that fellow in green— the architect dressed up as a forester? I haven't seem him about."

Mr. Brain managed to secure his assembly of all the distracted company before the arrival of the police. But when he first began to comment once

more on the young architect's delay in putting in an appearance, he found himself in the presence of a minor mystery, and a psychological development of an entirely unexpected kind.

Juliet Bray had confronted the catastrophe of her brother's disappearance with a somber stoicism in which there was, perhaps, more paralysis than pain; but when the other question came to the surface she was both agitated and angry.

"We don't want to jump to any conclusions about anybody," Brain was saying in his staccato style. "But we should like to know a little more about Mr. Crane. Nobody seems to know much about him, or where he comes from. And it seems a sort of coincidence that yesterday he actually crossed swords with poor Bulmer, and could have stuck him, too, since he showed himself the better swordsman. Of course, that may be an accident and couldn't possibly be called a case against anybody; but then we haven't the means to make a real case against anybody. Till the police come we are only a pack of very amateur sleuthhounds."

"And I think you're a pack of snobs," said Juliet. "Because Mr. Crane is a genius who's made his own way, you try to suggest he's a murderer without daring to say so. Because he wore a toy sword and happened to know how to use it, you want us to believe he used it like a bloodthirsty maniac for no reason in the world. And because he could have hit my brother and didn't, you deduce that he did. That's the sort of way you argue. And as for his having disappeared, you're wrong in that as you are in everything else, for here he comes."

And, indeed, the green figure of the fictitious Robin Hood slowly detached itself from the gray background of the trees, and came toward them as she spoke.

He approached the group slowly, but with composure; but he was decidedly pale, and the eyes of Brain and Fisher had already taken in one detail of the green-clad figure more clearly than all the rest. The horn still swung from his baldrick, but the sword was gone.

Rather to the surprise of the company, Brain did not follow up the question thus suggested; but, while retaining an air of leading the inquiry, had also an appearance of changing the subject.

"Now we're all assembled," he observed, quietly, "there is a question I want to ask to begin with. Did anybody here actually see Lord Bulmer this morning?"

Leonard Crane turned his pale face round the circle of faces till he came to Juliet's; then he compressed his lips a little and said:

"Yes, I saw him."

"Was he alive and well?" asked Brain, quickly. "How was he dressed?"

"He appeared exceedingly well," replied Crane, with a curious intonation. "He was dressed as he was yesterday, in that purple costume copied from the portrait of his ancestor in the sixteenth century. He had his skates in his hand."

"And his sword at his side, I suppose," added the questioner. "Where is your own sword, Mr. Crane?"

"I threw it away."

In the singular silence that ensued, the train of thought in many minds became involuntarily a series of colored pictures.

They had grown used to their fanciful garments looking more gay and gorgeous against the dark gray and streaky silver of the forest, so that the moving figures glowed like stained-glass saints walking. The effect had been more fitting because so many of them had idly parodied pontifical or monastic dress. But the most arresting attitude that remained in their memories had been anything but merely monastic; that of the moment when the figure in bright green and the other in vivid violet had for a moment made a silver cross of their crossing swords. Even when it was a jest it had been something of a drama; and it was a strange and sinister thought that in the gray daybreak the same figures in the same posture might have been repeated as a tragedy.

"Did you quarrel with him?" asked Brain, suddenly.

"Yes," replied the immovable man in green. "Or he quarreled with me."

"Why did he quarrel with you?" asked the investigator; and Leonard Crane made no reply.

Horne Fisher, curiously enough, had only given half his attention to this crucial cross-examination. His heavy-lidded eyes had languidly followed the figure of Prince Borodino, who at this stage had strolled away toward the fringe of the wood; and, after a pause, as of meditation, had disappeared into the darkness of the trees.

He was recalled from his irrelevance by the voice of Juliet Bray, which rang out with an altogether new note of decision:

"If that is the difficulty, it had best be cleared up. I am engaged to Mr. Crane, and when we told my brother he did not approve of it; that is all."

Neither Brain nor Fisher exhibited any surprise, but the former added, quietly:

"Except, I suppose, that he and your brother went off into the wood to discuss it, where Mr. Crane mislaid his sword, not to mention his companion."

"And may I ask," inquired Crane, with a certain flicker of mockery passing over his pallid features, "what I am supposed to have done with either of them? Let us adopt the cheerful thesis that I am a murderer; it has yet to be shown that I am a magician. If I ran your unfortunate friend through the body,

what did I do with the body? Did I have it carried away by seven flying dragons, or was it merely a trifling matter of turning it into a milk-white hind?"

