PAST MASTERS 176

P. C. Wren
Virginia Woolf
Ambrose Bierce
Algernon Blackwood
H. Rider Haggard
H. Bedford-Jones
Hugh Walpole
"Sapper"

and more

PAST MASTERS 176

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

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1: The Green Death

H. C. McNeile

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Unusually, this novelette by "Sapper" was published under his real name, H. C. McNeile, rather than his famous pseudonym.

Part 1

"AND why, Major Seymour, do they call you 'Old Point of Detail'?"

The tall, spare man, with a face tanned by years in the tropics, turned at the question, and glanced at the girl beside him. At the time when most boys are still at school, force of circumstances had sent him far afield into strange corners of the earth— a wanderer, and picker-up of odd jobs. He had done police work in India— he had been on a rubber plantation in Sumatra. The Amazon knew him and so did the Yukon, while his knowledge of the customs of tribes in Darkest Africa— the very names of which were unknown to most people— was greater than the average Londoner has of his native city. In fact, before the war it would have been difficult to sit for an evening in one of those clubs which spring into being in all corners where Englishmen guard their far-flung inheritance without Bob Seymour's name capping up.

Then had come the war, and in the van of the great army from the mountains and the swamps which trekked home as the first shot rang out, he came. As his reward he got a D.S.O. and one leg permanently shortened by two inches. He also met a girl— the girl who had just asked him the question.

He'd met her just a year after the Armistice, when he was wondering whether there was any place for a cripple in the lands that he knew. And from that day everything had changed. Even to himself he wouldn't admit it; the thought of asking such a glorious bit of loveliness to tie herself to a useless has-been like himself was out of the question. But he let the days slip by, content to meet her occasionally at dinner— to see her, in the distance, at a theatre. And now, for the first time, he found himself staying under the same roof. When he'd arrived the preceding day and had seen her in the hall, just for a moment his heart had stopped beating, and then had given a great bound forward. She, of course, knew nothing of his feelings; of that he felt sure. And she must never know; of that he was determined. The whole thing was out of the question.

Of course— naturally. And the only comment which a mere narrator of facts can offer on the state of affairs is to record the remark made by Ruth

Brabazon to a very dear friend of hers after Bob Seymour had limped upstairs to his room.

"That's the man, Delia," she said, with a little smile. "And if he doesn't say something soon, I shall have to."

"He looks a perfect darling," remarked the other.

"He is," sighed Ruth. "But he won't give me the chance of telling him so. He thinks he's a cripple."

With which brief insight into things as they really were, we can now return to things as Bob Seymour thought they were. Beside him, on a sofa in the hall, sat the girl who had kept him in England through long months, and she had just asked him a question.

"The Old, I trust, is a term of endearment," he answered, with a smile, "and not a brutal reflection on my tale of years. The Point of Detail refers to a favourite saying of mine with which my reprobate subalterns— of whom your brother was quite the worst— used to mock me."

"Bill is the limit," murmured the girl. "What was the saying?"

"I used to preach the importance of Points of Detail to 'em," he grinned. "One is nothing; two are a coincidence; three are a moral certainty. And they're very easy to see if you have eyes to see them with."

"I suppose they are, Old Point of Detail," she replied, softly.

Was it his imagination or did she lay a faint stress on the Old?

"It was certainly a term of endearment," she continued deliberately; "if what Bill says is to be believed."

"Oh! Bill's an ass," said Seymour, sheepishly.

"Thank you," she remarked, and he noticed her eyes were twinkling. "I've always been told I'm exactly like Bill. I know we always used to like the same things when we were children." She rose and crossed the hall. "Time to dress for dinner, I think."

In the dim light he could not see her face clearly; he only knew his heart was thumping wildly. Did she mean—? And then from half-way up the stairs she spoke again.

"Two are certainly a coincidence," she agreed, thoughtfully. "But the third would have to be pretty conclusive before you could take it as a certainty."

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"WELL, Major Seymour, hitting 'em in the beak?" The Celebrated Actor mixed himself a cocktail with that delicate grace for which he was famed on both sides of the Atlantic.

"So— so, Mr. Trayne," returned the other. "All the easy ones came my way."

The house-party were in the hall waiting for dinner to be announced, but the one member of it who mattered to Bob had not yet appeared.

"Rot, my dear fellow," said his host, who had come up in time to hear his last remark. "Your shooting was magnificent— absolutely magnificent. You had four birds in the air once from your guns."

"Personally," murmured the Celebrated Actor, "it fails to appeal to me. Apart from my intense fright at letting off lethal weapons, I have never yet succeeded in hitting anything except a keeper or— more frequently— a guest. I abhor violence— except at rehearsals." He broke off as a heavy, bull-necked man came slowly don the stairs. "And who is the latest addition to our number, Sir Robert?"

"A man who did me a good turn a few weeks ago," said the owner of the house, shortly. "Name of Denton. Arrived only half an hour ago."

He moved away to introduce the newcomer, and the Actor turned to Bob Seymour.

"One wonders," he remarked, "whether it would be indiscreet to offer Mr. Denton a part in my new play. Nothing much to say. He merely drinks and eats. In effect, a publican of unprepossessing aspect. One wonders— so suitable."

He placed his empty glass on the table and drifted charmingly away towards his hostess, leaving Bob Seymour smiling gently. Undoubtedly a most suitable part for Mr. Denton.

And then, quite suddenly, the smile died away. Bill Brabazon, who was standing near the fireplace, had turned round and come face to face with the newcomer. For a moment or two they stared at one another— a deadly loathing on their faces; then with ostentatious rudeness Denton turned his back and walked away.

"My God! Bob," muttered Bill, coming up to Seymour. "How on earth did that swine-emperor get here?"

His jaw was grim and set, his eyes gleaming with rage; and the hand that poured out the cocktail shook a little.

"What's the matter, Bill?" said Seymour, quietly. "For Heaven's sake, don't make a scene, old man!"

"Matter!" choked Bill Brabazon. "Matter! Why—"

But any further revelations were checked by the announcement of dinner, and the party went in informally. To his delight, Bob Seymour found himself next to Ruth, and the little scene he had just witnessed passed from his mind. It was not until they were half-way through the meal' that it was recalled to him by Ruth herself.

"Who is that dreadful-looking man talking to Delia Morrison?" she whispered.

"Denton is his name," replied Seymour, and every vestige of colour left her face.

"Denton," she muttered. "Good Heavens! it can't be the same." She glanced round the table till she found her brother, who was answering the animated remarks of his partner with morose monosyllables. "Has Bill—"

"Bill has," returned Seymour, grimly. "And he's whispered to me on the subject. What's the trouble?"

"They had the most fearful row— over a girl," she explained, a little breathlessly. "Two or three months ago. I know they had a fight, and Bill got a black eye. But he broke that other brute's jaw."

"Holy smoke!" muttered Seymour. "The meeting strikes the casual observer as being, to put it mildly, embarrassing. Do you know how the row started?"

"Only vaguely," she answered. "That man Denton got some girl into trouble, and then left her in the lurch— refused to help her at all. A poor girl— daughter of someone who had been in Bill's platoon. And he came to Bill."

"I see," said Seymour, grimly. "I see. Bill would."

"Of course he would!" she cried. Why, of course. Just the same as you would."

"I suppose that isn't pretty conclusive?" he said, with a grin. "As a third point, I mean."

But Ruth Brabazon had turned to the Celebrated Actor on her other side. He had already said, "My dear young lady," five times without avail, and he was Very Celebrated.

Neglected for the moment by both his neighbours, Bob proceeded to study the gentleman whose sudden arrival seemed so inopportune. He was a coarse-looking specimen, and already his face was flushed with the amount of wine he had drunk. Every now and then his eyes sought Bill Brabazon vindictively, and Seymour frowned as he saw it. Denton belonged to a type he had met before, and it struck him there was every promise of trouble before the evening was out. When men of Denton's calibre get into the condition of "drink-taken", such trifles as the presence of other guests in the house do not deter them from being offensive. And Bill Brabazon, though far too well-bred to seek a quarrel in such surroundings, was also far too hot-tempered to take any deliberate insult lying down.

Suddenly a coarse, overloud laugh from Denton sounded above the general conversation, and Ruth Brabazon looked round quickly.

"Ugh! what a horrible man!" she whispered to Bob. How I hate him!"

"I don't believe a word of it," he was saying, harshly. "Fraud by knaves for fools. For those manifestations that have been seen there is some material cause. Generally transparent trickery." He laughed— again, sneeringly.

For a second or two there was an uncomfortable silence. It was not so much what the man had said, as the vulgar, ill-bred manner in which he had said it, and Sir Robert hastily intervened to relieve the tension.

"Ghosts?" he remarked. "As impossible a subject to argue about as religion or politics. Incidentally, you know," he continued, addressing the table at large, "there's a room in this house round which a novelist might weave quite a good ghost story."

"Tell us, Sir Robert." A general chorus assailed him, and he smiled.

"I'm not a novelist," he said, "though for what it's worth I'll tell you about it. The room is one in the new wing which I used to use as a smoking- room. It was the part built on to the house by my predecessor— a gentleman, from all accounts, of peculiar temperament. He had spent all his life travelling to obscure places of the world; and I don't know if it was liver or what, but his chief claim to notoriety when he did finally settle down appears to have been an intense hatred of his fellow-men. There are some very strange stories of the things which used to go on in this house, where he lived the life of an absolute recluse, with one old man to look after him. He died about forty years ago."

Sir Robert paused and sipped his champagne.

"However, to continue. In this smoking-room in the new wing, there is an inscription written in the most amazing jumble of letters by the window. It is written on the wall, and every form of hieroglyphic is used. You get a letter in Arabic, then one of Chinese, then an ordinary English one, and perhaps a German. Well, to cut a long story short, I took the trouble one day to copy it out, and replaced the foreign letters— there are one or two Greek letters as well— by their corresponding English ones. I had to get somebody else to help me over the Chinese and Arabic, but the result was, at any rate, sense. It proved to be a little jingling rhyme, and it ran as follows:—

" 'When 'tis hot, shun this spot.
When 'tis rain, come again.
When 'tis day, all serene.
When 'tis night, death is green.' "

Sir Robert glanced round the table with a smile.

"There was no doubt who had written this bit of doggerel, as the wing was actually built by my predecessor— and I certainly didn't. That's a pretty good foundation to build a ghost story on, isn't it?"

"But have you ever seen anything?" inquired one of the guests.

"Not a thing," laughed his host. "But"— he paused mysteriously— "I've smelt something. And that's the reason why I don't use the room any more.

"It was a very hot night— hotter even than this evening. There was thunder about— incidentally, I shouldn't be surprised if we had a storm before tomorrow— and I was sitting in the room after dinner reading the paper. All of a sudden I became aware of a strange and most unpleasant smell: a sort of fetid, musty, rank smell, like you get sometimes when you open up an old vault. And at the same moment I noticed that the paper I held in my hand had gone a most peculiar green colour and I could no longer see the print clearly. It seemed to have got darker suddenly, and the smell became so bad that it made me feel quite faint.

"I walked over to the door and left the room meaning to get a lamp. Then something detained me, and I didn't go back for an hour or so. When I did the smell was still there, though so faint that one could hardly notice it. Also the paper was quite white again." He laughed genially. "And that's the family ghost; a poor thing, but our own. I'll have to get someone to take it in hand and bring it up-to-date."

"But surely you don't think there is any connection between this smell and the inscription?" cried Denton.

"I advance no theory at all." Sir Robert smiled genially. "All I can tell you is that there is an inscription, and that the colour green is mentioned in it. It seemed to me most certainly that my paper went green, though it is even more certain that I did not die. Also there is at times in this room this rather unpleasant smell. I told you it was a poor thing in the ghost line."

The conversation became general, and Ruth Brabazon turned to Bob, who was thoughtfully staring at his plate.

"Why so pre-occupied, Major Seymour?"

"A most interesting yarn," he remarked, coming out of his reverie. "Have a salted almond, before I finish the lot."

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TO have two hot-tempered men who loathe one another with a bitter loathing in a house-party is not conducive to its happiness. And when one of them is an outsider of the first water, slightly under the influence of alcohol, the situation becomes even more precarious. For some time after dinner was over Bill Brabazon avoided Denton as unostentatiously as he could, though it was plain to Bob Seymour and Ruth that he was finding it increasingly difficult to control his temper. By ten o'clock it was obvious, even to those guests who

knew nothing about the men's previous relations, that there was trouble brewing; and Sir Robert, who had been told the facts of the case by Bob, was at his wits' end.

"If only I'd known," he said, irritably. "If only someone had told me. I know Denton is a sweep, but he did me a very good turn in the City the other day, and, without thinking, I asked him to come and shoot some time. And when he suggested coming now, I couldn't in all decency get out of it. I hope to Heaven there won't be a row."

"If there's going to be, Sir Robert, you can't prevent it," said Seymour. "I'm sure Bill will do all he can to avoid one."

"I know he will," answered his host. "But there are limits, and that man Denton is one of 'em. I wish I'd never met the blighter."

"Come and have a game of billiards, anyway," said the other. "It's no use worrying about it. If it comes, it comes."

When they had been playing about twenty minutes, Ruth Brabazon and Delia Morrison joined them, the billiard-room being, as they affirmed, the coolest room in the house.

"We'll have rain soon," said Sir Robert, bringing off a fine losing hazard off the red. "That'll clear the air."

And shortly afterwards his prophecy proved true. Heavy drops began to patter down on the glass skylight, and the girls heaved a sigh of relief.

"Thank goodness," gasped Ruth. "I couldn't have stood— " She broke off abruptly and stared at the door, which had just opened to admit her brother. "Bill," she cried, "what's the matter?"

Bob Seymour looked up quickly at her words; then he rested his cue against the table. Something very obviously was the matter. Bill Brabazon, his tie undone, with a crumpled shirt, and a cut under his eye on the cheek-bone, came into the room and closed the door.

"I must apologise, Sir Robert," he said, quietly, "for what has happened. It's a rotten thing to have to admit in another man's house, but the fault was not entirely mine. I've had the most damnable row with that fellow Denton— incidentally he was half drunk— and I've laid him out. An unpardonable thing to do to one of your guests, but— well— I'm not particularly slow-tempered, and I couldn't help it. He went on and on and on— asking for trouble: and finally he got it."

"Damnation!" Sir Robert replaced his cue in the rack. "When did it happen, Bill?"

"About half an hour ago. I've been outside since. Meaning to avoid him I went to the smoking-room in the new wing, and I found him there examining that inscription by the window. I couldn't get away— without running away. I

suppose I ought to have." An uncomfortable silence settled on the room, which was broken at length by Sir Robert.

"Where is the fellow now, Bill?"

"I haven't seen him— not since I socked him one on the jaw. I'm deucedly sorry about it," he continued, miserably, "and I feel the most awful sweep, but— "

He stopped suddenly as the door was flung open and the Celebrated Actor rushed in. The magnificent repose which usually stamped his features was gone: it was an agitated and frightened man who stood by the billiard table, pouring out his somewhat incoherent story. And as his meaning became clear Bill Brabazon grew white and leaned against the mantelpiece for support.

Dead— Denton dead! That was the salient fact that stood out from the Actor's disjointed sentences.

"To examine the inscription," he was saying. "I went in to examine it— and there— by the window..."

"He can't be dead," said Bill, harshly. "He's laid out, that's all."

"Quick! Which is the room?" Bob Seymour's steady voice served to pull everyone together. "There's no good standing here talking— "

In silence they crossed the hall, and went along the passage to the new wing.

"Here we are," said Sir Robert, nervously. "This is the door."

The room was in darkness and in the air there hung a rank, fetid smell. The window was open, and outside the rain was lashing down with tropical violence. Bob Seymour fumbled in his pocket for a match; then he turned up the lamp and lit it. Just for a moment he stared at it in surprise, then Ruth, from the doorway, gave a little stifled scream.

"Look," she whispered. "By the window—"

A man was lying across the window-sill, with his legs inside the room and his head and shoulders outside.

"Good Heavens," muttered Sir Robert, touching the body with a shaking hand, "I suppose— I suppose— he *is* dead?"

But Seymour apparently failed to hear the remark.

"Do you notice this extraordinary smell?" he said at length.

"Damn the smell," said his host, irritably. "Give me a hand with this poor fellow."

Seymour pulled himself together and stepped forward as the other bent down to take hold of the sagging legs.

"Leave him alone, Sir Robert," he said, quickly. "You must leave the body till the police come. We'll just see that he's dead, and then—"

He picked up an electric torch from the table and leant out of the window. And after a while he straightened up again with a little shudder.

It was not a pretty sight. In the light of the torch the face seemed almost black, and the two arms, limp and twisted, sprawled in the sodden earth of the flower-bed. The man was quite dead, and they both stepped back into the middle of the smoking-room with obvious relief.

"Well," said Brabazon, "is he?"

"Yes— he's dead," said Seymour, gravely.

"But it's impossible," cried the boy, wildly. "Why, that blow I gave him couldn't have— have killed the man."

"Nevertheless he's dead," said Seymour, staring at the motionless body, thoughtfully. Then his eyes narrowed, and he bent once more over the dead man. Ruth, sobbing hysterically, was trying to comfort her brother, while the rest of the house-party had collected near the door, talking in low, agitated whispers.

"Bob— Bob," cried Bill Brabazon, suddenly, "I've just remembered. I couldn't have done it when I laid him out. I told you I was walking up and down the lawn. Well, the light from this room was streaming out, and I remember seeing his shadow in the middle of the window. He must have been standing up. The mark of the window-sash was clear on the lawn."

Seymour glanced at him thoughtfully. "But the light was out, Bill. How do you account for that?

"It wasn't," said the other, positively. "Not then. It must have gone out later."

"We'll have to send for the police, Sir Robert," said Seymour, laying a re-assuring hand on the boy's arm. Tell them everything when they come."

"I've got nothing to hide," said the youngster, hoarsely. "I swear to Heaven I didn't do that."

"We'd better go," cried Sir Robert. "Leave everything as it is. I'll ring the police up."

With quick, nervous steps he left the room, followed by his guests, until only Seymour was left standing by the window with its dreadful occupant. For a full minute he stood there, while the rain still lashed down outside, sniffing as he had done when he first entered. And, at length, with a slight frown on his face, as if some elusive memory escaped him, he followed the others from the room, first turning out the light and then locking the door.

IT was half an hour before the police came, in the shape of Inspector Grayson and a constable. During that time the rain had stopped for a period of about twenty minutes; only to come on again just before a ring announced their arrival.

The house-party were moving aimlessly about in little scattered groups, obsessed with the dreadful tragedy. In the billiard-room Ruth sat with her brother in a sort of stunned silence; only Bob Seymour seemed unaffected by the general strain. Perhaps it was because in a life such as his death by violence was no new spectacle; perhaps it was that there was something he could not understand.

Who had blown the light out? That was the crux. Blown— not turned. The Celebrated Actor was very positive that the light had not been on when he first entered the room. It might have been the wind, but there was no wind. A point of detail— one. And then the smell— that strange, fetid smell. It touched a chord of memory, but try as he would he could not place it.

His mind started on another line. If the boy, in his rage, had struck the dead man a fatal blow, how had the body got into such a position? It would have been lying on the floor.

"Weak heart," he argued. "Hot night— gasping for breath— rushed to window— collapsed. That's what they'd say."

He frowned thoughtfully; on the face of it quite plausible. Not only plausible— quite possible.

"Major Seymour!" Ruth's voice beside him made him look up. "What can we do? Poor old Bill's nearly off his head."

"There's nothing to do, Miss Brabazon— but tell the truth," said Seymour, gravely. "What I mean is," he explained, hurriedly, "you've got to impress on Bill the vital necessity of being absolutely frank with the police."

"I know he didn't do it, Bob," she cried, desperately. "I know it."

Bob! She'd called him Bob. And such is human nature that for a moment the dead man was forgotten.

"So do I, Ruth," he whispered, impulsively. "So do I."

"And you'll prove it?" she cried.

"I'll prove it," he promised her. Which was no rasher than many promises made under similar conditions.

"Thank goodness you've come, Inspector." Sir Robert had met the police at the door. A dreadful tragedy."

"So I gather, Sir Robert," answered the other. "One of your guests been murdered?"

"I didn't say so on the 'phone," said Sir Robert. "I said— killed."

The inspector grunted, "Where's the body?"

"In the smoking-room." He led the way towards the door.

"I've got the key in my pocket," said Seymour; and the inspector looked at him quickly.

"May I ask your name, sir?" he remarked.

"Seymour— Major Seymour," returned the other. "I turned out the light and locked the door while Sir Robert was telephoning for you, to ensure that nothing would be moved."

The inspector grunted again, as Seymour opened the door and struck a light.

"Over in that window, Inspector—" began Sir Robert, only to stop and gape foolishly across the room.

"I don't quite understand, gentlemen," said Inspector Grayson, testily.

"No more do I," muttered Bob Seymour, with a puzzled frown.

"I left him lying, as we found him, half in and half out of the window," said Seymour. "His legs were inside, his head and shoulders from the waist upwards were outside."

It was the constable who interrupted him. While the others were standing by the door he had crossed to the window and leaned out.

"Here's the body, sir," he cried. "Outside in the flower-bed."

Part 2

THE INSPECTOR went quickly to the window and peered out; then he turned and confronted Sir Robert and Seymour.

"He's dead right enough now," he said, gravely. "It seems a pity that you gentlemen didn't take a little more trouble to find out if he was in the first place. You might have saved his life."

"Hang it, man!" exploded Seymour, angrily, "do you suppose I don't know a dead man when I see one?"

"I don't know whether you do or don't," answered the other, shortly. "But I've never yet heard of a dead man getting up and moving to an adjacent flower-bed. And you say yourself that you left him lying over the window-sill."

For a moment an angry flush mounted on the soldier's face, then with an effort, he controlled himself. On the face of it, the inspector was perfectly justified in his remark: dead men do not move. The trouble was that Bob Seymour had felt the dead man's heart and his pulse; had turned the light of his torch from close range into his eyes. And he knew that he had made no mistake; he knew that the man was dead when he turned out the light and left the room. He *knew* it; but— dead men do not move. What had happened in the room during the time they were waiting for the police? The key had been

in his pocket: who had moved the body? And why? Not Bill Brabazon: that he knew.

With a puzzled frown he crossed slowly towards the two policemen, who were hauling the limp form through the open window. And once again he paused and sniffed.

"That smell again, Sir Robert," he remarked.

"What smell?" demanded the inspector, as they laid the dead man on the floor.

"Don't you notice it? A strange, fetid, rank smell."

The inspector sniffed perfunctorily. "I smell the ordinary smell of rain on dead leaves," he remarked. "What about it?"

"Nothing, except that there are no dead leaves in June," returned Seymour, shortly.

"Well, sir," snorted the inspector, "whether there are dead leaves or not, we've got a dead man on the floor. And I take it he wasn't killed by a smell, anyway."

In the full light of the room Denton was an even more unpleasant sight than when he had lain sprawling over the window-sill. The water dripped from his sodden clothing and ran in little pools on the floor; the dark, puffy face was smeared with a layer of wet earth. But it was not at these details that Bob Seymour was staring: it was an angry-looking red weal round the neck just above the collar that riveted his attention. The inspector, taking no further notice of the two spectators, was proceeding methodically with his examination. First he turned out all the pockets, laying the contents neatly on the table; then, with the help of the constable, he turned the body over on its face. A little fainter, but still perfectly discernible, the red weal could be traced continuously round the neck; and after a while the inspector straightened up and turned to Sir Robert.

"It looks as if he had been strangled, sir," he remarked, professionally. "I should imagine from the size of the mark that a fairly thin rope was used. Have you any idea whether anyone had a grudge against him? The motive was obviously not robbery."

"Strangled!" cried Sir Robert, joining the other three. "But I don't understand." He turned perplexedly to Bob Seymour, who was, standing near the window absorbed in thought. Then, a little haltingly, he continued: "Unfortunately there was a very severe row between him and another of my guests earlier in the evening."

"Where did the row take place?"

"Er— in this room."

"Was anyone else present?"

"No. No one heard them quarrelling. But Mr. Brabazon, the guest in question, made no secret about it— afterwards. He told us in the billiard-room that— that they had come to blows in here."

"I would like to see Mr. Brabazon, Sir Robert," said the inspector. "Perhaps you would be good enough to send for him."

"I will go and get him myself," returned the other, leaving the room.

"A very remarkable affair," murmured Seymour, as the door closed behind his host. "Don't you agree with me, inspector?"

"In what way?" asked the officer, guardedly.

But the soldier was lighting a cigarette, and made no immediate answer. "May I ask," he remarked at length, "if you've ever tried to strangle a man with a rope? Because," he continued, when the other merely snorted indignantly, "I have. During the war— in German East Africa. And it took me a long while. You see, if you put a slip-knot round a man's neck and pull, he comes towards you. You've got to get very close to him and kneel on him, or wedge him in some way so that he can't move, before you can do much good in the strangling line."

"Quite an amateur detective, Major Seymour," said the inspector condescendingly. "If you will forgive my saying so, however, it might have been better had you concentrated on seeing whether the poor fellow was dead."

He turned as the door opened, and Bill Brabazon came in, followed by Sir Robert.

"This is Mr. Brabazon, Inspector," said the latter.

The officer eyed the youngster keenly for a moment before he spoke. Then he pointed to a chair, so placed that the light of the lamp would fall on the face of anyone sitting in it.

"Will you tell me everything you know, Mr. Brabazon? And I should advise you not to attempt to conceal anything."

"I've got nothing to conceal," answered the boy, doggedly. "I found Denton in here about half-past ten, and we started quarrelling. I'd been trying to avoid him the whole evening, but there was no getting away from him this time. After a while we began to fight, and he hit me in the face. Then I saw red, and really went for him. And I laid him out. That's all I know about it."

"And what did you do after you laid him out?"

"I went out into the garden to cool down. Then when the rain came on, I went to the billiard-room and told Sir Robert. And the first thing I knew about this," with a shudder he looked at the dead body, "was when Mr. Trayne came into the billiard-room and told us."

"Mr. Trayne? Who is he, Sir Robert?"

"Another guest stopping in the house. Do you wish to see him?"

"Please." The inspector paced thoughtfully up and down the room.

"The light was on, wasn't it, Bill, when you left the room?" said Seymour.

"It was. Why, I saw his shadow on the lawn, as I told you."

"Did you?" said the inspector, watching him narrowly. "Would you be surprised to hear, Mr. Brabazon, that this unfortunate man was strangled?"

"Strangled!" Bill Brabazon started up from his chair. "Strangled! Good God! Who by?"

"That is precisely what we want to find out," said the inspector.

"But, good heavens! man," cried the boy, excitedly, "don't you see that that exonerates me. I didn't strangle him: I only hit him on the jaw. And that shadow I saw," he swung round on Seymour, "must have been the murderer."

"You wish to see me, Inspector?" Trayne's voice from the doorway interrupted him, and he sat back in his chair again. And Seymour, watching the joyful look on Bill's face, knew that he spoke the truth. His amazement at hearing the cause of death had been too spontaneous not to be genuine. In his own mind Bill Brabazon regarded himself as cleared: the trouble was that other people might not. The majority of murderers have died, still protesting their innocence.

"I understand that it was you, Mr. Trayne, who first discovered the body," said the inspector.

"It was. I came in and found the room in darkness. I wished to study an inscription by the window to which Sir Robert had alluded at dinner. I struck a match, and then— I saw the body lying half in half out over the sill. It gave me a dreadful shock— quite dreadful. And I at once went to the billiard-room for assistance."

"So whoever did it turned out the light," said the inspector, musingly. "What time was it, Mr. Trayne, when you made the discovery?"

About half-past eleven, I should think."

"An hour after the quarrel. And in that hour someone entered this room either by the window or the door, and committed the deed. He, further; left either by the window or the door. How did you leave, Mr. Brabazon?"

"By the door," said the youngster. "The flower-bed outside the window is too wide to jump."

"Then if the murderer entered by the window, he will have left footmarks. If he entered by the door and left by it the presumption is that he is a member of the house. No one who was not would risk leaving by the door after committing such an act."

"Most ably reasoned," murmured Seymour, mildly.

But the inspector was far too engrossed with his theory to notice the slight sarcasm in the other's tone. With a powerful electric torch he was searching

the ground outside the window for any trace of footprints. The mark in the ground where the body had lain was clearly defined; save for that, however, the flower-bed revealed nothing. It was at least fifteen feet wide; to cross it, leaving no trace, appeared a physical impossibility. And after a while the inspector turned back into the room and looked gravely at Sir Robert Deering.

"I should like to have every member of the house-party and all your servants in here, Sir Robert, one by one," he remarked.

"Then you think it was done by someone in the house, Inspector?" Sir Robert was looking worried.

"I prefer not to say anything definite at present," answered the official, guardedly. "Perhaps we can start with the house-party."

With a shrug of his shoulder, Sir Robert left the room, and the inspector turned to the constable.

"Lend a hand here, Murphy; we'll put the body behind the screen before any of the ladies come in."

"Great Scott! man," cried Seymour. "What do you want the ladies for? You don't suggest that a woman could have strangled him?"

"You will please allow me to know my own business best," said the other, coldly. "Shut and bolt the windows, Murphy."

The rain had stopped as the policeman crossed the room to carry out his orders. And it was as he stood by the open window, with his hands upraised to the sash, that he suddenly stepped back with a startled exclamation.

"Something 'it me in the face, sir," he muttered.

Then he spat disgustedly. "Gaw! What a filthy taste!"

But the inspector was not interested— he was covering the dead man's face with a pocket handkerchief, and after a moment's hesitation, the constable again reached up for the sash, and pulled it down. Only the soldier had noticed the little incident, and he was staring like a man bereft of his senses at a point just above the policeman's head.

"Don't move," he ordered, harshly. "Stand still, constable."

With a startled look the policeman obeyed, and

Seymour stepped over to him. And then he did a peculiar thing. He lit a match and turned to the inspector.

"Just look at this match, Inspector," he murmured. "Burning brightly, isn't it?" He moved it a little, and suddenly the flame turned to a smoky orange colour. For a moment or two it spluttered; then it went out altogether.

"You can move now, constable," he said. "I didn't want any draught for a moment." He looked at Inspector Grayson with a smile. "Interesting little experiment that— wasn't it?"

Grayson snorted. "If you've quite finished your conjuring tricks, I'll get on with the business," he remarked. "Come along over here, Murphy."

"What is it, Bob?" Bill Brabazon cried, excitedly.

"The third point, Bill," answered the other. "Great Scott! what a fool I've been. Though it's the most extraordinary case I've ever come across."

"Think you can reconstruct the crime?" sneered the inspector.

"I don't think— I know," returned the other quietly. "But not to- night. There's the rain again."

And might I ask what clues you possess?"

"Only one more than you, and that you can get from Sir Robert. I blush to admit it, but until a moment ago I attached no importance to it. It struck me as being merely the foolish jest of a stupid man. Now it does strike me quite in that light. Ask him," he continued, and his voice was grim "for the translation of that inscription under the window. And when you've got that, concentrate for a moment on the other end of the dead man— his trousers just above the ankles."

"They're covered with dirt," said the inspector, impressed, in spite of himself, by the other's tones.

"Yes— but what sort of dirt? Dry, dusty, cobwebbed dirt— not caked mud on his knees. Immense amount of importance in dirt, Inspector."

But Mr. Grayson was recovering his dignity. "Any other advice?" he sneered.

"Yes. Hire a man and practise strangling him. Then buy a really good encyclopaedia and study it. You'll find a wealth of interesting information in it." He strolled towards the door. "If you want me I shall be in the billiard-room. And, by the way, with regard to what I say about strangling, don't forget that the victim cannot come towards you if his feet are off the ground."

"Perhaps you'll have the murderer for me in the billiard-room," remarked the inspector, sarcastically.

"I'm afraid not," answered the other. "The real murderer, unfortunately, is already dead. I'll look for his accomplice in the morning."

With a slight smile he closed the door and strolled into the hall. The house-party were being marshalled by Sir Robert preparatory to their inquisition; the servants stood huddled together in sheepish groups under the stern eye of the butler.

"Have you found out anything, Major Seymour?" With entreaty in her eyes, Ruth Brabazon came up to him.

"Yes, Miss Brabazon, I have," answered the man, reassuringly. "You can set your mind absolutely at rest."

"You know who did it?" she cried, breathlessly.

"I do," he answered. "But unfortunately I can't prove it to-night. And you mustn't be alarmed at the attitude taken up by the inspector. He's not in a very good temper, and I'm afraid I'm the cause."

"But does he think—?"

"I should hesitate to say what great thoughts were passing through his brain," said Seymour. "But I have a shrewd suspicion that he has already made up his mind that Bill did it."

"And who did do it, Bob?" She laid her hand beseechingly on his arm as she spoke.

"I think it's better to say nothing at the moment," he answered, gently. "There are one or two points I've got to make absolutely certain of first. Until then— won't you trust me, Ruth?"

"Trust you! Why, my dear— " She turned away as she spoke, and Bob Seymour barely heard the last two words. But he did *just* hear them. And once again the dead man was forgotten.

ii

"MAY I borrow your car, Sir Robert? I want to go to London and bring back a friend of mine— Sir Gilbert Strangways." Bob Seymour approached his host after breakfast the following morning. "I'll have to be back by three, in time for the inquest, and it's very important."

"Strangways— the explorer! Certainly, Seymour; though I'm not keen on adding to the house-party at present."

"It's essential, I'm afraid. They can only bring in one verdict this afternoon— Murder. That ass Grayson was nosing round this morning, and he, at any rate, is convinced of it."

"What— that Bill did it?" muttered the other. "He's outside there now, making notes."

"You don't think the boy did it, do you, Seymour?"

"I *know* he didn't, Sir Robert. But to prove it is a different matter. May I order the car?"

"Yes, yes of course. Anything you like. Why on earth did I ever ask the poor fellow down here?" Sir Robert walked agitatedly up and down the hall. "And anyway, who did do it?" He threw out his hands in despair. "He can't have done it himself."

"All in good time, Sir Robert," said the other gravely. "The lucky thing for you is that you have practically never used that room."

"What do you mean?" muttered his host, going a little white.

"If you had, the chances are that this house-party would never have taken place," answered Seymour. "At least, not with you as the host."

"My God!" cried the other. "You don't mean to say that there's anything in that inscription!"

"It's the key to everything," returned the other, shortly. "To put it mildly, your predecessor had a peculiar sense of humour."

Ten minutes later he was getting into the car, when Inspector Grayson appeared round the corner.

"You won't forget the inquest is at three, Major Seymour?" he said, a trifle sharply.

"I shan't miss it," answered the soldier.

"Found the murderer yet?" asked the detective.

"Yes— this morning," returned the other. "Haven't you?"

And the officer was still staring thoughtfully down the drive long after the car had disappeared round a bend. This confounded soldier seemed so very positive, and Grayson, who was no fool, had been compelled to admit to himself that there were several strange features about the case. The inscription on the wall he had dismissed as childish; from inquiries made in the neighbourhood, Sir Robert Deering's predecessor had obviously been a most peculiar specimen. Not quits all there, if reports were to be believed. To return to the case, however, a complete alibi had been proved by every single member of the household, save one kitchenmaid, Mr. Trayne, and— Bill Brabazon. The kitchenmaid and Mr. Trayne could be dismissed— the former for obvious reasons, the latter owing to the impossibility of having done the deed in the time between leaving the drawing-room and arriving in the billiard-room with the news. And that left— Bill Brabazon. Every single line of thought led ultimately, to— Bill Brabazon. Motive, opportunity, capability from a physical point of view— all pointed to him. A further exhaustive search that morning of the flower-bed outside the window had revealed no trace of any footprint; it was impossible that the murderer should have entered by the window. Therefore— he shrugged his shoulders. The house-party again— and Bill Brabazon. Blind with fury, as he admitted himself, he had first knocked the dead man down and then strangled him, turning out the light lest anyone should see. Then, taking off the rope, he had left him, almost, but not quite, dead on the floor. In a last despairing gasp for air, Denton had staggered to the window and collapsed— still not quite dead. Finally, he had made one more convulsive effort, floundered on the flower-bed, and had there died.

Such was the scene as Inspector Grayson reconstructed it, and yet he was far from satisfied. Why strangle? An un-English method of killing a man. Still— facts were facts— the man had been strangled. Un-English or not, that was the

manner in which he had met his death; and since suicide could be ruled out, only murder remained. If the soldier could prove it was not young Brabazon— well and good. Until he did, Mr. Grayson preferred to bank on facts which were capable of proof.

The result of the coroner's inquest was a foregone conclusion. Death after strangulation, with a rider to the effect that, had prompt assistance been given on the first discovery of the body, life might have been saved.

Bob Seymour, seated beside another lean, suntanned man, heard the verdict with an impassive face. He had given his evidence, confining it to the barest statement of fact; he had advanced no theory; he had not attempted to dispute Inspector Grayson's deductions. Once he had caught Ruth's eyes fixed on him beseechingly, and he had given her a reassuring smile. And she— because she trusted him— knew that all was well; knew that the net which seemed to be closing so grimly round her brother would not be fastened. But why— why didn't he tell them now how it was done? That's what she couldn't understand.

And then, when it was all over, Bob and his friend disappeared in the car again.

"There's no doubt about it, Bob," said Strangways. "What a diabolical old blackguard the man must have been."

"I agree," answered Seymour, grimly. "One wishes one could get at him now. As it is, the most we can do is to convince our mutton-headed friend Grayson. I owe the gentleman one for that rider to the verdict."

The car stopped first at a chemist's, and the two men entered the shop. It was an unusual request they made— cylinders of oxygen are generally required only for sick rooms. But after a certain amount of argument, the chemist produced one, and they placed it in the back of the car. Their next errand was even stranger, and consisted of the purchase of a rabbit. Finally, a visit to an ironmonger produced a rose such as is used on the end of a hosepipe for watering.

Then, their purchases complete, they returned to the house, stopping at the police-station on the way. Grayson came out to see them, a tolerant smile on his face. Yes, he would be pleased to come up that evening after dinner.

"Do you want to introduce me to the murderer, Major?" he asked, maliciously.

"Something of the sort, Inspector," said Seymour. "Studied that encyclopaedia yet?"

"I've been too busy on other matters— a little more important," answered the other, shortly.

"Good," cried Seymour, genially. "By the way, when you want to blow out a lamp what is the first thing you do?

"Turn down the wick," said Grayson.

"Wise man. I wonder why the murderer didn't."

And for the second time that day, Inspector Grayson was left staring thoughtfully at a retreating motor-car.

It was not till after dinner that Bob Seymour reverted to the matter which was obsessing everyone's mind. Most of the house-party had left; only Mr. Trayne and Ruth and her brother remained. And even the Celebrated Actor had been comparatively silent throughout the meal, while Bill had remained sunk in profound gloom. Everything at the inquest had pointed to him as the culprit; every ring at the bell and he had imagined someone arriving with a warrant for his arrest. And Bob had said nothing to clear him— not a word, in spite of his apparent confidence last night. Only Ruth still seemed certain that he would do something; but what could he do, exploded the boy miserably, when she tried to cheer him up. The evidence OR the face of it was damning.

"About time our friend arrived, Gilbert." Bob Seymour glanced at his watch, and at that moment there came a ring at the bell.

"Who's that?" said Bill, nervously.

"The egregious Grayson, old boy," said Bob. "The experiment is about to begin."

"You mean—" cried Ruth, breathlessly.

"I mean that Sir Gilbert has kindly consented to take the place of Denton last night," said Bob, cheerfully. "He'll have one or two little props to help him, and I shall be stage-manager."

"But why have you put it off so long?" cried Bill, as the inspector came into the room.

"'When 'tis day. All serene,'" quoted Bob. "Good evening, Mr. Grayson. Now that we are all here, we might as well begin."

"Just as well," agreed the inspector, shortly. "What do we begin with?"

"First of all a visit to the smoking-room," answered Seymour. "Then, except for Sir Gilbert Strangways, we shall all go outside into the garden."

In silence they followed him to the scene of the tragedy.

"I trust you will exonerate me from any charge of being theatrical," he began, closing the door. "But in this particular case the cause of Mr. Denton's death is so extraordinary that only an actual reconstruction of what happened would convince such a pronounced sceptic as the inspector. Facts are facts, aren't they, Mr. Grayson?"

The inspector grunted non-committally. "What's that on the floor?" he demanded.

"A cylinder of oxygen, and a rabbit in a cage," explained Seymour, pleasantly. "Now first to rearrange the room. The lamp was on this table— very possibly placed there by the dead man to get a better view of the inscription under the window; so that we may proceed to what happened.

"First, Inspector, Mr. Brabazon entered the room, and, as he has already described, he and Mr. Denton came to blows, with the result that he laid Denton out. Then Mr. Brabazon left the room, as I propose we shall do shortly. And, after a while, Mr. Denton came to his senses again, and went to the window for air, just as Sir Gilbert has done at the present moment."

"You can't prove it," snapped Grayson.

"True," murmured Seymour. "Just logical surmise— so far; from now onwards— irrefutable proof. The murderer is admirably trained, I assure you. Are you ready, Gilbert?"

"Quite," said Strangways, bending down and picking up the rabbit-cage, which he placed on the table by the lamp.

"Perhaps, Inspector, you would like to examine the rabbit?" remarked Seymour. "No! Well, if not, I would just ask you to notice Sir Gilbert's other preparations. A clip on his nose; the tube from the oxygen cylinder in his mouth."

"I don't understand all this, Major Seymour," cried Grayson, testily. "What's the rabbit for, and all this other tommy-rot?"

"I thought I'd explained to you that Sir Gilbert is taking the place of the murdered man last night. The tommy-rot is to prevent him sharing the same fate."

"Good God!" The inspector turned a little pale.

"Shall we adjourn to the garden?" continued Seymour, imperturbably. He led the way from the room. "I think we'll stand facing the window, so that we can see everything. Of course, I can't guarantee that the performance will be exactly the same; but it will be near enough, I think. Nor can I guarantee exactly when it will start." As he spoke they reached a point facing the window. The lamp was burning brightly in the room, outlining Sir Gilbert's figure as he stood facing them, and with a little shudder Ruth clutched her brother's arm.

"Even so did Denton stand last night." Seymour's even voice came out of the darkness. "You see his shadow on the grass, and the shadow of the sash; just as Mr. Brabazon saw the shadow last night, Inspector."

Silence settled on the group; even the phlegmatic inspector seemed impressed. And then suddenly, when the tension was becoming almost unbearable, Sir Gilbert's voice came from the window.

"It's coming, Bob."

They saw him adjust his nose-clip and turn on the oxygen; then he stood up as before, motionless, in the window.

"Watch carefully, Inspector," said Seymour. "Do you see those dark, thin, sinuous feelers coming down outside the window? Like strands of rope. They're curling underneath the sash towards Sir Gilbert's head. The lamp— look at the lamp— watch the colour of the flame. Orange— where before it was yellow. Look— it's smoking; thick black smoke; and the room is turning green. Do you see? Now the lamp again. It's going out— even as it went out last night. And, by this time last night, Inspector, Denton, I think, was dead; even as the rabbit on the table is dead now. Now watch Sir Gilbert's shirt front."

"Great Heavens!" shouted Sir Robert. "It's going up."

"Precisely," said Bob. "At the present moment he is being lifted off his legs— as Denton was last night; and if at this period Denton was not already dead, he could not have lasted long. He would have been hanged."

"Oh Bill, it's awful!" cried Ruth, hysterically.

"Then came the rain," continued Seymour, "I have here the hosepipe fitted with a rose." He dragged it nearer the window, and let it play on the side of the house as far up as the water would reach. Almost at once the body of Sir Gilbert ceased rising; it paused as if hesitating; then with a little thud, fell downwards half in half out of the window, head and arms sprawling in the flower-bed.

"And thus we found Mr. Denton last night, when it was still raining," said Seymour. "All right, Gilbert?"

"All right, old boy!" came from the other.

"But if he's all right," said the inspector, wonderingly, "why wasn't the other?"

"Because Sir Gilbert, being in full possession of his senses when the hanging process started, used his hands to prevent strangulation. To continue— the rain ceased. We were out of the room waiting for your arrival, Mr. Grayson, and while we were out— Look! Look!"

Before their eyes the top part of Sir Gilbert's body was being raised till once again he stood straight up. Then steadily he was drawn upwards till his knees came about the level of the sill, when, with a sudden lurch, the whole body swung out and then back again, while the calves of his legs drummed against the outside of the house. "Do you remember the marks on the trousers, Inspector? And then the rain came again." Seymour turned on the hose. Once more the body paused, hesitated, and then crashed downwards into the flower-bed.

"All right, Gilbert?"

"All right," answered the other. "Merely uncomfortably wet." He rose and came towards them.

"And now, Inspector," murmured Seymour, mildly, "you know exactly how Mr. Denton was killed."

"But good Lord! gentlemen," said Grayson, feebly, "what was it that killed him?"

"A species of liana," said Sir Gilbert. "In my experience absolutely unique in strength and size— though I have heard stories from the Upper Amazon of similar cases. It's known amongst the natives as the Green Death."

"But is it an animal?"

"You've asked me a question, Inspector," said Sir Gilbert, "that I find it very difficult to answer. To look at— it's a plant— a climbing plant, with long, powerful tendrils. But in habits— it's carnivorous, like the insect-eating variety in England. It's found in the tropical undergrowth, and is incidentally worshipped by some of the tribes. They give it human sacrifices, so the story goes. And now I can quite believe it."

"But, hang it, sir," exploded the inspector, "we aren't on the Upper Amazon. Do you mean to say that one of these things is here?"

"Of course. Didn't you see it? It's spread from the wall to the branches of that old oak."

"If you remember, Inspector, I pointed it out to you this morning," murmured Seymour, mildly.

But you were so engrossed with the flower-bed."

"But why did the lamp go out?" asked Ruth breathlessly.

"For the same reason that the rabbit died," said Bob. "For the same reason that the match went out last night, and gave me the third clue. From each of the tendrils a green cloud is ejected, the principal ingredient of which is carbon dioxide— which is the gas that suffocates. The plant holds the victim, and they suffocate him. Hence the oxygen and the nose-clip; otherwise Sir Gilbert would have been killed to-night. By the way, would you like to see the rabbit, Inspector?"

"I'll take your word for it, sir," he grunted, shortly. "Only, why the devil you didn't tell me this last night I can't understand."

"I'd have shown you— only the rain had come on again. And you must admit I advised you to get an encyclopaedia."

iii

"BOB, I don't understand how you did it," cried Ruth.

It was after breakfast the following morning, and the sound of axes came through the open window from the men who were already at work cutting down the old oak tree.

The other laughed. "Points of detail," he said, quietly. "At first, before the police arrived, I thought it possible that Bill had been responsible for his death. I thought he'd hit him so hard that the man's heart had given out, and that in a final spasm he'd staggered to the window and died. It struck me as just conceivable that Denton had himself blown out the lamp, thinking it made it hotter. But why not turn it out? And would he have had time if he was at his last gasp? Then the police came, and the body had moved. I knew the man was dead when he was lying over the sill, though I hadn't seen the mark round his neck. I therefore knew that some agency had moved the body. That agency must have been the murderer— anyone else would have mentioned the fact. Therefore it couldn't have been Bill, because he was in the billiard-room the whole time, and I'd locked the door of the smoking-room. Then I saw the mark round his neck— strangled. But you can't strangle a powerful man without a desperate struggle. And why should the strangler return after the deed was committed? Also there were no footmarks on the flower-bed. Then I noticed the grey dust on his trousers just below the knee, and underneath the window outside, kept dry by the sill, which stuck out, was ivy— dusty and cobwebby as ivy always is. How had his legs touched it? If they had— and there was nowhere else the dirt could have come from— he must have been lifted off the ground. Strangulation, certainly, of a type— hung. The dirt had not been there when we first found the body lying over the sill. And if he'd been hung— who did it? And why hang a dead man? What had happened between the time Bill left the room and the police found the body? A heavy shower of rain, during which we found the body; then clear again, while we were out of the room; then another shower, when the police found the body. And then I thought of the rhyme:—

" 'When 'tis hot, shun this spot;
When 'tis rain, come again.'

"Could it be possible that there was some diabolical agent at work, who stopped, or was frustrated, by rain? It was then I saw the green cloud itself over the constable's head— the cloud which extinguished my match.

"Incredible as it seemed, I saw at once that it was the only solution which fitted everything— the marks on the back of his trousers below the knee— everything. He'd been hung, and the thing that had hanged him had blown out the lamp— or extinguished it is a more accurate way of expressing it— even as

it extinguished my match. The smell— I'd been searching my memory for that smell the whole evening, and it came to me when I saw that green gas— it's some rank discharge from the plant, mixed with the' carbon dioxide. And I last saw it, and smelt it, on the Upper Amazon ten years ago. My native bearers dragged me away in their terror. There was a small animal, I remember, hanging from a red tendril, quite dead. The tendril was round its neck, exuding little puffs of green vapour. So I got Gilbert to make sure. That's all."

"But what a wicked old man he must have been who planted it!" cried the girl, indignantly.

"A distorted sense of humour, as I told our host," said Bob, briefly, starting to fill his pipe.

"Bill and I can never thank you enough, Major Seymour," said the girl, slowly, after a long silence. "If it hadn't been for you— " She gave a little shudder, and stared out of the window.

"Some advantages in wandering," he answered lightly. "One does pick up odd facts. Suppose I'll have to push off again soon."

"Why?" she demanded.

"Oh, I dunno. Can't sit in England doing nothing."

"Going alone?" she asked, softly.

"Do you think anybody would be mug enough to accompany me?" he inquired, with an attempt at a grin. Dear Heavens! If only he wasn't a cripple.

"I don't know, I'm sure," she murmured. "You'd want your three points of detail to make it a certainty, wouldn't you? We only reached the coincidence stage two nights ago."

"What do you mean, Ruth?" he whispered, staring at her.

"That for a clever man— you're an utter fool. With a woman one is a certainty. However, if you'll close your eyes, I'll pander to your feeble intellect. Tight, please."

And it was as the tree fell with a rending crash outside that Ruth Brabazon found that, at any rate as far as his arms were concerned, Bob Seymour was no cripple. And Bob— well, a kiss is pretty conclusive. At least, some kisses are.

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2: On the Island of Shadows

Ernest Favenc

1845-1908

Evening News (Sydney) 7 Nov 1896

THIS IS the story told by Eugene Tripot, convict from New Caledonia, of what happened to him during the boat voyage when he had succeeded in making his escape.

He died in the hospital at Hong-Kong, insane, having lost his reason through the suffering and privation he went through on that occasion.

He had lucid intervals, during which he repeatedly told this story, and insisted on its truth.

He was rescued from a sandy islet on the outer edge of the Great Barrier Reef, off the coast of Northern Queensland, by a China steamer taking the outside passage. He had been cast away there for some weeks, living on trepang and shell-fish.

Nothing was seen to in any way bear out this story.

"THREE of us alone between sea and sky— three men with a wolf inside each, wolves that looked at each other out of our eyes. Gronard crouched in the bottom of the boat, gnawing at a piece of wood; Pelrine sat at the stern, with his sheath-knife in his hand, digging savagely at the thwart; I was sitting in the bow.

"The sail flapped idly at every little swing and roll of the boat, just as it had flapped during the last fortnight, never once bellying out.

"Beside us three there was the sun— the sun that hated us so. Hot and eager it rose in the morning— hot and eager to drink our blood. With anger that we should be still alive, it set in the evening. Gronard cursed the sun, Pelrine cursed the sun, and I cursed the sun.

"That was all we did from morning to night. It was all we had to do. It is bad for men to sit silent all day, only speaking to curse the sun, for then the wolf rages and breaks out.

"It broke forth in Pelrine, sitting digging his knife in the thwart, and suddenly he sprang upon Gronard. He would have sprung upon me, just the same, if I had happened to be next to him, for it was the wolf that sprung, not Pelrine, for Pelrine was always a good-hearted man.

"Gronard was taken at a disadvantage, but he was the strongest of us three, and grappled with Pelrine, and in the struggle the boat lurched, and both fell over the side. I saw them go down, down, in the clear water, turning and twisting, and all I thought was, 'They do not feel the sun down there.'

"They never rose, for I saw what looked like long flashes of white light dart at them, and I knew that the sharks that had kept us company so long had them for their sport at last.

"When I raised my head there was a ripple coming fast across the water. If Pelrine's wolf had not broken out just then both he and Gronard would be alive now. I went to the tiller and the sail filled, and the boat moved for the first time for two weeks.

"West was our course— anywhere west, to the great continent that reached for two thousand miles north and south. Merrily blew the wind, and in the evening there were clouds ahead, and a black thunderstorm flashed and muttered in the distance. All through the night there was the pleasant rip and gurgle of water.

"But the wolf gnawed still.

"Morning! and ahead of me I saw white water, but no land. It mattered little whether I died by the wolf or the wave, and I kept straight on. As I got closer to the breakers I saw there was a low, sandy mound visible, with some low bushes growing on it, and to this I steered.

"The northern side looked to be the smoothest, and I endeavoured to make that side; for though there was no sea, the wind having been but light, the sweep and rush of the Pacific rollers was tremendous, and when they broke upon this submerged wall of coral and recoiled broken and shattered, the very air seemed to tremble.

"At the northernmost point of the islet the turmoil seemed less, though the rollers were as big; but the passage was deep enough to let them pass through and expend their fury in a sullen swirl over the flats beyond.

"As I approached I was caught in one of the rollers and swept on with it, with great force and fury. We mounted on the crest of it, and then fell with a rush that made me feel sick. Next moment the boat was dashed on the beach, and I was flung unhurt beside it.

"Then the roller swept back and left us, the broken boat and myself, on the sand.

"It was a miserable little patch of dry land indeed, and when I had rested a little I commenced to examine it, first directing my steps to the low bushes on the highest part. I found it to be a ring of scrub surrounding a depression filled with water. I crashed through the bushes and stooped to drink, scarcely daring to hope that it would be fresh. It was, or at least fairly so, for the spray from the breakers drifted over into it.

