PAST MASTERS 177

Algernon Blackwood
Percy James Brebner
Ethel Lina White
Beatrice Grimshaw
Rudyard Kipling
F Frankfort Moore
"Sapper"
Marjorie Bowen

and more

PAST MASTERS 177

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

19 Sep 2024

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1: The Story Mr Popkiss Told

Algernon Blackwood

1869-1951

The Westminster Gazette Dec 24 1908

Wyalong Advocate, NSW, 6 March 1909

An amusing but more or less forgotten Blackwood tale, from a Christmas issue of the Westminster Gazette*, in the tradition of the Christmas ghost or "strange" story. It doesn't appear in any of his own many short story collections.*

"TALKING OF railway accidents—"

"But we weren't," interrupted the prig.

"—and of narrow escapes," continued Mr Popkiss, ignoring the contradiction, and looking like an offended parrot with its head on one side, "reminds me of one."

"Which?" inquired the prig smartly, "the railway accident or the narrow escape?" He was a small young man, with red eyes and a face like a weasel. He was also a "physical student."

"Both," said Popkiss, looking at him over the top of his spectacles, and spreading out his coat-tails before the live, so that he resembled more than ever a parrot, jaunty, yet slightly ruffled. swinging on its perch,

"Let's have the story," said Brown, in a tone of authority.

And the story began at once; for Brown was "the intellect" of the little party of newspaper-men telling yarns round the club fire-place that deserted Christmas-week, when their duties held them in London after everyone else had gone.

"It saved my life, so it was nearly an accident," continued Mr Popkiss ambiguously, "and this is how it happened. Most odd, it was."

He buttoned his coat tightly, as though conscious that he resembled a bird, and anxious to dissemble the fact. He was a man of fifty, bald, shabby, timid, and kind-hearted— an unsuccessful solicitor.

"It was last year, on the Boxing Day after Christmas," he began in his high-pitched voice, "and I was in a third class carriage, going down into Surrey for the New Year's week. I was alone, sitting by the window. It was after ten o'clock, and I was drowsy, but not asleep. The window streamed with rain. Outside, everything was black and raw and miserable— utterly cheerless. Just after leaving Wimbledon station another train drew up alongside, and I watched it through the window of my corner-seat, trying to work up an interest, and wondering which would win. I imagined the two trains were racing as one is apt to do at such a time— and that all the passengers knew it.

But for a long time we both ran an even race, neck and neck, and I remember thinking what a fool our engine-driver was not to put on steam and pull ahead.

"Faster and faster we went. It annoyed me that all these stupid passengers in the other train were so close to me, going to other destinations than mine. It seemed so dull and boring for them. You know the kind of foolish thoughts that wander up and down the mind at such times:"

"Quite," said the psychical student; "quite!"

"And I was glad the windows were so blurred by rain that they couldn't see into my carriage when, suddenly, I turned with a start and found that my own window was clear as crystal, and that I could see with the greatest ease into the carriage running close beside me. Something had sponged the windows clean. And in the corner seat of that other carriage, so close to my elbow that I could have put my hand out and touched him, sat a man, huddled up in overcoats and rugs, just as I was."

Mr Popkiss unbuttoned the top button of his coat to allow more freedom for possible gestures. The group of listeners stared with keen attention. The mind of the weasel-faced student was already busily searching for flaws by means of which he might tear the story to pieces the moment it was finished.

"Quite inexplicably," continued Mr Popkiss, pitching his voice higher in key but lower in tone, "the figure of this man arrested my attention vividly— almost unpleasantly. The face was hidden by his hand, but there was something about him that made me reflect. It seemed to me that I knew who he was. Like myself, he was alone in an empty compartment. The curious idea entered my head that he was watching me through the fingers over his face; and a mysterious uneasiness I could not account for came over me.

"I made a movement forward to look at him through the middle window- and the man made a precisely similar movement. Through the middle windows of both carriages, our eyes met, and in a flash I saw who it was "

"You recognised him?" asked several voices together.

"I recognised him beyond all question— he was myself!" continued Mr Popkiss, unfastening the second button of his coat; "absolutely myself!"

"Another Popkiss!" exclaimed the psychical student. "You mean a reflection, of course?"

"At first I thought it was a reflection, for the man copied every movement I made— every single movement. I won't bore you with details; but everything I did in my carriage that man also did in his carriage. And yet"— Popkiss mopped his forehead and unbuttoned the last button— "there was something about him— something about the peering face with spectacles— about the silent movements and shadowy appearance— that woke a nameless terror in me. I began to perspire all over. And something in me, too, began to tremble. Each

time I turned to look, there he stood, his arms placed precisely as mine were placed, his body in the same attitude exactly, and his spectacled eyes staring straight into my own."

His voice sank to a whisper as he said this. Everyone listened breathlessly.

"A projection of your own Double," murmured the student, "or a condition of hysteria inducing a vision," but no one paid any attention to him.

"Yes, and this is how it happened," resumed Popkiss, passing a hand over his bald head, as though the world wore so strange a place that it would not have surprised him to find unexpected tufts upon that marble surface, "and I never can persuade you how dreadfully queer I felt.

"Then, suddenly, an idea came to me just as the two trains were slowing down, still running neck and neck. I opened the window! The other man did the same. We put our heads out. There was no question of reflection then. I had to cling to the window sides to prevent myself falling, so great was the shock. For, instead of disappearing, as a reflection must have disappeared, the face of this other, man suddenly flamed up through the night in most amazing fashion; and, thrusting his head forward so that we almost touched one another, I heard his whispering across to me through the darkness. The words came with a sense of must appalling reality, and it seemed to me that a wind of ice and snow passed over my cheeks.

" 'Leave this train!' he said, above the rattle of the metals. 'Leave this train!'

"And the very next second, before I could answer, or do anything at all, the lights in his carriage were extinguished, and the train was running beside me in black darkness!

"But was it running beside me? That was the queer part of it. Was it still keeping up a neck-and-neck race with my own? For when I put my head further out to look, and as soon as my eyes got accustomed to the gloom, lo and behold, there was no train there at all! Both in front and behind the lines were clear. There was no train, and no sign of one.... Five minutes later we ran into Woking Junction."

The psychical student longed to say something, but his mind was so confused with such phrases as "double personality," "veridical drams," "subliminal consciousness," and the like, that before he could squeeze out a word Mr Popkiss was at it again, finishing, his story:

"It would be impossible to describe to you how, and why, the whole thing so impressed me," he explained softly, "that I actually did leave the train at Woking Junction, although my destination was several further stations further on... All I can tell you is that the train itself— my train— ran off the metals before it had gone another mile down the line, and two people wore killed

outright, and a dozen injured terribly... I had to sleep at Woking and go on next day when the debris was cleared away...."

He buttoned up his coat again very quickly, and touched the bell for the waiter.

"Queer, wasn't it?" he observed, looking round him with a thirsty sigh.

Involved discussion followed in a torrent, during the course of which the psychical student gave the group the benefit of much labored explanation. A world in which he could not explain everything by the processes of his own acute little mind was intolerable to him. And when the others, led by Brown, made difficulties, he fell back upon the delightful generalisation that "to imagine such things at all was a sure sign of mental degeneration...."

"What do you think of it yourself?" he asked at length of the story-teller.

"I?" said Popkiss, deprecatingly; "Oh, I don't think anything at all. It saved my life— and that's enough for me!"

He handed a cigarette to the student who "didn't drink," and sat back in his chair to listen to the next tale.

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2: The Case of Sergeant Arragon

J. H. M. Abbott

1874-1953

Sun (Sydney, NSW), 15 May 1932

This short story was reprinted, somewhat edited, as "The Mixed Luck of Sergeant Arragon", in the Sydney "Truth" on 31 May 1953, attributed to "a special correspondent". The story in set in colonial New South Wales in 1831. The author was a poet, historian and short story writer.

SERGEANT ARRAGON flattened his athletic body against the barrack wall and glared down at the upturned face of the dead man, clear-cut and handsome in the brilliant moonlight, with wide-open eyes staring up into the silvery beauty of that perfect, summer night.

"Good God!" he muttered. "And me just thinking of him, and praying it might be so. Good God,!"

The body lay in the gutter at the side of the roadway on its back, with the right knee bent, and the foot twisted inwards beneath the other leg. The white hands, on one of which a diamond glinted in the moonlight, rested on the flowered satin waistcoat, just below, a dark bloodstain that slowly grew and widened in a horrible and ghastly fashion. There was a smile on the full, clean-shaven lips that seemed to have a sort of surprised question in it, as though the quiet and motionless man were about to ask: "In the name of Heaven, what's happened to me?"

About the middle of the; narrow footpath a beaver top hat— right side up, as if it had been carefully deposited there— stood in solitary state, lending an air of respectability and well-being to the sordid and alarming tableau of murder.

A surprising distance away, over on the other side of the road, lay the dead man's walking-stick, a highly-polished staff of ebony with a big silver knob on the top of it that sparkled in the moonlight.

" 'Tis Charles Martindale, all right," murmured Sergeant Arragon as he stared down at the body. "God! I wish it had been me that done it! The swine— the rotten swine!"

FIVE MINUTES before, the sergeant had turned into Barrack Street, coming from the direction of Darling Harbor, Just as the crash and rattle of the drums inside the walls had begun to beat out "tattoo." The deafening noise, echoing back from the long range of high barrack buildings on the western side of the parade-ground and from the houses across George Street, had drowned all other sounds. The short street was empty, save for one passenger— a tall,

slimly-built gentleman in a tall hat, who was walking in the opposite direction on his own.

Suddenly, the approaching man had thrown his arms into the air and fallen backwards. His walking-stick had spun in a flashing arc whose passage was lit by moonbeams to where it lay now, and his hat had rolled on to the pavement and into its present position. Running forward, Sergeant Arragon had stooped over the prostrate figure, and, recognising his features,, instantly, had recoiled back against the barrack-wall in amazement.

It was an astounding thing thus to come suddenly across his most bitter enemy— dead— when the bitter enemy mould have been in London, nearly. 12,000 miles away. It dazed him completely, so that he could only flatten his body against the stone wall, and stare down at the dead man lying in the quiet street.

When the drums inside ceased, as abruptly as they had begun, their uproar, he could still only stand there staring. It was as if someone had hit him a blow on the head, and almost deprived him of the power or moving or of thinking. Perhaps for a whole minute he leaned, paralysed, against the wall— and then the sound of tramping feet coming down the slope brought him to himself. It was the picket marching back to barracks with a few odd stragglers collected from the public houses on "the Rocks." They came close to where he stood, and as if in a dream he heard the corporal, cry, "Halt!"

"Stiffen me!" exclaimed the man. "What th' hell's all this?"

"He's dead, I think, Simmons," said Sergeant Arragon. "Best pick him up— fall out a file of your men— and we'll take him to the guard-room and send for the police. There's his walking-stick over there— bring it with you. I'll carry his hat."

"Gawd!" said the corporal, hoarsely. "Th' cove's been shot. Here— you two — Smith, Hall— fall out and pick him' up, and carry him into barracks. This is a rum go, Sergeant. It wasn't you done it?" he added in a whisper, fearfully.

Sergeant Arragon shook his head.

"I wish to God it had been!" he growled. "No. No such luck!"

"Blime!" exclaimed the corporal. "Stiffen me!"

IN the light of the big lantern that illuminated the white-washed guard-room by the barrack gates in George Street, it was possible to make a closer examination of the dead man, who was laid out along a bench, so that his arms hung down on either, side, and his cutaway coat of blue broadcloth, falling wide open, revealed the great blood-stain that was obliterating the flowers of his "fancy" waistcoat. It was obvious that he had been shot, and almost quite as much so that the bullet had gone through his heart. But the sergeant of the

guard would permit of no examination of the wound until the Adjutant should be present. He sent a man to the Mess for him, and for the regimental surgeon also.

Only a few minutes elapsed before their arrival at the guard-room. It was guest-night in the Mess, and Captain Farrar, the Adjutant, was annoyed at having been called away. So was Dr. Holland.

"Damme, Sergeant," said the former, as he entered the guardroom, "don't you know that Sydney Barracks are not the town dead-house? What the devil induced you to bring this fellow here?"

"I didn't bring him, sir— 'twas Sergeant Arragon and the patrol what fetched him in. But not being positive sure the gennelman was dead, I thought it best to send for the doctor, and to let you know, sir."

"Oh, you did, did you! Well, let's have a look at him. How is he, doctor— dead or living?

"Oh, dead— dead as Julius Caesar," replied the surgeon, who had at once proceeded to examine the corpse. "Couldn't be any deader. Shot— clean . through the heart. Must have died, immediately. Nothing to be done for him— except to bury him. However, that's not our funeral, Farrar. I'd advise you to send word of the affair to the watch-house. The constables can convey the body to the General Hospital in Macquarie Street. Dr. Bowman's fellows may have the pleasure of the post-mortem— he's no business of mine."

"Damme— he's none of mine, either," growled the Adjutant. "How did you come by this windfall; Sergeant? Who found the mail's body?"

"Sergeant Arragon, sir— just outside the south wall, in Barrack Street,"

"Arragon!" said the Adjutant. "Why, how did you come to find him, Sergeant Arragon? Did you see the shooting?"

"I saw the man fall, sir— but I did not see who fired the shot, or even hear it."

"Well, but how was that? If you saw him fall, surely you heard the report of the firearm that did the mischief?"

"The drums had just struck up tattoo, sir, as I turned into -Barrack' Street, and the noise must ha' drowned the report. I heard no shot— only saw this person throw, up his arms and fall backwards into, the gutter. I ran up to him, but he never moved a muscle, and seemed to me to be quite dead. I turned out of York Street, sir— and I think the shot must have come from behind me. He was coming towards me."

"What d'ye say to that, Holland?" The Adjutant turned to the surgeon. "Was he shot from in front?"

"Oh, undoubtedly, Mr. Adjutant. The bullet must have struck him in the thorax, just over the heart, and passed clean through it. It came out his back, below the shoulder-blade. Here, I'll show you."

"Thank you," said the Adjutant, hastily. "I'll take your word for it. Sergeant Ryan," he spoke to the sergeant of the guard, "send a man to the watch-house, down in George Street, to tell the chief constable. He'd better bring a stretcher, or some other means of removing the body. We don't want it here. 'Tis no concern of ours. I suppose you'd better send for me when the police come. 'Tis a d——d nuisance, but no help for it. And you'd better stay here, Sergeant Arragon— of course they'll want to hear your story. By the way, where had you been to?"

"I'd been 'down to the Market Wharf, sir, to see the Newcastle packet away — I had a friend who was going to Hunter's River to-night, sir."

"Oh, well, you'd better wait here for the constables. They'll want to know all about it. Send across to the Mess when they come, Sergeant Ryan. Come along, doctor— let's get back. 'Twill be an hour, at least, before these dawdling fellows come from the watch-house."

ALL through a hot summer day Chief Justice Forbes presided over the trial of Sergeant William Arragon, charged with the murder of Charles Martindale— those who are curious about it may read the three columns of closely-set type in which "*The Sydney Herald*" of November 25, 1831, fully reports what was the sensation of the year in Sydney. Only three aspects of the evidence concern us here, and they are very damning aspects, which no jury could have put aside, or no Judge have refrained from quoting against the prisoner in, his summing-up. Major J. T. Morisset, who had been for several years Commandant at Newcastle, and was then Superintendent of Police in Sydney, had deposed that, being at the George Street watch-house when the message came from the barracks on the night of the murder, he had accompanied the District Constable to the guard-room.

Almost immediately several circumstances had led him to suspect Sergeant Arragon of the crime, and he had ordered his arrest, and took him to the; watch-house. Here he had been searched, and the pistol produced— one of a pair of duelling weapons— which had been recently discharged, was found on the person of Sergeant Arragon when, his pockets had been turned out. Further, the sergeant had admitted, in a voluntary statement, that he had been acquainted, and on very bad terms, with the deceased in England. Then the corporal of the picket; which, marching back to Barracks, had come upon Sergeant Arragon beside the body of the deceased, stated that the sergeant had seemed much agitated, and had expressed gratification at the death of

Martindale. Surgeon Holland, of H.M. 63rd Regiment, together with Dr. James Mitchell, of the. General Hospital, who had conducted a post-mortem examination of the body of the deceased, had both testified that the wound which had caused death could have been made by a bullet of the calibre of the pistol found upon Sergeant Arragon. After a summing-up unfavorable to the prisoner by the Chief Justice, the jury, having retired for but a brief Interval, returned a verdict of "guilty" against the prisoner.

In passing sentence, his Honor, Mr. Justice Forbes, had described the finding of the jury as entirely just, and, after commenting again on the weakness of that part of the accused's defence in which he had accounted for the pistol by saying that he had taken it to the Newcastle packet in order to present it to his friend, who was going to settle in the Hunter River district, and, had forgotten to hand it to him, and that its recent discharge was owing to his having tested It that afternoon, and not having since cleaned it, had described the murder as one of callous and bloodthirsty vengeance. Even had the deceased run off with his wife some years before, this did not entitle Sergeant Arragon to exact so fearful a revenge. He had then sentenced the accused to death, holding out to him no hope of mercy.

So that was how this curious business stood on the evening of December 5th, the time of Sergeant Arragon's execution having been arranged for 9 o'clock on the following morning at the back of the gaol in George Street.

IT WAS LATE at night when a loud and insistent hammering upon the closed gates of the barracks caused the sentry in front of the guardroom to open the little wicket door and thrust his head out into George Street, angrily demanding what was the matter. As he made his wrathful inquiry he was joined by the sergeant of the guard— who happened to be the same Sergeant Ryan who had been on duty when Major Morisset had arrested Sergeant Arragon.

"What th' devil's th' trouble?"demanded the sergeant. "We ain't deaf. What d'ye want?"

"I want to see Colonel Hoskins," said the late visitor; "I must see' him."

"Why, damme," swore the sergeant, "this ain't no 'time for to come a-callin' on th' C.O., and, anyway, he don't live in barracks. Ye won't find him here. Wait till to-morrow, and call at his house in Phillip Street, strike, me dead, man, ain't ye got no sense?"

The man shoved his way in through the wicket, and stared at the sergeant for a moment or two before he spoke again. They noticed that he was very pale, and that his face streamed with perspiration, which he wiped nervously

with a red bandana handkerchief. His mouth was gaping, and his hand shook as he dabbed at his features.

"Lookye, Sergeant," he said, suddenly, " 'twas me that killed the man they're going to hang your Sergeant Arragon over in the morning. That's what I want to tell the Colonel."

"What!" gasped Sergeant Ryan. "You done what?"

"I killed Charles Martindale. I've come to tell 'em so— so that Bill Arragon won't hang. Now will ye get someone— someone who can move in the matter? What about, the Ad-

There was a tense silence for a few moments as Sergeant Ryan stared in amazement at the man before him. Then he gave the sentry an order.

"Put your head inside the guard room and call one of 'em out," he said.

The sentry obeyed, and presently a sleepy soldier emerged.

"Look ye, Jimmy," the sergeant charged him, "go to Captain Farrar's quarters and wake him up. Tell him it's something terrible serious, and Sergeant Ryan'd be obliged if he'd come to the guard-room immediate. A matter o' life an' death, tell him. Say a fellie's come here who says 'twas him who killed th' cove they're a-goin' for to hang pore Bill over. D'ye see? Hurry, now. Come into the guard-room, you. I dunno what y'r game is— but it's a chance ye're right in th' head, an' mebbe 'tis a chance for pore Bill. Come into th' light till I look at ye."

SEVEN WEEKS later Sergeant Arragon halted a marching escort of twelve soldiers outside Sydney Gaol, stood them at ease, and waited for the batch of prisoners consigned to Norfolk island, which he was to see safely embarked upon the Governor Phillip brig, the transport which would carry them to a living death on Norfolk Island.

Presently the gate opened, and the gang of prisoners, wearing double irons, shuffled out into George Street. Four of the soldiers, at a signal from the sergeant, took up a position at the head of the dejected column, four more arranged themselves upon either side of it. and another section brought up. the rear. At the word of command, given by Sergeant Arragon on the nod of Tom Norton, the gaoler, the melancholy, procession began its slow progress towards the Cove, where the Governor Phillip awaited them by the Government wharf alongside the Commissariat Stores.

So slow and painful Was the despairing march of the unwilling voyagers that it, was more than half an hour before they arrived at the waterside. Here they were halted on the wharf, whilst the gaoler, and the officer in charge of the escort, that was to sail with the prisoners in the brig completed the business of checking the personnel of his Majesty's passengers to the dreaded:

place of banishment. There was hardly a man amongst them who did hot consider that he was taking his last look at Sydney Town.

"Bill— Bill , Arragon!"

The sergeant heard a hoarse whisper as he. strolled round the flank of the miserable parade.

"Bill— don't... ye know me?"

He turned, and looked at the man who had addressed him from the ranks of the prisoners. It was the fellow whose confession had saved him from the gallows. He started when he saw him— and then put out his hand.

"Lookye, Bill," the other whispered again, as he grasped the sergeant's fingers, "It never come out in court why I shot that fellie Martindale— an' you don't know, neither. Well, 'twas because he ran away with your wife— with little Nellie. That's why, I done it— because he left her to die o' mis'ry at Boulogne. They reprieved me yesterday, and I'm for th' Island— d—n them, they might ha' let me hang, an' I'd been obliged to 'em. When I shot him from Fat Moll's place In Barrack Street I hoped you'd be blamed, for I don't like sojers. An' then I larned you had been Nell's husband— an' I couldn't let it go. I couldn't let you hang. So that's how it was. Well— I've done one decent thing, anyway, before I go to hell. Good-bye, Sergeant Arragon."

The sergeant stared at him in wonder. Presently he asked a question: "But, "But, man alive, what had you to do with It? What was it to you that Martindale ran off with my missus?".

"I was her lover!"

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3: The Crime in the Yellow Taxi

Percy James Brebner

1864-1922

In: *The Master Detective*, 1916

The author's series detective was Christopher Quarles, a University professor whose "Watson" is Wigan, a police officer.

ONE'S LAST ADVENTURE is apt to assume the place of first importance, the absorption in the details is so recent and the gratification at solving the problems still fresh. Used to his methods as I had become, Quarles's handling of the Daniel Hardiman case was constantly in my mind until I had become acquainted with the yellow taxi. I will not say his deductions in the taxi affair were more clever— you must judge that— but I am sure they were more of a mental strain to him, for he lost his temper with Zena.

We had been arguing various points, and seemed to have exhausted all our ideas.

"Give a dog a bad name and hang him," said Zena, breaking the silence which had seemed to indicate that our discussion was at an end.

"I repeat that had he been in a different position he would have been arrested at once," said Quarles testily; "but because he happens to be a prominent Member of Parliament, goes everywhere which is anywhere, and knows everybody who is anybody, it suits people to forget he is a blackguard and it suits Scotland Yard to neglect its duty."

An inquest in connection with a very extraordinary case had taken place that day, and had been adjourned.

On the previous Monday, between seven and eight in the evening, the traffic had become congested at Hyde Park Corner, chiefly owing to the fog, and the attention of a gentleman standing on the pavement— a Mr. Lester Williams— had been drawn suddenly to the occupant of a taxi. Possibly a street lamp, or the light on an adjacent motor, picked out the lady's face particularly, and he had opened the door before he called to the driver.

The lady was leaning back in the corner, but he saw at once that something was wrong, and when he touched her the horrible truth became apparent.

She was dead.

He called to the driver to draw up to the curb and then called a policeman. Williams jumped at once to the conclusion that a crime had been committed, and the police took the same view.

There was no difficulty as regards identification. She was Lady Tavener, wife of Sir John Tavener, M.P. The driver, Thomas Wood, had come from the other side of Twickenham and had taken up Sir John and his wife at their own

front door. He had constantly driven them up to town and elsewhere, sometimes separately, sometimes together. On this occasion he had driven to a house on Richmond Green, where Sir John had got out. Lady Tavener was going on to the Piccadilly Hotel. Wood had got as far as Hyde Park Corner when a gentleman called to him. He had not seen the gentleman open the door of the taxi, knew nothing in fact until he was told to drive up to the curb and Lady Tavener was taken out dead.

At the inquest the evidence took rather a curious turn. It was common knowledge that Sir John had married Lady Tavener after her divorce from a Mr. Curtis, since dead, and Sir John's reputation was none of the best.

Veiled accusations were constantly made against him in those would-be smart journals catering for that public interested in this kind of scandal, and several questions founded on this knowledge were put to him at the inquest.

He came out of the ordeal very well, and gave his evidence in a straightforward manner. He did not pretend that he and his wife did not quarrel at times, sometimes rather severely he admitted, but he maintained there was no reason why his wife should commit suicide. He ignored altogether the idea that he was in any way responsible for her death. She seemed in perfect health when he had left her that evening. She was dining with some people called Folliott, and was going on to the theater with them afterwards. He also believed that a crime had been committed.

The medical evidence threw some doubt on this opinion, however. True, there were slight marks on Lady Tavener's throat, but it was possible she had caused them herself by catching hold of her own throat in some spasm. She was addicted to drugs, a fact which she had concealed from her husband apparently, and her general condition was such that a shock or some sudden excitement might very easily prove fatal. Two doctors were agreed upon this point, and said that she was in a condition known as status lymphaticus.

After the inquest I had gone to see Quarles, and his one idea was that Sir John should have been arrested. Zena's sarcastic suggestion that her grandfather would hang him merely because of his reputation, had made the old man lose his temper altogether.

As I was the representative of Scotland Yard in that empty room at Chelsea, I felt compelled to say something in its defense.

"Have you read the evidence given to-day carefully?" I asked.

"I was there," he snapped.

I had not seen him and was astonished.

"Arrest Tavener," he went on, "and then you may be able to solve the problem. There may be extenuating circumstances, but they can be dealt with afterwards. Let us go into another room."

He got up and brought the discussion to a close. He was in one of those moods in which there was no doing anything with him.

Although I was at the inquest, I had had little to do with the case up to this point; now it came entirely into my hands, and it may be that Quarles's advice was at the back of my mind during my inquiries.

I made one or two rather interesting and significant discoveries. The Folliotts, with whom it was said Lady Tavener was dining that night, did not know Sir John, and moreover, they had no appointment with Lady Tavener that evening, nor were they dining at the Piccadilly Hotel. The people on Richmond Green, with whom Sir John had dined, admitted that he was in an excited condition. He made an expected division in the House of Commons an excuse for leaving early, directly after dinner in fact, but he had not gone to the House and did not arrive home until after midnight, when he found a constable waiting for him with the news of his wife's death.

These facts were given in evidence at the next hearing, but it was less due to them than to public feeling, I fancy, that a verdict of murder against Sir John Tavener was returned.

That night I went again to Chelsea.

"I see that you have arrested him, Wigan," was the professor's greeting.

"I don't believe he is guilty," I answered.

"Why not? Let us have the reasons. But tell me first, what was his demeanor when he heard the verdict? Was he astonished?"

"He seemed to be pitying a body of men who could make such a mistake."

"Ah, he will play to the gallery even when death knocks at his door. Why do you think he is not guilty, Wigan?"

"Intuition for one reason."

"Come, that is a woman's prerogative."

"That sixth sense, which is usually denied to men," corrected Zena.

"Then for tangible reasons," I said; "if he killed his wife he committed the crime between Twickenham and Richmond Green, knowing perfectly well that her death must be discovered at the end of her journey. He would know that suspicion would inevitably fall upon him."

"That seems a good argument, Wigan, but, as a fact, suspicion did not immediately fall upon him. He has only been arrested to-day, and even now you think he has been wrongly arrested. The very daring of the crime was in his favor."

"My second reason is this," I went on. "If he were guilty, would he deliberately have closed the door of escape open for him by the doctors and declare that he did not believe his wife committed suicide? Would he not have jumped at the idea?"

"That also sounds a good argument," said Quarles, "but is it? He could not deny that he and his wife quarreled rather badly at times, but he wanted to justify his position, and he felt confident the opinion of the doctors would stand, no matter what he might say. If no other facts come to light, suicide will be the line of defense, Wigan, and it will be exceedingly hard to get any judge and jury to convict him. Nothing carries greater weight than medical evidence, and you will find the doctors sticking to their opinion no matter what happens. No, Wigan, your reasons do not prove that he is not an exceedingly clever and calculating rascal. On the present evidence I think he would escape the hangman, but the public will continue to think him guilty unless some one else stands in the dock in his place."

"I wonder whether the Folliotts have told the truth," said Zena.

"Intuition, Wigan," laughed Quarles, "jumps to the end of the journey and wants to argue backwards."

"Do you not often do the same, dear?"

"Perhaps, but not this time. I think you said the taxi had been in charge of the police?"

"Yes," I answered.

"I should like to see it."

"We can go to-morrow."

I had already spent a couple of hours with that taxi, and I was rather anxious to see how Quarles would go to work with it.

He began with the metal work and the lamps, nodded his admiration at the way they were kept, and remarked that but for the vehicle number and the registering machine it might be a private car. He examined the engine and the tires, using his lens; seemed to be particularly interested in the texture of the rubber, and picked out some grains of soil which had stuck in the tire. All four tires came in for this close inspection.

Inside the taxi his lens went slowly over every inch of the upholstering, and with the blade of a penknife he scraped up some soil from the carpet. This he put on a piece of white paper and spent a long time investigating it. He opened and shut the door half a dozen times, and shook his head. Then he seated himself in the driver's seat, and in pantomime drove the car for a few moments. Afterwards, he stood back and regarded the car as a whole.

"Well, Wigan, it is a very good taxi; let us go and have a ride in another one."

He did not hail the first we encountered, and when he did call one it was for the sake of the driver, I fancy. He explained that he wanted to drive to Richmond Green by Hammersmith and Kew Bridge.

"And we don't want to go too fast," said Quarles.

"Don't you be afraid, guv'nor, I shan't run you into anything; you won't come to no harm with me."

"It isn't that," said Quarles, "but I'm out to enjoy myself. I'll add a good bit to what that clock thing says at the end of the run."

"Thank you, guv'nor."

"Now just get down and open this thing to let me have a look at the works."

The driver looked at me, and I nodded. No doubt he thought I was the old man's keeper.

Quarles looked at the engine.

"It isn't new," he remarked.

"No, guv'nor."

"How long has it been running?"

"I couldn't say. I'm not buying this on the hire system."

"You fellows do that sometimes, eh?"

"Yes, guv'nor, there are several of us chaps own their own taxi."

"That's good. Now for Richmond, and go slowly from Hyde Park Corner."

I never remember a more tedious journey. Quarles hardly spoke a word the whole way, but sat leaning forward, looking keenly from one side of the road to the other, as if he were bent on obtaining a mental picture of every yard of the way. Arriving at Richmond Green he did no more than just glance at the house where Sir John had dined that night, and then told the man to drive to Twickenham as fast as he liked to go.

"Stop him when we reach Tavener's house, Wigan. You know it, I suppose?"

I did, and stopped the driver when we got there. Quarles had the car turned round, then he got out and examined the tires with his lenses. The driver winked at me, and I nodded to assure him that I knew the eccentric gentleman I had to deal with, and that he was quite harmless.

We then drove back to Richmond rapidly, and from there went toward town, but more slowly. By Kew Gardens along to Kew Bridge Quarles did not seem particularly interested in the journey, but as we drew near Hammersmith he became alert again.

We were going slowly past St. Paul's school when he told the driver to take the second turning to the left. It was a narrow street, a big warehouse, which was being enlarged, on one side, and a coal yard on the other. About fifty yards down this street, the driver was instructed to stop.

"We will get out for a minute and look at the view," said Quarles facetiously.

I confess I found nothing whatever to interest me, but Quarles seemed to find the blank walls of the warehouse and coal yard attractive.

"Now, driver, you can turn round and get us back to Hyde Park Corner as quickly as you like," said the professor as we got into the taxi again.

Arriving at our destination he told the driver to go into the park, and there stopped him. Again he examined the tires and the texture of them, picking some soil from the rubber, and he scraped up some dust from the floor of the taxi with a penknife and put it in an envelope.

"Thank you, my man," he said, paying a substantial fare.

"You're welcome, guv'nor," said the driver with a grin.

"He is fully persuaded that he has been driving a lunatic and his keeper," Quarles said as he walked away. "I suppose you can find the driver of the other taxi, Wigan."

"We might have found him this morning. He lives at Twickenham."

"I want you to see him and ask him two questions. First, was the fog in Hammersmith, or elsewhere on the journey, thick enough to bring him to a standstill before he reached Hyde Park Corner? Secondly, is he quite sure that the man who opened the door and called to him had not just got out of the taxi?"

"But—"

"You ask him these two questions and get him to answer definitely," said Quarles in that aggravating and dictatorial manner he sometimes has. "To-morrow night come to Chelsea. I am not prepared to talk any more about the Tavener case until then."

Without another word he went off in the direction of Victoria, leaving an angry man behind him. I am afraid I swore. However, I hunted up the driver of the taxi, and went to Chelsea the following night, still somewhat out of temper.

Quarles and Zena were already in the empty room waiting for me.

"Well, what did the man say?" asked the professor.

"The fog did not stop him anywhere until he got to Hyde Park Corner, and he is sure Lady Tavener was alone after leaving Richmond."

"He stuck to that?"

"He did, but after some consideration he said that he had almost come to a standstill in Hammersmith Broadway on account of the trams. I suggested that some one might have got into the taxi then, but while admitting the bare possibility, he did not think it likely."

"Did he give you the impression that he believed Tavener guilty?"

"Yes. He seemed to consider his arrest a proof of it."

"Naturally," said the professor.

"Your whole investigation seems to be for the purpose of proving Sir John innocent," I said. "Why were you so anxious to have him arrested?"

"Pardon me, my one idea is to get at the truth. Always be careful of your premises, Wigan. That is the first essential for a logical conclusion. Zena has said that because a dog has a bad name I want to hang him. Well, she gave me an idea; started a theory, in fact. Let us go through the case. First there is the question of suicide. It must come first, because if we are logical— the law is not always logical, you know— if we are logical, it is obvious no man could be hanged while the doctors stuck tight to their opinion. However, I have reason for leaving the question of suicide until last. Therefore we investigate the question of murder. Had Sir John disappeared after visiting the house on Richmond Green, I suppose not one person in ten thousand would have believed him innocent."

"But he didn't," I said.

"No," said Quarles. "But he behaved in a most peculiar manner. He left immediately after dinner, did not reach home until after midnight, and has not yet attempted to account for his time. He was in an abnormal condition. We will make a mental note of that, Wigan."

I nodded.

"We will assume that when he left her Lady Tavener was alive," Quarles went on. "At Hyde Park Corner she was dead, and the driver Wood was entirely ignorant that anything had happened. Yet, if murder was done, some one must have joined Lady Tavener during the journey. Wood says he was not held up by the fog, but on being pressed a little, speaks of coming nearly to a standstill in Hammersmith Broadway. There, or somewhere else, because we must remember Wood may have forgotten nearly coming to other stoppages, since driving in a fog must have required the whole of his attention— somewhere, somebody must have joined her. The driver, again under pressure, admits the bare possibility, but does not think it likely. However, we must assume that some one at some place did enter the taxi."

Zena was leaning forward eagerly, and I waited quietly for Quarles to continue.

"It follows that whoever it was must have been known to Lady Tavener," he said slowly. "Otherwise she would have called out to the driver or to people passing."

"You mean that he left it at Hyde Park Corner after the murder," said Zena. "You think it was Lester Williams."

"There is the possibility that he was getting out of the taxi instead of rushing to it, because he noticed the occupant looked peculiar," Quarles admitted.

"In that case would he have called the driver's attention?" I asked. "Your theory seems to demand actions which no man would be fool enough to commit."

"You can never tell upon what lines a criminal's brain will work, Wigan. I maintain that the same arguments I have used with regard to Sir John would apply in Lester Williams's case. Still, there are one or two points to consider. If you go to Hyde Park Corner you will find it difficult to pitch on any lamp which could throw sufficient light upon the face of the occupant leaning back in the corner as to cause alarm to any one on the pavement. I am taking into consideration the position of the taxi in the roadway and the angle at which the light would have to be thrown. And, since motor lights are in the front of cars, and Lady Tavener was facing the way her taxi was going, it is very improbable that the lights of another car would serve this purpose. Besides, it was a foggy night."

"Then you believe Williams was getting out of the taxi?" I asked.

"Let me talk about the contents of this first," said Quarles, separating an envelope from some papers on the table. "You will admit that I examined the taxi fairly thoroughly."

"You certainly did."

"And I came to one or two very definite conclusions, Wigan. The engine is practically new, very different from that of the taxi we took to Twickenham, which was of exactly the same make. I took some trouble in my choice of a taxi, you remember. I grant, of course, this may not be a very reliable proof, but the tires told the same story, I think."

"The first taxi might just have had new tires," I suggested.

"I do not fancy the whole four would have been renewed at the same time," he returned. "It is not usual. My conclusion was that the taxi had not been used very much."

"I must confess I do not see where this is leading us," I said.

"It led us to Twickenham, Wigan. In our down journey we covered the road taken by the taxi that night if it came direct to Hyde Park Corner. At Twickenham I examined the tires, and they satisfied me that so far there was nothing to negative a theory I had formed. On the return journey we turned into that side street— I had noted it on the way down— and at the end of our journey I examined the tires again and the floor of the taxi. I preserved what I found then in this envelope, and it is perfectly clear that our taxi had been driven over a road strewn with brick dust and coal dust, and that persons treading on such a road had entered the taxi."

"Of course, we both got out," I remarked.

"To admire the view," said Quarles. "And you may have noticed that there were few windows from which an inquisitive person could have told what we were doing. At night the place would be quite lonely unless the bricklayers and coal porters were working overtime. Now, Wigan, on the tires of the first taxi, and on its carpet, was dust exactly corresponding to that which I found on the tires and floor of our taxi. That is significant. Brick dust and coal dust together, remember. They are not a usual combination on a main road out of London."

I did not answer, I had no comment to make.

"If we have no very definite facts," Quarles went on, "we have many peculiar circumstances, and I will try and reconstruct the tragedy for you. Sir John and his wife have quarreled at times we know, and to some extent at any rate have gone each their own way recently. The fact that Sir John was the cause of her divorce, and married her, may be taken as proof that he was fond of his wife. A reformed rake constantly is, and often develops a strong vein of jealousy besides. That Lady Tavener was supposed by her husband to be dining with the Folliotts, who, as a fact, had no appointment with her that night, shows that she did not always explain her going and coming to her husband. I suggest that Sir John had begun to suspect his wife, and that his reason for leaving Richmond early was to ascertain whether she was going to the theater with the Folliotts as she had told him."

"It is an ingenious theory," I admitted.

"We follow Lady Tavener," said Quarles. "It is not likely she was going to spend the evening alone, or the Folliotts would never have been mentioned. She was going to meet some one. I suggest it was Lester Williams who had arranged to meet her at Hyde Park Corner. Whether the idea was to join her in the taxi, or that she should leave the taxi there with orders that the driver should meet her after the theater, I cannot say. I am inclined to think it was the former, and I hazard a guess that Lady Tavener had not known Williams very long. Of course, his explanation goes by the board. He was on the lookout for the taxi. From the pavement he only saw the taxi, but when he opened the door he found a tragedy."

"But why should you think he was a new acquaintance of Lady Tavener's?" asked Zena.

"Since he hurried to the door instead of waiting for the taxi to draw to the curb, I conclude he was taking advantage of the stoppage to join Lady Tavener in the taxi. Had she intended to leave the taxi there, he would have waited until it came to the pavement. But my theory demands that he should have been on the watch for the taxi, therefore he must have known it. Had Lady Tavener often used the taxi when she met Williams, Wood, the driver, would

have recognized Williams. This does not appear to have been the case, therefore I conclude they were comparatively new friends."

"Do we come back to the theory of suicide, then?" I asked.

"Not yet," Quarles answered. "At present we merely find a reason why Sir John and Lester Williams have said so little, the one concerning his suspicions, the other about his knowledge of Lady Tavener. Since his wife was dead, why should Sir John say anything to cast a reflection upon her. For the same reason, why should Williams implicate himself in any way. From their different viewpoints they are both anxious to shield Lady Tavener's name. Therefore, Wigan, since we wanted to learn the truth, it was a good move to put Sir John in such a position that, to save himself, he must speak. Had we left him alone I have little doubt he would have ended by accepting the doctor's opinion and, rather than explain anything, would have remained silent."

"And allowed suspicion to rest on his name?" said Zena.

"It wouldn't. The doctor's evidence would have made people sympathize with him and regret that he should ever have been under suspicion. I am not saying he had made a deep calculation on these chances, but he was content to wait and let things take their course. He is still doing so. His arrest has not brought any explanation from him."

"But he has said he believes his wife met with foul play," persisted Zena. "Do you believe he would do nothing to bring the murderer to justice?"

"I think not. I think he would value his wife's name more than his revenge. If Sir John knew that his wife was meeting Williams that night, he might presently lose his temper and cause a scandal."

"And he will know later, if your theory is right?" I said.

"Perhaps not," said Quarles. "Let us get back to the contents of this envelope. The driver would have us believe that the first taxi came direct from Richmond to Hyde Park Corner. We have strong reasons for believing it did not. Therefore, either he went out of his way, by Lady Tavener's orders, to call for some one, or some one got into the taxi without his knowledge. I sat on the driver's seat, Wigan, and I admit that, if fully occupied with driving, as he would be on a foggy night, entrance might have been made without his knowledge, but on one condition. The door must have been easy to open. The door of that taxi isn't easy. I tried it. It is exceedingly stiff, difficult to open, and impossible to close without a very considerable noise. Therefore Wood knows that some one entered, and we know that that some one must have walked on a road covered with brick dust and coal dust."

"Who is it?" I asked.

"Wood himself. He turned into the road we turned into. If Lady Tavener noticed that he had done so, she would not think anything of it. She would

imagine the road was up and a detour necessary. As a matter of fact, she would not have time to think much, and I do not think she was alarmed, not even when Wood opened the door. As he did so I imagine he said something of this sort: 'I think it only right to warn your Ladyship that Sir John is suspicious.' He had to give some excuse for stopping the taxi and going to his fare. Whether he knew that Sir John was suspicious or not is immaterial. He had constantly driven Lady Tavener, and was probably aware that some of her friends were not her husband's. At any rate, some remark of this kind would allay her suspicions, and then—"

"He murdered her?" asked Zena sharply.

"Well, I fancy this is where we come to the question of suicide," said Quarles. "He intended to murder her, had his fingers on her throat, in fact, but the sudden excitement saved him. I think she actually died of shock, as the doctors declare. I think he was able to say something to her which caused that shock."

"I can hardly believe—"

"Wait, Wigan," the professor said, interrupting me. "You will agree that, from the first, Wood's evidence would naturally accuse Sir John. When you saw him and pressed him with the two questions I suggested he still sought to leave the impression upon you that Sir John was guilty; but since your questions showed there was a doubt in your mind, he admitted, to safeguard himself, the possibility of some one having entered the taxi surreptitiously. One other point which counts, I think. One of the lamps of the taxi, and only one of them, had recently been removed from its socket. I imagine he took it to make quite sure that Lady Tavener was dead."

"But he had often driven Lady Tavener. Why had he waited so long?" said Zena.

"And what reason had he for the murder?" I asked.

"It was probably the first time he had driven them together, when Sir John had left his wife during the journey, and he wanted to implicate Sir John. In short, this was his first opportunity for the double revenge he was waiting for. I have shown, at least I think I have, that the taxi was not often used. We shall find it is his own taxi, I think, bought outright or being purchased on the hire system. I should say he rarely hired himself out except to Sir John and Lady Tavener. He was not an ordinary driver, but a very clever schemer, and, like a clever schemer, I think one little point has given him away altogether. Curtis, from whom Lady Tavener was divorced, died shortly afterwards, you may remember, of a broken heart, his friends said, which means that he grieved abnormally at the breaking up of his happiness. It is natural that his friends and relations should hate the Taveners, and one of them conceived the idea of

revenge. It is curious that several of the Curtises are called Baldwood Curtis. Baldwood is a family name. It was easy to assume the name of Wood. It would be likely to jump into the mind if one of them wanted to assume a name."

"What a horrible plot," said Zena, with a shudder.

"Horrible and clever," said Quarles.

"I wonder if you are right, dear."

"I have no doubt, but Wigan will be able to tell us presently."

He was right, I think, practically in every particular. I am not sure what would have happened to Wood. Technically he had not actually killed Lady Tavener, but he solved the difficulty of his punishment himself. Expecting the worst, I suppose, he managed to hang himself in his cell.

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4: The Thriller

Anonymous

Beverley Times (West Aust.), 20 Oct 1939

I can find only two short stories of this title, other than this one. One is by "Ima Nutt" (clearly a pseudonym), which appeared in 1917; and another which appeared in Love Story Magazine *magazine in 1928. Neither helped me identify the author of this short crime story.*

CROUCHED low in the high-backed armchair, the revolver gasped tight in his hand, Mr. Hilton watched the slim beam of white light slowly piercing into the darkened library. Although he was in the advantageous position of being able to see the midnight intruder without being seen himself, the faint moonlight through the open French windows was insufficient to give him any clear idea of the dim figure's identity. But the figure did not appear to possess much bulk, which gave Mr. Hilton a comforting self-confidence.

He knew what the burglar was after. It was the diamond necklace he had recently brought from the Continent. Some interfering idiot had written to the papers about it, and the fact that he kept it in the house had been broadcast all over the country.

He watched the white light finally come to rest on the safe. It was then that he decided to act. One hand reached out for the electric light switch and the other levelled the revolver.

Brilliant light flooded the room.

"Put your hands up," said Mr. Hilton crisply.

A pair of startled blue eyes blinked into his. The torch dropped to the floor. For a moment there was silence. The girl gave a shaky laugh.

"Heavens! What a fright you gave me." She drew a deep breath of relief, coolly ignored the menacing revolver and dropped into a chair. "My! I nearly died."

Mr. Hilton stared at her, helplessly inarticulate. In his mind be had thoroughly rehearsed the ensuing situation. But be bad failed to allow for the possibility of capturing a female burglar. She was pretty, too. Two dark curls peeped from the tight-fitting little hat that framed her face. Her shapely silk-clad legs magnetised Mr. Hilton's eyes. She was watching him carefully.

"Have you ever caught a burglar before?" she asked curiously.

"No."

"I thought not. You seem so— er— flabbergasted. Could you exactly describe to me your feelings at the present moment?"

Mr. Hilton recovered himself. "No," he said curtly. "I couldn't. What do you want here?"

She hesitated. "I should like drink," she admitted. "You gave me a very unpleasant shaking. My nerves are all jumpy. And I wish you'd put that nasty looking gun away. It's dangerous."

Mr. Hilton indicated the decanter and glasses on the table beside her.

"No, thanks," she smiled. "I never touch that stuff. I meant a glass of water."

"So that you can disappear while I fetch it?"

"Oh, no. If you think that, don't bother. I forgot for the moment I was a prisoner. What do you intend to do with me?"

Mr. Hilton slipped the revolver Into his pocket and sat down facing her.

"I ought to send for the police," he said.

"That's the usual thing," she agreed. "Unless, of course, you would prefer to hear my story."

"It should be Interesting," Mr. Hilton admitted. "You are rather an unusual type of person."

"It depends," she said thoughtfully, "on your taste. Would you prefer a story of a girl driven to crime by her wicked step-father. Or would you rather hear something about a girl who burgled to save her lover from being sent to prison for forging his uncle's cheques? Or, perhaps—"

"I should prefer," said Mr. Hilton, coldly, "the truth."

"You wouldn't believe it," she said candidly.

"No doubt."

"But I'll tell you," she decided. "I'm a novelist and I came here for the purpose of working out one of my little theories. Do you believe that?"

"No," said Mr. Hilton frankly. "I don't."

"I thought you wouldn't. What I wanted to know is this. How long would it take anyone to open a safe, extract a diamond, and close it again? What is your opinion?"

"My opinion," said Mr. Hilton shortly, "is that you are the most impudent young woman I have ever met."

"Really?" Her blue eyes twinkled laughingly. "Do you know, I've got a lovely sob stuff story in my mind. If only you'd believe it—"

"I won't— I intend to send for the police."

"If you must " She shrugged. "Anyway, it'll be a bit of experience. All these little things count in the life of a writer, you know."

"I daresay," said Mr. Hilton sarcastically. "No doubt the inside of a prison will give you wonderful inspiration."

"It's quite likely," she agreed. "John Bunyan made his reputation In prison. May I look at your books while you are finding a policeman?"

Mr. Hilton watched her move over to the shelves, vaguely conscious of the fact that the situation was slipping past his control.

She suddenly turned and faced him.

"You read thrillers," she accused. "Nearly every one of Gloria Dorset's books are here."

"Gloria Dorset" said Mr. Hilton, "is an excellent writer."

"Of 'thrillers,' " she laughed. "Anyway, I congratulate you on your taste in literature. Have you ever seen a photograph of her?"

"No."

"I thought perhaps you had not. But aren't you going to get that policeman?"

"Yes," said Mr. Hilton uncertainly.

She looked at him wonderingly.

"Are you afraid I'm going to run away " she asked. "I hope you're not thinking of tying me to a chair or something."

Mr. Hilton looked at her suspiciously. "I don't trust you," he admitted.

"No. I noticed the steely glint in your eyes. But, perhaps, if you shouted a policeman might hear. I believe there is one in the neighborhood— In fact I saw one coming this way when slipped through your gates."

"No tricks, mind, or I'll shoot!"

"I'll be good," she promised meekly.

He moved to the French windows and shouted across the town. "Constable! Constable!"

For some moments there was silence. He repeated his shout and suddenly saw at the gates a light. The light came towards him, then snapped out. A burly constable loomed through the darkness.

"Anything wrong?"

"Yes," said Mr. Hilton, moving aside to allow him to enter. "I found this— er— person in the act of opening my safe."

"Trying to," corrected the girl gently. At the sight of the constable she started up in pleased surprise. He stared at her, blinked, and stared again. He touched his helmet respectfully.

"Good evening, Miss Dorset."

"Good evening, Simmons. How is the baby?"

"Fine, miss. And the wife, too. It's wonderful how—"

"I say," protested Mr. Hilton, in amazement. "What the deuce— I called you into arrest this lady, not to discuss offspring."

"Don't worry," said Miss Dorset sweetly. "You see, Simmons is friend of mine. He once gave me an account of a burglary which I used in one of my best sellers. I've had some very valuable information from Simmons."

"Are you Gloria Dorset?" demanded Mr. Hilton.

"Of course. Didn't you know? Simmons knows."

The constable nodded. "I've known Miss Dorset for some time. Me and the wife always read her books."

"But— Great Scott!" ejaculated Mr. Hilton, "If that's the case— what the deuce were you doing at my safe?"

"I told you," said Miss Dorset patiently. "I want to know how long it takes to open a safe. Perhaps you can tell me, Simmons?"

The constable scratched his head dubiously.

"It depends on the safe," he explained, "and on the person that opens it. It might take two minutes and it might take two hours."

"That leaves me just where I started," said Miss Dorset, in despair. "My story is about a girl who steals a valuable diamond out of a safe. She doesn't know how the lock works, and she has just five minutes to do the trick. My publisher says it is impossible, so I determined to try it myself. All I've succeeded in doing is getting myself arrested for attempted burglary."

"Not at all," retorted Mr. Hilton, recovering his good humor. "I shouldn't think of charging you in the circumstances. I admire your work very much. Miss Dorset, and anything I can do to help you will be done with pleasure."

Miss Dorset looked at him in delight "Thank you so much. If you let me work out my little idea I shall be eternally grateful. I should like you to accept this latest little book of mine in return."

She opened her neat leather handbag and extracted a book, on the brilliant 'jacket' of which was a picture of herself: "It was my publisher's idea," she explained, "putting me on the front. I'm glad you like it. May I start now? Perhaps you will time me with your watch?"

"Delighted," said Mr. Hilton cheerfully. He put the light out. Simmons stood with his back to the French windows. For a long time there was silence save for the faint sound of Miss Dorset fumbling with the lock of the safe. Mr. Hilton sat In his arm chair near the light switch, waiting. At last she spoke.

"All over," she announced. "How long did I take?"

"Exactly seven and a half minutes," said Mr. Hilton, switching on the light.

Miss Dorset sighed. "I shall have to alter it after all," she said regretfully, perhaps you had better look in the safe to see that I haven't stolen anything."

"How absurd," said Mr. Hilton. But he looked; nevertheless. The only article in the safe was the necklace. He picked it up with reverent fingers.

"This necklace," he said, "is worth a fabulous sum. This is what I thought you were after."

Miss Dorset laughed merrily. "I must go now," she assured him. "Simmons, will you escort me off the premises? And mind you read my book. You'll get at least one genuine thrill out of it."

"I'm sure I shall," agreed Mr. Hilton pleasantly. "Good-night, Miss Dorset. Good-night constable."

The constable did not leave Miss Dorset at the gate, but walked briskly with her to the car that waited on the corner. Before taking his seat behind the wheel, he exchanged his helmet for a soft felt hat and buttoned a grey overcoat over his uniform.

"He'll get at least one genuine thrill," murmured 'Gloria Dorset, as she settled herself comfortably beside him to examine the glittering necklace In her hand, "when he discovers that the 'jacket' of that thriller is a fake."

"I rather think he'll get a bigger one," said the 'constable' softly, "when he discovers that his precious necklace is another fake."

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5: The Farmhouse on the Hill.

A Ghost Story

Algernon Blackwood

1869-1951

The Evening Post (Wellington, New Zealand), Dec 21 1907
Chronicle (Adelaide, S. Australia), 21 Dec 1907

WILLIAM BEACH, surveyor, arrived about midday at the small station of a south Dorchester village and shouldered his bag and instruments to walk across to the inn, where he had already telegraphed earlier in the day for a room. His surveying, having little to do with the account of his distressing subsequent adventures, may be left at once out of the story; but the fact that the inn was in the throes of temporary building operations is important to mention, since it led to the landlord's directing him to the only place in all the length and breadth of the scattered hamlet where accommodation was likely or even possible, the farmhouse half-way up the hill.

'That dark old house where you see the smoke 'anging about the trees,' he pointed. 'Garfit's away, but his missus'll find you a bed, no doubt, if you care for that kind of a place. That is,' he added quickly, by way of correction, 'if you ain't too particular.'

'Anything wrong with it, d'you mean?' asked the surveyor. 'Oh, I don't say there's nothing wrong with it,' said the man, emphasising a word in every . phrase. 'I'm not one to criticise my neighbors at any time, and I've known of other gentlemen sleepin' then, quite comfortable. Any'ow there's no other house to take you!' And he looked savagely at his own dilapidated hotel as though it cut him to the heart to send a customer elsewhere.