"It is no occasion for sneering," said the Anglo-Indian judge, with abrupt authority. "It doesn't make it look better for you that you can joke about the loss."

Fisher's dreamy, and even dreary, eye was still on the edge of the wood behind, and he became conscious of masses of dark red, like a stormy sunset cloud, glowing through the gray network of the thin trees, and the prince in his cardinal's robes reemerged on to the pathway. Brain had had half a notion that the prince might have gone to look for the lost rapier. But when he reappeared he was carrying in his hand, not a sword, but an ax.

The incongruity between the masquerade and the mystery had created a curious psychological atmosphere. At first they had all felt horribly ashamed at being caught in the foolish disguises of a festival, by an event that had only too much the character of a funeral. Many of them would have already gone back and dressed in clothes that were more funereal or at least more formal. But somehow at the moment this seemed like a second masquerade, more artificial and frivolous than the first. And as they reconciled themselves to their ridiculous trappings, a curious sensation had come over some of them, notably over the more sensitive, like Crane and Fisher and Juliet, but in some degree over everybody except the practical Mr. Brain. It was almost as if they were the ghosts of their own ancestors haunting that dark wood and dismal lake, and playing some old part that they only half remembered. The movements of those colored figures seemed to mean something that had been settled long before, like a silent heraldry. Acts, attitudes, external objects, were accepted as an allegory even without the key; and they knew when a crisis had come, when they did not know what it was. And somehow they knew subconsciously that the whole tale had taken a new and terrible turn, when they saw the prince stand in the gap of the gaunt trees, in his robes of angry crimson and with his lowering face of bronze, bearing in his hand a new shape of death. They could not have named a reason, but the two swords seemed indeed to have become toy swords and the whole tale of them broken and tossed away like a toy. Borodino looked like the Old World headsman, clad in terrible red, and carrying the ax for the execution of the criminal. And the criminal was not Crane.

Mr. Brain of the Indian police was glaring at the new object, and it was a moment or two before he spoke, harshly and almost hoarsely.

"What are you doing with that?" he asked. "Seems to be a woodman's chopper."

"A natural association of ideas," observed Horne Fisher. "If you meet a cat in a wood you think it's a wildcat, though it may have just strolled from the drawing-room sofa. As a matter of fact, I happen to know that is not the woodman's chopper. It's the kitchen chopper, or meat ax, or something like that, that somebody has thrown away in the wood. I saw it in the kitchen myself when I was getting the potato sacks with which I reconstructed a mediaeval hermit."

"All the same, it is not without interest," remarked the prince, holding out the instrument to Fisher, who took it and examined it carefully. "A butcher's cleaver that has done butcher's work."

"It was certainly the instrument of the crime," assented Fisher, in a low voice.

Brain was staring at the dull blue gleam of the ax head with fierce and fascinated eyes. "I don't understand you," he said. "There is no— there are no marks on it."

"It has shed no blood," answered Fisher, "but for all that it has committed a crime. This is as near as the criminal came to the crime when he committed it."

"What do you mean?"

"He was not there when he did it," explained Fisher. "It's a poor sort of murderer who can't murder people when he isn't there."

"You seem to be talking merely for the sake of mystification," said Brain. "If you have any practical advice to give you might as well make it intelligible."

"The only practical advice I can suggest," said Fisher, thoughtfully, "is a little research into local topography and nomenclature. They say there used to be a Mr. Prior, who had a farm in this neighborhood. I think some details about the domestic life of the late Mr. Prior would throw a light on this terrible business."

"And you have nothing more immediate than your topography to offer," said Brain, with a sneer, "to help me avenge my friend?"

"Well," said Fisher, "I should find out the truth about the Hole in the Wall."