"I drank, and the wolf was quiet for a bit, while I lay on the sand and looked around. A line of tossing white ran north and south— the line I had passed through— but to the west was a still sea, broken here and there in patches of

shining foam, but mostly still, and of light, transparent green colour. The tide was falling, and by midday there were bare spots of coral showing.

"I went down and searched for shell-fish, or anything left by the tide. I found what was better than all— plenty of the sea-slugs known as trepang. I soon had a quantity collected, and having the means of making a fire, I spent the rest of the day in cooking and eating; and again the wolf crouched for a time.

"That night I slept soundly after the cramped space of the boat, and when the wolf clamoured at daylight I arose. It was a strange thing to be standing there alone on that patch of sand, with the wall of tireless breakers on one side, that looked far above me, as though when they fell they would overwhelm my refuge.

"I fed on trepang, and passed the day idly resting, for now I had tamed the wolf within me. I longed for my companions, but they were in the bellies of the sharks.

"When darkness came I lay down and slept, but awoke in the middle of the night, dreaming that I heard strange sounds, I listened, and at first heard nothing but the boom and crash of the breakers; but presently I heard low voices and the crunching tread of feet on the coral sand. I leapt to my feet, but could see nothing. I called, but got no answer; and still, distinctly, I heard the sound of voices and the tread of feet.

"I hastily traversed the island, but saw nothing, only at times I heard the voices talking, and though I called and called again, none answered me. Then there was silence, and plainly I heard the click and grind of steel meeting steel, the tramp, and quickened breathing of two combatants; and still I saw nothing.

"Suddenly the clashing came quicker and sharper, as though there was a hotly-contested rally, and following it came a fall on the sand, and then a cry in a woman's voice, and a peal of musical laughter. There was low whispering, and the steps died away, heavy and slow, as though they carried a burden, and then there was no sound but the thunder of the tireless billows.

"I scarcely felt frightened— I had been living far too long hand in hand with death. I felt curious, and if terrified at all it was more at the idea that it had been a fancy of my brain— that it was my wits were failing me, for I knew well that loneliness serves some men thus.

"All was quiet for the remainder of the night, and in the morning there were no signs nor tracks of any person but myself.

"Now, although I heard the voices, the tongue that they spoke in was strange to me, but I thought it was Spanish, from the way that I had heard old comrades of mine talk together who were Spaniards.

"Next night the ghosts were there again, and once more the duel, as I took it, was fought on that solitary speck of sand in the great ocean, to the music of the surf.

"That was a strange, unreal life— by day to pace the sandy shore and listen to the waves, and talk to myself, or gather and cook the trepang that supported me; by night to hear the crunch of the sand under unseen feet, and the quick clash of the blades. But stranger still was to come.

"I bethought me, from what information I had gathered, that this reef was the great reef that lay off the coast of Queensland, and that inside, between it and the mainland, ships and steamers were constantly passing up and down.

"My boat was too shattered to admit of my trusting myself in it to the ocean, but could I not patch it up sufficiently to carry me in the still-water channels of the reef? I would only have to keep due west to come out somewhere on the edge of the frequented passage.

"To this end I took to exploring the reef westward as far as I could go during low tide. The second day I came across a submerged object lying on the edge of a deep channel— the wreck of a ship. At low water it was partly uncovered, and the gaunt ribs showed above the surface for some height. It was an ancient hulk, encrusted with marine growth and barnacles. Only the heart of the timber remained; but that was as hard as flint.

"They built stout ships in the days when she left her bones there. She was firmly wedged on the ledge of a reef, and must have been carried to where she lay in some tempest of extraordinary fury. How many years had she been there, and of what nation she was, I had no means of judging just then.

"But day after day I visited her, and in time found that out; I mustered courage to dive down and examine her below the water-mark of low tide. It was not the depth that required courage, but strange things had found their home amidst the waving growth around her. The banded yellow and black sea-snakes of those parts swam in and out, hideous shell-fish with staring eyes and long feelers hid amongst the beams, and, for aught I knew, some loathsome octopus might be lurking in his lair there.

"I pushed on farther and farther by degrees, until I found many casks still preserving their shape and outline, having something within that was of great weight. I burst one open, and inside was tarnished metal so covered with growth and slime that it was impossible to say what it was. After many efforts I broke off a portion of it to examine at my leisure. It was a lump of silver dollars, welded together by marine growth, and discoloured by long submergence.

"I sat aghast at the thought of all those casks there being filled with coin— silver coin— ay, and why not some of them gold? I stood ankle deep in the salt

water and looked around. A sea of light and shadow, calm and glassy, of ever-changing colour. Beyond, the restless tossing wall of white froth and foam.

"I had wealth— all I desired of it— in my grasp; and this was my domain.

"Was ever man so situated? When my turn came to die, should I join those ghosts on the isle, who must have been the men who sailed on this treasure-ship. There was blood on these coins, else why were they here, why was that nightly duel fought, what brought this ship so far south of her course?

"I returned to the island and cleaned the coins I held, scrubbed them with sand, and picked them apart with the knife that Pelrine had dropped when he went overboard. They were Spanish dollars, dated 1624 and a few years later.

"In successive journeys I examined some more of the casks, and found that one smaller one was full of gold, and doubtless there were more. It was better they should remain where they were, safer in every way, until I found a way out of my present position. Such a position in every way. With untold riches lying beneath a few feet of salt water of no more value than the leagues of coral north and south of me.

"And if I escaped and gained my fellowmen, of what avail would be my treasure to an escaped convict, who might at any moment be seized and returned to the living death I had fled from. My wealth alone would draw notice to me if I sought to enjoy it. At any rate, I determined to try and escape. I could decide afterwards about the treasure. Perhaps I should be able to purchase my freedom with some of it.

"I determined to wait till the moon was full (it being then half), as it would enable me to make use of the low tide at all hours, and it would also allow me time to patch up my boat, which I commenced to overhaul that day.

"I slept soundly the first part of the night, and awoke as usual at the tread of the ghosts. The moon hung low in the west, and I saw— yes, saw that night the apparitions that haunted that tiny isle.

"The night was clear, save for some angry-looking clouds in the cast, and the setting moon shone with spectral light over the still, shallow waters of the reef. The tide was low, and the passage I had passed through practicable for a well-manned boat with a skilful steersman.

"But was it the ghosts I saw? Half a mile out, or less, lay a ship with lights both in her rigging and streaming through her ports. A boat lay off the edge of the island, and I thought I heard another rowing in from the ship.

"I had no fear, and approached the group gathered on the sand. They were talking seriously, and, though the language was the same as I had always heard, I could now understand every word as though it was my own.

"They took no notice of me as I came near; I spoke to them, but received no answer; I laid my hand on one's arm, and I did not feel him. My sense of

touch was dead, my voice was inaudible, my presence invisible. For the time being we had changed places, and the ghosts were the substantial beings and I the impalpable shape.

"There were five of them, all richly dressed in the fashion of two hundred years ago. One was an elderly man of dignified appearance, and the other, who seemed his opponent, was a very handsome young gallant.

" 'Before we meet, Don Herrera, and I send your soul to keep company with those of all the traitors since Judas hung himself,' said the elder man in a voice of deep hate, 'I would say something that these gentlemen may remember concerning you.

" 'You, a trusted officer of his Majesty, have tampered with the marines of my ship. You tempted them to mutiny, but your vile plot was discovered, and your dupes hung on the yardarm, where you, too, would be hung, King's officer though you be, and noble to boot, but that I reserved you for my own hand.

" 'You, who came on my ship as an honoured guest, honoured on account of your standing as my Master's officer, although I knew you for a ruined profligate.

" 'You, in your greed for the gold and silver in yon ship, conspired against me, led weak men on to their death, and, above all, sought to dishonour me in a way that only death will wipe out. I would not slay you on my own deck, for death by my hand only would suffice, but I vowed that the first dry land we saw should witness the death of one of us. This spot will serve, and we need not wait for daylight.

" 'I call upon you all to hear that this man is a perjured traitor, whom I greatly honour by descending to cross swords with him.'

"The young man answered not, only by an insolent smile, then tossed his hat down, and drew his sword.

"During the time the captain was speaking the other boat arrived at the beach, and two people left and came to us, a priest and a woman. They stopped close to where I was standing, and I saw the most exquisite face illumined by the level moon that I ever saw in my life.

"The priest was dressed in the soutane and broad-brimmed hat of his profession, and looked ill at ease, but his companion flashed a bold glance from her dark eyes at the younger combatant that at once told me the guilty secret, and why the captain had not hung him at the yardarm, but brought him to this patch of sand to kill him himself.

"The fight commenced, warily and cautiously at first, but the two men soon warmed to their work, and then I saw the murderous trick of the young man. He was forcing the old man round, so that he should face the deceitful glare of

the setting moon. Bit by bit he accomplished his object; then there was a quick, sharp interchange, and the captain fell, pierced through the body.

" 'Bravo!' cried the woman standing by me, and she laughed merrily.

"I shuddered, and the priest darted from her side and knelt beside the dying man. He, too, had heard that devilish laugh, and lifted his head and gazed at his destroyer. He spoke, and his voice was clear and distinct.

" 'Behold the judgment of the wicked is close at hand. The gold you plotted for shall never be yours; the beauty you lusted for shall be food for fishes. You shall not linger long behind me.'

"He fell back, as the edge of the ghostly yellow moon kissed the water's edge, its dying rays lighting up the scene of horror, the silent men, the recumbent figure, the dark-robed kneeling priest, holding on high the crucifix; the white sand gleaming out from that great waste of water.

"Suddenly a flash of lightning, accompanied by a peal of thunder, made everyone start. The clouds had banked up in masses to the east, and were covering the face of the heavens. The party hurried off to the boats, taking the captain's body with them, the white breakers were already leaping high, and they quickly pushed off.

"I watched them as they pulled to the passage, and saw the rollers rushing towards them. Then the darkness fell, but out of that darkness rung out cries of despair, and high above all a woman's shriek, the death-shriek of the woman who had laughed at her dying husband. Next instant the tempest burst, and caught the doomed ship. I saw her lights coming closer; saw them, then lost them; then saw them again, and then I knew that she was in the breakers.

"They beat her with successive blows, and hurled her into the passage, a dismasted wreck; hurried her on with the rushing water as the tempest burst in the blackness and fury inconceivable, hiding all things from my view.

"I opened my eyes to a soft, balmy morning, and found myself lying in my usual place on the sand. No sign of the recent storm was visible, my clothes were dry, the sea calm, and the surf lower than usual. Bewildered, I looked around, scarcely believing my eyes. I looked again at the sea, noting how impossible it was for that to have gone down in an hour or two, and as I looked I saw a steamer.

"Instantly the uncontrollable longing to see my fellow-men seized me.

"I made my fire up with a mad haste, piled on it planks torn from my boat, and branches torn hastily from the bushes. A straight column of smoke ascended, and I was seen at once. The steamer stood in, and a boat was lowered. I rushed into the water to meet it. Fear, such as I had never felt in silent, lonely nights, overcame me.

" 'Take me from the ghosts!' I cried, as I scrambled in the boat, and fell insensible.

"THIS IS a hospital, and they think me mad but the wreck of the Spanish ship is there."

3: The White Cat of Drumgunniol

Sheridan le Fanu

1814-1873

All the Year Round, 2 April 1870 (Anonymously)

In*: Madame Crowls Ghost*, 1923

THERE IS A FAMOUS story of a white cat, with which we all become acquainted in the nursery. I am going to tell a story of a white cat very different from the amiable and enchanted princess who took that disguise for a season. The white cat of which I speak was a more sinister animal.

The traveller from Limerick toward Dublin, after passing the hills of Killaloe upon the left, as Keeper Mountain rises high in view, finds himself gradually hemmed in, up the right, by a range of lower hills. An undulating plain that dips gradually to a lower level than that of the road interposes, and some scattered hedgerows relieve its somewhat wild and melancholy character.

One of the few human habitations that send up their films of turf-smoke from that lonely plain, is the loosely-thatched, earth-built dwelling of a "strong farmer," as the more prosperous of the tenant-farming classes are termed in Munster. It stands in a clump of trees near the edge of a wandering stream, about half-way between the mountains and the Dublin road, and had been for generations tenanted by people named Donovan.

In a distant place, desirous of studying some Irish records which had fallen into my hands, and inquiring for a teacher capable of instructing me in the Irish language, a Mr. Donovan, dreamy, harmless, and learned, was recommended to me for the purpose.

I found that he had been educated as a Sizar in Trinity College, Dublin. He now supported himself by teaching, and the special direction of my studies, I suppose, flattered his national partialities, for he unbosomed himself of much of his long-reserved thoughts, and recollections about his country and his early days. It was he who told me this story, and I mean to repeat it, as nearly as I can, in his own words.

I have myself seen the old farm-house, with its orchard of huge mossgrown apple trees. I have looked round on the peculiar landscape; the roofless, ivied tower, that two hundred years before had afforded a refuge from raid and rapparee, and which still occupies its old place in the angle of the haggard; the bush-grown "liss," that scarcely a hundred and fifty steps away records the labours of a bygone race; the dark and towering outline of old Keeper in the background; and the lonely range of furze and heath-clad hills that form a nearer barrier, with many a line of grey rock and clump of dwarf oak or birch. The pervading sense of loneliness made it a scene not unsuited for a wild and unearthly story. And I could quite fancy how, seen in the grey of a wintry

morning, shrouded far and wide in snow, or in the melancholy glory of an autumnal sunset, or in the chill splendour of a moonlight night, it might have helped to tone a dreamy mind like honest Dan Donovan's to superstition and a proneness to the illusions of fancy. It is certain, however, that I never anywhere met with a more simple-minded creature, or one on whose good faith I could more entirely rely.

When I was a boy, said he, living at home at Drumgunniol, I used to take my Goldsmith's *Roman History* in my hand and go down to my favourite seat, the flat stone, sheltered by a hawthorn tree beside the little lough, a large and deep pool, such as I have heard called a tarn in England. It lay in the gentle hollow of a field that is overhung toward the north by the old orchard, and being a deserted place was favourable to my studious quietude.

One day reading here, as usual, I wearied at last, and began to look about me, thinking of the heroic scenes I had just been reading of. I was as wide awake as I am at this moment, and I saw a woman appear at the corner of the orchard and walk down the slope. She wore a long, light grey dress, so long that it seemed to sweep the grass behind her, and so singular was her appearance in a part of the world where female attire is so inflexibly fixed by custom, that I could not take my eyes off her. Her course lay diagonally from corner to corner of the field, which was a large one, and she pursued it without swerving.

When she came near I could see that her feet were bare, and that she seemed to be looking steadfastly upon some remote object for guidance. Her route would have crossed me— had the tarn not interposed— about ten or twelve yards below the point at which I was sitting. But instead of arresting her course at the margin of the lough, as I had expected, she went on without seeming conscious of its existence, and I saw her, as plainly as I see you, sir, walk across the surface of the water, and pass, without seeming to see me, at about the distance I had calculated.

I was ready to faint from sheer terror. I was only thirteen years old then, and I remember every particular as if it had happened this hour.

The figure passed through the gap at the far corner of the field, and there I lost sight of it. I had hardly strength to walk home, and was so nervous, and ultimately so ill, that for three weeks I was confined to the house, and could not bear to be alone for a moment. I never entered that field again, such was the horror with which from that moment every object in it was clothed. Even at this distance of time I should not like to pass through it.

This apparition I connected with a mysterious event; and, also, with a singular liability, that has for nearly eight years distinguished, or rather

afflicted, our family. It is no fancy. Everybody in that part of the country knows all about it. Everybody connected what I had seen with it.

I will tell it all to you as well as I can.

When I was about fourteen years old— that is about a year after the sight I had seen in the lough field— we were one night expecting my father home from the fair of Killaloe. My mother sat up to welcome him home, and I with her, for I liked nothing better than such a vigil. My brothers and sisters, and the farm servants, except the men who were driving home the cattle from the fair, were asleep in their beds. My mother and I were sitting in the chimney corner chatting together, and watching my father's supper, which was kept hot over the fire. We knew that he would return before the men who were driving home the cattle, for he was riding, and told us that he would only wait to see them fairly on the road, and then push homeward.

At length we heard his voice and the knocking of his loaded whip at the door, and my mother let him in. I don't think I ever saw my father drunk, which is more than most men of my age, from the same part of the country, could say of theirs. But he could drink his glass of whisky as well as another, and he usually came home from fair or market a little merry and mellow, and with a jolly flush in his cheeks.

To-night he looked sunken, pale and sad. He entered with the saddle and bridle in his hand, and he dropped them against the wall, near the door, and put his arms round his wife's neck, and kissed her kindly.

"Welcome home, Meehal," said she, kissing him heartily.

"God bless you, mavourneen," he answered.

And hugging her again, he turned to me, who was plucking him by the hand, jealous of his notice. I was little, and light of my age, and he lifted me up in his arms, and kissed me, and my arms being about his neck, he said to my mother:

"Draw the bolt, acuishla."

She did so, and setting me down very dejectedly, he walked to the fire and sat down on a stool, and stretched his feet toward the glowing turf, leaning with his hands on his knees.

"Rouse up, Mick, darlin'," said my mother, who was growing anxious, "and tell me how did the cattle sell, and did everything go lucky at the fair, or is there anything wrong with the landlord, or what in the world is it that ails you, Mick, jewel?"

"Nothin', Molly. The cows sould well, thank God, and there's nothin' fell out between me an' the landlord, an' everything's the same way. There's no fault to find anywhere."

"Well, then, Mickey, since so it is, turn round to your hot supper, and ate it, and tell us is there anything new."

"I got my supper, Molly, on the way, and I can't ate a bit," he answered.

"Got your supper on the way, an' you knowin' 'twas waiting for you at home, an' your wife sittin' up an' all!" cried my mother, reproachfully.

"You're takin' a wrong meanin' out of what I say," said my father. "There's something happened that leaves me that I can't ate a mouthful, and I'll not be dark with you, Molly, for, maybe, it ain't very long I have to be here, an' I'll tell you what it was. It's what I've seen, the white cat."

"The Lord between us and harm!" exclaimed my mother, in a moment as pale and as chap-fallen as my father; and then, trying to rally, with a laugh, she said: "Ha! 'tis only funnin' me you are. Sure a white rabbit was snared a Sunday last, in Grady's wood; an' Teigue seen a big white rat in the haggard yesterday."

" 'Twas neither rat nor rabbit was in it. Don't ye think but I'd know a rat or a rabbit from a big white cat, with green eyes as big as halfpennies, and its back riz up like a bridge, trottin' on and across me, and ready, if I dar' stop, to rub its sides against my shins, and maybe to make a jump and seize my throat, if that it's a cat, at all, an' not something worse?"

As he ended his description in a low tone, looking straight at the fire, my father drew his big hand across his forehead once or twice, his face being damp and shining with the moisture of fear, and he sighed, or rather groaned, heavily.

My mother had relapsed into panic, and was praying again in her fear. I, too, was terribly frightened, and on the point of crying, for I knew all about the white cat.

Clapping my father on the shoulder, by way of encouragement, my mother leaned over him, kissing him, and at last began to cry. He was wringing her hands in his, and seemed in great trouble.

"There was nothin' came into the house with me?" he asked, in a very low tone, turning to me.

"There was nothin', father," I said, "but the saddle and bridle that was in your hand."

"Nothin' white kem in at the doore wid me," he repeated.

"Nothin' at all," I answered.

"So best," said my father, and making the sign of the cross, he began mumbling to himself, and I knew he was saying his prayers.

Waiting for a while, to give him time for this exercise, my mother asked him where he first saw it.

"When I was riding up the bohereen,"— the Irish term meaning a little road, such as leads up to a farm-house— "I bethought myself that the men was on the road with the cattle, and no one to look to the horse barrin' myself, so I thought I might as well leave him in the crooked field below, an' I tuck him there, he bein' cool, and not a hair turned, for I rode him aisy all the way. It was when I turned, after lettin' him go— the saddle and bridle bein' in my hand— that I saw it, pushin' out o' the long grass at the side o' the path, an' it walked across it, in front of me, an' then back again, before me, the same way, an' sometimes at one side, an' then at the other, lookin' at me wid them shinin' eyes; and I consayted I heard it growlin' as it kep' beside me— as close as ever you see— till I kem up to the doore, here, an' knocked an' called, as ye heerd me."

Now, what was it, in so simple an incident, that agitated my father, my mother, myself, and finally, every member of this rustic household, with a terrible foreboding? It was this that we, one and all, believed that my father had received, in thus encountering the white cat, a warning of his approaching death.

The omen had never failed hitherto. It did not fail now. In a week after my father took the fever that was going, and before a month he was dead.

MY honest friend, Dan Donovan, paused here; I could perceive that he was praying, for his lips were busy, and I concluded that it was for the repose of that departed soul.

In a little while he resumed.

IT IS eighty years now since that omen first attached to my family. Eighty years? Ay, is it. Ninety is nearer the mark. And I have spoken to many old people, in those earlier times, who had a distinct recollection of everything connected with it.

It happened in this way.

My grand-uncle, Connor Donovan, had the old farm of Drumgunniol in his day. He was richer than ever my father was, or my father's father either, for he took a short lease of Balraghan, and made money of it. But money won't soften a hard heart, and I'm afraid my grand-uncle was a cruel man— a profligate man he was, surely, and that is mostly a cruel man at heart. He drank his share, too, and cursed and swore, when he was vexed, more than was good for his soul, I'm afraid.

At that time there was a beautiful girl of the Colemans, up in the mountains, not far from Capper Cullen. I'm told that there are no Colemans

there now at all, and that family has passed away. The famine years made great changes.

Ellen Coleman was her name. The Colemans were not rich. But, being such a beauty, she might have made a good match. Worse than she did for herself, poor thing, she could not.

Con Donovan— my grand-uncle, God forgive him!— sometimes in his rambles saw her at fairs or patterns, and he fell in love with her, as who might not?

He used her ill. He promised her marriage, and persuaded her to come away with him; and, after all, he broke his word. It was just the old story. He tired of her, and he wanted to push himself in the world; and he married a girl of the Collopys, that had a great fortune— twenty-four cows, seventy sheep, and a hundred and twenty goats.

He married this Mary Collopy, and grew richer than before; and Ellen Coleman died broken-hearted. But that did not trouble the strong farmer much.

He would have liked to have children, but he had none, and this was the only cross he had to bear, for everything else went much as he wished.

One night he was returning from the fair of Nenagh. A shallow stream at that time crossed the road— they have thrown a bridge over it, I am told, some time since— and its channel was often dry in summer weather. When it was so, as it passes close by the old farm-house of Drumgunniol, without a great deal of winding, it makes a sort of road, which people then used as a short cut to reach the house by. Into this dry channel, as there was plenty of light from the moon, my grand-uncle turned his horse, and when he had reached the two ash-trees at the meering of the farm he turned his horse short into the river-field, intending to ride through the gap at the other end, under the oak-tree, and so he would have been within a few hundred yards of his door.

As he approached the "gap" he saw, or thought he saw, with a slow motion, gliding along the ground toward the same point, and now and then with a soft bound, a white object, which he described as being no bigger than his hat, but what it was he could not see, as it moved along the hedge and disappeared at the point to which he was himself tending.

When he reached the gap the horse stopped short. He urged and coaxed it in vain. He got down to lead it through, but it recoiled, snorted, and fell into a wild trembling fit. He mounted it again. But its terror continued, and it obstinately resisted his caresses and his whip. It was bright moonlight, and my grand-uncle was chafed by the horse's resistance, and, seeing nothing to account for it, and being so near home, what little patience he possessed

forsook him, and, plying his whip and spur in earnest, he broke into oaths and curses.

All on a sudden the horse sprang through, and Con Donovan, as he passed under the broad branch of the oak, saw clearly a woman standing on the bank beside him, her arm extended, with the hand of which, as he flew by, she struck him a blow upon the shoulders. It threw him forward upon the neck of the horse, which, in wild terror, reached the door at a gallop, and stood there quivering and steaming all over.

Less alive than dead, my grand-uncle got in. He told his story, at least, so much as he chose. His wife did not quite know what to think. But that something very bad had happened she could not doubt. He was very faint and ill, and begged that the priest should be sent for forthwith. When they were getting him to his bed they saw distinctly the marks of five fingerpoints on the flesh of his shoulder, where the spectral blow had fallen. These singular marks— which they said resembled in tint the hue of a body struck by lightning— remained imprinted on his flesh, and were buried with him.

When he had recovered sufficiently to talk with the people about him— speaking, like a man at his last hour, from a burdened heart, and troubled conscience— he repeated his story, but said he did not see, or, at all events, know, the face of the figure that stood in the gap. No one believed him. He told more about it to the priest than to others. He certainly had a secret to tell. He might as well have divulged it frankly, for the neighbours all knew well enough that it was the face of dead Ellen Coleman that he had seen.

From that moment my grand-uncle never raised his head. He was a scared, silent, broken-spirited man. It was early summer then, and at the fall of the leaf in the same year he died.

Of course there was a wake, such as beseemed a strong farmer so rich as he. For some reason the arrangements of this ceremonial were a little different from the usual routine.

The usual practice is to place the body in the great room, or kitchen, as it is called, of the house. In this particular case there was, as I told you, for some reason, an unusual arrangement. The body was placed in a small room that opened upon the greater one. The door of this, during the wake, stood open. There were candles about the bed, and pipes and tobacco on the table, and stools for such guests as chose to enter, the door standing open for their reception.

The body, having been laid out, was left alone, in this smaller room, during the preparations for the wake. After nightfall one of the women, approaching the bed to get a chair which she had left near it, rushed from the room with a

scream, and, having recovered her speech at the further end of the "kitchen," and surrounded by a gaping audience, she said, at last:

"*May* I never sin, if his face bain't riz up again the back o' the bed, and he starin' down to the doore, wid eyes as big as pewter plates, that id be shinin' in the moon!"

"Arra, woman! Is it cracked you are?" said one of the farm boys as they are termed, being men of any age you please.

"Agh, Molly, don't be talkin', woman! 'Tis what ye consayted it, goin' into the dark room, out o' the light. Why didn't ye take a candle in your fingers, ye aumadhaun?" said one of her female companions.

"Candle, or no candle; I seen it," insisted Molly. "An' what's more, I could a'most tak' my oath I seen his arum, too, stretchin' out o' the bed along the flure, three times as long as it should be, to take hould o' me be the fut."

"Nansinse, ye fool, what id he want o' yer fut?" exclaimed one scornfully.

"Gi' me the candle, some o' yez— in the name o' God," said old Sal Doolan, that was straight and lean, and a woman that could pray like a priest almost.

"Give her a candle," agreed all.

But whatever they might say, there wasn't one among them that did not look pale and stern enough as they followed Mrs. Doolan, who was praying as fast as her lips could patter, and leading the van with a tallow candle, held like a taper, in her fingers.

The door was half open, as the panic-stricken girl had left it; and holding the candle on high the better to examine the room, she made a step or so into it.

If my grand-uncle's hand had been stretched along the floor, in the unnatural way described, he had drawn it back again under the sheet that covered him. And tall Mrs. Doolan was in no danger of tripping over his arm as she entered. But she had not gone more than a step or two with her candle aloft, when, with a drowning face, she suddenly stopped short, staring at the bed which was now fully in view.

"Lord, bless us, Mrs. Doolan, ma'am, come back," said the woman next her, who had fast hold of her dress, or her 'coat,' as they call it, and drawing her backwards with a frightened pluck, while a general recoil among her followers betokened the alarm which her hesitation had inspired.

"Whisht, will yez?" said the leader, peremptorily, "I can't hear my own ears wid the noise ye're makin', an' which iv yez let the cat in here, an' whose cat is it?" she asked, peering suspiciously at a white cat that was sitting on the breast of the corpse.

"Put it away, will yez?" she resumed, with horror at the profanation. "Many a corpse as I sthretched and crossed in the bed, the likes o' that I never seen

yet. The man o' the house, wid a brute baste like that mounted on him, like a phooka, Lord forgi' me for namin' the like in this room. Dhrive it away, some o' yez! out o' that, this minute, I tell ye."

Each repeated the order, but no one seemed inclined to execute it. They were crossing themselves, and whispering their conjectures and misgivings as to the nature of the beast, which was no cat of that house, nor one that they had ever seen before. On a sudden, the white cat placed itself on the pillow over the head of the body, and having from that place glared for a time at them over the features of the corpse, it crept softly along the body towards them, growling low and fiercely as it drew near.

Out of the room they bounced, in dreadful confusion, shutting the door fast after them, and not for a good while did the hardiest venture to peep in again.

The white cat was sitting in its old place, on the dead man's breast, but this time it crept quietly down the side of the bed, and disappeared under it, the sheet which was spread like a coverlet, and hung down nearly to the floor, concealing it from view.

Praying, crossing themselves, and not forgetting a sprinkling of holy water, they peeped, and finally searched, poking spades, "wattles," pitchforks and such implements under the bed. But the cat was not to be found, and they concluded that it had made its escape among their feet as they stood near the threshold. So they secured the door carefully, with hasp and padlock. But when the door was opened next morning they found the white cat sitting, as if it had never been disturbed, upon the breast of the dead man.

Again occurred very nearly the same scene with a like result, only that some said they saw the cat afterwards lurking under a big box in a corner of the outer-room, where my grand-uncle kept his leases and papers, and his prayer-book and beads.

Mrs. Doolan heard it growling at her heels wherever she went; and although she could not see it, she could hear it spring on the back of her chair when she sat down, and growl in her ear, so that she would bounce up with a scream and a prayer, fancying that it was on the point of taking her by the throat.

And the priest's boy, looking round the corner, under the branches of the old orchard, saw a white cat sitting under the little window of the room where my grand-uncle was laid out and looking up at the four small panes of glass as a cat will watch a bird.

The end of it was that the cat was found on the corpse again, when the room was visited, and do what they might, whenever the body was left alone, the cat was found again in the same ill-omened contiguity with the dead man.

And this continued, to the scandal and fear of the neighbourhood, until the door was opened finally for the wake.

My grand-uncle being dead, and, with all due solemnities, buried, I have done with him. But not quite yet with the white cat. No banshee ever yet was more inalienably attached to a family than this ominous apparition is to mine. But there is this difference. The banshee seems to be animated with an affectionate sympathy with the bereaved family to whom it is hereditarily attached, whereas this thing has about it a suspicion of malice. It is the messenger simply of death. And its taking the shape of a cat— the coldest, and they say, the most vindictive of brutes— is indicative of the spirit of its visit.

When my grandfather's death was near, although he seemed quite well at the time, it appeared not exactly, but very nearly in the same way in which I told you it showed itself to my father.

The day before my Uncle Teigue was killed by the bursting of his gun, it appeared to him in the evening, at twilight, by the lough, in the field where I saw the woman who walked across the water, as I told you. My uncle was washing the barrel of his gun in the lough. The grass is short there, and there is no cover near it. He did not know how it approached; but the first he saw of it, the white cat was walking close round his feet, in the twilight, with an angry twist of its tail, and a green glare in its eyes, and do what he would, it continued walking round and round him, in larger or smaller circles, till he reached the orchard, and there he lost it.

My poor Aunt Peg— she married one of the O'Brians, near Oolah— came to Drumgunniol to go to the funeral of a cousin who died about a mile away. She died herself, poor woman, only a month after.

Coming from the wake, at two or three o'clock in the morning, as she got over the style into the farm of Drumgunniol, she saw the white cat at her side, and it kept close beside her, she ready to faint all the time, till she reached the door of the house, where it made a spring up into the white-thorn tree that grows close by, and so it parted from her. And my little brother Jim saw it also, just three weeks before he died. Every member of our family who dies, or takes his death-sickness, at Drumgunniol, is sure to see the white cat, and no one of us who sees it need hope for long life after.

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4: Peace Waits At Marokee

H. Bedford-Jones

1887-1949

Adventure, Nov 1940

DAWN was imperceptibly lifting above the marble hills of hell that lie between the Nile Valley and the Red Sea.

The Breguet two-seater, crumpled on its nose in the gravelly flat, was now a roaring pillar of flame; Essarts, the dead pilot, was at the bottom of that noble funeral pyre. Jean Facini, assistant pilot and gunner, had managed to bring the burning plane to a blind landing. By a miracle of frantic luck, he got clear before the fire touched him.

He had never expected to land alive. He was still numb and shaken by it all, as he sat at a safe distance from exploding tanks and cartridges, drearily watching the prodigious burst of smoke and flame. The symbols of France on the body and wings of the Breguet vanished while he stared.

Suddenly a speck overhead caught Facini's eye, and he looked up. Dawn was mounting the eastern sky. The speck glinted like silver. It was a bomber, touched by the sunlight as yet denied to the world below. It glinted again and then vanished. He sighted it anew, but now as a dark descending object whose perfect silence startled him.

He moved farther from the heat of the blaze, staring. One of those big English craft, he perceived; a Blenheim, carrying a regular crew. Several of them had taken part in the raid on the Italian East Africa bases.

His first thought was that it had sighted the flames and was making for him, perhaps with intent to land on this strip of gravel and sand and cruel boulders, perhaps to send rescue later. But was it making for him? Was any human hand guiding this approaching ship? Fresh fear laid hold upon him, and a frightful wild surmise. A phantom, perhaps— a phantom plane!

He could hear no motors at all. There was no exhaust. The Blenheim was abnormally and horribly silent. He could even make out the motionless propellers as she came sweeping down, leveling out to make a landing.

Jean Facini crossed himself and swallowed hard, staring up with distended eyes. He was a shrewd, capable man, usually well-poised, unmoved by peril or risk; but now his steady, blithe efficiency was sapped by terror of the unknown.

The wings and fuselage of the Blenheim were bullet-torn, riddled, shot through and through. Next instant she was down, down a hundred yards away— down with a terrific crunch and crash, nosing up and over as the Breguet had done, only to fall back again, her left wing tearing clear away.

Facini saw her settle motionless, silent as death itself. He sat there, horror distending his eyes.

Abrupt relief seized him, when her door opened and three. men tumbled out of her. They looked about the empty skies and started toward him. He rose and went to meet them.

Three men; introductions were simple. Jock Erne, Anzac co-pilot, gaunt and loose-hinged and cheerful. Lance, observer and photographer, a quiet, deep-eyed, older man. Gunner Hawkins, stubby-nosed, rabbit-toothed, Cockney by his tongue.

"Saw your flame and nosed down for it," said Erne. "Alone?"

"Alone now." Facini's dark, mobile features were composed now. He pointed to the flames and told of Essarts, and the Caproni that had done for him. "It was wonderful of you to chance the landing."

Erne grinned. "No choice. Must have been the same Caproni that nailed us, but we got her. We were riddled. Petrol tanks emptied. Pilot riddled too. Poor Boddy! He was a grand pilot— Wellington chap. Well, he's gone. We touched up the jackals rather well, eh? Got those petrol tanks at Massowa, if I'm any judge. You speak English well."

Facini smiled. "I had an importing business at Mentone. I was often in London."

He saw blood dripping down over Erne's left hand, as the other turned.

"Lance, old chap! You know the orders. Take out everything we may need, then let her go. All the maps, and the water, especially the water. Hawkins, my lad, get your first-aid packet and go after this arm."

Erne sat down and bared his left arm; a bullet had torn the flesh badly. Hawkins fell to work on it. Lance went stumbling back toward the Blenheim.

Facini sat and waited, wearily. He looked the picture of despair; in reality, he was gloriously happy from the reaction. Happy to be alive, to have wads of money in his belt, to be rid of the French service forever. He cloaked the hatred in his eyes, as he met a quick glance from Erne.

"Facini, eh?" said the Anzac. "Odd names you French chaps have, to my notion."

"In Italian, it would be Fachini." He pronounced the name in Italian fashion. "Yes, once our people were Italian in Savoy, long ago. I am a Savoyard, you see. Now we're all French, of course."

"You heard the radio reports last night, before we left the base?"

Facini nodded. He got out a packet of jaunes and lit one, to hide the savage exultation that shook him. France broken, crushed, done for! And now the army in Syria, of which his squadron formed part, would cease hostilities. He had been in the last French air raid of the war! Savoy would be Italian once

more— and these English called the Italians jackals! Well, let them wait a bit, these English who had ceased to rule the world!

With cynical eye he watched Lance unload necessities from the crippled Blenheim; he asked Erne about her wireless and found it, too, had been riddled. They were preparing to fire her, dead pilot and all, lest her secrets fall into enemy hands.

Facini smiled inwardly, thinking of the information and photos he had given the Italian agent in Port Said; the new bomb racks and sights developed by the English, the new guns and mountings— everything! Italy, thanks to him, knew as much about these Blenheims as England did.

THE sun came up, red and scorching. Lance started his bonfire. The three Britons saluted the dead pilot; Facini rose and saluted also, quite sincerely. A brave man deserved this gesture, irrespective of nationality. Wiry, swarthy, alert, Facini looked what he was: one who could risk danger with calm and lucid gaze. A fifth columnist, whether spy or traitor, need not be a rascal.

"In case anyone's looking for us," said Erne, "take half an hour to give 'em a chance to spot the smoke. Get a bit of sleep while waiting, if you can."

Facini scooped hollows in the sand, only too glad to let someone else take charge. As he fell asleep, he wondered for the first time where the hell he was. Nothing about here except wild hills, touches of desert, utter emptiness. The crackling roar of the Blenheim was his last memory.

He wakened to find the sun high. Sitting up, he saw the other three grouped close by, and a pile of salvaged material, canteens and food. He fumbled in his jacket pocket and drew out a thick package of chocolate.

"All I can contribute," he said, and tossed it on the pile. Erne, who held a map open on his knees, beamed gauntly.

"Good. Know any Arabic? Neither do we. Before we left, I was given verbal bearings of a place whose name sounded like Marokee. Ever hear of it?"

"Oh, yes! I was there three weeks ago, landing supplies." Facini knuckled his eyes. "It's a spot near the Italian East, being secretly equipped as emergency landing field and advanced base for air operations. I understand it's to be kept a secret until the defenses are complete and it can be placed in use."

Erne nodded. "I see. You know more about it than we do, eh?"

"By good luck. We escorted some of your bombers landing guns there."

"Well, it's forty miles from here, roughly." Erne glanced around. "No chance now of our being picked up. We've food, and perhaps enough water to last three days. These hills are desert rock piles, inhabited only by a few Arabs and goats. There are no roads that we'll come upon; the existing tracks date

from Roman times. We're close to Eritrean territory and can easily make it, surrendering to the first Italian outpost; or, if you choose, we can head for Marokee, or whatever the dashed name is. It lies to the north."

"So does the Red Sea," said Lance, his quiet eyes filled with anxiety. "Let's not waste time. We head north?"

"If you chaps decided," replied Erne amiably. "I warn you, it'll be tough work! It'll take days. All blank hills and gorges, you know, blistering rock, a climb the whole blessed way. Either that, or turn ourselves in to the jackals."

"We'd bloody well best be abaht it," spoke up Gunner Hawkins. "I've reasons of me own for wanting to get there. Marokee, I sye!"

Three pairs of eyes went to Facini.

"Marokee," he said simply, and it was settled.

"Due north by compass." Erne folded his map. "We'll ready the loads and get started. Later we can find some shelter against the sun and rest until the worst heat of the day has passed."

They went to work. Facini, scornful of these English, hating them in his heart, set himself to match their efficiency and stamina and good cheer; he was savagely resolved to prove himself just a trifle better at everything than they were.

They got off at last. Pistols, binoculars, food and water. Nothing else. The water was the worst to carry, even in slung canteens, for it weighed like lead. Striking away from the gravel flat, Erne led into a narrow valley that trended north and east. It was a shallow gorge of naked rock and sand. The heat was consuming and terrible.

Facini laughed and talked as he swung into step. To himself, his laughter was more cynical. They were sorry for him. The enormous fact of France's utter collapse had stunned the army in Syria, but it had brought Facini wild exultation. And they were sorry for him, a Frenchman! They might better be sorry for themselves, he reflected.

Laughter surged again in him as he marched along the rocky defile. These others wanted to reach Marokee— well, so did he, and with far more reason! Not for the sake of rescue alone, but for what awaited him there. For he would be "Fachini" there, and no longer "Facini"; honor and decorations, an officer's uniform, a black shirt and the coveted emblem of the Fasces, would be awaiting him. For, by this time, the flag of Italy was waving over Marokee.

More than two weeks ago, he himself had sent through word about this place, and had received a reply. By the 20th, they had assured him, Marokee would be captured. Not destroyed, but surprised in the night and captured bodily, by a column of blackshirts and askaris from Italian East. Captured, to serve Italy against Egypt and the British base headquarters. He had suggested

the clever scheme himself. Have a column in readiness, unsuspected. Loose a rain of bombs, destroy the wireless, rush the place; no word of its capture would reach the British until too late. And Italy would be solidly established there— forever!"

They had assured him it would be done before the 20th. And today, he remembered, was the 22nd. Yes, thought Facini, he could well afford to smile!

No wonder he wanted with all his heart to reach Marokee, and what awaited him there.

"CHEERFUL blighter, ain't 'e?" observed Gunner Hawkins.

It was mid-afternoon and they were stirring. The shade of a rocky overhang had given shelter; packs off, boots off, they had slept well. Never better, thought Hawkins to himself, eyeing the strange naked walls of the ravine and the blazing rocks around.

A meal polished off, they were re-forming the loads. Hawkins nudged Lance and jerked his thumb at Facini, who was humming a brisk, gay air as he worked. Lance nodded carelessly.

"Yes, a good sort. By the way, Hawkins, why are you so anxious to reach Marokee?"

"Oo, me? Oh, I 'ave reasons!" Hawkins evaded, deliberately, showing his rabbit-teeth in a cheerful grin. Lance asked no more, but relapsed into his air of worried anxiety.

The loads were finished. Erne was poring over his map, Faeini was lazily at stretch, still humming. The bloke had a rare good voice, thought Hawkins, stuffing his pipe and smoking with fair content. Aside from the heat and the things that irked him, and his desire to reach Marokee as soon as possible, Hawkins had no particular worry. They would pull through somehow. This was no worse than the blinding mid-summer camp. He had been scared to the quick at dawn, and the solid earth felt good.

"Gor! To think 'ow the cap'n spouted blood, and the ruddy crate spouted petrol!" he muttered. "Fair makes me sick, it does. And us not knowing if we'd find a landing place, and 'aving to keep up speed or fall plop! But 'ere we are, safe and sound. "

Surreptitiously, he adjusted the pad under the collar of his tunic; handkerchief and torn shirt-tail were pinned there, out of sight. Pipe in teeth, he buckled his belt and hitched his shoes on swollen feet, then rose and strolled over to the Frenchman.

Facini was smoking one of his vile cigarettes and easing his position. He moved a flat rock with stockinged feet, shoving it aside. A strangled word escaped Hawkins.

"Look aht!"

With the word, he kicked frantically. From Facini broke a howl of pain and fury; the hobnailed boot struck his feet and ankles, so violently as to slew him about. He rolled over and came erect, agile as a cat, his swarthy features convulsed with rage.

Hawkins pointed. "You 'ad your ruddy feet fair on top of 'em!"

Looking down, Facini turned a sickly white. Hawkins grinned, amused by the man's sudden terror. Exposed by the overturn of the flat stone, two immense black scorpions were circling, tails aloft. Erne darted in and hammered them with a sharp bit of rock.

"Well done, gunner!" he exclaimed. "Damned well done!"

Hawkins glowed happily to the praise. Then he found Facini clasping him, embracing him in a fervor of comprehension and gratitude. He broke away and wiped his cheeks.

"Come, now, none o' that!" he gasped. "Too bloody thick, I calls it— "

"You saved my life," Facini was saying earnestly. "Mon ami, with all my heart I thank you, I thank you! It is something not easily forgotten."

Hawkins, abashed, grinned and turned this unwelcome emotion into a jest. They loaded up and were off, Erne and Lance in the lead, the other two following.

Unexpectedly, Hawkins found himself warming to the Frenchman; they had been drawn together by that sharp claw of chance. They tramped along and exchanged intimacies; each found the other a person of interest. Hawkins heard about the girl who was waiting in Mentone. He, broadly wistful, told of the missus and the two kids back home; by the last letter received, they had been evacuated to a farm in Sussex, away from the threatened bombs and agony of London.

Hawkins had knocked about in the army for a dozen years. He was ambitious to retire and raise, of all things, cabbages; they appealed to him, and he expatiated solemnly on their merits. Facini, who was in the perfume business or had been, talked of scent extraction and blending; Hawkins found this new and fascinating. Cabbages and perfumes alike had been knocked off their pins by the war, but Hawkins was consoling.

"The 'ole world's a bit screwy," he said complacently. "Soon's: we clean up the Jerries, it'll swing back again. I'll 'ave me cabbages yet."

"No." Facini shook his head. "It's we who must change, my friend. The old order of things has gone forever. The world we knew will never come back again. If we're clever, we'll recognize the fact and profit by it. Now that France has collapsed, Hitler is supreme."

"Oo, 'im?" Hawkins laughed the derision he felt. It was good to be an Englishman, he reflected; a person with complete surety of heart and soul, a man not to be changed or bowled over.ilike the froggies. "You wyte and see. Steady does it, me lad, steady does it! This 'ere plyce were makin' for— wot's its bloody name?"

"Marokee," said Facini. "I've not seen it written, but that's the way it sounds."

"I 'ope to 'ell we get there soon."

He was aware of a curious glance from the darkly alert eyes. "Yes? Why?"

"Never you mind, lad. I 'ave me reasons."

Facini smiled. "So your feet are hurting, eh? Yes, these rocks are sharp; they're hard on boots and feet alike."

Hawkins merely snorted. He had no intention whatever of imparting his private reasons to anyone; but he certainly wanted to see Marokee ahead. He was jolly glad of that pad beneath the edge of his collar.

"Bet you didn't tyke it so cool when your ship was afire!" he observed.

"Cool? *Mon Dieu*! I was too frightened to know what I did," Facini confessed gravely. "After I got clear of her, I sat there shaking all over."

"Comin' down unexpected like does grip at you." Hawkins shook his head. He liked this frank admission of fear. "Don't mind sying that I 'ad the wind up meself when we got ripped wide open and the cap'n killed. Gor! What a perishin' sight 'e was!"

THE afternoon blaze died down into grateful shadows here in the ravine. This road, however, was swinging too much eastward.

With his binoculars, Erne climbed the hillside on their left. Presently came his voice bidding them join him. It was a half hour's climb. At the crest they found more daylight, but evening was close just the same; the gorges to right and left were bluish and vague with shadow.

Hawkins, panting, cursed luridly to himself and inched his tunic back. He had left it unbuttoned; discipline did not exist here, and no one noticed or cared. He glowered at the endless sea of hills ahead.

"We must get down to that valley on the left," Erne was saying. "We can do it before darkness comes. Apparently it cuts straightaway northward, and that's our direction. Might come upon a Roman road or track, but I'm afraid it'd run east and west."

"Roman?" said Lance in some surprise. "Here in this desolation?"

Erne grinned faintly. "The finest stone and marble on earth used to come from here. Rome quarried these hills to form her most beautiful buildings. Then the barbarians swallowed up the world and those things were forgotten;

same as they'll be a thousand years from now when somebody walks over Westminster and tells how Hitler had bombed it."

"Oh!" said Lance. "You mean, over Auckland and Wellington, after the Japs have taken New Zealand!"

Erne chuckled, and put away his binoculars.

"Score one for you, Canuck! Still, the Japs are closer to Vancouver than they are to Auckland, glory be! Well, come along everybody; let's be at it!"

The descent was long and hard. Hawkins and Lance gradually fell behind.

"Funny 'im knowing so blasted much about this 'ere country!" Hawkins jerked a thumb toward Erne, ahead. "Rare good sort, for a colonial. Anzac, ain't 'e?"

"Yes; New Zealand." Lance nodded and grimaced. "Damn! That's what I get for not wearing issue boots. These are light ones for hot weather. Hope they'll hang together."

Hawkins sucked at his pipe to fend off thirst. He had no particular use for toffs like Lance. Too bloody good for issue boots, was he? And some sort of colonial into the bargain; Canuck or something.

The colonials were all right, of course; but still colonials.

Assuredly the rocks were bad. By the time the four men had won to the floor of the ravine Erne wanted to follow, they had had their fill of climbing and it was full dark. Luckily the moon was waxing and sat high overhead to help light the way.

The hours dragged wearily by. Hawkins cursed Jock:Erne and admired him vastly; a pusher, he was, who kept them going at all costs, without mention of his own hurt. Midnight found them dead beat, for the floor of this gorge was all loose tumbled rock. Erne halted for an hour's rest. Hawkins flung himself down and was asleep before he knew it.

He wakened to Erne's touch and low voice; the pilot was at his side, rousing him. The wounded arm was hurting like blazes and needed a fresh dressing; and no sparing the iodine either, said Erne. Hawkins got out his kit, bared the wound, and worked while Erne struck a match or two to help him see.

"Looks a bit of all right," he observed. and fumbled in the obscurity. "'Arf a mo', now; there we are. Feel better?"

"Lord, man! It's wonderful!" Erne relaxed, with a sigh. "What did you put on it."

"Secret, sir. Hawkins furtively screwed down the top of his canteen again. "Bit of a secret my missus taught me."

"Look here!" Erne gripped his wrist. "Not water? You didn't put water on it?"

"Wot? Wyste good water? Bli' me, sir, I wouldn't go and do that!" Hawkins declared indignantly.

"All right. Remember, that water means life to us! I doubt if we've covered ten miles. May find better going ahead. Lord! I certainly want to see Marokee in a hurry!"

"No more'n I do. Not by 'alf!" said Hawkins fervently. He hitched back his tunic and swore afresh. Erne peered at him.

"Here, what's wrong with you? Speak up! Why are you so damned anxious to get there?"

Hawkins felt himself yield by force of habit to the voice of authority. The others were asleep; he might as well be frank about it. After all, it was an order.

"Because o' me ruddy neck, sir," he replied uncomfortably.

"Well, what's wrong with your neck?" snapped Erne.

"Two boils a-comin' on fast." Hawkins felt injured at have to make such an admission. "Faster than I looked for. If we don't get there soon, I'll go fair mad, that's wot!"

"Oh!" Erne paused. "That's bad. I had one, three or four years back; couldn't lie abed nursing it, either."

"Frightfully bad! Well, steady on! We'll reach Marokee all right."

With a warm handclasp, he went to waken the others. Hawkins sat in a glow, his heart surging, his fingers cramming the final crumbs of tobacco into his pipe.

"Might ha' knowed 'e wouldn't laugh. Not 'im!" he reflected. "Gor! I'm sorry as I didn't put twice as much water on that 'ere bandage!"

AFTER another short halt at dawn, Erne kept pushing ahead until the morning was partly gone, and then made camp. High time, too. Lance was making heavy weather of it.

Lance had imagination plus, and now it was most desperately needful that he reach Marokee, for anxiety and terror spurred him each hour. Shortly before dawn they heard planes heading eastward, high up, on another raid; this touch with life cheered Lance tremendously. That cablegram burned in his pocket and was burned into his brain.

The message had arrived at the very last moment, as he was going out to take his place in the Blenheim. There was no chance to reply then. An hour or two would not matter, he had thought, they would be back shortly after sunrise. But they were not back; and now time was mattering most horribly. The lines graven in the quiet, poised, intellectual features were not from physical suffering; it is not our own hurts that bite the deepest.

Behind Lance lay Canada and a college universe of small horizons. In that forgotten past he had been a professor of Romance Languages. He was spending a sabbatical year in Paris, with his wife, when the war flared. He went into the air force, was sent out here to the near east. And now the French had collapsed, Paris was being bombed, and time would not wait for him.

He must have groaned unconsciously, for Facini glanced around and turned to him.

"Feet bad?" he asked. They had left the morning's camp behind. The gorge was a blaze of refracted heat. Lance straightened and tried to wipe the haunted look from his eyes.

"Oh, they might be worse. I'm all right, really," he said in French.

"*Tiens*!" Facini's face lit up. "Sit down and let me show you a trick, comrade. This accursed uniform jacket— glad to be rid of it." He called to Erne and Hawkins. "Go ahead, we'll catch up. I'm going to help his feet a bit."

The others went on. Facini chattered away gaily; Lance, who could think in French, made answer. A fine chap, this, Lance thought; the best type of southern Frenchman. Facini was slitting up his jacket while Lance got out of his footgear, cut and mangled by rocks.

"We'll fix that. Ah!" Facini, beginning to bandage the right foot with a strip of cloth, paused. "Blood, eh? Your feet are cut."

"No matter. Some things hurt worse than cuts."

Facini shrugged gravely and continued his work. The boots, replaced over the bandaged feet, had to be left unlaced. Lance stepped out and spoke joyously.

"Why, it's like having new feet! Facini, you're a miracle worker!"

He pressed the other's arm. Facini looked into his eyes and smiled. Lance could feel the friendly, intimate thrill that passed between them; it pleased him enormously.

"What can hurt worse?" queried Facini, as they took up the rugged way.

"Inability to help those dependent on us." Lance knew what most gratifies the Latin heart: to be told inner things and reasons, to be admitted to the precincts of the heart. So, striding onward, he confided in Facini. It helped him to do so, too; he held nothing back.

"The cable came just as we were leaving. My wife, you see, in Paris. I thought it announced the birth of a son, a daughter— we were sure it would be a boy. Instead, it said that she needed money desperately, that I must cable her some, so she could reach England. I can do it by wireless from Marokee, if we get there, if it's not too late, too late! God knows what's happening in Paris! She had funds. Something must have gone wrong."

"It is sad," Facini said very soberly. "Worse than sad, for a woman pregnant. But I do not think Paris will be bombed. Captured, yes— bombed, no. The news last night said it had been declared an open city."

"That does not lighten my burden," replied Lance. Still, talking things over did help tremendously. He showed Facini her picture, in the black, skin-soft money belt a friend had sent him from Toronto.

Althoygh he perfectly comprehended the process, he was astonished at how deeply this confidence impressed Facini and awakened a warmth of responsiveness. Facini went into rather intimate detail about the girl in Mentone, about the family; and in the course of this let slip his feelings in a way Lance was too astute to miss.

"Good heavens, man! You're not a communist, surely?"

"No, but I might well be a fascist," Facini said drily. "Do you think Savoy is French? Far from it. We were annexed to France by force. Socially, industrially, civilly, we are bedeviled by the French. They strangle us with embraces."