Now there was something in the tone of the disappointed innkeeper and in his curiously suggestive choice of words that combined to affect the surveyor disagreeably and make him vaguely conscious of a certain depression of spirits. He slipped at once into a minor key and when he turned a corner of the sandy path and found himself suddenly face to face with the old grey-stoned Tudor house, massive of wall and irregular of shape, its forbidding aspect produced so marked an impression on him that he instinctively hesitated, trying to seize the actual definite quality that caused gloom to hang about it like a cloud; and wondering rather uncomfortably how, and why, so picturesque a building, backing against a whole hill-side of heather— there in the full flood of midday sunshine— should contrive to present to dolorous and lugubrious an appearance. For this first view at close quarters struck the dominant note of the place with undeniable vividness; the impression it conveyed was unpleasant, but 'sinister' was the word that at once leaped to his mind.

With the weakness peculiar to impressionable persons, Beach would probably have retired there and then, but while his purpose was still an instinct merely, he became suddenly aware that a figure with fixed gaze had been staring at him for some time from the pillars of the deep porch where the yew trees that lined the approach threw their darkest shadow. A second glance showed him that it was a woman, a woman dressed in black. Clearly this was Mrs. Garfit; and he advanced to meet her.

She was, he saw, a big strong-faced woman, yet with a cast of features somewhat melancholy, and she gave him a formal smile of welcome, which, if not over cordial at first, changed to something a little more pleasant as soon as she learned his errand.

'We can manage something, perhaps,' she said in a flat colorless sort of voice, cutting short his explanations about the inn and turning slowly to enter the house. 'I'm willing to pay the ordinary inn charges,' he added, noticing her want of alacrity, and smiling to observe the changes produced by his words.

'Oh, of course, if you pay in advance,' she said— which he had not exactly offered to do— and signing him to follow her in. The surveyor no longer was puzzled by the innkeeper's description. Plainly the farmer's wife was a grasping woman; she bled her occasional customers more successfully than he did, that was, no doubt, where the poison lay!

He followed her through the cold hall, stone-flagged, and up the broad wooden stairs to the landing, noting the dark beams across the ceiling and the curious sudden slopings of the floors; for the odor of great age breathed everywhere about him and the interior of the building was as charming as the exterior was sinister.

Then Mrs. Garfit opened a door, moving aside for him to pass, and he saw a small room with a skylight window in the sloping ceiling, a cramped brass bed in the far corner and hooks in the wall from which a number of faded old dresses hung in a dingy row. The air smelt musty and there was no fireplace.

The surveyor's heart sank appreciably.

'If you have a somewhat larger room—' he began, turning to her, 'one with a fireplace, too, as I shall be working a bit in the evenings—'

Mrs. Garfit looked blankly at him, screwing up her eyes a little, while she weighed the possibility.

'The fire would be a shillin' extra,' she said presently, 'and I could let you 'ave this room for another two shillin' more than the small room.'

She crossed the landing and showed him the room referred to; it was large, with two windows, an arm-chair and a deep fireplace.

'Only I recommends the other,' she added somewhat inconsequently.

'I prefer the larger one, thank you,' said Beach shortly, and then and there clinched the bargain, making the best terms he could with her for breakfast and supper as well.

'Then you holds to the big one,' repeated the woman, after counting over the silver in her big bony hands, 'because my 'usband— and he'll be back ter-morrer, 'e says the little one sleeps in best.'

Beach ordered his fire to be lit immediately and then went out to catch the snort hour of light still available, glad to escape for the moment from both house and woman.

His work took him out upon the open hilltops, where the sight of the sea. dull crimson under the wintry sunset, and the beauty of the hilly country did go much towards further dissipating the original impression of gloom that when he returned about six o'clock, with a roaring appetite, he had passed into a more vigorous and cheerful state of mind, and paid little attention to the dour-faced farmer's wife or the sensations of uneasiness and dismay which had at first oppressed him.

He had a high-tea before the kitchen fire, shared— both tea and fire— by a black cat of huge proportions, which insisted upon rubbing against his knees, jumping up on his lap, and at last even putting her velvet paws into the very middle of his jam and butter.

The general servant clattered about the place, waiting upon him, under occasional orders from the mistress; and a young man, presumably a Garfit, lumbered once or twice through the kitchen with noisy nailed boots and a curiosity to inspect the stranger within his gates. But the food was excellent; he had done a good bit of work; and the friendly attentions of the black cat soothed him so pleasantly that he passed gradually into a happy state of indifference to everything but the seductions of a good pipe and the prospect later of a refreshing sleep.

Then, midway in a stream of most pleasantly flowing reflections, his nerves answered to a startling shock, and his sensations of content were scattered suddenly to the winds of heaven. There, at the end of the room, Mrs. Garfit was bending over an open drawer and, through the smoke curling upwards from his pipe, he had caught sight unexpectedly of her face reflected in the mirror that hung upon the cupboard door. She was evidently not aware of being inspected, and her visage, sombre at any time, now wore an aspect so malefic that the sudden revelation positively horrified him.

He saw it, dark and hard, with eyes at once terrible yet haunted, the mouth set, and a deep settled gloom upon the features that was quite dreadful. A flicker of fear, like the faint passing of a light, showed itself for a moment there, and was gone as swiftly as it came.

The surveyor gave a sudden start that sent the cat flying from his knee, and when the woman turned again to face the kitchen she had resumed the mask of her normal expression of countenance.

'I'll take my candle and go up to read a bit,' he stammered, as though surprised in an unauthorised or guilty act. 'And please let me have breakfast at eight o'clock.'

He was disturbed and not a little alarmed, by the sight of that changed and evil face, and as he slowly went upstairs he could not help connecting it in his mind with the pain of a tormenting conscience. It seemed to turn the face black— black, with mental pain— and the pallor of the skin had made the contrast truly horrible. It lived vividly in his imagination, unpleasantly alive.

A blazing fire in his bed-room, a good novel, and a tolerably comfortable armchair, he hoped, would soon put to flight, however, the distressing effects of the vision. Yet, somehow, when he closed the door, it did not keep the woman out. That face came into the room with him. It perched on the table beside his book and seemed to watch him as he read. The picture persisted in his mind; it kept rising before his eyes and the printed page. A sense of presentiment and apprehension began to gather heavily about his heart.

Then, as he sat there, half reading, half listening to the sounds below stairs, his thoughts took another turn. He thought of his brother Hubert. Now, Hubert was the antithesis of himself; practical and keen-minded. They had formerly known great arguments— visionary' versus materialist— in which Hubert's cool and logical mind invariably gained the victory, and William, with what dignity he could muster, always fell back upon the quotation that has often helped others in a similar predicament, 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Hubert,'— the lines need not be completed, but he wished Hubert were with him now. Hubert might have argued things away perhaps, certain feelings and trepidations, a strangely persistent inner trembling— a slowly growing fear.

Then, with a fresh start, he recognised that it was this very sense of alarm that had suggested Hubert to his mind at all; and that in his sub-consciousness he was already groping for help! Plainly this was the reason of his brother's appearance upon the scene. The sinister setting of his night's lodging, the desolate hills, and above all that revelation of the woman's changed face had combined to touch his imagination with unholy suggestion. The idea of companionship became uncommonly pleasant.

His thoughts dwelt a good deal upon these things, but, after all, the strong Dorsetshire air was not to be denied; the fire: moreover was comforting, and his limbs ached. By-degrees he persuaded the novel to possess him more and

more until, at length he found relief from his inquietudes in the exciting adventures of others.

The coals dropped softly into the grate and the winter wind came mournfully over the hills and sighed round the walls of the house; there was no other sound; downstairs everyone seemed to have gone to bed. He would read one more chapter and turn in himself. Good sleep would chase the phantoms effectually. But the new chapter began with wearisome description and his thoughts wandered again— theodolite— black cat— Hubert— the woman's face....

His eyes were travelling heavily through a big paragraph when a faint sound made itself audible in the room behind him, and he turned with a quick start to look over the back of his chair. The candle threw his head and shoulders, greatly magnified, upon wall and ceiling; but the room was empty; nothing seemed to stir. Yet the moment he looked down again upon his book the sound was repeated.

Instantly, he was in the whirl of a genuine nervous flurry, confused a little, and thinking of a dozen things at once. Perhaps the friendly black cat had followed him up and was hiding in the room; he would, get up and search. But before he could actually leave his chair, a slight movement close beside him caught the corner of his eye. The brass knob of the door-handle at his left was turning. That was where the sounds came from. There was someone at the door.

Beach caught his breath with a rush. His first instinct was to dash forward and turn the key; his second, to seize the poker; yet he found no strength to do either, the one or the other. He glued his eyes to the knob, watching it slowly turn. It stopped for a moment, and then the door pushed gently open and he saw the figure of Mrs. Garfit. partially concealed by a black shawl over the head, and wearing the very expression that he had seen reflected in the mirror downstairs a few hours before. She was staring intently into the empty room behind him. Encircled by both arms and grasped by her great muscular hands; she carried a kind of loose bundle which she held pressed closely into her body.

The woman, thus drawn in patches of black and white, standing erect in the door way with darkness at her back, and that face of set evil dominating the picture, presented an appearance so appalling that at once the fear in the surveyor's heart passed into terror, pure and simple, and he found himself unable to utter a sound or make the smallest movement.

Without taking the slightest notice of him she tiptoed softly forward into the room, and Beach then became aware for the first time that she was not alone. A man crouched behind her in the darkness of the landing, holding a

lantern beneath the folds of a cloak. He was kneeling; and his face, with red hair and beard, and half-opened mouth showing the teeth, was just distinguishable in the faint glimmer of the shrouded light.

Looking neither to the right hand nor to the left the woman passed almost soundlessly beside him, brushing the arm of the chair with her black gown, and making obviously for the end of the room. And then Beach, fearing that any moment she might face about and come towards himself, turned his head by a supreme effort and saw that she was already at the far end beside the bed, he made at the same time the further startling discovery— a cold sweat bursting through his skin— that the bed was occupied!

For one second he saw on the pillow the face of a young girl, sleeping peacefully, with masses of light hair about her, and then the black outline of that terrible woman bent double over her, and the loose bundle she carried in her hands descended full upon the pillow with her great weight above it, and remained there motionless. like a tiger upon its prey, for the space of what seemed to him many minutes.

There was no struggle and no sound; nothing but a little convulsive movement beneath the bed-clothes lower down; and then the surveyor, still powerless to move or cry in the grip of a real terror, was aware that the man had left his post of observation in the passage and was already half way across the floor. He, too, went past him, as though unaware of his presence, but the woman, hearing the stealthy approach, straightened herself up beside the bed and turned to meet him. The lantern carried by the man, who was short and humpbacked, shed a faint upward light upon her features, and the slow smile it revealed coming into being on her fixed white face was so ghastly that it gave Beach that little extra twist of terror needed to release the frozen will and make speech and movement possible. With a loud cry he leaped out of his chair and dashed forward upon the fiendish couple still standing beside the bed of murder— and woke with a violent start in his arm-chair before an extinguished fire in a room that was pitch dark and miserably cold.

Whew! A nightmare after all. But the chill in his blood was due to more, he could swear, than a cold room and a blackened grate. With trembling fingers he lit the second candle and saw to his immense relief that the room was untenanted, the bed smooth and empty, the other candle had long ago guttered out and his watch showed him that he had slept three hours. It was one o'clock.

He examined the bed, that awful bed where he had seen a young girl smothered in her sleep, and the horror of the nightmare remained so vividly with him that he gave up trying to persuade himself that it had been nothing more than a dream, and that two evil persons, and a third, had not vacated the

room. One thing was certain— he could never sleep in such a bed. He would slip across to tho other room., The dread of perhaps meeting the woman in the passage gave him pause for a moment, but after all it was a lesser terror, and he softly opened the door and crept, candle in hand, over the cold boards to the other side of the landing. He stood and listened for a moment— the house was utterly still— and then quietly turned the knob. But the door was locked. He was obliged to return to his own room, where he passed the remainder of a troubled night in, what sleep he could snatch upon an arm-chair and two others.

The late daylight, cold and grey, brought no such balm to his imagination as the bright sunshine of a spring morning might have done, and the horror of his dream possessed him so painfully that he realised he could not spend another night in that room unless— yes, that was a splendid idea— unless he could get his brother, Hubert, down for the week-end to share it with him. Hubert's cold logic would work wonders. Ah, and another thought! It would be interesting to see if he felt anything odd about the house or room. He would say nothing about his own impressions, or his own experience, and would see what Hubert felt. The idea possessed him at once and he decided to telegraph the moment he had finished breakfast. Then, having arranged for another bed to be moved into the room he took some bread and cheese with him and spent the entire day surveying the hills until the darkness fell over the country, and it was time to meet the train.

And Hubert came, glad of the prospects of walks and talks with his brother, and seduced by the telegraphic description of the 'jolly old farmhouse' among the hills. He appeared delighted, too, with the Tudor building.

'You ought to advertise, ma'am, and take in summer boarders,' he said briskly to Mrs. Garfit.

'You better tell my 'usband that, she replied with something like a sigh mixed up in her sullen voice. 'He'll be here tonight or to-morrer mornin'.'

'Surly old cat,' said Hubert, when they were alone at bed-time in their room; 'she'd have to wear a veil to keep her boarders. Her face is like some of those women in the Chamber of Horrors.'

He laughed cheerfully, and plunged into the details of his week's work— he was a stockbroker—and a family matter that were of interest between them. William avoided all reference to his own feelings and kept the talk purposely on the most matter of fact subjects possible. He had carefully manoeuvred that Hubert should occupy the large bed, but he could not repress a creeping sense of horror when, the time sleep came, and he saw his brother, snuggling down under the sheets and blankets and putting his head upon that haunted pillow.

All through the night, as long as the firelight lasted, he lay awake and watched to see if anything would happen. But up to the late hour when he finally fell asleep nothing did happen. It must have been very early in the morning when he woke with a start and saw someone standing beside his bed in the darkness, and heard his name called softly. It was Hubert.

'I say, Billy, is that cursed woman in the room, or what— who is calling?' His brother jumped up and struck a light. Hubert's face was blanched. This was the first thing he noticed.

'What's up?' he stammered, still dazed with sleep. 'The door's locked; there's no one here— is there?'

Hubert stood there shivering. Then he took the candle, and walked round the room, poking into corners and cupboards, and even looking under the beds; he went back lo his own bed again and pulled the sheets about savagely.

'What did you hear?' asked William nervously.

'I'm not sure I heard anything. Something woke me — I couldn't breathe properly— felt suffocated— and I thought I heard that woman calling to "hurry up." Been dreaming, I supposed.'

He hesitated a moment. William saw that he had only told half, and wanted to say something else that rather stuck in his gorge.

'You'll get your death of cold standing there,' he whispered.

Hubert ceased fumbling at his own bed and crossed the floor; his face was white as chalk!

'I say, old Billy, do you mind very much if I sleep with you? l think, perhaps, my sheets seem a bit damp,' he whispered at length.

And when he had crawled into bed William felt that he was shaking all over, and for a long time before sleep again overtook them he kept giving little nervous starts of fear. He knew his brother too well to ask him just then what had really happened, but next morning, when the sunshine was in the room, he pressed him for an explanation, and Hubert admitted that he had never felt so frightened in his life; horrible dreams of being stifled had haunted his sleep, and finally someone had come stealthily up to the bed and tried to suffocate him by putting a blanket over his face. For a wonder, too, when, he heard his brother's story, he neither argued nor scoffed, but merely remarked that it would be interesting to find out the history of the house and also to see if Mr. Garfit resembled the man with the lantern.

And the first person they met on going down to a belated breakfast was the farmer himself coming in from a gig standing in the yard. He was humpbacked and very short. Moreover he had red hair and beard, and a trick of leaving his mouth opened that the teeth showed.

The landlord of the Purbeck Arms, when suitably urged, furnished something of the required history of the house by stating that, some years before, Garfit's stepdaughter had been found suffocated in her bed, and that the couple of them, man and wife, had only escaped the gallows because the circumstantial evidence was weak.

'It was long beforp I came to these parts,' he said, 'but you'll find the whole story in the newspapers of that date.'

'I remember the Garfit case when I was a boy, now you mention it,' the surveyor said.

'You see,' interrupted the man significantly, 'the girl had money of her own from her mother. The Garfits, of course, got that.'

The Sunday trains were very bad, but they were preferable, the brothers thought, to another night in such a house.

'And such damp sheets too!' explained Hubert with a shuddetr.

'There are more things in heaven and earth, Hubert,' began his brother gravely. 'You felt the presence of the dead, and I, being more psychic, was impressed by the vivid thoughts of the living— the "haunted living." '

'Ah!' said Hubert, looking straight ahead. 'We must have a chat about it some day. By the way,' he added; 'Have you got tuppence for the porter, Billy?'

But a thorough search of the newspaper files at the club when they got back to London corroborated all that the innkeeper had told them of the Garfit murder. The surveyor, moreover, prepared a careful report of the case for the Psychical Research Society, and when it was published, sent a copy to his brother with various annotations down the margins in red ink.

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6: The Purple Bus

Ethel Lina White

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The Hardin Tribune Herald, 29 March 1935
The Winnipeg Tribune Magazine, 23 March 1935

*In the 1930s a large number of Ethel Lina White's short stories were "syndicated" and published almost exclusively in North America. These are now coming available through Roy Glashan's Library (*freereads.com.au*) which has access to US newspapers.*

LUCY TREE had been warned not to go on her Journey. She had received three successive anonymous letters, each containing the same message:

"Stay at home. You will not reach your Journey's end."

In spite of the hint her heart beat faster when the Royal Purple bus, by which she was traveling, left the Chiswick High road and swung round the curve into the Great West road.

Lucy took off her beret, revealing a curious bleached lock in her brown water-waved hair, and sank deeper into the padded violet seat. She was under the spell of motion, gliding on and on through a muffled countryside which held the unreal quality of a dream. Before her unrolled the map of Old England, hiding small towns and ancient villages in its fold.

She wished the journey would last forever. For she was not only returning to work but she was faced with the threat of a painful ordeal at its end.

Although she looked a typical smart, modern girl of attractive appearance, in one respect her character was distinctive. She held rigid principles in an age of compromise. It was therefore inevitable that she should clash with one of the old gang at the school where she was a sports mistress.

The atmosphere of the place was soaked with snobbery and its head was dominated by her lifelong friend, Miss Yaxley-Moore, a lady of aristocratic birth and terrific personality, who filled the post of matron.

Miss Yaxley-Moore was arrogant, and infallible in her judgment, which no one dared to oppose. She was responsible for the health of the school. But, although she took temperatures with the importance of a Harley street specialist and splashed her conversation with medical terms. Lucy soon discovered that she was both incompetent and lazy.

After a few minor scraps they came to grips over a fat pupil, the daughter of a very important man. Just before the school broke up Lucy ordered this girl off the hockey field on the grounds of physical unfitness. Miss Yaxley-Moore clung to the creed that noblemen must be flogged to demonstrate their

superior caste to the soft youth of the L.C.C. and she brought up her heavy guns.

In spite of her opposition the young games mistress won the battle and a doctor was called to examine the fat girl. He diagnosed a chest complaint, complicated by a weak heart. As a trained nurse could not be procured until the following day he instructed the icy matron how to sustain the girl's strength during the night.

Morning, however, found the patient in a state of inexplicable collapse. When she was revived she asked for Lucy, on whom she lavished the usual schoolgirl worship.

"Darling," she whispered, "let my people know. Old Glaxo"— she referred to Miss Yaxley-Moore— "swore to the doctor she'd given me drops and things every two hours. But I got nix. I called and called, and she only snored."

"Leave it to me, dear," promised Lucy. "Don't worry. Just get well."

Acting on impulse, she opened the medicine chest which was the private property of the matron. Almost the first thing she saw was a small bottle. The fat pupil's name was written on the paper, while the wax which sealed it was unbroken.

In a white heat of indignation she rushed to Miss Yaxley-Moore and delivered her ultimatum.

"I'm keeping this," she said, clutching the bottle. "But if I find you here when I return after the holidays I shall show it to the doctor."

Then Lucy went out to Switzerland for the winter sports, and, with the resilience of youth, forgot the affair. On her return to England she was shocked to read in an unforwarded letter that the fat pupil had died before Christmas.

She worried ceaselessly over the news, for her principles would not let her ignore its gravity. She boarded the Purple bus with the determination to stir up a scandal which would permanently remove the matron from the scholastic sphere.

But in reality she had done more than that, for she had stirred up the lowest, muddiest, strata of buried human nature. Ever since Miss Yaxley-Moore had brought home news of the impending scandal her half sister, Miss Bat, had brooded ceaselessly over the threat of disgrace to her name.

MISS BAT was a lady of means and long pedigree of which she was inordinately proud. For forty years she had lived, dangerously, by herself, for herself, and on herself, ingrowing and buried. During the holidays only she grudgingly shared her home with Miss Yaxley-Moore, who had no income.

After the first jolt of hearing of the pupil's death, Miss Yaxley-Moore brazened the affair out, for she foresaw a future of enforced and congenial leisure as her half sister's pensioner.

"If Sir Felix brings the matter into court," she declared, "my defense will be that I used my own judgment, as in my opinion it was dangerous to waken the girl from her sleep. But whichever way the cat jumps you must face the fact. I shan't get another post."

Miss Bat said nothing. But through silent days and sleepless nights the dusty machinery of her brain ticked ceaselessly on until she lost all sense of proportion in one fixed purpose.

For forty years she had saturated herself with the pride and importance of her position as Miss Bat of Sundial house until it had become acute monomania. In addition her avarice was awakened, for she would have to support Miss Yaxley-Moore.

She determined that Lucy Tree must not return to the school. She must be tricked into breaking her journey at Sundial house. In this connection Miss Bat worked out an ingenious ruse, with her half-witted maid, Olive, as her tool.

The rest would be easy, for there would be nothing to connect a fatal accident— which could be made to suggest suicide— with herself. Lack of motive and her position raised her above suspicion.

She plotted ceaselessly until near the end of the holidays, when Miss Yaxley-Moore broached the subject of sending in her resignation.

"You will do nothing of the kind," declared Miss Bat. "You will return two days earlier than the others and find out the time and route of this girl's return. You will telephone these to me and I also want a minute personal description. Remember, also to drop hints of an unhappy love affair out at the Swiss winter sports."

"And what about me when she finds me still at the school?" demanded Miss Yaxley-Moore.

"She will not come back," was the grim reply.

HAPPILY unconscious of the menace to her safety, Lucy rolled on toward Bath, where she reached her destination.

It was very warm inside the Purple bus and the windows had become steamy with moisture. Presently she felt obliged to appeal to a little lady who sat in front.

"Do you mind if I open a window?"

As the lady was frail and elderly she was pleasantly surprised by the reply in a crisp, educated voice:

"Please do. Let me help you. The window is rather stiff."

Lucy did not know how the accident happened, but as she leaned forward the old lady turned her head so that her glasses were swept off by the girl's arm.

She stopped down and picked them up from under her seat. Although the frame was intact, one pebble was smashed completely and the other badly cracked.

The lady put them into her bag with a slight exclamation of impatience.

"Tiresome," she said. "How careless of me!"

"No," confessed Lucy. "It was my fault. I'm terribly sorry."

"It doesn't matter much. I have a spare pair at home and I shall soon be there."

As she spoke the Purple bus stopped and the conductor made an announcement:

"Moone. We stop here twenty minutes for tea."

The passengers consulted their watches and began to scramble through the doorways. Lucy lingered and watched the elderly lady as she groped her way between the seats.

Feeling rather guilty, she took her arm.

"Please let me," she said. "Perhaps— we might have tea together?"

"Thank you." replied the lady. I'm almost blind without my glasses. Can you see an old Tudor building just across the road? That is the best café."

As they entered the Elizabethan house Lucy gathered the impression that her companion was known and respected in the neighborhood.

The café, which was low-beamed and of irregular shape, was already filled with the other passengers from the coach. As Lucy looked around to find an empty table the little old lady spoke:

"There's a wee room at the end which may be empty. They always crowd in near the door. I'll order the tea now."

Lucy went through the café and opened a door at its far end leading to ;he inner room.

It was small and dimly-lit by a wrought-iron lantern. The sunken floor was stone-flagged and the atmosphere held the chill of ages.

With a slight shiver Lucy crossed to the fire, over which sat a big fat country girl. Her neck and chin were swathed in a gray woolen scarf and she plainly had a heavy cold. As Lucy drew near, to her disgust, the girl coughed explosively right into her face.

She withdrew quickly just as the door opened and her friend of the Purple bus entered, accompanied by a waitress with the tea tray.

Instantly the girl rose respectfully to her feet. The lady smiled at her and gave her a gentle nod of dismissal.

"Good evening, Olive. Wouldn't you rather have your tea outside?" She handed the girl a coin and added in a benevolent voice. "You have a shocking cold. What's the matter with your neck?"

The girl stared at her with blank, stupid eyes.

"Please, mum," she replied, "I've got the mumps."

The broad foolish smile lingered on Olive's face as she went into the large room.

Her patroness also beamed with anticipation as she took up the teapot.

"How refreshing the tea smells. Weak or strong?" she asked. "But, my dear, whatever is the matter?"

"Matter?" echoed Lucy in a distracted voice. "I'm sunk— that's all. That girl has mumps. I've never had them, and they're contagious. I'm a teacher. This means I must stay in quarantine for about a month before I dare return to the school."

"Oh, I'm sorry." The old lady's voice was gentle. "I don't want to advise you badly, but you will probably not develop mumps. You look remarkably healthy. Why not return to your school and say nothing about it?"

"I couldn't do that," declared Lucy. "That wretched girl sprayed me when she coughed. It would be criminal to risk infecting children."

She was in a real dilemma, for the end of holidays always found her bankrupt. She had practically no money in her possession and she would have to pass the night in some hotel.

"I don't know what to do," she burst out suddenly. "It's no good going on to Bath, as it's farther to return. And I can't go back to my sister's house in London, for she has children."

The little lady cleared her throat.

"May I introduce myself?" she asked. "I'm Miss Bat of Sundial house, Paddiscombe, which is the next village. Perhaps you'd like to spend the night with me? That will give you time to make your plans."

Lucy studied Miss Bats' face. With the confidence of youth she believed herself to be a judge of character. Miss Bats face passed the test. She had mild brown eyes, which were an infallible indication of a kindly nature, her ears were not low-set. and her lips were not thin, although her gentle mouth was a trifle weak.

"Thanks so much," she cried impulsively. "I'd love to come."

Miss Bat rose to her feet.

"My name is spelt with one 't'," she explained. "A small matter, but it means everything to me in a world of changes."

In that sentence she gave Lucy a clue to her nature which was worth more than any physiognomy chart.

As they rolled on through dark macabre country she felt more and more depressed, and disproportionately apprehensive of the future, as though an actual voice were warning her not to leave the safety of the Purple bus.

Her mysterious warning had been disastrously fulfilled. She certainly would not reach her journey's end. When the bus stopped at Paddiscombe, outside an ancient inn, she followed Miss Bat out of the bus.

"Is that all?" asked Miss Bat, in rather a strained voice as Lucy's small suitcase was dumped down on the damp stones.

"Yes," replied the girl. "I sent my trunk luggage in advance."

Miss Bat's lips tightened. "It has just occurred to me that we had better establish Olive's mumps. These country folk are very ignorant over illness. Suppose you send a vague telegram to your school so as not to burn your boats. Then, tomorrow morning, I'll go over to Moone by the early bus and investigate the matter. I know where Olive lives."

The good sense and kindly thought of Miss Bat's speech inspired Lucy to fresh hope. With luck she might return tomorrow to her post.

"That's frightfully decent of you," she exclaimed. "You're right. I did fly off the handle... Which way?"

"To the left, please."

In spite of the fresh development, however, Lucy had the exact sensation of being entrapped in some nightmare.

Presently they reached a small shop, which Miss Bat informed her was the post-office. Her head had begun to ache so badly that she was scarcely conscious of her action as she mechanically scrawled a telegram to the school:

"DETAINED. BAD NEWS. WRITING."

It was not until they were once again outside that she realized that Miss Bat had dictated the message.

"I'm letting myself be run by a little cardboard lady," she thought with a faint flicker of amusement.

Suddenly Miss Bat pulled her arm.

"Here we are at the Sundial house," she said, her voice full of pride.

Lucy looked up at the outlines of a beautiful Elizabethan mansion, set flush with the road. She had vaguely dreaded something damp and ivy-bound, so her spirits rose at the sight.

"I've given my maid a holiday," explained Miss Bat as she unlocked the massive front door, which was white with age. "That is why I had tea at the cafe. But she will be back tonight."

In the light of a lamp Lucy saw an oak paneled hall and the sweep of a gracious staircase. Then her hostess led the way down a short passage.

"We will go into the library, which is in a back wing," she said. "Since motoring has become popular I can no longer use my beautiful front rooms."

Lucy followed Miss Bat into a long, narrow room, furnished in Victorian style, with faded grass-green carpet and curtains and book-cases filled with nineteenth century authors. There were two narrow windows on one side and on the other a half glass door. A fed caked fire glowed in the steel grate.

Miss Bat turned up the wick of the lamp on the bureau and opened a drawer, from which she took another pair of glasses.

"There," she said, laying the smashed pair in their place, "now I can see again. The blessed relief not to feel helpless... Do you like my house?"

"It's wonderful," Lucy assured her. "You must be very proud of it."

"I am. We have lived in it for over two hundred years. My family goes back even farther. That is our tree."

She nodded towards a dim framed chart which hung on a corner of the wall outside the radius of the lamp.

"In these upstart days," she continued, "I feel that a long pedigree means everything."

"I don't agree," remarked Lucy thoughtlessly, as she remembered the snobbish atmosphere of the school. "I can't see why any one has a right to feel elevated just because she stands on a pile of moldy bones."

Moldy bones? The tinted glass hid the venom of Miss Bat's gaze. But presently Lucy became uneasily conscious of her acute scrutiny.

"Are you looking at my bleached streak?" she asked with a forced laugh. "It's genuine and quite amusing. I'm proud of being distinctive."

In spite of Miss Bat's hospitality she was aware of a cold, unfriendly atmosphere. There was something about the house and its mistress which affected her unpleasantly.

Springing to her feet, she lit a cigarette and began to pace the library.

"Does this door lead to the garden?" she asked.

"No, the courtyard," replied Miss Bat, a gleam suddenly lighting her eyes. "And now I'm going to put a hot water bottle in your bed. Will you give me your nightgown to wrap round It?"

Hiding her amusement at the old maidish precaution, Lucy began to fish among the few articles in her suitcase while Miss Bat stood by and watched her. She realized at once that the fatal bottle of medicine was not there.

She had intended to remove the evidence, thus drawing Lucy Tree's string. The unsupported charge would have no weight with the school authorities. But

when the wretched girl had sent on her luggage in advance she had sealed her own doom.

Miss Bat hated this girl who dropped ash over her carpet and dared to deride the priceless heritage of ancestors.

Moldy bones. At that moment she thought of the well.

The well was only a few yards distant, sunken 60 feet deep, in the center of the courtyard, and used only in severe drought. It was impossible to see it in the dark and it lay directly in the girl's path. A few of her quick strides would end in a sheer drop down to a circle of inky water.

It would not take long. However frantic her efforts, she would soon be overpowered by the intense cold. Directly it was safe Miss Bat intended to raise the alarm.

There would be no further need to worry about the bottle of medicine after her death. Lucy's luggage would be sent back to her family, who would attach no importance to it.

—And everything was ready. That morning Miss Bat had escorted Olive to the bus for Paddiscombe and given her instructions. When she was gone she had herself removed the cover from the well and then had started out to Marlborough, where she boarded the Purple bus.

Lucy was ungratefully relieved when Miss Bat went from the room. She lit another cigarette and roamed about.

Presently, at the end of her resources, she carried the lamp to the dark end of the library in order to examine the family tree. She glanced first at the original ancestor and his date and then looked downward to find Miss Bat's name.

It was a distinct shock to discover that it paired with the ramification of "Yaxley-Moore," and she nearly dropped the lamp.

"What a mess," she thought. "I seem to remember now old Glaxo boasting of her ancestral home in a Wiltshire village. Of course, Miss Bat wouldn't know me from a bar of soap or I'd have been the last person she'd befriend. But I can't stop now."

Feeling very guilty and only grateful that she had not tasted Miss Bat's bread and salt, she had fastened her suitcase and was in the act of pulling on her beret when Miss Bat returned.

"Are you leaving me?" she asked.

"Yes," replied Lucy, speaking quickly in her confusion. "You must think me a terrible weathercock, but— but I've just remembered something important. I'm bound to get to Bath tonight. Of course. I'm just as grateful to you for your kindness as if I'd stayed."

As she foresaw. Miss Bat was too well bred to persuade her to stay.

"As you wish." she said. "But you'd probably like to wash. One feels so soiled after a motor Journey."

"Thanks, I'd love to," cried Lucy.

Miss Bat opened the door which led out to the courtyard and pointed to a lighted door, directly opposite the library, on the other side.

"That is the maid's bathroom in the kitchen wing," she said. "There is plenty of hot water there. If you cross the yard you will save the long walk round by the hall and passages."

As she spoke the feeble glow from the library lamp shone on a yard or so of damp flagstone and made the surrounding darkness the deeper.

"I'll go and look at the time table," she continued. "You should have plenty of time to catch the next bus to Bath."

But Miss Bat did not keep her promise. She knew that Lucy was booked to eternity. Creeping upstairs to her own room, she waited for the sound of a cry.

Eager to wash off her grime. Lucy stepped quickly into the courtyard. Already her spirits were beginning to soar at the prospect of release. She could see the light in the opposite wing, in a dead line from where she stood, and she headed toward it, walking directly toward the well.

It seemed that nothing could save her from the sudden ghastly drop and the choking death in the black icy water. Then suddenly she felt the end of her cigarette scorching her fingers and threw it hastily away.

But, to her amazement, instead of lying in her path, a red glowing stub, it disappeared entirely.

She stopped dead and struck a match. To her horror, its wavering flame revealed a distant gleam of water, far below, almost under her feet.

Springing back with a cry. she rushed to the library. Her heart was pounding, while her head whirled with crazy suspicions and fears.

"She meant to murder me," she whispered. "No. It's impossible. Yet, suppose it's all been a trap. Suppose it's all been a trap. Suppose she broke her glasses on purpose and then pretended to be blind."

Her knees shook under her from the severity of her shock as she crossed to the bureau and examined the broken pair of spectacles. Even as she had suspected the frame contained only ordinary tinted glass instead of strong magnifying lenses.

"That proves it," she whispered, throwing the spectacles on the ground. "It was a trap."

Her one wish was to get quickly out of the tainted house. Snatching up her bag, she rushed through the hall and reached the road just in time to signal to the Purple bus as it roared round the bend. Two minutes later she was inside—

warm and secure— while the village slipped behind her and faded like an evil dream.

THE NEXT AFTERNOON the Purple bus, on its way from Bath, dropped a fare in the village of Paddiscombe. Miss Yaxley-Moore swaggered into the Sundial house and faced her half-sister with a brazen smile.

"Well," she said, "I'm here. My luggage follows. Tree stopped off and saw the doctor on her way to the school and he got on to Sir Felix that night. Since then things have moved quickly. The case is coming into court."

As Miss Bat said nothing, she peeled off her gloves and sat down before the fire.

"Yes," she repeated, "I'm here. Even if I'm a guest of his majesty for a period I shan't be too proud to return to you. You've got me for keeps."

"And suppose I refuse?" asked Miss Bat in a high thin voice.

"You can't. People will talk."

The beaten expression in the other woman's eyes betrayed that she had gauged the depths of her half-sister's monomania. She was still Miss Bat of Sundial house— two hundred years old— and she must continue to command public respect. Nothing was left to her but to try and salve the pride of her name.

And her punishment was a life sentence— an enforced partnership of hatred. Only the ticking of the clock broke the silence as the two women sat and faced each other in the fading light.

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7: The True Steel

William Merriam Rouse

1884-1937

Argosy All-Story Weekly, 2 Dec 1922

SNARG had sent for John Peter Warriner, which was in itself a high impertinence. Worse, he had had the effrontery to ask in his dirty, ill-spelled note that Warriner come in a chaise instead of riding as was his habit. If Tobias Snarg had dared to come himself to the manor with such a request, and no prompt explanation, Warriner would have kicked him from the door; but the frightened black boy who stood on the porch, hat in hand and with the air of trying to hide behind one of the fluted columns, was not to blame.

"Tell him I'll go, and be damned to him!"

Warriner flirted the pieces of the torn note into the air and turned away. Snarg would have to offer something of unusual interest to pay for this or Warriner would thrash him in his own ill-favored house. Rum from the West Indies? Fine brandy from France? Cigars from Cuba? None of these offered excuse for the insolence.

Toby Snarg had certain dealings in Canada, as far as Quebec. He owned a sloop that sailed down Lake Champlain more often by night than by day, bringing cargoes, duty free, to northern New York. For a matter of a half dozen years, since the close of the second war with Great Britain, Snarg had done a good business with many of the landlords in the Adirondack wilderness. He confined his smuggling to luxuries and his dealings to the rich.

Warriner, of Warriner Manor, used him. Not for black purposes, as did some, but to serve such ends as were not readily to be satisfied by other means. The feeling of the time as to smuggling was loose. John Peter Warriner, of lineage that went back through English history to the Conquest, to Normandy, was something of a cynic, a little ruthless, but bound in strict allegiance to his own code of honor and to the young republic, for which he had fought at Plattsburg as his father had at Saratoga.

Snarg had said not to arrive until dark. Both the hint of mystery and the astound ing quality of the insolence from one who was wont to come seeking his customers had helped decide Warriner to go; he even found himself eager as he began to dress shortly before candle lighting. He would have dressed with equal care for a ball, a duel, or a dog fight.

White nankeen trousers, revealing the contours of his mighty thighs and calves, a tight coat of blue broadcloth with rolling collar and long tails, a waistcoat of flowered silk with silver buttons. He pocketed a pair of beautifully chased pistols and a packet of money— both being necessary in all dealings with Snarg.

At length Warriner was satisfied with himself; having made sure for the third time that his shirt, of linen as fime and soft as silk and worked with a multitude of pleats, was spotless. As particular as an Incroyable of the period of the Directory he, nevertheless, looked the Viking for, like nearly all Warriners, he was tall, yellow-haired, barrelchested and pink and white. A man with whom it was exceedingly dangerous to trade blows.

Warriner leaped into his chaise without putting foot to step and gathered up the reins. The stable boy sprang away from the horse's head and the chaise left with its iron tires striking fire from the roadway. For an hour the two-wheeled vehicle swayed and bumped, and fields and forests passed in a green stream. Then Warriner pulled down his powerful horse at the residence of Tobias Snarg.

There was a curl of disgust upor his lips as he drew up in front of the big brick house, once a mansion, that Toby Snarg had acquired since his prosperity. It was dark now, night having come during the hour, but Warriner knew that the gardens were choked with weeds, the hedges untrimmed. The many windows of the house seemed like sad and hollow eyes. Dogs barked. The black boy came running to take the horse. Then the door opened and Snarg's heavy carcass appeared there with the lightness of a dancing master.

Snarg was surprising. He was gross, with iron muscles concealed beneath layers of fat. His teeth were yellow and stained, but strong as the teeth of a horse. He grinned much and the corners of his mouth turned up broadly, but his grin was as likely to prelude a knife thrust as a handclasp. Now he stood bowing and grinning, so that Warriner could see the top of his cropped poll in the light from the doorway and note how the hair grew down upon his temples and into a peak above his brows,

"Good evening to ye, sir!" he said. " Come in, sir! They's French wine waiting, Mr. Warriner, and some of the longest and blackest cigars that ever come out of Cuba!"

How Toby Snarg hated him! Warriner smiled faintly from his seat in the chaise. But he loved money more. They hated each other for no reason except that each was what he was. Snarg hated and feared and made money: and Warriner used him with a devil-may-care indifference to his venom which intensified that poison. Money! Snarg loved money even more than he hated a gentleman.

"Well, Snarg!" Warriner vaulted from the chaise and stood beside Toby, looking down into his upturned, grinning face. "You've a mighty good reason for that note, I trust?"

"Yes, sir!" Snarg led the way into the house, chuckling. "It's business to be done after dark and spoke in a whisper! You'll see why I didn't come to you,

Mr. Warriner! And youll be thanking Toby Snarg that he wrote that note to you instead of somebody else!"

They went into a room littered with guns, bits of harness, even smelling of the stable; but furnished with battered mahogany, with magnificent, tarnished silver candelabra. Odors of stale food and stale spirits. For a missing pane in one of the tall windows a piece of horse blanket had been substituted.

"Have something to drink and smoke, Mr. Warriner!" Toby waved his fat, unwashed hands at the table, where sat half a dozen cobwebbed bottles and some bundles of cigars. He poured wine and stood grinning and rubbing his ale-stained shirt front.

"I'm going to ask you to come upstairs and look at what I got for you," he said. "You look first and then we'll talk business. Here's your health, sir!"

Warriner held his glass to the light and stared into the beautiful color a moment, frowning, before he drank with the man. Could it be that he dared plot any villainy against John Peter Warriner? He dared, but he knew that he would lose too much, Warriner decided; so he raised his glass in acknowledgment and drank.

"It must be something good to repay me for driving in that woman's go-cart," he said. "I prefer a horse's back between my legs."

"You'll see, Mr. Warriner! Five minutes more and you'll be thanking me, sir!"

Snarg took a candle from the table and fitted it to a pewter stick. Then, with a nod and a smirk, he went out into the hall and up bare stairs that creaked as though in protest at his presence there. He stopped before a door on the second floor and inserted a key in the lock, while the candle dripped tallow upon his boots.

Warriner felt for his pistols, but Snarg preceded him fairly enough into a bare room, dusty and echoing. He walked to one side of the room and ran his hand along the wainscoting. A little rectangular panel, at the height of a man's head, slid noiselessly back. Snarg looked, then beckoned and stood with his finger on his lips. With one hand resting upon the grip of a pistol Warriner went up to the opening and looked through.

He found himself gazing into a chamber similar to the one in which he stood, except that it was rather crudely furnished. In the middle of the room a girl knelt before a high - backed, splint - bottomed chair as though it were a prie-dieu. She was dressed in a simply made gown of some dark material. Her unbound hair, black and waying, fell over her shoulders and down to her waist. Long, black lashes swept cheeks touched with rose; her profile was clear and delicate against the light. She held a rosary and prayed in French.

"Hail, Mary, full of grace! The Lord is with thee—" Warriner's glance flashed about the room, there were heavy bars on the window— "pray for us sinners, now, and at the hour of our death. Amen."

Warriner turned away from the opening in the wall and looked into the grinning face of Snarg.

"Ain't she a little beauty, Mr. Warriner?" he whispered as he closed the panel.

"What devil's work is this, Toby?"

"A thousand dollars takes her!" Snarg balanced back on his heels complacently. "I can see you're hard hit!"

"Ah!" murmured Warriner. "New Orleans, perhaps? A touch of the tar brush? Slave-running, Toby?"

"No, sir!" Snarg wagged his head emphatically. "She's pure white, pure French, and I shouldn't wonder if she was eddicated, too! That's the trouble! I got her on my hands and I got to get rid of her some way. When my boat was coming up the St. Lawrence last trip this gal and another one was out on the river. They got upset, and the other gal was drowned, but my crew picked up this one. So fur, all right. But Cap'n Nippy Smith was drunk that day and what does he do but chuck this gal into his cabin and lock her up and forget all about it. When he come to, a couple of days later, they wa'n't nothing to do but keep her. So Cap'n Nippy brought her along to me, durn him! I made up my mind to turn her into money. She's as good as dead as far as Canada goes, and they's many a young blood, and old ones, too, that will pay for a gal like that. Give her some gowns and rings and she'll quit praying and quiet down."

"Who else knows about this, Snarg?" asked Warriner.

"Nobody but Mr. Alexander Thorne. I didn't intend to have him see her, but we was drinking pretty hard here last night, and you know how wild he is, Mr. Warriner. He was running all over the house, and he tried her door and she screamed. Then I had to show him. He ain't got a shilling to his name or he'd have bought her. He was clean crazy to have her."

"Why offer her to me, Toby, in preference to any one else?"

"Fair question, Mr. Warriner, and I'll tell ye. You don't get crazy drunk like some gentlemen we both know. You don't talk. You got the money to pay cash. I had plenty experience with gentlemen's notes. It's turrible risky for me to keep her now anybody knows she's here. Thorne ll be back. He begged and threatened. If she's gone he can't do anything. You see the way I'm fixed, don't ye?"

"I'll take her," said John Peter Warriner. He drew out a morocco billfold. "Here's part of your money. Come for the rest to-morrow. Unlock the door and order my chaise at once."

"Glad you come, hey?" chuckled Snarg as his fingers closed upon the money. They went out into the hall, he turned the key in the door of the girl's room and then went creaking downstairs to order the. chaise. Warriner lifted the latch and stepped inside.

The girl had sprung up at the first sound, evidently. Now, pale as death, she backed slowly to the wall.

"*Bon soir*, *mademoiselle*!" Warriner spoke as gently as he could. "I have come to help you."

"Oh!" She lifted her arms to heaven. "Thank God you speak French! Deliver me from this terrible place, monsieur! From that terrible man! From the drunken *monsieur* who was here last night! From everything! Take me back to my home in beautiful Canada. God and His angels will reward you!"

"Be tranquil, *mademoiselle*," said Warriner. " You are going to leave this place with me, and at once!"

She ran toward him with hands outstretched, like a frightened child. Warriner sprang and caught her as she pitched forward, fainting. He lifted her and went downstairs with her slender body limp in his arms and her head upon his shoulder. Snarg met him, smelling of fresh spirits.

"All ready!" he exclaimed hoarsely. "Nice little armful, but I'm durned glad to see the last of her. Be after the rest of the money to-morrow, sir!"

Without replying Warriner climbed into the chaise, gathered up the reins in one hand, and drove for home as though the devil were after him.

Limp and warm and helpless against his heart. Toby Snarg was right. He had been hard hit. John Peter Warriner, a young gentleman of fortune who had made the grand tour, who knew his Horace and thought in terms of the eighteenth century philosophy, had succumbed to the black velvet eyes and pearl tinted skin of a little Canadienne. No, it was neither the skin nor the eyes. It was that flame of life within her which burned with a light just a little different from every other flame of life in the world. She, no doubt, would call it her immortal soul. Warriner accepted the inevitable, and joyously. After a time she stirred, and her arms clung to him.

"My father!" she whispered. "Ah— but I have had a bad dream! *Mon Dieu*!"

She cried out and struggled as she came fully to herself. Warriner held her as gently as he could.

"You have nothing more to fear mademoiselle," he said. "Very soon you shall be quite comfortable."

He felt her crying softly, heard the broken murmur of her prayers, and then they drew up before the pillars of the manor. He carried her into the drawingroom and put her down in a great velvet upholstered chair. He lighted

every candle, so that polished furniture and brasses gleamed. He stood by the fireplace and looked down at her. She was a rare gem in a worthy setting.

"*Mademoiselle*," he said, "I am John Peter Warriner, and this is Warriner Manor. Will you tell me who you are?"

She had recovered a degree of self-possession now—a really marvelous reaction after what she had been through. Her fear seemed to have gone.

"I am Mlle. Marianne Fortier," she said, "of Quebec. We were at our villa on the St. Lawrence above the city when my friend. Alma-Rose was drowned and those men picked me up. The captain was drunk, and he could not speak French, anyway. I was helpless. My father would have paid them. I suppose they were afraid—"

"Yes," agreed Warriner. "They are smugglers."

He stood looking down at her in silence. Very likely his heart was in his eyes, for Mile. Fortier shot an uneasy glance at him,

"Monsieur," she said, "you are a gentleman. You are going to send me home, aren't you?"

Now within John Peter Warriner stirred a little something of the spirit of those far ancestors of his who rode with drawn sword from end to end of Saxon England. Here was the woman who had been his own from time immemorial, he felt.

"Mlle. Marianne," he said, "you are free. We are twenty miles from Port Franklin, on Lake Champlain, and from there I shall take you by boat to Canada. Most certainly I should free any woman whom I found in your situation. The easiest way was to buy you, as I did, for Snarg would have been capable of killing you if he had thought there was danger from the officers of the law. All that, however, is nothing. What concerns me greatly is that I have loved you from the moment when I looked into that room and saw you at your prayers."

"*Dieu Seigneur*!" she cried. "Is all the world gone mad? First that drunken captain steals me! 'Then a tall, dark gentleman, also very drunk, asks me to marry him! Then the fat man sells me as a slave! Now you, monsieur, say that you love me! What kind of love is it, monsieur, that speaks so quickly?"

"I t is an honorable love, mademoiselle. It carries with it my name and fortune. I shall ask you to marry me. I do now."

"Utterly mad!" she exclaimed. "Do you know what you are saying? This is a serious thing— marriage! Or do you mock me? Are you no better than those others? I do not love you! I will not marry you! Oh, *mon Dieu*!"

"Pardon!" said Warriner grimly. "You think I am mad— and perhaps you are right. You do not trust me. *Parbleu*! Because I have asked you to be my wife you do not trust me."

He reached above the marble mantelpiece and took down from the wall a long dagger with a hilt of rough and very old workmanship. He dropped it point downward so that it quivered in the polished boards at her feet.

"There is true steel, mademoiselle. It was carried by a Crusader, one of my ancestors. Tradition says that it will fight only in a holy cause. Take it, and if I do not take you safely home as I have promised, use it on me!"

Warriner thought bitterly that he had made a fool of himself, and was still making a fool of himself. Rash, as always, plunging to the undoing of his own happiness. He watched her take the dagger and lay it in her lap, shaking her head.

"I do believe that you wil take me home, monsieur, for you have a good heart. But while I am in this part of the world where all men are insane I shall keep it for protection."

"You will want to go to your room," said Warriner quietly now. "Come *mademoiselle*. I will call my housekeeper."

He held the door open, She rose. In ten minutes she had been made comfortable in the best of the guest chambers, and Warriner was alone in his library struggling to get a grip upon the most difficult situation he had ever faced. He cursed himself for his crashing haste. He would send to Port Franklin and find out the time of the first boat north. He was in honor bound to take her on that boat, but he was determined to make the most of every moment with her that was his.

The next morning John Peter Warriner paced the drawing-room, waiting for her to appear. Already he had sent one stable boy with an armful of fresh cut roses to her room and another to Port Franklin for information. He turned and bowed as she entered, and his heart sank as he saw that she did not wear one of his flowers. She had brought the dagger.

"I do not need this, monsieur," she said, after she had replied to his greeting. She placed it upon a little table. "We were both, I think, quite foolishly excited last night."

"I am of the same mind, Mile. Marianne," said Warriner; "but— I have sent to find out about your boat—"

He broke off at a sudden look of terror upon her face. Toby Snarg was standing in the doorway. Warriner saw red, and for a moment was speechless with rage.

"You!" he cried. "How dare you come into my house like that?"

"Now, Mr. Warriner," expostulated Snarg uneasily. "I didn't see nobody, and I'm in a mighty big hurry— a mighty big hurry!"

"Oh!" Warriner managed to control himself. He walked to a desk and counted out some bills and coin from a drawer. "There's what you're after.

Now go, and don't come into my house like that again unless you want to get kicked out."

Snarg grew darkly red, but he did not move. He stood with the money in his hand.

"I got something to say about her," he announced at length.

"Very well," replied Warriner, after a second's hesitation. "Make it brief."

"Alexander Thorne got me out of bed afore daylight this morning," said Snarg sullenly. " He's got hold of some money some way, and he wants that gal. I'll give you back your thousand, Mr. Warriner, and another with it, for her—"

"Get out!" barked Warriner.

"Twenty-five hundred, cash—"

John Peter Warriner struck a beautiful blow, starting his fist without warning movement and sending it crashing against Snarg's jaw. Heavy man that he was, he went back against the wall with such force that the sturdy timbers of the house trembled.

What followed seemed to happen all at once. A cry from Marianne, a glimpse of Snarg reeling toward the table where the dagger lay, and then a flash of steel as he caught it up and sprang to strike.

Warriner threw up an arm, but the blow never fell. The next instant Toby Snarg was sprawling on the floor, his feet tangled in a rug over which he had tripped. The dagger slid away from his hand.

Warriner drew a pistol. Snarg got up and began to back toward the door.

"We'll get that gal!" he promised, and flashed out of the door as Warriner fired. The bullet drove into the wall. Warriner leaped to a window in time to see Snarg riding away. He turned to Mlle. Fortier, smiling.

"He wanted to buy you back, *mademoiselle*! Truly, you are a very valuable person!"

She had picked up the dagger and stood looking at it.

"Monsieur," she said, " it is indeed true steel! It will not fight in an evil cause. Did you see how he fell? No evil can come near you while you have it."

"I would rather have my saber," he laughed. "Or a brace of pistols!"

But Marianne Fortier was impressed, and it was almost with reverence that she put the dagger back on the table. Warriner had other matters to think of. The stable boy returned with the information that a boat making the trip into Canadian waters would leave the following night.

Until that time it was necessary to bear in mind Snarg and his patron, Alexander Thorne. Thorne was unscrupulous, evidently supplied with money, and as genuinely in love as he could be. That he had mentioned marriage had

proved that. Snarg was moved by his own great passion, greed. And greed was bolstered by long hatred and fresh desire for vengeance.

Warriner gave orders to his foreman, Tim Creagan, a stout and loyal fellow, to set a guard that night. Then he loaded his rifles and fouling pieces and got out the heavy cavalry saber that he had carried in the war of '12. This he left in the library, but he resolved that his pistols would stay in his pockets, loaded, until he and Marianne Fortier were safely at the home of her father. He resolved to mount his half dozen men and arm them for a guard when he went to Port Franklin the next afternoon.

Hours passed, however, and there was no sign of a return of Snarg. Warriner devoted himself to Mlle. Fortier; but to-day, having become thoroughly herself, she was cool, aloof, charming, kind. It seemed that John Peter Warriner was to make no further progress for the present, if at all. Silently he cursed himself for having thrown away through his impulsiveness what prestige he might have gained from the rescue.

That afternoon storm clouds began to gather. Warriner and Mlle. Fortier stood upon the porch and watched the blue-black mass form low over the mountains; listened together to the distant reverberations and saw the first flashes of lightning. The first drops came driving down, and they had turned to go into the house when Warriner saw a hillside a quarter of a mile away light up with a glare that was not from the storm. The next instant a red tongue of flame waved up the side of a hay barn which stood there.

Warriner ran to the stable to tell Creagan and found the foreman already starting for the fire with every man about the place. Warriner went back to the drawing-room and joined Marianne at one of the French windows. The broad expanse of clipped lawn and shrubbery, the. winding gravel driveway, were swept by gusts— covered by sudden sheets of blue light. The windows rattled to the crashing thunder.