THAT NIGHT, at the close of a stormy twilight and under a strong west wind that followed the breaking of the frost, Leonard Crane was wending his way in a wild rotatory walk round and round the high, continuous wall that inclosed the little wood. He was driven by a desperate idea of solving for himself the riddle that had clouded his reputation and already even threatened his liberty. The police authorities, now in charge of the inquiry, had not arrested him, but he knew well enough that if he tried to move far afield he would be instantly arrested. Horne Fisher's fragmentary hints, though he had refused to expand them as yet, had stirred the artistic temperament of the architect to a sort of

wild analysis, and he was resolved to read the hieroglyph upside down and every way until it made sense. If it was something connected with a hole in the wall he would find the hole in the wall; but, as a matter of fact, he was unable to find the faintest crack in the wall. His professional knowledge told him that the masonry was all of one workmanship and one date, and, except for the regular entrance, which threw no light on the mystery, he found nothing suggesting any sort of hiding place or means of escape. Walking a narrow path between the winding wall and the wild eastward bend and sweep of the gray and feathery trees, seeing shifting gleams of a lost sunset winking almost like lightning as the clouds of tempest scudded across the sky and mingling with the first faint blue light from a slowly strengthened moon behind him, he began to feel his head going round as his heels were going round and round the blind recurrent barrier. He had thoughts on the border of thought; fancies about a fourth dimension which was itself a hole to hide anything, of seeing everything from a new angle out of a new window in the senses; or of some mystical light and transparency, like the new rays of chemistry, in which he could see Bulmer's body, horrible and glaring, floating in a lurid halo over the woods and the wall. He was haunted also with the hint, which somehow seemed to be equally horrifying, that it all had something to do with Mr. Prior. There seemed even to be something creepy in the fact that he was always respectfully referred to as Mr. Prior, and that it was in the domestic life of the dead farmer that he had been bidden to seek the seed of these dreadful things. As a matter of fact, he had found that no local inquiries had revealed anything at all about the Prior family.

The moonlight had broadened and brightened, the wind had driven off the clouds and itself died fitfully away, when he came round again to the artificial lake in front of the house. For some reason it looked a very artificial lake; indeed, the whole scene was like a classical landscape with a touch of Watteau; the Palladian facade of the house pale in the moon, and the same silver touching the very pagan and naked marble nymph in the middle of the pond. Rather to his surprise, he found another figure there beside the statue, sitting almost equally motionless; and the same silver pencil traced the wrinkled brow and patient face of Horne Fisher, still dressed as a hermit and apparently practicing something of the solitude of a hermit. Nevertheless, he looked up at Leonard Crane and smiled, almost as if he had expected him.

"Look here," said Crane, planting himself in front of him, "can you tell me anything about this business?"

"I shall soon have to tell everybody everything about it," replied Fisher, "but I've no objection to telling you something first. But, to begin with, will you

tell me something? What really happened when you met Bulmer this morning? You did throw away your sword, but you didn't kill him."

"I didn't kill him because I threw away my sword," said the other. "I did it on purpose— or I'm not sure what might have happened."

After a pause he went on, quietly: "The late Lord Bulmer was a very breezy gentleman, extremely breezy. He was very genial with his inferiors, and would have his lawyer and his architect staying in his house for all sorts of holidays and amusements. But there was another side to him, which they found out when they tried to be his equals. When I told him that his sister and I were engaged, something happened which I simply can't and won't describe. It seemed to me like some monstrous upheaval of madness. But I suppose the truth is painfully simple. There is such a thing as the coarseness of a gentleman. And it is the most horrible thing in humanity."

"I know," said Fisher. "The Renaissance nobles of the Tudor time were like that."

"It is odd that you should say that," Crane went on. "For while we were talking there came on me a curious feeling that we were repeating some scene of the past, and that I was really some outlaw, found in the woods like Robin Hood, and that he had really stepped in all his plumes and purple out of the picture frame of the ancestral portrait. Anyhow, he was the man in possession, and he neither feared God nor regarded man. I defied him, of course, and walked away. I might really have killed him if I had not walked away."

"Yes," said Fisher, nodding, "his ancestor was in possession and he was in possession, and this is the end of the story. It all fits in."

"Fits in with what?" cried his companion, with sudden impatience. "I can't make head or tail of it. You tell me to look for the secret in the hole in the wall, but I can't find any hole in the wall."

"There isn't any," said Fisher. "That's the secret." After reflecting a moment, he added: "Unless you call it a hole in the wall of the world. Look here; I'll tell you if you like, but I'm afraid it involves an introduction. You've got to understand one of the tricks of the modern mind, a tendency that most people obey without noticing it. In the village or suburb outside there's an inn with the sign of St. George and the Dragon. Now suppose I went about telling everybody that this was only a corruption of King George and the Dragoon. Scores of people would believe it, without any inquiry, from a vague feeling that it's probable because it's prosaic. It turns something romantic and legendary into something recent and ordinary. And that somehow makes it sound rational, though it is unsupported by reason. Of course some people would have the sense to remember having seen St. George in old Italian pictures and French romances, but a good many wouldn't think about it at all.