"I didn't know France was an oppressor," Lance rejoined.

"Any undesired ruler is an oppressor," said Facini. Lance gave him a curious glance, then stumbled and a cry of pain escaped him. A jagged bit of rock, needlesharp, had ripped half the left boot away and gashed his instep.

They halted again. Facini made a remarkably efficient job of the bandaging, using the last fragments of his jacket. Against these rocks, he observed, the tough cloth was more enduring than the soft leather. When these bandages were worn through, the English tunics would replace them.

"MAROKEE can't be more than a few miles away," said Jock Erne. "We'll reach it before night. Damn it, we must! Too much depends on it. We must!" Since mid-morning of the third day, they had been camped here amid the ancient walls. Lance slept; even in repose his face was worn and haggard. Gunner Hawkins slept with uneasy stirrings; fever was in his blood, his neck was anguished, and lack of water had hit him cruelly. Erne's gaze touched them anxiously, then went to Facini, who shrugged.

"So it's not far, eh?"

"Only a few miles." Erne stabbed at the map with a finger. "This must be the Roman station of Mons Alba, indicated here. Look at the walls! You can trace the enclosure for animals, the cisterns, the defense wall. Marble from here built the monuments of antiquity; now it's empty desolation, even the roads forgotten. Well, wake 'em up, will you? I've one cigarette all around, before we get off."

Erne's gaunt, hard-chiseled features were blurred with beard, as were all four faces. He knew the others were suffering. He had driven them nfétcilessly,

_ had driven himself as well. He was suffering more; his bullet-ripped arm, inflamed, was plaguing him with a thirst that could not be quenched.

Facini wakened the others. They joined him; he held his cigarette case open, mutely. A final smoke all around. Facini produced vestas, tiny waxed slivers. Cigarettes alight, the four relaxed, and Erne tossed his empty cigarette case away with a clatter.

"Odd matches," he said, inspecting one of the tiny vestas.

"Kind you see in Italy," said Lance. "Nowhere else, as a rule."

Erne wondered at Facini's startled expression, then forgot the matter.

"Not too far to go, lads," he announced. "We'll see Marokee before dark. We must!" He saw they were too far gone for any enthusiasm. He tried to spur them, in vain. A hard, quick ring came into his voice. "I want to get there more than any of you; I must, I shall get there! Nothing on this damned earth can stop me, either! So up and at it."

They staggered up obediently and were off anew. Erne was devoutly thankful that the ravine led northward and had a slight down grade. Twice this morning they had crossed the rocky slopes, to keep direction; to do it again would be impossible.

Left arm in its sling, he strode on without a limp, though his feet were badly cut. Facini, with a burst of energy, caught up and spoke thickly, rolling a pebble in his mouth.

"You're confident nothing can stop you. Why? Why must you reach Marokee?"

"Destiny!" Erne's thin lips curved. He liked this wiry, gay-hearted man who had kept abreast of them and never a word of grousing or complaint. "Life, for one thing; I mean to live. Then I must reach there to send a wireless message. It's imperative."

"Oh!" said Facini. "A woman, eh?"

"Hell, no!" Erne laughed harshly. "To the air ministry. They've been working on an idea of mine; an entirely new system of gun sighting and mounting, with a basic structural design that'll permit the use of long range guns, accurately! You'll see a two-seater sit on the clouds well beyond range and blow hell out of Messerschmidts and Capronis. They'll be so far out-ranged that they'll be helpless!"

"*Dieu*!" Facini's eyes widened. "It's perfected?"

"One thing wrong about the sighting mechanism; it's held the whole. thing back. Well, I've got the answer! It came to me night before last. I've worked it over in my mind. I've got it, absolutely! Twenty words wirelessed to the air ministry will change the whole war in the air. That's why I must get to Marokee... I must, I shall! I can't be stopped!"

It was unusually bad, even for this frightful road. They had come to patches of fallen stone and rubble that filled the bottom of the gorge, choking the way. One had to climb along. Thank the lord it was not upgrade! Erne glanced back at Lance and Hawkins; they were dragging themselves along with a horrible wavering effort. His voice pealed cheerily and bravely to encourage them.

The words ended in a gasp. A stone turned under his foot; his foot went down; he went down. Up again, only to stagger and catch himself, and stand on one foot. He knew instantly what it was; a bad twist of the ankle. Facini knew, too. He caught Erne's arm.

"Down! Sit down, quickly! Every instant counts!"

Erne obeyed and Facini knelt, fumbling at the boot, at the laces; already the ankle was swelling enormously, Erne perceived. He looked up, as Hawkins and Lance came weaving along like sleepwalkers. His voice stabbed at them.

"On you go, lads; keep moving! We'll overtake you presently. Nothing but a turned ankle." He watched them plod on and away. Then he spoke to Facini, a quiver in his words. "Off with you!" he said softly. "I'll rest a bit, then come along. You keep going."

Facini laughed a little. "You know better; so do I. You'll go with me. Too bad we've no water to reduce the inflammation. Nothing broken. Now I'll have to hurt you, but that's the only ee to spread the blood and help the oot."

The sun was blazing down. The afternoon heat, in this little world of naked rock, was terrific. Both men were heatparched, incapable of perspiration. None the less, Erne felt sweat gather on his brow as Facini worked shrewdly, gently manipulating ankle and leg.

Erne was close to panic; his boast that nothing could stop him had been shattered, for he was stopped. He no longer kept up the front that had driven them all so relentlessly; his will-power was futile. Then he realized that Facini was looking up at him and smiling, and speaking again.

"You'll get there. You think you can't touch foot to ground, but you will. We'll leave your boot and use your tunic to build up a bandage. Same as Lance."

He kneaded and massaged while he spoke. Erne, feeling weak and sick, shed his tunic. Facini slit the cloth and made it into a huge pad about the foot and ankle.

"May find a stick later to help you hobble," he said. "None around here. Up you get, now! Hang on to my arm. You'll do famously. You must!"

Erne suppressed a groan as he came erect; then his iron will reacted. He was himself again. Grimly silent, he hobbled on, step upon step, his head swimming.

Ahead, the gorge widened and swung in a sharply angled curve. There they came upon the other two men. Lance had dropped and was shaking with helpless sobs. Hawkins was sitting beside him, and looked up at them with feverbright eyes.

"Gimme a 'and wif 'im," he croaked.

Erne's brain cleared; he felt Facini press his hand and heard the composed voice.

"Stay here, Erne; they need you. I'll go on; it can't be far now. I'll get there and send back help."

Erne lowered himself to the stones. His breath came in a wheeze of futility; he was done.

NEW vigor filled Facini as he strode down the gorge, alone. It widened, but it also curved again. His wearinwss fell away; exultation surged and surged upon him.

He knew what lay ahead, for today was the 24th. No later than the 20th, they had promised him; Marokee was now in Italian hands. And what a tremendous thing he had accomplished, all unexpectedly! Erne was helpless, was safe for gathering in; this man, and the thing he had invented... all useless to England now!

Eagerness grew in his soul. The blackshirts and askaris would welcome him; his name would be known to the officers. In Marokee, in Italian East, back in Italy, he would be a man famed and....

He halted abruptly, motionless, staring. The gorge had opened. There, half a mile away, he saw Marokee on its little flat-topped plateau.

He could see masses of men at work. No flag was flying; too bad he had not brought Erne's binoculars! However, there was no need. Below the plateau, other squads were going back and forth. Somewhere, a machine-gun rattled. His breath leaped in a gusty shout; taken, taken! Italy was here!

Facini broke into a flurried, stumbling run. Down the gorge, amid huge piled rocks, something moved; a man stepped out. Facini saw the black features. An askari! Wild with jubilation, he whipped up his revolver and fired again and again, in the air, saluting.

"*Viva*!" The hoarse shout burst from him. "*Viva Italia*! *Viva Italia*!"

Half a dozen rifle-shots cracked from, among the rocks. Pealing metallic echoes filled the gorge; Facini spun about and fell.

He opened his eyes, flutteringly. He lay bandaged; a white officer knelt be-ide him. His brain cleared. A blank, terrible look came into his face; incredulity overwhelmed him. English! Black men, yes, but not askaris; King's African Rifles... he knew the uniform.

"Hell! Do you speak English?" the officer was saying.

"Yes, yes, of course," murmured Facini. The officer looked startled.

"Damned sorry; what made you shoot at us and yell in Italian? You're not one of them? We're mopping up, you know. The jackals jumped us last night. Damned near got us, but we've settled their hash. I say, where d'ye come from?"

Facini looked up, tried to speak; he could only groan.

"You're passing out," said the officer gently. "Deuced sorry. Tell me what I can do for you. Anything we can do..."

Facini's brain reacted to the words in a startling flash. Dying! Then, even dying, he could still strike back at England!

They were done, back there; Erne was done and could not struggle on. With him would perish the thing he had invented.

Victory, even in defeat! There was the greatest blow that could be struck for Italy; struck without a word, struck in silence. Even a dying man could strike such a blow— it would mean the war won for Italy!

Then it was like the opening of a gate in his mind, and sunlight flooding in. What matter the war? Hawkins was in a bad way, would perish back among the rocks; Hawkins, who had saved his life. Poor Hawkins! Still, it was war.

And Lance. Ah, that was different! Lance must send that message; Lance, his friend, the brave and gentle fellow who suffered for love of those he could not help. Yes, Lance must be helped, for the sake of that woman and unborn child in Paris. Hawkins must be helped— it was the least a man could do.

"Pray for us, now and in the hour of our death..." Facini clutched the officer's sleeve with convulsive fingers. His voice gathered strength. "Three men— English, a mile or two— up the ravine. Bomber crashed— get help to them— all hurt...."

He sighed, and his head lolled. Peace stole into his haggard, blurred features.

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5: Another of those Cub Reporter Stories

Irvin S. Cobb

1876-1944

The Saturday Evening Post, 17 May 1913

THE FIRST TIME I saw Major Putnam Stone I didn't see him first. To be exact, I heard him first, and then I walked round the end of a seven-foot partition and saw him.

I had just gone to work for the *Evening Press*. As I recall now it was my second day, and I hadn't begun to feel at home there yet, and probably was more sensitive to outside sights and noises than I would ever again be in that place. Generally speaking, when a reporter settles down to his knitting, which in his case is his writing, he becomes impervious to all disturbances excepting those that occur inside his own brainpan. If he couldn't, he wouldn't amount to shucks in his trade. Give him a good, live-action story to write for an edition going to press in about nine minutes, and the rattles and slams of half a dozen typewriting machines, and the blattings of a pestered city editor, and the gabble of a couple of copy boys at his elbow, and all the rest of it won't worry him. He may not think he hears it, but he does, only instead of being distracting it is stimulating. It's all a part of the mechanism of the shop, helping him along unconsciously to speed and efficiency. I've often thought that, when I was handling a good, bloody murder story, say, it would tone up my style to have a phonograph about ten feet away grinding out The Last Ravings of John McCullough. Anyway, I am sure it wouldn't do any harm. A brass band playing a John Philip Sousa march makes fine accompaniment to write copy to. I've done it before now, covering parades and conventions, and I know.

But on this particular occasion I was, as I say, new to the job and maybe a little nervous to boot, and as I sat there, trying to frame a snappy opening paragraph for the interview I had just brought back with me from one of the hotels, I became aware of a voice somewhere in the immediate vicinity, a voice that didn't jibe in with my thoughts. At the moment I stopped to listen it was saying: "As for me, sir, I have always contended that the ultimate fate of the cause was due in great measure to the death of Albert Sidney Johnston at Shiloh on the evening of the first day's fight. Now then, what would have been the final result if Albert Sidney Johnston had lived? I ask you, gentlemen, what would have been the final result if Albert Sidney Johnston had lived?"

Across the room from me I heard Devore give a hollow groan. His desk was backed right up against the cross partition, and the partition was built of thin pine boards and was like a sounding board in his ear. Devore was city editor.

"Oh, thunder!" he said, half under his breath, "I'll be the goat! What would have been the result if Albert Sidney Johnston had lived?" He looked at me and

gave a wink of serio-comic despair, and then he ran his blue pencil up through his hair and left a blue streak like a scar on his scalp. Devore was one of the few city editors I have ever seen who used that tool which all of them are popularly supposed to handle so murderously— a blue pencil. And as he had a habit, when he was flustered or annoyed— and that was most of the time— of scratching his head with the point end of it, his forehead under the hair roots was usually streaked with purplish-blue tracings, like a fly-catcher's egg.

The voice, which had a deep and space-filling quality to it, continued to come through and over the partition that divided off our cubby-hole of a workroom— called a city room by courtesy— from the space where certain other members of the staff had their desks. I got up from my place and stepped over to where the thin wall ended in a doorway, being minded to have a look at the speaker. The voice sounded as though it must belong to a big man with a barrel-organ chest. I was surprised to find that it didn't.

Its owner was sitting in a chair in the middle of a little space cluttered up with discarded exchanges and galley proofs. He was rather a small man, short but compact. He had his hat off and his hair, which was thin but fine as silk floss, was combed back over his ears and sprayed out behind in a sort of mane effect. It had been red hair once, but was now so thickly streaked with white that it had become a faded brindle color. I took notice of this first because his back was toward me; in a second or two he turned his head sideways and I saw that he had exactly the face to match the hair. It was a round, plump, elderly face, with a short nose, delicately pink at the tip. The eyes were a pale blue, and just under the lower lip, which protruded slightly, was a small gray-red goatee, sticking straight out from a cleft in the chin like a dab of a sandy sheep's wool. Also, as the speaker swung himself further round, I took note of a shirt of plaited white linen billowing out over his chest and ending at the top in a starchy yet rumply collar that rolled majestically and Byronically clear up under his ears. Under the collar was loosely knotted a black-silk tie such as sailors wear. His vest was unbuttoned, all except the two lowermost buttons, and the sleeves of his coat were turned back neatly off his wrists. This, though, could not have been on account of the heat, because the weather wasn't very hot yet. I learned later that, winter or summer, he always kept his coat sleeves turned back and the upper buttons of his vest unfastened. His hands were small and plump, and his feet were small too and daintily shod in low, square-toed shoes. About the whole man there was an air somehow of full-bloomed foppishness gone to tassel— as though having been a dandy once, he was now merely neat and precise in his way of dress.

He was talking along with the death of Albert Sidney Johnston for his subject, not seeming to notice that his audience wasn't deeply interested. He

had, it seemed, a way of stating a proposition as a fact, as an indisputable, everlasting, eternal fact, an immutable thing. It became immutable through his way of stating it. Then he would frame it in the form of a question and ask it. Then he would answer it himself and go right ahead.

Boynton, the managing editor, was coiled up at his desk, wearing a look of patient endurance on his face. Harty, the telegraph editor, was trying to do his work— trying, I say, because the orator was booming away like a bittern within three feet of him and Harty plainly was pestered and fretful. Really the only person in sight who seemed entertained was Sidley, the exchange editor, a young man with hair that had turned white before its time and in his eye the devil-driven look of a man who drinks hard, not because he wants to drink but because he can't help drinking. Sidley, as I was to find out later, had less cause to care for the old man than anybody about the shop, for he used to disarrange Sidley's neatly piled exchanges, pawing through them for his favorite papers. But Sidley could forget his own grievances in watchful enjoyment of the dumb sufferings of Harty, whom he hated, as I came to know, with the blind hate a dipsomaniac often has for any mild and perfectly harmless individual.

As I stood there taking in the picture, the speaker, sensing a stranger's presence, faced clear about and saw me. He nodded with a grave courtesy, and then paused a moment as though expecting that one of the others would introduce us. None of the others did introduce us though, so he went ahead talking about Albert Sidney Johnston's death, and I turned away. I stopped by Devore's desk.

"Who is he?" I asked.

"That," he said, with a kind of leashed and restrained ferocity in his voice, "is Major Putnam P. Stone— and the P stands for Pest, which is his middle name— late of the Southern Confederacy."

"Picturesque-looking old fellow, isn't he?" I said.

"Picturesque old nuisance," he said, and jabbed at his scalp with his pencil as though he meant to puncture his skull. "Wait until you've been here a few weeks and you'll have another name for him."

"Well, anyway, he's got a good carrying voice," I said, rather at a loss to understand Devore's bitterness.

"Great," he mocked venomously; "you can hear it a mile. I hear it in my sleep. So will you when you get to know him, the old bore!"

In due time I did get to know Major Stone well. He was dignified, tiresome, conversational, gentle mannered and, I think, rather lonely. By driblets, a scrap here and a scrap there, I learned something about his private life. He came from the extreme eastern end of the state. He belonged to an old family. His

grandfather— or maybe it was his great-grand-uncle— had been one of the first United States senators that went to Washington after our state was admitted into the Union. He had never married. He had no business or profession. From some property or other he drew an income, small, but enough to keep him in a sort of simple and genteel poverty. He belonged to the best club in town and the most exclusive, the Shawnee Club, and he had served four years in the Confederate army. That last was the one big thing in his life. To the major's conceptions everything that happened before 1861 had been of a preparatory nature, leading up to and paving the way for the main event; and what had happened since 1865 was of no consequence, except in so far as it reflected the effects of the Civil War.

Daily, as methodically as a milkwagon horse, he covered the same route. First he sat in the reading room of the old Gaunt House, where by an open fire in winter or by an open window in summer he discussed the blunders of Braxton Bragg and similar congenial topics with a little group of aging, fading, testy veterans. On his way to the Shawnee Club he would come by the *Evening Press* office and stay an hour, or two hours, or three hours, to go away finally with a couple of favored exchanges tucked under his arm, and leave us with our ears still dinned and tingling. Once in a while of a night, passing the Gaunt House on my way to the boarding house where I lived— for four dollars a week— I would see him through the windows, sometimes sitting alone, sometimes with one of his cronies.

Round the office he sometimes bothered us and sometimes he interfered with our work; but mainly all the men on the staff liked him, I think, or at least we put up with him. In our home town each of us had known somebody very much like him— there used to be at least one Major Stone in every community in the South, although most of them are dead now, I guess— so we all could understand him. When I say all I mean all but Devore. The major's mere presence would poison Devore's whole day for him. The major's blaring notes would cross-cut Devore's nerves as with a dull and haggling saw. He— Devore I mean— disliked the major with a dislike almost too deep for words. It had got to be an obsession with him.

"You fellows that were born down here have to stand for him," he said once, when the major had stumped out on his short legs after an unusually long visit. "It's part of the penalty you pay for belonging in this country. But I don't have to venerate him and fuss over him and listen to him. I'm a Yankee, thank the Lord!" Devore came from Michigan and had worked on papers in Cleveland and Detroit before he drifted South. "Oh, we've got his counterpart up my way," he went on. "Up there he'd be a pension-grabbing old kicker, ready to have a fit any time anybody wearing a gray uniform got within ninety

miles of him, and writing red-hot letters of protest to the newspapers every time the state authorities sent a captured battle flag back down South. Down here he's a pompous, noisy old fraud, too proud to work for a living— or too lazy— and too poor to count for anything in this world. The difference is that up in my country we've squelched the breed— we got good and tired of these professional Bloody Shirt wavers a good while ago; but here you fuss over this man, and you'll sit round and pretend to listen while he drools away about things that happened before any one of you was born. Do you fellows know what I've found out about your Major Putnam Stone? He's a life member of the Shawnee Club— a life member, mind you! And here I've been living in this town over a year, and nobody ever so much as invited me inside its front door!"

All of which was, perhaps, true, even though Devore had an unnecessarily harsh way of stating the case; the part about the Shawnee Club was true, at any rate, and I used to think it possibly had something to do with Devore's feelings for Major Stone. Not that Devore gave open utterance to his feelings to the major's face. To the major he was always silently polite, with a little edging of ice on his politeness; he saved up his spleen to spew it out behind the old fellow's back. Farther than that he couldn't well afford to go anyhow. The Chief, owner of the paper and its editor, was the major's friend. As for the major himself, he seemed never to notice Devore's attitude. For a fact, I believe he actually felt a sort of pity for Devore, seeing that Devore had been born in the North. Not to have been born in the South was, from the major's way of looking at the thing, a great and regrettable misfortune for which the victim could not be held responsible, since the fault lay with his parents and not with him. By way of a suitable return for this, Devore spent many a spare moment thinking up grotesque yet wickedly appropriate nicknames for the major. He called him Old First and Second Manassas and Old Hardee's Tactics and Old Valley of Virginia. He called him an old bluffer too.

He was wrong there, though, certainly. Though the major talked pretty exclusively about the war, I took notice that he rarely talked about the part he himself had played in it. Indeed, he rarely discussed anybody below the rank of brigadier. The errors of Hood's campaign concerned him more deeply than the personal performances of any individual. Campaigns you might say were his specialty, campaigns and strategy. About such things as these he could talk for hours— and he did.

I've known other men— plenty of them— not nearly so well educated as the major, who could tell you tales of the war that would make you see it— yes, and smell it too— the smoke of the campfires, the unutterable fatigue of forced marches when the men, with their tongues lolling out of their mouths

like dogs, staggered along, panting like dogs; the bloody prints of unshod feet on flinty, frozen clods; the shock and fearful joy of the fighting; the shamed numbness of retreats; artillery horses, their hides all blood-boltered and their tails clubbed and clotted with mire, lying dead with stiff legs between overturned guns; dead men piled in heaps and living men huddled in panics— all of it. But when the major talked I saw only some serious-minded officers, in whiskers of an obsolete cut and queer-looking shirt collars, poring over maps round a table in a farmhouse parlor. When he chewed on the cud of the vanished past it certainly was mighty dry chewing.

There came a day, a few weeks after I went to work for the *Evening Press*, when for once anyway the major didn't seem to have anything to say. It was in the middle of a blistering, smothering hot forenoon in early June, muggy and still and close, when a fellow breathing felt as though he had his nose buried in layers of damp cotton waste. The city room was a place fit to addle eggs, and from the composing room at the back the stenches of melting metals and stale machine oils came rolling in to us in nasty waves. With his face glistening through the trickling sweat, the major came in about ten o'clock, fanning himself with his hat, and when he spoke his greeting the booming note seemed all melted and gone out of his voice. He went through the city room into the room behind the partition, and passing through a minute later I saw him sitting there with one of Sidley's exchanges unfolded across his knee, but he wasn't reading it. Presently I saw him climbing laboriously up the stairs to the second floor where the chief had his office. At quitting time that afternoon I dropped into the place on the corner for a beer, and I was drinking it, as close to an electric fan as I could get, when Devore came in and made for where I was standing. I asked him to have something.

"I'll take the same," he said to the man behind the bar, and then to me with a kind of explosive snap: "By George, I'm in a good mind to resign this rotten job!" That didn't startle me. I had been in the business long enough to know that the average newspaper man is forever threatening to resign. Most of them— to hear them talk— are always just on the point of throwing up their jobs and buying a good-paying country weekly somewhere and taking things easy for the rest of their lives, or else they're going into magazine work. Only they hardly ever do it. So Devore's threat didn't jar me much. I'd heard it too often.

"What's the trouble?" I asked. "Heat getting on your nerves?"

"No, it's not the heat," he said peevishly; "it's worse than the heat. Do you know what's happened? The chief has saddled Old Signal Corps on me. Yes, sir, I've got to take his old pet, the major, on the city staff. It seems he's succeeded in losing what little property he had— the chief told me some rigmarole about

sudden financial reverses— and now he's down and out. So I'm elected. I've got to take him on as a reporter— a cub reporter sixty-odd years old, mind you, who hasn't heard of anything worth while since Robert E. Lee surrendered!"

The pathos of the situation— if you could call it that— hit me with a jolt; but it hadn't hit Devore, that was plain. He saw only the annoying part of it.

"What's he going to do?" I asked— "assignments, or cover a route like the district men?"

"Lord knows," said Devore. "Because the old bore knows a lot of big people in this town and is friendly with all the old-timers in the state, the chief has a wild delusion that he can pick up a lot of stuff that an ordinary reporter wouldn't get. Rats!

"Come on, let's take another beer," he said, and then he added: "Well, I'll just make you two predictions. He'll be a total loss as a reporter— that's one prediction; and the other is that he'll have a hard time buying his provender and his toddies over at the Shawnee Club on the salary he'll draw down from the Evening Press."

Devore was not such a very great city editor, as I know now in the light of fuller experience, but I must say that as a prophet he was fairly accurate. The major did have a hard time living on his salary— it was twelve a week, I learned— and as a reporter he certainly was not what you would call a dazzling success. He came on for duty at eight the next morning, the same as the rest of us, and sorry as I felt for him I had to laugh. He had bought himself a leather-backed notebook as big as a young ledger, just as a green kid just out of high school would have done, and he had a long, new, shiny, freshly sharpened lead pencil sticking out of the breast pocket of his coat. He tried to come in smartly with a businesslike air, but it wouldn't have fooled a blind man, because he was as nervous as a debutante. It struck me as one of the funniest things— and one of the most pathetic— I had ever seen.

I'll say this for Devore— he tried out the major on nearly every kind of job; and surely it wasn't Devore's fault that the major failed on every single one of them. His first attempt was as typical a failure as any of them. That first morning Devore assigned him to cover a wedding at high noon, high noon being the phrase we always used for a wedding that took place round twelve o'clock in the day. The daughter of one of the wealthiest merchants in the town, and also one of our largest advertisers, was going to be married to the first deputy cotillion leader of the German Club, or something of that nature. Anyhow the groom was what is known as prominent in society, and the chief wanted a spread made of it. Devore sent the major out to cover the wedding, and when he came back told him to write about half a column.

He wrote half a column before he mentioned the bride's name. He started off with an eight-line quotation from Walter Scott's Lady of the Lake, and then he went into a long, flowery dissertation on the sacred rite or ceremony of matrimony, proving conclusively and beyond the peradventure of a doubt that it was handed down to us from remote antiquity. And he forgot altogether to tell the minister's name, and he got the groom's middle initial wrong— he was the kind of groom who would make a fuss over a wrong middle initial, too— and along toward the end of his story he devoted about three closely-written pages to the military history of the young woman's father. It seems that her parent had served with distinction as colonel of a North Carolina regiment. And he wound up with a fancy flourish and handed it in. I know all these details of his story, because it fell to me to rewrite it.

Devore didn't say a word when the old major reverently laid that armload of copy down in front of him. He just sat and waited in silence until the major had gone out to get a bite to eat, and then he undertook to edit it. But there wasn't any way to edit it, except to throw it away. I suppose that kind of literature went very well indeed back along about 1850; I remember having read such accounts in the back files of old weeklies, printed before the war. But we were getting out a live, snappy paper. Devore tried to pattern the local side after the New York and Chicago models. As yet we hadn't reached the point where we spoke of any white woman without the prefix Mrs. or Miss before her name, but we were up-to-date in a good many other particulars. Why, it was even against the office rule to run "beauty and chivalry" into a story when describing a mixed assemblage of men and women; and when a Southern newspaper bars out that ancient and honorable standby among phrases it is a sign that the old order has changed.

For ten minutes or so Devore, cursing softly to himself, cut and chopped and gutted his way through the major's introduction, and between slashing strokes made a war map of the Balkans in his scalp with his blue pencil. Then he lost patience altogether.

"Here," he said to me, "you're not doing anything, are you? Well, take this awful bunch of mushy slush and read it through, and then try to make a decent half-column story out of it. And rush it over a page at a time, will you? We've got to hustle to catch the three o'clock edition with it."

Long before three o'clock the major was back in the shop, waiting for the first run of papers to come off the press. Furtively I watched him as he hunted through the sticky pages to find his first story. I guess he had the budding pride of authorship in him, just as all the rest of us have it in us. But he didn't find his story, he found mine. He didn't say anything, but he looked crushed and

forlorn as he got up and went away. It was like him not to ask for any explanations, and it was like Devore not to offer him any.

So it went. Even if he had grown up in the business I doubt whether Major Putnam Stone would ever have made a newspaper man; and now he was too far along in life to pick up even the rudiments of the trade. He didn't have any more idea of news values than a rabbit. He had the most amazing faculty for overlooking what was vital in the news, but he could always be depended upon to pick out some trivial and inconsequential detail and dress it up with about half a yard of old-point lace adjectives. He never by any chance used a short word if he could dig up a long, hard one, and he never seemed to be able to start a story without a quotation from one of the poets. It never was a modern poet either. Excepting for Sidney Lanier and Father Ryan, apparently he hadn't heard of any poet worth while since Edgar Allan Poe died. And everything that happened seemed to remind him— at great length— of something else that had happened between 1861 and 1865. When it came to lugging the Civil War into a tale, he was as bad as that character in one of Dickens' novels who couldn't keep the head of King Charles the First out of his literary productions. With that reared-back, flat-heeled, stiff-spined gait of his, he would go rummaging round the hotels and the Shawnee Club, meeting all sorts of people and hearing all sorts of things that a real reporter would have snatched at like a hungry dog snatching at a T-bone, and then he would remember that it was the fortieth anniversary of the Battle of Kenesaw Mountain, or something, and, forgetting everything else, would come bulging and bustling back to the office, all worked up over the prospect of writing two or three columns about that. He just simply couldn't get the viewpoint; yet I think he tried hard enough. I guess the man who said you couldn't teach an old dog new tricks had particular reference to an old war dog.

I remember mighty well one incident that illustrates the point I am trying to make. We had a Sunday edition. We were rather vain of our Sunday edition. It carried a colored comic supplement and a section full of special features, and we all took a more or less righteous pride in it and tried hard to make it alive and attractive. We didn't always succeed, but we tried all right. One Saturday night we put the Sunday to bed, and about one o'clock, when the last form was locked, three or four of us dropped into Tony's place at the corner for a bite to eat and a drink. We hadn't been there very long when in came the old major, and at my invitation he joined us at one of Tony's little round tables at the back of the place. As a general thing the major didn't patronize Tony's. I had never heard him say so— probably he wouldn't have said it for fear of hurting our feelings— but I somehow had gathered the impression that the major believed a gentleman, if he drank at all, should drink at his club. But it was long after

midnight now and the Shawnee Club would be closed. Ike Webb spoke up presently.

"It's a pity we couldn't dig up the governor tonight," he said.

The governor had come down from the state capital about noon, and all the afternoon and during most of the evening Webb had been trying to find him. There was a possibility of a big story in the governor if Webb could have found him. The major, who had been sitting there stirring his toddy in an absent-minded sort of way, spoke up casually: "I spent an hour with the governor tonight— at my club. In fact, I supped with him in one of the private dining rooms." We looked up, startled, but the major went right along. "Young gentlemen, it may interest you to know that every time I see our worthy governor I am struck more and more by his resemblance to General Leonidas Polk, as that gallant soldier and gentleman looked when I last saw him——"

Devore, who had been sitting next to the major, with his shoulder half turned from the old man, swung round sharply and interrupted him.

"Major," he said, with a thin icy stream of sarcasm trickling through his words, "did you and the governor by any remote chance discuss anything so brutally new and fresh as the present political complications in this state?"

"Oh, yes," said the major blandly. "We discussed them quite at some length— or at least the governor did. Personally I do not take a great interest in these matters, not so great an interest as I should, perhaps, take. However, I did feel impelled to take issue with him on one point. Our governor is an honest gentleman— more than that, he was a brave soldier— but I fear he is mistaken in some of his attitudes. I regard him as being badly advised. For example, he told me that no longer ago than this afternoon he affixed his official signature to a veto of Senator Stickney's measure in regard to the warehouses of our state——"

As Devore jumped up he overturned the major's toddy right in the major's lap. He didn't stop to beg pardon, though; in fact, none of us stopped. But at the door I threw one glance backward over my shoulder. The major was still sitting reared back in his chair, with his wasted toddy seeping all down the front of his billowy shirt, viewing our vanishing figures with amazement and a mild reproof in his eyes. In the one quick glance that I took I translated his expression to mean something like this:

"Good Heavens, is this any way for a party of gentlemen to break up! This could never happen at a gentlemen's club."

It was a foot-race back to the office, and Devore, who had the start, won by a short length. Luckily the distance was short, not quite half a block, and the presses hadn't started yet. Working like the crew of a sinking ship, we snatched the first page form back off the steam table and pried it open and gouged a

double handful of hot slugs out of the last column— Devore blistered his fingers doing it. A couple of linotype operators who were on the late trick threw together the stick or two of copy that Webb and I scribbled off a line at a time. And while we were doing this Devore framed a triple-deck, black-face head. So we missed only one mail.

The first page had a ragged, sloppy look, but anyway we were saved from being scooped to death on the most important story of the year. The vetoing of the Stickney Bill vitally affected the tobacco interests, and they were the biggest interests in the state, and half the people of the state had been thinking about nothing else and talking about nothing else for two months— ever since the extra session of the legislature started. It was well for us too that we did save our faces, because the opposition sheet had managed to find the governor— he was stopping for the night at the house of a friend out in the suburbs— and over the telephone at a late hour he had announced his decision to them. But by Monday morning the major seemed to have forgotten the whole thing. I think he had even forgiven Devore for spilling his toddy and not stopping to apologize.

As for Devore, he didn't say a word to the major— what would have been the use? To Devore's credit also I will say that he didn't run to the chief, bearing complaints of the major's hopeless incompetency. He kept his tongue between his teeth and his teeth locked; and that must have been hard on Devore, for he was a flickery, high-tempered man, and nervous as a cat besides. To my knowledge, the only time he ever broke out was when we teetotally missed the Castleton divorce story. So far as the major's part in it was concerned, it was the Stickney veto story all over again, with variations. The Castletons were almost the richest people in town, and socially they stood way up. That made the scandal that had been brewing and steeping and simmering for months all the bigger when finally it came to a boil. When young Buford Castleton got his eyes open and became aware of what everybody else had known for a year or more, and when the rival evening paper came out in its last edition with the full particulars, we, over in the *Evening Press* shop, were plastered with shame, for we didn't have a line of it.

A stranger dropping in just about that time would have been justified in thinking there was a corpse laid out in the plant somewhere, and that all the members of the city staff were sitting up with the remains. As luck would have it, it wasn't a stranger that dropped in on our grand lodge of sorrow. It was Major Putnam Stone, and as he entered the door he caught the tag end of what one of us was saying.

"I gather," he said in that large round voice of his, "that you young gentlemen are discussing the unhappy affair which, I note, is mentioned with

such signally poor taste in the columns of our sensational contemporary. I may state that I knew of this contemplated divorce action yesterday. Mr. Buford Castleton, Senior, was my informant."

"What!" Devore almost yelled it. He had the love of a true city editor for his paper, and the love of a mother for her child or a miser for his gold is no greater love than that, let me tell you. "You knew about this thing here?" He beat with two fingers that danced like the prongs of a tuning fork on the paper spread out in front of him. "You knew it yesterday?"

"Certainly," said the major. "The elder Mr. Castleton bared the truly distressing details to me at the Shawnee Club."

"In confidence though— he told you about it in confidence, didn't he, major?" said Ike Webb, trying to save the old fellow.

But the major besottedly wouldn't be saved.

"Absolutely not," he said. "There were several of us present, at least three other gentlemen whose names I cannot now recall. Mr. Castleton made the disclosure as though he wished it to be known among his friends and his son's friends. It was quite evident to all of us that he was entirely out of sympathy with the lady who is his daughter-in-law."

Devore forced himself to be calm. It was almost as though he sat on himself to hold himself down in his chair; but when he spoke his voice ran up and down the scales quiveringly.

"Major," he said, "don't you think it would be a good idea if you would admit that the Southern Confederacy was defeated, and turned your attention to a few things that have occurred subsequently? Why didn't you write this story? Why didn't you tell me, so that I could write it? Why didn't—— Oh, what's the use!"

The major straightened himself up.

"Sir," he said, "allow me to correct you in regard to a plain misstatement of fact. Sir, the Southern Confederacy was never defeated. It ceased to exist as a nation because we were exhausted— because our devastated country was exhausted. Another thing, sir, I am employed upon this paper, I gainsay you, as a reporter, not as a scandal monger. I would be the last to give circulation in the public prints to another gentleman's domestic unhappiness. I regard it as highly improper that a gentleman's private affairs should be aired in a newspaper under any circumstances."

And with that he bowed and turned on his heel and went out, leaving Devore shaking all over with the superhuman task of trying to hold himself in. About ten minutes later, when I came out bound for my boarding house, the major was standing at the front door. He looped one of his absurdly small fingers into one of my buttonholes.

"Our city editor means well, no doubt," he said, "but he doesn't understand, he doesn't appreciate our conceptions of these matters. He was born on the other side of the river, you know," he said as though that explained everything. Then his tone changed and anxiety crept into it. "Do you think that I went too far? Do you think I ought to return to him and apologize to him for the somewhat hasty and abrupt manner of speech I used just now?"

I told him no— I didn't know what might happen if he went back in there then— and I persuaded him that Devore didn't expect any apology; and with that he seemed better satisfied and walked off. As I stood there watching him, his stiff old back growing smaller as he went away from me, I didn't know which I blamed the more, Devore for his malignant, cold disdain of the major, or the major for his blatant stupidity. And right then and there, all of a sudden, there came to me an understanding of a thing that had been puzzling me all these weeks. Often I had wondered how the major had endured Devore's contempt. I had decided in my own mind that he must be blind to it, else he would have shown resentment. But now I knew the answer. The major wasn't blind, he was afraid; as the saying goes, he was afraid of his job. He needed it; he needed the little scrap of money it brought him every Saturday night. That was it, I knew now.

Knowing it made me sorrier than ever for the old man. Dimly I began to realize, I think, what his own mental attitude toward his position must be. Here he was, a mere cub reporter— and a remarkably bad one, a proven failure— skirmishing round for small, inconsequential items, running errands really, at an age when most of the men he knew were getting ready to retire from business. Yet he didn't dare quit. He didn't dare even to rebel against the slights of the man over him, because he needed that twelve dollars a week. It was all, no doubt, that stood between him and actual want. His pride was bleeding to death internally. On top of all that he was being forced into a readjustment of his whole scheme of things, at a time of life when its ordered routine was almost as much a part of him as his hands and feet. As I figured it, he had long before adjusted his life to his income, cunningly fitting in certain small luxuries and all the small comforts; and now this income was cut to a third or a quarter perhaps of its former dimensions. It seemed a pretty hard thing for the major. It was fierce.

Perhaps my vision was clouded by my sympathy, but I thought Major Stone aged visibly that summer. Maybe you have noticed how it is with men who have gone along, hale and stanch, until they reach a certain age. When they do start to break they break fast. He lost some of his flesh and most of his rosiness. The skin on his face loosened a little and became a tallowy yellowish-red, somewhat like a winter-killed apple.

His wardrobe suffered. One day one of his short little shoes was split across the top just back of the toe cap, and the next morning it was patched. Pretty soon the other shoe followed suit— first a crack in the leather, then a clumsy patch over the crack. He wore his black slouch hat until it was as green in spots as a gage plum; and late in August he supplanted it with one of those cheap, varnished brown-straw hats that cost about thirty-five cents apiece and look it.

His linen must have been one of his small extravagances. Those majestically collared garments with the tremendous plaited bosoms and the hand-worked eyelets, where the three big flat gold studs went in, never came ready made from any shop. They must have been built to his measure and his order. Now he wore them until there were gaped places between the plaits where the fine, fragile linen had ripped lengthwise, and the collars were frayed down and broken across and caved in limply. Finally he gave them up too, and one morning came to work wearing a flimsy, sleazy, negligee shirt. I reckon you know the kind of shirt I mean— always it fits badly, and the sleeves are always short and the bosom is skimpy, and the color design is like bad wall-paper. After his old full-bosomed grandeur this shirt, with a ten-cent collar buttoned on to it and overriding the neckband, and gaping away in the front so that the major's throat showed, seemed to typify more than anything else the days upon which he had fallen. About this time I thought his voice took on a changed tone permanently. It was still hollow, but it no longer rang.

A good many men similarly placed would have taken to drink, but Major Putnam Stone plainly was never born to be a drunkard and hard times couldn't make one of him. With a sort of gentle, stupid persistence he hung fast to his poor job, blundering through some way, struggling constantly to learn the first easy tricks of the trade— the a, b, c's of it— and never succeeding. He still lugged the classical poets and the war into every story he tried to write, and day after day Devore maintained his policy of eloquent brutal silence, refusing dumbly to accept the major's clumsy placating attempts to get upon a better footing with him. After that once he had never attempted to scold the old man, but he would watch the major pottering round the city room, and he would chew on his under lip and viciously lance his scalp with his pencil point.

Well, aside from the major, Devore had his troubles that summer. That was the summer of the biggest, bitterest campaign that the state had seen, so old-timers said, since Breckinridge ran against Douglas and both of them against Lincoln. If you have ever lived in the South, probably you know something of political fights that will divide a state into two armed camps, getting hotter and hotter until old slumbering animosities come crawling out into the open, like poison snakes from under a rock, and new lively ones hatch from the shell every hour or so in a multiplying adder brood.

This was like that, only worse. Stripped of a lot of embroidery in the shape of side issues and local complications, it resolved itself in a last-ditch, last-stand, back-to-the-wall fight of the old régime of the party against the new. On one side were the oldsters, bearers of famous names some of them, who had learned politics as a trade and followed it as a profession. Almost to a man they were professional office holders, professional handshakers, professional silver tongues. And against them were pitted a greedy, hungry group of younger men, less showy perhaps in their persons, less picturesque in their manner of speech, but filled each one with a great yearning for office and power; and they brought to the aid of their vaulting ambitions a new and a faultlessly running machine. From the outset the *Evening Press* had championed the cause of the old crowd— the state-house ring as the enemy called it, when they didn't call it something worse. We championed it not as a Northern or an Eastern paper might, in a sedate, half-hearted way, but fiercely and wholly and blindly— so blindly that we could see nothing in our own faction but what was good and high and pure, nothing in the other but what was smutted with evil intent. In daily double-leaded editorial columns the chief preached a Holy War, and in the local pages we fought the foe tooth and nail, biting and gouging and clawing, and they gouged and clawed back at us like catamounts. That was where the hard work fell upon Devore. He had to keep half his scanty staff working on politics while the other half tried to cover the run of the news.

If I live to be a thousand years old I am not going to forget the state convention that began at two o'clock that muggy September afternoon at Lyric Hall up on Washington Street in the old part of the town. Once upon a time, twenty or thirty years before, Lyric Hall had been the biggest theater in town. The stage was still there and the boxes, and at the back there were miles— they seemed miles anyway— of ancient, crumbling, dauby scenery stacked up and smelling of age and decay. Booth and Barrett had played there, and Fanny Davenport and Billy Florence. Now, having fallen from its high estate, it served altered purposes— conventions were held at Lyric Hall and cheap masquerade balls and the like.

The press tables that had been provided were not, strictly speaking, press tables at all. They were ordinary unpainted kitchen tables, ranged two on one side and two on the other side at the front of the stage, close up to the old gas-tipped footlights; and when we came in by the back way that afternoon and found our appointed places I was struck by certain sinister facts. Usually women flocked to a state convention. By rights there should have been ladies in the boxes and in the balcony. Now there wasn't a woman in sight anywhere, only men, row after row of them. And there wasn't any cheering, or mighty

little of it. When I tell you the band played Dixie all the way through with only a stray whoop now and then, you will understand better the temper of that crowd.

The situation, you see, was like this: One side had carried the mountain end of the state; the other had carried the lowlands. One side had swept the city; that meant a solid block of more than a hundred delegates. The other side had won the small towns and the inland counties. So it stood lowlander against highlander, city man against country man, and the bitter waters of those ancient feuds have their wellsprings back a thousand years in history, they tell me. One side led slenderly on instructed vote. The other side had enough contesting delegations on hand to upset the result if these contestants or any considerable proportion of them should be recognized in the preliminary organization.

One side held a majority of the delegates who sat upon the floor; the other side had packed the balcony and the aisles and the corners with its armed partizans. One side was in the saddle and determined; the other afoot and grimly desperate. And it was our side, as I shall call it, meaning by that the state-house ring, that for the moment had the whiphand; and it was the other side, led in person by State Senator Stickney, god of the new machine, that stood ready to wade hip deep through trouble to unhorse us.

Just below me, stretching across the hall from side to side in favored front places, sat the city delegates— Stickney men all of them. And as my eye swept the curved double row of faces it seemed to me I saw there every man in town with a reputation as a gun-fighter or a knife-fighter or a fist-fighter; and every one of them wore, pinning his delegate's badge to his breast, a Stickney button that was round and bright red, like a clot of blood on his shirt front.

They made a contrast, these half-moon lines of blocky men, to the lank, slouch-hatted, low-collared country delegates— farmers, school teachers, country doctors and country lawyers— who filled the seats behind them and on beyond them. To the one group politics was a business in which there was money to be made and excitement to be had; to the other group it was a passion, veritably a sacredly high and serious thing, which they took as they did their religion, with a solemn, intolerant, Calvinistic sincerity. There was one thing, though, they all shared in common. Whether a man's coat was of black alpaca or striped flannel, the right-hand pocket sagged under the weight of unseen ironmongery; or if the coat pocket didn't sag there was a bulging clump back under the skirts on the right hip. For all the heat, hardly a man there was in his shirtsleeves; and it would have been funny to watch how carefully this man or that eased himself down into his seat, favoring his flanks against the

pressure of his hardware— that is to say, it would have been funny if it all hadn't been so deadly earnest.

You could fairly smell trouble cooking in that hall. In any corner almost there were the potential makings of half a dozen prominent funerals. There was scarce a man, I judged, but nursed a private grudge against some other man; and then besides these there was the big issue itself, which had split the state apart lengthwise as a butcher's cleaver splits a joint. Looking out over that convention, you could read danger spelled out everywhere, in everything, as plain as print.

I was where I could read it with particular and uncomfortable distinctness, too, for I had the second place at the table that had been assigned to the *Evening Press* crew. There were four of us in all— Devore, who had elected to be in direct charge of the detail; Ike Webb, our star man, who was to handle the main story; I who was to write the running account— and, fourthly and lastly, Major Putnam Stone. The major hadn't been included in the assignment originally, but little Pinky Gilfoil had turned up sick that morning, and the chief decided the major should come along with us in Gilfoil's place. The chief had a deluded notion that the major could circulate on a roving commission and pick up spicy scraps of gossip. But here, for this once anyway, was a convention wherein there were no spicy bits of gossip to be picked up— curse words, yes, and cold-chilled fighting words, but not gossip— everything focused and was summed up in the one main point: Should the majority rule the machine or should the machine rule the majority? So the major sat there at the far inside corner of the table doing nothing at all— Devore saw to that— and was rather in the way. For the time I forgot all about him.

The clash wasn't long in coming. It came on the first roll call of the counties. Later we found out that the Stickney forces had been counting, all along, on throwing the convention into a disorder of such proportions as to force an adjournment, trusting then to their acknowledged superiority at organization to win some strong strategic advantage in the intervening gap of time. Failing there they meant to raise a cry of unfairness and walk out. That then was their program— first the riot and then, as a last resort, the bolt. But they had men in their ranks, high-tempered men who, like so many skittish colts, wouldn't stand without hitching. The signals crossed and the thunder cracked across that calm-before-the-storm situation before there was proper color of excuse either for attack or for retreat.

It came with scarcely any warning at all. Old Judge Marcellus Barbee, the state chairman, called the convention to order, he standing at a little table in the center of the stage. Although counted as our man, the judge was of such uncertain fiber as to render it doubtful whose man he really was. He was a

kindly, wind-blown old gentleman, who very much against his will had been drawn unawares, as it were, into the middle of this fight, and he was bewildered by it all— and not only bewildered but unhappy and frightened. His gavel seemed to quaver its raps out timorously.

A pastor of one of the churches, a reverend man with a bleak, worried face, prayed the Good Lord that peace and good-will and wise counsel might rule these deliberations, and then fled away as though fearing the mocking echoes of his own Amen. Summoning his skulking voice out of his lower throat, Judge Barbee bade the secretary of the state committee call the counties. The secretary got as far as Blanton, the third county alphabetically down the list. And Blanton was one of the contested counties. So up rose two rival chairmen of delegations, each waving aloft his credentials, each demanding the right to cast the vote of free and sovereign Blanton, each shaking a clenched fist at the other. Up got the rival delegations from Blanton. Up got everybody. Judge Barbee, with a gesture, recognized the rights of the anti-Stickney delegation. Jeers and yells broke out, spattering forth like a skirmish fire, then almost instantly were merged into a vast, ominous roar. Chairs began to overturn. Not twenty feet from me the clattering of the chairman's gavel, as he vainly beat for order, sounded like the clicking of a telegraph instrument in a cyclone.

I saw the sergeant-at-arms— who was our man too— start down the middle aisle and saw him trip over a hostile leg and stumble and fall, and I saw a big mountaineer drop right on top of him, pinning him flat to the floor. I saw the musicians inside the orchestra rail, almost under my feet, scuttling away in two directions like a divided covey of gorgeous blue and red birds. I saw the snare drummer, a little round German, put his foot through the skin roof of his own drum. I saw Judge Barbee overturn the white china pitcher of ice water that sweated on the table at his elbow, and as the cold stream of its contents spattered down the legs of his trousers saw him staring downward, contemplating his drenched limbs as though that mattered greatly.

All in a flash I saw these things, and in that same flash I saw, taking shape and impulse, a groundswell of men, all wearing red buttons, rolling toward the stage, with the picked bad men of the city wards for its crest; and out of the tail of my eye I saw too, stealing out from the rear of the stage, a small, compact wedge of men wearing those same red buttons; and the prow of the wedge was Fighting Dave Dancy, the official bad man of a bad county, a man who packed a gun on each hip and carried a dirk knife down the back of his neck; a man who would shoot you at the drop of a hat and provide the hat himself— or at least so it was said of him.

And I realized that the enemy, coming by concerted agreement from front and rear at once, had nipped those of us who were upon the stage as between

two closing walls, and I was exceedingly unhappy to be there. I ducked my head low, waiting for the shooting to begin. Afterward we figured it out that nobody fired the first shot because everybody knew the first shot would mean a massacre, where likely enough a man would kill more friends than foes.

What happened now in the space of the next few seconds I saw with particular clarity of vision, because it happened right alongside me and in part right over me. I recall in especial Mink Satterlee. Mink Satterlee was one of the worst men in town, and he ran the worst saloon and prevailed mightily in ward politics. He had been sitting just below our table in the front row of seats. He was a big-bodied man, fat-necked, but this day he showed himself quick on his feet as any toe-dancer. Leading his own forces by a length, he vaulted the orchestra rail and lit lightly where a scared oboe player had been squatted a moment before; Mink breasted the gutterlike edging of the footlights and leaped upward, teetering a moment in space. One of his hands grabbed out for a purchase and closed on the leg of our table and jerked it almost from under us.

At that Devore either lost his head or else indignation made him reckless. Still half sitting, he kicked out at the wriggling bulk at his feet, and the toe of his shoe took Mink Satterlee in his chest. It was a puny enough kick; it didn't even shake Mink Satterlee loose from where he clung. He gave a bellow and heaved himself up on the stage and, before any of us could move, grabbed Devore by the throat with his left hand and jammed him back, face upward, on the table until I thought Devore's spine would crack. His right hand shot into his coat pocket, then, quick as a snake, came out again, showing the fat fist armed with a set of murderously heavy brass knucks, and he bent his arm in a crooked sickle-like stroke, aiming for Devore's left temple. I've always been satisfied— and so has Devore— that if the blow had landed true his skull would have caved in like a puff-ball. Only it never landed.

Above me a shadow of something hung for the hundredth part of a second, something white flashed over me and by me, moving downward whizzingly; something cracked on something; and Mink Satterlee breathed a gentle little grunt right in Devore's face and then relaxed and slid down on the floor, lying half under the table and half in the tin trough where the stubby gas jets of the footlights stood up, with his legs protruding stiffly out over its edge toward his friends. Subconsciously I noted that his socks were not mates, one of them being blue and one black; also that his scalp had a crescent-shaped split place in it just between and above his half-closed eyes. All this, though, couldn't have taken one-fifth of the time it has required for me to tell it. It couldn't have taken more than a brace of seconds, but even so it was time enough for other things to happen; and I looked back again toward the center of the stage just

as Fighting Dave Dancy seized startled old Judge Barbee by the middle from behind and flung him aside so roughly that the old man spun round twice, clutching at nothing, and then sat down very hard, yards away from where he started spinning.

Dancy stooped for the gavel, which had fallen from the judge's hand, being minded, I think, to run the convention awhile in the interest of his own crowd. But his greedy fingers never closed over its black-walnut handle, because, facing him, he saw just then what made him freeze solid where he was.

Out from behind the *Evening Press* table and through a scattering huddle of newspaper reporters, stepping on the balls of his feet as lightly as a puss-cat, emerged Major Putnam Stone. His sleeves were turned back off his wrists and his vest flared open. His head was thrust forward so that the tuft of goatee on his chin stuck straight out ahead of him like a little burgee in a fair breeze. His face was all a clear, bright, glowing pink; and in his right hand he held one of the longest cavalry revolvers that ever was made, I reckon. It had a square-butted ivory handle, and as I saw that ivory handle I knew what the white thing was that had flashed by me only a moment before to fell Mink Satterlee so expeditiously.

Writing this, I've been trying to think of the one word that would best describe how Major Putnam Stone looked to me as he advanced on Dave Dancy. I think now that the proper word is competent, for indeed the old major did look most competent— the tremendous efficiency he radiated filled him out and made him seem sundry sizes larger than he really was. A great emergency acts upon different men as chemical processes act upon different metals. Some it melts like lead, so that their resolution softens and runs away from them; and some it hardens to tempered steel. There was the old major now. Always before this he had seemed to me to be but pot metal and putty, and here, poised, alert, ready— a wire-drawn, hard-hammered Damascus blade of a man— all changed and transformed and glorified, he was coming down on Dave Dancy, finger on trigger, thumb on hammer, eye on target, dominating the whole scene.

Ten feet from him he halted and there was nobody between them. Somehow everybody else halted too, some even giving back a little. Over the edge of the stage a ring of staring faces, like a high-water mark, showed where the onward rushing swell of the Stickney city delegates had checked itself. Seemingly to all at once came the realization that the destinies of the fight had by the chances of the fight been entrusted to these two men— to Dancy and the major— and that between them the issue would be settled one way or the other.