The storm was at its height when a curve in the drive that had been bare but a moment before was blotted out by swift forms. Horsemen riding hard and low. Thorne and Snarg with a halfscore of men at their backs. Marianne, sensing danger, cried out.

"Tricked, by the gods!" gasped Warriner. "I didn't think lightning struck that barn! They set fire to it and drew off the men or they would never dare this!"

He had, perhaps, as much as one full minute before they would come beating at the door of the manor. The white face of the girl was turned to him, as to a strong tower. Could he hold out until Creagan and the men came back? He doubted it, against such odds. He could not hide her; they would search the house from top to bottom. He could not escape with her, for there was no

time to saddle horses. He could think of but one course of action and he decided upon it between two breaths.

"Marianne!" he cried, seizing her hands. "Listen carefully to me! Go to my room! There is money in the teakwood cabinet— take it. Then down the servants' stairway to the stable. A boy's there. Tell him to put the fast black mare to the chaise, drive you across the back meadow to the main road, and get to Port Franklin in the best time the mare can make. There you'll be safe. To-morrow you sail. Go, Marianne, and remember, if you think of me, that I love you!"

"But you?" she whispered, clinging to his arm. "Why don't you come?"

John Peter Warriner laughed. His blue eyes filled with points of cold light, like little points of naked steel.

"I must engage the attention of these gentlemen for a matter of ten or fifteen minutes, *mademoiselle*! Now, go quickly!"

"But—you are alone!"

"Go! In the name of Heaven, go!" He pushed her toward the door.

"If I must, monsieur— *adieu*!"

Her slippered feet pattered upon the stairs. Warriner could hear the shouts outside as the men flung themselves from their saddles. He leaped into the library, snatched up his saber, flung the scabbard into a corner, and ran back to the stairway. He began to back slowly upward, shifting both pistols to a left-hand pocket. Halfway up the stairs were broken by a landing. A very good place to defend. Above he heard cries and hurrying feet. The women servants were taking refuge in the third story.

The massive black walnut front door swung open and thundered back against the wall with the silver knocker banging. The doorway filled with a rush of men. Alexander Thorne led, as befitted him. A tall, dark man; elegant in spite of his sodden clothing. Behind him pressed Snarg and Captain Nippy Smith, a pock-marked bandit. It was the crew of the boat, then, with which they made the raid; hard fighters all.

"Warriner!"' called Thorne from the foot of the stairs. "I've come for the girl!"

John Peter Warriner, leaning upon the basket hilt of his saber, smiled down at him. Thorne carried a pistol in each hand. So did Snarg. Most of the others carried cudgels in sight, and knives, no doubt, where they could be reached. Warriner preferred to see the pistols, for a pistol could only bite once. There would be no time for reloading in this fight once started.

"Thorne," he said, "come and take the girl if you can!"

He saw a half dozen barrels gleam in the weird gray-blue light and dropped to the floor of the landing, low but with his legs under him. He drew and fired

at Thorne as he went down. The volley crashed, filling the house with a cataract of sound. The wainscoting above his head cracked and splintered under the impact of the lead.

"Raw troops fire high!" he thought jauntily as he sprang to his feet. His heart sang with the joy of battle and he hurled the empty pistol into a face that came out of the billowing black powder smoke. The second pistol leaped to his hand.

They wavered in the drifting smoke, with their stomachs full for the moment. Thorne was intact, but one of the men lay stretched, groaning, upon the floor. Captain Nippy was deliberately reloading. Warriner shot him as he rammed home the bullet, and he rolled over the other wounded man.

"Come on, you damned laggards!" cried Thorne. "That's his last shot!"

So they came on again, a packed mass of bodies. Warriner flung his second pistol and struck Thorne between the eyes, smashing him back into the arms of his men. Then he knelt with a long thrust and drove his point a good two inches into the shoulder of Toby Snarg. Again the wave receded, but only for a. moment. And now Warriner knew that they would warm to the fighting and give him trouble, hell-hot.

"Crush him down!" shouted Thorne. "What are your clubs for?"

He snatched a cudgel from one of the men. Snarg, with his horrible grin spread until every yellow tooth in his head was revealed, drew a knife.

Cut and thrust! Parry! Thrust! The heavy saber played like a living thing in the hand of John Peter Warriner. The cudgels rattled upon his blade. The long knife of Snarg flashed in and out, trying to get under his guard. He was driven backward up the last section of the stairs.

Let him be forced away from the head of the stairway and the end would be in sight. After that he could only stand with his back against the wall and fight to the death. There would be no mercy now among those blood-maddened men.

Fortunately no more than two could reach him effectively at once. He held long, but at last he was on the top stair. Then, under a terrific blow from a club, his saber broke and he was left with a foot-long stump. It was the end, he thought bitterly, come just when there wasea slight chance of victory. For Thorne was down on the landing, leaning, deathly pale against the wall, with both hands pressed to his side. Two others sprawled upon the stairs. The attack had begun to slacken.

Now Snarg pressed him. His left arm hung useless, but he handled the knife with undiminished vigor. He called to the men to come on and finish it. Warriner gripped the stump of his saber to meet the last attack—and suddenly

jerked backward at a frantic pull upon his arm. He looked down into the wide black eyes of Marianne Fortier.

"The true steel, monsieur!" she panted, thrusting the crusader's dagger into his hand. "God and the Virgin be with you!"

At sight of her there was a shout from the stairs. Warriner turned barely in time to meet the blade of Snarg. Knife and dagger locked and hung for an instant. Snarg and Warriner blocked the stairway. The others drew back, tacitly.

"Hail, Mary, full of grace—"

The words struck upon Warriner's ears and he knew that Marianne was there, behind him. The knowledge gave him the strength of ten. Snarg disengaged and thrust. Warriner took a long flesh wound upon his arm. His coat sleeve flapped. Certainly Snarg was a devil with the knife.

"—the Lord is with thee—"

Thrust and parry! Thrust! The points each found flesh. Snarg staggered. But his blade had slid along Warriner's ribs. Lights danced before his eyes.

"Pray for us sinners, now—"

True steel, she had said. Warriner feinted and lunged with all the desperation of failing strength. A groan. Snarg lost his footing. He heaved mightily backward, his grinning face going down like a waning moon of the infernal regions.

At the same moment the hall below filled with a roar of voices. Creagan and his men at last! Those on the stairs who could turned and plunged down, charging for liberty. The fight filled the house with a mighty clamor.

John Peter Warriner staggered to a chair and dropped into it, gasping. Marianne, with wet and shining eyes, pulled at the flapping sleeve.

"Your wounds!" she cried. "I must dress them at once!"

"You didn't go!" he panted.

"Go while there was danger?" she exclaimed. "Do you think it is a woman of that nature whom you have asked to be your wife? Ah, I have much to teach you, my Jean Pierre!"

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8: For the Child

Hume Nisbet

1849-1921

The Telegraph (Brisbane) 6 Sep 1900

Scottish novelist who spent his teens and early twenties in Australia; he returned to UK in 1872. By the late 1880s he was financially struggling artist in London, and turned from art to writing. He went on to produced nearly 50 novels and three volumes of short stories, many of which were set in Australia and the south seas. This story reflects his poverty years in London.

"WELL, mate, got some work yet?"

"No."

"Then you know where you can get a good job when you want one." L With these sneering words the well-fed, beer-soaked loafer lurched past the ghastly-faced, hollow-eyed mechanic, and entered the "Black Bull" Tavern, leaving the starving man to crawl up to his empty garret.

It was one of the lowest and most poverty-stricken slums of London, with a pawnshop at one corner and a dirty public-house at the other. Well-dressed men and women avoided it, for it was the lair of infectious microbes. It swarmed with wretched and ragged humanity, young and old, althouigh Death went up and down tirelessly mowing them down. It was close and airless, dingy-coloured and evil-smelling, with dilapidated doors and broken filthy windows. The staircases and walls wore covered with ugly stains, and reeked constantly with , the poisonous moisture of contaminated breaths. Inside the dens, beds were a rarity, and chairs and tables superfluities seldom indulged in.

Tom Dangerfield was an expert locksmith, who had fallen upon evil times in spite of his skill in his difficult craft. His political opinions were mainly the cause of his misfortunes, for although no one had accused him of dishonesty, yet he held such extreme democratic views, and aired them so dogmatically, that no self-respecting master would give him employment. He was known as "Dangerfield the Anarchist," and with, most Englishmen such enemies to the Constitution are regarded as several degrees worse than the professional, and non-political criminal.

Jerry Tozer, the well-fed, beer-soaked individual, was it more tolerated person; for he was only a house-breaker who hsd matriculated early and served many times in Her Majesty's strongholds. He had no need, to starve, as Tom Dangerfield now did. If he warred with society, he did it quietly and without cramming his opinions down the throat of the public.

Now he and his comrades had wanted the services of the locksmith for a long time, and were prepared to pay him handsomely for his work. They watched with satisfaction his suicidal tactics; saw him turned from one workshop after another with unholy glee; looked on the starvation and burial of his wife with grim complacency; saw his little child and himself suffering the pangs that, had slain his wife with pitiless eyes, even while they constantly tempted him to join their ranks.

"Help us, and we'll help you; that's only fair. We take our risks, and you must take yours. You know where money, meat, und drink are to be had when you Want them. If you can better yourself elsewhere, do so. It's a free country, and you have your free choice."

They had tempted him in this way, all through his rebuffs from honesty.

When his wife Mary first fell ill through exposure and want, they tempted him to save her; when she was dead they tempted him to bury her decently; and now that his little boy Jimmy was at the same pass they were at it still. Not a copper would they give him for pity. It was to be the devil's contract or nothing. They were criminal, you see, and only recognised the comradeship of crime.

On most days, although he failed in his efforts after work, he managed to pick up a crust or two, to make sops for the little fellow and keep the life in him— sops without milk or sugar— yet want so extreme as theirs is not particular so long, as the gap is filled. Sometimes he even picked up enough to fill up the cavity in himself as well.

But on this day the housewives must havo been extra careful, or the beggars not so prodigal as usual, for, although he had sought diligently, he hadn't fallen in with any scraps. He was going to face a child who had not broken his fast for twelve hours, and he had absolutely nothing to give him.

As he entered the bare attic, his child made a vain effort to rise from the sacking on which he lay, and whimpered; "Oh, daddy, I'm so glad you have come, I am so tired and— hungry."

Tom Dangerfield lifted the light skeleton of a four-year-old hoy and held him to his own famished chest.

"Have a drink of water, Jimmy, and I'll get something as soon as it grows dark."

"No, daddy, I've drank water all day till it made me sick. I cannot drink any more water, and I have sach a pain here."

He held his thin hand over his swelled stomach and closed his eyes, as if he was going to faint.

Tom Dangerfield staggered with him to the window, and opened it to get all the air he could. A streak of ruddy light shot down the alley from the setting

sun. It made the three brass balls of the pawnshop glow like glistening gold. It irradiated the sign board and windows of the Black Bull Tavern. It luried with a scarlet lustre the burly hotly and bloated face of Jerry Tozer, who leaned against the door post us he smoked his pipe and watched some ragged children playing.

That sunmy gave the wretched father a vision, as he stood at the open window holding his dying son. It was the vision of a cottage in the country, close to the sea, which had been theirs when Mary and he were first married. Virginia creepers were round the porch at the front and scarlet beans at the back. He could feel the delicate young shoots of the hanging creepers touching his brow as the salt winds moved them, while the red sun transformed the sea in front into molten gold. Was it a tendril that touched his brow, or the dead lingers of Mary, then so soft and light?

"Daddy, it is surely dark now. Have you not brought me any bread?"

"Oh, my God ! Oh, my God, what shall I do!"

He glared wildly up at the chimneypots, where the golden clouds were massing, then from these down to the street.

Jerry Tozer was looking up at him. In one hand he held his pipe, pointing the stem at the starving child, and with the other he held up a coin. It might have been a shilling, but the ruddy sun-ray gave it the colour of gold.

" Daddy ! Daddy! Give ine something to eat. It is quite dark now."

With a shrill cry Tom Dangerfield leaned out of the window,' and shrieked to the burly tempter:

"Bring up something, for God's sake, for Jimmy to eat and drink, I am your man."

The struggle was over, and the devil, had won the long-played game.

THE BURGLAR found Tom Dangerfield a mighty useful mate, who did his work thoroughly, but a most exacting partner for all that. He knew his value, atid made them pay for it accordingly. There was no evading his claims, for he was a dangerous and surly fellow when roused, and by no means social at any time. .But he was daring and expert, and could pick any lock they set him to pick. He had a head on him, too, for planning out as well us executing a midnight job; therefore they gave him what he demanded and followed him ' where he led.

He spouted no more about social rights or the division of property. He was putting his formerly useless theories into deadly practice now for the sake of his child.

Jerry Tozer and his mate had, been in time to save the life of: little Jimmy. He was now at the seaside, getting health and strength nnder the charge of his maternal grandmother, whose old days, also, were smoothed by the money that Tom sent down. After each division of the proceeds of the robberies, Tom Dangerfleld sent off the main portion of it in postal orders, which the grandmother banked for herself and Jimmy. He was doing, well now, he wrote, as the postal orders proved.

For himself, he had shifted into other quarters, where he was not known, and changed his name. He did not expect his career to be a long one, nor did he care, so that he could make enough to keep Jimmy fronr ever wanting until he was old enough to look out for himself.

When a soldier is reckless of his life, he seldom finds his death on the field of battle. In the same way, the housebreakers had a longer and more successful run than he anticipated. He was crafty, and not yet known to the police. In less than six months. he had posted sufficient money orders to keep his son in the modest fashion his father had planned out.

Then came the Waterloo of Tom Dangerfield.

One night they were interrupted by the police, and although they, managed to escape and take their loot with them, it was at the most deadly price a robber could pay for the sake of temporary liberty. Jerry Tozer was seized and forced to use his crowbar. In the excitement of the moment he struck too hard and became a murderer.

Tom Dangerfield had none of the hopeful delusions that buoy up ordinary criminals. Reviewing the events of the night calmly, he knew that they had left tracks behind .them that would set the blood-hounds of the law straight on their scent. He knew, also, that while they might have held together while only robbery was the bond, this murder would make one of the gong turn traitor sooner or later. There was no escape now.

After a hurried conference the gang separated and fled to where criminals are always caught— the country. Tom went straight to his lodgings and prepared for the end. He would send none of the blood-stained money to the grandmother of his son, nor would he write any farewell letter. They did not know where he lived, nor what his present name was, and for the sake of his child he meant to keep his fate a secret.

He had meditated what he would do under such circumstances for a long time, and had prepared his plans with devilish ingenuity. He went over his effects minutely, destroying all that might lead people to identify the burglar with Tom Dangerfield the locksmith; then as midnight struck he took his revolver and went out.

His lodgings were at Hammersmith, not far from the river. He knew a lonely spot where he could do what he wanted. He reached the place; some empty barges floated on the water. The night was still, and the spot deserted.

Leaping from barge to barge he at length stood on the last one, and sprinkled some powder on the deck.

"It is the face people are identified by," he murmured. "I must spoil that, for the sake of the child."

Holding his revolver in one hand, he put his legs and half his body over the barge's side, then drawing a match from his pocket he dropped it amongst the powder which he had sprinkled close to his face.

The watchman on the shore saw a sudden flash and the glimpse of a face on that barge, then he heard, swiftly following, a shriek of pain and the report of a pistol, and that was all. When he reached the barge there was nothing there except a blackened patch on the deck.

Little Jimmy Dangerfield never knew what had become of his daddy, and the police are still hunting for the only one of the gang whom they did not capture. Nor is it likely that he will be captured, neither needed he have taken all those heroic or demonaic precautions in order to keexi his identity a secret.

Away down near the marshes by the river's mouth, the body of a man was picked up weeks after the watchman saw-that midnight flash on the barge at Hammersmith. He might have been old or young, rich or poor, black or white, at the date of his drowning. No one could tell what he had been when found. What he was had best ne covered with earth and oblivion.

It was for the child.

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9: Pinch And The Poorhouse

Katharine Tynan

1859-1931

The English Illustrated Magazine, Dec 1896

In: *The Handsome Quaker, and other stories*, 1902

THE CABIN was empty, except for a couple of wooden stools and a straw shake-down in the comer. The May sunshine came brilliantly through the open door. Outside was a triangular grass-plot, the corners pointing each to a grassy lane. A thorn-tree in full flower was in the midst of the grass-plot, and below it was a holy well, hooded in stone. A few rags on the thorn-tree spoke of the waters powers of healing. It was a pleasant spot.

"There was always somethin' goin' on," said its owner, "some wan passin' by, if it was only a child ladin' a goat."

He sat now on one of the stools, and looked regretfully at his lost kingdom. He was a simple-feuded old man, with a much younger expression than the urchin who confronted him on another stool, and who was engaged with much gusto in making a meal of a raw onion and dry bread. There was a dog also present— a grey, wire-haired terrier, who lay in the sun and blinked in lazy comfort.

"You'll change your mind, Misther Bryan," said the urchin, "an' ate a taste wid me?"

"I haven't the desire, Owney boy, an' 'tis well I haven't. The young should ate hearty, an' you've little enough there for yourself."

"You're kindly welcome, all the same, Misther Bryan."

He was a shock-headed urchin, with a pale, peaked face under his close thatch of red hair. He had a club-foot, which kept him from joining the games of the other boys, and he was sensitive on the score of it. No doubt that explained the queer friendship between him and old Johnny Bryan. The two were without kith and kin also, and in their loneliness they were glad of each other.

"They say," said the lad, looking sideways from his bread and onion, "that there's the finest of atin' an' drinkin' in the place you're going to— mate every day, lashin's an' lavin's of it, an' porther an' whisky (if the doctor ordhers it)— everything, except tobacky, that you could want."

The old man sighed heavily.

"There's many a thing I'll want. I'll want the tree out there, an' the well an' the mountains, an' the birds, an' the pleasant word wid them that passes up an' down. Why, look here, Owney! 'twas never lonely wid the door open there, an' you never knowin' when a foot 'ud come by. I'm glad you're to have it, Owney, but I'll want to see it sore in the place I'm goin' to. None of my name

ever went there before me, an' it's bitter hard, for I gev the labour o' my youth to the country that gives me only the House for my old age."

He looked down at his hands, swollen and deformed with rheumatism, and sighed again. The boy looked at him with a tentative air.

"We might go on as we're goin', Misther Bryan— you wid the house, and me wid frightenin' the crows. 'Tis your house that's in it, and 'tis fair I should take my part; sixpence a day's not much, but we might live on it. You've a aisy mouth to fill, Misther Bryan, and then maybe you'd get the relief afther all.*'

"It wouldn't do, Owney," said the old fellow sadly. "Sixpence a day is little enough to live on yourself, and spare a crust for Pinch. You won't let Pinch want, Owney?"

"No fear; me an' Pinch'll fare alike. Look at him now, the ould villyin of the world, waggin' his tail as if he understood. He'll fret afther you, Misther Bryan."

"Not for long, Owney. Now his father, ould Pinch, 'ud have broken his heart. He was the faithfuUest dog I ever knew. Not but what young Pinch is the very moral of him. But he's young, an' th' affections are not set in him. Besides, he's fond of you, Owney boy, an' it's more natural for him to belong to you. Young dogs is terrible fond of divarsion. I dare say he thinks me an ould slowcoach, eh, Pinch?"

The dog had stood up on hearing himself discussed, and had gravely put his head on his old master's knee.

"He won't get much divarsion out o' me," said Owney, looking down at his club-foot; "there's nairther tatterin' nor tearin' in me like other boys o' my age; but I'll be kind to Pinch, never fear."

"He comes of a great ould stock, Owney. His mother was of the stock o' Battler, his father had the blood o' Finn MacCool and Dublin Boy. Many was th' offer I refused for ould Pinch, and I'll go bail himself here is worth a hatful o' money. I wouldn't be surprised now if he was worth five goold guineas."

"Sound man, Pinch!" said the boy admiringly.

" 'Tis not to every gorsoon I'd tell it, afeard he'd be for turnin' the poor baste into money. But I don't think it o' you, Owney agra."

"You needn't, Misther Bryan. Five guineas is a power o' money to be inside a dog's skin, but I'll keep it by me, Misther Bryan. I've a fancy for Pinch. Other dogs is too fond o' barkin' at me. They don't like the quare foot of me."

There was the sound of a steam-whistle in the distance.

"One o'clock!" said the old fellow. "It's time to be off, Owney boy. Well, I'll be on the road before you get home. You'll take Pinch wid you, an' I'll lock the door an' lave the kay under the stone. I'll wait for the cool o' the evenin' before I ramble off."

The boy turned round from the door with anxiety on his expressive face.

"You're sure it's right about the little house, Misther Bryan?"

"It's all right, my son. Father Keogh drew up the paper for me, an' there's no gettin' out of it. No wan could meddle wid you, barrin' myself, an' no one's likely to thry, for there's none o' my name livin'. Listen, Owney dear, before you go. You're sure you tould no wan ?"

"Unless the crows. They're the only people I've a chance of spakin' to from mornin' till night."

"I'd like it to be a saycret till I go. I'd be sorry to have to say good-bye to any wan, an' I on my way to the poorhouse."

"Well, good-bye, Misther Bryan. I'll be in the first visitin' day to see you. Keep up your heart, man. I'm tould it's a rale elegant place."

He went off with a rather unwilling dog at his heels, and the old man, after watching the pair out of sight, re-entered the cottage. He resumed his seat on the stool, and mused with his head on his breast while the hours of the afternoon passed by. He had tried everything before he had come to entering the poorhouse. He had dragged himself on his poor twisted, rheumatic limbs to one farmer after another for whom he had worked formerly. But there was no place for him. He was as useless as a log, and an eyesore in any farm-yard; so, when his last chance had failed, he had made over to the boy the little cabin which had been his and his father's before him, and made up his mind to enter the "House." He had a queer pleasure in his gift to Owney.

" 'Tis a quiet sort o' place, Owney dear," he had said, "where you may be alone the len'th of a summer's day, an' if there's company about you don't want, sure you've only to lock your door an' put the kay in your pocket, an' there you are."

"True for you, Misther Bryan," said Owney, "an' I'm not denyin' that I'll be as happy as a king wid a little house to meself I was always bothered afeard I'd have to go back to the village, weary on it!"

When Owney came home in the cool of the evening the house was empty. Pinch went about restlessly, whining and sniffing, while his new master sat on a stool regarding him with a melancholy look. After a time Owney made his fire of twigs and boiled some water for his tea, and after a frugal meal honestly shared with Pinch, the two went to bed together. It was lonely in the little cabin at night without old Bryan.

A couple of days later the old man was creeping about in the sunny courtyard of the Union. A few other helpless old people crawled up and down in the sun. They had made friendly advances to him, but as yet he had not responded. He was too sick at heart with the degradation which had come upon him.

He thought of his little cabin in a misty way. He could see it there in the sun with the white butterflies flitting about the doorway, and the daisies in the grass, and the well-water so cool and dark. The sunshine would be streaming in at the little window and climbing the wall by his bed. Owney and Pinch would be in Farmer O'Reilly's ten-acres scaring the crows, and under them the wide, free country, and in the distance the hills. The tears came thickly into the old fellow's bleared eyes. If only he might be there once more, a free man and self-respecting!

There was a good deal of traffic through the courtyard. Tradesmen's carts drove in, and ladies on their way to visit the sick in the hospital passed by, and well-dressed people with business at the master's house or the clerk's office. That was the master himself going about so busily— a young, sprucely-dressed man, florid and pleasant-looking.

Able-bodied paupers trailed about to and from the various workshops. Old Bryan wondered what kept them there. He had no idea of the pauper taint in the blood which makes the workhouse home. He expressed his wonder to another old man who sat on a bench tapping the ground with his crutch.

"A many o' them were born in it," he replied, "an' more was brought up in it. I can see it's bitter to you, dacint man, as it was to me till I got used to it. But man, woman, or child, brought up to it, they never want to get out of it."

A sturdy fellow went by with a coffin on his shoulder. Old Bryan looked after him half-enviously. He would not be sorry to exchange whatever days of shameful ease were left to him for a resting-place in that narrow house.

The old fellow who had spoken to him nudged him again.

"Sit by me, good man," he said, "an' I'll read you what's on the paper."

He had taken a newspaper from his pocket, and was unfolding it with pride. It was a fortnight old, but that did not make its contents less precious.

At that moment a little grey dog, dusty and footsore, limped in at the gate behind a butcher's cart. He ran here and there about the courtyard with his sharp little nose to the ground, and presently he gave a yelp of joy. The scent led him straight to the bench on which old Bryan sat blinking in the sun. He sprang on to the old man's knee and began licking his face furiously, his whole little body trembling with excitement.

"Why, Pinch, Pinch!" cried the old fellow. "Where did you come from at all, you little rogue? An' the tracks o' me two days ould!"

The dog and the man were still hugging each other when the workhouse-master came that way.

"What's this?" he asked quickly. "Where does the dog come from?"

Old Bryan stood up and touched his cap humbly.

"If you plase, sir, 'tis a little bit of a pup I rared meself. I never thought the crature 'ud have the wit to find me, nor the heart to follow me. I'm sure I beg your pardon, sir; the dog doesn't know it isn't a place for his sort. If you'd let him stay a day or two, sir, there's a boy that's a good master to him 'ull be comin' after him."

He was holding Pinch in his arms, and looking at the master with an appeal which went to the kindly heart of the man.

"H'm!" he said, putting a finger under Pinch's grey-bearded chin. "He looks a well-bred one!"

Pinch wriggled round his little head and licked the master's hand.

"You see he knows I like dogs," the master said, looking pleased. "Where did you get him, my friend?"

"I had his father before him, sir. He comes of a fine ould, ancient family— rale blood-stock, sir. If ye take an intherest in Irish terriers I could rattle over his pedigree for you, sir."

"Well, my man, were you thinking of keeping the dog with you?"

"I never thought 'twould be allowed, sir," said old Bryan with an eager flush. Then his face fell. "An' perhaps 'twould be unnatural, too, to keep a lively young crathur like him shut up between walls."

"Never mind that, my friend," said the master, smiling. "He looks as if he'd be very happy with you. I'm sure if you asked him he'd say he'd like to stay. He's a good ratter, eh ?"

"The best from here to Cape Clear."

"I thought so. Well, I don't think the ratepayers would object. The place is getting overrun with rats. Keep him from killing the cats— that's all."

The whole world had changed for old Bryan. Why, with Pinch for a companion, even the workhouse would be home-like. The only thing was his scruple about keeping Pinch with him.

"Well," he said at last, "I'll give him his choice when the boy comes. If he chooses Owney, Owney let it be. I can't say fairer nor that."

Owney came a few days later, looking paler than ever from his grief and anxiety about Pinch. When he found that the dog was safe, his relief was great. Pinch received him affably, but there was evidently a great distinction in his mind between the boy and his old master.

" Don't be talkin' of chices, Misther Bryan," said Owney, looking hungrily at Pinch. "He med his chice when he followed you. He'd have bruk his heart wid me. An' besides"— with an affectation of lightness— "I don't care about Pinch. I'm goin' to get a little cat o' me own. I'm all as wan as promised her. She's a blind-eyed little cat wid a quare foot like meself. Now, look here, Misther

Bryan, that dog's a dale better off for divarsion here thin wid me. What's flyin' after crows to a dog of his breed ?"

" 'Deed then I believe you," said old Bryan. " 'Tis wondherful how he's made himself at home. Every wan's so civil-spoken to him, from the master down to the littlest child in the House. 'Tis surprisin' how much good-nature is in the crathurs. An' the cats even lets on to be frightened of him, an' pelts up a three to give him a scamander after them. An' look here, Owney boy, as a rattin' dog he is onsurpassed. It 'ud break the heart of a cat wid any spirit in her to see the execution he does."

"You'll be feelin' yourself at home, now you've Pinch, Misther Bryan?"

"Well, I'm resigned, Owney. But whin I go— it isn't likely I'd last out a young dog like Pinch— I'd like you to take him out of it. I wouldn't like Pinch to be a poorhouse dog. D'ye know, Owney, I'm a bit surprised at him makin' himself so much at home— so I am, Pinch!" stroking the dog's little hard head. " 'Tis different wid them that has to come here agin their will. But I never thought wan of your breedin' 'ud take kindly to the poorhouse."'

10: The Bishop of Hell

Marjorie Bowen

1885-1952

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THIS is the most awful story that I know; I feel constrained to write down the facts as they ever abide with me, praying, as I do so, a merciful God to pardon my small share therein.

God have mercy on us all!

In the hope, vain though I feel it to be, that when I have written down this tale it may cease to haunt me, I here begin.

It was twenty years ago, and never since, day nor night, have I had any respite from the thought of this story, through which you can hear the drums of Hell beat loudly and yet which has an awful beauty.

God have mercy on us all!

HECTOR GREATRIX was my friend, yet to say friend is to profane a noble word; rather was he my counsellor, companion, and prop in all things evil.

His reputation was hideous even among the rakehelly crowd who flattered and followed him; he went lengths from which others shrank, and his excesses, his impiety, his boldness terrified even those hardened in wicked ways.

And what added a deeper edge of horror to his conduct was that he had been an ordained clergyman.

Younger son of a younger son, his father had placed him in the Church in the hope of rapid preferment, for the Greatrix were a highly placed family and the great Earl of Culvers was the head of it; but the scandal of young Hector's life was such that even in those days he was unfrocked. His intimates, in the clubs and gambling dens, called him, in bitter derision, "Bishop of Hell".

I write of the year 1770, when this tale begins.

Hector Greatrix was then in the height of his fame and fashion. No-one could deny him certain splendour; he was literally in physical height head and shoulders above his companions, and mentally also; his wit, his invention, his daring knew no bounds, but all these qualities were turned to evil. He was at this time about thirty years of age, of a magnificent figure, so graceful that his strength was hardly noticeable, tawny haired and tawny eyed, with features as yet unblemished from his debaucheries, the most elegant of hands and feet, the most exquisite taste in dress, and the most engaging of manners. There was not one honourable man nor respected woman among his acquaintances and all his intimates were villains; I do not except myself.

There was, however, one exception. Colonel Burgoyne, his cousin on the female side, had helped him by his countenance and by money. Why, I never understood, because William Burgoyne was the most austere, upright, and punctilious of men, of great wealth, of exceptional position, and of the most distinguished career.

I think now, as I thought then, that it was quite impossible for Colonel Burgoyne to realize what Hector Greatrix really was, or the set to which he belonged. The villain could be most plausible, and his cousin must have believed him to be wild, unfortunate, and blameable, but in no way vile or dishonoured.

In sum, Colonel Burgoyne effectually played the mediator between Greatrix and the chief of the family, Lord Culvers, who, no anchorite himself, was not ill-disposed towards his handsome and seductive nephew; but then his lordship, who was much disabled by gout, seldom left Greatrix Park and knew little of London society, so that he was by no means aware of his nephew's reputation.

I, as one of the most reputable of his disreputable friends, being, as I can truly say, more wild and young than vicious, was chosen to go with Hector to Greatrix Park when the old earl asked his company, and so I was able to see at close quarters how this charming knave pulled the wool over the eyes of his two kinsmen.

The end of the comedy was an allowance for Greatrix, a handsome subsidy from the earl most generously supplemented by a few hundreds more from the wealth of Colonel Burgoyne.

Greatrix was to study the law and live in chambers— suitable to his rank; he had no chance of accession to the family honours of the earl, whose heir, a dull, sickly youth enough, had lately married a blooming young woman of robust constitution, who had provided him with a couple of boys. So, Greatrix, thanks to Colonel Burgoyne, had done better than the most sanguine might have hoped. And he seemed more moved thereby than I had thought possible.

"Burgoyne has done me a good turn," he swore, "and damme if I'll ever do him a bad one."

As for his allowance and the study of the law, he laughed at these things; what he really valued was the countenance of these two great, wealthy gentlemen.

"This visit will help my credit in London," he declared. "It is good for a couple of years' debt."

"And what when two years are up and your credit and the patience of your relatives are alike exhausted?"

"Who am I," smiled Greatrix, "to think two years ahead?"

I think it was impossible for him to conceive of disaster or even common misfortune. His object gained, he was impatient to return to town; a woman with red hair was waiting for him. He had a curious and persistent passion for women with that bright shade of auburn, like burnt gold.

Colonel Burgoyne pressed us to stay a night with him on our way to town, and Greatrix, with an inner curse, for he wanted to be free of this formal, austere man, consented with a winning courtesy.

Moil Place was in Kent, quite near London, a commodious and elegant residence presided over by Mrs Burgoyne, who was some several years younger than her husband.

This type of woman was unknown to either Greatrix or myself; I have had no sisters and could not recall the character or the lineaments of my mother. Greatrix had two sisters, but they were town ladies of smirched reputation, and his mother had been a passionate, reckless, uncommon woman.

To both of us Mrs Burgoyne appeared flat, childish, almost imbecile, almost incredible. She had been married direct from a Clapham boarding school and had there received several tokens (as the doting husband let slip) for deportment and good conduct.

It was June, and she wore a muslin gown with a wide blue silk sash and a wide straw hat tied under the chin with another ribbon of the same hue. She lisped a little and her small face was clearly and definitely coloured like a china ornament; she was, in fact, like the puppets children dress up and play with; then, when she had gone into the house and was pouring tea behind the Burgoyne silver— pieces that looked larger than herself— she suddenly took off her hat and showed a head overflowing with auburn curls, long, glossy, almost vermilion, yet soft and like burnt gold, all knotted up on the crown of her head.

With this revelation of her hair you saw her beauty— the golden eyes with blonde lashes, the features of such an exquisite delicacy, the pearly shades on throat and neck, the delicious carmine of faint carnation.

I did not care to look at Greatrix, and yet I felt that I need not have suffered this embarrassment.

Colonel Burgoyne was the one man in the world for whom Greatrix had expressed any respect or consideration and the lady obviously adored her husband. I was both amused and surprised to observe the manifestations of sentimental affection between them. There was a child too, a little doll in white lace just out of the cradle. What fondness Colonel Burgoyne could spare from his wife was devoted to the infant.

I was cloyed and thankful when we had taken our seats for town. Greatrix, after the effort of the last few days, was in a surly mood. "I have never passed a couple of days so tiresome," he said.

And I, always minded to jeer at him when I could, replied: "You have never seen a woman so beyond your reach, Hector. She never looked at you, I do believe."

He laughed indifferently. "Alicia Burgoyne is ready to the hand of any man who likes to reach out for her."

What was yet good in me was shocked by this insult to our hostess, a woman who, commonplace and childish perhaps, had yet seemed to me to convey a sweet purity, a gentle fidelity, and an adoring affection beyond all reproach.

"She is in love with her husband," I declared.

"The more reason she can be in love with another— 'tis your passionately attached wives who fall the easiest victims; that little creature is amorous as a lovebird. Take Burgoyne away for a month or so and she'd flutter into any arms held out— "

"By God, Hector," I swore, "if you can't believe in any nobility or decency, don't defame those qualities. Your words stick in my throat. These people have exerted themselves in kindness towards you. Mrs Burgoyne is silly, maybe, but a gentlewoman deserving of respect."

"Since when have you turned Puritan?" he asked coldly.

I was not affected by his sneers; I felt a certain definite repulsion from him, and from that day I saw less of him and applied myself with some diligence to my studies.

We each of us had rooms in Paper Buildings, and the more I heard of Hector Greatrix the more I withdrew myself from his company. Two of his boon companions shot themselves; the daughter of his laundress was found hanged; a married woman of his acquaintance was taken out of a Hampstead pond one winter morning. His name was associated, secretly and sombrely, with all these tragedies.

Some rumours of these matters must have reached the Earl in his lofty retirement, for I heard from the associates of Greatrix who still continued to be mine that there had been a summons to Greatrix Park, quarrels, and the employment once more of Colonel Burgoyne as mediator.

I had seen little of the Burgoynes; their severe and yet sentimental life, the chaste simplicity of their connubial bliss did not greatly attract me. I had been asked again to Moil Place and had needed all my fortitude to control my yawns. Mrs Burgoyne had now another infant at her breast and was more than ever infatuated with her husband.

Another six months and this idyllic family was rudely disturbed: Colonel Burgoyne's regiment was ordered to India for three years and he was forced to leave abruptly his wife and children he so tenderly loved.

That winter, to my surprise, I met Mrs Burgoyne in a London ballroom; it was only a few months since her husband had sailed and I imagined her consoling herself with her babies at Moil Place. When I spoke to her she seemed shy and confused; I learned that she had "moped" in the country, that the doctor had ordered a change, and that these insufferable years of waiting would seem shorter amid the distractions of society. She was staying with a married brother at St James's, and I could not doubt that she was well protected both by her own heart, her position, her relatives, her children; yet when I saw her dancing with Hector Greatrix I did not care to watch.

Needless to follow the course of an experienced and heartless seducer; suffice it to say that Greatrix was soon talked of in connection with Mrs Burgoyne, and, unattainable as I believed her to be, I could not forbear an appeal to her pursuer.

I found him, by rare luck, in his chambers.

"For God's sake, Hector," I conjured him, "stop your attentions to Mrs Burgoyne; even though it is impossible for you to destroy her peace of mind, you may blight her reputation."

"What is this to me?" he asked coldly. "Did I not tell you she would come at my whistle?"

I urged him to forbear. "Never before have you compromised a woman of her position. Consider what it will mean to you— the fury of your uncle and of her husband, the scandal that will put you out of society— out of England."

"And there," he interrupted, "I am likely to go in any case. I can keep the duns quiet no longer and my lord will be bled no more."

I told him I hoped he would go before Mrs Burgoyne's good name was smirched by his detestable attentions and I reminded him solemnly of his obligations towards Colonel Burgoyne. He had no answer for me, and soon after I observed with relief that Mr Lambert, Alicia Burgoyne's brother, had taken alarm and that she was being kept from any opportunity of meeting Greatrix.

Yet what availed this?

Hector Greatrix, having spun his credit to the utmost and within a few hours of the Fleet Prison for debt, fled to the Continent and Alicia Burgoyne went with him.

Though I was never squeamish in these affairs, I will confess that this completely sickened me— the man was so vile, the woman so infantile, so pure, so attached to her husband.

The scandal was hideous. The Earl cut Hector off with a curse; the Lamberts adopted the abandoned children; and as soon as they had news of Alicia, sent her a small allowance that was probably the main support of the wretched couple. This money was sent care of a bank in Genoa, but no-one knew where Mrs Burgoyne and her lover really were living.

Through the compassion of His Royal Highness, who had the chief command in India, Colonel Burgoyne was allowed to return to England on the receipt of the awful news and arrived in London something less than two years since he had sailed.

He immediately resigned his commission and returned with his children to Moil Place.

Declaring that he had no intention of following the fugitives, he said simply that if Greatrix ever returned to England one of the two would, in a few days, be dead; and Mr Lambert, with his next remittance, reported this message, advising his unfortunate sister and her paramour to keep clear of their native country for fear of further scandal and horror.

I avoided the possible chance of meeting Colonel Burgoyne. I had no desire to see this broken and outraged man, whose career, that had promised so splendidly, was broken in the middle and for whom life seemed to hold nothing but bitterness and humiliation. This, it might seem, should be the end of the story; it indeed appeared that nothing further could happen, either to the outcasts in their exile or to the betrayed husband, to alter the position of either or in any way bring them together again.

But who would have guessed at the turn Fate had in store?

Colonel Burgoyne had not been home much more than another two years when a severe epidemic of smallpox broke out in England; among the first victims were the wife and children of Lord Culvers; the son by his first marriage, always delicate, had lately died of a decline; and the old earl, then over seventy years of age, did not long endure the shock, but sank under the weight of his bereavement a few days after the funeral of his youngest child.

The estates and the money were both entailed, every portion of property having been strictly tied up by a preceding Earl, and Hector Greatrix was now Earl of Culvers and one of the wealthiest noblemen in England. I could have laughed at the irony of the situation.

Lord Culvers was summoned to London by his lawyers, and on the same day Colonel Burgoyne came up from Moil Place and took a house in Dover Street, Mayfair, not far from his lordship's town mansion, Culver House.

Hector came as far as Paris and there stopped. He still had Mrs Burgoyne with him; not, as I supposed, from any remnants of affection, but because of

her allowance, which was till now his sole means of support. I shuddered to think what Alicia Burgoyne must be like now.

There had never been any talk of a divorce, but now people began to ask why Colonel Burgoyne did not permit his wife to marry her lover. They were people who did not know Hector.

I received, unexpectedly, a summons from my lord to attend him in Paris. He had not too many reputable acquaintances then, and I had become a respectable enough citizen while he was sliding down to pandemonium. Therefore, I supposed, this dubious honour.

I went, as one will, partly out of curiosity, partly out of complacence, and partly out of a faint pity for Alicia Burgoyne.

He had, of course, handled plenty of money already, and upset as the city still was, I found them elegantly installed in a hôtel meublé that had only lately become national property.

Hector was sumptuous to behold and cordial enough in his wild way; he had changed for the worse— the first bloom of his beauty had gone, the first fineness of his manners; but he was handsome enough, God help him.

She was with him.

I learnt afterwards that she had had and lost in the feverish heat of Italy three children, and never had she been without another woman sharing her lover's favours; often these lived under the same roof with her. She had known, I think, most of the humiliations possible to a refined woman who lives with a vile, brutal man; there could have been little of horror and squalor that she had not seen, nay, been in the midst of!

I could hardly keep curiosity from my eyes— this was the doll of Moil Place, with her lisp, her muslin, her babies.

She was, and this is perhaps the most horrible thing, much more beautiful, rich, opulent in line now, with a full bosom and flowing curves of thighs and shoulders, taller (she had been but eighteen), clever at dressing, clever of speech; gay, abandoned, and intolerably wretched. Her tone was one of bravado, but the look in her eyes was that of a whipped dog who creeps away from the lash.

As soon as we were alone, she was down on her knees to me with a movement so passionately sudden that I could in no way prevent it— on her knees, Mrs Burgoyne of Moil Place!

"Tell me," she implored, "will not William divorce me? Surely you have some message from him?"

I told her, none.

She began to weep. "If I were free Hector might marry me before he returned to England— that is my only hope."

"Surely, madam," said I in pity, "a vain one?"

But she was not yet free of the illusion women are so slow to lose— that they have always some power over a man who has once loved them or been their lover, and she cherished the desperate hope that her husband might set her free and she regain something of all she had lost under the name of Lady Culvers.

Never was there a more futile and piteous hope even in the brain of a foolish woman. I could not forbear saying to her, when I had induced her to rise from her knees: "Madam, has not your association with my lord shown you the manner of man he is?"

"Indeed it has," she answered bitterly, "yet surely he could not, in these changed circumstances, abandon me— "

So she clung to the protection of that honour she had herself discarded, and a panic terror showed in her eyes as she added that she had now nothing with which to keep him— it had always been the money that had held him; the money the Lamberts sent, and, Heaven avert its face, other money, presents from Italian lovers of hers whom he had forced on her; she told me, with a wildness that made me fear for her reason, that she had paid for her last child's funeral by such means.

"And yet, madam," I shuddered, "you wish to continue your association with such a monster? Indeed, I wonder that you have not already left him, if only for the protection of another man."

As she was silent, I added: "Is it possible that you love him?"

She replied: "No, I have never loved any but William and my dear, dear children."

But I doubt if she knew what love was, and I think that for months she had known no emotion save fear.

Seeking to abate her misery I asked her what she could dread worse than had yet befallen her.

"There's Hell," she said.

"I should think," I replied, "that Hell is where my lord is."

But no; to her, still at heart a religious, respectable English gentlewoman, anything was preferable to the life of open shame before her if my lord forsook her; she thought, in her narrow, ignorant mind, that if she could marry her lover her fault would be condoned; and I knew that in the eyes of many it would be.

I advised her that she could go into retreat somewhere with the money that the Lamberts allowed her, but she shook her head with a feeble laugh; she knew, she said with a dreadful accent, her own weakness, and she saw herself,

once cast off by my lord, sinking to the lowest depths of degradation, till she reached Bridewell or a foreign lazar house.

And I could see this too. I promised to speak to my lord, but naturally with little hope; but the next day when I saw him, sitting over his breakfast playing with his dogs, he gave me no opening, for he plunged into his own affairs.

"Look 'ee here, Jack," he said, "I was too drunk yesterday to talk business and when I came back from the opera you'd gone. But this is the matter I've sent for you for— has Burgoyne seen reason? As I've no news, I take it he has gone to his prayers and his pumpkins at Moil Place and will give no trouble."

"No," I said, "Colonel Burgoyne came up to London as soon as he heard of your fortune, and has taken lodgings in Dover Street— 'tis said that he keeps a watch posted by Culver House for your return."

My lord's face turned ashy.

"What for?" he cried.

"That he may challenge you the moment that you set foot in England."

My lord sprang up then; his rage was diabolic, there is no other word for this fury of a fiend outwitted at last; his oaths and blasphemies were detestable, atrocious, as he strode up and down with his dressing-gown flowing open and his locks, damp from last night's debauch, seeming to rise on his head.

"I never heard," I said, wincing, "that you were a coward, Hector, but it seems you are."

"Coward!" he yelled. "When I eloped with Burgoyne's wife I was a ruined man without a prospect in the world— did I think I'd ever want to return to England with the title and the money?"

He had been, in fact, exquisitely caught, but I could feel no spark of compassion for him.

"You'll have to meet the man," I told him, not looking at his distorted face.

"I'll not. Burgoyne is a damned good shot. Do you think I want to go out when I've suddenly got everything to my hand?"

I could guess that he did not; to him the position, the money, meant the opening of Paradise. He would, no doubt, have a good life— fine flatterers, fine women, all that wealth could buy in London would be his; nay, there would be plenty who would receive him in the finest society of the town and not scruple to offer him their daughters in honourable matrimony; the hounded exile would be the great lord and at last able to get full value for his rank, his beauty, his audacity, his fascination.

"I stay in Paris," he cried. "People will come over to me here. I'll cheat the man that way. Paris is as well as London if you have money."

"It were wiser, perhaps," I said with disgust. "But no-one will endure a man who is an avowed coward, my lord; you'll have to keep the company you've been used to lately if you stay out of England. People will know why— they're beginning to say already that you linger. I for one," and I rose, "would turn my back on you."

"Blast your impudence, Jack," he whispered. "What is this tone to me?"

"You're a peer of England. Culvers is a great name; it'll cover much, but not cowardice."

"Damn that word. I don't want to die— that's reasonable."

"Yes; if I were you, my lord, I should not want to die."

"Bah, you're thinking of my bishopric. Hell! As if I believed in Hell. There's nothing, not even Hell, Jack— one goes out like a snuffed candle— just blackness, blackness, nothingness, nothingness."

The look on his face as he said this was one of such awful despair that I thought this was a moment when he might be softened by his own terrors.

"I can see one possible way out. Hector, if you were to let Colonel Burgoyne know that if he divorced his wife you would marry her— perhaps for her sake, he would forgo his revenge."

He laughed in my face.

"The woman's been the harlot of half the rogues in Italy."

I stopped him. "Don't talk of that— even your corroded heart might blench there. Marry her, if you can, for your soul's sake and hers."

His hideous pride was greater than his fear.

"A kept woman," he mocked. "My God, I'm Culvers now."

"Remember it," I recommended him. "What do you mean to do with this poor creature?"

Then, as if he remembered that she was the original cause of his present predicament, he began to curse her, using those abominable names he so freely applied to women, and as for what he meant to do with her, his project was what the miserable wretch had herself guessed— complete abandonment; and his view of her future was her view— the streets and the maison de Dieu.

I reminded him of her birth and upbringing, of her relatives, but he only redoubled his blasphemies.

"Am I answerable if these Puritans breed women who run into the gutter?"

I left him; useless to contemplate a spectacle so frightful. And I avoided any further interview with Alicia Burgoyne. When I returned to London, I observed the watcher set by Colonel Burgoyne near the shuttered gloom of Culver House.

In three months' time my lord returned to London; whether urged thereto by the jeers of his enemies, the flatteries of his friends, or his own pride, or whether unable to endure his Tantalus position, or whether his nerve broke at the suspense and the waiting, I know not, but he came to London. I had heard that he had hopes of approaching Burgoyne with offers of apology or even money; of seeking in some way an accommodation. This sounded ridiculous, but from his nature it was possible to conclude that he cherished some such plan. He arrived in London secretly, with a horrid stealth, and slipped into Culver House under cover of a November evening.

Yet the next morning Lord Mildmay called on him with a challenge from Colonel Burgoyne.

That same evening I was summoned to Culver House.

My lord sat with some of his old boon companions in one of the dismantled rooms (for his coming had been sudden and unexpected); the holland covers were yet over the great velvet and gilt chairs, muslin bags enveloped the candelabra, and where the bottles and glasses stood on the ornate table were rings in the dust; candles had been hastily stuck into tarnished sticks, and the only servants were the French rascals my lord had brought with him.

Rosy amorini and florid wreaths peeped from the shadows of the imposing walls, and the lordly pomp of this chill magnificence was a strange background for the men drinking by the huge fire on the marble hearth. Everyone was drunk but my lord, but he, this night, could find no oblivion in the wine cup; panic kept his head clear, and I could see by the ferocious anguish of his face that his thoughts were by no means dimmed.

He met me with bravado.

"If I go to Hell tomorrow, I'll pay you a visit to let you know what 'tis like."

"Is Burgoyne so infallible?" asked one of his followers, and another, with tipsy malice: "He's a damn good shot."

"He has on his side justice at least," I said coldly, for I had now come to detest my lord.

He looked at me in agony. "Say I've a chance," he muttered, and I smiled, always having believed him to be of an invincible courage.

For all that I thought his chance good enough; if Burgoyne was a fine marksman, so was my lord.

"Why don't you get to bed? What time is the meeting?" I looked with contempt at his hideous company; not one of them had set foot in Culver House, or any mansion like it, before.

"Seven o'clock tomorrow morning," said one Hilton, the soberest of the wretched band and my lord's second.

It was now past midnight.

"Why have you sent for me?" I asked again.

He was pacing up and down the room in a very climax of terror and rage, while the drunken crew round the table condoled with and mocked him in a breath. He wore an almond-green velvet coat, overlaced, I recall, with silver— for that year the men's clothes began to be very plain— and his hair was long and powdered in the old-fashioned style still favoured in Italy. I think that the beauty of his lineaments rendered his expression the more awful— the despair, the dread, the fury expressed in that pale visage were awful indeed to contemplate.

"I will not go!" he cried. "I'll not stand up to be killed!"

He then asked me to make his will (I was by then a lawyer of some modest standing), for the Culver property was his to dispose of since he was the last male of his family. Yet when it came to asking his wishes he would not reply, and finally refused to consider the matter; and so I left him staring into the huge mirror with a glass of brandy in his hand and cursing the clock for marking the passing of the time.

I had not dared to ask him anything of Alicia Burgoyne but, as I was leaving, I did demand particulars of the lady from one of the servants, a man I had seen in Paris.

She had been left in Paris, quieted, I gathered, by some lie as to my lord's return. This affair and mainly the memory of my lord's face so wrought on my mind that I could not sleep that night and went out early for news of the duel.

I got this from the creature Hilton, the second.

The meeting had taken place in Hyde Park; at the first shot my lord had fallen. "Killed?" asked Colonel Burgoyne.

"Sir," said the surgeon, bending over the writhing man, "death would have been more merciful— he is shot through the jaw."

"He is marked where I aimed to mark him," replied the implacable soldier coldly. "He will never kiss another man's wife again; nor his own; nor even any drab from Whitefriars."

With that remark he left the Park; his austere figure and his sombre countenance had never changed during the course of the encounter.

My lord was carried home in his carriage; he soon became unconscious, for the lower part of his face was shattered, half blown away, and, though he might well live, he would never be anything but a mask of terror.

Alicia Burgoyne, quieted for the moment by my lord's lies, no sooner lost sight of him than she fell into a fierce panic and resolved to follow him by the next packet. With little more than the price of her journey in her pocket and accompanied by a huge handmaid, who was her last attendant, she landed at Dover twenty-four hours after my lord, and took the night coach to London.

Arriving there, the demented creature could think of no asylum but Culver House; and, as she could hardly believe that the man for whom she had sacrificed everything and with whom she had lived for years would refuse her shelter, she directed her steps to the stately mansion of my lord.

The valet who opened to her knew her and was for refusing admission, but the handmaid said cunningly (Mrs Burgoyne being past coherent speech) that my lord had sent for them; and the servant, not knowing if this might be so, reluctantly admitted them. The two shuddering and draggled women had just reached the great doors on the first landing when my lord came home.

He had regained consciousness, and though his pain was fearful he had no tongue to make lament with; he walked between Hilton and the surgeon, who were indeed not well able to carry so large a man, and so slowly came up the wide treads of the stairs to where Mrs Burgoyne, who had heard the steps, cowered against the door, her silk shawl, her fallen hair, her bonnet disarranged, her face like milk, her lips ashy.

As my lord came into view, with his jaw swathed in bloody bandages and his terrible eyes above them, she broke into shriek after shriek; my lord sprang forward with a strength that made nothing of those who held him, took the frail wretch in his quivering hands and hurled her down the stairs. The surgeon tried to catch her, but she was weak and her high heel caught in her dress; she fell to the bottom of the flight and lay in the hall.

Whimpering, the handmaid scuttled after her; Hilton, to please his patron, from whom he still hoped favours, said: "It's Alicia Burgoyne, the cause of the whole damn business— turn her out," he added to the gibbering valet.

The surgeon, who was a fashionable man and fee'd by my lord, made no protest, and as the Earl was led to his chamber, the servant and the handmaid picked up Mrs Burgoyne and carried her into the street. She stirred as they touched her and the black woman clamoured for pity, so that the valet consented to carry her to a pot-house nearby, where the landlady, after marking her rings and watch, took her in and let her lie in a back room, where the customers came and stared at her and the air was thick with the smell of smoke and beer.

She asked for her husband and a clergyman, but the handmaid was too ignorant to know what she meant; and so, about noon, she died, aged not quite twenty-three years.

It was a clear case of murder, but the landlady and her gossip, the slippered doctor, hushed the thing up, robbed her of her rings, watch, silk, and linen garments— and even the burnt gold hair that had first attracted my lord— and buried her in a pauper's grave. The handmaid they turned into the street; and she, distracted with terror, crept back to Culver House and begged for scraps

at the kitchen door. There, out of compassion, they gave her my name and where I was to be found, and I discovered her on my stairs when I came home that night and so learnt from her the manner of Alicia Burgoyne's death. I sent the poor wretch to a friend who had a house of servants and debated whether or not I should write these matters to Colonel Burgoyne.