They would just swallow the skepticism because it was skepticism. Modern intelligence won't accept anything on authority. But it will accept anything without authority. That's exactly what has happened here.

"When some critic or other chose to say that Prior's Park was not a priory, but was named after some quite modern man named Prior, nobody really tested the theory at all. It never occurred to anybody repeating the story to ask if there was any Mr. Prior, if anybody had ever seen him or heard of him. As a matter of fact, it was a priory, and shared the fate of most priories— that is, the Tudor gentleman with the plumes simply stole it by brute force and turned it into his own private house; he did worse things, as you shall hear. But the point here is that this is how the trick works, and the trick works in the same way in the other part of the tale. The name of this district is printed Holinwall in all the best maps produced by the scholars; and they allude lightly, not without a smile, to the fact that it was pronounced Holiwell by the most ignorant and old-fashioned of the poor. But it is spelled wrong and pronounced right."

"Do you mean to say," asked Crane, quickly, "that there really was a well?"

"There is a well," said Fisher, "and the truth lies at the bottom of it."

As he spoke he stretched out his hand and pointed toward the sheet of water in front of him.

"The well is under that water somewhere," he said, "and this is not the first tragedy connected with it. The founder of this house did something which his fellow ruffians very seldom did; something that had to be hushed up even in the anarchy of the pillage of the monasteries. The well was connected with the miracles of some saint, and the last prior that guarded it was something like a saint himself; certainly he was something very like a martyr. He defied the new owner and dared him to pollute the place, till the noble, in a fury, stabbed him and flung his body into the well, whither, after four hundred years, it has been followed by an heir of the usurper, clad in the same purple and walking the world with the same pride."

"But how did it happen," demanded Crane, "that for the first time Bulmer fell in at that particular spot?"

"Because the ice was only loosened at that particular spot, by the only man who knew it," answered Horne Fisher. "It was cracked deliberately, with the kitchen chopper, at that special place; and I myself heard the hammering and did not understand it. The place had been covered with an artificial lake, if only because the whole truth had to be covered with an artificial legend. But don't you see that it is exactly what those pagan nobles would have done, to desecrate it with a sort of heathen goddess, as the Roman Emperor built a temple to Venus on the Holy Sepulchre. But the truth could still be traced out,

by any scholarly man determined to trace it. And this man was determined to trace it."

"What man?" asked the other, with a shadow of the answer in his mind.

"The only man who has an alibi," replied Fisher. "James Haddow, the antiquarian lawyer, left the night before the fatality, but he left that black star of death on the ice. He left abruptly, having previously proposed to stay; probably, I think, after an ugly scene with Bulmer, at their legal interview. As you know yourself, Bulmer could make a man feel pretty murderous, and I rather fancy the lawyer had himself irregularities to confess, and was in danger of exposure by his client. But it's my reading of human nature that a man will cheat in his trade, but not in his hobby. Haddow may have been a dishonest lawyer, but he couldn't help being an honest antiquary. When he got on the track of the truth about the Holy Well he had to follow it up; he was not to be bamboozled with newspaper anecdotes about Mr. Prior and a hole in the wall; he found out everything, even to the exact location of the well, and he was rewarded, if being a successful assassin can be regarded as a reward."

"And how did you get on the track of all this hidden history?" asked the young architect.

A cloud came across the brow of Horne Fisher. "I knew only too much about it already," he said, "and, after all, it's shameful for me to be speaking lightly of poor Bulmer, who has paid his penalty; but the rest of us haven't. I dare say every cigar I smoke and every liqueur I drink comes directly or indirectly from the harrying of the holy places and the persecution of the poor. After all, it needs very little poking about in the past to find that hole in the wall, that great breach in the defenses of English history. It lies just under the surface of a thin sheet of sham information and instruction, just as the black and blood-stained well lies just under that floor of shallow water and flat weeds. Oh, the ice is thin, but it bears; it is strong enough to support us when we dress up as monks and dance on it, in mockery of the dear, quaint old Middle Ages. They told me I must put on fancy dress; so I did put on fancy dress, according to my own taste and fancy. I put on the only costume I think fit for a man who has inherited the position of a gentleman, and yet has not entirely lost the feelings of one."

In answer to a look of inquiry, he rose with a sweeping and downward gesture.

"Sackcloth," he said; "and I would wear the ashes as well if they would stay on my bald head."