Still at a half crouch, Dancy's right hand began to steal back under the skirt of his long black coat. At that the major flung up the muzzle of his weapon so that it pointed skyward, and he braced his left arm at his side in the attitude you have seen in the pictures of dueling scenes of olden times.

"I am waiting, sir, for you to draw," said the major quite briskly. "I will shoot it out with you to see whether right or might shall control this convention." And his heels clicked together like castanets.

Dancy's right hand kept stealing farther and farther back. And then you could mark by the change of his skin and by the look out of his eyes how his courage was clabbering to whey inside him, making his face a milky, curdled white, the color of a poorly stirred emulsion, and then he quit— he quit cold— his hand came out again from under his coat tails and it was an empty hand and wide open. It was from that moment on that throughout our state Fighting Dave Dancy ceased to be Fighting Dave and became instead Yaller Dave.

"Then, sir," said the major, "as you do not seem to care to shoot it out with me, man to man, you and your friends will kindly withdraw from this stage and allow the business of this convention to proceed in an orderly manner."

And as Dave Dancy started to go somebody laughed. In another second we were all laughing and the danger was over. When an American crowd begins laughing the danger is always over.

NEWSPAPER MEN down in that town still talk about the story that Ike Webb wrote for the last edition of the *Evening Press* that afternoon. It was a great story, as Ike Webb told it— how, still sitting on the floor, old Judge Barbee got his wits back and by word of mouth commissioned the major a special sergeant-at-arms; how the major privily sent men to close and lock and hold the doors so that the Stickney people couldn't get out to bolt, even if they had now been of a mind to do so; how the convention, catching the spirit of the moment, elected the major its temporary chairman, and how even after that, for quite a spell, until some of his friends bethought to remove him, Mink Satterlee slept peacefully under our press table with his mismated legs bridged across the tin trough of the footlights.

IN RAPID SUCCESSION a number of unusual events occurred in the *Evening Press* shop the next morning. To begin with, the chief came down early. He had a few words in private with Devore and went upstairs. When the major came at eight as usual, Devore was waiting for him at the door of the city room; and as they went upstairs together, side by side, I saw Devore's arm steal timidly out and rest a moment on the major's shoulder.

The major was the first to descend. Walking unusually erect, even for him, he bustled into the telephone booth. Jessie, our operator, told us afterward that he called up a haberdasher, and in a voice that boomed like a bell ordered fourteen of those plaited-bosom shirts of his, the same to be made up and delivered as soon as possible. Then he stalked out. And in a minute or two more Devore came down looking happy and unhappy and embarrassed and exalted, all of them at once. On his way to his desk he halted midway of the floor.

"Gentlemen," he said huskily— "fellows, I mean— I've got an announcement to make, or rather two announcements. One is this: Right here before you fellows who heard most of them I want to take back all the mean things I ever said about him— about Major Stone— and I want to say I'm sorry for all the mean things I've done to him. I've tried to beg his pardon, but he wouldn't listen— he wouldn't let me beg his pardon— he— he said everything was all right. That's one announcement. Here's the other: The major is going to have a new job with this paper. He's going to leave the city staff. Hereafter he's going to be upstairs in the room next to the chief. He's gone out now to pick out his own desk. He's going to write specials for the Sunday— specials about the war. And he's going to do it on a decent salary too."

I judge by my own feelings that we all wanted to cheer, but didn't because we thought it might sound theatrical and foolish. Anyhow, I know that was how I felt. So there was a little awkward pause.

"What's his new title going to be?" asked somebody then.

"The title is appropriate— I suggested it myself," said Devore. "Major Stone is going to be war editor."

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6: À la Ninon de l'enclos

P. C. Wren

1875-1941

In: *Stepsons of France*, 1917

IT WAS ONE OF La Cigale's good days, and the poor "Grasshopper" was comparatively sane. He was one of the most remarkable men in the French Foreign Legion in that he was a perfect soldier, though a perfect lunatic for about thirty days in the month. When not a Grasshopper (or a Japanese lady, a Zulu, an Esquimaux dog or a Chinese mandarin) he was a cultured gentleman of rare perception, understanding, and sympathy. He had been an officer in the Belgian Corps of Guides, and military attaché at various courts....

From a neighbouring group talking to Madame la Cantinière, in the canteen, came the words, clearly heard, "*Ah! Oui! Oui! Dans la Rue des Tournelles.*"

"Now, why should the words 'Rue des Tournelles' bring me a distinct vision of the Café Marsouins in Hanoï by the banks of the Red River in Tonkin?" asked the Grasshopper a minute later, in English.

"Can't tell you, Cigale; there is no such *rue* in Hanoï," replied Jean Boule.

"No, *mon ancien*," agreed the Grasshopper, "but there was Fifi Fifinette's place. Aha! I have it!"

"Then give us a bit of it, Cocky," put in 'Erb (le Légionnaire 'Erbiggin— one, Herbert Higgins from Hoxton).

"Yep— down by the factory, near Madame Ti-Ka's joint, it were," observed the Bucking Bronco.

"Aha! I have it. I remember me why the words 'Rue des Tournelles' reminded me all suddenly of the Café Marsouins in Hanoï," continued the Grasshopper. "It was there that I heard from Old Dubeque the truth of the story of Ninon Dürlonnklau, who was Fifi Fifinette's predecessor. She was a reincarnation of Ninon de l'Enclos, and of course Ninon dwelt in the Rue des Tournelles in Old Paris a few odd centuries back."

"Did they call the gal Neenong de Longclothes because she wore tights, Ciggy?" inquired 'Erb.

"Put me wise to Neenong's little stunts before I hit it for the downy,"[1] requested the Bucking Bronco.

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[1] Go to bed.

"Ninon de l'Enclos was a lady of the loveliest and frailest," said the Grasshopper. "Oh! but of a charm. *Ravissante*! She was, in her time, the well-beloved of Richelieu, Captain St. Etienne, the Marquis de Sevigné, Condé,

Moissins, the Duc de Navailles, Fontenelle, Des Yveteaux, the Marquis de Villarceaux, St. Evrémonde, and the Abbé Chaulieu. On her eightieth birthday she had a devout and impassioned lover. On her eighty-fifth birthday the good Abbé wrote to her, 'Cupid has retreated into the little wrinkles round your undimmed eyes.'"...

"*Some* girl," opined the Bucking Bronco.

"And she lived in the Rue des Tournelles, and so the mention of that street called the Café Marsouins of Hanoï in Tonkin to my mind (for there did I hear the truth of the fate of Ninon Dürlonnklau, the predecessor of Fifi Fifinette whom some of us here knew)....

"And the chevalier de Villars, the son of Ninon de l'Enclos, was her lover also, not knowing that Ninon was his mother, nor she that de Villars was her son— until too late. Outside her door a necromancer prophesied the death of de Villars to his face. An hour later Ninon knew by a birth-mark that de Villars was her son, and cried aloud, 'You are my son!' So he fulfilled the prophecy of the necromancer. He drove his dagger through his throat— just where this birth-mark was. What you call *mole*, eh? ... Shame and horror? No ... Love. They who loved Ninon de l'Enclos *loved*. Her arms or those of death. No other place for a lover of Ninon. You Anglo-Saxons could *never* understand....

"And in Hanoï lived her reincarnation, Ninon Dürlonnklau, supposed to be the daughter of one Dürlonnklau, a German of the Legion, and of a perfect flower of a Lao woman. And, mind you, *mes amis*, there is nothing in the human form more lovely than a beautiful Lao girl from Upper Mekong.

"And *this* Ninon! Beautiful? Ah, my friends— there are no words. Like yourselves, I seek not the bowers of lovers— but I have the great love of beauty, and I have seen Ninon Dürlonnklau. Would I might have seen Ninon de l'Enclos that I might judge if she were one half so lovely and so fascinating. And when I first beheld the Dürlonnklau she was no *jeune fille*....

"She had been the well-beloved of governors, generals, and officials and officers— and there had been catastrophes, scandals, suicides ... the usual *affaires*— before she became the hostess of legionaries, marsouins,[2] sailors....

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[2] Colonial infantry.

"She had herself not wholly escaped the tragedy and grief that followed in her train, for at the age of seventeen she had a son, and that son was kidnapped when at the age that a babe takes the strongest grip upon a mother's heart and love and life.... And after a madness of grief and a long illness, she plunged the more recklessly into the pursuit of that pleasure and joy that must ever evade the children of pleasure, *les filles de joie*."

'Erb yawned cavernously.

"Got a gasper, Farver?" he inquired of John Bull.

The old soldier produced a small packet of vile black Algerian cigarettes from his *képi*, without speaking.

"Quit it, Dub!" snapped the deeply interested Bucking Bronco. "*Pro*duce silence, and then some, or beat it."

"Awright, Bucko," mocked the unabashed 'Erb, imitating the American's nasal drawl and borrowing from his vocabulary. "You ain't got no call ter git het up none, thataway. Don't yew git locoed an rip-snort— 'cos I guess I don' stand fer it, any."

"Stop it, 'Erb," said John Bull, and 'Erb stopped it. There would be trouble between these two one hot day....

"The Legion appropriated her to itself at last," continued the Grasshopper, "and picketed her house. Marsouins, sailors, *pékins*[4]— all ceased to visit her. It was more than their lives were worth, and there were pitched battles when whole *escouades* of *ces autres* tried to get in, before it was clearly understood that Ninon belonged to the Legion. And this was meat and drink to Ninon. She loved to be La Reine de la Légion Étrangère. This was not Algiers, mark you, and she had been born and bred in Hanoï. She had not that false perspective that leads the women of the West to prefer those of other Corps to the sons of La Légion. And there were one or two moneyed men hiding in our ranks just then. She loved one for a time and then another for a time, and frequently the previous one would act rashly. Some took their last exercise in the Red River. An unpleasant stream in which to drown.

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[4] Civilians.

"Then came out, in a new draft, young Villa, supposed to be of Spanish extraction— but he knew no Spanish. I think he was the handsomest young devil I have ever seen. He had coarse black hair that is not of Europe, wild yellow eyes, and a curious, almost gold complexion. He was a strange boy, and of a temperament decidedly, and he loved flowers as some women do— especially ylang-ylang, jasmine, magnolia, and those of sweet and sickly perfume. He said they stirred his blood, and his pre-natal memories....

"And one night old Dubeque took him to see La Belle Dürlonnklau.

"As he told it to me I could see all that happened, for old Dubeque had the gift of speech, imagination, and the instinct of the drama.... Old Dubeque— the drunken, depraved scholar and *gentilhomme*.

"Outside her door a begging soothsayer whined to tell their fortunes. It was the Annamite New Year, the Thêt, when the native *must* get money somehow for his sacred jollifications. This fellow stood making the humble *laï* or

prolonged salaam, and at once awoke the interest of young Villa, who tossed him a piastre.

"Old Dubeque swears that, as he grabbed it, this *diseur de bonne aventure*, a scoundrel of the Delta, said, 'Missieu French he die to-night,' or words to that effect in pigeon-French, and Villa rewarded the Job-like Annamite with a kick.... They went in....

"As they entered the big room where were the Mekong girls and Madame Dürlonnklau, the boy suddenly stopped, started, stared, and stood with open mouth gazing at La Belle Ninon. He had eyes for no one else. She rose from her couch and came towards him, her face lit up and exalted. She led him to her couch and they talked. Love at first sight! *Love* had come to that so-experienced woman; to that wild *farouche* boy. Later they disappeared into an inner room....

"Old Dubeque called for a bottle of wine, and drank with some of the girls.

"He does not know how much later it was that the murmur of voices in Madame's room ceased with a shriek of '*Mon fils*,' a horrid, terrific scream, and the sound of a fall.

"Old Dubeque was not so drunk but what this sobered him. He entered the room.

"Young Villa had fulfilled the prophecy of the necromancer. He had driven his bayonet through his throat— just where a large birthmark was. What you call *mole*, eh? It was exposed when his shirt-collar was undone.... Ninon Dürlonnklau lived long, may be still alive— anyhow, I know she lived long— in a *maison de santé*. Yes— a reincarnation....

"That is of what the words *la Rue de Tournelles* reminded me."

"'Streuth!" remarked le Légionnaire 'Erbiggin, and scratched his cropped head.

7: One for Anthony George

Charles Edwardes

fl 1885-1916

Euroa Advertiser (Victoria) 15 Jan 1904

British author who wrote many short stories for The Cornhill Magazine *and others, often uncredited, and also for boys' magazines such as* Chums *and* Boys' Own paper*. He was noted for his numerous Travel Books such as "Rides and Studies in the Canary Islands", 1888. Biographical data is not readily available.*

JAMES RUFFELL, late of New Orleans, and now, thanks to luck in cotton, eager to shine to the best of his untutored ability in British society of the loftiest kind, quite meant to act upon his son's suggestion and buy this Cayley Castle, if it took his fancy. '

He got out at Cayley station and was driven to the Red Lion Hotel. He proposed to lunch before inspecting the famous ruin. He felt very comfortable in himself and about things in general. Though a trifle stout, he was still middleaged. and enjoyed the best of health. He had but one single regret, indeed, and that daily a diminishing one— if only his wife, Susan, had lived a few years longer, to share his opulence and help him to entertain the British aristocracy, as by and by he hoped to entertain them, in a castle or elsewhere!

But this was certainly a diminishing regret. Susan had been the best and most assiduous of helpmates, but she was deficient in graces. Her tongue was a rasper. As excellent a wife to him as he could have desired, but not exactly of the adaptable kind. James couldn't, for instance, imagine her holding her own flatteringly with a British duchess.

"Mr Ruffell, sir, a telegram for you," said the hotel manager, when James announced himself.

That telegram made him frown. It was from his son Anthony, in Paris. Anthony had put him up to this beautiful castle ruin, and had declared he couldn't do better than buy it and transform it into an ideal British home. It was Anthony who had told the captivating tale of its Norman doorways, great Gothic windows, velvety lawns and peacocks, and its romantic situation in a dimpled hollow between grass hills, with the silvery sea only half a mile away, fringed with golden sands.

Paris has done much for Anthony: made a poet of him as well as an artist. James Ruffell's jaws had yawned in admiration of his son's fascinating glibness, and he had afterwards made the appointment with Anthony at the Cayley Inn wholly in the interests of the castle.

"So sorry can't come," said the telegram. "Wouldn't be hasty about it. Lots of better things in the market than Cayley. Have written."

James Ruffell ate his luncheon just the same. He felt resentful towards Anthony. He didn't know what to make of a son like that— hot about a thing one week and cool the next week. And he wanted company.

Afterwards he went out to the castle, still feeling sore in spite of his wine. It was a gem of a ruin; no doubt about that. The outer wall almost perfect; and the first glimpse of that mellow sward within soothing to the eye under the blue heavens.

James pulled at the bell. It clanged medievally, and Percia Boxham, the seneschal's daughter, opened the wicket and smiled upon him.

Seldom nowadays was James Ruffell staggered by anything, least of all by a pretty face. In his fifty years of life he believed that he had discounted all possible surprises, including those of the cotton market. Yet he was startled into an immediate stare by Percia Boxham.

The daintiness of her beauty was extreme. She was gowned like a Paris young lady, and the smile in her sunny grey eyes seemed one of express welcome. But the smile went from her. She looked beyond James, and seemed disappointed.

"This is my card, miss," said James. "I'm not just the or'nary sort of visitor. It's for sale, my son tells me, and—"

Percia's eyes flashed upon him.

"Oh, do come in," she said. James entered. "Seems I'm known here, too!" he murmured, with a proud smile. "Well, that's no miracle."

The girl was wonderful. James couldn't make it out when she told him that she was only the custodian's danghter. She was almost condescending, at first; frigid and bored. But his respectful courtesies seemed to thaw her, and, by and by, in the Elizabethan banqueting hall (roofless), she became captivating. She told him a legend or two.

"I'm not accustomed to this sort of thing, you must know, Mr Ruffell," she said afterwards; " and you've got to make allowances. I don't live here, and it's a favor that you're admitted, because to-day isn't a visiting day. There isn't a soul in the place except just ourselves and the jackdaws."

This with a gentle scrutiny of him that agitated James Ruffell.

"Say now," he stammered, "it's very good of you. But how did you know I was coming?"

"Ah," she replied, "that's a secret. And now you must see the dungeons."

Even thus early, James caught himself thinking of the girl with very emphatic human appreciation. The "Plantagenet" dungeon did more for him in that way. In spite of her warning about its worn steps, he made a bad stumble, scraped his back down several of the stairs, and discoveredthat he had a sprained ankle.

It took him about twenty minutes to return to the hotel, on Percia Boxham's arm. He managed it mainly by hopping— an exhausting exercise. Yet he was almost merry about the misadventure.

"If it wasn't for the pain, I'd be saying I was enjoying myself greatly," he remarked during a rest in the courtyard, with a white peacock looking on.

The girl herself, having shown all the sympathy and resourcefulness imaginable, had become rather reserved again before they were at the hotel. Perhaps it was due to James' prattle about his wealth and its powerlessness to safeguard him against the simplest of accidents. At any rate, James himself seemed to think that he was wrong thus to boast. He apologised.

"I'm still man enough, my dear, I hope, to see that money's one thing and appiness another— sense, too, if you look at it straight."

At the hotel he clasped her hand warmly.

"I'm wiring to my son in Paris to come right here to me," he said. "I'll feel lonely laid up, I expect. But perhaps— perhaps, my dear, your father'll let you take pity on a stranger and pop in to see how he's getting on in the meanwhile."

Percia colored faintly, and nodded.

"Thank you, Mr Ruffell," she said; "I'll come round."

IT WAS from the hotel manager that James heard more about Percia.

She was an actress of considerable attainments; had travelled on the continent and even in America; and was at home now for a spell of rest.

If Mr Ruffell could see the elegance with which her father's quarters in the castle gatehouse were furnished, he would guess that she was no common actress. They were quite luxurious, said the manager; and it was all Miss Percia's doing.

This interested James Ruffell very much inleed. He was not prejudiced about actresses one way or the other.

"She is a very kind young lady," he said simply.

He thought about her when the doctor had called and condemned him to several days of inactivity. He thought about his son, too. Anthony was a susceptible young man. He had had several small entanglements already. If he knew his son, as he believed he did, Aunthony was just the youth to fall in love with Miss Percia at sight.

And then he fidgetted. He didn't exactly like to contemplate such an occurrence, even though it would be charming to have a pretty face like Percia's in the family.

No, he did not like it.

"I could almost hope the boy will not come," he murmured. "Maybe, I'll send him another wire."

The girl not only called in the evening, but completely won James' heart. She just laid herself out to entertain him with bright everyday chatter. With her shapely elbows on the table and her face between her hands, she told him about her experiences as an actress. She loved her profession, she said; but she hated many of the men (the young men) with whom she clashed in the course of her work.

It was after it all that, on impulse, James asked her a question.

"You've never, when you were in Paris, met anyone of my name, I suppose?" he inquired.

"Ye-s," she said, I have."

"You don't say? Not my son, Anthony George?"

"Yes, that was his name. I— I have met him here also."

"Well, that's queer now," James gasped. " And how did you like him?"

"Oh," she said, with quite a Parisian little "*moue*" and a shrug, "I— I liked him!"

"And didn't he fall in love with you, my dear?" demanded James Ruffell, eagerly.

She shrugged again. "He said so," she replied.

But for his bandaged ankle, James would have risen. He shrugged, and resigned himself.

But Miss Percia seemed to think that she had said more than enough.

"You mustn't get worried, Mr Ruffell," she said quietly, as she prepared to go. "And you needn't be in the least afraid, now, that your son will commit the unpardonable sin of a *mesalliance* with me. There was that risk— a little while ago. But I should as soon think of marrying you as your son— sooner, if it comes to that. Oh, please, forgive me, I didn't mean to hurt your feelings. H-he has behaved rather badly, that's all. We ought to be seasoned, I suppose, to such chances, but I admit I felt it. And now good-night."

In his bewilderment James couldn't get out any coherent words. With a rather wistful smile she drifted away.

And now, little by little, James Ruffell believed he understood his son Anthony's tactics. It was not at all agreeable to him to sum up the young man in accordance with his instincts.

"If," he whispered, "he shows any low shilly-shally about it, I'll make him sorry for himself. The girl's a jewel. No, Master Tony, I'll not have you making a prig of yourself, and so I'll let you know. And you'll get more than you deserve with her, and what I'll allow the pair of you— for her sake."

James Ruffell was helped to bed in a state of much mental perturbation. He didn't quite expect his son now in answer to his telegram, but he would send him another wire in the morning to spur him.

BUT HE DIDN'T send his son this wire either. There was a letter from Master Anthony, in its way a tremendous letter.

Anthony George had some news for his father. His father would be delighted to hear that he was engaged to the Countess De Blanville, one of Paris' most lovely young widows. This was the reason he had been unable to meet his father at Cayley, as arranged.

Nor was this all. He begged his father to come right back to Paris, and certainly not to think of buying such an out-ofthe-way property as the Cayley ruin.

"I don't know what made me enthuse to you so much about it," he wrote, "And, anyhow, there are far better things of the kind in France. Clara is very eager to make your acquaintance, and— don't mind saying so— her father, the Marquis de la Grane, wants to discuss settlements. In fact, to be blunt, he makes his sanction to our marriage depend upon a satisfactory arrangement of this sort. And Clara is so devoted to her father that she wouldn't marry me without his approval."

It was a long letter, with some poetry in it, which made James Ruffell show his teeth. It demanded much digesting too, during and after breakfast, with frequent intrusive thoughts about that pretty girl at the castle. But scarcely was his breakfast over when Miss Percia herself appeared with a letter in her hand.

"You are better, Mr Ruffell, yes?" she asked, and her beauty seemed to James quite irresistible in its morning freshness.

"Yes, thank you, my dear," he replied. "I want to talk to you."

"Yes, and I to you," said she, sitting down. "I've heard from your son. Is it fair, I wonder, to tell you how he insults me?"

"What!" exclaimed James Ruffell. Her anger, if anger it was, passed like a feather in the breeze.

"Well, no," she laughed; "I don't suppose he considers it an insult. He's made that way. And, between ourselves, Mr Ruffell, though he's your son, I wouldn't marry him now for anything."

"How has he insulted you, my dear?" asked James Ruffell, with stern eyes. "I'll tell you," she replied. "He promises me a thousand pounds if I will be 'good and dear and forgiving'— his words— "and do nothing to embarrass him. He is in love with someone else, that is all. Poor someone else and— Lucky Percia Boxham. That is all have to say about it."

"Well, my dear?"

"Well, what? You don't think I'll take his money? I can earn my bread in my own way, and plenty of it."

James Ruffell's eyes had a very earnest expression in them now.

"I know you can," he said. "And you are a good daughter to your father, my dear. My boy's a fool. I've had my suspicions before. Now I know. Does he say where he'll get that thousand from?"

"No, he doesn't trouble himself so

"Just so— just so. He'll have to get it though. He'll have to get it from his Countess, or her father the Marquis. Oh, my dear, my dear, I'm like you— I have no patience with the bladder-headed, cat-brained young fools our sons turn out— some of them."

That surprised Percia. "I'm not even going to write to him," she said calmly.

" No, my dear? Well, we'll see about that. And don't go just yet. That is to say, I want to write something for you to read to yourself outside."

Percia didn't quite know what to make of that. She smiled and went to the window, and when James had done his writing and fastened it in an envelope she went away with it as if it were a moderately interesting conundrum.

"It's not that cheque, I hope?" she asked first.

"No, no," he replied; "you're not going to be insulted by the family twice in that way. Read it somewhere quiet, and— and— you'll come again."

"Of course," she said, putting her hand in his, which seemed to plead for it.

And this was James Ruffell's letter:

"My dear, my dear.

If an old man's heart is worth having, you have mine. I'm fifty-two, with nothing but my money to recommend me. One can do great things with money. Think it over, and if you will marry me—let me know. And God bless you, anyway."

Percia thought it over all that day. She didn't go to the hotel in the evening, but sent a note, with just these words in it :"I'm still thinking."

But the next morning she was at James Ruffell's breakfast-table before he was down, ready (with the landlord's amused permission) to pour out his coffee for him.

"My dear," said James, when breakfast was over (he had little appetite for plain food), "I'm so swelled with pride I could forgive Anthony everything, but—" He nodded and smiled, and Percia also smiled. Their smiles were-both mischievous and radiant with. good-fellowship.

"Yes, but—" she suggested.

"But he'll have to send you that thousand pounds— and get it how he can— and he'll have to fix things up with that Countess and her parent without help from either of us. A lad that can leave such a good thing for his own father won't be worth a nutmeg until he's had his eyes opened with a hardship or two."

Percia agreed that the programme might do for the present.

"You'll let him marry her in the end, though?" she asked.

"We'll settle about that together," replied James Ruffell, "when we've seen the lady. He's got to eat his dose of dirt first. We'll go and reckon her up together, my dear."

8: A Ghost Story

Anonymous

Queenslander, 19 July 1890

The word "fou" is a Scots world meaning "full"; in this contect "drunk".

THERE WAS a large party of us commercial travellers in the smoking-room of the "George." One of us had started the subject of ghosts, and we were very merry over stories of folk, fou and sober, who imagined they had seen a ghost and afterwards found their mistake.

Jim Peters, however, who was the oldest man in the room, sat smoking in silence. He usually led the conversation of any company he happened to be in, and had besides a large stock of anecdotes, so that his silence was remarkable.

"Thinking over a good thing, Peters?" said some one. "You are very quiet to-night."

"I don't like your joking about the subject," said he seriously. "I once saw a real ghost."

Every eye was instantly turned on him at this announcement. Peters took a sip of toddy and proceeded to refill his pipe, remarking at the same time,

"It happened a long time ago; before a lot of you fellows were born."

Our curiosity being excited, we pressed him to relate his experience.

"It was about forty years ago," he said.

"I WAS quite a young fellow, but I held some very good commissions in the wine trade. A traveller's life was very different then: there were no railways; I did most of my journeys in a light gig. I had been up through the Highlands as far as Inverness, and was driving over to Elgin, when I saw the ghost.

"It was a wild night. A storm of wind and hail sprang up, and I made but slow progress. Darkness set in while I was still some miles from the town. The wind was cold and piercing, and the hail felt like drops of molten lead upon my face. I don't know that I ever was more miserable. However, I comforted myself as well as I could, and longed earnestly for John Laing's fireside. He had been a customer of my father's, who was on the road before me. I was always sure of a good order and a warm welcome from old John.

"Well, I say, I was heartily wishing myself at his fireside over a tumbler of toddy, when the wind lulled a little and the moon came out, and to my surprise I saw coming towards me no other than John Laing himself, accompanied by a tall, dark looking man.

" 'Why,' cried I, 'are you so far from town on such a night, Mr Laing?'

"He did not answer but walked on and as he passed I leaned over the gig side to repeat my question. Great God! his throat seemed cut from ear to ear, and in his hand the tall man carried a razor dripping with blood!

"I sat spell-bound watching them, till the moon once more becoming obscured, I lost sight of them in the darkness. The cold sweat was standing like beads on my forehead, and I shook in every limb. My horse had been strangely restless since the two appeared, and now that they were behind him, he set off for Elgin, despite the wind and rain, as if the devil were after him.

"I drove straight to John Laing's house—"

"And found your friend all safe and sound," broke in one of us with a laugh.

Peters bent forward and said solemnly.

"I found that he had been got in bed that morning with his throat cut from ear to ear."

A cry of horror broke from us, but Peters, waving his hand to command silence, continued.

"The motive of the crime was clearly robbery. John Laing did not believe in banks. He had a small safe in his bedroom, in which he kept his savings. It was open and empty."

"Was the criminal never found?" asked some one.

"A stranger— a tall, dark man— had been hanging about one of the hotels for some days. He disappeared at the time of the murder without paying his bill, but all efforts to find him failed. I waited for poor Laing's funeral, and then made my way southward.

"When I went to square up I found that the firm from whom I held my best commissions had taken on a partner, and as he was to travel, I was no longer required. The others I held were not much to depend on, so I looked about, and at last got a start from a large grain and flour merchant. I had to cover the south of Scotland, and so far into England as Newcastle. On my first journey to the latter place I put up at the 'Piercy Arms,' a nice new hotel. I got on very well, and booked some large orders.

"One evening, as I was returning rather later than usual, I encountered a tall, dark-haired man in the hotel lobby. He seemed aghast at my appearance, and gesticulated wildly, saying, 'The man in the dream!'

"He was in such a state of terror that I looked closely and curiously at him. I felt a cold shiver come over me as I recognised him. He was the ghostly man I had seen with the blood-stained razor that fearful night.

"He recovered his composure long before I did, and said, with an attempt at a smile, 'I have to apologise for my rudeness. I am the landlord, Mr. Harris. I was practising for private theatricals— I hope you do not think me mad.'

"I tried to look as if his explanation were quite satisfactory, and declining his invitation to step into the bar-parlour, passed on to my room. I did not sleep any that night. I lay tossing in bed, trying to unravel my thoughts about the matter, but it was no use. The house seemed strangely quiet, and an eerie feeling which had hung about me since my encounter in the lobby became more and more intensified.

"The shutting of a door somewhere downstairs seemed to break the spell. I bounded out of bed and pulled up my blind. It was a beautiful moonlight night, almost clear enough to read by, and to my surprise I saw the land-lord, Mr. Harris, sneaking down the street, with a small black bag in his hand. My mind was instantly made up to follow him.

"I watched which turn he took, and, hastily dressing, followed as fast as I could. As I suspected, he went straight to the docks. The tide was almost full, and the London boat would sail in an hour. I saw him go aboard, and then looked about for a policeman. I had resolved to venture on a bold stroke. Fortunately I easily secured a constable, and telling him I wished to arrest a man for murder, he got another. When Harris saw me come aboard with the police, he turned ashy pale. 'I accuse this man of the murder of John Laing in Elgin,' I said.

" 'It's a lie!' he shouted in an agony of fear as the officers seized him.

"Now that he was captured, the full responsibility of my situation flashed on me. I had absolutely no evidence against the man— nothing but my own sure conviction, the reason of which I felt sure would only be laughed at by any one else. As we walked to the Police Office the prisoner continued to glance sideways at me, and to mutter to him-self. By a great effort I managed to hear, 'The man of my dream— the man of my dream.'

" 'Yes,' I said, the man of your dream!' He started at my repeating his words, and the policemen tightened their hold of him, thinking he meant resistence.

" 'You need not be afraid,' he said in a shaky voice, 'I won't try to escape; I'll confess all when we get in.' "

And he did confess. He was the very man. He hid in Elgin after the deed was done till darkness fell, then he stole out of the town. He passed me on the road, and was terrified by my hailing him by the name of his victim and staring at him so earnestly. How I came to see my poor old friend by his side, or to see himself carrying the weapon with which he did the awful deed, no one could ever explain. I have always held that it was a vision permitted me, that I might avenge the death of my poor old friend."

"What did Harris mean by the 'man of my dreams,' " said one of us, "and what became of him?"

"He was hanged at Edinburgh," replied Peters. "My saluting him by the name of his victim and staring at him so earnestly made such an impression on his mind that he constantly dreamed of me as pursuing him to hand him over to justice, as indeed I did. That's my story. You see I have good reason for not thinking ghosts a fit subject for laughter."

9: Wyatt's Chinese Puzzle

Captain Frederick Moore

1881-1947

Short Stories, 25 Sep 1938

Frededrick Ferdinand Moore went to sea as a teenager, served in the US Army in the Phillipines, became a reporter during the Boxer rebellion in China, and eventually author of hundreds of adventure short stories and novels. He was murdered in 1947 after serving a writ in his job as deputy marshal with the LA County Sheriff's Department. About half a dozen of these "Wyatt" stories appeared in the late 1930s.

WYATT and Hesh stopped whispering as I arrived in the bar for breakfast. Wyatt owned the bamboo hotel on Singing Sands Island. A native of Cape Cod, his forty years in the tropics and his trading with wild natives had sharpened his natural shrewdness. As he turned to his zinc bar to avoid my glance his thin face suggested to me a man who was plotting to smother his grandmother for her earrings.

I sat at a table and faced Hesh. He suggested a gardener who had just taken a job as hangman and was not proud of the profession. He bent his head and sucked coffee from a saucer to avoid my gaze.

"Morning, Hesh."

The little cockney seemed startled. He pretended to be unaware of my arrival. His pale blue eyes wavered under my glance and a tremor passed over his thin sunburned face. He was a runaway sailor who caught turtles on shares for Wyatt.

"Good morning, sir. Nice morning, what?" He put the saucer to his lips again and sucked at the coffee with sounds that suggested a grampus coming out of breakers for a breath of air.

It was a nice morning. Birds twittered in the onion garden back of the hotel. They were in the palm grove at times, between hotel and the beach. The sun glinted on the blue water of the bay. There was a gentle breeze shaking the high mops of the palm tops.

I turned to Wyatt, who had gone to ground behind his bar. "How are you, Wyatt?" I demanded.

The skinny Cape Codder's face shook with a nervous spasm. "Me? Oh, I'm fair to middlin', thanks."

"Is your liver any better?"

"I guess that my liver'll do me for a spell yet. Ayah, I'm all right." Wyatt turned his back on me to polish the glasses on the shelf behind the bar.

I emptied the coffee pot into a cup There was a game on—and it had been going on for a week or more. That game was a mystery. It had something to do

with Ching. Wyatt and Hesh were covertly watching the Chinese cook when he brought our meals from the cook shack. And I had sized Ching up as one slick Chink who would out-think both Wyatt and Hesh in any underhanded game.

As I drank my coffee some words which I had overheard as I came down the stairs returned to my mind. Hesh had said cautiously, "I tell you I seen 'im pinch it, so you watch 'im the next time 'e goes out the door." Then both Wyatt and Hesh clammed up on me.

Ching came in from the cookhouse. He brought a tray of hot biscuits and a tin of butter. His fat yellow face, spattered with a Chinese smile and his fun-lit little black eyes, with the Gulf Stream blue of his blouse, filled me with cheer.

"Ah, Ching! Good morning; Hot biscuits, eh? Thank you!" I put it on a bit thick, and saw Wyatt wince at my effusiveness.

Ching put the tray before me, pulled his hands into the blouse sleeves, bowed, and shook hands with himself politely. "Goo' mo'nin', sar! Nice-ee piece-ee biskit, you like him, you catch him. Him nice fo' you."

Hesh snorted into a saticer of coffee. Wyatt slammed a bottle of square trade gin on a shelf. Ching was too popular with me to suit them. Ching turned and made for the doorway. The empty coffee pot was in his left hand. He walked with a peculiar lurching gait which made me wonder if he had been on a Chink bender with Wyatt's gin.

I LOOKED at Wyatt. He was suddenly on the alert. He leaned forward over the bar and watched the retreating Chink with eyes that all but bored into the cook's back. At the doorway, Ching lurched to the right. He threw out a hand to the right as if to correct his balance as he passed the shelving near the open door. The shelves on the back wall were loaded with odds and ends and various trade goods that Wyatt carried in stock to increase his hotel profits. Ching straightened up and went out into the onion garden to the cookhouse to get me a pair of eggs from his own chickens.

Wyatt swung to Hesh. "What'd he git?"

"Could I see through 'im?" demanded Hesh irritably. "You should ha' seen wot 'e snagged, not me. It was 'is right 'and that done the job, and that's your side of 'im, Wyatt."

"He was too quick for me— it was that loose sleeve of his'n that turned the trick."

"What's wrong?" I asked. "Ching drunk?"

Wyatt shook his head in disgust. His leathery face twisted. He walked to the shelves at the far end of the bar, taking care not to be observed through the open back kajang which was toward the cookhouse. "To keep up with the

heathen you got to have a yellow brain," he said, as he squinted along the top of a loaded shelf.

There were packages of gramophone needles which were bought by various schooners in those waters— traders, copra-carriers, pearlers and trepang boats.

"Anythink missin'? asked Hesh.

"Hell's bells!" exclaimed Wyatt, as his fingers counted along a vacant space on the upper row of packages. "Gramophone needles, that's what he's stealin'! Five— six— seven packages!"

Hesh hastened to Wyatt's side. "Wot the blinkin' 'ell does 'e want needles for? 'E ain't got no grammyphone to play."

"No, he ain't,' agreed Wyatt. "But he's got away with a dozen or so packages of needles in the last month. And what's he doing with needles in job lots?"

"Nothink, unless 'e picks 'is blinkin' teeth with 'em."

"Hell, Wyatt, you've got enough gramophone needles there to supply all the schooners between here and New Guinea for the next twenty years."

"They don't sell wuth a damn," said Wyatt, still peering at the shelf and counting packages.

"How'd you ever load up with such a stock? You ought to have more sense."

Hesh went back to his table, Wyatt went behind the bar, and squinted out through the kajang to make sure that Ching was not coming.

"Radio sets, them's what licked me," said Wyatt. "Of course, most natives are scared as hell of radio. They can't see any machinery go around, so they stick to grams, and I sell some needles now and then. It ain't the wuth of the needles that Ching's pinchin'. They cost me six cents wholesale a package. What beats me is what'n hell he does with 'em. It don't make no more sense than a doodle bug in an onion."

"Then lock up the needles and stop worrying."

Wyatt shook his head. "I won't lock 'em up. I take out of his pay what he steals. So he can steal 'em all. I got to learn what that Chink's up to. I learn a lot from Chinks."

"You won't learn nothink this time," said Hesh. "Ching'll 'op a schooner one of these days with a trunk full of your needles, so—" But Hesh checked his words. Ching was coming with my eggs.

And when Ching went out with the empty tray he got another package of needles. Wyatt swore, revealing an amazing vocabulary. Hesh snickered into his coffee. At tiffin-time, Ching gathered covertly another package, but at supper, which we had on the front veranda to give him a chance to add several

packages to his collection, Ching did not bother to take any needles. We were thoroughly mystified,

THE next morning Wyatt looked worn out. "I ain't slept," he explained. "Been figgerin' on them needles. What'd Ching stop for, unless to puzzle me up. Sometimes I wish I was born with Chink blood into me."

"Wot makes 'im so modest?" demanded Hesh. 'Been me, I'd ha' pinched the lot at supper and made a job of work of it."

"Them needles!" said Wyatt. "What does he do with 'em?"

"Leave it to Chinks to show a profit," I said.

Ching brought breakfast but stole no needies on his way out.

"Damn the Chinks!" exploded Wyatt. "They never do what you expect— or what you don't. But I'll bet he's got a schooner comin' in soon that'll take what he stole at a price half what I ask."

But we had the answer to the mystery before any schooner came. Hesh and I went out in a canoe that evening and paddled around in the moonlight for an hour. We landed a little above the hotel. As we walked up the slope at the far edge of the palms we passed a grove of pawpaw trees and a thicket of bamboos. Close to the heavy shadows of the trees while we were in dazzling moonlight I heard a sound that terrorized me.

Pun-n-g!

"Blowgun!" I yelled at Hesh. "Get out of here— quick!" Then I raced for the hotel veranda. Hesh was at my heels as I went up the steps.

Wyatt was in the darkness under the low eaves of thatch, "What'n time be you two up to?" he cried. "See a ghost?"

"Headhunters!" I gasped.

"My word!" cried Hesh. "He was that close that I felt his breath when he blowed that arrer at us,"

"Aw, hell! Don't you talk to me about gittin' shot at by headhunters around here. This island's safe, and don't you give my property a bad name."

I dropped into a chair. "The hillmen are getting in close. Bad name or not, there are headhunters in your front yard. We were fired on by a native using a sumpitan— and I was on this island long before you showed up here. Don't try to kid me, Wyatt."

"Aw, that was a hill boy practisin'. He couldn't hit you in the dark, anyway. Mebbe come down to the beach to catch crabs and took a shot at you two so's he'd keep his hand in."

"We were in the moonlight, I tell you, and it's no fun to be—" I broke off and grabbed at my right shoulder. Something under my coat had bitten me.

"What's wrong?" asked Wyatt.

I slapped hard to kill the biter— and it bit harder. I tore off my coat in frantic haste, then my shirt. Insect bites are quickly fatal at times on Singing Sands Island.

Running a hand over my right shoulder, I yelled, "Get me a flashlight, Hesh!"

The cockney ran for a flash and brought it with a bottle of liniment. He looked at my shoulder. "It ain't no blinkin' bite," said Hesh. "A laundry left a pin in your shirt."

Wyatt burst into laughter. "Dude laundry, that's what, not headhunter arrers. That hill boy missed, but he didn't lose nothin'.

"They don't want heads that ain't got nothin' into 'em, so you're safe, even if we be near headhunters."

Hesh applied liniment. I picked up my shirt. No pin. I examined my coat. Then I had the shivers. "An arrow!" I yelled. "See that, Wyatt? A poisoned arrow hit me. I'll be dead in twenty minutes!"

I pointed to a tiny cylinder of wood pith. The pith fits the bore of the blowgun, acts as a cork at the rear end of the arrow point, and under pressure of air drives the arrow to the target. A thorn point with poison is always on the forward end of the pith cork.

But I saw no thorn point as I pulled the pith from the coat. What caught my sight was the glint of bright steel under the beam of light from Hesh's hand.

"Gramophone needle!" I yelped.

Wyatt bounded to his feet. "Grammyphone needle! Tradin' 'em to the natives for spear points! Gittin' rich with my needles and shuttin' me out of the profits, So that's the yeller hellion's game, while—"

"Get me a drink!" I bawled. "I'm shot with a poisoned arrow— and they're deadly. Damn you and your profits!"

"Strike me blind!" gasped Hesh. "Gold nuggets, that's wot 'e gits for needles, while I'm sloshin' around with crimson turtles tryin' to keep wrinkles from under my belt! There ain't no justice in—"

"Brandy! Gin! Load me with liquor —that's my only chance! Get going, Wyatt!" Sweat began running from-my forehead into my eyes.

"Ayah, You need to be pickled to die pleasant around here. You start to pray. You got shot on my property so the drinks are on the house." Wyatt made for the bar while Hesh slopped liniment on my shoulder when I collapsed into a canvas chair.

"Gold nuggets," said Hesh. "That's wot nytives 'ere finds in the Mawa River, ain't it? And wot'd a nugget be worth?"

"Two or three hundred dollars, depending on the size," I told him:

Wyatt, in the bar filling a pint tumbler with gin, heard me. His voice was full of fury as he bawled to us, "Nuggets like that for a package of needles that costs me six cents wholesale! Godfrey mighty! That Chink'll buy me out with the profits he makes on my pinched needles!" He came out and handed me the drink. "Here you be! Embalm yourself with this and before you die think up some way I can git in on the nugget tradin' goin' on around here— with my property."

I emptied the glass and had a shudder. "Whuff!" I remarked when I had my breath again. "That stuff would bring a bull out of the blind staggers."

"You give me a few p'inters before you're drunk or dead," said Wyatt. "How does Ching get a gold nugget from the headhunters with a package of my grammyphone needles?"

"Jim Sing," I said, "the chink who had the hotel here before the headhunters burned his hotel and took his head, used to take tin hatchets that he bought from a German trader for a dime, put them on a stump out in the jungle at night, and go back at daylight and find a nugget on the stump. Jim was a Chink, and maybe Ching knows where that stump is. One hatchet, one nugget, that was the business. Needles now instead of tin hatchets, I'd say."

"Me from Cape Cod— and money bein' made like that around here and me not in on it!" wailed Wyatt.

"And your customers getting shot with the poisoned arrows," I said.

"Customers at their own risk here. What I want from you is how can I git in on the tradin' game?"

"Watch Ching. I'll bet there's a package of needles on that jungle stump now— and he'll be going before long to collect his nugget."

"That's wot the bloke that shot the arrer at you was down this way for," said Hesh. '"Come with a nugget for needles."

WYATT slapped his leg. "We've got to find that stump!"

"Get me another drink," I told him, "I'm beginning to see double, and that's one of the symptoms of arrow poison. Hurry!"

Wyatt snickered but got to his feet. "That gin of mine makes two men grow where only one was, Hell, we'll kill off that p'ison with gin. I need you to help me think."

"Look 'ere!" said Hesh. "From a corner kajang upstairs I can see between the cookhouse and the jungle. I'll watch and see if Ching slips out to go to that stump— and we'll foller 'im if he does."

I followed Wyatt into the bar and Hesh tailed along. We all examined the needle on the pith that had been taken from my duck coat. I could find no

bluish stain on the steel. 'Did you see a blue mark near the point where the needle pricked the skin of my shoulder, Hesh?"

"Nothink like that, no, sir."

"Then," I declared, "I'm safe. If the arrow had been a thorn, the thorn would have carried the poison through the cloth of coat and shirt. But the two layers of fabric took the poison off the steel of the needle before the point reached my skin."

"Fine!" said Wyatt. "Thar ain't nothin' the matter with you but the creepin' jitters. You near scared yourself to death." He thrust a second glass of gin at me. "Drink this to be on the safe side."

I drank it: "I'm going to live long enough, Wyatt, to see you with a poisoned arrow stuck in your pants and listen to you laugh it off."

"Shut up. You're drunk. Think of how I can git gold for needles."

So I shut up and went back to the veranda chair. Hesh went upstairs to watch the cookhouse to make sure that Ching would be seen when he sneaked into the jungle. Our game was to find the trading stump.

I was roused from a nap in my chair by Hesh coming hastily down the bamboo stairs. Wyatt was also napping in a chair on the veranda and he came awake as the cockney stepped into the light streaming out through the bar kajang.

Hesh whispered hoarsely, his eyes snapping, "Ching just popped to the jungle. Took the path that goes up the 'ill!"

Wyatt blinked. 'Good! We've got to see where he goes for gold."

"Tell you wot," declared Hesh. "I knows a path that comes in from the side and crosses Ching's path. We could sneak up and see him come back, and we'd know what jungle trail leads to the stump." He began to button his shirt collar and then hitched up his belt.

Pulling my small automatic pistol, I said to Wyatt, "Quick! Put out that light in the bar. Make things look as if we've all gone to bed, and anyway we don't want to Le watched from the cookhouse by Ching's helper."

"Git that big revolver of mine off the hook, Hesh," said Wyatt as he made for the bar. "And hit for that path of yourn. We'll be somewhere's ready to back you up if you git in a Ching fight."

HESH got the weapon and ran through the palms at the end of the hotel, keeping in the shadows of the palm tops. I saw him disappear into the deep hole made by the jungle's velvet blackness.

My watch told the time as after ten. Allowing five minutes since Hesh had seen Ching go, I would have some check on how long it took Ching to get to the

stump and get back if he got back before Wyatt and I made for the jungle to stand by to protect Hesh.

Wyatt and I went to the dark back veranda, Wyatt with his shotgun. We watched a strip of brilliant moonlight between cookhouse and jungle. The other building was about thirty feet from us.

In that moonlight which made a sheen of powdered silver on everything, all objects stood out with amazing clarity— even black shadows. The open kajangs of Ching's building toward the beach were black holes in the wall. No lamp burned within the kitchen. We wondered if Chinese were watching.

High up there was a slight breeze. At intervals it rattled the palm tops and ruffled the roof of the jungle which rose from us sharply up the steep hillside. So the night was filled with the whispering of moving foliage, while from the beach there came the snoring of gentle breakers.

It was less than half an hour before we saw Ching's figure emerge from the lip of the jungle. I caught a flash of the pearl buttons on the front of his black blouse, saw distinctly the shape of his black cap and the white wrappings about his ankles that secured the bottoms of his loose black trousers,

Ching moved straight into the moonlight, then paused, and turned his head to listen for some sound in the jungle. He seemed to suspect that he had been followed. As he turned, I saw that there was a blade in his left hand. Moonlight glinted on the weapon. He crouched and lifted the knife as if he feared attack from the jungle.

It was then that I observed in his right hand an object that looked like a club. But that was not lifted. It was a thick cylinder, about two feet long, and about eight inches in diameter. Suddenly I recognized it as a dilly-bag woven from fibers, which is the bag headhunters use slung over their backs whep they go after jungle produce— or on a raid for heads.

I whispered to Wyatt. "See that native bag? That's proof that he Drowght back gold from the stump."

Wyatt hissed greedily then, "The yeller hellion— and my needles!"

"Hesh has probably been following him— and Ching knows it."

The Chinese, apparently satisfied that nobody was coming from the jungle to make trouble, walked to the cookhouse and entered through a rear door.

"Damn Chinks! There goes my gold. And me payin' him wages to trade with my property that he's pinched. Somebody's goin' to git their fingers burnt in this game."

We sat in the dark and talked quietly, keeping a wary eye on the cookhouse. Before long we heard cautious feet in the dry stubble at the end of the hotel away from the cookhouse. Hesh came in on us, panting for breath, his face dripping with sweat when Wyatt shut a bar kajang and lit the lamp.

"What luck, Hesh? See any gold?" Wyatt demanded.

"Such a time I've 'ad," gasped Hesh. He clapped a hand over his heart and dropped into a chair.

I told Hesh, "Take your time. We saw Ching come back with a knife in one hand and a long native bag in the other."

Hesh stared at me. "Wot's that? Did 'e git the ruddy barsket with the gold— after I dropped it in the path?"

WYATT steamed up. "You had a bag of gold—and dropped it?"

"Open a bottle of beer for him, Wyatt, and slug it with some gin. Hesh needs a stimulant."

"I couldn't run with the blasted barsket," said Hesh. "Ching was after me in the trail— and 'e 'ad a knife that you could kill an elephant with if you just throwed it!"

"Ching saw you?" Wyatt handed over the beer and gin.

Hesh nodded. "But 'e didn't know it was me. Tried to put a knife into me in the dark of the trail." Then he drank.

"Find that stump?' demanded Wyatt:

"Sure I found it. Chinks don't fool me none, And wot's more, I found the stump afore Ching got to it. And there was the barsket. So I 'ooked it and starts back— and blam-oh, I runs into Ching in the trail, and 'e all but smears me up when in a spot of light he seen the barsket in my 'and. So I drops it and cuts for 'ome. And you tells me that 'e brought the blinkin' barsket back with 'im."

Wyatt groaned. "Bang goes my nugget of gold! But J'll shake it out of the yellow hellion. Bought with my needles! That's my nugget!" He rose, reached for his shotgun, and looked toward the cookhouse through a peep hole in the back kajang.

" 'Old your 'orses, Wyatt." said Hesh, as he finished off his gin-spiked beer. He stood, thrust a hand into a side pocket of his khaki jacket and struggled. to bring forth something which stuck in the fabric.

"What've you got?" demanded Wyatt.

Hesh threw a gnarled and yellow object on the table—an irregular formation of gold with spidery sharp points, and half the size of a man's hand. "There you are, Wyatt! That's wot I got!"

Wyatt caught his breath. He stared, mouth open, face twitching, his eyes on the yellow metal.

"Hesh! You got gold!"

"Did you expect me to leave the blinkin' stuff stay for the Chinkie to git. In the barsket, it was, but I takes it out, and was bringin' the barsket back. Ching can 'ave that— me, I got wot I went for, wot?"

"Damn me for a peddler!" exclaimed Wyatt. "Hesh, you lay off the turtle fishin' from now on, and run the gold department. Wait till I weigh that up on my stilyud." He hurried behind the bar for the steelyard.

" 'Ow much?" asked Hesh, as the nugget balanced on the hook.

"Twelve ounces!" exclaimed. Wyatt gleefully. 'This ain't jeweler's weight, but it give an idee of value. I've enough needles in stock to make enough money to go to Paris, France, and eat French cookin'."

We spent an hour or more going over Hesh's triumph. He went over once more. his encounter with Ching in the jungle trail. Then we had a round on Wyatt and went to bed.

CHING was just arriving with breakfast trays when I got down to the bar in the morning. We were all set to see the Chinese in a sullen mood. To our surprise he was in grinning good humor, his little black eyes untroubled, and his hands steady, And he took special pains When serving Hesh—even holding the sugar bowl while the cockney ladled sugar into his coffee.

" 'Ullo, Chinkie? 'Ow's tricks? Hit the pipe larst night, wot?"

Ching grinned down on Hesh. "You catch plenty sleep last night time?"

"Sure? I always sleep good. Wot you think I do? Sit up to look at the blinkin' scenery?"

"Scenery? What pidgin this?"

"Oh, nature, the crimson seashore— volcaners and trees— and— and— jungles and the like o' that. Nature just bustin' loose, Ching."

"Ayah," put in Wyatt as he snagged a biscuit. "Mermaids in moonlight and folks skitterin' around losin' their sleep so they burn the biscuits when they begin cookin' the next mornin'."

Ching turned a bland eye on Wyatt. "B'un him just one side on top."

Wyatt handed over the empty pot. "More coffee and less gab."

Ching took the pot. "Can do," he said. and waddled to the doorway. As he went out he slipped into his loose sleeve a quick hand that took with it a package of needles,

"More gold on that stump tonight," grinned Wyatt. "We got to git it ahead of the Chink, blast his yeller hide!"

So that night after dark Hesh took Wyatt's big revolver and made for the place where the two jungle paths met and crossed. Wyatt and I, with the kajangs at the back closed, kept watch on the cookhouse. We did not extinguish the lamp in the bar, reasoning that no light in the hotel early in the eyening would make Ching suspicious of being watched.

Ching disappeared into the jungle a few minutes after nine. He was not back by midnight unless he had sneaked in by a route which kept the cookhouse in line with him as he returned.

But with Hesh still absent I reasoned that Ching was still in the jungle. Still, both Wyatt and I were worried.

"We ain't heard no shot," said Wyatt. "If Hesh was in a jam we'd ha' heard his gun talk."

"Unless Ching knifed him or the headhunters got Hesh with a quick spear."

Wyatt rose from his chair. "I better take my shotgun and pole up that path that Hesh took." He plucked the gun from its rack, filled his pants pockets with shells and put on a black cap with the visor to the back. Then I went along with him, taking my automatics.

By keeping in the deep shadows of palms and moving from tree to tree to avoid being seen from the cookhouse, we got into the trail Hesh had taken.

I let Wyatt lead the parade. That path was not open for casual wandering. It was only by the hard ground under our feet that we could feel our way, and we had to thrust ourselves forward through thick leaves.