I was not encouraged to do so by the remembrance of his face on the morning of the duel, and while I hesitated I had news of the death of my lord. This was practically suicide, because his life had never been in danger, but he tore off the bandages with a ruthless hand, turned his mutilated face to the wall and furiously died— the day of the burial of Alicia Burgoyne.

Would that this were the end and that I, who believed in neither Heaven nor Hell, could have here finished with Hector Greatrix, seventh Earl of Culvers. I went out that day to a gathering of people who knew nothing of my lord, and stayed late, endeavouring to forget. I drank and danced and gambled, and fled the gossips who must mouth over the Culvers' scandal.

When I returned I found that the light on the stairs, commonly left there by my laundress, had gone out, so must fumble my way up in the dark and silence of the quiet building. When I reached my room I must fumble again in the dark for flint and tinder, feeling from one piece of furniture to another; it was cold, and through the tall window I could see the moon like an icicle in the dark sky. At last, when I had begun to be considerably oppressed by the dark. I found the tinderbox and struck a light.

As I set the flaming tinder to the candle I perceived that I was not alone in the room; someone was seated in the hooded chair that had its back towards me; a man. I could see the white hand hanging down, the skirt of a coat on which some bullion trimming gleamed. I concluded that a friend, minded to pay me a visit, had gone to sleep awaiting my return.

I approached, holding my light, and with I know not what feeling of unfathomable dread.

The figure turned as I neared.

It was my lord.

He wore the almond-green suit with the silver braiding in which I had seen him hold his ghastly vigil of terror and fury. God have mercy on us all!

His face was alight; where the visage should have been was a ripple of flames quivering upwards, and through this crimson veil of fire gleamed his infernal eyes with an expression of unutterable woe. The flames rose above his head, shaped into a peak; he wore a shining mitre glittering with lambent fires of green and blue like hellish jewels.

This fiend had been forced to keep his oath— to discover to another scoffer the truth of Hell.

My eyes could not long support this atrocious spectacle; as he raised his ashy hand in mock benediction, I fell senseless, seeing as I dropped the demoniacal mitre flare from his flaming brows to a man's height above his tortured eyes.

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11: A Cricket Match at Hogan's

E. S. Sorenson

1869-1939

Evening News (Sydney) 21 May 1904

The World's News (Sydney) 21 Dec 1907 (as "A Bush Cricket Match")

In: *Quinton's Rouseabout, and Other Stories*, 1908

THE GREAT TEST MATCH between the Bolong Station hands and the experts of Warri Bore and township had been the talk of the district for months. So, when the eventful day at last came round, the scattered population of the district turned out to do it honour, and gathered in a wildly excited heap in front of Hogan's— a wayside pub three miles from the station. Warri township was a long ride from Hogan's, and the 'Borers' came out the day before, so as to be fresh for the contest. The Boundary-riders had some scouts at the pub. to meet them, and these carried out their part of the programme so well that the visiting captain had considerable trouble in getting his hilarious team to bed at midnight. They were all Trumpers and Nobles by that time.

The captain had not long retired himself when he heard Tom Connors, the crack bowler, betting somebody £10,000 that he would bowl five Boundary-riders with the first six balls in the morning. Rushing out, he found the doughty Tom nodding over a pannikin, while "Long" Macpherson, a scrub cutter, poured some vile decoction into it from a black bottle. A fight was prevented by the timely appearance of Hogan; and then the irate captain went round and carefully locked the doors to prevent his precious team being further tampered with. The eleven was considered the cream of the district, and was made up of bore workers, storekeepers, two squatters, a publican, and a constable.

The Boundary-riders were a harder lot, but with less experience of the manly game. Still, they could all bowl, having practised in spare time with gibbers, using the hut for wicket; and they all had a nigger's eye for anything coming at them. Two of them were known to carry a ball and a tomahawk about on the run with them; they would get off for half an hour on any level piece of ground, and chop out a rough bat from a sapling. They bowled at trees, and when one made a successful drive with the bat the other would mount his horse and canter after the ball. So it was naturally expected they would give a good account of themselves.

The pitch was on a strip of level ground in front of the hotel. The tussocks and lumps had been carefully chipped off, the sticks and cow dung had been gathered up for a short radius, and a heavy log rolled up and down between the wickets. Still, the ground had a very bushy aspect. At the back was a thick cluster of trees, and close at one end was a sandy mound, honeycombed with

rabbit burrows. These things, Hogan said, would help to make the game interesting.

The Borers felt a bit seedy next morning when the Boundary-riders arrived, and they were not sorry when the latter won the toss and elected to bat. An hour or two's running about, leather chasing, would shake the scorpions out of their eyes. Connors sent down the first ball, somewhere behind the batsman, and the manager of Bolong smacked it hard as it passed him. It was the only hit he made; yet with that single stroke he topped the score. The ball flew to the sandhill, and presently the fieldsman yelled out that it had gone down a rabbit burrow. The batsmen continued to run to and fro, while the outfield rushed to the pub, swallowed a "long-sleever," and hunted up a pick and shovel. Twenty-eight runs were scored before the ball was grabbed out. Bat Connors took his revenge, two wickets falling before another run was added.

In the meantime bunny's fancy work had been debated by the two captains, with the result that Hogan's groom was engaged to do pick and shovel work for both sides, and each time his services were needed the hit was to count five runs.

The fourth man to face the demon bowler, after snicking a couple of singles, drove one hard into the middle of Hogan's dam. The outfield streaked to the brink, and commenced to peel off his veneer of civilisation, for a swim. But Hogan rushed out, and strenuously objected.

"Kape yer fut out of that, now, or I'll murdher ye!" he cried.

"But I must get the bail," panted the fielder.

"I tell ye I'll not have me dam polluted by any of ye. It's the water we drink!"

The fieldsman stood on his naked feet, nonplussed, desperate.

"It's a conspiracy!" 'he cried. "Look at them running!"

Hogan looked.

"Bedad, thin, an' they're foine runners," he said admiringly. "But— niver moind, they'll knock up boy'n'bye."

The fieldsman commenced to swear. Then young Hogan, aged 8, came on the scene.

"Shure, Johnny will get it for ye," said his father. "There's not so much of him to pollute the water wid."

The chagrined fieldsman was only too willing; but here the Bolong captain protested. Johnny wasn't a player. The Warri skipper joined them, and a hurried consultation took place. Then it was agreed that Johnny should act as swimmer for both sides, and the water mark should henceforth count as another five hit.

The dam was an easy boundary, and every bat now aimed for it; but as it was close by the end of the pub, their erratic shots more often hit the latter. Ball after ball clattered on the iron roof, one lodging in the spout, and seven runs resulting while the ladder was being hunted up. The bowler claimed a catch, as it had not touched the ground, but the umpire disallowed it, holding that the spout had ground connections. Mrs. Hogan discreetly closed the doors and shutters, and hoped the awful match would soon be over. Hogan was caught napping. A ball crashed through the bar window and hit him in the eye. He staggered against the shelves, and three or four bottles were knocked down and smashed. A trifle disturbing this to a quiet business man. Still Hogan said nothing— to the cricketers. He was making a big score himself.

The last wicket fell for 92, and the players adjourned an a body to inquire after Hogan's health. The inquiries refreshed them considerably, and then the Warri cracks went in to bat. The sun was a scorcher: but the spectators, counting flies, had swelled to five hundred millions. Play was slow, desultory; the people lounged in groups under trees, with bottles and waterbags distributed about, or yawned on the pub verandah. A few families, who had come out for a picnic, made fires and boiled their billies or quartpots, while the cart horses stood by, some with nosebags on, some nibbling at little heaps of bush hay.

Interest revived occasionally, as when the ball struck a wandering dog, and the resultant howls were greeted by a multitudinous jabbering from the aboriginal stand. When the constable finally skied one, and it dropped into the hollow spout of a box tree, 40ft from the ground, the excitement was tremendous. The fielders gathered round the tree, and took the bearings of the offending limb from various angles. One suggested chopping it down; another thought it would be easier to burn it. Meanwhile the cosher-man and his partner were making runs. The skippers hastily formed themselves into a committee of ways and means, and it was agreed that the black tracker be put on to climb trees for both sides, and that treed balls should also count five.

The Borers had made 116 when the last man knocked his stumps down with the bat. Immediately afterwards Hogan rang the cowbell for lunch. There was more drinking. Anybody who would accept it was presented with a bottle. Hogan's liberality was unlimited. He handed in lager and ale by the dozen; the losing team had to foot the bill. There were toasts and speeches, each ending with "fill 'er up again." At 3 o'clock the game was resumed under somewhat altered conditions. The bowling was erratic, the batting more so. Everybody slogging— mostly at the air. Connors, making a vigorous swipe at a ball, missed, and, losing his grip, flung the bat into a cockspur bush. Connors was destined to become famous. Though a "demon" bowler, he was a poor

batsman; but, being a big man, with the strength of a bullock, when he did get fair on to one, in his own phraseology, it was bound to go somewhere.

The crowd liked to see Tom's mighty swings; they suggested magnificent drives if the bat and bail happened to come into collision. They did eventually and the stroke brought the house down— at least, it brought Macpherson down. Mac was sitting on his horse, leisurely filling his pipe preparatory to going home. The ball whanged hard against the horse's flank, and with a suddenly electrified spring the astonished animal dropped Mac on the grass, and then bolted. The long one upended slowly, spiting out grass, and grasping an empty bottle in each hand, made a beeline for Connors.

"A cricketer yer call yerself!" he snorted. "By the jumpin' wallaby, I'll bowl you out!" Whizz! "I'll make a cricketer of yer!" Whoosh!

The constable hurriedly left the bowling crease to arrest Macpherson, and, slipping the bracelets on his wrists, handed him over to the black tracker, who chained him to a tree.

Tom's bat didn't have the good fortune to collide with the ball again, and duck eggs became plentiful. The Borers had wanted only 52 runs to win, when they commenced their second innings: they still wanted 25 when the ninth wicket went down. Victory looked certain for the Boundary-riders. But here the natural resources of the field supplied a sensational turn in the proceedings. The last man in was a good wicket keeper and a fair bowler, but a rank duffer with the bat. Like Connors, he hit wildly, but blindly, at everything. He fluked one, and it flew hard and high over the bowler's head, hit the ground, and rebounded into an old fenced-in well. It was 50ft to the water, the windlass was broken, and the rope missing. It looked hopeless from the outset. There was no emergency man engaged to go down wells, and, it being the last innings, the Borer captain would listen to no compromises— the Boundary-riders must get it themselves.

When half the required runs had been nicked off, Hogan strolled out "to see how the play was goin'." He saw— and grinned.

"Sit down and have a shmoke, boys," he said to the batsmen. "Ye'll have plenty o' toime to make a schore in the cool of the evenin'. It's a bit hot now."

But the panting Borers kept on till victory was theirs. After that Hogan did all the scoring, the disgusted Boundary-riders having acquired a thirst that was unquenchable. Some of them left next morning, some a fortnight later. They all got home eventually.

That was three years ago, and there has been no mention yet of a return match.

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12: The Devil's Smithy

Beatrice Grimshaw

1870-1953

Liberty 2 July 1932

As thou pliest thy trade in this devil's smithy—
Which is the poison to poison her, prithee?
Browning.

IN the Sheba Islands there was no cool season. There was only hot and hotter.

It was hot in the lounge of the City of Manchester Mission. The Mission folk, resting after their day's labor, panted for breath.

Between the sun blinds the sea showed, flaming blue. Red poinciana trees burned fierily. The dark skins of the native servants glittered with sweat as they carried round tea. Beyond the range of the punkah no air stirred.

At the far end of the lounge rose the voice of Arthur Peveril, second in command of Port Absalom station. He was reading *The Eve of St. Mark*:

"The city streets were clean and fair
From wholesome drench of April rains;
And, on the western window panes,
The chilly sunset faintly told
Of unmatured green, vallies cold,
Of the green thorny bloomless hedge,
And rivers new with spring-tide sedge,
Of primroses by sheltered rills,
And daisies on the aguish hills."

"Oh, stop!" called a beseeching voice. " I can't bear it; it makes one feel so much worse."

"Oh, go on!" begged another. "I can actually fancy I see the chilly sunset!"

Another woman, sitting beside the two "lady teachers," said nothing. She was watching the reader.

Peveril did not appear to have heard either of the teachers. He seemed to be occupying himself exclusively with the Mission nurse. Mrs. Glenn was a new arrival, a young widow out from "home." She was not at all like the lady teachers, who were exactly like almost every other female missionary in the Shebas— which is to say that they were extremely worthy women, hard workers, deserving of every consideration and esteem.

But they had mousy hair and shiny faces, and they wore what Easter Glenn had been heard to describe, in a satirical moment, as "Christian clothes."

Easter herself was tall, blonde as a Norse princess, and beautifully dressed in white silk hospital frock and white lawn veil.

In spite of the marrow-melting heat, she managed to look cool.

Arthur Peveril, the good-looking redhead who sat beside her, had been five years without a furlough. To him, as to most other members of the Mission, England, chilly sunsets, unmatured green, valleys, thorny bloomless hedges, and the rest, were part of an impossible paradise seen only in longing dreams.

There was only one member of the Mission staff who loved the Shebas for their own fierce sake, and that was Lydia Cookson, the "lady in charge" of the next station.

But Lydia had been on the field since she was twenty-two, eleven years ago. Lydia was clever (and a missionary is none the better for that). Lydia, in the opinion of everyone but her fiancé, was really a little mad....

Lydia was the woman sitting silent beside the lady teachers. And her fiance was Arthur Peveril, just now reading poetry aloud to the nurse.

Peveril, a passionate enthusiast, a man with a touch of the saint about him and a flavor of the possible sinner, had deliberately chosen out Lydia, as the least unattractive of the various unmarried women on the field, some months before. They were to be married in March.

In January Nurse Glenn came out. No missionary; just a young woman who wanted a job and liked the idea of travel. Recommended, of course, and highly qualified. Somewhat of a disturbing element in the Mission as weeks went on. Because "everyone" (which meant the two teachers and the lay readers and the entirely missionary wives of the two married missionaries) could see from the very first what was going to happen. Arthur Peveril did not seem to see it. He said that a true friendship between a man and a woman was a precious thing.

"You know," he was saying in a low voice (yet not so low but that the teachers, and the dark woman beside them, could hear), " from the very moment when I first heard your name, you made me think of that poem. You are the poem! Easter Glenn— why, it actually means the green valleys and the primroses and the—"

"Funny thing," said the nurse in her calm voice. "I thought I'd heard you were to be married at Easter."

PEVERIL looked at her with the air of a man suddenly awakened from a dream.

"Why, yes," he answered. "Oh, yes. That is, Miss Cookson and I— we were to have been married in March, but circumstances have arisen— the fact is—"

Easter, looking at him under heavy eyelids, saw him flush, noticed his hesitation.

"The fact is that I'm getting furlough a little later, somewhere about September, and we thought—"

He did not say what he and Lydia thought. He broke off short, turned the leaves of his volume of Keats, and said: "Now listen to this. This is the Eve of St. Agnes:

"St Agnes' Eve— Ah, bitter chill it was!
The owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold."

In her corner, Lydia quietly arose and slipped away from the lounge. The two lady teachers, avidly watching, broke into sudden talk. They did not gossip; it was "not allowed." Loyally they tried to speak of something else:

"Isn't it hotter than ever?"

"Did you hear what happened in the hospital?"

The first said, "No— yes. I believe there was trouble with Aikora."

"Yes. The sorcerer from Kari-Kari village. He came in to beg for some quinine, and they gave it to him— he is a true son of Satan, but one mustn't— And he saw Nurse Glenn, and stared at her, and said something insulting in native— admiring, you know; no other native would dare— and the native helper translated it, and she just took the basin of dirty water beside her and flung it right in his face!"

"Dear me! Well! No doubt she did what she thought right— and one can't for a moment allow— But Aikora, you know! And just when Miss Cookson was doing such magnificent work for the gospel cause! "

"Don't you worry about Lydia. She can handle him."

"Oh, she's wonderful! A real heroine. Do you remember how she broke in upon that cannibal feast, and went to the village where they were all fighting, and ran in among them, and struck up the spears and—"

"Oh, yes. She deserves to have a station all to herself— though no woman ever before— It's so lonely!"

There was a moment's silence, and then the first teacher broke forth determinedly: "Nurse Glenn— has wonderful hair."

It was a noble effort of Christian charity, but it damned Nurse Glenn as completely as Peveril, five minutes before, had deified her.

Both women felt better.

A long way off, the pattering hoofs of Lydia Cookson's mule sounded upon the path, upon the hollow bridge, and died....

It was night in Kari-Kari, and the Missi had come back.

The natives had seen her ride away that morning, pale and heavy-eyed. They knew— all things are known in a native village— that she had hardly slept for two nights. Not since the letter came from Port Absalom, brought by Peveril's boy.

No one had expected to see her back within twelve hours; but she was there in her house, behind shut doors.

ON the floor she lay, like a native, with her face hidden in her folded arms. She was not crying now. She had cried for two nights and a day, and then she had gone to Port Absalom, unsummoned. Arthur had been quite kind, entirely reasonable. He had pointed out the advisability of waiting till furlough time, and Lydia had agreed.

He had said everything that was nice, and he hadn't kissed her, and he had gone away.

An hour after, he was reading poetry to the white creature from the hospital.

Lydia, from that moment, knew. And she was terrified. Not by the knowledge itself, but by what it had done to her.

It had seized her and cast her, for the time being, into the dark flood that flows always too near the feet of dwellers in savage lands. To Lydia's feet it flowed very near— now. She had bought her empire over the savages with a price. She knew that these eleven years spent among head-hunting fiends, living through the furious seasons, the fiery beauty of Kari-Kari, through dangers that irresistibly beckoned, solitudes that burned like ice, had changed something in her nature, brought her too near the people over whom she ruled.

She loved Arthur Peveril. Not as he loved her, or had loved her: in a good, kind, Christian way— the best possible way, of course. No. She loved him with the flame and fury of a heathen.

At that she writhed upon the floor and sent out a sudden cry.

Someone had opened one of the closed shutters and was looking in upon her. "Missi," the person said.

"Go away," answered Lydia. "I am ill."

"Missi," the voice persisted in native. "Let me in. I am Aikora."

SORCERERS in the Sheba Islands ranked as princes. Lydia knew that no light thing had brought Aikora to her door. She sat up and looked at him as he entered.

He was a young man, physically perfect, as were all the sorcerers of the islands; picked men, every one. Naked save for a strip of bark cloth, he wore

none of the usual savage decorations— no beads, tusks, or shells. His bronze skin glittered; his eyes, beneath the huge bar that marks the savage, shone fiery black. The man was a human dynamo; you could almost hear him crackle.

Lydia rose and seated herself. "Well?" she said curtly. "What do you want? Have you come to say you are sorry for carrying off my girls and corrupting my young men?"

"No," said Aikora, standing cool and perfectly poised beside her. "I have come to take you to the sorcerers' college."

Lydia caught her breath. For years she, and all the Mission, had been trying to locate the sorcerers' college, hidden with cunning skill in the deepest forests and surrounded by a maze of misleading tracks. Every year a few of the finest youths of the villages were carried off, by ones and twos, to be educated as wizards; to terrorize the surrounding country, commit murder wholesale, carry out and perpetuate all the horrors of worship that the Mission was trying to eradicate. No one had ever succeeded in finding the place.

And now Aikora was offering to take her there.

Lydia was shrewd. She asked immediately: "What do you want?"

"Nothing," said Aikora. Then, watching her, he added: "A charm, maybe. Something to make a charm."

And, as Lydia opened her mouth to refuse, he added quietly: "A charm— to make a woman grow cold to a man.

"I— I can't help you in any heathen rubbish," she told him feebly. The temptation was almost beyond her. Lydia believed fully in the power of the sorcerers, as did many other white people. "Satan himself helps them," she used to say.

"Never mind," Aikora said. "But you can come— and see. No harm there."

"I will come," Lydia said, taking down her electric torch from the shelf.

But Aikora shook his head. "No light," he said. "You must bring no light, and you must ride.your mule, and your eyes must be bandaged."

"What!"

"No other way." He waited.

Lydia thought quickly. "Go out," she said, "and I will come in a minute. Get me my mule."

She closed the door behind him, then hurriedly opened her store of small trade beads and filled her pocket with them. They were fine as oatmeal, but brightly colored.

"I'll mark the way with those," she said, and laughed.

Aikora knocked on the door. "Mule here," he said.

Before she mounted, in the warm dark outside, he tied a handkerchief tightly about her eyes. In the forest there would not be so much as a ray of starlight; but nevertheless she was to ride quite blind. Aikora took no risks.

FOR hours they seemed to twist and turn among innu" merable forest tracks. Sometimes the mule climbed, grunting, over rocks, and sometimes it splashed clumsily through the bed of a stream. The heat impended like a heavy blanket over Lydia's head; she could hardly breathe; her arms and neck streamed sweat as they went. But Aikora, leading the mule, stepped as lightly as a bird, and once or twice, when he touched her hand, his hand was as cool as spring water.

At last they left the mule tied to a tree. Lydia was led for some distance afoot. A door was opened; her shoes trod over soft mats on a bamboo floor.

"Take the bandage off," said the sorcerer.

Lydia took it off, and found herself standing in a huge dusky room lit only by the flames of a fire that burned in the middle. The roof was smoky, indistinct. The pillars upholding it, thick forest trunks stripped of bark, were curiously carved and painted. Drums, also carved, and wooden monsters were hung about these pillars; and on stands there were many human heads which had been cured into leather and painted bjack and red. Also there were skulls, adorned with pig snouts and set with pearlshell eyes that glimmered in the firelight.

Strange— and horrible! Lydia in that moment felt herself akin to the wizards of Scripture: to Saul when he called upon the demons.... Were not these things true?

THERE were three or four young boys sitting in a corner. They took no notice of Lydia. They seemed to be drugged, half conscious. One of them was drumming, drumming, with limp fingers that never ceased. Aikora spoke to him in native; told him to fetch "the love charm." The boy got up. He was naked save for his little fur sporran. He was curiously painted. He went on drumming as he moved; it seemed as if he could not stop. He was a mere shell of a human being, no soul left.

Lydia's lips were dry; she licked them unconsciously. She had heard about the youths. A lad who had never touched woman could be used to help with sorceries. This was part of the education.

The boy came back, still drumming. His eyes were turned up till one could see almost nothing save the whites, but he seemed to know what he was about. Drumming with one hand, he reached out to Aikora with the other, and went backward to his seat again.

Aikora showed Lydia the charm. It was a queer small carving of black wood, like a pig, like a nut, like a little yowling fiend—she did not know what to call it. It seemed to have no definite shape, but to take on different shapes as she moved it about.

"This is the great charm," the sorcerer said. "It cannot fail."

"What do you want to do with it?" asked Lydia.

"The same as you do," he told her. "This white woman has annoyed me. She is not to marry the red chief. It will be bad for all of us if she does. It will be bad for the Mission."

Lydia wanted to say, " A lot you care about the Mission!" but somehow the words would not come. Aikora went on. He told her that she must get him a piece of the white woman's underclothing— some that she had worn and that had not been washed since. She must cut it in two, give him one half and keep the other. The half she kept was to be wrapped round the charm, and the charm put away in the dark.

"In three days," Aikora told her, "she will grow cold— cold to the red chief. And he will never marry her."

For a moment Lydia hesitated. Then she stretched out her hand. "Give me the charm," she said.

The little soulless boy kept on drumming, drumming, and never looked at her. The high, dusk room was full of strange odors: dust and mildewed thatch, and perfumed gums from the forest, and the sharp scent of the herb that native men use for adornment, and smoke and sweat, and above all the leathery, sickening smell of the dried heads. There was another smell, too. Lydia wondered if she knew what it was.... Yes. Snakes!

AT the far end of the room stood rows of clay cooking pots, each with its cover on. Aikora had not spoken; but a youth at some sign, rose from the floor and, while the drumming still went on, took off a pot lid and stood watching. Almost immediately, out of the pot rose a glittering head with tongue that flickered like black flame, and a huge tiger snake began to pour itself over the pot edge.

Aikora nodded, and the lad took the snake as if it had been an eel, and twisted it back.

"These are our watchdogs," the sorcerer told Lydia. "It would be very bad for anyone who came looking about the place. They have their teeth, and the covers are not always on."

She knew that he was warning her. She did not care. "I will use the beads," she thought.

Aikora tied the handkerchief over her eyes again, and led her out. For quite a long while after she was mounted on her mule she could hear the dull, unceasing, hypnotizing sound of the drum. "He's going roundabout," she thought. "But I can beat him."

It was pitch dark, and Aikora was walking on ahead of the mule. Screened by the night, Lydia dropped one fingerful of beads after another all the way back.

They reached the village, came to her house. Aikora plucked the bandage off her eyes. "You must get me the garment tomorrow!" he said. "Leave it beneath the corner stone of the wall. Here is something that belongs to you. Good night."

Into her hand he poured a mass of beads, all that she had painstakingly strewn upon the dark way. There was a screaming laugh as he disappeared into the forest.

Late next day Lydia was sitting in her house with a pile of wash before her. The clothes from Port Absalom headquarters were sent to Kari-Kari every week, since it was known that Lydia's girls were the best laundresses in the Mission. Lydia trained her converts excellently, and for the most part they did not (in Mission parlance) "fall away." One of them, Deira by name, had gone off to the bush lately, but it was said that she had gone far from willingly; Aikora's name was whispered....

The clothes of Arthur Peveril were Lydia's first care. He was something of a beau for a missionary. His mother, down south, kept him supplied with fine silk vests, and Lydia loved to mend them, to count and darn his socks, sew buttons on the white suits when they came back from ironing. Easter Glenn had not taken that pleasure from her— yet.

When she had counted Peveril's clothes, she turned to Easter's. There was a huge pile of fine underthings, mostly silk and lace. Lydia wrinkled her nose at them. "Nets to catch fools," she said.

She chose a silk chemise, and was about to cut it in two with her working scissors, when suddenly she paused, struck by a new thought.

Aikora had said that she was to keep one half of Easter's undergarment and wrap it round the charm. With the other he would work spells, and in three days— no more— the woman would have grown cold to the man.

All very well, as far as it went. But would it be enough, if Peveril remained in love with Easter? Easter might refuse him, send him away. Would that give him back to Lydia if Easter was still there, still temptingly hanging like a bright fruit on a low bough? She did not think it would.

Laying down her scissors, she thought. The very air of the house seemed to stand still. Pencils of sunlight slid through the walls of basketwork, wrote runes

upon the floor, and passed away. Lydia sat on, unmoving. In the tall cottonwoods "six-o'clock" locusts struck up their wooden chirring. A crocodile, somewhere in the lagoon, sent out its mournful sunset bellow, sounding like a bull in death agony. Night was near.

Lydia got up and lit the lamp. "Why not?" she said aloud.

She took one of Peveril's silken vests and slit it in half. Aikora would never know the difference.

One half she wrapped about the charm, hiding the little parcel on a high shelf. The other half, folded in a green banana leaf, she left beneath the corner stone of the wall.

Then, calmly, she returned to her neglected tasks.

THAT night she slept as she had not slept for weeks. Once only she dreamed. She saw, for a moment, Peveril, tall and winsome, with a laugh in his eyes. She saw Easter Glenn. And Peveril had an icicle as long as a spear, and with it he was driving Easter Glenn away.

The native girls nudged one another and giggled when Lydia came into school next morning.

"The chieftainess is happy," said one. "Maybe she brought poison from the house in the forest, to kill the white woman who has cast spells on the red chief."

"Maybe," agreed the others.

On the following day Lydia rode her mule into Port Absalom. She had business there.

Deira, the lost girl, ran by her stirrup as she went. She had not escaped from Aikora; the sorcerer had sent her back with a curt message: " Payment."

Deira did not understand. "Him say him no want me," she explained, trotting beside the mule. "Him say me cly too much, cly all-a-time. Cly all-a-same one piggypig, him say. True, Missi, me cly. Me no like Aikora." She was crying now, a pretty little figure in her short grass petticoat that swung like the kilt of a Highlander as she ran; with her bushy brown-gold hair, unadorned, and her red-painted breast bare of flowers or beads. Last week Deira had been decked with all the many ornaments of a village maiden. Now she went plainly, like a married woman. Only, no bride price had been paid for her, no cooking pots carried home; nor was there any slim brown youth with blackened teeth awaiting her where the village smoke went up.

She would marry, but it must be an old man now, and she would go cheap; no boasting among the matrons over the number of pigs that had changed hands at her marrying. Life was shorn of prestige for little Deira.

But Lydia was glad to have her back, though she did not care for the tone of Aikora's message. She was taking Deira in to headquarters now, in order to leave her with a colored teacher's wife. There she would be safe even if Aikora changed his mind. The fate of the sorcerer's cast-off loves was terrifying, even in thought. There had been women's heads among those sinister trophies in the "college."

After leaving the girl in the native quarters she went up to the Mission. "Deira is all right now," she thought. " 'But can thim that helps others help thimselves? Answer me that, Sorr.' "

AS if in mockery, as if her evil spirits had replied, there came a peal of laughter from the house. She could see into the lounge. Easter and Peveril were there, sitting on a sofa together, sharing some careless jest.

Lydia looked at them. She felt her heart go down like a stone sinking into deep seas.

"O God," she began to say— and then remembered that she had no right to call on God any more. She had sold herself to the devil, had she not? And now she was beginning to wonder whether Satan (as people said he did) was not going to cheat her of the price. What had Aikora meant when he assured her that one of those two would, within three days, grow cold to the other? This was the third day, and they were sitting side by side, looking in each other's eyes.

She went to her own room on the women's side of the sleeping corridor, and saw no one else that night. She rested badly. Hour after hour she sat upright in bed, listening to the faint sounds of quiet breathing from Nurse Glenn's room beside hers, noting the silence that told of Peveril's heavy slumber opposite. The men's rooms opened into another corridor, but they backed on to the women's; every sound could be heard.

Outside the night was quiet, save for the faint chipchipping of a woodcutter bird a long way off, and at intervals the noise of flying foxes quarreling among the mango trees. Down on the beach the suck and draw of waves and sent out a sudden cry. steadily sounded. The tidewas coming in.

Late, toward morning, the stillness of the night was splintered by a cry—a shout in a man's voice. Trampling of feet and blows immediately followed.

About Port Absalom, the Mission lived in constant expectation of native attack. Everyone was out of bed in an instant. The corridors filled with men and women in night clothes; torches flashed. People asked one another, with determined calm: " Did you see? Where are they? Have they come? "

Some of the women, white-faced, saw the gates of heaven near; most of the men felt the thrill of fighting blood, and thanked the same heaven that they were going to have some fun....

Then it all collapsed. Arthur Peveril came out of his room with a handkerchief tightly tied about his hand, and said: "There was a tiger snake in my room. Where's the ax? Quick! "

Nurse Glenn, in a becoming wrapper, ran forward. "Let me see," she begged, taking hold of his hand.

He pulled it away. "Leggo!" he said. "You can't— Ah, Lydia, good!"

Lydia had run to the kitchen and fetched the cook boy's ax. She asked no questions. She gave him the ax, as she would have given him her head, had he asked for it.

"Stand back," Peveril warned. He pulled the bandage from his little finger.

Lydia saw two blue marks on the middle joint, and her heart turned over, for she knew the power and venom of a tiger snake in the hot season's heart.

One of the married missionary women screamed as Peveril laid his hand upon the veranda rail and raised the ax. It was all over in a second. The finger fell bleeding on the floor, and Peveril, letting the severed stump drip over the rail, said coolly: "That's done it. Now we'll go and have nurse tie it up."

Easter was sobbing. "Why did you?" she asked through tears. "I've plenty of snake serum at the hospital."

"Yes, down the beach—and before you could have got it— Why, this was the biggest tiger snake I ever saw! He escaped, worse luck."

"We'll kill him for you," promised one of the men. "Where do you think he went?"

A small brown face, unheeded, peered through the veranda rails. "No good you looking for dem snake," Deira said. "Him b'long Aikora. Him go home."

NOBODY listened. The men went out to engage in a fruitless hunt for the snake. Peveril went down to the hospital with Easter. Lydia, un-noticed, followed them. She heard Peveril consoling Easter, telling her not to be upset.

"You don't know our snakes," he said, "especially such a monster as that was. Why, if I'd waited for you and your serums, I'd have been as cold as freezer beef by now!"

As cold as freezer beef!

Lydia stopped dead beneath the palms, her hand upon her heart. Before her, pale in the starlight dusk, the figures of Peveril and the nurse went on.

Lydia said slowly: "I ought not to be allowed to live!"

She had understood.

Aikora indeed had spoken nothing but truth when he said that Easter Glenn would be "cold" to Peveril if she, Lydia, gave him that undergarment of Easter's wherewith to make his spells.

Cold! Yes, cold in death. And she had given him Arthur's shirt instead.

It was not her fault that Peveril was alive. She— with her tamperings and her spells! She— who hadn't believed the current tales about sorcerers and trained snakes, who had thought Aikora's tigers were neither more nor less than he described them, watchdogs, meant to keep strangers away from the "college." They were that, no doubt; but she knew now that they were more.

Deira— she must ask Deira! She could hear her, somewhere among the mango trees, where the great fruit bats had ceased their quarreling and quieted down to sleep, where now the first stir of the dawn wind was beginning.

The girl who " cried all the time " was crying still. Well, she had something to cry about. And she could tell something, surely; she had lived a week in the sorcerer's own house.

Lydia found her, crouched upon the ground. "Me no do it," she explained, sniffling.

"No one said you did," countered Lydia, who was beginning to understand just why Aikora had tired of this creature; almost feeling ready to sympathize with him. "Stop howling, if you can," she ordered, "and tell me what you meant about the snake."

Deira sat back on her heels and, still sobbing at intervals, told what she knew.

It was quite true that the sorcerers, especially Aikora, could train their snakes to bite anyone they liked. It was done in this way:

You procured a piece of the intended victim's clothes, an unwashed piece, and for some days you teased the snake with it, making him strike his fangs in, and dragging it away, hitting him with it, and so forth.

By and by the snake came to associate the odor with the annoyance.

Then you took him by night to the victim's house, slipped him under the bed, and waited results.

Of course there were spells as well— very powerful spells. But that was the way of it.

Aikora had been very angry with the white woman because she had insulted him and made little of him before the other natives. And Aikora would be very angry indeed when he found that his snake had played him false. No doubt he would kill it.

But she, Deira, had not done anything; Missi must believe her.

"Oh, shut your head!" Lydia impatiently told her. "You could never do anything— but cry."

The nurse was coming back in the pale dawnlight, alone. Lydia went to meet her. "How is he?" she asked.

"I gave him a shot of serum for safety, and made him go to bed," Easter replied. "He'll do all right. But his hand— his beautiful hand—"

She turned her head aside; she did not want to talk. She had been crying, too.

LYDIA, with dry, burning eyes, glanced scornfully at her. How contemptible they were, these women who sobbed and cried! She felt herself harder, infinitely stronger, than any of them. None of Nurse Easter's breed would have sinned, as she had darkly sinned, for her lover.

Not one would have had the strength, if she had sinned, to keep silent about it. Their sort of sinning ran another way— an easier way....

And none of them all would have done what she was now going to do.

It would be very simple. There were herbs in the forest that would give her ease. She would find them tomorrow— no, today; it was morning now. Her last morning.

Before she died she would pray very hard, and perhaps she might be forgiven. Perhaps she might be allowed the least and lowest seat among the "many mansions" where Arthur, surely, would have the highest place.

And there, where there was no marrying or giving in marriage, where she could never know kiss or embrace of his, her consolation would lie in knowing that Easter at least would be no wife of his, either.

Live on and see their happiness here she could not.

That afternoon, with the herbs plucked and the brew in a cup beside her, she sat alone and quiet in her house at Kari-Kari. Away in the port it was steamer day, she knew.

There would be bustle and excitement— mails arriving, passengers leaving the ship. Here, already, was the stillness of death.

She twined her long ivory fingers round the cup, caressing it. In the looking-glass that hung on the wall she could see her face. For the first time it struck her that she had beauty. Not the kind of beauty most people understood or appreciated, but a bizarre charm, an almost decadent attraction, with her deep eyes, and tilted faunlike eyebrows, and the sharp corners to her long red mouth.

Well, all that would be clay, and soon. Cold— as Peveril would have been cold today, through her, but for his own swift courage. Her fingers closed round the cup. All her senses were tight strung. She could hear the noise of

beetles moving in the thatch, the sound of land crabs walking among dead leaves outside. She could hear— No, no!

But it was. It was the sound of hoofs— somebody riding toward Kari-Kari.

A LADY teacher drew rein before her door. She was one who liked Lydia, and had been feeling uneasy about her these few days. She had made an excuse to call at the KariKari station, being " moved," as she said, to go and see what Lydia might be about. Also—and this may have had something to do with the " moving "— she had a piece of news to impart.

"Do you know," she said, dis mounting and tossing her reins to the boy— "do you know we're losing Nurse Glenn?"

"Yes?" queried Lydia, with a face of stone.

"Truly. It's very unexpected, and so— so— Well, one can't call it scandal, can one, when it's really news? She— her husband has turned up."

Not a muscle moved in Lydia's face. Standing in the doorway, she reached forward and stroked the neck of the panting horse.

"Indeed?" she said.

"It seems she was not a widow, after all. She ran away with another man, and was actually living in sin with him, when he deserted her. So then she got this appointment to keep out of her husband's way, and he followed her here, and they had a dreadful quarrel, but in the end he decided to take her back, instead of divorcing her as he said he would, because— can you believe it?— he's fond of her, after all. And the steamer leaves tonight, and she's going."

Lydia said, "A very bad example to our converts."

"Shocking," agreed the teacher. Then, recollecting herself: "But, after all, which of us can say that he or she is perfect? "

Lydia made no answer to that. She had gone into the house and was busy washing up china. "I'll give you some tea," she said. "Just let me throw the slops out of this cup."

Deira the "Blubberer" (for so the village had named her, and the name was to stick) had come back to her family, from the Mission of Port Absalom, after only two days.

"I don't mind if you sell me to one of the old men," she told them. "I would rather have that than the talk of the native teachers' wives; they do nothing but scold. And I want to stay in Missi's village.

"She is a good sort. She isn't really down on sorcery, for all she tells us that it is bad. What do you think she is doing now? "

The family leaned forward, eager to know.

"She has locked her door (but I peeped through a hole) and she is making spells by burning papers in the fire."

"Ma!" chuckled the family, delighted.

Lydia, having finished her burning, put back on the shelf a little volume of Keats, from which two pages now were gone.

In the fireplace, glowing embers showed white on red, two fragmentary lines:

...green, vallies cold,
... primroses... sheltered rills.

Lydia turned on her heel and left the fire.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE: This use of snakes by sorcerers is well known to many residents of the western Pacific. Recently a government tax collector was attacked by a sorcerer's trained snake, and nearly killed.

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13: Strange Mission

Percy James Brebner

1864-1922

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Gaslight London, hansom cabs, mysterious strangers...

AS I CROSSED the hall of the club Reynolds came down the stairs from the, billiard-room.

'Going home?' I asked.

'Yes.'

'Come in my cab, then.'

'Thanks, very much, I will.'

He lived in Kensington and I had a *pied-à-terre* there in the shape of small chambers, for which I paid a tremendous rent. I invariably took a hansom from the club at night; indeed, my habit was so well known that the same cabman usually waited for me. I suppose the hall porter knew this, for he always blew his whistle in a peculiar way, to let my particular man know that I was wailing.

It did not happen to be my usual man tonight. The driver noticed an upward glance of enquiry.

'He's got the flu, sir. I arranged to be here instead.'

It was a wretched night— blustering and raining. We had to have the glass down, and I fancy Reynolds wished he had gone home by train, although he did not say so. He began talking about the Derby horses, and although such a subject was not without interest for me, and I had every reason to believe that he did get hold of some first class information at times, I began to yawn.

'I am horribly tired,' I said by way of apology.

'So am I; the weather,' he answered. 'I do not know if— 'he said nothing more.'

I may even have given him some drowsy, sort of answer, but, at any rate, I do not remember .doing so. I fell asleep and was dreaming. I was standing on a sinking ship. The last boat was full and had moved off; someone had just handed me a lifebelt, and told me to do the best I could for myself. I felt the deck go down, further and further down, and then I jumped— jumped far out to avoid the suck, struck the water— and became conscious.

In starting up from my corner I-knocked my hat against the glass; I also kicked my companion.

'Awfully sorry, Reynolds; I went off and was dreaming.'

And I turned towards him with a smile as I felt in my pocket for my cigarette-case. My smile became a gape of open-mouthed astonishment. My

fingers touched my cigarette-case, but did not draw it. out. I was still dreaming, surely!

The man beside me was not Reynolds, but an entire stranger!

Was I afraid? Frankly, I cannot say. The eyes which met mine were dark and piercing, and for a moment or two they fascinated me. Then my hand shot up to the trap in the roof.

'Better not,' said my companion. There was considerable impressiveness in the tone of his voice, but there was absolute conviction in the small round hole, dimly seen a few inches from my head— a revolver held in business-like fashion.

'What do you want?' I asked, bringing my hand slowly down from the trap.

'Your help, your company, and your silence,' was the answer. 'May I put this unpleasant toy away?'

I nodded and felt distinctly more comfortable when he had put the revolver in his pocket.

'I am forced to trust you,' he said; 'another must explain. I am merely a tool, and, to be honest, a traitor; you will understand why presently. I am only carrying out my instructions.'

'Rather curious ones,' I said. 'What has become of my friend?'

'He is walking the rest of the way home. You see, I was told that I should find you alone to-night.'

'And where are we going?'

'I have already said almost too much,' he answered. 'Will you pardon me if I do not answer your question?'

By failing asleep, and inconsequence of my subsequent surprise, I had entirely lost my bearings. The driver had evidently received his instructions, for he suddenly drew up to the kerb in front of a house which lay back from the road behind a stone wall.

'The man will wait,' said my companion, as he opened the gate.

It was a large house, modern, and well kept, but my guide did not go to the front door.

'For my own sake I have to be careful,' he explained, as he led me to a side door which he opened with a key; and then, requesting me to tread lightly, he conducted me up some stairs and into a room.

'Will you sit down?' he said, switching on the electric light. 'My part in the. affair ends here; I will fetch someone who will explain matters to you.'

The appearance of the room was certainly reassuring. It was lightly and prettily furnished— a chintzy room, if I may use the expression, with nothing whatever mysterious about it. A fire burnt cheerfully in the grate; a chair, upon which lay an open book face downwards, was drawn close up to the fire, and a

footstool near it suggested that a woman might have been sitting there a few moments before my arrival. Indeed, I had so definitely made up my mind that this was the case that, when the door opened, I was hardly surprised to see a woman enter, followed by my captor. Good heavens! Had he shown me her portrait instead of the business end of a revolver I believe I should have accompanied him.

She stood for a moment look at me and then turned to him.

'Fool!' she said, and the fellow cringed. There had been no signs of nervousness about him when he tackled me in the cab.

'I did my best, I—'

'Go! I will explain,' she said sharply. It was evident that I was not the person she expected to see, and her anger was still apparent when she crossed the room after the man had gone, and closed the door softly behind him.

'Please, sit down while I apologise,' she said. 'There has been a mistake.'

I bowed.

'My friend'— and she indicated with a gesture the man who had just left us— 'my friend, for he is that in intention, had instructions to bring a certain gentleman here. By an unlucky chance you have been brought instead. Oh! It has all been a terrible muddle, and I am—'

And then, to my amazement, she was sobbing.

'Is it not possible that I may be as useful as— as the other man would have been?'

'I must tell you,' she said, controlling herself with some effort. 'Having had this visit forced upon you, it is only fair you should know. The other man is my lover.'

'Your lover! Then why—?'

'Why should he hesitate to come? Indeed, you may well wonder. We are in London, and within a few yards of us there are police, yet there exist tragedy and mystery, unknown— often undetected. I must tell you quickly or we may be disturbed. I am the victim of a gang of conspirators. I do not know all their aims; I only know that-they are far-reaching. At the proper moment, when I least expect it, when I am most innocent of it, I shall be used as the decoy to further some great plot. I was forcibly abducted from my father's house in Brussels by a man I believed to be our friend. My lover is in this country and has been searching for me in vain. The man who brought you here to-night is one of the gang, but I nave prevailed upon him to pity me. My lover is cautious and he would not have come willingly, fearing some trap. He would know my messenger, so you can quite understand why it was necessary to use force.'

'Your messenger's conduct and what he said are explained,' I answered.

'And I must apologise and let you go,' she returned, rising with a little gesture of despair and standing before me.

I stood and faced her.

'One moment. 'Had your lover been here, what were you going to ask him to do?'

She turned to me with an eager look in her eyes.

'Could I not carry a message to him?' I suggested.

'Alas! I do not know where he is. To-night he dined at the French Embassy—I knew that from the papers— my friend waited for him, followed him, and made a mistake, I do not know where he is now. It was only seeing his name in the papers which made me conceive a desperate a chance.'

'Tell me, what would you have asked him to do?'

'It would have been a little thing to him. I should have asked him to go to Brussels and deliver a letter. My father is the only person who can save me.'

'Your lover is not the only person who might go to Brussels,' I said quickly.

'You! Will you go?'

'Why not?'

'Oh, no, you cannot do this for a stranger, for—'

'Give me the letter,' I said, holding out my hand for it. 'I will cross within a few hours.'

Her actions seemed almost mechanical as she took the letter from her pocket and gave it to me, her eyes fixed upon me the while. It was rather bulky, was sealed, and on the envelope was written, 'Monsieur Gouperon,' but there was no address.

'Besides the letter this contains the miniature of my mother, which has always been in my possession,' she said. 'It will prove to my father that this is no trick.'

'Is this your father?' I said, pointing to the name.

'Monsieur Gouperon?' and she laughed .a little excitedly. 'Oh, no, he is an advocate. I must explain further. My lover,— ah! it is a secret— his and mine— my lover is poor, not very important; and my father— forgive me, my friend, I will tell you who he is if you demand, but, please, I would rather not. He is well-known in the capitals of Europe,, and I am rather a more important person than I seem. Do you understand?'

'I will ask no questions,' I said.

'You are good to me. Monsieur Gouperon in the Rue des Croisades, number thirteen. He will deliver the letter to my father.'

'At any rate, the letter shall be in Monsieur Gouperon's hands as soon as possible,' I said, putting it into my pocket.

'How can I thank you?' she whispered, and truly those beautiful eyes looking into mine thanked me sufficiently. 'You are like him— my lover— something. I can almost understand the mistake. I should have— yes, why not, since you do his work? Thank you!' and before I realised it she had kissed me. Then she went to the door, and called softly to the man who had been watching.

He and l did not exchange a word as we went to the gate. The cab was waiting, and I was soon being driven through small deserted streets. The driver pulled up in Kensington High-street, and I got out.

'What happened when that gentleman got into the cab to-night?' I .asked.

'I suppose he caught sight of you and stopped me. The gentleman who was with you, sir, got out and walked. Hope there was nothing wrong, sir?'

'No, something a little unexpected, that is all. By the way, what is the name of the street we stopped in to-night?' I asked, as I held up a very ample fare to him. 'At Hampstead? Oh that was Cardigan-place. Thanks, sir, I have been paid,' and he whipped up his horse and was gone before I could take the number of the cab; in fact, I am not sure there was a number on it.

In a few hours I was on my way to Brussels, wondering who the woman was, and hoping that some chance would put me in possession of her secret.

I arrived in Brussels in the evening, and early on the following morning was in the Rue de Croisades on my way to Monsieur Gouperon's. I had reached No. 13, and was looking to see on which floor the lawyer was to be found, when a voice behind me asked in French who it was I wished to see.

'Monsieur Gouperon,' I answered.

'We are fortunately met,' the man returned. 'You are from England, and have something for me, doubtless.'

His question made me hesitate. I had not supposed that he would be expecting me.

'Are you Monsieur Gouperon?' I asked.

'His deputy in this affair.'

'I am afraid I can only transact this business with Monsieur Gouperon himself.'

'I am hardly surprised,' he said. 'It is my duty to arrest you, monsieur.'

'Arrest me! On what charge?'

'All explanations will be given at the bureau. Monsieur will come, and :give no trouble?'

I might have been fool enough to dispute. the point, but I saw two other men in the doorway, evidently police officers. There was some mistake, of course, but I, had no alternative but to go with the men.

I soon discovered that the charge was very clear and precise indeed. I had crossed the -Channel with some gems— part of the jewels recently stolen from Lord Mersham's house in London, bent on negotiating them with receivers of stolen property. I denied it, declaring that my mission to Brussels was of a private nature.

Accordingly I was searched, the letter to Gouperon was found, and, when it was opened, instead of containing a miniature, as I imagined, there was a small case of gems. Monsieur Gouperon, concerning whom suspicion had been aroused only a few days before, had gone— had no doubt received warning, so the authorities had waited for me instead.

I had been deceived with a cleverness and completeness which made me mad to think of it. I told my story as I have told it here; and very naturally, my hearers did not believe it. In their place I should not have believed it. I was brought back to London in custody, quite aware that the gravity of the charge was not lessened by the fact that Lord Mersham was a member of my club, and that, even if I were not convicted as a knave, everyone would be convinced that I was a fool.

It transpired that Reynolds came to himself that night in a sitting position against a hoarding close to Sloane-street. He had fallen asleep in the cab, too, and had no recollection of what had happened. No doubt it was in this neighborhood that the man had taken his place in the cab, and there could be no doubt whatever that the driver was an accomplice. He had been waiting outside the club; therefore my habit of always driving home must have been known to the gang, and in some manner, possibly through the trap, both Reynolds and I had been drugged.

There was some confirmation of this solution in the fact that the cabman who usually drove me had been specially engaged earlier in the evening at an absurdly high fee and had been kept waiting about in the Tottenham Court-road. In Cardigan-place, Hampstead, there was no house like the one into which I had been taken, so the cabman lied when he .gave me that address.

People were generous enough to believe that I had nothing to do with the robbery of Lord Mersham's jewels, but there were few who did not put me down as a fool.

Then a new sensation was sprung upon us.

The jewels found upon me were proved to be imitations. Everyone had been so busy trying to solve the mystery that little thought had been given to the gems.

This discovery put a new complexion on the whole affair. I had been sent on a fool's errand. The thieves knew that I should find no Monsieur Gouperon

at Brussels, knew also that the police were on the alert; I had been used as a decoy. This is all that is known for certain, but there are two interesting points.

Some three months after my adventure I received a postcard, posted in London, too, and addressed to my club. The writing was a woman's.

'How can I thank you?' it ran. 'Consider yourself kissed again.'

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14: The Enchanted Buffalo

L. Frank Baum

1856-1919

The Delineator, May 1905

*Like many of his once-popular children's tales which were **not** about Wizard and the others of Oz, this tale largely disappeared for decades. It has re-appeared in printed anthologies since the 1980s, as well as numerous free and commercial digital versions. It was part of a series of "Prairie Tales".*

THIS IS a tale of the Royal Tribe of Okolom— those mighty buffaloes that once dominated all the Western prairies. Seven hundred strong were the Okolom— great, shaggy creatures herding together and defying all enemies. Their range was well known to the Indians, to lesser herds of bisons and to all the wilds that roamed in the open; but none cared to molest or interfere with the Royal Tribe.

Dakt was the first King of the Okolom. By odds the fiercest and most intelligent of his race, he founded the Tribe, made the Laws that directed their actions and led his subjects through wars and dangers until they were acknowledged masters of the prairie.

Dakt had enemies, of course; even in the Royal Tribe. As he grew old it was whispered he was in league with Pagshat, the Evil Genius of the Prairies; yet few really believed the lying tale, and those Who did but feared King Dakt the more.

The days of this monarch were prosperous days for the Okolom. In Summer their feeding grounds were ever rich in succulent grasses; in Winter Dakt led them to fertile valleys in the shelter of the mountains.

But in time the great leader grew old and gray. He ceased quarreling and fighting and began to love peace— a sure sign that his days were numbered. Sometimes he would stand motionless for hours, apparently in deep thought. His dignity relaxed; he became peevish; his eye, once shrewd and compelling, grew dim and glazed.

Many of the younger bulls, who coveted his Kingship, waited for Dakt to die; some patiently, and some impatiently. Throughout the herd there was an undercurrent of excitement. Then, one bright Spring morning, as the Tribe wandered in single file toward new feeding grounds, the old King lagged behind. They missed him, presently, and sent Barrag the Bull back over the hills to look for him. It was an hour before this messenger returned, coming into view above the swell of the prairie.

"The King is dead," said Barrag the Bull, as he walked calmly into the midst of the tribe. "Old age has at last overtaken him."

The members of the Okolom looked upon him curiously. Then one said: "There is blood upon your horns, Barrag. You did not wipe them well upon the grass."

Barrag turned fiercely "The old King is dead," he repeated. "Hereafter, I am the King!"

No one answered in words; but, as the Tribe pressed backward into a dense mass, four young bulls remained standing before Barrag, quietly facing the would-be King. He looked upon them sternly. He had expected to contend for his royal office. It was the Law that any of the Tribe might fight for the right to rule the Okolom. But it surprised him to find there were four who dared dispute his assertion that he was King.

Barrag the Bull had doubtless been guilty of a cowardly act in goring the feeble old King to his death. But he could fight; and fight he did. One after another the powerful young bulls were overthrown, while every member of the Tribe watched the great tournament with eager interest. Barrag was not popular with them, but they could not fail to marvel at his prowess. To the onlookers he seemed inspired by unseen powers that lent him a strength fairly miraculous. They murmured together in awed tones, and the name of the dread Pagshat was whispered more than once.

As the last of the four bulls— the pride of half the Tribe— lay at the feet of the triumphant Barrag, the victor turned and cried aloud: "I am King of the Okolom! Who dares dispute my right to rule?"

For a moment there was silence. Then a fresh young voice exclaimed: "I dare!" and a handsome bull calf marched slowly into the space before Barrag and proudly faced him. A muttered protest swelled from the assemblage until it became a roar. Before it had subsided the young one's mother rushed to his side with a wail of mingled love and fear.

"No, no, Oknu!" she pleaded, desperately. "Do not fight, my child. It is death! See— Barrag is twice thy size. Let him rule the Okolom!"

"But I myself am the son of Dakt the King, and fit to rule in his place," answered Oknu, tossing his head with pride. "This Barrag is an interloper! There is no drop of royal blood in his veins."

"But he is nearly twice thy size!" moaned the mother, nearly frantic with terror. "He is leagued with the Evil Genius. To fight him means defeat and death!"

"He is a murderer!" returned the young bull, glaring upon Barrag. "He has killed his King, my father!"

"Enough!" roared the accused. "I am ready to silence this King's cub. Let us fight."