After we had been moving slowly for about ten minutes, we had to take care that we did not cross the path that Ching was using. -And there was danger of bumping into Hesh— and catching one of his bullets in our teeth.

WYATT finally found with his feet the cross path. He whispered a warning and flattened to the ground. I crawled close and got down alongside him. He pushed the muzzle of his shctgun forward into the trail.

"Hesh ought to be up the path to our left. Clearin' he spoke of that's got the stump must be that way. Cookhouse down to our right along the trail Ching uses."

"Keep quiet," I warned. "There are hillmen all around us, or I'm a Turk."

"Aw, shucks! You're just plumb nervous."

"I'm not, but the hair on the back of my neck is."

Wyatt got to his knees. "I'm goin' to find that stump." Then he pushed ahead to the left and I followed.

There were queer rustlings all around us. A tree toad called "Becky" but his Becky did not answer. I knew that hillmen had a system of talking by imitating the croaks of tree toads.

Wyatt turned reckless. He went blundering ahead, swearing in what he regarded as a conservative tone, but with the jungle full of crawling headhunters, I knew that our location was constantly checked by Wyatt's senseless remarks.

Presently the clearing revealed itself as a mesh of moonlight flecks seen through the dense wall of foliage ahead of us. Leaves were beginning to take outline just in front, for the open spot was swimming in moonlight.

When we were about ten yards from the rim of the clearing, Wyatt stopped. Something was crawling away from us to the right. We heard the leaves rustle faintly every time the crawler moved. A man was trying to get out of our path— or he had just cleared the path to let us pass him.

I could see Wyatt in vague shape, crouched and looking to the right. His shotgun was lifted to the ready. We listened. The sound of crawling stopped abruptly.

Wyatt bawled, "Where be ye, Hesh?"

There was no answer.

"Stop that!" I growled. "Headhunters all around us."

"Aw, mebbe they be. Like to see one. I'd blow a hole through him. Hey, Hesh! Where in Tophet be ye?"

Hesh bellowed from behind us, "Will you kindly shut your ruddy jaw?"

"Whyn't you come back home? Think I want to gallivant around in the woods all night to save your life?"

"Shut up and save it. I got my troubles."

"Whar's Ching?"

"I don't know. If I bloody well did, I'd shoot the beggar."

"What for?"

"Will you stop this blinkin' yellin' match ?"

"Come where we be, you fool?"

"I'm the fool. Ching's tried to let a knife in me four times— but I got the blinkin' gold."

"Godfrey mighty! Whyn't ye git home with it?"

"This bush is full of 'ead'unters, that's one reason. I can't spit without 'ittin' one. And no more jawr, Wyatt. I'm signin' orf,"

Wyatt growled, "We might as well go back. No profit here if Hesh's got more gold."

I threw myself against a tangle of vines to one side to let Wyatt pass to the back trail and keep the shotgun in front of us. "They're closing in on us," I warned, as he passed me. "Move slowly, and—"

Pung! Then three more blowgun shots, The muzzles of the *sumpitans* were so close that I could almost reach them if I put out a hand.

"Run!" I yelled to Wyatt. "Or if you don't want to run, get out of my way. I need trail room."

Wyatt hurried a little and I began climbing his heels. "They can't hit nothin'," he told me. "Just blowgunnin' to skeer us— and I ain't skeered wuth a damn."

THEN the whole jungle was shaken violently all around us for a minute. The commotion ceased as abruptly as it had begun. We listened for a minute. The blast of a pistol shot shook the heavy air.

I said, "Hesh has got Ching."

"That ain't my revolver. Sounds like a dude gun that Ching bought ons a sailor for a dozen biscuits."

"Then Ching has got Hesh."

"No. Hesh'd blow him back to the cookhouse with my gun. Hey, Hesh!"

If Hesh heard the hail he did not reply to it.

Wyatt moved along, faster now, making along the trail toward the cookhouse, for he reasoned that Hesh had taken that shorter path to get out of the jungle near the hotel.

As I hurried along close on the heels of Wyatt, leaves swished near my head. I knew the sound of a spear moving swiftly through leaves. The spear had been thrown from my left. Another spear just missed me. The light bamboo shaft brushed the back of my head when vines altered the course of the spear point.

I dove forward with new speed, yelling, "Go it, Wyatt! They're throwing spears! We're right into a mess of headhunters!"

Stopping and turning, I fired three shots as I turned. One bullet went to the left, one to the left rear, and one straight back along the close trail. There was a chance that the reports would slow down the attack of the spearmen— and put Wyatt faster along the trail.

Wyatt began running. He swore as he went.

As I was close upon him he caught a foot in a vine and fell headlong. Both barrels of his shotgun discharged in a blinding flash along the trail before him.

The roar almost deafened me. The smoke made me cough. Wyatt struggled to his feet. His language was dreadful. "I can't stop to load. We got to git to hell out of here."

"Glad you've made up your mind about that," I told him, and fired three more shots just to keep the jungle nice and interesting. Then I tailed along after Wyatt, who was going as fast as he could— and that was fast.

Wyatt paused for breath just before we crew near to the edge of the jungle. As he panted, we heard somebody running as fast as we had been, tearing along and stumbling over vines that grew across the path.

"That's Hesh," I declared. "And he's got sense enough to keep his mouth shut."

Wyatt reloaded the shotgun. 'Ayah. He's got sense enough to git home with gold. I'm glad that Ching didn't git him— and the gold."

"Get along yourself," I told him.

Wyatt moved ahead at an easy lope. Then he fell again. He seemed very slow in getting up again.

"Hurry!" I cried. "We're not out of danger yet."

"What'n hell was that I fell over?" demanded Wyatt. He was pawing around in the trail with a free hand, disturbing the vines, crawling on his knees. "Here 'tis! Why, Godfrey mighty! It's a basket—and it's full! I'd say by the heft that the gold's in it."

"Hesh must have lost it," I said. "Here, give me that shotgun and run along with the blasted basket. You can't stop now to fiddle around with gold in a basket in this blackness."

"Mebbe youre right. Take the gun— hammer's on the half cock, so full cock it if you want to shoot.. We got to save this gold" Wyatt thrust the gun at me, struggled to his feet, and charged along the trail,

THERE was a faint crashing ahead of us in the direction of the cookhouse. In a few minutes we burst from the jungle into the moonlight just as a figure darted to the back veranda of the hotel. We had only a momentary glimpse of the man, for he was already in the shadow of the hotel when we saw him, and we heard, rather than saw, him bound up the steps to the back door of the bar. That door was secured with rattans, but the man we saw burst the door open.

We moved toward the hotel. A light flamed in the bar. We saw, outlined through the slivers of light in the braided rattan kajang, an indistinct figure reaching up to a shelf as he pulled down a bottle.

"My best brandy," said Wyatt, with a chuckle. "Wa'l, for a basket with gold in it, fair enough for Hesh to have a snort of the most expensive stuff I've got."

Running to the back veranda, Wyatt beat me to the door of the bar. I paused to swing the shotgun astern to be sure no headhunters were coming out of the jungle, then hurried after Wyatt.

I ALL but fell over him, for Wyatt was standing inside the partly open door, his head thrust forward, and bent down while he stared in amazement— or terror— at what he saw.

Ching was on his back on the floor before the bar; feet kicking and hands waving. One hand held a bottle of brandy. The neck of the bottle had been

knocked off, and as the Chinese flourished the bottle, brandy spattered on his face and the front of his black blouse. He was making desperate efforts to speak, his lips twisting in agony.

"What'n hell's the matter with him?" demanded Wyatt.

"Hit by a poisoned arrow!" I cried. "Get those heart tablets of yours— and get 'em quick or Ching's a dead man!"

I heard the grating of metal from the bottom of the thin dilly-bag basket as Wyatt threw it on a table. There were nuggets in that basket, I knew then for sure. I wrung the brandy bottle from Ching's hand, held his lips open, and poured brandy into him.

Wyatt brought his box of heart tablets. But Ching was in the convulsions which mark the final stages of being hit by a poisoned arrow. I saw a blue patch on one of his yellow cheeks, just under the right eye. In the center of the patch there was a bright glint of steel from a tiny object driven well into the soft flesh under the eye— a bad spot to be hit.

"What's he havin' a fit for?" asked Wyatt.

Before I could answer, Ching turned on his side and died abruptly.

"See that blue spot under the eye? One of your needles. Hit the skin with no fabric to clean off the poison."

Wyatt squinted in the lamplight. "For cat's sake! That's why he had to have brandy, but he didn't git to it quick enough. Why, it must've been him that was runnin' ahead of us."

I took a shot of brandy from the bar bottle Wyatt got for himself.

"Where the devil's Hesh, Wyatt?"

"He'll be along any minute. Must've took the longer path. I'm goin' to have a look at that gold in the native basket." He crossed to the table.

"There must be a hell of a lot of nuggets in that dilly-bag basket, all swelled up like that."

"Ayah. It was pretty heavy. Move that lamp so I can see better."

Wyatt thrust his hand into the long cylinder of a bag. Then he pulled out his hand and looked at it. I saw him stagger backward from the table staring at his fingers in horror. He lost his balance and thrust out a stained hand to keep from falling— and screamed.

"What's wrong?" I cried: But somehow, I knew the answer.

Wyatt raged in sharp yelps. "Damn Chinks! Damn gold— and damn the headhunters! I brung home Hesh!"

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10: The Laying of a Red-Haired Ghost

Algernon Blackwood

1869-1951

The Lady's Realm, Sep 1909

Express and Telegraph (Adelaide), 2 Oct 1909

Many of Blackwood's stories have been reprinted and anthologised numerous times, but this seems to be one of his "forgotten" tales.

IT WAS A STRANGE and incredible story, Jim thought, as he sat opposite his sister in the firelight and listened to her nervous and disjointed telling of it. They held little in common, these two, and had not met for some years; she was greatly his senior, and when she had married Captain Blundell, who combined a love of spirits with a credulous belief in spiritualism, Jim sheered off altogether. He could not stand a man who came drunk to his own table, and who. in his sober moments, could talk of nothing but the vulgar claptrap of séances and spirit-rapping.

But now, six months after-the funeral, Jim found himself summoned down by a pathetic little letter; and there he was, after tea. in a corner of the big drawing room, watching his sister's pale, emotional face, in the firelight, and wondering how .any woman could possibly believe all she was telling him.

In spite of this "wonder," however, he was beginning to feel conscious of a certain "creepiness" down the back, and several times he caught himself wishing that the footman would bring the lamps and be quick about it.

"As you know, Jim, Harry was a tremendous spiritualist," she went on, with a little show of natural embarrassment.

"He was always having séances and what he called 'experiments' in the house, up to the day of his seizure."

"Mediums?" asked Jim, feeling the old contempt stir him.

She nodded, with, a gesture imploring his patience.

"Every professional medium in the United Kingdom has slept in this house;" she answered; "They came down, male and female, in endless succession for weekend visits, and for two years I kept a diary of all their-phenomena."

Jim shuffled nervously, fearing a detailed account.

"But a few months before his death," she went on, "all this came to a sudden stop. He gave up having paid mediums—"

"You must have been glad," said Jim, with genuine, sympathy.

"Because he said he had found something better. You see, our circles were made up of people staying in the house, always devout believers— and when there were not enough of these he brought in recruits from among the servants. First the upper servants, then anybody. Gardeners, grooms, upper

housemaids, and even cooks have all sat at various times with us round the table or cabinet, watching hands, faces, and sometimes full-form figures flit about the room. Oh, it was very wonderful!"

Jim poked the fire and lit another cigarette hastily. He believed nothing; but it was foolish, he considered, for nervous persons like his sister to talk, of such things after dark, especially in a lonely, country house with ill-lighted corridors and ghostly staircases. Moreover, she was always, peering over her shoulder as though she saw something in the great darkened room behind her.

"It was on one of these occasions," she continued, lowering her voice, "he discovered that. one of the servants was a medium of exceptional powers. After that, no professional ever entered the house again."

"And this medium-servant—?" asked her brother impatiently.

"Was Masters."

"What?" he cried; "Masters, the old housekeeper?"

"Yes; she began by; going into a trance at one of. the séances, and my husband said she possessed most unusual powers and must sit for development."

"And you got the same results with that old woman?"

"Even better. Oh, Masters was extraordinary!" replied his sister with enthusiasm. "Simply extraordinary! But it's not that I want to tell you about. It's something very different."

Jim noticed her hesitation and embarrassment, and wondered what he was going to hear next. He suggested ringing for the lights, but his sister objected that she did not want the servants to overhear a single word. Her manner became more mysterious. She drew her chair closer, and began to speak in a hushed voice, but with great earnestness.

"It's what has gone on since— that I want to tell you," she whispered. "Since my husband's death, I mean— what goes on now—"

"Now!" repeated Jim, feeling, more and more uncomfortable.

"And I sent for you because you are the only one of the family left. I could never speak to a stranger of this."

"Of course not;" he said hurriedly. "You say-things go on now, do you?"

He glanced quickly at her face, and noted its sudden pallor and the unmistakable signs of fear in her manner.

"Do you mean in this house?"

He got up to ring the bell for the lamps, but she drew him back into the chair.

"Wait till I've finished, please, Jim. You know this is a very large house," she went: on disconnectedly, still under her breath for fear of listeners. "And a very lonely one; and I've been living here since my husband died."

"Yes," he said emphatically;

"I only use, a small part of it. The rest of it— his part— is shut up."

"Naturally."

"And I have fewer servants, too."

"Of course."

"And the greatest difficulty in keeping them. They won't stay. They are always hearing noises in the unused part of the house— his part. And some of them swear they have met it on the stairs."

Jim looked up quickly; he was alarmed at her tone of voice.

"Met what?" he asked aloud.

"Him," she whispered back across the firelight. "He's been about all the time. He's always about now. He's not far from you and me at this very moment, probably."

Her brother sprang up and faced the darkening room with his back to the fire. Her serious manner dismayed him a good deal.

"You mean—" he began.

"Harry still lives here-still comes here."

"Helen," he said severely, "your nerves are unstrung. What in the world do you mean by talking in this way?"

"Exactly what I say, Jim. Harry is still in this house," she answered quietly, in a tone that sent the shivers down his back.

"The house is h-h-haunted, you mean!"

"I mean that Harry is still about in it," she whispered.

"But you have seen him?"

"Often," she went on, her excitement growing as she saw her brother's interest. "And he's always telling me to do things. He says his happiness depends on my doing them. He says this all the time. He comes at night to my room; and even when, I don't see him, I hear his voice in the dark, whispering at me."

Jim straightened himself up and drew a long,-deep breath. He was slowly forming his own conclusions. He knew a splendid nerve specialist in town, who would soon, know how to put the matter right. He was not subtle-minded himself and hardly knew how to deal with such a case, but the doctor would manage all that. So, for the moment, he said nothing and schooled himself to listen with sympathy and patience. In spite, of his conclusions, however he regretted that his sister looked to him for protection in such a matter, and almost wished he had not come.

"Then, only a month ago," she went on, "Masters herself came to give warning. She cried a lot and declared she really could not stand it any longer."

"Masters sees him, too?"

"As often as I do nearly. The very night she gave notice he came into my room and-said I must not let her go on any account, for she was such a wonderful medium and he could not manifest at all without a medium. If Masters left he would be unable to come back and he would suffer-and be very unhappy."

"So the wretched woman is still here?"

"I was obliged to double her wages before she'd consent to stay, and even now I'm always afraid she'll go out of her mind or do something dreadful like that."

The entrance of the footman with the much-longed-for lamps put an end to their conversation for the moment, and the dressing-gong postponed it still further; but after a depressing tête-à-tête dinner Jim asked to see Masters alone in the smoking-room. His sister was not there, for he did not wish her nerves to be further excited before going to bed.

He talked to Masters about family matters that interested them both before approaching the topic of main interest. She volunteered little, but answered all his questions frankly and he soon saw that she believed in it all even more implicitly than did his sister. She was less intelligent, and of course more credulous, and she told him some amazing bits of information about her late master which only confirmed Jim in his theory that these two hysterically-inclined women were completely hypnotised into the belief that Captain Blundell had returned to the scene of his orgies and "experiments," and still walked the rooms and passages of the old family mansion. She mentioned that even with her higher wages she did not think, she could stand it much longer.

Jim asked her particularly about the first séance at which she went into a trance.

"I simply; felt kind of faint," she told him, "and then turned of a sudden all unconscious. That's all I knew till I woke up and they told me what had happened while I was asleep. 'In a trance' the poor captain called it. And after that I used to sit twice a week regular for him."

Jim felt sure she, believed every word she uttered. Her descriptions of her meeting with the captain since his death were very vivid, and she turned pale and trembled all over while she spoke of seeing his red head and bloated face bending over her bed in the night time. And when she told how she saw him moving silently down the corridors, sometimes overtaking and passing her without a word, and vanishing in the doorway of his old room. Jim was distinctly sorry that he had not waited for her recital until the morning.

But it did not in the least stoke his belief that, both women were entirely deluded, and his mind was already at work on a plan to send the foolish old

housekeeper off on a holiday, while he got his sister up to London; and induced her to see a specialist.

He avoided further conversation on the subject that night— for his own sake as much as for theirs— and he felt quite angry with himself to note that his nerves gave an involuntary start when his sister led him to his lofty panelled bedroom, and informed him that this was the very room her husband had died in six months previously.

"There is far more chance of your seeing him if you sleep here," she exclaimed, "and then you can judge for yourself. Masters, who sleeps just across the passage so as to be near me, tried hard to prevent me putting you here; but I knew you wouldn't feel the least afraid. But do please remember, Jim," she added pleadingly, "if he comes, not to speak roughly or unkindly to him."

She was gone, and the door closed behind her.

Jim's reflections for the next few minutes were very far from pleasant. He believed none of it, but he had nerves for all that; and to be put to sleep in the death-room, with a medium servant opposite and an hysterical sister a little farther up the passage— this was more than he had bargained for. His mind and imagination were alive with all the stories of the evil apparition he had heard; and even his bedroom, he noticed, was littered with spiritualist journals and cheap occult magazines, dealing with the marvellous and terrifying side of this class of things.

No wonder, he reflected, that these women, living alone in the country, their minds, still dominated by the bluster and superstition of the bibulous Blundell— no wonder they still saw him walking the floors and whispering at them in the darkness of the night. It was matter for surprise they did not see and hear a great deal more.

And, although Jim possessed a strong will and had soon reduced his imagination to order, it required considerable effort: on his part to crawl between the sheets of old Blundell's bed and blow the candles out on the table beside him. And the last picture in his mind as he finally fell asleep took the form of this man as he had seen him at his sister's wedding years ago— with his flaming red hair, his bloated cheeks, and his small, pig-like eyes.

For all that, however, he slept undisturbed, and during the following day he tried to divert his sister's thoughts as much as possible to other things than: spirits. He also contrived that Masters should never once see her alone.

FOR three days the household moved along normal and unexciting channels of ordinary country life, but the fourth morning Helen came down to breakfast pale and trembling, and declared her husband had appeared to her

in the night, and had whispered that he could not come as before so long as Jim was in the house, and that, he was suffering and very unhappy. Her brother's sceptical attitude, he said, destroyed the conditions, and made it almost impossible for him to materialise.

"That explains, you see, why he has not appeared to you, she said weepingly.

Jim did not care what the explanation might be, so long as the apparition did not actually come; and this only made him feel more, than ever that his theory was correct, and that the whole story was a tissue of moonshine and hysteria..

But that very night something happened that compelled him to reconsider his theories; and, if. possible, to readjust them.

It was after midnight when he came up from the smoking-room, where an interesting novel had detained him far beyond his usual hour. In order not to disturb his sister, whose room he had to pass, he took off his shoes and walked on tiptoe up the stairs.

The house was dark and silent, and the great, hall he had to pass through seemed unusually large. Its proportions seemed almost to have; altered. To find his way he was obliged to keep his hand on the rail; but halfway; up ne became so confused as to his exact whereabouts that he decided to return to the smoking-room and get a candle.

It was at: this very moment that his nerves signalled a warning to him. His heart suddenly began to beat very fast, and as he turned to grope his way downstairs he became aware that "something" had moved up directly in front of him out of the darkness.

Something, he felt positive, was standing within two feet or less, of his person. In another second he would touch it. Everything was pitch-black; and at once his mind was flooded with the details of what his sister and Masters had seen. With terrible vividness the horrible stories came before, him. The hair rose on his head and he felt his knees shake. The theory about hypnotised and hysterical women, so convincing in the daylight, seemed in a second to have become inadequate and absurd. The frightened face of the housekeeper and his sister's pallor occurred to him with new meaning.

He tried hard to pull himself together and began to fumble in his pocket, for a match; but he only just had time to move a little to one side and get his back up against the wall, when the darkness before him grew faintly luminous and he plainly saw a figure moving slowly past him down the stairs. Jim felt the sweat trickling down his neck as he stared. Something with human shape passed him slowly, silently, with a sort of dim light of its own just sufficient to make it visible. It made absolutely no sound, but he felt the air stir on his

cheek; and, just at the second when, it was closest to him, it turned slowly round and showed him its face.

Jim almost screamed aloud. It was a man with bloated cheeks, small shining eyes, and red hair!

He thought every instant the figure would spring at him out of the darkness, and he almost fell forward on to it, and feared he would collapse on the floor from sheer fright. But in the same second it passed him and was gone, moving by with soundless feet as though his own presence had been unobserved....

His first thought was to rush to his sister or to Masters and tell them what he had seen. But cooler thoughts followed quickly, when he reflected how mortified he would be to confess that he was too frightened to follow the figure and speak to it. Instead, his trembling fingers found a match and he at once struck a light and peered about him.

The shadows ran away on all sides, and he saw a long empty corridor, lined with pictures, but devoid of all doors or furniture, and certainly destitute of any other human figure than his own. But it was not the passage he knew. Evidently, he had taken the wrong turning in the dark. He ought to have gone up another flight of stairs before turning, and he forthwith began to retrace his steps, by the light of the match, and happily reached his own door before, its last flicker left him on the darkness again.

And, once within his own room, he locked the door, poked the fire into a blaze, lit every candle he could find-and then sat down to think it all over.

After thinking it over for half an hour, safe from the paralysing effects of fear, Jim realised honestly enough that his theories needed readjusting. He therefore, readjusted them to the best of his ability and then got into bed and slept peacefully till morning.

Next day, he told his sister what he had seen, but assured her at the same time that he had a plan for making the unhappy spirit return to its grave and rest quietly.

"It was Harry, you see, as I told you."

"It gave me an awful turn," said Jim. "Eyes, face, hair, and all. It was exactly like him."

"And you really think you can stop it without making him unhappy?" she asked plaintively.

'"I'll try. It won't make him unhappy, I promise that. Don't let Masters know I've seen him or she'll have hysterics."

Jim arranged with his sister that he should slip into her room late that night, unobserved, and deep on the sofa behind the curtains. She was to wake

him when the apparition came, in case he was asleep. For the rest she must have confidence in him— and wait results.

At a few minutes past eleven, Jim took up his position on the sofa behind the curtains, making himself comfortable with rugs and pillows. His sister was soon asleep. But he himself lay there with every sense alert, waiting for the first signs of the apparition. The room was in complete darkness, the house silent as the grave.

It was well after one o'clock when the sound of a door-handle being turned roused him out of a light doze and made his hand seek the dark lantern ready for use. Very cautiously and quietly the door was opened— and someone moved stealthily into the room.

The darkness was too great to allow him to see a vestige of anything, but from the sound of drapery brushing against the wardrobe he knew that the intruder was standing somewhere between him and the front of the bed.

An instant later he knew that this was correct; for the faint, pale, luminous glow he had seen three nights before on the stairs, made itself visible just where the bed ended; and Jim was able to make out by its aid the indistinct outline of a human head and shoulders.

At the same moment his sister moved uneasily in her sleep. The bed was being gently shaken; and almost immediately afterwards, the jolting awakened her and he heard her terrified voice from the bedclothes:

"Harry, is that you, dear?"

A sepulchral whisper replied from the shape at the foot of the bed.

"It is. But I cannot come again while your brother is in the house."

The light shifted a little and Jim plainly saw the mass of red-hair on the figure's head. '

"I will tell him," answered Helen, in a terrified whisper. "Please do not be angry with me."

"I am angry only because you do not obey me," continued the hoarse whisper. "You do not carry out what I say."

"But what have I not done?"

"The money I want left to my faithful old housekeeper, is still not arranged for. You have not altered the will as I directed."

"But I will do so to-morrow, Harry dear— at once," said the other with a gulp of terror. .

Meanwhile Jim had stealthily left his hiding-place on tiptoe and come close up to the apparition of Captain Blundell. He was almost touching it, and as his sister uttered these last words he encircled the figure with his arms and clapped his handkerchief over his mouth. There was a smothered cry and a wild rush across the room in the darkness. Helen uttered a piercing scream,

and when the door slammed behind him Jim found himself out in the passage with a very solid apparition struggling in his arms most violently

"If you don't. keep quiet, I'll stun you, I d'ye hear?" he whispered.

The figure made no reply and he dragged and carried the still struggling "Captain Blundell" down the passage into his own room. Once in, he produced the rope he had already provided in view of this very climax and tied up the apparition so. that it, could hot possibly move. Then he ran back to his sister's room as fast. as his legs could carry him, first locking his door on the outside. v

He found her with every candle alight, sobbing with terror, and in a condition certainly bordering on hysteria.

"Oh, Jim, did you see him that time? But what, happened, and did he try to injure you? It was all so terrible."

"Come quickly," cried her brother. "Come to my room. I've laid the ghost. You never need be afraid again."

He dragged her by the hand, clad in a dressing-gown and shaking like a leaf, down the passage to his own room. He unlocked the door and they went in together. Silence and darkness met them.

"Now, Helen," he said, "I'll give you a light and you shall see the spirit better than you've ever seen it before."

There was a sound of heavy shuffling in the darkness. He turned his dark lantern on the scene at the same moment.

Helen gave a long scream and caught his arm for support. There, in front of them, leaning in a half-faint against the bed-post, just as Jim had left her, stood Masters, the old housekeeper! She had a villainous red wig on her head; her checks were rouged violently, and her eyes painted. And at her feet lay a faintly luminous slate, and the sheet she had used to wrap round her neck and shoulders.

Before releasing her, Jim insisted on Helen taking him at once to the, woman's bedroom, where, as he suspected, they found further paraphernalia, consisting of a second red wig, grease paint, rubber, hands, a couple of slates, and white sheets with loose arms carefully sewed on to them. She had learned all the tricks from the "professionals," and had played them at their own game and beaten them clean out of the market.

But Helen Blundell was never troubled again by the apparition of her late husband and Masters, the faithful old house-keeper had to seek another place without a character.

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11: The Heroes of Duckfoot

Edward Dyson

1865–1931

Evening News (Sydney) 2 March 1907

JOHN HENRY COLLARD and Peter Alexander Bodycomb had been regarded as the rising young men of Duckfoot till their hair was very thin on the top and rather grey at the edges, and they were still spoken of as promising young Australians at Band of Hope meetings, debating assemblies, and functions of like moment. John and Peter had been rivals for scholastic honors when they attended old Killgower's "College" on the flat by the pile bridge, and since then they had been rivals in politics, rivals in religion, rivals in business, and rivals in love.

Public opinion at Duckfoot was definitely divided on all questions debatable amongst sensible, self-respecting, and respectable men. Duckfoot took every question, and halved it sharply, as you might split an apple, and Duckfoot society enlivened the monotony of existence at Duckfoot, with its disagreements. In all these disagreements, John Collard stood for that section which regarded itself as the Liberal party. This party even believed itself almost Radical in its more passionate moments; the Conservative element of Duckfoot attained its highest fruition in the person of Peter Bodycomb.

Peter kept a grocery on one side of Constitution-street, Duckfoot, and John Collard kept a grocery on the other side. The rivals spent much of their time at their opposing doors, in long white aprons, watching each other, each fearing that his opponent might take advantage of a momentary lapse of vigilance on his part to revolutionise business. Bodycomb had seized the opportunity when Collard was afflicted with sandy blight, to mark sugar down a halfpenny, and when John Collard took to spectacles, Peter followed suit immediately.

"A man looks so very much more intellectual in spectacles," Peter explained. "We really cannot permit the Democrats to have the sole benefit of even such adventitious aids."

Public opinion at Duckfoot was so fairly apportioned that the rival grocers had each almost a precise half of the business of Duckfoot township and district, and Peter and John were so truly representative of local thought that if a customer of Peter's began dealing with John everybody knew it indicated a deliberate change of political sentiment on the part of the customer. True, this occurred rarely. It was no easy matter to vary the political beliefs of an elector of Duckfoot.

It would appear that Peter's conduct in falling in love with Miss Henrietta Powlet, immediately it became known that John was paying Miss Powlet marked attention, was an act of "cussedness," but it is possible that the

seeming-jocular providence which shaped their ends to uncompromising rivalry in other matters, had willed that John and Peter should round off the comedy by being competitors for the hand of one fair lady.

Henrietta was a pert little woman, with pursed lips, and brows curiously elevated in the centre, over small, round, brown eyes, giving her an alert, bird-like air, which was accentuated by the sharp little bill, that might have been a nose. She was the local dressmaker and milliner, and was doing so well that she could afford to affect a marked superiority to man, even to man at his highest point of development, in the person of John— or Peter.

Miss Henrietta did not walk, she bounced; she was always in a hurry, always business-like, and always prim. Had Duckfoot possessed a sense of humor, the quaint spectacle afforded by John Collard or Peter Bodycomb walking by Henrietta, and endeavoring to assume a leisurely and lover-like air, while the little dressmaker bounced along at the rate of five miles an hour, apparently occupied with concerns of vast moment, would have provided food for a year's gaiety.

For twelve months John and Peter had been rivals for the hand of Miss Powlet, and neither had a hap'orth of advantage. Henrietta would walk, or, more correctly, bounce to church, with John, and bounce home with Peter. She would go for a bounce with either on Sunday afternoon, showing no discrimination whatever, and those walks were always hurried and energetic. It was the most difficult matter in the world for a diffident man to make progress in the affections of Miss Powlet. She never remained still long enough for a slow man to get an arm round her waist, and neither Collard nor Bodycomb was a cavalier of the dashing type.

John prayed daily for an opportunity of distinguishing himself, that would impel Henrietta to grant him some preference, for he had long recognised that the addition of her millinery and dress and mantle-making business to his general store was a most desirable thing. Unfortunately, Peter's prayers for precisely the same boon were just as regular, and the rival petitions nullified each other. Duckfoot watched the competition with little interest, but several spinsters of the township and district were piteously envious of Miss Powlet, for marrying men were scarce, and John and Peter were both highly desirable, al-though no longer young, and both cast in the same commonplace mould, being tall and thin, with projecting knees and rounded shoulders; both had long noses, weak eyes, and moustaches feeble in texture, and ginger in color.

This was the situation when the great event happened, and thrilled Duckfoot to its very core. The news that John Collard had saved Peter Bodycomb from a watery grave, with immense heroism, and at the risk of his own life, travelled up the river and down the river, and far inland, in an

incredibly short space of time. Within two hours a crowd had assembled before John's store. It was composed of the Liberals of Duckfoot. It cheered John with immense enthusiasm, and was not content till he appeared on his own verandah, and delivered a modest little speech.

"I feel that I have only done my duty, fellow citizens and friends," said John. "I have only done what any one of you would have done in similar circumstances. Peter Bodycomb and I have warmly opposed each other on every question that has interested the people of this thriving township. We are rivals in business, and are against each other on almost every point, but Peter is a man, and a brother, and I could do no less." Here John gave indications that emotion was overcoming him. He drew out his handkerchief.

"Friends, and good people of Duckfoot, I thank you," he said, "but I trust you will be as quiet as you can for poor Bodycomb's sake. He has sustained a severe shock; he is probably prostrated."

"It's a lie!" cried a voice. "I am not prostrated, any more than you are." Peter had appeared on his verandah. He seemed excited; he was gesticulating wildly.

"People of Duckfoot," he cried; but it was the Liberal party he addressed, and it resented his attitude towards his saviour, and drowned his protesting voice with cheers for Collard. The grand incident of the day, as it presented itself to John's mind, was a trifle fogged. He knew he was rowing up the river, and Peter was rowing down the river. Their boats collided in midstream, and were overturned. John remembered that he and Peter grappled in the water; he remembered some comings up and goings down; the gulping in of much yellow river water, and then came a period of obfuscation, followed by the slow return to light and life, and finding himself on dry ground, with Peter still in his tight clutch. He was some moments grasping the situation, and then he realised that the thing he had long prayed for had been vouchsafed to him. He was not only alive, but he had saved the life of his rival, Peter Bodycomb. Peter, too, had revived. John, with some presence of mind, lifted Peter, intending to carry him to the nearest house, and so assert his claim to the honor and glory; but Peter, recognising his intention, no doubt, resisted fiercely, and endeavored to carry John. First John carried Peter a few paces, then Peter came into the ascendant and carried John, and so on, for about fifty yards. The struggle was wildly absurd, and resembled a long-distance wrestling match. The pair desisted when they were quite exhausted, and walked home, aloof and indignant, two quaint, bedraggled objects, hatless, dripping, and coated with river mud.

Duckfoot simply let itself go about John; the story of his heroism swelled as it rolled; his brave action was the one theme of conversation. Within four

hours a movement was on foot to recognise his reckless daring, and a letter was drawn up and dispatched to Sydney, drawing the attention of the Royal Humane Society to the noble action of "our worthy and respected townsman, John Collard."

Miss Henrietta Powlet actually called upon John, and breathlessly congratulated him.

"Oh, please don't mention it!" said John, exulting inwardly.

"Everybody must respect valor," said Henrietta, "and appreciate self-sacrifice and willingness to give one's life for a fellow-creature, and all that, John."

It was the first time she had called him John. Collard felt his bosom stir with those ebullient emotions that make a conquering rooster fly on to the shed and crow.

John's act gave Liberalism a decided impetus at Duckfoot. The party rallied round its hero. It was its bounden duty to show the world that Duckfoot knew how to appreciate valor. On the morning of the second day everything was ready; and the excitement was at its highest. A public meeting had been called. The citizens of Duckfoot were making a presentation to John Collard, Esq. Their mark of esteem took the shape of a large gold medal, suitably inscribed. Fortunately the watchmaker had one in stock. There were many speeches before the presentation, all couched in fervent and florid language. Somebody recited an appropriate set of verses, written by the local poet at a moment's notice; somebody sang, "Let Me Like a Soldier Fall;" and the medal was hung on the hero's breast. Miss Henrietta Powlet, as Grand Dame of the Duckfoot Order of Sensible Sisters, decorated "their splendid and illustrious townsman." This was considered very apropos. The enthusiasm was enormous, the people cheered madly. It was the happiest moment of John's life. He stood before them all, his hand pressed to his heart, his head slightly bent to suggest humility, the renovated medal gleaming upon his bosom, a hero in his own right.

At this intensely dramatic moment Proudfoot the baker, rushed into the hall, hatless and disordered, crimson with indignation. He dashed on to the platform.

"Stop! Stop!" yelled Proudtoot, throwing up an imperious palm.

A sudden silence fell upon the meeting.

"The other crowd are holding a meeting," cried the baker. "They're making a presentation to Peter Bodycomb. They've given him an inscribed gold watch. Listen."

The meeting listened with absorbing interest. It heard the sound of distant cheering.

"That's the Conservatives cheering Bodycomb," said Proudfoot. "They say he saved the life of John Collard!''

The announcement paralysed John's meeting for an appreciable space of time; it was dumb and motionless. The hero was horror-stricken at such mendacity. Presently murmurs arose.

"They say Peter Bodycomb dragged John Collard out of the river, and carried him towards the township. It's infamous!"

"It's an outrage on the common instincts of humanity," blurted the hero, his medal palpitating with righteous indignation.

"It's gross ingratitude!" exclaimed Maugher, the chairman.

Henrietta moved away from the hero into the background. There was a moment of painful indecision on the part of the assemblage, and then the echoes of another frantic outburst of cheering at Bodycomb's meeting were borne in upon them, and the spirit of the Liberal party asserted itself, the people sprang to their feet, and cheer after cheer rang out. John Collard smiled again. The situation was saved.

To the great disgust of the Liberals, Peter Bodycomb persisted in his claim. He had had a terrible struggle with John in the river; he had dragged him ashore at the risk of his own life, and John had repaid him by an act of treachery unequalled in the annals of our country. Peter assumed the airs of a hero. He made an unblushing display of his inscribed gold watch. The watch had cost 20 guineas, whereas John's medal had only cost five. Certainly the friends and admirers of John Collard could not conscientiously allow the matter to rest here. They offered John a complimentary banquet, and John accepted. There were more eulogistic speeches at the banquet John, sitting in the place of honor, was crowned with mock laurel. His health was drunk after a storm of cheers; but the effect was spoiled by the tumultuous cheering of a crowd across the way, where the Conservative party, was tendering a complimentary banquet to Peter Bodycomb.

Daniel Maugher spoke with loathing of the nefarious efforts of the Conservatives to rob the true hero of the credit of a brave and glorious deed; and at the same time Thomas Strach, over at Peter's banquet, was describing with rugged eloquence how the fair fame of Duckfoot was being contaminated by the ignoble scheme the Liberals had concocted to pass on to a number of their own party the honor and glory due to Peter Bodycomb. Duckfoot had been hotly divided on many questions; never had it shown such keen and bitter partisanship as it developed in connection with this business of the rival heroes. Peter was given a complimentary picnic to Emu Head, and on the same day John enjoyed a picnic given in his honor at the Lagoon. Peter was presented with many gifts, John received an equal number of tributes, all

suitably inscribed. Maugher wrote for the metropolitan papers a glowing account of John Collard's act of heroism; Strach wrote an equally glowing account of Peter Bodycomb's daring rescue of a drowning man. Both accounts were published; disputations arose in the correspondence columns, and the editors treated the matter in a frivolous spirit, stating that as there was some doubt whether Peter had rescued John, or John had saved Peter, it would be wisest to divide the honors, and say each saved the other. Following this was a curt intimation that "this correspondence must now cease."

Peter's partisans struck their cruellest blow at John's smoke social. After the hero had been presented with a smoker's kit, "suitably inscribed," Strach, who had not been invited, jumped on a chair, and said: "Mr. Chairman, permit me to say, in the interests of public decency, that you are lavishing praise and presents upon a man who is a fraud and a humbug."

At this there were fierce yells, and an attempt was made to tear Strach down; but he continued, in a louder key, "And whom I can prove to be a fraud." Strach pointed a terrible finger at John Collard, who stood pale and expectant, "Mr. Chairman, that man Collard cannot swim a stroke."

Dead silence followed these awful words. John went paler still, his weak knees were trembling visibly and audibly, trickles of perspiration stole from under his thin hair.

"Is—is that true, John?" said Maugher.

"Well," quaked John, "it's true that I can't swim, but—but—" He bogged there, and the silence that followed was broken by the exultant laugh of Strach, as he strode from the room.

Maugher had a brilliant idea. "Well, gentlemen," he cried, "if John cannot swim, his act in saving Bodycomb's life is all the more remarkable, his heroism the higher. I call for three cheers for John Collard, the Liberal hero."

The cheers were given, but they were feeble, and were quite drowned by the roars of insolent triumph belched from the room in which Peter Bodycomb was being feted.

It cannot be denied this development did John's cause a lot of harm. It sapped the enthusiasm of his party. Henrietta went to church with Peter on the following Sunday. She walked home with Peter. She attended the Cinderella ball in Peter's honor on, the Monday evening. John had no ball. He lurked at home, morose and envious, concocting vengeance. Perhaps it was a random shot, but it was effective.

At the Band of Hope meeting on Wednesday evening John solemnly declared that Peter was obtaining public credit under false pretences.

"Odium has been heaped upon me," said John, "because it is assumed that my claim is invalidated by reason of the fact that I can't swim. I admit I cannot

swim. I defy anybody to prove that I ever said I could— but in the excitement of that great moment when I saved Peter Bodycomb's life, I for-got I could not swim. And now, ladies and gentlemen, it is for Peter Bodycomb to explain how he saved me, since he himself is totally unable to swim."

Peter jumped up on the platform passionately protesting, but he could not truthfully say he was a swimmer, and John's cause revived again.

Henrietta, as a mark of contrition, bought some sugar at his shop next morning, and spent quite five minutes in conversation with the hero. By this time the difference between Peter and John had become viciously personal; they forgot their divinity; then bandied words with each other across the road; and their language was not as well studied as was to be expected from acknowledged leaders of public opinion. Peter undercut John in tea, and John reduced yellow soap a penny a bar, and gave a pipe to every purchaser of a pound of tobacco.

The dispute culminated in a garden party, given to John by Maugher, on the north side of the river. Strach was equal to the occasion, and gave a garden party to the rival hero on the south side of the river. Only a strip of water divided the opposing forces, and neither money nor trouble was spared by each party to outdo the other. The speeches, songs, and recitations in John's honor were literally hurled at Peter's party; and the songs, recitations, and speeches, descriptive of Peter's valor, were spouted at John's party, across the water. When the festivities were at the highest, the little river steamer Bunyip, with two barges in tow, steamed in between the rival factions, and the captain noting the lavish nature of the festivities, slowed up.

"Hello!" cried Captain Tarbut, "what's all this? What's a-going on here?"

"It's a garden party in honor of John Collard, who almost sacrificed his own life to save that of his enemy, Peter Bodycomb," cried Maugher. "Come ashore, captain, and drink the hero's health."

"This is a complimentary garden party extended to the hero, Peter Bodycomb, who nobly saved John Collard from an untimely death in the river, on this spot," cried Strach.

Captain Tarbut held up his hands to still the tumult.

"Give us it one at er time," he said. "Who saved who?"

"Peter Bodycomb rescued John Collard!"

"John Collard saved Peter Bodycomb."

"Was this on the fifteenth iv last month et erbout two o'clock?"

"Yes," cried a dozen voices from either side.

"Then, maybe, I kin square yer def'rence. The *Bunyip* was passin' here at that time, 'en we come on er pair iv idiots fightin' in the water, like cats in er bag, longside their up-turned boats. I dug er boat-hook in 'em, 'n' yanked 'em

ashore, 'n' jist, left 'em there t' drain, havin' no time t' waste on jabberin' jackasses, what don't know enough t' come in outer ther wet."

Then there was much murmuring from both banks.

"So yer don't believe me. I refers yer t' me crew," said the captain.

"That's the golmighty truth, s'elp me!" said the crew, grinning from his perch on a tallow cask.

Blankly the people of John's party gazed into each other's faces, dumbly the people of Peter's party met eye to eye. Peter lingered for a few moments in the painful silence, and then turned, and drifted away. John stood his ground for 50 seconds, and then sneaked behind a clump of saplings, and retreated from the scene.

It took the rival parties about five minutes to grasp the situation, and then one took possession of Captain Tarbut, and the other took possession of Edward, his crew, and they feted those stalwart mariners, for, after all, they were the true heroes of Duckfoot.

Next Sunday Miss Henrietta Powlet, dress-maker and milliner, bounced to church with Tom Swimmerton, a young selector, and a man of no parts— not even parts of speech.

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12: The Sad Case of Willie Borlow

Edward Dyson, as by "Silas Snell"

Punch (Melbourne) 28 May 1914

"Miss Trigg, Domestic" appeared in a series of comic stories in the Melbourne Punch *during 1914.*

IT WAS Mr. Borlow engaged Minnie Trigg at the registry office. Something in her raffish eye and her ginger-for-pluck appearance appealed to him.

"The job is easy," he said. "Fifteen shillings a week, a five-room'ed villa, no children, no cats, no callers, and no confounded piano or phonographs. I hate, loathe, and despise phonographs. I have the greatest contempt for cats."

" 'Ow many in the fam'ly?" asked Minnie with a judicial air. "Is the washin' sent out? What nights off, an' is a girl 'lowed to be seen 'ome?"

"There are myself and my mother," replied .Mr. Borlow. "Mother doesn't talk much, and can't hear very well. Mother crochets. It's her only vice. Don't care a fuss what you do with the washing. You can go off pretty well every dashed night for all I care, and you can come home with a blessed circus and I won't growl, provided there's no brass band. Mind you," he added fiercely, shaking a threatening finger at Miss Trigg, "no brass bands. I hate brass bands. And I hate monkey organs. Dash it all, girl, if you encourage monkey organs about the place I'll kick you out of rhe house!"

"Yer barmy!" said Miss Minnie Trigg mildly.

"BUT I took on the job all right," Miss Trigg confided to her friend, 'Arriet Brown, a few days later. "My troubs erbout his kiekin' me out or puttin' any silly bizness across me. He ain't no higher than that. I cud kick his bloomin''at off, but he's ez queer- ez a van-load of apes comin' back frim a picnic. He's got money, I fancy, jist enough t' live on. an' liis mother lives with him. He's old, but she's older. 'Sttuth ! I never saw sich an old body. She 'sits in a chair what creaks, an' her bones creak, an' her voice creaks. She don't talk often, an' when she does you'd think it was tlie wicker work furniture comin' round after hem' sat on by a fat gatherin'."

"Don't sound ez if you was t$oin't' be worked to a shadow at 'Willis Villa, " said 'Arriet.

"No, I ain't quite killin' myself; but I reckon it's goin' t' be worth the money to live with Willie. Willie's the boss. His mother calls him Willie, an' seems t' think he's still a kid in knickers, though he's near sixty, an' a widower, with a whisky freak, an' one foot in a ten-pound bundle mostly along of gout."

But Minnie learned a great deal more of her new family before a fortnight had fled. Mr. Borlow was a short, thin, merry gentleman of a very excited

manner, with round, staring eyes, and thin, bristling, grey hair. He shaved clean, and his face was pale, lit up with one touch of colour. The extremte tip of his nose was so red that the illumination looked artificial, and suggested a circus down in an angry humour. I

Minnie's first real adventure with Mr. Borlow happened early one morning. She had served breakfast, and was having her own meal, when Mr. B. made a sudden, dramatic entrance into the kitchen. His eyes were rounder than usual, his thin hair was erect, the danger signal on the limit of his trunk burned with electric fury. He held a decapitated egg in his left hand. He paused in the middle of the room, held up the egg, and pointed a rigid forefinger at it.

"Call that an egg ?" he squealed. "Call that an egg, do you ? You— you— you wretch! You she devil, do you call that an egg?"

"'Taint a wheelbarrer, is it?" said Minnie. "An' it ain't a mangle."

"Smell it !" Mr. Borlow strode forward, pushing the offending egg at her. "Taste it !"

"Garn, chase yerself! If it ain't a noo-laid I'll take yer word fer it," said Miss Trigg.

"New laid ? New laid ? New laid ?" with every repetition of the query. Mr. Borlow's voice jumped up the scale. "Why, dash it all, woman, it's an antique! It's a Babylonian relief. It's from the tombs of the first Pharaohs, and it smells like all the plagues of Egypt. How dare you serve me such a dirty trick?"

"Blime!" said Miss Trigg. "You don't expect me to know the birth an' breedin' of every egg that comes into the 'ouse, do you?"

"I know this, that it's like your infernal cheek to give me an egg for breakfast that is totally unfit to associate with gentlemen. Don't you grin at me, you whelp of the slums. Don't you dare!"

Mr. Borlow threatened Minnie with the egg. Minnie ducked, and the offending ova was bowled against the wall, where it hung in an offensive blob.

Mr. Borlow kicked over the kitchen table. "I'll teach you to give me improper eggs," he squealed. He took up a plate, and crashed it on the floor. "There's for your putrid egg," said he. He seized the milk jug, and hurled it through the window. "That'll teach you to know a demoralised and unsound egg when you see it!" he howled.

Miss Trigg was not much disturbed. "Oh, go on," she said, "don't mind me. There's the sugar basin. Have a go at the butter dish."

"You— you vixen. You ginger vixen!" cried Mr. Borlow. He chased her twice round the overturned table, and threw half-a-loaf at her as she skipped through the kitchen door.

"Natural," said Miss Trigg, telling the adventure to Miss Brown, "I reckons it's all up with yours at 'Willis Villor,' an' I'm goin' about t' pack up me goods,

when 'long comes his niblets a nour after, calm ez cold-biled rice, an' sez he, ever so sweet an' gentle: 'It's a nice day, is it not?' I sez it's a moderate fine day, barrin' a little thunder, an' a slight shower iv eggs an' things. 'Maybe, Minnie,' sez his gills, 'you'd like the afternoon to yourself an' half-a-crown to spend.' He flicks me arf er doller, an' goes off. Well, I ain't one to 'arbour spite, so I unpacks an' resolves t' ferget the bad egg."

Minnie enjoyed another week of comparative peace and quiet with the Borlow's, but a second demonstration came in due course. She had served the dinner, and was entering the diningroom with two coffee cups on a. tray, when Borlow sprang upon her from behind the door.

"What're these?" yelled Mr. Borlow in a seeming frenzy. "What in the deuce's name are these things?" In the fright of the preliminary outburst Minnie had dropped the tray, and the fragments of the cups and saucers strewed the carpet.

"They're pancakes, of course," stammered the girl.

Borlow held all the pancakes she had served for the sweets' course piled on his left hand. He was pointing at them tragically with the forefinger of his right. To all appearances he was more distressed about the pancakes than he had been about the egg.

"Ho!" he yelled, "so, ho! they're pancakes? Well, take your infernal pancakes." He slapped one clear in her face. He pelted her with three others. He seized her in a paroxysm of fury, and pushed a pancake down her back.

Miss Trigg was not what you would call a long-suffering damsel. She knew her rights as a superior domestic, and would not admit that any master was within his rights in pushing pancakes down her back.

"I was that roused," she told 'Arriet, "I 'ardly.knew what I was up to afore I'd grabbed a tureen iv cauliflower, an' fair smashed it on his 'ead. He went down, sorter sittin' with his 'air an' eyes clogged with biled vegetable, gapin' at me like somethin' struck by lightnin'.

"There was I," continued Minnie, for the edification of Miss Brown, "standin', knocked sorter silly by my own rash act, wonderin' what was goin' t' happen next, when all iv a sudding ole Mrs. Borlow begins to cackle. It was the funniest cackle you ever 'eard. Blow me, if the old girl wasn't laughin'. It sounded like snappin' twigs, but it was laughin' all right, an' she was rattlin' in her chair, makin' her bones crack somethin' awful, an' croaks she: 'Tha's right, my dear! Tha's right! That'll do Willie good, that will!' With that I scooted out the room. When I comes back with the coffee sorter shy, Borlow was sittin' carm an' placid in his chair, with a bump on his 'ead 'bout ez big round ez a grey kitten, an' sez he: "Coffee? Ah ! thank you, Minnie, thank you very much."

An' strike me up a tree, if he doesn't come into the kitchen while I'm washin' up, an' give me a shillin'."

It was only a day later that Mr. Borlow interviewed Minnie in the bathroom concerning cats. He was carrying a large, writhing, blasphemous, yellow she-cat by the tail, and was in a great state of moral unrest.

"What.did I tell you about cats, miss?" he. gasped, whirling the cat threateningly. "Didn't I say no cats ? Didn't I give you distinctly to understand I would not have rats ?"

" 'Taint my cat!" Minnie protested.

"I said no cats," persisted Willie Borlow; "and what do I find but this disgusting animal in my trunk— with six kittens!" He took a kitten out of his coat pocket, and threw it at Minnie.

"Six kittens, you harridan!" he yelled. He produced another kitten, and threw it. "How dare you encourage cats in my. trunks?" he squealed. "What do I keep you for, you red-headed she-devil?"

He threw another kitten.

By this time Minnie had come to a sort of appreciation of Mr. Borlow s great need. She replied with a lump of soap, which took him in the ear. Willie Borlow threw another kitten, and whirled the mother cat for a grand assault ; but Minnie swabbed him in the face with the mop, rammed him to the floor, and gave him three, to go on with. In the excitenent the cat escaped.

"Dear me," said Willie Borlow, sitting with lis back to the door, and rubbing his huits. "Dear me, this is very Home-like.''

"Home-like?" murmured Minnie. "Home-like?" then she sat on the side of the bath, and laughed. "Homelike!" She had never struck anything so ridiculous in the course of her long public service.

The old woman hobbled into the kitchen that afternoon. "I believe you have been beating my Willie again," she cackled.

"That's ' right* Te-he-he. That's right. Don't be afraid, stand up to him. He-he-he-he. it soothes him. Tehe-he."

The ancient crone seemed quite happy.

"You see," said old Mrs. Borlow, "my poor Willie lost his dear wife five years ago, and he's never got over it. He misses her awfully. Having no one to have it out with is a terrible trial to him. But you seem to suit, my dear— you seem to suit."

"I do my best, mum."

"While Willie's poor wife was alive he used to have it out with her, and she used to hit him with the bellows. That was very soothing."

"D'yer mean t' say 'e likes it ?" queried Minnie in amazement.

"I don't know, my girl; but it's necessary to him. Willie must have it out with somebody. When I was younger he used to hive it out with me. But now I'm too old. Oh, dear! Oh, dear! now I'm too old. I always used a fish skillet. A wooden fish skillet, has a very soothing effect on my Willie. But a mop will do— a mop will do."

"Do you really say now I've got to hit Mr. Borlow about when he has them tantrums?" asked Minnie.

"He expects it. He's used to it. He s been used to it all his life. For thirty years I beat Willie when he. was too obstreperous— for thirty years his poor wife did. it. She's dead now, poor thing, and I'm too old."

"Hadn't yeh better get a man in, mum?"

"Oh, no ! Oh, dear, no, my child ! A man won't do at all. Willie must have a woman to roar at. It has always been a woman. His late wife did it very well. He can't recollect some of the beatings she gave him without weeping. He was very fond of her. Once he assaulted her with a whole dinner, from soup to fruit. He thrashed her quite severely with a boiled pullet. Then she hit him with the piano stool, and whipped him so severely with a carpet beater that he had to stay abed for three days. Don't hesitate, dearie, if he seems to be getting out of bounds. Use your mop on him."

"I'll do my best, mum."

"Do, do, and my Willie' is. not ungrateful. He will probably raise your wages."

"And 'ere I am," Minnie explained to her friend, 'Arriet Brown, "fixed in a nice easy grip, with seventeen an' a tizzie a week, where I ain't got much to do, an' where I'm expected t' deal it out good an' 'ard t'. the boss. I hit him in the weskit with a vegetable m'arrer on'y this mornin', 'cause he went ravin' over the way I done his shirts up. It's dead funny the way I knocks him about with the mop, when he gets tryin' t' kick the roof off. 'Selp me, you'd think we was married."

Minnie was really quite comfortable, with the Borlows. Sne had discovered that there -was no particular harm in Willie if he was properly handled and , severely dealt with at the right moment. He had to explode at times, and bore no ill-will when corrected after the manner practised by his late lamented wife.

"I don't miss her so much now," Willie confessed one morning after he had been driven round the garden with a yard broom, to soothe an outbreak brought on by a hole in his sock.

Miss Trigg had been with the Borlow couple for over twelve months at the time when, she took a week's holiday to go to her sister's wedding at Traralgon. When she returned she found strangers in Willie's villa, and learned,

to her great amazement, that Willie Borlow was dead. He had died suddenly the evening before, and preparations were being made for the funeral.

"You see, my girl," explained the aged mother, "he had an awful bad attack of tantrums, brought on by some burnt toast at breakfast. He had long recognised it was no use going on at a poor, useless old body like me, so he went roaring round the house, looking for someone to have it out with; but, of course, there was nobody. That was the death of my dear Willie— his having no one to have it out with. I always dreaded the moment would come. Suddenly he recollected, and cried out: 'Great heavens I made the toast myself.' And with that he fell in a fit. He never recovered. Poor Willie! Poor, poor, little Willie! He would have been alive and happy to-day if he had only had somebody to have it out with."

MINNIE was weeping when she told 'Arriet. "It on'y shows," she said, " 'ow a girl should stick to her dooty. I feel as if I'd killed him. It was me goin' away an' leavin' him with no one t' ease his feelin's on what brought on that fit."

"There, there, don't go an' carry on," said the mournful 'Arriet.

"I carn't 'elp it, 'Arriet,. Me 'eart's touched. I believe pore Willie was goin' t' ask me t' m'arry him, he was that took with my way of 'andlin' a mop."

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13: The Duchess and the Jeweller

Virginia Woolf

1882-1941

In: *A Haunted House and Other Short Stories*, 1943

OLIVER BACON lived at the top of a house overlooking the Green Park. He had a flat; chairs jutted out at the right angles— chairs covered in hide. Sofas filled the bays of the windows— sofas covered in tapestry. The windows, the three long windows, had the proper allowance of discreet net and figured satin. The mahogany sideboard bulged discreetly with the right brandies, whiskeys and liqueurs. And from the middle window he looked down upon the glossy roofs of fashionable cars packed in the narrow straits of Piccadilly. A more Central position could not be imagined. And at eight in the morning he would have his breakfast brought in on a tray by a man-servant: the man-servant would unfold his crimson dressing-gown; he would rip his letters open with his long pointed nails and would extract thick white cards of invitation upon which the engraving stood up roughly from duchesses, countesses, viscountesses and Honourable Ladies. Then he would wash; then he would eat his toast; then he would read his paper by the bright burning fire of electric coals.

"Behold Oliver," he would say, addressing himself. "You who began life in a filthy little alley, you who..." and he would look down at his legs, so shapely in their perfect trousers; at his boots; at his spats. They were all shapely, shining; cut from the best cloth by the best scissors in Savile Row. But he dismantled himself often and became again a little boy in a dark alley. He had once thought that the height of his ambition— selling stolen dogs to fashionable women in Whitechapel. And once he had been done. "Oh, Oliver," his mother had wailed. "Oh, Oliver! When will you have sense, my son?"... Then he had gone behind a counter; had sold cheap watches; then he had taken a wallet to Amsterdam...At that memory he would churckle— the old Oliver remembering the young. Yes, he had done well with the three diamonds; also there was the commission on the emerald. After that he went into the private room behind the shop in Hatton Garden; the room with the scales, the safe, the thick magnifying glasses. And then... and then... He chuckled. When he passed through the knots of jewellers in the hot evening who were discussing prices, gold mines, diamonds, reports from South Africa, one of them would lay a finger to the side of his nose and murmur, "Hum—m—m," as he passed. It was no more than a murmur; no more than a nudge on the shoulder, a finger on the nose, a buzz that ran through the cluster of jewellers in Hatton Garden on a hot afternoon— oh, many years ago now! But still Oliver felt it purring down his spine, the nudge, the murmur that meant, "Look at himyoung Oliver, the young jeweller— there he goes." Young he was then. And he dressed better

and better; and had, first a hansom cab; then a car; and first he went up to the dress circle, then down into the stalls. And he had a villa at Richmond, overlooking the river, with trellises of red roses; and Mademoiselle used to pick one every morning and stick it in his buttonhole.

"So," said Oliver Bacon, rising and stretching his legs. "So..."

And he stood beneath the picture of an old lady on the mantelpiece and raised his hands. "I have kept my word," he said, laying his hands together, palm to palm, as if he were doing homage to her. "I have won my bet." That was so; he was the richest jeweller in England; but his nose, which was long and flexible, like an elephant's trunk, seemed to say by its curious quiver at the nostrils (but it seemed as if the whole nose quivered, not only the nostrils) that he was not satisfied yet; still smelt something under the ground a little further off. Imagine a giant hog in a pasture rich with truffles; after unearthing this truffle and that, still it smells a bigger, a blacker truffle under the ground further off. So Oliver snuffed always in the rich earth of Mayfair another truffle, a blacker, a bigger further off.

Now then he straightened the pearl in his tie, cased himself in his smart blue overcoat; took his yellow gloves and his cane; and swayed as he descended the stairs and half snuffed, half sighed through his long sharp nose as he passed out into Piccadilly. For was he not still a sad man, a dissatisfied man, a man who seeks something that is hidden, though he had won his bet?

He swayed slightly as he walked, as the camel at the zoo sways from side to side when it walks along the asphalt paths laden with grocers and their wives eating from paper bags and throwing little bits of silver paper crumpled up on to the path. The camel despises the grocers; the camel is dissatisfied with its lot; the camel sees the blue lake and the fringe of palm trees in front of it. So the great jeweller, the greatest jeweller in the whole world, swung down Piccadilly, perfectly dressed, with his gloves, with his cane; but dissatisfied still, till he reached the dark little shop, that was famous in France, in Germany, in Austria, in Italy, and all over America— the dark little shop in the street off Bond Street.

As usual, he strode through the shop without speaking, though the four men, the two old men, Marshall and Spencer, and the two young men, Hammond and Wicks, stood straight and looked at him, envying him. It was only with one finger of the amber-coloured glove, waggling, that he acknowledged their presence. And he went in and shut the door of his private room behind him.

Then he unlocked the grating that barred the window. The cries of Bond Street came in; the purr of the distant traffic. The light from reflectors at the back of the shop struck upwards. One tree waved six green leaves, for it was

June. But Mademoiselle had married Mr. Pedder of the local brewery— no one stuck roses in his buttonhole now.

"So," he half sighed, half snorted, "so—"

Then he touched a spring in the wall and slowly the panelling slid open, and behind it were the steel safes, five, no, six of them, all of burnished steel. He twisted a key; unlocked one; then another. Each was lined with a pad of deep crimson velvet; in each lay jewels— bracelets, necklaces, rings, tiaras, ducal coronets; loose stones in glass shells; rubies, emeralds, pearls, diamonds. All safe, shining, cool, yet burning, eternally, with their own compressed light.

"Tears!" said Oliver, looking at the pearls.

"Heart's blood!" he said, looking at the rubies.

"Gunpowder!" he continued, rattling the diamonds so that they flashed and blazed.

"Gunpowder enough to blow Mayfair— sky high, high, high!" He threw his head back and made a sound like a horse neighing as he said it.

The telephone buzzed obsequiously in a low muted voice on his table. He shut the safe.

"In ten minutes," he said. "Not before." And he sat down at his desk and looked at the heads of the Roman emperors that were graved on his sleeve links. And again he dismantled himself and became once more the little boy playing marbles in the alley where they sell stolen dogs on Sunday. He became that wily astute little boy, with lips like wet cherries. He dabbled his fingers in ropes of tripe; he dipped them in pans of frying fish; he dodged in and out among the crowds. He was slim, lissome, with eyes like licked stones. And now— now— the hands of the clock ticked on, one two, three, four... The Duchess of Lambourne waited his pleasure; the Duchess of Lambourne, daughter of a hundred Earls. She would wait for ten minutes on a chair at the counter. She would wait his pleasure. She would wait till he was ready to see her. He watched the clock in its shagreen case. The hand moved on. With each tick the clock handed him— so it seemed— pate de foie gras, a glass of champagne, another of fine brandy, a cigar costing one guinea. The clock laid them on the table beside him as the ten minutes passed. Then he heard soft slow footsteps approaching; a rustle in the corridor. The door opened. Mr. Hammond flattened himself against the wall.

"Her Grace!" he announced.

And he waited there, flattened against the wall.

And Oliver, rising, could hear the rustle of the dress of the Duchess as she came down the passage. Then she loomed up, filling the door, filling the room with the aroma, the prestige, the arrogance, the pomp, the pride of all the Dukes and Duchesses swollen in one wave. And as a wave breaks, she broke, as

she sat down, spreading and splashing and falling over Oliver Bacon, the great jeweller, covering him with sparkling bright colours, green, rose, violet; and odours; and iridescences; and rays shooting from fingers, nodding from plumes, flashing from silk; for she was very large, very fat, tightly girt in pink taffeta, and past her prime. As a parasol with many flounces, as a peacock with many feathers, shuts its flounces, folds its feathers, so she subsided and shut herself as she sank down in the leather armchair.

"Good morning, Mr. Bacon," said the Duchess. And she held out her hand which came through the slit of her white glove. And Oliver bent low as he shook it. And as their hands touched the link was forged between them once more. They were friends, yet enemies; he was master, she was mistress; each cheated the other, each needed the other, each feared the other, each felt this and knew this every time they touched hands thus in the little back room with the white light outside, and the tree with its six leaves, and the sound of the street in the distance and behind them the safes.

"And to-day, Duchess— what can I do for you to-day?" said Oliver, very softly.

The Duchess opened her heart, her private heart, gaped wide. And with a sigh but no words she took from her bag a long washleather pouch— it looked like a lean yellow ferret. And from a slit in the ferret's belly she dropped pearls— ten pearls. They rolled from the slit in the ferret's belly— one, two, three, four— like the eggs of some heavenly bird.

"All's that's left me, dear Mr. Bacon," she moaned. Five, six, seven— down they rolled, down the slopes of the vast mountain sides that fell between her knees into one narrow valley— the eighth, the ninth, and the tenth. There they lay in the glow of the peach-blossom taffeta. Ten pearls.

"From the Appleby cincture," she mourned. "The last...the last of them all."

Oliver stretched out and took one of the pearls between finger and thumb. It was round, it was lustrous. But real was it, or false? Was she lying again? Did she dare?

She laid her plump padded finger across her lips. "If the Duke knew..." she whispered. "Dear Mr. Bacon, a bit of bad luck..."

Been gambling again, had she?

"That villain! That sharper!" she hissed.

The man with the chipped cheek bone? A bad 'un. And the Duke was straight as a poker; with side whiskers; would cut her off, shut her up down there if he knew— what I know, thought Oliver, and glanced at the safe.

"Araminta, Daphne, Diana," she moaned. "It's for them."

The ladies Araminta, Daphne, Diana— her daughters. He knew them; adored them. But it was Diana he loved.

"You have all my secrets," she leered. Tears slid; tears fell; tears, like diamonds, collecting powder in the ruts of her cherry blossom cheeks.

"Old friend," she murmured, "old friend."

"Old friend," he repeated, "old friend," as if he licked the words.

"How much?" he queried.

She covered the pearls with her hand.

"Twenty thousand," she whispered.

But was it real or false, the one he held in his hand? The Appleby cincture— hadn't she sold it already? He would ring for Spencer or Hammond. "Take it and test it," he would say. He stretched to the bell.

"You will come down to-morrow?" she urged, she interrupted. "The Prime Minister— His Royal Highness..." She stopped. "And Diana..." she added.

Oliver took his hand off the bell.

He looked past her, at the backs of the houses in Bond Street. But he saw, not the houses in Bond Street, but a dimpling river; and trout rising and salmon; and the Prime Minister; and himself too, in white waistcoat; and then, Diana. He looked down at the pearl in his hand. But how could he test it, in the light of the river, in the light of the eyes of Diana? But the eyes of the Duchess were on him.

"Twenty thousand," she moaned. "My honour!"

The honour of the mother of Diana! He drew his cheque book towards him; he took out his pen.

"Twenty—" he wrote. Then he stopped writing. The eyes of the old woman in the picture were on him— of the old woman his mother.

"Oliver!" she warned him. "Have sense! Don't be a fool!"

"Oliver!" the Duchess entreated— it was "Oliver" now, not "Mr. Bacon." "You'll come for a long weekend?"

Alone in the woods with Diana! Riding alone in the woods with Diana!

"Thousand," he wrote, and signed it.

"Here you are," he said.

And there opened all the flounces of the parasol, all the plumes of the peacock, the radiance of the wave, the swords and spears of Agincourt, as she rose from her chair. And the two old men and the two young men, Spencer and Marshall, Wicks and Hammond, flattened themselves behind the counter envying him as he led her through the shop to the door. And he waggled his yellow glove in their faces, and she held her honour— a Cheque for twenty thousand pounds with his signature— quite firmly in her hands.

"Are they false or are they real?" asked Oliver, shutting his private door. There they were, ten pearls on the blotting-paper on the table. He took them to the window. He held them under his lens to the light...This, then, was the

truffle he had routed out of the earth! Rotten at the centre— rotten at the core!

"Forgive me, oh, my mother!" he sighed, raising his hand as if he asked pardon of the old woman in the picture. And again he was a little boy in the alley where they sold dogs on Sunday.

"For," he murmured, laying the palms of his hands together, "it is to be a long week-end."

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14: Long Odds

H. Rider Haggard

1856–1925

Macmillan's Magazine, Feb 1886

THE STORY which is narrated in the following pages came to me from the lips of my old friend Allan Quatermain, or Hunter Quatermain, as we used to call him in South Africa. He told it to me one evening when I was stopping with him at the place he bought in Yorkshire. Shortly after that, the death of his only son so unsettled him that he immediately left England, accompanied by two companions, his old fellow-voyagers, Sir Henry Curtis and Captain Good, and has now utterly vanished into the dark heart of Africa. He is persuaded that a white people, of which he has heard rumours all his life, exists somewhere on the highlands in the vast, still unexplored interior, and his great ambition is to find them before he dies. This is the wild quest upon which he and his companions have departed, and from which I shrewdly suspect they never will return. One letter only have I received from the old gentleman, dated from a mission station high up the Tana, a river on the east coast, about three hundred miles north of Zanzibar. In it he says they have gone through many hardships and adventures, but are alive and well, and have found traces which go far towards making him hope that the results of their wild quest may be a "magnificent and unexampled discovery." I greatly fear, however, that all he has discovered is death; for this letter came a long while ago, and nobody has heard a single word of the party since. They have totally vanished.

It was on the last evening of my stay at his house that he told the ensuing story to me and Captain Good, who was dining with him. He had eaten his dinner and drunk two or three glasses of old port, just to help Good and myself to the end of the second bottle. It was an unusual thing for him to do, for he was a most abstemious man, having conceived, as he used to say, a great horror of drink from observing its effects upon the class of men— hunters, transport riders, and others— amongst whom he had passed so many years of his life. Consequently the good wine took more effect on him that it would have done on most men, sending a little flush into his wrinkled cheeks, and making him talk more freely than usual.

Dear old man! I can see him now, as he went limping up and down the vestibule, with his grey hair sticking up in scrubbing-brush fashion, his shrivelled yellow face, and his large dark eyes, that were as keen as any hawk's, and yet soft as a buck's. The whole room was hung with trophies of his numerous hunting expeditions, and he had some story about every one of them, if only he could be got to tell them. Generally he would not, for he was

not very fond of narrating his own adventures, but to-night the port wine made him more communicative.

"Ah, you brute!" he said, stopping beneath an unusually large skull of a lion, which was fixed just over the mantelpiece, beneath a long row of guns, its jaws distended to their utmost width. "Ah, you brute! you have given me a lot of trouble for the last dozen years, and will, I suppose, to my dying day."

"Tell us the yarn, Quatermain," said Good. "You have often promised to tell me, and you never have."

"You had better not ask me to," he answered, "for it is a longish one."

"All right," I said, "the evening is young, and there is some more port."

Thus adjured, he filled his pipe from a jar of coarse-cut Boer tobacco that was always standing on the mantelpiece, and still walking up and down the room, began—

"IT WAS, I think, in the March of '69 that I was up in Sikukuni's country. It was just after old Sequati's time, and Sikukuni had got into power— I forget how. Anyway, I was there. I had heard that the Bapedi people had brought down an enormous quantity of ivory from the interior, and so I started with a waggon-load of goods, and came straight away from Middelburg to try and trade some of it. It was a risky thing to go into the country so early, on account of the fever; but I knew that there were one or two others after that lot of ivory, so I determined to have a try for it, and take my chance of fever. I had become so tough from continual knocking about that I did not set it down at much.

"Well, I got on all right for a while. It is a wonderfully beautiful piece of bush veldt, with great ranges of mountains running through it, and round granite koppies starting up here and there, looking out like sentinels over the rolling waste of bush. But it is very hot— hot as a stew-pan— and when I was there that March, which, of course, is autumn in this part of Africa, the whole place reeked of fever. Every morning, as I trekked along down by the Oliphant River, I used to creep from the waggon at dawn and look out. But there was no river to be seen— only a long line of billows of what looked like the finest cotton wool tossed up lightly with a pitchfork. It was the fever mist. Out from among the scrub, too, came little spirals of vapour, as though there were hundreds of tiny fires alight in it— reek rising from thousands of tons of rotting vegetation. It was a beautiful place, but the beauty was the beauty of death; and all those lines and blots of vapour wrote one great word across the surface of the country, and that word was 'fever.'

"It was a dreadful year of illness that. I came, I remember, to one little kraal of Knobnoses, and went up to it to see if I could get some *maas*, or curdled

butter-milk, and a few mealies. As I drew near I was struck with the silence of the place. No children began to chatter, and no dogs barked. Nor could I see any native sheep or cattle. The place, though it had evidently been recently inhabited, was as still as the bush round it, and some guinea fowl got up out of the prickly pear bushes right at the kraal gate. I remember that I hesitated a little before going in, there was such an air of desolation about the spot. Nature never looks desolate when man has not yet laid his hand upon her breast; she is only lonely. But when man has been, and has passed away, then she looks desolate.

"Well, I passed into the kraal, and went up to the principal hut. In front of the hut was something with an old sheep-skin *kaross* thrown over it. I stooped down and drew off the rug, and then shrank back amazed, for under it was the body of a young woman recently dead. For a moment I thought of turning back, but my curiosity overcame me; so going past the dead woman I went down on my hands and knees and crept into the hut. It was so dark that I could not see anything, though I could smell a great deal, so I lit a match. It was a 'tandstickor' match, and burnt slowly and dimly, and as the light gradually increased I made out what I took to be a family of people, men, women, and children, fast asleep. Presently it burnt up brightly, and I saw that they too, five of them altogether, were quite dead. One was a baby. I dropped the match in a hurry, and was making my way from the hut as quick as I could go, when I caught sight of two bright eyes staring out of a corner. Thinking it was a wild cat, or some such animal, I redoubled my haste, when suddenly a voice near the eyes began first to mutter, and then to send up a succession of awful yells.

"Hastily I lit another match, and perceived that the eyes belonged to an old woman, wrapped up in a greasy leather garment. Taking her by the arm, I dragged her out, for she could not, or would not, come by herself, and the stench was overpowering me. Such a sight as she was— a bag of bones, covered over with black, shrivelled parchment. The only white thing about her was her wool, and she seemed to be pretty well dead except for her eyes and her voice. She thought that I was a devil come to take her, and that is why she yelled so. Well, I got her down to the waggon, and gave her a 'tot' of Cape smoke, and then, as soon as it was ready, poured about a pint of beef-tea down her throat, made from the flesh of a blue vilderbeeste I had killed the day before, and after that she brightened up wonderfully. She could talk Zulu— indeed, it turned out that she had run away from Zululand in T'Chaka's time— and she told me that all the people whom I had seen had died of fever. When they had died the other inhabitants of the kraal had taken the cattle and gone away, leaving the poor old woman, who was helpless from age and infirmity, to perish of starvation or disease, as the case might be. She had been sitting there

for three days among the bodies when I found her. I took her on to the next kraal, and gave the headman a blanket to look after her, promising him another if I found her well when I came back. I remember that he was much astonished at my parting with two blankets for the sake of such a worthless old creature. 'Why did I not leave her in the bush?' he asked. Those people carry the doctrine of the survival of the fittest to its extreme, you see.

"It was the night after I had got rid of the old woman that I made my first acquaintance with my friend yonder," and he nodded towards the skull that seemed to be grinning down at us in the shadow of the wide mantel-shelf. "I had trekked from dawn till eleven o'clock— a long trek— but I wanted to get on, and had turned the oxen out to graze, sending the voorlooper to look after them, my intention being to inspan again about six o'clock, and trek with the moon till ten. Then I got into the waggon, and had a good sleep till half-past two or so in the afternoon, when I rose and cooked some meat, and had my dinner, washing it down with a pannikin of black coffee— for it was difficult to get preserved milk in those days. Just as I had finished, and the driver, a man called Tom, was washing up the things, in comes the young scoundrel of a voorlooper driving one ox before him.

" 'Where are the other oxen?' I asked.

" 'Koos!' he said, 'Koos! the other oxen have gone away. I turned my back for a minute, and when I looked round again they were all gone except Kaptein, here, who was rubbing his back against a tree.'

"'You mean that you have been asleep, and let them stray, you villain. I will rub your back against a stick,' I answered, feeling very angry, for it was not a pleasant prospect to be stuck up in that fever trap for a week or so while we were hunting for the oxen. 'Off you go, and you too, Tom, and mind you don't come back till you have found them. They have trekked back along the Middelburg Road, and are a dozen miles off by now, I'll be bound. Now, no words; go both of you.'

"Tom, the driver, swore, and caught the lad a hearty kick, which he richly deserved, and then, having tied old Kaptein up to the disselboom with a reim, they took their assegais and sticks, and started. I would have gone too, only I knew that somebody must look after the waggon, and I did not like to leave either of the boys with it at night. I was in a very bad temper, indeed, although I was pretty well used to these sort of occurrences, and soothed myself by taking a rifle and going to kill something. For a couple of hours I poked about without seeing anything that I could get a shot at, but at last, just as I was again within seventy yards of the waggon, I put up an old Impala ram from behind a mimosa thorn. He ran straight for the waggon, and it was not till he was passing within a few feet of it that I could get a decent shot at him. Then I

pulled, and caught him half-way down the spine; over he went, dead as a door-nail, and a pretty shot it was, though I ought not to say it. This little incident put me into rather a better humour, especially as the buck had rolled over right against the after-part of the waggon, so I had only to gut him, fix a reim round his legs, and haul him up. By the time I had done this the sun was down, and the full moon was up, and a beautiful moon it was. And then there came down that wonderful hush which sometimes falls over the African bush in the early hours of the night. No beast was moving, and no bird called. Not a breath of air stirred the quiet trees, and the shadows did not even quiver, they only grew. It was very oppressive and very lonely, for there was not a sign of the cattle or the boys. I was quite thankful for the society of old Kaptein, who was lying down contentedly against the disselboom, chewing the cud with a good conscience.

"Presently, however, Kaptein began to get restless. First he snorted, then he got up and snorted again. I could not make it out, so like a fool I got down off the waggon-box to have a look round, thinking it might be the lost oxen coming.

"Next instant I regretted it, for all of a sudden I heard a roar and saw something yellow flash past me and light on poor Kaptein. Then came a bellow of agony from the ox, and a crunch as the lion put his teeth through the poor brute's neck, and I began to realize what had happened. My rifle was in the waggon, and my first thought being to get hold of it, I turned and made a bolt for it. I got my foot on the wheel and flung my body forward on to the waggon, and there I stopped as if I were frozen, and no wonder, for as I was about to spring up I heard the lion behind me, and next second I felt the brute, ay, as plainly as I can feel this table. I felt him, I say, sniffing at my left leg that was hanging down.

"My word! I did feel queer; I don't think that I ever felt so queer before. I dared not move for the life of me, and the odd thing was that I seemed to lose power over my leg, which had an insane sort of inclination to kick out of its own mere motion— just as hysterical people want to laugh when they ought to be particularly solemn. Well, the lion sniffed and sniffed, beginning at my ankle and slowly nosing away up to my thigh. I thought that he was going to get hold then, but he did not. He only growled softly, and went back to the ox. Shifting my head a little I got a full view of him. He was about the biggest lion I ever saw, and I have seen a great many, and he had a most tremendous black mane. What his teeth were like you can see— look there, pretty big ones, ain't they? Altogether he was a magnificent animal, and as I lay there sprawling on the fore-tongue of the waggon, it occurred to me that he would look uncommonly well in a cage. He stood there by the carcass of poor Kaptein, and deliberately

disembowelled him as neatly as a butcher could have done. All this while I dared not move, for he kept lifting his head and keeping an eye on me as he licked his bloody chops. When he had cleared Kaptein out he opened his mouth and roared, and I am not exaggerating when I say that the sound shook the waggon. Instantly there came back an answering roar.

"'Heavens!' I thought, 'there is his mate.'

"Hardly was the thought out of my head when I caught sight in the moonlight of the lioness bounding along through the long grass, and after her a couple of cubs about the size of mastiffs. She stopped within a few feet of my head, and stood, waved her tail, and fixed me with her glowing yellow eyes; but just as I thought that it was all over she turned and began to feed on Kaptein, and so did the cubs. There were four of them within eight feet of me, growling and quarrelling, rending and tearing, and crunching poor Kaptein's bones; and there I lay shaking with terror, and the cold perspiration pouring out of me, feeling like another Daniel come to judgment in a new sense of the phrase. Presently the cubs had eaten their fill, and began to get restless. One went round to the back of the waggon and pulled at the Impala buck that hung there, and the other came round my way and commenced the sniffing game at my leg. Indeed, he did more than that, for my trouser being hitched up a little, he began to lick the bare skin with his rough tongue. The more he licked the more he liked it, to judge from his increased vigour and the loud purring noise he made. Then I knew that the end had come, for in another second his file-like tongue would have rasped through the skin of my leg— which was luckily pretty tough— and have tasted the blood, and then there would be no chance for me. So I just lay there and thought of my sins, and prayed to the Almighty, and reflected that after all life was a very enjoyable thing.

"Then all of a sudden I heard a crashing of bushes and the shouting and whistling of men, and there were the two boys coming back with the cattle, which they had found trekking along all together. The lions lifted their heads and listened, then bounded off without a sound— and I fainted.

"The lions came back no more that night, and by the next morning my nerves had got pretty straight again; but I was full of wrath when I thought of all that I had gone through at the hands, or rather noses, of those four brutes, and of the fate of my after-ox Kaptein. He was a splendid ox, and I was very fond of him. So wroth was I that like a fool I determined to attack the whole family of them. It was worthy of a greenhorn out on his first hunting trip; but I did it nevertheless. Accordingly after breakfast, having rubbed some oil upon my leg, which was very sore from the cub's tongue, I took the driver, Tom, who did not half like the business, and having armed myself with an ordinary double No. 12 smoothbore, the first breechloader I ever had, I started. I took

the smoothbore because it shot a bullet very well; and my experience has been that a round ball from a smoothbore is quite as effective against a lion as an express bullet. The lion is soft, and not a difficult animal to finish if you hit him anywhere in the body. A buck takes far more killing.

"Well, I started, and the first thing I set to work to do was to try to discover whereabouts the brutes lay up for the day. About three hundred yards from the waggon was the crest of a rise covered with single mimosa trees, dotted about in a park-like fashion, and beyond this was a stretch of open plain running down to a dry pan, or waterhole, which covered about an acre of ground, and was densely clothed with reeds, now in the sere and yellow leaf. From the further edge of this pan the ground sloped up again to a great cleft, or nullah, which had been cut out by the action of the water, and was pretty thickly sprinkled with bush, amongst which grew some large trees, I forget of what sort.

"It at once struck me that the dry pan would be a likely place to find my friends in, as there is nothing a lion is fonder of than lying up in reeds, through which he can see things without being seen himself. Accordingly thither I went and prospected. Before I had got half-way round the pan I found the remains of a blue vilderbeeste that had evidently been killed within the last three or four days and partially devoured by lions; and from other indications about I was soon assured that if the family were not in the pan that day they spent a good deal of their spare time there. But if there, the question was how to get them out; for it was clearly impossible to think of going in after them unless one was quite determined to commit suicide. Now there was a strong wind blowing from the direction of the waggon, across the reedy pan towards the bush-clad kloof or donga, and this first gave me the idea of firing the reeds, which, as I think I told you, were pretty dry. Accordingly Tom took some matches and began starting little fires to the left, and I did the same to the right. But the reeds were still green at the bottom, and we should never have got them well alight had it not been for the wind, which grew stronger and stronger as the sun climbed higher, and forced the fire into them. At last, after half-an-hour's trouble, the flames got a hold, and began to spread out like a fan, whereupon I went round to the further side of the pan to wait for the lions, standing well out in the open, as we stood at the copse to-day where you shot the woodcock. It was a rather risky thing to do, but I used to be so sure of my shooting in those days that I did not so much as mind the risk. Scarcely had I got round when I heard the reeds parting before the onward rush of some animal. 'Now for it,' said I. On it came. I could see that it was yellow, and prepared for action, when instead of a lion out bounded a beautiful reit bok which had been lying in the shelter of the pan. It must, by the way, have been

a reit bok of a peculiarly confiding nature to lay itself down with the lion, like the lamb of prophecy, but I suppose the reeds were thick, and that it kept a long way off.

"Well, I let the reit bok go, and it went like the wind, and kept my eyes fixed upon the reeds. The fire was burning like a furnace now; the flames crackling and roaring as they bit into the reeds, sending spouts of fire twenty feet and more into the air, and making the hot air dance above it in a way that was perfectly dazzling. But the reeds were still half green, and created an enormous quantity of smoke, which came rolling towards me like a curtain, lying very low on account of the wind. Presently, above the crackling of the fire, I heard a startled roar, then another and another. So the lions were at home.

"I was beginning to get excited now, for, as you fellows know, there is nothing in experience to warm up your nerves like a lion at close quarters, unless it is a wounded buffalo; and I became still more so when I made out through the smoke that the lions were all moving about on the extreme edge of the reeds. Occasionally they would pop their heads out like rabbits from a burrow, and then, catching sight of me standing about fifty yards away, draw them back again. I knew that it must be getting pretty warm behind them, and that they could not keep the game up for long; and I was not mistaken, for suddenly all four of them broke cover together, the old black-maned lion leading by a few yards. I never saw a more splendid sight in all my hunting experience than those four lions bounding across the veldt, overshadowed by the dense pall of smoke and backed by the fiery furnace of the burning reeds.

"I reckoned that they would pass, on their way to the bushy kloof, within about five and twenty yards of me, so, taking a long breath, I got my gun well on to the lion's shoulder— the black-maned one— so as to allow for an inch or two of motion, and catch him through the heart. I was on, dead on, and my finger was just beginning to tighten on the trigger, when suddenly I went blind— a bit of reed-ash had drifted into my right eye. I danced and rubbed, and succeeded in clearing it more or less just in time to see the tail of the last lion vanishing round the bushes up the kloof.

"If ever a man was mad I was that man. It was too bad; and such a shot in the open! However, I was not going to be beaten, so I just turned and marched for the kloof. Tom, the driver, begged and implored me not to go, but though as a personal rule I never pretend to be very brave (which I am not), I was determined that I would either kill those lions or they should kill me. So I told Tom that he need not come unless he liked, but I was going; and being a plucky fellow, a Swazi by birth, he shrugged his shoulders, muttered that I was mad or bewitched, and followed doggedly in my tracks.

"We soon reached the kloof, which was about three hundred yards in length and but sparsely wooded, and then the real fun began. There might be a lion behind every bush— there certainly were four lions somewhere; the delicate question was, where. I peeped and poked and looked in every possible direction, with my heart in my mouth, and was at last rewarded by catching a glimpse of something yellow moving behind a bush. At the same moment, from another bush opposite me out burst one of the cubs and galloped back towards the burnt pan. I whipped round and let drive a snap shot that tipped him head over heels, breaking his back within two inches of the root of the tail, and there he lay helpless but glaring. Tom afterwards killed him with his assegai. I opened the breech of the gun and hurriedly pulled out the old case, which, to judge from what ensued, must, I suppose, have burst and left a portion of its fabric sticking to the barrel. At any rate, when I tried to get in the new cartridge it would only enter half-way; and— would you believe it?— this was the moment that the lioness, attracted no doubt by the outcry of her cub, chose to put in an appearance. There she stood, twenty paces or so from me, lashing her tail and looking just as wicked as it is possible to conceive. Slowly I stepped backwards, trying to push in the new case, and as I did so she moved on in little runs, dropping down after each run. The danger was imminent, and the case would not go in. At the moment I oddly enough thought of the cartridge maker, whose name I will not mention, and earnestly hoped that if the lion got *me* some condign punishment would overtake *him*. It would not go in, so I tried to pull it out. It would not come out either, and my gun was useless if I could not shut it to use the other barrel. I might as well have had no gun.

"Meanwhile I was walking backward, keeping my eye on the lioness, who was creeping forward on her belly without a sound, but lashing her tail and keeping her eye on me; and in it I saw that she was coming in a few seconds more. I dashed my wrist and the palm of my hand against the brass rim of the cartridge till the blood poured from them— look, there are the scars of it to this day!"

Here Quatermain held up his right hand to the light and showed us four or five white cicatrices just where the wrist is set into the hand.

"But it was not of the slightest use," he went on; "the cartridge would not move. I only hope that no other man will ever be put in such an awful position. The lioness gathered herself together, and I gave myself up for lost, when suddenly Tom shouted out from somewhere in my rear—

"'You are walking on to the wounded cub; turn to the right.'

"I had the sense, dazed as I was, to take the hint, and slewing round at right-angles, but still keeping my eyes on the lioness, I continued my backward walk.

"To my intense relief, with a low growl she straightened herself, turned, and bounded further up the kloof.

" 'Come on, Inkoos,' said Tom, 'let's get back to the waggon.'

" 'All right, Tom,' I answered. 'I will when I have killed those three other lions,' for by this time I was bent on shooting them as I never remember being bent on anything before or since. 'You can go if you like, or you can get up a tree.'

"He considered the position a little, and then he very wisely got up a tree. I wish that I had done the same.

"Meanwhile I had found my knife, which had an extractor in it, and succeeded after some difficulty in pulling out the cartridge which had so nearly been the cause of my death, and removing the obstruction in the barrel. It was very little thicker than a postage-stamp; certainly not thicker than a piece of writing-paper. This done, I loaded the gun, bound a handkerchief round my wrist and hand to staunch the flowing of the blood, and started on again.

"I had noticed that the lioness went into a thick green bush, or rather a cluster of bushes, growing near the water, about fifty yards higher up, for there was a little stream running down the kloof, and I walked towards this bush. When I got there, however, I could see nothing, so I took up a big stone and threw it into the bushes. I believe that it hit the other cub, for out it came with a rush, giving me a broadside shot, of which I promptly availed myself, knocking it over dead. Out, too, came the lioness like a flash of light, but quick as she went I managed to put the other bullet into her ribs, so that she rolled right over three times like a shot rabbit. I instantly got two more cartridges into the gun, and as I did so the lioness rose again and came crawling towards me on her fore-paws, roaring and groaning, and with such an expression of diabolical fury on her countenance as I have not often seen. I shot her again through the chest, and she fell over on to her side quite dead.

"That was the first and last time that I ever killed a brace of lions right and left, and, what is more, I never heard of anybody else doing it. Naturally I was considerably pleased with myself, and having again loaded up, I went on to look for the black-maned beauty who had killed Kaptein. Slowly, and with the greatest care, I proceeded up the kloof, searching every bush and tuft of grass as I went. It was wonderfully exciting work, for I never was sure from one moment to another but that he would be on me. I took comfort, however, from the reflection that a lion rarely attacks a man— rarely, I say; sometimes he does, as you will see— unless he is cornered or wounded. I must have been

nearly an hour hunting after that lion. Once I thought I saw something move in a clump of tambouki grass, but I could not be sure, and when I trod out the grass I could not find him.

"At last I worked up to the head of the kloof, which made a *cul-de-sac*. It was formed of a wall of rock about fifty feet high. Down this rock trickled a little waterfall, and in front of it, some seventy feet from its face, was a great piled-up mass of boulders, in the crevices and on the top of which grew ferns, grasses, and stunted bushes. This mass was about twenty-five feet high. The sides of the kloof here were also very steep. Well, I came to the top of the nullah and looked all round. No signs of the lion. Evidently I had either overlooked him further down, or he had escaped right away. It was very vexatious; but still three lions were not a bad bag for one gun before dinner, and I was fain to be content. Accordingly I departed back again, making my way round the isolated pillar of boulders, beginning to feel, as I did so, that I was pretty well done up with excitement and fatigue, and should be more so before I had skinned those three lions. When I had got, as nearly as I could judge, about eighteen yards past the pillar or mass of boulders, I turned to have another look round. I have a pretty sharp eye, but I could see nothing at all.

"Then, on a sudden, I saw something sufficiently alarming. On the top of the mass of boulders, opposite to me, standing out clear against the rocks beyond, was the huge black-maned lion. He had been crouching there, and now arose as though by magic. There he stood lashing his tail, just like a living reproduction of the animal on the gateway of Northumberland House that I have seen in a picture. But he did not stand long. Before I could fire— before I could do more than get the gun to my shoulder— he sprang straight up and out from the rock, and driven by the impetus of that one mighty bound came hurtling through the air towards me.

"Heavens! how grand he looked, and how awful! High into the air he flew, describing a great arch. Just as he touched the highest point of his spring I fired. I did not dare to wait, for I saw that he would clear the whole space and land right upon me. Without a sight, almost without aim, I fired, as one would fire a snap shot at a snipe. The bullet told, for I distinctly heard its thud above the rushing sound caused by the passage of the lion through the air. Next second I was swept to the ground (luckily I fell into a low, creeper-clad bush, which broke the shock) and the lion was on the top of me, and the next those great white teeth of his had met in my thigh— I heard them grate against the bone. I yelled out in agony, for I did not feel in the least benumbed and happy, like Dr. Livingstone— who, by the way, I knew very well— and gave myself up for dead. But suddenly, as I did so, the lion's grip on my thigh loosened, and he

stood over me, swaying to and fro, his huge mouth, from which the blood was gushing, wide open. Then he roared, and the sound shook the rocks.

"To and fro he swung, and suddenly the great head dropped on me, knocking all the breath from my body, and he was dead. My bullet had entered in the centre of his chest and passed out on the right side of the spine about half-way down the back.

"The pain of my wound kept me from fainting, and as soon as I got my breath I managed to drag myself from under him. Thank heavens, his great teeth had not crushed my thigh-bone; but I was losing a great deal of blood, and had it not been for the timely arrival of Tom, with whose aid I loosed the handkerchief from my wrist and tied it round my leg, twisting it tight with a stick, I think that I should have bled to death.

"Well, it was a just reward for my folly in trying to tackle a family of lions single-handed. The odds were too long. I have been lame ever since, and shall be to my dying day; in the month of March the wound always troubles me a great deal, and every three years it breaks out raw.

"I need scarcely add that I never traded the lot of ivory at Sikukuni's. Another man got it— a German— and made five hundred pounds out of it after paying expenses. I spent the month on the broad of my back, and was a cripple for six months after that. And now I've told you the yarn, so I will have a drop of Hollands and go to bed. Good-night to you all, good-night!"

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15: The Minister's Black Veil

Nathaniel Hawthorne

1804-1864

The Token and Atlantic Souvenir, 1835

THE SEXTON stood in the porch of Milford meeting-house, pulling busily at the bell-rope. The old people of the village came stooping along the street. Children, with bright faces, tripped merrily beside their parents, or mimicked a graver gait, in the conscious dignity of their Sunday clothes. Spruce bachelors looked sidelong at the pretty maidens, and fancied that the Sabbath sunshine made them prettier than on week days. When the throng had mostly streamed into the porch, the sexton began to toll the bell, keeping his eye on the Reverend Mr. Hooper's door. The first glimpse of the clergyman's figure was the signal for the bell to cease its summons.

"But what has good Parson Hooper got upon his face?" cried the sexton in astonishment.

All within hearing immediately turned about, and beheld the semblance of Mr. Hooper, pacing slowly his meditative way towards the meetinghouse. With one accord they started, expressing more wonder than if some strange minister were coming to dust the cushions of Mr. Hooper's pulpit.

"Are you sure it is our parson?" inquired Goodman Gray of the sexton.

"Of a certainty it is good Mr. Hooper," replied the sexton. "He was to have exchanged pulpits with Parson Shute, of Westbury; but Parson Shute sent to excuse himself yesterday, being to preach a funeral sermon."

The cause of so much amazement may appear sufficiently slight. Mr. Hooper, a gentlemanly person, of about thirty, though still a bachelor, was dressed with due clerical neatness, as if a careful wife had starched his band, and brushed the weekly dust from his Sunday's garb. There was but one thing remarkable in his appearance. Swathed about his forehead, and hanging down over his face, so low as to be shaken by his breath, Mr. Hooper had on a black veil. On a nearer view it seemed to consist of two folds of crape, which entirely concealed his features, except the mouth and chin, but probably did not intercept his sight, further than to give a darkened aspect to all living and inanimate things. With this gloomy shade before him, good Mr. Hooper walked onward, at a slow and quiet pace, stooping somewhat, and looking on the ground, as is customary with abstracted men, yet nodding kindly to those of his parishioners who still waited on the meeting-house steps. But so wonder-struck were they that his greeting hardly met with a return.

"I can't really feel as if good Mr. Hooper's face was behind that piece of crape," said the sexton.

"I don't like it," muttered an old woman, as she hobbled into the meeting-house. "He has changed himself into something awful, only by hiding his face."

"Our parson has gone mad!" cried Goodman Gray, following him across the threshold.

A rumor of some unaccountable phenomenon had preceded Mr. Hooper into the meeting-house, and set all the congregation astir. Few could refrain from twisting their heads towards the door; many stood upright, and turned directly about; while several little boys clambered upon the seats, and came down again with a terrible racket. There was a general bustle, a rustling of the women's gowns and shuffling of the men's feet, greatly at variance with that hushed repose which should attend the entrance of the minister. But Mr. Hooper appeared not to notice the perturbation of his people. He entered with an almost noiseless step, bent his head mildly to the pews on each side, and bowed as he passed his oldest parishioner, a white-haired great grandsire, who occupied an arm-chair in the centre of the aisle. It was strange to observe how slowly this venerable man became conscious of something singular in the appearance of his pastor. He seemed not fully to partake of the prevailing wonder, till Mr. Hooper had ascended the stairs, and showed himself in the pulpit, face to face with his congregation, except for the black veil. That mysterious emblem was never once withdrawn. It shook with his measured breath, as he gave out the psalm; it threw its obscurity between him and the holy page, as he read the Scriptures; and while he prayed, the veil lay heavily on his uplifted countenance. Did he seek to hide it from the dread Being whom he was addressing?

Such was the effect of this simple piece of crape, that more than one woman of delicate nerves was forced to leave the meeting-house. Yet perhaps the pale-faced congregation was almost as fearful a sight to the minister, as his black veil to them.

Mr. Hooper had the reputation of a good preacher, but not an energetic one: he strove to win his people heavenward by mild, persuasive influences, rather than to drive them thither by the thunders of the Word. The sermon which he now delivered was marked by the same characteristics of style and manner as the general series of his pulpit oratory. But there was something, either in the sentiment of the discourse itself, or in the imagination of the auditors, which made it greatly the most powerful effort that they had ever heard from their pastor's lips. It was tinged, rather more darkly than usual, with the gentle gloom of Mr. Hooper's temperament. The subject had reference to secret sin, and those sad mysteries which we hide from our nearest and dearest, and would fain conceal from our own consciousness, even forgetting that the Omniscient can detect them. A subtle power was

breathed into his words. Each member of the congregation, the most innocent girl, and the man of hardened breast, felt as if the preacher had crept upon them, behind his awful veil, and discovered their hoarded iniquity of deed or thought. Many spread their clasped hands on their bosoms. There was nothing terrible in what Mr. Hooper said, at least, no violence; and yet, with every tremor of his melancholy voice, the hearers quaked. An unsought pathos came hand in hand with awe. So sensible were the audience of some unwonted attribute in their minister, that they longed for a breath of wind to blow aside the veil, almost believing that a stranger's visage would be discovered, though the form, gesture, and voice were those of Mr. Hooper.

At the close of the services, the people hurried out with indecorous confusion, eager to communicate their pent-up amazement, and conscious of lighter spirits the moment they lost sight of the black veil. Some gathered in little circles, huddled closely together, with their mouths all whispering in the centre; some went homeward alone, wrapt in silent meditation; some talked loudly, and profaned the Sabbath day with ostentatious laughter. A few shook their sagacious heads, intimating that they could penetrate the mystery; while one or two affirmed that there was no mystery at all, but only that Mr. Hooper's eyes were so weakened by the midnight lamp, as to require a shade. After a brief interval, forth came good Mr. Hooper also, in the rear of his flock. Turning his veiled face from one group to another, he paid due reverence to the hoary heads, saluted the middle aged with kind dignity as their friend and spiritual guide, greeted the young with mingled authority and love, and laid his hands on the little children's heads to bless them. Such was always his custom on the Sabbath day. Strange and bewildered looks repaid him for his courtesy. None, as on former occasions, aspired to the honor of walking by their pastor's side. Old Squire Saunders, doubtless by an accidental lapse of memory, neglected to invite Mr. Hooper to his table, where the good clergyman had been wont to bless the food, almost every Sunday since his settlement. He returned, therefore, to the parsonage, and, at the moment of closing the door, was observed to look back upon the people, all of whom had their eyes fixed upon the minister. A sad smile gleamed faintly from beneath the black veil, and flickered about his mouth, glimmering as he disappeared.

"How strange," said a lady, "that a simple black veil, such as any woman might wear on her bonnet, should become such a terrible thing on Mr. Hooper's face!"

"Something must surely be amiss with Mr. Hooper's intellects," observed her husband, the physician of the village. "But the strangest part of the affair is the effect of this vagary, even on a sober-minded man like myself. The black

veil, though it covers only our pastor's face, throws its influence over his whole person, and makes him ghostlike from head to foot. Do you not feel it so?"

"Truly do I," replied the lady; "and I would not be alone with him for the world. I wonder he is not afraid to be alone with himself!"

"Men sometimes are so," said her husband.

The afternoon service was attended with similar circumstances. At its conclusion, the bell tolled for the funeral of a young lady. The relatives and friends were assembled in the house, and the more distant acquaintances stood about the door, speaking of the good qualities of the deceased, when their talk was interrupted by the appearance of Mr. Hooper, still covered with his black veil. It was now an appropriate emblem. The clergyman stepped into the room where the corpse was laid, and bent over the coffin, to take a last farewell of his deceased parishioner. As he stooped, the veil hung straight down from his forehead, so that, if her eyelids had not been closed forever, the dead maiden might have seen his face. Could Mr. Hooper be fearful of her glance, that he so hastily caught back the black veil? A person who watched the interview between the dead and living, scrupled not to affirm, that, at the instant when the clergyman's features were disclosed, the corpse had slightly shuddered, rustling the shroud and muslin cap, though the countenance retained the composure of death. A superstitious old woman was the only witness of this prodigy. From the coffin Mr. Hooper passed into the chamber of the mourners, and thence to the head of the staircase, to make the funeral prayer. It was a tender and heart-dissolving prayer, full of sorrow, yet so imbued with celestial hopes, that the music of a heavenly harp, swept by the fingers of the dead, seemed faintly to be heard among the saddest accents of the minister. The people trembled, though they but darkly understood him when he prayed that they, and himself, and all of mortal race, might be ready, as he trusted this young maiden had been, for the dreadful hour that should snatch the veil from their faces. The bearers went heavily forth, and the mourners followed, saddening all the street, with the dead before them, and Mr. Hooper in his black veil behind.

"Why do you look back?" said one in the procession to his partner.

"I had a fancy," replied she, "that the minister and the maiden's spirit were walking hand in hand."

"And so had I, at the same moment," said the other.

That night, the handsomest couple in Milford village were to be joined in wedlock. Though reckoned a melancholy man, Mr. Hooper had a placid cheerfulness for such occasions, which often excited a sympathetic smile where livelier merriment would have been thrown away. There was no quality of his disposition which made him more beloved than this. The company at the

wedding awaited his arrival with impatience, trusting that the strange awe, which had gathered over him throughout the day, would now be dispelled. But such was not the result. When Mr. Hooper came, the first thing that their eyes rested on was the same horrible black veil, which had added deeper gloom to the funeral, and could portend nothing but evil to the wedding. Such was its immediate effect on the guests that a cloud seemed to have rolled duskily from beneath the black crape, and dimmed the light of the candles. The bridal pair stood up before the minister. But the bride's cold fingers quivered in the tremulous hand of the bridegroom, and her deathlike paleness caused a whisper that the maiden who had been buried a few hours before was come from her grave to be married.

If ever another wedding were so dismal, it was that famous one where they tolled the wedding knell. After performing the ceremony, Mr. Hooper raised a glass of wine to his lips, wishing happiness to the new-married couple in a strain of mild pleasantry that ought to have brightened the features of the guests, like a cheerful gleam from the hearth. At that instant, catching a glimpse of his figure in the looking-glass, the black veil involved his own spirit in the horror with which it overwhelmed all others. His frame shuddered, his lips grew white, he spilt the untasted wine upon the carpet, and rushed forth into the darkness. For the Earth, too, had on her Black Veil.

The next day, the whole village of Milford talked of little else than Parson Hooper's black veil. That, and the mystery concealed behind it, supplied a topic for discussion between acquaintances meeting in the street, and good women gossiping at their open windows. It was the first item of news that the tavern-keeper told to his guests. The children babbled of it on their way to school. One imitative little imp covered his face with an old black handkerchief, thereby so affrighting his playmates that the panic seized himself, and he well-nigh lost his wits by his own waggery.

It was remarkable that all of the busybodies and impertinent people in the parish, not one ventured to put the plain question to Mr. Hooper, wherefore he did this thing. Hitherto, whenever there appeared the slightest call for such interference, he had never lacked advisers, nor shown himself averse to be guided by their judgment. If he erred at all, it was by so painful a degree of self-distrust, that even the mildest censure would lead him to consider an indifferent action as a crime. Yet, though so well acquainted with this amiable weakness, no individual among his parishioners chose to make the black veil a subject of friendly remonstrance. There was a feeling of dread, neither plainly confessed nor carefully concealed, which caused each to shift the responsibility upon another, till at length it was found expedient to send a deputation of the church, in order to deal with Mr. Hooper about the mystery,

before it should grow into a scandal. Never did an embassy so ill discharge its duties. The minister received then with friendly courtesy, but became silent, after they were seated, leaving to his visitors the whole burden of introducing their important business. The topic, it might be supposed, was obvious enough. There was the black veil swathed round Mr. Hooper's forehead, and concealing every feature above his placid mouth, on which, at times, they could perceive the glimmering of a melancholy smile. But that piece of crape, to their imagination, seemed to hang down before his heart, the symbol of a fearful secret between him and them. Were the veil but cast aside, they might speak freely of it, but not till then. Thus they sat a considerable time, speechless, confused, and shrinking uneasily from Mr. Hooper's eye, which they felt to be fixed upon them with an invisible glance. Finally, the deputies returned abashed to their constituents, pronouncing the matter too weighty to be handled, except by a council of the churches, if, indeed, it might not require a general synod.

But there was one person in the village unappalled by the awe with which the black veil had impressed all beside herself. When the deputies returned without an explanation, or even venturing to demand one, she, with the calm energy of her character, determined to chase away the strange cloud that appeared to be settling round Mr. Hooper, every moment more darkly than before. As his plighted wife, it should be her privilege to know what the black veil concealed. At the minister's first visit, therefore, she entered upon the subject with a direct simplicity, which made the task easier both for him and her. After he had seated himself, she fixed her eyes steadfastly upon the veil, but could discern nothing of the dreadful gloom that had so overawed the multitude: it was but a double fold of crape, hanging down from his forehead to his mouth, and slightly stirring with his breath.

"No," said she aloud, and smiling, "there is nothing terrible in this piece of crape, except that it hides a face which I am always glad to look upon. Come, good sir, let the sun shine from behind the cloud. First lay aside your black veil: then tell me why you put it on."

Mr. Hooper's smile glimmered faintly.

"There is an hour to come," said he, "when all of us shall cast aside our veils. Take it not amiss, beloved friend, if I wear this piece of crape till then."

"Your words are a mystery, too," returned the young lady. "Take away the veil from them, at least."

"Elizabeth, I will," said he, "so far as my vow may suffer me. Know, then, this veil is a type and a symbol, and I am bound to wear it ever, both in light and darkness, in solitude and before the gaze of multitudes, and as with strangers, so with my familiar friends. No mortal eye will see it withdrawn. This

dismal shade must separate me from the world: even you, Elizabeth, can never come behind it!"

"What grievous affliction hath befallen you," she earnestly inquired, "that you should thus darken your eyes forever?"

"If it be a sign of mourning," replied Mr. Hooper, "I, perhaps, like most other mortals, have sorrows dark enough to be typified by a black veil."

"But what if the world will not believe that it is the type of an innocent sorrow?" urged Elizabeth. "Beloved and respected as you are, there may be whispers that you hide your face under the consciousness of secret sin. For the sake of your holy office, do away this scandal!"

The color rose into her cheeks as she intimated the nature of the rumors that were already abroad in the village. But Mr. Hooper's mildness did not forsake him. He even smiled again— that same sad smile, which always appeared like a faint glimmering of light, proceeding from the obscurity beneath the veil.