"No!" said an old bull, advancing from the herd. "Oknu shall not fight to-day. He is too young to face the mighty Barrag. But he will grow, both in size and strength; and then, when he is equal to the contest, he may fight for his father's place among the Okolom. In the meantime we acknowledge Barrag our King!"

A shout of approval went up from all the Tribe, and in the confusion that followed the old Queen thrust her bold son out of sight amidst the throng.

Barrag was King. Proudly he accepted the acclaims of the Okolom—the most powerful Tribe of his race. His ambition was at last fulfilled; his plotting had met with success. The unnatural strength he had displayed had vanquished every opponent. Barrag was King.

Yet as the new ruler led his followers away from the field of conflict and into fresh pastures, his heart was heavy within him. He had not thought of Prince Oknu, the son of the terrible old King he had assisted to meet death. Oknu was a mere youth, half-grown and untried. Yet the look in his dark eyes as he had faced his father's murderer filled Barrag with a vague uneasiness. The youth would grow, and bade fair to become as powerful in time as old Dakt himself. And when he was grown he would fight for the leadership of the Okolom.

Barrag had not reckoned upon that.

When the moon came up, and the prairie was dotted with the reclining forms of the hosts of the Royal Tribe, the new King rose softly to his feet and moved away with silent tread. His pace was slow and stealthy until he had crossed the first rolling swell of the prairie; then he set off at a brisk trot that covered many leagues within the next two hours.

At length Barrag reached a huge rock that towered above the plain. It was jagged and full of rents and fissures, and after a moment's hesitation the King selected an opening and stalked fearlessly into the black shadows. Presently the rift became a tunnel; but Barrag kept on, feeling his way in the darkness with his fore feet. Then a tiny light glimmered ahead, guiding him, and soon after he came into a vast cave hollowed in the centre of the rock. The rough walls were black as ink, yet glistened with an unseen light that shed its mellow but awesome rays throughout the cavern.

Here Barrag paused, saying in a loud voice:

"To thee, 0 Pagshat, Evil Genius of the Prairies, I give greeting! All has occurred as thou didst predict. The great Dakt is dead, and I, Barrag the Bull, am ruler of the Tribe of Okolom."

For a moment after he ceased the stillness was intense. Then a Voice, grave and deep, answered in the language of the buffaloes: "It is well!"

"But all difficulties are not yet swept aside," continued Barrag. "The old King left a son, an audacious young bull not half grown, who wished to fight me. But the patriarchs of the Tribe bade him wait until he had size and strength. Tell me, can the young Prince Oknu defeat me then?"

"He can," responded the Voice.

"Then what shall I do?" demanded the King. "Thou hast promised to make me secure in my power?"

"I promised only to make you King of the Tribe— and you are King. Farther than that, you must protect yourself," the Voice of the Evil Genius made answer. "But, since you are hereafter my slave, I will grant you one more favor— the power to remove your enemy by enchantment?"

"And how may I do that?" asked Barrag, eagerly.

"I will give you the means," was the reply. "Bow low thine head, and between the horns I will sprinkle a magical powder."

Barrag obeyed. "And now?" said he, inquiringly.

"Now," responded the unseen Voice, "mark well my injunctions. You must enchant the young Prince and transform him from a buffalo into some small and insignificant animal. Therefore, to-morrow you must choose a spring, and before any of the Tribe has drunk therein, shake well your head above the water, that the powder may sift down into the spring. At the same time centre your thoughts intently upon the animal into which you wish the Prince transformed. Then let him drink of the water in the spring, and the transformation on the instant will be accomplished?"

"That is very simple," said Barrag. "Is the powder now between my horns?"

"It is," answered the Voice.

"Then, farewell, 0 Pagshat!"

From the cavern of the Evil Genius the King felt his way through the passages until he emerged upon the prairie. Then, softly— that he might not disturb the powder of enchantment— he trotted back to the sleeping herd.

Just before he reached it a panther, slender, lithe and black as coal, bounded across his path, and with a quick blow of his hoof Barrag crushed in the animal's skull. "Panthers are miserable creatures," mused the King, as he sought his place among the slumbering buffaloes. "I think I shall transform young Oknu into a black panther?"

Secure in his great strength, he forgot that a full-grown panther is the most terrible foe known to his race.

At sunrise the King led the Royal Tribe of Okolom to a tiny spring that welled clear and refreshing from the centre of a fertile valley.

It is the King's right to drink first, but after bending his head above the spring and shaking it vigorously Barrag drew back, and turned to the others.

"Come! I will prove that I bear no ill will," said he, treacherously. "Prince Oknu is the eldest son of our dead but venerated King Dakt. It is not for me to usurp his rights. Prince Oknu shall drink first."

Hearing this, the patriarchs looked upon one another in surprise. It was not like Barrag the Bull to give way to another. But the Queen-mother was delighted at the favor shown her son, and eagerly pushed him forward. So Oknu advanced proudly to the spring and drank, while Barrag bent his thoughts intently upon the black panther.

An instant later a roar of horror and consternation came from the Royal Tribe; for the form of Prince Oknu had vanished, and in its place crouched the dark form of a trembling, terrified panther.

Barrag sprang forward. "Death to the vermin!" he cried, and raised his cloven hoof to crush in the panther's skull.

A sudden spring, a flash through the air, and the black panther alighted upon Barrag's shoulders. Then its powerful jaws closed over the buffalo's neck, pressing the sharp teeth far into the flesh.

With a cry of pain and terror the King reared upright, striving to shake off his tormentor; but the panther held fast. Again Barrag reared, whirling this way and that, his eyes staring, his breath quick and short, his great body trembling convulsively.

The others looked on fearfully. They saw the King kneel and roll upon the grass; they saw him arise with his foe still clinging to his back with claw and tooth; they heard the moan of despair that burst from their stricken leader, and the next instant Barrag was speeding away across the prairie like an arrow fresh from a bow, and his bellows of terror grew gradually fainter as he passed from their sight.

The prairie is vast. It is lonely, as well. A vulture, resting on outstretched wings, watched anxiously the flight of Barrag the Bull as hour by hour he sped away to the southward— the one moving thing on all that great expanse.

The sun sank low and buried itself in the prairie's edge. Twilight succeeded, and faded into night. And still a black shadow, leap by leap, sprang madly through the gloom. The jackals paused, listening to the short, quick pants of breath—the irregular hoof-beats of the galloping bull. But while they hesitated the buffalo passed on, with the silent panther still crouched upon its shoulders.

In the black night Barrag suddenly lifted up his voice. "Come to me, 0 Pagshat— Evil Genius that thou art— come to my rescue!" he cried.

And presently it seemed that another dark form rushed along beside his own.

"Save me, Pagshat!" he moaned. "Crush thou mine enemy, and set me free!"

A cold whisper reached him in reply: "I cannot!"

"Change him again into his own form," panted Barrag; "hark ye, Pagshat: 'tis the King's son— the cub— the weakling! Disenchant him, ere he proves my death!"

Again came the calm reply, like a breath of Winter sending a chill to his very bones: "I cannot."

Barrag groaned, dashing onward—ever onward.

"When you are dead," continued the Voice, "Prince Oknu will resume his own form. But not before?"

"Did we not make a compact?" questioned Barrag, in despairing tone.

"We did," said the Evil Genius, "and I have kept my pact. But you have still to fulfil a pledge to me."

"At my death— only at my death, Pagshat!" cried the bull, trembling violently.

A cruel laugh was the only response. The moon broke through a rift in the clouds, flooding the prairie with silver light. The Evil Genius had disappeared, and the form of the solitary buffalo, with its clinging, silent foe, stumbled blindly across the endless plains.

Barrag had bargained with the Evil One for strength, and the strength of ten bulls was his. The legends do not say how many days and nights the great buffalo fled across the prairies with the black panther upon his shoulders. We know that the Utes saw him, and the Apaches, for their legends tell of it. Far to the south, hundreds of miles away, lived the tribe of the Comanches; and those Indians for many years told their children of Barrag the Bull, and how the Evil Genius of the Prairies, having tempted him to sin, betrayed the self-made King and abandoned him to the vengeance of the Black Panther, who was the enchanted son of the murdered King Dakt.

The strength of ten bulls was in Barrag; but even that could not endure forever. The end of the wild run came at last, and as Barrag fell lifeless upon the prairie the black panther relaxed its hold and was transformed into its original shape. For the enchantment of the Evil Genius was broken, and, restored to his own proper form, Prince Oknu cast one last glance upon his fallen enemy and then turned his head to the north.

It would be many moons before he could rejoin the Royal Tribe of the Okolom.

Since King Barrag had left them in his mad dash to the southward the Royal Tribe had wandered without a leader. They knew Oknu, as the black panther, would never relax his hold on his father's murderer; but how the strange adventure might end all were unable to guess.

So they remained in their well-known feeding grounds and patiently awaited news of the absent ones.

A full year had passed when a buffalo bull was discovered one day crossing the prairie in the direction of the Okolom. Dignity and pride was in his step; his glance was fearless, but full of wisdom. As he stalked majestically to the very centre of the herd his gigantic form towered far above that of any buffalo among them.

A stillness fraught with awe settled upon the Royal Tribe. "It is old King Dakt, come to life again!" finally exclaimed one of the patriarchs.

"Not so," answered the newcomer, in a clear voice; "but it is the son of Dakt— who has avenged his father's death. Look upon me! I am Oknu, King of the Royal Tribe of Okolom. Dares any dispute my right to rule?"

No voice answered the challenge. Instead, every head of the seven hundred was bowed in silent homage to Oknu the son of Dakt, the first King of the Okolom.

16: Where My Hat Hangs

Hayden Carruth

Fred Hayden Carruth, 1862-1932
Camperdown Chronicle (Victoria), 25 July 1905

THE HOT last of July sun poured down upon the dusty road along the narrow coulee which led back among the bluffs and up to the prairie stretching away to the west. And at this time, despite the metropolitan pretensions of Hawk's Landing, with its two-score of Mississippi steamboats a day, this prairie, except for a narrow fringe along the bluff edge, was unbroken by the plough of the settler. For Minnesota was still a territory, and the Civil War was a decade or more in the future.

Up the narrow trail and through the stifling dust a man was toiling. He looked rough even in that wild neighborhood and impressed the beholder at first sight as being middle aged, though closer inspection gave the idea of fewer years. He carried a dilapidated black satchel, evidently nearly empty, slung over his shoulder on a bit of pine slab, apparently a piece of driftwood, but still fresh from some up-river sawmill. His coat was suspended on the end of this stick beyond the valise. He wore a rather wide leather belt, and his trousers were thrust in his boots, from the top of one of which projected the handle of a dirk knife, a utensil much affected by the steamboat men and raftsmen of the time and region, ostensibly for table and other uses of domestic peace, but really for employment in public brawl when the hand of these worthy citizens was turned against their brother men.

Everything, in fact, indicated that the man plodding onward was a river man on his way to the harvest fields of the cultivated strip.

It was late in the afternoon when he reached the first house, still a little below the level of the prairie. He turned up the steep incline which led from the road and dragged himself, almost staggered, toward the house. At the door he dropped his coat and bag, sat down on the lower step and rested his head in his hands. Someone was moving about inside the house, but he made no effort to open communication.

By and by a woman, thin and perhaps 50 years of age, came to the door with a dish pan in her hands. She started slightly as she saw the figure before her, but only slightly, for figures of the character were too common.

"Well, what do you want?" she said rather sharply.

He looked up, and for a moment seemed to be pulling his wits together.

Then he said simply, "Work."

"Well, we want another man, but he needs to be right smart. Can you bind your station?"

"Yes. To-morrow."

"You don't 'pear as if you could to-day." She looked at him a moment as he sat with his head bowed. Then she added. "Have you been drinking?"

He looked up quickly and for the first time gazed squarely In her eyes.

"Yes," he said.

"Thought so," was the woman's comment. "Well, rest up, and when my husband comes down from the field he'll talk with you."

The man rose and looked toward the barn. "I'll just go out and camp on the hay," he said. Then he added quickly as he drew a very black brier pipe from his pocket and laid it on the step. Til leave that .here."

"You'd better leave your bottle here, too," said the woman.

The man started slightly, then drew an empty flask from his pocket, looked at it a moment and turned and threw it down the ."rocky gulch.

"If you'd done that before you emptied it, you'd 'a been better off," said the woman.

He made no reply.

"You look more intelligent than most of these fellers that come along," went on the woman candidly. "Don't you know better?"

"Yes."

"Then why don't you stop It?"

"I can't."

"S'posen you try. If you stay here we'll do what we can to help you."

The man looked at her his manner showing more surprise than anything else. "I never had much help," he said slowly. "But it wouldn't do any good. It don't matter, anyhow."

"It must be someone," returned the woman. "Haven't you got friends?"

"No."

"Where's your home?"

"Where my hat hangs."

He moved away toward the barn, and the woman returned to the house.

When the husband and the other men came in at supper time, the stranger was asleep on the hay. At bedtime he was still sleeping heavily, and they did not disturb him. But in the morning, early as it was, they met him coming up the rocky path from the direction of the creek where he had made a much needed toilet.

Rogers, the farmer, readily, struck a bargain with him, and after breakfast he went away to the harvest field with the others. He proved an industrious workman, and stayed not only through the wheat cutting, but doing the stacking of the grain and while the other fall work went on, after the other hands had gone and only the farmer and his son, a lad of eighteen, remained. He had said that his name was Brown. Once he was away at Hawk's Landing for

three days, and on his return slept in the barn for the best part of 21 hours. It was the old enemy.

OCTOBER had come, and the long winding ravines when looked down upon from the bluff edges, had become like valley of fire, with the red of the maple and the sumac, and the glorious flaming yellow of the trembling poplars. The thrashing of the wheat was going on everywhere. From before the sun rose In the morning until darkness came there floated from the fields the low, monotonous hum of the thrashing machines, and at night the sky glowed with reflections of the burning straw stacks.

One day, somewhat earlier, perhaps in the latter part of September, a small steamboat bound north had momentarily thrust her nose into the slate-colored sand of the Hawk's Landing Levee. The gangplank had been hastily lowered and something carried down and left on the long windrow of driftwood. Then the steamer backed off, and with a cloud of black smoke pouring from her chimneys, ploughed away up the river.

The something left on the bank was a sick man. He was carried to a neighboring barroom to await the return of the only doctor from a visit to the country.

When he came two hours later, he said the man was near unto death with the small-pox. soon the disease appeared here and there in the neighborhood and began to spread, especially among the thrashing machine crews. One day the oldest Rogers boy, who had been away down the river a few miles with a machine, came home, complaining that he was ill.

The doctor took but a moment to decide that he was suffering from the dreaded disease. Then, kindly, but firmly, the doctor said that he must be taken away, so as not to endanger the rest of the family and suggested an isolated wood-chopper's cabin, a half mile away, on the other side of the coulee.

"And some one will have to be found to take care of him," went on the doctor.

His mother started to speak, to Fay that she would go, when Brown got up from his chair and took the sick boy's hand, at the same time saying: "I'll go. If it's agreeable to all concerned. I've had it— five years ago— down at Natchez."

In 20 minutes the doctor and the patient and the nurse rode away across the gulch, and up the narrow trail to the cabin.

Many anxious days followed for the Rogers family. The doctor went every morning to visit the cabin, but no one else approached it. He brought back the report that the boy was having a severe attack, but that Brown was proving himself a good nurse. He had cleared away the underbrush about the cabin, so

that the boy's mother could see it from an upstairs window, and he hung out one flag when he was better and two when he was worse, or was supposed to though he never got out the second flag.

At last the crisis was past, and the boy began slowly to improve. But it took a long while, and it was many days before the doctor was justified In making arrangements to remove the two in quarantine.

One day he said: "Brown, to-morrow I am going to take you both back. Haven't told the boy's folks yet, because I want to surprise them. I'll be up about 10 o'clock."

When, the next morning, the doctor drove up the coulee, he noticed hour bare the trees were becoming. Only the few cedars and spruces and the little red oaks, far up on the bluff sides, relieved the nakedness of the scene! The brook bounded over the gulch, foaming over the rocks and crossing the road in a noisy, impetuous way. It was chilly, and as he got farther up the coulee he met with a few flakes of snow whirling down on the north-west wind.

"Bad day to bring my patient down," he muttered, "but it's time he was at home. Guess the family will give him a warm reception— and Brown, too."

He turned oft the main road to follow the path to the cabin. Standing in the shelter of a rock was Brown.

"I was just waiting for you, Doc," said the, man. "Reckon I'll go along down to the Landing. I s'pose it's been long enough, so that if I was going to have that there small-pox I would have it, ain't it?"

"Yes ; but you said you had had it, anyhow. Didn't you?"

Brown scratched a match on the rock deliberately-and lit his pipe.

"I've been thinking it over, doc," he said slowly, "and I've come to the conclusion that it was something else I had— yellow fever. I believe. Tell the folks good-bye." And he started down the road.

"But where are you going?" called the doctor.

"Where? Oh, anywhere. Just going— going home."

"But where is that?"

"Home? Oh— where my hat hangs!"

When Rogers reached the Landing three hours later, determined to find him and carry him home, he was told that the man he sought had taken a passage on a down river steamboat. The information came first hand— from the man who had helped him up the gangplank.

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15: Tom Tracy's Trap

F. Frankfort Moore

1855-1931

North Eastern Despatch (Victoria) 22 April 1911

TOM Tracy was an extremely zealous officer, and that, in the opinion of most members of the force, is only another way of saying that he was an extremely young officer. There were some people who aid not hesitate to declare that he was an expensive luxury; the fact being that he had in the course of his two years' experience at Scotland Yard arrested quite a number of persons whose innocence was notorious, simply on account of the resemblance they bore to other persons whose innocence was not quite so fully recognised, and the Department had thought well to accede to the demands for compensation made by some of these innocent persons.

But Sir Archibald Boulger, the well-known head of the Criminal Investigation Department, never alluded in his presence to the disbursements which had to be made on account of the zeal of young Tracy, and so far from reprimanding him for tue excess, of his zeal the Chief only smiled at his apologies, saying:

"You did nothing but your duty, Tracy. Don't you ever be afraid to arrest anyone about whom you have the least suspicion. If you take to scrutinising men too closely before arresting then you will never do stroke of business. Arrest them first and scrutinise them afterwards. It would be better to arrest fifty innocent men rather than let one guilty man escape."

Tom Tracy acknowledged the kindly encouragement of the great Chief, but all the same he felt discouraged. He had, on joining the detective force, been under the impression that in the course of a week or two a person of no previous experience would acquire the skill and precision of the late Mr. Sherlock Holmes, but he had, after his second arrest of an innocent person, on the suspicion of his being a murderer who had gone away without leaving even the vaguest address, come to the conclusion that Sherlock Holmes was a gentleman of exceptional talent and more than exceptional opportunities.

But just as his resolution to throw up his appointment and turn his attention to some other business was strengthening, be made a little coup. He followed half over London a man who was "wanted" for a crime committed in a town in Scotland, and arrested him single-handed, solely through having seen his photograph in the Scotland Yard album.

"It's plain that you have a splendid faculty for recognising features, however disguised they may be," said the Chief. "There are not half a dozen men in the force capable of imagining how a man wearing a moustache would look when clean-shaved."

This encomium 'had a good effect upon Tom. It stimulated his imagination; so that it was really strange that during the week following the man's conviction anyone remained unarrested in London. One day he followed a well-dressed person with a rosette tn his hat and gaiters upon his legs, for he had heard of criminals assuming the disguise of a dignitary of the church. Happily the clergyman was recognised by another with whose face Tom was familiar, but the Dean of Chelsea has probably up to the present moment no idea of how narrowly he escaped being arrested as the Hampstead housebreaker.

It was possibly the stimulus acquired by his success that caused him one day to stop abruptly opposite ' some articles diaplayed for sale in the spacious doorway of Messrs. Morton and Sugden in the Fulham Road. It was not the fine "English Turkey Carpet made in Saxony" that attracted his attention, it was not even the secondhand antique English carved oak settle, made in Holland; it was a large oak plate chest— the largest he had ever seen.

He stood looking at it thoughtfully for some minutes, and what was in his mind at the moment was, "If I were a professional burglar I would stand by that plate chest until someone bought it, and when I heard the purchaser give the address to which it was to be sent would make arrangements to visit that address after allowing a reasonable time for the filling up of the green baize trays with the family silver."

And even while this thought came to him a well-dressed man, smoking a cheroot, sauntered into the doorway and examined the bold English carving on the Belgian made oak settle. Tom Tracy at once ceased examining the plate chest and began scrutinising the features of the new comer; not directly, of course—he was too clever for that— but when those features were reflected in profile in a hideous early Victorian mirror which hung on the side of the doorway, and was offered to the public at the templing price of twenty-five shillings, the result of his furtive scrutiny was to make him aware if the fact that the man was not in the smallest degree interested in the settle; he was lifting up the lid of the chest formed by the seat but he was not even looking at it; he was glancing round with the tail of his eye in the direction of the plate chest.

Then it was that one of Messrs. Morton and Sugden's courteous young men came out of the shop and remarked to the gentleman that the settle was a singularly good specimen, adding, that old English carved oak was getting scarcer every day, which was a statement of fact, though it had nothing to do with the article to which he was pointing.

"Yes," said the possible customer, "I'm not sure that I have room for so large piece as this the hall of my present house is very small. I'll take a rough measurement, however, and find out if I could manage to squeeze it in."

The salesman in an instant had whipped out his rule-measure, and ascertained that the article was four feet seven in length, and that the height of the back panel was four feet three. The gentleman took a note of the figures and walked away.

"A fine plate chest, sir, and singulariy cheap." The salesman had turned his attention to Mr. Tracy, and Mr. Tracy saw by the assistance of his friendly mirror that the gentleman who bad been looking at the settle was still lingering about the doorway. He was now scrutinisng a Louis XV clock, which was at the side of the window.

"Yes," said Tom. "I wanted something of the sort. I have just inherited a lot of silver plate, and I have been for some time on the look out for a good chest, something that would stand in the butlers pantry. This is hardly good enough for a dining-room."

"It's not meant for a dining-room, sir," said the salesman. "But it's a good sound I article, and the baize lining makes it practically air-tight."

"Just give me the measurement of the deepest tray," said Tom. "I have three very large salvers, and if I find that they will fit into the tray I'll lake the. thing. Of course I can't ask you to keep it for me for an indefinite time, but peihaps you wouldn't mind retaining it until to-morrow morning."

After a moment's demur and a consultation with same one in greater authority within the office, the salesman agreed to keep the chest until the next day.

"I shall come round here with my wife between eleven and twelve," said Tom. "I'm almost sure that it will be large enough," he added, and after another criti! cal glance at the article, he walked away. He did not fail to notice that the gentleman who had been so greatly interested in the oak settle had remained scrutinising the panel of a Vernet-Martin cabinet at the side of the window, a position in which he could not fail to hear every word of the negotiations between Tom and the salesman.

Still as he took his place on the top of a bus going to Charing Cross, Tom could not help having an uneasy feeling that he was becoming too clever—that it would be ridiculous to suppose that the first person who approached the shop door after he had formed his theory respecting the plate chest must to a certainty be actuated by felonious intentions. If, as Shakespere made one of his characters say, "The thief doth think each bush an officer," Tom felt that it was equally certain that the detective officer doth think each bush a thief. Mindful, however, of the words of kindly encouragement which he had

received from his Chief, he made up his mind to lay the matter before Sir Archibald and hear what he had to say about it.

On hearing his story Sir Archibald laughed pleasantly and shook his head.

"I'm afraid it would be too much to expect that the fly would walk into your parlour so easily," said he. "However, there's no denying the fact that your theory is a plausible one. It stands to reason that if a large plate chest be bought by anyone it might be worth the while of an adroit housebreaker to find out where it goes. No, I don't think that there's anything worth following up in this."

"That's what my feeling is now, sir," said Tom. "Only just at the moment when the idea crossed my mind, I could not help fancying that perhaps-"

"Quite right, my man, there's always a 'perhaps,' and it's sometimes worth acting on," said the Chief.

Tom thanked him, and left his room. During the rest of the day, however, he was so haunted by the original suspicion of the man who had pretended to be looking at the oak settle, when all the time he was furtively watching the possible purchaser of the plate chest, that he returned to Sir Archibald's room.

"I've been thinking over this plate chest business, Sir Archibald," said he, "and I somehow can't get rid of the feeling that my first impressions were right. Why should the man find it necessary to pretend that he was examining the chest when all the time he was scrutinising me out of the corners of his eyes!"

"Why, indeed? But the question is, did your imagination not carry you away to make you fancy you saw what you wished to see?"

Tom shook his head.

"Well, what would you suggest doing?" resumed the Chief.

"My notion was to go to tue shop in the morning, and if the man is there too I will take it for granted that my surmise was correct; and I'll buy the plate chest, order it to be sent somewhere, and then await his coming for its contents some fine night."

" It's a bit far-fetched, my man," said Sir Archibald. "In the first place, if you ordered the chest to be sent to your own house—"

"I wouldn't do that, sir. I'd order it to be sent to-a first-class house— a house where one might reasonably expect a lot of silver to be found."

"I'll tell you what I'll do for you, Tracy," said the Chief, after a pause of considerable duration. "You say that the man whom you suspect overheard you tell the salesman that you would return in the morning?"

"I could swear that he waited on purpose to hear if I made any appointment, sir," replied Tom.

"Well, then. I'll give you permission to go to the place in the morning, and if you find the man there also, you may carry out your plans."

"I'm much obliged to you, sir. But about the house, sir— that's my trouble. You see I am not in a position to be on terms of intimacy with anyone living in Palace Gate or Cromwell Road or Princess Gardens, or in fact, any locality that would sound, promising to a housebreaker."

"Palace Gate, did you say? Ah, I think I can help you so far as Palace Gate is concerned. I have a brother-in-law who lives there— Colonel Doveton. He will oblige you in this little matter, I'm sure, i'll give you a letter which you can deliver to him— number 380— explaining that the chest will be sent as a gift to him to-night."

"I'm very much obliged to. you, sir," said Tom.

He got the letter from Sir Archibald that evening, and the next morning at the hour he had mentioned to the salesman, he appeared at the doorway of Messrs. Horton and Sugden's. The plate chest was still there, but the gentleman who had taken such a fancy for the oak settle had apparently found that it would not suit his hall, or had made up his mind to risk the loss of the article by deferring his purchase until later in the day, for he was nowhere to be seen.

Tom, having satisfied himself respecting the non-appearance of the gentleman lor whom he was waiting, crossed the road to the news vendor's and bought a copy of the *Morning Herald*. He opened out the paper vi the shop, as if he were searching tor some special item of news. He spent ten minutes in this way. Then he bought a copy of the *Daily Clarion*, and went through the same business. Before he had reached the second page he saw the person for whom he was waiting. He was standing at the side of the doorway examining, as he had done on the previous day, the Louis XV clock in the window.

Tom folded his papers, crossed the road, and once more stood in front of the plate chest. The salesman came out of the shop, and expressed the hope that the article would suit him.

" It will do admirably," replied Tom. " I ill ask you to send to my house this evening."

"Certainly, sir," said the man. "What is the address, please?"

The gentleman engaged in examining the clock put his head forward— Tom saw him do it in the mirror— in anticipation of the reply.

"Colonel Dovelon, 380, Palace Gate," said Tom, and the mirror revealed the gentleman at the window in an attitude of intense surprise. He could not pause tc see what his next attitude was, for the salesman had opened the door of the shop for him to pass through, to get the bill for the chest.

After paying his bill he hastened to Colonel Doveton's house at Palace Gate and delivered the letter which he had received from Sir Archibald. Then with an exultant heart, he took the bus to Scotland Yard.

"He will be surprised when he hears how the gentleman gave himself away," he thought. "Poor Sir Archibald! I could see that he believed my imagination had rur away with me. He never fancied for a moment that fhe man would return. I wonder if Sherlock Holmes ever worked out a plan on so simple a basis. Ah, I'll astonish the old Chief."

But he himself was the first to be astonished, for on getting permission to go into Sir Archibald's room, he found himself entering, face to face with the gentleman whom he had seen an hour before outside Messrs. Morton and Sugden's.

"That's the man, sir," cried Tom."Who has arrested him?"

"That's the man, and I hope he'll be arrested at once," cried the stranger.

Sir Archibald lay back in his chair and roared with laughter.

Ths two others stared at him.

"Dick," said the Chief at last, "this is Tom Tracy— a most promising and ingenious member of my staff. Tracy, this is brother-in-law, Colonel Doveton— an eminent collector of old silver, who on seeing a big plate chest on the Fulham Road formed the ingenious theory that it could only he bought by another collector, whose address he was anxious to learn in order that he might write to him on the subject of effecting a few exchanges of duplicates."

Tom bowed, and then ventured to smile before he left the room.

His smile was a very grim one.

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17: Fourteen Fathom by Quetta Rock

Randolph Bedford

1868-1941

The Sydney Mail and New South Wales Advertiser 7 Dec 1910
McClure's, (USA) May-Oct 1911 (as *A Tale of the Coral Sea*)
The Telegraph (Brisbane) 21 Nov 1931 (as *Fourteen Fathom by Quetta Rock; this text*)

There are two slightly different versions of this story by the Australian author and politician. So far as I can tell, it was first published in the Sydney Mail *in 1910, as "Fourteen Fathoms S E of Quetta Rock". Trimmed by a paragraph or two, it became "Fourteen Fathom by Quetta Rock" in all subsequent reprints. In 1931 it was the subject of a lawsuit when it appeared to be the basis of Columbia movie "Fifty Fathoms Deep" without the author's permission.*

THE palm-fronds threshed softly; odors of frangipanni bloom, reek of seaweed and coral trash, and of the Chinaman and the incense of his joss-house mingled and were destroyed and produced again by the fitful land breeze. Nigh to midnight the land breeze became too strong for anything but the frangipanni scent; the palm-fronds threshed through the air saturated with moonlight; the red lamp on the jetty showed as a purple stain.

The last of the pilots of Torres Straits went to bed; the Grand Hotel of Thursday Island closed its bar: but the two barefoot men on the veranda still talked on the topic that had lasted since dusk—the wreck of the *Pandora*; and one man, Pipon, tried to soothe the other, Moresby, who talked without ceasing of the wreck and twenty thousand pounds of pearls.

"Can't we get a launch, Jim?" he asked, for the twentieth time. "A steamer or a launch?"

"I told you no," replied Pipon.

"Bear up, old man; y' can have a lugger."

"A lugger and a dead calm? It would be worse than waiting here."

"Well, quiet a bit!"

"Quiet! How can I be?—when I am in a fever to be there!"

He looked south as if trying to make out the coast of Australia, now the ghost of a shadow in the moon haze and sea blur.

"What could you do if you were there Martin? You couldn't do anything."

"I could stand by the wreck; I could—"

"You couldn't do any good. It's lucky Phil Regard is coming to-morrow. He's the British India diver. He'll do all there is to be done."

"My pearls, Tom! The big one and nine ounces of little ones. Oyley was bringing them up. What depth did the *Pandora* sink in?"

"Nobody knows, old man; or how she went. The skipper was a good man—exempt, too. Knew every key and every inch of reef— and there's millions of 'em."

"It was my rotten luck, Tom, to miss the *Pandora* by five minutes, and then pick up the *Maranea* to catch her here, and find, when I did get here, that she'd sunk fifty or a hundred miles south. And there's my pearls— Oyley was taking charge of 'em— and then I missed the ship. Oh, gimme a raft— gimme a kerosene-tin— and I'll start!"

"Not you! Come on; take a fool's advice and sleep. You'll wait for the morning, and then leave it all to Phil Regard. He'll be here to-morrow."

The grass trees rustled softly to the poinciana as the men went to bed; the breeze strengthened to a wind, and replaced perfume with a taste of salt; from the veranda above a man began to whimper— a man that had seen death and terror and was now dreaming it all over again and shrieking out the story in his recurrent nightmare— the one survivor of the *Pandora*, who had been picked up by a pearling lugger.

"She's going! Two minutes— you can't get the boats out of the chocks. Why didn't they have boat practice? You can't! You can't! Don't scream, women— dear women, don't scream— it's better to drown than— ah, my God, the sharks! the sharks!"

DRUCE, the pilot of Torres Straits, boarded that slow, comfortable, old-time high-pooped steamer of the tea clipper type, the *Airlie*, at Goode Island, and brought her up in the early dawn to the wharf at Thursday. A big, bearded, brown-eyed man was the first to land; he was a man in a hurry— in a hurry for news, at least. He waited for neither bath nor breakfast, but aroused an irritated postmaster, and begged so for telegrams that the postmaster gave him his mail long before the beginning of office hours. There were many newspapers, and he did not look at them; a dozen letters, all man-directed and official, and he put them in his pocket. A bitter disappointment settled on his face— the letter from the beloved was not there. He found new hope in the telegrams. Alas! They were as the letters; and his heart was heavy then. This diver of the sea, who knew no fear that he could not fight down, fought against this disappointment and could not conquer it.

"I telegraphed her from Darwin, and she hasn't wired a reply. She's thoughtless, not cruel, not cruel— my girl."

He took from his pocket-book a faded photograph— faded not by age but by wear; looked at it, and put it back again.

"God bless her! I'll telegraph again, and in seven days we'll be together— for a month, anyhow. But—she might have made sure of not missing the post; a letter would make me a king to-day."

He returned to duty by taking a telegram from his pockets, and a fierce resentment held him for a moment as he read it:

Pandora sunk; locate wreck; if not impossible recover gold, ship's papers. B. P. provide tug and tender; made splendid terms.

So he would not see her in a week— happiness was to be postponed again. He thought of the long two months of salvage diving in the Flores Sea. Three months since he had seen her, and now there was to be another fortnight of hunger for her!

But hope came to his comfort. "Another year and I'll have made enough to retire on, with this new chance. And then, no separation till dead finish comes!"

So he went to Burns Philip and arranged for the departure of the little steamer, hired diving tenders, and had his diving gear brought from the *Airlie's* hold. It was then that Moresby found him— Moresby of the drowned pearls; and the new commission made Phil Regard almost gay.

"Oyley had 'em," said Moresby. "I gave them to him to mind because I was going on a spree in Brisbane."

"Was he straight, d'ye think?"

"I think so. He put 'em in a little steel box in his trunk,— he had his own pearls in the box,— and his wife had the key on a chain round her neck."

"What was the number of his cabin, and what was he like?"

"A dark, red-mustached chap— cabin number 41-43 B, port side, near the music-room."

"You know the ship?"

"I tell you, I sailed on her from Sydney to Brisbane, and lost my passage at Brisbane through going to the races. I gave the pearls to Oyley when I was going ashore. But you will get 'em again, mate?"

"I don't know. Nobody knows where she foundered. But, if I do?"

"Five hundred pounds."

With the lack of ceremony characteristic of the latitude, every man in the bar joined in the conversation.

"Five hundred pounds!" said Druce, the pilot. "Five hundred pounds for dredgin' fifteen or twenty thousand pounds out o' the Pacific Ocean! Five hundred to find a ton of scrap-iron in eighty thousand square miles o' coral? It's worth that to find the old hulk that hit the rock somewhere, and sank on it, and jewed me out o' pilot fees."

"I thought it wouldn't be hard to find the wreck," said Moresby hesitatingly. "If—"

"Oh," replied Druce, "if your aunt had whiskers she'd be your uncle. Why, I know ten wrecks about here that no man knows the name of— ships that were never missed. You know, too, don't you, Dan'l?"

An old man, bent and wizened, replied quaveringly: "I've seen below me— when I've been down— old Spanish ships, an' old Dutch ships, an' old Portugees down below; me in twenty fathom water, an' them deep below, me man—"

"Twenty fathoms— too much," said the big diver. "I've got a girl at home, and she wants me. Fifteen fathoms is all I care to go."

"Aa-ah," said the old diver, nipping with his strong and crooked fingers the arm and leg muscles of Phil Regard, "I was as strong and straight as ye; but deep divin', an' showin' off above the other min, an' takin' no notice o' the shootin' pains in me legs— callin' it rheumatics, an' all the time 'tis the paralyzer warnin' ye. An' then twenty-eight fathom I went, an' hauled up— I was a cripple."

He laughed as he spoke, but there was in his eye a tear of sorrow for his own dead strength; and, to cover his self-pity, he said, with a feeble attempt at gaiety:

"But 'tis only here I am a cripple! Put me down in fifteen or twenty fathom and give me the pressure on me skin again an' a four-knot tide, an' I'll fly along the floorin' of the sea like a sunbird."

"And you're offering five hundred pounds for the chance of that?" said Druce to Moresby.

"Open your heart, Moresby. A mean man makes me spit blood."

"A thousand, then," said Moresby. "I want to be fair, and it's all to nothing."

"It isn't," said Phil Regard. "I've got to go below on another contract, and you think I've only got to open a cabin door and take a key from some poor, dead woman, and open a box. But that means two extra corners to go round, and the more corners the more chances of fouling. It's your pearls to my life. I want a certainty."

"Here y' are, then," said Moresby. "A hundred pounds for opening the cabin door, and I'll take your word for it; and a thousand if you bring back the pearls."

"It's a deal," agreed Phil Regard, and they shook hands on it.

The warning bell of the *Airlie* clanged, and Druce departed to his pilotage. Phil Regard, as yet only half resigned, saw the steamer that should have borne him south disappear down the channel, rounding the Residency, and so away to open sea. Then he resolutely put regrets behind him and went to his tug and tender to prepare for his attempt to find a few thousand tons of foundered metal in an immensity of blue.

The survivor of the *Pandora* had become quiet enough to talk of the horror of the wreck.

"I was steerage steward," he said, "Mister. I can't think! Stay by me, Mister— don't leave me alone."

"Hold on to my coat, if you like. I'll stand by."

"We never had a boat practice— rottin' in the chocks, the boats were. It was about eleven at night— moonlight— quiet; y' could hear the scrapin' of shovels in the stoke-hole on the flat sheets, and the noise came up the ventilators. An' not a ripple. An' there I'm smoking by the rail, waitin' till I can sneak out on the boat deck to sleep— the glory hole bein' so hot. An' then it comes. It was like a kid tearin' brown paper for fun. It seemed to get her amidships— that was because she was drawing a lot more water aft. Only one man came out of the engine-room. The man on the bridge was mad! I was mad! The quiet people in the cabins had the best death. Sharks got all the deck lot. She ran a minute or two, an' I saw the water risin' closer up— an' loosed a raft and went over. It was like hell. Mister, the howls. Her deck blew up amidships. I think she's sound aft. An' the steam jumped out of her funnel as thick as wool, an' down she goes. An' then on the raft I seen white fire cutting the water all over, crisscrossin' it. It was sharks. An' then a veil, an' more crisscrossin' of fire, o' white lightnin', an 'another yell."

"I know! I know!" said Phil Regard soothingly. "Don't think of it! Help me. Tell me where you think she went down."

"I can't help thinkin' of it. Heads o' people in the moonlight, an' then rushin' fire, an' a scream like a horse burnin', an' another head pulled under. Oh— oh! Another head gone."

"Steady! Steady! Take a pull at yourself. Where did she go down?"

"A girl of twenty or so— I heard her singing in the saloon the night before— a song about 'Mine, forever mine,' an' her husband lookin' at her as if he was dyin' for her while she was singin'. He was swimmin' with her when the sharks took him; an' I beat the sea with me 'ands, an' brought the raft close, an' I was bringin' her up to the raft— swish! comes the shark fire, an' she went too. Oh, mate, hell it was!"

The diver's eyes grew moist at that; he thought of his beloved safe at home, and the tragedy touched him nearly. But he said again:

"Where's the *Pandora*?"

"I drifted to an island, an' then I went mad, an' the lugger found me."

"To-day is Wednesday. When did the *Pandora* sink? Now, think— listen! We may pick up somebody yet. Tell me."

"She sunk on Monday night."

"Where?"

"We made twelve knots to Cape Grenville; then we slowed to ten to bring her in at daylight."

"What time at Cape Grenville?"

The survivor of the *Pandora* wrinkled his brows as if thought were a physical pain, and replied: "Twelve o'clock in the mornin'. Y' can't find her—she's got no masts, on'y hydraulic winchpoles."

Phil Regard, with the dividers in his hand, said inquiringly: "And she struck at eleven in the night?"

"It might have been later. I don't remember."

"We'll go on that. Where were you picked up?"

"The lugger came from Bushy Island."

Regard pricked off one hundred and ten miles on the chart.

"Somewhere east of New Castle Bay," he said.

Before noon he had left Thursday Island, taking the direct track with his light-draft tugboat— east between Tuesday and Horn islands; and then, after easting Mount Adolphus Island and thridding the reefs to the south of it, steering south through the turquoise of shallow water and into the sapphire of deep sea, he ran south to Bushy Island, and then east over reefs, and then north again, and then west, and then zigzag. And the next day he drove slowly over a blackness in the coral bed; a monstrous black thing surrounded by lazy sharks and darting brilliant fish that made the sea-green water alive with swaying and flashing color, like the air of a tropical jungle: the *Pandora*— almost on an even keel and sunk in fourteen fathoms.

With a little reluctance, Regard made the preparations necessary for such as dive in dress and helmet, and shaved clean the mustache that had grown since he had dived in Flores Seas. The growing of the mustache had been an innocent vanity for the pleasure of his wife, who objected to his professionally beardless face, just as the new suit was for her benefit and not to be worn until the day of happy meeting, that he might shine all freshly in her eyes. Then, in the warm shadow of the white awning, he stripped, and donned the many woolen undergarments and the canvas dress, with its water-tight red-rubber bands at wrists and ankles.

The tender put on his feet the great brass-toed boots of twenty-eight pounds weight; and when he had climbed to the ladder and placed his feet upon the rungs, they screwed his twenty-eight-pound copper helmet on the collar-ring, and hung thirty-eight pounds of lead upon his breast and thirty-eight pounds of lead at his back. Life-line, piping, corselet, helmet, brass boots, and leaden weight complete, the men at the pump began to turn; the tender screwed the face-glass into the helmet and tapped upon it as a signal; the pumps lifted the pressure of the weights from the diver's chest. The air thudded irritatingly into the copper prison that was the helmet; the sense of confinement, and the close smell of the natural breathing element of man

unnaturally compressed, returned to Phil Regard. He thought of the wife in Sydney—the last thought of the divinity before bracing himself to work that had the chance of death in it always, though use had brought danger into contempt; then he opened the valve that he might get way to sink with, and dropped easily and gently into the caresses of the water. The sun's shimmer on the sea dimmed to a great pervading shaft of tawny light that made the sea-green lucent, as the white sand below reflected the rays of the breathing world.

The black corpse of the *Pandora* seemed to rise to him. He closed the valve, and sank as through a cataract of feathers. Avoiding the deck, he dropped to the bottom for a survey of the hull. The current hurried him; he might have to wait until slack water. But the lugger drifted too, and he walked rapidly on his toe-tips around the wreck. There could be no doubt of the impossibility of raising her. From the great gaping hole amidships, that extended from one side of her to the other, swam fish of all colors, playing in those puzzling tunnels. Moving lightly as a feather-weight, as if the laws of gravitation had been repealed, Regard studied the situation. All about him stretched tangles of seaweed and coral with white walks between the spongy copses and the brakes. A yellow water-snake followed his every movement with curious imitation, and white fish circled around his helmet so that a green hand must have become dizzy. From a rift in the rock wavered the tentacles of a devilfish feeling its way to crime with every cup and sucker; immense shoals of young fish were being driven to the surface by stronger bullies. Yet, with all its clamorous hunger and insolent murder, it was a world of bewildering loveliness.

Upon the ribbed sand the starfish; above, the brilliance of living coral: the great violet bouquet-shaped madrepora, its coral flowers with buff branches and petals of magenta; staghorn corals in brown and yellow and lilac and green; coral valleys of myrtle green, coral ridges of golden brown, all the glorified forms of carbonate of lime— beautiful as the fish, brilliant as the painted finch, and tinted like the Raggiana bird of paradise. Regard stepped on a branch of heliopora coral, and it broke in indigo.

Brakes of broad-bladed sca-grass grew as in a swampy meadow for the sea-cow; trepang like black cucumbers slumbered on the sand; weed-grown pearl oysters protected themselves with water made turbid by Regard's footfalls; a big blue-spoked stingray faltered by a rock; and prone on the ruffled floor lay a great skate, which is a flattened shark. Everywhere the water swarmed with strange and beautiful forms: the parrot-fish in his livery of black and gray and scarlet; the giant anemone and his galaxy of sea-stars; the peacock blue and green frills and furbelows of the giant clam shells, spotted turquoise and

barred black; the grotesque tobacco-pipe fish of golden and azure spotted brown; the placid brown oxray, so blundering that it is often unintentionally malevolent, since if it once takes hold upon air-pipe or life-line it never lets go; yellow-finned and ultramarine-bodied fish; black and electric-blue fish; fish arabesqued in green and salmon and black and gray and orange and blue and yellow; fish of protective fin and tassel and little body; fish with long brown pennants growing from their heads; mad fish with upturned noses; tasseled, branded, striped, speckled, barred, spotted fish, each painted like a Carpentaria finch.

The weight of ocean pressed the diver softly in his armor of the air; his body felt as if stroked by the silky hands of the caressing sea—kindly even to the little fragile sea flowers. And then from the great tunnel in the hull of the *Pandora* came floating, gorged and lazy, the horrors of the deep.

Used as he was to these cruel cowards, in the light of the story of the bride who had died in the wreck, they held for him a new horror, and for a moment he was afraid. Their gorged habit, their slow, plethoric movements, their dull eyes, forgetting for a moment to be greedy, told the tale. Regard felt almost physically sick. All those eyes looked at him threateningly, contemptuously; the little fish that swam up to his face-glass and gazed at him did not seem to be frightened as quickly as usual by the movement of his hands.

The sharks came nearer, and Regard, lifting the rubber wrist-band, shot air at them in a succession of silver bullets, and the cowards became energetic and fled. A carpet-bag shark, the incarnation of filthy malevolence, hovered above him until Regard turned the escape-valve on his helmet and shot a madness of fear into the horrible thing.

He finished his survey of the hull with difficulty, attended always by the yellow sea-snake, which followed him as if it expected food from this strange monster, accompanying him to within a few fathoms of surface. For an hour Regard rested and fed; then he went to the ladder, and was loaded and imprisoned again, and sank down to the deck of the *Pandora*.

His retinue of enemies left him at the entrance to the saloon; but the small fish, their brilliance seeming to light the half-gloom, swam into the depths and in and out at the portholes—"like schoolboys playing a game," thought Phil Regard. Even there some little things had begun already to benefit by the fall of greatness; little pearl shells as big as a thumb-nail— born in motion from the spat, floating in the current, and sucked down by the foundering ship— had here spun their byssus to tie them to the saloon stairs, hiding their weakness in this unexpected asylum.

"All this death to make a safe hiding-place for a shell," thought Regard bitterly, as he walked on tiptoe through this silent world where all values of

vision were distorted, where a waving shadow seemed to be a fish and a fish of sober hues was as shadow until the hand felt its form.

He thought hard— racking his brains inside his copper prison for the memory of the plan of the ship.

"The ship's papers will be in the captain's safe; I'll get them to-morrow. The specie-room is inside the mail-room; I'll find that." So, with due regard for the safety of air-pipe and life-line against projections and fittings, he left the saloon, its decorations already dimmed by the traveling slime of the sea, and found the mail-room, and beyond it the specie-room intact.

He talked to himself, and the words reverberated to him from the helmet: "I'll bring dynamite and a wire down and blow the specie-room open, rig a winch, and haul out the gold boxes. That'll be to-morrow. And while I'm here I'll do the horrible job— Moresby's pearls."

He went back to the saloon stairs. Above it a great gray shape hung watchfully, patiently, as if it had all eternity to wait in. Regard, with never a quickening of the pulse, fired the silver bullets from his wrist-band, and the gray shape backed and fled. Regard laughed and went on to find Moresby's pearls.

He opened a cabin door. Two fish fled through the porthole, and the body of a woman came at him in the swirl of the water. The dead face struck his helmet. Regard cried out in horror, and backed away. But in a moment he caught his courage and closed the porthole; then he shut the cabin door again and went to the next. He could not distinguish the letter denoting the corridor, nor the number either. He opened an inner cabin, and a drowned man came out and struck him. He opened another, and there were in it a dead man and a dead woman trying with her floating skirts to hide a little child from the sea. The man had tried to save another child, and that other child had fixed his teeth in his father's arm, and so had died in cruel fear of the green death that had shipped with them. Horror gripped the diver as with fingers of cold steel.

Yet his duty was to be done, and he did it. He found B corridor, and the first cabin had in it a dead girl with her hands clasped as if she still prayed. He closed the cabin reverently, and came to another in which an old man and an old woman had died in their bed places; and then to an outer cabin opposite the one he had first entered. The light was better there; he saw that this was B 41 at last, and that by a little care he might have saved himself the awfulness that had shaken him.

The lock of B 41 did not yield to the lifting of the handle, so Regard inserted the point of his small ax between the door and the beading and levered it open. Two bodies, those of a man and a woman,— the man's as if he had died

standing, the woman's in the lower berth floating up against the wires of the upper berth,—moved queerly in the disturbed liquid— as if they were alive.

"Porthole closed," said Regard to himself, trying not to look at the dead for a moment. "He had the fan going— the lever's on the top speed."

He looked at the body of the man, and shudderingly turned him around in the water.

"That'll be the man Moresby gave the pearls to. Oyley was the name, and he looks it. There's the trunk under the berth. And this poor soul has the key round her neck. I cant do it... But I promised. I'll do it to-morrow... No; better now—get it done with. Forgive— whoever you are, forgive me. Young, too, and pretty." With a shaking hand and covering his face, he touched the woman's neck, and there he felt the necklet and the key.

"It's horrible. I'll have to use both hands for the fastening."

As if he were physically afraid of it he looked back at the sinister dead man floating near the porthole; then, swiftly and without looking, he unfastened the necklet and held it up—a necklet and a key. The movement floated the body from its position against the springs of the upper berth; it turned upright, floating by his head— through the little circle of the face-glass its dead eyes looked sorrowfully into his own.

And then— madness! Unbelief! Doubt! Unbelief again! And again madness! clamored through his brain. The air seemed to be withdrawn; the helmet became a mountain of copper; the weights upon his back and breast were each a ton of lead. He looked at the necklet— yes, it was so! He had given it. He released it, and it sank to the ooze upon the sodden carpet. He looked at the bracelet of opal before the mirror, and recognized it, too; and then at the dead woman gazing at him mournfully with eyes that seemed to plead: "Forgive; I have been punished, and repented so; forgive."

Still unbelieving, but stunned, he pushed the dead man through the door and out of the alleyway (evicting it as if its presence in that cabin still outraged propriety); and it floated up, bobbing queerly in the tide eddies. Then he turned back, mad but unbelieving, and re-entered the cabin. There could be no doubt— no doubt! He left her there, and fastened the cabin door behind him. And then his heart broke.

He could not live! With his last conscious instinct, he hacked with uncertain hand at the air-pipe, and missed it; then the weight of all the ocean settled on his heart and he wavered to the floor.

He had a conscientious tender. At that sudden jag upon the life-line the tender hauled carefully, and, by that luck which shames the best judgment, drew Philip Regard safely through the alleyway to the deck of the *Pandora* and up to sunlight.

But they might as well have left him there, for the strong man who had dived never returned to the surface.

"Beats me!" said Druce, looking pityingly at the withered wreck that sat every day, and through all the daylight hours of every day, upon the veranda of Thursday Island hospital. "Can't understand it. A fine, big, strong world-beater of a man paralyzed in fourteen fathoms. It beats me!"

18: The Disappearing Trick

D. H. Souter

1862-1935

Sydney Stock and Station Journal 31 March 1899

WHEN it was nearly dark the three men brought it home heavily between them in a greenhide bucket. They walked gingerly and spoke in jubilant whispers, although they had every reason to believe that their nearest neighbours were more than a mile away. They heard the faint twanging of a banjo, and the harsh notes of a man's voice, mellowed bv the distance, came fitfully from the other side of the rise.

It was quite three weeks since they left the camp, when the chairman of the Keeperup Vigilance Committee, had, in picturesque terms, advised them to do the disappearing trick and informed them that if they hadn't cleared out before morning they would be conveyed on a rail as far as the creek— but no farther.

In the still hour before the dawn they roped their belongings on the chairman's mare, and by the faint light of a declining moon, drove her across the bridge to where Mullocks said there was as good a show as Keeperup, an' a darned sight better— bust them. They unloaded the animal, and, pointing her head towards home, with a slap on the rump set her free, and wrapping themselves in their worn blankets, lay down and slept the sleep of men once more at peace with the world.

It was not altogether their fault that they abhorred work— that is physical labour, no doubt in their own particular lines they laboured as hard as the next man— and if Dingle found card playing less exhausting than pick and shovel work, why blame him for making it his business, Jimmy and Mullocks had similar— and other— convictions, so Keeperup decided to get along without them. Hence the Exodus which culminated in the heavy greenhide bucket.

'MAKE a light Jimmy,' said Mullocks, who, with Dingle, was taking a spell at the handle.

'Don't be in sich a bloomin' 'urry.'

'Gawd, don' be a blawstid ijiot— light up,' said Dingle as his foot caught in a tangle of tent ropes, 'd'ye want to break my bloomin' neck?'

Jimmy lit a slush lamp that threw a faint glow almost as far as the walls of the tent, and the three men on their hands and knees gathered round the bucket in speechless admiration.

There it lay, a lump of glittering ore which thus suddenly had transformed them from vagabonds to men of fortune.

They touched it with their fingertips, and gloated over its prospective value.

'It's a foine bit o' stone.'

'An' there's more where that comes from!'

'Ov coorse there is— heaps more. Who ever heard ov only wan slug in a— Howly saints! what's that?' cried Tim, dropping his voice to a frenzied whisper, and falling spreadeagle fashion on the nugget, while Dingle blew the lamp out.

'Hi! you waitee one minnit!'

'The damn Chinaman!'

He was almost at the tent door now, stumbling noisily over the ground, and laughing and chuckling in shrill tones. 'You waitee one minit— I blinger tucker, in my clat— plenty flow— plenty glub. Oh, 'ell!'

And tripping over a tent rope he pitched headlong through the opening of the tent among the three men.

'Whaffor you glab me? Oh me Ah Lee. Plenty tucker. Letee go!. Whaffor you chokee me? You gone dotty!'

'No,' said Dingle, 'but we were just going.'

Tim covered the find all through the interview, and when Ah Lee had gone the question of how much he knew and what he suspected kept the three men awake till morning.

'IT'S a great pity we didn't screw his head off whin we were at it,' said Tim; 'I'm sure I felt his dirty fingers tickling the stone under me chest, an if I'd got holt of his arrum I'd have pulled it out ov the socket an' belted him over the head with it. I wud so!'

'Well, we can't take the stuff over to Keeperup and give the whole show away!'

'Not much, an' we can't leave it here—'

'Without somebody to moind it.'

'What about shifting the tent over to the hole?'

'An' if Ah Lee didn't suspect something before he suspected it then.'

'No; let's toss up who stops to look after the tent, an' hide the stuff under the floor, an' when we get a bit more out of it we don't mind running the red flag up.'

So the lot fell upon Dingle, who was not too pleased with the idea, for, reasoned he, the other fellows might find twice an much, and, planting it somewhere else, do him out of his share. And the other men were not too pleased, for they thought that if Dingle got a chance to clear out with the gem there was little hope of them having their share of it.

It was quite a mile and a half from the tent to the shallow shaft where they found the gold. Part of the way across thinly scrubbed land, and then over a bald rise which commanded a view of the tent, then a saddle-backed hill, on the further side of which was Eldorado.

'If there's any trouble, Dingle, me boy,' said Tim, 'fire yerr bloomin' gun off; we might hear ye. Keep yer eyes skinned fer the darned Chow.'

And Tim and his mate set off to have another search in the claim. They were elated, certainly, but there was a something that damped their joy and made them throw backward glances at the tent that held the treasure.

'Not a bad idea at all of Dingle's to plant the 'gem' under the floor ov the tent.'

'Under just where he has his blanket spread.'

'So's he can keep his eye on it all the time.'

'Um, yes!'

And they walked on smartly now, for the tent was hidden by the trees, but at the rise, turned and had another good look. They could see their mate, sitting smoking in the shade of the fly, and presently he noted their figures against the skyline and waved them a farewell.

'He spots us, Jimmy.'

'Um, yes! Well, let's be goin' and look for another.'

And they began to descend the hill on the other side.

'Say,' said Tim, 's'posin'—'

'That's it,' said Jimmy, 'there's nothing to hinder him.'

'There is not, and I wouldn't trust Dingle—'

'Any more than I trust the bloomin' Chow.'

So Tim crept back to the rise and Jimmy went towards the mine alone. He turned at the other side of the saddle and saw Tim on the crest, of the hill wave his hat to him in token that all was well.

'He spots us both,' mused James, 'and what's to hinder him going whacks with Dingle. I wouldn't trust either of 'em farver 'n I could see 'em, I would not.' And he sank down on his belly in the scrub and kept a sharp eye on Tim for the rest of the day.

That night there was no new find to record, nor the next, nor the next, and at the end of the week the three men began to look doubtfully at one another, and, from discussing the method of spending their acquired wealth, considered themselves hardly treated by fortune because she had not sent them any more.

'It don't stand to reason that there's no more in the hole, does it?'

'No,' aaid Jimmy guiltily, 'it don't, but when one bloke— I mean two coves— can't cut out much stuff in a day when he's got— when they've got— ter do their own haulin', by Cripes!'

'Well, p'r'aps not, an spose we all three go an' have a good day tomorrow.'

'An' the 'gem'?'

'Oh, we'll hump it along with us!'

'SEEMS a bit off to cart the thing all the way there an' back, don't it,' said Dingle, meditatively— 'besides the risk of somebody spottin' it on the way!'

'Think it's safe ter leave it where it is?'

'Safe as houses. It won't do the disappearing trick. Why I hain't seen a soul once since we came here, an' I believe it's safer under that there foot of dirt than in the Bank or England.'

So they plodded towards the mine, only Jimmy was doubtful what excuse he could make about the discovery that was certain to be made. The shaft had not been visited since the day they brought the big nugget out.

'Suppose I turn sick, ' mused he, 'an' sneak off, gorstruth where'll I go wi' that chunk o' stuff under my arm?'

'Say, Dingle, yer musn't expect too much, yer know. It makes an awful difference when yer a man short, don't it Tim,' and Tim winked, and said, 'My word.'

'I don't know,' said Dingle, looking down into the hole, 'but it strikes me ye were graftin' well.'

Even Tim had to agree in this, and Jimmy was astounded at the progress that had been made, for he gasped wildly, 'Gawd'elp me! who's been diggin' ere?'

'Eh?'

'Who's bin diggin' 'ere?' he screamed, turning on his mates like a wolf at bay. 'Who was it? Wot's the good o' bluffing? Tim an' me ain't been 'ere since we took the slug up a Monday fortnight.'

WHEN they got back to the tent, there had been somebody digging there as well; for there was a big hole under Dingle's shakedown, and the slug was gone. It had done the disappearing trick, and so had Ah Lee the Chinaman.

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19: The Miser's Coffin

Sandy Sharp

fl. 1890-1905

Braidwood Dispatch and Mining Journal (NSW) 22 April 1905

From the series "Detective Sketches, by Sandy Sharp, the famous Glasgow Detective". I can find out little about the series, other than several stories, and nothing about the author.

IN THE sensational incidents of the strange story I am about to relate, I certainly did not shine as a detective. But I was a young member of the plain clothes contingent of the city police, and had not then won my spurs in my profession. The whole circumstances of the case made such a deep impression on my mind that although more than thirty years have elapsed since the occurrences I would here narrate, they are as fresh and vivid on the tablets of my memory as though they took place a week since.

One morning our chief sent for me into his private office, and said:

'Am I right, Sharp, in thinking you are acquainted with Balgrochan?'

I looked at him for a moment ere I answered:

'I have been there a few times.'

'So I have been told. Used to go courting a lassie named Elsie Donaldson, didn't you?'

'Ye-es,' I replied, just a wee bit riled that he should talk of my affairs.

'Then I think you'll be the best man to go to Balgrochan. Did you hear that Elsie was married?'

'No; I haven't heard of it. Did she marry Davie Robb, the flesher?'

'No; she jilted him, and married a man old enough to be her father. His name is— or was, for he has unaccountably disappeared— Andrew Sime.'

'Never heard of him,' I said.

'Maybe not. He only returned to Balgrochan about six months since. He was married to Elsie Donaldson at eight o'clock last Thursday night, and about eleven he disappeared. The village folk and the constable have done all they can to find him, or to account for his strange absence on his wedding night, and have failed. I want you to go there and see if you can discover any clue to the mystery.'

'I would be much obliged if you would send some other officer,' I replied.

'No, Mr, Sharp. I have fixed upon you as the most likely to get at the bottom of the mystery, if there be one. Elsie may be prevailed upon to tell you if she has given her husband any cause for deserting her immediately after marriage. He may have done it out, of sheer spite, as the result of jealousy, if he has had reason, or fancied he had, for believing that his bride and the good-

looking young flesher were still friends though she had consented to marry the old miser, as he is styled in Balgrochan, for his money. You must go, Sharp.'

'Very well, sir.'

As my readers will quite understand, it was a commission I would have evaded had it been possible, but I had the sense to see that a refusal to undertake it would be set down as rank mutiny against orders, and I might whistle for promotion afterwards, even if I were not dismissed from the force.

More than a year had elapsed since I had quarrelled with Elsie, consequent upon her open flirtation in my absence with Davie Robb. Davie was a village flesher, and thriving fellow. His father was a farmer but only in a small way, and having five sons. Davie had been ail ordinary farmer's labourer until somebody had ventured to wonder why there was no flesher in the village, and Davie determined to try his fortunes in that direction. He had saved a few pounds, and paid a small premium to a Glasgow flesher for some practical lessons in the art of killing and dressing oxen, pigs, and sheep.

His business increased rapidly, and us he could give me any number of points in personal appearance, none in Balgrochan was surprised when Elsie managed to throw me over for the flesher. She would probably have married him, and lived happily enough, had not Andrew Sime returned to his native village after making a fortune in London, how no one seemed to know. He bought a snug little cottage, covered with roses and honeysuckle, and engaged a housekeeper, a deaf old woman, but still sturdy and strong, as his sole domestic.

Andrew was not long in the village before he announced his intention to marry, and fixed upon pretty Elsie is the future Mrs. Sime. At first Davie Robb took no notice of the gossip brought to his shop by the village busybodies, who seemed never tired of telling Davie that Andrew Sime was far too oft at the workshop of the village carpenter, Elsie's father. He believed he could stake his life on her faithfulness, just as I would have been ready to do when first told of her flirtations mill Davie; and those who would have liked to see him jealous only made him laugh at the notion that 'such a dried-up old mummy as Andrew Sime will cut me out in Elsie's good graces.'

But I knew Elsie to be full of romantic notions, imbibed as the result of reading the old-fashioned novels lent her by the laird's daughter, and unfortunately her mother began to think it would be a fine thing for Elsie to be the wife of a man who had made his fortune, like Sime, instead of the village flesher, who was not likely to make one at all. And just as the continual dropping of water will wear away stone, so the poison instilled constantly and slyly into her ears had the effect of causing Elsie to contrast the position she would occupy as the flesher's wife, serving out pounds of meat and

pennyworths of scraps to the village wives, with that of mistress of Rose Cottage, and nothing to do but to ride about in the handsome new machine which her older and richer admirer had promised to purchase if she would marry him.

The two rivals met one evening in the tillage inn, Andrew Sime having purposely gone there to make Davie Robb acquainted with the fact that Elsie had accepted him. Davie was present, and the moment Sime saw hint he said:

'A mutchkin o' whisky for the company to drink the health of my future wife, Elsie Donaldson.'

And the miser threw a half crown on the table.

'If it is true what you say, the day you marry her will be a sorry one for you, Andrew Sime,'

'You mean that as a threat, I suppose. But I am used to being threatened.'

'If it is true that you got your money in London by acting as factor and bailiff to the owner of some of the slums in Whitechapel, I can quite understand you are used to being threatened. And in my opinion 'tis a pity some of the threats were not carried into effect. But when I threaten I perform— bear that, in mind,' said Davie, as he left the inn kitchen with a scowl of hatred at his rival.

Davie went straight to the cottage of Elsie's father, hoping against hope that Andrew Sime's assertion had been no more than an empty boast, spoken for the express, purpose of irritating him. But Elsie was not at home; she had gone to Glasgow, there to stay until a day or two prior lo the wedding.

'Gone to Glasgow? Why I saw her an hour since.'

'Maybe, Davie; the lassie didna ken then she was going. But Mr. Sime cam' in and she gaed him an answer to the question he asked her last night. Dinna be savage, Davie; ye canna blame the lassie for lookin' after herself.'

'Ye'll rue the part ye hae played in this business, and sooner than ye think, maybe.' But neither the successful suitor nor Elsie's parents seemed to look upon Davie's words as threats.

The preparations for the wedding went on. Sime paid several visits to his intended bride in Glasgow, and the Donaldsons were never tired of telling the neighbours about the splendid presents Sime had made to their daughter. The wedding supper was held at the village inn, and no one present would have thought Sime to be miserly. There was plenty of the best both to eat and drink, and at a late hour, when Sime had partaken somewhat freely of the whisky punch he roused the enthusiasm of the company by the announcement that he had that day made his will leaving everything he possessed to his dear, bonnie wife.

A few minutes afterwards he left the room, went downstairs and out of the inn. No one seemed to have noticed him; at all events he was not seen to go out of the front door.

Some minutes passed, and Elsie began to wonder what had become of her husband. At length she asked one of the servants to go and seek for Mr. Sime. But the bridegroom was not on the premises, and when Elsie went to the cottage he was not there. Search was then made for him throughout the village, but he could not be found. His cottage, still in the care of the old housekeeper, who had been preparing it for its new mistress, was the rendezvous for the gossips of the village, all filled with wonder at the strange climax to the wedding.

All sorts of conjectures were indulged in; not a few believing that Davie Robb knew something of his rival's disappearance. The conviction that some evil had befallen the bridegroom grew stronger on the following day, when the most rigid inquiry failed to discover any trace of the missing man.

Mrs Donaldson wished her daughter to take up her abode in the cottage of her husband, but Elsie shudderingly refused. She exercised her authority as mistress, however, by dismissing the deaf servant, and locking up the house.

When the words made use of by Davie Robb at the village inn reached the ears of the constable, he suspected that a murder had been committed, and communicated with the Fiscal at Dumbarton. That official requested the assistance of our chief in Glasgow; hence the reason I was chosen for the task of ferreting out the mystery.

On arriving at Balgrochan I soon made myself acquainted with the facts I have narrated above, and I went first of all to see Davie Robb.

'I know no more than you, Sandy, what has become of Andrew Sime. I was not at the wedding supper; but surely that does not go to prove that I have had any thing to do with his being lost. Sime is a queer old chap, and may turn up when least expected,'

'Where were you on the night of the wedding, Davie?' I asked.

'I was at James Fraser's farm, a mile beyond Leitchbank, till past nine o'clock, looking at a steer he wants to sell; then I walked home, calling at the King's Head, in Leitchbank, on the way.'

'And what time did you reach home?'

'About the half after eleven.'

'Anybody up at your house, or able to say it was not after that time when you got home?'

'No; they were all in bed, and had left the door on the sneck.'

'Davie, is it true you threatened Sime about a month since one night at the inn?'

'It's true that I said the day he married Elsie would be a sorry day for him, but all I meant was that a lassie who could treat men as she treated you and me would not make a good wife. That was my meaning, and nothing else,'

I soon found that the good folks of Balgrochan were strongly of opinion that Sime had been murdered by his rival, and the belief grew stronger when it became known that the young flesher could not properly account for himself at the very hour when Sime left the wedding party. But there was no proof that Sime was dead, and all my efforts to obtain a clue to his whereabouts were futile. I stayed a fortnight at Balgrochan, and then returned to Glasgow.

A MONTH passed by, and then Davie Robb called on me at the Central to tell me he intended to emigrate. He declared that his life was a misery to him, for even the little children at home shouted at him in the street, and his trade had almost all departed. The village folk would send to one of the villages around for their meat, or do without rather than buy it from one who was believed to be a murderer.

'It'll be a sore blow to your mother, Davie,' I said, for I knew he was her favourite son.

'Ay, Sandy. My mother preaches patience; says the truth will come out sooner or later, and go on. But I've made up my mind, and I'm going to America.'

'But what about Elsie?'

'I haven't spoken a word to her since I knew she was to wed Andrew Sime. She may yet be a wife; anyway, I want nothing with her.'

'What does your sister Janet say?'

'She's in London with the laird's family; but here is her last letter.'

'Do not be downhearted, Davie,' wrote Janet. 'In his own good time God will make your innocence manifest to all who now look upon you with suspicion. In a new country you will not be known, and may yet be as prosperous as you once thought to be at home. Never lose heart; trust in God and some day you will come home again, with the welcome of everyone who knows you.'

But there was a startling denouement in prospect.

The morning after Davie Robb left home for Liverpool a stranger fishing in the brook discovered in a crevice in the rocks on the bank of the little stream the body of a man, so much decomposed that it had evidently been there for some weeks, if not months. On giving information to the police, it was at once decided that the missing man, Andrew Sime, had been found. Sime had a slight malformation in his right foot, which was rather thick, or 'clubbed,' and the right foot of the corpse was similarly deformed. Conveyed to Balgrochan, and

viewed by numbers of the villagers, many of them expressed doubts on the subject, but Elsie's father declared positively that the body was that of his son-in-law.

Then the police, guided by the man who had found the body made a search of the rocky ground near by, and what was considered as conclusive evidence against Davie Robb was found in the shape of a flesher's 'sticking knife' with 'D. Robb' cut in the wooden handle. Immediately this was found the Fiscal applied for a warrant for Davie's arrest, and he was taken into custody on board the steamer in which he had secured a passage for New York.

The sergeant who effected the arrest was much surprised to find Davie taking it so coolly. He showed not the slightest sign of guilt or fear, and even when made acquainted with the finding of the knife at the spot where the body was discovered Davie was still passive.

'I am innocent, mother,' he declared when she went to see him at the police station at Kirkintilloch.

'It is true everything looks black against me, for the knife is mine, but I lost it weeks before the wedding.'

But when he knew that his father, believing him to be guilty, had refused to go near him, or to provide the funds necessary for his defence, Davie lost heart and grew despondent. Taken before the Sheriff, he was remanded for a week to give the surgeons time to make a thorough post mortem examination of the body.

That week, as Davie told me afterwards, seemed as though it would never come to an end. He passed the night in pacing his cell, vainly trying to see a ray of light in the black cloud by which he was overshadowed.

The week came to an end at last, and Davie Robb had again to endure the ordeal of appearing in a crowded Court, the object of the abhorrence, without, a sign of commiseration, of the horrified spectators. The surgeons who conducted the post mortem examination, elated that there was no doubt the deceased had a club foot, and this was regarded as conclusive evidence of his identity with Andrew Sime. That the corpse was totally bereft of clothing when found was considered to be additional evidence of the murder.

The argument of the police was that Davie Robb had encountered the drunken bridegroom when he left the inn, that the fresh ait made him so drunk that he became stupid, and wandered away from home towards the place where the body was found; that Davie followed him until they reached a spot suitable for the murder, and then stabbed his rival with the 'sticking knife,' stripped his victim, hiding the clothing in some secret spot before placing the body in the crevice where it was found. But though the most rigid search was instituted for the missing clothes of Andrew Sime, keepers, and others who

knew the neighbourhood being instigated to join in the search by offers of a large reward, nothing was found.

Davie Robb pleaded not guilty, and was committed to the next Circuit Court at Glasgow.

To Davie's surprise, there was one person in Balgrochan who resolutely refused to believe him guilty. Elsie Sime, with what was regarded in the village as strange perversity, angered her parents by her strongly expressed belief in Davie's innocence.

The day following his committal, without making her mother acquainted with her intentions, she came to see me in Glasgow, and implored me with tears to help her in proving the innocence of the accused young flesher. I thought it was rather rough on a fellow to be asked to save from the gallows one who had 'cut me out in the lassie's affections, but her passionate grief chased away any anger I might have felt, and I promised, could I obtain permission from our chief, to try again to bottom the mystery surrounding her husband's death. I had some difficulty in persuading our chief that Davie Robb might be an innocent man, but he yielded to my wishes at last, and said it was a will-o'-the-wisp I was chasing.

Almost the first persons I saw in Balgrochan were Elsie and her mother, who seemed quite angry when I told her why I had again come to the village.

'I have nae patience with her,' said Mrs. Donaldson. 'Fowk are sayin' she's no sorry Sime is dead, and that if Davie Robb gets clear she'll many him, an' live on Sime's siller.'

'Sime's siller, mother? Maybe you can tell me where it is. None of the banks in Kirkintilloch or Glasgow know anything about it. There isn't a scrap of paper in his drawers or boxes to show that he had any money. I begin to believe that all his tales about his money were just a pack of lies told to impose on me.'

Mrs. Donaldson had no reply for her daughter, for it was quite true that no trace of the miser's hoard could be found.

I scarcely knew how or where to commence my search for a clue to the mystery. So far as I could see, if the corpse found on the banks of the brook were really that of Andrew Sime, then in all human probability Davie Robb was guilty! But us I had full faith in his innocence, it followed that the corpse was not that of the miser. What had become of him? Thinking it possible I might find some clue among his papers to his life in London I asked Elsie to let me have the key of Sime's cottage.

She readily consented, and for the whole afternoon I was engaged in making a minute search of the four rooms, but without a shadow of success. There was a wood shed behind the cottage, but Elsie assured me that there

was nothing in it but wood and coal, so I did not enter it. I had absolutely nothing further to go upon, and was half-inclined to give up the quest as hopeless, for, as I said at the beginning of this sketch, I was then but a young detective. My failure and the despondency consequent thereupon did not take away my appetite, and I made a hearty supper of rabbit pie, the small chunks of fresh pork, in the pie making it delicious. As the result of my indulgence my sleep during the greater part of the night was broken by dreams.

One of these was so vivid and life-like that it made a strong impression upon me. I imagined that I saw a middle-aged man of somewhat forbidding aspect opening the lid of a dirty-looking chest, such as housekeepers put corn into. As soon as I heard anyone moving below I dressed and went down to find the kitchen maid making the fire.

'Did you know old Sime, the miser?' I asked the girl. 'What was he like?'

'Rather short, iron-grey hair, long and shaggy, rather long nose, and not many teeth. No beard or moustache; used to shave himself every day.'

'Capital,' I said, giving the girl a shilling. 'I couldn't hare done it better myself.'

'Father's a constable, and two brothers, all in Glasgow; maybe you know them; names are Lamond,' said the girl with a laugh.

'To be sure I do,' I replied, as I sauntered out.

Off I went to the miser's cottage and opened the door of the wood shed.

There was such a horrid smell assailed me that I knew instantly I was on the threshold of a discovery. Holding my nose and keeping my mouth closed, I entered the shed, and was startled as you may well believe, to see in the far corner the identical corn chest I had seen in my dream. The stench emanated from the chest, and I saw that the strong iron hasp was over the staple. Lifting the heavy oaken lid, I felt a thrill of the keenest possible satisfaction run through me. For there, huddled up in a heap, was the rotting corpse of Andrew Sime.

Letting down the lid of the chest, I closed the door of the shed and hurried off to the village constable's house. He was breakfasting, and surprised to see me, for he had persisted so doggedly in his belief of Davie Robb's guilt that I had cut him dead.'

'Good morning, Murdoch. When you have finished your breakfast I have a nice little job for you.'

'What is it!' he answered somewhat surlily.

'You must have a little patience: you will know all in good time.'

He was not long before he rose and said he was ready.

'Have you got any disinfectants in the house?' I asked.

'Oh, yes; plenty of chloride of lime,' he replied, staring at me with wide open eyes.

'Then you'd best bring some; you will want it.'

He got a small bagful and we went to the cottage.

'Murdoch, I will now let you into a secret; Andrew Sime's body is in an old corn chest in that shed.'

'What? Impossible! I saw him buried.'

'Come along man, and own you can be mistaken.'

He followed me, and gazed into the chest when I lifted the lid with such an expression on his face as I had never seen on a human countenance before.

'I suppose you will not deny that that body is, or was, Andrew Sime.'

'There is no doubt about it, Mr. Sharp. Your fortune is made.'

'Nonsense. I ought to have examined this shed when I was here a month since,' I answered. 'Go and get some help to take out the body.'

It was a gruesome task, for the corpse was terribly decomposed But helpers were plentiful and willing enough. The remains of the old miser were removed and then we could see that the bottom was a false one and that underneath it a pit, about a yard in depth, had been dug— Sime's bank. The miser's hiding place had proved his coffin.

It was evident that he had gone to got some money, none being found in his clothing; and that while stooping inside to haul one of the leathern bags in which he kept his gold, the lid of the chest had fallen down, the iron hasp had slipped over the strong iron staple, in which a brass padlock went when the chest was secured. All the hapless man's strength was insufficient to enable him to burst the bonds of what had proved his coffin.

His housekeeper was so deaf that she would not hear his cries, supposing he had the power to cry, the position in which his body was found making it doubtful. There was evidence that he had struggled terribly, however, for the money bags were covered with blood stain, which the doctors said showed that he had burst one or more blood-vessels in his deliberate efforts to release himself.

The news spread like wildfire through the village, and more surprising than the discovery itself was the unanimity displayed by the fickle folk of Balgrochan in their repeated asseverations that they had all along believed poor Davie to be as innocent as the newly-born bairn.

Elsie immediately declared her intention of going to Dumbarton to see Davie, though her mother ventured to say that the neighbours would talk about it, seeing that her husband's body lay unburied.

'Let them talk! Now I know that Davie is innocent and will soon be home again I care not what they say.'

I accompanied the young widow to the county town, and in a few hours Davie Robb was liberated on bail to appear at the Circuit Court and be declared not guilty.

A year afterwards Davie and Elsie were married, and I danced at their wedding, when I received many congratulations on having probed the mystery of the old miser's disappearance. But I took care to be silent about my dream.

19: The Emerald Ring

Andrew Soutar

1879-1941

Queenslander, 11 Aug 1932

BORTHWYCK was young and ambitious, and had very definite views about politics. All that he lacked was a sound knowledge of human nature. He had come down to the constituency to "nurse" it, and was satisfied in his own mind that within a very short space of time he would be able to convince the electorate that his party alone stood for progress. He, had been told that it would be a very difficult seat to win, and with the pardonable arrogance of youth he had replied: "The harder the battle the greater the victory."

He had his own ideas of how to set about the work of converting these people, of emphasising for them the fallacious reasoning that led them to support the candidate of the other party. He said to himself that the day was gone when it was considered bad form to betray any inclinations towards the under-dog."

He looked the new secretary in the eyes, and endeavoured to convey the Impression that he had long since passed his salad days and that secretaries were no more than secretaries to him. The agent who had recommended her for the post had stated simply that she appeared to be well educated, and was capable of carrying out all the work that he might entrust to her.

In the appraising look that he gave her, he took in her rather excellent features. Subconsciously, he was saying to himself that the forehead was well shaped; the eyes appeared to be more than usually intelligent; the Inflection of her voice was dignified; considerable regard had been paid to her hands; she spoke with grammatical accuracy, and appeared to have not a little understanding of the work for which he was engaging a secretary.

The only aspect that displeased was her dress. It wasn't shabby, but it belonged to yesterday. And, thinking selfishly of his own position, he argued against his better self: "If I am to impress this constituency it will not do to let them think that I have to fall back on anything for a secretary."

It required a little courage for him to say it— but he said it— that in every respect, save one, she appeared to be the person be was looking for to help him in his arduous work. He had tested her capabilities as a stenographer and typist. He said to her:

"There used to be a day, Miss Cautley, when it was said that the worst of being a Labour member or a Socialist was that one looked like one. To-day all parties have been levelled; it is brains that count, and brain alone. It will be necessary for you to dress well. Do you understand that?"

"Yes," she said. "I will endeavour to meet your wishes in that respect, although it may take me a few days to obtain what I consider is necessary."

"Splendid!" he said. "That's the attitude to take up with me— always I say what I mean, and I expect those who work for me to do the same. I suppose you know the people in this district fairly well?"

"I cannot say that I do," she said. "I have come in contact with them only seldom. I wouldn't have applied for this post unless—" There she stopped. And it seemed to him that she was going to ask for pity.

"That will do," he said. "If you feel that the work is beneath you, you have only to say so. There, are hundreds of very excellent women ready to take the position."

"I want the work," she said, "and far from it being beneath me, I regard it as a great opportunity to show that I am worth my place among workers."

He was sorry that he had spoken hastily, although again there came that whisper in his ear that everybody must be handled firmly In order to bring them to a sense of appreciation of their job. He was sorry, because his weaker self saw something that was very fascinating in the flash of her eye and the throw of her head. On reflection she was different from all other secretaries with whom he had come in contact. She had that elusive something they call personality; he could feel it exuding from her and affecting his sense of proportion.

THEY began work on the following morning, and within half an hour she deeply impressed him with her grasp of local affairs, even party affairs. So much so that he said to her: "You must have done a good deal of this kind of work."

"I read the newspapers," she said. "Therefore, I am, I hope, au fait with things that are happening around me day by day."

She resumed her typing. He looked over the top of his newspaper and marked the delicacy of her fingers and the absorbed look in her eyes. He said to himself: "She's rather proud of her position; she's enthusiastic, and that's worth a good deal to me."

He ventured to take her a little way into his confidence, insisting by the tone of his voice that he was only trying to educate her up to his requirements. It wasn't all arrogance, nor boastfulness, for he himself was fully cognisant of the trust that had been reposed in him by his leaders.

"This not going to be an easy seat to win," he said. "What do you think?"

She answered him: "All things are easy to those who have the will to make them easy."

"That's not bad," he said. "Well, I am determined to win this seat, and I am going to give myself six months in which to get thoroughly acquainted with the people. I have an Idea that when these people are shown that they have been worshipping false Mote all these years, they will begin to think for themselves. I must begin by teaching them that I am one of them." He stroked his chin, thoughtfully, before adding: "I am one of them. Does that surprise you, Miss Cautley? Until I made good, I had to work as hard as any labourer. Now, I feel that I do understand the people. I cannot conceive of any barrier between me and the realisation of my ideals. What do you think?"

She turned and looked at him, not in surprise, but with something like boredom on her face.

"Is this part of a speech that you want me to take down, Mr. Borthwyck?" she asked.

"No," he said, abruptly; "I thought you were cleverer than that," and, as he turned again to his newspaper, he said to himself (it was a hateful habit, and he couldn't rid himself of it— that talking to himself): "If she doesn't dress better, she will get on my nerves."

And yet that little spasm of resentment disappeared an hour later when she led him through a maze of local political problems, naming this opponent and his foibles, that supporter and his value. What he didn't like was her very tactful insistence that if a man would win the affections of a people he must first learn to understand them.

THREE days later she appeared in new raiment, and the transformation knocked a good deal of the politics out of his head. He felt justified in taking her a little further into his confidence.

"You will find," he said, "that I shall rely on you to a great extent during this campaign."

"Is that wise?" asked Miss Cautley. "You have known me only a little while."

"If I have one faculty developed more than another," said Borthwyck, "it is that of observation. First impressions go a long way with me."

She was too diplomatic to say anything about his comment on her dress the first day she worked with him.

"There are some sticky problems In this division," he said, "but I feel that you and I can tackle them. The people here are smarting under several very real grievances, and no one seems to have had the courage to take them up and subject them to careful analysis. There's Mountford— Sir James Mountford. He made a couple of millions in the tobacco trade and gave twenty thousand pounds for his title. Yet he pays his employees barely a living wage."

"He gives a great deal to charity," said Miss Cautley, quietly.

"He does— Hell—" said Borthwyck. "I'm sorry," he added quickly; "I didn't mean to use the expletive, but when I hear people talking like that it arouses everything that's bad in me."

"His workpeople adore him."

"They may," said Borthwyck.

"Although he pays them barely a living wage," she smiled, "he has provided them with playing-fields; he encourages them in their sports, and every year he makes them what is really a very handsome present as a reward for their loyalty to him."

Borthwyck nodded at her simplicity. "What you mean, Miss Cautley," he said, "is that the public do all this for his workpeople, yet get no thanks for it. He charges an excessive price tor his tobacco, and out of the excessive profits he buys himself a knighthood and buys his people's loyalty. That's how I look at it."

"It may be that you are right," she said, and went on with her work.

"Then, there's that man, Bentham," he said. "Bentham, who employs two hundred men and women in his hat factory. The authorities have had to threaten him again and again because of his disregard for Board of Trade regulations— unprotected machinery, obsolete methods of drainage, and so forth. A dignified old bird, so they tell me, who lives on tradition and all that sort of tommyrot You know the type, Miss Cautley?

"What my father said and did stands for me. Can't think for themselves. Never regard themselves as anything but masters, and the rest of the world as servants; expects servility in his workpeople as though they were bondsmen and bondswomen."

"Are you quite sure of your facts?" asked Miss Cautley. "I have never heard any one speak evil of him."

"Perhaps not," said Borthwyck, "but then you don't get among the people as I do. You may have lived in this town all your life, but It takes some people a lifetime to learn what others may pick up in a few weeks. I get down to bedrock. That's the plan if you are going to set out to win the confidence of the people. You said as much yourself the other day. You must understand them. That letter can wait. Let me talk to you; I feel that I can talk to you, and talking helps me to think. You say that Bentham is a friend of his people. You've hinted at it. Let me give you an illustration to convince you that you have not grasped the whole of the situation. Certainly, Bentham has won the loyalty of his people, but that is because they haven't the courage to kick against the terms of employment that he imposes."

He took from his pocket a tiny cardboard box, opened it, and pushed it across the desk.

"Look at that ring," he said.

She rose from her chair and went to his desk. She picked up the box and examined the diamond and emerald ring it contained, and there was an expression of perplexity in her eyes as she said:

"Well, what about it?"

"I bought that this morning," he said.

"Really!" She replaced the box and ring on the desk.

"Yes," he said, "I am very fond of wandering into any shop, buying odds and ends, getting into conversation with the shopkeeper, and learning of the life of the people from him. It's a simple way, and yet an admirable one. I bought that ring this morning from the shop of a local pawnbroker. He had some rather interesting antiques in the window; they fascinated me, but I didn't buy- anything but the ring, because I gathered from him that there was what the newspaper people call a story attaching to it. That ring, Miss Cautley, cost me about four pounds. It may win for me the next election."

"It had been pledged?" she suggested.

"No, sold," he said: "It belonged to one of the workpeople— a foreman in the employ of John Bentham, the man you say commands the loyalty of his people. The poor devil, struggling along on a wage that just helped him to make ends meet, has been driven at last to sell the ring that had clinched his engagement with his wife. That's the price of loyalty."

"Are you sure of your facts?" she asked. "It wouldn't do to put forward a story of that description unless you knew that you were speaking the truth. The people of this district do not accept any statement that is made from a public platform. I should go carefully about it, if I were you, Mr. Borthwyck."

He looked up from the desk and the semblance of a flush spread over his face as he said, rather boyishly: "You speak as though you would be disappointed if I didn't win this election."

"I think I should," she said.

"Splendid!" said Borthwyck. "Why?"

"Oh, I don't know," she said; "at least, I cannot express myself. I think you are ambitious; I think that you have the good of the people at heart; I think that you would make an excellent member if—"

"That will do," said Borthwyck, curtly, but again that Insidious habit of talking to himself asserted itself. "She's a capital little woman," he said, beneath his breath; "she's just the sort of woman that I would like if I were fighting this battle in double harness."

Borthwyck followed up the story. It was good copy; he could embroider it and fashion it into an excellent weapon with which to flout the indifferent capitalist.

But her warning was not forgotten. He realised that she was quite right; he must make certain of his facts. Again, he visited the shop where he had purchased the ring; from the shop he made his way to the factory of John Bentham and there he questioned the foreman who had sold the trinket. And from the foreman he returned to his office and his mien was different.

"You were right, Miss Cautley," he said. "It's a dangerous thing to jump to conclusions in this life. I have learned a great deal this morning; I'm not sure that it may not alter the whole of my views on life."

"You startle me, Mr. Borthwyck," she said. "I hope you don't mean that you are not going to fight this constituency? What is it that you have learned that has altered your views?"

"That l am not so clever as I thought I was," he said. "I thought I could judge a person the instant I set eyes on him or her. I misjudged you."

"How can that be?" she asked, rather apprehensively.

And he asked her bluntly: "Why didn't you tell me that your name was not 'Cautley'?"

"I wanted the work," she said, very quietly.

"Why didn't you tell me that you were the daughter of John Bentham?"

She made no reply.

"Why didn't you tell me that John Bentham, whose father and grandfather had been in that factory before him, has been working on so narrow a margin for five or six years that actually he has been taking less than some of his own workpeople?"

The tears were struggling to her eyes, but her voice was quite resolute as she replied:

"The Benthams don't wear their hearts on their sleeves."

" 'Poor as church mice,' " he quoted, sympathetically.

"Yet proud as lions, I hope," said she.

"You wanted to augment the family purse, and you were ready to take this Job."

"To be quite frank, I let it be known among those who were likely to hear of my being here that I was doing it for the fun of the thing."

"I quite understand that," he said, "You wanted the salary."

"You bet I did!"

"And then, when I, like a boor, made rude remarks about your dress, you decided that you would have to get a new one, no matter where the money came from."

"Well, I got it," she said, very quietly.

"You did," he said. "You took your own ring and got the foreman to sell it for you. You begged him not to tell John Bentham, and you bought the dress to please me."

"Not you, exactly," she said. "I wanted to keep the job."

"Holy smoke!" said Borthwyck. "If an understanding of the people is the first qualification of a candidate for Parliament, I haven't any earthly chance. By Jove! You are a great woman!"

He looked down at the ring on the desk.

"Will you take it back?" he asked.

"No!" she replied. "I can't afford to buy it back."

He closed the box and placed it in his pocket.

"All right," he said. "I would like to keep it as a— as a sort of trifle. Something to prompt my memory if ever I become so inflated that— Look here. Whether you like it or you don't, whether you resent it or you don't, whether I lose a secretary or gain something else that's better, I'm going to buy you another one!"

"You have confidence in yourself," said Miss Cautley.

"That's one of the foundations of success."

"Are there any letters to take down?"

"Yes," said Borthwyck, not without emotion. "Will you begin this one? It is rather important. I wish you would correct me if you feel that I am taking too much for granted."

"I am ready," said Miss Cautley.

"Good!" said Borthwyck. "Let's begin!"

And he began:

"My dear Miss Bentham— I am going to ask you if I have any reason to hope..."

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20: The Tidal River

"Sapper"

H. C. McNeile, 1888-1937

The Strand Magazine, Feb 1933

Sapper had several series characters, the best known being action hero Bulldog Drummond. Standish was protagonist of his detective story series.

"THE very person I've been wanting to see. I rang up your rooms, and your man told me you'd probably be dining in your club."

I glanced up from my coffee. A man by the name of Mervyn Davidson was standing by our chairs. I only knew him slightly, but Ronald Standish had shot with him once or twice.

"Could you possibly come down to my place tomorrow," continued Davidson, "or are you too busy?"

"Do you mean professionally?" asked Ronald.

"Yes," said the other, pulling up a chair. "Do you mind, at any rate, if I tell you the story?"

"Fire right ahead," said Ronald, lighting a cigar.

"The thing happened yesterday," began Davidson, "and at first everybody thought it was an accident. However, as you don't know any of the people concerned I'd better start by putting you wise to them and to the locality. You've been down my way, I think?"

"Only once," said Ronald. "So take it that I'm quite ignorant."

"I will," said Davidson. "My house is just five miles from the sea, and as you may perhaps remember, the River Ling forms one boundary to the property."

Ronald nodded.

"Yes, I recollect that. Tidal, isn't it, as far as you?"

"For three or four miles farther up-stream. A muddy bit of water, but unfortunately it plays a big part in the tragedy which concerns my next-door neighbour, a retired business man named Yarrow. Do you want my estimate of the gentleman, or would you prefer to keep an open mind?"

"I want everything that bears on the case," said Ronald.

"His character certainly does that," said Davidson, "but I didn't want to bias you in any way. In short, then, he was a most unpleasant individual."

"Was?" Ronald raised his eyebrows.

The other nodded.

"I'm coming to that. Yes, he was a most unpleasant man, and one of the incomprehensible things of life is how his perfectly charming wife came to marry him. She is years younger than him, and an extremely pretty woman. He must have been well over fifty, whereas she is on the right side of thirty.

Exactly what his business was I can't tell you: he was one of the most morose and uncommunicative men I've ever met. But it must have been lucrative, as there was no shortage of money about the ménage. I've dined with them off and on, and I know the style they lived in.

"It was not, however, an entertainment I indulged in more than I could help, because the atmosphere of the household was so damnable. He was frequently rude to her in front of the servants, and even if he wasn't that he had that cold, sarcastic manner that made one long to hit him.

"He had one hobby, and one hobby only, so far as I know— fishing in the Ling. Everyone to his own taste, and if it appeals to a man to sit on the bank of a muddy river fishing for uneatable fish with a worm and a float, by all manner of means let him do so. He certainly did, for hours on end. The river flowed past his place, but between it and his boundary was a right of way. And it was at one particular spot on this path that he always took up his position.

"Now, though the path is a right of way, it is very little used. Probably not more than two people go along it a day, though sometimes on Sundays the customary loving couples walk there. But on weekdays it is practically deserted. Well, it so happened that the day before yesterday I was down near the river giving instructions to my gardener about one or two things, when I saw a man called Stapleton coming along the path. His trousers were dripping with water, and the instant he saw me he gave a shout.

" 'For God's sake come, Davidson. Yarrow has been drowned.'

"The gardener and I went at once, and sure enough it was so, Wedged against a sunken tree by the pressure of the water was his body, and a glance was sufficient to show that it was too late to do anything. His hat was on the bank, and a camp-stool and creel.

" 'I tried to get him out,' said Stapleton, 'but he was too heavy for me.'

" 'When did you find him?' I asked.

" 'Five minutes ago,' he said. 'I was walking from Briggs's farm and as I passed I saw that hat, which I recognised as his. So I looked over the edge and there he was.'

"Between us we hoisted the body out and laid it on the bank. I sent my gardener back for a hurdle, and while he was away we made an attempt at doing some artificial respiration. But it was utterly hopeless, and we both knew it.

" 'How on earth did it happen, I wonder?' I said after we had desisted.

" 'The only thing I can think of,' said Stapleton, 'is that he fainted, or had a fit, and fell in. The water is comparatively shallow; if he'd been conscious he'd have had no difficulty in getting out.'

"Which was perfectly true, as the bank though steep was not high. No one would have had the smallest trouble in scrambling out, and it seemed to me that his solution must be the correct one.

"At last the hurdle arrived, and we put him on it. And then it struck me that somebody had better go on in advance to prepare Mrs. Yarrow for the news. Stapleton evidently did not want to, so I said I would. I didn't relish the job: with a woman, one never knows. He had treated her like a dog during his life, but for all that you can't tell how they'll take things. To my intense relief she kept perfectly calm. She turned white and swayed a bit; then she asked me quite quietly what to do.

"'I think the best thing would be to put the body in the billiard-room,' I said. 'You realise, Mrs. Yarrow, that he'll have to be seen by a doctor, and possibly the police may come into it. But, of course, it will be entirely a formality. It's obvious what happened.'

"I repeated Stapleton's theory, and she listened in silence. And then, in view of subsequent developments, she made a rather strange remark: 'My husband has never fainted in his life.'

"At the time I thought nothing of it; they were just carrying in the body, and I went to see if I could be of any assistance. We laid it on the floor, and Stapleton put the hat and the creel on the table. And then we waited a bit awkwardly, nobody quite knowing what to do next. I dismissed the gardener and the man who had helped him, and Stapleton and I talked in the hushed tones one uses in the presence of death. Little pools of water were forming on the floor under him, but it seemed indecent to move him again.

" 'I liked him, you know,' said Stapleton, 'though I know he was not popular. But it's a pretty mouldy end! And to think that I took a photograph of him on my way out to Briggs this morning. I never thought that the next time I saw the poor devil he'd be like this.'

"Half an hour later Dr. Granger arrived, and Stapleton and I left him to do what was necessary. Mrs. Yarrow had gone to her room, and I gave a message for her to the butler, to say that if there was anything I could do to help she must have no hesitation in ringing me up. Then, since there was nothing more to be done, I suggested to Stapleton that he should come over to my house and have a drink. I felt I badly needed one.

"An hour passed when suddenly the telephone rang. I went to it, and heard the voice of Sergeant Grayson at the other end. Being on the Bench, I knew him very well; a good man, distinctly above the average local policeman in intelligence. Would I go up to the Yarrows' house, and take Stapleton with me: some startling developments had taken place.

"We went immediately, wondering what on earth they could be, and the butler showed us into the billiard-room. The doctor was still there, with the sergeant and a constable, and all their faces were very grave.

"'Sorry to trouble you, sir,' said Grayson to me, 'but it was unavoidable. May I ask both you gentlemen to tell me all you know.'

"We did so, and when we'd finished he looked significantly at the doctor, who nodded.

"'The fact is, Davidson, said Granger, 'that this is not a simple case of drowning. Yarrow was drowned all right, but it was the result of foul play. He didn't faint or have a fit, which was what I, too, first thought: he was stunned by being hit a heavy blow with some weapon on the base of his skull. He then pitched forward into the water, and probably was drowned almost instantaneously.'

" 'Good God!' I cried, aghast. 'Are you sure, doctor?'

" 'Quite sure, I'm sorry to say. The bruise is there plain for all to see, and by the feel of it I think something is chipped or broken inside. So you can guess how fierce the blow was.'

" 'But who did it?' I said, staring at him.

" 'That, sir,' said the sergeant, 'is what we've got to try and find out. And we have one very valuable piece of evidence. Mr. Yarrow's watch stopped at half-past two. Which proves conclusively that the poor gentleman met his end before that hour. Now, sir'— he turned to Stapleton— 'as you seem to have been one of the last people to see him alive, can you add anything to what you have already told us?'

" 'I can't, Sergeant,' answered Stapleton. 'I passed Mr. Yarrow just as he was packing up for lunch. It must have been about one o'clock, as I reached Briggs's house at ten minutes past. I had one film left in my camera, and as I wanted to get the roll finished I asked him to pose in the most characteristic attitude I could think of— sitting on his camp-stool fishing. I then had lunch, and the rest you know. I left Briggs's farm between five-and-twenty and twenty to three, and found the body in the river. I went in and tried to get him out, but I couldn't. And then Mr. Davidson came on the scene.'

" 'Don't you think, Sergeant,' I put in, 'that it would be a good thing to get hold of the butler and find out about times from him?'

"So the butler was sent for, and it's his evidence that has brought me to you, Standish. I can't believe the boy did it, but I'm bound to say things look just about as black as they can be— Sorry: I'm jumping ahead too fast.

"It appears that Yarrow came in to lunch shortly after one to find a youngster called Christopher Stern having a cocktail with Mrs. Yarrow. And now comes the part that has got to be told, though naturally the butler said

nothing about it. He knew, of course— we all did: you can't keep things like that dark in the country. Young Stern is in love with Mrs. Yarrow and has been for years, though what her feelings are on the matter I don't know.

"At any rate, it was quite clear from what the butler implied that his master was not at all pleased to find Stern there, and when he discovered that his wife had asked the boy to lunch he was even less pleased. Looking back now I remember having heard from other sources that Yarrow was very jealous of his wife, and it was obvious from what the butler said that the lunch was not a great success. We pressed him to be more explicit, but he is a good servant. And the most we could get out of him was that Yarrow was in a bad temper.

"Now comes the damning part. At a quarter past two Yarrow gathered his fishing tackle together, and the butler saw him standing in the hall talking to Stern. He was speaking angrily, though the butler did not hear what he said. But it ended in the two men leaving the house together and taking the direction of the river."

Davidson paused, and beckoning a waiter, ordered drinks. "More than that," he continued, "the butler could not say, but it was enough to make things begin to look ugly for Stern. And the boy's own statement of what happened didn't help much. We telephoned for him and he came round at once. And I think we all watched him as he came into the room. He saw the body, turned as white as a sheet and clutched the table as if he was about to fall.

" 'What's happened?' he muttered.

" 'I want you to tell me, sir' said the sergeant, 'exactly what took place this afternoon after you left this house with Mr. Yarrow!'

" 'But I don't understand,' stammered the youngster. 'I know nothing about it.'

"After a while he pulled himself together and his story tallied exactly with the butler's. Yarrow and he had had words after lunch— he refused to say what about, but we all of us knew— and it had finished up with Yarrow forbidding him the house. They had gone out together and he had walked with Yarrow as far as the river. And there he had left him to his fishing.

" 'Where did you go?' asked the sergeant.

" 'Along a path somewhere: I really forget,' said Stern.

" 'And what time did you leave Mr. Yarrow?'

"This again Stern couldn't remember: he supposed he'd stayed two or three minutes.

" 'So, Mr. Stern,' said Grayson gravely, 'you know nothing about Mr. Yarrow's death?'

" 'Absolutely nothing.'

" 'You didn't have a struggle with him or strike him with anything?'

" 'Good God! no. Why do you ask?'

" 'Was anyone else there while you were with him?'

" 'I saw no one.'

" 'And you didn't pass anybody as you went along the path?'

"Again he shook his head.

" 'Not that I'm aware of,' he said. And then, after a moment, he added: 'But I was all worked up and I might not have noticed. Anyway,' he cried wildly, 'what is it all about? Why are you asking me all these questions?'

"'I am asking you these questions, Mr. Stern,' said Grayson, 'because so far as we know at present you are the last person who saw Mr. Yarrow alive. And Mr. Yarrow was murdered.'

" 'Murdered!'

"The word was just breathed— barely audible, and once again Stern clutched the table.

" 'Who by? But— but, it looks as if he'd been drowned.' And then, wildly: 'Great Heavens! you don't suspect me?'

"Grayson stared at him.

" 'I didn't say I did, Mr. Stern. But you left the house at a quarter past two with Mr. Yarrow; you must, therefore, have arrived at the river at about twenty past. You tell me you remained talking for two or three minutes.' He paused impressively. 'And Mr. Yarrow was murdered before half-past.'

" 'You keep on saying he was murdered,' said Stern. 'How do you know that?'

" 'He was hit on the back of the head and stunned,' answered Grayson. 'Then he fell into the water and was drowned.'

"And at that it was left for the time. Whether or not they have actually arrested young Stern yet, I don't know, but it's only a question of hours before they do so. And I wondered, Standish, if you would come down and run your eye over the country, so to speak. I'd like to do everything I can for Stern— he's an extra ordinarily nice boy. But I must confess it looks pretty hopeless to me.

"You think, then, that he did it?" said Ronald.

"What else can one think? We know that he was with Yarrow just before it happened; we know that they were having a quarrel over Mrs. Yarrow. We know also that the place where they were is usually entirely deserted, so that the chances of someone else being there are remote."

Davidson shrugged his shoulders.

"I am quite prepared to believe," he continued, "that Stern didn't even know he'd killed him. That in a moment of ungovernable rage he hit Yarrow

and knocked him out, and that then, after he had gone, Yarrow rolled over and fell in the water and was drowned. In which case it might be possible to make it a case of manslaughter only."

"What does Mrs. Yarrow say?" asked Ronald.

"Nothing at all, so far as I know. I gather that she has admitted that her husband did not like Stern, but we knew that already. In fact, with regard to yesterday, the butler knows far more than she does."

"Well, there are certainly one or two very significant points," said Ronald, lighting a cigarette. "So, if you like, Davidson, Bob and I will come down to-morrow. I suppose there's a pub some where handy."

"My dear fellow, I wouldn't dream of letting you do that. I can put both of you up with the greatest of pleasure in the world. But I'm afraid it's pretty hopeless for young Stern. There's a good train from Liverpool Street at ten. I'll meet you at the other end."

"What do you make of it, Bob?" said Ronald, as Davidson went off to write a letter.

"Told as he's told it, I must say I agree with him. It looks black for Stern. Motive, opportunity, time— everything seems to fit."

"Almost too well," said Ronald. "However, we'll see?"

TRUE TO HIS PROMISE, Davidson met us at the station. "They've arrested him," were his first words. "I'm afraid it's a waste of time for you, Standish."

"When did they do it?" asked Ronald.

"Immediately after the inquest this morning. Hallo! there's Stapleton— the man who found Yarrow's body."

He waved his hand, and a good-looking, slightly-built man of about forty, who had just come out of a photographer's shop, came over to the car.

"Bad affair this," he said, "about young Stern. Still, I suppose it was only to be expected."

Davidson introduced us, and Stapleton looked at Ronald with interest.

"I've heard of you, Mr. Standish," he said. "Tom Ponsonby, who is a distant cousin of mine, is never tired of singing your praises."

"That's very nice of him," said Ronald.

"Have you come down here over this business, or merely to stay with Davidson?"

"A little of both," said Ronald, with a smile. "I hear they've arrested Stern."

The other nodded.

"I don't see how they could avoid it," he replied. "If ever there was an obvious case this is it."

He fumbled in his pocket.

"By the way, Davidson, I've just had that roll of films developed. Here is the last photograph of the poor chap taken an hour and a half before his death. Good, isn't it?"

"Very," said Davidson, passing it to us.

It showed Yarrow seated on his camp-stool watching his float. His face was in profile; his hat and creel were on the bank beside him.

"I'm glad I got it," said Stapleton simply. "It's just the pose I'd like to remember him by."

"I wonder if you would allow me to keep this," said Ronald "Or perhaps you would let me have another print made. My reason is that it helps one to visualise the scene in a way that mere imagination can't do."

"By all manner of means keep it," cried Stapleton. "I can easily have another done."

"I suppose, Mr. Stapleton, that you saw no sign of any weapon on the bank when you found the body?"

"It never dawned on me to look for one. I assumed it was a common or garden case of drowning. The possibility of foul play never entered my head."

"Naturally not," said Ronald. "It wouldn't."

We stayed there talking for a few moments; then Stapleton got into his car and went off.

"Have you formed any plan of campaign, Standish?" asked Davidson. "Or do you think the thing is too hopeless to worry about?"

"Far from it," said Ronald.

Davidson glanced at him in surprise.

"You mean that you think young Stern has a chance?"

"I most certainly do," answered Ronald. "But until I've seen one thing I can't say more than that."

"And what is this thing you want to see?" asked Davidson curiously.

"The dead man's watch," said Ronald. "I take it you can manage that for me."

"I suppose Grayson has it," said Davidson. "It's a vital piece of evidence for the prosecution."

"Or for the defence," remarked Ronald with a faint smile. "However, we'd better wait and see."

"For the defence!" spluttered Davidson. "What on earth are you driving at, my dear man?"

But Ronald refused to elucidate further, or even to discuss the matter while we had lunch. But after the meal was over he suggested an immediate move.

"Let's go first to the place where it happened," he said. "And then if you'd ring through to him, Davidson, we'll go along and interview Sergeant Grayson."

"Certainly," answered our host. "I'll take you there at once. And I'll have the car waiting in the drive so that we'll waste no time."

He left us to go and telephone, and I tackled Ronald about the watch. But he was in one of his uncommunicative moods, and I could get nothing more out of him than the illuminating statement that it was damned rum. Then Davidson returned and we started for the river.

"That is where I was when I first saw Stapleton," said our host, pointing to a clump of trees in his park. "We've got about another quarter of a mile to go."

We turned into the path that ran along the bank. On our right through the bushes which fringed the river we could see the muddy waters of the Ling; on our left ran more bushes and a fence.

"Yarrow's property," remarked Davidson. "You'll be able to see the house soon through the trees."

At length he paused. We had come to a small clearing.

"Here's the spot," he said. "You can actually see the marks of the legs of his camp-stool in the ground."

Ronald nodded, and stood motionless studying the surroundings. The gap in the bushes on the bank measured about ten yards, and the river was some thirty yards wide. Behind us the undergrowth was dense. Up and down stream the path twisted, so that the place was completely secluded. On the right-hand side of the clearing a tree, half waterlogged, stuck out into the water, and Davidson pointed to it.

"It was against that the body had drifted." he said. "The tide was ebbing at the time and carried it there."

Ronald nodded again.

"I see it's just high tide now," he remarked. "Let's get the depth of the water."

He picked up a long stick and took some soundings.

"Three or four feet close inshore and a muddy bottom."

He straightened up and then for nearly half an hour he crept round on his hands and knees examining the ground at the bottom of the bushes. He went each way along the path, exploring it minutely, while Davidson watched him with curiosity tinged with slight impatience. At length he gave it up and rejoined us.

"I can find nothing," he said. "But, of course, the ground is very hard."

"What did you expect to find?" asked Davidson.

" 'Expect' is too strong a word," answered Ronald. "All that can be said is that I thought it possible I might."

He lit a cigarette, and we waited.

"Let us try and size tip the situation," he said. "To start with an obvious platitude, either young Stern did it or someone else did. If it was young Stern we are wasting our time, because frankly, Davidson, your suggestion of manslaughter won't wash. A man who is stunned by a dunt on the head sufficient to break a bone lies where he falls. He doesn't wriggle about afterwards. Therefore, whoever hit Yarrow saw him fall into the river.