"If I hide my face for sorrow, there is cause enough," he merely replied; "and if I cover it for secret sin, what mortal might not do the same?"

And with this gentle, but unconquerable obstinacy did he resist all her entreaties. At length Elizabeth sat silent. For a few moments she appeared lost in thought, considering, probably, what new methods might be tried to withdraw her lover from so dark a fantasy, which, if it had no other meaning, was perhaps a symptom of mental disease. Though of a firmer character than his own, the tears rolled down her cheeks. But, in an instant, as it were, a new feeling took the place of sorrow: her eyes were fixed insensibly on the black veil, when, like a sudden twilight in the air, its terrors fell around her. She arose, and stood trembling before him.

"And do you feel it then, at last?" said he mournfully.

She made no reply, but covered her eyes with her hand, and turned to leave the room. He rushed forward and caught her arm.

"Have patience with me, Elizabeth!" cried he, passionately. "Do not desert me, though this veil must be between us here on earth. Be mine, and hereafter there shall be no veil over my face, no darkness between our souls! It is but a mortal veil— it is not for eternity! O! you know not how lonely I am, and how frightened, to be alone behind my black veil. Do not leave me in this miserable obscurity forever!"

"Lift the veil but once, and look me in the face," said she.

"Never! It cannot be!" replied Mr. Hooper.

"Then farewell!" said Elizabeth.

She withdrew her arm from his grasp, and slowly departed, pausing at the door, to give one long shuddering gaze, that seemed almost to penetrate the

mystery of the black veil. But, even amid his grief, Mr. Hooper smiled to think that only a material emblem had separated him from happiness, though the horrors, which it shadowed forth, must be drawn darkly between the fondest of lovers.

From that time no attempts were made to remove Mr. Hooper's black veil, or, by a direct appeal, to discover the secret which it was supposed to hide. By persons who claimed a superiority to popular prejudice, it was reckoned merely an eccentric whim, such as often mingles with the sober actions of men otherwise rational, and tinges them all with its own semblance of insanity. But with the multitude, good Mr. Hooper was irreparably a bugbear. He could not walk the street with any peace of mind, so conscious was he that the gentle and timid would turn aside to avoid him, and that others would make it a point of hardihood to throw themselves in his way. The impertinence of the latter class compelled him to give up his customary walk at sunset to the burial ground; for when he leaned pensively over the gate, there would always be faces behind the gravestones, peeping at his black veil. A fable went the rounds that the stare of the dead people drove him thence. It grieved him, to the very depth of his kind heart, to observe how the children fled from his approach, breaking up their merriest sports, while his melancholy figure was yet afar off. Their instinctive dread caused him to feel more strongly than aught else, that a preternatural horror was interwoven with the threads of the black crape. In truth, his own antipathy to the veil was known to be so great, that he never willingly passed before a mirror, nor stooped to drink at a still fountain, lest, in its peaceful bosom, he should be affrighted by himself. This was what gave plausibility to the whispers, that Mr. Hooper's conscience tortured him for some great crime too horrible to be entirely concealed, or otherwise than so obscurely intimated. Thus, from beneath the black veil, there rolled a cloud into the sunshine, an ambiguity of sin or sorrow, which enveloped the poor minister, so that love or sympathy could never reach him. It was said that ghost and fiend consorted with him there. With self-shudderings and outward terrors, he walked continually in its shadow, groping darkly within his own soul, or gazing through a medium that saddened the whole world. Even the lawless wind, it was believed, respected his dreadful secret, and never blew aside the veil. But still good Mr. Hooper sadly smiled at the pale visages of the worldly throng as he passed by.

Among all its bad influences, the black veil had the one desirable effect, of making its wearer a very efficient clergyman. By the aid of his mysterious emblem— for there was no other apparent cause— he became a man of awful power over souls that were in agony for sin. His converts always regarded him with a dread peculiar to themselves, affirming, though but figuratively, that,

before he brought them to celestial light, they had been with him behind the black veil. Its gloom, indeed, enabled him to sympathize with all dark affections. Dying sinners cried aloud for Mr. Hooper, and would not yield their breath till he appeared; though ever, as he stooped to whisper consolation, they shuddered at the veiled face so near their own. Such were the terrors of the black veil, even when Death had bared his visage! Strangers came long distances to attend service at his church, with the mere idle purpose of gazing at his figure, because it was forbidden them to behold his face. But many were made to quake ere they departed! Once, during Governor Belcher's administration, Mr. Hooper was appointed to preach the election sermon. Covered with his black veil, he stood before the chief magistrate, the council, and the representatives, and wrought so deep an impression, that the legislative measures of that year were characterized by all the gloom and piety of our earliest ancestral sway.

In this manner Mr. Hooper spent a long life, irreproachable in outward act, yet shrouded in dismal suspicions; kind and loving, though unloved, and dimly feared; a man apart from men, shunned in their health and joy, but ever summoned to their aid in mortal anguish. As years wore on, shedding their snows above his sable veil, he acquired a name throughout the New England churches, and they called him Father Hooper. Nearly all his parishioners, who were of mature age when he was settled, had been borne away by many a funeral: he had one congregation in the church, and a more crowded one in the churchyard; and having wrought so late into the evening, and done his work so well, it was now good Father Hooper's turn to rest.

Several persons were visible by the shaded candlelight, in the death chamber of the old clergyman. Natural connections he had none. But there was the decorously grave, though unmoved physician, seeking only to mitigate the last pangs of the patient whom he could not save. There were the deacons, and other eminently pious members of his church. There, also, was the Reverend Mr. Clark, of Westbury, a young and zealous divine, who had ridden in haste to pray by the bedside of the expiring minister. There was the nurse, no hired handmaiden of death, but one whose calm affection had endured thus long in secrecy, in solitude, amid the chill of age, and would not perish, even at the dying hour. Who, but Elizabeth! And there lay the hoary head of good Father Hooper upon the death pillow, with the black veil still swathed about his brow, and reaching down over his face, so that each more difficult gasp of his faint breath caused it to stir. All through life that piece of crape had hung between him and the world: it had separated him from cheerful brotherhood and woman's love, and kept him in that saddest of all prisons, his

own heart; and still it lay upon his face, as if to deepen the gloom of his darksome chamber, and shade him from the sunshine of eternity.

For some time previous, his mind had been confused, wavering doubtfully between the past and the present, and hovering forward, as it were, at intervals, into the indistinctness of the world to come. There had been feverish turns, which tossed him from side to side, and wore away what little strength he had. But in his most convulsive struggles, and in the wildest vagaries of his intellect, when no other thought retained its sober influence, he still showed an awful solicitude lest the black veil should slip aside. Even if his bewildered soul could have forgotten, there was a faithful woman at this pillow, who, with averted eyes, would have covered that aged face, which she had last beheld in the comeliness of manhood. At length the death-stricken old man lay quietly in the torpor of mental and bodily exhaustion, with an imperceptible pulse, and breath that grew fainter and fainter, except when a long, deep, and irregular inspiration seemed to prelude the flight of his spirit.

The minister of Westbury approached the bedside.

"Venerable Father Hooper," said he, "the moment of your release is at hand. Are you ready for the lifting of the veil that shuts in time from eternity?"

Father Hooper at first replied merely by a feeble motion of his head; then, apprehensive, perhaps, that his meaning might be doubted, he exerted himself to speak.

"Yea," said he, in faint accents, "my soul hath a patient weariness until that veil be lifted."

"And is it fitting," resumed the Reverend Mr. Clark, "that a man so given to prayer, of such a blameless example, holy in deed and thought, so far as mortal judgment may pronounce; is it fitting that a father in the church should leave a shadow on his memory, that may seem to blacken a life so pure? I pray you, my venerable brother, let not this thing be! Suffer us to be gladdened by your triumphant aspect as you go to your reward. Before the veil of eternity be lifted, let me cast aside this black veil from your face!"

And thus speaking, the Reverend Mr. Clark bent forward to reveal the mystery of so many years. But, exerting a sudden energy, that made all the beholders stand aghast, Father Hooper snatched both his hands from beneath the bedclothes, and pressed them strongly on the black veil, resolute to struggle, if the minister of Westbury would contend with a dying man.

"Never!" cried the veiled clergyman. "On earth, never!"

"Dark old man!" exclaimed the affrighted minister, "with what horrible crime upon your soul are you now passing to the judgment?"

Father Hooper's breath heaved; it rattled in his throat; but, with a mighty effort, grasping forward with his hands, he caught hold of life, and held it back

till he should speak. He even raised himself in bed; and there he sat, shivering with the arms of death around him, while the black veil hung down, awful, at that last moment, in the gathered terrors of a lifetime. And yet the faint, sad smile, so often there, now seemed to glimmer from its obscurity, and linger on Father Hooper's lips.

"Why do you tremble at me alone?" cried he, turning his veiled face round the circle of pale spectators. "Tremble also at each other! Have men avoided me, and women shown no pity, and children screamed and fled, only for my black veil? What, but the mystery which it obscurely typifies, has made this piece of crape so awful? When the friend shows his inmost heart to his friend; the lover to his best beloved; when man does not vainly shrink from the eye of his Creator, loathsomely treasuring up the secret of his sin; then deem me a monster, for the symbol beneath which I have lived, and die! I look around me, and, lo! on every visage a Black Veil!"

While his auditors shrank from one another, in mutual affright, Father Hooper fell back upon his pillow, a veiled corpse, with a faint smile lingering on the lips. Still veiled, they laid him in his coffin, and a veiled corpse they bore him to the grave. The grass of many years has sprung up and withered on that grave, the burial stone is moss-grown, and good Mr. Hooper's face is dust; but awful is still the thought that it mouldered beneath the Black Veil!

16: Brown's Heterogeneous Hatchery

Ellis Proctor Holmes

1860-1924

The Blue Book Magazine April 1911

A Ben Brown story. The author, a dentist, wrote a dozen or so short stories and at least one novel.

BEN stood on the station platform waiting for a train.

"A message for you, Ben, from the freight superintendent," said the operator.

Brown took the telegram and read:

U-P. box-car, 1776, probably sidetracked between Deerfield and Boston. Contents, incubators. Setter & Hatch, St. Louis, consignees. Billed to Setter & Hatch, Poultry Show, Mechanics Building, Boston.

Incubators are filled with eggs timed to hatch during week of show, which begins to-day.

Find car, keep heated, and hurry to destination. Care for contents to the limit of your ability and wire this office freely for needed instructions.

P. Delano, Sup. Freight."

"Now wouldn't that give you the chilblains!" exclaimed Brown, as he finished reading. "Chasing up and down the road, this weather, looking for a carload of incubators!

"What in Tophet do they have poultry shows in January for, anyhow?" he continued. "Here 'tis cold 'nough to freeze the pinfeathers off a Brahma rooster, and they expect me to locate that bloomin' car and stay with it till it reaches Boston."

"What you kicking for? You're no Brahma rooster, Ben!" said the operator.

"You're jest right, I ain't," replied Brown. "And I guess I ain't likely to do any roostin', either, for a spell. I'll telt you one thing," he added, as he swung aboard the down train, "being a tracer for this railroad ain't' any snap."

As Brown had intimated, his position with the railroad may have been no sinecure, but he was the right man in the right place, notwithstanding. With his accustomed alertness he started out to run down car No. 1776 and found it, presently, on a side track opposite a brick-yard, a good quarter of a mile from the station at Kingston.

The brick-yard people had applied for an "empty," and the freight had evidently cut out the wrong car, and shunted it onto their track.

Brown lost no time in getting into the car and making an examination of its contents. There were twenty incubators, at least, and half-a-dozen brooders.

He could scarcely believe his ears, but he fancied he heard the peeping of chickens; peering in one of the incubators he saw several puffy little creatures emerging from the shell.

"By lightning!" he exclaimed, throwing off his overcoat, "they've begun to hatch! A dozen of 'em in sight and more coming every minute!"

He hurriedly read the directions affixed to an incubator and found that its thermometer did not register sufficient heat. Then he examined the lamps and saw that the oil was nearly consumed.

"This is a pretty mess," he grumbled. "Wonder how the super' thinks I'm going to keep this car heated, say nothing about 'tending to all these lamps!"

Brown stepped-to the door and looked out. There was nobody in sight. Not stopping for his overcoat he jumped to the ground and made for the railroad station.

"Say, Macarty," he exclaimed, bursting in upon the agent. "I've found that bloomin' carload of incubators they're hatchin', and there'll be more'n a million chicks yippin' for feed before night."

"Well, look here, man, you've got to stop it," said Macarty.

"Stop it!" echoed Brown. "What the dickens do you mean by that?"

"Why didn't the consignee ship them chickens as aigs?" asked Macarty. "And by the same token ain't' the company liable for aigs, which be one-quarter the price of baby chicks?"

"Sure Mike, I never thought of that," said Brown.

"Well, now, you've gotter think wance in a while, if ye want to hold down your job," returned Macarty. "S'pose, now, them aigs hatch and the chickens die on your hands—what does the consignee do? Le' me tell ye:

" 'Good-mornin', Setter, says Hatch, 'heard from that carload of incubators yet?'

" 'I have that,' says Hatch, lookin' glum. 'Found in a brick-yard and the aigs is chickens.'

" 'Be they livin' or dead?' says Setter, anxious-like.

" 'Dead,' says Hatch, heavin' a sigh. 'Frizen stiff—every one.'

" 'Hoo-ray! says Setter, reachin' for a pen. "We've got the railroad goin' and comin'. We'll put in a bill for loss on the aigs and soak 'em for damages on the chickens.'

"So it's me advice to ye, Brown, lave the cold air come in and stop them aigs right where they be, or turn on the heat and cook 'em good and hard."

"Guess I'll have to wire the super for instructions," said Brown. Then he wrote:

Mr. P. DELANO, Sup. Freight,

Have located car 1776 at Kingston, one-fourth mile out on siding. Eggs are beginning to hatch. If I shut off the heat, railroad will be liable for spoiled eggs; if eggs hatch and chickens die wont we have to stand for chickens? What will I do? B. Brown.

Brown sent in his message and then got busy. He loaded an old oil stove that Macarty had found for him, and a supply of oil onto a hand car; he procured some chicken feed and some rations for himself at a near-by grocery store; then he returned to his car. Here he set up his stove and put in two solid hours filling and trimming the incubator lamps.

He dreaded a too close investigation of the incubators, but he could hear the chickens peeping all about him, and it reminded him that he must get back to the station for the superintendent's answer to his message.

As he left the car he was surprised to find a hard snowstorm in progress. Nearly an inch of snow had gathered since he entered the car. He hurried to the station.

"Here's your answer," said Macarty, handing the message to Brown as he entered.

B. Brown.

Waiting at Kingston. Have wired Sec. of Agriculture to know if liable for eggs or chicks, Wait. DELANO.

"Well," said Brown, as he finished reading. "Guess I'll get back to the chicken coop. Will come up again later."

"Wait a minute— wait a minute, now," said Macarty. "I have anither wan."

"Well, why in Tophet didn't you hand it over before?" asked Brown.

"For the love of Mike— tell me how could I," Macarty exclaimed, "with the tail-end av it still on the wire. But here's the last word," he added, "and now ye have it."

Brown took it and read:

Secretary absent. His assistant reports that, considering our delay in delivering incubators, railroad may be held liable for chickens if eggs do not hatch. Therefore keep incubators running at any cost. DELANO.

"Well, what do ye think of that, now?" asked Macarty.

"I think I'm up against it— that's what I think," Brown replied. "As I asked the super' suppose they hatch and the chickens die on my hands— what's going to happen then?"

"Its as plain as the nose on my face," said Macarty. "Them Setter & Hatch fellers has got the railroad in the hole, whichever way it goes. Turn off the heat

and ye're liable for sp'iled aigs; cook 'em too much and they'll soak ye for roast chicken; hatch 'em out and they'll charge ye for rint of the machines."

"Well, so long!" said Brown, starting for the door. "And mind, Macarty, don't you fail to have the night freight pick up my car— not on your life!"

"I will that!" replied Macarty.

Brown trudged back to his car through the fast gathering snow.

"Suppose, now, this storm makes the freight late," he soliloquized, "and they refuse to back in here and pull me out —great Scott! But there's Macarty! They won't get by Macarty."

He reached the car at last, and climbed aboard. The darkness fell quickly. He lighted up and began to take an inventory of his stock.

The first incubator that he opened contained sixty or seventy chicks— some too weak to stand, and others hopping about over empty shells— and eggs that had failed to hatch.

From incubator to incubator he moved, making notes and putting figures to paper as he went, until he had examined three-fourths of them. Then he sat down on a brooder, near his oil stove, and made a more systematic copy of his memoranda.

"Incubators one to seven," he wrote, "about five hundred chickens. Eight to thirteen, nothing doing; fourteen, seventy-six ducks; fifteen, nineteen turkeys and more on the way.'

There was a box of advertising circulars and poultry journals near at hand, from which he selected a pamphlet, at random, and read it while he ate a lunch of crackers and cheese.

From his perusal of this poultry literature he learned (among other things) that chicks need not be fed until they are twenty-four hours old— which relieved his mind greatly— and that young turkeys, which were very fond of grasshoppers, should be prevented from getting their feet and legs wet.

Becoming sleepy after a time, he looked at his watch. It was nearly eleven o'clock. The storm was raging and he could hear the snow beating against the car as it swirled and drifted about it.

"Well, I'm in for it— blessed if I ain't'!" he said to himself. "The freight wont take me on to-night, that's dead sure! So here goes Brown— to roost with the biddies!"

The night, like all other nights, came to an end; while the storm, like other storms, seemed to increase with the light of the second day of its duration.

Brown prepared and ate a meager breakfast and then took up his task of caring for the chickens; first he transferred them to the brooders, and then fed and watered them to the best of his ability. The number of chickens had increased materially, but that of the ducks and turkeys remained about the

same. Chickens, ducklings and turkeys shared and shared alike, one kind of feed being used for all.

These duties attended to, Brown started forth to brave the storm and the drifts, and arrived at the station puffing and blowing.

"Hello! Hello! Ye livin' picture!" shouted Macarty. "And now don't ye blame it onto me— the freight! They was four hours late and the conductor swore he'd not pull his own sick grandmother out o' that drift, and small blame to him, I say!"

"Sure! I'm not kicking!" said Brown. "Gimme a block of blanks, and don't talk. I've got to do some writing!"

At the end of ten minutes or so he handed his message to Macarty, who said as he took it:

"Go on, go on with ye! That mess of stuff! Le' me read it, ferninst." And making frequent comments as he proceeded, Marcarty read:

Mr. P. DELANO, Sup. Freight. Snowed-in at brick-yard. At last count had nine hundred chicks, eightytwo ducks, twenty-three turkeys and more coming. Send six cans of grasshoppers and rubber boots for the turkeys, There is one freak machine with padlocks and another one full of Easter eggs as big as muskmelons. Shall I pry off the padlocks or will you get keys from consignee? B. Brown.

"Well now, friend Brown, I see yer finish!" exclaimed Macarty, as he finished reading. "Mark me wor-rds— if ye don't lay out the rubbie boots and grasshoppies, likewise them Easter aigs— ye're fired! The sup'rintindent'll not stand for 'em— he couldn't see the joke !"

"Well, cut out the grasshoppers and rubber boots, then," said Brown. "But the Easter eggs ain't' any joke and you run 'em in with the rest."

Brown did not have dong to wait for the answer—which Macarty put to paper with many exclamations of surprise.

"Here ye are, me boy," he said, handing the message to Brown, "the old man himself is making jokes now." And Brown read:

We are just in receipt of telegram from Setter & Hatch, giving particulars as to contents of incubators, eighteen of which contain eggs of the hen, duck, and turkey, as you have discovered.

Of the other two incubators, which are of a different pattern and peculiar construction, the larger contains eighteen eggs of the ostrich which are very valuable. The contents of the locked one are serpents' eggs of several varieties, which, because of their novelty, were expected to create a sensation at the Poultry Show. As this incubator is securely fastened you have nothing to fear from the young serpents.

We are now in communication with the Interstate Commerce Commission relative to the proper classification of this consignment, and rates for the same. Traffic is tied up, generally, by storm, but will send crew to clear track as soon as possible. P. DELANO, Sup. of Freight.

As Brown finished reading he looked up and saw Macarty staring at him, with a broad grin on his face.

"How about them sarpents an' ostriches?" he asked. "Is the super jokin', or what?"

"Is he joking! I guess nit!" exclaimed Brown. "They're all there— the whole, bloomin' shootin' match! Chickens, turkeys, ostriches, dodoes, sea-serpents and canary birds.

"I'm running the managerie," he added, "and if you'll come down I'll give you a free ticket to the show."

Macarty declined with thanks, and Brown waded back to his charge. It was still snowing, but the weather had moderated somewhat. He went directly to the padlocked incubator and made sure that there was no chance for anything to escape from within.

There was an almost deafening chorus of peeping chickens and Brown threw in a supply of feed all around to keep them quiet. Then he cautiously pulled open the drawer of the ostrich incubator and grinned with delight as he beheld some half dozen of them clear of the shell. They were as large as full-grown chickens, and no sooner was the drawer open than one of them made a peck at Brown's teeth and struck him on the lip.

"Great Caesar's ghost!" he exclaimed, jumping back. "I'll wire the super for a baseball mask and bat if I'm going to stay with this bunch of hummingbirds!"

"What'll I give 'em to eat?" he asked himself. "I'll ask the super; there's no hurry. If a chicken can go twenty-four hours without eating, these fellows are big enough to go a week."

He transferred the ostriches to a large brooder, evidently intended for them, and spent the remainder of the day in attending to the various needs of his steadily increasing family.

In knocking about among the incubators he accidentally broke a glass panel in the "freak" incubator; this gave him no little uneasiness, but after a careful examination, getting neither sight nor sound of anything within it, he stuffed a rag into the aperture and dismissed the matter from his mind.

He had just made things ready for the night when there came a call from without.

Brown hurriedly opened the car door and beheld Macarty, waist deep in a drift.

"Hello! Come in, come in!" exclaimed Brown.

"Gimme yer hand and I will" said Macarty. "How be the happy family? Has the snakes swallered the doo-doos yet, or do the ostriches be after eatin' the snakes?"

"Nothing doing in snakes," Brown replied. "I'm mighty glad to see you, but didn't you know it's bed-time ?"

"Sure, and I do that," replied Macarty. " 'But it's lonesome he'll be,' I says to myself, 'and I'll go down and have a bit av a smoke-talk with 'im."

So they filled their pipes and smoked and smoked and refilled their pipes until at last, Macarty announced that he must be going.

"Oh, not yet," said Brown. "Drop down on my bunk there till the freight comes along."

Macarty yawned. "It do look good to me," he said, stretching himself out on a pile of excelsior and wrapping paper in one corner of the car; in five minutes he was in the land of dreams.

Brown sat down, leaned against a packing case and dozed peacefully. Their lantern burned low, flickered and went out.

They had not slept long, when Brown was brought to a realizing sense of his surroundings by a sort of stage whisper from Macarty.

"Say, Brown, be ye awake?" he asked,

"Sure!" said Brown.

"Well, then, will ye tell me wan thing?" asked Macarty. "Did ye swipe the buttons off me vest?"

"Did I what!" exclaimed Brown, getting to his feet.

"Did ye— mother of Mike, there goes me collar-button!" exclaimed Macarty. "Strike a light! Strike a light! The doodoos is loose and eatin' the shirt off me back!"

Brown tried to light the lantern but it wouldn't burn.

Macarty was executing a war dance and striking out right and left in the dark, calling upon the saints for protection from his unseen enemies.

All at once he let out a yell that chilled Brown to his marrow.

"Murder! Murder! Och, it's dead I am! For the love av Hiven, man, make a light!"

Brown grabbed a lamp from a brooder and hurried to Macarty. He was sitting on the floor, surrounded by half-a-dozen young ostriches who were eagerly looking him over for more buttons.

"Never mind the doo-doo birds," said Macarty. "I don't mind them, though 'tis thieves and robbers they be, but me pockets is full av snakes! Och!" he cried, grasping his leg just below the knee, "there's wan crawlin' up me trousers now, and anither wan under me vest," (making a grab for it) "an' he's got me— I feel the sharp tathe av 'im! It's dead I am an' no help fer it!"

"Forget it!" said Brown, as he took hold of Macarty and helped him to his feet. "Now shake yourself, old man."

Macarty did as directed, and sure enough, a young serpent a foot and a half in length dropped from him to the floor. He threw off his coat and vest, found the second one and sank to the floor.

"Its him— the wan that bit me. I'll not live to see the light o' day," he groaned.

"Fiddlesticks!" exclaimed Brown. "They're too young to bite. It's them brass points on your suspender buckle that you jabbed into yourself when you were jamming the snake."

"Niver," said Macarty. "I'll not take any chances— I'm a dead man! But there is a ray av hope," he added. "I have some snake-bite medicine in the left-hand corner ay me desk, under a mess av dirty cotton waste for safe keepin'. Would ye mind gettin' it— fer the sake av the wife an' childer?"

"Sure I'll get it— give me your keys," said Brown, and he was off.

After what seemed a long time to poor Macarty, Brown returned with the "medicine." He drew the cork and said, as he handed the bottle to Macarty, "smells like whiskey."

Macarty eagerly grabbed the flask and took a long draught. "Sure it tastes as good as it smells!" he said.

"Better let me hold the bottle for you," said Brown.

"Jest a minute," said Macarty. "There was two snakes, remember ; wan in me vest—he's soaked, and wan in me trousers— here's to im."

"Well, you've soaked the second one all right ; now pass it over," said Brown.

"Jest a minute," said Macarty. "There was two snakes— two in me vest, here's wan— here's two;— an' two in me trousers, here's wan— here's two; an' four altogether—here's to 'em."

"You've got 'em all drowned by this time," said Brown, but Macarty didn't take the hint.

"There was four snakes in me vest— here's wan— two— t'ree— four; an' four snakes in me trousers— here's wan— two— t'ree— four—; and eight in the bunch—-here's to 'em."

Brown reached for the flask and Macarty looked hurt.

"There was eight— doo-doo birdies in me vest— here's to 'em! An' eight snakes—"

Brown took the empty bottle from the nerveless hand of Macarty and covered him carefully with his overcoat.

"Well, friend Macarty," he said, "if you're not cured you're mighty well corned."

It was growing light as Brown left the car and hurried to the station. He sat down to the telegraph instrument and wired this message to the superintendent's office.

Had terrible night. Macarty, agent here, came down to assist me. Snakes got out, bit Macarty and he's paralyzed. Send gang of chicken feeders and two or three snake charmers. 'Think Macarty will recover. B. Brown.

Brown, hearing the whistle of a locomotive, hurried to the door and beheld a giant snow-plow approaching. In less than half an hour the side track was clear, and the belated night freight, that had followed the plow, had taken on Brown's car.

They helped Macarty out of the car and into his office and wound a wet towel about his head.

There was a call over the wire and Brown took the key.

Have no fear concerning serpent bites. Read the message. These serpents are oviparous and, therefore, non-venomous. Must be a case of nerves with Macarty.

Freight will pick up your car this morning. Accompany same to destination and report at this office on arrival.

P. DELANO, Sup. of Freight.

"So long, Macarty," said Brown. "Don't forget to lay in a new lot of snake medicine."

Macarty pressed both hands to his throbbing temples as he groaned and replied:

"The poison av them snakes do be poundin' the brains out av me head, but l'ave it go with the super— 'twas a case av narves with Macarty."

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17: Field With Five Trees

Hugh Walpole

1884-1941

The Strand Magazine, Dec 1934

I WAS ASKED not long ago, at one of those dinner-parties where people ask such questions, to describe for my fellow-guests the oddest and queerest experience of my life. When one looks back, one discovers so many queer experiences, and then at the same time one realises that most of them refuse not only description but analysis— so I suppose with this one that I am about to relate.

I went to keep an appointment— five trees barred the way, and that was all there was to it. You can believe it or not, as you please.

It happened years and years ago before the war. I am now between sixty and seventy years of age, a widower with two grown-up children, on the whole content, although I have achieved so little— on the whole tranquil, even in this frantically disturbed world. It wasn't so disturbed then.

I had been married for five years. I had no children. I was a writer of sorts, and lived in a little stone cottage half-way up the hill from the village of Grange on Derwentwater in Cumberland, where I still live.

One of the important elements of this story, if it is to be true at all, is that I shall be frank about Mary Ellen, my wife. Poor Mary! She has been dead for fifteen years, but still keeps me company, as those one has truly loved always do, however long their bodies have been dust.

I think if Mary were to appear here now and give you an account of herself as she saw herself, she would agree very much with my estimate of her, except that she never knew as I did, how grandly unselfish, how sweetly forgiving, how beautifully maternal she was. She was above all things else, long before she had any children of her own, a mother. She mothered me, who badly needed it, with a goodness, a sense of humour, and a tolerance that I've never known any other human being to equal. I loved her and she loved me. But there came a time, as there comes in every marriage, when we were dissatisfied, fools that we were. Yet she loved me dearly— especially the companionship that we had. She was a wonderful companion. She had a grand, even a splendid, sense of enjoyment. She loved little things. She was perfectly content on our small income— perfectly happy to be there in the country alone with me from one end of the year to the other. The only thing that she wanted that she hadn't got was children.

It was just a year after this strange adventure that we had our first child. We had been married, as I've said, five years— and suddenly everything went wrong. That is the queerest thing about any relationship between two human

beings, that for no reason at all everything suddenly moves out of perspective. Little personal tricks that have meant nothing for years are in a moment exasperating.

Mary had, I remember, a habit of leaving the room without shutting the door. And contrariwise, she would enter a room with a rush, banging the door behind her. Often she would look untidy; her soft, brown hair, which I had once thought the most beautiful thing in the world, would tumble about her forehead. She was not very clever about her clothes. She was strong, robust, rosy-faced, bright-eyed, clean like an apple. Sometimes, when she was happy, she would talk very loudly and with great excitement.

I, on the other hand, in those days took myself rather grimly. I was determined to become a great writer, a thing, God forgive me, that I have never managed to be. I was earning a fair income at that time with my novels and stories, but I thought that I had real genius and that one day all the world would know it. Mary, I can now see on looking back, knew very well that genius I had not and would never have. Perhaps I detected, beneath her laughing praise and encouragement, this sense of disappointment. I was at that time meticulous in my habits. I liked everything to be very neat and careful about me. In fact, I took myself altogether with an absurd seriousness. I was immature for my years and she knew it. I was always a boy to her, to the very end. Perhaps that also, without my knowing it, irritated me.

We had, however, many things in common. We were, on the whole, amazingly happy. One joy that we deeply shared was our love for this especial country. I have no wish to employ pages of description in the manner of Mr. Fitz, the famous novelist, or Mrs. Grundy, the writer about gardens, but it is important to my little story that should make it clear why Mary and I were happier here on this exact spot of ground than anywhere else in the world.

It wasn't that I didn't know other places. I've experienced the long, purple nights of Arizona— the lovely, benignant glow of the Russian white night— the tawny, boastful pride of the Pyrenees— the lakes and blossoms of Japan— the flowered valleys of Cashmere.

I know that this small square of Cumbrian and Westmorland ground can seem like a mud patch on a wet day, like a garish coloured picture postcard on a sunny afternoon in August, can shrivel up and disappear and disappoint— do all the things that its detractors charge against it. But its beauty, when it chooses to be beautiful, no other place in the world can boast of.

This country was, in effect, the one thing that at this time Mary and I shared best with one another. Everything else began to have an edge— an edge of suspicion, mistrust and danger. But at no time from the first to last did we lose our companionship in this country— and I had almost forgotten to

mention the sign and seal of the whole affair, namely, the field with the five trees.

I can see it now as I look from my library window, although it is closest and best visible from the windows of the bedroom Mary and I shared for so many years, and that I still inhabit. It is a field above Lodore on the way to Watendlath, formed like a half-moon. Its grass is, under sunlight, of the intensest green. The five trees that edge the ground are so alike that they resemble the brother Volsungs in Morris's *Sigurd*, except that they are not so tall as those splendid heroes were.

I remember saying to Mary when we first came to the cottage, that this field had eyes— or rather it was she, I think, who said that to me. 'We will never,' she said, 'be able to do anything that we are ashamed of, because that field will always know it. It is, I am sure, looking after us.' In any case, it became one of the great joys of our daily life, to awaken in the morning and see first thing that field and those trees, so beautiful, quiet, permanent and strong. We, both of us, clung to it the more when our troubles began.

These troubles were at first all on my side. Which of us does not know the times when we are irritable without reason— when shame at ourselves makes us yet more irritable— and when we strike at the persons we love most because, I suppose, they will endure our tempers the most patiently? At first I thought I was ill— that it was my liver or indigestion. Then I thought it was because my work was going badly, and here I began to complain bitterly of Mary. Whatever she said about it, my work was wrong.

Then examining myself and at heart bitterly ashamed of my unreason, I decided that I was still a young man— and was I, because I had married a good English woman, to spend the rest of my days as a kind of hermit? And one dreadful evening I broke out with all this, saying so much more than I really meant, reproaching her most unfairly for things that she had never done, accusing her of being what she was not. That evening I desperately hurt her pride. She was so seldom angry, never sulky, and very, very hard to offend. But that evening I offended her. She said very little— only at the end, quietly, 'I'm sorry. I see that you should have married someone quite different. But I can't change, however much you might wish it. I'm myself.' And she went out of the room.

It was after this that Mary made her great mistake. She invited her mother to stay with us. I don't know— I shall never know— whether she did this in a spirit of feminine revenge or whether it was simply that she thought the old lady would give her some companionship at a time when she must have been desperately lonely. Indeed, as I learned afterward, she was far more lonely and unhappy than I knew. I would say in passing that we never allow sufficiently for

the loneliness of those near to us. We are aware often enough of our own loneliness and cry out bitterly against it, but we think that we are exceptional creatures in this.

Mary knew well enough that I detested her mother, Mrs. Millicent. She knew, too, that Mrs. Millicent cordially disliked me.

Physically she was unpleasant to me because she had bobbed her hair, painted her cheeks, wore dresses too young for her, and was altogether, I thought, a silly, tiresome, scandal-mongering old horror. And I did her a great injustice, as one always does when one dislikes people too much. She was courageous, had fine qualities of independence, adored Mary, and made a brave show of what life remained to her.

She thought me idle, lazy, spoiled, and altogether unworthy of her daughter. Her hatred of Cumberland was almost fanatical.

She was a sharp old lady and very soon discovered something was wrong between us.

When mothers discover that their beloved daughters are unhappy and that sons-in-law whom they greatly dislike are responsible, they have only one ambition in life— to punish the sons-in-law! And my mother-in-law wished not only to punish me, but also Cumberland, the English countryside, and everything rustic. She made, at once, my field with the five trees a symbol of her attack.

'I really believe, Walter,' she would say, 'that you could gladly sit all day and gaze at that silly field. Why don't you buy it if you are so fond of it?'

I have no doubt but that she also attacked Mary and tried to drag her secret from her. But there was no secret. We were moving in the dark— away, away, and knew no reason why.

One night I caught her to me and said to her, 'Mary, Mary, what is it?'

'I don't know— I don't know,' she sobbed. 'You don't love me any more.'

'I do— I do,' I answered her. But as I said it I thought that I did not. I lay there, listening to the rain, and longed to escape, not only from Mary, perhaps, indeed not from Mary at all, but chiefly from myself. I think that this was the first time in my life when, poor defenceless egoist that I was, I began to wonder whether I was worth anyone's bother. But at least it was a step in the right direction! Love acts always independently of lovers. Sometimes it moves with them. Then, with a shrug of its beautiful shoulders, it moves away. 'Catch me if you can,' Love cries, and there is no way to recapture its company save to wait and be patient. But what lover ever was patient?

And then the country deserted us. After all, if you worship a place, it demands, I suppose, on your part, a certain fineness of conduct.

But we did not love the rain at that particular crisis in our lives, and oh! how old Mrs. Millicent hated it! I am sure that she thought it of my providing.

Then, as is always the way when the circumstances are ready for it, a quarrel emphasised the breach and made it appear intolerable.

Breakfast is a dangerous meal, as many writers before me have observed. It was especially dangerous for Mrs. Millicent, for she was an old lady who should never meet her fellows before midday. But there she was, as fresh as her paint and powder could make her, drinking her coffee, and thinking of her enforced, unhappy rusticity. For many a day, Mary and I each read our paper at breakfast and threw to one another little excitements from China or the latest gossip from London. Mrs. Millicent did not read a paper and, therefore, quite naturally hated that others should do so. On this especial morning I glanced at the pictures of my newspaper and then stared across at my beloved field, just now almost fraudulently green, with the five trees guarding it.

'Well,' said Mrs. Millicent, 'I've always hated that field— but at least I owe it something. It's made Walter polite at breakfast.'

And then I lost my temper. All the misery of the last weeks came out in that moment. I told the old lady all that I thought of her, all that I had ever thought of her. I blamed her for all the trouble between Mary and me. I said that I could not work while she was in the house. I said— oh, what matters now, after all these years, the things that I said!

Mrs. Millicent rose from her seat and said, 'Enough! Mary, I leave this house.' And Mary, rising also, said, 'Mother, if you go I go too.'

And the field looked across at me and veiled its green with shadow and once again the rain began to fall. Of course, the trouble was for the moment calmed. Later in the day I apologised.

That night Mary said, 'Walter, what has come to you? What is it? Tell me and I will help. I must help or we're lost— both of us.' Which sounds melodramatic for Mary, but the word 'lost' was true. We were, indeed, close to some fatal and irreparable separation.

On the following day, so pat that it seemed as though fate were taking a maliciously personal interest in my small affairs, I met a lady. Here, even after all these years, I write with hesitation. Pearl Richardson is dead. I've not seen her for many, many years. I feel now that I never knew her, never had any real contact with her, that she was a shadow from a world filled with shadows, and yet at this moment as I sit here, she is more vivid and actual to me than men who have been my friends for a lifetime— more vivid to me than any woman I've ever known, except Mary.

I WAS in Keswick, miserable, without plan or purpose. It had been a wet morning, but the sun had come out, and the hills, as they so often are after rain, were sharp and brilliant as though they had received an extra coat of paint. All the little town was gleaming and glittering. In the market square where I was standing, the light was almost blinding. Into this light stepped a young woman.

I'd been wondering what I would do. While I was hesitating the girl passed me. She was wearing, as I so vividly remember, a dress of bright green which ill suited her pale face with the light, fair eyebrows. Just after she passed me she turned and looked at me. It was a look of quiet and considering investigation. She stood there looking at me and then came toward me smiling.

'Could you tell me,' she asked, 'where I can find the Keswick Art Shop?'

'Oh, yes,' I answered. 'It's straight along in front of you— over the little bridge and you'll find it on the left.' And as I spoke, it seemed to me that thereafter I would move like a man in a dream. I put it in that way, because I was still pausing on the border of that dangerous country. A moment's chance remained to me of turning around and walking away, and I knew with absolute certainty that if I did not walk away I would be a free agent no longer. I've never felt that with any other man or woman before or since. But I suppose on that particular day I was acutely unhappy, very lonely, with that kind of hurt pride and selfish resentment that comes from not getting one's own way.

She was, and it seems very odd to me now looking back, the exact opposite of Mary physically. She was pale, with rather weak grey eyes, with no cheerfulness, no sense of well-being about her at all. But my heart was thumping and I even stammered a little as I said, 'If you will allow me, I'm going that way and I'll show you where it is.'

'Thank you very much,' she said, and she spoke as though it were no new thing for her to be escorted by a stranger.

As we walked along we said very little to each other, but by the time that we had reached the bridge we had come to that sort of mutual agreement which strangers, who both want the same thing and want it badly, generally discover. We stood on the bridge before moving on, looking down at the little stream sparkling in the sunlight. She told me something about herself. She said that she was staying at the Station Hotel with a girl friend— that she'd never been in Cumberland before— that it had rained ever since their arrival, and that this was the first bit of sunshine that she had had— and as she said that, she looked at me.

'You are so bored, I suppose,' I said, 'that you'll be leaving early to-morrow.'

'Oh, no, I'm not,' she answered. 'Gracie, my friend, is. She can't stand the place, but I like it. It's grand when it rains.'

'Oh, then,' I said, 'this is the country for you.'

'Yes, it is,' she said. 'I don't know why I never came here before.' Then she looked at me and said abruptly, 'You live here? Are you married?'

I said that I did live here and that I was married.

'That's a pity,' she said, 'your being married, I mean.'

'Why?' I asked her.

'Oh, because we could have seen a bit of each other if you hadn't been,' she answered.

'We can, anyway,' I replied.

I remember that little conversation as though the words are being spoken now in this room in front of me by two complete strangers whom I am coldly observing. I remember that I thought that I didn't like her, and that I should like her less the more I saw of her. I remember, too, a funny fancy that I had that her green dress was like the green of my field in the sun. Yes, I remember that I didn't like her, and that I wanted there and then to take her in my arms and cover her face with kisses. She was so different from anything that I'd known for so long that she seemed to me exactly what I desperately needed. And I suppose, too, in the low, dark cellars of my mind, there was the thought that I would teach Mary a lesson, and above all, show that nasty old woman, her mother, that there were other things in the world. I was certainly not the first man, nor the last, whom Miss Pearl Richardson tried to devour. In any case, whatever her purpose was, we succeeded in those few minutes in establishing a relationship. Before I left her I had promised to give her dinner in Keswick the following evening.

I was no less unhappy when I went back that afternoon, but I was almost wildly excited. Why? I'm afraid I cannot say. I've always thought that love, in spite of modern cynicism, is the finest thing in the world. Besides, at this particular moment, although I did not then know it, I loved Mary more deeply than I had ever loved her.

Within a very few hours, Mary discovered that I had changed, and then, as she told me afterward, she began to be very frightened.

'It was that afternoon,' she said many months later, 'that I thought for the first time that I might really be going to lose you. Up to then I'd known something was very wrong, but I'd been sure that nothing could truly separate us. But as soon as you came in that day, and with a kind of forced geniality greeted us and talked with an empty friendliness about anything or nothing so that I knew that your mind was elsewhere, I was terrified. I knew that there

was someone somewhere that I must fight, but I was fighting in the dark. I hadn't an idea what to do.'

I was to learn one more curious thing. Next morning, when I awoke and looked across at the field, I had a strange impression that it was nearer to me than it had ever been before. I could see every detail of it. It was almost as though I could count the blades of grass. I'd always had the absurd notion that the five trees were active— that they could move— and sometimes I would look expecting to find only three there, or two.

I lived, I suppose, although my memory of that is very faint, in a kind of armed truce with Mary during these weeks. Everything was unreal to me except Pearl. I remember that I hated her name. I thought it foolish and affected, and her first occasion for rapping me over the knuckles was my saying so. She was deeply offended. I was detached enough about her to realise that her vanity was excessive and that everything that belonged to her— the especial kind of rouge that she used, the flower that she wore on her dress, relations of hers (although she didn't like them), even places where she had been— were sanctified and important because she had had some connection with them. Even I took on a kind of importance because she thought that I was in love with her.

I'm quite sure that she was never in love with me— that she had from the very first a vindictiveness towards Mary, whom, of course, she had never seen— because if Mary had not been there she could have swallowed me up more quickly. She was irritated, too, and the more determined because I would not make love to her as other men had done. She said I behaved like a hero in one of the old story-books, by which she meant, I suppose, that I did nothing more than kiss her. The odd thing was that she represented to me, and this I find the hardest of all to understand, adventure and romance.

And yet I knew that she was common, with no interest in anything except herself and men, that she never would be different from this. I think for these very reasons she became pathetic to me— someone whom I wished to protect, educate as though she were a poor, strayed child come to me for help. Of all the sentimental nonsense! She was anything but a poor, strayed child.

Women, I venture to think, are of two kinds. Either they must look up to the man they love or they must protect him. Sometimes they must do both. With some women the worse a man is, the more they must protect him. But with many women, as with Mary, if they despise, they cannot love. If I did this she would despise me for ever. And how fantastic it is, upon looking back, that I could seriously contemplate this flight with someone whom I neither admired nor loved, throwing everything away for nothing at all. And yet this is what men so often do.

I was afraid lest people should talk, and Pearl therefore went to stay, of all places in the world, in the lonely hamlet of Watendlath. That, now I think of it, was her principal virtue. She really did love this country. She would meet me in a little valley between Watendlath and Lodore, or I would come up to the farm for tea, or she would be at the bottom of the hill in Rosthwaite.

The day came when I agreed to go with her for a fortnight to Scarborough. I went back to my home that night after it was settled, knowing quite well that I was, as Mary had said, a lost man. As I sat by myself that evening, looking across at my field which now to my excited fancy seemed to be so close that it was almost staring in at my window, I felt the same excitement that I'd known at the very first moment when I met the girl. It was a hot, feverish excitement, and when Mary came into the room and told me supper was ready it was as though she were removed from me by a whole life of experience.

I only wanted to sit beside the girl and look at her. When I was with her I felt a sort of weariness, as though I'd had no sleep for weeks. But when I was away from her, I ached to be with her again. I had no satisfaction, no calm, no peace, whether with her or away from her. We made our arrangements. There was to be a trap waiting at Rosthwaite. I was to walk over, meet her at the farm, take her down to the trap, and then we would drive away. A man from Keswick drove the trap with our bags out to Rosthwaite and left it there, and early on a dark afternoon I started to walk up from the lake road. Dusk came very early at that time of the year, and I knew that we should have a dark walk down to Rosthwaite, but the path was easy to follow and I wanted nobody to see us.

I left my house that morning to drive into Keswick. Mary and I had a few last words.

'You will be back for supper?' she asked me.

'Yes,' I said, 'about seven.' And that was really the first lie that I had ever told her. She said nothing, gave me one look, and then I left her.

Now this is the strange part of my little story. I can hardly expect you to believe me... I don't know that I even want you to... I only know that every word I say is true.

I walked up the path, across the bridge above the tumbling stream, and then stood looking back at what is one of the loveliest views in the world—across Lodore to the lake.

I passed the line of bungalows on my right and came to my beloved field. As I reached its edge darkness began to gather. It was too early for dusk and yet the field was obscure, as though curtained by some thin mist. I was really out of breath and I leaned against a little stone wall, wondering what was the matter with me. As I stayed there some thorn from a bush close by pricked my

hand. I looked, but there was no bush near enough, I thought, to have touched me. The feeling of hostility greatly increased and I wondered what was the matter with my nerves.

I came away from the little wall and started to walk. The mist gathered more thickly and I found myself wondering, of all things in the world, whether I would find my way. Find my way— when I knew this field and the path that ran beside it utterly by heart. But I suddenly thought— no, I will cross the wall and go up the other side away from the field. But when I turned to find the wall, I found that I was slipping down a bank into the stream that ran under the wall. I caught at the turf with my hand, it broke away, and before I could stop myself, I was down in the stream. I stumbled about among the stones, the water soaking into my shoes, and clambered up again. Then, as I reached the top, I felt exactly as though someone had struck me in the face. I had a momentary impulse to call out abusively, as though it had been a living person, and then I realised my folly. How strong the wind was, and yet it seemed nothing compared with so many other times I'd known. I couldn't find the stone wall again, so I turned and began to climb the field which runs on a gentle slope to the fell. The dusky light showed me quite clearly the separate forms of five trees. As I moved up the open ground they were well away from me. Yet, very soon it was as though the wind was beating me toward the left, and although I moved forward, I seemed to make no real progress. It is a very small field and can be crossed in two minutes. But now, as the rain began to fall, striking my face, I felt as though I were blinded. I put my hand before my eyes and then stumbled and fell on to my knees, and now I began to feel quite unreasoning terror. The rain was falling fast and the mist was thick. But through the mist I seemed to see trees marching. I could see against the skyline the faint shape of the fell which seemed an infinite distance away. I began to draw my breath with difficulty. It came in gasps and my heart was hammering unsteadily. One knows that in nightmare dreams, and sometimes in actual fact, one moves round and round a very small space, losing altogether one's sense of direction. Now when I moved forward, I could no longer see the line of the fell or the stone wall. But quite clearly outlined against the mist were five trees, forming, as it seemed to me (and this was, of course, a hallucination), a complete circle around me. So strong was this impression, however, (and after all what is reality except what one's fancy makes it?) that I saw what I thought was a gap between two of the trees and made desperately for it. And then the two trees seemed to close together and advance toward me. Panic seized me. I put my hands before my face and ran stumbling forward. Once again, this time more severely, I dashed against what seemed to be now a wall of rough and hostile bark. I even called out, 'Let me go! Let me go!'

Then I fell on my knees. The air about me seemed to grow suffocatingly close, just as though the walls of a room were closing in upon me. I could smell the wet bark, the thin timber essence of branches. I put up my hand, touched a branch, which broke, and then I felt tendrils about my legs. I began to beat with my hands, scraping the skin against the bark. The sense of suffocation grew more appalling with each instant, and the bitter scent of wet wood filled my nostrils. I rose to my feet and looked. I could see with absolute distinctness the five trees close ringed about me. They seemed to be of great thickness and intolerable height. It was as though they whispered to me an order. I obeyed it and turned and climbed out with little frightened gasps. Down the hill toward Lodore I ran, as though dreadful destruction pursued me. I remember stumbling and falling— getting up again, going on past the bungalows, over the bridge, down the road to the lake, and then somehow I found my way home.

Mary has told me since how I arrived at the house that night. My hat was gone; my face, covered with scratches, was bleeding; my clothes were torn, my knees soaked with mud. She was sitting reading. When I appeared at the door, she stood up. I cried, 'Mary! Mary!' and ran to her. Kneeling down before her and straining upward, I laid my bleeding face against her breast.

That is all. I did not see or hear of Miss Pearl Richardson again until five years later. There was a paragraph in the paper saying that in a lodging-house in Sheffield a woman named Pearl Richardson had killed herself by gas-poisoning.

This is the queerest experience of my life.

A year after this, as I have said, our first child was born, and until Mary's death there were not, I am sure, two happier married people anywhere in England. And the field with the five trees looks across at me now benevolently as I write. God allows us more protection from our follies than we know.

18: The Legend

Edith Wharton

1862-1937

Scribner's Magazine, March 1910

*Famous for her 1920 Pulitzer Prize winning novel "*The Age of Innocence*", Edith Wharton started writing at the age of 40. In addition to a number of novels, she also wrote a variety of short stories, including the celebrated and much-reprinted ghost story "Afterward", 1910. This is one of her lesser-known stories.*

ARTHUR BERNALD could never afterward recall just when the first conjecture flashed on him: oddly enough, there was no record of it in the agitated jottings of his diary. But, as it seemed to him in retrospect, he had always felt that the queer man at the Wades' must be John Pellerin, if only for the negative reason that he couldn't imaginably be any one else. It was impossible, in the confused pattern of the century's intellectual life, to fit the stranger in anywhere, save in the big gap which, some five and twenty years earlier, had been left by Pellerin's unaccountable disappearance; and conversely, such a man as the Wades' visitor couldn't have lived for sixty years without filling, somewhere in space, a nearly equivalent void.

At all events, it was certainly not to Doctor Wade or to his mother that Bernald owed the hint: the good unconscious Wades, one of whose chief charms in the young man's eyes was that they remained so robustly untainted by Pellerinism, in spite of the fact that Doctor Wade's younger brother, Howland, was among its most impudently flourishing high-priests.

The incident had begun by Bernald's running across Doctor Robert Wade one hot summer night at the University Club, and by Wade's saying, in the tone of unprofessional laxity which the shadowy stillness of the place invited: "I got hold of a queer fish at St. Martin's the other day— case of heat-prostration picked up in Central Park. When we'd patched him up I found he had nowhere to go, and not a dollar in his pocket, and I sent him down to our place at Portchester to re-build."

The opening roused his hearer's attention. Bob Wade had an odd unformulated sense of values that Bernald had learned to trust.

"What sort of chap? Young or old?"

"Oh, every age— full of years, and yet with a lot left. He called himself sixty on the books."

"Sixty's a good age for some kinds of living. And age is of course purely subjective. How has he used his sixty years?"

"Well— part of them in educating himself, apparently. He's a scholar— humanities, languages, and so forth."

"Oh— decayed gentleman," Bernald murmured, disappointed.

"Decayed? Not much!" cried the doctor with his accustomed literalness. "I only mentioned that side of Winterman— his name's Winterman— because it was the side my mother noticed first. I suppose women generally do. But it's only a part— a small part. The man's the big thing."

"Really big?"

"Well— there again… When I took him down to the country, looking rather like a tramp from a 'Shelter,' with an untrimmed beard, and a suit of reach-me-downs he'd slept round the Park in for a week, I felt sure my mother'd carry the silver up to her room, and send for the gardener's dog to sleep in the hall the first night. But she didn't."

"I see. 'Women and children love him.' Oh, Wade!" Bernald groaned.

"Not a bit of it! You're out again. We don't love him, either of us. But we *feel* him— the air's charged with him. You'll see."

And Bernald agreed that he *would* see, the following Sunday. Wade's inarticulate attempts to characterize the stranger had struck his friend. The human revelation had for Bernald a poignant and ever-renewed interest, which his trade, as the dramatic critic of a daily paper, had hitherto failed to discourage. And he knew that Bob Wade, simple and undefiled by literature— Bernald's specific affliction— had a free and personal way of judging men, and the diviner's knack of reaching their hidden springs. During the days that followed, the young doctor gave Bernald farther details about John Winterman: details not of fact— for in that respect his visitor's reticence was baffling— but of impression. It appeared that Winterman, while lying insensible in the Park, had been robbed of the few dollars he possessed; and on leaving the hospital, still weak and half-blind, he had quite simply and unprotestingly accepted the Wades' offer to give him shelter till such time as he should be strong enough to go to work.

"But what's his work?" Bernald interjected. "Hasn't he at least told you that?"

"Well, writing. Some kind of writing." Doctor Bob always became vague and clumsy when he approached the confines of literature. "He means to take it up again as soon as his eyes get right."

Bernald groaned. "Oh, Lord— that finishes him; and *me!* He's looking for a publisher, of course— he wants a 'favourable notice.' I won't come!"

"He hasn't written a line for twenty years."