"So we'll consider the other alternative— that it was someone else who murdered him. Now, from what you have told us Yarrow was an unpopular man, so he probably had plenty of enemies. You further stated that fishing from this spot was his invariable hobby, a fact which other people must have been quite as well aware of as you were. Suppose, then, that this hypothetical some one else, desirous of seeing Yarrow, came here knowing that he'd find him. Suddenly he hears Yarrow approaching and quarrelling with Stern. He hides in the bushes, waits till Stern goes; then seizing his opportunity bashes Yarrow on the head and watches him drown."

I glanced at Davidson. His face expressed polite interest. And I must confess that I was a bit disappointed myself. Perhaps I had expected too much after such a prolonged examination, but the bald fact remained that an intelligent child of ten could have reached the same conclusion.

"And since," continued Ronald imperturbably, "the betting is four to one that that or something like it is what did take place, I thought I might find traces of his footprints."

And now we stared at him: this was a more positive assertion. "How on earth can you have arrived at that?" demanded Davidson.

Ronald smiled.

"Let's go and see Sergeant Grayson," he said. "And there is only one thing more I've got to say at the moment. If my theory is correct we are dealing with a very clever man, but one who is not quite clever enough."

"You'll be telling us you know who it is next," said Davidson, with mild sarcasm.

"I haven't a notion," said Ronald frankly. "Not the ghost of an idea. But it will be something if we can prove it wasn't young Stern."

Sergeant Grayson was expecting us, and with a genial and tolerant smile he produced the watch.

"I hear you want to see it, sir," he said. "Though what you think you'll get from it bar the obvious fact that it stopped at half-past two is beyond me."

"We'll see, Sergeant," said Ronald cheerfully, as he examined it. "By the way, it was in his waistcoat pocket, I suppose?"

"That's right, sir: attached to a button-hole by this leather guard."

The watch was a thin gold one, and the back fitted so tightly that it was only with the help of a penknife that Ronald prised it open. And when he had done so he sat staring at the works with a puzzled frown.

"Have you had this open, Sergeant Grayson?" he said at length.

"Can't say I have, sir. Why?"

"What do you think made the watch stop?"

"Water getting in, sir, of course."

"Then why is the whole inside bone dry?"

The sergeant scratched his head. "It's two days ago, sir, you know."

"Rot, man," cried Ronald. "If enough water had got into that watch to stop it, it would still be there after two weeks. It couldn't evaporate."

He was idly turning the swivel as he spoke, and suddenly a look of keen concentration came on his face.

"Great Scott!" he almost shouted, "the main spring is broken."

"Must have happened as Mr. Yarrow fell in," said the sergeant. "So that fixes the time exactly."

"My dear sergeant," remarked Ronald quietly, "I will, if you like, have a small bet with you. I will obtain for you a hundred different watches. You will go to the bank of the river or any similar spot and fall in a hundred times, with a different watch in your waistcoat pocket on each occasion. And if one mainspring breaks, I will present you with a bag of nuts."

"Well, it did this time," said the sergeant stubbornly.

"Look here, Grayson," said Ronald, "what makes a mainspring snap? Over-winding— ninety-nine times out of a hundred. Are you going to tell me that Mr. Yarrow during a heated interview with young Stern pulled out his watch and started to wind it up? It's ridiculous."

"Not more ridiculous than that someone else did," remarked Davidson.

"That's just where you're wrong," cried Ronald. "Last night I carried out a small experiment. I got into a warm bath wearing a waistcoat— and deuced absurd I looked, too," he added, with a grin. "In my waistcoat pocket was a watch. I stopped in the water for twenty minutes, and the watch was still going when I got out. It's the point that struck me the instant I heard your story, Davidson. This watch stopped too soon. If young Stern had done it, a watch that fits as tight as this one would have been still going at three."

No one said a word: we were all too keenly interested. "When I opened the back," he continued, "I expected to find it full of water. I was then going to suggest that we should have it thoroughly dried and carry out my experiment of last night with it. The murderer, however, was evidently unable to open it— you saw the difficulty I had— and he was in a hurry. So instead of filling it with water, he deliberately overwound it, thereby breaking the mainspring, and

hoped it would not be noticed. Then he set the hands at half-past two, and replaced it in Yarrow's pocket."

"But why should he put them at that hour?" said Grayson.

"Expressly to incriminate Stern," cried Ronald a little irritably. "That surely is obvious."

But the sergeant had become mulish.

"Theory— all theory," he snorted. "You go your way, Mr. Standish, and I'll go mine. And when you lay your hands on the man who, having just committed a cold-blooded murder, had the nerve to do what you have suggested, Mr. Stern will be free within five minutes."

"It's your funeral, Sergeant," said Ronald quietly. "But I tell you in all seriousness that you are barking up the wrong tree. The bit of evidence that you think most damning is, in reality, what completely exonerates young Stern. Who did it, I don't know; but it wasn't him."

The trouble of it was that it remained at that. Exhaustive inquiries in the neighbourhood failed to reveal the presence of any stranger, and so far as the local residents were concerned, it was impossible to single out anyone in particular. Moreover, since public opinion was unanimous that Stern was the murderer, interest in the case had flagged with his arrest.

Ronald grew more and more irritable. He spent hours on the river bank searching for possible clues without the smallest result. And, at length, even he began to give up hope.

"There absolutely nothing to give one a pointer, Bob," he cried to me in despair before lunch one day. "I am as convinced as ever that Stern didn't do it, but who the devil did? I feel it's leaving the youngster in the lurch, but there doesn't seem much use in our stopping on here. We're doing no good."

And Davidson agreed. Though he pressed us to stay as long as we liked, I think, at the bottom of his mind, he had come round to Grayson's opinion, that it was just theory. And so we took our departure, though it was like getting a dog away from a bone, so far as Ronald was concerned. He had told Stern's solicitor to subpoena him as an expert witness, but I knew he felt uneasy about the result.

"Even if he gets off, and I don't think they'll hang him, it's going to be a damnable thing for the youngster. If the trial was in Scotland, the utmost I should expect would be a verdict of Non Proven. They can't bring that in here, but it's what it will practically amount to. Not one person in a hundred will believe he is innocent, and he'll be under the stigma for the rest of his life."

IT WAS the evening before the trial, and I was round with him in his rooms. Never have I known him so depressed, and it was not difficult to understand.

He felt he had failed, and though it was through no fault of his, the result was the same. And then, quite suddenly, the most amazing change came over his expression.

"My sainted aunt!" he shouted. "Let me think a moment." I glanced over his shoulder: he was studying the snapshot of Yarrow taken by Stapleton.

"What time was it when you and I and Davidson reached the river that first day we were down there?"

"We left the house at a quarter past three," I said. "So it must I have been half-past, as near as makes no odds!'

"Get Vickers on the 'phone," he cried. "Proof, Bob— proof under my nose all these weeks and I never saw it!"

Vickers was the K.C. defending Stern, and I got through at once.

"Tell him I'm coming round to see him immediately," said Ronald, and before I had time to speak he had dashed out, and I heard him shouting for a taxi. And that night it was touch and go that I did not find myself arrested on a similar charge to young Stern. For the irritating devil would say nothing. He kept grinning all over his face and rubbing his hands together.

"Wait till to-morrow, Bob," was all I could get out of him. "And then I can promise you the kick of your young life."

The court was crowded, but through Ronald's influence I got a good seat. And a glance at young Stern's face showed that the news, whatever it was, had been passed on to him. The atmosphere was tense, as it always is during a murder trial, but the prisoner seemed the least concerned person in the place. I saw Davidson and Stapleton not far away in the body of the court, but Ronald had been given a seat just behind Vickers. And then the trial began. Counsel for the Crown outlined the case for the prosecution, and though he spoke with studied moderation it was a pretty damning indictment. He admitted freely that the case rested on circumstantial evidence, but pointed out that ninety per cent. of murder cases did. Then he called his first witness— John Stapleton— who went into the box and took the oath.

He looked, I thought, strained and pale, but that was not to be wondered at. Yarrow had been a friend of his, but apart from that, to be one of the principal witnesses when a man's life is at stake is a nerve ordeal. However, he gave his evidence in a calm and steady voice, and when Vickers rose to cross-examine him, Stapleton gave him a courteous bow.

"Now, Mr. Stapleton, we have heard that you lunched with Mr. Briggs on the day of the murder. What time did you arrive at the house?"

"Between ten and a quarter-past one."

"And it is about ten minutes' walk, is it not, from where Mr. Yarrow was fishing?"

"That is so."

"You therefore left Mr. Yarrow at about one o'clock?"

"Yes."

"Before leaving him, did you take a photograph of him fishing?" Stapleton looked surprised, as did everyone else, including the judge; so far the fact had not been mentioned.

"Now you speak of it, I did," said Stapleton. "I'd really forgotten about it."

"But you remember now?"

"Perfectly. I had one exposure to complete the roll and I took one of him fishing."

"At about one o'clock?"

"Yes. It was just before I left him to go to lunch."

"Is this the photograph you took?"

Vickers held up the snapshot and Stapleton studied it.

"Yes. That is it."

"And is that tree that one sees half submerged in the water the one against which you found the body?"

"Yes. It is."

Vickers passed the photograph up to the judge.

"I would ask you to examine it carefully, m'lud. Now, Mr. Stapleton, is that tree down-stream or up-stream from the place where Mr. Yarrow was fishing?"

"Down-stream."

Vickers produced a book and opened it. And suddenly I glanced at Stapleton. Ceaselessly he was wetting his lips with his tongue.

"I have here," continued counsel quietly, "a book which gives the times of high and low water for every day of the year in every part of the country. Would it surprise you to know, Mr. Stapleton, that on the day Mr. Yarrow was murdered, high tide in the River Ling was at one-fifty p.m.?"

"I will take your word for it," said Stapleton in a low voice.

"Therefore, when you took this photograph at one o'clock it was not yet high water; the tide was still coming in?"

"If high water was at one-fifty it must have been."

"Then why, John Stapleton," cried Vickers in a terrible voice, "is it going out in that photograph? You can see the swirl of the water against the tree."

For what seemed an eternity did the man in the box stand there mouthing, and one could have heard a pin drop in the court. Then came a sudden shout of "Stop him," but it was too late. Stapleton had cheated the hangman. And maybe as a point in his favour he confessed before he died.

"THE MOTIVE— who can tell?" said Ronald, as we waited for lunch at Davidson's house. "But it was a devilish clever crime, though not quite clever enough. Somehow or other Stapleton must have known that Stern and Yarrow had had a row. Somehow or other he must have known that Stern left Yarrow a little before half-past two. The photograph which sealed his fate was probably taken to foster the idea that he and Yarrow were friends. And he forgot about high tide. If you remember, Davidson, it was just on the turn two days later at three-thirty. Now it gets about fifty minutes later every day, so that on the day of the murder high tide was an hour and forty minutes earlier— at one. His one slip. But as to motive..."

He shrugged his shoulders, and at that moment the butler announced Mr. Briggs.

"Won't keep you a moment, gentlemen," he said, "but there's just one point you might like to know. I thought no more about it till the trial to-day. At twenty-past two on the day Mr. Yarrow was murdered, someone rang Stapleton up at my house."

"Who?" said Ronald.

"Mrs. Yarrow."

21: The Sand-Walker

Fergus Hume

1859-1932

In: *The Dancer in Red*, 1906

I MAKE NO ENDEAVOUR to explain this experience. Explanation of it is impossible. I can conceive no theory upon which to base even the most slender attempt. It baffles me, it has always baffled me and it will continue to baffle me. Yet the impress of the thing loses nothing of its vividness with time.

It is as clear before me now, as it was within a few hours of its event. I believe I heard a ghost knocking; I am certain I saw a ghost moving. "Indigestion, fancy, an overwrought and distorted brain," you will say, no doubt.

I wish I could think it was. But it wasn't. The sequel to that glimpse of the dead was too terrible, the cause too pertinent to the effect, to permit for one moment of any attribution to disorder, mental or alimentary. No,— What I saw was actual self-existent. I will set down the facts for you as they occurred, and you shall explain them away— if you can. Then, if you remain unconvinced— go to Gartholm, by the German Ocean, and hear what the folk there have to say. They are a stodgy people, incapable utterly of the most insignificant hyperbole. They will tell you this tale plainly as I tell it to you. They believe as I believe.

It was in the summer of '96. I was travelling in "woollens" for the great Huddersfield firm of Carbury and Crank. Furnished with a gig and a fast-trotting mare, it was my duty to exploit the more scattered parts of the country, where the railroad was still unknown and civilisation, as we use the term, tarried a while.

Gartholm is the name given to a certain wide, low-lying plain, shut in from the North Sea by mile upon mile of sandhills. They are heaped up like hummocks along the coast. It was along a kind of causeway running straight through many miles of grain that I drove that hot July. I had never been in these parts, and I rejoiced at such ample evidence of fertility. It argued prosperity for those around; hence good business for myself and my employers. I made up my mind to remain there for at least a month. I left in less than half that time.

As if the plain itself were not sufficiently damp and low-lying, the village of Gartholm had been built in a kind of central depression, immediately beside the river. In other respects it differed but slightly from the ordinary English village, save that there was no inn. Close by the tower of the rubble-built church there was a pot-house, licensed for the sale of liquor "to be drunk on

the premises," but I failed there to get sleeping room either for myself or Tilly, my weary mare.

Darkness was close upon us and I was worn out with my day's drive. There seemed little prospect of comfort, even had I gained admittance to this miserable hovel. But that was denied me. The landlord, a bulky monumental lump of indolence, stood in the doorway and effectually blocked all entrance. A dozen or so of idlers collected to admire Tilly and amuse themselves at my expense. And I realised that there were worse fates than that of being cast upon an uninhabited island, even in this England of ours at the close of the nineteenth century.

While I was in this plight, arguing with the landlord and endeavouring to arrive approximately at the sense of his dialect, a being, human by contrast to those around, made his appearance from out the crowd, and approached my gig. He turned out to be the village schoolmaster, and those around called him "Muster Abram."

"You are looking for a lodging?" he said, in a smooth and (by comparison) strangely civilised voice.

"I am," I replied, soothing Tilly, who, small blame to her, in no wise appreciated her immediate surroundings. "I'm Dick Trossall, C.T. to Carbury and Crank, if you've ever heard of 'em in this forsaken hole."

"C.T.?" repeated Master Abraham interrogatively, cocking his one eye (he had lost the other) which was as bright as any robin's.

"Commercial Traveller," said I in explanation; "or bagman if you like it better. You don't comprehend Queen's English I see in these parts."

"Hardly; when so abbreviated. But if it really be board and lodging you seek, you can get that only from Mrs. Jarzil at the Beach Farm."

There was a murmur from those at hand, as he said the name, and, I thought, a somewhat dubious expression upon the faces of one or two. I did not on the whole, feel drawn towards Mrs. Jarzil and her farm, and I looked at the schoolmaster enquiringly. Utterly ignoring this, and vouchsafing me no reply, he proceeded straightway to climb into my gig, without so much as "by your leave." There was neither modesty nor undue hesitancy about Master Abraham.

"We will get on then to Mrs. Jarzil's farm," said I. A touch from the whip and Tilly was off at a good spanking trot in the direction Master Abraham had indicated. In a few moments we were out of sight of the hangers-on and driving through the street into another causeway similar to the first. In the distance we could see the house lying under the lee of the sandhills. A dismal sort of place it seemed, and wholly solitary.

"Yes, yonder is the Beach Farm," said the schoolmaster, "and Mrs. Jarzil." He stopped suddenly, so that I turned to look at him.

"What on earth is the matter with Mrs. Jarzil?"

"Nothing, nothing— I was merely wondering, not so much if she could, as whether she would, accommodate you. You see Mrs. Jarzil had some trouble with her last lodger. He was a botanist. He called himself Amber— Samuel Amber. Some two years ago it was; he boarded at the Beach Farm, then suddenly he disappeared."

"Disappeared? Good Lord! what do you mean?"

"Exactly what I say. He walked out of yonder house one night, and never returned."

We were close to the house now. It loomed up suddenly in the mist, which lay thick and heavy over the sandhills. I felt horribly depressed. Apart from the intense gloominess of the surroundings, the damp and darkness and desolation, all of which had perhaps more than their due effect upon my jaded nerves, I was conscious of an indefinite sense of uneasiness. This one-eyed creature at my elbow made me decidedly uncomfortable. I have not a robust nervous system at the best of times, and he with his sinister innuendoes was fast gaining a hold upon me.

"There was a daughter, you see," he went on, before I could speak.

"Oh, there was a daughter, was there?" I repeated somewhat relieved. It might be, after all, that he was nothing more than a mere scandal-monger. I fervently hoped so.

"Yes; and Mr. Amber made love to her— at least so it is supposed. At all events she disappeared, too."

"At the same time as the man?"

"Lottie was her name," continued Master Abraham, utterly heedless of my query, "and a pretty pink and white creature she was, with the loveliest golden hair. I used to call her Venus of the Fen. She was at the Farm when Amber first arrived. After a while he left, and she with him. He did not return for a twelvemonth, and then only to— to disappear."

"What on earth are you telling me all this rigmarole for? I don't care twopence for any of your Ambers and Lotties or Venuses either, for that matter. If the girl was as pretty as you say, I don't blame the man for going off with her. I presume she was a willing party to the arrangement."

"Mrs. Jarzil will have it that Amber forced her daughter to elope with him. You see he returned a year later— alone."

"Well, what explanation did he make?"

"None— none whatever."

"And what did the lady have to say to that?"

"Nothing. Amber took up his residence at the Farm as before, and remained there until— until he disappeared."

Upon my soul I was beginning to feel thoroughly scared.

"Do you mean to tell me that Mrs. Jarzil got rid of him by foul play?"

"Oh, dear me, no; nothing of the kind. Mrs. Jarzil is a most religious woman."

"Then what the; perhaps you will kindly make yourself clear. For what reason do you retail to me this parcel of rubbish?"

"Only this." He laid his skinny hand upon my arm. We were turning into the drive which led up to the house. He pointed with the other hand towards the sand-ridge.

"Only what?"

The man nodded. Then he whispered to me. "The Sand-Walker, you know."

An elderly woman had come to the door and was standing there. The chief thing I noticed about her was her determinedly masculine appearance. For the rest she was a veritable study in half tone. Her hair, her dress, her complexion, in fact everything about her, was of various shades of grey. Her mouth denoted a vile if not a violent temper.

My reception was anything but cordial; in fact at the outset she refused altogether to take me in, but under the persuasive eloquence of Master Abraham she relented so far as to agree to board me by the week at what to me seemed an exorbitant charge. She was evidently grasping as well as religious— a highly unpleasant combination I thought. But in the circumstances I had no option but to accept the inevitable. It was a case of any port in a storm.

As I proceeded to drive round to the stable to put up Tilly— a thing which I invariably attended to myself— Master Abraham accompanied me. And somehow I was glad of even his company. There was not a living soul about. I asked him why this was.

"Mrs. Jarzil keeps no servants," he replied. "She has not kept any since Lottie and Mr. Amber went away; or rather, to be precise, since Mr. Amber disappeared."

"How is that?"

"She can get none to come here— or to remain if they do come. They are afraid of the Sand-walker."

I asked him point blank what he meant. But I could get nothing out of him.

"Whatever you do, don't go on to the beaches at dusk," was all he said. Then he vanished. I say vanished advisedly, for though I ran after him to the door for the moment I could see no sign of him; I rushed on round the corner of the house, and came plump on to Mrs. Jarzil.

"Master Abraham!" I gasped.

Then Mrs. Jarzil pointed down the road, and I saw a flying figure disappearing into the darkness.

"Why does he run off like that?" I asked. I began to think I was losing my senses.

"Every one runs from Beach Farm," replied the woman in the coolest manner possible, and with that she left me staring in amazement.

I don't think anyone could dub me a coward, but this place unnerved me. Both within and without the house all was mysterious, weird, and uncanny. My spirits sank to zero and my nerves were strung up to a tension positively unendurable. Even the bright light from the kitchen fire filled me with apprehension. I could not touch food or drink.

Mrs. Jarzil, gliding about the room, in no wise reassured me. Masculine and ponderous as she was, the deftness and stealthiness of her movements were uncomfortably incongruous. She spoke not a word. She totally ignored my presence. I began to loathe the woman. But I determined that anything was better than the horrible suspense I was enduring. So I went straight for the thing which was making havoc of me.

"What is the Sand-walker, Mrs. Jarzil?"

At the moment she was polishing a dish cover. As I spoke it crashed on the floor. I never saw a woman turn quite so pale as she did then.

"Who has been talking to you about the Sand-walker?"

"Master Abraham," was my answer. By this time she was visibly shaking.

"Fool!" she exclaimed. "A triple fool, and dangerous, too. See here, you Mr. Trossall. I am willing to board you, but not to answer your silly questions. And if you don't like my house and my ways, you can leave them both. I can do without you. God knows I have had enough of boarders." Though it was rash, and for all I knew dangerous, willy-nilly the name Amber slipped my tongue. But she had regained her self-possession now, and laughed contemptuously as she picked up the dish cover.

"I see Abraham's been telling you my story. It is not a very pretty story, is it? Yes, Mr. Amber was a scoundrel. He carried off my daughter Lottie to London. Ay, and he had the boldness, too, to return here after his wickedness. I said nothing. It was my duty to forgive him, like a Christian, and I did. Although a mother, I am a Christian first. Poor Lottie! Poor child! I wonder where she is now."

"Do you know where Mr. Amber is?"

"Yes, Abraham told you no doubt that he disappeared. One would think he had been caught up into the moon; the way the fools round here talk. Yet the

explanation is perfectly simple. The man was accustomed to walk on the Beaches at night. There are quicksands there, and he fell into one."

"How do you know that?"

"I found his hat by one of the worst of them. He had sunk. I am glad he did. He ruined my life and Lottie's. But 'Vengeance is Mine; I will repay saith the Lord.' "

"And this Sand-walker; who, what is it?"

"That does not concern you. I have told you enough. I am not going to answer all your silly questions," she reiterated.

Not another word would she say. Still I felt somewhat relieved. Abraham had contrived to surround with an atmosphere of mystery what after all was purely an accident. I saw that now; and I was able to go to bed in a much more tranquil state of mind than I would otherwise have done.

My room was just off the kitchen. I hadn't been in it more than half an hour when I heard Mrs. Jarzil at her devotional exercises. I could hear her reading aloud certain Biblical extracts of a uniformly comminatory character. Her voice was peculiarly resonant and booming. Her choice seemed to me to range from Deuteronomy to Ezekiel and back again. "And Thine eye shall not pity; but life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot."

"And the earth opened her mouth and swallowed them up; they and all that appertained to them went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them."

"The wicked are overthrown and are not."

So for half an hour or more she went on, until I was in a cold perspiration. Then she knelt down and prayed, I was in hopes she had unbosomed herself for the night at all events. But then followed such a prayer as I have never heard. The ban of Jeremiah was a blessing to it. She cursed Amber, dead though he was. She cursed her daughter and called down upon her unfortunate head such visitations that I confess I shuddered. The woman was raving; yet all the time I could hear her sobbing, sobbing bitterly. The whole thing was ghastly, revolting. I would have given anything to get away.

At last she ceased, and, I presume, went to bed; though how she could sleep after such an indulgence was a marvel to me. But perhaps now that she had so assuaged her wrath, exhaustion if not relief would follow. I hoped so. At all events she was quiet. After a while I got up, to make sure that my door was securely fastened. Then I scrambled back to bed, and fell into an uneasy fitful doze. So I got through the long night. I never once slept soundly, and when I awoke in the morning I felt but little refreshed.

With the light came the sense of shame. I was inclined to deal severely with myself for my— as they now appeared to me— absurd apprehensions of the

previous night. I made up my mind then and there that I should be a downright coward if I carried out my determination to leave the place. My room was comfortable, and the food was good. And I rated myself roundly for being such an impressionable booby. Besides, I knew enough to make me curious to know more.

Albeit as silent as ever, I found Mrs. Jarzil civil and composed enough at breakfast. So although I had not succeeded in getting rid wholly of my aversion to the place, I started off in quest of business, saying that I would return about five o'clock.

I soon found out that so far as business went, at all events, I had fallen on my feet. The very excellent woollen goods of Messrs. Carbury and Crank appealed to these fen dwellers. They were a rheumatic lot. But that was more the fault of the locality than of themselves. At any rate the local dealers seized upon my samples with avidity, and I booked more orders in the day than I was accustomed to do in a week in some places. I returned therefore that evening to the Beach Farm in the best of spirits, but at the gate I encountered Master Abraham. He soon reduced them to a normal level.

"Well, how did you sleep?" he said, I thought with a twinkle in his eye.

"Like a top, of course; I always do."

"You heard nothing at your window?"

"Of course not. What should I hear?"

"Then you didn't go on to the Beaches?"

"Certainly not, I was only too glad to get to bed. Besides, were you not at particular pains to advise me against going there?"

"Yes, perhaps I was; and I repeat my advice. If you do, it will come to you at the window."

"What in heaven's name do you mean, man?"

"I mean the Sand-walker."

At that moment Tilly made a bound forward— she hates standing— and there was nothing for it but to let her go. The schoolmaster took himself off, and I drove up to the door.

But I silently swore at that skinny Abraham for bringing back to me the uneasy feelings of the previous night. His warning still rang in my ears. I could not get rid of it. I was determined I would not pass the night in ignorance. I resolved to take the bull by the horns and face whatever there was to face then and there.

After a "high tea" (that was between six and seven o'clock) I mentioned casually to Mrs. Jarzil that I was going for a stroll. She neither bade me go nor stay; so over the sandhills at the back of the house I scrambled until I found myself on the sea shore.

The beach was very dreary. All was still, save for the gentle swash of the wavelets breaking in upon the ribbed sand. There was but little wind. To right and left of me there stretched an interminable vista of sand, vanishing only to blend itself in the distance with the heavy mists, which even at that season of the year hung around. The little land-locked pools were blood-red with reflection of the sun. Through the off-shore of the sea and sun were ablaze with crimson light, I felt an awful sense of desolation as I sat there in the dip of a sand-hill watching the departing sun ring its changes on the spectrum. The crimson merged to amethyst, the amethyst to pearl, until in sombre greyness the light shut down upon the lonely shore.

A mad purposeless impulse seized me. With a whoop I ran down the firm sand to the brink of the water. I stood there for some moments looking out to sea. When I turned, the mists were thick even between me and the sand-hills. Darkness came down fold over fold. Every moment the fog became more damp and clammy, the sense of desolation more intense. I was isolated from all that was human; from God for aught I knew.

Then I thought of the quick-sands— of Mr. Amber — of Mr. Amber's hat found lying there; and I ran back, as I thought, to the sand hills. But I must have moved circuitously, for I could not reach even their friendly shelter. I lost my bearings hopelessly. Where the sea or where the hills I knew not. I rushed first this way, and then that, heedless and without design, intent only on escaping from the enshrouding mists, from the awesome desolation.

Suddenly the sands quaked under me. I stopped. The fate of Korah and his brethren flashed through my mind. My heart drummed loudly in the stillness. The mists grew thicker, the night darker. Then it was I saw It beside me.

At first I thought it was mortal— human— for its shape was that of a man. With an exclamation of thankfulness I endeavoured to approach it. But try as I might, I could not get near it. It did not walk, it did not glide, it did not fly. It simply melted in the mist, yet always visible, always retreating. That was the horror of the Thing.

My flesh creeped. I felt an icy cold through every pore of my skin. With awful insistence it was borne in upon me I was in the presence of the dead. Yet I was powerless. I could utter no cry. I could not even stop myself. On, on I went following that melting receding thing, until suddenly my foot stumbled on a sand-hill. Then It became mist with the mist, and I saw It no more. I scrambled up the hill and wept like a child.

How I reached the Beach Farm I cannot tell. I stumbled, blind with terror into the lamplight of the kitchen. I almost fell into Mrs. Jarzil's arms. She uttered no word of surprise, but sat there staring at my terror-stricken face and quivering limbs, silent and unsympathetic. At last she spoke.

"You have seen the Sand-walker?"

"In God's name what is it?"

"God has nothing to do with the Sand-walker," she replied. "It is wholly of hell."

I could speak no more that night. By help of some raw spirit I managed to pull myself together sufficiently to scramble into bed. The very sheets were a comfort to me; at all events they were between me and It.

I was utterly exhausted, and for a few hours I slept. I awoke suddenly with every nerve on the stretch, every sense acute almost beyond bearing. Mrs. Jarzil was vociferating in the kitchen, and sobbing between whiles. Then, as surely as I am a man and a Christian, I heard three loud knocks upon the window-pane. Mrs. Jarzil turned her imprecations into prayer. In her deep voice she boomed out verses from the Psalms: "Hear my cry, O God; attend unto my prayer."

I could stand it no longer. I flung myself out of bed, wrapped the coverlet around me, and rushed into the kitchen. Mrs. Jarzil was kneeling. Her face poured with perspiration. She paused as I appeared. There were three loud knocks at the door.

"What— O God, what is it?" I cried.

"The Sand-walker."

Then she prayed again: "I will abide in Thy tabernacle for ever. I will trust in the cover of Thy wings.

I made for the door, but Mrs. Jarzil seized me by the arm.

"Don't let him in, don't let him in. He wants me. It is Amber, I tell you. It is Amber."

"Amber! The Sand-walker!"

"Yes, yes. He is the Sand-walker. He wants me — down on the Beaches. If you open the door I am bound to go. He draws me; he compels me. But the Lord is my strength, and shall prevail against the powers of hell."

I had to prevent her from unbarring the door. She flung herself upon it and fumbled with the lock in frenzy. I dragged her back fearful lest she should admit the thing outside. Gradually she grew more calm, until at last she stood before me with a composure almost as terrible to behold as had been her frenzy.

"I have resisted the Devil, and he is fled!" she said. "You can go to bed now, Mr. Trossall. You will be disturbed no more. There will be no more knocking, no— more— knocking." She caught up the candle to go. I detained her till I took a light from it. Then I went to bed. I kept the light burning all night, but there was no more knocking.

Next morning not a word passed between us about what had occurred. I ate my breakfast and drove off to my business. In the main street I met Abraham. I hailed him.

"Is there no other place where I can find a lodging?" I asked him.

"Ah! so you have been on the Beaches?"

"Yes. I was there yesterday evening."

"You have seen the Sand-walker?"

"For God's sake don't speak of it," I said. For it terrified me even in the open day— here with the sunshine hot upon me.

"And you have heard the knocking?"

"Yes, I have heard everything— seen everything; let that suffice. Can I find another lodging, I ask you?"

"No; there is none other in the district. But why need you fear. It is she— not you, the Sand-walker wants, ay, and he'll get her one night"

"You know this Sand-walker, as you call him, is Amber."

"All Gartholm knows that. He has been walking for a year past now on the Beaches. No one would go there now for any money you could offer them— at least not after sun-down. I warned you, you remember."

"I know you did. But nevertheless I went, you see. And this Sand-walker saved my life. For he led me back to the sand hills when I had lost myself hopelessly in the fog."

"It's not you he wants, I tell you, it's she."

"Why does he want her?" I asked.

The man's tone was very strange.

"Ask of the quicksands!" he replied; and with that disappeared in a hurry. I was getting quite accustomed to this, and would have been surprised had he taken his leave in anything approaching a rational manner.

Now, you may perhaps hardly credit it, but I tossed a shilling then and there to decide my action in the immediate future. "Heads I go, tails I stay."

The coin spun up in the sunlight. Tails it was. So I was to remain, and in that devil-haunted house. Well, at all events I was doing a brisk trade. There was some comfort in that.

During the next ten days I drove for miles over the district, and did uncommonly well everywhere. I found that the legend of the Beach Farm was universally familiar, and they all shook their heads very gravely indeed when they learned that I lodged there. In fact, I am not at all sure that this was not of assistance to me rather than otherwise. I became an object of intense interest, and, no doubt, of sympathy had I known it.

After that terrible night, there was a lull in the torment of the Sand-walker. Occasionally it rapped at the door or the window, but that was all. As for me I walked no more on the Beaches.

But the time was near at hand when the Devil would have his own. It came one evening about six o'clock. There had been heavy rain, and the marshy lands were flooded and the mists were thick around. Overhead all was opaque and grey, and the ground was sodden under foot. I was anxious to get home, and Tilly was doing all she knew.

"On arrival I looked after her as was my wont, first and foremost. When I had made her comfortable for the night I returned to the kitchen. To my surprise I found Mrs. Jarzil in conversation with a girl, in whom from Abraham's description, meagre though it had been, I had no difficulty in recognising his Venus of the Fen. She was certainly pretty. I agreed with Abraham there. She was crying bitterly, whilst her mother raged at her. They both stopped short as I entered— a sense of delicacy, no doubt.

"Whatever is the matter?" I asked, surveying the pair of them.

"Oh, sir, you are mother's new lodger, aren't you?" said the girl. "Master Abraham told me as she had one. Do please ask her to hear reason, do, I implore you, sir."

"I will allow no one to interfere with my private aflairs," said Mrs. Jarzil, stamping her foot. "If you are wise you will not seek to make public your disgrace."

"There is no disgrace. I have done nothing to be ashamed of, I tell you."

"No disgrace? No disgrace in allowing yourself to be beguiled by that man— to be fooled by his good looks and soft speeches?"

"What do you mean, mother? I have nothing to do with Mr. Amber."

"Liar, you ran away with him. What more could you have to do with him, I should like to know?"

Lottie's spirit rose, and with it the colour to her cheeks. "I ran away with him? Indeed I did nothing of the kind. It was you who made me run away. You treated me so cruelly that I determined to go into service in London. I was sick to death of your scolding, and your preaching and praying, and this dismal house, and these horrible mists, and never a soul to speak to, sick to death of it I tell you. That's why I went. Mr. Amber indeed!" (this with a toss of her head). "I have more taste than to take up with the likes of him. I met him as he was leaving here. I was walking, and he offered me a lift— "

"Abr'am saw you; Abr'am saw you both!" interrupted her mother savagly. "He told me you had eloped with the man."

"That was a lie. I parted from Mr. Amber at the London railway station. From that time to this I have never set eyes upon him. For my own sake I made him promise to hold his tongue."

"He did— he did!" cried Mrs. Jarzil, wildly. "God help him and me, he did. He returned here, but he said nothing— made no explanation. I believed he had ruined you. Now, oh now, I see it all. And you have ruined me."

"Oh, mother, what do you mean?"

"Why did you not let him speak? Oh, why did you not write and explain. I believed— I thought he had robbed me of you— and I revenged myself upon him.

"Revenged yourself?" I cried. I began to have an inkling of what was coming. But Mrs. Jarzil paid no heed to me. She shook Lottie furiously.

"Do you know what your silence has cost me?" (She was beside herself now). "It has cost me my soul— my soul, I say. Oh, why did you let me believe him guilty? I killed him. I murdered him for your sake. It was not vengeance, it was not justice, it was crime— crime and evil."

"You— killed— Mr. Amber?

"Yes; I killed him. I swore he should pay for what he had done. His own curiosity did for him. I played upon it. I lured him to the quicksands."

"The quicksands?" I repeated, horrified.

"I placed a lantern on the brink of the most dangerous of them," the woman continued, feverishly. "He used habitually to walk on the Beaches at dark. His curiosity did the rest. He had to see what that light was. I knew he would. It was the last light he ever saw in this world. Yes, you call it murder. It was murder. But it was your fault— your fault. And now he walks, and taps at the door for me. He wants me; he wants me. I thought I had justice on my side— that I was avenging your disgrace; and I fought with my soul; oh, how I fought! But now— I see he is right. It is I who must now be punished. I must go. I must go. Oh, God be merciful to me, a sinner."

Lottie lay stretched on the floor. She had fainted. I placed myself between her mother and the door. I dared not let her out.

"Where would you go?" I cried, seizing her by the arm and frustrating a desperate effort to get away. She was fairly demented, and seemed possessed of strength almost demoniacal.

"To the Beaches— to my death. Let me go— let me go. An eye for an eye, I say— a tooth for a tooth. That is the law of God. Hark! Listen! He calls — he calls me." (I could hear nothing but the howling of the wind.) "I must go, I must go, I must— "

She was too quick for me. Before I had time to stop her she was away into the desolate night. I rushed after her. In her present condition there was no

knowing what she might do. Clearly her mind was unhinged. I could hardly see for the rain. It was nearly dark too. But on through the mire and the mist I went. I jostled up against a man. It was Abraham. I remembered it was he who had caused all this, and with the thought I lost control of myself. I gripped him by the throat.

"You dog— you liar! Lottie the girl has come back!"

"I— I— I know!" he gasped. "I was coming up to see her. Leave, me alone. What do you mean by this?"

"You deserve it, and more, you villain. You know well the girl did not go with Amber. You lied to her mother; you made her think so. You were in love with her yourself. The man's death lies at your door more than at hers. She has gone to the Beaches— to her death, I tell you— unless she is stopped."

Then I realised that I was wasting time. I hastened on, regretting deeply that my feelings had so got the better of me just then.

It was blowing half a gale, though it was not till I had crossed the sandhills that I realised it. Then the full blast of the wind struck me. It was as much as I could do to keep my feet. I could not see the woman anywhere, though I peered into the gloom until my head swam. Not a sign of her or any living creature could I see. There was nothing but the roar of the wind and the sea, and the swish of the driving rain.

Then I thought I heard a cry— a faint cry. I ploughed my way down in the direction whence I fancied it came. I became aware that Abraham had followed me. He was close behind me. Together we groped blindly on.

"He'll get her this time!" shouted the man.

"Come on! Come on!" I roared at him. "Yonder she is."

"And yonder the Sand-walker."

The wretch hung back. Then a gust of wind, more concentrated and more fierce than before, seemed to rend an opening in the fog. Two shadows could be seen fluttering along— one a man of unusual height, the other a woman, reeling and swaying. She followed the Thing. As we gazed, a light appeared in the distance, radiant as a star. Its brilliance grew, and spread far and wide through the fog. The tall figure moved up to and past the light— the other following, always following.

She staggered and flung up her arms, and a wild and despairing cry rang out above the elements. And the light gradually died away, and the wind howled on, driving the mists across the sinking figure.

Slowly she sank into the sand, deeper and deeper. One last terrible moan reached us where we were, then she disappeared. For the moment the storm seemed to hush. Then all was darkness.

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22: Through the Ivory Gate

Mary Raymond Shipman Andrews

1860-1936

Scribner's Magazine, June 1905

BREEZE FILTERED through shuffling leafage, the June morning sunlight came in at the open window by the boy's bed, under the green shades, across the shadowy, white room, and danced a noiseless dance of youth and freshness and springtime against the wall opposite. The boy's head stirred on his pillow. He spoke a quick word from out of his dream. "The key?" he said inquiringly, and the sound of his own voice awoke him. Dark, drowsy eyes opened, and he stared half-seeing, at the picture that hung facing him. Was it the play of mischievous sunlight, was it the dream that still held his brain? He knew the picture line by line, and there was no such figure in it. It was a large photograph of Fairfield, the southern home of his mother's people, and the boy remembered it always hanging there, opposite his bed, the first sight to meet his eyes every morning since his babyhood. So he was certain there was no figure in it, more than all one so remarkable as this strapping little chap in his queer clothes, his dress of conspicuous plaid with large black velvet squares sewed on it, who stood now in front of the old manor house. Could it be only a dream? Could it be that a little ghost, wandering childlike in dim, heavenly fields, had joined the gay troop of his boyish visions and slipped in with them through the ivory gate of pleasant dreams? The boy put his fists to his eyes and rubbed them and looked again. The little fellow was still there, standing with sturdy legs wide apart as if owning the scene; he laughed as he held toward the boy a key— a small key tied with a scarlet ribbon. There was no doubt in the boy's mind that the key was for him, and out of the dim world of sleep he stretched his young arm for it; to reach it he sat up in bed. Then he was awake and knew himself alone in the peace of his own little room, and laughed shamefacedly at the reality of the vision which had followed him from dreamland into the very boundaries of consciousness, which held him even now with gentle tenacity, which drew him back through the day, from his studies, from his play, into the strong current of its fascination.

The first time Philip Beckwith had this dream he was only twelve years old, and, withheld by the deep reserve of childhood, he told not even his mother about it, though he lived in its atmosphere all day and remembered it vividly days longer. A year after it came again; and again it was a June morning, and as his eyes opened the little boy came once more out of the picture toward him, laughing and holding out the key on its scarlet string. The dream was a pleasant one, and Philip welcomed it eagerly from his sleep as a friend. There seemed something sweet and familiar in the child's presence beyond the one

memory of him, as again the boy, with eyes half-open to everyday life, saw him standing, small but masterful, in the garden of that old house where the Fairfields had lived for more than a century. Half-consciously he tried to prolong the vision, tried not to wake entirely for fear of losing it; but the picture faded surely from the curtain of his mind as the tangible world painted there its heavier outlines. It was as if a happy little spirit had tried to follow him, for love of him, from a country lying close, yet separated; it was as if the common childhood of the two made it almost possible for them to meet; as if a message that might not be spoken, were yet almost delivered.

The third time the dream came it was a December morning of the year when Philip was fifteen, and falling snow made wavering light and shadow on the wall where hung the picture. This time, with eyes wide open, yet with the possession of the dream strongly on him, he lay subconsciously alert and gazed, as in the odd unmistakable dress that Philip knew now in detail, the bright— faced child swung toward him, always from the garden of that old place, always trying with loving, merry efforts to reach Philip from out of it— always holding to him the red ribboned key. Like a wary hunter the big boy lay— knowing it unreal, yet living it keenly— and watched his chance. As the little figure glided close to him, he put out his hand suddenly, swiftly for the key— he was awake. As always, the dream was gone; the little ghost was baffled again; the two worlds might not meet.

That day Mrs. Beckwith, puffing in order an old mahogany secretary, showed him a drawer full of photographs, daguerreotypes. The boy and his gay young mother were the best of friends, for, only nineteen when he was born, she had never let the distance widen between them; had held the freshness of her youth sacred against the time when he should share it. Year by year, living in his enthusiasms, drawing him to hers, she had grown young in his childhood, which year by year came closer to her maturity. Until now there was between the tall, athletic lad and the still young and attractive woman, an equal friendship, a common youth, which gave charm and elasticity to the natural tie between them. Yet even to this comrade-mother the boy had not told his dream, for the difficulty of putting into words the atmosphere, the compelling power of it. So that when she opened one of the old-fashioned black cases which held the early sun-pictures, and showed him the portrait within, he startled her by a sudden exclamation. From the frame of red velvet and tarnished gilt there laughed up at him the little boy of his dream. There was no mistaking him, and if there were doubt about the face, there was the peculiar dress— the black and white plaid with large squares of black velvet sewed here and there as decoration. Philip stared in astonishment at the sturdy figure; the

childish face with its wide forehead and level, strong brows; its dark eyes straight-gazing and smiling.

"Mother— who is he? Who is he?" he demanded.

"Why, my lamb, don't you know? It's your little uncle Philip— my brother, for whom you were named— Philip Fairfield the sixth. There was always a Philip Fairfield at Fairfield since 1790. This one was the last, poor baby! And he died when he was five. Unless you go back there some day— that's my hope, but it's not likely to come true. You are a Yankee, except for the big half of you that's me. That's southern, every inch." She laughed and kissed his fresh cheek impulsively. "But what made you so excited over this picture, Phil?"

Philip gazed down, serious, a little embarrassed, at the open case in his hand. "Mother," he said after a moment, "you'll laugh at me, but I've seen this chap in a dream three times now."

"Oh!" She did laugh at him. "Oh, Philip! What have you been eating for dinner, I'd like to know? I can't have you seeing visions of your ancestors at fifteen— it's unhealthy."

The boy, reddening, insisted. "But, Mother, really, don't you think it was queer? I saw him as plainly as I do now— and I've never seen this picture before."

"Oh, yes, you have— you must have seen it," his mother threw back lightly. "You've forgotten, but the image of it was tucked away in some dark corner of your mind, and when you were asleep it stole out and played tricks on you. That's the way forgotten ideas do: they get even with you in dreams for having forgotten them."

"Mother, only listen— -" But Mrs. Beckwith, her eyes lighting with a swift turn of thought, interrupted him— laid her finger on his lips.

"No— you listen, boy dear— quick, before I forget it! I've never told you about this, and it's very interesting."

And the youngster, used to these willful ways-of his sistermother, laughed and put his fair head against her shoulder and listened.

"It's quite a romance," she began, "only there isn't any end to it; it's all unfinished and disappointing. It's about this little Philip here, whose name you have— my brother. He died when he was five, as I said, but even then he had a bit of dramatic history in his life. He was born just before wartime in 1859, and he was a beautiful and wonderful baby; I can remember all about it, for I was six years older. He was incarnate sunshine, the happiest child that ever lived, but far too quick and clever for his years. The servants used to ask him, 'Who is you, Marse Philip, sah?' to hear him answer, before he could speak it plainly, 'I'm Philip Fairfield of Fairfield'; he seemed to realize that, and his responsibility to them and to the place, as soon as he could breathe. He wouldn't have a

darky scolded in his presence, and every morning my father put him in front of him in the saddle, and they rode together about the plantation. My father adored him, and little Philip's sunshiny way of taking possession of the slaves and the property pleased him more deeply, I think, than anything in his life. But the war came before this time, when the child was about a year old, and my father went off, of course, as every southern man went who could walk, and for a year we did not see him. Then he was badly wounded at the battle of Malvern Hill; and came home to get well. However, it was more serious than he knew, and he did not get well. Twice he went off again to join our army, and each time he was sent back within a month, too ill to be of any use. He chafed constantly, of course, because he must stay at home and farm, when his whole soul ached to be fighting for his flag; but finally in December 1863, he thought he was well enough at last for service. He was to join General John Morgan, who had just made his wonderful escape from prison at Columbus, and it was planned that my mother should take lithe Philip and me to England to live there till the war was over and we could all be together at Fairfield again. With that in view my father drew all of his ready money— it was ten thousand dollars in gold— from the banks in Lexington, for my mother's use in the years they might be separated. When suddenly, the day before he was to have gone, the old wound broke out again, and he was helplessly ill in bed at the hour when he should have been on his horse riding toward Tennessee. We were fifteen miles out from Lexington, yet it might be rumored that father had drawn a large sum of money, and, of course, he was well known as a Southern officer. Because of the Northern soldiers, who held the city, he feared very much to have the money in the house, yet he hoped still to join Morgan a lithe later, and then it would be needed as he had planned. Christmas morning my father was so much better that my mother went to church, taking me, and leaving lithe Philip, then four years old, to amuse him. What happened that morning was the point of all this rambling; so now listen hard, my precious thing."

The boy, sitting erect now, caught his mother's hand silently, and his eyes stared into hers as he drank in every word:

"Mammy, who was, of course, little Philip's nurse, told my mother afterward that she was sent away before my father and the boy went into the garden, but she saw them go and saw that my father had a tin box— a box about twelve inches long, which seemed very heavy— in his arms, and on his finger swung a long red ribbon with a little key strung on it. Mother knew it as the key of the box, and she had tied the ribbon on it herself.

"It was a bright, crisp Christmas day, pleasant in the garden— the box hedges were green and fragrant, aromatic in the sunshine. You don't even

know the smell of box in sunshine, you poor child! But I remember that day, for I was ten years old, a right big girl, and it was a beautiful morning for an invalid to take the air. Mammy said she was proud to see how her 'handsome boy' kept step with his father, and she watched the two until they got away down by the rose garden, and then she couldn't see little Philip behind the three-foot hedge, so she turned away. But somewhere in that big garden, or under the trees beside it, my father buried the box that held the money— ten thousand dollars. It shows how he trusted that baby, that he took him with him, and you'll see how his trust was only too well justified. For that evening, Christmas night, very suddenly my father died— before he had time to tell my mother where he had hidden the box. He tried; when consciousness came a few minutes before the end he gasped out, 'I buried the money'— and then he choked. Once again he whispered just two words: 'Philip knows.' And my mother said, 'Yes, dearest— Philip and I will find it— don't worry, dearest,' and that quieted him. She told me about it so many times.

"After the funeral she took little Philip and explained to him as well as she could that he must tell Mother where he and Father had put the box, and— this is the point of it all, Philip— he wouldn't tell. She went over and over it all, again and again, but it was no use. He had given his word to my father never to tell, and he was too much of a baby to understand how death had dissolved that promise. My mother tried every way, of course, explanations and reasoning first, then pleading, and finally severity; she even punished the poor lithe martyr, for it was awfully important to us all. But the four-year-old baby was absolutely incorruptible. He cried bitterly and sobbed out:

"'Farver said I mustn't never tell anybody— never! Farver said Philip Fairfield of Fairfield mustn't never bweak his words,' and that was all.

"Nothing could induce him to give the least hint. Of course there was great search for it, but it was well hidden and it was never found. Finally, Mother took her obdurate son and me and came to New York with us, and we lived on the little income which she had of her own. Her hope was that as soon as Philip was old enough she could make him understand, and go back with him and get that large sum lying underground— lying there yet, perhaps. But in less than a year the little boy was dead and the secret was gone with him."

Philip Beckwith's eyes were intense and wide. The Fairfield eyes, brown and brilliant, their young fire was concentrated on his mother's face.

"Do you mean that money is buried down there, yet, mother?" he asked solemnly.

Mrs. Beckwith caught at the big fellow's sleeve with slim fingers. "Don't go today, Phil— wait till after lunch, anyway!"

"Please don't make fun, Mother— I want to know about it. Think of it lying there in the ground!"

"Greedy boy! We don't need money now, Phil. And the old place will be yours when I am dead— " The lad's arm went about his mother's shoulders. "Oh, but I'm not going to die for ages! Not till I'm a toothless old person with side curls, hobbling along on a stick. Like this!"— she sprang to her feet and the boy laughed a great peal at the haglike effect as his young mother threw herself into the part. She dropped on the divan again at his side.

"What I meant to tell you was that your father thinks it very unlikely that the money is there yet, and almost impossible that we could find it in any case. But some day when the place is yours you can have it put through a sieve if you choose. I wish I could think you would ever live there, Phil; but I can't imagine any chance by which you should. I should hate to have you sell it— it has belonged to a Philip Fairfield so many years."

A week later the boy left his childhood by the side of his mother's grave. His history for the next seven years may go in a few lines. School days, vacations, the four years at college, outwardly the commonplace of an even and prosperous development, inwardly the infinite variety of experience by which each soul is a person; the result of the two so wholesome a product of young manhood that no one realized under the frank and open manner a deep reticence, an intensity, a sensitiveness to impressions, a tendency toward mysticism which made the fiber of his being as delicate as it was strong.

Suddenly, in a turn of the wheel, all the externals of his life changed. His rich father died penniless and he found himself on his own hands, and within a month the boy who had owned five polo ponies was a hard-working reporter on a great daily. The same quick-wittedness and energy which had made him a good polo player made him a good reporter. Promotion came fast and, as those who are busiest have the most time to spare, he fell to writing stories. When the editor of a large magazine took one, Philip first lost respect for that dignified person, then felt ashamed to have imposed on him, then rejoiced utterly over the check. After that editors fell into the habit; the people he ran against knew about his books; the checks grew better reading all the time; a point came where it was more profitable to stay at home and imagine events than to go out and report them. He had been too busy as the days marched to generalize; but suddenly he knew that he was a successful writer, that if he kept his head and worked, a future was before him. So he soberly put his own English by the side of that of a master or two from his bookshelves, to keep his perspective clear, and then he worked harder. And it came to be five years after his father's death.

At the end of those years three things happened at once. The young man suddenly was very tired and knew that he needed the vacation he had gone without; a check came in large enough to make a vacation easy; and he had his old dream. His fagged brain had found it but another worry to decide where he should go to rest, but the dream settled the vexed question offhand— he would go to Kentucky. The very thought of it brought rest to him, for like a memory of childhood, like a bit of his own soul, he knew the country— the "God's Country" of its people— which he had never seen. He caught his breath as he thought of warm, sweet air that held no hurry or nerve strain; of lingering sunny days whose hours are longer than in other places; of the soft speech, the serene and kindly ways of the people; of the royal welcome waiting for him as for everyone, heartfelt and heart-warming; he knew it all from a daughter of Kentucky— his mother. It was May now, and he remembered she had told him that the land was filled with roses at the end of May— he would go then. He owned the old place, Fairfield, and he had never seen it. Perhaps it had fallen to pieces; perhaps his mother had painted it in colors too bright; but it was his, the bit of the earth that belonged to him. The Anglo-Saxon joy of landowning stirred for the first time within him— he would go to his own place. Buoyant with the new thought, he sat down and wrote a letter. A cousin of the family, of a younger branch, a certain John Fairfield, lived yet upon the land. Not in the great house, for that had been closed many years, but in a small house almost as old, called Westerly. Philip had corresponded with him once or twice about affairs of the estate, and each letter of the older man's had brought a simple and urgent invitation to come South and visit him. So, pleased as a child with the plan, he wrote that he was coming on a certain Thursday, late in May. The letter sent, he went about in a dream of the South, and when its answer, delighted and hospitable, came simultaneously with one of those bleak and windy turns of weather which make New York, even in May, a marvelously fitting place to leave, he could not wait. Almost a week ahead of his time he packed his bag and took the Southwestern Limited, and on a bright Sunday morning he awoke in the old Phoenix Hotel in Lexington. He had arrived too late the night before to make the fifteen miles to Fairfield, but he had looked over the horses in the livery stable and chosen the one he wanted, for he meant to go on horseback, as a southern gentleman should, to his domain. That he meant to go alone, that no one, not even John Fairfield, knew of his coming, was not the least of his satisfactions, for the sight of the place of his forefathers, so long neglected, was becoming suddenly a sacred thing to him. The old house and its young owner should meet each other like sweethearts, with no eyes to watch their greeting, their slow and sweet acquainting; with no living voices to drown the

sound of the ghostly voices that must greet his homecoming from those walls— voices of his people who had lived there, voices gone long since into eternal silence.

A little crowd of loungers stared with frank admiration at the young fellow who came out smiling from the door of the Phoenix Hotel, big and handsome in his riding clothes, his eyes taking in the details of girths and bits and straps with the keenness of a horseman.

Philip laughed as he swung into the saddle and looked down at the friendly faces, most of them black faces, below. "Goodbye, " he said. "Wish me good luck, won't you?" and a willing chorus of "Good luck, boss," came flying after him as the horse's hoofs clattered down the street.

Through the bright drowsiness of the little city he rode in the early Sunday morning, and his heart sang for joy to feel himself again across a horse, and for the love of the place that warmed him already. The sun shone hotly, but he liked it; he felt his whole being slipping into place, fitting to its environment; surely, in spite of birth and breeding, he was southern born and bred, for this felt like home more than any home he had known!