"A line of *what?* What kind of literature can one keep corked up for twenty years?"

Wade surprised him. "The real kind, I should say. But I don't know Winterman's line," the doctor added. "He speaks of the things he used to write

merely as 'stuff that wouldn't sell.' He has a wonderfully confidential way of *not* telling one things. But he says he'll have to do something for his living as soon as his eyes are patched up, and that writing is the only trade he knows. The queer thing is that he seems pretty sure of selling *now.* He even talked of buying the bungalow of us, with an acre or two about it."

"The bungalow? What's that?"

"The studio down by the shore that we built for Howland when he thought he meant to paint." (Howland Wade, as Bernald knew, had experienced various "calls.") "Since he's taken to writing nobody's been near it. I offered it to Winterman, and he camps there— cooks his meals, does his own house-keeping, and never comes up to the house except in the evenings, when he joins us on the verandah, in the dark, and smokes while my mother knits."

"A discreet visitor, eh?"

"More than he need be. My mother actually wanted him to stay on in the house— in her pink chintz room. Think of it! But he says houses smother him. I take it he's lived for years in the open."

"In the open where?"

"I can't make out, except that it was somewhere in the East. 'East of everything— beyond the day-spring. In places not on the map.' That's the way he put it; and when I said: 'You've been an explorer, then?' he smiled in his beard, and answered: 'Yes; that's it— an explorer.' Yet he doesn't strike me as a man of action: hasn't the hands or the eyes."

"What sort of hands and eyes has he?"

Wade reflected. His range of observation was not large, but within its limits it was exact and could give an account of itself.

"He's worked a lot with his hands, but that's not what they were made for. I should say they were extraordinarily delicate conductors of sensation. And his eye— his eye too. He hasn't used it to dominate people: he didn't care to. He simply looks through 'em all like windows. Makes me feel like the fellows who think they're made of glass. The mitigating circumstance is that he seems to see such a glorious landscape through me." Wade grinned at the thought of serving such a purpose.

"I see. I'll come on Sunday and be looked through!" Bernald cried.

BERNALD came on two successive Sundays; and the second time he lingered till the Tuesday.

"Here he comes!" Wade had said, the first evening, as the two young men, with Wade's mother sat in the sultry dusk, with the Virginian creeper drawing, between the verandah arches, its black arabesques against a moon-lined sky.

In the darkness Bernald heard a step on the gravel, and saw the red flit of a cigar through the shrubs. Then a loosely-moving figure obscured the patch of sky between the creepers, and the red spark became the centre of a dim bearded face, in which Bernald discerned only a broad white gleam of forehead.

It was the young man's subsequent impression that Winterman had not spoken much that first evening; at any rate, Bernald himself remembered chiefly what the Wades had said. And this was the more curious because he had come for the purpose of studying their visitor, and because there was nothing to divert him from that purpose in Wade's halting communications or his mother's artless comments. He reflected afterward that there must have been a mysteriously fertilizing quality in the stranger's silence: it had brooded over their talk like a large moist cloud above a dry country.

Mrs. Wade, apparently apprehensive lest her son should have given Bernald an exaggerated notion of their visitor's importance, had hastened to qualify it before the latter appeared.

"He's not what you or Howland would call intellectual—"(Bernald writhed at the coupling of the names)— "not in the least *literary;* though he told Bob he used to write. I don't think, though, it could have been what Howland would call writing." Mrs. Wade always mentioned her younger son with a reverential drop of the voice. She viewed literature much as she did Providence, as an inscrutably mystery; and she spoke of Howland as a dedicated being, set apart to perform secret rites within the veil of the sanctuary.

"I shouldn't say he had a quick mind," she continued, reverting apologetically to Winterman. "Sometimes he hardly seems to follow what we're saying. But he's got such sound ideas— when he does speak he's never silly. And clever people sometimes *are,* don't you think so?" Bernald groaned an unqualified assent. "And he's so capable. The other day something went wrong with the kitchen range, just as I was expecting some friends of Bob's for dinner; and do you know, when Mr. Winterman heard we were in trouble, he came and took a look, and knew at once what to do? I told him it was a dreadful pity he wasn't married!"

Close on midnight, when the session on the verandah ended, and the two young men were strolling down to the bungalow at Winterman's side, Bernald's mind reverted to the image of the fertilizing cloud. There was something brooding, pregnant, in the silent presence beside him: he had, in place of any circumscribing impression of the individual, a large hovering sense of manifold latent meanings. And he felt a distinct thrill of relief when, half-way down the lawn, Doctor Bob was checked by a voice that called him back to the telephone.

"Now I'll be with him alone!" thought Bernald, with a throb like a lover's.

In the low-ceilinged bungalow Winterman had to grope for the lamp on his desk, and as its light struck up into his face Bernald's sense of the rareness of his opportunity increased. He couldn't have said why, for the face, with its ridged brows, its shabby greyish beard and blunt Socratic nose, made no direct appeal to the eye. It seemed rather like a stage on which remarkable things might be enacted, like some shaggy moorland landscape dependent for form and expression on the clouds rolling over it, and the bursts of light between; and one of these flashed out in the smile with which Winterman, as if in answer to his companion's thought, said simply, as he turned to fill his pipe: "Now we'll talk."

So he'd known all along that they hadn't yet— and had guessed that, with Bernald, one might!

The young man's glow of pleasure was so intense that it left him for a moment unable to meet the challenge; and in that moment he felt the brush of something winged and summoning. His spirit rose to it with a rush; but just as he felt himself poised between the ascending pinions, the door opened and Bob Wade plunged in.

"Too bad! I'm so sorry! It was from Howland, to say he can't come to-morrow after all." The doctor panted out his news with honest grief.

"I tried my best to pull it off for you; and my brother *wants* to come— he's keen to talk to you and see what he can do. But you see he's so tremendously in demand. He'll try for another Sunday later on."

Winterman nodded with a whimsical gesture. "Oh, he'll find me here. I shall work my time out slowly." He pointed to the scattered sheets on the kitchen table which formed his writing desk.

"Not slowly enough to suit us," Wade answered hospitably. "Only, if Howland could have come he might have given you a tip or two— put you on the right track— shown you how to get in touch with the public."

Winterman, his hands in his sagging pockets, lounged against the bare pine walls, twisting his pipe under his beard. "Does your brother enjoy the privilege of that contact?" he questioned gravely.

Wade stared a little. "Oh, of course Howland's not what you'd call a *popular* writer; he despises that kind of thing. But whatever he says goes with— well, with the chaps that count; and every one tells me he's written *the* book on Pellerin. You must read it when you get back your eyes." He paused, as if to let the name sink in, but Winterman drew at his pipe with a blank face. "You must have heard of Pellerin, I suppose?" the doctor continued. "I've never read a word of him myself: he's too big a proposition for *me.* But one can't escape the talk about him. I have him crammed down my throat even in

hospital. The internes read him at the clinics. He tumbles out of the nurses' pockets. The patients keep him under their pillows. Oh, with most of them, of course, it's just a craze, like the last new game or puzzle: they don't understand him in the least. Howland says that even now, twenty-five years after his death, and with his books in everybody's hands, there are not twenty people who really understand Pellerin; and Howland ought to know, if anybody does. He's— what's their great word?— *interpreted* him. You must get Howland to put you through a course of Pellerin."

19: Chariots of San Fernando

Malcolm Jameson

1891-1945

Weird Tales, Jan 1946

Jameson wrote wonderfully entertaining vintage space opera, but in this tale he comes down to Earth; and the San Fernando is not the one outside Los Angeles, but deep in the South American jungles.

Foreword

IT may be to the credit of the skeptical scientific attitude that no single important group or individual has accepted the sensational account by Dr. Stephen Taussig of the discovery of new, amazing fauna in the San Fernando country at the Amazon's headwaters. Taussig, sole survivor of the Museum of Living Science Expedition, was plainly deranged when he reached the outposts of civilization. Bits of alleged evidence— a glassy object some ten inches long by six wide; of a pointed oval-shape and convex like a cupped hand; a length of coiled transparent tubing, perhaps thirty feet long and tapering from the diameter of an inch to half as much; and a huge bone, unfortunately shattered in transit to America— have invited curiosity, but not diagnosis.

I came into the mystery by pure chance. I was secretary- companion three years ago to John J. Beazle, a wealthy dabbler in exploration and adventure, with some pretension to botanical and zoological education, and sailed far up the Amazon in his yacht, the *Tethys*. News came of a white man, sick and delirious, at a settlement on one of the uncharted side-streams. We sought the place and found it to be the outpost Cruxite mission of Youmbinque.

Father Hundig, who was caring for the sick man, welcomed our appearance and loans of bedding, ice and medicines. The patient, though wasted, screamed and struggled so that we could hot move him from the missionary's cot. Beazle, not much interested, spent most of the days that followed among liquor bottles on the *Tethys*. It was I who heard Stephen Taussig's story, which I have tried to set down in his own words from my short-hand notes.

The specimens mentioned above lay near Taussig's cot. When whole, the bone was as massive as the femur of a dinosaur, some six feet long, with its very center a roughly cubical bulge a foot thick. Tapering both ways from this central lump, the ends of the bone terminated in spherical knobs, ivory-hard and perhaps eight inches in diameter. As it spindled toward these ends, the bone showed round and smooth but for v-shaped grooves running lengthwise from small holes toward the middle.

It was plainly fresh, to judge from the oily moisture and clinging fragments of tough flesh. I was surprised to find no sign of terminal cartilage on the knobs. About this and the two crystal pieces clung an odor of rot, strangely and chemically pungent.

Father Hundig told how Taussig and others had stayed at the mission on their outbound trip some weeks before, and how Taussig had returned in a native canoe, alone but for sullen Indian paddlers whom he kept in hand at pistol point. Though seriously ill, Taussig begged the priest to take charge of the specimens the boat carried, then collapsed. The Indians paddled away in patent relief.

The recent death of Father Hundig leaves my account almost unsupported, but his diary might prove interesting to scholars with open minds. Meanwhile, here is Taussig's story, to be read either as scientific data or mere *curiosa*, I am not expert enough to suggest which.

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OUR up-river trip was mostly uneventful. All had been well planned and Dooling, who had previously visited this basin, acted as interpreter and go-between with the Indians. We had no difficulty until we reached the confluence of the Caquini.

You must have heard the Indian legends about the San Fernando as a hell peopled with unspeakable devils. We did not fall into the error of disregarding these entirely; savage tabus are often founded on a practical basis. We guessed that in the region were real dangers, perhaps unknown predatory animals, and we hoped to find them and prove how exaggerated folklore can be.

But neither threats nor promises could induce a single native to accompany us beyond the great falls of the Caquini. We were faced with the unsatisfactory job of going ahead without guides or bearers. The solution of the problem was somewhat disquieting.

Two days journey below the falls, we stopped at man's uttermost habitation, the village of the Chicupes. The natives appeared more apprehensive about the country just beyond than any of the down-river peoples.

Their fear had created a bizarre custom— each year they selected two prime warriors to go as sacrifices into the unknown land. If one of these should survive, they said, for the space of a single moon, his safe return would show that the devils had been propitiated. Such a survivor would be rewarded with the chieftainship. But none had ever returned.

By a fortunate coincidence, the selection had been made only a few days before we arrived. The two young warriors were undergoing some interesting rites of purification before leaving. After tedious negotiations and the paying of substantial bribes, we arranged to go along with the party that escorted them.

We had bearers at least, but with them came disquiet. If two warriors, and of the best, went into the San Fernando yearly and did not return, what became of them? We could not guess. Neither, I am sure, can you. But we found out.

A short distance from the falls we established a base camp. Beyond here our Indians would not go. The next three weeks were uneventful. We set up our field laboratories and explored the heavy forest in widening circles. There was little of interest and less of danger in our findings. Hedrick identified some poisonous plants, there were a few snakes and insects, and I shot one wildcat. It was like many another district in the jungle.

Our Indians huddled timorously at our base camp, but we overcame our own sense of vague apprehension. How false were these senses of security we were soon to learn.

As we prepared to move on, only the sacrificial braves, Itai and Tubutu, could be persuaded to help carry our tinned foods, cameras and other supplies. This pair, really splendid youngsters, had slept and eaten apart from their friends, and were seemingly regarded as already dead. Camber remained in charge of the base, with instructions to bring every day as much food and other necessaries as he could carry to a certain advance base we chose as point of departure into the unknown. Hedrick, Dooling and I, with the two Chicupes, pressed on.

Nine miles on our journey, among thinning trees that hinted open savannas ahead, I almost tripped over a neat ball of crushed and splintered bones. Just beyond lay the neatly severed head of a Capuchin monkey. As we gathered to look, there seemed to hang about us a heavy odor more suggestive of the chemical laboratory than the jungle. Hedrick, stooping, identified the smashed bones as belonging to the monkey whose head lay beyond. They were jammed into a rough sphere the size of a melon, broken and pressed as if some ramming device, and covered with chemical-smelling slime.

"Looks as if it had been chewed up and Spat out," commented Hedrick. "But what jaws could crumple a pelvis like that?"

As to the head, it had been sliced off as smoothly as by a machete, and its hair was dry and clean. None of us could think of an animal large enough to take such a bite, with, at the same time, such sharp, guillotine-like incisors. We rejected both lions and anacondas. Whatever had killed the monkey would be

in a class by itself, a class unknown to us, a class that might prove decidedly unpleasant to study.

The Indians showed fright, but only for a moment. Steeped in tradition, they seemed to recognize their brotherhood with the monkey's remains. Dooling sniffed the air.

"Silico-ethane," he said. "Where does it come from?" He lifted some slime on a twig. "Here it is. Silicic acid, or I'm an impostor among chemists." He scraped some into a specimen can. "I'll analyze it later." Hedrick took pictures and we went on.

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AT the spot agreed upon, where Camber was to come daily, we made a temporary advanced base. It was about noon, so we ate a snack, then Hedrick and I struck out for a quick look around at what was beyond. We took Itai with us to carry cameras and boxes, but Hedrick and I were burdened only with rifles and machetes. Dooling said he would go to work with his chemicals and hoped to have a report for us when we returned.

Before us was flat country covered with a short grass. A mile in front and away to the left rose a low range of hills, fairly steep, but round-topped and covered with grass. In the far distance we could make out the hazy blue profile of a mountain range. To the right was a high cliff, about a mile distant at its closest, and running straight away from us for as far as we could see. This escarpment marked a great fault that elevated the country beyond and made possible the magnificent falls of the Caquini, ten miles behind. There was a little watercourse that followed the cliff down to the Caquini.

We were soon out of the grass and into the thicket of bushes shoulder high. Hedrick stopped in amazement and examined several of the bushes, pulling long pods from them. He shredded the pod, first smelling and then tasting its contents.

"*Ricinus*, of some sort," he said in response to my questioning look. "Must be a variety of castor bean, but I never expected to see it growing wild in South America. I think I can chalk this up as my great discovery of the day. Yours will be the monkey-killer, if you can track it down."

"It didn't leave tracks," I said. "I looked for them."

Hedrick was quite bucked up over his castor beans. I knew what he was thinking, of how nice it would be to see in print *Ricinus Americanus Hedriquensis*. We all have those little vanities.

The area covered by them was fairly extensive. We reached a little knoll, a foot or so higher than, the general level, and we could see that they extended

all the way to the cliff, and from the forest on our right to several miles to the left of us. We kept on through them as it was by far the shortest way.

A few hundred yards farther on we both were brought up in surprise to find ourselves in a comparatively clear space. The bushes were all down—some uprooted, all of' them broken and torn apart and most of the foliage gone. Lanes led in a dozen directions, like the spokes of a wheel. In these spaces the wreckage of the bushes was appalling. The sight suggested a small scale replica of the damage done by elephants. Here was a new situation to ponder. No one had ever heard of an elephant in this country, and anyway, these would have to be midget elephants.

It was not until we had carefully and minutely examined the ground that we got our first clue. We found wagon tracks! We checked each of the lanes that led in. Each showed the marks of broad tires with a gauge of nearly six feet! Our previous mystification was nothing to what we felt now. How could there be wagons in an uninhabited country lying hundreds of miles beyond populated country where even a cart was unknown? And such wide wagons, and so many, and in such a place?

When we had seen all there was to see, we went on, following the wagon trail that led straightest toward the water and the cliff. Under foot all the way were the broken and stripped castor plants. Twice before we reached the far boundary of this extraordinary bean patch we came across much wider places where other wagons had converged and had destroyed a half acre or so of the plants.

Our trail led more or less straight to the foot of the cliff and we finally emerged onto a wide sand-bed that edged the clear creek which ran along the foot of the bluff. Our wagon wheel marks continued straight on into the water, and there they ended! We could see them for a few feet under water, but beyond the running stream erased them. The creek was hardly fifty feet wide, the other bank of it was a towering cliff, rising sheer three hundred feet.

"What a country!" said Hedrick, wiping his brow, after we had had a good drink of the clear water, and refilled-our canteens. "I'm beginning to think those Indians have something."

After a brief rest, we turned upstream, walking along close to the water where the sand was damp and firm. Presently we came to more wheel-marks. That cleared the mystery for a moment. Apparently the driver had chosen to come upstream part of the way in the river. Then we came to an intricate criss-cross of tracks, indicating dozens of wagons, in and out of the river, in and out of the beans, up and down the sand-bed, like a circus lot the day after. We traversed a mile of this, conversing from time to time, chiefly to explode each other's theories as fast as one would develop some hypothesis to work from.

Even if there had been a reasonable source of wagons, the maze of markings on the sand would still have been of dubious meaning. For one thing, there were no tracks of horses, oxen or other draft animals.

Again, many of the trails were partially obliterated, as if by a drag. We also decided that the carts were two-wheeled, and of various gauges, from six feet to as little as two. As we stooped to measure a trail through the thicket, I saw something round and whitish, half buried in the sand near the bean stalks. I picked it up.

It was a human skull.

Around the brow was a leather strap, stiff and mouldy, stitched with copper wire— just such a symbol of sacrifice as Itai wore that moment. Beyond lay bones, human but crushed and compacted, like those of the monkey.

I turned to him, with a sign of inquiry. Brave enough, he drew himself up as if at attention.

"Garzus," he muttered, and passed his left hand thrice across his face— the Chicupe counterpart of the sign of the cross to avert evil. There were tears on his brown cheeks, and he was afraid— mortally afraid— for all that he was a picked fighting man of his people.

iii

THERE was nothing to be gained by lingering over the relics of the dead Indian; if we were to penetrate the veil of mystery that shrouded these strange deaths we must learn more.

An uneasiness, vague at first, but steadily mounting to a sense of profound apprehension, settled upon us. We had not forgotten those hideous legends. Heretofore we had regarded them as the mad inventions of fanatical witch-doctors or the insane imaginings of superstitious heathens. But now we could not help remembering that no matter in what other respects the myths might differ, they had invariably spoken of the horror of this land of fiends as the "rolling death," and always coupled with that expression had been the dread word "Garzus"— a word signifying "dragon" or "hippogriff."

The wonder grew on us as we speculated whether there could be in this accursed country a ferocious race of aborigines who drove chariots after the fashion of the early Britons. Perhaps in this weird and malignant land there was a fearsome creature of a type unguessed; could it be that such a monster drew the war-chariots of the barbarous people of this place? We shrank from that solution. We told ourselves that we must not permit ourselves to be swept away by the psychic vagaries of these credulous savages; that we must regain our grip on our common sense; that we must search, and find more

clues until we had found the simple, practical explanation that out reason told us must lie somewhere behind these grotesqueries.

Ahead of us the creek bent outward from the cliff to round a vast hemi-cone of detritus where long ago a section of the cliff had been undercut and fallen down. The widened stream's ripply surface told us that here were shoals that we could cross without serious wetting. Since at this point also there was a convergence of cart tracks leading into the river and evidence of their emergence on the other side, we waded across.

The chariot tracks led around to the downstream face and here we were further astonished to find ourselves in what had every appearance of being a rough quarry. Dozens of half-begun shafts showed where someone had dug into the walls. An inspection of the roughly level floor of the quarry revealed that away from the walls there were a number of mounds of broken limestone and a little slate. Whoever was working here was only interested in the quartz and silicates. On the ground in front of the newest working we found a pile of large quartz crystals mixed with fragments of agate.

I went to pick up a particularly beautiful piece of stone when to my startled disgust I found it covered with slime. As it slithered from my fingers I recognized the revolting odor and texture of the stuff that was smeared on the dead monkey's bones. Half nauseated, I hardly heard Hedrick's cry of astonishment as he pointed to the gobs of jelly lying on the ground on the far side of this collection of rocks. But there they were, enough to fill a gallon bucket, scattered about as if dispersed by the nuzzling snout of some feeding beast. As I wiped my hands, Hedrick collected several pounds of it to take back to Dooling. There was no smell in the air here of silico-ethane; this was chlorine, faint but unmistakable!

"I think we have enough material for one night's insomnia," Hedrick said, "and it's getting late. Let's go back to Dooling."

Back in the trees we found Dooling had made an improvised camp and had some food cooking, and on a box we could see a beaker and some test-tubes.

"That jelly *is* a silicic acid," Dooling announced as soon as we joined him, "but just which I don't know. It appears to be an organic variety and there's no telling what the formula for it is."

"Take a look at this, then," said Hedrick, handing him the jar with the stuff from the quarry.

It proved to be the-same, or closely similar. The last sample was somewhat stiffer than the slimy stuff from the skeleton.

We talked until late that night, but got nowhere with the baffling data we had collected that day. Being together around a cheery fire, and having warm

food tended to allay the qualms of misgiving. Tomorrow might bring a solution to part of these riddles.

iv

EARLY the next day, we had left two miles of flat plain behind us and were halfway up the side of the first of the foothills. We had already passed three sets of long-dried bones, of antelope, this time. The layout was always the same; a compact pile of crushed bones, and within three or four yards, a complete skull, these with antlers. Then we found a fresh set, a kill of not later than the day before.

"That monster not only has a big mouth, but it must be fast," was Hedrick's comment. "It is no cinch to catch an antelope in an open place like this."

We examined the grass; there were two distinct trails, one down from the top of the hill, the other up. The up-trail, oddly enough showed the signs of the drag behind it, the other not. There could be no mistake, the direction of the bent grass was conclusive. Outside the line's left by the wheels, we noticed many blades of grass tipped with droplets of a clear yellow liquid. As this golden dew appeared nowhere else, it must have dropped from the hubs of the chariot. Hedrick lifted a drop with a finger, held it under his nose, then gingerly tasted it.

"Crude castor oil," he grunted.

We followed the trails to the summit of the hill, where we found a long, nearly level ridge, marked occasionally by clumps of trees resembling mesquite. Up here there were many marks in the grass, as if a number of the vehicles had paraded up and down, and we observed half a dozen places where trails led straight downward.

Following the trails along the summit, we had just passed a clump of bushy trees, when we wheeled at the sound of a stifled scream from Itai.

Ten yards away a face was looking at us.

It was no human face— only grotesquely humanoid— and gigantic. Maybe it was four feet across, with large, dark, lustrous eyes gazing placidly at us. Between them a long nose, flexible as a trunk, twitched, and below grinned a yard-wide mouth, as full of teeth as a shark's. At each temple clustered what appeared to be curls, and two more clumps showed on top of the head. I was stupid with amazement and horror. I remember thinking that I used to know a barber who looked something like that.

But more ghastly still was the body. It was mounted on wheels that attached to either side of a plumpness like a sort of owl. There were no arms

or legs, only a dragonlike tail that swept behind to steady the bulk. The wheels were pale and solid, like the wooden ones on a Cuban ox-cart.

All that we saw in a flash of time. For at once the curl-pads on the monster's head unwound and flicked at us— four darting cables in the air. Itai was closest, and those devil's antennae whipped around his neck, arms and legs, yanking him through the air like a toy on a string. He screamed— once— and then the mouth received him, feet- first, and closed. His head dropped off, neatly severed, and bounced soddenly away.

Hedrick and I still stared. These large brown eyes closed as if in ecstasy. The thing began to chew, like a ruminant cow. Hedrick fired first, then I— bullet after bullet from our rifles, at point-blank range.

There was no effect. It chewed calmly. Lead bullets were like peas tossed at a sofa pillow— I saw momentary dimples as the missiles struck and glanced off. That hide was tougher than armor. Its covering of glassy scales rang musically when hit.

We fired, perhaps two or three clips each, when the monster was satisfied with its snack. Opening its eyes and mouth, it spat onto the ground Itai's crumpled skeleton— then looked at us.

I had some saving instinctive impulse. Dropping my rifle, I whipped out my machete. Hedrick did likewise. The tentacles stretched toward us, more slowly— the thing wasn't quite so hungry now.

We whacked and slashed. My first stroke encountered a strand almost as tough as wire cable. A second blow, more strong and desperate, cut away an eight-foot length, and bright blood flowed. Hedrick was tangled in two of the antennae, lifting him from the ground as he hacked and hewed.

I rushed, swinging with all my strength and he fell free. The monster gave a soul-shattering howl, and its eyes crinkled shut in pain, huge tears rolling into sight. Three of its four tentacles had been wounded, and fell back into coils that spurted blood. Still screaming, the creature threshed itself about with a sweep of its tail and pushed away. I saw prismatic lights on the scales of the back armor.

We pursued the Garzus— we knew that this must be one— and, scientists even in this hour of peril and fear, we saw that it moved by shoving stubby shoulders against spokelike ribs on the inner faces of the horny wheels. When we came close, we encountered another weapon. The back scales lifted, like hair on an angry cat, and from beneath white smoke gushed upon us. At the same moment the thing hoisted its tail, balancing on its wheels, and coasted away down a swift slope, losing itself behind the clouds of vapor. It had laid a smoke-screen of silicon tetrachloride.

v

IT was with decidedly mixed feelings that we turned back to the spot where we had commenced our fight. But for the accident of position, either one of us might have played the role of Itai, and had the animal been less sluggish after its meal, it would have taken a second victim. The Thing was immune to gunfire, and with its four tough tentacles one man could not withstand it, even if fore-warned. He could only hope to wound it on his way into that hopper of a mouth.

Knowing now the secret of its locomotion, we perceived that the safest place to encounter one would be on level ground. It could hardly move faster than a brisk trot unless rolling free. We shuddered to think what oar fate would have been if our party had been charged by a group of them while still on the hillside, for we now understood the technique of the beast's hunting. Yet even on flat ground, the ability suddenly to flick those forty- foot tentacles made them formidable foes. Yet, the Things must have some weakness; we knew we must study them and find a way to conquer.

The pieces of the antennae stank of silico-ethane and we observed that they were really thick-walled gelatinous tubes. Just what was the function of the wire-thin inner duct that terminated in a sort of nozzle at the tip of the tentacle we could not fathom.

We had a brief discussion, and decided to go on to the quarry and begin our observation. Later we would come back and bury the remains of the unfortunate Itai. We scoured the ridge to make sure there was not another lurking Garzus to swoop down on us after we had begun the descent. Off to the west, the smoke-screen had almost dissipated. Our recent adversary had turned away to the south, several miles upstream from the ford and the quarry.

We found the quarry exactly as we had left it. Sixty feet or so overhead was a hard stratum of sandstone forming a ledge above which we could see the dark mouths of several caves. By grasping at the roots of shrubs growing out from the face of the cliff and taking advantages of the many minor projections we climbed without difficulty to the ledge. Directly under us was the quarry; to the left, beyond the creek, was the sand-bank where the Garzi paraded. We flattened down on our faces, and unslinging binoculars, began our vigil.

Nothing happened for several hours. Once we made out through our glasses another little tragedy on the hillside we had quit earlier. From the crest of the hill came a flash of light, something like a runaway cannon slid swiftly down to where an antelope was grazing, there was a quick gleaming of silvery lariats flailing the air— and there was no more antelope. In a little bit, the

rolling thing turned, and slowly climbed up the hill and disappeared into a clump of trees.

Intent on this drama, we had not noticed the first approach of a herd of Garzi. But soon there were dozens, slowly rolling up and down the sands, while some browsed in the patch of *Euphorbiaceae*, tearing at the brandies of the bean bushes. Among them were many little ones, Garzilli we called them. The larger Garzi seemed to be engaged in prodding the little ones into promenading, following them closely. Whenever one of the baby monsters would show a tendency to stop or even to slow down, the parent would whack it forward with a resounding side slap of the tail. Now and then an elder Garzus would appear to attack one of the little ones from the side, gripping it firmly with all four tentacles while nuzzling at the near wheel. The Garzillus would make the air hideous with its trumpeting and squealing for a moment, and then, released, it would roll wabblingly away, its soft young wheels bending and caving under the infant's weight.

"Must, be teaching 'em to roll!" whispered Hedrick.

In the meantime, several full-grown Garzi had forded the creek and were up in the quarry. We watched their operations with the most intense interest, for of all the clues we had previously found, those in this spot were the least intelligible.

From our excellent observation post we learned to distinguish between male and female. The latter were smaller, but the salient difference was in the snout. The female proboscis was much shorter and thicker, and terminated in a cup-shaped tip of bone or ivory. This tip appeared to be quite thin, even sharp, like a tin biscuit cutter.

WE could not see exactly what they were doing among the piles of silicates because usually their scaly backs and tails were to us, but we could see fumes rising and detect the odor of chlorine in the air. Just what acid or in what manner they secreted it, we shall probably never know, but having poured it out, they waited patiently. From our previous find, we were able to anticipate the result, they were preparing silicic acid. In a while we were to see them eat it, and others follow and repeat the performance.

Virtually prisoners until the hour should come when this herd would move on, Hedrick and I had ample opportunity to digest what we had seen. Finally, we withdrew a distance into the cool inner part of the cave and compared notes.

We were too realistic not to accept the natural explanation of it. After all, the human being consumes and converts in his lifetime a vast quantity of carbon, salt and other solids. There is small difference between a diet of

diamonds and coal and a diet of opals and quartz. It is all a matter of glands and digestive processes.

The Garzus, from its observed diet and excretions, had an affinity for silicon. Its skin and the scales of its armor were siliciculous; it exhaled a silico-ethane, it could produce silicon tetrachloride for protection, and used a silicic acid in digestion. In order to ingest the required amount of the element, it had special glands that enabled it to reduce onyx and quartz to an edible jelly. It was all very reasonable. And it made us anxious to kill and dissect one of the things. Doubtless the more normal diet of animal flesh was to provide the necessary heat for movement and the operation of its internal laboratories.

Hedrick and I were in fair agreement as to these theories, but we still had the novel method of locomotion to consider. Nature is a great experimentalist, but this example verged on the incredible. I must have been a little dazed by the rapid events of the last two days, for I must admit that I owe the explanation of it to Hedrick's keen mind.

But I was to wait a while before receiving it. When we had finished our discussion of the silicic aspects of the Garzus, we went out onto the ledge to take a look. The herd had gone. They had gone through the castor plants, a few were still there browsing on the far edge, the others were slowly rolling toward, the forest— toward where Dooling and Tuputu were awaiting us!

vi

WE scrambled down straight through the ravaged bean growth, crashing through the brittle bushes and acquiring many scratches. As we neared the far edge, we slowed down, and gripping our machetes and keeping a sharp lookout for the Garzi, but it was not until we had emerged on the other side that we saw any.

The sun was behind us, a circumstance that rendered the Garzi ahead of us exceptionally visible, for the rays reflected from their prismatic backs were brilliant and of every hue. There were three of the glittering creatures, their tails to us, at the foot of a tree by our camp site. We could see the flashes from the snaky feelers that were stripping the lower branches from the tree. We advanced boldly, knowing their clumsiness, but stopped about twenty yards behind them. There was no danger as long as we could stay out of reach of the tentacles, we felt that outside of their radius we could outrun the cumbersome creatures should they turn and threaten us. But they were too intent on what was before them to notice our approach.

A shout from above informed us that Dooling was high up in the tree. He was trying to warn us of the monsters, and said there were several more back

in the woods. As he spoke, we saw two rolling toward us, one from directly behind the tree, the other from somewhat to the right of it. We ran to the highest of the nearby trees and scrambled up not a moment too soon, for before we were high enough to be out of reach, we each had to straddle a limb and slash frantically at sinuous glassine tentacles.

I did not succeed in doing more than nick the ones grasping for me, but Hedrick managed to cut away a yard or so of the tip of one, and we heard the yelp and howls of its injured owner with grim pleasure. We resumed our ascent until we came to a roomy fork about fifty feet from the ground. An excited chatter overhead reminded us that we had company. A group of the Capuchin monkeys was huddled there, squeaking and twittering in fright.

Firmly settled, we craned our necks hallooing, until we spotted a khaki patch through the lacery of leaves. That was Dooling perched in his tree, a couple of hundred feet away. After we had cut away some intervening branches so that we could see better, we observed that his tree was not so high as ours, and although he was at about our level, he could go no higher. He, too, had partners in misery, a pair of monkeys like ours. Shouting back and forth, we gave each other the high spots of the day's happenings.

Dooling said that Camber had been there about noon with a good load of provisions. They had visited for a while, and Camber had gone back, saying he would return again tomorrow. Dooling went to work on our notebooks. His first intimation of danger was the warning given him about an hour before by the excited Tuputu.

They watched two Garzi approach, and he fell into the pardonable error of trying to shoot them. Ignorant of the uncanny peril in the innocuous looking curls on the heads of the monsters, he continued shooting until the first one got too close. Tuputu charged it with a machete, and Dooling saw him snatched and devoured in one horrible instant. Under the circumstances, he could think of nothing better than to climb the nearest tree.

We told him he'd done the only possible thing, but that he was safe now. And when we said it, we thought he was. We did not know that the Garzus had still another deadly weapon.

WE watched the Garzi below us grope the lower branches of our tree with their tentacles, reaching, feeling for us, as if they did not trust their eyes. When we next glanced Dooling's way, we were startled to see that a ring of Garzi about the tree had extended their antennae to the fullest, all pointing at Dooling. They looked in the almost level rays of the setting sun like glistening glass rods. They failed to reach him by about ten feet, but the fumes we now saw jetting from their tips did not. Dooling shouted hoarsely something about

deadly gas— chloroform— and frenziedly tried to climb. We saw him cling a moment to a little fork just above his head, then slip away and fall crashing. Like echoes, we heard the thuds of the monkeys as they plopped to the ground beside him. Helpless to do anything, we had to see the inert forms wrapped in tentacles that fell as quickly as cut ropes and witness the greedy tug of war between two rival Garzi who had simultaneously clutched the body of our friend. We turned our eyes away, unable to endure more. When we had heard the third of the shocking *clops* of decapitating mouths snapped shut, we knew that Dooling was now in the maw of the "rolling death" of San Fernando.

Sick with horror, and despondent over our own futility, we hauled ourselves mechanically higher up the tree. Another twenty feet and we were among the shuddering monkeys.

Soon we had our gas attack. We caught the odor, but our height and a freshening breeze that had just sprung up made it ineffective. Seeing that we did not drop, the Garzi abandoned their posts below us and wheeled off into the forest.

In another hour, the bright beams of the rising full moon illuminated the savanna clearly. Hedrick placed a hand on my arm.

"Let's go down," he whispered, "there is at least one more thing we can try."

He led the way to the other tree, where the scattered remains of our advanced camp lay, rooted and tumbled around by the dragons. He picked up an armful of notebooks and asked me to do the same. Watching our tread carefully, for somewhere about here lay the heads of two of our fellows, we stalked out onto the moonlit plain.

"Damn the notebooks," Hedrick muttered, "if this hunch works, we can write a book whose dullest page will be worth a ton of this rubbish."

He led on. The breeze was quite strong now at our backs, as if blowing out of the moon behind us. Nowhere was the loom of a bulky Garzus. All about us was grass, and just ahead the shoulder high bushes of the castor bean area.

vii

"THANK God for the wind," said Hedrick, fervently. He tore branches from a bean plant and threw them to the ground. Ripping out a handful of leaves from the notebook he wadded them up. I struck a match and held it to the paper in cupped hands. Five minutes later, a roaring fire was sweeping away from us toward the cliffs. We ran each way along the edge of the plantation, lighting new fires every few dozen feet. In an hour's time we rejoined, and stood for a moment watching the wall of flame as it swept toward the river. The crackling

of bursting pods and stalks and the roar of the receding flame made a tremendous noise, but we did think once we heard the howling of a roasting Garzus.

We returned at once to our scattered camp. It was fairly light in here now, the moon beams coming through from one side and the ruddy glare of the burning bushes from the other. We rummaged about and found a ball of fish-line, and I mounted to our nest in the tree. Once there, I let the line down, and successively drew up piece after piece of our outfit that Hedrick tied on below. As each item reached me, I would cut off a short length of the line and lash it to a convenient limb. It must have been midnight when Hedrick joined me.

We had boxes of food, six canteens of water, and some of Dooling's chemical gear and the first aid kit. We took our belts and rifle slings and rigged safety belts. We were all set for a siege. We could last in comfort for a week. But that night we could not sleep, there had been too many gruesome things happen before our eyes, and too much of interest. And the coming day was to have its responsibilities. We must warn Camber, for he would come walking along, innocent of the dangers that surrounded him.

Hedrick elaborated his theory of silicon absorption and recombination, and gave me his ideas on the rolling system of locomotion.

"Until we saw these things," he said, "we would have staked our professional reputations that a free joint, like between wheel and axle, would be an impossibility in a living thing. The limb cannot have a connection with the body, and therefore would wither from lack of nourishment. But here, all around us, are examples of this impossibility in actual being. Luckily, there is also the evidence which enables us to see how.

"The diet of castor beans serves a double purpose. It provides raw material for the glands of the Garzus which manufacture an organic oil that is both a lubricant and a carrier of living substance to replenish the wheels as they first grow, then wear away. As the human body absorbs mercury or lead if rubbed on the skin, so do these horn wheels absorb food from the oil surrounding the axles.

"The females have a bony gadget at the tip of their noses. I am confident if we could find a nest of fresh born Garzilli we would find them with soft, flexible wheels of gristle, and without intervening joint. As they get older, the gristle turns to horn, becomes stiff enough to bear its weight, but the little thing cannot yet move about, it must remain motionless in the lair. This is when the mother brings her peculiar nose into play. *She cuts a joint*. By this time, the castor oil glands have begun functioning. The oil flows into the incision, soothing it, and thereafter acts as lubricant and carrier of building elements to the severed horn.

"Normally, the horn would again adhere to the axle, just as human bones tend to grow together after a serious joint injury We can understand now the purpose of the relentless driving up and down of the little ones by the parents. You even saw on several occasions where a mother recut a joint that might have been beginning to freeze. By the time the Garzillus approaches full growth, it has worn definite bearing surfaces on both axle and wheel, its oil glands have taken over their duties, and the rolling joint ceases to require any more attention than our own elbows.

"But suppose we cut off that part of the food supply which provides the oil, like our burning the bean patch. If, as I hope, that is the-only considerable supply near here, it is bound to have profound effects. I anticipate adhesions, perhaps complete immobilizations of the wheels. Stalled in their tracks, they cannot replenish their silicon supply, and the chemical exudations of which they are capable will probably diminish in strength. And, unless some other animal is so stupid as to stray within reach of the antennae, they will also lack the blood food they have been getting."

This logic seemed to me to be perfect. The one great question was, how long will it take? Snakes can endure months without food. Would we see this herd, its wheels locked, die all about us? Would it take a week, a month, how long?

Our discussions had used up the night. In the fuller light of the. breaking day we began to see the monsters rolling toward us, closing in on our tree trunk. They were coming back to finish their work of yesterday. Whatever the ultimate effect of the destruction of the castor plants, in the meantime we must find quicker acting weapons.

viii

AS hastily as possible Hedrick prepared a neutralizer for the Garzus chloroform. We tore off our shirts, and were ready to wet them with the solution and bind them to our noses if attacked again.

"Camber is coming here about noon," Hedrick said, "and they will surely get him. We've got to get down and head him off."

I had been thinking of that, too. I felt I would as soon die myself as witness another friend gulped down. But there was so little we could do. Now that we knew about the gas, it would be suicidal to descend and try an attack with machetes.

Hedrick produced another beaker from Dooling's box.

"It doesn't cost anything to experiment," he remarked drily. "I am going to mix up a belly-ache for our little playmates. You be thinking of a way to feed it to them."

He went to work with his bottles, weighing stuff by guess. The bubbling, fizzy concoction looked potent. I wondered if the Garzi would snap up a bottle. Their craving for silica might lead them to. Then I remembered that they did not eat crystals raw, they first dissolved them into jelly. Our medicine must be fed to them some other way. That is when I thought of the poor monkeys. I dug in Dooling's box and found a big hypodermic syringe, and a can of chloroform.

Busy with compounding our prescription, we were not watching the Garzi, but at the first whiff of the threatening odor, we bound up our faces with the saturated shirts. The stupefying fumes rose steadily to us. A monkey passed out and fell, straight down. Another, from just above, crumpled and started to slide by us but I grabbed the limp form and half jammed, half hung it in the crotch of a branch. The other monkeys were hanging desperately to the limbs, groggy, barely conscious. Pouring some chloroform onto a piece of shirt, I clambered around, putting first one monkey and then another completely out, securing them so that they could not fall. I got a grim comfort out of the condition in which I found them. They were doomed anyway; I could not be blamed too much for using them in the way I had planned. At least there was a promise of vengeance.

As fast as Hedrick could fill the syringe, I brought and held the limp animals until he shot the injection home. I piled the sagging forms around us as best I could on the limbs and branches about us. It took a long time to prepare eight, but eight we needed, one for each of our besiegers.

The gas had stopped before we were ready, but the Garzi were still there, staring up at us with those astonishing eyes.

"Let's go," I said, and began heaving the bodies down.

IT was a full ten minutes after the horrid churning before we knew that the gastric juices of the dragons had mingled with our doses. Unprepared for what followed, we almost fell from our perch. Before, we had heard the howls of injured Garzi, when we had hacked at their antennae, but those were as nothing compared to the hideous cacophony that arose now from below. The medley of shrieks, trumpeting howls and bellowing nearly broke our ear-drums, while the threshing about of the agonized monsters made our tree tremble from its uttermost leaf to the very trunk. Slashing about below, the crystal encrusted tails beat wildly against their mates, against the tree, anything solid. In their frenzy and agony, the creatures' glands let go with

every offensive and defensive device known to them. Gasses squirted from the drooping antennae and from beneath the hard, glittering scales of the back and tail came smoke, the cavernous mouth belched other gasses and vomited gobs of bloody jelly.

It was with grim, sardonic joy that we viewed this spectacle. If the extraordinary structure of the Things had allowed it, they would have wallowed and squirmed, but bound as they were by those colossal wheels, they could do nothing but yowl and thresh about, whipped here and there by the dragonish tails. The exudation of the smokescreen, an instinctive reflex, quickly blotted them from our vision. What followed we could only guess at, it was much too thick below.

"I figured they had acid stomachs," was Hedrick's bland comment.

After a bit, when the smoke had cleared somewhat, all we could see were a few smoky trails, leading away. If Hedrick's prescription had proved fatal, they had gone away to their hidden lairs to die. We left the remnants of our field laboratory and the food supplies that were in the upper branches. We climbed down, and machete in hand, took the back trail to the base camp. We were halfway there when we met Camber. We turned him back and walked along beside him. He was inexpressibly shocked at what we told him, but we could see the gleam of disbelief in his eyes. He heard us out, but as we neared the base camp his revealing comment was:

"It's a tough country— a good night's sleep will do you both good."

We fell onto our cots like men struck by an axe.

WHEN we woke Camber felt that he ought to make the usual trip to the advance base. He still believed that Dooling and the two Indians were camped there. We reiterated our story in vain. He persisted in treating us as sick men, spoke of tropical fever and the like. Futilely, as it later transpired, we tried to impress him with the reality of the tragedy we had survived.

A couple of mornings afterward, when we got up for our breakfast, we found Camber gone. We selected the sharpest machetes in the camp and hastened after him. I need not tell you the rest. Six miles away we found the head and the thoroughly masticated bones. The incredulous, as well as the credulous, are sometimes led to fearful dooms.

The Garzi, then, still moved about their domain. We got our notes in order, and started to mix more of Hedrick's prescription, but had used up several ingredients. Because we must, we retreated into the thick forest through which we had first come, knowing that no wheels could follow us there.

Our natives were as nervous as when last we saw them. Perhaps they wondered what had become of our companions, but none deserted. At the end of a week, Hedrick and I scouted back into Garzus territory.

From the tree that once gave us refuge we surveyed the country beyond. Fire had swept away most of the castor beans. About two clumps that had survived thronged numerous Garzi, apparently fighting over the inadequate supply. We camped that night at the edge of the thick forest.

Next morning we saw none of the Garzi, and no castor beans at all. Venturing into the open, we spotted a grotesque shape standing motionless on the charred plain, and further on another. Approaching the nearest one, we found that it whipped its tail savagely and reached with its tentacles, but did not move on its wheels. We closed in, gingerly chopped off its tentacle-tips and pressed in to prune them as close as we could.

He could not turn those wheels— they were frozen. After experimental slashes, we sliced away some of his lifted scales. Finally, with repeated stabs in the exposed softness, we killed it amid weird and mournful howls.

An axe from the camp enabled us to strip away the tough bulk, until we had freed the axle-bone and wheels. While I finished the stripping of the axle, Hedrick, examining some of the exposed viscera, screamed.

I whirled to help him, but I staggered back, choking and momentarily blinded, from a cloud of vile yellow-green glass.

His machete had thrust into an organ, from which the venomous juice had squirted into his face. He was unrecognizably disfigured by its deadly acid!

I LASHED his body to the axle-bone and from our belts and gun-slings rigged myself a harness. Then, dragging the chassis of the Garzus, I struck along the creek margin toward the falls. I passed stalled Garzi— singly, in groups, one a mother with three young— and with gloomy satisfaction knew that they must linger where they were, to starve for want of castor beans, quartz and blood food. One still rolled, very slowly, after me, but easily I distanced him and came to our base camp.

There stood perhaps a dozen Garzi, the last of their great race. Necessity had driven them on creaking wheels into this country where for ages they had existed only in legend. About them lay the strewn wreckage of our camp— boxes, our valuable notes, instruments. Our canoes were crushed by the blind thrashings of the starved beasts. Up several trees hung some of our Indians, but scattered on the ground were many brown heads of crushed victims.

By now, none of the raiding Garzi could move freely. Casting off my harness, I approached, machete in hand. One after another I cut away the

groping tentacles— twice I was nearly snared and eaten— and it was an afternoon's dreadful, exhausting work.

The surviving Indians watched me, and this conquest of demons before their eyes gave me the prestige with which I carried out the last phase of the adventure. I bullied them down from their perches, made them load a single unsmashed canoe with a few salvaged supplies and the specimens I had saved. The chassis of the Garzus could not go whole, and so I hewed away the wheels, saving only the axle-bone.

The trip down-river to the mission lasted a week. When the Indians, still horrified, tried to desert me and my relics of their dreaded demon-enemies, I kept them at the paddles with a levelled pistol. And I reached here, and then the cumulation of horror, fatigue and perhaps sickness brought on by that whiff of acid-gas, blacked out everything.

THAT is the end of Taussig's narrative. He came home with us aboard the *Tethys*. How that heavy axle-bone came to be broken is one of the mysteries— both Taussig and I think that the Indians who handled it deliberately chopped it up as a magical rite. Anyway, his story did not suit those who heard it at home. The Garzus remains unrecorded among the fauna of the upper Amazon, but it may be that in the future some man of daring and faith will go into the Caquini country and find those telltale remains.

But before he goes, let him come to me. I know where Taussig lives today— he runs a taxidermist's shop on Ninth Avenue, and refuses even to discuss the affair save with me, to whom he thinks he owes much. Perhaps I can persuade him to show the model of a Garzus which stands hidden on a closet shelf in the back of his shop. Even though small and stationary, it is frightful enough to be convincing.

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20: The Thing at Nolan

Ambrose Bierce

1842-1914?

San Francisco Examiner, 2 August 1891, (as "A Queer Story")

TO THE SOUTH of where the road between Leesville and Hardy, in the State of Missouri, crosses the east fork of May Creek stands an abandoned house. Nobody has lived in it since the summer of 1879, and it is fast going to pieces. For some three years before the date mentioned above, it was occupied by the family of Charles May, from one of whose ancestors the creek near which it stands took its name.

Mr. May's family consisted of a wife, an adult son and two young girls. The son's name was John— the names of the daughters are unknown to the writer of this sketch.

John May was of a morose and surly disposition, not easily moved to anger, but having an uncommon gift of sullen, implacable hate. His father was quite otherwise; of a sunny, jovial disposition, but with a quick temper like a sudden flame kindled in a wisp of straw, which consumes it in a flash and is no more. He cherished no resentments, and his anger gone, was quick to make overtures for reconciliation. He had a brother living near by who was unlike him in respect of all this, and it was a current witticism in the neighborhood that John had inherited his disposition from his uncle.

One day a misunderstanding arose between father and son, harsh words ensued, and the father struck the son full in the face with his fist. John quietly wiped away the blood that followed the blow, fixed his eyes upon the already penitent offender and said with cold composure, "You will die for that."

The words were overheard by two brothers named Jackson, who were approaching the men at the moment; but seeing them engaged in a quarrel they retired, apparently unobserved. Charles May afterward related the unfortunate occurrence to his wife and explained that he had apologized to the son for the hasty blow, but without avail; the young man not only rejected his overtures, but refused to withdraw his terrible threat. Nevertheless, there was no open rupture of relations: John continued living with the family, and things went on very much as before.

One Sunday morning in June, 1879, about two weeks after what has been related, May senior left the house immediately after breakfast, taking a spade. He said he was going to make an excavation at a certain spring in a wood about a mile away, so that the cattle could obtain water. John remained in the house for some hours, variously occupied in shaving himself, writing letters and

reading a newspaper. His manner was very nearly what it usually was; perhaps he was a trifle more sullen and surly.

At two o'clock he left the house. At five, he returned. For some reason not connected with any interest in his movements, and which is not now recalled, the time of his departure and that of his return were noted by his mother and sisters, as was attested at his trial for murder. It was observed that his clothing was wet in spots, as if (so the prosecution afterward pointed out) he had been removing blood-stains from it. His manner was strange, his look wild. He complained of illness, and going to his room took to his bed.

May senior did not return. Later that evening the nearest neighbors were aroused, and during that night and the following day a search was prosecuted through the wood where the spring was. It resulted in little but the discovery of both men's footprints in the clay about the spring. John May in the meantime had grown rapidly worse with what the local physician called brain fever, and in his delirium raved of murder, but did not say whom he conceived to have been murdered, nor whom he imagined to have done the deed. But his threat was recalled by the brothers Jackson and he was arrested on suspicion and a deputy sheriff put in charge of him at his home. Public opinion ran strongly against him and but for his illness he would probably have been hanged by a mob. As it was, a meeting of the neighbors was held on Tuesday and a committee appointed to watch the case and take such action at any time as circumstances might seem to warrant.

On Wednesday all was changed. From the town of Nolan, eight miles away, came a story which put a quite different light on the matter. Nolan consisted of a school house, a blacksmith's shop, a "store" and a half-dozen dwellings. The store was kept by one Henry Odell, a cousin of the elder May. On the afternoon of the Sunday of May's disappearance Mr. Odell and four of his neighbors, men of credibility, were sitting in the store smoking and talking. It was a warm day; and both the front and the back door were open. At about three o'clock Charles May, who was well known to three of them, entered at the front door and passed out at the rear. He was without hat or coat. He did not look at them, nor return their greeting, a circumstance which did not surprise, for he was evidently seriously hurt. Above the left eyebrow was a wound—a deep gash from which the blood flowed, covering the whole left side of the face and neck and saturating his light-gray shirt. Oddly enough, the thought uppermost in the minds of all was that he had been fighting and was going to the brook directly at the back of the store, to wash himself.

Perhaps there was a feeling of delicacy— a backwoods etiquette which restrained them from following him to offer assistance; the court records, from

which, mainly, this narrative is drawn, are silent as to anything but the fact. They waited for him to return, but he did not return.

Bordering the brook behind the store is a forest extending for six miles back to the Medicine Lodge Hills. As soon as it became known in the neighborhood of the missing man's dwelling that he had been seen in Nolan there was a marked alteration in public sentiment and feeling. The vigilance committee went out of existence without the formality of a resolution. Search along the wooded bottom lands of May Creek was stopped and nearly the entire male population of the region took to beating the bush about Nolan and in the Medicine Lodge Hills. But of the missing man no trace was found.

One of the strangest circumstances of this strange case is the formal indictment and trial of a man for murder of one whose body no human being professed to have seen— one not known to be dead. We are all more or less familiar with the vagaries and eccentricities of frontier law, but this instance, it is thought, is unique. However that may be, it is of record that on recovering from his illness John May was indicted for the murder of his missing father. Counsel for the defense appears not to have demurred and the case was tried on its merits. The prosecution was spiritless and perfunctory; the defense easily established— with regard to the deceased— an *alibi*. If during the time in which John May must have killed Charles May, if he killed him at all, Charles May was miles away from where John May must have been, it is plain that the deceased must have come to his death at the hands of someone else.

John May was acquitted, immediately left the country, and has never been heard of from that day. Shortly afterward his mother and sisters removed to St. Louis. The farm having passed into the possession of a man who owns the land adjoining, and has a dwelling of his own, the May house has ever since been vacant, and has the somber reputation of being haunted.

One day after the May family had left the country, some boys, playing in the woods along May Creek, found concealed under a mass of dead leaves, but partly exposed by the rooting of hogs, a spade, nearly new and bright, except for a spot on one edge, which was rusted and stained with blood. The implement had the initials C. M. cut into the handle.

This discovery renewed, in some degree, the public excitement of a few months before. The earth near the spot where the spade was found was carefully examined, and the result was the finding of the dead body of a man. It had been buried under two or three feet of soil and the spot covered with a layer of dead leaves and twigs. There was but little decomposition, a fact attributed to some preservative property in the mineral-bearing soil.

Above the left eyebrow was a wound—a deep gash from which blood had flowed, covering the whole left side of the face and neck and saturating the

light-gray shirt. The skull had been cut through by the blow. The body was that of Charles May.

But what was it that passed through Mr. Odell's store at Nolan?

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