As he drew away from the city, every little while, through stately woodlands, a dignified sturdy mansion peeped down its long vista of trees at the passing cavalier, and, enchanted with its beautiful setting, with its air of proud unconsciousness, he hoped each time that Fairfield would look like that. If he might live here— and go to New York, to be sure, two or three times a year to keep the edge of his brain sharpened— but if he might live his life as these people lived, in this unhurried atmosphere, in this perfect climate, with the best things in his reach for everyday use; with horses and dogs, with out-of-doors and a great, lovely country to breathe in; with— he smiled vaguely— with sometime perhaps a wife who loved it as he did— he would ask from earth no better life than that. He could write, he felt certain, better and larger things in such surroundings.

But he pulled himself up sharply as he thought how idle a daydream it was. As a fact, he was a struggling young author, he had come South for two weeks' vacation, and on the first morning he was planning to live here— he must be lightheaded. With a touch of his heel and a word and a quick pull on the curb, his good horse broke into a canter, and then, under the loosened rein, into a rousing gallop, and Philip went dashing down the country road, past the soft, rolling landscape, and under cool caves of foliage, vivid with emerald greens of May, thoughts and dreams all dissolved in exhilaration of the glorious movement, the nearest thing to flying that the wingless animal, man, may achieve.

He opened his coat as the blood rushed faster through him, and a paper fluttered from his pocket. He caught it, and as he pulled the horse to a trot, he saw that it was his cousin's letter. So, walking now along the brown shadows and golden sunlight of the long white pike, he fell to wondering about the family he was going to visit. He opened the folded letter and read:

"My dear Cousin," it said— the kinship was the first thought in John Fairfield's mind— "I received your welcome letter on the 14th. I am delighted that you are coming at last to Kentucky, and I consider that it is high time you paid Fairfield, which has been the cradle of your stock for many generations, the compliment of looking at it. We closed our house in Lexington three weeks ago, and are settled out here now for the summer, and find it lovelier than ever. My family consists only of myself and Shelby, my one child, who is now twenty-two years of age. We are both ready to give you an old-time Kentucky welcome, and Westerly is ready to receive you at any moment you wish to come."

The rest was merely arrangements for meeting the traveler, all of which were done away with by his earlier arrival.

"A prim old party, with an exalted idea of the family," commented Philip mentally. "Well-to-do, apparently, or he wouldn't be having a winter house in the city. I wonder what the boy Shelby is like. At twenty-two he should be doing something more profitable than spending an entire summer out here, I should say."

The questions faded into the general content of his mind at the glimpse of another stately old pillared homestead, white and deep down its avenue of locusts. At length he stopped his horse to wait for a ragged Negro trudging cheerfully down the road.

"Do you know a place around here called Fairfield?" he asked.

"Yessah. I does that, sah. It's that ar' place right hyeh, sah, by yo' hoss. That ar's Fahfiel'. Shall I open the gate fo' you, boss?" and Philip turned to see a hingeless ruin of boards held together by the persuasion of rusty wire.

"The home of my fathers looks down in the mouth," he reflected aloud.

The old Negro's eyes, gleaming from under shaggy sheds of eyebrows, watched him, and he caught the words.

"Is you a Fahfiel', boss?" he asked eagerly. "Is you my young marse?" He jumped at the conclusion promptly. "You favors de fam'ly mightily, sah. I heerd you was comin"; the rag of a hat went off and he bowed low. "Hit's cert'nly good news fo' Fahfiel', Marse Philip, hit's mighty good news fo' us niggers, sah. I'se btlonged to the Fahfiel' fam'ly a hundred years, Marse— me and my folks, and I wishes yo' a welcome home, sah— welcome home, Marse Philip."

Philip bent with a quick movement from his horse and gripped the twisted old black hand, speechless. This humble welcome on the highway caught at his heart deep down, and the appeal of the colored people to southerners, who know them, the thrilling appeal of a gentle, loyal race, doomed to live forever behind a veil and hopeless without bitterness, stirred for the first time his manhood. It touched him to be taken for granted as the child of his people; it pleased him that he should be "Marse Philip" as a matter of course, because there had always been a Marse Philip at the place. It was bred deeper in the bone of him than he knew, to understand the soul of the black man; the stuff he was made of had been southern two hundred years.

The old man went off down the white limestone road singing to himself, and Philip rode slowly under the locusts and beeches up the long drive, grass-grown and lost in places, that wound through the woodland three-quarters of a mile to his house. And as he moved through the park, through sunlight and shadow of these great trees that were his, he felt like a knight of King Arthur, like some young knight long exiled, at last coming to his own. He longed with an unreasonable seizure of desire to come here to live, to take care of it, beautify it, fill it with life and prosperity as it had once been filled, surround it with cheerful faces of colored people whom he might make happy and comfortable. If only he had money to pay off the mortgage, to put the place once in order, it would be the ideal setting for the life that seemed marked out for him— the life of a writer.

The horse turned a corner and broke into a canter up the slope, and as the shoulder of the hill fell away there stood before him the picture of his childhood come to life, smiling drowsily in the morning sunlight with shuttered windows that were its sleeping eyes— the great white house of Fairfield. Its high pillars reached to the roof; its big wings stretched away at either side; the flicker of the shadow of the leaves played over it tenderly and hid broken bits of woodwork, patches of paint cracked away, windowpanes gone here and there. It stood as if too proud to apologize or to look sad for such small matters, as serene, as stately as in its prime. And its master, looking at it for the first time, loved it.

He rode around to the side and tied his mount to an old horse-rack, and then walked up the wide front steps as if each lift were an event. He turned the handle of the big door without much hope that it would yield, but it opened willingly, and he stood inside. A broom lay in a corner, windows were open— his cousin had been making ready for him. There was the huge mahogany sofa, horsehair-covered, in the window under the stairs, where his mother had read Ivanhoe and The Talisman. Philip stepped softly across the wide hall and laid his head where must have rested the brown hair of the little

girl who had come to be, first all of his life, and then its dearest memory. Half an hour he spent in the old house, and its walls echoed to his footsteps as if in ready homage, and each empty room whose door he opened met him with a sweet half-familiarity. The whole place was filled with the presence of the child who had loved it and left it, and for whom this tall man, her child, longed now as if for a little sister who should be here, and whom he missed. With her memory came the thought of the five-year-old uncle who had made history for the family so disastrously. He must see the garden where that other Philip had gone with his father to hide the money on the fated Christmas morning. He closed the house door behind him carefully, as if he would not disturb a little girl reading in the window, a little boy sleeping perhaps in the nursery above. Then he walked down the broad sweep of the driveway, the gravel crunching under the grass, and across what had been a bit of velvet lawn, and stood for a moment with his hand on a broken vase, weed-filled, which capped the stone post of a gateway.

All the garden was misty with memories. Where a tall golden flower nodded alone from out of the tangled thicket of an old flowerbed a bright-haired child might have laughed with just that air of starred, gay naughtiness, from the forbidden center of the blossoms. In the molded tan-bark of the path was a vague print, like the ghost of a footprint that had passed down the way a lifetime ago. The box, half-dead, half-sprouted into high unkept growth, still stood stiffly against the riotous overflow of weeds as if it yet held loyally to its business of guarding the borders. Philip shifted his gaze slowly, lingering over the dim contours, the shadowy shape of what the garden had been. Suddenly his eyes opened wide. How was this? There was a hedge as neat, as clipped, as any of Southampton in midseason, and over it a glory of roses, red and white and pink and yellow, waved gay banners to him in trim luxuriance. He swung toward them, and the breeze brought him for the first time in his life the fragrance of box in sunshine.

Three feet tall, shaven and thick and shining, the old hedge stood, and the garnered sweetness of a hundred years' slow growth breathed delicately from it toward the great-great-grandson of the man who planted it. A box hedge takes as long in the making as a gentleman, and when they are done the two are much of a sort. No plant in all the garden has so subtle an air of breeding, so gentle a reserve, yet so gracious a message of sweetness for all of the world who will stop to learn it. It keeps a firm dignity under the stress of tempest when lighter growths are tossed and torn; it shines bright through the snow; it has a well-bred willingness to be background, with the well-bred gift of presence, whether as background or foreground. The soul of the box tree is an aristocrat, and the sap that runs through it is the blue blood of vegetation.

Saluting him bravely in the hot sunshine with its myriad shining sword points, the old hedge sent out to Philip on the May breeze its ancient welcome of aromatic fragrance, and the tall roses crowded gaily to look over its edge at the new master. Slowly, a little dazed at this oasis of shining order in the neglected garden, he walked to the opening and stepped inside the hedge. The rose garden! The famous rose garden of Fairfield, and as his mother had described it, in full splendor of cared-for, orderly bloom. Across the paths he stepped swiftly till he stood amid the roses, giant bushes of Jacqueminot and Marechal Niel; of pink and white and red and yellow blooms in thick array. The glory of them intoxicated him. That he should own all of this beauty seemed too good to be true, and instantly he wanted to taste his ownership. The thought came to him that he would enter into his heritage with strong hands here in the rose garden; he caught a deep-red Jacqueminot almost roughly by its gorgeous head and broke off the stem. He would gather a bunch, a huge, unreasonable bunch of his own flowers. Hungrily he broke one after another; his shoulders bent over them, he was deep in the bushes.

"I reckon I shall have to ask you not to pick any more of those roses," a voice said.

Philip threw up his head as if he had been shot; he turned sharply with a great thrill, for he thought his mother spoke to him. Perhaps it was only the southern inflection so long unheard, perhaps the sunlight that shone in his eyes dazzled him, but, as he stared, the white figure before him seemed to him to look exactly as his mother had looked long ago. Stumbling over his words, he caught at the first that came.

"I— I think it's all right," he said.

The girl smiled frankly, yet with a dignity in her puzzled air. "I'm afraid I shall have to be right decided," she said. "These roses are private property and I mustn't let you have them."

"Oh!" Philip dropped the great bunch of gorgeous color guiltily by his side, but still held tightly the prickly mass of stems, knowing his right, yet half-wondering if he could have made a mistake. He stammered:

"I thought— to whom do they belong?"

"They belong to my cousin, Mr. Philip Fairfield Beckwith"— the sound of his own name was pleasant as the falling voice strayed through it. "He is coming home in a few days, so I want them to look their prettiest for him— for his first sight of them. I take care of this rose garden," she said, and laid a motherly hand on the nearest flower. Then she smiled. "It doesn't seem right hospitable to stop you, but if you will come over to Westerly, to our house, Father will be glad to see you, and I will certainly give you all the flowers you want." The

sweet and masterful apparition looked with a gracious certainty of obedience straight into Philip's bewildered eyes.

"The boy Shelby!" Many a time in the months after, Philip Beckwith smiled to himself reminiscently, tenderly, as he thought of "the boy Shelby" whom he had read into John Fairfield's letter; "the boy Shelby" who was twenty-two years old and the only child; "the boy Shelby" whom he had blamed with such easy severity for idling at Fairfield; "the boy Shelby" who was no boy at all, but this white flower of girlhood, called— after the quaint and reasonable southern way— as a boy is called, by the surname of her mother's people.

Toward Westerly, out of the garden of the old time, out of the dimness of a forgotten past, the two took their radiant youth and the brightness of today. But a breeze blew across the tangle of weeds and flowers as they wandered away, and whispered a hope, perhaps a promise; for as it touched them each tall stalk nodded gaily and the box hedges rustled delicately an answering undertone. And just at the edge of the woodland, before they were out of sight, the girl turned and threw a kiss back to the roses and the box.

"I always do that," she said. "I love them so!"

Two weeks later a great train rolled into the Grand Central Station of New York at half-past six at night, and from it stepped a monstrosity— a young man without a heart. He had left all of it, more than he had thought he owned, in Kentucky. But he had brought back with him a store of memories which gave him more joy than ever the heart had done, to his best knowledge, in all the years. They were memories of long and sunshiny days; of afternoons spent in the saddle, rushing through grassy lanes where trumpet flowers flamed over gray farm fences, or trotting slowly down white roads; of whole mornings only an hour long, passed in the enchanted stillness of an old garden; of gay, desultory searches through its length and breadth, and in the park that held it, for buried treasure; of moonlit nights; of roses and June and Kentucky— and always, through all the memories, the presence that made them what they were, that of a girl he loved.

No word of love had been spoken, but the two weeks had made over his life; and he went back to his work with a definite object, a hope stronger than ambition, and, set to it as music to words, came insistently another hope, a dream that he did not let himself dwell on— a longing to make enough money to pay off the mortgage and put Fairfield in order, and live and work there all his life— with Shelby. That was where the thrill of the thought came in, but the place was very dear to him in itself.

The months went, and the point of living now was the mail from the South, and the feast days were the days that brought letters from Fairfield. He had promised to go back for a week at Christmas, and he worked and hoarded all

the months between with a thought which he did not formulate, but which ruled his down-sitting and his up-rising, the thought that if he did well and his bank account grew enough to justify it he might, when he saw her at Christmas, tell her what he hoped; ask her— he finished the thought with a jump of his heart. He never worked harder or better, and each check that came in meant a step toward the promised land; and each seemed for the joy that was in it to quicken his pace, to lengthen his stride, to strengthen his touch. Early in November he found one night when he came to his rooms two letters waiting for him with the welcome Kentucky postmark. They were in John Fairfield's handwriting and in his daughter's, and "place aux dames" ruled rather than respect to age, for he opened Shelby's first. His eyes smiling, he read it.

"I am knitting you a diamond necklace for Christmas," she wrote. "Will you like that? Or be sure to write me if you'd rather have me hunt in the garden and dig you up a box of money. I'll tell you— there ought to be luck in the day, for it was hidden on Christmas and it should be found on Christmas; so on Christmas morning we'll have another look, and if you find it I'll catch you 'Christmas gif' as the darkies do, and you'll have to give it to me, and if I find it I'll give it to you; so that's fair, isn't it? Anyway— " and Philip's eyes jumped from line to line, devouring the clear, running writing. "So bring a little present with you, please— just a tiny something for me," she ended, "for I'm certainly going to catch you 'Christmas gif'."

Philip folded the letter back into its envelope and put it in his pocket, and his heart felt warmer for the scrap of paper over it. Then he cut John Fairfield's open dreamily, his mind still on the words he had read, on the threat— "I'm going to catch you 'Christmas gif'."' What was there good enough to give her? Himself, he thought humbly, very far from good enough for the girl, the lily of the world. With a sigh that was not sad he dismissed the question and began to read the other letter. He stood reading it by the fading light from the window, his hat thrown by him on a chair, his overcoat still on, and, as he read, the smile died from his face. With drawn brows he read on to the end, and then the-letter dropped from his fingers to the floor and he did not notice; his eyes stared widely at the high building across the street, the endless rows of windows, the lights flashing into them here and there. But he saw none of it. He saw a stretch of quiet woodland, an old house with great white pillars, a silent, neglected garden, with box hedges sweet and ragged, all waiting for him to come and take care of them— the honor of his fathers, the home he had meant, had expected— he knew it now— would be some day his own, the home he had lost! John Fairfield's letter was to tell him that the mortgage on the place, running now so many years, was suddenly to be foreclosed; that,

property not being worth much in the neighborhood, no one would take it up; that on January 2nd Fairfield, the house and land, were to be sold at auction. It was a hard blow to Philip Beckwith, With his hands in his overcoat pockets he began to walk up and down the room, trying to plan, to see if by any chance he might save this place he loved. It would mean eight thousand dollars to pay the mortgage. One or two thousand more would put the estate in order, but that might wait if he could only tide over this danger, save the house and land. An hour he walked so, forgetting dinner, forgetting the heavy coat which he still wore, and then he gave it up. With all he had saved— and it was a fair and promising beginning— he could not much more than half-pay the mortgage, and there was no way, which he would consider, by which he could get the money. Fairfield would have to go, and he set his teeth and clenched his fists as he thought how much he wanted to keep it. A year ago it had meant nothing to him, a year from now if things went his way he could have paid the mortgage. That it should happen just this year— just now! He could not go down at Christmas; it would break his heart to see the place again as his own when it was just slipping from his grasp. He would wait until it was all over, and go, perhaps, in the spring. The great hope of his life was still his own, but Fairfield had been the setting of that hope; he must readjust his world before he saw Shelby again. So he wrote them that he would not come at present, and then tried to dull the ache of his loss with hard work.

But three days before Christmas, out of the unknown forces beyond his reasoning swept a wave of desire to go South, which took him off his feet. Trained to trust his brain and deny his impulse as he was, yet there was a vein of sentiment, almost of superstition, in him which the thought of the old place pricked sharply to life. This longing was something beyond him— he must go— and he had thrown his decisions to the winds and was feverish until he could get away.

As before, he rode out from the Phoenix Hotel, and at ten o'clock in the morning he turned into Fairfield. It was a still, bright Christmas morning, crisp and cool, and the air like wine. The house stood bravely in the sunlight, but the branches above it were bare and no softening leafage hid the marks of time; it looked old and sad and deserted today, and its master gazed at it with a pang in his heart. It was his, and he could not save it. He turned away and walked slowly to the garden, and stood a moment as he had stood last May, with his hand on the stone gateway. It was very silent and lonely here, in the hush of winter; nothing stirred; even the shadows of the interlaced branches above lay almost motionless across the walks.

Something moved to his left, down the pathway— he turned to look. Had his heart stopped, that he felt this strange, cold feeling in his breast? Were his

eyes— could he be seeing? Was this insanity? Fifty feet down the path, half in the weaving shadows, half in clear sunlight, stood the little boy of his lifelong vision, in the dress with the black velvet squares, his little uncle, dead forty years ago. As he gazed, his breath stopping, the child smiled and held up to him, as of old, a key on a scarlet string, and turned and flitted as if a flower had taken wing, away between the box hedges. Philip, his feet moving as if without his will, followed him. Again the baby face turned its smiling dark eyes toward him, and Philip knew that the child was calling him, though there was no sound; and again without volition of his own his feet took him where it led. He felt his breath coming difficulty, and suddenly a gasp shook him— there was no footprint on the unfrozen earth where the vision had passed. Yet there before him, moving through the deep sunlit silence of the garden, was the familiar, sturdy little form in its Old-World dress. Philip's eyes were open; he was awake, walking; he saw it. Across the neglected tangle it glided, and into the trim order of Shelby's rose garden; in the opening between the box walls it wheeled again, and the sun shone clear on the bronze hair and fresh face, and the scarlet string flashed and the key glinted at the end of it. Philip's fascinated eyes saw all of that. Then the apparition slipped into the shadow of the beech trees and Philip quickened his step breathlessly, for it seemed that life and death hung on the sight. In and out through the trees it moved; once more the face turned toward him; he caught the quick brightness of a smile. The little chap had disappeared behind the broad tree trunk, and Philip, catching his breath, hurried to see him appear again. He was gone. The little spirit that had strayed from over the border of a world— who can say how far, how near?— unafraid in this earth-corner once its home, had slipped away into eternity through the white gate of ghosts and dreams.

Philip's heart was pumping painfully as he came, dazed and staring, to the place where the apparition had vanished. It was a giant-beech tree, all of two hundred and fifty years old, and around its base ran a broken wooden bench, where pretty girls of Fairfield had listened to their sweethearts, where children destined to be generals and judges had played with their black mammies, where gray-haired judges and generals had come back to think over the fights that were fought out. There were letters carved into the strong bark, the branches swung down whisperingly, the green tent of the forest seemed filled with the memory of those who had camped there and gone on. Philip's feet stumbled over the roots as he circled the veteran; he peered this way and that, but the woodland was hushed and empty; the birds whistled above, the grasses rustled below, unconscious, casual, as if they knew nothing of a child-soul that had wandered back on Christmas day with a Christmas message, perhaps, of goodwill to its own.

As he stood on the farther side of the tree where the little ghost had faded from him, at his feet lay, open and conspicuous, a fresh, deep hole. He looked down absent-mindedly. Some animal— a dog, a rabbit— had scratched far into the earth. A bar of sunlight struck a golden arm through the branches above, and as he gazed at the upturned, brown dirt the rays that were its fingers reached into the hollow and touched a square corner, a rusty edge of tin. In a second the young fellow was down on his knees digging as if for his life, and in less than dive minutes he had loosened the earth which had guarded it so many years, and staggering with it to his feet had lifted to the bench a heavy tin box. In its lock was the key, and dangling from it a long bit of no-colored silk, that yet, as he untwisted it, showed a scarlet thread in the crease. He opened the box with the little key; it turned scrapingly, and the ribbon crumbled in his fingers, its long duty done. Then, as he tilted the heavy weight, the double eagles, packed closely, slipped against each other with a soft clink of sliding metal. The young man stared at the mass of gold pieces as if he could not trust his eyesight; he half thought even then that he dreamed it. With a quick memory of the mortgage he began to count. It was all there— ten thousand dollars in gold! He lifted his head and gazed at the quiet woodland, the open shadowwork of the bare branches, the fields beyond lying in the calm sunlit rest of a southern winter. Then he put his hand deep into the gold pieces, and drew a long breath. It was impossible to believe, but it was true. The lost treasure was found. It meant to him Shelby and home; as he realized what it meant, his heart felt as if it would break with the joy of it. He would give her this for his Christmas gift, this legacy of his people and hers, and then he would give her himself It was all easy now— life seemed not to hold a difficulty. And the two would keep tenderly, always, the thought of a child who had loved his home and his people and who had tried so hard, so long, to bring them together. He knew the dream-child would not visit him again— the little ghost was laid that had followed him all his life. From over the border whence it had come with so many loving efforts it would never come again. Slowly, with the heavy weight in his arms, with the eyes of a man who had seen a solemn thing, he walked back to the garden sleeping in the sunshine, and the box hedges met him with a wave of fragrance, the sweetness of a century ago; and as he passed through their shining door, looking beyond, he saw Shelby. The girl's figure stood by the stone column of the garden entrance. The light shone on her bare head, and she had stopped, surprised, as she saw him. Philip lifted his hat high, and his pace quickened with his heartthrob as he looked at her and thought of the little ghostly hands that had brought theirs together; and as he looked the smile that meant his welcome and his happiness broke

over her face, and with the sound of her voice all the shades of this world and the next dissolved in light.

"Christmas gif', Marse Philip!" called Shelby.

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23: A Pardonable Deception

Lady Gilbert

Rosa Mulholland, 1841-1921

Sunday Times (Sydney) 31 May 1903

TWO young married women were sitting by the fire in a dressing-room of an English country house at the hour of one o'clock in the morning. The elder had beauty expressive of a strong, tender character. The younger, a rag-featured, piquant little creature, with eyes full of curiosity, was speaking.

'So you married a poor man?'

'A distinguished soldier.'

'I know; still—'

'Exactly. I will gratify you, for if I do not tell you the truth you will invent a fiction.'

The inquisitive one laughed and nodded. She who was willing to be communicative continued:—

'You know I was without family or kindred, heiress of a large income and a beautiful old home. After my schooldays I attached myself to a good lady who travelled with me over a great deal of the world, for I felt unbearably solitary in this place, and I had a lively desire to visit other countries and have tne experience of other lives besides my own.

'After some years, my dear companion having died, I found myself here, alone except for servants and the neighbors and acquaintances, who made me an object of their attentions.'

'I wonder you did not marry at once, interrupted the inquirer.

'Many wondered; but partly because my friend had warned me, perhaps too urgently, against mercenary men, a good deal because I had not been edified or attracted by any of the marriages I had seen, and I suppose,' with a sudden smile, 'because I had not met with the man who was happily my fate, I shrank from all suggestions of the kind, and held on with both hands to my liberty.

'After a season or two of pleasure in both town and country, I craved for another change. Ungrateful of my endowments, I envied some others their poverty, and at last resolved to taste on experience which it seemed that Providence had hardly ordained for me. I allowed my friends to suppose that I was bent on further foreign wanderings, wound up my affairs in preparation for a long absence, committed my home once more to the guardianship of my trusted housekeeper, and departed this (society) life.

'Imagine me then in St. Thomas' Hospital, in cap and apron, studying hard to fit myself for first-class work as a nursing sister.'

'Oh, that was what you did, was it ?' broke in the listener. 'How quiet you kept it. My dear, I wish I had seen you in the cap; it must have been so becoming to you.'

'It was different from this,' said the narrator, touching the diamond star in her hair; 'but I liked it well. There was no time to think about becomingness ; I was thoroughly sick of all that, and had left it with my laces and jewels at my banker's.

'What I wanted was work worth doing, an assurance that my suffering fellow creatures were ever such a little bit the better for my existence.'

The listener made a little grimace and smiled. 'You were always so odd, dear,' she said, indulgently.

'Just as I had finished my terms, and received all my qualifications, the war broke out, and I was soon in the thick of it, for I was of the very first band of nurses despatched to the front.'

'I can't believe it! You were not afraid of being shot, or blood-poisoned, or terrified into fits?'

'I just felt that I was living in earnest'

'Come to the point, however. Where did you meet him?'

'I think the very first time I saw him was when he lay in the hospital bed in Pretoria, covered with blood. You shrink at the thought. I did not at the sight. I went to work to help the surgeon and to moke the patient as comfortable as I could after a cruel operation.'

'And he fell in love with you on the spot?'

'He wasn't in a condition for any such prompt proceeding. He required all his energies to wrestle with the fever through which I nursed him. The first time I spoke to him about anything beyond his medicine and nourishment, and the ease of his pillows, was after he had been some time convalescent— one day when I saw a particularly sad look on his brown face, and asked if I could do anything for I him; perhaps write a letter to his friends. He thanked me and said he had no relatives; no one would be specially interested in hearing about him; and I thought it a pity that somebody should not be glad of his recovery, as well as of the distinctions that awaited him.'

'So you began to be glad yourself?'

'I did my best to cheer him, and on the long, hot summer evenings, while I was fanning him, we had many a quiet conversation. He was much interested in all the nurses, was always admiring their skill and gentleness, deploring their fatigues, which he considered more to be pitied than the sufferings of their patients.'

'And you were jealous?'

'No. I thought of him only as a sick man under my care, and was pleased to amuse him with whatever discourse he might fancy. One day he gave me his ideas about the nursing vocation, which included the opinion that ladies with home, money, and position ought not to forsake their more immediate duties for the hospital, but that the career of the care of the sick should be left open to those women who needed an occupation and the means of obtaining a livelihood. I thought it for the moment a prosaic and disappointing theory, but on reflection I admitted that it was a kindly one with regard to the less favored by fortune of our sex. I felt from that moment, however, that if he knew my little history I should be under his disapproval, and I allowed him to rank me among the mercenaries to whom he had given his sympathy.'

'So you already felt—'

'That he was going to love me if I did not take pains to disenchant him; and partly because he was a sick and lonely man, partly for some other reason that I could not quite understand, I felt no inclination to do any such thing. I knew he was a poor soldier, and that he thought I was a poor nurse, and I thought if this man is going to love me, why, I shall not allow the dross of the world which is unfortunately mine to hinder him. I kept my dreadful secret, and long beftore he was fit to leave the hospital he had asked me to be his wife, and I had accepted him.'

'You— you didn't inind at all about his being— lame?'

'Mind it ? Yes, I did. I loved him the more for it. Loved him the better because, though brave and distinguished, he was no longer fit for service. He had the vaguest ideas of how we were to live. We had very little money between us when we went on board ship to return to England, for my bank-book was buried deep in the bottom of my trunk, and I did not dare to display more money than just as much as I had earned by my labors in the hospital. I urged him not to think again about money, as I was a capital manager, and knew how to make a little go a long way. I was exceedingly happy, knowing all that I was able to do for him; yet I found myself in a serious dilemma. The question was, how could I break the news that I had deceived him?

'I had been humored to the top of my bent in marrying a man who loved me for myself, in ignorance that I possessed a fortune. He must be a strange man, indeed, I thought, if, later on, when the truth came to his knowledge, he were to prove displeased or disappointed. But the fact remained that I had married him under false pretences, and I felt ashamed of it.

'I felt also unwilling to hasten the inevitable moment which should see me even in seeming lose the enviable position of a woman who has been sought by the man she loves for love, and love alone; and so the long voyage that seemed all too short passed without my having said one word to enlighten him

as to the future of ease and luxury which I had provided for him. 'Whilst he took his convalescent's nap on deck in the afternoons I paced up and down, thinking out my difficulty. The time was coming when I must have my mind made up as to what steps I was to take, for I had resolved not to allow my whim or mistake to cost him one day of less comfort than I was able to bestow on him. At last I hit on a plan. You know Beatrix. She is my dearest friend, so much so that she might have kept me from the hospital experience if only she had not always been so bent on marrying me to some one of her acquaintances. I wrote to her and posted the letter at a convenient moment to travel by a fastergoing vessel than our own. The letter ran somewhat like this:—

'Dear Beatrix—

'I am travelling to England with my husband, a distinguished and at present invalid soldier, who is under the impression that he has married a penniless nurse. You can help me to break the truth to him gracefully. I know your husband is spending the summer in his yacht. Will you take possession of my house and invite me and my husband to spend some weeks with you? I shall rely on you to act well the hostess, and when I see you I will tell you the sequel.

'The result of this stroke of genius was an invitation from Beatrix, which awaited us when we arrived at our hotel.

'He was a little unwilling at first, but I overruled all his objections, and, as soon as possible, we were established as the guests of Beatrix here in our own comfortable home.

'Of course, I found my way to my wardrobe, and it was sweet to see my husband's surprise when he saw me dressed for dinner. I had put on the first pretty gown I found; it happened to be a white satin, and naturally it made a change in my appearance.

'This is charming, Mary,' he said; 'but, my dear—'

'I knew what he meant.

' "Beatrix had some of my old frocks in charge," I said. "You know I am a lady?"

' "That I always knew,' he said, gravely, but I saw by the slight cloud on his dear face that he feared I had a taste for expensive things which he could not give me.

' "You were good not to ask anyone to meet us," I said to Beatrix at home. "Max is hardly ready for society as yet."

' "I guessed you would not care for a house party at present," she said, "or else I should have gratified some friends who are anxious to see you."

'Quiet, happy days went past. It was delightful to see Max enjoy his comforts, to hear him admiring our surroundings of park and woodland, or commending the good taste of Beatrix in the arrangements of her house.

'Once I ventured to say to him, "Wouldn't it be nice if you and I had a home like this, all to ourselves, every bit our own?"

" 'Don't let us covet our neighbors' goods," he answered, playfully. We had been here six weeks, and the time had flown. Every morning when I arose I made a half resolution to tell him the truth before that day wore out, and yet somehow a nice opportunity never seemed to offer itself. Dear Beatrix was very patient, and I knew that her sense of humor enabled her to enjoy a situation which many would have thought a bore. Still, she warned me that her yachting husband would soon be on the return wave, and that her own home could claim her as the leaves began to tirn yellow on the trees. I pondered my dilemma and acknowledged that I had only deepened my difficulties by my cunning plot.

'It had come to this, that I feared nothing except lowering myself in my husband's estimation by confessing that I had deliberately deceived him.

'Meanwhile I was recklessly airing a variety of my pretty frocks, and even some of the old family jewellery. Max said:—

" 'Mary, you look charming in all these pretty decorations; yet sometimes I think regretfully of my white-coifed maiden.' That was both hard and sweet to hear. He also said:—

" 'I begin to think you must have belonged to people who were once exceedingly well-to-do. And I fear—'

" 'That I am one of those rich women whom you dislike, who left their luxuries for the hospital.'

" 'I did not mean to say that,' he said, but he began to appear troubled and restless at making so long a stay in the hospitable house of another. I felt that matters were coming to a crisis, and yet I do not know how I should have acted, for I was growing more and more nervous and demoralised, had not Beatrix suddenly at breakfast one morning cut the knot by saying:—

" 'Now, Mary, I Shall really be obliged to leave you to-morrow. I have enjoyed my visit extremely, but Will is coming home, and I must be there to welcome him.'

"Max raised his eyes and looked from her to me; then quietly went on with his breakfast. He had seen us both smile, and thought we were making a frivolous joke, which seemed to him rather meaningless. But Beatrix was desperate.

" 'Have I not done the honors very nicely?' She said, looking full at Max. 'I have played housekeeper to Mary in her own house that she might Imagine she was somewhere else passing her second honeymoon.'

"Max looked at her silently and gravely.

" 'If this jest amuses you,' he said, 'I can make no objection to humor one who has been so kind to us.'

" 'Oh!' said Beatrix, 'this will never do. Mary, speak out. Colonel Max, your wife has no courage.'

"At the word 'courage,' my husband's eyes, which had been fixed on me sternly, softened."

" 'She has courage,' he said. His thought had gone back to the hospital.

" 'Oh, Max!' I said, and I began weeping like a criminated child, 'I am really that dreadful woman you disapprove of.'

"Beatrix was gone, and I was in my husband's arms. It took us a month to talk the matter out, but after that he became reconciled to the inevitable."

"You lucky woman!" said the inquisitive one, putting her handkerchief to her eyes as the clock struck three in the wintry morning.

24: The Mark of the Beast

Rudyard Kipling

1865-1936

The Pioneer, 12 July 1890

Much reprinted wer-wolf story by the celebrated Victorian author of "The Jungle Books"

Your Gods and my Gods— do you or I know which are the stronger?
—Native Proverb.

EAST OF SUEZ, some hold, the direct control of Providence ceases; Man being there handed over to the power of the Gods and Devils of Asia, and the Church of England Providence only exercising an occasional and modified supervision in the case of Englishmen.

This theory accounts for some of the more unnecessary horrors of life in India: it may be stretched to explain my story.

My friend Strickland of the Police, who knows as much of natives of India as is good for any man, can bear witness to the facts of the case. Dumoise, our doctor, also saw what Strickland and I saw. The inference which he drew from the evidence was entirely incorrect. He is dead now; he died, in a rather curious manner, which has been elsewhere described.

WHEN Fleete came to India he owned a little money and some land in the Himalayas, near a place called Dharmsala. Both properties had been left him by an uncle, and he came out to finance them. He was a big, heavy, genial, and inoffensive man. His knowledge of natives was, of course, limited, and he complained of the difficulties of the language.

He rode in from his place in the hills to spend New Year in the station, and he stayed with Strickland. On New Year's Eve there was a big dinner at the club, and the night was excusably wet. When men foregather from the uttermost ends of the Empire, they have a right to be riotous. The Frontier had sent down a contingent o' Catch-'em-Alive-O's who had not seen twenty white faces for a year, and were used to ride fifteen miles to dinner at the next Fort at the risk of a Khyberee bullet where their drinks should lie. They profited by their new security, for they tried to play pool with a curled-up hedgehog found in the garden, and one of them carried the marker round the room in his teeth. Half a dozen planters had come in from the south and were talking "horse" to the Biggest Liar in Asia, who was trying to cap all their stories at once. Everybody was there, and there was a general closing up of ranks and taking stock of our losses in dead or disabled that had fallen during the past year. It was a very wet night, and I remember that we sang "Auld Lang Syne" with our

feet in the Polo Championship Cup, and our heads among the stars, and swore that we were all dear friends. Then some of us went away and annexed Burma, and some tried to open up the Soudan and were opened up by Fuzzies in that cruel scrub outside Suakim, and some found stars and medals, and some were married, which was bad, and some did other things which were worse, and the others of us stayed in our chains and strove to make money on insufficient experiences.

Fleete began the night with sherry and bitters, drank champagne steadily up to dessert, then raw, rasping Capri with all the strength of whisky, took Benedictine with his coffee, four or five whiskies and sodas to improve his pool strokes, beer and bones at half-past two, winding up with old brandy. Consequently, when he came out, at half-past three in the morning, into fourteen degrees of frost, he was very angry with his horse for coughing, and tried to leapfrog into the saddle. The horse broke away and went to his stables; so Strickland and I formed a Guard of Dishonour to take Fleete home.

Our road lay through the bazaar, close to a little temple of Hanuman, the Monkey-god, who is a leading divinity worthy of respect. All gods have good points, just as have all priests. Personally, I attach much importance to Hanuman, and am kind to his people—the great gray apes of the hills. One never knows when one may want a friend.

There was a light in the temple, and as we passed, we could hear voices of men chanting hymns. In a native temple, the priests rise at all hours of the night to do honour to their god. Before we could stop him, Fleete dashed up the steps, patted two priests on the back, and was gravely grinding the ashes of his cigar-butt into the forehead of the red stone image of Hanuman. Strickland tried to drag him out, but he sat down and said solemnly:

"Shee that? 'Mark of the B-beasht! I made it. Ishn't it fine?"

In half a minute the temple was alive and noisy, and Strickland, who knew what came of polluting gods, said that things might occur. He, by virtue of his official position, long residence in the country, and weakness for going among the natives, was known to the priests and he felt unhappy. Fleete sat on the ground and refused to move. He said that "good old Hanuman" made a very soft pillow.

Then, without any warning, a Silver Man came out of a recess behind the image of the god. He was perfectly naked in that bitter, bitter cold, and his body shone like frosted silver, for he was what the Bible calls "a leper as white as snow." Also he had no face, because he was a leper of some years' standing and his disease was heavy upon him. We two stooped to haul Fleete up, and the temple was filling and filling with folk who seemed to spring from the earth, when the Silver Man ran in under our arms, making a noise exactly like

the mewing of an otter, caught Fleete round the body and dropped his head on Fleete's breast before we could wrench him away. Then he retired to a corner and sat mewing while the crowd blocked all the doors.

The priests were very angry until the Silver Man touched Fleete. That nuzzling seemed to sober them.

At the end of a few minutes' silence one of the priests came to Strickland and said, in perfect English, "Take your friend away. He has done with Hanuman, but Hanurnan has not done with him." The crowd gave room and we carried Fleete into the road.

Strickland was very angry. He said that we might all three have been knifed, and that Fleete should thank his stars that he had escaped without injury.

Fleete thanked no one. He said that he wanted to go to bed. He was gorgeously drunk.

We moved on, Strickland silent and wrathful, until Fleete was taken with violent shivering fits and sweating. He said that the smells of the bazaar were overpowering, and he wondered why slaughter-houses were permitted so near English residences. "Can't you smell the blood?" said Fleete.

We put him to bed at last, just as the dawn was breaking, and Strickland invited me to have another whisky and soda. While we were drinking he talked of the trouble in the temple, and admitted that it baffled him completely. Strickland hates being mystified by natives, because his business in life is to overmatch them with their own weapons. He has not yet succeeded in doing this, but in fifteen or twenty years he will have made some small progress.

"They should have mauled us," he said, "instead of mewing at us. I wonder what they meant. I don't like it one little bit."

I said that the Managing Committee of the temple would in all probability bring a criminal action against us for insulting their religion. There was a section of the Indian Penal Code which exactly met Fleete's offence. Strickland said he only hoped and prayed that they would do this. Before I left I looked into Fleete's room, and saw him lying on his right side, scratching his left breast. Then. I went to bed cold, depressed, and unhappy, at seven o'clock in the morning.

At one o'clock I rode over to Strickland's house to inquire after Fleete's head. I imagined that it would be a sore one. Fleete was breakfasting and seemed unwell. His temper was gone, for he was abusing the cook for not supplying him with an underdone chop. A man who can eat raw meat after a wet night is a curiosity. I told Fleete this and he laughed.

"You breed queer mosquitoes in these parts," he said. "I've been bitten to pieces, but only in one place."

"Let's have a look at the bite," said Strickland. "It may have gone down since this morning."

While the chops were being cooked, Fleete opened his shirt and showed us, just over his left breast, a mark, the perfect double of the black rosettes—the five or six irregular blotches arranged in a circle—on a leopard's hide. Strickland looked and said, "It was only pink this morning. It's grown black now."

Fleete ran to a glass.

"By Jove!" he said, "this is nasty. What is it?"

We could not answer. Here the chops came in, all red and juicy, and Fleete bolted three in a most offensive manner. He ate on his right grinders only, and threw his head over his right shoulder as he snapped the meat. When he had finished, it struck him that he had been behaving strangely, for he said apologetically, "I don't think I ever felt so hungry in my life. I've bolted like an ostrich."

After breakfast Strickland said to me, "Don't go. Stay here, and stay for the night."

Seeing that my house was not three miles from Strickland's, this request was absurd. But Strickland insisted, and was going to say something when Fleete interrupted by declaring in a shamefaced way that he felt hungry again. Strickland sent a man to my house to fetch over my bedding and a horse, and we three went down to Strickland's stables to pass the hours until it was time to go out for a ride. The man who has a weakness for horses never wearies of inspecting them; and when two men are killing time in this way they gather knowledge and lies the one from the other.

There were five horses in the stables, and I shall never forget the scene as we tried to look them over. They seemed to have gone mad. They reared and screamed and nearly tore up their pickets; they sweated and shivered and lathered and were distraught with fear. Strickland's horses used to know him as well as his dogs; which made the matter more curious. We left the stable for fear of the brutes throwing themselves in their panic. Then Strickland turned back and called me. The horses were still frightened, but they let us "gentle" and make much of them, and put their heads in our bosoms.

"They aren't afraid of US," said Strickland. "D'you know, I'd give three months' pay if Outrage here could talk."

But Outrage was dumb, and could only cuddle up to his master and blow out his nostrils, as is the custom of horses when they wish to explain things but can't. Fleete came up when we were in the stalls, and as soon as the horses saw him, their fright broke out afresh. It was all that we could do to escape from the place unkicked. Strickland said, "They don't seem to love you, Fleete."

"Nonsense," said Fleete; "my mare will follow me like a dog." He went to her; she was in a loose-box; but as he slipped the bars she plunged, knocked him down, and broke away into the garden. I laughed, but Strickland was not amused. He took his moustache in both fists and pulled at it till it nearly came out. Fleete, instead of going off to chase his property, yawned, saying that he felt sleepy. He went to the house to lie down, which was a foolish way of spending New Year's Day.

Strickland sat with me in the stables and asked if I had noticed anything peculiar in Fleete's manner. I said that he ate his food like a beast; but that this might have been the result of living alone in the hills out of the reach of society as refined and elevating as ours for instance. Strickland was not amused. I do not think that he listened to me, for his next sentence referred to the mark on Fleete's breast, and I said that it might have been caused by blister-flies, or that it was possibly a birth-mark newly born and now visible for the first time. We both agreed that it was unpleasant to look at, and Strickland found occasion to say that I was a fool.

"I can't tell you what I think now," said he, "because you would call me a madman; but you must stay with me for the next few days, if you can. I want you to watch Fleete, but don't tell me what you think till I have made up my mind."

"But I am dining out to-night," I said.

"So am I," said Strickland, "and so is Fleete. At least if he doesn't change his mind."

We walked about the garden smoking, but saying nothing— because we were friends, and talking spoils good tobacco— till our pipes were out. Then we went to wake up Fleete. He was wide awake and fidgeting about his room.

"I say, I want some more chops," he said. "Can I get them?"

We laughed and said, "Go and change. The ponies will be round in a minute."

"All right," said Fleete. I'll go when I get the chops— underdone ones, mind."

He seemed to be quite in earnest. It was four o'clock, and we had had breakfast at one; still, for a long time, he demanded those underdone chops. Then he changed into riding clothes and went out into the verandah. His pony— the mare had not been caught— would not let him come near. All three horses were unmanageable— mad with fear— and finally Fleete said that he would stay at home and get something to eat. Strickland and I rode out wondering. As we passed the temple of Hanuman, the Silver Man came out and mewed at us.

"He is not one of the regular priests of the temple," said Strickland. "I think I should peculiarly like to lay my hands on him."

There was no spring in our gallop on the racecourse that evening. The horses were stale, and moved as though they had been ridden out.

"The fright after breakfast has been too much for them," said Strickland.

That was the only remark he made through the remainder of the ride. Once or twice I think he swore to himself; but that did not count.

We came back in the dark at seven o'clock, and saw that there were no lights in the bungalow. "Careless ruffians my servants are!" said Strickland.

My horse reared at something on the carriage drive, and Fleete stood up under its nose.

"What are you doing, grovelling about the garden?" said Strickland.

But both horses bolted and nearly threw us. We dismounted by the stables and returned to Fleete, who was on his hands and knees under the orange-bushes.

"What the devil's wrong with you?" said Strickland.

"Nothing, nothing in the world," said Fleete, speaking very quickly and thickly. "I've been gardening— botanising you know. The smell of the earth is delightful. I think I'm going for a walk— a long walk— all night."

Then I saw that there was something excessively out of order somewhere, and I said to Strickland, "I am not dining out."

"Bless you!" said Strickland. "Here, Fleete, get up. You'll catch fever there. Come in to dinner and let's have the lamps lit. We'll all dine at home."

Fleete stood up unwillingly, and said, "No lamps— no lamps. It's much nicer here. Let's dine outside and have some more chops— lots of 'em and underdone— bloody ones with gristle."

Now a December evening in Northern India is bitterly cold, and Fleete's suggestion was that of a maniac.

"Come in," said Strickland sternly. "Come in at once."

Fleete came, and when the lamps were brought, we saw that he was literally plastered with dirt from head to foot. He must have been rolling in the garden. He shrank from the light and went to his room. His eyes were horrible to look at. There was a green light behind them, not in them, if you understand, and the man's lower lip hung down.

Strickland said, "There is going to be trouble— big trouble— to-night. Don't you change your riding-things."

We waited and waited for Fleete's reappearance, and ordered dinner in the meantime. We could hear him moving about his own room, but there was no light there. Presently from the room came the long-drawn howl of a wolf.

People write and talk lightly of blood running cold and hair standing up and things of that kind. Both sensations are too horrible to be trifled with. My heart stopped as though a knife had been driven through it, and Strickland turned as white as the tablecloth.

The howl was repeated, and was answered by another howl far across the fields.

That set the gilded roof on the horror. Strickland dashed into Fleete's room. I followed, and we saw Fleete getting out of the window. He made beast-noises in the back of his throat. He could not answer us when we shouted at him. He spat.

I don't quite remember what followed, but I think that Strickland must have stunned him with the long boot-jack or else I should never have been able to sit on his chest. Fleete could not speak, he could only snarl, and his snarls were those of a wolf, not of a man. The human spirit must have been giving way all day and have died out with the twilight. We were dealing with a beast that had once been Fleete.

The affair was beyond any human and rational experience. I tried to say "Hydrophobia," but the word wouldn't come, because I knew that I was lying.

We bound this beast with leather thongs of the punkah-rope, and tied its thumbs and big toes together, and gagged it with a shoe-horn, which makes a very efficient gag if you know how to arrange it. Then we carried it into the dining-room, and sent a man to Dumoise, the doctor, telling him to come over at once. After we had despatched the messenger and were drawing breath, Strickland said, "It's no good. This isn't any doctor's work." I, also, knew that he spoke the truth.

The beast's head was free, and it threw it about from side to side. Any one entering the room would have believed that we were curing a wolf's pelt. That was the most loathsome accessory of all.

Strickland sat with his chin in the heel of his fist, watching the beast as it wriggled on the ground, but saying nothing. The shirt had been torn open in the scuffle and showed the black rosette mark on the left breast. It stood out like a blister.

In the silence of the watching we heard something without mewing like a she-otter. We both rose to our feet, and, I answer for myself, not Strickland, felt sick— actually and physically sick. We told each other, as did the men in Pinafore, that it was the cat.

Dumoise arrived, and I never saw a little man so unprofessionally shocked. He said that it was a heart-rending case of hydrophobia, and that nothing could be done. At least any palliative measures would only prolong the agony. The beast was foaming at the mouth. Fleete, as we told Dumoise, had been bitten

by dogs once or twice. Any man who keeps half a dozen terriers must expect a nip now and again. Dumoise could offer no help. He could only certify that Fleete was dying of hydrophobia. The beast was then howling, for it had managed to spit out the shoe-horn. Dumoise said that he would be ready to certify to the cause of death, and that the end was certain. He was a good little man, and he offered to remain with us; but Strickland refused the kindness. He did not wish to poison Dumoise's New Year. He would only ask him not to give the real cause of Fleete's death to the public.

So Dumoise left, deeply agitated; and as soon as the noise of the cart-wheels had died away, Strickland told me, in a whisper, his suspicions. They were so wildly improbable that he dared not say them out aloud; and I, who entertained all Strickland's beliefs, was so ashamed of owning to them that I pretended to disbelieve.

"Even if the Silver Man had bewtiched Fleete for polluting the image of Hanuman, the punishment could not have fallen so quickly."

As I was whispering this the cry outside the house rose again, and the beast fell into a fresh paroxysm of struggling till we were afraid that the thongs that held it would give way.

"Watch!" said Strickland. "If this happens six times I shall take the law into my own hands. I order you to help me."

He went into his room and came out in a few minutes with the barrels of an old shot-gun, a piece of fishing-line, some thick cord, and his heavy wooden bedstead. I reported that the convulsions had followed the cry by two seconds in each case, and the beast seemed perceptibly weaker.

Strickland muttered, "But he can't take away the life! He can't take away the life!"

I said, though I knew that I was arguing against myself, "It may be a cat. It must be a cat. If the Silver Man is responsible, why does he dare to come here?"

Strickland arranged the wood on the hearth, put the gun-barrels into the glow of the fire, spread the twine on the table and broke a walking stick in two. There was one yard of fishing line, gut, lapped with wire, such as is used for mahseer-fishing, and he tied the two ends together in a loop.

Then he said, "How can we catch him? He must be taken alive and unhurt."

I said that we must trust in Providence, and go out softly with polo-sticks into the shrubbery at the front of the house. The man or animal that made the cry was evidently moving round the house as regularly as a night-watchman. We could wait in the bushes till he came by and knock him over.

Strickland accepted this suggestion, and we slipped out from a bath-room window into the front verandah and then across the carriage drive into the bushes.

In the moonlight we could see the leper coming round the corner of the house. He was perfectly naked, and from time to time he mewed and stopped to dance with his shadow. It was an unattractive sight, and thinking of poor Fleete, brought to such degradation by so foul a creature, I put away all my doubts and resolved to help Strickland from the heated gun-barrels to the loop of twine— from the loins to the head and back again— with all tortures that might be needful.

The leper halted in the front porch for a moment and we jumped out on him with the sticks. He was wonderfully strong, and we were afraid that he might escape or be fatally injured before we caught him. We had an idea that lepers were frail creatures, but this proved to be incorrect. Strickland knocked his legs from under him and I put my foot on his neck. He mewed hideously, and even through my riding-boots I could feel that his flesh was not the flesh of a clean man.

He struck at us with his hand and feet-stumps. We looped the lash of a dog-whip round him, under the armpits, and dragged him backwards into the hall and so into the dining-room where the beast lay. There we tied him with trunk-straps. He made no attempt to escape, but mewed.

When we confronted him with the beast the scene was beyond description. The beast doubled backwards into a bow as though he had been poisoned with strychnine, and moaned in the most pitiable fashion. Several other things happened also, but they cannot be put down here.

"I think I was right," said Strickland. "Now we will ask him to cure this case."

But the leper only mewed. Strickland wrapped a towel round his hand and took the gun-barrels out of the fire. I put the half of the broken walking stick through the loop of fishing-line and buckled the leper comfortably to Strickland's bedstead. I understood then how men and women and little children can endure to see a witch burnt alive; for the beast was moaning on the floor, and though the Silver Man had no face, you could see horrible feelings passing through the slab that took its place, exactly as waves of heat play across red-hot iron— gun-barrels for instance.

Strickland shaded his eyes with his hands for a moment and we got to work. This part is not to be printed.

The dawn was beginning to break when the leper spoke. His mewings had not been satisfactory up to that point. The beast had fainted from exhaustion and the house was very still. We unstrapped the leper and told him to take

away the evil spirit. He crawled to the beast and laid his hand upon the left breast. That was all. Then he fell face down and whined, drawing in his breath as he did so.

We watched the face of the beast, and saw the soul of Fleete coming back into the eyes. Then a sweat broke out on the forehead and the eyes— they were human eyes— closed. We waited for an hour but Fleete still slept. We carried him to his room and bade the leper go, giving him the bedstead, and the sheet on the bedstead to cover his nakedness, the gloves and the towels with which we had touched him, and the whip that had been hooked round his body. He put the sheet about him and went out into the early morning without speaking or mewing.

Strickland wiped his face and sat down. A night-gong, far away in the city, made seven o'clock.

"Exactly four-and-twenty hours!" said Strickland. "And I've done enough to ensure my dismissal from the service, besides permanent quarters in a lunatic asylum. Do you believe that we are awake?"

The red-hot gun-barrel had fallen on the floor and was singeing the carpet. The smell was entirely real.

That morning at eleven we two together went to wake up Fleete. We looked and saw that the black leopard-rosette on his chest had disappeared. He was very drowsy and tired, but as soon as he saw us, he said, "Oh! Confound you fellows. Happy New Year to you. Never mix your liquors. I'm nearly dead."

"Thanks for your kindness, but you're over time," said Strickland. "To-day is the morning of the second. You've slept the clock round with a vengeance."

The door opened, and little Dumoise put his head in. He had come on foot, and fancied that we were laying out Fleete.

"I've brought a nurse," said Dumoise. "I suppose that she can come in for… what is necessary."

"By all means," said Fleete cheerily, sitting up in bed. "Bring on your nurses."

Dumoise was dumb. Strickland led him out and explained that there must have been a mistake in the diagnosis. Dumoise remained dumb and left the house hastily. He considered that his professional reputation had been injured, and was inclined to make a personal matter of the recovery. Strickland went out too. When he came back, he said that he had been to call on the Temple of Hanuman to offer redress for the pollution of the god, and had been solemnly assured that no white man had ever touched the idol and that he was an incarnation of all the virtues labouring under a delusion.

"What do you think?" said Strickland.

I said, "'There are more things…'"

But Strickland hates that quotation. He says that I have worn it threadbare.

One other curious thing happened which frightened me as much as anything in all the night's work. When Fleete was dressed he came into the dining-room and sniffed. He had a quaint trick of moving his nose when he sniffed. "Horrid doggy smell, here," said he. "You should really keep those terriers of yours in better order. Try sulphur, Strick."

But Strickland did not answer. He caught hold of the back of a chair, and, without warning, went into an amazing fit of hysterics. It is terrible to see a strong man overtaken with hysteria. Then it struck me that we had fought for Fleete's soul with the Silver Man in that room, and had disgraced ourselves as Englishmen for ever, and I laughed and gasped and gurgled just as shamefully as Strickland, while Fleete thought that we had both gone mad. We never told him what we had done.

SOME YEARS later, when Strickland had married and was a church-going member of society for his wife's sake, we reviewed the incident dispassionately, and Strickland suggested that I should put it before the public.

I cannot myself see that this step is likely to clear up the mystery; because, in the first place, no one will believe a rather unpleasant story, and, in the second, it is well known to every right-minded man that the gods of the heathen are stone and brass, and any attempt to deal with them otherwise is justly condemned.

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